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**THE THIRD ORDER OF ST DOMINIC  
(The Lay Dominicans): A Possible Way  
Forward for an Order in Crisis**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with the Roman Catholic Order founded by Saint Dominic in 1215. The Order encompasses Friar Preachers, Christian Brothers, Active Religious Sisters, Contemplative Sisters and the Lay Dominicans.

Saint Dominic was instrumental in defeating heresy in southern France, which had been brought about by former Christians alienated from the Church and its teachings. During this period, Saint Dominic and his helpers were threatened and abused for challenging heresy and for reconverting former heretics to Christianity. In 1207, Saint Dominic and his helpers met a group of ladies and converted them back to their former ascetic lives as Catholic nuns. The land and shelter acquired for them adjacent to the Church of Saint Mary of Prouille was to become the first established convent for Dominican nuns.

Saint Dominic continued his preaching and teaching as the Dominican Order developed, the first English Priory being established in Oxford on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1221. Within a century, fifty Priories had been set up in the United Kingdom alone.

Prior to his death in 1221, Saint Dominic had been instrumental in the establishment of the Rule and Constitution of the Order, which covered liturgy and asceticism and dealt with aspects concerning the government of the Order. The Rule and Constitution of the Order still applies in today. However, the last three decades have seen the Order facing a crisis with continuing falling numbers of entrants from the western World. This dissertation examines the possible causes and effects of such a decline, along with the impact this has had on its present and future continuation as seen by the Dominicans themselves. The author also explores a possible solution to relieve the crisis.

## PREFACE

The object of this dissertation is to arrive at some understanding of the present state of the Dominican Order in today's western World and particularly in England: its relevance, possible future, what that future might hold and possible ways forward to help the Dominican Order – currently in crisis – to survive and grow.

The work here presented is a continuation from that previously undertaken on Mother Margaret Hallahan, Foundress of the Dominican Sisters in England in 1842. The Dominican Sisters' work consists of nursing and teaching and they make 'simple' vows pledging 'obedience until death'.

The 'Religious' discuss their hopes and fears for the future of their own Order and for all Religious Orders. Their answers are open, honest and diverse. Some express sadness, others happiness and hope, but all place their trust in God.

There are many people who, in one manner or another, have contributed to this project and helped to make it possible. I would like to express my especial gratitude to the following:

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# **THE THIRD ORDER OF ST DOMINIC (The Lay Dominicans): A Possible Way Forward for an Order in Crisis**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

St Dominic was born Dominga de Guzman around 1170 in Caleraga, Castile. At the age of seventeen, he entered the University of Polencia, where he studied theology and philosophy. Known for his generosity he is said to have sold all his possessions to help the poor during a famine in 1219. In about 1196, he became canon of the Cathedral of Osma, in Castile, and was soon actively engaged in local ecclesiastical reforms. He accompanied his superior, Didacus of Acedus, Bishop of Osma, on a religious mission to Rome in 1203.

On his way back to Spain, he was struck by the clerical abuses and the prevalence of the Albigensian heresy (a dualist doctrine that rejected creation as evil, affirming two eternal principles of good and evil) that he observed in the Longuedec region of southern France. He observed that the Albigensians were able to spread their teachings because they were well educated and organised. He set up the opposition along similar lines, determined that his preachers would be even better educated and organised.

Dominic and a few companions were given a house and church at Prouille, near Toulouse, where they began their life of penance, study and preaching. In 1206, a convent for women was formed and in 1216 the Order of Friars Preachers was granted ecclesiastical approval. Dominic's preachers travelled throughout Europe, instructing not only the common people, but civil and religious leaders as well.

Dominic insisted on the importance of education. His friars studied theology at the University of Paris and canon law at the University of Bologna. They were also involved in academic pursuits in Toulouse, Madrid and Rome. In the four years after the order was recognised, Dominic established the following

priorities: six in Lombardy, four in France, three in Tuscany and Rome, four in Provence and two in Spain. Dominican preachers went to England, Scandinavia, Hungary and Germany. Dominic died in Bologna on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1221 during a personal missionary campaign in northern Italy. He was canonised in 1234 and his feast day is 8<sup>th</sup> August.

St Dominic left very little in writing. A letter to a convent of Nuns in Madrid, and some letters of penance to heretics he has previously converted are all that remains.

The Lay Dominicans reform movement (ie the Third Order of St Dominic) had no definite founders. A longing for the deepening of the Christian faith and a demand for reform came from all classes of society. Many lay groups wished to reform the Church to which some had remained loyal. Others had become heretical such as the Albigensians. A demand grew for a deepening of faith and knowledge of the Bible. The reformers wished to make their lives relevant to the teaching of the gospel, and they were all bitterly critical of the 'established' church.

The Dominican Order was a 'clerical' Order, though many of its members from the beginning were not clerics but lay brothers. The inspiration of his Order was the same as that which inspired the lay reform movement: the integral, an apostolic spirit, and evangelical poverty.

The Dominican Order appealed to people from the middle classes of towns and cities, and to students of universities that had sprung up. These were the same people who were most interested in the reform or 'penitent' movement. By 1280, many lay penitent groups were becoming heretical. The Brothers and Sisters were not affiliated to any Order, but they sought guidance from local priests. Where Dominican priories were founded these penitents grouped around them. The Master General of the Dominicans, Munio de Zomora, decided that lay groups must have some sort of organisation and accordingly

published a 'Rule of Penitents of St Dominic'. This was the beginning of the Third Order in 1285.

Any organic institution is, to a larger or lesser degree, dependent upon the individuals who contribute towards it. This is no less true in the field of ecclesiology than it is in corporate business. As far as the Dominican Order is concerned, one has only to consider the decreasing numbers of its members, both clerical and Lay, to realise the vital effect this has on the problem of its identity and role in society and the church. Although this may in some respects be commensurate with the general decline of interest in the Christian Faith, as well as the use and advances in Welfare State provisions, it does not detract from the possibility that a different strategy than that which is currently in operation might at least slow down the process of decline, if not reverse the trend altogether.

Having begun from a preliminary assessment that the problem facing the Dominican Order is one of crisis, it is my intention to discover if the Order is sufficiently aware of the 'causes' as being wholly due to society disinterest or to their own need for a radical re-structure. The central question of this work, therefore, is: 'How might one propose a strategy by which the Dominican Order can be culturally relevant to the current age without sacrificing its essential ethos and values?'

The questions that naturally arise from this problem are:

- What is the present situation of the Dominican Order, particularly in England?
- How is the Dominican Order attempting to address the situation of falling numbers of vocations?
- How might the Third Order provide a possible way forward for the Dominican Order?

The aim of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of the present crisis in the Dominican Order in England and to review the possibility of the Third Order of St Dominic providing a possible way forward for the Dominican Order.

The objectives of this study must be seen in their relationship to the aim. In so doing, I intend to approach the subject from three angles:

- To research and assess the validity of those who are sympathetic to the main focus of this study.
- To research and assess the validity of those who are not sympathetic to the main focus of this study.
- To attempt to identify the means by which the Third Order of St Dominic (The Lay Dominicans) might reverse its current trend to one that is more positively optimistic.

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Dominican Order has at present lost something of its inspiration in pursuing the proclamation of the Gospel of its vision, particularly in the UK, and that the best means for survival and progress in the modern age is for a radical restructuring of the Third Order.

It cannot be denied that any research is to some extent subject to the bias of the researcher, even if unintentionally so. The discipline of theology is not exempt from this predisposition, as personal background, denominational allegiance and culturally conditioned sensitivities all play their part in affecting how the evidence is interpreted. In a concerted effort to avoid excessive prejudice as far as is practicable, therefore, I intend to give due recognition to sources of information that present the case in antithesis to my central theoretical argument as well as those in favour of that hypothesis.

To establish a possible way forward for an Order in crisis, I propose an intense study of the Dominican Order, their assessment of the present situation, and

possible actions to be taken to relieve the crisis within the Order that might thereby ensure its survival and progress in the modern age. As part of this strategy, I will also study the archive literature of the Dominican Order, material written by past and present members of both the Dominican Order and by Lay Dominicans, and arrange interviews with members of both groups.

## 2.0 THE FOUNDER OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER

### 2.1 ST DOMINIC - THE FORMATIVE YEARS

St Dominic was born Domingo de Guzman around 1170 in the Castilian village of Caleruega in Spain. He was the youngest son of Felix de Guzman and Jane of Aza. There were two older children: Anthony, who became a Canon of St James, and Mannes, who eventually became a follower of Dominic and joined his order. Dominic was beatified by Pope Gregory XVI and his feast is kept on 30<sup>th</sup> July (Jarrett, 1934: 5). A later writer, Galvanus de la Flamma, speaks of a sister as well, but of her nothing is known. However, the statement seems to be corroborated by Gerard de Frachet (1256), who mentions in his *Vitae Fratrum* two nephews of St Dominic "who lived in the Order in much holiness" (in Jarrett, 1934: 6).

Although the evidence for St Dominic's knightly descent is not very early, it does seem now to be generally admitted. Such proofs as there are have been carefully collected by Bremond in his *De Guzmani Stirpe Sti Dominici*. St Dominic's mother, Jane of Aza, was beatified by Pope Leo XII and her feast is kept by the Order of Preachers on 7<sup>th</sup> August (see Jarrett, 1934: 5).

Dominic remained at home with his parents until he was seven years old. He was then sent to his mother's brother, the parish priest of Gumiel d' Izan, where he was to remain for seven years. Apparently, Dominic was a clever boy, showing little interest in games, though he did enjoy reading. Solemn, sensitive, and moved by the suffering of others, he was known for his generosity.

When Dominic was fourteen he went to the University of Palencia to study liberal arts. At this time the arts took precedence over the study of clerical sciences, which was already St Dominic's calling. After six years, Bishop Martin de Bazan appointed Dominic to a canonry at Osma (Jarrett, 1934: 10). This was to allow Dominic sufficient funds to continue with his theological studies.

Dominic was ordained priest in 1195, taking up the duties of his canonry around the age of twenty-four. He was to carry out these duties at Osma for the next nine years. Although the canons were grouped under the rule of St Augustine, they belonged to no order in our modern sense of the word. Their work appears to have been to supply some of the neighbouring parishes with clergy. It seems, however, that Dominic seldom left the precincts of the cloister, and was made sub-prior in 1199 under the priorship of Diega d'Azeveda. When Bishop Martin died, Diego succeeded him in about 1201. Dominic became Prior and head of the chapter at the age of thirty-one (Jarrett, 1934: 13).

In 1203, Bishop Diego requested that Dominic accompany him on a journey to negotiate a marriage. The marriage was to be between Ferdinand, the son of King Alfonso IX of Castile, and a daughter of the Lord of the Marches. There appears to be no other precise details of this prince, while the route and destination are similarly unknown. There have been many theories regarding the route the Bishop Diego and Dominic took. The kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden, the French Marches (where Hugh de Lusignan was ruler), and even the Marches of Italy have all been suggested, because on their return journey Bishop Diego and Dominic visited Rome (Jarrett, 1934: 17). It is certain, however, that they journeyed through the district of Toulouse. Toulouse was a powerful area of the Gnostic heresy, which was to shape Dominic's life. He sensed a calling to convert and reconcile the heretics to the teaching of the Church.

As they continued their journey through southern France, Dominic met some former Christians. They had become alienated from the Church and converted to the religions of the Cathari (ie Pure Ones), often called Albigensians because of their stronghold at Albi. This cult had its remote origins in the Gnosticism over which the Church had triumphed in the second century. It then passed through the Manichaeism of Persia to the Paulicians of Armenia. In the ninth century, it passed to the Bogomils of Bulgaria, and in the tenth century to Constantinople. Then, in the twelfth century, it moved with the Crusaders to

northern Italy, to France and the Rhineland. Its greatest success, however, was achieved among the nobility of southern France (Ashley, 1990: 4). There it took the dualism, which held that the visible creation was attributed to an evil god.

According to dualism, all being was perceived to be divided into either matter or spirit, with the former essentially evil and the latter essentially good. Matter was evil; hence every living thing was unclean. To prolong the existence of matter was evil, and to reproduce matter was a greater evil. The only real act of goodness was abandoning life. Suicide was, therefore, considered the choicest form of death, with luxury considered a crime. Penance and austerity, which lessened the vigour of the body, were direct incentives to a purer knowledge of God (Jarrett, 1934: 22). Salvation for the elite of the 'Perfect' or 'Pure' was achieved by this extreme way of life according to their teaching. The majority of followers who lacked courage for such a way of life received a special sacrament, the *consolamentum*, administered by the Perfect at the hour of death (Ashley, 1990: 4).

On their return journey, Bishop Diego and Dominic went first to Rome to beg Pope Innocent III to allow them to go together on the mission of preaching against the heresy. He refused, however, insisting that the bishop was needed at home. They continued on their journey towards Osma, and met the Abbot of Citeaux and two of his Cistercian monks at the city of Montpellier in June 1206 (Ashley, 1990: 5). They told Bishop Diego and Dominic that they had been unsuccessful in their preaching to convert the heretics, mainly because of the great reputation for holiness that 'the Perfect' enjoyed among the people. Bishop Diego decided that the mission must continue, and the Catholic clergy's bad example must be countered by preaching in the same manner as the Apostles had done – barefoot and begging.

This band of preachers travelled for four years in southern France, preaching and holding public disputes with 'the Perfect'. In 1207, twelve other Cistercian abbots joined them. They then separated into smaller groups (Ashley, 1990: 5).

Dominic, Bishop Diego and a companion by the name of William of Claret centred their preaching on the town of Prouille. A group of about nine ladies met Dominic, advising him that they wished to convert from the heresy and to return to their ascetic life as Catholic nuns. In order to achieve this, however, they would require shelter and protection. A tract of land adjacent to the Church of St Mary of Prouille was given to the nuns, and a simple dwelling in the fashion of a convent was built for them. This was granted by the Bishop of the Church of St Mary of Prouille in 1207 (Jarrett, 1934: 39). The names of the nine nuns were: Adelais, Raymunda Passurine, Berengaria, Richarde de Barbira, Jordana, Guglielmina de Belpech, Curtolana, Clarreta, and Gentiana. Soon, two further converts were added to this number, Manenta and Guglielmins, both of whom were from Catholic families of Fanjeaux (Jarrett, 1934: 41). The nuns observed strict silence and permanent enclosure.

In that same year, Bishop Diego returned to Spain, possibly hoping to return to Prouille with new recruits, but he died there on 30<sup>th</sup> December. Also in 1207, one of the Cistercian monks, Peter of Castelnau, was assassinated on the orders of the Count of Toulouse after he had unsuccessfully tried to persuade him to oppose the heresy. As a result of this action, Pope Innocent III launched a crusade against the noble supporters of the heretics in 1209 (Ashley, 1990: 6). The leader of the crusade was Count Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester. Count de Montfort made his residence in the town of Fanjeaux, near Prouille. Here he met and became an admirer of Dominic. Dominic became a spiritual adviser to two of de Montfort's daughters, one of whom was a nun, and baptised another. He also performed the marriage ceremony for the Count's son when he married a French princess. As a token of appreciation, the Count gave land and gifts to the convent at Prouille.

Dominic continued to preach, sometimes staying at the convent in Prouille, where William of Claret became his companion. Dominic had this convent rebuilt in 1213. Most of his efforts, however, were directed towards preaching

on the road, where he had no food, clothing or shelter, and was in personal danger for much of the time (Ashley, 1990: 6).

At Dominic's canonisation process at Toulouse, three women testified on his behalf. Guillelmine Martini, Noguera of Toulouse and a nun of Saint Croix, named Beceda, all bore witness to having offered him hospitality (possibly during 1210-1211), at which time they had observed his extreme poverty, rigour of life and exhaustion. He was also reputed to have performed miracles and successful exorcisms (Ashley, 1990: 6).

In 1213, Dominic was made vicar of Carcassonne, and the following year he accepted the role of parish priest of Fanjeaux. It was during this time that Dominic began to realise he needed a regular group of helpers, and he planned to locate them at Fanjeaux. In 1215, Dominic went to preach at Toulouse, where he met a gentleman by the name of Peter Seila. Peter invited Dominic and his companions to live in his own house, which remains to this day. This became known as 'the cradle of the Order' (Ashley, 1990: 6, 7).

## **2.2 THE FOUNDATION OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS**

In 1215, Dominic accompanied Bishop Fulk of Toulouse to the fourth Lateran Council in Rome. With the help of Cardinal Ugolina (the future Pope Gregory IX, who also sponsored St Francis of Assisi), he was granted permission to found an Order of Preachers by Pope Innocent III (Ashley, 1990: 8). Dominic returned to Toulouse, where he announced the Pope's favour. He also voiced his intention to disperse the Order throughout Europe. The reason for this astonishing decision was that Dominic had been warned in a vision that Simon de Montfort would soon be killed, and that the work of preaching in the region would be halted by civil war.

One of the original members of this newly formed Order were Dominic's brother, Mannes, who had joined him before the end of 1207. Others included

Dominic the Little of Segovia; Miguel de Ucerro, a native of Osma; Miguel de Fabra, a nobleman who was learned enough to later become the first teacher in Pans; Pedro of Madrid; John of Navarre; Sueiro Gomez, a Portuguese knight who had come to France as a crusader; Bertrand Garrigue, who was already preaching against heresy before Dominic; William of Claret; Peter Seila; Mathew of France, a canon from the University of Paris who had originally come with Count Simon de Montfort; Thomas of Tolouse; Noel of Repouille; Prior of Prouille who was to drown the following year; Vitalis of Prouille; Stephen of Metz; William Raymond and Odier of Normandy. Also numbered amongst them was Laurence of England, the Order's first lay brother's (Ashley, 1990: 8). Of these, Dominic kept only William of Claret and Noel of Repouille at Prouille. He then set out on foot to Rome to obtain further papal privileges to make the work of the Order more effective.

In 1218, Dominic dispatched Bertrand Garrigues and John of Navarre to Bologna, at that time the home of the most reputable university in Europe for the study of Cannon Law (Jarrett, 1934: 84). The friars were very successful at Bologna, nearly all their new recruits here being taken from the most learned members of the university. In October of that same year Dominic visited Bologna, where he stayed until December. He then travelled to Toulouse and Prouille, before finally crossing back into Spain. Here he set up a house of friars and another of nuns, establishing further houses of friars in Segovia, Palencia and San Esteban de Gormaz (Ashley, 1990: 8). Dominic wrote a short letter to the nuns of Madrid, the only extant writing of his other than a few legal documents. In it, he urges them to live a strict cloistered, contemplative, disciplined life and also to protect their monastery. From Spain he returned to Toulouse, from which houses at Lyon, Montpellier and Bologna were soon to develop.

In 1219, Dominic was in Paris (Ashley, 1990: 9), but in August of that year he went to Bologna, which was to remain his home until his death. It was in Bologna that Dominic realised something had to be done to hold together the

scattered priories of the Dominicans. He decided to initiate a system of visitations, the details of which required each newly appointed Master General of the Order to visit every priory in turn. This allowed every friar to meet the Master General, with the accompanying opportunity to air any grievance he might have. Such a system also allowed the Master General to see all the priories and to establish links with the superior of each priory.

The first English priory was established at Oxford on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1221, and schools were immediately opened in the city (Jarrett, 1934: 164). Within a century, fifty priories had been established in the United Kingdom alone.

By 1219, Dominic's health began to deteriorate. The following year, at the First General Chapter of the Order, he sought to resign as the supreme Master General. His resignation request was denied, though four 'definitors' (or helpers) were appointed to assist him. At this General Chapter, the Rule and Constitutions of the Order were established. The Rule and Constitutions were not to bind under sin, and all provisions were dispensable for the sake of the preaching mission. The Constitutions were written in two parts, the first covering liturgy and asceticism, while the second dealt with aspects concerned with the government of the Order (Ashley, 1990: 10). The supreme power of the General Chapter to legislate and the office of the Master of the Order were thereby firmly established.

Dominic then proceeded on a preaching mission for the Pope in Lombardy, a territory where the Waldensians (an evangelical sect) and the Albigensians were powerful. The county was engaged in war, however, and preparations were being made for a crusade to the Holy Land. His work was curtailed by Dominic's third period of illness in a year, and he returned to Rome to report to the Pope. It was at this time that Dominic was seeking assistance to establish more houses throughout Italy and dealing with the problem of brethren deserting the Order. It was probably also around this time that Dominic met St Francis of Assisi, who was a mutual friend of Cardinal Ugolino, the future Pope

Gregory IX. Cardinal Ugolino had assisted both mendicant Orders in achieving papal approval.

In May 1221, Dominic returned to Bologna for the Second General Chapter of the Order. It is likely that England was set up as one of the provinces of the Order at this General Chapter. After the Second Chapter, St Dominic continued to travel and to preach, but on 28<sup>th</sup> July he became ill again and was confined to bed. On 1<sup>st</sup> August, the brethren moved Dominic to the Benedictine priory of Monte-Mario because of the intense heat of the city. On 6<sup>th</sup> August, he called Prior Ventura and made his confession. He then spoke with the brethren and requested that he would like to die at home. Dominic was carried to the convent of St Nicholas, where he promised the brethren that he would intercede to God for them. Dominic died on the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> August at the age of forty-nine. Jordan of Saxony was elected as his successor and, at the initiative of Gregory IX, St Dominic was canonised in 1234 (Ashley, 1990: 11).

### 2.3 THE FORMAL PROCESS OF THE CANONISATION OF SAINT DOMINIC

Following Saint Dominic's death in August 1221 a flood of miracles were said to have been attributed to him, which stimulated Pope Gregory IX to hold a commission of enquiry into his life with a view to beginning the process of Canonisation. This was opened by a papal decree of 11<sup>th</sup> July 1233 under the presidency of the Archdeacon of Bologna, the Prior of St Maria del Reno and a Canon of the Trinity. It sat in Bologna from August 6<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> and took the depositions on oath from those witnesses who had best known Dominic:

#### I

*The first witness to be called was Brother Ventura of Bologna, priest of the Order of Preachers and Prior of Bologna. He took the oath and said:*

*"It is more than thirteen years since I came into the Order of Preaching Brothers, urged thereto by Brother Dominic himself. It was he that gave me the habit and in his hands I made profession. At that time Brother Dominic held full jurisdiction over the whole Order: to him belonged all power of dispensing and correcting, and in what concerned the ruling of his brethren*

he had no superior but the Lord Pope himself. But in that year there met in Bologna the first general chapter of the Order at which I myself was present, and to the Fathers of the Chapter Brother Dominic made known his will. He bade them choose from their numbers certain ones who were to have the name of Diffinitors. These brethren should have full authority over the whole Order, both over the Fathers assembled in chapter and over the Master of the Order too. Without diminishing their reverence for the Master of the Order they were to exercise the full right to define and make laws, to impose regulations and to punish those who merited punishment.

“I was a companion to Brother Dominic during such time as he dwelt in the city of Bologna as well as on his journeys throughout the land of Lombardy, living in close familiarity with him at his comings and goings, sitting at table in his company, sharing his lodgings, praying at his side. When there were many companions of our journey it was ever his desire that the word of God should be broken to such as were with him, and this he either did himself or he bade some others to preach. This I know well, for oftentimes was I in the company. As we went along our way it was our custom to discuss and converse about the things of God, or else we taught or read or prayed. On his journeys Brother Dominic would celebrate Mass each day if a church was at hand. I can bear witness that he shed many tears during the singing of Mass. When we reached the Inn at the end of the day he would first go to the church to pray if there were a church nearby; and if it should chance that we were in the neighbourhood of a monastery, he always rose from his rest at night when the monastery bell gave the sound for Matins. Then he would wake his brethren and say the Divine Office with abundant devotion. It was our custom on these travels always to walk in silence after Compline, and we observed the same in the morning until we had recited Terce. Brother Dominic laid himself down to sleep on the straw fully clothed as in the day, wearing also his shoes; but I think he took off his stockings. On his journeys, as at home, he kept the long fast from the Feast of Holy Cross [ie September 14<sup>th</sup>] until Easter, and even in the heat of the summer he kept the fast days of the Church. As he went from place to place he ate with content whatever was put before him, though he would never eat meat or anything cooked with meat. And if at times we fared badly he was never in the least disturbed; nay, it seemed to make him more joyful than at other times. All these things I can vouch for from my own personal experiences.

“Another thing I remember is this, that when Brother Dominic came to a priory of his own brethren, he would not go to rest like other men, but he would gather his brethren about him and speak to them of God so that the hearts of all were comforted. Nor did he make any exceptions for himself, but he joined in the common life of the community, keeping the rule in all its integrity and zealous that his brothers should do likewise. These things I know for I have been witness of them, nor can I call to mind that he ever spoke or acted against the rule. Never have I heard him gossip about his neighbour or speak unkindly of any man. Always he showed himself a man of prudence and discretion, patient and kind, much given to mercy and very amiable, balanced in mind and just. Many men of great Christian piety have

*I seen in the different lands I have visited, but never did I meet one who was holier than Saint Dominic. To me he made his confession in his last illness, and this was a general confession of his life which he made aloud in the presence of some of the Fathers. I do not believe that he was ever in his life guilty of grave sin, and he kept his purity unsullied. I know this not only from the general confession which I received, but also because Brother Dominic afterwards said this to me: 'Father, I have done wrong in speaking of my virginity. I should have done better to be silent.'*

*"He often preached to religious communities of other Orders. As for his own brethren, he was their great consoler when they came to him in their temptations and trials. Many times have I observed this when I went with him throughout Lombardy, especially at Milan, Piacenza and several other places. And though he was so zealous a lover of the rule, strict to punish those who failed, nevertheless he imposed penances with so much sweetness and friendly love that the brethren were glad to receive them. With them he always chanted the Divine Office which he very much loved. But in one thing he did not join them, for I never knew him to have a place of his own for sleeping, unless he was ill. Had he ever had such a place I should surely have known it. He spent most of the night in prayer and most often the night was spent in the church were he frequently mingled his prayer with tears."*

*Here the witness was asked how he knew this.*

*"Many a time I have watched him praying and weeping in the church, and sometimes I have found him sleeping there overcome with fatigue. Indeed, owing to his frequent watchings, he would even fall asleep during our meals in the refectory.*

*"At the end of July in 1221, Brother Dominic came back to Bologna from Venice where he had been visiting Cardinal Ugolino, then Bishop of Ostia and Legate of the Holy See, now the Lord Pope.*

*"Brother Dominic came to us exhausted and worn out; never the less he passed a long while that night over the affairs of the Order with Brother Rudolph the procurator and myself. I had just entered on my office as Prior of Bologna. After a time I besought Brother Dominic to go to rest and not to rise for Matins in the night, but he would not hear of this. Instead he made his way to the church to pray and I went to bed. I was not present at Matins, but afterwards I heard from the others that Brother Dominic was there. After Matins his head began to ache and he clearly showed signs of that sickness which was destined soon to take him away to the Lord. In that last illness we could not persuade him to lie on a bed; his bed was a sack on the floor. He asked that the novices should be sent to him, and when they came he spoke to them with loving tenderness, consoling them with great earnestness and beseeching them all to be good. This last illness he bore as he had borne all the others, not weighed down by it or uttering complaints; on the contrary he was still his own delightful and joyful self.*

*“The malady grew worse and we carried him up to Santa Maria del Monte where there is better air. Brother Dominic knew that he was dying and he asked for the Prior and the brethren to come to him. When we gathered round, about twenty of us, he began to preach to us from where he lay on the ground; such a good sermon, so full of tender feeling, the most touching discourse I ever heard from his lips. As far as I am able to remember, it was after this that I anointed the dying man. Then a rumour came to my ears: the parish priest of Santa Maria del Monte had just given out that he would not let us move the body of Brother Dominic from that spot; he would insist that the corpse should be buried in his Church. I told this to Brother Dominic and he said: ‘Let me not be buried anywhere else but under the feet of my brethren. Take me up and carry me out now and let me die in the vineyard. You can bury me in our church’. So we straightaway picked him up and carried him back to St Nicholas of the Vines in Bologna, though we were much afraid that he would die on the way. About one hour after our return Brother Dominic called me to his side and said: ‘Now prepare’, and we gathered round him to say the prayers for the departing soul; but he said: ‘Wait a little’. Then I said to him: ‘You know, Father, how sad and desolate you are leaving us. Do not forget to pray to God for us all’. He looked up to heaven and raising his hands in prayer uttered these words: ‘Holy Father, I have gladly persevered in doing Thy will, and I have kept and watched over these souls that Thou hast placed in my care. I commend them all to Thee. Do Thou guard and keep them’. Afterwards the brethren told me that Brother Dominic had said to them: ‘I shall be more useful and helpful to you after my death than I have ever been during my life’.*

*“Presently he said to us: ‘Now begin’ and we commenced the prayers for the dying. Brother Dominic himself joined in the prayers for a while and died before they were all done; as far as I can remember he died during the recital of the prayer Come to his aid, ye Saints of God. It was by providence and mercy of God that Cardinal Ugolino, the Bishop of Ostia and now the Lord Pope, was present at the funeral along with many venerable bishops and abbots. Cardinal Ugolino himself sang the Requiem and presided at the funeral. It was on the Feast of St Sixtus twelve years ago [ie August 1221] that Brother Dominic went to the Lord.*

*“I have heard and firmly believe that God has worked many miracles through Brother Dominic since his death. I believe this and I mention it now because many men and women have brought candles and offerings to his tomb out of thanksgiving for the miracles God has wrought on them through his merits. Some of these people desired to cover the tomb with rich coverings of silk, but the brethren would not agree to this for fear that the priory might be disturbed by crowds of pilgrims; they were also afraid of being thought guilty of greed and vain glory.*

*“I must add that Brother Dominic was so full of zeal for the salvation of souls that his great charity not only embraced the faithful but went out to all the pagans and infidels and even to the very souls in hell. He yearned after them all with tears and for that reason he never spared himself in the*

ministry of preaching. He was always longing to go and preach the gospel to the pagans, and if he could not go himself he sent his brethren out to do this work."

The witness was here asked how he knew of this desire of Brother Dominic.

"I heard this from the lips of Brother Dominic himself as well as from my brethren; he often spoke to me of the matter and it was the subject of his discourses to the brethren."

## II

The second witness was Brother William of Montferrat, priest of the Order of Preachers, who took the oath and said:

"Sixteen years ago I went to Rome in order to pass the season of Lent in that city, and the Lord Pope that now is was then the Bishop of Ostia invited me as his guest. Accordingly I lodged with the Lord Bishop. During that time, Brother Dominic, the Founder of the Preaching Brothers, was dwelling at the Roman Court and he often came to the house of the Bishop of Ostia. It was in this way that I first came to know Brother Dominic; I was much drawn to admire his manner of life and so began to love him. Often we spoke together of what concerns the saving of souls, and although I had conversed with many religious men it seemed to me that Brother Dominic was the holiest man I had ever met. He was more set upon the conversation of all souls than anyone I had ever known before.

"In that same year I journeyed to Paris in order to study theology, and this I did by agreement with Brother Dominic for we had determined that when I had finished the two year's course of theology at Paris University, and when he had made provision for his Order of Preachers at a general chapter of the brethren, we would both go forth to convert the heathen. While I was studying theology at Paris, Brother Dominic came thither out of Spain and gave me the habit of the Preaching Brothers. From the day when I entered the Order I have very often and in very many places been in close companionship with Brother Dominic. I have journeyed with him to Rome and to many other places, eaten with him, lived in the same house, prayed with him, and I have known him both in sickness and in health. I declare that during all that time of intimacy I have seen Brother Dominic follow the rule of the Preaching Brothers with the utmost fidelity and although he would readily give dispensations to his brethren, he would never give a dispensation to himself. Whether he was sick or well, he always kept the fast days laid down in the rule. Once when I accompanied him on a journey to Rome he was very ill with dysentery; but he would not break the fast or eat any meat, nor did he take anything special at meals save only an occasional apple or a radish. All this I know from my acquaintance with Brother Dominic, for I have many times been his companion and I noticed that he never made any change to the manner of his life on account of his sickness."

*Here the witness was asked whether he had ever seen Brother Dominic ill apart from the journey to Rome.*

*"I was with him when he was sick at Viterbo, but I cannot remember what his illness was on that occasion.*

*"During these journeys we often fared badly in our meals, and at times we were not very well received and had to find shelter wherever we could; but I never knew this to disturb Brother Dominic, whether he was well or ill. Before lying down to sleep he would pray for a long time, often with groans and tears, so that sometimes I and my companions were awakened by the noise. He certainly spent more time in prayer than in sleep; and when he did lie down to sleep, he laid down dressed as he was in his habit, cappa, belt and shoes. Never did he sleep on a bed, but on the floor or on a table, sometimes on a heap of straw. He never spoke during the times of silence enjoined by the rule, neither did he gossip, and when he spoke to all it was wither to God or about God."*

*Asked how he knew all this, the witness answered that it was the evidence of his own eyes and ears, for more than anyone else he had been the companion of Brother Dominic on his journeys.*

*"I firmly believe that Brother Dominic preserved his chastity unsullied; others told me this who had known him for many years, and my own view of the matter was confirmed by all that I have seen of his behaviour."*

*The witness was asked who were those of whom he spoke.*

*"The Bishop of Osma and some of the Canons of Osma spoke to me of this, and I have heard the same thing from others whose names I no longer remember.*

*"After the death of Brother Dominic I met many persons who declared that they had been cured of serious diseases through his merits, but I cannot tell you who they were for I do not recall their names; as I have been a diffinitor I have not had opportunity of making enquiries into this matter."*

### III

*The third witness was Brother Amizus, Prior of Padua and priest of the Order of Preachers. He took the oath and said:*

*"Master Dominic was a man of humble disposition, meek, patient and kind; peaceful, free from ambition and modest in his demeanour. He showed great maturity of judgement in all his words and deeds. He was remarkable for his piety and his power of consoling others in their troubles, more especially his own brethren; none surpassing him in zeal for observance of the rule or in his great love of poverty. He desired the brethren of his Order to practise poverty in food and in dress, bidding them to live in poor houses and have*

*poor churches; even the furnishings and the linen used in their churches were to be of a poor kind. All his life he paid great attention to this matter, seeing to it that the brethren of the Order should not have rich vestments in their churches. He did not want them to wear silk in the church nor to put it on the altar, nor would he allow anything of gold or silver save only the chalice.*

*"He was constant in prayer both by day and by night; indeed, he seemed scarcely to take any rest. Always most steadfast in his observance of the rule, he would never grant himself any dispensation. He was always to be found in his place with the rest in the choir, in the refectory and at all other duties. Nor did he spare himself in preaching, for he hungered after the salvation of souls and he fostered a like zeal among his brethren. His love was great for all religious persons and for the members of all other religious orders, whom he frequently praised."*

*The witness was asked to say what was the source of his information.*

*"I lived with Brother Dominic for a time and saw many of those things for myself; other things I have mentioned I have learned from those who saw them. I have always heard and I am convinced that Brother Dominic preserved his chastity without stain; this is common knowledge among the brethren."*

#### IV

*The fourth witness was Brother John of Navarra, priest of the Order of Preachers. He took the oath and said:*

*"I entered the Order in the year that Pope Innocent III gave his approval to the Order at the Lateran Council. When the Fest of Saint Augustine comes around it will be eighteen years since I received the habit from Brother Dominic, the founder and first Master of the Order. On the day that I received the habit I made my religious profession in the hands of Brother Dominic in the church of Saint Romanus at Toulouse. Ever since that time I have known Brother Dominic well, living in the same house with him, making many journeys with him by day and by night. He was very constant in prayer, and he prayed more than anyone I have ever known. Often he prayed during the night, and that he used the discipline on himself unsparingly. This I know from my own personal experience; moreover, some of my brethren have told me that he would get them to give him the discipline. I have also heard that Brother Dominic used a discipline made of three iron chains.*

*"He was full of compassion for others and was most ardent in his longing for the salvation of souls. It was this that urged him to preach so frequently and to send his brethren out preaching. With all his heart he bade them preach, begging and admonishing them to be zealous for the salvation of souls. He was so full of trust in God that he even sent out those among that*

were immature: 'Be confident,' he said, 'for God will be with you and will guide your preaching. You will not fail'. And when they went, they found that he was right. I was with Brother Dominic in the priory of Saint Romanus at Toulouse when he came to a decision which was strongly opposed by the Count de Montfort, the Archbishop of Narbonne, Bishop Fulk of Toulouse and by several other prelates: the decision to send me with five other brethren and one lay brother to Paris. There he bade us to study, preach and establish a house. I was very unwilling to go, but Brother Dominic told us not to be afraid for everything would go well. Turning to the Bishops and the Count de Montford who opposed his decision, he said: 'Do not let us argue. I know what I am doing.' Indeed, he sent another group of brethren to Spain with the same assurances.

"So I went to Paris, and while I was studying there Master John, the Dean of St Quentin who was teaching theology at the university, put at our disposal the church of Saint Jacques near the Orleans gate. In making us this gift he had the support of the university authorities and of the scholars at Paris. We built a priory at Saint Jacques and gained many excellent recruits for the Order. Others gave us property and income, and all went well as Brother Dominic had foretold. About this time a great deal of property, including castles, was bestowed on the Order of Preachers in the south of France and in the district of Toulouse. The brethren in that neighbourhood, finding themselves so well off, began to carry money, ride on horseback and don the dress of canons. As soon as he heard of this, Brother Dominic strove earnestly to bring it about that the brethren of his Order should give up all property, persuading them to despise possessions and to hold fast to poverty. He bade them to keep off horses, to live on alms and to make no provisions when they went on journeys. Consequently all the property held by the Order was given away; most of it he handed over to the nuns of the Cistercian Order, and the rest to others.

"Brother Dominic treated all folks with gentle courtesy, whether they were rich or poor. He dealt in the same manner with Jews and infidels, of whom there were many in Spain. In return he was loved by all except the enemies of the Church against whom he disputed in public debates and in sermons; but these too he strove with all charity to win back to repentance and to the faith.

"I have often seen Brother Dominic lie down to sleep dressed as during the day, except that he took off his stockings. In going from one town to another he would walk barefoot, though he would put his shoes on before entering the town, taking them off again when he went out. He would not let anyone but himself carry his shoes. This I have seen for myself, and others have told me the same thing. If his feet were hurt he made no complaint, but merely said: 'This is a penance for me.' He always behaved like one who got joy out of hardship. He had a great love for poverty and earnestly strove to persuade his brethren to cherish it."

The witness was asked how he knew this.

*"Brother Dominic always liked to have a poor habit and showed great delight in giving up the goods of this world; and I have often been present when he exhorted us to love holy poverty. He was moderate in food and drink, and especially so in his use of extra dishes. He would grant dispensation to others; never to himself. In fact, he kept the whole rule with inflexible strictness."*

*Asked how he knew this, the witness said that he had seen it for himself.*

*"As we passed through towns and cities on our journeys Brother Dominic hardly raised his eyes from the ground, a thing I know well for I have often been his companion on such occasions. He had no proper sleeping place of his own like the rest of us."*

*In answer to a question the witness replied:*

*"Had he ever had such a place I should certainly have known of it, for I have gone out of my way to make enquiries on this point."*

*"On several occasions Brother Dominic was elected to bishopric, but he could never be persuaded to accept the honour; he preferred to live a poor life with his brethren."*

*In answer to a question:*

*"This is common knowledge both among my brethren and among the secular clergy and lay folk."*

*Asked to which episcopal sees Brother Dominic had been elected:*

*"He was elected to the sees of Benziers and of Couserans, as I learnt before I entered the Order of Preachers."*

*"Brother Dominic rarely spoke unless it was to God, I mean in prayer, or about God. Nevertheless, he was always joyous when in the company of others, though during prayer he often shed tears. I have seen this for myself. I have heard him say that he would like to be scourged and set upon and to die for Christ's sake."*

*"I remember that Brother Dominic many times spoke or wrote to his brethren urging them to be constant in their study of the Old and New Testament. I have often been present when he spoke of this, and I have read the letters he wrote on the subjects. He himself always carried about with him from place to place the Gospel of Saint Matthew and the Epistles of St Paul; he was always meditating on the epistles and seemed to know them by heart. The Canons of Osma and other reliable persons have told me that when Dominic was a young man in the world, studying at the University of Palencia, there was a terrible famine in that part of Spain which brought great suffering and want to the poor. Dominic was so moved with pity and*

charity that he sold all his books and everything he had in order to get food for the poor. I have been told many others were led to similar self sacrifice by his generous example."

V

The fifth witness was Brother Rudolph of Faenza, priest of the Order of Preachers and procurator at Bologna. He took the oath and said:

"I was formerly rector of the Church of Saint Nicholas of the Vines at Bologna. This church was made over to the Order of Preaching Brothers by the Bishop of Bologna, who was persuaded to this by Cardinal Ugolino, then Bishop of Ostia and Legate of the Holy See, now the Lord Pope. This took place more than fourteen years ago. In the year when the Order of Preaching Brothers obtained the church of Saint Nicholas of the Vines brother Dominic, the founder and First Master of the Order, came to Bologna and became his headquarters until his death, though he was sometimes absent; he had to make visits to the Holy See, he was also away at Venice, and he was further occupied in preaching in Lombardy. But while he lived at Bologna I saw a great deal of him in the church, in the choir, in the house, in the refectory. I was procurator in that house. I made my profession in the Order before Brother Dominic came to live at Bologna. I can say without hesitation that I know the person and the life of Brother Dominic very well.

"First of all it was his custom to spend the night in the church, where he prayed with sighs and tears."

Being asked for the source of his information on this:

"I have followed him into church and have sometimes stood there at night watching him as he prayed and wept. I often saw him standing to pray and holding up his hands in prayer."

Asked how he could see this at night:

"There was always a light in the church; moreover, as I was on terms of such familiarity with Brother Dominic, I would sometimes stand by his side and pray along with him. I can say without any reserve that his devotion was very great and that he was more given to prayer than any man I have ever known.

"Brother Dominic wore an iron chain continually round his waist; it was on him when he died."

Asked how he knew this:

"I myself found the chain on his dead body. I took it to keep for myself, but I have since given it to the Master of the Order, Master Jordan. At night, Brother Dominic lay down to rest dressed as in the daytime, save he took off

his stockings. Sometimes he slept on the ground, at other times on a sort of wicker basket on which I used to spread a blanket for him. Often he slept seated, and on account of his watchings at night, he would often fall asleep at meals in the refectory. Brother Dominic always joined the community in the choir and at table, and he ate the same food as the rest of the brethren. I remember once, I as procurator, arranged some special extra dishes for the brethren. Afterwards Brother Dominic sent for me and said to me privately: 'Do you want to kill the brethren with these special dishes?' If there was a shortage of bread or other food or wine I used to go to him and say: 'We have no bread or wine.' Brother Dominic would say: 'Go and pray. God will provide.' So I used to go to the church and pray, Brother Dominic usually going with me; and to be sure the Providence of God always brought it about that our needs were supplied. Sometimes the little bread we had left would be put on the refectory tables by Brother Dominic's orders, and Providence always supplied us with more.

*"Brother Dominic kept the Rule of the Preaching Brothers with devoted exactness, and he insisted on the observance of the rule in every detail whether of clothing, food, drink, fasting or any other thing. I can speak of this from my own personal experience.*

*"I steadfastly maintain that I have never seen anybody so delighted in doing the will of God as Brother Dominic. How he yearned after the salvation of souls, Christian and pagan alike, and he had a special care for the Cuman Tartars. He was certainly the greatest lover of souls I have ever met. Again and again he said how he longed to go out and preach the Gospel to the Cumans and other pagan people.*

*He was a man of very cheerful disposition and joyous demeanour. He was patient, merciful, kind and a great consoler of his brethren. If he saw one of them breaking the rule he would pass by without saying anything; but later on he would calmly and kindly point out the fault and urge the brother to admit it. It was always his practice to punish transgressions of the rule with rigour, but he did it so gently that the transgressor went away very much consoled. He was a great lover of poverty and continually besought his brethren to practise poverty in their way of life. I remember that about the time Brother Dominic arrived at Bologna, Orderic of Galicia was arranging to bestow a property worth more than five hundred pounds of Bolognese currency upon the brethren; in fact the deed had already been signed in the presence of the Bishop of Bologna. But Brother Dominic would not have the gift because he did not want his brethren to hold property; they were to live on the alms of the faithful and to content with poor fare. And when they had enough for the needs of the day he bade them not to add to their store on that day. Their houses were to be small, their clothing to be cheap. He was even opposed to their using silk for the church ceremonies, preferring that the vestments should be made of a more common material.*

*"The common subject of his talk, whether at home in the priory or on his journeys from place to place, was God and the salvation of souls. Never was*

heard gossip or detraction from his lips; such things he always avoided. These things I know from my long companionship with him. He was untiring in the devotion with which he gave himself to the labour of preaching and hearing confessions.

*"I also remember how, when the first general chapter of the brethren met at Bologna, Brother Dominic said to the assembled Fathers: 'I deserved to be deposed from the office of Master of the Order, for I have become useless and slack.' So saying, he prostrated himself before them all. And when they would not hear of putting anyone else in his place, he arranged that Diffinitors should be appointed with far-reaching powers over himself and the rest. When his last illness fell on him the brethren stood round him weeping as he lay dying. I sat on the ground by him holding his head, wiping the sweat from his face with a towel. But he tried to console us all, telling us not to cry, for he would be of more use to us when he was dead than he had ever been while he was alive. One of us asked him: 'Father, where do you want to be buried?' and he replied 'Under the feet of my brethren.' To the best of my recollection Brother Dominic breathed his last while we were saying the prayer Subvenite Saneti Dei. I never remember seeing him lying on a bed or even upon a sack until he was dead; he died lying on a sack. It was he himself who gave the word when to begin the prayers for the dying. 'Begin now' he said to the brethren, and while the last prayers were being said he held up his hands and died.*

*"As I was the procurator I made arrangements for his burial. I had a grave dug, found a slab of stone that would cover it, and a wooden coffin was made for the body. I myself put his body in the coffin and nailed down the lid. After that I stayed by the coffin until the funeral. Hence I can with confidence say that no spices or embalming stuff of any kind were put either in the coffin or in the grave. This could not have been done without my knowledge, for as procurator I had charge of all the arrangements for the burial.*

*"Again I was in charge of the work of opening the original grave during the translation of the body to a fresh tomb which has recently taken place. As a matter of fact, I did the work myself and opened the grave with iron picks. First of all I used an iron crowbar to prize up the stone slab covering the grave. Under the slabs were large blocks of stone which had been cemented in place, and the cement used was very hard setting; this was why I had to use the iron picks. We had taken these precautions at the funeral because we were afraid that someone might come and steal the body. After I had prized up the covering slab and opened the grave there arose a sweet and delicious fragrance; never have I smelt so delightful a scent even in the shops where they sell aromatic spices. I am not the only witness of this; there were many others present who will tell you the same, the bishops and the clergy, the municipal authorities and numbers of the honourable citizens of Bologna. The sweet perfume remained in the open grave for many days after. I know all this was because I witnessed all these things for myself."*

## VI

*The sixth witness to be called was Brother Stephan, Priest of the Order of Preachers and provincial of the province of Lombardy. He took the oath and said:*

*"It is upwards of fifteen years since I first knew Master Dominic, the founder of the Preaching Brothers, though even before I met him I had heard him spoken of very highly. This was in the days when Brother Dominic was subprior of Osma and canon of the cathedral there. I have been told that when Dominic was a young student at Palencia a great famine raged in that country and many poor people died of starvation; Dominic was so filled with compassion and pity that he sold his books which contained the notes he had added with his own hand, and other property of his too, so that he might buy food for the poor. 'I cannot study off dead parchments,' he said, 'while there are men dying of hunger.' Others in Palencia, people of high authority, were led to act likewise by his example.*

*"I have also heard that later on Brother Dominic accompanied the Bishop of Osma into Languedoc where he began to preach, especially against heresy. It was in that country that he first set up the Order of Preachers. It was while I was a student at Bologna that Master Dominic arrived in that city and began to preach to students and citizens. I went to confession to him and soon began to have a love for him. A short time after I was just about to sit down to dinner with my companions at the hospice where I lodged when two friars arrived with a message for me: 'Brother Dominic wants you straightaway,' they said. I replied: 'I will come directly I have finished my dinner.' But they said: 'No, come now. He wants you at once.' So I left my dinner and went to the church of Saint Nicholas of the Vines. As soon as I got in the church I saw Brother Dominic with a number of his brethren. When he saw me he said to the brethren: 'Show him how to make the venia.' After I had made the prostration I got up and surrendered myself to Brother Dominic who straightaway clothed me in the habit of the Preaching Brothers. 'I am giving you weapons,' he said, 'with which you are to fight against the devil for the rest of your life.' I was much at a loss, both then and later, to know what had led him to send for me like that and to give me the habit; the question of vocation to the religious life had never been mentioned between us. But now I have no doubt that Brother Dominic acted under the inspiration of Almighty God.*

*"He had a wonderful power of giving great consolation to the brethren in their times of temptation and difficulty. When I was a novice I was troubled with all sorts of temptations but I always found comfort in the advice and preaching of Brother Dominic. Many of my fellow novices told me that it was the same with them.*

*"After I entered the Order I remained for nearly a year at Saint Nicholas of the Vines in Bologna, and during that time I saw a lot of Brother Dominic. I can say without hesitation that I never once heard him say an unkind or*

*hurtful word or any useless talk. If he spoke at all it was either to God or about God, and this was true whether he was at home or on his journeys. Brother Dominic urged his brethren to do the same, and he had this piece of advice put into the constitutions of the Order. He devoted himself unceasingly to the labour of preaching, and his words were so moving that often I have seen the audience shed tears. I have never seen such a man of prayer as he was. After Compline he would send the brethren to rest, but he would remain in the church to pray. As he prayed during the night he sometimes uttered such sighs and groans that the brethren who slept nearest to the church were awakened and moved to tears themselves. Brother Dominic often stayed there praying until it was time for Matins; then he would join the others at the Divine Office, sometimes passing from one side of the choir to the other urging the brethren to sing with devotion.*

*"I never remember seeing him sleep on a bed, though I have spent a long time under the same roof with him. In my anxiety for him I used to make enquiries about this, but I could never learn that he never used a bed.*

*"I have often watched him celebrate Mass, and I noticed that at the Canon of the Mass, his eyes and cheeks would be wet with tears. None who assisted at his Mass could fail to remark his great devotion and the fervour with which he sang the Pater Noster. He was most zealous in his love of the rules, but there was never anybody like him in his power of giving consolation to the brethren. We shall never find his like again among those who come after him. He loved poverty very much, and I have many times heard him preach about it and urge us to cherish poverty. He refused to accept poverty or allow his brethren to accept it. It was his wish that the priorities of his Order should be small and poor. He himself always went about in the meanest of habits and his clothes were always poor."*

*The witness was here asked how he knew this:*

*"Whenever I have seen him he has been wearing a very old habit with a short scapular; he did even trouble to put on a cappa and conceal his retched clothing when he came into the presence of the great. I can add that the cells of the brethren at Saint Nicholas of the Vines were very poor and small, and Brother Rudolf the procurator, had them raised about three feet during Brother Dominic's absence. But when he came back and saw what had been done he rebuked Brother Rudolph, saying to him and the rest of the brethren: 'Are you so soon beginning to forsake poverty and build yourselves great palaces?' By his orders the work was stopped and the house remained in that unfinished state for the rest of his life. Thus he loved to practice poverty himself and to see it practised by his brethren. He bade us to use poor clothing, to carry no money with us on our journeys, but to live on alms; and these things he had set down in the rules and constitutions. He himself was very sparing in food and drink."*

*The witness was asked what was his authority for this:*

*"I have often noticed in the refectory that when the brethren had two dishes, Brother Dominic was satisfied with one. While the rest were eating he nearly always fell asleep from fatigue owing to his watching on the night before.*

*"I firmly believe that Brother Dominic was virginal in mind and body up to the day of his death."*

*Asked how he knew this the witness replied:*

*"I was Brother Dominic's confessor, and as his confessor I am convinced that he was never guilty of mortal sin. He was always patient and cheerful in suffering."*

*The witness was here told to say how he knew this.*

*"I have been with him at times when we have in direst need, and it never made him other than carefree and gay.*

*"As the provincial of Lombardy it was my duty to fix the time and make arrangements for the translation of the body of Brother Dominic to the new tomb. I was present along with many of the brethren. There was also a great crowd of citizens of Bologna and some of the principal officials of the city. We had much difficulty in opening the original grave on account of the strong cement used when it was first filled in. The beautiful perfume that came out when the grave was opened caused all the bystanders to fall on their knees blessing and praising God for thus making known to us the glory of His saint. Then with great reverence and devotion the Master General of the Order, carried the body to the tomb in which it now rests. The Archbishop of Ravenna and many other prelates were present on this occasion."*

## VII

*The seventh witness to be called was Brother Paul of Venice, priest of the Order of Preachers. After taking the oath he said:*

*"It is nearly fourteen years since I entered the Order of Preaching Brothers at Bologna. I made my religious profession in the hands of the Master Reginald of Orleans and I received the habit of the Order on the Sunday when we sing the gospel of the Cannonite women. Brother Dominic came to Bologna the following summer and ever since that time I have seen him a great deal of him both in the priory at Bologna and during his journeys through the country of Venice. In fact I lived with him, went about with him, took meals with him and worked with him for two whole years. I never heard him speak a useless or unkind word, nor did he gossip or seek to please others by flattery. As we walked along Brother Dominic either prayed or preached or meditated on God."*

*Asked to be more explicit about this, the witness said:*

*"Master Dominic would often say to me and my companions: 'Go ahead now and let us meditate on our Saviour.' Then we would hear him groaning and sighing. Wherever he might be, Master Dominic either spoke to God or he spoke about God; he urged us to do the same and had this put into the constitutions of the Preaching Brothers."*

*In reply to a question the witness said:*

*"I have spent so much time with Master Dominic that I have seen and heard all these things for myself. I have never seen him peevish, annoyed or upset at any time; he was joyous under trials and patient in adversity."*

*"Brother Dominic loved poverty for himself and wanted it for his Order. Once when he was at Bologna some of the citizens wished to give some property to the Order, but he refused it and forbade his brethren to accept it. In fact he had a clause inserted in the constitution to prevent us from receiving gifts or property. The habit he wore was always a poor one, and it was his practice to take off his shoes and walk barefoot when he was outside the town. I have often been in his company when he has done this. I have also seen him going from door to door begging alms, and he would receive bread just like a poor man. Once when he was begging at Dolia in Lombardy a man gave him a whole loaf of bread; the Father knelt on the ground and received the bread with great humility and thankfulness."*

*"I have been on many journeys with him but I have never known him to sleep in a bed; he usually made his bed on some straw. I remember once being with Blessed Dominic and another companion on a very long march. When at last we reached our destination, which was Legnano near Verona, we were very kindly treated and given shelter. Brother Dominic himself prepared the beds for me and my companion and then went off to spend the night in the church. Later we assisted at Matins in the church along with the clergy of the place. During these marches Blessed Dominic always kept the fasts, though he insisted on his companions their full meals on account of the fatigues of the road. I cannot recall that he ever had a proper sleeping place of his own at Saint Nicholas of the Vines in Bologna though I was there with him for a long time. Sometimes he slept on the floor sometimes on a wicker basket, at other times on a board, but most often in the church where he prayed with many tears. I have witnessed this all for myself. Sometimes I have to call him for his prayer, and then I used often to see the tears on his cheeks. He was a man very given to prayer. On his journeys he would always sing Mass if there was a church at hand. Very great was his desire for the salvation of souls, both Christians and heathens. Many a time he has said to me: 'As soon as the affairs of the Order have been settled at a general chapter we will go off and preach the faith of Christ to the Cumans and win them for our Lord.'"*

*“Brother Dominic kept the rule perfectly without the least deviation, and he urged and commanded the brethren to observe it in all its integrity. He never failed to punish those who broke it, but he corrected them with so much patience and charity that they were never upset. He shared like all the rest of us in the common life of the community. Despite his watchings at night he was always in his place for Matins and at times would go from one side of the choir to the other exhorting us to sing with care and recite the prayers with devotion. He was such a man of prayer himself that no disturbance or distracting care seemed able to stop him from praying to God. He had an extraordinary gift of consoling us and all others in trouble and temptation, as I now from my own experience. He was always very patient and merciful in his dealings with others, humble and serene, and of very kindly disposition. I firmly believe that he preserved his innocence and chastity unspotted right up to his death. Indeed Brother Dominic was a man of such great virtue that I have never seen his equal, nor do I believe that a holier man has lived in these recent years.*

*“Last Sunday when I arrived at Bologna from Venice in order to give evidence at this examination of his life, I was ill for several days with such a violent pain in my back that I feared I should not be able to appear before the commission of enquiry. But I went to the tomb of Blessed Dominic and earnestly besought him to come to my assistance. My prayer was heard and now I am completely cured.”*

## VIII

*The eighth witness was Brother Bonvisi of Piacenza, priest of the Order of Preachers. He took the oath and said:*

*“I have now been in this Order about sixteen years. I lived with Brother Dominic for four months at Saint Nicholas of the Vines in Bologna; I also travelled with him from Rome to Milan. While at Milan Brother Dominic fell ill and I took care of him. At Bologna when the brethren left the choir at night after Compline, Brother Dominic used to stop in the church to pray. I was very curious to know what he did in the church, so I used to hide myself in the church and watch him. I heard him pray with sighs and tears and sometimes he called upon God in a loud voice.”*

*The witness was asked whether he was sure that the man he saw was Brother Dominic.*

*“I was able to recognise him not only by the light that was burning in the church but also by his voice, and I have no doubt at all it was Brother Dominic I saw and heard. Not only so, but these nightly vigils and prayers of Brother Dominic were common knowledge with the whole community.*

*“I was also curious to know how he passed the night, for he had no cell of his own like the rest of the brethren. Sometimes I came across him sleeping on*

*the floor and even lying on a coil of rope. He used to lie down to sleep dressed just as he was during the day for his journeys.*

*The witness was asked how he knew this:*

*"I have seen this for myself and all my brethren knew it too. When I went with him to Rome as soon as we left behind us the towns and villages we passed through, he would take off his shoes and stockings and walk with bare feet. I wanted to carry his footwear for him and offered to do so, but Brother Dominic would not let me. At one part of the journey the road was very rough and the stones were very sharp he said to me: 'Miserable wretch that I am, I once put my shoes on again when I came to this place.' On that journey to Rome we encountered very heavy rain so that the rivers were in flood; but Brother Dominic did not seem to mind this. He praised and blessed God and sang the Ave Maris Stella in a loud voice, when he got to the end of that hymn he started the Vent Creator Spiritus and sang it loudly all through. For myself I was somewhat afraid when we waded through the rushing waters of the flood but Brother Dominic told me to go on in the name of the Lord. This gave me more confidence and putting my trust in holy obedience I went on more hopefully, though the flood seemed to me very dangerous. During these journeys when the time came to take shelter for the night or to get a meal, Brother Dominic never gave any orders but followed the wishes of his companions. If we fared badly this was always a sign for him to be more joyous than if we fared well.*

*"During the time of his illness at Milan when I nursed him, he suffered from a violent fever for a time, and while the fever was on him he spent the time in prayer and meditation; but as soon as the fever abated he immediately began to preach to the brethren about divine things. At time he would read, sometimes I read to him, and all the time he praised God and rejoiced in his infirmity. On one occasion during the time I was procurator at Bologna there was no bread to put out on the refectory tables on a certain fast day. Brother Dominic made a sign to me that the bread should be put out but I told him that there was not a bit of bread in the house. This made him lift up his hands with a joyous face and praise God. Presently two men came into the refectory, one with a basket of bread and the other with a basket of figs which provided all the food they wanted. I was present on this occasion and saw what happened.*

*"Brother Dominic was a man exceeding humble, kind and tender towards others, very patient, full of devotion for God, a great lover of poverty and very zealous for the salvation of souls. He was a friend of all religious, and loved all religious orders. He kept the rule with great fidelity. Never did I know him render evil for evil or cursing for cursing; on the contrary he called down blessings on those who treated him ill."*

*The witness was asked to say what the source of his information here was:*

*"These things I know from living on terms of great familiarity with Brother Dominic.*

*"When I was a novice, before I had my experience in preaching, indeed I had not just studied theology, Brother Dominic sent me from Bologna to Piacenza to preach there. I besought him to excuse me from going because of my want of experience, but with words of great sweetness he urged me to go. 'Go with confidence,' he said, 'God will be with you and will guide your words of.' So I went to Piacenza and preached as he said, and God gave such grace to my words that I gained three or four brethren for the Order of Preachers."*

The above information on the Formal Process of the Canonisation of Saint Dominic was taken from the original translation, which is stored in the archives of the Dominican Order in Santer Sabina, Rome, and was edited by Father Reginald Ginns.

At Toulouse, a second commission collected evidence from many who had an even longer knowledge, remembering Dominic in his days of early missionary labour. This consisted mainly of 'common folk', who all spoke of his kindness, goodness and gentleness. But they knew him as someone apart from them all: his friend was God.

A Papal Bull was issued at Spoleto on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1234, declaring as a result of the enquiries made that the sanctity of Dominic was approved. His feast day was to be on 4<sup>th</sup> August as a newly canonised saint.

### **3.0 THE DOMINICAN ORDER**

#### **3.1 Dominican Friars**

The Order of Friars Preachers is an international religious order of the Roman Catholic Church (Ashley, 1990: 10). They are called 'friars', which comes from the French *frère* and Latin *frater*, meaning 'brother' (Cook, 1961: 40). Dominican friars may be priests or lay brothers, but they are all bound by the same vows and live in communities known as 'convents' or 'priories'. The priory is a base for the friars' apostolic work, though they do not belong permanently to any one priory and may be moved for the sake of their ministry. A person joining the Order may choose to be either a clerical brother or a lay brother, the difference being that the former are eventually ordained to the priesthood, whilst the latter assist as 'co-operator' brothers. Both, however, are equal members of the Order.

In the mediæval period, Dominican Friars in Great Britain were commonly called 'black friars' (Cook, 1961: 2), so named after the *cappa* (ie the black cloak worn over their white habits when they are travelling or preaching). The name 'Blackfriars' is applied not only to Dominican friars themselves, but also to their priories. Dominican priests and 'co-operators brothers' make up what is known as the 'Dominican First Order'.

#### **3.2 Dominican Nuns**

The 'Dominican Second Order' is a group of enclosed contemplative nuns who, according to the plan of St Dominic, dedicate themselves totally in their religious life of communion with God. Whereas the apostolic life of the brethren and other groups of the Dominican family is nourished, the nuns provide also a witness of prayer, silence and penance, thereby providing a vital role in the Dominican apostolate.

The nuns are the only Dominicans to live in monasteries strictly cloistered or 'enclosed'. They were actually the first Dominicans, St Dominic having established a monastery for women at Prouille in 1206 (Justin, 1980: 10). The nuns are known as the 'Sisters of the Order of Preachers' and come under the jurisdiction of the Master of the Order (St Dominic's successor). They profess vows, are devoted to prayer and asceticism, they study, sing the Office in choir and engage in manual work.

### **3.3 Dominican Sisters**

Almost from the beginning within the Dominican Order, there have been communities of women who combined the life of prayer with that of external works, such as teaching, nursing the sick and supporting the poor. Documents exist of the first teaching community of Blessed Aemilia Bicchier at Vercelli, dated 1256 (Justin, 1980: 10), which was made up of the laywomen Dominicans.

Today, Dominican sisters involved in the active apostolate far outnumber their male counterparts. The sisters are known as 'Third Order Conventual' and are inspired by the Dominican mystic and Doctor of the Church, St Catherine of Siena (Clarke, 1990: 13), who worked extensively for Church unity. The work of the Dominican sisters is now very varied and includes teaching in schools and universities, whilst many work overseas, including Bodo within the Arctic Circle.

In England, the sisters formed under Mother Margaret Hallahan in 1842 at Stone in Staffordshire. They nursed the sick and taught in local schools. Dominican sisters are organised in autonomous congregations, three of them based in this country. All Dominican sisters make 'simple' vows, and pledge 'obedience until death' (Justin, 1980: 10)

### **3.4 Lay Dominicans**

Lay fraternities of the Order are associations of lay people who have joined together in the apostolic spirit of St Dominic. Lay Dominicans developed from the desire of the laity for a radical, evangelical lifestyle. It arose from two sources. The first, the Order of Penance, was inspired by the example of St Francis of Assisi and included lay people who were leading a life of penance or chastity in the world. Others became associated with the Order because they identified themselves with the Dominican apostolate and spirit of action and contemplation. The seventh Master of the Order granted them their own Rule in 1285. They were called the 'Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St Dominic'. A further group had developed simultaneously, a military order called the 'Militia of Jesus Christ created by Dominic's friend, Bishop Fulk, for the defence of the Church. In 1235, Pope Gregory IX confided the Militia to the care of the Dominicans. By the close of the thirteenth century, these two orders had amalgamated to form the Third Order of St Dominic (St Dominic's Priory, 1990: 3).

Lay Dominicans live by the Rule according to the spirit of St Dominic. They are lay people living in society but contributing to it by an informed and committed Christian witness. They study the message of Jesus and discuss it in order to understand it better. Above all, they try to witness their faith, to be sensitive to the needs of people, to promote justice and peace and to serve the truth. Lay Dominicans usually belong to one of the Dominican convents or priories. Instead of the habit of the Order, they wear a small white woolen scapular under their secular dress. Upon death, however, a Lay Dominican may be buried in the full Dominican habit.

### **3.5 The Legacy of Mother Margaret Hallahan**

The foundress of the Dominican Sisters, Margaret Hallahan, was born in London on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1802 of poor Irish Catholic parents. They both died

when Margaret was ten years old, at which point she was placed in an orphanage, where she remained until she entered domestic service.

The local priest, Father Hunt, placed her in service as a maid to Madame Caulier, the wife of a French émigré. Margaret was just eleven years of age at the time and she remained with Madame Caulier until she was about twenty. A friend of Madame Caulier, Dr Morgan, was taken sick at this time, and she sent Margaret to help care for him. His wife had died and his three daughters were married. Margaret remained with him until his death. She then took service with Dr Morgan's daughter, Mrs Thompson, where she was to nurse the whole family of children.

While Mr Thompson was in South America, his wife and children lived in Margate, Kent, but on his return the whole family, including Margaret, went to Bruges. Margaret worked with the poor and sick of Bruges, as well as tending to her own duties of domestic and nursemaid to the Thompson family. She attended Mass daily and, although she knew nothing of the language, it was in Bruges that she realised her vocation to become a Religious 'sister'. It was largely her life in Bruges that did much to shape her for the work to which God had destined her; it was here, too, that she became a Dominican Tertiary.

Having lived with the Thompson family for fourteen years, Margaret was taken seriously ill. She was sent to the poor house of the Sisters of Charity in the town. On her recovery, she went to live at the house of a friend, who was also a Dominican Tertiary. It was during this period of recuperation that another friend, Mrs Amherst, wrote to her from England. Mrs Amherst was the mother of Bishop Amherst and she asked Margaret to come to England to work for her associate, Dr Ullathorne, who required a schoolmistress to take over the day-to-day responsibilities of his poor school in Coventry, England.

Margaret arrived back in England on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1842. It was both the feast of St Catherine of Siena and the anniversary of her Profession as a Tertiary. She was

aged forty, with few friends and possessed only a small amount of clothing, books and a statue of Our Lady. Margaret spent the evenings and the hours when she was not actually in school visiting the poor and sick, finding the latter often in the most terrible conditions of squalor and poverty. Several evenings in the week she held night classes for the girls who worked in the local ribbon factories.

The congregation of the Dominican Third Order Regular of Saint Catherine of Siena, which owes its origin to Mother Margaret Hallahan, began in Coventry. She was already a tertiary and her desire was for a complete religious life, a life of regular observance and work for the poor. Two or three companions sharing her passion for charitable work also wished to give themselves to God more completely and so the idea of their living together in a community came into being.

The Dominican Fathers who had been established at Hinckley for nearly a century asked Dr Ullathorne, who was also Benedictine, to undertake the personal training of the tiny community. The Clothing of Mother Margaret and her three postulants took place on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1844. In December of the following year all four novices took their simple perpetual vows. Mother Margaret first renewed her own profession in the morning before the Mass, during which the other sisters made their profession. (Mother Margaret was already a professed member of the Third Order of St Dominic.) The text is as follows:

*Jesus-Mary-Dominic-Catherine:*

*I, Sister Margaret Hallahan do declare that I have entered the Third Order of St Dominic out of no violence, compulsion or fear, but as I trust, by the grace of Almighty God, until death.*

*In witness here to I have signed my name this eighth day of December 1845.*

*Margaret Mary Hallahan, Coventry.*

*Witness: WB Ullathorne.*

*To honour the Almighty God, of the BV Mary, St Dominic and all the saints: I, Sister Margaret Mary Hallahan renew my profession and promise*

*obedience, obliging myself at the same time to the three simple and perpetual vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, to Almighty God, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the Blessed Dominic, and to you Reverend Father, Brother Dominic Aylward, representing the very Reverend Father Brother William Nickolds Provincial of England, in place of the Right Reverend Father, Brother Vincent Ajello, Master General of the Order of Preachers and his successors, according to the Rules of St Augustine and the special institutions of the Sisters of Penance of our Holy Father St Dominic, the care of which is committed to the aforesaid Preaching Brothers... that I will be obedient to you and to my other Provincials even unto death.*

*In faith of which I here sign my own name with my own hand... Margaret Mary Hallahan.*

*Witness to the above: WB Ullathorne.*

The preceding texts are taken from the first profession register of the Congregation, which bears the title *The Profession Book of the Sisters of the Third Order of the Penance of St Dominic* (pages 365, 366). The Register is retained in the archives of the Mother House in England, situated in Stone, Staffordshire. The vows of the Order remain the same today, but the Final vows are now taken after eight years as a novice. On the death of a sister, the copy of her Final vows are buried with her.

### **3.5.1 Bristol**

In 1846, the small community moved to Clifton in Bristol, and it was there that Margaret received her first orphans. Four poor Irish children and her first 'incurably sick patients', two old women who afterwards went to Stone.

The community lived in dire poverty but postulants were beginning to enter, some of them cultured converts, friends of Dr Newman and his companions. Dr Ullathorne was consecrated Vicar Apostolic of the Western District in 1846. The ceremony took place at Coventry and Mother Margaret was invited to attend, where she met and made life long friends of Dr John Henry Newman (later Cardinal Newman) and his fellow converts of the Oxford Movement. Mother Margaret built her first real convent at Clifton.

When the community grew large enough to allow Margaret to make other Foundations, she turned to the industrial Midlands as affording the best outlet for her apostolic zeal. Her first Midland foundation was at Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, in the Potteries. She rented a large house on the main road belonging to the Railway Company in January 1850. The actual house was called *Foley*, which was situated between Fenton and Longton.

Mother Margaret had the drawing room of *Foley* converted into a chapel and provision was made for a middle-class pension school in another room of the house. The stables were turned into a poor school by day and were used as a night school in the evenings. The chapel was open to the people for Mass and evening services, which were well attended; people not only filled the chapel, but also the hall and staircase of the house.

Eventually, the community had to be withdrawn from Longton. The lease of the house was exhausted and the Railway Company would neither sell the property nor improve it, and there was no other site in the neighbourhood suitable for a convent. An offer was made by a Mr James Beech, however, of an acre and a half of land situated at Stone in Staffordshire. It was this circumstance that finally determined the establishment of the Novitiate House in that locality.

Although the plan for a 'foundation' in the Potteries was abandoned, in 1856 a piece of ground on the Newcastle Road on the outskirts of Stoke-on-Trent was bought and a large church and convent with a presbytery was partially completed in 1857. The community remained at Stoke, teaching and visiting members of the parish until the late 1990s. The older and more experienced Sisters of the Order staffed the convent and school. In 1998-99, the few remaining Sisters were transferred from Stoke to Stone. The Order still teaches in the local school, however, and continues to visit the sick of the Parish.

### 3.5.2 Minor Foundations

The Bridgewater Foundation was founded in July 1850 and the Sisters continued there until the April of 1851. Difficulties arose in the process of making permanent establishments in the town, added to which was the necessity of providing for more important works in Staffordshire.

The Dominic Community took up residence at Leicester in a house rented for the purpose in February 1860. Document I of the Convent Papers taken from the records 1859-65 details extracts from the Council Book quoted below:

*1860, February:*

*February 8<sup>th</sup>: Various changes in the community in consequence of the approaching foundation at Leicester, which is fixed to commence on the feast of St Catherine de Ricci (13<sup>th</sup> February). The first named to begin in the foundation are: SM Catherine, SM Phillipa, SM Josephine, SM Raymund, SM... (sic). The convent is to be dedicated to St Joseph. The house purchased for this Convent is still in the possession of the Province; we are eventually to take it into our own hands as soon as everything connected with its purchase from the town authorities is settled.*

A night school and home for the elderly was founded at Leicester and the home still has a Dominican nursing Sister present, though it is now run by a charitable consortium.

A foundation at Rhyl in North Wales was made in 1864. Mother Margaret had a devotion to St Winefred of Wales since the earliest days in England when she had visited the miraculous well at Holywell. Wales was one of the areas of Britain most deprived of the Catholic faith. The work was hard and the religious community was unfamiliar and not always welcome in Wales. The foundation did not prosper and the expenses involved became too great for the resources of the community; the Sisters were, therefore, withdrawn in August 1866.

A colony of Sisters took up residence in Walthamstow House in Walthamstow, Essex, in November 1866. The Archbishop of Westminster, Henry Manning,

had invited Mother Margaret to make a foundation in his diocese. He suggested that she should undertake the diocesan orphanage in order to care for Catholic children then being brought up in Government run workhouses. Mother Margaret rented Walthamstow House for a term of three years for the purpose of an orphanage in August 1866.

The Sisters began to work in the parish schools. The original purpose of the foundation, however, was frustrated by the regulations of the English Poor Law Board. This concerned the release of children from the state orphanages known as the Union Workhouses and the unwillingness of Mother Margaret to submit her establishment to governmental inspection, which was necessary to obtain official subsidies. The spiritual and physical emptiness of the place, together with the failure of the orphanage plans, also distressed Mother Margaret. This was especially so in view of the fact that there was often no Mass in the house at Walthamstow, and her age and infirmities by this time often prevented her from going out to Mass on weekends.

When she first visited Walthamstow in 1866, Margaret had also visited a priest, Fr James McQuoin, who was in charge of a mission in the slums in the East End of London at Bromley, St Leonards near Bow. The main work of the Sisters thus became that of school teaching. They lived at first in a rented house, but a convent and church were eventually built with the help of generous benefactors. These were not complete until after the death of Mother Margaret. The official opening of the convent chapel in the house at Bow took place on the feast of St Catherine of Siena on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1868, ten days before the death of Mother Margaret.

The convent and the school at Bow flourished until 1922, when the schools had to be closed and the community withdrawn. This was because of alterations in education regulations in London and greatly increased costs, resulting from the First World War of 1914-18 (cf Register of Branch Houses, preserved in the archives at Stone, Staffordshire).

Stone is a small market town in Staffordshire situated between the county town of Stafford and the industrial area of the Potteries. Mother Margaret accepted an offer from Mr James Beech of St Anne's Chapel and its grounds for a site for a convent. Mr Beech was a local man who owned property and land in the area. St Anne's Chapel was built in 1842 with money donated by Mr Beech for Fr Dominic Barber, an Italian priest in charge of the Catholic mission at Aston-by-Stone to say Masses for the local people.

Mother Margaret visited Stone on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1852. In May of the same year a contract was signed with Mr Thomas Hardy, a builder of Chilvers Coton in the county of Warwick, to begin building the convent. The work began on 15<sup>th</sup> August, the foundation stone being laid by Bishop Ullathorne on 30<sup>th</sup> of that month and the first brick placed just over a week later. In July 1853, a contract was signed with Mr Hardy to build a church to be attached to the convent. Mother Margaret, along with one novice, arrived in Stone on 25<sup>th</sup> July and on 1<sup>st</sup> August the remaining novices joined them. However, only a small part of the convent and cloisters were completed. A large area of ground was staked off where the church was intended to stand and a preparation area for the builders. The Sunday Mass was said in St Anne's Chapel and the novices attended daily instruction under the trees in the convent garden.

The first Mass celebrated within the convent walls was on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1853, the Feast of St Dominic. Bishop Ullathorne sang a Pontifical High Mass in the temporary chapel set up in the community room for Mass and Divine Office. The convent at Stone, dedicated to St Dominic, became thereafter the Novitiate and Mother House for the Order. After the Mass the foundation stone of the church was laid.

The unfinished Church of the Immaculate Conception and St Dominic was blessed and opened for use as a parish church on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1854. Dr Henry Newman travelled to Stone to preach at the opening. This parish church

replaced the small Pugin Church known as St Anne's Chapel within the convent grounds, which had been founded by Blessed Dominic Barberi in 1842.

Later in the year, on 19<sup>th</sup> October, Bishop Ullathorne consecrated the altars in two small side chapels in the church, the Rosary Altar on the left side and St Winifreds Altar on the right side of the Sanctuary.

Between the years 1854 and 1863 the church was completed and additions were made to the convent. Well before her death in 1868, therefore, Mother Margaret had achieved her purpose and her heart's desire of having a "square convent with cloisters" (SM Gabriel du Boulay: Memoir, Chapter XXI, Part 6, Convent Archives) as being most suited to the contemplative/active life of Dominican Sisters and also in accordance with the Dominican Constitutions. The church was solemnly consecrated by Bishop Ullathorne on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1863.

### **3.5.3 St. Mary's Nursing Home, Stone**

The establishment of a hospital for 'incurables', by which Mother Margaret meant a home where the aged and chronically sick could be cared for, had been one of her earliest and strongest desires.

At Stone it had always been Mother Margaret's intention to have a purpose built hospital. With this end in view, in 1856 she went to Belgium, accompanied by Sister Imelda Poole, who was to be elected the next Mother General on the death of Mother Margaret. They visited several hospitals in order to gather information about the management of such establishments. Eventually, in 1861, a house was purchased for the expressed purpose and named St Mary's Hospital.

At the time of Mother Margaret's death in 1868 the number of patients had risen from 30 in 1862 to 47 and larger accommodation was urgently required. The Register of Branch Houses (AGSG15) describes how, in 1869, in memory of

Mother Margaret, a large donation of funds was made by friends of the community at the instigation of a Mrs Fitzherbert of Swynnerton (Ch XV, C 126), specifically to provide the desired new hospital.

However, the fund proved only large enough to allow the hospital to be moved to larger premises. In 1871 Elmhurst House, which had originally belonged to James Beech, became available. It was purchased and, with many extensions, converted to a hospital. It remained as the nucleus of St Mary's Home until 1976 when the present Home was built on part of the convent garden.

St Mary's still caters for aged and physically sick. Respite care patients are admitted into the home to enable their relatives to take a vacation/break. The capacity of the home is currently for fifty-seven patients and is staffed by Sisters, Nurses and Care Staff.

#### **3.5.4 The Continuing Work of the Dominican Order**

The Sisters of the Dominican Order continue their mission of nursing the sick, parish visiting and school teaching, both in this country and abroad.

St Catherine's Home for the elderly in Leicester was run by the Dominican Sisters until the Summer of 1999, when ownership was transferred to a charitable organisation specialising in elderly care. However, a Sister continues to nurse there and provides spiritual and nursing support.

In England the Sisters nurse mainly in St Mary's Home in Stone. They work with secular staff and provide spiritual as well as medical support for the sick and terminally ill patients in the home. Parish visiting continues by the community in Stone and the surrounding areas, visits being made to the sick, elderly and house bound of the parish. The Sisters continue teaching in the Convent School, which is situated in the convent grounds. They also teach in

the local Catholic Primary School, situated in Margaret Street (named after Mother Margaret) opposite St Mary's Home.

The Sisters founded a convent in Bodo, North Norway in the 1950s. There are six Sisters in the convent, one of whom is a trained nurse working in the local hospital, whilst another is a teacher in the local school. The remaining Sisters care for the convent, cook and visit the sick and poor in the local area.

### **3.5.5 Review Of The 'Cause For Beatification' of Mother Margaret 1934-2000**

In 1934, the name of Mother Margaret Hallahan appeared in a list of members of the Dominican Order whose lives and works should be investigated with the view to possible beatification and canonisation. The nomination was approved by the General of the Order, Very Revd Benedetto M Lenzetti OP, who directed that the Articles for the Informative Process should be drawn up. These were formally ratified by the General Office of Postulation, Santa Sabina, Rome, on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1936.

The first session of the Information Process in the diocese of Birmingham was held at the Archbishop's house on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1936. Sessions were held at intervals during the following three years until the last session, at Stone, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1939. During these sessions, sixteen witnesses were interviewed concerning the life of Mother Margaret. Proceedings were suspended, however, due to the intervention of the Second World War.

The Tribunal for the Informative Process was reconstituted by the Archbishop of Birmingham in 1955 and held its first session at Stone on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1955. Six witnesses were interviewed during this period. The final session concluding the Information Process was held at Stone on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1957, when it was recommended that a decree be sought sanctioning the opening of an historical cause. For this purpose the writings of Mother Margaret were submitted to the judgement of the Sacred Congregation of Rites and a favourable decree was

granted on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1963. (This decree, granted from Rome, allowed the Sisters to continue gathering information for the 'Cause For Beatification'.)

During the years 1957-1963 transcripts of archive material numbered 1-806 had been sent to the Congregation.

At Whitsun, in 1963, Sister Mary Cecily Bouling OP was appointed Promoter of the Cause. In June of the same year, an Historical Commission, formed to present further documents, was appointed by His Grace the Archbishop of Birmingham and approved by the Postulator General of the Dominican Order. Sister Mary Nicola Loed OP took the following documents to Rome to the Sacred Congregation in 1967:

- All documents of a theological or chronological importance that had not been formerly submitted.
- A chronology of the life of Mother Margaret.
- A catalogue of all known documents by or about her.

Under the direction of the Regulator appointed by the Sacred Congregation, Revd Fr Pobladura and the Dominican Postulator General, Fr Tarcisius Piccari OP, Sister Mary Cecily worked at assembling the Positio. Between October 1967 and April 1968 she was in Rome for that very purpose. In 1970 the Positio was considered complete. (The Positio was considered complete in respect of the transcripts, letters and witness statements, but no factual evidence of a miracle or the granting of favours in Mother Margaret's name.) However, at this point Sister Cecily was offered a position of Professor of Church History at Ushaw Seminary, Yorkshire, in England, a position she accepted. As no one was appointed to replace her, the Cause fell into abeyance.

In the years between 1970 and 1992, interest and love for Mother Margaret was lacking amongst the Sisters of the English Congregation of St Catherine of Sienna. It seems, however, that the Prioress General of the

Cause of Mother Margaret to pursue it, or to appoint a new Promoter. This lack of interest would in part have been due to the changes in religious life after the Second Vatican Council, and the problems and unrest amongst many Sisters consequent upon these changes, all of which absorbed the time and attention of superiors.

In 1992, as a consequence of a visit of Sister Mary Valery Walker OP to the offices of the Dominican Postulation at Santa Sabina, the then Prioress General, Sister Mary Edward House OP, and her Council agreed to take up the Cause once more. They were particularly interested in the role of Mother Margaret in the 'Second Spring' of Catholicism in England. They appointed Sister Mary Valery Promoter of the Cause.

At this time, Pope Paul VI had made changes to the process of Beatification and it becomes necessary to obtain rescripts from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, permitting the continuation of the Cause on the work already done, rather than a new start having to be made. Rescripts were granted on 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> April 1994.

Since that time, under the direction of the Relator appointed by the Congregation, the Revd Monsignor Jose Luis Gutierrez, and the Revd Innocenzo Vencho OP, Sister Valery has worked to adopt and complete the original Postio (ie the work of Sister Cecily).

### **3.6 The Habit of the Brothers and Sisters**

The habit of the Dominican Friars consists of white woolen material for the tunic, a leather belt worn around the waist, and a black mantle, with white scapula and capuce. The Dominican Nuns and Sisters wear a plain white woolen material tunic, leather belt, a black mantle, a white bonnet with black veil, and a white scapular. The scapular must be blessed as often as it is renewed.

## 4.0 THE THIRD ORDER

### 4.1 LAY DOMINICANS

In 1221, the Rule of the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance was revised. The pious laity, who were attached to the Dominican Churches, were taken under the jurisdiction of Master General Munio of Zamora, who received them to the benefits of the Order. Pope Innocent VII formally approved the Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St Dominic in 1405 (author?, 2000: 43).

Lay Dominicans are descendants of this lay penitential movement that began in the twelfth century. They were laymen and women who sought to lead a life of Christian perfection and penance in the world. Many vowed themselves to celibacy and wore a religious habit. Attendance at weddings, banquets, parties, and the theatre were forbidden unless one had a specific dispensation even in the lifetime of some of today's members (author?, 2000: 43).

This monastic type of rule is no longer practised among the Lay Dominicans. Instead, there is a revised Rule, emphasis being placed on the individual's gifts and ministry. It is considered important to study current problems, to be aware of the signs of the times, and to help to deal with them in a Christian way, to make different types of sacrifices according to ability, others, needs and desires (author?, 2000: 43).

The mission of the 'Order of Preachers' is the salvation of souls through prayer, study, community and evangelisation through the observance of their Rule. In the Rule of the Lay Dominicans, "Conversion of heart according to the spirit and practice of evangelical asceticism" is stated as one of the principal sources in fulfilling their vocation (author?, 2000: 43).

## 4.2 ADMISSION TO THE THIRD ORDER

No person may be admitted to the Third Order unless, after thorough examination and adequate probation, according to the prudent judgement of the Director it is established that:

- a. He/She is Catholic of upright life.*
- b. He/She has an earnest desire of Christian perfection, and is fit and well disposed to follow the prescribed means.*
- c. He/She loves the Truth and is eager to uphold the Catholic Faith.*
- d. He/She has a special devotion for the Church and the Roman Pontiff, and will show a filial obedience to the Order of Friars Preachers.*
- e. There is reason to hope that he/she will persevere in his/her good intentions.*

(Rule of the Third Order of St Dominic, sd: 7.)

The following have power to give admission to the Third Order:

- a. The Master General and the Promoter General, everywhere.*
- b. The Prior Provincial and the Promoter Provincial by right of office, within the limits of the Province.*
- c. The local Director into his own Fraternity.*
- d. Any priest properly delegated by the directors named above, within the limits of their respective jurisdictions. He may not, however, use the faculty granted to him to receive someone into a fraternity without the permission of the Director of the same fraternity.*

(Rule of the Third Order of St Dominic, sd: 8.)

The delegation given by the Master General is for life, whilst the delegation given by any other director requires the confirmation of his successor. The local Director, however, can only delegate only in particular cases (Rule of the Third Order of St Dominic, sd: 8).

For someone to validly enrol in any Fraternity of the Third Order, the consent of the majority of the Council of the Fraternity is required in addition to the approval of the Director (Rule of the Third Order of St Dominic, sd: 8).

### 4.3 SACRED PROFESSION IN THE THIRD ORDER

Profession consists of a formal promise – though not, however, a vow – to live according to the Rule or the Third Order of Friars Preachers.

A temporary professed Lay Dominican on the completion of three years should be received to final Profession on the consent (necessary for validity) of the majority of the Council of the Fraternity. The form of Profession is as follows:

*“To the honour of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost and the Blessed Virgin Mary, and our Father Blessed Dominic, I \_\_\_\_\_ in the presence of you the Director and the Prior (or Prioress) of the Fraternity of the third Order of Penance of Blessed Dominic in this place, representing the Most Reverend Master General of the Order, do make profession that is my will to live henceforth according to the Rule and manner of the Brothers and Sisters of the same Order of Penance of Blessed Dominic for three years (or until death).”*

(Joret, 1947: 5.)

In each Fraternity a book is kept for its members, in which is recorded the names of those received into the Order, with the date of clothing and Profession.

The Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order are bound as long as they remain professed, to persevere in this Order and they may not, except for a just reason, transfer to another Third Order (Rule of the Third Order of St Dominic, sd: 13).

## **5.0 THE CRISIS WITHIN THE DOMINICAN ORDER**

### **5.1 THE BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS**

From the very beginning of the Church, there have been men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty and to imitate him more closely, by practising the evangelical counsels. They led lives that were dedicated to God, each in his/her own way. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, many of them became hermits or founded religious families. By virtue of her authority, the Church gladly accepted and approved such commitment. Thus, in keeping with the divine purpose, a wonderful variety of religious communities came into existence (Baum, 1990: 59).

One of these communities, the Dominican Order, faces the same kind of crisis as many other contemporary institutions. Its history has been one of a marked rise and decline from the Order's earliest beginnings, when there were nine Dominican Sisters and seventeen Friars, to the Reformation, when membership reached its peak. Since that time there has been a decline in numbers of both men and women wishing to enter the Order. The situation in Ireland, Holland, in Flemish-speaking Belgium and Spain each give cause for particular concern.

#### **5.1.1 The Numerical Problem**

The situation in England tells its own story. Prior to the Reformation when Dominican numbers peaked, it was estimated that there would have been a total of between 2,000 to 3,000 Dominicans in this country. However, since that time there has been a decline in numbers, though globally there are at present within the Dominican family 6,500 friars and 4,000 nuns, 35,000 Active Sisters and some 100,000 lay people linked to the Order (Radcliffe, 2001: 45). As recently as fifty years ago there were sixteen Dominican houses in England; now there are only five. There are 106 male Dominicans and 350 females. These numbers also include the Bushey Dominicans, who are a branch of the English

Congregation of the Dominican Order. The Sisters work in the overseas missions.

The numbers of Dominicans of both genders, however, are increasing in South America, India and Africa, whilst numbers of male religious in the western world entering the Order are greater than the female numbers. Perhaps this can offer some valid observations to the root of the problem in the Dominican Order and considerations for its way forward.

### **5.1.2 An Ageing Population**

It is common knowledge that some 'religious' persons today are searching for their identity or role and feel unsettled. To add to this problem there is a rapid rise in the average age of the members in the community. A necessary consequence of this is the closing of many religious houses. Other houses continue to exist, but their practical and apostolic work has increased. These houses are mainly staffed by an ageing religious population that is finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands expected of them. Moreover, the financial upkeep of these large and generally inadequately heated buildings with their rambling gardens, greenhouses and out buildings is a heavy financial burden on the community. Some communities are unable to work the land and provide appropriate numbers of religious for the household chores and home care. Arguable more depressing is the fact that the communities are unable to care for their own sick members, who are then placed in hospitals or nursing homes.

Most congregations in the past opened houses at random and according to individual circumstances. Often this was at the pressing demands of a person of wealth and influence. Periods of sustained prosperity enabled them to take root and expand in their home dioceses, which could be considerable distances from their motherhouses. This has consequently left the present communities with too many small convents consisting of two, three or four ageing religious

persons isolated from the motherhouse, thus being tied to a parish and its organisational structure. This sense of isolation is often increased by the elderly and frail religious being unable to commute easily. Indeed, many struggle to care for themselves or for each other.

### **5.1.3 Secular Staff**

Currently, an increasing number of secular staff are being employed by religious persons to carry out some of the work formerly done by the religious themselves. The vast range of such duties includes cooking, cleaning, laundry, gardening, and professional work such as teaching and nursing. Thus, secular staff are now providing the skilled labour and care that the Order itself was originally intended to give. There is now only a token religious presence in schools, colleges and nursing homes to provide essential spiritual support and comfort to people in our rapidly evolving world.

### **5.1.4 The Work of the Religious**

The work of the religious has become increasingly diversified and takes place more in the community than in the actual foundations or the Order. The necessity for a wage to help with the running costs of the convent and the fulfilment of some highly trained religious professionals have each contributed towards bringing about these changes. Religious individuals can, therefore, find themselves more frequently in the company of secular colleagues than with their own religious communities. This situation and the possibility of divided loyalties can in itself cause tensions and even threaten the break up of a community.

## **5.2 THE PERSONAL RESPONSE OF THE RELIGIOUS**

Fifty questionnaires were sent to various Religious Orders, both male and female, each posing five questions for the purpose of research. Thirty of these were returned completed, whilst one apology was received citing the pressure

of work and a further two returned as invalid postal addresses. There was no reply received from seventeen of the mailed questionnaires. The questions set were as follows:

1. What do you think has brought about the present crisis of fewer vocations joining Religious/Holy Orders?
2. Why do you feel that greater numbers of males rather than females are entering Religious/Holy Orders?
3. How do you think the problem of falling numbers could be addressed?
4. Do you consider the present situation to be a temporary or continuing decline?
5. What do you feel to be the greatest challenges facing Religious/Holy Orders today?

#### 5.2.1 Question 1

Most respondents proffered more than one reason for this:

Materialism - 33%;

Loss of values, loss of long term commitment to a way of life and loss of faith to live the life - 13%;

Parents no longer wish their children to enter Holy Orders/Religious Orders. Now that family units are smaller, parents hope for grandchildren - 13%;

Great changes have taken place in society over the past thirty to forty years with the consequential rise in living standards. Much better educational opportunities and jobs, enabling travel and entertainment - 13%;

Lack of Christian values in the home environment - 10%;

Falling numbers attending Church - 10%

The negative image of the religious portrayed by the media (including the widespread coverage of scandal and sex abuse), coupled with the emphasis on consumerism and instant gratification – 6%;

Lack of faith and a paucity of religious education in schools and the home have brought about the present crisis of fewer vocations – 6%;

A loosening of the 'moral framework', which has seen a questioning of the need for celibacy as a requirement for priesthood – 6%;

Lack of information for the laity and the confusion created following Vatican II has created a vacuum in religious content and process, which has resulted in a 'crisis of faith' from which the Church has not recovered – 6%;

People today cannot envisage the concept of a 'life long commitment' – 6%;

Religious life lacks appeal and significance in today's secular world – 6%;

There is a greater focus on individual success and 'getting to the top', sometimes to the detriment of everyone else – 6%;

Youth prefers the enjoyment of life to serving God – 3%;

Religious persons need to withdraw more from the spirit of secular life and live a more enclosed time for greater prayer life to overcome the unrest among nations – 3%;

The emphasis on lay spirituality and on the side of the laity in the Church – 3%;

The Church needs to modify its practices in order to meet the real spiritual needs of and to speak a language understood by the present generation. It is the Holy Spirit conveying something to us, which we ought to seek to discern – 3%;

Christ is with the Church until the end of time – 3%;

The average age of communities continues to rise, becoming even less inviting to the young and so the crisis worsens. This will continue as long as so few young people join religious congregations - 3%;

Cardinal Daly once explained that the characteristics for 'crisis' are essentially the same as those for 'opportunity'. God is calling; are they (ie young people) listening? - 3%;

The beginning of a shortage of vocations was beginning to be seen over twenty years ago and now this shortage is being felt more acutely - 3%;

Pressures of everyday living and little reflection in lives - 3%;

The State has now taken over, especially in health provision and education, which used to be done by religious communities - 3%;

A drift away from structured religion; priesthood and religious life are very much a part of Church structure - 3%;

A theory that the demise of the clergy and the religious is God's way of ensuring that those of the laity are given their rightful place in the Church. For centuries the clergy and the religious have dominated Church affairs, whilst the laity has been considered as inferior - 3%.

### 5.2.2 Question 2

The liberation of women, education and professional status - 16%;

Significant changes in all aspects of life have been far greater for the female than for the male - 13%;

Males enter younger, wishing to become priests after serving as altar boys - 10%;

Marriage is seen as a must-have fashionable event for girls - 3%;

Parents do not wish for their daughter to enter Religious Orders - 3%;

Women, who are now liberated, do not wish to take vows - 3%;

There is less religious teaching in schools today. Therefore, there is less contact with young people - 3%;

I am not sure that this is true in England or in places like the Philippines - 3%;

A number of males enter Holy Orders, but also a number of males enter Religious Orders. Females enter only Religious Orders - 3%;

I do not think this is correct, but I feel it is fairly proportionate - 3%;

In the Roman Catholic Church women are not allowed to receive Holy Orders, as all priests must be male - 3%;

I am not sure that there are greater numbers of males than females entering religious life - 3%;

I am unaware of the fact of that statistic - 3%;

There are less good works for females to do in Religious Orders today (eg caring for the sick and teaching) - 3%;

Nuns who are depicted on television and the radio do not give an up-to-date picture of religious life and is off-putting to young people - 3%;

There is a suggestion that homosexuality plays a part in this - 3%;

There are more vocational openings for women these days than teaching, nursing and secretarial work, which was the norm forty or fifty years ago - 3%;

In all ages men and women are given the vocation to serve the Church - 3%;

I presume that this question refers to the Anglican experience, since there are as yet no women priests in the Catholic Church - 3%;

Young men who feel insecure and find no identity in what secular life [options] have to offer are attracted to the priesthood because they feel it offers 'security' and 'status', which they could not achieve in secular life. They are often unsure of their own 'sexuality', too, and priesthood offers what they see to be a 'safe haven' – a dangerous conclusion in my view. I can only think that young women do not feel the insecurity to the same degree and are not, therefore, seeking a 'safe haven' or don't see the religious life as offering them a different alternative, as their male counterparts do – 3%.

### 5.2.3 Question 3

More mature people being seen as possible vocations – 10%;

Participation in the religious life before entering – 10%;

A return to old values and Christian teaching within the home environment – 10%;

Do not know the answer and wish that they did – 10%;

Releasing the religious from other duties to promote vocations – 6%;

The important thing is that the *charism* of a congregation lives on. Ways must be found, therefore, of sharing the *charism* with the laity (eg Associates) – 6%;

Religious Orders must do more to bring themselves up to date and be seen to be relevant in the world today – 6%;

An increase in numbers attending the Church – 3%;

Religious persons need to withdraw more from the spirit of secular life and live more enclosed, with time for greater prayer to overcome the unrest among nations – 3%;

The religious need to reflect the joy and happiness, which flow from a life of fidelity and commitment to Christ - 3%;

It will take time; there are so many problems in society nowadays - 3%;

There could be greater consultation with young people on their views of religious life - 3%;

Prayer and fasting - 3%;

A very saintly person has said there is a crisis of faith in the western World; this is the reason for a decrease in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life - 3%;

By making celibacy optional, many young boys would be attracted to the priesthood - 3%;

If the Vatican allowed women to become priests no doubt many would wish to apply - 3%;

It will only be addressed when people are ready to listen to the call within them and when they feel that they need some help from a Being greater than themselves - 3%;

By asking ourselves 'How best can we serve?' History shows that charismatic people arise to meet new needs in society - 3%;

Falling numbers in Europe and North America do not represent the whole Church. In South America and Africa there are many vocations - 3%;

The so called golden age of vocations of some years ago should not be viewed as a norm. Falling numbers of people entering the priesthood/religious life should not, therefore, be necessarily viewed as a decline. The various ministries of the lay life should be explored further and the models of priesthood/religious life examined and adapted to suit the needs and expectations of this changing age. Permanent commitment to kingdom values is

clearly becoming increasingly confusing to the faithful with the emergence of former married Anglican Priests being received into the Catholic Church and being appointed to parishes around the country - 3%.

#### 5.2.4 Question 4

➤ **Temporary decline - reasons:**

There is so much time and effort being spent on this very difficult problem by all the Religious Orders. The situation should improve - 10%;

The continuing power of prayer for vocations - 10%;

There are plenty of vocations in the Third World. I think that the present situation in Europe is temporary - 10%;

Every situation is temporary. The Church of Christ will always be there, though it may change its shape in many ways. All that any of us can do is to be faithful and to trust in God - 10%;

Temporary, but no reason given - 10%;

Religion and Christian values may very well become fashionable again; in other words, a swing of the pendulum - 6%;

The religious must lead by example to a population of increasingly disillusioned individuals to ensure that it is temporary - 6%;

Religious vocations could well be brought into England to be trained and enter Holy Orders - 3%;

Temporary, though the high numbers of the early 1960s will not again be reached - 3%.

➤ **Unsure - reasons:**

This is in the hands of the Lord and we accept it from day to day - 6%;

The religious must make more time for prayer life - 3%;

I can only hope and pray that it is temporary, but the major problem is the attitude of the people around us - 3%;

There is a continuing decline in North-West Europe, North America and Australia, but the growing points in my own Order are India, South East Asia, Africa and South America - 3%.

➤ **Permanent decline - reasons:**

It will continue to decline unless radical changes are made - 3%;

I feel that the present situation will continue in decline for the foreseeable future, with some religious congregations dying out and others amalgamating with each other - 3%;

The present situation will continue to decline - 3%;

It could well be permanent, but it is all in God's hands - 3%.

### 5.2.5 Question 5

Materialism - 10%;

Dealing with the discouragement and keeping alive their faith in their own commitment. Hope in God, who continues to call all to holiness and love and joy in spite of everything - 10%;

To make sure that *charism* is carried on through a Third Order or associates. Even if the congregation has no members, the associates will continue the good work of keeping alive the *charism* of the Order - 10%;

Apathy - 10%;

People appear to have forgotten God - 6%;

Sexual promiscuity - 3%;

For Religious Orders to become too modern in the quest for popularity - 3%;

People have now become so independent of mind - 3%;

Lack of obedience - 3%;

Religious persons must withdraw more from the spirit of secular life - 3%;

The greatest challenge is trying to keep true to the spirit of our founder/foundress and caring for our ageing Sisters - 3%;

To have a whole new vision of religious life and the way it can develop in our modern world. Religious life has continued in a very similar way for hundreds of years and, though many changes have taken place since Vatican II, it is still seen to be irrelevant for the modern world. Older religious persons must be open to younger members exploring new ways of being true religious, and for younger members to have the courage to go out and be the bridges between the new and the old - 3%;

We are all getting older. We should not be too worried. The Lord will enrich the harvest again with vocations - 3%;

You need to clarify the term 'Holy Orders'. Holy Orders is one of the seven sacraments. People also enter Religious Orders. They are not necessarily the same - 3%;

Extinction is the obvious one. It will be interesting to see where the Church will be in ten years with falling church-going numbers - 3%;

To be a counter-culture in today's world (eg in our lifestyle); to share our spiritual heritage with lay people; to be seen to make a stand on issues of justice (eg asylum seekers and migrant workers); to be faithful to our spirit of *charism* – 3%;

For Religious Orders not to lack the courage to open new houses where a real need exists – 3%;

We need a renewal of faith. The greatest challenge facing us all, including the Religious Orders, is the spirit of secularism that has overtaken the western world – 3%;

Pressures of meeting targets (eg professional registration of many works previously accomplished) – 3%;

The decline in vocations, the problems this brings and the reorganising of situations to meet these demands – 3%;

The lack of vocations to religious life and the increasing number of elderly religious people requiring care and medical help – 3%.

### **5.3 AN ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS TO THE FIVE QUESTIONS**

#### **5.3.1 Question 1**

'What do you think has brought about the present crisis of fewer vocations joining Religious/Holy Orders?'

Most respondents put forward more than one answer for the present crisis, with the overwhelming percentage of opinion (ie 33%) regarding materialism as the main reason for this. On reflection, many would consider this to be a major factor in the crisis. A first thought and easily identified. As Gilbert argued: "the enhanced mastery over nature, and the increasing material comfort and security that have gone hand-in-hand with modernisation, have guaranteed a human

preoccupation with the present life and temporal world" (1980: ??). If this is the major reason for the crisis of fewer vocations, it is difficult to understand the fact that so many members of the Dominican Order themselves came from a 'middle class' background, leaving behind comfortable and secure home environments.

Other reasons are put forward to explain the present crisis, but the percentage of opinion drops to the highest of 13%. Three answers equalled this percentage and it is evident that more time, thought and reflection had been spent on them:

- "Loss of values, loss of long term commitment to a way of life and loss of faith to live the life."

This perhaps sums up many of today's problems. From the religious perspective, the 'loss of Christian values' and loss of homes and family units that nurtured the young in these stable environments has all but disappeared. This would have been an ideal background for a future religious person. Christian values, taught at a young age, giving the inner strength and courage to accept and embrace a long term commitment to a way of life and a strong inner faith to live that life, provides the future 'religious' with the right mental attitude to live such a committed life.

- "Parents no longer wish their children to enter Holy Orders/Religious Orders. Now that family units are smaller, parents hope for grandchildren."

A number of Dominicans known personally made contributions to this particular response. An Irish background could be the key to this fact. In the past, the family unit with strong Roman Catholic parents promised a son to the priesthood and a daughter to the religious Order. Many of the current older Sisters have sibling sisters in religious Orders and brothers, uncles, nephews or cousins in the priesthood. There is a very close family bond between them, probably because of the shared experience of a common religious upbringing.

Family units are today smaller than past generations and parents without such a conviction would not wish their child to become a 'religious' person. It would probably be alien to them, almost akin to the loss of their child. The loss of potential grandchildren could be even less acceptable. In family units where members are still strongly Roman Catholic, there will be a strong desire by the parents to have their only son or daughter marry, live in a nice house, obtain a good job and eventually produce grandchildren. To be a success in the eyes of the world that demands success has become the dominant pursuit and aim in society.

For a small family to give their only son or daughter to the 'religious life', however religious that family may be, is a very difficult choice for them to make. The fact that most priests must now live alone with ageing housekeepers their only company, whereas in the past three or four priests shared, may be felt an unhappy and negative experience.

For the 'religious community', life also poses its problems. Many communities are now small in numbers with advanced average ages. For a younger woman to enter this ageing and probably sickly environment would certainly be a daunting and lonely prospect for her.

- "Great changes have taken place in society over the past thirty to forty years with the consequential rise in living standards. Much better educational opportunities and jobs, enabling travel and entertainment."

There are obvious links with materialism and that those items previously perceived as luxuries are now readily available to most people. For girls from all classes of society there is opportunity to enter a profession, to travel and experience the wider enjoyments of life. They can choose their own time to settle down and begin a family with their 'chosen' husband or partner. Similarly, young men have many more choices of professions available to them, and a sense of satisfaction and Christian values can be found outside of those professions that previously were the sole provider of such fulfilment. Moreover,

travelling costs today are comparatively inexpensive and the 'gap year' at College or University encourages this experience of life with its recreation and entertainment.

It is understandable for younger people to view the world of Convent or Abbey as dusty, draughty, archaic places. The 'Religious' themselves have also become aware of this problem, and are now trying to address it with laity visiting Convents and Abbeys, to enable them to see the human face of 'Religious'.

The fourth and fifth most common responses (each of 10%) are closely linked:

- "Lack of Christian values in the home environment"; and
- "Falling numbers attending Church."

If parents do not themselves live a life based upon Christian values they are unlikely to teach their offspring the importance of such a lifestyle. It is a fact that fewer people in the UK are attending Church today than in previous generations, so Christian values are even less likely to be taught within the home environment. Many people attend Church exclusively for Christenings, weddings and funerals in order "to be there for the family".

Modern industrial societies are now multicultural and there are many forms of religious expression within these societies, bringing about the possibility of a conflict in moral codes. Such societies also view success primarily in financial terms, which is essentially more of a secular value than a Christian one. Bishop Wilson defined secularisation as: "The decline of the influence of religious institutions, thinking and practices upon social life" (1966: ??). If this definition is correct, it posits the questions what will eventually replace this and, perhaps more importantly, what can the religious institutions do to halt the decline?

It is much easier to read the signs of the early twenty-first century icons, pop idols, film stars and football celebrities and the new cathedrals of shopping malls and fashion boutiques than it is to discover ways of halting the decline of

the influences of religious institutions, thinking and practices upon social life. Meanwhile, the 'religious' themselves are at a loss and divided.

The next seven most common responses to this question each attracted 6% of the total cast:

- "The negative image of the religious portrayed by the media (including the widespread coverage of scandal and sex abuse), coupled with the emphasis on consumerism and instant gratification."

This response has in some measure been precipitated by the high profile paedophile cases brought against a number of priests. Also, accusations of cruelty have been made by former pupils of some Catholic schools by women who have related their stories to the press concerning their children, who they claim to have been fathered by priests. The sense of betrayal of their trust and abandonment by the Church has been further compounded by the fact that mothers and babies have thereafter been bereft of any kind of financial support or care. Such actions are totally incompatible with religious teaching and morally unacceptable. In all such cases, the innocent majority have effectively paid the price of the guilty minority in terms of loss of trust and respect by a suspicious public. They, too, have suffered from damaged reputations, hurt feelings and a sense of disgust for those who have brought such shame on their Orders.

The emphasis on consumerism and instant gratification again has close links with materialism, though media advertising also contributes to this. Television, radio, newspapers and glossy magazines advertise the latest 'must have' items, all designed to make people feel more comfortable, trendy, sensual and generally more attractive to the opposite sex. All of this – it is claimed – can be achieved with little effort, delay or inconvenience on the part of the purchaser.

- "Lack of faith and a paucity of religious education in schools and the home have brought about the present crisis of fewer vocations."

This response is also closely associated with answers four and five. It is perhaps significant that Roman Catholic State and Convent Schools continue to flourish in many areas. These schools are also popular with parents of other denominations, who believe that they represent the best opportunity for their children to receive a good standard of education. Religion is taught in these schools and the children attend Church as part of the school curriculum. An unfortunate statistic as far as Religious and Holy Orders are concerned is that proportionately few of the children who leave these schools go on to become nuns or priests. In the past, this was not the case. In fact, many of the schools were a source of recruitment for these Orders. It would appear, however, that although the ethos of these schools remains largely unaltered, the aspirations of the younger generation have changed significantly.

- “A loosening of the ‘moral framework’, which has seen a questioning of the need for celibacy as a requirement for priesthood.”

This could quite legitimately be perceived by some as yet another twenty-first century ill engendered by the social climate in which we find ourselves. A high proportion of respondents, both male and female, appear to be at a loss when commenting on the role of women in society today, almost as if they have been overtaken by events to such an extent that they are thereby unable to fully grasp either the implications or the seriousness of the situation. This may have been precipitated by the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has become unsure of the female role within the Church. In the past, women were regarded almost exclusively as ‘mother’ figures, who fulfilled both a maternal and spiritual role for husbands and families. This role is quickly disappearing along with the moral standards that were so often the driving force behind it. It would be misleading to claim that the respondents directly blame the present situation for the crisis within Church and Religious and Holy Orders upon women, but this is often the case generally.

Questioning celibacy as a requirement for priesthood does at first seem to fit in closely with a loosening of the moral framework. It could be argued, therefore,

that if society's morals have become so lax, then it would not expect certain of its members to maintain - or even aspire to - a higher moral code. The fact remains, however, that celibacy continues to be a requirement of the Roman Catholic Church and people still expect those to whom it applies to adhere to it for as long as the requirement exists. Moreover, society often places loftier demands on those who are in positions of trust or privilege. Politicians, company executives, representatives of the police, members of the Royal Family and clerics who have been discovered to have abused this trust will surely testify to the intensity of passions thereby aroused against them.

- "Lack of information for the laity and the confusion created following Vatican II has created a vacuum in religious content and process, which has resulted in a 'crisis of faith' from which the Church has not recovered."

In the past, the congregation attended Church, whilst the priest said Mass and preached his sermon. Today, however, people expect to participate in the Mass, to read passages from the Scriptures and on occasion assist in the administration of Communion. Although traditional gulfs have become less obvious in recent times within the Roman Catholic Church, there still exists a discernible breach between the Church, the clergy and the laity. Sometimes, even the apparent lack of understanding between priests and the Vatican suggests that either or both are out of touch with the world in which they live.

The religious also seem divided, some preferring the more clearly defined parameters before Vatican II, whilst others find its consequences far more liberating. Such overtly diverse opinions frequently cause tension and confusion in close knit communities. Moreover, because many of the laity are on the periphery and have comparatively little understanding of the implications of Vatican II, much of it seems to have little relevance to their daily lives in general.

- “People today cannot envisage the concept of a ‘life long commitment’.”

Substantial numbers of people would doubtless agree with this perception, but their reasons for it are unclear. Theories abound, including materialism, consumerism, a ‘throw away’ society, living with the threat of nuclear weapons, terrorism, uncertainty in financial and/or property markets, employment insecurity compared to previous generations can all be advanced in explanation. Any or all of these theories might contribute to the problem to a greater or lesser extent. No single one, however, would appear to point to any major fundamental change in mankind or his thinking and discerning the reason why society is unable to make such a commitment. Perhaps it is because it requires a ‘leap of faith’ and it is this faith that is in short supply in our western World of plenty.

- “Religious life lacks appeal and significance in today’s secular world.”

This may be linked to other responses regarding the negative image of religion as portrayed by the media and the cultural emphasis on consumerism and instant gratification. Such a concession, however, though admittedly contributory factors, does not appear to provide the answer to the whole story. The lack of appeal to young people especially can be easily seen insofar that they are not as easily attracted to old buildings that are largely devoid of many of the modern conveniences that are nowadays taken for granted, whilst the mode of dress must surely seem representative of a bygone age in today’s ever-changing world of fashion.

Of even greater importance, however, might be the apparent irrelevance in today’s secular world, in which men and women are able to enter the caring professions and give of themselves without the need to enter Religious or Holy Orders. The State has now virtually taken over the care of the young, the sick, the elderly and infirm. The voluntary sector is also well supported by virtue of caring and able people of all religious denominations and faiths and people of no particular Church or belief. Thus, many of the good works undertaken by

the Religious Orders in the past when they were desperately needed are now considered to be outdated and out of touch with the modern world.

- “There is a greater focus on individual success and ‘getting to the top’, sometimes to the detriment of everyone else.”

Self-achievement, self-satisfaction, self-gratification and self-esteem are all essentially linked together by the implications of their prefix - self. Arguably the driving force of today’s society, particularly in the West, is self-interest. Affluence and fame are much more sought after, perhaps because they are much more attainable. They are no longer the reserve of those with wealthy or privileged backgrounds. In fact, greater emphasis is placed upon a person’s rise to fame and fortune when they have come from a ‘working class’ background.

It must be conceded that there is much to admire in the reward of the hard working members of society. Of late, however, it seems that only the end is worthy of honour, irrespective of the means by which that end is gained. Moreover, whilst the achievers are eulogised, the rest by implication become even more disenfranchised as those further down the ‘pyramid of success’ are thus regarded in terms of relative weakness and comparative failure. Another consequence of the ‘winning at all costs’ mentality is that some of those costs are the casualties of family and other relationships. When we worship at the altar of ‘self’, the sacrifice we must be prepared to make is that of ‘others’. The dichotomy between this religion of autonomy and the Christian faith is so obvious it hardly needs to be identified.

The remainder of the responses to question one each attracted the same percentage of the total feedback (ie 3%):

- “Youth prefers the enjoyment of life to serving God.”

Whilst the veracity of this statement today is beyond question, it was also probably true of society many years ago. The real difference would appear to be

that youthful pleasures are no longer the exclusive domain of young people. Older adults, too, are ever more reluctant to accept behavioural responsibility. Indeed, it could be argued that the young people of today have been given very little moral guidance or of Christian concern by their parents, many of whom prefer to live a hedonistic life without giving any thought whatsoever of honouring God, let alone serving him. In previous generations, society's youth would have been encouraged to consider entering Religious or Holy Orders by supportive parents, family and friends. Now, those same parents, family and friends would offer only discouragement at the first sign of any such ridiculous suggestion.

- "Religious persons need to withdraw more from the spirit of secular life and live a more enclosed time for greater prayer life to overcome the unrest among nations."

The majority of respondents who gave this answer came mainly from enclosed Orders. They have a genuine and absolute belief in the power of prayer and the enclosed way of life. Life has changed little in these convents and abbeys and the members of the Orders see their convent or abbey as a 'powerhouse' of prayer, interceding for a world that sadly no longer appears to be able to pray for itself. The incumbents of these communities obviously feel that some of their colleagues outside have become too involved in the secular life and need to return to the ways of the past. Although this was not explicitly stated, it did appear to be a general feeling among the enclosed religious.

- "The emphasis on lay spirituality and on the side of the laity in the Church."

It will at first be noted that, though many of the responses given compare favourably, others are in complete contrast. This itself expose the deep division within Religious and Holy Orders today, which sadly shows no sign of abating. The general consensus of these particularly respondents would be that the laity

have been given far more influence and participation in the Church than is beneficial for either them or the body they purport to represent.

- “The Church needs to modify its practices in order to meet the real spiritual needs of and to speak a language understood by the present generation. It is the Holy Spirit conveying something to us, which we ought to seek to discern.”

It could be argued that the Church has modified its practices considerably, though it still appears to be unable to communicate its message in a language that can be more readily understood. The Church seems remote and outdated to many members of society. However, society retains its essential desire for the assurance that good should triumph over evil, as is frequently portrayed in films and television programmes with a so-called ‘feel good’ factor. Such media representations have great appeal and are shown to large audiences. In this respect, it seems that the entertainment industry has in some ways assumed the role of moral guide, associated with the Church. Religious individuals are somewhat divided on the issue. Whilst some believe that the Church is becoming too modern in its practices, others are of the opinion that it has not gone far enough. Perhaps this may give some clues to the present problem. Such mixed messages are hardly likely to appeal to a generation that is already fragmented by social division; only a united front can truly hope to penetrate the armour of the sceptic.

- “Christ is with the Church until the end of time.”

Unlike some of the other comments given, this would surely not be denied by any. In the context of the question, however, the answer implies that those respondents who voiced it remain content to leave all in God’s hands and take no active part in attempting to resolve their present situation. It gives the impression of an almost *che sára, sára* approach to life that has more in common with fatalism than with whether or not one believes in God’s sustaining power for Religious Orders.

- “The average age of communities continues to rise, becoming even less inviting to the young and so the crisis worsens. This will continue as long as so few young people join religious congregations.”

This is the predicament of almost every religious community. The majority of their members are aged, infirm and largely dependent on their few younger colleagues to provide nursing care. The surroundings can hardly be described as conducive to health and vitality with many congregations living in old, rambling, labour intensive convents or abbeys. The situation must appear uninviting and really quite frightening for young visitors considering entering religious congregations, whilst the members themselves must also fear for their own future.

- “Cardinal Daly once explained that the characteristics for ‘crisis’ are essentially the same as those for ‘opportunity’. God is calling; are they (ie young people) listening?”

It has to be conceded that at this point in time the vast majority of young people are not listening. Religious life is not seen by young people today as an opportunity to serve God and at present it is difficult to imagine how this trend can be reversed.

- “The beginning of a shortage of vocations was beginning to be seen over twenty years ago and now this shortage is being felt more acutely.”

This is certainly true of the Dominican Order, but originally the full implications of the situation were not fully recognised. Many religious persons believed that the pendulum would take an upward swing and that their way of life would once again become appealing to young people. Sadly, this has not been realised and the situation has worsened. Most Religious Orders are now prepared to confront the problem and try to do something that might reverse the trend.

- "Pressures of everyday living and little reflection in lives."

This is also true. The pressures to be successful in life have never been greater and begin at a much younger age. Parents are likewise pressurised to provide the latest designer clothing, computers, mobile phones and videos for their children. Meals are no longer enjoyed by the family sitting down together as a normal occurrence. It is more likely to be at a fast food outlet on a retail park or a TV dinner in isolation. Little (if any) time is set aside for reflection in lifestyles that have become products of a 'throw away, on the go' society, forever restless, failing to settle and constantly searching for the next exciting venture.

Moreover many women work to provide extras to make life more comfortable, but in an increasing number of cases they do so to actually provide for the necessities of life for the family. This is especially so where there has been either a marital breakdown or single parenthood is the issue.

- "The State has now taken over, especially in health provision and education, which used to be done by religious communities."

Health provision and education were in the past the strongholds of religious communities, their main contributions to society being in these two important areas. Such good works were often performed for the benefit of those that might otherwise have been socially marginalised. These 'good works' were recognised by members of society as the offerings and works of the religious, who were respected and highly regarded for them. It is understandable that in families with strong Catholic convictions, the younger members would wish to aspire to such a way of life, particularly daughters of those families in an age when women had few other options.

- "A drift away from structured religion; priesthood and religious life are very much a part of Church structure."

Many religious persons regard Vatican II as the catalyst for the present ills of Church and Religious/Holy Orders. Whilst it may be true that the

repercussions of Vatican II are still being felt within Religious/Holy Orders, whether such vast changes would have come about anyway – albeit more gradually – is impossible to say. Many religious persons were undoubtedly content with their former way of life, which had not changed for centuries from its pillars of organisation, discipline, structure and unquestioning obedience. Comforts were at an absolute minimum, but security and surety were prizes worth the price.

Change came at an alarming rate for the religious everywhere. Whilst some may have expected it to be a welcome open window of opportunity for the cloistered way of life, others viewed it with dread, at best a change for its own sake; at worst, a recipe for strife and confusion. In many respects, the religious appear to be divided amongst themselves. All are in agreement, however, regarding the fact that there has been and continues to be a strong drift away from structured religion. Whether Religious/Holy Orders would otherwise have been in this situation at this point in time is difficult to gauge, though it must be noted that Vatican II has brought about the questioning of many things concerning religious life. Society has also experienced rapid change and has become more cynical, at times appearing to question the need for any form of structure at all.

- “A theory that the demise of the clergy and the religious is God’s way of ensuring that those of the laity are given their rightful place in the Church. For centuries the clergy and the religious have dominated Church affairs, whilst the laity has been considered as inferior.”

The dominance with which the clergy and the religious have for centuries governed ecclesiological matters cannot be denied. In fact, many would argue that this is still the case. No doubt many religious persons would be offended by such an accusation from within their own ranks, some perceiving it to be bordering on heresy and thereby choosing to dissociate themselves from the premise altogether. That notwithstanding, however, many laity would freely acknowledge the veracity of such a proposition, citing examples of clergy who

'know best', religious persons who are 'holier than thou' and priests who put themselves 'on a pedestal'.

Although the laity currently plays a more active role within the Church, this does not appear to be encouraging more of them to attend. In the context of the question posited, therefore, the theory does not appear to be substantiated. Otherwise, surely larger numbers would be swelling the congregations now that the perceived hindrance seems to have begun to be removed. This is not happening, however, the laity not seeming to care whether they were or were not regarded as inferior in the past. The logical conclusion to question might be that too little is being done and too late by the clergy and the religious towards the laity, who cannot miss what they never experienced (ie equal partnership within the Church based upon love, trust and understanding for each other's role within the Christian environment).

### 5.3.2 Question 2

'Why do you feel that greater numbers of males rather than females are entering Religious/Holy Orders?'

Again, some respondents gave more than one answer to this question, the highest percentage of opinion regarding women's liberation as the main reason for the present situation (16%):

- "The liberation of women, education and professional status."

This appears to be one of the major problems facing Religious/Holy Orders today. Such liberation of lifestyle for women effectively means that they are thereby empowered to find fulfilment in their lives outside of those limited areas that were previously accessible to them, including Religious Orders. It remains a fact, however, that women continue to be the mainstay of the Catholic faith. Mothers still encourage their families to attend Mass, marry in Church and baptise the young. The main difference now is that women no

longer wish their daughters to be accepted as postulants in a Religious Order as was previously the case. What, after all, could they achieve? What would be their motivation? Would they find fulfilment in such a way of life? These questions would be in every mother's mind whose daughters might consider a lifestyle so totally far removed from the twenty-first century norm.

Added to this is the fact that women can find fulfilment in the 'caring professions' and no longer feel the necessity of entering Religious Orders to obtain this sense of fulfilment. The problem is deeper than this, however: women are not so eager to give up their new found options by embracing vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which seem so incompatible with today's liberated lifestyle. This is a truly stark choice for today's woman, even if she aspires to such a way of life.

Mothers also exert significant influence over their sons' lives. It takes extremely strong convictions for a mother to encourage her son to enter Religious Orders or the Priesthood. In many ways, Religious Orders, Holy Orders and the priesthood are lonely existences in cold, depressing buildings either with frail, elderly colleagues or a housekeeper of similar disposition.

The second most popular response to question 2 attracted 13% of the total:

- "Significant changes in all aspects of life have been far greater for the female than for the male."

Whilst this is certainly true, it is not so much the changes themselves that have made such a significant impact, but the ways in which the women affected by them have addressed themselves to the issues thereby raised. Some women are find fulfilment exclusively in marrying and raising a family; others want to do this and experience the fulfilment of a professional career of their own. At times, the pressures marital and maternal life combined with those of a career have yielded high stress levels and divided loyalties for both male and female alike.

A further complexity is realised in the fact that not all women are happy to marry and have families. Some choose to live in long or short term relationships with partners; whilst others choose to follow successful and rewarding careers to the exclusion of personally intimate relationships. The choices are many and varied, which can often only add to the sense of perplexity women now confront.

If the popular media are to be believed, then some women deal with it by becoming 'ladettes' (ie heavy drinking, smoking and hard living women). The emphasis is placed on the fact that these women now see themselves as the 'hunter/gatherers'. Certainly, women generally now have a greater alcohol intake than in the past, partly no doubt because they have more disposable income and time on their hands. The days of the all-male public houses have long gone, giving way to wine bars and bistros, which are far more welcoming for women. The husband or male partner is often expected to baby-sit while the woman enjoys a 'girls' night out'. The woman now has almost exclusive control over her biological functions (ie birth control) and senses a feeling of empowerment brought about by knowledge and education. The mainstay of the Catholic faith has long been the portrayal of the woman as a 'mother' figure, assuming responsibility for family worship and morals. Women in general no longer see themselves cast in this role and if they are at times unsure of their own roles within society, the Catholic Church seems unable to determine the female roles in society or in Church, let alone be able to offer any sort of lead to women.

The next most common response received 10% of the total:

- "Males enter younger, wishing to become priests after serving as altar boys."

In the past it was a privilege for young boys of Roman Catholic families to become altar boys. After leaving school, they would very often continue in this position, teaching younger candidates the responsibilities associated with being

an altar boy. Today, this is still the case, though on a much lesser scale and comparatively few have the desire to go on to the priesthood. It would appear that once their Catholic education is complete, other stronger influences come into play. They feel the pressure to achieve in life: a good job, nice car, girlfriend, an enjoyable social life, travel, sport and male friends. Even if their parents still attend church, many boys at this stage of their lives do not. When they do return to the Church, it is later in life at marriage or to have a child baptised.

It seems that only some boys of sensitive, yet firm disposition contemplate the priesthood, supported by parents of equally strong convictions. Today it seems that more mature males are entering Holy Orders and Religious Orders. These men have taken advantage of the opportunity to see life on the outside and have turned their backs on all that it has to offer.

The remaining responses each made up 3% of the total feedback:

- “Marriage is seen as a must-have fashionable event for girls.”

For many girls this is true, but it is also a viewpoint shared by their parents. There are not many mothers in society who would not wish for their daughters to be happily married and produce grandchildren. Sadly, the ‘fashionable event’ of marriage frequently occupies more thought, meaning and commitment than the actual marriage itself. Wedding ceremonies can take place in stately homes, shopping malls, hot air balloons and even beneath the sea. The venues would appear almost endless and parents continue to pay for their beloved son or daughter’s wedding whatever the location or cost. Not all girls go on to marry of course, but it seems that Religious Orders are unable to offer anything to stimulate an interest in their way of life for these girls.

- “Parents do not wish for their daughter to enter Religious Orders.”

It is a fact that the overwhelming majority of parents do not wish for their daughters to enter Religious Orders. Gone are the days of large Catholic

families when a daughter was 'promised' to the Church. Perhaps larger families contributed to making it a more palatable option with parents safe in the knowledge that there were more opportunities for other of their children to eventually marry and produce grandchildren.

Also, parents today no longer have the same commitment to the Church and, therefore, do not feel obliged to give one of their daughters to a Religious Order. It would seem that Religious Orders today appear to have so little that would appeal to a younger woman. Being aware of this, Catholic parents are generally not inclined to contribute to their daughters' unhappiness by insisting that they devote their lives to ageing religious communities. Even if they did, one cannot imagine a young woman of today entering a Religious Order against her wishes simply to 'please' her parents.

- "Women, who are now liberated, do not wish to take vows."

Women's liberation has arrived and for today's woman such 'freedom' is taken for granted. It is totally alien for a twenty-first century woman to even contemplate taking vows for a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, which appear so out of touch with what they consider as the 'real world'. Poverty would not be chosen before a well-paid job, chastity would not be opted for over sexual freedom and obedience would mean sacrificing their much-cherished independence.

The (post-)modern woman would simply not accept such vows and certainly not for life. So much so, in fact, that some Religious Orders are considering the taking of vows for two or three years and then renewing them if the Sister is agreeable. At least this will not be so daunting or final for a new Sister. Women no longer wish to accept a lifetime commitment and they certainly do not wish to give up their independence indefinitely.

- "There is less religious teaching in schools today. Therefore, there is less contact with young people."

This applies equally to the fee-paying and the non fee-paying schools run by the Dominican Order and, almost certainly, to many other religious teaching Orders. One major factor is that there are no longer sufficient numbers of either willing or sufficiently trained persons to meet the staffing requirements of such schools. This is borne out by the fact that, unlike previous generations, many head teaching posts and almost all the teaching posts within the schools are held by secular staff. The outcome of this is that children have little contact with the Sisters and girls no longer see a Sister as a role model. It is more likely that they see the headmistress as the role model and aspire to her perceived 'success'.

- "I am not sure that this is true in England or in places like the Philippines."

Unfortunately, this is especially true in England and much of the western World. However, in the Philippines, India and Africa the numbers of religious persons are on the increase. In the past, it was primarily the West that sent missionaries to these countries; now the situation has reversed, with the western World receiving such help from elsewhere in an attempt to aid ageing religious communities and possibly bring about a Christian revival.

Many of the respondents felt the reason for the increasing numbers of vocations from these particular countries was in part due to the fact that materialism, consumerism and women's liberation had not yet made such an impact on the sending countries. Another factor might be that health care and education are not state governed but everyone's responsibility.

- "A number of males enter Holy Orders, but also a number of males enter Religious Orders. Females enter only Religious Orders."

Males do enter both Holy and Religious Orders, but females may only enter Religious Orders because they cannot become Roman Catholic priests. A male can choose to become a religious Brother or a priest within his chosen Order,

whilst the female can only become a religious Sister within her chosen Order. Whether this is the reason why more males than females choose to enter Religious Orders is difficult to determine. Some women may care deeply that they could never become a priest or even consider it to be grossly unfair that they are barred from doing so solely on the basis of their gender.

It is possible to become so immersed in this argument that one misses the point entirely. In truth, the bulk of young women in this country care little one way or the other and becoming a Roman Catholic priest does not occupy a high placing on their 'wish list'. It may well be that if at some time in the future women are allowed to become Roman Catholic priests, some women would choose to take up that option. It is debatable, however, whether this in itself would encourage greater numbers of women to enter Religious Orders.

➤ "I do not think this is correct, but I feel it is fairly proportionate."

Within the western World, more males than females are entering Religious Orders. The reasons for this are not clear, but comments associated with other responses might provide some clues. Moreover, in the countries mentioned above (ie the Philippines, India and Africa) the numbers become more proportionate and young women appear happy to commit themselves to lives spent in Religious Orders.

➤ "In the Roman Catholic Church women are not allowed to receive Holy Orders, as all priests must be male."

Interestingly, all respondents who gave this answer were Religious Sisters, some of them expressing personal feelings of hurt and sadness regarding this matter. Perhaps even more amazing is the fact that these were Sisters of the older generation, who had obviously spent most of their lives in convents. They did not supply the answer as a piece of information; they know that everyone is aware of this. Rather it was offered to underline and discreetly pen their

opposition to a situation that they cannot envisage changing in the foreseeable future.

- "I am not sure that there are greater numbers of males than females entering religious life."

The ratio of those entering religious life in the western world is overwhelmingly in favour of males against females. In the Philippines, India and Africa, however, the number of vocations becomes more evenly spread. Perhaps those personally involved have provided some of the reasons for this with some of the opinions they have expressed above: materialism, consumerism and women's liberation having not yet arrived in those countries with sufficient force.

- "I am unaware of the fact of that statistic."

The majority of respondents who gave the reply were male, perhaps for obvious reasons. If one lives and works in an all-male environment, it must be almost impossible to be aware of the working and situation of female Religious Orders. There is little contact between male and female Religious Orders, even when the female Sister and male Brother belong to the same Order.

- "There are less good works for females to do in Religious Orders today (eg caring for the sick and teaching)."

This is a well known and accepted fact. The tragedy, however, is that the Roman Catholic Church and Religious Orders seem almost paralysed and incapable of providing any sort of replacement for them. Perhaps the logical reason for this is the fact that male and female worlds within the Roman Catholic environment are so strictly observed and historically bound within the accepted male dominated tradition that it would appear almost impossible to envisage change at present.

- “Nuns who are depicted on television and the radio do not give an up-to-date picture of religious life and is off-putting to young people.”

This may well be so. On the one hand, for example, Hollywood seems to have a preoccupation with oversentimentalising religious vocations, whilst on the other, current affairs programmers appear only content to sensationalise allegations of cruelty and/or abuse. To add to this unhappy state are the ‘leave and tell’ brigade of Nuns, each with their own unique story of why they left their particular Order. All of this transmits damaging messages to the public.

However, it would be speculative to suggest that a more balanced representation of a nun’s life would be any less off-putting for young people: elderly Sisters in aged communities trying to care for each other, often in cold and draughty convents, and largely unable to continue the good works with which their Order was initially established because of lack of numbers, age and infirmities. All of this might provoke a sympathetic response, but very little besides.

- “There is a suggestion that homosexuality plays a part in this.”

This is a true but unpleasant fact of life. Some young men do enter the priesthood because they are unsure of their sexuality. Whilst the Roman Catholic priesthood should provide the possibility of a safe haven for such young men, sadly this does not always prove to be the case with young men either leaving the priesthood in ‘hushed up’ circumstances or in the full glare of media publicity. All of these circumstances only serve to add to both the embarrassment of the Catholic Church and the intense anguish of all those involved. The root cause of why the priesthood holds such fascination for this type of young man is open to conjecture, though its all-male environment surely plays a huge part. Perhaps if married men and/or women were allowed to enter the Roman Catholic priesthood, then this might go some way towards resolving this particular problem.

- “There are more vocational openings for women these days than teaching, nursing and secretarial work, which was the norm forty or fifty years ago.”

This is a fact often quoted by religious persons today and, along with materialism, is seen as one of the major problems facing Religious Orders. Unfortunately, for such a well-known fact it seems that little or no inroads have been made into resolving the issue it represents. Religious Orders appear to have neither the will nor the confidence to confront the problem and are at a complete loss regarding a clear and decisive way forward. The dilemma is compounded by the fact that so many Religious Orders are made up of elderly women and very few young ones. It must be almost impossible for these aged communities to suggest new initiatives to encourage young women of the modern world to enter such a way of life, when many of them abandoned the worldly lifestyle so many years ago and are completely out of touch with it. The Roman Catholic Church offers little support, largely because it presently seems incapable of providing a fulfilling position for women within Church life.

- “In all ages men and women are given the vocation to serve the Church.”

This answer is correct, but the worrying aspect of this reply is that these respondents appear content to almost contribute to the almost Micawberist attitude. Many of those who gave this answer are members of enclosed Orders, which partially explains their way of viewing the problem (ie the power of prayer will overcome), as their convents are often regarded as ‘power houses’ of prayer. They also believe that if Religious /Holy Orders are to die out, then it is God’s will and they are content to submit to his Sovereign rule.

- “I presume that this question refers to the Anglican experience, since there are as yet no women priests in the Catholic Church.”

Unsurprisingly, all the respondents who gave this answer were male, though it is difficult to evaluate their reason for giving such a reply. Perhaps they

misunderstood the question or feel that such a situation will not arise in the Catholic Church for many years. How they must wish the problem referred only to the Anglican experience! This response demonstrates little thought or consideration and highlights the root cause of many of the divisions within the Roman Catholic Church today: no one seems willing to tackle the issues. Quite the opposite in fact, there is an ostrich-like naivety being cultivated that seems to imagine that if we bury our heads in the sand the problem will disappear. Not only are the issues not being addressed, their existence is not even being acknowledged. It is difficult to see how this present mindset can be changed.

- “Young men who feel insecure and find no identity in what secular life [options] have to offer are attracted to the priesthood because they feel it offers ‘security’ and ‘status’, which they could not achieve in secular life. They are often unsure of their own ‘sexuality’, too, and priesthood offers what they see to be a ‘safe haven’ – a dangerous conclusion in my view. I can only think that young women do not feel the insecurity to the same degree and are not, therefore, seeking a ‘safe haven’ or don’t see the religious life as offering them a different alternative, as their male counterparts do.”

I am sure that anyone who has experience of the Catholic Church, life and structure will recognise this type of young man. All the respondents were male and all will, of course, have encountered such young men. This answer is based upon logic, fact, candour and absolute honesty, as witnessed by these respondents. They know the cost of the wrong type of man entering the priesthood, bad press, shame and loss of confidence, which has to be shared by all. Trust that has been developed over many years can be destroyed in an instant by one unsavoury newspaper article.

It would be unfair, however, to generalise by claiming that all such young men cause problems for the Roman Catholic Church. Many realise that they have made a mistake and leave their training before becoming ordained priests, this action in itself showing some courage and strength of character. The question

remains for the Roman Catholic Church: why do these types of young men initially see the priesthood as a safe haven? Perhaps the respondents themselves give clues to this in the second part of their answer without realising the fact.

### 5.3.3 Question 3

'How do you think the problem of falling numbers could be addressed?'

The answers given to this question appear more uncertain, as reflected in the fact that the most common was shared by four responses, each of 10%:

- "More mature people being seen as possible vocations."

This is certainly true of the Dominican Order, with its female component actively encouraging mature women to participate in their lifestyle. Interested parties are invited to participate in convent life for a weekend to sample the 'religious experience' before contemplating any possible decisions. Other Orders are also encouraging mature people, who are regarded as those who have experienced the 'world', are often well educated, and at the stage of their life when they are most likely to religious matters. This may well become the future trend for many Religious Orders.

- "Participation in the religious life before entering."

This answer has close links with the first response. It demonstrates how much time and effort some Religious Orders are now prepared to invest in what they see as a possible way forward, by introducing people who feel 'drawn' to the religious life and showing the reality of such a life can only be beneficial for all. This experience removes the often 'starry eyed' perception of what life in Religious/Holy Orders is really like and replaces it with the truth of the matter. That is the positive side to this trend, but the negative one might be that what appeals to a person for a short period of time might not continue indefinitely (ie a lifetime commitment). No short term experience is able to convey the gravity

of such a commitment and, in today's restless world, such a commitment might seem strange and alien.

- "A return to old values and Christian teaching within the home environment."

This is the prayer of many religious persons today: "if only things could be as they were; if only people would return to the old ways." The sad reality is that wishful thinking of Christian teaching cannot take place in a home environment where parents themselves do not attend Church and where old values are scarcely recognised. In the past it was much easier to preach to people who believed and questioned nothing; today it could be said that people believe nothing and question everything. The Catholic Church appears remote, out of touch with the lives of ordinary people and its very place in society being brought into question. The answer cannot be to return to former ways, however comforting that might seem to some; new ways must be found of embracing 'modern man', no matter how uncomfortable that experience may be.

- "Do not know the answer and wish that they did."

One can in many ways sympathise with this response. To have spent a lifetime in a Religious/Holy Order and experienced the 'call of God,' and realising the reward of such commitment, it will be perplexing and saddening to witness that such a way of life has little or no meaning for people today. This, however, is the reality of the matter and this answer reveals the wide gulf that exists between the religious and the rest of society. Moreover, it is a gulf that seems to be widening into an abyss of negation.

The next three responses each attracted 6% of the total collated:

- "Releasing the religious from other duties to promote vocations."

This reply holds some hope. In the past, the religious were more visible, teaching in colleges and schools, nursing in homes and hospitals, and working

and helping in parishes. Their presence in society was tangible and confirmed that they were making a worthwhile contribution in the world. Mother Theresa was a supreme example of this portrayal. The difficulty is that ageing communities have few young religious individuals to spare to release from other duties and promote vocations, whilst enclosed Orders have never evangelised in this way. They advertise discreetly in the Catholic press, and have even on occasion been so bold as to participate in the odd documentary to explain their lifestyle and beliefs to a curious public. But none of this has produced any real growth in numbers for the Orders.

- “The important thing is that the *charism* of a congregation lives on. Ways must be found, therefore, of sharing the *charism* with the laity (eg Associates).”

The religious are beginning to examine this idea more closely and exploring its possibilities. Many Orders have Associate members, but have mainly regarded them as well-meaning, useful people, on the fringes of the Order, but with little real influence or status within the Order. However, things are changing and Orders are becoming more aware of the valuable contribution the Associates can make to them. Seminars are teaching at local, national, and international level and are supported by the religious and priests. These are positive signs, offering a glimmer of hope for the future.

- “Religious Orders must do more to bring themselves up to date and be seen to be relevant in the world today.”

Post-Vatican II, many Religious Orders have attempted to do this, though with admittedly limited results. Some Orders have shortened the length of their habits or tunics, whilst others have abandoned the former altogether. By so doing, they hope to make themselves more approachable to lay people and apparently more relevant in today’s world. Orders in England continue to teach in colleges and schools, but their geographical location places them firmly in Middle Class communities. Many of the convents and abbeys are similarly

positioned by virtue of donations of land and buildings having been made in the past by generous, wealthy benefactors. Parish visits also take place in other areas, meaning that working class people see little of the religious. This situation is now being addressed by religious representatives coming to England from the developing World, who are founding small convents within deprived community areas in an attempt to spread the word of God. The wheel seems to have turned full circle.

The remainder of the responses each represent 3% of the total feedback:

- “An increase in numbers attending the Church.”

This answer is closely associated with the third most common: “A return to old values and Christian teaching within the home environment.” Sadly, at this time there seems little hope for such organisations. There is certainly no evidence to support either premise. The problem of falling numbers entering Religious/Holy Orders might well be addressed by such actions, though the answers given appear more in hope than substance.

- “Religious persons need to withdraw more from the spirit of secular life and live more enclosed, with time for greater prayer to overcome the unrest among nations.”

This answer featured as a response to more than one question (see 5.3.1). As before, the majority of those gave this answer are, in fact, from enclosed Orders and they obviously believe that prayer and reflection will solve the problems of the world today. It appears, however, that this answer implies a veiled criticism of the religious, suggesting that those from enclosed Orders feel that those of a more open persuasion have engaged themselves too much with secular life.

- “The religious need to reflect the joy and happiness, which flow from a life of fidelity and commitment to Christ.”

Many religious persons do reflect happiness and inner peace, based on a sure and certain knowledge of their commitment to Christ. However, so few of them are comfortable in the company of others that this is rarely seen. Exceptions to this might be the odd television documentary or press article where they are presented as happily going about their daily lives and telling of their joy to serve their fellow man. Many envy their inner peace and faith in the life to come, but seemingly very few wish for such a lifestyle for themselves, preferring to strive for success in secular life and enjoy the material things of this world.

- "It will take time; there are so many problems in society nowadays."

This answer seems to imply that if the general situation improves, so will the fortunes of Religious/Holy Orders. Sadly, far from there being any evidence to support such a theory, quite the opposite seems to be true: people are more inclined to turn to God in times of difficulty and desperation than is the case in times of plenty and prosperity.

- "There could be greater consultation with young people on their views of religious life."

This would make sense and provide a real learning experience for all participants. Young people could offer completely fresh ideas on religious life, which would not be coloured by protocol and tradition. They would probably be enthusiastic about such consultation and the opportunity to air their views. Whether this would lead to their being sufficiently enthusiastic to enter, however, is debatable, as is the possibility of Religious/Holy Orders adopting some of the suggestions proffered by the young people.

- "Prayer and fasting."

Almost all of the respondents who gave this answer were members of enclosed Orders and stands in distinct contrast to the previous response, emphasising

the division of thought within the various Orders on how to tackle the problem that besets them all.

- “A very saintly person has said there is a crisis of faith in the western World; this is the reason for a decrease in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life.”

It is true that there is a crisis in faith in the western world, which impacts upon the numbers of vocations. A leap of faith is needed to move from secular life to life in Religious or Holy Orders. There is currently little to encourage faith with falling Church attendance and schools being exhorted to produce tangible results from their pupils. The secular life is now the dominant culture, a materialistic world where ‘seeing is believing’. It could be said that cynicism has replaced faith and trust has given way to sceptical attitudes. It often seems an uphill struggle, therefore, to nurture vocations in such an arid climate.

- “By making celibacy optional, many young boys would be attracted to the priesthood.”

The respondents who gave this answer were all male. The lack of females suggesting this reply may have been because either they believed themselves to be unqualified to do so or that they do not subscribe to this option. To allow Roman Catholic priests to marry would require a monumental shift in the doctrine of the Catholic Church. On a personal level, I have heard priests say that there is no chance of this happening with the present Pope, believing that the ordination of female priests is more likely to take precedence. Whether making celibacy optional would attract more to the priesthood is difficult to discern; it would certainly bring about a fresh understanding and realism of family life to the priesthood. Such changes are but a remote possibility at the present time, however, and it can only be truly regarded as wishful thinking.

- “If the Vatican allowed women to become priests no doubt many would wish to apply.”

This may well be true, though there is no substantial evidence to support it. Indeed, the fact that young single women are not attending Church as in the past and that married Roman Catholic women in general no longer see the priesthood as a vocation for their children suggests otherwise. In addition, younger women would find it difficult to sacrifice their newly found liberation. Most interest would probably come from more mature women, as is happening at present in the Religious Orders, or transfer growth from those whose only current option is Religious Orders.

- "It will only be addressed when people are ready to listen to the call within them and when they feel that they need some help from a Being greater than themselves."

In the hour of need many do pray to God, even those who are uncertain of his existence. When all else fails and when all seems lost, it is then that people begin to call on the help of a Being greater than themselves. Unfortunately, for a large majority of people this occurs not as part of their daily lives, but as a final resort. The call within is more difficult to define and much more personal. In general, people find it far easier to understand and appreciate the need to seek help from outside of themselves when all else fails and the situation seems hopeless. The sense of a call within, however, is difficult to define in tangible terms that could be appreciated by who have not experienced it. Though conscience plays a part and is an attribute worthy of our cultivation, it is far more than mere conscience alone. To 'find' God at a time of personal crisis can and does still happen and in people seem to generally accept this particular call. It would seem that the call from God to serve him on a far more personal level, however, is a concept beyond the comprehension of secular society.

- "By asking ourselves 'How best can we serve?' History shows that charismatic people arise to meet new needs in society."

Religious/Holy Orders asking themselves how best they can serve does appear to be a sensible and practical option. There is certainly no shortage of good

works that require help and support: the homeless, drug addiction, alcoholism and child prostitution to name a few. The practicalities of the present situation, however, are such that there are simply not enough able-bodied religious persons to support these good works. Some Orders do help in various ways, but there are not enough members within these communities to make any significant impact. Members of Religious/Holy Orders are well aware of the needs and problems of society today and they do care deeply. Prayer and fasting is offered up for such ills, whilst great concern is expressed for suffering members of our society who find themselves in such unfortunate circumstances. Whether charismatic people will arise to meet new needs in society remains to be seen. At present, such people appear to be emerging more from secular society than from religious communities, which could be a trend that continues for some time to come.

- “Falling numbers in Europe and North America do not represent the whole Church. In South America and Africa there are many vocations.”

This is true; there are many vocations in South America and Africa, but this does not add to the understanding of why the western world is unable to encourage vocations. In many ways it seems only to highlight the problem of the West, helping to fill the gap elsewhere, but offering no explanation for the present situation. Indeed, it could be argued that the wheel has turned full circle. The western world taught the meaning of Christianity to these countries and now they are returning to teach us.

- “The so called golden age of vocations of some years ago should not be viewed as a norm. Falling numbers of people entering the priesthood/religious life should not, therefore, be necessarily viewed as a decline. The various ministries of the lay life should be explored further and the models of priesthood/religious life examined and adapted to suit the needs and expectations of this changing age. Permanent commitment to kingdom values is clearly becoming increasingly confusing to the faithful with the emergence of former married Anglican Priests being

received into the Catholic Church and being appointed to parishes around the country.”

The respondents who gave this answer were all priests and clearly unhappy with married Anglican priests being received into the Catholic Church. It is a well-documented fact that in the western world numbers of vocations entering Religious/Holy Orders is in decline; sadly, this cannot be viewed in any other way. It would be a significant step forward if the Catholic Church were to explore the ministries of the lay life further and the models of priesthood/religious life examined and adapted to suit the needs and expectations of this changing age. If the Catholic Church was able, through its representatives, to dialogue in a positive way with lay people and discover their needs and aspirations, it could well revitalise the Church and bring religious persons back as participating, respected members of the lay community.

The last part of the answer regarding kingdom values becoming an area of confusion to the faithful because of former married Anglican priests being received into the Catholic Church is unsubstantiated by any cogent evidence. Indeed, any permanent commitment to kingdom values was already in decline long before this concession was made. Church attendance was progressively decreasing previously accepted values under threat.

#### **5.3.4 Question 4**

‘Do you consider the present situation to be a temporary or continuing decline?’

The answers given to this question fall into one of three categories: the present situation viewed as a temporary decline, which was held by the majority of the respondents; those who are uncertain of the future trend; and finally (and in the minority), those who considered that numbers would continue to decline.

### a) Temporary decline

The top five responses in this category each attracted 10% of the total received:

- “There is so much time and effort being spent on this very difficult problem by all the Religious Orders. The situation should improve.”

It is a fact that all Religious Orders are currently working hard on the problem of encouraging new vocations to their Orders. Of equal importance is the fact that they all appear willing to recognise that they do have a difficult problem. The open active Orders hope to encourage the recruitment of more vocations into religious communities, whilst the enclosed Orders at present continue to rely on prayer and fasting in order to bring this about. Answers from both active and enclosed members of these Orders were approximately equal in their opinion that the present situation is but a temporary decline, though their approaches to seeking to resolve the issue are somewhat different.

- “The continuing power of prayer for vocations.”

Although the active and enclosed Orders appear to vary in many ways regarding their approach to solving the decline in numbers entering religious life, they are united in their belief in the power of prayer for vocations, all of the conviction that the answer rests ultimately in Gods hands.

- “There are plenty of vocations in the Third World. I think that the present situation in Europe is temporary.”

There are, indeed, many vocations in the Third World. There are also encouraging signs that the situation in Europe is beginning to change for the better. It will be interesting to observe whether the vocations of the Third World can actively revive the growth of the religious in the West. Possibly the respondents who gave this answer have a part to play in this potential revival.

- “Every situation is temporary. The Church of Christ will always be there, though it may change its shape in many ways. All that any of us can do is to be faithful and to trust in God.”

The majority of respondents who gave this answer were from contemplative enclosed Orders. From their perception of life, every situation is temporary and this fact is recognised with greater clarity than others. This answer, more than any other, reveals the world of the contemplative religious and the difference in their approach to the situation than their more active brothers and sisters in Religious Orders. On occasions the feelings of members of enclosed Orders surface in their replies and it is possible to detect some unease regarding the manner with which their more active brothers and sisters in Religious Orders are attempting to boost the numbers entering religious life.

- “Temporary, but no reason given.”

There are few conclusions that can be gleaned from this reply. The time to consider a reply is difficult as the religious are very busy people and it does take time to formulate possible reasons for the present situation and any future trends. Another reason could be that the respondents were at a loss to offer any meaningful answers. Whilst this admittedly merits little logic, it is nevertheless very human. Perhaps the subject is so painful for the religious to contemplate that they feel nothing can be done, preferring to dedicate their lives to the present rather than ponder on an uncertain future.

The following two responses to question 4 each yielded 6% of the total feedback:

- “Religion and Christian values may very well become fashionable again; in other words a swing of the pendulum.”

This answer appears to typify the ‘all will be well on the night’ syndrome, a matter of weathering the present storm and hoping for better things to come

without the need to actually take any positive measures to bring it about. The religious who provided this answer came from both enclosed and active Orders, thereby highlighting the resignation and uncertainty felt by each.

- “The religious must lead by example to a population of increasingly disillusioned individuals to ensure that it is temporary.”

The religious must, indeed, lead by example and many within the population are disillusioned, not only with an increasingly materialistic world but also with the lack of trust they are able to place in the religious themselves. Bad press for the religious and the obvious disunity of the churches and their ideologies only increases this disillusionment. It is now that the religious must take the lead by offering an alternative to the secular ‘gospel’ of a materialistic age. However, it must also be observed that many of the religious themselves have become increasingly disillusioned with the world around them and are at a loss to understand today’s society, often feeling cut off and isolated. This gulf must be bridged to ensure that the present situation is temporary.

The remaining answers to question 4 in this category (ie temporary decline) each received 3%:

- “Religious vocations could well be brought into England to be trained and enter Holy Orders.”

This is already beginning to take place, but seems to be having little impact on the situation, probably because they are so very few and are, therefore, unable to make any significant contribution. It really is too early to tell the potential impact, though there is some cause for optimism that if the trend continues to attract larger numbers of both male and female vocations coming to England, then they should eventually make positive contributions to the recruitment into Religious/Holy Orders.

- “Temporary, though the high numbers of the early 1960s will not again be reached.”

The respondents who gave this answer do not give any practical reasons for their assumption, perhaps relying on more scientific than a ‘gut’ feeling. Whatever the reasons for this answer, it is impossible to evaluate. One can only look at the present trends to provide some sort of possible outcome for Religious/Holy Orders. Certainly, the greater numbers of the early 60s would not be reached from such a small nucleus of the population if this trend were to continue at its present rate for the foreseeable future.

#### **b) Unsure**

- “This is in the hands of the Lord and we accept it from day to day.”

Of those who were unsure, this was the most common response with 6%. It again reflects the perspective of mind of the enclosed religious: to leave all in the Lord’s hands and to accept the outcome, whatever that might be. It clearly demonstrates illustrates their absolute faith and trust in God, who will answer their prayers according to his will and authority. This answer is also closely linked to the response that follows it below.

The remaining two answers in this category each received 3% of the total for this question:

- “I can only hope and pray that it is temporary, but the major problem is the attitude of the people around us.”

The hoping and praying that the situation is only temporary can be readily appreciated and understood by most people. The qualifying statement at the end, however, is rather more difficult to discern. It certainly identifies the problem that the religious feel when trying to understand, communicate and share in a ‘world’ with some members of a secular society. There is an element

of mistrust regarding our materialistic, fame seeking, promiscuous, winner takes all society, and it could be argued that the religious do have a serious point. The real issue, however, is much deeper: some Religious Orders are unable to grasp the concept of today's society and the secular world is totally alien to them. Thus - rightly or wrongly - they close their minds to the whole matter. The problem is further compounded by the internal division that exists among them, some feel that their way of life is threatened and devalued by others who court publicity to encourage vocations to their Orders. Whilst none of this is expressed directly, it is implicitly found in their replies, probably fuelled by frustration and concern for the future of their Orders.

- "There is a continuing decline in North-West Europe, North America and Australia, but the growing points in my own Order are India, South East Asia, Africa and South America."

This is true of many Orders today, vocations entering mainly from the developing world, thus helping to bolster the shortfall in vocations entering from the West. All this supports Orders in the western world, until the much hoped for revival of religious vocations materialises and 'home grown' religious persons are once again prepared to serve the Lord within Religious/Holy Orders.

### **c) Permanent decline**

All four responses in this category attracted 3% of the total feedback for this question:

- "It will continue to decline unless radical changes are made."

The respondents who supplied this answer did not propose what those radical changes might be. They obviously consider change to be necessary, but did not offer any clues how they arrived at this conclusion. They were all from Active Religious Orders and, therefore, acutely aware that very real changes must take

place for many Orders to survive in today's secular society. Whether active Religious Orders have the will and conviction to initiate such changes remains to be seen.

- "I feel that the present situation will continue in decline for the foreseeable future, with some religious congregations dying out and others amalgamating with each other."

This process has already begun. Large old convents are closing and their premises sold, with their previous elderly communities being rehoused in smaller convents with rather younger colleagues. Although the amalgamated communities are often of the same Order, this is by no means guaranteed. This situation will continue as small religious communities decline with little hope of younger vocations entering. It also seems inevitable that some religious congregations will cease without the prospect of any new Orders to replace them.

- "The present situation will continue to decline."

There is an element of inevitability in this answer, with no reasons for the present situation being offered and no hope of a change for Religious/Holy Orders in the future. The respondents here were all male and are probably stating what they believe to be fact, without malice or emotion. They seem to be basing their assumptions both on the state of Religious/Holy Orders at present and their apparent inability to respond quickly enough to the crisis.

- "It could well be permanent, but it is all in God's hands."

The respondents who gave this reply have obviously arrived at the same conclusion as those who gave the one immediately preceding it. This reply, however, places evidently more reliance upon the hope of Divine Providence to rectify the situation. It was also proffered by both male and female members of both active and enclosed Orders, thereby providing an insight into all aspects of

the thought spectrum. Furthermore, it reveals how difficult it must be for aging religious persons to remain enthusiastic and optimistic when their present circumstances appear so bleak and uncertain in an apathetic materialistic world.

### 5.3.5 Question 5

'What do you feel to be the greatest challenges facing Religious/Holy Orders today?'

Again, the four most common responses to this question each attracted 10% of the total received:

- "Materialism."

Once again, materialism is presented as a challenge to Religious/Holy Orders and the potential numbers of vocations wishing to enter them. On the surface this argument appears to be factually substantiated. In the past, vocations came mainly from middle-class families with well-educated backgrounds, which is still the case to some albeit limited extent. There must be a reason, therefore, why these groups of people no longer wish to become members of Religious/Holy Orders. Whilst materialism undoubtedly plays a significant role in such a decision, with many people reluctant to forgo a comfortable life style for one considerably less so, to present materialism as the exclusive reason for such a decision seems to be taking the easy option. A basic cause may be a fundamental shift in society's aspirations, with materialism constituting but one of its components.

- "Dealing with the discouragement and keeping alive their faith in their own commitment. Hope in God, who continues to call all to holiness and love and joy in spite of everything."

Addressing this issue is very difficult for many members of Religious/Holy Orders today. Ageing communities often feel they are left with no alternative

but to sell their convents – which are also their homes – and thereafter face uncertain and often lonely futures. After living a life following the unchanging traditions of Orders and then having to face changes occurring at alarming and frightening speed must be very distressing. The religious, however, are resilient people who have enormous trust and hope in God for the future. Such faith is a great source of comfort and provides a true inner strength. The negative aspect in following centuries old traditions in convents, largely divorced from the secular world, might well be a factor in the present difficult situation in which they find themselves. In the face of such adversity, it is to their credit that the majority of religious persons continue to provide love and joy in abundance to a world in great need.

- “To make sure that *charism* is carried on through a Third Order or associates. Even if the congregation has no members, the associates will continue the good work of keeping alive the *charism* of the Order.”

This can be the only way forward for some Orders, due to the sad fact that perhaps only two or three aged Sisters could be left within their particular community, with no prospect of any younger vocations to take their place. The Third Order and its associates do help and support Religious/Holy Orders and adhere to their constitutions. However, Third Order or associate members of Religious/Holy Orders acting on their own initiative without the practical support of a community could be a brave step. At present, members meet at each others' homes, convents and buildings belonging to the Church community, which afford practical support for such ventures. But the practicalities of Third Order or associate members performing duties and taking on increasingly more active roles within the Roman Catholic Church present wider implications. For some it might be viewed as a step too far, whilst for others a possible way forward. For the future, however, it may well be that for some Orders it will be their final legacy to a secular world.

➤ "Apathy."

As with materialism, apathy is also considered a challenge to the numbers of vocations wishing to enter Religious/Holy Orders. No religious person seems capable of expressing with any degree of certainty the causes of such apathy regarding religion in the western world. Though theories abound, no single one can claim provide the precise or only reason, those proffered including materialism, women's liberation, birth control, education and a National Health Service that offers care for all. We also live in a relatively free society without the imminent threat of war, famine or poverty. Perhaps all or some of these elements create for many feelings of self-sufficiency and, therefore, without any overt need for divine help. If society continues to follow this pattern of lifestyle, then Religious/Holy Orders must find such challenges difficult to overcome or compromise.

➤ "People appear to have forgotten God."

This answer is closely associated with the one that immediately preceded it and was posited by 6% of those canvassed. Although the reasons for it are no less difficult to discern, there remains a great generosity of human spirit as shown in recent times in the very sad event of the Tsunami disaster, which claimed so many lives and left many more homeless. Such an awesome revelation of nature's potency presents an acute awareness of human frailty even in the context of technological development and achievement. Mankind's desire to help becomes the stronger for it, giving perhaps some cause for hope.

All of the remaining responses to this question attracted the same quota of the total received (ie 3%):

➤ "Sexual promiscuity."

This continues to be a thorny issue for the Roman Catholic Church, the standards of which have been established for the role of both male and female

in the context of a perceived ideal family unit. In the past, such standards were not questioned, but accepted as the norm. In today's society, however, such standards are seldom left unchallenged and these in particular are largely considered to be out of touch with reality. Divorce, single parenthood, unmarried cohabitation and homosexuality have all at some stage - and for various reasons - arrived at the door of the local parish priest, who then has to try to reconcile the two worlds.

In addition to all these problems are the changes in lifestyle of women today, which have been so vast and far ranging that the Catholic Church has yet to catch up with, come to terms with or find a way of dealing with. The role of women today, the issue of birth control and the place of women in the Roman Catholic Church must be addressed before the situation can move forward. Moreover, the problems posed by sexual promiscuity must be challenged by both men and women within its ranks.

- "For Religious Orders to become too modern in the quest for popularity."

The replies represented here were mainly from members of enclosed Religious Orders and, again, highlight the deep division between the Religious/Holy Orders. At present it does not seem possible for these Orders to progress or even survive in today's western world. It seems almost inevitable that their convents will continue to close and their Orders cease to exist unless aged members amalgamate to maintain a semblance of their movement.

- "People have now become so independent of mind."

This cannot be refuted with people today no longer prepared to accept dogma or tradition without challenge. In the past, young Roman Catholics were taught the constituents of their faith by means of learning the Catechism for Catholics, the purpose of which was to present the teachings of the Church in a condensed and practical way by posing set questions and answers. It was an easy and successful way of teaching the faith to school children and study groups. The

Catechism remains unaltered and we still have – potentially at least – the same target audience. The difference today, however, is that school children, study groups and others have their own questions and arrive at their own conclusions on the basis of the responses they receive. This is the way of the secular world: discuss, challenge and at times choose to differ. In essence, today's society questions most statements, but believes very few.

➤ "Lack of obedience."

It is difficult to comment upon this response, as obedience is perceived here as submission to authority by most citizens of the West, with the concept of a lack of obedience to God's will being almost unfathomable to many people. Certainly obedience is a vow taken by vocations to Religious/Holy Orders and would be recognised within this context by most people, though this does not make the word any more appealing to them.

➤ "Religious persons must withdraw more from the spirit of secular life."

This answer has been given several times by members of enclosed Religious/Holy Orders to the various questions posed. It represents strength of feelings concerning the various recruitment methods of their active colleagues. Although a common approach that is agreed upon by the respective Orders regarding the best way forward for the recruitment of vocations to both enclosed and active Orders is desirable, it remains highly unlikely at present.

➤ "The greatest challenge is trying to keep true to the spirit of our founder/foundress and caring for our ageing Sisters."

This answer is a real cry from the heart for many of the religious today, many of whom are themselves aged, but still actively trying to care for their equally aged though less capable Sisters, whilst also going about their daily duties within the convent. Religious Orders are unable to employ secular staff for all their needs due to rising costs, so many are required to combine these duties

with their own spiritual obligations. Most of them maintain the spirit of their founder/foundress, but at present no improvement in their circumstances seems likely and their future looks bleak.

- “To have a whole new vision of religious life and the way it can develop in our modern world. Religious life has continued in a very similar way for hundreds of years and, though many changes have taken place since Vatican II, it is still seen to be irrelevant for the modern world. Older religious persons must be open to younger members exploring new ways of being true religious, and for younger members to have the courage to go out and be the bridges between the new and the old.”

This is a concept worthy of note. Viewed from such a perspective, religious life could once again become valued and relevant to our society. The harsh reality, however, is that the Church of Rome currently remains staunchly traditional and has given no hint of considering development or any kind of new vision for religious life, which has continued largely unaltered for centuries. Whilst it is true that many changes have taken place since Vatican II, the outworkings of the Roman Catholic Church it is still regarded as bearing little relevance to the modern world. Much of this is possibly because Vatican II was not so much a catalyst to address the future as a catch-up exercise with the problems it then faced.

A new vision for religious life is probably the best of the remaining options. Many of the older members in active Orders realise the importance of encouraging younger colleagues to explore new ways of being truly religious, whilst the younger members continue to offer themselves as bridges between the new and the old. The problem is, however, that there are so few of them to meet the challenge or to have any significant impact on the situation.

- “We are all getting older. We should not be too worried. The Lord will enrich the harvest again with vocations.”

It is a fact that many members of Religious/Holy Orders are elderly, but whether new vocations will come forward in the numbers required to make any significant impact on the situation is difficult to forecast. Many members of the enclosed Orders certainly believe that this will occur and are content to leave the matter entirely in God's hands.

- "You need to clarify the term 'Holy Orders'. Holy Orders is one of the seven sacraments. People also enter Religious Orders. They are not necessarily the same."

Holy Orders is, indeed, one of the seven sacraments, the others being Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Marriage, Penance and Extreme Unction. The difference between Holy Orders and Religious Orders is that only males may enter Holy Orders that they may become priests, whereas both males and females may enter Religious Orders. As females may not proceed to the priesthood, they are thereby excluded from Holy Orders.

- "Extinction is the obvious one. It will be interesting to see where the Church will be in ten years with falling church-going numbers."

Extinction is a very real possibility for some Orders. Those that remain will be ones who have been able to adapt to modern day challenges and provide worthwhile pastoral services to an increasingly disillusioned society, though they will probably be much reduced in size and, therefore, housed in smaller convents closer to those they seek to serve.

Falling church attendance is difficult to predict. An article in the *Evening Sentinel* newspaper on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2005 stated that the numbers of people attending church each week in Staffordshire and Cheshire rose by almost 4,000 during 2003. In Staffordshire, the weekly attendance rose from 36,800 to 38,900, whilst in Cheshire the number of church goers each week increased from 38,100 to 39,800. These figures are in line with trends across the country, where the Church's figures show the average attendance per week increased by one per

cent, these statistics being published by the Church of England but representing all denominations. Numbers for people attending a Roman Catholic Mass each week, according to the Archdiocese of Birmingham statistics for the year 2003, showed an increase from 82,691 in 2002 to 85,694. However the number of Catholic marriages a drop from 382 in 2002 to 359 in 2003, this trend also being replicated in mixed marriages (650 in 2003 compared with 839 in 2002). The number of Catholic conversions tells a slightly different tale with 474 in 2003, an increase of six on the previous year, with the number of Seminary students dropping from twenty-five to twenty-one over the same twelve-month period.

- “To be a counter-culture in today’s world (eg in our lifestyle); to share our spiritual heritage with lay people; to be seen to make a stand on issues of justice (eg asylum seekers and migrant workers); to be faithful to our spirit of *charism*.”

The lifestyle of the religious in today’s world is very much a counter-culture. The difficulty is in how this is presented as a way of life to society by those involved in such a way as to make it appear relevant and meaningful. Hitherto, the religious have not been successful in achieving this goal. The sharing of spiritual heritage with lay people sounds a promising objective, and hopefully more positive steps will be taken in this direction, though it must be conceded that some Orders would be more willing than others to pursue this line of thought. The Church, including both its leaders and members, still stand for justice in our world, though at times such a stance is not met with the level of popularity one might have hoped for either by politicians or some members of the public. Religious/Holy Orders remain true to their spirit of *charism*, and it seems likely that members of Third Orders and their associates will continue this spirit of *charism* when some Orders have ceased to exist.

- “For Religious Orders not to lack the courage to open new houses where a real need exists.”

Although this is already taking place, the majority are from developing world countries helping to fill the vacuum left by a declining religious population in the West. At the same time, some religious Orders in this country are opening new houses, but this is mainly because they are closing large uneconomical convents and replacing them with buying smaller and easier to maintain houses for their ageing communities.

- “We need a renewal of faith. The greatest challenge facing us all, including the Religious Orders, is the spirit of secularism that has overtaken the western world.”

Few with religious conviction would argue with either premise in this statement: a renewal of faith is required and western society is largely subject to the spirit of secularism. At present this hoped for renewal of faith appears unlikely. On the positive side, however, society is becoming increasingly cynical and dissatisfied with a shallow, demanding, completely irreligious way of life. Trust placed by society in its citizens who occupy public office is at its lowest ebb and it should be proclaimed with just cause. Secularism might well have peaked and been found wanting. The challenge facing the Church and Religious/Holy Orders is their ability – or otherwise – to appeal to and offer a credible alternative by once more making the essentially Christian way of life relevant in the western world.

- “Pressures of meeting targets (eg professional registration of many works previously accomplished).”

In the past there were many more religious persons to carry out ‘good works’ such as caring for the sick in homes, children in schools, and the housebound in the parish. In some instances, such care was possible without the need for formal qualifications, experience and compassion being the only criteria. Today, however, legal standards and obligations are far more stringent. Regrettably, many of those with a desire to provide ‘good works’ in a social context are of an

age and disposition that precludes them attain such professional qualifications or registration.

- “The decline in vocations, the problems this brings and the reorganising of situations to meet these demands.”

The decline in vocations has presented the religious with many problems. Although this is not a new problem, it seems that only in recent times has it been acknowledged by the religious and subsequent attempts been made to address serious staff shortages. Old convents have been closed, with new smaller ones taking their place, whilst some have pooled their resources by amalgamating. Whilst they still try wherever possible to place religious persons in their schools and nursing homes, there is a dearth of such candidates to run them entirely on this basis as they did in the past.

- “The lack of vocations to religious life and the increasing number of elderly religious people requiring care and medical help.”

Sadly this sums up the situation in which the vast majority of religious persons now find themselves. The lack of vocations to Religious/Holy Orders is the root cause of the problem, with the increasing number of elderly sick in their midst a genuine concern. In many religious communities the majority of its members are elderly, with few – if any – younger vocations to support and care for the sick and aged of the Order. The only real answer to the problem seems to be an increase in vocations to Religious/Holy Orders to ensure the survival of such Orders in their present form.

## **6.0 A WAY FORWARD?**

### **6.1 POSSIBLE REFORMS**

Reform is essential to ensure the continuity of Religious Orders in the western world. Therefore, new approaches to reform must be explored and the success or failure of these ideas should be discussed.

#### **6.1.1 Life-time Commitment?**

One of the most common concerns amongst members of Religious Orders regarding society today is the apparent lack of long term commitment, which has traditionally been an integral part of belonging to such an Order. This reluctance on the part of some younger people, though often the product of fear, is perceived by the religious to be a very serious threat to the continuance of their Orders. As a possible way to overcome this, the Dominican Order is currently encouraging potential candidates adopt the religious life on a no obligation trial period basis. Whilst this does not altogether remove the problem of making the final vow of a lifetime commitment, it does suspend the decision until it can be a more informed one.

The time for radical change has surely arrived for many Religious Orders and contractual periods of membership may well be one avenue worthy of further exploration. At least the apprehension of a lifetime commitment would be removed with the shorter term option appealing to more people without the fear that a mistake made in haste cannot be rectified. Although this idea is not completely new and Religious Orders would need to amend their constitutions to accommodate its implementation, it could well be with some favour and provide some degree of success.

### 6.1.2 Specific Jobs

In conjunction with 'period' membership, there could be a possibility of specific jobs assigned within the Religious Orders where specialists are required for certain projects for a limited period. Such groups would provide variations according to needs and engage in a variety of public services and private occupations (eg doctors, nurses, civil servants, teachers, etc). Should the members take this concept one stage further and elect to live in ordinary houses in residential areas, other occupations could be included (eg refuse collectors, storekeepers, maintenance engineers, etc).

All of this would provide valuable work for the community and enable the religious to meet people with whom they might otherwise have no social contact. Such an opportunity for the informal exchange of thoughts and ideas would benefit all concerned and provide young people with a viable alternative lifestyle. The religious would experience at first hand the very real problems and concerns facing ordinary working families and to be able to offer help and support, such as sitting with elderly housebound members of the local community and shopping for their groceries, helping to arrange hospital visitors' transport and supporting them on hospital appointments. The list is almost endless and yet no particular skill other than kindness and care is required.

Overworked mothers with young children could also benefit from a visitor who would help with the ironing, take a child to school if its mother was unwell or father at work. Such help would be invaluable to families who do not have relatives or friends living in close attendance. Single parents would also feel that they had someone to offer them support and friendship, instead of having to struggle alone. Working with young families would benefit the religious enormously, both helping to form personal bonds and to provide practical evidence that the Church really is both caring and relevant to a needy world.

Some Religious Orders are already living in small convents in residential areas. However, the members of these Orders come mainly from the developing world. Other Orders have sold large and often half empty convents and have relocated to smaller premises, their motivation being one of necessity rather than based on the initiative to radically reform.

### **6.1.3 Mixed Gender Convents**

The religious houses of Celtic origin in this country were frequently mixed gender monasteries (ie for monks and nuns), such houses being presided over by an abbess or abbot. This was the custom in the Irish convents of St Brigit (AD 450-523). Hilda's Abbey at Whitby (founded around 657) and that of Wimborne in Dorset (about fifty years later) were based on the Celtic type, though neither was regarded with much favour by the Church of Rome. In 1131, St Gilbert founded the orders of Sempringham in the Lincolnshire village of that name, and twelve Gilbertine houses of nuns and canons were established. There was a house for nuns and a house for the canons in the same precinct, but these were strictly separate. The double houses elsewhere continued until the general suppression.

In the current social climate, with its liberal outlook and greater parity of the sexes, it might well be that mixed monasteries are the answer for struggling religious communities. This might not prove quite so acceptable as one might at first imagine, however, given that despite its practical changes society retains its high expectations of a moral code being practised by the religious. Media interest would no doubt be swift to seize the opportunity afforded by such 'standards'.

Mixed gender convents would certainly not be considered by the currently conservative Roman Catholic Church. However, if a mixed gender convent was to consist of both 'lay' associates and religious members, this could be a positive contribution both to society and the Roman Catholic Church. Discipline and a

code of life would be applied for both lay and religious members, the latter being readily identifiable by continuing to wear the habit. Married couples might also work in the convents, so too single gender groups, each group providing support for one another and of equal status, providing an understanding of the many varied and diverse lifestyles of today. Retreat houses for the laity and clergy might be provided by these community houses. Individuals might seek direction, comfort and support from a counsellor with whom they felt an affinity based on their understanding and/or experience of the problems being faced.

The needs of individuals within society today are many and stressful. A break in a retreat house for parents with busy homes and lifestyles, hard-working professionals or fatigued celebrities, for example, with the members of the houses providing spiritual support, professional knowledge and a sympathetic ear in a place of peace and tranquillity seems like an opportunity too good to dismiss.

If any of these approaches were adopted, it is likely that many people would respond and bring new challenges and purpose to the Religious Order. Lay members of the community would feel a sense of belonging and participate as equal partners in such a much needed and worthwhile venture; single members of the community would gain vital knowledge and understanding of religious life and feel able and confident in the possibility of testing their vocation; and the religious themselves would benefit from the experience of living and working in the same environment as lay people, thus providing them with valuable knowledge of everyday life and people in the community and the problems of life outside a convent. Undoubtedly, the three areas most positively affected on the part of the religious would be their accessibility, their approachability and their relevance to society.

The religious could also make twin provision for the secular clergy within the retreat houses by setting aside small units to accommodate them in specially

designated areas that offer solitude and comfort. There is an expanding need for many of today's overworked and understaffed clergy, who are themselves experiencing increasing work loads and stress levels.

#### **6.1.4 Married Priests?**

Although greater numbers of males than females are entering religious life, the number of those wishing to join the priesthood continues to decline. Figures given by the Sky News television programme on 29 May 2005 for the diocese of Westminster is as follows: 843 for the year 1990, 623 in 2005 and the projected figures for the year 2008 is 477. The Roman Catholic Church is preparing a recruitment campaign in response to falling numbers of vocations to the priesthood and an increase in enquiries following the publicity of the death of Pope John Paul II. Advertisements for vocations will be printed on beer mats in public houses, with larger ones being displayed on the London Underground in an attempt to capitalise on the recent interest shown. It is a radical initiative taken by the Roman Catholic Church, which now appears to accept the seriousness of the present situation and is prepared to take action accordingly.

In the results of the survey carried out in the previous chapter, only 3% of the religious thought that making celibacy an option would attract boys to the priesthood, though the status of the respondents raises certain questions regarding their ability to offer an entirely objective reply. Members of the Roman Catholic Church are also divided on this issue. Some believe that only an unmarried priest can dedicate his whole attention to the Church, as ordained by God. Others, however, believe that a priest who is married would have the advantage of being better able to identify with the relational difficulties encountered by more members of his congregation. It is not an easy issue to resolve, nor one with which the Roman Catholic Church is particularly keen to engage. Although we have a relatively new Pope following the recent election of Benedict XVI, it appears that - for the time being, at least - conservative thinking remains the dominant influence.

### **6.1.5 Women Priests?**

Again, only a small minority (ie 3%) of those questioned thought that the ordination of women priests would make any significant difference to the numbers wishing to enter the priesthood. However, the real strength of feeling regarding this issue is difficult to discern. The religious are neither familiar nor comfortable with the idea of challenging Roman Catholic Church policy or doctrine. Whilst it is true that not all religious females would wish to become priests, neither can it be denied that significant numbers would at least appreciate the opportunity being made available. Moreover, although it would not solve the problem of too few priests, it would indubitably help the situation and make the Roman Catholic Church more representative of today's western society. Sadly, such radical solutions are beyond the thinking of the traditional conservative, but if the situation of too few priests remains, then thoughts must surely begin to turn to more as yet untried measures.

### **6.1.6 Specific Role Communities**

There exists a very real need for specific role communities in western society today. One such enterprise already in operation is the Cenacola community, founded in Italy by Sister Elvira Petrozzi. There are now some forty representative houses spread throughout Italy, the rest of Europe and the Americas. There are in excess of a thousand persons in the community today, with separate houses for men and women. The Cenacola community is a Christian association, staffed by the religious and friends of the community. Young people suffering from the strains of life and who have turned to drug addiction, alcohol or other substance abuse are made welcome through the provision of supported residential accommodation in an essentially and exclusively Christian environment.

Life in the community is simple and without the distractions of television, radio or newspapers. Similarly, tobacco, alcohol and so-called 'leisure' drugs are not allowed. Prayer, reflection, discussion and work are so interwoven that each

person can overcome the fears of the past as they seek to make themselves known in the light of the truth. Each new member is given a 'guardian angel' in the form of a fellow member who, having lived in the community for some time, is thereby equipped to offer love, support and encouragement through the difficult first months in the community.

Specific role communities are worthwhile and relevant in today's society. The religious and their associate members would be well placed to offer accommodation, knowledge and expertise to embark on such a venture. They could be established to help with other social problems, including havens for victims of domestic violence and/or abuse, rehabilitation units for petty offenders and shelters for pregnant teenagers. Such communities could offer so much love and support for many of the ills being confronted in the twenty-first century. They offer a real challenge and would provide ample opportunity for the religious to show that they are very relevant to society today.

## 6.2 THE LACK OF VOCATIONS

The crisis that besets all Religious Orders in the West today is the lack of vocations. An analysis of the potential solutions proffered by the religious has been provided in chapter 5. We will look at some of them again here in an attempt to discover any features, similar themes, common conclusions, fresh ideas and new proposals put forward in the hope of resolving the crisis.

The most common theory posited by the religious to the problem of lack of vocations (ie 33%) thought that materialism was the main cause for the present crisis and felt powerless to effect any change. Sadly, this pattern of thought amongst them seems to have provided the perfect excuse for not engaging with the issue at all. Perhaps the feeling of being so out of touch with society and with little experience of how to cope with modern day life and its trials has produced defensive communities, who thereby consider a more attractive option to remain insular in the vain hope that things would return to the former

patterns and way of life. The religious have a great sense of history regarding their Orders, many having been in existence for centuries. This has provided comfort and a belief that the crisis of too few vocations would pass and the Lord would provide. It is only of late that they have come to realise and accept the urgency of the situation and are considering various options in an attempt to reverse it.

Loss of values, lack of Christian values and lack of faith together combine to make 29% of the reasons given by religious for the lack of vocations. Again, the religious felt impotent in their struggle against this particular situation, many of them choosing instead to remain in their convents to 'weather the storm'. Meanwhile, the opportunity to offer society credible alternatives and the real possibility of regaining lost values and faith becomes lost in a sea of complacency. The problem for the religious is that, although they are citizens of the western world and care deeply about its troubles, they find it difficult to interact with and be part of society. Although they remain committed individuals to their faith and desire to do good, it is possible to discern from their responses that many have become unsure of their role and have suffered a loss of confidence concerning the way in which they are now perceived generally. It might even be argued that they have resigned themselves to the negative publicity brought about by the actions of a few, which has tainted the reputation of the majority.

This level of uncertainty and lack of confidence has produced within the members of Religious Orders an inability to accurately interpret the signs of the times. As such, they have not adjusted their lifestyle according to changes in society, which may well account for 6% of respondents feeling that the religious life lacks appeal and significance in today's secularised world.

A similar proportion (ie 6%) believe that the lack of information for the laity and the confusion created following Vatican II has resulted in a crisis of faith from which the Church has not recovered. Vatican II has and still does divide

opinion within Religious Orders. What might on the surface appear a trivial matter, such as style and length of habit, the simplification of a veil or even the need to wear a habit at all has created serious conflicts of opinion. Many religious habits are unique to their particular Orders, having evolved over centuries and are not lightly put aside or even altered simply to be more culturally or contextually compatible. However, habits have been modified by the majority of Orders to be more in keeping with modern requirements and circumstances, though they appear no more appealing to the youth of today than their predecessors. This fact serves only to reinforce the opinion that religious life today lacks any significance for young people, seemingly quaint but out of touch with the real world.

Since Vatican II, the laity has been given the opportunity to participate more fully in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. Males may now become deacons; females can be altar servers, whilst Eucharistic ministers are allowed to read Church lections. The laity has been empowered and given a voice to question and, therefore, expects the Church to be more open and accountable. As expected, both priests and the religious are divided on this issue. Some see the situation as empowering the laity too much and feel threatened by the potential to abuse such power, whilst others consider that it was time for the laity to play a more active role in the life of their Church, especially if it encourages more vocations. This, of course, is a possibility if more active participation provokes a greater sense of belonging and a desire to become even more fully involved. Another view is that with such busy life styles, the active contribution already being made is sufficient to provide spiritual fulfilment.

The changing role of women in society, both in terms of professional opportunities and personal choices available to them, combined to provide 32% of the main reasons given for the lack of female religious vocations. Clearly the Roman Catholic Church and Religious Orders are still trying to come to terms with the implications of the ever-developing role of women in society. It is widely acknowledged to be a major factor in the lack of vocations to Religious

Orders, but no one in positions of authority within the male-dominated Roman Catholic Church appears able to meet the challenges it presents. For them it is almost impossible to understand and appreciate the hopes, fears and aspirations of women in the current age. This is due not only to the way priests and the religious are trained, but also the almost total segregation of the sexes from an early age. Although priests are usually very close to their mothers, who thereby become virtually the only women whom they can confide, this does not really provide a true picture of the opposite sex and the young liberated women they may be called upon in the pursuing of their duties to encounter. In the past, this way of life served the priesthood well, the present crop of authority figures within the Roman Catholic Church bearing testimony to that fact. How difficult their task must be when they have so little experience and knowledge of women outside their family circle! Housekeepers, female relatives and religious females cannot be considered as truly representative of women in general, the situation in which the Roman Catholic Church and Religious Orders now finds themselves illustrating the point beyond doubt.

The proposals put forward by the religious in the hope of resolving the crisis were many and varied. The four most common answers produced only 10% of the total, only two of which provide any real initiative or impetus. They revolve around focussing on more mature recruits to meet the shortfall and offering trial periods of participation.

Religious Orders are targeting more mature people in the hope of increasing vocations and, as was discussed earlier, it seems to be an option that is meeting with some measure of success. These people are usually educated and trained to a high standard and, having experienced what a secular life has to offer, now wish for one that is conducive to them finding spiritual fulfilment. Some of these candidates come from Third Orders or Lay Orders, and so have some prior knowledge of the religious life. Others who are less religiously experienced, however, are encouraged to participate in some form of religious life before entering, such as spending time with members of a community,

where they are free to ask questions and discuss any fears they may have regarding the challenges of such a way of life. To make such a commitment to enter a Religious Order is a huge step to take for a person, whatever their age, and they must be sure of their vocation. This participation before entering provides the prospective entrant with at least some experience of what such a way of life would be like.

The other two most common responses to this question were a combination of negativity and defeatism: those who were looking backwards to the old-fashioned values that worked previously, instead of looking forward to find new values that worked today; and those who had simply stopped looking altogether. Those who sought to return to Christian teaching in the home obviously believe it to be the duty of parents to provide their children with accepted standards of behaviour and godly values. Whilst many people agree with this premise, the Church cannot thereby abrogate its own share of the responsibilities to provide such instruction, principally through its schools and colleges. Such institutions were founded to promote these very ideals and parents cannot be held accountable for the shortcomings of the Roman Catholic Church and Religious Orders in this area.

Those who admitted that they did not know the answer to the present crisis, but wished that they did was as much an admission of failure as it was an answer tinged with fear for the future. The fact that there were so many responses given and none that enjoyed common agreement suggests that it was typical of everyone who took part. Indeed, members of some Religious Orders have resigned themselves to the fact that their particular Order will cease to exist and take comfort in the hope that the *charism* of the congregation will live on through the laity, whilst other Religious communities are taking active measures to amalgamate, knowing that this is the only way they can hope to survive.

### 6.3 COMMON AREAS OF OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM

The answers given to question 4 'Do you feel the present situation to be a temporary or continuing decline?' fell into one of three categories. Of those who believed the decline to be temporary, nine different reasons were offered, the top five accounting for exactly half of the total given to this question.

Such figures would seem to suggest that Religious Orders are in general agreement, are confident about the future, and are beginning to experience the first fruits of a recovery (or at least arrive at a positive and constructive agenda for a dynamic approach to tackle the crisis of too few vocations). This, however, is not the present situation. There are no joint plans in place by the Active Orders, no real commitment for Religious Orders to amalgamate and, as yet, no changes are being considered by the Enclosed Orders. This fact becomes obvious upon analysis of the respondents' replies:

1. "There is so much time and effort being spent on this very difficult problem by all the Religious Orders. The situation should improve" (10%);
2. "The continuing power of prayer for vocations" (10%);
3. "There are plenty of vocations in the Third World. I think that the present situation in Europe is temporary" (10%);
4. "Every situation is temporary. The Church of Christ will always be there, though it may change its shape in many ways. All that any of us can do is to be faithful and to trust in God" (10%);
5. "Temporary, but no reason given" (10%).

It is perhaps significant that in each of the above, no respondent felt any obligation to offer a constructive plan of action to redress the present situation. In fact, it might even be argued on this basis that some Religious Orders are still in denial. They realise that there is a shortage of vocations to Religious Orders,

but are unable to grasp the real extent of the problem. Indeed, answer 3 in this category implies that many see the surplus of vocations in developing world countries as a real hope for the future, viewing them as potential missionaries to the West. The problem remains, however, that there is no consistent or reasoned approach to a possible way forward.

Currently, Religious Orders in developing countries are tending to 'inherit' small houses belonging to the local Roman Catholic Church, or small portions of what were originally large old convents, which can no longer be otherwise staffed. They carry out parish work and work in hospitals and nursing homes. It does not appear at present that their members are living or working directly with other Religious Orders from countries in the West. Moreover, it seems that there are no plans to develop such a cohesive force and, thereby, bring about significant changes in terms of their relevance in society today. Language difficulties, cultural differences and ignorance of traditional values are also obstacles of some major import that must be addressed.

It must be acknowledged that religious persons from developing countries have a significant role to play in the much hoped for revival of vocations in other parts of the world. Whether the established Orders can seize the opportunity, regain the initiative and become relevant again to western society is a crucial factor in attaining a successful outcome to their present crisis.

The remaining four reasons given for the present situation being viewed as temporary combined to represent 18% of the total for this question:

6. "Religion and Christian values may very well become fashionable again; in other words, a swing of the pendulum" (6%);
7. "The religious must lead by example to a population of increasingly disillusioned individuals to ensure that it is temporary" (6%);
8. "Religious vocations could well be brought into England to be trained and enter Holy Orders" (3%);

9. "Temporary, though the high numbers of the early 1960s will not again be reached" (3%).

As can be seen from the above answers given to question 4, there is no real substance or plan to bring about this hoped for revival of vocations. Religion and Christian values may well become fashionable again. I am personally aware that many religious persons are praying faithfully for just such an outcome, believing that it has fallen to them to uphold their way of life in exemplary fashion until there is either an increase in vocations or their Order ceases to exist, all being in God's hands.

Most would agree that the religious must lead by example in a population of increasingly disillusioned individuals. However, the inherent problem with this statement cannot be overlooked. Due in no small measure to the negative media representation – warranted or otherwise – there is an increasing level of distrust towards the religious by the general public, which has adversely affected the confidence of the religious themselves. Many people, however, do still trust those with religious convictions to teach their children and nurse their sick. Similarly, the religious acknowledge the fact that they must continue to work to regain the trust they once enjoyed, without which there is little hope of an increase in vocations to ensure their survival.

Some of the replies given to this question – notably response 8 above – serve only to illustrate the problem of how little communication takes place between Orders and how out of touch with current events some religious communities are, even in a technological world that allows global communication. It is likely that many respondents who gave this reason belong to Enclosed Religious and Holy Orders and have not followed current thinking on the subject.

The situation continues to be viewed as temporary even by those who accept that the large numbers of the early 1960s entering the religious life would not again be reached. Whilst no reasons were given to support this theory, it can be

reasonably assumed that it is based on trust, prayer, hope and a belief that some positive results will hopefully follow all the recent endeavours to encourage vocations.

Sadly, none of the answers in this second grouping offered any real hope for the future and none gave any valid reasons why the present situation should only be viewed as temporary.

The second category of responses to question 4 was by those who were unsure whether the situation of decline is temporary or permanent. It produced only four different answers with a combined total of 15%, the two most common of which were:

1. "This is in the hands of the Lord and we accept it from day to day" (5%);
2. "Religious must make more time for prayer life" (3%).

Although both replies rely on the will of God, there is a subtle difference between them. Whilst the former demonstrates a complete acceptance of the situation, the latter betrays a veiled criticism, presumably of the more Active Orders. Those of Enclosed Orders seem to be of the opinion that their Active counterparts are not sufficiently 'active' in setting aside time to pray for the situation to improve. Either that or they are too 'active' in trying to make themselves more fashionable and appealing to society than is warranted by the situation.

Whatever Enclosed Orders perceive the present and future problems to be for Religious Orders, they have not really answered the question of whether the decline is temporary or permanent. They obviously prefer to keep their options open by facing the future with prayer and acceptance of God's will, however that might unfold.

Prayer and hope also featured heavily in the next response to question 4 in this category: "I can only hope and pray that it is temporary, but the major problem is the attitude of the people around us" (3%). No qualifying statements are given for this response. It could be interpreted as society in general being too materialistic, temporally minded with no thought of an after-life, too shallow, uncaring, craving excitement and instant gratification and, therefore, having no time for religion. Although some or all of these could well be true, they are symptoms of the problem not the problem itself. In other words, the religious need to ask themselves why this situation has arisen in the first place.

The Roman Catholic Church sees the home as the first school of Christianity, with parents as the initial teachers of the faith to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation suitable to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation, father and mother jointly sharing this responsibility. This was the 'world' into which many current religious persons were born. They were brought up in a caring Christian environment, being taught respect, human values and discipline, after which they attended Convent schools and became members of Religious Orders. Unfortunately, this ideal no longer exists. It seems that the reality and the perception of reality by the Roman Catholic Church are not at present one and the same. Moreover, until the Catholic Church is able to come to terms with the modern day concept of family life in western society (eg single parent family, partners and children of previous marriages and same sex partners) it is difficult to perceive how the situation could improve and where future 'home grown' vocations might come from.

The fourth answer to question 4 in this category also seems to pin its hopes in the developing world: "There is a continuing decline in North-West Europe, North America and Australia, but the growing points in my own Order are India, South East Asia, Africa and South America" (3%). As stated previously, there are both positive and negative aspects to this possibility. The other worrying factor is that there are no plans to integrate Third World and Western

World Religious Orders. Many of the latter will remain small with aged and ageing communities, whilst others will have a small number of Third World religious individuals working within their community and there will be small convents consisting solely of vocations from developing countries, as at present. Privately, many view this as little more than a 'holding' situation until such times as members of western society once again hear the call of God and are prepared to dedicate their lives to him.

Relatively few considered the present situation to be a permanent decline, with only four answers realising a total of 12% (ie 3% each).

The first answer was offered by those who apparently realise the dire urgency of the situation: "It will continue to decline unless radical changes are made." Unfortunately, they did not offer any thoughts or views regarding what those changes might be or, indeed, how they could be brought about. It would seem to suggest yet again that there is an increasing awareness of the problem amongst members of Religious Orders and a growing sense of unease, but a state of general inertia seems to prevail and prevents radical changes from taking place. Sadly for some Religious Orders, change will not take place, they will continue to decline and eventually become extinct.

The second answer is reflective of the present condition: "I feel that the present situation will continue in decline for the foreseeable future, with some religious congregations dying out and others amalgamating with each other" (3%). The only unknown factors are the period of time in question until the decline halts and, of at least equal importance, what state will many Religious Orders then be in to face the future.

The third answer simply reaffirms part of the question in statement form without offering either explanation or supporting evidence: "The present situation will continue to decline" (3%). There is a general almost fatalistic acceptance of the apparently inevitable, with perhaps beneath the surface a

sense of despair, disappointment, overwhelming sadness, even bitterness, and a very real concern. They can only really envisage a future of the elderly sick religious attempting to care for each other in growing isolation in an increasingly secular world. Privately, many question themselves and wonder if they could have or should have done more to try and connect with modern society, but remain at a loss as to how they might approach the problem.

The final answer again serves to illustrate the fact that many of the religious are resigned to the possibility of extinction of their Orders, but they are prepared to trust God for the future and fate of their Orders: "It could well be permanent, but it is all in God's hands" (3%). Some of these religious communities might well have tried to update themselves and become more appealing to members of modern society. Others would have persevered in their age old traditions, but unfortunately both schools of thought appear to have met with little success for these particular Orders.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

Sadly, it seems inevitable that some Religious Orders will cease to exist in the near future. Small communities of Enclosed Religious Orders will close, as they do not have a Third Order to carry on the *charism* of their Order. However, larger Enclosed Orders should continue to survive for at least the foreseeable future, thereby providing the opportunity for those so called to express their vocation thus.

The future of the Active Religious Orders would appear to depend very much upon how they are able to interact, reach out and provide positive input into the lives of those outside its ranks who are becoming increasingly disillusioned with a secularist society. However, small communities of aging Active Religious Orders cannot realistically hope to reverse the current trend of having to close.

There are two closely linked scenarios whereby a large worldwide community like the Dominican Order might find some comfort: the possible amalgamation of members of religious Dominican communities in the West with those of the developing countries and the Third Order of St Dominic (ie the Lay Dominicans) to offer practical support and encouragement whilst this restructuring is taking place. The Lay Dominicans have a worldwide membership, large enough to make a significant contribution to the Dominican Family and of equal importance, and they are living and working within the larger social framework, thereby giving them a unique opportunity to experience the needs and aspirations of society in general. Amalgamation and restructuring on such a large scale would not be easy and would take time, but it is both achievable and advantageous for the future of the Dominican Order, offering a possible way forward.

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