

Monialibus

*Nuns of the Order of Preachers
International Bulletin*



N° 30 January 2014



Meeting of the International Commission of Nuns

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The following sisters have collaborated as translators for this issue of Monialibus:
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Letter of fr. Brian, op

Dear Sisters in Christ,
Emmanuel, “God with us” –

Though I am writing this letter during the Advent Season (in order to give the translators sufficient time to do their artistic service), I want to wish each of you abundant JOY and HOPE during these days of God’s tenderness and nearness to us, made manifest through the mystery of the Incarnate Word. These days invite us to see and hear and touch the Word of Life who has come to dwell among us, and our hearts can do nothing less than sing a song of thanksgiving!

This letter, my last as Promoter of the Nuns of the Order, is my attempt to give thanks, though I feel that it is not possible to say all that I want to say through the keys of a computer!! This dilemma is nothing new, though, given that the preacher is always faced with this paradox – trying to point to the eternal Truth through limited, human words. Is that not what Mary experienced when she had her encounter with the Angel Gabriel? Her humble “Here I am, Lord” probably seemed so small and insignificant before so great a mystery.

So, I beg your patience as I try to say “thank you” with my poor, simple words.

During these days of Advent, I have had some time to do one of my favourite things here in Rome: take afternoon walks along the Tiber River (which can be seen from our priory here in Santa Sabina). I have never lived in a city with a big river running through it, so this has been a new and wonderful experience for me (I had never been the Promoter of the Nuns before either!). The Tiber river is lined with trees on both banks, and during this time of the year the golden-coloured leaves of Autumn are “letting go” of the security of the tree, preparing themselves for their final journey! For many of the leaves, that final journey includes a free ride in the current of the river, flowing ultimately into the Mediterranean Sea! What a marvellous mystery! Since my childhood I have been

fascinated with the mystery of trees and the beauty of their leaves! I wanted to study forestry engineering in the university, but God evidently had other plans!

A few days ago I took one of my walks along the river, watching as some of the leaves ‘let go’ of their comfortable security, jumping into the brisk current of the Tiber River, beginning their new journey. This image is for me one of nature’s greatest lessons about inner freedom and trust in God. Is not our life something like that of the leaf on a tree? We come into this world as a tiny bud on the Tree of Life, and one day we are invited to ‘let go’ and – in freedom and abandon – drop into the merciful arms of Divine Providence. The Gospel of John reminds us that Christ is the vine and we are the branches, and that without a deep union in love we are nothing. But we are also leaves, and life is a series of invitations to ‘let go and give thanks’ as we journey on in the great mystery of life and death. This mystery is beautiful and frightening – an icon of our invitation to trust God completely.

We have all experienced this paschal mystery of letting go! The day we left home and entered the Order was one of those experiences. For you who have been called to be a prioress or novice mistresses or chantress or member of the monastery Council or of the International Commission of Nuns or *whatever* know what it means to set off on a journey of utter trust in God’s mercy. It is terrible and it is wonderful! We feel fearful and free at the same time! Did Mary and Joseph not feel this when they gave their *fiat* to God’s ‘crazy’ proposal? We have to admit, it sounded *crazy* at the time!

My dear sisters, are we not called to live this *crazy trust* in God’s providence every day of our lives? I am certainly not suggesting that it is easy! I get nervous every time I sense that God is saying, “Brian, it is time to let go and jump again!” That is when I begin to bargain: “But Lord, I have already let go several times this year!! Isn’t it time for another leaf to have this ‘marvellous’ experience?” God usually pauses, then smiles, saying, “Yes it is, but since I love you so much, I would not want you to miss another ‘marvellous’ experience!”

Sisters, as I look back on these six years as “brother of the nuns,” I am filled with gratitude to God who gave me the grace to say “yes” and to jump into this great mystery! I give thanks to fr Carlos and fr Bruno for the trust and patience. The journey down this wild and wonderful River has been filled with joy and grace (and yes, I’ll be honest, an occasional headache!). For all that I have received during these years I give thanks.

Dominican life is teaching me little by little to live this radical freedom, to set off on the path of the Holy Preaching like Abraham and Sarah – without knowing where I am going. Mendicancy has taught me to be open to the grace of the present moment and trust that the River of God’s love will lead me in the right direction. This is our life of itinerancy! It is lived both interiorly and exteriorly. When the leaf leaps into the Autumn breeze it does so with true freedom. “Lord, send us each day to those who hunger for your living Word!” Does not each nun and each monastery have to live this mystery as deeply as an itinerant preacher?

Thank you, sisters, for teaching me to trust in God’s mercy during these years. For the times that I have not trusted, or for the persons whom I might have treated uncharitably along the way, I beg your forgiveness. I must confess that there have been days in which I thought that I could not get on another airplane or answer another email! Itinerant life is no party (as those of you who have experienced monastery fusions, unions and closings know so well)! But it is one of the ways that we follow in the footsteps of the pilgrim Christ, who said: “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head” (Mt 8,20). Dominic left us a great example, a path of radical trust in God. With nothing but the Holy Scriptures and a walking stick, we “let go” like the Autumn leaf, letting God lead us into the heart of humanity.

As we celebrate these days the birth of the Word, I ask for your prayers as I set off for the next phase of this beautiful “way of the preacher” (which will begin with some sabbatical time of prayer and silence). I want you to know that I will continue to pray

ferently for you, my sister companions on the Path. I know that you will pray for our dear brother, fr César Valero, as he begins his service as the new Promoter of the Nuns. He has many years of experience in Dominican government and is a brother of profound compassion and wisdom. His arrival to Santa Sabina gives me great hope for the Order, and especially for you, my sisters. I feel like old Simeon: “Now Lord you may let your servant go in peace, for my successor has arrived!!”

May our journey towards the Jubilee of the Order renew each of us in faith, hope and charity. Our brother, fr Bruno, is inviting us into a time of *metanoia* and renewal. The Word is our light, our daily bread, our hope.

your brother in St. Dominic,
fr Brian J. Pierce, OP

Original: English

P.S. I take advantage of this last letter to thank with all my heart Sr. Isabel María, of the Monastery in Murcia, Spain, for her very generous service as editor of *Monalibus* during these years. It has been a joy and a blessing for me to work with Sr. Isabel María and the marvellous team of translators. May God bless each of them abundantly!

Letter to the Master

To the Sisters of the International Commission of Nuns of the Order

Dear Sisters,

At the beginning of this letter, by which I visit you as you begin your meeting of the Commission, I want to express to each of you my gratitude.

Above all, I want to thank all of you for the reflections that you have sent, and especially for the attention that you have given to my request regarding the preparation for our dialogue with the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life.

It is very important for me to be supported by our exchange of ideas when the moment comes for our dialogue with the congregation.

I also want to join your own expression of gratitude so as to thank with all my heart brother Brian, who finishes soon his mandate in service to the nuns of the Order. As you well know, he has spared no effort, desiring from the depths of his heart to visit the majority of the monasteries of the Order, participating in working groups and in meetings of the Federations. In the midst of all of this, he has been in every moment a brother who carries forth the Word of life, and we know well how important this has been for all of us. For myself, brother Brian has been in a certain way my "master of novices," guiding me in my apprenticeship in this important dimension of responsibility which the Master of the Order has with our sisters, the nuns.

My gratitude goes equally to brother Cesar Valero whom you welcome in this meeting and who soon, during the month of January, will replace brother Brian. I thank brother Cesar for having accepted this service. I can imagine all the fears that one must have when faced with a responsibility like this one, but I also know through experience that the welcome and trust among the sisters and friars, your friendship and prayer, your patience and goodwill are a strong support, sustaining us in the service which is always, in one way or another, "too big" for us. I do not doubt that brother Cesar will find in you and in all the nuns the support and joy he will need to carry out, with you, this mission of service to the Order.

Evidently, my gratitude is directed equally, in communion with you, to the Lord who gives every grace to us in the context of this magnificent mission of giving witness to the world, according to our modest means. It is none other than a witness to the light and truth of the living Word, the Word who comes to establish his dwelling in this world.

As you know, the recent Chapter of Trogir has proposed that we make use of the three years that we have until 2016 in order to

prepare ourselves to celebrate the anniversary of the confirmation of the Order. The Chapter calls us to truly commit ourselves to a path of "*metanoia*", a path that will lead us back to the Wellspring of our vocation, in order to draw forth the strength, confidence and courage needed for the future. This is always, deep down, the path of Jubilee, which, in a spirit of gratitude, calls us to set off with humility and truth. These are necessary conditions if we are to discover, in a given context, and taking into consideration our strengths and weaknesses, how we are called to be creative. On my part, I am convinced that the preaching of the Order and its mission to serve charism of preaching in the Church, being totally dedicated to the evangelization of the Word, call us to highlight more than ever the gift which is the synergy among friars, nuns, the laity and apostolic sisters. I know that I can count on you to help me promote, in the best way possible, that part which corresponds to the nuns in this mission.

I have read attentively the responses that you have sent to me, and now I am preparing for the first gathering that we will have with the other general superiors of the Mendicant Orders, with the secretary Archbishop of the Congregation. Without a doubt, we will have the opportunity to touch on a number of questions relating to the difficult situations for which the collaboration with the Congregation can really help us (fragile monasteries, the process of closing a monastery...). But my hope is that this gathering will not be dedicated only to "problems" that need to be resolved, but that it will be above all an occasion to highlight the living and creative reality of the monasteries in the life of the Church. During the audience in which the Holy Father recently received me, he insisted on the necessity of being mindful of the specificity of each one of the charisms of the nuns, and this point has been repeated often in the reflections coming from the nuns. In that sense, it is good to keep seeking ways to consolidate the life of the monasteries, the processes of initial and permanent formation, the promotion of vocations, relationships within the federations, the collaboration with the Friars and that the other members of the Dominican

family ... It is also in that same sense that we should be willing to think about new foundations and how to sustain them. In a similar way, we must think together about the monasteries that are presently in situations of great fragility, especially those that are in places which the Order considers essential for the mission. I am convinced that on these themes your reflection can be of great help to me, and therefore I thank you in advance. Please do not hesitate in sending to me any suggestions that you think might be useful.

I hope that you have a very fruitful meeting and I assure you of my communion in prayer. Please transmit my fraternal friendship to the community of Prouilhe.

Trusting in your prayer, I assure you of my fraternal love.

Brother Bruno Cadoré, OP

Master of the Order

Original : French

New Promoter of the Nuns



Fray César Valero, OP, friar of the Province of the Rosary, has been appointed Promoter of the nuns to replace Fr. Brian Pierce, OP. With pleasure he has accepted to answer some questions through which we can get to know something

more about him. During the next six years that he will be at the service of the Order as Promoter of the nuns we hope he will visit us, the nuns, so that we can get to know him better.

Well, Fr. Cesar, the first question is compulsory: How was your vocation? Tell us something about your personal history.

I am the older of two other brothers. We were a simple, humble, hardworking family. We lived in a

small village in the north of the Province of Valladolid: Santervás de Campos.

In the middle of the 20th Century the atmosphere in these villages in Spain favoured the religious environment and the interest for divine matters. From when I was a child I participated in this sensitive environment. I was an altar boy, I used to pray the rosary in the church of the village, I even played at celebrating the Eucharist (a little altar that my mother gave me as a present might still be somewhere in the attic of my parents' house).

During my childhood two or three Franciscan friars lived in my village. They worked and cultivated a piece of land they had inherited. One of them, Fr. Clemente, dedicated part of his time to the boys of the village. Some of them went to study to the Franciscan Seminary in Palencia. I also had that plan... But one day two Dominican friars arrived at the school of the village: Fr. Gregorio Buena (deceased) and Fr. Santiago Gonzalez, at the moment he is in Venezuela. They asked who wished to go to their School-seminary in Valladolid. Although three enrolled only two of us went and I have been there ever since. I was then eleven years old.

With time I began to think that the vocational experience is like going to sea (in this case the sea is the mystery of God). There is a gentle way of going to sea; you have to walk a long distance from the shore until you feel surrounded by the immensity of the sea. The other way is quick and sudden. You hardly have to walk into the water at all; the sea covers all of you. Consequently there are some vocations that develop slowly and others that occur in a fast and unexpected way. My vocational history belongs to the first group.

The Province you belong to is missionary since its origin and this is a plus for the Dominican itinerancy to which all of us are called. How long have you been in the Order and which places have you lived in? Which is the most special experience you remember?

I made my first Profession in 1974. I was ordained a priest in 1980. I have spent most of my life in Spain. During my priesthood I have been in charge of the youth, and the vocational well-being in the parish. Other years I have been at the brothers' service in responsibilities of government. I have devoted my time to preaching as much as possible.

I remember, a particular impact in my life, when I was in Orient and Venezuela as a missionary. I can't stop thinking of the brave effort of so many friars that during 400 years surrendered everything in distant lands for the love to Jesus Christ. For me they are a reference of apostolic generosity that challenges any resistance I can feel. I pray to these ones, my brothers, our brothers, many of them martyrs, so that the service I was asked to do for my contemplative sisters also has the mark of a fraternal and generous surrender, taking into account my limitations which are many.

Which service for the Order were you doing when the Master phoned you to entrust you this task? How did you react?

For the last four years I have lived intensely the ministry of preaching from the community of St. Martin of Porres, in Mostoles, a dense urban nucleus in the southwest of Madrid. I have been also collaborating with the sanitary and educational pastoral work of the parish entrusted to our community. By order of the Committee of Iberian Provinces (entities of the Order in Portugal and Spain) I assumed the responsibility of running the Centre of Communication and Preaching which is located in the Convent of St Peter Martyr in Madrid and where courses and activities related to our Dominican charisma have been imparted since 2008.

The first contact to propose this task to me was last June. I was really surprised and my first reaction which still endures was that I didn't feel the most suitable person for this task. For this reason I will have to practice mendicity before the Lord, asking for light and wisdom, and before the sisters and brothers, asking for merciful comprehension and collaboration.

I don't personally know you but I confess that for two or three years I had a piece of paper with your mobile number that somebody gave me and told me: "Call him, he is very good...", but the moment did not arrive. Since you entered the Order how has your relationship been with the nuns? What do you think of our life?

Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja.... No, I am not so good, I wish I was! My first contact with the nuns was during my first year of novitiate in Ocaña (Toledo)

where the Monastery of St. Catherine is. The relationship between the novices and the nuns was fraternal and close. We loved each other. I remember their joy, poverty and love for us. Later through the ministry of preaching (retreats, tridua, novenas...) I have had association with twenty or thirty monasteries of Spain.

Out of Spain when I was student of Theology, on a trip to Italy, we stayed in the Monastery of Sesto Fiorentino. I will never forget the great welcome of the sisters to the group of students!!!

And on one occasion when the monastery was placed in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, I preached an annual retreat for the sisters.

Although I don't know the reality of the life of the nuns deeply, these meetings have allowed me observe some of their difficulties and also the deep holiness and self-denial that exist in their lives.

I consider the lives of the nuns a beautiful gift for the Order and for the Church and for humanity. Your life which is intensely offered for the contemplative search of the mystery of God becomes for us an eloquent message saying that He is the Absolute in our lives, the origin and goal of our being and our acting.

The role of Promoter of the nuns in our Order is not new, but like everything in our Order does not have fixed parameters; the Dominican freedom is something wonderful and challenging. Have you conjectured how you are going to work with us? Can you share something?

I sincerely confess that I still don't have clear what all of you expect of me. That is why the first thing I have done and I will do is, listen. I have listened and I must go on listening to Fr. Bruno who told me about his interest in you and what you mean for the Order. I have listened to Fr. Brian who has shared with me his rich experience about the life of the nuns and his spontaneous enthusiasm for attending their requests. In Prouilhe I have listened to the sisters of the International Commission of Nuns. Their words and testimony encourage my first steps in this field. Now I am getting ready to listen to you who form the wide whole of the Dominican Monasteries in the world. I trust you to point out the way for me and I hope we begin a fruitful interchange.

On my part I would like that all together we could help each other to strengthen our vocation, the communion, the formation and the dignifying of life in your monasteries.

We should help each other to be what we should be, also making an effort in making the Dominican contemplative life known to young people. For this it is necessary to realize what our Fundamental Constitution states: Live in harmony having one mind and one heart in Christ.

This way of communion must be real in the whole Dominican Family. We must joyfully welcome all the initiatives which lead us to a more solid formation in the knowledge of the Word of the Lord and that they awaken in us the wish of taking root in our Lord Jesus Christ.

All together we will have to look for ways that guarantee the healthy and holy development of monastic life in its rich multiplicity of its contents and shades, we should make sure that the fraternal life in community, the liturgical and spiritual life, the formation and meditation and also the relaxation and rest have their space, time and performances that authenticate the quality of the whole.

Original: Spanish

Meeting of the International Commission of Nuns

The annual meeting of the International Commission of Nuns took place in Prouilhe, France, from 29th September to 7th October 2013. The eleven members of the Commission took part, together with our promoter fr. Brian and, invited by him, the new promoter, fr. César. Also with us was our translator Sr. Janett, a Filipino missionary Sister assigned in Spain.

The meeting was touching in several ways: first, because it took place in Prouilhe, the cradle of our Order; secondly, because it was the last meeting for fr. Brian; and thirdly, it was last also for six of the representatives: Sr. Vincenza representing Italy, Sr. Monica for Africa, Sr. Rosa Luz for South America, Sr. Mary Augustine for Asia and Pacific, Sr. Aurea for the *Federación de la Inmaculada Concepción* in Spain, and Sr. Lola (or Maria Dolorez) for the *Federación de Santo Domingo* in Spain. It was sad

to see these sisters and fr. Brian going. But we will see Sr. Lola next year as she invited us to her monastery of Toro in Spain for the next meeting.

The community in Prouilhe kindly reserved for us their retreat house for the whole week. We all nuns with Sr. Janett fit in nicely, while the two friars stayed in a parochial house near the monastery. We met in a big room in the retreat house and its small chapel served us for our private prayer and for the Vespers. For Lauds and Masses we joined the local community of nuns in the basilica.

First, fr. Brian read to us a letter from fr. Bruno, the Master of the Order, addressed to the ICN and to himself and fr. César. Fr. Bruno first thanked fr. Brian for his service to the nuns over the last six years, and then he also thanked fr. César for accepting to be his successor. Fr. Bruno then described the Dominican Jubilee as a time of *metanoia* for the Order. He invited all the communities of nuns and friars to celebrate an act of reconciliation in order to set on the journey towards the Jubilee.

As usual, reports from the regions were read and discussed. Because it would be too long to repeat here everything that was said, let me just mention three things: the community in Senekal, South Africa, has moved to Zambia: this move should help the community to receive new vocations. Four nuns from the monastery in Rweza, Burundi went to Benin to make a foundation. The monasteries in France have launched an excellent new website together, with news from France but not only – see *Moniales dominicaines en France*.

The weather was beautiful and still quite warm, so one evening we went by the baren fields to the 'town on the hill' - Fanjeaux, overlooking Prouilhe. We were received by Srs. Barbara and Arlette who showed us around the places related to St. Dominic. We also visited the house of the S.H.O.P. (or the Sisters Historian O.P.) where we had our dinner. When we went back to Prouilhe, it was already dark so we had a little adventure. Nobody broke their legs and we did not loose anybody.

Fr. Brian informed us about the internet university DOMUNI which offers study courses

now also in English as well as French and Spanish. Many nuns in France have been studying in this way and find it very satisfactory. Courses in theology, philosophy and religious sciences are offered; you can choose the subject and the way in which you want to follow it: you can make it fit your own needs. And the good news is - we nuns (others also but nuns especially) are encouraged to ask for scholarships.

One day we went by a rented bus from Prouilhe to Toulouse and Carcassone where we had Vespers with Dominican friars and with the local bishop who loves St Dominic very much. These Vespers in the beautiful historical cathedral of Carcassone were to commemorate the event exactly 800 years ago when our Holy Father Dominic preached the Lent in precisely this same cathedral. In Toulouse we visited the basilica where St. Dominic used to pray (St. Severin) and the old church and priory of the Dominicans (the Jacobins) where St. Thomas is buried. We saw the house of Peter Seilha also in Toulouse and had our Mass in the room where St. Dominic used to stay with his friars.

Towards the end of our meeting we had a recreation with the local community and another among ourselves. It was important to celebrate because we knew we would never meet again like this, with our dear fr. Brian and the six sisters who were leaving. May the Lord bless you, dear Brother, and all of you, our beloved Sisters! Thank you for everything! And although we will miss you, we are looking forward to our next meeting with Fr. César and the six new members yet to be appointed.

Sr. Josefa OP for ICN, the Monastery of Prague,
the Czech Republic
Original: English

Visit to the monasteries of Rweza in Burundi and of La Reunion in the Indian Ocean

Beginning in March, Brian Pierce, Promoter of the nuns, and Eric Salobir, promoter for use of the media, made several visits in Africa and in the Indian Ocean.

Arriving in the evening of Feb. 27 in Burundi, they spent the night with the brothers in Bujumbara before reaching the monastery of Rweza which is farther from the airport. Brother Brian had been there five years ago, but it was brother Eric's first visit and he helped fr. Brian by translation.

The four days of the visit were very full ones: one part of it was instruction from documents which brother Brian often uses: Benedict XVI's "Message to the people of God," his post-Synodal exhortation on "the Word of God," and also the letters of fr Bruno on the contemplation and the preaching of the Word of God.

One of the sisters described the conferences this way: "Brother Brian spoke and spoke, Brother Eric translated and translated, the sisters listened and listened, and asked questions. Time flew by, time flew by, and every sister asked for the grace of Joshua: Sun! Stop over Rweza so that brother Brian can continue to speak to us!"

Here is a little poem written as a resume of his teaching:

**Preacher,
Listen to the Word
Go into its dwelling
Look at (watch) and contemplate the
face of the Word
Pray the Word.
Make the Word go out of the house
And proclaim the Word to humanity
When you feel yourself empty, turn
back your steps
And contemplate, contemplate, the
Word
and especially do not stay there:
Go and sow the Word!**



Of course there was also time during these very full days to share news of the Order

and of the monasteries in the whole world, time for speaking of the role of the means of communication and of the media in announcing the Word of God, and also for speaking of the next foundation in Benin. In fact, after this visit, in the breath of Pentecost, four sisters from Rweza flew away to create a new contemplative Dominican presence in Africa.

Everything good has an end and our brothers had to leave this dynamic community. The last day, and especially the farewell Mass, were marked by the breakdown of the electric generator and fr Eric had to celebrate by torchlight. But he didn't miss one Missal prayer!

The next stage for the brothers was the monastery of La Reunion in the Indian Ocean. You will see more about that elsewhere in this issue of *Monialibus*. Beginning with the first meeting, br. Brian went straight to the center of our life: the community Liturgy. In a brilliant commentary on the beautiful letter from br. Bruno on this subject, he opened up immense horizons for us. It was a joy for our young sisters to be confirmed in their Dominican vocation, and to receive so much light on the nuns' place in the Order of Preachers, in the heart of the Church. [...] After teaching so rich and deep, we were able to follow, thanks to fr Eric, a question/answer exchange on the life of the Order throughout the world, our monasteries, and communications. (The presence of the promoter for the media demanded that!) It was all very exciting.

Since promoters have a crowded calendar, a day of rest had to be foreseen too. Our brothers were able to visit a vanilla plantation to see one of the products of this island. And what better place to rest than the magnificent landscapes of La Reunion. Then came the great day of the solemn profession of Sr. Mary of the Angels. She was surrounded by her family, her village, and her Dominican Family.

We can now let fr. Brian speak:

"These visits to Burundi and to La Reunion, made with brother Eric Salobir, promoter of the Order for the media, reminded me again of the courage and the hope which are needed to found the first monastery in a new

country. These two monasteries (and this is equally true of most of the communities in Africa and Asia) are "unique" monasteries, with no other Dominican monastery nearby with which to share in a regular way visits and mutual help. That is why it is so important for monasteries in mission countries to be part of a larger association, a federation, or a regional group of monasteries.

"When I visit these isolated 'mission monasteries,' I remember our Dominican vocation of preaching the Word to the ends of the world. The Dominican monastery is a 'Holy Preaching' in these countries. There is a real beauty in this missionary spirit and once more I had seen it in Burundi and in La Reunion. Both are monasteries rooted in the Church and in local cultures; this is clear in their relations with the people of each place. Fr. Eric and I both remarked how eager the nuns of the two monasteries were, thirsty to share and to reflect together on the different aspects of our charism and our Dominican spirituality. There was real interest and joy when we spent time studying and reflecting together on *lectio divina* and on the letter of the Master on the liturgy. This sharing was a source of life for fr Eric and me also. At Burundi, we learned the latest news about their next foundation: the first four sisters had left for Benin on Pentecost Sunday. And at La Reunion, we had the joy of celebrating the solemn profession of Sr. Mary of the Angels. May God continue to make our monasteries places of contemplative prayer and missionary preaching!"

Monastery of Rweza, Burundi;
Monastery of La Reunion (Indian Ocean), France
Original: French

*Chronicle from the Monastery Saint
Catherine of Siena – Cordoba –
Argentina*



On the 2nd of July, in a climate of joy and gratitude, we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the House of Prayer “associated to the Holy Preaching”, the first expression of consecrated life of our country.

Providentially, on the same day it was the meeting of the Master of the Order with the Prioresses and delegates of the communities. Mother Adriana Colombres, Vicar of the Federal Mother for the communities of Argentina and Chile, was present too. Our community had the opportunity of taking part in this moment of grace.

At 3 p.m. in the afternoon we welcomed the Master of the Order, Fr. Bruno Cadoré, OP, accompanied by Fr. Prakash Anthony Lohale, OP (Socius for Apostolic life), Fr. Javier Posse (Socius for Latin America and the Caribbean) and the Prior Provincial Fr. Pablo Sicouly, OP. We waited for them in the atrium of the church. As they were coming in contemplating the images of the temple, one of the nuns was playing the organ.

Once we were gathered together with Fr. Bruno and the friars, the Prioress or delegate of each Monastery made a presentation of her community, its reality and challenges. Then the Master addressed us with the following words:

“It is interesting –Fr. Bruno said- for a monastery and for the Order the celebration of a Jubilee is always a challenge to realize that we are celebrating history. Yes, but history is nothing without the present and without the promises of the future that we do not know. Then, gratitude to God is also a prayer, so that He helps us to be open to the future of His mission, His presence and His call to the Order”.

“I think that the celebration of the Jubilee of the Order in 2016 is a challenge and a responsibility: I would like each community of nuns and friars to strengthen their identity

“BEING HOUSES OF THE WORD”, houses that welcome the Word”.

After, there was some time for questions. Later we shared a snack and at 6 p.m. we prayed Vespers. Fr. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, OP, also participated in this liturgy. It was a moment of grace in which nuns and friars praised God in the Chapel.

The presence of the present successor of our father Saint Dominic and the former, Fr. Carlos Azpiroz, in the celebration of the anniversary of the foundation of this house of prayer was a gift of God.

After Vespers we said goodbye to the Master and his companions who went on to visit other communities.

At 7 p.m. our Archbishop Monsignor Carlos Jose Nañez presided the thanksgiving Eucharist for four centuries of contemplative presence. There were more ministers in the Mass: Monsignor Jose María Arancibia and Monsignor José Ángel Rovai, Monsignor Samuel Jofré, bishop of the diocese of Villa María, our chaplains, the Episcopal vicars, Fr. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, Fr. Miguel Guevara, Fr. Manuel Martínez, Fr. Pablo Condrac, Fr. Diego Correa, Fr. Carlos Correa Luna, Fr. José Alberto Molina, Fr. Lisandro Noguera and around thirty priests. The seminarists were serving in the Mass.

The celebration started with a procession while the young chorus was singing the entrance chant. The nuns, among them five Carmelites, were in the procession and were preceded by the seminarists.

This event was an opportunity to remember with gratitude the 400 years in this house of prayer and praise which is sign of the presence of God in the heart of our Church.

After 40 years of the foundation of Cordoba Colonial, on the 2nd of July of 1613, our monastery was born under the patronage of Saint Catherine of Siena.

That day the first sisters carrying lighted candles entered the monastery in a solemn procession. The bishop Fr. Fernando de Trejo y Sanabria, the families of the nuns, some priests and friars were witnesses of the delivery of the monastery. All of them with great emotion praised God and discovered in those candles the

brightness of the Lamb whom the novices were following.



We thank God because He has supported this supernatural work: a Creole foundation that the Holy Spirit inspired a woman who belonged to the first generation of Cordovans called Leonor de Tejada.

Our archbishop in his homily emphasized the following: “The monastery in the center of the city is a sign of the goodness of God. The monastery is a source of blessing through its service for the whole Church. It dignifies the city (...)”.

Pope Francisco was present in this event of grace for the entire Church through a Papal Blessing which was read at the end of the Mass.

On the 16th of July, Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we celebrate Sr Cristina’s diamond wedding.

The Eucharist was officiated by our chaplains. We raised our thanksgiving to God for His fidelity manifested in our sister’s life. In Vespers she made the renovation of the Profession “until death” in the Prioress’ hand. It was a testimony of perseverance which is good for all of us.

Our gratitude to all those that accompanied us with their presence, prayer, greetings and so many signs of fraternity in this year in which we have received grace after grace.

See you at each Eucharist.

Community of the Monastery of Saint Catherina of Siena. Cordoba – Argentina.

Original: Spanish

Dominican nuns of Africa hold their regional meeting in Nairobi

The prioresses and delegates of the Dominican nuns of Africa met at the monastery of Corpus Christi in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, from 16 to 23 September 2013 for their regional meeting held every three years. These were: Sr. Therese Claire and Sr. Mary Agnes – the prioress and delegate of St. Dominic Monastery, Bambui (northwest Cameroon), Sr. Mary Anne and Sr. Mary Martin, from the host monastery of Karen (Nairobi), Kenya, Sr. Margarita and Sr. Imelda, delegates from the monastery of Our Lady of Peace in Rweza (Burundi). The monastery located in Senekal, South Africa for almost thirty years recently transferred to the Diocese of Kabwe in Zambia. Though they are still in the process of foundation and dependent on the founding monastery of Karen, this new foundation was represented by the vicaress, Sr. Joyce Gabriel, along with Sr. Monica, in her capacity as Coordinator of the UMAOP (Union of African nuns of the Order of Preachers) and Representative of Africa on the International Commission of Dominican Nuns.

The prioresses and delegates of the two monasteries of Angola, the monastery of Toumi in western Cameroon, and the newest community in foundation – in the Diocese of Dassa-Zoumé, Benin (a foundation under the auspices of the Monastery of Burundi) – could not make the trip to Nairobi. Brothers Brian Pierce, OP, Promoter General of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers and Gabriel Samba, OP, Socius of the Master of the Order for Africa, also took part in the meeting.

The objective of this regional meeting was threefold: to review the life of Dominican monasteries in Africa, assess the formation program agreed at the last meeting in Bambui in 2010, and reflect on the future of Dominican monasteries in Africa.



The Master of the Order of Preachers, Brother Bruno Cadoré, OP, sent a message to the nuns that was read at the beginning of the meeting. The nuns have reaffirmed the need, importance and urgency of a strong initial formation and formation programs for the African monasteries. Two nuns from the Kenyan monastery, both of whom presently study outside the monastery, shared the experience of this opportunity to deepen their formation as Dominican nuns. Brother Brian encouraged the nuns to seek formation opportunities that could bring monasteries together for the benefit of all the nuns of the region, and to minimize costs. Two proposals for ongoing formation were presented: one would be a scripture formation course offered by two apostolic Dominican sisters from the USA, and the other idea was to combine a course on writing icons (offered by Sr. Toni Harris, former Promoter of Justice & Peace) with a workshop on economic development for the African monasteries. The nuns finally decided to design a course that would focus on formation in leadership, iconography, and project development and fundraising. The formation will take place next year in Bambui, Cameroon and the coordinator of the region will contact Sister Toni for the arrangement.

Brother Brian also talked about the Dominican University online DOMUNI as an excellent ongoing formation opportunity for the nuns. The idea was greeted with joy, and yet at the same time the sisters expressed their limitations, due to the lack of quality internet connection in their monasteries. Both the

Promoter of the Nuns and the regional coordinator invited the sisters to strengthen the links between the different monasteries in Africa, by participating in the regional meetings, paying their annual contribution, and by implementing the decisions agreed upon at the regional level. Brother Brian congratulated them on the criteria and procedures that they have put in place for the use of their funds.

Finally, there was a sharing of ideas regarding the Jubilee of the Order in 2016, marking the 800th anniversary of the confirmation of the Order by Pope Honorius III. In view of this celebration, each monastery is encouraged to write its history and to send it to Sister Barbara Beaumont (SHOP, in Fanjeaux, France) for publication.

As Sr. Monica arrives at the end of her six-years term on the International Commission of Nuns, and as regional coordinator, the nuns thanked her for her service and have also sent three names to the Master of the Order for the appointment of a new Coordinator and Representative of Africa. They elected Sister Mary Martin of the monastery of Karen as the new bursar of the region, to replace Sister Therese Claire of the Monastery of Bambui who has concluded her tenure. And finally, the assembly requested that Brother Gabriel Samba make contact with the monasteries of Douala and Rweza to speak about new possibilities of collaboration between these two monasteries.

Fr. Gabriel Samba, op
Original: English

Meeting of Prioresses and Novice Mistresses of Central and Eastern Europe

In the friendly environment of the Convent of our brethren in Prague there was held an annual meeting of nuns – prioresses and novice mistresses – from monasteries in Central and Eastern Europe. The session took place from 17th to 21st of October 2013, and this year's topic was formation. From the Polish monasteries arrived Sr. Dominica and Sr. Zdzislawa from St.

Anna, Sr. Bernadeta from Radonie and Sr. Stanislawa from Cracow. Czech monasteries were represented by Sr. Dominika and Sr. Rajmunda from Znojmo, and Sr. Katerina and Sr. Marie from Prague. We also welcomed the guests: Fr. Brian, and Sr. Josefa – our representative in the ICN. Sr. Stanislawa from St. Anna assisted as a translator. During these three days we discussed various aspects of the initial formation, and we returned to our communities with a proposal to organize two weekly meetings in the next year, both for the sisters in formation and for the novice mistresses. We hope that these meetings will enrich our communities, as our already traditional meetings of prioresses always do.

Sr. Marie Pitterová OP
Monastery of Prague (Czech Republic)
Original: Czech

Dominican Monastery in Vietnam

Every time sharing the work which God has done, is one more time to express gratitude towards Him (Mk 5,19). So we like to retell our Monastery's history every year on the anniversary of our Monastery's Birthday.

But first we want to share some exciting, important news. All of our permissions and paperwork are at last completed, and have been delivered to the Sacred Congregation in Rome. We are now happily awaiting the Holy See's permission to establish the autonomous Monastery of the Dominican Cloistered Nuns of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit, in Vietnam.

We look forward to this great gift God gives us. We would like to share our joy with the Dominican Family telling you, about what God has done for our Monastery. Please be happy and give thanks to God together with us.

In our country, the Dominican Family is blessed with many vocations: a province of friars was established in 1967, five congregations of sisters (of diocesan right) were established between 1951 and 1970; but the Dominican contemplative life was lacking. Unfortunately, after the unification of the country in 1975, the

political situation was not favorable to establishing a monastery of contemplative nuns. Not only all foreign missionaries had to leave the country, but the establishment of new religious institutes encountered great obstacles.

Since it is not possible for a foreign monastery to open a new house in Viet Nam, the alternative is to send some Vietnamese candidates to be trained abroad with the intention to go back for introducing the Dominican contemplative life to our country. Hence, in August 28, 1999, Sr. Mary Rose Dinh Thi Ngoc Huong (a member of the Congregation St. Catherine of Siena, Tam Hiep), and in May 9, 2000, Sr. Theresa Bui Thi Tam (a member of the Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena, Thanh Tam) entered the novitiate of the Dominican Monastery in Farmington Hills, Michigan USA. They made solemn profession of vows in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Other two sisters followed the same way.

In the meantime, with the recommendation of Rev. Father Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., Master of the Order, the Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament agreed to be the founding monastery for Viet Nam. On October 23, 2002 Sr. Mary Rose Figura, O.P., Prioress of the Monastery, together with Fr. Manuel Merten, O.P., General Promoter of the Dominican Nuns, visited Viet Nam. They met the Archbishop of the Diocese of Ho Chi Minh City, Most Rev. John B. Pham Minh Man, who allowed the two above mentioned sisters, who had finished their novitiate, to stay in his diocese, but "secretly" that is without external manifestation. Six months later, on March 16, 2003, these sisters moved to a house in Ngu Phuc, in the diocese of Xuan Loc. On January 9, 2004, the bishop of this diocese, Most Rev. Paul Mary Nguyen Minh Nhat, granted the canonical consent for the establishment of a religious community. The "permission of the civil authority" arrived seven years later, on September 16, 2010.

In March 2008, the Master of the Order allowed that the new candidates could be trained in Viet Nam, instead of going to the USA. This marked a new step in the development of the community. In fact, the

“first generation” of nuns consisted of sisters coming from the congregations of the apostolic life; but from now on, new vocations would come from lay women as well as religious.



At present, our community comprises 6 nuns in Solemn Vows, 2 in Temporary Vows, 1 novice and 6 Aspirants.

We are living on a small piece of land (888 m²), but since 1999, the Dominican Friars in Viet Nam gave us a piece of land (about 3 hectares), not far from the present house. We are waiting for a permission from the Government, in order to construct the new building on that land.

Finally we would like to say special words: “Thanks” to the Dominican Family, specially:

- We are very grateful to the Masters of the Order and all dear Brothers of the Curia (former and present).
- Heartfelt thanks to the dear Sisters of our Mother Monastery.
- We are special grateful to our Prior Provincials and all the Brothers of the Provincial in Viet Nam.
- Special thanks to the Federation of the Dominican apostolic Sisters in Viet Nam.
- Thanks to our Benefactors.

May God bless you all who have prayed and helped us in the past, at present and in the future.

Sister A. Jeanne Nguyen Thi Hao, OP
Original: English

“How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live in unity! “

Dear Sisters:

We are the novices and the sisters in temporary vows who form the community of the common novitiate of the Federation of Our Lady of Rosary, Bética Province, Spain. We would like to introduce ourselves and share with you our experiences during the months of living and evolving together.

My name is Sr Mary; I come from Antananarivo, Madagascar. I am a novice from the Monastery of Our Lady of the Incarnation, Alcala la Real (Jaen). This is my first year in the common novitiate. These months have helped me a lot and they have enriched me, especially living together with the sisters, learning very much from each other and walking together. Moreover, I would like to share all that have experienced, like the preaching with my community and everyone who is around me.

My name is Sr. Jacinta; I come from Machakos, Kenya. I am a novice from the Monastery of the Mother of God, Seville. This is my first year in the common novitiate. Personally, I feel enriched and I have a great desire to share my experiences with the sisters of my community. Living with my sisters has made me grow and I have lived very deep, intimate moments, sharing everything with them. I enjoyed the liturgy very much, it has been very lively, and we all participated in it.

My name is Ada Iris, I come from Santiago, Dominican Republic, and I am a novice from the Monastery of St. Florentine, Ecija (Seville). The novitiate was a powerful experience for me, because I have come to understand that God is the only one that guides my life. I have had the opportunity to get to know new cultures, and I also have mixed with girls from different places of the world. For all this the catholicity of the Church has become clear to me, that even though there are different languages, the language of the Spirit is the same. Different ways of thinking but the same aim: the search of God, the preaching from our hidden

life with Christ in God. I am very happy and I hope other girls can live this experience.

My name is Sr. Magdalena; I come from Machakos, Kenya. I am a professed sister in temporary vows from the Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, Arahall (Seville). These two years living in the common novitiate have helped me grow humanly and spiritually a lot. I was able to overcome my fears and I discovered that Dominican common life is like embroidery where fine and different coloured threads should be combined and interwoven harmoniously to draw the face of Christ and show it to all. The truth is that we have acquired it with the fraternal communion we had in the novitiate.

My name is Sr. Elizabeth; I come from Xalapa, Mexico. I am a professed sister in temporary vows from the Monastery of St. Catherine of Siena, Antequera (Malaga). During these two years I have been in the common novitiate I discovered the Order. I feel part of a family, I know that I belong to a community but through it I belong to the Order. I have discovered the richness and beauty of the differences and the catholicity of the Church because our novitiate is very international. All this made me feel accompanied in my vocation. I have finished my time of initial formation but now I begin my Dominican reality which I wish to live intensely.

My name is Sr. Therese; I come from Kerala, India. I am a professed sister in temporary vows from the Monastery of St. Anne, Villanueva del Arzobispo (Jaen). God has given me a gift of two years in the common novitiate. I have grown as a person and spiritually very much. I deepened in my vocation as a Dominican nun. I discovered the richness of belonging to the great family of Preachers. These courses have been, for me, two great Pentecostal experiences as among us there are European, African, American and Asian sisters and we all listen to each other in the common language of fraternal love. I finished my time of initial formation. I leave with joy, feeling accompanied by the sisters that, like me, are looking for the One who said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

For this gift we would like to thank: firstly God who has called us to follow Him in the Dominic Family. Secondly to our communities that had great interest for our formation. Thirdly to the Federal Mother and the Federation: they have made possible the opening of the Novitiate. We are very grateful to this community of the Federal Monastery because they welcomed us as their sisters and made us feel at home. Finally we would also like to thank the friars who have given classes to us every week. Thanks to the different sisters of the Federation who have imparted courses of formation.

And, of course, we are really grateful to our Mistress for her patience accompanying each and everyone of us. As you see everything is an abundance of grace. May Lord, who has started his work, fulfill it.

Novitiate of the Federation of Our Lady
of the Rosary. Bética - Spain

Original: Spanish

“Experience is the best teacher”

Sisters Esther and Mary Martin, both from Corpus Christi Monastery, Karen Nairobi, Kenya share their ongoing formation experiences made possible through programs started by the Association of Sisters of Kenya (AOSK). These programs are focused on helping religious women and men in their ongoing human and spiritual growth (an integral approach). The programs offered are diverse: Catechesis, Sabbatical, Formation for Formators, and Psycho-Spiritual Formation. I participated in the nine month course on Formation. Below is a mixture of the very positive reflections from both sisters.

Formation Course

The nine-month course is an ongoing Formation Course for religious sisters, brothers and priests who have experience in Mission and in religious life, and who have been asked by their superiors to take this program. Some of them have been asked to become formators, and others take the course for their own renewal. This allows them to go back to the mission and

to their communities with renewed strength, zeal, and new ideas for living and mission.

The courses offered in the Chemchemi Formation Course are:

- **Canon Law**
- **Old and New Testaments**
- **Liturgy**
- **Formation Course for Formators**

Apart from attending classes, there are prayer groups, group sharing and preparation for the Liturgy. All these activities are intended to help a person to become holy and whole.

How the Program has helped me

From 2008-2009 I attended a formators course. When I came to Chemchemi, I thought that the main aim of the course was to give me some ideas and principles to help young people as a Dominican Nun. However, after a few days I was surprised I was invited to make an inner journey in order to become more aware of myself in order to help other people. In other words, I thought that I was being sent to a course so that I could be a formator. To my surprise that was just a small part of it. I found out that much of the formation period had to do with my own journey, about myself. We dealt with various topics: human formation, spiritual formation, Christian formation, motivational formation, formation for relationship, personal formation in order to learn to make choices freely, etc...

In the first week, I felt like a fish out of water, for having lived in the monastery for so many years I was now being exposed to a very different atmosphere: I was the only contemplative among the apostolic brothers and sisters, but luckily after two weeks two sisters from the Bambui monastery in Cameroon joined the course, making me feel more secure.

Slowly, I started understanding and believing that one cannot help another person if she/he does not know her/ himself. After a month, I was no longer aware that I was outside the monastery, because of the beauty and intensity of the formation program. That year of formation challenged me. Some people take formation – especially the initial formation – as a passage or a tunnel. One goes through the years of formation to fulfill canon law or the

constitutions, but there is no real effect; we are neither affected or even *infected* by the formation process. I have come to realize that when one has no sense of self, formation cannot take place at all. That is why many have crises after solemn vows, and start behaving differently. The lack of self-formation can lead to self-deterioration, leading to disobedience.

So what is formation? What is it not? What does it entail?

(i) Formation is a process in which an individual enters into the deep recesses of his or her life, in order to acquire a profound and durable knowledge of self. The document *Vita Consecrata*, n. 68, says that renewal of consecrated life depends very much upon formation. It presents formation as a vital process by which an individual is consecrated to the Word of God in the depths of his or her being and at the same time learns how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities.

(ii). Formation is not just information about our family or about Christian, religious, or institutional morals. It is not just a training whereby one is expected to be disciplined and well-mannered. It is not just a matter of protection from world dangers and an orientation to spiritual things. This is information, which can be an aid to the essentials of formation.

(iii). Formation transforms, redeems, saves, and restores us. When God created Adam and Eve He created them in His own image and likeness. In the process of living, they distorted this image and likeness of God, thereby, becoming deformed. God in His goodness sent His only Son, and we were restored to God's image. Formation transforms not 'only the spiritual aspect' of an individual, but the total person, i.e., spirit and body. It adds value and integrity in the life of an individual.

(iv). Formation entails total openness to the graces of the Most High, preparing us to embrace and grow through life's challenges. As Jesus emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, formation requires self-emptying so as to provide space for transformation to take place. In order to grow, one has to be in a state of nothingness and readiness.

Formation requires willingness to share one's mind, inspirations and aspirations so that we can be enriched.

Sr. Mary Martin, OP
Sr. Esther Adhiamo, OP
Original: English

The fruits of mercy

Dominic's cry: "What will become of sinners? What will become of the poor?" reaches us intensified and resounding like an echo because of the signs of the times. Times of crisis, times of hunger, hunger for God. On both fronts we are involved for the challenge of mercy. How can we not have pity on the Christ who knocks on our door? Great realities usually originate from small decisions. Respond by giving food, listening and offering an environment of prayer which was the beginning of our labor, a labor which exceeds our capacity, but like a bright torch we have transferred it to the laity and to our friends. We have discovered that our house is a "house of prayer".

Currently we run a modest soup kitchen where some volunteer women provide around 80 rations of food. We also have industrial premises where assistance can be offered such as civil services, health, teaching for children who cannot pay extra classes, etc... Basic baskets of food are distributed to 400 families. Disadvantaged women are taught to sew and how to organize their houses, some fruit and vegetable patches are available so needy people can cultivate their own crops and they are guided by retired farmers.

All this is fruit of a small kernel of mercy which sprouted eleven years ago in our monastery. Now the volunteers have formed an association called "People of Consolation" alluding to the name of our monastery. It is they and not us who are in charge of everything.

On the other front, we were also asked: "Teach us to pray". We open our Chapel and we share our prayer and the *Lectio Divina*. Every Sunday a considerable group of people pray with us. It is an evening of prayer. They participate with their echoes to the psalms and to the Gospel, with their prayers and readings,

with simple symbols which make prayer a living part of our life.

We cannot evade these two fronts in these arid times we are living, and today we can confirm that "in giving we enrich ourselves".

Sr. Aurea Sanjuán, OP and community
Monastery of the Consolation
Xátiva (Valencia – Spain)
Original: Spanish

"Brothers and sisters He created them...and God saw that it was Good!"

Our brother Brian Pierce came "on Visitation" to the monastery of St. Maximin in October of 2013. We welcomed him gladly and there were good exchanges with him, both in community and during personal meetings with one or another sister who could converse with him in English. I myself was able to benefit from a beautiful meeting; during it I told him about my good Dominican experience of being an unobtrusive little "associate" of the editorial team of the Review *ISTINA*. Fr Brian was very interested and wanted me to write an article about it for *monialibus*.

What I offer is very simple, very Dominican, and completely monastic.

May I introduce you to the Review *ISTINA*?

"Istina" is a Russian word which means TRUTH (very Dominican!), but not social, political or philosophic truth – that word would be PRAVDA - but THE truth, that is, Christ himself, He who is truly Risen.

In Paris, the *ISTINA* Study Center is a Dominican institute oriented toward "the unity of Christians of East and West." At the Study Center, the quarterly Review *Istina* is edited. It was founded in 1934, with "*Russia and Christianity*" as its first title. The Director of the Review is a Dominican friar, and the editorial committee is composed of Dominican friars, so we are "with family" there!

In each issue there are sizable articles, dossiers prepared by good competent authors(!),

as the center of the Review. At the end of each issue there are book reviews and a “Chronicle of Periodicals” – and that is where I enter. That part has many sections: Oriental churches, Anglicanism and Protestantism, Ecumenism, Judaism.

How did this collaboration come about, you ask?

Fr. Michel Malleve (Director of *Istina*) met me a long time ago and knew of my spiritual commitment to ecumenism, especially with the Orientals and the Orthodox. He thought I would be able to help with the book reviews or with the Orthodox section of the periodicals.

After I received the approval of Sr. M. Pascal, my prioress, we thought about the project more concretely....In the course of the conversation he became aware that I am also devoted to Judeo-Christian dialogue and friendship. At *Istina*, this area had been let go for several years, for lack of “personnel” to work on it. So I became an unexpected and providential collaborator! Soon I was the person responsible for doing the “Chronicle of the Review SENS” for the Review *ISTINA*.

Concretely, what is there to do?

The Review SENS is published by the Jewish-Christian Fellowship of France. It comes out every month and has long and beautiful articles on Jewish-Christian dialogue. We found out that friends of the monastery have been giving us this Review for many years. (Thank you to those benefactors!) It falls to me to read it and to prepare a little resume – two or three lines – for each article. I make up a document for each issue that comes out, and when I have a certain number I send them to the Director of *ISTINA*, who then undertakes to make them appear progressively, according to the content of the issues he has in preparation.

There it is! - an activity done in silence in the cloister, nourishing for contemplation, prayer, intercession, and compassion. It asks a modest and regular investment of intelligence and it presupposes a talent for synthesis. (The work required for that is good exercise and can even become a habitus!) It needs time, of course!

I personally work during the time allocated for study (with us, every Wednesday afternoon) and I can add Sunday and other free times to that.

Great spiritual profit?

What is especially important to me is the apostolic implications for prayer which are nourished and informed by means of an assiduous reading of SENS. It is truly a very spiritual experience, a monastic, a Dominican one, in the service of the unity of Christians and of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. I appreciate also the intellectual benefits – because it is also a very Dominican service to the Truth!

I have been offering my small assistance since January of 2013, and hope my contribution responds to the expectations of the friars and editors. For that intention I entrust myself to your prayers.

The initiative I have described undoubtedly could find other “adepts” and give parallel ideas of service to the apostolic life of our Order?...My thanks to fr Brian who suggested this sharing.

Let us go on ahead with joy and think of our Savior!

Sr. Claire, o.p., of St. Maximin
Original: French

God and his image

Dear Sisters, we would like to share with you all – especially with those Spanish speaking persons - a book that reached us at the beginning of the year as an unexpected “Christmas present”. We think that it was certainly a gift of “the Word made flesh” who wished to stay with us “in the form of a book” so we could get to know Him better and love Him more.

The author is one of our brothers, a French Dominican friar. The book was published in 1964 and it was re-edited in France in 2004. It was translated into Spanish in 2011.

For us, reading and studying it has meant a before and an after in the comprehension of the Bible. To “open your

appetite" we have transcribed what is written on the back cover a part of the presentation made by the author.

"In this book Father Dominique Barthélemy, OP, a great specialist on Biblical studies, does not speak as such but as a great reader and believer of the Scripture... He enables the texts and the history to speak so deeply that we can predict the faith of Israel through which we receive the revelation of Jesus Christ. A master piece has been created according to Hans Urs Von Balthasar".

Father Dominique says: "If 'amateur' comes from the verb love, this is a work of 'amateur'. If the 'amateur' goes quickly towards what it loves, without worrying about the stability of the soil he is standing on and restoring with the next step the balance which was threatened in the preceding falsely taken step, then this is a work of 'amateur'.

Despite this too easy apology, the pages that I publish today worry me a bit. As I was writing them I was afraid of having forgotten all I should know about literary criticism. When I enumerate some precepts of the Law, the Elohist Codex is mixed with the Deuteronomic Codex without any objection. The character traits of Moses appear spiky from Yahwist, Elohist and sometimes priestly traditions as if it was permitted to associate its manifestations without wise preliminary discussions.

Exodus, Ezekiel and the Revelations dialogue like old friends without having been introduced. I am afraid that those who venture through these pages feel some discomfort when they realize that I consider the Bible a work of a single author. I know very well that a task cannot be serious –in the critical sense- if it is considered with retrograde prejudice. You must know, then, that in this sense it is not a serious task.

In spite of all this I have allowed myself to publish it because I am convinced that a lot of serious criticism could overlap the essential seriousness of the Holy Scripture: the word of God addressed to His people, that is, to you and me".

We don't want to tire you anymore. We hope that this short "introduction" has

commended you on to plunge into its reading to get to know and experience it with immense fullness; the inscrutable richness of the living WORD that lives in our hearts. Do not hesitate in writing to the Three Kings so that they give it to you as a present on their way back after adoring Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. We think this book should be in the library of all Dominican contemplative nuns.

This book has been edited by the FOUNDATION MAIOR, Desengaño St. 10, 3º A, 28044 MADRID. You can order it and they will send it quickly. I don't think it is on sale in the bookshops.

May the Word made book, bread and flesh in Jesus Christ and in each one of our brothers and sisters keep all of us united in love. In that love we stay.

Your sisters from Sancti Spirits in Toro, (Spain).

Sor M^a Azucena Sedano, op

Original: Spanish

Echo

We've all heard it at one time or another,
The fun sound of an echo;
Whether in a mountain valley, a cave
Or a special building.
We're always taken aback when
We hear the reiteration of our voice;
We smile at the repetition of the sound
As it bounces back to our ears.
I heard an echo today,
In the monastery chapel,
The place where cloistered nuns
Had formerly lived and prayed,
Individually and as a community.
They are gone now, their prayers silent,
But the echo of their petitions
Reverberates around the world,
A rippling effect that will go on forever.
So our prayers echo where God intends,
They are answered for our specifics,
And abundantly all we ask or think,
Rippling out to bless the world
And echoing back to bless us.
Thanks be to God!

Norma Seaman

United Methodist Church, Cincinnati, OH
45208

Sent by Sr. Mary Columba, OP

*The monastery spoken of in this poem was a
Dominican Monastery in Cincinnati, Ohio (USA)*

**The foundation of the first
Monasteries of Dominican Nuns**

(Continuation)

As to the story of the foundation of S. Sisto in Rome, it is different again: here it was the question of founding a monastery which would assemble "volunteers" from different monasteries in the city to form a reformed monastery. The initiative is due to Honorius III, who gave the enterprise to St. Dominic. This monastery was expected to receive 60 sisters: when we know that at the beginning of the 13th century there were roughly 80 nuns in the seven monasteries in Rome, one can seize the ambition of the pontifical project to build a monastery to house three quarters of the nuns of Rome!

The history of this monastery is known through the story told by a nun of a roman Monastery, sister Cecily, who describes the arrival of the sisters at S. Sisto on the 28th February 1221:

« At that time, blessed Dominic, on the orders of Lord Honorius, pope, had to assemble the nuns who lived in the various monasteries of the city and make one community at the church of S. Sisto, occupied until then by the friars. There was amongst others the monastery of S. Maria in Tempuli, who kept the image of the blessed Virgin venerated today in the church of S. Sisto. The abbess, together with Cecily and all the nuns except one, made a promise in the hands of St. Dominic to enter cloistered life if the image of the Holy Virgin remained with them in the church of S. Sisto. But if the image went back to the church of St Mary, as had happened before, they would all be totally released from their vow. Blessed Dominic gladly accepted this condition. Having received their word, he told them that he did not wish them to leave the

cloister to visit their parents or for any other reason. However, when the parents learnt of this, they came to the monastery to reason vehemently with the abbess and the nuns, reproaching them of wishing to destroy such a noble convent and of delivering themselves into the hands of this unknown brigand, to such an extent that certain sisters repented of the vow that they had taken. Informed by the Holy Spirit, blessed Dominic came to see them one morning and after having celebrated mass and preached a sermon, he declared to them: My daughters, you repent already and you wish to retire from the way of the Lord. I ask that all those who wish to enter the convent renew their promise in my hands.» Then all those who had had regrets rallied, thanks to his merits, and the abbess and all her daughters remade their promise between his hands. When they were committed by the same conditions as before, blessed Dominic took all the keys of the monastery and was sole in control. He arranged that lay brothers should guard the sisters day and night and to procure for those inside food and all necessities. He no longer allowed the sisters to talk alone with their families or other people. And when the Lord Pope had given the church of S. Sabina to the brethren where they were to live, taking with them all their furniture, books and other objects, blessed Dominic insisted that the abbess and all her sisters should live in the church of S. Sisto. Thus, it was on the first Sunday of Lent [28 February 1221] that the sisters entered their new home (...) As to the image of the blessed Virgin, it was removed the night after the entry of the sisters. By night, because the reaction of the Romans was feared, they did not want the image to be transferred, as it was easier to visit the first church. Blessed Dominic, accompanied by two cardinals, Lord Nicholas and Lord Steven, the nephew of whom he had resuscitated, and a considerable crowd, all barefooted, escorted by numerous torch bearers, carried it on their shoulders to the church of S. Sisto. The sisters, barefoot, waited in prayer. The image was placed very reverently in their church; it is there today under the guardianship of the same sisters, for the praise

of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen »

In April 1221, 8 sisters arrived from Prouilhe, as the chronicle by brother Benedetto de Montefiascone relates: « After that, blessed Dominic, to form the nuns called on the monastery of Prouilhe which he had erected himself, Sister Blanche and seven other sisters. Four returned to their monastery after a short while: Sister Blanche stayed until the end with three other sisters in the monastery of S. Sisto, where blessed Dominic established her as prioress. She taught the nuns the observances of the Order, and showed them how to speak in sign language.

It is now necessary to say a few words about the foundation of the monastery of S. Agnese of Bologna, even if, strictly speaking, it was founded after the death of St. Dominic. But the first contacts with the founder, Diana of Andalo, with St. Dominic date from 1220. We have a chronicle from the 13th century, the *Chronicle of St. Agnes* which tells of the sometimes incredible circumstances of the foundation. The friars preachers arrived in Bologna in 1218; rapidly, they were rejoined by Reginald d'Orleans, the ex-most senior member of Saint-Aignan d'Orleans, who had just entered the Order: he «came to Bologna and preached the word of God fervently: Dame Diana, daughter of the Lord of Andalo, attracted by the spirit of God, started to despise the pomp and vanities of the century, and to be seen in the company of, and have more and more frequently conversations with the friars preachers. This is why, when blessed Dominic arrived in Bologna, she started to cherish him with all the affection of her spirit and to talk to him about the salvation of her soul. Lastly, a little later, she put herself into his hands and made her profession in the presence of master Reginald and other brothers (...) In between, this Dame Diana, who had not forgotten her vow, started to talk to blessed Dominic about the way she could complete it. One day, therefore, blessed Dominic gathered his brothers together and asked them for their agreement to build a house for sisters who would be called and

would be of the Order; as the brothers told him that he could do as he pleased, blessed Dominic said to them: «I do not want to give you an answer today, I wish to consult with the Lord and tomorrow I will give you my reply». And as was his habit, he went back to pray with ardour. The next day, after prayers, while he was with the brothers in Chapter, he said: «My brothers, the sister's house must absolutely be built, even if ours has to wait»

Diana secretly entered the neighbouring monastery of Ronzano, but her family came to find her: «Arriving at the monastery, they made her leave with such force that they broke one of her ribs. She kept the mark of the fracture until her dying day. Because of their violence, she had to remain in bed for nearly a year in her father's house. Blessed father Dominic was in Bologna. When he heard of her entry he rejoiced greatly: but having heard of the violence that she had undergone, he shared deeply in her suffering and sent her, in secret, letters while she lay ill in her father's house. In fact, her family did not allow her to speak to any one, unless one of them was present.»

After the death of St. Dominic, Diana d'Andalo managed to return to the monastery of Ronzano: «Despairing of her, her family allowed her to leave. She lived in this monastery from the feast of All Saints until the week after the octave of Ascension. In the middle of all this Master Jordan, of happy memory, who was then provincial of Lombardy, with the fore-mentioned brothers, to whom blessed Dominic had entrusted the business, faithfully helped her, working so that she might achieve the work that she had so long desired. »

It was thus that the monastery of S. Agnese was founded and that the sisters could enter in 1224. But they need to be formed: «Master Jordan, of good memory, wanted, with the permission of the sovereign pontiff, to bring four sisters from S. Sisto so as to teach them about the Order and religious life, he sent to the Curia two of the four brothers to whom blessed Dominic had entrusted the affair. (...) The sovereign pontiff Honorius went to the women's monastery of S. Sisto; (...) and amongst the things that he said to the sisters, was that he

thought it was very difficult to allow a few to leave; however, as he considered it would be incongruous and improper, not to accord the grace to be fulfilled the prayers of such people, he affirmed that he intended to send four of them to the monastery of S. Agnese. That is why, by the virtue of the Holy Spirit and obedience, he ordered them to elect four, the most appropriate, to complete this work. In this way, four sisters who had made profession in the hands of blessed Dominic and who had received from him the habit came to the monastery of S. Agnese and stayed in that community until the day they died, rich in a great strength of saintliness. One of these sisters was sister Cecily who is alive to this day. »

A few remarks by way of conclusion: firstly, one will see that the foundation of each of the first Dominican monasteries corresponds to particular circumstances: The monastery of Prouilhe, for example is founded in the context of the predication against heresy. S. Sisto in Rome is the fruit of the pontifical will for reform. That which coincides the best in a more general way with what had been the foundation of the Order of Preachers and the personality of St. Dominic. Father Simon Tugwell, who is today the best specialist on St. Dominic, has shown that he did not correspond to the figure of an unique founder to whom would return all the initiatives in a providential way without either hesitation or error, but that he was a man who knew how to adapt to the circumstances and the needs of the church, who knew how to depend on others. The foundation of the Order of Preachers is a joint work. The history of the first monasteries of the Order, confirm this interpretation. The foundation of the monastery of S. Agnese of Bologna demonstrates that it was a joint undertaking, at the initiative of Diana of Andalo, but in which numerous brothers are involved, the same as those who had had such importance in the first expansion of the Order, such as Reginald of Orleans or Jordan of Saxony.

Another remark on the subject of the unity of these monasteries, of which the circumstances surrounding their foundation were so different. St. Dominic and his brothers transported sisters from one to another

monastery so as to insure their unity. Thus the sisters from Prouilhe came to S. Sisto to teach the customs of the Order, and the sisters from S. Sisto went to S. Agnese of Bologna. In the same way the constitutions of the sisters of S. Sisto, largely inspired by the first constitution of the brothers, went from monastery to monastery.

A last remark: the monasteries of Dominican nuns multiplied so rapidly that the brothers sought to get rid of them as quickly as possible so that the *cura monialum* did not obstruct the office of preaching. In 1239, they obtained from pope Gregory IX to be exempt from the direction and the administration of the sister's monasteries. From then on, the nuns started the struggle to be reintegrated into the Order. It was the case of S. Sisto in Rome in 1244, and then a new monastery founded in 1234 at Montargis. At the end of 1246, about thirty monasteries were entrusted to the brothers: at the most they gained exemption from the temporal administration. In 1252, pope Innocent IV exonerated the brothers from the *cura monialum*, except for the monasteries of Prouilhe and S. Sisto. In the end, in 1259, all the monasteries returned under the jurisdiction of the Order.

The sisters had, perhaps, perceived more clearly than the brothers the links that bound them. It is customary to say that St. Dominic founded the nuns before the brothers. A glance at history allows us to nuance this affirmation, as it relies on the date of the foundation of Prouilhe, but, in fact, the exact status of this first foundation is not very clear. It remains that this chronological anteriority, if anteriority there is, is a sign of another anteriority, that of a spiritual order: it concerns that of contemplation on preaching, because preaching is contemplation communicated. The mystery of Christian preaching is accomplished when the exterior preaching of the preacher - that of the friar preacher - rejoins the interior preaching of the Spirit of God in the heart of mankind. The nuns of the Order of Preachers participate in the office of preaching, not only by praying for the brothers but also and primarily so that the heart of the listeners should be open to the Holy

Spirit. There is the profound sense of their office of intercession.

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Original in French
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