

**Letter to the Order of Preachers from
Friar Buenaventura García Paredes, OP, Master General
Christmas, 1926**

(Translated from Spanish by Helena Sause, OP)

Re: the Dominican Women Religious

1. The Spirit of the Family

Although there is much in my letter sent to the entire Order along with the Ocaña General Chapter Acts of which applies principally to the friars who are my special charge, it is equally appropriate for our Nuns and Sisters. In order to fulfill my obligation I am sending them this letter, adding some words about the spirit of the family in which all of us should be closely united, as descendants of the our founder, Saint Dominic.

All who have received holy Baptism have received a divine heritage in receiving the spirit of Jesus Christ. By this spirit we constitute one family of which he is the Head. The Apostle Paul teaches that the same spirit is created in each one of us according to the measure of Christ and the perfection of the mystical body, the Church.

The founders of religious orders have received this spirit abundantly in a specific way within the Church. As Abraham was elected to be father of many nations, they participate in a spiritual fatherhood, and by a spiritual generation transmit to others, bringing birth to religious families who continue the work of their founders within the Church.

In this consists the spiritual heritage of each religious order. Each religious by his/her religious profession as disciples of the founder are seen in the same outward clothing (habit), form their interior religious life in the observance of the fundamental norms received from their founder and constitute within the great Christian family, a smaller special family. Each religious family possesses as an inheritance, the spirit of the founder and of his/her life, and thanks to him/her conserves this gift through time in the community which has a specific and indelible character which distinguishes it from other religious families.

2. Unity in its Variety

Even if many and diverse ministries of our Dominican Sisters are in Dominic's spirit as they work for the good of their neighbor, not all of our Dominican Sisters are under the immediate jurisdiction of the Order nor does their governing depend on the Master General. However because there is one Order there should be substantial union among all the branches of the Dominican tree. We are truly daughters and sons of one common Father. We congratulate ourselves on this spiritual inheritance, and we wish to transmit a sacred familial heritage to all those behind us that they may have the apostolic spirit and in their turn, will multiply the yield of abundant fruits.

The great variety of Congregations and Institutes extant in the Order do not in any way weaken this union of origin, nor alter the nature of blood relationship, nor destroy all that the family has in common, nor impede the integral links of filial obedience to the head of the great

Dominican family. The unique blood which flows through the veins of the whole body of the Order, flowing in a spiritual and religious life, keeps alive the inexhaustible and vibrant spirit Dominic. As the sons of Dominic fully enjoy a distinct consciousness of their Dominican sonship, so too should all the members and branches of the Order be united as a true family and maintain at least a moral obedience, to the leadership of the Order, the Master General, as the successor of our holy Father Saint Dominic.

3. Its Effects

The request from various Dominican congregations for a decree of incorporation and affiliation to the Order which the Master General has granted according to their apostolic spirit and the various needs of the times, produces an effect which recognizes their unity of life with our contemplative nuns and with the Brethren. It also has a secondary effect proceeding from the first: family ties to the diverse branches and an obedience of all members of the Order to the Master General. Over the space of seven centuries there has accumulated a rich treasure of grace and merits, fruits we have recognized and ought to conserve and augment in order to leave an enriched treasury for future generations.

More than 5,500 Brethren, scattered over the whole globe in various convents or houses and in foreign missions among the unbaptized, work in the sacred ministry of souls. Forgetting past tribulations and struggling with present nightmares, they apply themselves each day with more fervor to the regular observance and they exert themselves ardently that study may flourish more and more, and they demonstrate their apostolic heart in the struggle with error and vice.

More than 4,600 contemplative nuns dwell willingly within monastery walls, while with lives of expiation and prayer for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, they suffer a poverty of life's necessities and patiently endure the forgetfulness and scorn of their contemporaries who do not comprehend such a life-style.

Our apostolic Sisters are more than 24,000 members, distributed among various congregations and institutes, and exercise their multiple works in many countries, equally among Catholics, Protestants and the unbaptized, inflamed with the zeal of charity, and powerfully responding to every kind of corporal and spiritual need of their neighbor.

If the total number of the entire Dominican family were united even more closely, it undoubtedly would augment the Order with a magnificent vigor. No one group would suffer any type of diminishment, but on the contrary, all would prosper greatly. As the activity of Dominicans became more fruitful it would be more closely united to the self-sacrifice of the contemplative nuns. As stronger effectiveness was achieved, the cooperation among the Dominican Sisters would become more intense.

From the beginnings of our government there has been a desire to achieve close union. In Jesus, Mary, Queen of the Rosary, and our father Dominic, we firmly hope that in spite of ordinary difficulties this desire may be fulfilled. From the moment in which we became an Order, one and the same spirit vivified us; love for the common good of the Order beats in all Dominican hearts; the same enthusiasm for the sacred mission received from Dominic is a flame in our hearts, which are unanimous in our desires. The same actions, even though diversified

according to the diversity of each immediate need, manifest the same external character and homogeneity from the unique spirit of the whole Order.

4. Means to Intensify It

As far as the means which must be applied in order to increase mutual relationships among the branches and members of the Order in pursuing practically this closer and more fruitful unity and in conformity with what was prescribed by the Ocaña General Chapter, I have determined the following:

1.1 Publish the Constitutions of our Nuns as soon as possible, after obtaining the approval of the Holy See, edited in conformity with our Constitutions as much as it can be applied to the Nuns. The same General Chapter ordered that the title the nuns' Constitutions be entitled *The Constitutions of the Nuns of the Holy Order of Preachers*, without any other added title, such as *of the Second Order*, which has been used for some time without any real reason based on the law or the tradition of the Order.

1.2 Solicit the Holy See that the Master General of the Order may himself or his delegates, make canonical visitations to the convents of nuns who are not subjects to the Order's immediate jurisdiction and those who request such a visit.

Such visitations will not diminish the jurisdiction of the local Ordinary, and will only set out to conserve and encourage a regular observance in the spirit of the Constitutions and good customs in tune with the spirit of the Order received from the holy founder and confirmed by tradition. Thus the true and genuine spirit may not decrease nor deviate because of an influx of regulations and customs or usages foreign to the Order. The Master General will report to the Sacred Congregation of Religious about his canonical visitations.

1.3 Arrange with the Holy See that the Master General or his delegates may make a canonical visitation every five years to all the institutes of the active Sisters who are affiliated within the Order and who have pontifical or diocesan right. The unique purpose of such a visit will be that the institutes may remain healthy and conserve the true spirit of the Order.

1.4 All the institutes of Dominican Sisters, either of pontifical or diocesan right, who are affiliated within the Order, may use in their documents the Order's proper seal, adding the proper emblem of each institute. Likewise the Sisters belonging to those institutes may add to their first and last names the words appropriate to the Order, such as *of the Order of Preachers*, or more briefly, the initials *O.P.*, signing their name as: *Sister N.N., O.P.*

1.5 In order to more easily effect the practice of these means and so that we may provide with proper diligence what refers to the preservation of the family ties and encourage the closer union of the many branches of the Order, to obtain and maintain what is convenient for all, we are instituting in our General Curia, a permanent Commission, composed of three of our *socii*, as voting members, and a Secretary, who is also the Secretary of the General Council. The convents of our nuns and the Institutes of the active Sisters scattered all over the world will be able to have recourse to this Commission. Those who form said Commission are the following:

Friar Luis Nolan, Provincial of Lithuania;
Friar Antonino Ricagno, Provincial of Ricagno;
Friar Juan Casas, Provincial of Greece;
Friar Manual Montoto;

the first three as voting members and the last as Secretary.

And now at the end of this letter, I pray earnestly with all of you, our beloved Sisters and Daughters, that you receive this letter in the spirit in which it was written, with brotherly affection and fatherly love, asking you at all times for the help of your prayers for me, for our *socii*, and for the whole Order.

[Friar Buenaventura García Paredes, OP]