

THE DOMINICAN LITURGY

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HE earliest historical note on the Dominican liturgy is found among the works of Humbert of Romans, fifth Master General of the Order of Preachers. In his *Expositio super Constitutiones* he writes: "It must be understood that in the first days of the Order there was great variety in the Office,¹ and therefore one Office was compiled, that there might be uniformity everywhere. In the course of time however four brethren from four Provinces were commissioned to put it in better order, which indeed they did and their arrangement was confirmed. But as there were yet some things therein to be corrected, another commission, approved by three Chapters, was given to Master Humbert."²

In keeping with the tenor of this notice, it is customary to distinguish four periods in the evolution of the Dominican liturgy. Prior however to the first period of "great variety," of which Humbert speaks, some liturgical uniformity existed among the first disciples of St. Dominic, for a while at least. If the early brethren did not celebrate the Office solemnly when, in April, 1215, they first began "to conform themselves to the customs of religious," they certainly did so after the summer of 1216, when the conventual church of S. Romain in Toulouse was made over to them. But the rite they followed is unknown. The rites current at Osma, or Toulouse, or among the Premonstratensions have been suggested, all with more or less probability, but in default of any certain document, we can only conjecture on the matter.

At any rate, on August 15, 1217, St. Dominic dispersed his first disciples throughout Europe to propagate the newly approved Order and its mission of doctrinal preaching, and thence, it is agreed, dates the first period in the evolution of our liturgy, the period of "great variety." Each of the little bands that departed for Madrid, Paris and Rome carried with it, no doubt,

¹ Here, and in what follows, *Office* is to be understood in the wide sense of the word, so as to include the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

² B. Humberti de Romanis. *Opera. De vita regulari*, II, 152 (ed. Berthier).

copies of the Rule and of the "customs of a stricter life" which had been adopted. And it seems right to surmise that, in the interests of uniformity, the first Dominicans agreed to observe the rite which up to that time had been followed, provided however that in so doing they should not be acting counter to the customs in vogue in the districts where they might find welcome. Otherwise they would be giving occasion to the faithful of scandal or admiration. To understand this proviso thoroughly, it would be necessary to review what is known of the causes and extent of liturgical variety in the Middle Ages. Here however we must content ourselves with observing that, although the Roman rite was substantially adhered to, manifest and perplexing variety in accidentals was universal and taken for granted. The liturgist Durandus, writing in the thirteenth century, remarks: "Almost every church has its proper observances, and gives vent to its own devotion, and this is considered neither reprehensible nor absurd."³ Neither can we relate here the phenomenal growth of the Order. It is enough to remark that in 1221, only four years after the dispersal of the brethren, St. Dominic presided over a General Chapter at Bologna at which eight Provinces, embracing some sixty convents, were represented. Given on the one hand such a liturgical milieu and on the other a rapidly increasing and widely dispersed number of religious, conforming themselves to the liturgical customs peculiar to their region, the "great variety" spoken of by Humbert becomes readily intelligible.

Now had St. Dominic founded a monastic organization, composed of independent monasteries and monks who vowed stability to the convent of their profession, such a state of affairs would have been sufferable. However our holy Patriarch rather had in mind a highly centralized institute, a band of apostles whose field of activity was to be coterminous with the ends of the earth. This being so, it is clear to what great inconvenience this diversity in rites gave rise when the brethren, in their capacity as itinerant preachers, passed from one diocese or region to another. Neither is it hard to imagine what perplexity and confusion must have reigned when brethren from all parts of Europe assembled for a General Chapter. Such disorder was intolerable; it endangered the unity of the still young Order, "and therefore," in the words of Humbert, "one Office was compiled that there might be uniformity everywhere."

³ *Rationale divinatorum Officiorum*. In proœmio.

Unfortunately Humbert says no more. His words are none the less precious, for we have no other certain knowledge about this second period in the evolution of our liturgy. The precise dates of the work of compilation and the identity of those to whom the work was entrusted are unknown to us. However it is generally agreed that the task of unification was begun during the life-time of St. Dominic, that is before 1221. Father Mortier, O.P., cannot be far wrong when he writes: "It is legitimate to think and to say that among the numerous questions which, the chroniclers briefly tell us, the Fathers of the first General Chapter in 1220 discussed with St. Dominic, the liturgy had an important place. The contrary would be unlikely. To establish the perfect unity of the Order, the grand lines of which were sketched by this Chapter, it was entirely necessary to establish liturgical unity."⁴ It is customary to date its completion to the term of office (1222-1237) of Blessed Jordan of Saxony, the immediate successor of St. Dominic as Master General of the Order. It may have been ready as early as 1228. At any rate it was approved before 1233, for among the *Acta* of the General Chapter held at Bologna in that year, we read this ordination, which seems to take for granted a uniform Breviary: "We desire that Novices who, after paying for their habits, have enough money to buy a Bible and a Breviary, should do so."⁵

Unfortunately no certain manuscript of this first monument of our Dominican liturgy has come down to us. The so-called Breviary of St. Dominic, with its many additions, substitutions, corrections and erasures, preserved in the Archives of the Order at Rome, is considered to be neither the original manuscript nor a transcription of it.⁶ Another manuscript Breviary, also preserved at Rome, the *Breviarium manuscriptum saeculi XIII*, is more of a problem, but Father Rousseau, O.P., who has examined it thoroughly,⁷ is of the opinion that it dates to 1243 and that "more probably it is not the original manuscript, but a later and somewhat emended transcription of it."⁸

This compiled Office was received in the Order until 1244, whence opens the third period of our early liturgical history. It would seem that the compilation was not satisfactory on all

⁴ *La Liturgie Dominicaine*, I, 14.

⁵ *Acta Capitulorum Generalium*, I, 4. (ed. Reichert).

⁶ Cfr. *Analecta sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum* (AOP), XVII, 719, 720.

⁷ Cfr. AOP, XVII, 744-766.

⁸ AOP, XVII, 744.

sides, which is scarcely surprising when one reflects on the enormity of the task it implied. Again it must be remembered that customs dear to the minds or hearts of some necessarily had to be sacrificed in the interests of uniformity, and no doubt it was no simple matter to curb the free-going liturgical spirit of the time. Besides, errors in transcription were bound to creep in. At all events the General Chapter held at Bologna in 1244 ordered the definitors coming to the next Chapter at Cologne in 1245 to bring with them copies of the liturgical books in use in their respective Provinces, "in order that the Office may be put in accord."⁹ Apparently, on comparing the books from the different Provinces, great discrepancy was still found in the Office, for the Chapter commissioned "four of the brethren from France, England, Lombardy and Germany to come together in the convent at Angers, and there to correct, put in accord and supply defects in the text, chant and rubrics of the night and day Office."¹⁰ This revision, entrusted to the four brethren, whose identity is entirely unknown to us, was formally introduced at the next Chapter, held at Paris in 1246, approved by that at Montpellier in 1247 and confirmed, thus becoming . . . in the Order, by the Chapter held at Paris in 1248.¹¹ This revision, known as the first revision, or the revision of Angers, was completed in part at least before 1249.

Despite the formal confirmation of the Order, this first revision of the four brethren was still displeasing to many. That there should still be discrepancies and errors in so monumental a task is scarcely to be wondered at. At any rate so serious were the complaints lodged against the "manifold discord in the Divine Office," that the General Chapter held at London in 1250 again commissioned the four brethren to repair to the convent at Metz and recast their revision.¹² The new arrangement, known as the second revision or the revision of Metz, was ready when the next Chapter met at Metz in 1251. This time however the Capitular Fathers proceeded more cautiously, and, enacting no formal legislation, simply ordered that all should receive the latest revision and bring their books into conformity with it.¹³ The Chapter held at Bologna in the following year did however introduce formal legislation,¹⁴ which would seem to indicate

⁹ Cfr. *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 29.

¹⁰ *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 33.

¹¹ Cfr. *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 35, 36, 39, 41.

¹² Cfr. *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 53-54.

¹³ Cfr. *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 60.

that the revision was satisfactory, but the approbation and confirmation of two succeeding Chapters, necessary to make it law in the Order, were never forthcoming, and so ends suddenly the third period in the evolution of our liturgy, the period of the Angers and Metz revisions by the four unknown brethren.

No Chapter was celebrated in 1253, due to the death of John of Wildeshausen, fourth Master General of the Order, but one did meet at Buda in 1254 and elected Humbert of Romans as his successor. As Provincial of the Roman Province, Humbert had shown great zeal and skill in unifying the Office, and later on, as Provincial of the French Province, a Lectionary, compiled by him, had been approved for the whole Order. Perhaps the work of the four brethren was not all that might be desired; perhaps it was simply the personal ascendancy of Master Humbert; for whatever reason the Capitular Fathers, instead of approving the revision introduced in 1252, now commissioned Humbert to undertake another arrangement and correction of the entire Office. So opened the fourth period in the evolution of our liturgy. So great was the Chapter's faith in Humbert's liturgical sense, that it immediately introduced formal legislation on the revision yet to be made and destined to be known as the "new" revision or the revision of Master Humbert, and the Chapters assembled at Milan (1255) and Paris (1256) approved and confirmed it, thus giving it the force of law in the Order.¹⁵

It seems now to have been felt that the long hoped-for uniformity had finally been attained. The Paris Chapter went so far as to make provision for the expense that transcription from the archetype would involve for the different Provinces, and the Chapter of the following year at Florence admonished all that the sole archetype of the approved Office was to be found in the Convent of St. James in Paris.¹⁶ There it remained until the time of the French Revolution, whence after many vicissitudes it made its way in 1841 to the Archives of the Order in Rome, where it is now preserved.¹⁷

Now that the Office had been approved and accepted in the Order, nothing remained but to obtain papal approbation. This came eleven years later in a Bull of Pope Clement IV dated July 7, 1267, and thus the Dominican liturgy became an official liturgy

¹⁴ Cfr. *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 63.

¹⁵ Cfr. *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 68, 73, 78.

¹⁶ Cfr. *Acta Cap. Gen.*, I, 81, 88.

¹⁷ Cfr. AOP, XVII, 813-825 and XVIII, 104-120 for a detailed account of this archetype of our liturgy.

of the Roman Church.¹⁸

Since 1256 our liturgical books have often been re-edited and not a few changes have been introduced, especially in 1605 and in 1921.¹⁹ None the less there is no doubt that after almost seven hundred years, the Dominican liturgy remains substantially intact, and that the Friars Preachers of this twentieth century serve God with the same prayers, ceremonies and chant as did our elder brethren of the thirteenth century.

Before concluding, we may ask what was the source or sources of the Dominican liturgy. Quite recently Father Rousseau, O.P., has examined this difficult question in detail,²⁰ and submits evidence for the following solution:

"The liturgy of the Preachers is Romano-Gallican in origin.

"Roman: first because it has whatever is considered essential by the Roman Church in the arrangement of the Office and in the rite of celebrating Mass; second because it has borrowed several non-essential customs also from this Church.²¹

"Gallican: because it has drawn many minor rites from the Gallican liturgy, or rather from the Roman as it flourished in Gaul in the thirteenth century. It is not likely however that any particular church of Gaul, or any Order of Canons or monks will ever be able to be pointed out as the source whence our rite was drawn in whole or in part. Rather the four brethren, our liturgists, who devoted so many years of labor to this work, and especially Master Humbert, whose hand put the finishing touches on their work, and who brought the Dominican liturgy to so happy a consummation, suitably adapted to the Order of Preachers customs primitively or later on accepted by many different churches and monasteries, often changing them, when it was fitting, and harmonizing them with preëxisting elements.

Nevertheless among all the rites from which we have drawn, it is beyond doubt that, while the Premonstratensian and monastic rites contributed no little, the rite of the Church of Paris had a greater influence in the formation of the rite of the Preachers than any other."²²

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that our liturgy was adopted in whole or in part by the Crozier Fathers, the Teutonic Knights, the Canons of Liege and even some dioceses. Father Angelus Walz, O.P., points out (*Compendium Historiae O.P.*, p. 107) that it influenced the liturgical books of Scandinavia. Cfr. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIII, 478-481, for the remarkable resemblances between the Sarum and Dominican rites.

¹⁹ Cfr. AOP, XVIII, 97-103. Also Walz, O.P., *Compendium Historiae O.P.*, pp. 99-108, 304-309, 460-463.

²⁰ Cfr. AOP, XVIII, 193-203, 252-273.

²¹ Cfr. AOP, XIII, 93-106, 213-231, 272-296.

²² AOP, XVIII, 197.