

DOMINICAN DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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STUDY of the more important devotions in the Church brings to light the gradual development, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, of the treasures of the Church's doctrine. This development is especially noticeable in the history of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Although this devotion did not exist in the Church as a public and universal practice until the seventeenth century when St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a humble Visitation nun, gave it a determined form and object, nevertheless it existed for many centuries as an individual, or at least a private, practice.

From the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, this devotion was everywhere practiced by privileged souls, and the annals of different religious orders, of the Carthusians, Benedictines, Franciscans, and Dominicans, furnish many examples of it. So far very little has been done on the history of the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the Order of Preachers. And today recent authors give little credit to the Dominicans. Yet, from the first century of its existence, the Order of Preachers has concurred vigorously in shaping and developing this devotion. In a recent issue of the "Analecta" of the Order, Fr. Angelus M. Walz, O. P., Archivist-General, contributes a very interesting and scholarly article on the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the Order of Preachers from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. There are many things in this study of Fr. Walz which we believe will be of interest in the readers of "Dominicana." The present article is concerned with the devotion to the Sacred Heart alone, not with devotion to the Wounds, nor to the Pierced Side. We shall consider the devotion as practiced by Dominicans in Germany, Italy, Spain, Peru, France, and Belgium.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, the Beguine Mechtild, a Dominican tertiary, entered the Cistercian monastery of Helfta, in Germany when sixty years of age. Her namesake, St. Mechtilde, and St. Gertrude the Great, equally famous in the history of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, and the annals

of the Friars Preachers, lived in this same monastery as younger nuns. The Beguine Mechtild had visions revealing to her the Sacred Heart of Jesus. When she made them known to her confessor, Friar Henry, a Dominican from the convent of Halle, he immediately ordered her to commit them to writing. She wrote her inspirations on separate sheets of paper, which are since commonly referred to as "The Light of My Divinity." Friars Theodore of Appoldia, and Herman of Leipsig highly esteemed Mechtild's writings and revelations.

One of the most known of the thirteenth century Dominicans is Blessed Albert the Great, reputed for his learning, in the physical sciences, in philosophy, in theology, and in the spiritual life. In his tract on the Eucharist, the peak of his learning and piety, Blessed Albert has a lengthy treatise in which the love of the Heart of God not only is foreshadowed, but very clearly delineated. Thus, he explains the institution of the Eucharist from the all-consuming love with which the Heart of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, burns toward men.

Friar Bernard, O. P., of Brabant, the confessor of St. Liutgard (d. 1246), revised the Life of this Benedictine nun, which had been written by Thomas of Cantimpre, O. P., adding to it the story of the exchange of hearts of Jesus and the nun.

To the efforts of the famous German Dominican mystics, Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso, in promoting the doctrine and practice of mysticism, is due the corresponding increase wrought by them in devotion to the Sacred Heart. John Eckhart, 1260-1327, brings out a new consideration by showing the presence of the Sacred Heart in the Blessed Sacrament. In his mystical teachings on Holy Communion, he speaks of the intimate union by which the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus and the heart of the communicant are joined together.

It would be very easy to gather an abundance of texts on the Heart of Jesus from the sermons and letters of John Tauler (d. 1361). His own extraordinary devotion to the crucified Saviour led him to the Heart of Jesus, and he had little difficulty in moving others to a similar devotion. He excited the faithful by his teaching and preaching to rest with St. John the Apostle on the Heart of Jesus, and to imitate Its virtues of meekness and humility. The Sermons of the "Illuminated Doctor" abound in such examples. The effects of the doctrine and devotion of Tauler remained for a long time after his death, being revived par-

ticularly in the sixteenth century, when, among others, St. Peter Canisius, in 1543, edited the works of Master Tauler.

If devotion to the Sacred Heart is evident in any of the fourteenth century mystics, it is particularly characteristic of Blessed Henry Suso (d. 1366). This is clear from the forcefulness of his preaching, the purity of his love, and the subsequent diffusion of his writings. His "Book of Eternal Wisdom," dictated in the form of colloquies with his pupils, which abounds in more sweet passages of veneration for the Heart of Jesus than the Latin translation of the *Horologium Sapientiae*, was more often transcribed in the Middle Ages than Thomas a' Kempis' "Imitation of Christ" was later circulated. Who could enumerate the vast extent to which the hundred meditations of Suso on the Passion of Christ—so full of reference to the Heart, at once human and divine—were multiplied in convents and other religious houses?

In addition to these most illustrious of the mystics, we may mention three others of less renown: Henry of Louvain (d. 1340), a friend and brother of Tauler in religion, Giselher of Slatheim, and Ludolph of Saxony. Friar Henry, by his counsel, directs the soul to the Heart of Jesus, there to rest and to extinguish its thirst. Friar Giselher, in a sermon delivered at Ehrfurt in 1326, tells his hearers that their thoughts and desires should always be united to the divine Heart of the Saviour. Although Ludolph of Saxony, in later life, left the Dominican Order for the Carthusians, nevertheless we mention him here, since from his first religious training, he carried with him not only his brilliancy of intellect, but also the devotion he acquired to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which devotion he abundantly incorporated in his "Vita Christi."

In concluding the story of the Dominican devotion in Germany, we may say a word about the Dominican nuns. In the middle of the thirteenth century, there were forty convents of nuns in the province of Teutonia. In 1303, when the province was divided, nine monasteries belonged to Saxony, and seventy-two remained in Teutonia. Many testimonies of the devotion to the Sacred Heart practiced by the daughters of St. Dominic are historically evidenced in prayers, biographies, and manuscripts found in their convents, and adorned with various texts concerning the Sacred Heart.

The impression of the Sacred Stigmata granted to St. Francis of Assisi increased, especially in Italy, the devotion to the

Wounds of Christ, particularly to the wound in His side, and from the side of Christ to His Heart. Documents concerning the devotion in the thirteenth century seem to be more explicit with regard to the Friars Minor than with regard to other orders.

More frequent are the accounts which intimate the union of the Seraphic Virgin of Sienna in the fourteenth century with the divine Heart of the Saviour. Friar Thomas Caffarini, O. P., tells us that it often seemed to St. Catherine that she was resting in the arms of Jesus, and that He was pressing her against His Sacred Heart. Blessed Raymond of Capua, in his *Life of St. Catherine* narrates that in 1370 Christ had given His Heart to St. Catherine in exchange for her heart. In her wonderful "*Libro della divina dottrina*," St. Catherine describes the effect of her soul ascending to the side of the crucified Christ, where she discovered the mysteries of her Saviour's Heart. In most of her works, St. Catherine pours forth her love for the Sacred Heart. In her "*Lettere*" she asserts that all the virtues, especially ardent charity, are to be found in the side of the Saviour. Her most devoted disciples, who are particularly famous in the restoration of regular observance in the Order of Preachers, inherited her spirit. Thus, Blessed John Dominic (d. 1419), refers many times to the sweet mysteries of the Heart of Jesus, and in the life of Blessed Matthew Carreri (d. 1470), there is noted a transfixion of his heart which occurred while he was meditating on the Passion before the crucified Saviour.

The ardent soul of Fra Jerome Savonarola (d. 1498), dwelt continually on the charity of the Saviour in his meditations on the suffering Christ, recalling the wounded side and commemorating the intense love of the Heart of Jesus. Blessed Margaret of Savoy (d. 1464), while yet in the married state, dedicated her dying husband to the memory of the Sacred Heart. To Blessed Osanna was communicated in an admirable manner the suffering which the Heart of Jesus had undergone. St. Catherine de Ricci (d. 1589), a nun of Prati, had an unusual devotion to the wounds of Christ, especially to His Sacred Heart; wherefore she is sometimes numbered among the souls dedicated in an especial manner to the Sacred Heart. Great praise is due to Fr. Ignatius of Nente, O. P. (d. 1648), of the Convent of San Marco, Florence, because of the devotion he promoted to the Sacred Heart both by his preaching and by his writings. He translated the works of Blessed Henry Suso from the Latin into

his native Italian, and thus was led by Blessed Henry himself to the Sacred Heart. Some believe him responsible for a certain painting on the ceiling of the library in the Convent of St. Dominic at Fiesole, representing the Heart of Jesus, and bearing the inscription: "I shall die in my nest, and as a palm tree shall multiply my days." (Job, xxix, 18).

Ven. Louis of Grenada (d. 1588), is easily the leader among Spanish mystical and ascetical writers of the Order of Preachers in the sixteenth century. Many texts are found in his writings referring to the Sacred Heart. His works met with unique success and bear witness to the devotion of Louis for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. If we turn our attention to the Spanish possessions in the New World, especially in Lima, Peru, we witness that most sweet flower of sanctity, St. Rose, entirely inebriated with the Cross of Christ. Not only did the figure of the Heart appear depicted on Rose's dress, fully and skilfully outlined, but also the holy virgin heard the voice of her Spouse saying to her: "Show Me thy heart." Shortly after, on Palm Sunday, 1617, Jesus again addressed her, saying, "Rose of My heart, be My spouse."

The relation of Rose to the Heart of Jesus is not limited by these testimonies merely to her mystical spousal; for the Heart of Jesus was, for St. Rose, the author of all the virtues. This is clear from certain manuscripts which explain the grades of the love of Rose cooperating with the charity of God for men. Although it is not certain that these manuscripts were compiled or published by the holy virgin, yet they are undoubtedly an echo of the inception of the affective virtues in St. Rose. One of these folios shows, under a representation of the Holy Trinity, three series of hearts distinguished by various allegorical inscriptions. Another of these manuscripts shows in the center three hearts, in which the effects of the divine bounty to St. Rose are expressed. Suitable inscriptions indicate that God had pierced the heart of His servant, had inflamed it with divine love, and had made His abode there. A representation of the Child Jesus, and of the Cross of the Saviour, found in these manuscripts, indicate sufficiently that the discussion is about the heart of Jesus Christ, and not about divine love in general.

Owing to the lack of research on the history of special devotions among the brothers and sisters of the Order of Preachers in France, documents are rare concerning the devotion to the

Sacred Heart. We shall enumerate a few cases which are more prominent. Fr. Peter Giraldel, O. P., 1575-1633, entrusted with the direction of novices, urged his disciples to dwell on the Heart of Jesus every Friday. We read in the singular life of the Ven. Agnes of Jesus, of the monastery of Langeac, 1602-1634, that she experienced in some way in her own heart the burning wounds of the Heart of Jesus; wherefore she was thought worthy to receive the Sacred Stigmata in an invisible manner. However, there is lacking in her biography, any mention of the sweet spiritual conversations with the Heart of Jesus, which is found more explicitly and more frequently in other mystics of the Order. The Most Rev. Hyacinth M. Cormier, O. P., thus describes for us the pious practice cultivated by Mother Marie Gabrielle de Jarente, a professed nun in the monastery of St. Praxedes, 1638-1707: "Mother Marie Gabrielle de Jarente felt that Jesus had lovingly loaned her His Heart for a cell, and she endeavored to use It in a manner worthy of the divine Lender."

Fr. Vincent Hensberg, O. P. (d. 1634), an indefatigable author of pious meditations, in a work entitled "Viridarium Marianum," edited for the first time at Antwerp in 1615, considers the tender workings of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the following prayer: "O most lovable Lord Jesus, all praise and thanksgiving be to Thee, for the wounds of Thy most sweet heart. In this wound, I beseech Thee, pardon whatever I have done against Thee from an evil will or a perverted intention. I offer to Thee my heart that Thou may so unite it to Thy heart that I may in all things seek Thee with a pure intention, and may have no other will but Thine. Amen."

The superiors of the Friars Preachers have always encouraged devotion to the Sacred Heart. Owing to the length of this paper, we shall not tax the patience of our readers further by enumerating a list of the later Master Generals of the Order as well as the Acts of General Chapters encouraging its members in their devotion to the Sacred Heart. We shall conclude by saying that the Most Rev. Hyacinth M. Cormier, master general from 1904 to 1916, gave clear evidence of his personal devotion, and that of his order, to the Sacred Heart, when he caused to be painted over the high altar in the chapel of the Collegio Angelico, the residence of the General of the Order in Rome, a representation of the divine Saviour, as Master of the Apostles, bearing His Sacred Heart before His breast.