

THE VOCATION OF AN ORDER

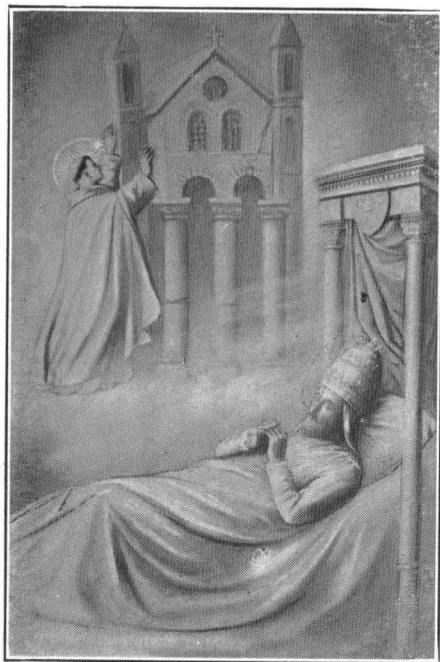
SOCIETIES, like individuals, always have special vocations. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of the Church. Her vocation is the salvation of every soul. She is to be until the end of time a mighty river carrying every drop from the mountain peaks and valleys of creation into the placid ocean of eternal bliss. And as an incomparable leader she has encouraged the more valiant of her children to band together and labor with her in an especial and determined manner for the conquest of souls. There is no portion of the Church's history more interesting, more inspiring, than those pages which tell of the birth and spread of the societies known to us as Orders and Congregations.

Now, St. Paul is very explicit in telling us that we have a double vocation. First of all, he assures us that we are called to be saints. This, then, is our general or common vocation. But in striving to fulfil it we most surely arrive at a knowledge of and correspondence with our specific vocation. So with the religious Orders. They all have one great end. Their common vocation is identical with that of the Mother Church which nourishes them. But, like individuals, they, too, have been assigned special fields wherein to labor. Hence, the Church has been compared to a garden, and the Orders and Confraternities that multiplied so rapidly in her fertile soil have been likened to flowers and trees. All draw their sustenance from the same earth, grow strong under the sunlight of God's love and the rains of His mercy. No two are alike, yet their very variety makes beautiful the garden. Some grew as fair, pale blossoms, shed quickly their perfume, and died. Others—and one such is the Order whose vocation we shall consider—taking deeper root, have grown into mighty trees, the shade of whose branches has spread into the garden's furthest corners.



**The Blessed Virgin Presenting
St. Dominic to Her Son**

Over and above this special calling, one may distinguish two other vocations. The first is usually the preparation for the second. For example, St. Peter was first called to be an Apostle. His second voca-



**Pope Innocent III Seeing in Vision
St. Dominic Sustaining the Church**

tion came when he was made head of Christ's Church on earth. Lacordaire's first vocation was to be a Friar Preacher. His second was to bring back to France his own and other banished religious Orders. For clarity's sake, let us call the first the primary vocation, the other the secondary. Now, the primary vocation of St. Dominic and his first disciples was to crush the Albigensian heresy. Their secondary vocation was a wider and more permanent one. For from their first call to defend the Church against a specific heresy they have merited to become her watchmen, whose special duty it is to guard all avenues against the approach of error. The Order's vocation is unmistakable, since it is emblazoned upon its escutcheon. Its motto is "Truth," and the reason of its existence is to spread and defend it.

What a vocation! Has a more noble one ever been given to any society in the Church than the guarding of Truth—the untarnished jewel, the greatest treasure, the legacy of Christ? Our Lord calls Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life, and He will live in His Church until the end of time. Is it not indeed a sublime call to stand about Him, ready to shield His person from the shafts and darts of His enemies? Truth—the keystone of the Church's arch! Well do those hostile to her know that if they could but loosen it the arch would fall! And what a singular privilege do those enjoy who are called upon to be its special defenders!

The call is indeed a mighty one, but those to whom it has been given are mindful of its magnitude. Crusaders of centuries, they have never wearied in the age-long conflict, for they have felt that "God willed" it for them to save the sacred vessels of truth from the unholy touch of heretics and unbelievers. Knights of Truth, they have never lost vision of the Holy Grail that led them ever and holds them still.

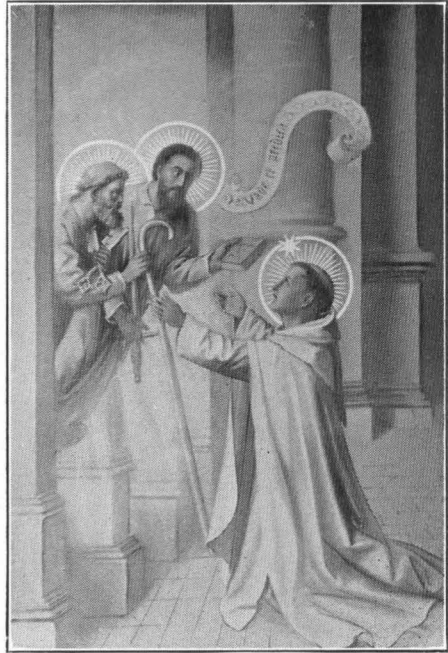
Now, as truth has always triumphed, so, too, have they who have been most valiant in her defense. With a small band the Order began

its march against the cohorts of heresy; but as men looked upon its stalwart sons and heard their battle-cry, they flocked to it and begged to be clothed with the white habit—which signified as much purity of doctrine as purity of life. Minds that were seeking the truth; hearts that were beating in unison with its sole custodian, the Mother Church of the ages; souls thirsting for the reward promised to those persevering in the ways of truth—all sought to cast their lot with Dominic's children. From far and near the people hastened to look upon these strange men who preached, as other apostles, the message of truth. Her sons came from all countries to sit in the great universities and sift the wheat of truth from the chaff of error for feebler and younger minds.

Others there were, again, who looked across the waters from their cell windows, burning with a mighty desire to reveal the great King's secrets to the benighted pagans of distant lands. And some, indeed, set sail, and found unknown harbors upon whose shores swarmed men ignorant of all truth. To them the newcomers proclaimed it with apostolic power, hesitating not so much as one moment to seal their message, if need be, with their life's blood.

Every divine vocation has a divine approbation, even though it be not necessarily a miraculous one. For no angel ran before St. Paul heralding him as the Apostle of the Gentiles. Yet who is there that will deny him this prerogative? Right here we may ask for the sign of divine approval of Dominic's society, which has done such great works in Holy Mother Church. Where is the proof that heavenly councils have approved the friars of St. Dominic as the apostles of truth? We nowhere read that such an announcement was ever made to the world by an angel. Yet, judging from the fruits of their labors, they have most surely received it. It would take volumes to record the number and variety of the proofs of divine favor. We have space here to draw attention only to a few.

First, then, there is St. Dominic himself. The vision which was granted to his mother, Blessed Johanna, before his birth—of a watchdog carrying in his mouth a flaming torch—was a perfect foreshadow-



"Go and Preach"

ing of his future vocation. His whole life shows him to have been the Lord's watch-dog, jealous to defend His truth. In his mouth he carried



St. Dominic Preaching to the Albigenses—Dominican Church, Naples

the flaming light of Christ's Gospel, which illumined the way for those sitting in the outer darkness. A wolfish heresy was that of the Albigenses, which stalked, hungry for the souls of men, throughout the

country, until Dominic received from Mary, the Mother of God, in the Rosary a powerful weapon of defense.

And can we not look upon the coming of St. Thomas Aquinas in the formative period of the Order's history as another mark of divine approbation? For it must have been the messengers of truth who whispered in his ear that he should cast his lot forever with an Order which, though young and despised by the great ones of the earth, was even then the Order of Truth. The Angelical Doctor's whole temper of mind grew naturally out of the dominant ethos of his Order. He would never have been quite the same in any other Order. Truth, the pure spring of knowledge, he thirsted for. As a child he had frequently lisped to his nurse: "What is God?" As a Dominican, he answered to all the ages: "He is the first Truth by nature and by word—in essendo ac dicendo" (IIa IIae, Art. I). Truth, the object of the intellect, and therefore the ultimate good of man, as he clearly laid down in his "Summa contra Gentiles," was ever the end of his quest.

Though Thomas is the greatest, he is not by any means the only one who proves the heaven-ordained vocation of the Dominican Order. Others by the score preceded him, envied by all contemporary scholars. For example, there is his master Albertus Magnus, who approached nearer than any other to a like intimacy with truth. He it was who led the young mind of Thomas to the very threshold of the sanctuary of truth, nor felt any jealousy rise up within him when he saw his young Sicilian pupil pass on where his feet could never tread. And since St. Thomas' day, what an innumerable band has stood in the public places and at the crossroads, feeding the hungry multitudes with the substantial bread of knowledge.

But truth also demands sacrifice. Everything is worthless in comparison with it. Even life, which is the best we have, is a trifling thing to give in exchange for it. And the Order, whose business it is to protect and preach it, has sealed its vocation—as nearly all great vocations and great undertakings have ever been sealed—with the blood of its martyrs. They are, of all its children, its most favored ones. One, St. Peter of Verona, wrote upon the sand with his blood, "Credo!" Perhaps no Order in the Church has a longer bed-roll of martyrs. During the first century of the Order's existence, no fewer than twenty-seven thousand Dominicans laid down their lives for Christ in the foreign missions of Asia and Africa. In our own times Dominicans have dyed their white habits in their own blood, to be laid as a precious offering at the feet of the Master.

A vocation, as we well know, may be lost. Hence the heroic efforts the saints have always made in order to persevere in their calling. We see even the great St. Paul trembling, lest in the final reckoning he should be found wanting. Dominicans, knowing the rigors of their vocation, have not shrunk from the means necessary to succeed and persevere in it. The means they have chosen are three: "Laudare, Benedicere, et Praedicare,"—to praise, to bless and to preach. The first two sanction in the Dominican scheme all the observances of a conventual life. From blessing Divine Truth in their cells, in their studies, in their hourly tasks, the friars pass naturally to choir, where together in holy chants, in the presence of Truth Itself, they praise

Truth, and with their hearts still fired with zeal for it, they go forth to preach it to others. "Order of Preachers" a Vicar of Christ christened them, and by this title are they known to all men. In St. Hyacinth we see the apostle of the whole Polish nation; in St. Vincent Ferrer, the Angel of the Judgment; in Savonarola, the much maligned reformer of worldly-minded Florence; in Lacordaire, the modern apostle of atheistic Paris; Monsabre, the man who popularized theology; in Tom



St. Thomas Among the Doctors—Zurbaran

Burke, the fine flower of Irish eloquence, who refuted the calumnies of the historian Froude. All these are only leaders of an unnumbered band who have broken the bread of life to men in the fulness of their Dominican calling. If during the early years of the thirteenth century the Umbria of the "Poor Little Man of Assisi" was as Galilee, then the cloisters of Prouille where the apostolic Dominic and his little band

found the spirit and strength for their apostolate were as the "closed upper room."

Two dogmas of the Catholic Church have ever been the storm centres of the most virulent heresies: the honor given to Mary, the Mother of God, and the Church's teaching regarding the Holy Eucharist. The former heresy was all the more dangerous since it sought to strike the Son through the mother. As doughty champions of Mary's prerogatives, Dominicans can glory in the title "Friars of Mary," which was given them by popular acclaim almost from the beginning.

St. Thomas, aglow with fervor after his night watches with Christ, hidden under the sacramental veils, came forth as another David in defense of the second dogma assailed by the heretics. So well did he write of this "mysterium fidei" that he merited to hear from the lips of the Master Himself His commendation. None has entered deeper into the unfathomable depths of this mystery than the Angel of the Schools. To this day the glories of the hidden Christ are chanted in the words of his immortal hymns.

Then, too, there was another—a child-Dominican—who preached as only saints and children can, without words. Blessed Imelda, finding her heart too small for the greatness of the Divine Presence, let love bear her soul to the limitless heavens, so that as often as the story of her life should be told, it might teach us what our love should be at the Master's coming. The lesson of her life has not been lost, for she has been chosen by the Church as the patron of that train of little ones who come to Christ in their first innocence.

Though our victories in the cause of truth are not all of the past, of the past we can write best. The deeds of the Dominican Order are done and writ, and nothing external can change their import. Future generations, no doubt, will be called upon to record the deeds of the Order to-day, and under God's providence they will be as worthy to live in the minds of men as the glorious achievements of past ages.

—**Brother Joseph, O. P.**



Under Our Lady's Cloak