



# *Monialibus*

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JANUARY 2004



**International Commission of Nuns  
Prouilhe, France  
October 2003**

*"It is God who makes us dwell together in unity"*

# CONTENTS

- Editor's Page
  - Program of the Master
  - Letter of Fr. Manuel Merten, OP
  - Program of the General Promoter
  - Account of the Meeting of the International Commission of Nuns in Prouilhe, France
  - Homily of Bishop Jacques Despierre at the ICN Meeting in Prouilhe
  - Monialibus - the International Bulletin of Dominican Nuns
  - Italian Dominican Monasteries: Annual course for the nuns in formation
  - Nuns of the First Monastery in USA: Make decision to close
  - Shared Experiences: The Use of Internet in Promoting Vocations for the Nuns
- “The Milky Way”
- Announcements: Dominican Family in Iraq  
New Book by Sr. Marie-Ancilla, OP  
New Book by S. Marie, OP (Genevieve Trainar)



## **EDITOR'S PAGE**

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This issue of Monialibus welcomes and greets you, MABUHAY! The “mother editor” of Monialibus, has given birth to a “new editor” from the Philippines who, in her native land, welcomes people and greets them, Mabuhay! Long Live!

As the nuns are widely spread throughout the world, Fr. Manuel Merten focuses on communications in order to be in touch, build bonds and share about the concerns of the nuns. In his letter, he related his visits to various monasteries, where he discovers more and more

that monastic life is “a loving relationship between a person, a monastery and God”.

The unity amongst the members of International Commission of Nuns was evident as we talked about the letter from the Assistant of Apostolic life and the document on the “Dominican Charism of Preaching”. The question now is how can we represent the views of the nuns regarding this reflection? We responded to the petition of the General Chapter of Providence addressed to the Promoter of the Nuns, who, with the help of the International Commission and the Federations were to draw up a map locating the presence of Dominican monastic life or where it could be established in the future. We also dealt with the significance of “distance learning” by using the Internet with the assistance of Fr. Michel Van Aerde, OP.

It might be of interest for you to hear the ‘history’ of Monialibus and its development. The Commission, I’m sure all the monasteries too, would like to express their deep gratitude to Sr. Claire Rolf, OP for her efforts and great love for the nuns and the Order in organizing this bulletin.

In this edition, the postulants, novices and juniors of Italian Monasteries share their “Roman Experience” with you at their annual course held in Rome.

Every monastery has their “story” from beginning to the end. We share with you the story of the closing of the monastery of St. Dominic in Newark, USA. May this Paschal experience mysteriously bear fruit of new life for each of the sisters, the Order and the world.

You will find a new rubric: “Announcements”. It is a way to share brief information which may be an encouragement or be of interest. In this issue you will discover two books written by nuns that have recently been published

If you have any information you would like to have published in Monialibus, you can contact me at [emmanuelleop@digitelone.com](mailto:emmanuelleop@digitelone.com) . Salamat po! (Thank you!) MABUHAY!

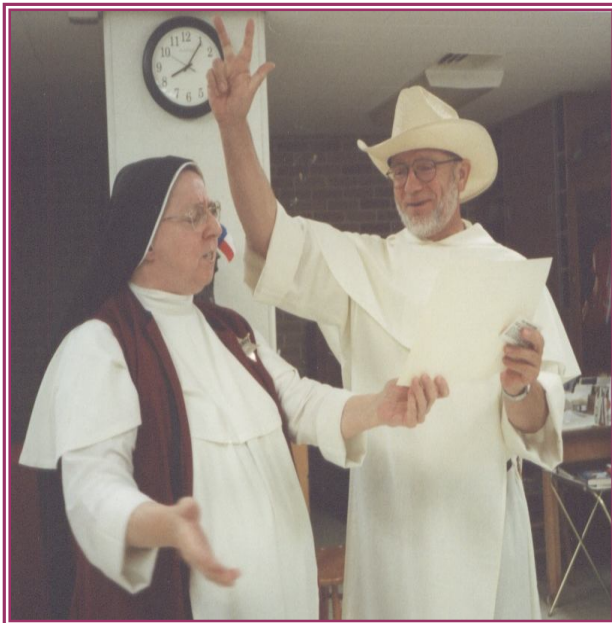


## ***PROGRAM OF THE MASTER***

### **YEAR 2004**

- 2. 1 - 7      CIDAL meeting in Chile
- 2. 23 -28    Plenary meeting of the General Council in Rome
- 3. 1 - 19     Canonical visitation to the Province of Spain
- 4. 4 - 25     Canonical visitation to the Province of Ireland

### ***LETTER OF FR. MANUEL MERTEN, OP, PROMOTER OF THE NUNS***



**Dear Sisters,**

**As** I begin this letter, I am still completely under the influence of a week-long retreat, which I spent with our sisters in the monastery in Prague from the 30<sup>th</sup> of November to the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2003. The testimony of John of Spain, that St. Dominic always had the Gospel of St. Matthew with him (and the letters of Paul the Apostle) and studied it so intensively that he almost knew it by heart, was taken as the foundation for our own consideration of this Gospel. During the addresses in Holy Mass and one talk each morning, I attempted to work out some of the evangelist's focal points, and to connect them with the life and the preaching of the Father of our Order. At the end of each morning talk, the sisters were given some impulses for meditation, which helped us to get into conversation with each other and to share our faith during our afternoon gatherings. Each evening, instead of compline, we celebrated a somewhat longer service at the close of the day, which was put together by a different sister every day. The service of penance on the last evening was a particular highlight. We prayed the penitential psalms together, and heard texts chosen from the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions, confessed our mistakes and weaknesses to each

other and to God, imitated the prostration of the Magi before the Child Jesus through the symbol of the Venia (cf. Mt. 2:11), and reminded ourselves of our profession at the same time, and the request connected with this for God's mercy and the mercy of our sisters and brothers. The service was framed and punctuated by songs in several voices. This was concluded by the General Absolution. I look back on these days with thanks, as they were a spiritual highlight for me this year, which is now gradually drawing to a close.

When I let my thoughts wander over the course of the year, I conclude that the year 2003 was, in several respects, a year which was moving and full of experiences for me. Taking leave of my dear mother was a prominent crucial event, as you might expect. The loving and compassionate expressions of sympathy from so many of you and your support through your prayers have done me good, and my siblings and their families too. I am deeply grateful to have experienced anew what a gift it is to belong to this large Dominican Family that cares about each member.

Very soon after my mother's death, I was able to celebrate a celebration of life with the sisters in Prague: the tenth anniversary of the founding of the monastery. My predecessor, fr. Viktor Hofstetter OP, wrote a touching report about this in IDI. He was really present, you could say, at the birth of this foundation.

During the month of August, I was mainly in the United States of America. My first visit there was to the sisters in **Washington**. I was able to share their joy in having two postulants, and participate in their deliberations about the plan to leave Washington and build a new monastery in a more quiet area.

In the community of the six sisters of **Camden**, I discovered with joy that they are fond of each other and give each other mutual support. We considered together how the links with the other monasteries in the USA and with the whole Dominican Family could be strengthened.

My visit to the eight sisters of the monastery of **Union City** was short. I was deeply moved by the kindness and warm-heartedness of these mainly elderly sisters. Despite their limited strength, illness and infirmity, they faithfully fulfil their task of the service of prayer for the Order and the Church. It is hoped that they will obtain all the help and support from the Dominican Family which they will increasingly need in the future.

A visit to the sisters in **Newark** became a special spiritual experience for me. On the way there, I was worried about the following: "How can I provide them with comfort and courage, in view of the dissolution of the monastery which has been decided upon, and the plan to distribute its members to other monasteries in the USA?" But the reality was completely different. The way in which the sisters spoke about the dissolution of the monastery, and how they now understand their departure to other communities, were a real witness to their faith, their responsibility for the mission of the Order, and a classic example of what we understand by our "itinerancy". Three of the conversations I found especially moving. I quote them here just as I remember them:

- “Even if we were now to have candidates who were willing to join, we could no longer guarantee them that they would spend their more than seven years undergoing training in a community that continues to be functional. We thought that accepting candidates at this juncture would be irresponsible.”
- “The number of sisters is getting smaller and smaller, but our expenditure is not reducing at all - on the contrary, the same large house must be heated, and the repair costs are the same etc. I eventually reached the point where I find it more and more difficult to reconcile this situation with the vow of poverty.”
- “I was convinced that God has called me to go into a monastery, that he has led me along all the paths which have brought me here. How can I assume that his readiness to lead me ceased as soon as I arrived in Newark? I think that God is capable of leading me further. Despite all my love for this house and this place - God’s opportunities for my life are greater!”

My visit to the monastery in the **Bronx** provided, along with many conversations and good encounters, a particular surprise: a power cut for almost 24 hours. This blackout encouraged our talent for improvisation and provided us with a pleasant candle-lit barbecue evening in the inner courtyard, as an advance celebration of the Feast of the Assumption of St. Mary. The flight to Syracuse planned for the next day was one of the five hundred flights that were cancelled due to the blackout. All the attempts to catch a bus or a train were also doomed to failure.

In the end, there was only one solution: two Bronx sisters brought me to my next goal, the monastery in **Syracuse**, after a seven-hour car journey. There was an encounter with the sisters in the evening, which was more than a short one, and then we celebrated Holy Mass together the next morning, and had a somewhat longer conversation, then it was already time for me to move on, to the airport. I promised to look for an opportunity to come back for a longer visit.

From Syracuse I flew to San Francisco via Chicago. A pleasant stay with our sisters in **Menlo Park** then took place. There was hardly enough time to discuss the many questions that came up in our rounds of talks, or to explain and report about all the things which interested the sisters. There was something additional, that most of our monasteries of nuns do not have: a community of brothers lives on the site belonging to the sisters. The togetherness is experienced by both sides as truly enriching. I was reminded of the early days of the Order in Prouilhe (and other places as well), where this manner of brotherly and sisterly perception was the norm in the mission of the Order.

The journey to San Francisco airport was arranged by the sisters in such a way as to make possible a short visit to the brothers in Oakland and a little city tour of San Francisco. I am grateful to them for that, even though the Golden Gate Bridge was unfortunately hidden in fog and clouds.

The monastery in **Los Angeles** was a total surprise for me. There is already something different about it, when you hear that this monastery is situated in Hollywood, and I learnt in the flesh that this is really the case. As youths, we used to be fascinated by the film-star Audrey Hepburn: I used to have a picture of her in my desk drawer, and I still often like to see the film “Vacanze Romane”, in which she and Gregory Peck played the main characters. I was completely amazed when one of the older sisters told me: “Oh yes, Audrey Hepburn often visited our monastery. I spoke with her several times. She was a pious young lady, and asked us over and over again to pray for her.” Despite the danger of my report about the monastery in Los Angeles seeming to be about superficialities, sometimes I still have in my mouth the taste of the excellent chocolates which the sisters produce.

My next stop was the monastery in **Lufkin**. Once again, I am in danger of reporting about less important things rather than the contents of the deep conversations we had, the impressive encounters and the sisterly and brotherly exchange of views. But Lufkin is actually situated in Texas, and, as everyone knows (and I know as well!), Texas is a little bit larger, a little bit better, a little bit more important, and one actually ought to dispense with the phrase “a little bit” if one wants to describe what Texas is - and that goes for this monastery in Texas as well. The sisters taught me all these sorts of things and, during a small celebration on our last evening together, they declared me to be an honorary citizen of Texas. Documentary evidence exists showing me with the certificate, a Texas hat and a pistol in my habit belt. I even managed to have an exchange of bullets with one of the sisters, and that there is also a photo of this. But let me warn you: even if you were to see this photo, don't believe it - in Texas, everything is a little bit bigger, even bigger than the exaggerations which also exist in other parts of the globe.

My next stop was **Lockport**. This monastery is canonically not part of the Order. Its founder, Mother Mary Henry, came from the monastery in Lufkin, and felt herself called by God to go along new paths and to try out new ways of accepting candidates. In this way, she became a companion to many women, who were already getting old, even though it now looks as if her religious recruitment concept does not hold water. I was able to give Mother Mary Henry the sacrament of anointing the sick, during a simple celebration. She then died a few days later. I ask you all to pray for the small community in Lockport, which is confronted with great challenges in various ways.

My last port of call in the USA was the monastery in **Marbury**: a small but very lively community, which only recently had the joy of accepting a postulant into their ranks. The sisters are so loved by the people in that area, that they hardly ever need to buy food. They receive everything as gifts. I was astounded when the sisters invited me to a tour of their lands (within the monastery walls). It is not often the case that you can drive around in all directions for half an hour within the cloister, and cut down the Christmas tree within it and bring it home yourself.

At the beginning of September, the annual meeting of the German-speaking prioresses of our monasteries in Central Europe took place. We expect an additional short report about this. Just like at the meeting of the prioresses of the monasteries in the Eastern European countries in Cracow in June, the wish was expressed to have a meeting of

all the prioresses of the so-called region of “Europa Utriusque”, in order to overcome the isolation, which some experienced very strongly; and to have an exchange of views about common questions and problems. A small working group was set up to prepare such a meeting for the year 2005.

I was in Spain for the majority of September. The Master of the Order had invited me (along with fr. Pedro Luis Gonzales, the Assistant for Spain and Portugal) to take part in the retreat he was giving for the nuns of the three Spanish federations, in Caleruega. You have almost certainly heard about this retreat from another source. For example, there was an article about it in IDI. I think it was a good time for all of us.

After this retreat, I myself remained in Spain for a while to visit various monasteries. I began with a stay of several days in **Olmedo**, where more than sixty sisters live together in a relatively small place and site. Their joy in their life as nuns of our Order is obvious and very clearly felt. They provide clear evidence, from the bottom of their hearts, of their inner wish to give their love of God a visible form by the simplicity of their way of life and in their zeal to lead a “hidden life”.

In **Medina del Campo**, I got to know a “royal monastery”. This monastery has truly “royal” dimensions. I thought of the idea of giving the sisters rolling skates for Christmas, so that they can cope with the huge distances within the house more easily and quickly. Here, as in several other houses which I visited later, I was able to marvel at valuable historical things, but I was also able to see how the sisters earn their daily bread in the simple and not so “royal” way of sewing children’s pyjamas.

My next stop in the itinerary was Valladolid, where I set up my base with the brothers in San Gregorio. From this priory, it is easy to reach the three Dominican monasteries in the city on foot. None of them is more than ten minutes away: **Santa Catalina** is the oldest foundation in the city, and can look back on an existence of more than five hundred years. There are several younger Spanish sisters there. One of them, Sr. Cristina, revealed her good knowledge of English, and could be persuaded, with the permission of the prioress, to join the translation team of “Monialibus”. In Santa Catalina, I also had a very hearty brotherly and sisterly encounter with Sr. Maria Luz Franco, the prioress of the Federation of St. Dominic.

The monastery of **Porta Coeli** also looks back on a long history, and especially to its famous founder: Calderon. For that reason, the sisters are known by the locals as “Calderonas”, and are much better known under that name than as “Dominicans”. They still keep the body of their founder there, who met his death in a nasty way. For that reason, it is not to everybody’s taste to look at him. But I gave him the honour! The sisters produce hosts and cakes. There are several younger sisters in the community. They come from West Africa.

**Corpus Christi** in Valladolid is the most recent foundation, one which was expressly founded for poorer girls, a tradition which is still continued today. This monastery accommodates the rooms and the library of the novitiate of the federation - there are joint training sessions for the novices of the communities of the federation, but in



which, actually, not all of them take part. The younger sisters in the community come from India.

From Valladolid, I journeyed on to **Palencia**, where I was very heartily received for several days. There were good encounters with the whole community, important and interesting individual conversations, and, last but not least, an introduction into the secrets of the production of the noblest delicacies in the monastery bakery.

Sr. Dionisia, the prioress in Palencia, very kindly organised day trips for me to the monasteries of Mayorga and Lerma. In **Mayorga**, I got to know not only the sisters but also the interesting story of St. Toribio. He came from this relatively small, but previously well-known place, went to Peru as a missionary, became a bishop there, and died with the reputation of being a saint. He was then eventually canonised and his body was solemnly brought back to Mayorga. This return is still celebrated as the town festival today - including bull-driving and bull-fights. I came a day too late for this, and was only able to see the rubbish that was still lying around everywhere. Because of this special link with Peru, there are several younger Peruvian sisters in the community of Mayorga.

The visit to the sisters in **Lerma** also provided me with great joy. The community is lucky to have a number of younger sisters from Spain itself. We talked a lot, and laughed together even more. The sisters work together in the production of ceramics. I should point out here that these are rather works of art than utilitarian pieces. I was continually astounded by the beautiful things these sisters were able to make. They have enjoyed a good reputation for a long time, so that they have more orders than they are capable of producing.

In October, I had a cordial meeting with a number of prioresses and those responsible for formation from our monasteries in Italy. They had come to Rome for a continuing education event.

This year's meeting of the International Commission of the Nuns of the Order took place in Prouilhe last October. Of course, we had our eyes on the fact that this meeting place gave the sisters the chance to meet the community there, and to hear and experience how living in the newly-acquired internationality of the first monastery of the Order "feels". During an evening meeting between the community and the members of the International Commission, there was plenty of opportunity to exchange views. I would like to quote just one comment here, which, I think, expresses the most important aspect of the gathering. When asked what they had achieved so far, one sister answered: "We have learnt to love each other and have discovered our Dominican vocation more deeply". There is a separate report about the meeting of the International Commission.

One detail in the course of our discussions in the International Commission of the Nuns deserves special attention. Sr. Claire M., who is now prioress in Prouilhe, requested to give up her work in the publishing of "Monialibus", because she simply has not enough time for this on account of her challenging office (the basilica project, the preparations for the jubilee celebrations in 2006 etc.). Quite quickly, we were able to

find a successor for her, in the person of Sr. Mary Emmanuelle from the Philippines. I am pleased to thank both of them, and do this also on behalf of all of you: Sr. Claire M. for the way in which she gave a sense of direction in setting things up, and her diligent work in the publication of the seven issues we have had up to now, and Sr. Mary Emmanuelle for her readiness to take over this position.

In November, I was in Rome, as prescribed, for the meeting of the General Council and to be available for all sorts of other miscellaneous meetings, conversations and encounters; and of course to join in the celebration of fr. Carlos' birthday and, this year, some other important birthdays as well. For example, fr. Chrys McVey, the Assistant for Apostolic Life and Promoter of the Dominican Family, celebrated his seventieth birthday, and Sr. Veronica Rafferty, who, together with fr. Michel van Aerde is responsible for "Dominican Volunteers International", celebrated her sixtieth.

At the end of November, I visited the sisters of our monastery in Fátima. It was my first visit to Portugal. The sisters affectionately made sure that, alongside the conversation with the individual sisters and the meeting with the whole community, I still had time to visit the holy places. I am grateful that I was able to experience more deeply the message of peace that radiates from this place.

Before the year is over, I shall also visit Cracow in Poland and Algund in Northern Italy.

I close this letter with affectionate greetings and best wishes, and also with an apology for everything which I should have done (and wanted to do), but simply could not manage. Here I mean, above all, the many unanswered letters and E-mails, the neglected congratulations for festivals and jubilees, the demonstration of my sympathy on the death of sisters, and much more.

In cordial and brotherly solidarity

*fr. Lucius Lucius on*

## **PROGRAM OF THE GENERAL PROMOTER**

### **YEAR 2003**

11. 23 - 27 Fatima, Portugal: Visit to the Monastery  
11. 28 Cologne, Germany: Meeting Officials of Archdiocese - financial support for construction of the monasteries in Central /South America  
11. 28 - 29 Luxembourg: Meeting of the Monastery's Administration Board  
11. 30 - 7 Dec. Prague, Czech Rep.: Retreat for the nuns of our monastery  
12. 9 - 10 Cologne, Germany: Province Council Meeting  
12. 11-14 Krakow, Poland: Checking of conditions for a possible foundation in Belorussia  
12. 16 - 21 Lagundo/Algund: Assist the monastery during their Prioral Election  
12. 24 - 26 Schwalmtal, Germany: Church Services to Dominican Sisters / Nuns

### **YEAR 2004**

1. 1 - 3 Walberberg, Germany: Meeting, Common Studies and Provincial issues  
1. 14 Cologne, Germany: Province Council Meeting  
2. 18 - 24 Cologne, Germany: Prolonged Promoters Meeting  
2. 28 Prouilhe, France: Preparation for the "Prouilhe 2006"  
3. 19 - 21 Wurselen, Germany: Formation Course  
3. 22 - 26 Drogheda, Ireland: Visit to the Monastery

## ***Meeting of the International Commission of the Nuns 20<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October 2003 at Prouilhe***

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From 20<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October, the annual meeting of the International Commission of the Nuns took place at Prouilhe. Brother Manuel Merten, Promoter of the Nuns, and ten members were present (Sr. Teresa Coronado from Mexico was unable to attend for health reasons). We had invited, as translator, Br. Brian Pierce, OP, from the Province of St Martin of Porres in the USA, and president of the Commission on the Nuns at the General Chapter of Providence.

### **On the agenda were:**

- Report from the General Promoter
- Reports from each region
- The petition addressed to the International Commission at the General Chapter at Providence (Acts n° 320) concerning a map of the world that would show present and future monasteries.

- Br. Joseph Nguyen Thang, Procurator of the Order was unable to come. His contribution on canonical questions concerning nuns and the procedure to be followed in particular cases is put off until next year.
- Distance learning via Internet (Acts n° 317) with Br. Michel Van Aerde.
- A question from the Socius for Apostolic Life concerning the document 'The Dominican Preaching Charism'.
- Evaluation of the international Bulletin, Monialibus.
- Assessment and choice of date, place and programme for the next meeting.

### **Pilgrimage and opening Mass at the house of St. Dominic in Fanjeaux**

It was raining on October the 20th, as our meeting began by reciting the Lauds with the Nuns of the Community of Prouilhe. Thankfully the rain stopped just as we set out on our pilgrimage following in the footsteps of our Father Saint Dominic, who walked along that muddy path which climbs its way up to Fanjeaux. We decided to keep silence in order to pray, meditate, and contemplate, and when we reached the place,

marked by a stone cross where our Father Dominic was threatened with death, we stopped for a while. There, each sister prayed aloud the intentions that she was carrying in her heart. After, we had a hard climb, and really needed to cooperate in order to reach the top. There, we looked out over the vast, open country-side which Dominic had also contemplated so prayerfully in his time. Then, we made our way into the village to



the small house where Dominic is said to have lived and where Fr. Elie Pascal, OP was waiting for us with a hot coffee. He spoke to us of the history of the Order in the area and afterwards we gathered for the celebration of the Eucharist in the room of our Father St. Dominic. This was, for us, a very meaningful and prayerful beginning of our meeting and we lived it in communion and in prayer for all the nuns around the world.

### **Concerning the presence of Dominican monastic life throughout the world: Providence (Acts n° 320)**

The General Chapter of Providence communicated to the Promoter of the Nuns, Fr Manuel Merten a petition requesting, with the aid of the International Commission and the Federations, the preparation of a map of the world indicating those places where Dominican monastic life is present or could be present, in order to arrive at a coordinated evaluation of those places where monasteries could be reinforced or founded in the future. The Commission reflected and made a list of suggestions with the reasons for their choice. For example: West Africa, Nigeria, the Congo, Bolivia

and Haiti are places where the Dominican family is present and requesting the presence of nuns. Islamic countries such as Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, Iraq were mentioned, because the simple, silent presence of a monastic community could be a form of preaching and a support to the Dominican family in these countries. A peaceful, praying presence of nuns was also spoken of in the context of the Holy Land, as a possible sign and support to the friars who are present there. And if we look at a map of the world, we see that there are whole areas that are completely void of any Dominican monastic presence; countries such as Australia, China, and Russia came to mind. We affirmed the importance to established a monastery in places where there are (or will be) other entities of the Dominican family with a view to collaboration. On this same occasion, we had a very interesting exchange on the subject of recent foundations and how they were made. Following on from these discussions, we decided to devote a special issue of *Monialibus* to this subject.

### **Distance learning / formation via Internet (Acts n° 317)**

Another topic on our programme was an introduction to study by means of Internet. Br. Michel Van Aerde came to present the programme of university level studies developed by the Dominicans of the French provinces. The web site now consists of more than 3 million pages and there will be more to come in the future! They offer higher level courses (Masters and Doctorate) in theology, Scripture Studies, history of religion etc. The site can be consulted on [www.domuni.org](http://www.domuni.org). We were interested in the courses offered in various languages for nuns who would like to pursue the study of scriptures, theology or other specific subjects.

### **On the subject of Preaching (Acts \*42 and \*435)**

During the course of our meeting we discussed a letter entitled ‘the Dominican Charism of Preaching’ by Brs. Chrys McVey and Wojciech Giertych, assistants for apostolic and intellectual life. It dealt with the document on ‘Preaching by the non-ordained’ which was prepared for the General Chapter of Providence in 2001. We had a fruitful discussion, from which emerged the affirmation that the nuns of the Order do indeed preach in various ways. This is not reflected in this document, and so we are going to go further with this subject in order to contribute our own complementary perspective: Dominican preaching within or in the light of contemplative monastic life.

### **Evaluation of *Monialibus***

- The reports from the regions revealed that the international bulletin is much appreciated.
- Comments mentioned were: “*Monialibus* doesn’t come out often enough and it’s too short”.
- A desire was expressed for :
  - an article that would help us to get to know monasteries throughout the world.
  - a new rubric for news or announcements e.g. a book recently

published by a nun.  
- we plan a special issue on foundations.

- The rubric “**Shared Experiences**” gave rise to much discussion in one region, and we re-affirmed that these articles are simply a sharing of the experience of one nun, and not a point of view that we are seeking to promote.
- We are looking for translators, so that the workload doesn’t always fall on the same shoulders.
- Sr. Claire asked that another sister (new member) of the Commission might take over the editorship of *Monialibus*. She proposed the name of Sr. Mary Emmanuelle from the Philippines. The Commission gave a vote of confidence and Sr. Mary Emmanuelle graciously accepted this service.

We regretted the absence of Br. Joseph Nguyen Thang, Procurator of the Order, who at the last minute was unable to come, but he has promised to work with us at our next meeting, which will be held in Rome in 2004.

In the late afternoon of the last day of our meeting we were surprised by the phone call from our Master General, Fr. Carlos Costa, OP, who greeted and sent all of us his best wishes!

We deeply appreciate the generosity and warm welcome we received from Sr. Claire and the new International community of Prouilhe.

***HOMILY OF MONSIGNOR JACQUES DESPIERRE***  
***Bishop of Carcassonne***  
***Meeting of the International Commission of Nuns***  
***21 October 2003***

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**“Stay dressed for service and keeps your lamps lit.”** These words of Jesus express that which should be the life of every disciple, the life of every Christian and the life of every Dominican nun. Keep your lamps lit. This is your identity. A monastery is the place in the church where the lamp of prayer stays alight.

Happy are those who have heard the call to pray continually so that the church, which is the true Bride of Christ, remains vigilant in prayer. This is your mission in the church. Without prayer what would the church become?

Monasteries make prayer their priority for without prayer our life will not be centered or rooted in Christ. He first loved us and in turn He has given us the mission to love Him and make His love known. A monastery organizes its whole life around prayer. The divine office, the meditation of the Word of God, the Eucharist nourishes our prayer and actualizes a living vital contact with the Lord and transforms your very lives into Eucharist offerings.



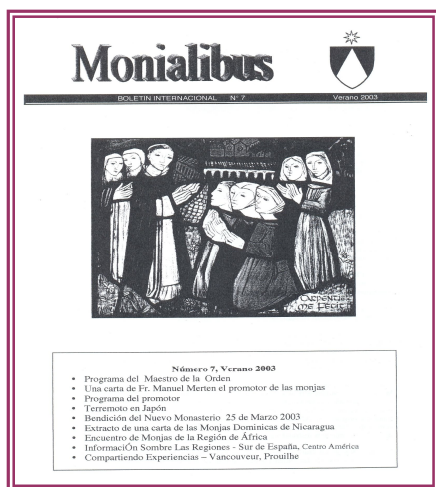
I thank all members of the International Commission of Dominican Nuns, who have come to this place where our Blessed Father Dominic planted the first community of Dominican nuns almost 800 years ago. We shall soon celebrate the anniversary of the foundation. You may know that long before Dominic came here, Prouilhe was already consecrated to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Prouilhe. Thanks to the Dominican family, there has been a continuity of prayer, prayer with Mary, here in this blessed place. Prouilhe, which has always been a crossroads in the midst of life's difficulties, is a place where the lamp of prayer has burned generation after generation.

Thank you also for all the sisters who have come here from other countries: Canada, Japan, Philippines, Portugal, Malta, Spain, and Peru. You have come from far away, leaving your countries in order to keep the light of prayer lit here, at the cradle of the Order and origins of the great Dominican family. It is a sign of hope for the Order. It is a missionary sign for the diocese.



As in the time of Dominic, when he confronted the beliefs of the Cathars, the church today is confronted with many diverse mutations, which are shaking the modern world. This is a spiritual combat for which we need prayer. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today, your mission is the same yesterday and today. In the banality of your day-to-day life you risk to lose sight of this and the great vision of Dominic becomes obscured.

As Jordan of Saxony said with regards to St Dominic, "God gave him a special grace of prayer for sinners, the poor and the afflicted". (Cf. Libellus n° 12) You also, you have this special grace of prayer so that humanity today can find the way which leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ. So please, keep your lamps lit. Amen



## **MONIALIBUS** *The International Bulletin of Dominican Nuns*

### **A brief history**

**1996:** At the meeting of the Commission in Prouilhe we reflected upon the possibility of publishing an International Bulletin since this had been proposed by

the Chapter of Oakland. Our conclusion was that it was not possible for us at the time. We committed ourselves to try to exchange existing bulletins and promote the sharing and translations of articles, or studies that were in existence and not yet translated. (e.g. Italian Publications, Vicaire, Ratios)

**1998:** In the final letter of the meeting of the Commission in Rome it was stated that: « Some of the members of the Commission are willing to cooperate in order to try to start an international bulletin. We are well aware that this is a very difficult task (perhaps even impossible because of our limited means and because of all the language groups represented within the Order) but we are going to try in order to promote the communication of important news, articles and information. »

**1999:** Sr. Claire from France took the initiative to produce a Number 0 and named it “MONIALIBUS”. It was not a ‘real’ bulletin to be sent out to the monasteries in the regions. It was an example of what might be produced without too much difficulty. It was proposed that we start with a few pages, perhaps twice a year, editions in Spanish, English or French could be sent to each member. It was suggested that the member then, in turn, send the bulletin out to their region in one of these languages or, if she could, have it translated in the languages understood in her region. “We said that we would do it if it was possible but, when we considered the I.D.I. model, we realised that this was impossible for us. Sr. Claire proposed a more modest model with the goal to reinforce the communion, help us to pray for one another, the Master, and the Order in a more intentional way”. (cf Monialibus n°0)

The rubrics proposed were:

- Where is the Master?
- Where is the Promoter?
- Notes from the Master
- Notes from the Promoter
- The Regions
- Perspectives (conferences)

The editor asked the members to let her know what they thought. A few members expressed hesitations and they suggested that we should leave it to the new commission.

**2000:** When the mandates of the members of the Commission were extended, Brother Timothy gave strong encouragement saying, “go ahead, just do it”.

**2001:** With the support of Brother Manuel, the First Edition appeared in March. It was sent to all the members who in turn photocopied the Bulletin and sent them to the monasteries in their regions.

This first bulletin included:

- The itineraries / agendas of the Master and the promoter
- An interview of the new promoter (the nuns loved it!)

- News from Drogheda with the dedication of their new monastery which had been destroyed by fire.
- News from Oslo: solidarity at the occasion of the accident of their prioress
- News from Nicaragua after the Cyclone “Mitch”
- Conference of brother Timothy Radcliffe given to the Benedictine Abbots

From the reports of the members of the Commission at the meeting in Caleruega in June of that year, the response was extremely positive. At this meeting, Sr. Claire was delegated by the commission to be the editor of the Bulletin. It was emphasized that the bulletin is meant to be a tool to promote communion, understanding, unity, and the respect for our legitimate differences.

**In the last three years, 7 editions have come out and new rubrics have been added.**

In summary, the Bulletin now includes:

- The program of the Master of the Order
- A letter and the program from Fr. Manuel Merten, Promoter of the Nuns
- News from the regions and monasteries (We have had a report from each region)
- Reports on various events or meetings (the General Chapter, the Commission meeting and important regional meetings)
- A new rubric was added which is called Shared Experiences: which is “a section where nuns can share their experiences.

**2003:** An evaluation of the **Monialibus** was made at the meeting of the International Commission in October of 2003. Once again, it was clear that it is greatly appreciated around the world. The suggestions mentioned were that it could come out more often and it could be longer. The desire was expressed that there be articles that help us to get to know the different monasteries around the world. A **new rubric** with short announcements was suggested (it could include, for example, the news of books that are published by nuns). A special issue on Foundations will be published in the year to come. An article in the rubric **Shared Experiences** has been the occasion for lively discussion in one region and therefore we affirmed once again that these articles are not promoting certain points of view. The readers are not expected to adhere to what is expressed in the articles; they are simply a nun's personal experience. More translators are needed (especially Spanish to English) in order that this work does not always fall on the shoulders of the same sisters. Sisters who could do this should inform the member in their region.

## **ITALIAN DOMINICAN MONASTERIES**

### ***Annual course for the nuns in formation***

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On May 19-24, 2003 the annual formation course for the young postulants, novices and juniors coming from different monasteries of Italy was held in Rome. Together with their mistresses, fifteen formands have successfully completed the course. They came from the following monasteries: Azzano San Paolo, Castelbolognese, Nocera Inferiore and Pratovecchio. Thanks to the talks given by Fr. Christian Steiner O.P. during the first four days, the sisters and their Mistresses experienced living together fully immersed in Dominican spirituality. The last two days were spent on a pilgrimage to Santa Sabina and the Santa Maria Sopra-Minerva; two places of importance to all Dominicans.

The theme, “Participation in Redemption in the Doctrine of St. Catherine of Siena”, aroused great interest and desire for a further and deeper study of the doctrine of St. Catherine. Each day began with the Eucharistic celebration and Morning Prayer. Midday prayer and Vespers complete the day with lovely melodies played on the cithara by three young sisters.

The first talk given by Fr. Christian was followed by an hour of personal reflection. In the afternoon there was group work that was followed by a sharing with Fr. Christian where doubts or questions were raised, clarified and answered.

The meals, shared together in sisterly joy, were pleasant moments of mutual exchange of knowledge and sharing of experiences. The evenings were crowned by a relaxing and an “explosive” recreation with games, songs, music and .....jokes!

St. Catherine and her doctrine had been less known to some of us because of the difficulty in understanding her medieval language. Reading together some of Catherine’s writings helped us understand better this great figure. In fact we have rediscovered that Catherine, with her strong will and passion, her feminine way of loving and living Christ in her time, can be an excellent model for women of today. Her use of metaphorical language that is full of images enables us to grasp the hidden messages of her doctrine. It is this richness that makes it impossible for her doctrine to be enclosed in rigid definitions and formulas. Catherine taught us that each atom of our being has a unique signature: The Trinity! Such awareness can bring about many changes within us and in our relationship with our own sisters and all those with whom we come in contact with. What made her so strong and decisive was her total dependence on the Almighty. Catherine was always pitiless against her defects, but never against her being.

Fr. Christian spoke to us about the five senses of the soul according to the Saint. Regarding Baptism as a nuptial event, it is wonderful to remember that nothing and no one can remove from us the grace received on the day we were baptized. Only our will, capable of discerning what is good and evil, can take us away from this state of a

grace-filled life, when it turns towards evil. The love of Christ is abundant in our lives. Our sins are ours no more; Christ has assumed them totally in his body.

Fr. Christian also spoke to us of the virtues as nourishment of our souls and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us. It was very consoling to become aware that, after each confession, the Lord cancels the sins we have confessed and, if we turn away from our past life, our sins are no more visible because those errors do not exist any more, and are completely nullified. Christ's grace adjusts our past and through the sacrament, He gives us new vigor for our present life.

Fr. Christian then spoke to us about the sacrament of Confirmation and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments, gifts of the Holy Spirit and the virtues were presented in a coherent whole. One of the characteristics of the virtues is repetition: the monastic life, so repetitive in its external gestures, creates in us a constant openness towards what is true and, for this reason, helps us in the realization of a virtuous life.

Fr. Christian showed how the simple actions of our daily life, viewed correctly in the Spirit, could give a touch of greatness. For example, to eat is a human collaboration with the divine act of our creation in that particular moment: thus we can grasp the importance of the so-called "good manners at table." The act of taking food has its dignity, and likewise, all of our actions.

During the last two days of the course we met two important persons: the Master of the Order, Fr. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, OP and Fr. Manuel Merten, O.P., Promoter of Nuns. On the day of the Solemnity of the Translation of our Holy Father St. Dominic, we shared beautiful moments with Fr. Carlos. Pointing to certain locations on the map, he spoke to us about the projects, the hopes and the difficulties of Dominican Monasteries spread throughout the world. Seated with us around a table, the Master replied to our questions with kind simplicity and availability. His replies showed great interest and appreciation to the contemplative life in the Order.

In the afternoon of the same day, we had a meeting with Fr. Manuel Merten, the Promoter of Nuns, who was interested in how each one of us came to know the Order. After an open, cordial and joyful dialogue, he led us on a guided visit to the library and the different offices of the Curia in Santa Sabina. In the evening, after the Sisters from different Dominican congregations sang hymns in various languages, we joined in the solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by the Master, a representative of the Minister General of the Franciscan Order, and our Dominican Fathers. The celebration had a multicultural atmosphere. The presence of the whole Dominican family: nuns, friars, sisters, and laity, gave us the great joy of Dominican familial love. Everyone shared in the refreshment after the mass.

The day after, following the example of St. Catherine, the lover of "Sweet Christ on Earth", as she used to call the Pope, we went to St. Peter's Square to join in praying the Angelus and to receive the Holy Father's blessing. It was for us an experience of intense moment of communion with the whole Church. In the afternoon, we visited Santa Maria Sopra Minerva where we had the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist in

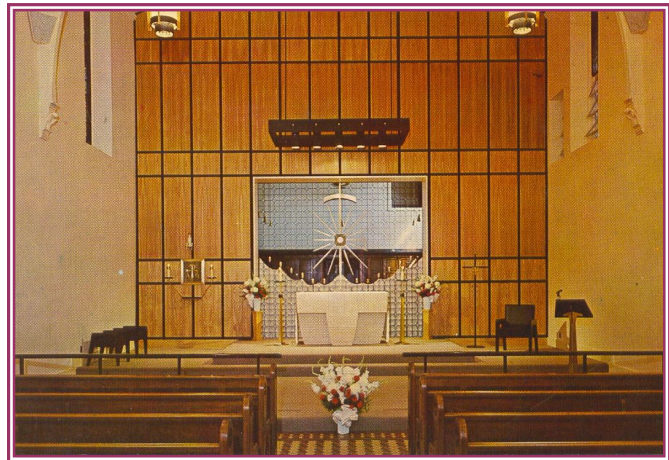
the cell of St. Catherine with Fr. Giovanni Monti, the Provincial of the Roman Province. It was a very powerful moment that held us tightly together in love for the Order. It was indeed a fitting conclusion to our Roman experience. This experience gave us renewed vigor to go back to our communities and live our day-to-day life with more enthusiasm. It was from there that we have to resume our spiritual journey with fresh energy and with the strength of communion with the rest of the community. With an ardent desire to live with the same passion, the same purpose and the same call, we strive to walk together with our Mother and Mistress, St. Catherine, in our journey towards Jesus.

## ***NUNS OF THE FIRST MONASTERY IN USA Make Decision to Close***

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The Monastery of Saint Dominic in Newark, New Jersey, the first monastery of nuns of the Order in the USA, was founded in 1880 by four nuns from the Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament in Oullins, France. The Newark monastery thrived. In the course of its first forty years it was able to make four foundations of its own from which other monasteries have sprung in turn.

In recent years concern for the future of the monastery surfaced many times at regular community meetings. The sisters were living the full monastic life according to our Constitutions, were financially stable, and had sisters able to fill all the monastery's leadership positions. However, their numbers were dwindling as a result of deaths in the community and no influx of new members to replace them. Though most enjoyed general good health, they were aging. Moreover,



the sisters saw themselves moving into a situation where even if they were to attract new members, they could not guarantee sufficient personnel to properly support the formation program for the seven years until they came to profession of solemn vows. Facing the truth of this state of affairs, the nuns voted in March 2003 to close the monastery.

Because it may be of interest to many of our nuns, we asked the Newark nuns if we might reprint the following excerpts from a letter written by them to their sister-monasteries in the USA for the Feast of St. Dominic in 2003:



## ***“Loving greetings for the Feast of Our Blessed Father Saint Dominic”***

*Although we are immersed in the throes of clearing out our more than a century old monastery, we did not wish the occasion of our special family feast to go by without your hearing from us. This is especially so because we have been the object of so much solicitude and offers of help on your part since the news of our imminent closing became known. We thank each of you for your concern and we know that your sisterly prayers for us have been supporting us through these difficult days.*

*The future of our monastery had surfaced many times in the course of the past five (or more) years at our regular community meetings but without our perceiving any clear action to be taken.*

*Finally, on January 1, 2002 we began a Thirty Days Prayer before Evening Prayer of the Divine Office each day, asking through the intercession of Our Blessed Lady of the Rosary for guidance in our coming prioral election and in discerning our future as a community. Throughout the ensuing year the discussions at our chapter meetings became more focused as we examined and narrowed down our options. But we also felt more and more the need for an outside facilitator to help us in the process.*

*At the end of January of this present year, Father John Farren, OP, former prior at the House of Studies in Washington, DC, came at our request from New Haven, CT to serve as the facilitator of two lengthy and very intense chapter meetings. By the end of the second meeting we felt that our time together had been well spent and that Father John was the right person for the task at hand. He returned again to help us a month later. A realistic and prayerful survey of our situation in the succeeding weeks led, in mid-March, to the final vote of the Chapter to close our monastery. The vote was unanimous. In the midst of our pain and mixed emotions about our personal futures, we are at peace.*

*At present we have each made our choice and been accepted in a new home. We wanted to stay together until after our Blessed Father’s feast so the first departures will be just a few days after that. Over the next six weeks we will move on, a few at a time, with a small group remaining until the end, which is projected for early October.*

*What has seemed to be God’s confirmation of our final decision came when, before we had made it public or even received the response to it from Rome, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal - some of whom know us personally - came on the scene inquiring about the possibility of selling our monastery to them as a Novitiate House. You can imagine our gratitude to God! One of our great concerns had been what would become of the monastery itself. The friars will need to raise the money for the purchase, but they and we trust the Lord to complete what He has begun by their finding much-needed and generous benefactors of the project. They would like to move into our monastery in September. This will not be possible (we had calculated that we would need a year to clear out!) but their desire has accelerated our moving process. It is ENORMOUS! But we hope to be out by mid-October or earlier if possible.*

*Two very big items in the moving process are the closing of our altar bread department and the providing of a new earthly resting-place for our deceased sisters. There are eighty-nine nuns buried in the vault under our chapel. We are at present in the process of arranging for their transferal to a plot in a Catholic cemetery that is less than two miles from the monastery. At the same time, we are also involved in the transferal of our altar bread accounts to new suppliers.*

*There have been emotion-packed experiences of farewells from many friends. Individual priest-friends have come to offer a “farewell” Mass. A Thanksgiving Mass offered by our Archbishop John Myers is scheduled for our relatives and benefactors on September 13<sup>th</sup>. We expect a packed chapel.*

*So we give you, our sisters, this little glimpse, beyond the bare news, of our closing. We truly feel upheld by your prayers for us. Thank You. We will be united with all of you in our special family feast.”*

(At the time of this sharing in Monialibus, it is already the beginning of December and seven sisters are still living in the Monastery awaiting final city approval and negotiations for the completion of the sale. Seven others have since moved into their new communities. Please pray that all will be completed without further delay so that they may soon know the blessing of being settled in their waiting communities.)

## SHARED EXPERIENCES

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It has been suggested that the bulletin Monialibus include a section where nuns can share their experiences. These articles do not necessarily represent any official position of the International Commission nor are they an attempt to promote a certain point of view. It is a simple sharing of lived experiences. This can help us discover and respect the legitimate diversity in the ways of living the Dominican contemplative life around the world. Our intention is to promote understanding and develop links of communion.

### **The Use of Internet in Promoting Vocations for the Nuns Palencia, Spain**

**U**pon the request of Fr. Manuel Merten, we would like to share with you an experience that we are having via the Internet.

We all know the scarcity of vocations that affect, above all, Occidental Europe. Thinking of a way to make known our life and mission in the Church, we prepared a Power Point Presentation, narrating briefly in the first place how our Order was born and the first Dominican Nuns; how our Monastery was founded, and in what consists our life taking as basis the text of our Fundamental constitution. Such presentation together with the vocational experiences of the two younger Sisters of the community is sent via e-mail to parishes, catechists and to those in charge of the pastoral care of the young as well as to other persons who are anonymous and unknown to us, but who are involved in Church work in Spain. We ask them to disseminate as much as possible the message that invites the young to come to know us personally.



The answers until now have been numerous from persons who are grateful for the information or who want to know more about our Father and the Order. Others ask for prayers for different intentions and also there are girls interested in knowing us with whom we continue our contacts. Since we began this effort, four young girls have come to stay with us in order to experience our life from ten days to one month. Others continue to communicate with us and are going through a period discernment with regards to their

vocation. It is also heart-warming that from Hispanic-America, there are answers coming from young girls to whom we share the addresses of our various Monasteries in Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia and USA. They really want to know about the Dominican life.

May this short article, suggested by our Promoter, be an encouragement, and perhaps by visiting us and learning about our particular vocational campaign, we can find ways, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to seek new vocations for our Order. May our Father St. Dominic bless this initiative so that it may produce fruits in other Monasteries of the world.

### **“The Milky Way” Karachi, Pakistan**

**I**f you were to visit our Monastery on any week day at about 3.P.M. you would perhaps think we were being invaded by an army! The ‘troops’ in question are none other than the children “en masse” who live on our premises; for 3 P.M. is the time for milk ‘n cookies for all the little ones.

Each morning Mother Mary Imelda’s first chore is to prepare the daily snack for the kiddies. She mixes up the milk (the milk powder is donated by a kind benefactor) and adds a generous helping of freshly beaten eggs and sugar. Then she fills two large plastic jugs and puts them in the ice-box so that the nutritious and delicious drink will be nice and cold by afternoon. Next, she selects her cookies for the day (also donated by some generous benefactors). The cookies come in nice little packets, just enough for each child. The children just love the cookies, especially the sandwich cream which come in different flavors, vanilla, lemon, coconut, strawberry etc.

Sometimes our stock runs out, and then the sister in the bakery makes some cookies for the children.

When the older children return from school they have a quick lunch, then come over to the Monastery parlor where they have a special tutor to help them in their daily home-work. By three o'clock the non school-going arrive at the front door. Some of the toddlers are so small that they have to be carried by a (Not much older!) brother or sister.

Then Mother Mary Imelda starts filling her supply of glasses and cups, large medium and small. The children though lively are usually pretty well-behaved. But of course like all normal youngsters, they do get a little out-of-hand at times. Then the appearance in the door-way of "Uncle Rudy" or our Chaplain (Archbishop Simeon Pereira) is enough to put the miscreants back on their best behavior. The masculine presence seems to work wonders!

By the time the little ones have all been given their milk and cookies, the older children having finished their studies, come for their share of the goodies. With the last echo of 'thank you, Mother', the children go off to play ball on the front lawn and Mother Mary Imelda retires to the kitchen to wash and dry the large stack of cups and keep them ready for the next day.

Mother loves the children and is happy to give them her time and service. They will surely remember her kindness and patience as they grow into maturity. Perhaps the 'Milky Way' will be a means of leading them higher along the celestial path to God!

You and your loved ones are always remembered in the prayers of all the sisters here in Pakistan. We are grateful for your unfailing support and will pray especially that this coming year will be filled with many blessings.



## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **DOMINICAN FAMILY** ***News from Iraq*** **November 15, 2003** ***By Sr. Sherine, OP***

The situation in Iraq is still insecure, but Mosul is better than Baghdad. Everyday there is bombing, shooting, stealing and murders. Daytime is as dangerous as the night. We are sure only of the moment we are living in, but what will happen the next moment is known to God alone. The current situation is very depressing, it causes great worry and fear for every single person in Iraq including the children who have been and are the victims of violence. The coalition forces and the occupiers have made the situation too complicated. There is a lot of violence in the Muslim - Christian relation. What plays on our psyche and disturbs our sleep is the terrible noise of the American helicopters flying throughout the night. I beg you, please, remember your Dominican brothers and sisters living in this difficult situation that we remain devoted to the will of God.

### **NEW BOOKS**

**Sister Rose Wehrlé, *Spiritual Autobiography and Others Works***  
**By Sr. Marie-Ancilla, OP**  
**Editions de la Thune, 2003.**

This book examines a period which is still little known in the history of the nuns of the Order of Preachers, especially at the spiritual level. Sr. Rose of St Marie is in fact a sister of the XIX century who entered the monastery at Mauleon (France) and who founded the monasteries of Perpetual Rosary in Belgium, France and USA. She ended her life in Baltimore following the expulsions of 1903.

Her spiritual autobiography, written at the request of her spiritual director allows us to discover an authentic Dominican mystic - which is not without some relationship to St Therese of the Infant Jesus, of whom she was the elder.

The rather surprising journey of Sr. Rose (reformer of the monastery at Krakow, being part of the foundation at Arles, foundress of Bonsecours in Belgium, etc.) and the depth of her spiritual life merits to be known by the nuns of the Order!

This book cost € 20, postage included, and can be purchased from La Thune  
Cheques made out to the following address:

*La Thune*  
30 rue Thubaneau  
F - 13001 MARSEILLE  
France

**Transfiguring the Time, Nihilism, Symbolism and Liturgy.**

**By Geneviève Trainar**

**Geneva, Ed. Ad Solem, 2003 / L'editeur Ad Solem, 2 rue des Voisins, CH - Geneve**

The thesis of this little work, where faith and reason intertwines, is simple: “The rite permits, right now, and for whoever consents to it, to transfigure time”. Its originality springs from what our sister, then still a young philosopher, has wished - to confront liturgical experience with the latent nihilism which pervades all postmodern mentality. An analysis of the temporal essence of nihilism is set in relationship to the symbolical intelligence and of the ritual memory at work in the liturgy. But how is it possible to make a resume of a philosophical argumentation? It is necessary to read page by page .....

This text is followed by a substantial post face of our Brother Olivier-Thomas Venard who rereads in actualizing with much vigor, audaciously envisaging a new link between culture and cult. In the last analysis this little book allows a fruitful go-and-come between philosophy and theology, liturgy and culture, feminine and masculine writings. How could one not wish that this collaboration between a friar and a sister would be renewed and so enrich our Dominican tradition?

(Genevieve Trainar is Sister Marie, OP from the Monastery of Langeac, France)

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