

CATCHING FIRE FROM DOMINIC'S VISION

The Coming of the Preachers
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Marie-Dominique Chenu said of the role of the historian “What I am looking for in history is not documentation, but inspiration”, this would seem to concur with the title of this symposium ***Catching fire from Dominic's vision***, which is an unusual brief for a historian. It tells me that you want more fire and fewer facts, more Dominic and fewer dates; yet the very fact that you invited a historian at all, shows that our search for inspiration in the fire and the vision that marked the beginnings of our Order needs to be rooted in firm ground. We need to know if the idea we have of Dominic’s vision corresponds to reality. As Guy Bedouelle has written: “There is a close relationship between the search for truth that is the ideal of the Order of Preachers and the study of history. What is a historian if not someone who, within his or her limitations seeks to know and to understand what happened?” Indeed to understand where we come from is an integral part of knowing who we are and where we are going that is to say our history is part of our personal and collective identities. Our history therefore is part of the on-going process of self-knowledge, a vital ingredient in any religious life.

If there are aspects of Dominic’s vision that have become shrouded in the mists and legends of time, the historian should be able to help us discover them anew. To come back to Marie-Dominique Chenu, he seems to have believed that history is basically a subversive activity, as he wrote: “Recalling the past, returning to the sources is always a revolutionary phenomenon, since it is a return to the creative forces. And that calls into question all of the superstructures that have accumulated in the course of time. Not that these superstructures are without value, but they need to be relativised: a return to the initial intuitions transforms the vision one has of systems.” This transformation of vision, through an understanding of history is what we are trying to do together right now, during these days as we try to look closely at what was happening here at Prouilhe 800 years ago. And that is what I hope to do — look closely at just a limited period: those first years between 1206 and 1216.

The title I have chosen for this historical input '***The coming of the preachers***' is also a quotation, this time from the Cistercian monk Pierre de Vaux de Cernay, the chronicler of the Albigensian Crusade — and I believe it is important because this is the term used consistently in this chronicle to refer to Bishop Diego, Dominic and their companions. On the one hand, it describes their function in the Church, preachers ten years before there was any question of founding an Order of Preachers. And on the other it also serves consistently to distinguish Diego and his companions from the crusaders, the military men, whose coming was to be several years later from 1208 onwards. For Pierre de Cernay, 1206 is indeed the year to be marked out as ‘the coming of the preachers’. It was at the end of this same year that Prouilhe was to be founded. A lot was going to happen within the space of six months or so.

This chronicle of Pierre de Cernay is one of the most detailed sources for the history of this period. It is a non-Dominican source, therefore its purpose was not in the least hagiographical, and it can thus be of great interest to us as a more objective witness to the beginnings of the Order, than, for example the Libel/us. This chronicle was composed between 1212 and 1218 and so is closer in time to the events described than Jordan’s work. The Dominican Order was still in swaddling clothes when the chronicle was completed. and so its author was not likely to be unduly impressed by the glory that accrued to St Dominic thereafter. This is not the only chronicle of its kind; there are also those by Robert d’Auxerre and Guillaume de Puylaurens to be taken into account.

An important thing to bear in mind at the outset is - forgive me for saying so - that in 1206 Dominic was a nobody. He was in the service of his bishop, accompanying Diego of Osma on a mission, and so his

natural place was in the shadow of his bishop, whom the chronicler describes immediately as ‘a great man greatly to be praised’. And so, the chroniclers tell us, Diego and his companions, the preachers, came into this region, known as the Lauragais, in early summer 1206, having travelled from Rome and stopped near Montpellier, where they met the papal legates. Dominic can be identified as the ‘single companion’ who remained behind in Languedoc with bishop Diego, ‘the dedicated servant of God,’ after the latter sent his household retinue and wagons back to Osma after this Montpellier encounter. For Diego had proposed a strategy that amounted to beating the heretics at their own game, that is by imitating the apostles in everything, travelling around on foot, and begging from door to door. This is a significant point for understanding the founding and the future of the Order, for Diego’s motives were 100% apostolic; as Simon Tugwell has put it: “poverty was adopted because it was the most promising missionary strategy in the circumstances”. (1) And on this point an important contrast with Francis of Assisi can be established, for him poverty was much more of a personal quest, linked to an inner struggle or conversion. But in Dominic’s case, quite simply, and it is a key phrase: “his life was shaped by the needs of others”. (2)

It is possible to track fairly accurately the summer preaching circuit of these preachers for 1206: Servian, Béziers, Carcassonne, Verfeil, Montréal, and Pamiers. During these first few months, things were done pretty much on an ad hoc basis. In September the Cistercian Abbot had returned to Citeaux for his General Chapter, and so towards the end of the year, operations on the ground were consolidated into a more permanent form as a result of the bull of Pope Innocent III dated 17 November 1206. This was addressed to the legate, Raoul de Fontfroide and extended the preaching mission until that point entrusted to the Cistercians, to other collaborators. Dominic was now one of these tried and tested’ men henceforth included officially in the preaching mission, who were to ‘imitate the poverty of Christ, and with an ardent spirit’ convert the heretics by the example of ‘word and deed’. He and Diego settled at Fanjeaux, and thereafter there was to be less itinerary as efforts became concentrated on a smaller area, the villages of Villepinte, Bram, Castelnau-dary and Fanjeaux. They were now opting for a more concentrated campaign in a geographically restricted area: a surprising development perhaps in the case of these men these men who had travelled far and wide. But they were doubtless seeing, on the one hand, the need for the truths of faith to be regularly repeated, and on the other the importance of insertion in a local community for efficacy of preaching.

According to the chronicler Pierre de Cemay, their purpose in this was to be able to concentrate more vigorously on their preaching, following the example of the Divine Master in deed and word’. What apt choice of vocabulary here, for preaching is indeed an activity that requires ‘vigorous concentration’; this is a key word for understanding the preaching campaign in the Lauragais in 1206-7. The foundation of Prouilhe can be seen very much as an integral part of this process of putting down roots and concentrating efforts.

There is much discussion among historians as to the true date of the great dispute or debate at Montreal as well as the timing and location of the miracle of the fire that is traditionally associated with it. Pierre de Cernay’s situates these events in March-April 1207, thus the dispute at Montreal occurring after the end of the first concentrated’ preaching campaign and the miracle of the fire after the end of the dispute. He claims to have got his information from ‘that most pious man’ Dominic himself, and there are two significant factors in his account: firstly that the miracle of the fire is the first occasion on which Dominic is mentioned by name in this chronicle. He is now presented as ‘one of our men. Dominic, a man of consummate piety’, but the label companion of the bishop of Osma’ is still appended. And secondly, the miracle appears very much as the fruit of the preaching, and by no means as a substitute for it. The implication being that God gave Dominic to perform miracles to consolidate the work of preaching, not to convince people by what they might otherwise take simply for magical powers. The fact that this miracle concerns the truth of words that have been written down is surely significant.

So far so good, but unfortunately for us, neither Pierre de Cernay nor any of the other early non-Dominican sources mentions the foundation of Prouilhe. How should we interpret this silence? One important factor would be that the foundation of a community of women could be perceived – wrongly as it turns out – as not impinging directly on the course of the campaign against the heretics, and this, after all, was the principal subject of these chroniclers. And also, for those writing before the establishment of the Order, one could argue that the true significance of Prouilhe would not have emerged at that stage. Its status as the first fruits’ of Dominic’s work does not become clear until there are other, subsequent fruits.

Nevertheless, a careful reading of the chronicles does reveal something important about the nature of the settlement at Prouilhe. Pierre de Cernay states that Bishop Diego returned to Spain in September 1207 “to make provision from his revenues for the material needs of the preachers of the Word of God in the province of Narbonne.” On this point the chronicle of Robert of Auxerre adds a little more detail, this work is contemporaneous with the events, having been written around 1207-8, and is considered to be one of the most significant historical compositions bequeathed to us by the Middle Ages. The chronicler describes Diego as a man of great peace and fluent speech, but naturally enough Dominic is not mentioned at all at this early date. Robert d’Auxerre explains that this money from Spain was needed to support ‘local centres’: “From his own revenues he [Diego] had purchased reserves of food and had set up a certain number of depots, which he opened up generously to the preachers of the Word of God.” Now Prouilhe was certainly one of these local centres — and indeed was to emerge as the principal and most successful of them, a sort of refuelling station — in every sense of the word, material and spiritual.

So in its beginnings, Prouilhe provided a refuelling centre for preachers and a home for a community of women. We inevitably come to the question as to why Diego and Dominic founded a community for women at this time, just when the preaching campaign was proving to be no easy matter. To say that the foundation of Prouilhe is shrouded in a deal of mystery is not an exaggeration. The founders were obviously too caught up in the events themselves to keep records, and to make matters worse, over the centuries, as it became necessary to establish property rights over various churches and pieces of land, there were a number of falsified documents concerning the early years of Prouilhe, so not all of the early deeds can be taken at face value. Added to this, the ravages of various fires, notably at the cathedral of Osma in 1505, at Prouilhe in 1715, and then the French Revolution have destroyed many documentary sources. So our knowledge is of necessity very sketchy, and as Simon Tugwell wrote in conclusion to a 66 page scholarly article published recently on the question ‘For whom was Prouilhe founded?’: ‘We are completely in the dark’. (3) So what hope for lesser historians?

Because of this lack of reliable documentary evidence, it would seem a reasonable approach to look at the way Dominic subsequently set about founding his Order of Friars Preachers, which is much better documented, and see what can be deduced retrospectively concerning Prouilhe, given that Prouilhe was incorporated — and clearly intentionally so - into this later foundation.

It would seem inconceivable that Prouilhe had its origins in a theoretical plan or an abstract concept. The theoretical approach is indeed attractive, and the notion that Dominic founded a monastery of enclosed contemplative nuns first, so that they would already be in place praying for the friars preachers when he founded them subsequently has its appeal, but there is not a shred of historical evidence to suggest that Dominic actually planned things that way. That it turned out to be the case can be seen perhaps as an act of divine Providence — but as such is outside of the scope of the historian. One might argue that it doesn’t matter if we can’t prove things historically, but I would suggest that it does, for it is important for our own mission to look at just how Dominic did set about things.

If we find no evidence for a preconceived plan on Dominic’s part, what did happen? If he founded the Order of Preachers as opposed to an Order of scribes, for example, it was because he had encountered a pastoral need for sound preaching as early as 1203. on the occasion of the famous encounter with the innkeeper at Toulouse, when he was on the way to Denmark with Bishop Diego. And even more so, on the return journey from Rome in 1206. And later Dominic’s charism as a preacher attracted disciples who joined him even before there was a formal Order to join. Thus it was when confronted with a) a need for preaching and b) the reality of a preaching community gathered around him, that he determined the time had come for ecclesiastical recognition of something that already existed, first of all from the local bishop in 1215 and then from the Pope in 1216.

Likewise, one can argue, in the case of Prouilhe: it was not so much the desire to found a monastery as the need to find a solution to a practical problem on the ground. Otherwise, and if the problem were not fairly urgent, surely Diego and Dominic would have waited for a more favourable conjuncture of circumstances to launch into such a venture. In 1206 they had barely arrived, whereas in 1214, when Dominic was parish priest, founding a monastery might have been a more logical thing to do. But surely here we are dealing with the movings of the Holy Spirit rather than with logic.

In this case, the urgent pastoral problem would seem to be on the one hand: what to do with women converted from Catharism, and hence alienated from their families, and with no means of financial support, and on the other: how to prevent young girls from being sucked into Catharism by heretical

educational establishments, to which they might have been sent by impoverished parents of the local Catholic nobility.

The exact identity of the first sisters of Prouilhe is a very complex one. but even if the various hypotheses cannot be proved beyond doubt, it would seem a strange story to invent that Diego and Dominic set up a community as a safe house for women converted from heresy. What would be the purpose of such a fabrication, and who would have gained by it? Although this version of events does not feature in Jordan of Saxony, Ferrandus or in the writings of other early Dominican historians, it did survive into the 17th century in the local tradition in Fanjeaux, when it was written down by the Dominican historian Jean de Réchac in 1647 and Pierre Cambefort, vicar of Fanjeaux in their respective Histories of Saint Dominic.

This question of women converted from Catharism sets Prouilhe apart in the history of medieval monastic foundations, and can perhaps be seen a pertinent reminder of the various gospel passages in which Jesus proclaims that he has come to call sinners rather than the virtuous, that he has come to heal those who are sick, as the healthy have no need of a doctor. And here lies one of the most original features of the early Prouilhe, and hence of the beginnings of our Order. It was essentially a charitable foundation, intended to take in women, recently reconciled with Catholicism, without family support or financial resources. These were the kind of aspirants who might not have been readily accepted in the conventional Catholic abbeys of the region. This is surely an aspect of Dominic's vision in the beginnings that we should not lose site of.

And so in a sense the monastery of Prouilhe was an irregular foundation. As we saw earlier, there was a clear papal mandate for Dominic and a group of preachers, but not for a monastery. Normally considerable financial endowments were required prior to the setting up of a community of nuns, who would then be affiliated without delay to some religious Order. Prouilhe had no such endowments in 1206, and as we gather that the families of most of the sisters were in straightened circumstances, there would have been no dowry for them. Given that the community was established at Prouilhe on the feast of St John the Evangelist, 27 December 1206, it is easy to imagine that the needs for extra funds suddenly became especially pressing, and thus the motivation becomes clear for Diego's journeys to Spain in 1207 (there were three of them according to Fr Vicaire).

Indeed in every respect, the foundation of Prouilhe seems to have been a fairly piece meal affair, just as religious foundations often are today. Idealised tradition may have handed down a notion that Dominic enclosed the nuns as early as 1207, but the reality is that there were no monastic buildings on the site at that time, that the sisters were living in two or three private houses, and were split between Prouilhe and Fanjeaux. It is indeed a rare thing to move a constituted community into fine buildings already prepared for them, with the constitutions already written, the habits just waiting for the sisters to put them on, and the key in the enclosure door just waiting to be turned and so make everything perfect. It is tempting to imagine that this is what the foundation of Prouilhe was like, but the hard facts of history tell us that it was not. Nevertheless, what the sisters, Dominic and his preaching companions most certainly had from the beginning was the use of the church at Prouilhe. So in that very real sense, the heart of the community was established on the site from the outset.

The way Simon Tugwell puts it is probably fairly accurate to my way of thinking: "He (Dominic) also founded a house at Prouilhe for women rescued from the heretics, which soon became a monastery of nuns". (4) It's a simple sentence, but the verbs used here are keys to understanding Dominic's approach to mission: i) women had been **rescued**, implying a dramatic situation where souls were in danger; ii) because of this, he set up something up to provide for the need: he **founded** a house; iii) only after that does the house **become** a monastery, and the women become nuns, that is the slotting into ecclesiastical structures is arranged in due course, and in any case, after the event, so to speak.

With the arrival in the spring of 1207 of Arnault de Cîteaux and the twelve Cistercian abbots at Montréal, who came to reinforce the preaching mission, the depot of Prouilhe/Fanjeaux took on an even more official status as a mission post subject to these pontifical legates. This subdivision became an integral part of the holy preaching and was henceforth entrusted to Dominic and Diego, but as both Diego and Raoul de Fontfroide were to die before the year 1207 was out, Dominic found himself in sole charge of this local mission. The recently founded community of women at Prouilhe was to form the stable centre of one of the sectors of the holy preaching.

It is perhaps important to say a few words about the history of this term ‘holy preaching’, which was not, in fact, a Dominican invention. It has its origins in the writings of Gregory the Great, and was applied to the mission to the Cathars by pope Innocent III. The term holy preaching applied to Prouilhe is used in a legal deed of gift as early as August 1207: the gift in question was made to “the Lord God and Blessed Mary and to all the Saints of God and to the Holy Preaching and to Lord Dominic of Osma and to all the brothers and sisters who are today and will be in the future”.

The question of Diego versus Dominic as founder of Prouilhe has to be approached in the light of what I said earlier, about the relationship between a bishop and a canon in his service. It would be virtually inconceivable in the context of the preaching campaign in the Lauragais, where Diego was the focus of attention as well as representative of the Church’s hierarchy, for a member of his retinue, albeit his sub-prior, independently to found a monastery. It must surely have been at least a joint venture. This is testified to in the early tradition of the Order, notably in the *Libellus* where Diego is given as the founder of Prouilhe. And as we know, the official version of the life of St Dominic was changed at the General Chapter of 1259, replacing the name of Diego with Dominic as the founder of Prouilhe. No reason is given. What is however certain is that Dominic very quickly took on sole responsibility for Prouilhe, from mid- 1207 onwards, when Diego returned definitively to Spain, for he died there on the 30 December of the same year.

It would seem that the first monastic buildings here were completed in 1211, and this enabled the community of sisters to be gathered together in one place. 1211 is now fairly generally accepted by historians as the date when Dominic returned to Fanjeaux/Prouilhe after an absence in Spain to put his affairs in Osma in order; even if there is no extant documentary evidence for this journey, it would seem inconceivable that he did not at some point after Diego’s death return to secure permissions from his superiors for what was now his new venture at Prouilhe. The monastic community had by now acquired a sufficiently solid economic base to allow it to expand. The statistics we have reveal 12 sisters at the outset (of which 9 were probably Cathar converts) which had grown to 20 in 1211.

It would have been an option for Dominic at this stage to move his male preaching companions off the site, and house them, for example, in one of the houses vacated by the sisters in Fanjeaux. This he did not do, and we must surely take it as a deliberate choice on his part to keep the two communities in the one place. Was it a double community? Fr Vicaire argues that it cannot be considered as such in the way that Fontevraud or Sempringham were, as there was no common authority linking the two. For one thing many of the preachers had left Dominic after the death of Diego, and those who remained were not religious linked to him by vows. Only the sisters were in the process of being constituted as a religious community at this stage, but it is important to note, despite legend and or tradition, that Dominic was never their prior. The sisters had their own prioress from the start; she is named as such in the earliest documents, and Dominic acts only on her behalf.

The monastery was to remain in a fairly fragile condition for some ten years, not affiliated to any Order. Indeed the earliest documents emanating from Bishop Foulque of Toulouse, the diocese in which Prouilhe was situated at that time, show clearly that the community was not fully canonically erected, even if it is an anachronism to talk in such terms. In a document dated May 1211, Foulque gives rights over the church at Bram to the Prouilhe community, but not as *monialibus*. He refers to them rather as ‘*dominahus converses religiose viventibus*’, that is to say converted ladies living religiously. (There is an early deed which refers to them as *monialibus*, but it does not come from Bishop Foulque, their responsible bishop, but from Bérenger bishop of Narbonne). To come back to Foulque, he was obviously reluctant to grant these ladies property rights in perpetuity. What we find at the beginnings of Prouilhe is the granting of a life-time interest to certain named individuals.

This whole state of affairs is fairly surprising, given that William Claret, a Cistercian monk, is named in some of the earliest deeds of gift as sharing with Dominic of Osma material responsibility for the sisters at Prouilhe. It might have been a convenient solution for Dominic to make the community over to the Cistercians, as they had been so much involved with the preaching mission any way. The fact that he did not take this option would seem to argue in favour of Dominic’s already planning, or at least desiring, to do something new. And besides, if he had made the monastery over to the Cistercians, he would almost certainly have lost the refuelling facility for his preachers. The very fact that the nuns of Prouilhe were never affiliated to any other Order can be seen as an argument in favour of the idea that Dominic at this early stage was already starting to think about a religious entity that would encompass both brothers and

sisters, and that the presence of two communities, one of nuns and one of preachers, separate but on the same site appealed to him.

If one looks closely at all the documents concerning Prouilhe between 1206 and 1216 a wide variety of terms is used to refer to the buildings on the site: the church, the house, the place, the holy preaching, then around 1213, the monastery or even the abbey make an appearance, but then disappear, and the earlier terms are used again. This all points to a degree of uncertainty concerning the status of Prouilhe; as Simon Tugwell has said: ‘it was expected to become part of something larger, and no longer an autonomous monastery with attached clerics.’ (5) To use today’s jargon, Dominic was already going for the big picture.

So here we have as elements of Dominic’s newness of vision, preachers and sisters living on the same site, in a process of becoming. He was obviously prepared to live with the possible ambiguities and difficulties inherent in such a situation. But this isn’t all, for almost immediately, that is to say as early as August 8 1207, there is incontrovertible evidence for the presence of lay people living and working alongside the preachers and the converted ladies at Prouilhe. Indeed such an enterprise as the Holy Preaching was becoming would clearly need help with the various tasks associated with subsistence agriculture and housekeeping. Yet these lay people to whom I am referring were not there simply as hired casual labourers. No, and to my mind it is one of the most amazing things about the early history of Prouilhe, that we have legal deeds by which, in this pre-Order period, several married couples of fairly humble origin from local villages – Villasavary and Villepinte, that still exist just down the road – made a gift of themselves and all their worldly goods. The earliest surviving such document refers to ‘Ermengard Godolina and her man’, and it is indeed even more interesting, given medieval society, that the deed is in her name. She states that she is of sound mind, and that of her own free will she gives her house and all she has “to the Lord God, Blessed Mary, and all the Saints of God and to the Holy Preaching, to Lord Dominic of Osma and to all the brothers and sisters present today and in the future”. It reads very much like a form of profession, but as there was no Order at this stage, there could be no Third Order either. Notwithstanding, Dominic accepted these people who gave themselves to the community of the Holy Preaching, very much in the manner of Benedictine oblates. The term ‘Holy Preaching’ is frequently used in these early deeds of gift which refer to “*cunctis fratribus aique sororibus in inonasterio de Prolano*”.

So, in the first ten years at Prouilhe, there were incontrovertibly sisters, preachers, women aspiring to be nuns and lay men and women living within the same enclosed space. We know it was enclosed and not just houses in different parts of the same village, as another deed of gift dated 1211 tells us of one Isarn Bola, who donates to the Holy Preaching a house within the enclosure of Prouilhe. The gifts of these early years were in fact many and varied: pieces of land, cattle, and vineyards, one with the specific purpose of providing income to purchase oil for the sanctuary lamp.

When Dominic moved his centre of activity away from the Lauragais region to Toulouse in 1215, he left behind him a rapidly expanding monastery: by 1258 the limit was fixed at 100, in 1269 at 140, and in 1283, 160.

A significant stage in the history of Prouilhe and important for assessing the place of the nuns in the Order is the bull of Innocent III, dated October 8, 1215. This is the first papal document that marks the move towards the setting up of an Order of Preachers and it concerns both the brothers and the nuns. This document begins with greetings and apostolic blessing addressed *priori, fratribus et monialibus domus Sanctae Mariae de Pruliano*. And so here is the pope himself calling the ‘converted ladies’ nuns and taking them under his protection, along with the preachers. And yet this was not the standard document for recognition of religious communities – the bull *Religiosam vitam eligentibus* such as would be issued for the friars later. On the one hand the property rights of Prouilhe are confirmed, but it is referred to as *domus*, house, and not *monasterio*.

A certain number of questions are still left open in 1215 and 1216. “Dominic was essentially a pragmatist, in no undue hurry to tie up all the loose ends in some great scheme.” (6) No provision is made for the lay people at this stage. What used to be known as the Third Order was not to come into being officially at this stage.

All of this brings us to the question that surfaces from time to time: given the fairly mixed situation during the first ten years at Prouilhe, with sisters, preachers and lay people living on the same site, albeit separately, did Dominic actually intend to found an enclosed monastery of contemplative nuns and a

religious Order for men, or did he actually aspire to something different, something that would have been even more radically new than the Order of Preachers that came down to us, and that this more radical option was turned down by the Pope. This idea was first mooted by the German Dominican Scheeben in the 1920's. Simon Tugwell has tackled it on several occasions. In 1991 he considered the possibility that the Holy Preaching could not be recognised by the Church as an entity, but only in its component parts, i.e., on the one hand a monastery of enclosed nuns and on the other an Order of Friars Preachers. But in his most recent article in *Archivum* of 2004 he states that there is actually no proof that Dominic asked the Pope for anything other than what was granted by Rome. Nonetheless, it is interesting to speculate, and the very fact that all the questions about the future of the preachers and the nuns were not all neatly tied up on the spot in 1215, is at least grounds for thinking that the situation was viewed as unusual – which indeed it was – and that in any case time was needed to get things right.

To my mind, Scheeben was possibly asking the wrong questions: even if we have no hard evidence that Dominic was trying to do something revolutionary in terms of canon law or the nature of female religious life, that does not mean that there was nothing new or revolutionary about the enterprise. In a recent television interview a Dominican historian was asked 'And so was St Dominic a revolutionary?' No', came the answer, he was a saint, but with that revolutionary quality common to all saints'. The newness of Dominic's foundation at Prouilhe is surely to be found in the very identity of the first sisters. The radicality of Dominic's vision led him to conceive of a monastery as a work of mercy - *misericordia* - in action. If he converted women who belonged to Cathar convents for 'Perfects', some equivalent form of Catholic religious life, of equal rigour, had to be on offer. And what is more, it had to be free of charge as there could be no dowry provided by Cathar families.

And surely another key element in the newness of Dominic's vision lies in the notion of synergy, of complementarity. Indeed, considering the foundations made during his lifetime, it would seem clear that Dominic was keen for there to be a convent of nuns in fairly close proximity to the convents of friars. We only have to look at the case of Toulouse, where as early as 1215 and the acquisition of the house of Pierre Seilhan, there was at the Porte Arnaud Bernard a hospice intended to accommodate *dominorum conversarum*, converted ladies, exactly the same expression as was used in some early documents concerning Prouilhe. Unfortunately, this hospice disappeared in 1217 in the uprising of Toulouse. Madrid and Rome had convents of both friars and nuns before the death of Dominic, and then there are those unforgettable words of his recorded in the *Chronicles of San Sisto* in which he asked the friars what they thought about building a monastery for nuns in Bologna. After praying, he gave his own opinion which was: "My brothers, we really must build a monastery for the ladies, even if it means delaying the building our own". Unfortunately this principle of separate but 'neighbouring' communities of friars and nuns seems to have been lost sight of fairly rapidly after the death of the founder. Some early monasteries, even in France (Montargis founded in 1245 and Saint-Pardoux in 1293, for example) were established in remote locations far from a convent of friars, and on the contrary, Paris, an important Dominican centre from the outset, and even Toulouse, had to wait until the 17th century before seeing a monastery of nuns of the Order founded within its walls.

As far as Prouilhe is concerned; Simon Tugwell maintains that Dominic probably was thinking of a classic style of monastic life. It seems probable that he wrote down the customs of the sisters of Prouilhe between 1216 and 1218. And indeed his own letter to the nuns of Madrid written in 1220, not so many years later, expresses what is really a very traditional view of female monastic life.

To return to Prouilhe, the community of preachers on the site was duly erected as a convent of the Order in 1218. That in itself does not mean Prouilhe became a double community, as there continued to be two distinct governments: a prior and a prioress. And yet if there had been no bond, there would have been no point in erecting a convent of friars on the site of the monastery. The link was a) historical, as both were founded by St Dominic, and b) institutional, centred on the successor of St Dominic, that is, the figure of the Master of the Order. This is perhaps the key to understanding the notion of 'doubleness' inherent in our Order. Friars and sisters are linked not by a common authority locally – their systems of government being separate and different – but the link is established via the Master in a form of vow that was common. I say was, because in the Constitutions of the Nuns published in 1930 by Master Gillet, their form of profession was changed from its centuries old version, according to which the nuns made profession to their prioress as representative of the Master. In the new version, profession is made to the prioress and to the master – so unfortunately we now find ourselves in a *filioque* kind of situation, which

will doubtless be resolved in due course. That is one of the consolations of having 800 years of history – it makes all things relative.

If Dominic had seen responsibility for sisters as a handicap to the preaching mission, as later friars did in the famous *cura monialium* disputes in the 1230's, he would surely have organised things differently from the outset, and done everything possible to incorporate the sisters independently into an already existing religious Order as soon as possible. As we have seen, this was an option that he did not take up at the time. In 1235 the sisters of Prouilhe protested to Pope Gregory IX about the withdrawal of friars from their monastery. The pope, obviously reflecting the tradition the nuns had communicated to him, wrote in a bull of April 1236 that "as previously. out of respect for the memory of Blessed Dominic... friars are to take care of the nuns of St Mary of Prouilhe, who were the first to be drawn into your Order by your holy founder, after he had caught them in the nets of his doctrine and drawn them away from the turbulences of the world to the blessed shores where their souls delight in the suavity of eternal rest..." This papal bull is interesting in two respects: the reference to Dominic catching the first sisters in the nets of his doctrine would seem to speak in favour of the idea of their being converted from heresy by his preaching. Secondly, the expression "drawn into your Order" is unambiguous: the nuns are part of the same Order of Preachers as the friars, and hence their care can in no way be considered as an outside activity'.

So what does the early history of Prouilhe tell us of Dominic's newness of vision of an Order embracing both friars and nuns in one common mission? As Franz Muller, the provincial of Switzerland has said: "In realising his project, Dominic shows himself not only capable of distinguishing between what is essential and what is accidental. but also of learning from experience." He was both audacious and prudent. The status of Prouilhe as a refuelling depot, with its early practicalities such as hospitality during preaching missions or financial support of the friars in their mendacity would seem to be only a partial answer. From what we have seen, the monastery clearly had an apostolic purpose in its own right: it became directly implicated in Dominic's work of salvation by the very fact that it admitted converts from heresy. And at the same time, the prayers of the sisters were complementary to the preaching mission in that they were in themselves efficacious for the salvation of souls. These women of the Order were part of its mission from the outset, and by no means just a pious adjunct. This same consideration can be applied by extension to the laity, who, as we have seen, was indeed already present at Prouilhe from 1207 onwards, even if they were not officially recognised in 1215 but in due course granted a rule by Master Munio de Zamora in 1285.

Thus it is surely not an exaggeration to suggest that Prouilhe is not just the first fruits of the Order, in so far as it was the site of its first religious community, but rather that the Holy Preaching laid the foundations for what has been called – and indeed called for the centuries – the Dominican family. The term is used quite unselfconsciously in the 17th and 19 centuries). These are surely grounds enough for refuting those sceptics who like to see in the notion of a Dominican family some invention of the late 20 century.

Perhaps an even more challenging lesson to be learnt from the history of the early years of Prouilhe is the idea of accepting to be in a process of becoming, which may go on for some time. This necessarily means accepting a degree of fragility, vulnerability. This is how the first sisters of Prouilhe lived. For what we are to become is rarely fixed at the outset; we become it, we shape it ourselves day by day, in the daily activities that confer meaning on our existences. (7)

I'd like to conclude with a quotation from our brother cardinal Yves Congar who wrote: "History teaches us not to be surprised at anything, but rather to expect that anything might happen, because it already did. Its realism becomes a healthy relativism. Sometimes we discover that what we took to be a tradition going back to time immemorial dates from only the day before yesterday. And we learn through examples from the past that what is new often gets a bad reception, simply because it surprises or upsets habits. History is not edifying, it's a school of virility." (8)

My personal conviction is that what we can learn from the history of Prouilhe belongs much more to the present than to the past.

(1) Simon TUGWELL, 'Friars and Canons: the earliest Dominicans in *Monastic Studies, the continuity of tradition*, Bangor, 1991. p. 195

(2) Ibid.

- (3) Simon TUGWELL, "For Whom was Prouilhe founded?", *APP*, 2004, p.
- (4) Simon TUGWELL, 'Friars and Canons: the earliest Dominicans in *Monastic Studies, the continuity of tradition*', Bangor, 1991. p. 194
- (5) Simon TUGWELL, MOPH XXVII, 1998. *Bernardi Guidonis, Scripta de Sancto Dominico*, p. 73.
- (6) TUGWELL, Friars and Canons: the earliest Dominicans' in *Monastic Studies, the continuity of tradition*, Bangor, 1991, p. 205.
- (7) Cf Yves BURDELOT, *Devenir humain*, Cerf, 2003, p.101.
- (8) Yves CONGAR, *Ce que gagne la culture de la foi à la connaissance de l'histoire*, dans Cahiers Saint Dominique. n°, 2005, p. 25-26.