

News from Fanjeaux

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S.H.O.P. ENJOYS AN AMERICAN SEASON

With a Visit to North America and a Visitor from South America

In this second half of 2012 the Sister Historians HQ at Fanjeaux has been resolutely turned towards the other side of the Atlantic: Sr Barbara visited the United States in September, and in November Sr Cynthia Folquer op from Argentina visited us.

Second Assembly of the Association of Dominican Nuns, September 2012

This Assembly brought together the prioress and delegates from a majority of the Dominican monasteries in North America and the Caribbean. It was held at the mother house of the congregation of Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois, and was graced by a week-end visit from the Master of the Order Fr Bruno Cadoré, the presence of the Promoter of Nuns, Fr Brian Pierce, and the Association's friar assistant Fr Dominic Izzo o.p..

The Assembly lasted ten days and the Association had invited two historians to provide input at the beginning. For the organizers had realised that it is important to learn from the lessons of the past when preparing for the future. Thus it was that Fr Allan White of the English Dominican Province and Sr Barbara of S.H.O.P. were invited to give two lectures each and lead discussions around the subject "How have Dominican nuns managed to survive for eight hundred years, often in times of great crisis". Sr Barbara tried to identify the spiritual values in the life of the nuns of the Order that made it possible to maintain a Dominican identity despite the many wars, plagues and revolutions that have marked their life in different parts of the world throughout the centuries. Fr Allan dealt more with the institutional aspects that have contributed to this survival. In passing he mentioned, provoking great amazement and interest in the assembly, that the first North American Dominican nuns were not those whom we have always assumed - those who entered at Oullins, France to prepare the foundation at Newark NJ in 1880. No, the heritage goes back much further: in the 18th century there were young women so keen to become Dominican nuns—at a time when this species was totally unknown on their continent, that they crossed the ocean and entered the very fragile, English-speaking foundation in Brussels, made in the 1660's, at →



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the time when Cardinal Philip Howard was active in the Low Countries. Indeed some members of his own family joined this Dominican community. Fr Allan mentioned by name four of these American sisters, all of whom persevered in their vocations, but were never able to return to their homeland. It was from this community in Brussels that Dominican nuns finally returned to England, having been expelled from Brussels in the wake of the French Revolution.

The highpoint of the Assembly at Springfield was the visit of the Master who reminded the nuns that they too have their role to play in the mission of the Order, that they are Dominican contemplative nuns, and not contemplative nuns who happen to be Dominican, i.e. "Dominican" is the first and major element in the identity.

*Note: The texts of the lectures will be published in **Dominican Monastic Search**, the publication of the Association of Dominican Nuns of North America.*

DISCOVERING THE DOMINICAN FAMILY OF ARGENTINA

In early November it was a privilege and a pleasure to welcome Sr Cynthia Folquer, an eminent Dominican historian from Tucuman, Argentina. Sr Cynthia was in Europe to defend her doctoral thesis at the University of Barcelona and took time out to spend five days with us in Fanjeaux.

Sr Cynthia, who is the editor of an important book on the history of the Dominican Order in Argentina, has written her thesis on the beginnings of her congregation, the Dominican Sisters of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, founded in Tucuman in 1887. Her title is striking: *Travelers to the depths of the Soul*, for she argues that these early Argentinean sisters were much influenced by their reading of the Rhineland mystics, notably Henry Suso. Fr Angel Marie Boisdron o.p., of the Dominican province of Lyon, was instrumental in founding the Congregation.



Sr Cynthia (Tucuman) and Sr Marie Bruno (Gramond) on a visit to Prouilhe

But Sr Cynthia also has another string to her Dominican bow: she also works with indigenous communities in the mountains north of Tucuman. These villages are very remote and can only be reached after a journey of eight hours on horseback. Sister shared with us a DVD of a documentary she has made about the religious experience of these communities, where traditional beliefs and Catholicism seem to cohabit in perfect harmony. Catholic priests are able to visit at most once a year. The traditional figures of the "Pachamama" and the "Llastay" fulfill a strong ecological role, favouring a balance in nature and protecting animals.

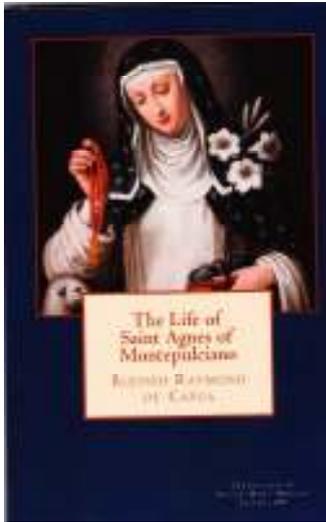


One of the mountain communities visited by Sr Cynthia

Sr Cynthia has promised to collaborate on the next S.H.O.P. distance learning course, which will be devoted to beginnings of Dominican women in Latin America. Her particular contribution will be on St Rose of Lima. S.H.O.P. hopes to have this course available by the end of 2013. There is a lot of translation work involved, as the sources are - not surprisingly - mostly in Spanish.

SAINT AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO, 1268-1317

A Dominican Saint Who Deserves To Be Better Known



The S.H.O.P. library was delighted to receive just recently a new book on St Agnes of Montepulciano: the biography of her by Blessed Raymond of Capua, author also of the standard work on St Catherine of Siena. It is hard to believe that this is the first time that the life of this medieval Dominican nun has been translated into English, and so our gratitude must go to Sr Mary Martin Jacobs op of the Dominican Monastery at Summit NJ for making this text available to the English-speaking world.

The life of St Agnes was really quite remarkable—she found herself an abbess at the age of fifteen, and a newly built monastery that she founded at Montepulciano collapsed just five years after being built. In fact it only became a Dominican monastery the year before Agnes's death, for she had began her religious life as a "Sister of the Sack," a penitential order assimilated into the Dominicans at the end of the 13th century.

Agnes of Montepulciano was noted for miracles of healing performed both during her lifetime and after her death. Catherine of Siena had a great devotion to her and visited her tomb at Montepulciano on several occasions. Sr Donna Marie Moses in the Introduction and Sr Mary Martin in the translator's preface both write frankly about the frustrations of this text, which is of course much closer to the medieval *legenda*, designed for edification, than the modern genre of biography that reveals more personal information about the subject.



The Monastery at Montepulciano

***The Life of Saint Agnes of Montepulciano*, by Blessed Raymond of Capua, translated by Sr Mary Martin Jacobs, published by Dominican Nuns Summit Publications, 2012, 141pp. Available from Amazon or from the monastery website, which also offers other DNS publications.**

Closing Event at the Dominican Nuns' Art Exhibition at Caterina Benincasa Monastery, Newcastle DE

On Sunday September 30th, an afternoon event marked the end of an impressive year-long exhibit devoted to artistic creations by Dominican nuns in the gallery of Caterina Benincasa monastery. Sr Barbara of S.H.O.P. had been invited to talk on the tradition of artistic creation amongst Dominican nuns throughout the ages. A brief historical survey extended from the medieval illuminators of liturgical manuscripts, through the high art of the Italian Renaissance with figures such as Sr Plautilla Nelli op.



Also mentioned was literary creation with Sr Ann Marquets o.p., of the monastery of Poissy, France, who published poetry that was highly acclaimed during her lifetime. After the talk a DVD showed the restoration of one of Plautilla Nelli's major works, the *Lamentation of Christ*, which was a revelation to most of those present, as our great painter nun is not as well known as she deserves. Besides the nuns of the monastery the audience included parishioners, Dominican friars from the House of Studies, Washington DC and lay Dominicans from the local fraternity.



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“The Association of Sister Historians of the Order of Preachers is defined in its statutes as: “a resource for documentation, communication and formation at the service of Dominican women, religious and lay, through the study of their histories.” Statutes

The House of St Dominic has a new Guardian



This summer Fanjeaux welcomed a new friar guardian of the House of St Dominic, Fr Pierre Zgirski o.p., ordained in June this year.

Unfortunately he will not be resident; in fact he is assigned to the convent at Montpellier, a good bit further away from Fanjeaux than Toulouse.

Don't forget that the House of St Dominic is not normally open to the public outside of a few weeks in the summer, and in order to visit at other times of the year, it is necessary to write in advance to the Friar guardian to obtain permission. That way you can avoid disappointment.

Certain improvements have been made to the house in the last couple of years, notably making the friars' living quarters more separate from the visitors' area, and installing an impressive sacristy.



VISITORS TO FANJEAUX

As in the last few years, it has been gratifying in 2012 to see more and more groups of Dominican laity visiting the Dominican Holy Places. Those with whom S.H.O.P. had contact recently include groups from Brazil, Switzerland and Flanders (the fifth consecutive year in the this latter case).

As usual, the office holders of the S.H.O.P. Association, Sr Mary O'Driscoll and Sr Patricia Dougherty, spent some time in Fanjeaux during the summer months. Each of them regularly ministers to groups at the Belvedere retreat house, owned by the Dominicaines du Verbe Incarné.

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