



THE DOMINICANS

Summer 2025

The Magazine of the Dominican Friars of the English Province



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Leonine Directions

I never imagined that I would have the opportunity to be in Rome during the time of a papal conclave, but this year the election of Pope Leo XIV coincided perfectly with my usual Plenary meetings of the General Curia of the Order and with an Assembly of international Rosary Promoters that had been in the works for over a year.

So I landed in Rome on the day the Conclave began, and that afternoon after my first meetings were completed, I sat with German tourists on Via della Conciliazione, with the roof of the Sistine chapel in view as the Cardinals, visible on a big screen near where I was sitting, processed into that famed chapel and made their oaths. As I said to those around me, I was watching to see one of my 'housemates' pronounce his promise in Latin, and praying for him! I'm grateful to Cardinal Timothy for offering us a unique reflection of his experience of the conclave. The next day, I was relieved that the morning of meetings in Santa Sabina had ended just as black smoke was sent forth from the world's most watched chimney, because otherwise we would have had to interrupt our discussions and race across the Tiber to St Peter's Square, had the election been successful that morning. Instead, after pranzo, I made my way to the Angelicum and, together with a Dominican friend, we walked over at a relaxed pace to St Peter's Square. There was much anticipation in the air, a sense of uncertainty, but we



found solace and unity in prayer: We prayed the Rosary with Dominican sisters from Indonesia and Holland; we watched the baby seagull on the big screen with fascination as it was being fed; and then we sang the Regina Caeli at 6pm. We were just praying the canticle at Vespers when the crowds clapped and cheered: *White smoke!* Around us were Poles, two Scots, a few Italians, an American, and countless others from all around the world, many waving their national flags – the sense of the Catholic Church being gathered in Rome to greet their new universal shepherd.

Over a week later, on Sunday 19th May, even more people had arrived in Rome for the Mass inaugurating the Petrine Ministry of Pope Leo XIV, and I was blessed to be able to concelebrate this Mass with my fellow Rosary Promoters from around the world; this Sunday was also the Jubilee of Confraternities,

and we, who are Directors of the Rosary Confraternity in our Provinces, had planned to be at this Mass, and this was to be our last full day in Rome. As Providence would have it, then, I was able to be in Rome for these historic days as the pontificate of Leo XIV began, a pope who, like us Dominicans, lives in obedience to the Rule of St Augustine.

It is perhaps inevitable, when a new pope chooses an old name, that one looks to his immediate predecessor for insight into the direction his pontificate might take. So, Leo XIII had written a dozen encyclicals on the Rosary, and hence I am delighted to share a new Rosary Hymn written for this year's Walsingham pilgrimage (p.5). Leo XIII also famously established the principles of Catholic Social Teaching which we see in action in our involvement with the needs of communities in Pakistan (p.9). However, the focus of this edition is on the crucial task of Dominican formation and the fruits of that formation, seen through the ministries of three young brothers, Fr Joseph, Fr Thomas Thérèse, and Fr Benedict. Leo XIII's revival of the study of Scripture and the thought of St Thomas point to the perennially vital work, faithfully carried out at Blackfriars, of forming our brothers for the mission of Christ in dialogue with our world today. To this end and in a new Leonine age, we're ever grateful for your generous support and prayers.

Fraternally,

– Fr Lawrence Lew OP, Editor

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

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Requiescant in Pace

We remember with affection and gratitude all the recently departed, including the following who made gifts to the Friars in their Wills.

- **Eileen Collier** (Formation Fund)
- **John Drumm** (St Dominic's Priory, London)
- **Mary Galbraith** (St Albert's Parish, Edinburgh)
- **Alfred 'Dick' Grove** (Blackfriars, Cambridge)
- **Anthony Kirwan** (Blackfriars, Cambridge)
- **Damien Sweeney** (Holy Cross Priory, Leicester)
- **Fr Gerald Vann** (English Province)

May they and all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Since 1221, gifts made in Wills have always played a vital part in sustaining the mission of the friars. **If you are considering leaving such a gift, please see the back page of this magazine or visit www.english.op.org/legacies**





Inside the Conclave

Our brother Timothy Radcliffe in May became the second English Dominican to participate in the election of a pope (the first being Philip Howard). Here he gives insight into the nature of the modern Conclave.

Conclave means, of course, being locked in. I dreaded this. When we arrived in the Domus Santa Marta where we would live for the duration, we underwent a search that put Heathrow's security to shame. I had difficulty in explaining that the charger for my hearing aids was not a special device for communicating with the outside world, just for communicating with others in the Conclave! All iPhones, and iPads and laptops were surrendered. Machines buzzed in the corridors to block all WiFi connections. The blinds were sealed shut.

At first this seemed intolerable. My fingers itched to send texts and keep up with the news. But it was profoundly liberating. Each of us had to be present to himself, to each other and to God. Usually we encounter each other not just as individuals, but as representatives of groups, parties, movements. The laundry bags in our residence bore the surprising exhortation 'Be You'. Usually we are tempted to look at each other not as You but as one of Them. But slowly we came to be together in a new way, as fellow disciples. St Aelred of Rivaulx says to his young friend Ivo, 'Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, in our midst.'

Here is the paradox: Never before had I felt such a profound responsibility. Soon I would take an oath to vote for whom-ever I believed it was God's will should be elected. This election would have profound consequences for the future of the Church.

Many cardinals said that they were relaxed about voting since the Holy Spirit would give us the Bishop of Rome whom we needed. Yes and No. When Cardinal Ratzinger was asked, before he was elected, if the Holy Spirit chose the Pope, he replied: 'I would not say so, in the sense that the Holy Spirit picks out the Pope... I would say that the Spirit does not exactly take control of the affair, but rather, like a good educator, as it were, leaves us much space, much freedom, without entirely abandoning us.'

So we had the duty to think and pray and discuss. Yet at the same time we became quite light-hearted. I never imagined that a Conclave would include so much laughter and joking. The disagreements remained. Different candidates were championed, and yet somehow we became at ease, with a confidence that there was Christ in the midst of us. When the election was completed, different officials came in for the next stage. One of people charged with ceremonial matters, seeing me moved, joked: 'Don't worry. It may be your turn next time.' I hope it was a joke!

For two days we were face to face with Michelangelo's massive Last Judgment. It is filled with faces. They looked at us as we

voted. Initially I was rather thrown by the face of Christ turned in judgment against the damned. But I came to see it as a marvellous affirmation of the triumph of goodness over evil, of love over hatred, of life over death. The sheep on the right of Jesus are being swept upwards in a burst of energy, helping each other on the way, in an explosion of life-filled movement.

Today we face the rise of war and violence, the loss of confidence in democracy, the catastrophe of climate change. It would be easy to succumb to hopelessness. But we voted face to face with this affirmation of the triumph of life, of love and of hope. Peter Marshall said, 'It is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed, than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail.' So this vast boiling tumultuous image said to us: Choose life and love even when it seems pointless. This is the essence of martyrdom.

The voting is a liturgical event. We placed our ballots in a bowl on the altar. The culmination of the election was the Eucharist presided over by the newly elected Bishop of Rome. The original altar is placed so that when the host is lifted up at the consecration, it was held over against the gate of Hell, with some hungry-looking demons at its mouth. We were electing the one who would preside at the commemoration of the Last Supper, that act of hope in the face of despair, when all that lay ahead seemed to be betrayal, denial, torture and death. So the Conclave culminated in the hope of the Eucharist.



Focussing on Formation

On Thursday April 4th 2025, eighteen Dominican formators from the US, Canada, Ireland, and England gathered in Blackfriars Oxford for the English-speaking inter-provincial formators' meeting. This meeting which lasted until 7 April was the first such meeting since the Covid pandemic and provided a marvellous opportunity for Dominican formators to gather, share experiences, acquire knowledge, build relationships, and simply enjoy fraternal companionship.

The keynote speaker was Fr Wojciech Giertych OP who is currently Theologian of the Pontifical Household and who was previously Student Master for the Polish Province. Fr Wojciech gave two outstanding lectures at the conference. The first, which was entitled 'Forming Brothers in the Dominican Tradition', examined the context in which Dominican friars are formed in the English-speaking world.

Admittedly we face challenges in the English-speaking world today. Furthermore those challenges call for careful responses in the formation of Dominican friars. Nevertheless, we should take heart because Dominicans have never been more needed in the Church. Any crisis is also an opportunity and we Dominicans are uniquely placed to respond to the Church's needs.

Fr Wojciech's second talk was on 'Chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 19:12)'. Our vowed chastity is, as Fr Wojciech so memorably reminded us, an eschatological sign showing that we

place our hope in God, the source of our supreme happiness. There in God we find all we want or need and Dominicans in formation need to be gradually and charitably led to this realisation through the instruction of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps nowhere else does the life of a Dominican friar stand in such sharp contrast to that of the world. Yet this challenge must be faced if the brothers of the future are to be ready to give the Dominican witness the Church and the world needs.

Yet as well as the plenary sessions which were so ably led by Fr Wojciech and Fr Nicholas Crowe OP, Prior Provincial of the Province of England, the most important part of the conference – in my view at least – were the small group sessions where Student Masters, Novice Masters, and Promoters of Formation had the opportunity to meet together and discuss their experiences and insights. It is remarkable how helpful these discussions were.

However, there was more to the conference than just the meetings. Conversation flowed easily into fraternal recreation and meals, and bonds were formed which I am sure will remain. Likewise liturgy animated the conference and I doubt those of us present will quickly forget the homilies Frs Philip Mulryne OP and John Marie Bingham OP kindly preached at the conventual Masses.

We look forward to meeting again in Dublin next year. For the moment, though, thanks are due to Fr Nicholas for

his wisdom in committing the Province to hosting the conference, the Oxford Student Brothers who worked so hard to make it a success – even recruiting a parent to help with driving; the Prior also and the Oxford community deserve mention, as does, last but not least, the Student Master!

– **Fr Dominic Ryan OP**

In his book, *The Shattering of Loneliness*, Bishop Erik Varden wrote that we remember what we have been, what has made us who we are, but at the same time we become what we remember. To speak of remembrance is to speak of identity.

My time as a postgraduate law student at Oxford some twenty years ago was one of the most formative of my life, and set in train a course of events that led me to become a Dominican priest. I remember with particular clarity coming to a deep sense of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, while paying an unscheduled visit to the Oxford Oratory during Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It was the moment that my Catholic faith came full circle after a period of questioning, and was in a certain sense the final piece of the jigsaw for the fundamental questions I had had as an undergraduate student in Dublin. Oxford holds fond memories – of friends and good experiences – but more profoundly as a place where my faith began to flourish. And the memory of that time has marked me and

the course of my life. As Varden noted, we become what we remember.

Returning to Oxford after an interval of twenty years (apart from a few hours spent helping Slaughter and May's 'aggressive recruitment efforts', to quote an English Dominican student brother) brought those memories back. Returning as a priest to the city that had nourished my faith had a particular resonance. The reason for the visit was a four-day gathering at Blackfriars of Promoters of Vocations, Masters of Students and Masters of Novices from the Dominican Provinces of England, Ireland, Canada and the United States. This was the first such gathering since the Covid pandemic. The exchange of experiences and challenges between formators had proved beneficial in the past, and our gathering in Blackfriars proved no different. Discussing formation with Dominican brothers from relatively similar, but nevertheless distinct cultures, and finding in those discussions common challenges, but more importantly a common Dominican vision and purpose, was enormously beneficial.

That common vision and purpose is rooted in our fraternal life as brothers. It is one of the joys of Dominican life to visit a place with which you do not (or no longer have) a strong connection and to find in a Dominican Priory a home. That was my experience at Blackfriars. I found myself wondering if I had simply visited Oxford as a tourist staying in a hotel whether my impressions would have been different. But the hospitality of the English brethren and the sense of fraternity among those attending the formators' meeting, most of whom did not know each other before, made the question theoretical. New and more recent memories of Oxford have been formed, and like those of twenty years ago, they will help shape the future.

– **Fr Benedict McGlinchy OP,**
Vocations Director, Irish Province

In our province, a careful personal formation is given to friars through tutorial-based teaching in Blackfriars Studium, Oxford. Read more about this and support our friars' formation at www.english.op.org/formation

Visiting Mary's House



On Sunday 25 May, the English Dominicans gathered at the national Marian shrine in Walsingham. A new hymn was sung for the first time during the pilgrimage, with tune by Fr Dominic White OP and words by Sr Ann Catherine Swailes OP.

ENTRANCE HYMN - Our Lady of the Rosary

Sr Ann Catherine Swailes OP & Fr Dominic White OP



1. Mary, as Gabriel's word is spoken
In peace at Nazareth,
Healing for every heart once broken,
Streams upon the Spirit's breath.
Mary, answer from your stillness,
Rouse a weary world from death.
2. Mary, guest at Cana's wedding
Procure for us the pure wine
That we may, our burdens shedding,
Dance with Christ in joy divine
Finding in this hour of feasting
Of his love the pledge and sign.
3. Mary, as your Child hangs bleeding,
Our wounded King, on the Tree
Teach us all who pass unheeding
Our true royalty to see.
For in him we are your children
Bound to you our hearts go free.
4. Mary robed in golden splendour
All radiant in your Son's light.
True your song, and clear and tender
Reaching us from heaven's height.
May your hands, upheld in blessing
Guide us through our last long night.



The Blessings of Parish Ministry

I arrived in London in the middle of the pandemic in 2020, after my ordination to the diaconate at Blackfriars Oxford, where I began my studies for the priesthood in 2014. I was then ordained priest one year later on 4 July 2021, remaining in the priory and parish in London. In September 2023 I was appointed parish priest and rector of St Dominic's – The Rosary Shrine.

It has been a great joy ministering in the parish and shrine here in London, as a deacon initially, then as a priest, and now as parish priest and rector. It has been a steep learning curve for me adapting to the life and role of parish priest.

The great blessing of the role is being with people and being able to share in the joys and sorrows of their lives. Those who attend our church here in London come from diverse backgrounds: there is no one dominant ethnic group or nationality, for example. There is a real sense of people wanting to belong to a community but also a desire to know about the faith and to live it. There is an important interplay between the social and the religious which can be seen through the many events that occur here during the year. Historically and still today the Irish community play an invaluable role in this parish, along with in more recent times the Filipino community who bring great joy, enthusiasm, and energy to this place.

I am fortunate to find myself in a parish

that is very much alive, and I believe growing: attendance at Christmas and Easter liturgies has increased noticeably, as has the number of those seeking to become Catholic, a trend noted on a national level and which I can certainly verify on the local level here in this parish.

My formation in Oxford afforded me a solid theological foundation for the pastoral work I am engaged in here in London. Of course, initial formation cannot prepare you for everything, such as the mountain of administration that a parish priest must face. Nor can initial formation necessarily prepare you for all the pastoral situations one will encounter. I have been given a good intellectual formation, and pastoral work invites me constantly to draw on what I have received, but prayer and study help me in turning to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in moving forward, in learning more, in dealing with situations for which I have received no direct preparation.

Healing has been an important aspect of my priestly ministry. I myself have needed healing in my own life in a variety of ways, and I see in those who worship here a desire for healing. My hope for the future is that St Dominic's – The Rosary Shrine will be a place where all people will find healing in their lives, whether through the variety of social occasions on offer, helping to heal the pain of isolation; whether through the worthy and

dignified celebration of the sacraments, helping to heal the wounds of sin and to steer one from vice to virtue; or through talks and study groups, to help heal and strengthen the intellect so that one might understand rightly and that one might dwell always in what is true.

The longer I am in this role as parish priest and rector, the more I see my role from the point of view of healer. It is not that healing comes from me *per se*, which should be obvious; but that I am called to be an instrument of Christ's healing grace to others. On occasions this will involve listening to people one-to-one, at other times in the sacraments I celebrate, and at other times even through administration, where perhaps I am trying to help persons resolve irregular canonical situations. In seeking to be an instrument of healing to others, I find also that healing is brought about in areas of my own life.

My hope is that all people can find at St Dominic's – The Rosary Shrine a place of healing, and I hope that the Lord might use me as an instrument in enabling that more and more.

– **Fr Joseph Bailham OP**

Please help support the formation of the next generation of Dominican Friars – see back page.



Joys & Challenges of Pastoral Work

Since being ordained in 2022, I have moved to Edinburgh to 'labour in the vineyard of the Lord' as chaplain to the universities of Edinburgh, Napier, and Queen Margaret. This is not the only ministry I have, of course; like most friars, I have many plates to spin, whether it be as provincial promoter to the Lay Dominicans, or religious assistant to Edinburgh and the North-East fraternities, taking my turn on the hospital call-out rota for the deanery, or contributing to the diocesan diploma for Catechetics. I never find myself at a loose end.

My experience of priesthood is different from most newly ordained priests' experience because of the university context; for example, I have confirmed and received into full communion many more people than I have baptised. I thankfully have not had too many funerals, and none who were students. I expect the wedding invitations will come in the next five years or so.

Like all people, you have your fair share of encouragements and discouragements in ministry. To focus on the positive, I remember a lady who was in her late eighties approached me after my first funeral and told me her husband had died a few years previously; since then, she had been afraid of dying. However, after hearing me preach about heaven being a place where we are enabled by God to love more, not less, and love being primarily

an action, she said she did not feel afraid to die anymore. The idea of our love being more active and yet more restful was a great comfort to her. This was a rare glimpse into how someone was helped along the way.

Whilst people often find it easier to criticise rather than build up, towards the end of your time in a place, some things come into clearer focus, and you are afforded a glimpse into the reason why you were sent. An insight into the reason for the sweat and tears, a gift given by God through those you have loved well.

There have been many challenges in my first years of priesthood; one of those challenges is that you cannot really talk openly about the challenges without hurting others. No one really knows or sees what the priest sees and does or how it affects him personally; he is often not at liberty to share it, which leads to a lack of understanding. I find this personally quite challenging because I am a naturally open person.

The complex situations begin to cross your desk quickly, but thanks to the formation I received in Blackfriars, Oxford, I have been well prepared to meet those challenges. Study prevents preachers from speaking in platitudes, and the fruits of preaching, which are the fruit of study, show there is no intrinsic dichotomy between the pastoral and the academic. If we want to bring relief and

comfort to a fearful and weary world, we must study well and learn to pass on the fruits of our contemplation effectively.

There is only so much you can be prepared for in formation. The ability to think on your feet, to make a reasoned judgement, and to apply the knowledge you have are indispensable qualities. It is also useful to gain experience from how you have seen others handle situations; this informs your own approach to mediating God's love to his people and building up the communion of saints.

The aspects of my ministry I have enjoyed most are unsurprising for a Dominican: preaching, hearing confessions, and answering questions. I suppose this is because these are the ways I have been most effective in helping people to be united to God. That is what my life is about really as a priest. There is not much more to it than that, and there is nothing more life-giving.

Coming to the end of my time in Edinburgh, I would be very happy to slip quietly away and be forgotten in the maelstrom of friars who have preceded me and those who will come after. My hope for the future of the chaplaincy and the people I have served is that they remember God and thereby live well.

– **Fr Thomas Thérèse Mannion OP**

Form Future Friars - see back page.



Renewal in the Spirit

The late Holy Father, by proclaiming the current Jubilee Year to be the year of Hope, has reminded us something fundamental about the Church, namely, that God is with us, and therefore, 'nothing is able to separate us from the love of Christ' (Rom 8:39). We might have been discouraged by the fact that, in the last couple of decades, Britain has become a post-Christian society; however, 'the wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes' (John 3:8).

Amid our insecurities and hesitations, a quiet renewal is taking place, and we in Leicester have witnessed it first-hand this year. It is not just the fact that the number of church-goers has increased by several hundred comparing with the pre-Covid years, but also, that a number of young adults have been attracted to the beauty of the Saviour and his promises. This year we had over 20 young men and women who have been preparing for either baptism or reception into full Communion with the Church. Most of them are students. They come from various backgrounds. Some come from, as it were, the post-Christian milieu; some come from a

purely atheistic background; several were brought up in Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Sikh families.

Leicester is quite special in that over 40% of its population is Asian, and there is also a very significant number of people of African and Caribbean, Central and Eastern European heritage; the City Council says that over 30% of residents do not speak English as their main language. This is obviously mirrored in our congregation, that truly showcases how universal the Church is. And though not everyone knows English very well, and very few know the beautiful English Victorian hymns, we all belt out *Missa de Angelis* at Mass on Sunday.

At Holy Cross, during the Easter Vigil this year, 3 people were baptised: Jude, Lucia, and Thomas Francis. Their journeys to the font of rebirth were very different, but what unites them is that they are all people who dare to ask fundamental questions that have been with the human race from its very beginning: *Who am I? What is my life all about? What is life worth living for?* Then came the experience of the Divine, in some way or other, and finally, they came across some

good people who have talked to them, and pointed out that the priory church might be a place worth attending.

There is very little that we as friars preachers can do, if we have no contact with the people who seek answers or go through intellectual or spiritual challenges. It is all of you, brothers and sisters, who live in the world and are exposed to what we are sheltered from. It is you who, by giving personal witness to the faith, and by engaging with those who seek God with a sincere heart, give the Holy Spirit a chance to bring more people to 'taste and see how good the Lord is'. Perhaps the words that St Peter tells us in his First Letter have never been more urgent than in our time:

'Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.'

May the Lord, who is our Hope and our Goal, keep us all in his grace this year, for the greater glory of his Name.

– **Fr Benedict Jonak OP**

Solidarity with the Tribal Missions in Pakistan

The Dominicans in Pakistan are a small but determined group. Dominican missionaries arrived in 1931, first Italians then Americans; in 1966 the first Pakistani men joined the Order. Today, the Vice-Province of Ibn-e-Mariam ('Son of Mary') numbers some thirty Dominican priests, with several men in formation, as well as Sisters and Lay Dominicans. My first encounter with Pakistani friars was in the Philippines in 2009: brothers Shakeel, Naveed and Vernon had gone to Manila to study for the priesthood, while I was there as a lay volunteer before joining the Order in England.

Brother (now Father) Shakeel has kept in touch and recently told me he had received a new mission. Having served as novice master, he has been sent to the mountain tribes between Bahawalpur and Yazman Mandi, between the Indus valley and the Cholistan desert. The place is marked by a lack of infrastructure, a mix of religions (predominantly Hindu, but also Christian and Muslim) and isolation from the urban centres. It is in such difficult places that the Church's mission



is most pressing. Fr Shakeel is working with the local communities to improve education and healthcare provision for all, while guiding the Catholic community to live out its faith both in private and in public. Their Palm Sunday procession, for instance, looked even more dramatic than ours in London!

Fr Shakeel reached out to me a few months ago to ask for help. He saw the desperate needs around him and hoped the Dominican Order could provide some financial solidarity. Of course,

there are many needs around the world that demand our attention. But it is often the personal connections that are most trustworthy and effective for channeling resources. This was a lesson I had learnt a decade ago when serving on the committee for BOAT – the Blackfriars Overseas Aid Trust – as a student brother in Oxford. BOAT supports small-scale projects around the world, where modest gifts can have a big impact, always insisting on close personal communication to ensure the money arrives directly and securely where it is needed on the ground. In fact, I had been the liaison for a project in Pakistan, called 'Women in Struggle', funding healthcare and education for women and girls. Now that a new and similar project in Pakistan seemed possible, moreover with a personal connection through a fellow friar, I was keen to contact my friends at BOAT again and see if they could help.

Thankfully, BOAT adopted Fr Shakeel's mission for their Lenten appeal this year, as well as a soup kitchen project in South Africa. So I visited Blackfriars on 6th April, the Fifth Sunday of Lent, to tell the 9.30 Congregation about Fr Shakeel's predicament. The response has been overwhelming.

The monies raised (£4,000!) will now enable Fr Shakeel to buy school furniture, books and medical supplies for the

children, and provide medication and access to doctors for women, often in very precarious situations. At a time of heightened political tension and military activity in the region, it is more important than ever that the Order and the Church show active solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ and with the people they serve, regardless of religion or ethnicity.

I would like to express my personal gratitude to all who gave so generously. Thanks also to the BOAT committee and to Br Dominik who has been an invaluable link with the committee.

If anyone would like to support Fr Shakeel's mission or any ongoing projects at BOAT, please visit: www.blackfriars.org.uk/boat Thank you in advance, and may God bless you.

– Fr Matthew Jarvis OP





Dialogue, the Engine of Communion

Homily of the Prior Provincial, Fr Nicholas Paul Crowe OP, at Blackfriars Oxford, 7 February 2025, at the Thanksgiving Mass for the Elevation of Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP to the rank of Cardinal.

When I first joined the Dominican Order, and especially when I first arrived in this house as a student brother, I was immediately struck by a sense of entering an ongoing conversation – not merely a conversation among those physically present, but one that spanned generations, engaging the voices of brethren who had died long ago. Figures like Herbert McCabe, Victor White, and Gervase Matthews seemed almost to linger within these walls. We still tell their stories, we still reflect upon their ideas; they continue to contribute to this ongoing conversation.

One such voice from the past was Cornelius Ernst, in many ways a mentor to our brother Timothy. In fact, I first explored many of Cornelius' ideas through a posthumous volume edited by our brothers Timothy and Fergus Kerr. In that book, Cornelius suggested that language is 'the form of our life' as

Dominican friars. He described our 'contemplative engagement with the world' as founded upon a shared discipline of prayer, study, and dialogue. We worship together, we listen to God together, we share our insights with one another, and through this communal act of reflection, we seek to uncover the significance or meaning of the world, and thereby the significance or meaning of our own lives. There is a sense in Cornelius' writing that the communication – the conversation – within a religious house is never, or should never be, confined merely among ourselves. It is a conversation in Christ, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, extending beyond these walls to include all seekers of Truth.

On one level, this sounds simple. Yet we know well that, in practice, it can be very difficult. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us, 'The Word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword'. As Cornelius himself points out, we often experience the newness of the Gospel as something that stands in opposition to the world, confronting us with its strangeness and challenging our habitual ways of thinking and acting.

Of course, this opposition does not need to be hostile. Often the contrast is

joyful: glimpsed in precious moments of conversion, repentance, or communion, moments when a new light dawns, revealing the expansive horizons of the Kingdom of God and the freedom of the children of God – grace anointing the ordinary and revealing its hidden beauty.

At other times, the opposition between the Word and the world is painful, manifesting itself in fear, pain, violence, tyranny, and oppression. Sometimes that violence and oppression come from others, wounding us deeply, which can be frightening. Sometimes that violence and oppression reside within us, frightening us in a different way. Yet in both cases, we have the Lord's promise: 'Take courage; I have conquered the world' (John 16:33).

While there is undoubtedly an opposition between the Kingdom and the world, it is also true that God loves the world. Consider that famous passage many of you know by heart: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him might not perish, but have eternal life' (John 3:16). As St Paul reminds us in Romans 5, Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Christ has conquered the world – not by violence, but by love. In Jesus' victory, enemies are transformed by love into

friends. The Word became flesh, inviting humanity into a divine conversation. By entering this conversation, we begin to share in divine life. This is our salvation.

This, for me, is the most precious insight – among many – that our brother Timothy has brought to our shared conversation here at Blackfriars, the wider Order (especially as Master), and the Church as a whole most recently through his work at the Synod. Our brother Timothy has carried a conviction that dialogue rooted in a shared search for Truth is an engine of communion, a means by which, through God's grace, enemies become friends.

Think about our Gospel reading (Mark 6:14–29) this evening – not the easiest text for a Mass of thanksgiving! John the Baptist spoke difficult truths to Herod, even challenging the legitimacy of his marriage, a challenge that struck at the very foundation of Herod's political and economic power. And so Herod had John – a wild prophet of the open spaces of the wilderness – imprisoned in a dark and confined dungeon. Yet, by some miracle of grace, John and Herod kept their conversation alive. We heard that Herod enjoyed listening to John. He was perplexed, yes, but something in John's witness attracted him. Herod recognised, even dimly, the contrast between his own life and the life John pointed toward.

There was something new, strange, and even attractive in John's testimony. As long as Herod remained in this conversation, hope remained alive. Even for Herod, the door to conversion remained slightly ajar.

Alas, Herod lacked the wisdom or courage to step through that door, or even to keep the conversation alive. Aroused by his stepdaughter's dance, he bound himself to a foolish and lustful oath. When outmaneuvered by the girl, he was too proud to retract his words. He ended the conversation ignominiously, silencing the prophet with violence and slamming the door to communion shut. Knowing how to keep a conversation going is an underrated skill vital to human flourishing, individually and collectively. Herod's tragedy was not just that he severed John's head, but that in doing so he severed the thread of dialogue that could have led to his salvation.

When he was Master of our Order, our brother Timothy wrote: 'So much war, genocide, and intolerance find their roots

in a collapse of belief that, through dialogue, we can come to a shared truth in which we recognise each other.' And again: 'One of the functions of the Church and of a religious order is to be present in places of deafness and incomprehension, offering a space where conversation may begin.'

Today, we thank God that the Church has honoured our brother Timothy. We give thanks for his tireless commitment not just to keeping the conversation in Christ going, but also to bringing the divine conversation vividly alive in the imagination. We pray that his elevation may open further opportunities to preach, listen, and share. The conversation at Blackfriars, in the Church, and in our world continues. Timothy still has work to do; we all still have work to do. We pray for strength in our commitment to the shared search for Truth, and in our willingness to speak and listen in love, so that we might deepen our communion with the God who speaks and, in him, discover our true identity and purpose.



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Version: LIT-5

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Vocations Surge – Please support their formation!



The Dominican Friars are blessed with new recruits: in September 2025, we are currently expecting up to eight men to join the noviciate in Cambridge!

Fr Albert the bursar is even having to create a new bedroom from an attic space, so as to fit them all in!

We urgently need your help with funding. **The noviciate year alone costs around £12,000 per friar.**

Then in 2026, God willing, some or all of the novices will move to Blackfriars Oxford to become student brothers. Here we cover their living and study expenses over 5 years when they are unable to

earn; and then for 2 more years of study post-ordination in Rome or elsewhere, for a Licence to teach Theology. This period of study costs around £19,000 per friar per year. This means that the full 8 years from novice to mission-ready friar costs around £150,000.

Careful & Thorough Formation

If you have ever been moved or inspired by a homily given by a Dominican, or by a book written by a friar, then you will appreciate the value of the careful formation that they receive.

This formation is essential for those

who would serve as Dominicans, ensuring they are ready for their future roles, such as engaging with students as university chaplains, participating in profound debates within academia, sharing the gospel in the mass media, or providing pastoral care within our parishes.

Could you help?

This year we are establishing an annual appeal, under the name of the **St Dominic's Formation Fund**. Its purpose is to pay for the initial and lifelong formation of the friars.

- **Could you make a generous one-time gift?**
- **Could you sign up to give just £10 a month – or could you even stretch to larger amounts such as £40 a month?**

Follow the link below to watch our appeal video and to donate online.

Support the formation of friars

Give now online: www.english.op.org/formation



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