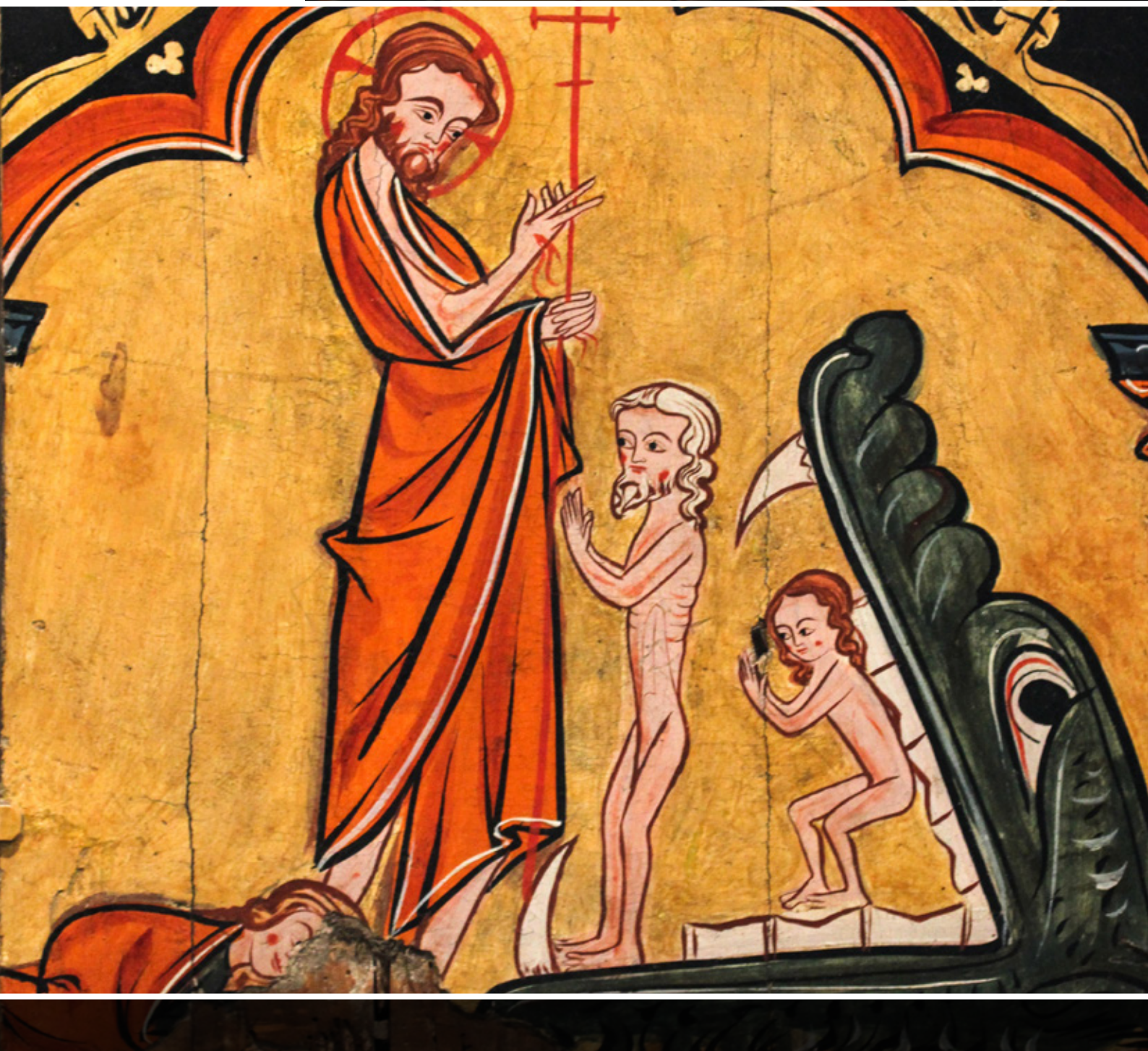


THE DOMINICANS

Lent & Easter 2018

The Magazine of the Dominican Friars in England & Scotland



- **Making the Most of Lent** Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP
- **Adult Faith Formation** Thomistic Institute UK Launch
- **Iraq: Signs of Hope in the Desert** Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP
- **Latest news** and much more...



Welcome to our Lent & Easter issue

This year, the feast of the Annunciation which would otherwise fall on 25 March, has been transferred outside Holy Week into Eastertide. Yet, Our Lady's *fiat* explored in this issue by Br Toby Lees can guide our approach to Lent as well as to the Christian life generally. Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP helps us to make the most of Lent, while Br Richard Steenvoorde reflects on the meaning of saying 'yes' to ordination as a deacon, and Fr Timothy Radcliffe updates us on the extraordinary ministry of our Dominican sisters in Iraq as they return to the Nineveh plains. Wishing you a blessed Lent and Easter.

– Fr Richard Finn OP, Editor

You can send any comments
or feedback to me via
magazine@english.op.org

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Update from Leicester



It has been a time of significant transition in Leicester as we approach the 200th anniversary in 2019 of the opening of a Dominican church at Holy Cross. As this milestone draws near, we have been looking for ways to rejuvenate our vision and commitment to the mission in Leicester.

Holy Cross was founded to preach the Gospel to the poor, and place the riches of the Word of God at the service of those who need to experience God's mercy most urgently. Our preaching is marked by the compassion of Christ, and He is always our inspiration. As we build on the firm foundations that previous generations established, we're seeking to express this mission in a contemporary way.

Much work has already gone into upgrading the priory and church buildings, so that they are ready for the next 200 years. Meeting and office space has been enhanced, with more works in the pipeline, and new lighting is currently being installed in the church, a fitting celebration of the Diamond Jubilee in May 2018 of its final consecration.

Efforts to restructure our apostolate are now bearing fruit. Our commitment to chaplaincy at HMP Leicester has seen provision grow significantly, with more opportunity to work with prisoners and share with them the Word of God, assisted by a strong team of volunteers. In addition, a much valued partnership with the Leicester 'City of Sanctuary' project reaches out to refugees and asylum seekers. They hold a weekly drop-in session at Holy Cross which signposts helpful organisations, and raises awareness of threats such as trafficking, while 'spin-off' events include an art class and a creative-writing group.

Meanwhile, Fr Matthew Jarvis OP has been helping Leicester students (pictured above) communicate the Church's story to their peers, with specialist input from Brenden Thompson of Catholic Voices on 'How to defend the faith, without raising your voice'. Brenden is an alumnus of Blackfriars Hall, Oxford.

As our third century at Holy Cross beckons, we must be attentive to the signs of the times, and bring the fruits of our contemplation to the people most in need. Please keep us in your prayers, and we will keep you posted.

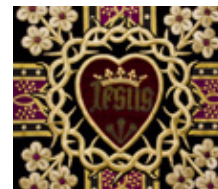
– Fr David Rocks OP, Prior and Parish Priest

Requiescant in Pace

We remember with affection and gratitude the recently departed who made bequests to the Friars. *May they and all the faithful departed rest in peace.*

- Patricia Walker (Oxford Priory)

Legacies have always been vital to our mission.
A leaflet on legacy giving is available from our
priories or Development Office (see back page).





Making the Most of Lent



Most Rev Anthony Fisher OP is Archbishop of Sydney, Australia. During the early 1990s he lived at Blackfriars, Oxford, while working on his doctorate under Prof. John Finnis. He is now an Honorary Fellow of Blackfriars Hall.

‘Asceticism’ has been defined as ‘extreme self-denial and austerity’. That sounds distinctly scary! It calls to mind some gaunt figure living in a desert cave, dressed in an animal skin – or nothing at all – scratching himself with a rock and who has only a pet lion or crow for company. Or a grim-faced aunt who strongly disapproves of ‘sin, the flesh and the Devil’ and who equates these with alcohol-fuelled parties, the internet, and modern dancing (an equation which is perhaps not wholly unreasonable). On this view the holy ascetic is someone who renounces all the fun things of life and approaches it through gritted teeth. However, there’s another, properly Catholic, view of asceticism, and Lent is just the time to recall its virtues.

St Thomas Aquinas taught that, if God is good, anything He creates is good – and that must include the world, the body, eating, drinking and the rest... When Christians engage in temporary penances or life-long renunciations they recognise – or should recognise – that what they are giving up is *good in itself* and they should only give it up for the sake of some *greater good*.

Indeed you might say Catholicism is, by nature, a high-cholesterol religion. We delight in our cosmos and in the fact

that God not only created and sustains it, but joined it forever through the Incarnation. We celebrate Christmas with twelve days of feasting and Easter with fifty! As Hilaire Belloc rhymed: ‘Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine/ There’s always laughter and good red wine.’ St Thomas was not known for his thin waist!

But we should not let go of asceticism altogether. Asceticism comes from the Greek word *askesis*, which means ‘practice’ or ‘exercise’, like an athlete training for success in sport. Like present-day Australians, the ancient Greeks took their sport very seriously. They invented or perfected gyms, stadiums, the Olympics and many sports we still play today.

Some priests work their favourite sport or team into homilies from time to time; Pope Francis is so inclined himself. Likewise St Paul used the idea of wrestling or running to describe the Christian life and he compared heaven with the wreath or trophy given to the winner (e.g. 1Cor 9:24-7; 2Tim 2:5; 4:7). But only practice makes perfect, and Paul recognised that practice in the spiritual life includes some self-denial. Lent is practice for Easter. It is when we go into training as Christians. It is our spiritual fitness regime.

Instead of sports diets, exercise regimes and performance-enhancing drugs, we are offered fasting, prayer and almsgiving as our programme, our *askesis*. Only a few weeks from now, at Easter, the competition begins. We will take our Olympic oath by repeating our baptismal promises, and we will run into the stadium of the world wearing Christ’s colours and proclaiming the Resurrection.

So what’s your spiritual fitness and exercise plan for Lent? Allow me to offer readers of *The Dominicans* a few suggestions.

Extra prayer: try a weekday Mass in addition to the Sunday ones; the family Rosary; try some time of adoration; some quiet time with God every day, even if it is just a few minutes more than normal. Confession, of course, is the Lenten prayer. There is no better way of purging yourself of all the impurities and really getting yourself in tip-top condition!

Extra fasting: no meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, but how about *every* Friday? Skip the snacks between meals. Pick something you really like and often eat or drink – not something you really won’t miss much and so can easily give up – and let that go for six weeks. Fast from your smart phone on Fridays. Identify your own particular addiction or compulsion or bad habit and try going ‘cold turkey’ for Lent.

Extra almsgiving: CAFOD’s Family Fast Day is a favourite way of giving to the poor at this time. Don’t just give the loose change that is weighing down your pockets or purse: give so it bites a bit. Give so you’ve got to give up some luxury, some little pleasure, for once. How else might you help the needy? How about visiting a sick or elderly person? Or volunteering some time to a charity?

In the end, of course, the making of a saint is God’s work not ours. We may hope that our little acts of asceticism are motivated and empowered by God’s grace, and so open our hearts to receiving all the more from Him. Hopefully, our little penances manifest our love for God. If we enter the ‘desert’ of Lent to discipline our passions, it is only so we can enter more fully into the ‘dessert’ of Easter, when we will express those passions with alleluias. As St Augustine taught in his famous *Confessions*, it is by quieting the passions that we allow ourselves to listen to God – and then to sing with Him.

Giving our 'Yes'

Br Toby Lees OP, who is currently studying theology in Rome, reflects on the Feast of the Annunciation.

What made you become a Dominican? Irrespective of whatever I speak about at schools – and no matter how compelling I think I have made the subject at hand – this question always comes up. It is asked in a tone which suggests in equal measure fascination and bewilderment! It is a perfectly understandable question, and one you get used to answering. I tend to frame my answer around various pivotal points in my life: moments of change that mark a new direction and a greater openness to God than I had before.

One such pivot was World Youth Day in Sydney 2008. The atmosphere was astonishing. I'd never felt the excitement and the joy of so many people from so many nations coming together to learn more about and to deepen our faith. And we had the most wonderful teacher. Pope Benedict's addresses left an indelible impression on me. There was one in particular: it was the morning after an all-night vigil at Randwick racecourse and he gave a reflection on the Annunciation as we prayed the Angelus together. He spoke of the fear that Mary must have had when the angel first appeared; and then came the phrase that sticks: he spoke of Mary's 'Yes', her resounding 'Fiat', as being 'the pivotal moment in the history of God's relationship with his people.' He went on to say that as 'As Mary stood before the Lord, she represented the whole of humanity. In the angel's message, it was as if God made a marriage proposal to the human race. And in our name, Mary said yes.' I left Sydney knowing that I wouldn't remain a lawyer, but not yet sure to what I would say 'yes'.

All of history turns on the Annunciation and the consequent Incarnation. Most obviously, our very marking of time is by reference to that small voice that uttered the most significant 'yes' that ever was uttered. My life, your life, each of our lives is transformed by that moment of assent

to the will of God and we're called to replicate that 'yes' in our own lives.

If we were asked to talk about the pivotal moments in Mary's life, we might be tempted to say that the Annunciation was the central one. But I'd argue that, whilst it is a moment that transforms our lives, we would be wrong to describe it as a turning point in Mary's life. This would be to misunderstand who Mary is, what she was made for, and what God intended for her before all time. For, Mary's whole life was a 'yes' to God. Her fidelity to God didn't begin at the Annunciation and it does not



end there; as if she had assented to the Incarnation and now her work was over. In fact, her work extends to the Cross and beyond, to her mediation in heaven.

Mary's 'yes' is a wonderful example of how God works out our salvation through His human instruments. It is a mark of the dignity He has given us that He does not save us without us. When we look back through salvation history, we can think of many other crucial figures. However, when reflecting on some of those who came to mind, it struck me that they have one thing in common, which Mary does not share: Peter, Paul, Abraham, Israel ... the names by which we venerate them are not the names they grew up with: Simon, Saul, Abram, Isaac. Their lives are marked by a clear before and after, and God marks this 'after' with a new name, signaling a new identity in living according to His will.

But with Mary, there is no such change. When the angel Gabriel greets Mary, he greets her with a title, 'Hail,

full of grace', he tells us something about who she is. No change of heart is required for Mary to act in accordance with God's will at the Incarnation, because her 'yes' is in accordance with her whole life. Mary's 'yes' at the Annunciation is a defining moment in her life, because it shows us who she really is; that 'yes' is the very definition of who she is.

In this, as in so many other things, Mary is a model for us. We ought to aspire to be the sort of people for whom saying 'yes' to God is our basic disposition. We might find ourselves saying 'yes' in surprising situations, but the fact of our saying 'yes' should cease to be surprising. When I'm asked that question of 'Why did you become a Dominican?', I become painfully aware of many 'no's there have been along the way, of ways in which I still resist giving myself completely, of the fear that I might be called to give up something of great value in the act of saying 'yes' without reservation.

I don't think I'm alone in this.

There's a tragic tendency to oppose our being truly free and our living out of God's will. We become convinced that being free to love means being free to love whatever we want whenever we want; but, in fact, the real freedom is in committing over and over to loving what is best. And to love what is best is to love God and then to love our neighbour as God shows us how to do this in the life of Jesus. This is easier to write than do! Yet, that's when we need to remember the other crucial fact about the 'yes' we celebrate when we mark the Annunciation. For, there are two sides to this Feast: first, the example of Mary's 'yes' itself; and, second, the resulting Incarnation – the fruits of which are already active in Mary's life but which now open up for us the life of grace in Christ. This is how we are fortified to make Mary's 'yes' our own. It is with the Incarnation that the ultimate dimension of human existence – life in Christ – is opened up to us. This is what a love that took Him to the Cross and beyond has won for us, but it won't be of any effect in our lives, unless we join our 'yes' to Christ's and to Mary's, and make it a 'yes' that endures.



Learning to Serve

Br Richard Steenvoorde OP was ordained to the diaconate at Blackfriars, Oxford, on Sunday 21st January. A student friar of the Dutch Province, he is currently completing the final stages of his MPhil in Theology at Oxford University. He reflects here on the meaning and grace of his diaconal ordination.

As I was doing the dishes for the second night running in the priory kitchen at Oxford, a young brother stepped in and joked, 'So, I see you are exercising your diaconal obligations, serving at table.' Not really, I thought; this is more like dealing with the left-over crumbs! And at that moment, the Gospel story of the Canaanite woman sprang to mind, who was thankful for the crumbs from her master's table, and thus obtained from Jesus the healing of her daughter (Matt 15:22-28). So, there might be a hidden depth to serving at table and being thankful for the crumbs. I might just experience a miracle.

Another story may help explore my theme: shortly after the part in the Mass where I was ordained, I had to

receive the offerings of bread and wine being brought up by members of the congregation. As I walked towards the altar step, with my stole and dalmatic still not quite in place, I noticed two women coming forward, Yvette and Victoria. Victoria clearly was very weak, so Yvette was supporting her as they slowly made their way up with the gifts. They were both smiling and that put me at ease. 'It is my first time', whispered Victoria under her breath to me. 'It is also my first time', I whispered back. She beamed. As it turned out, it would also be her last time. A day later Victoria fell seriously ill. A couple of days later she passed away, never regaining consciousness.

I think a lot about Victoria these days. Drawing on almost her last reserve of physical strength, Victoria started my diaconate in a real way. Her act of service to the altar had been handed on to me. During all my preparation for ordination to the diaconate, this role of the deacon, being a bridge between the people of God and the altar, moving back and forth to serve both, had never struck me as powerfully as in that moment, in that beaming smile of Victoria and Yvette as they helped me, so that I could take their service

forward to the altar, forward to God.

Bishop Kenney remarked in his ordination homily that the kind of deacon you are will determine the kind of priest you are going to be. I hope that I will never forget where I came from, standing at that altar step. And I intend to pray for all the people who got me there and whom I may be given the privilege to serve in future.

Soon, I will have to start packing my things in order to leave Oxford. It has been a privilege to be here, to study here, to learn. I will go back to my own country to help set up a new Dominican priory. But Oxford, especially the students and congregants at our priory, taught me some lessons about real Christianity, a faith fully alive, open to God and the world, that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

Of course, I thank the brothers for their patience with me. But, here and now, I especially thank the extended Oxford community: Sr Winnie, Barbara, Olga, Alistair, Lucy, Anna, Brigitte, Yvette and Victoria, who, each in their own way, and with little acts of kindness, have helped me to become the deacon I am today, and thus have already had an impact on the priest I hope to become.



Signs of Hope in the Desert

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP, former Master of the Order of Preachers, revisited Iraq in December. He reports on communities rebuilding lives shattered by Da'esh.

In the last three years, I have visited the Middle East and the Maghreb several times: Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Turkey and Iraq. Some of my friends are unenthusiastic about these trips, convinced that I will never be seen again. I love to go because it is in such tough places that my hope in the Lord is renewed. God says, 'I will lead you into the wilderness and speak there to you tenderly.' (Hosea 2.16) Being with our Christian brothers and sisters in such wildernesses, I overhear the tender words the Lord speaks to them. So I was happy when the Iraqi Dominican Sisters of St Catherine invited me to spend two weeks with them before Christmas. I was accompanied by a Texan Dominican, Brian Pierce.

The Acts of the Apostles claims



that 'residents of Mesopotamia' (Acts 2.9) were present at Pentecost. There have been Christians in Mesopotamia ever since. Sometimes they have been tolerated: when Baghdad was a centre of intellectual vitality, they were active participants; but they have increasingly endured vicious persecution, as in the terrible massacres of 1915 when 126 of the 250 priests present in the country were killed, and seven of the Iraqi Dominican sisters. For the last hundred years, Christians have wondered how long it will be possible for them to remain. The Jewish community, which had flourished here for two and a half thousand years, has disappeared. Will we be next to go?

The last time that Brian and I visited Iraq was in 2015, after the irruption of Da'esh had precipitated the flight of hundreds of thousands from Mosul and the plain of Nineveh to Kurdistan. Then the priority for our brothers and sisters was care for the refugees. The brethren established two camps, called The Vine and Hope. Now Da'esh has been defeated and the new challenge is the return home. Many fear to do so since Muslim neighbours whom they had considered friends turned out to sympathise, at least initially, with Da'esh, and took over homes and shops that belonged to Christians. When we talked to them two years ago in the camps, many said that after such betrayal they could never return again. Collaborators with Da'esh have shaved off their beards and melted back into

the community, confident that Da'esh will return.

But despite these threats, the sisters have gone back, emboldening others to go home too. A teacher said to us, 'If the sisters are there, we can be too'. On the way to the plain of Nineveh, we saw long queues of lorries carrying away the remains of shattered Mosul. As we entered the territory recently retaken from Da'esh, there were innumerable check points, manned by Shia Muslims soldiers, Christian soldiers and even Iranians. No one trusts anyone else. Yet when they saw the sisters in habit, usually we were waved through. One soldier shouted, 'Let through the saints!'

Most of our schools on the plain have been blown up by car bombs. The sisters' immediate priority is to rebuild them. The walls of the new Dominican school in Qaraqosh (*its predecessor is pictured above*), the main centre for Christians on the plain of Nineveh, were decorated with the children's pictures celebrating the homecoming (*see left*). A third of the population has returned. The reconstruction of the convent must wait. There can be no delay in getting the children back into the classrooms. For the time being, the sisters live in threes and fours in the houses of their families and friends.

We visited several schools and received an uproarious welcome from the children. But many were nervous of any noise and showed signs of exhaustion and stress. The Iraqi education system is collapsing and so



everyone wants to go to the Dominican schools, Muslims and Yazidis as well as Christians. Often the sisters experience love and appreciation, but sometimes the Muslim parents and teachers are just waiting for the sisters to go so that they can take over.

Yet it was here, in these small kindergartens and schools, that we found fragile signs of hope. In the Dominican school in Baghdad, with 80% Muslim children, a group of sixth-formers assured us that their friendships transcended religious divisions. 'We are all the same', one young girl claimed happily. I hope that they will come to love the differences and learn from them, but even so this bold statement is a small tender plant of mutual love in this desert of violence. When a sister was unable to give the Christian children their catechesis, a Muslim teacher took the set book from the shelf, and gave the class herself: 'I would not want them to miss a class.' Of such small incidents may a new Iraq be born!

Some sisters are now beginning to teach again in the University of Mosul: science, music, graphic art etc. They go in civilian clothes, but are harassed and taunted, especially by young men from the south who assume that they are immoral. But they go on teaching! It is typically Dominican to believe that the best response to mindless religious violence is education. Teaching the young of all ages to think together subverts the power of simplistic slogans to foment violence, whether these come

from local religious teachers or Western politicians.

The maternity ward of one of our hospitals in Baghdad is presided over by Sister Bushra who supervises the birth of some thirty babies a day. She is known as 'the Mother of Iraq'. Again, some of the staff are waiting for the Christians to go so that they can take over this well-equipped hospital. But mothers of all faiths gathered in the ward and shared their joy in their newly born babies. Who knows what fruit these friendships may bear?

One of the most deeply moving moments was a visit to our brother, the Archbishop of Kirkuk, Yousif Tomas Mirkis OP. Kirkuk is on the fault line of so many tensions because of both its geographical location and its oil. It is the place of potentially explosive encounters between Kurds and Arabs, Christians and Muslims, Shia and Sunni. We visited a hostel for women university students run by the sisters. Da'esh had burst in hoping to capture them. Fortunately, the eight girls present had just had time to hide under their beds; they listened for seven hours as the terrorists described what they would do to them. The door of the sisters' convent on the other side of the road is covered with bullet holes, after the failed attempt of Da'esh to enter.

The Archbishop, with his small number of priests, half of the number we have at Blackfriars in Oxford, has ambitious plans to build a Christian quarter where they can be safe, with

a school, a church and perhaps even a university. At its centre is a garden, one of the few we saw in this desert land. Trees line the streets, a small green place in the desert. Such bold ambition for the small Christian community in this uncertain time is truly astonishing.

Everywhere, the sisters feasted us. In Qaraqosh, a city mutilated by violence, we gathered to celebrate our return with the national dish of baked carp, lamb and utterly delicious rice. The first time I came to Iraq in 1998, the sisters had been unable to bake me a cake because of a lack of ingredients due to sanctions, and so they danced the baking of an imaginary cake. This time there was food as well as a joy that spoke powerfully of their confidence in the Lord.

While we waited in the military fortress that is Baghdad airport, five of the six flights announced were for Teheran. All the women queuing for these flights wore the full hijab or burqa, a sign of how Iraq is drawing closer to its Shiite neighbour. But no woman was so dressed on our flight back to Turkey, and on to the West.

The sisters could take that flight, like so many others, and make a home in a safer place, but they remain. Their faithful abiding with their people is also a sign of hope in the Lord whose last words were: 'Behold I am with you until the end of time.' (Matt 28.20).

See more photos and information on how to donate to the sisters at www.english.op.org/iraq-2018.



Forming Students and Adults in the Faith – a New Partnership

This Spring sees a new transatlantic Dominican partnership between our Province and the St Joseph Province (eastern USA). This will involve the **Thomistic Institute** (TI) based at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington D.C. working with the Aquinas Institute at Blackfriars, Oxford, and St Dominic's Church (the Rosary Shrine) in London.

Intelligent Presentations on Contemporary Issues

The Thomistic Institute has been working very successfully for some years with American university student groups, chaplaincies, diocesan pastoral centres, young professional groups and think-tanks, to fulfil a particular need in the Church and wider society.

Speakers give intelligent and engaging presentations on contemporary issues illuminated by Catholic thought, especially (but not only) using the thought of St Thomas Aquinas. The aim is to 'strengthen the intellectual formation of Christians at universities, in the Church, and in the wider public square'.

With a 'chapter' in every major Ivy League university, TI has clearly met a thirst for rational discourse and solid Catholic arguments that helps people navigate the complexities of the modern world. It has confirmed that the Church's rich intellectual tradition, especially as it is represented by Aquinas, is a relevant, much needed, and valued resource. In this way, TI offers modern society what Vatican II

calls "the honest assistance of the Church" in fostering the noblest aspirations of the human person.

New Chapters in the UK

The new partnership will see the Thomistic Institute launch chapters in London and Oxford.

Based on the same format that has worked well across the Atlantic, TI will hold an inaugural programme of talks featuring speakers:

- **Fr Thomas Joseph White OP**, Director of the TI;
- **Prof Stephen Bullivant** St Mary's, Twickenham;
- **Dr Daniel De Haan** of Cambridge University;
- **Fr Richard Conrad OP**, Director of the Aquinas Institute;
- **George Weigel**, papal biographer, political analyst and social activist.

The friars are excited about this collaboration, and hope that it will meet with similar success in our Province.

Contact Details

London: Fr Lawrence, lawrence.lew@english.op.org or Fr Oliver oliver.keenan@english.op.org

Oxford: Br Albert albert.robertson@english.op.org or Br Joseph joseph.bailham@english.op.org

For more information, as well as recordings of previous talks, visit www.thomisticinstitute.org

Upcoming Thomistic Institute Lectures in Oxford and London

The Light of Christ: The Promise of Catholicism in the 21st Century

Fr Thomas Joseph White OP

St. Dominic's Church, Southampton Road, London NW5 4LB

7.30pm, Tuesday 6 March 2018

Repeated on Wed. 7 March (8pm):

Heythrop College, 21 Kensington Square, London W8 5HH

'We confess that we are Atheists': St. Thomas and McCabe on the 'Atheism' of Christianity

Prof Stephen Bullivant

Blackfriars, St. Giles, Oxford OX1 3LY
7.30pm, Wednesday, 7 March 2018

The Soul After Neuroscience

Dr Daniel De Haan

Imperial College, London SW7 2AZ
Time: TBC, Wednesday, 4 April 2018

Aquinas on the Natural Complexity of Human Emotions

Fr Richard Conrad OP

Time & Venue TBC, Wed., 16 May 2018

Faith & the Public Square Title TBC

George Weigel

St. Patrick's Church, Soho, 21A Soho Square, London W1D 4NR

Time: TBC, Wednesday, 27 Jun 2018



Vale of Tears or Kingdom of God?

Dr Andrew Meszaros, an alumnus of Blackfriars Hall who teaches systematic theology at Maynooth, delivered this year's Aquinas lecture in Oxford and Cambridge. He reflects here in an abridged version on the theological meaning of human history.

In the mid-20th century, Catholic theologians argued about the significance of such human achievements as great works of art, music, progress in industry, inventions, or social and economic equality, among many other things. Those who attributed theological significance to them came to be known as 'Incarnationalists'; those who opposed them in order to affirm the transcendence of God's Kingdom were known as 'Eschatologists'. Behind the labels, much turns on this debate. We can see this quite clearly if we imagine these thinkers in conversation with someone brought up in a modern, secular thought-world, but passionate about social justice (perhaps a French Socialist, or a humanist *Guardian* reader):

The Secularist: We're sick of being told that this world is a vale of tears. If it is, we should fix it – but stop telling

us that there is meaning to suffering, or that providence will fix things in the end, or that our true fulfilment is in heaven. We want to live and love living... *now*.

The Incarnationalist: We hear you. Your embrace of the world, and your pursuit of truth and justice is laudatory. But your project will fail without Christianity. But guess what! Christianity can accommodate your project. In fact, Christians share many of your concerns! We're not anti-humanist; we believe God became a human being! You are building the Kingdom of God, but you need God to bring it to fulfilment.

The Eschatologist: You, the Humanist, you are deluding yourself. This is a vale of tears. Just look around you! All of your good works, laudable and impressive as they are, will not come to much compared to what God has already done, and what God has in store for you. And you, Incarnationalist, are all but neglecting your pastoral duty: you know how easy it is to make what is good into a false God. The problem is not income inequality or violence, but sin; and our task is not to 'heal the world and make it a better place', but to reach heaven.

This twentieth-century debate on a theology of history between Incarnationalists and Eschatologists involved two different tendencies. One can be dubbed 'Augustinian' and the other 'Thomist'. By examining the appeals made to Augustine and Aquinas, we can better understand the theological priorities of those involved in the debate.

In the *City of God*, St. Augustine sends a straightforward message to those scandalised by the fall of Rome: the real Eternal City is not Rome and

never was; the eternal city was and will continue to be the City of God: the 'congregation and fellowship of the saints', whether in heaven, or on its pilgrim way there. Hence, Augustine chiefly interprets historical events – whether individual mundane experiences or great historic events such as inventions, achievements, political upheavals, wars, and revolutions – in light of, and relative to, the only real City which is not of this world, but of the next. For Augustine, true happiness is being with God forever. Believing in the Gospel is tantamount to God 'by degrees withdrawing His servants from a world decaying and collapsing under these evils, in order to build with them an eternal and most glorious City'. There is no fundamental collaboration between the City of God and the City of Man because such a collaboration would presuppose shared loves, shared ends. The two cities, instead, are 'different from and inimical to one another'. One lives according to the 'flesh' and 'man'; the other according to the spirit and God.

Continued overleaf...



Vale of Tears or Kingdom of God?

... Continued from page 8.

In the 20th-century debate on a theology of history, Augustine was a privileged authority for the Eschatologists. For Bouyer and Daniélou, earthly endeavours only really have value if they are subordinated to God; and even then, their primary purpose is to serve humanity's temporal needs. The great temptation of the twentieth-century, as they saw it, was the pursuit of a Marxist utopia.

Motivated by a pastoral desire to reach out to those who think Christianity is uninterested in this world, an Incarnationalist would want to argue that earthly endeavours not only serve the temporal needs of men, but glorify God; they serve men precisely because they glorify God first. But in order to justify this theological move, he, like other Incarnationalists, appeals to another authority: Aquinas. Here are brief sketches of four such appeals to the friar.

For **Gustave Thils**, Aquinas is the consummate synthetic thinker, who, in his day, synthesized faith and reason, theology and philosophy. In our day, so thinks Thils, we can use Thomas to synthesise our heavenly destiny with our earthly endeavours. For **Marie-Dominique Chenu**, one of St Thomas's major contributions was his appropriation of Aristotelian teaching on form and matter, and the soul as the form of the body: when humans *are* bodies (and don't merely *have* them), the body is ennobled, and its actions play a part in our salvation.

In a creative way, **Yves Congar** takes Aquinas's teaching of *habitus*, and concludes that, implied therein is the idea of human self-determination, and hence the ability (not always achieved!) to progress. We determine what kind of persons we are by our actions; as a society, we do the same. Finally, **René-Antoine Gauthier** sees in Aquinas's treatment of magnanimity a decisive step in the development of Christian humanism. Unlike many of the Fathers, and other medieval scholastics working in the Augustinian tradition, Aquinas accepts – with qualification – the more contentious aspect of Aristotle's doctrine: namely, that man, in certain cases, ought to have confidence in his own abilities.

Whatever one thinks of the persuasiveness of these appeals – whether individually or taken together – what is at stake is a modification, not a replacement of an Augustinian worldview. While both Incarnationalist and Eschatological tendencies were given a voice in *Gaudium et spes*, these voices merely sat side-by-side. For a modern synthesis that captures the best in both approaches, we should turn to the thought of Saint Pope John Paul II. His theology of the body and his theology of art are two crucial examples of an approach where both Eschatological and Incarnational concerns are addressed. There is still work to be done here, and it is well worth doing, if we are to engage successfully with the many secularists of the twenty-first century.

Readers' Letters

Dear Fr Richard,

I was most interested to read your piece in the Advent 2017 edition of *The Dominicans* under the heading 'Esprit de Corps'. I was a Laxton boy during the years 1940–1947, which encompassed the difficult war years, and I have warm memories of my formative years there.

Whilst I accept Fr Stanislaus' emphasis on public spirit (*esprit de corps*) as an essential feature of any Catholic School, and of Blackfriars School in particular, there was another philosophy which marked the school while Fr Henry St John OP was headmaster. Briefly, he wanted to develop individuals rather than a 'type' (the classic English public-school boy) and, so it was said, that was why the school turned down an invitation to become a member of the Headmasters' Conference. All this may be apocryphal and certainly recollected over many years, but my enduring impression is of a school concerned to recognise and develop individual talents, and to tolerate personal idiosyncrasies in a way which fitted that philosophy.

This focus on the individual character and personality in no way denies Fr Stanislaus' fear of the 'disintegrated force of ... isolated individualism', and the two characteristic attitudes can fit well together, but I suggest that the emphasis is different. I suspect the same may be true of the Dominican Order itself.

With very best wishes,
Michael Bridson



Four of the novices from Blackfriars, Cambridge, were pleased to meet Bishop Alan Hopes of East Anglia in Norwich on the feast of the Presentation, at the annual Day for Religious in the diocese. The brothers also took time to visit the old Dominican priory there, and the cell of the mystic Mother Julian.



The Dinner & Supper Books

From the Archives

As the friars at Blackfriars, Oxford, re-introduce reading at meals on several nights a week during Lent, Fr Richard Finn OP recalls how an earlier English Dominican, Fr Vincent McNabb OP, valued this age-old practice.

On 25th January 1918, the *Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion* published an article by Fr Vincent MacNabb entitled 'In a Friars' Refectory: A Study in Contrasts'. The first contrast was between the two types of food available to the friars, for as Fr McNabb explained 'every meal (breakfast is not a meal, but a snack) consists of two portions. There is the portion served round within dishes or on plates in silence by the appointed brethren. This is usually ample, and even good, and at times fitly cooked and served. But it is not the main portion. This central piece, this sovereign fare, is not carried round on platters or dishes or plates, nor does it appeal to the fast-awakened hunger of the friars. It is read between snatches of sung Scripture, and carried by the voice of the hooded friar in the pulpit, it makes direct appeal to the minds of those whom hunger might for a moment dethrone

from their intelligence.' Reflecting on the reading that accompanied the two main meals of the day, McNabb was moved 'solemnly [to] return thanks on the one hand to my Maker, who has thought well to create in me the twin appetites for food and truth, and on the other to those men of holiness and genius who discovered the noble craft of reading at the taking of food.'

However, there was a second contrast to reckon with in the refectory as well. Fr. Vincent contrasted the 'Dinner Book' to the 'Supper Book'. The former could be lighter fare: the friar could 'travel with Scott to the South Pole or with Burton to Mecca'. But the reading at supper was to be more solid food, more suited to the prayers, responses, and canticle to be sung at Compline. In McNabb's words, it must fit 'the tragedy of the "In manus Tuas" or the "Ave atque vale" of the "Te Lucis ante terminum", or the quiet leave-takings of the "Nunc Dimittis". For this reason the friars' refectory at supper time often echoes to the challenging life of one of God's saints or one of the Church's champions.'

Recently, the dinner book had been J. L. Hammond's *The Town Labourer – From 1760 to 1832*; the Supper Book had been Husenbeth's *The Life of the Right Rev. John Milner DD*. McNabb admitted that not everyone found Hammond's book appropriate for

'dinner reading in a friars' refectory' but insisted that 'there can be no question about its being fit, and even necessary, reading for a friar, especially for a friar whose priestly life will be that of an apostle in the world after the war.' He noted that while the book on Milner covered much the same historical period, its 'five hundred and twenty fact-filled pages' held 'not a single fact dealing with a contemporary social servitude almost without parallel in the history of civilised nations.' That contrast led McNabb to reflect (in the words of the historian John Hobson Matthews) on 'why so many of our people, after bearing the trials of persecution, lost their faith in the early nineteenth century'. To the friar 'the answer seemed to be given by the contrast between the dinner book and the supper book read in the friars' refectory.' McNabb concluded that 'It would be almost a crime crying to Heaven if the contrast between the dinner book and the supper book read in a friars' refectory did not stir all friars and all priests to that wise zeal which, after the world's greatest war, will not overlook or mishandle the Church's greatest opportunity.' Whether that opportunity was grasped is a moot point. Nonetheless, McNabb's reflection on these books still poses questions for present-day friars and Christians generally.

Dates for your Diary



Pilgrimages

- 13 May** Annual Dominican Pilgrimage to Walsingham. Contact Fr David Rocks, david.rocks@english.op.org
- 25 Jun**– Rosary Shrine Pilgrimage to Lourdes. Contact Fr Thomas Skeats, thomas.skeats@english.op.org

Aquinas Institute

Usually held at Blackfriars, Oxford, or nearby. Enquiries and bookings via richard.conrad@bfriars.ox.ac.uk

- 3 Mar** Aquinas Colloquium. 'Thomas Aquinas and Modern Biology'.

The Rosary Shrine

St Dominic's, London NW5 4LB. More info at www.rosaryshrine.co.uk

- 16 Mar** Inaugural Rosary Shrine Lecture: 'Hail Holy Queen': Dr Scott Hahn. 7.30pm. £5. Book online via www.eventbrite.co.uk
- 14 Apr** 'Early Irish Poetry & St Francis' Canticle'. 7.30pm.
- 28 Apr** Day Conference for 150th Anniversary of Fr Vincent McNabb OP. 11am–4pm.
- 12 May** Biber's Rosary Sonatas: Glorious Mysteries. Bach Players. 7.30pm. Free for under-18s. £12.50. www.ticketsource.co.uk/thebachplayers or on door.

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