

THE WAY OF TRUTH

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THE Protestant Reformation resulted in a divorce between Religion and the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. As a logical evolution of the Reformation principles there followed the divorce of Religion from the authority of the Bible. Modern rationalism, the natural product of Protestantism, has made a clean break with God. Reason, a faculty which renders man like to God, is used to destroy the very end which it ought to attain. Man, the supreme intellectual being of the material universe, seeks with unaided intellect to probe the why and wherefore of all things. Rationalism flounders in consequent darkness and irrationality. The modern much-read but ill-read public, impregnated with the false doctrines of rationalism, follows to an alarming degree the immoral principles which it has imbibed. The current immorality is praised as intellectual freedom. In a word, the light that radiates from true Wisdom has ceased to shine in the modern perverted intellectual atmosphere.

To meet this false intellectualism it has become incumbent upon Catholics to meet reason with reason, in so far as their intellectual capacity and state of life will allow. It behooves not only the ministers of religion but also the laity to build an intellectual fortress of strength and endurance to withstand the objections of a sneering and Godless rationalism. For the theology of the Catholic Church, although a perfect science, is not an occult one. Since the earliest days of its existence, the Church has always urged the faithful to establish their religious convictions upon a rational basis.

In this it has only followed the injunction of its first Pope: "being ready always to satisfy every one that asketh you a reason of that hope which is in you."¹ But herein there lies danger; for the evil that enveloped and overcame the forebears of modern rationalism also threatens the Catholic. In an endeavour to use the intellectual life and to live it fruitfully, the Catholic

¹ I St. Peter, III, 15.

layman must have an intense spiritual life. "The intelligence itself can only develop its highest powers in so far as it is protected and fortified by the peace given by prayer. The closer a soul approaches God by love, the simpler grows the gaze of her intelligence and the clearer her vision."²

To aid the modern Catholic layman to live this life of intellect and prayer, the example of St. Dominic shines forth as a beacon of guidance and refuge. His emphasis on the value of knowledge as the fruit of contemplation won him a place in the history of the Church as a positive and laudable originator. Fortified by prayer united to sacred doctrine and the profane sciences, he left his cell to do battle as a herald and knight of Christ. His sons were to be saintly scholars; the life of prayer was to vivify the life of study; prayer and study were to be so united that they became as one. Hence they who strengthen their own faith and labor for the honor of God and the salvation of souls by use of the light of science are following a principle essential to Dominican spirituality: to contemplate and give to others the fruit of contemplation.

It cannot be expected, however, that all who wish to study or to impart the tenets of the faith, will attain in their lives the fulness of contemplation as did St. Dominic. Yet, in so far as they inculcate in their lives a scientific approach to sacred doctrine there must be a proportionate life of spirituality whence the life of study proceeds. Otherwise the work is vain and dangerous. For knowledge when divorced from the life of prayer is unproductive of good and deadly with evil. Knowledge of itself, St. Paul tells us, puffs up with pride. The knowledge that results in pride is not only detrimental to the order of spirituality but also to the order of further knowledge, for it effaces the virtue of docility, which is a prime requisite for the acquisition of knowledge. Human knowledge must be raised from the natural to the supernatural. Love must flow from Truth and Truth must be inflamed with Love.

If the layman who is interested in the apostolate of Catholic Action and the activity of the Catholic study clubs follows this beacon of Dominic, there need be no worry that his intellectual life will become sterile or harmful. His knowledge will become absorbed in the higher spiritual life. The gifts of the Holy Ghost will become more manifest in his life. Supernatural

² Maritain, *Prayer and Intelligence* (London, 1928), p. 5.

knowledge will enable him to see in created things the divine symbolism which lies hidden in them. Supernatural understanding will impart a penetration into the revealed truths. Supernatural wisdom, towering high above the wisdom of the natural order, will impart to him a taste for the mysteries of salvation and the power of seeing all things in God.

And, in turn, from these infused gifts of the Holy Ghost, there will proceed the fulness of contemplation used in its strict sense. Although there may be an acquired contemplation that results from a person activity aided by grace, the infused contemplation of which we speak is a simple loving knowledge of God which results not from our personal effort aided by grace but rather from the illumination of the Holy Ghost. Although it proceeds formally from the gifts of wisdom, it also flows, in a lesser degree, from the gifts of understanding and knowledge. Through it the supernatural mysteries are penetrated and by its means everything is judged in conformity with the divine judgment. It is thus that men taste the sweetness of the Godhead; thus they realize in increasing intensity the Allness of the Divinity and the nothingness of man. It was this celestial acquisition of knowledge that characterized the lives of St. Dominic and his faithful disciples. Unhesitatingly they all acknowledged that they were illumined far more at the foot of the Cross than they were from cold and lifeless manuscripts. Our Lord, speaking to St. Catherine of Siena, asked the question: "At what table does St. Dominic feed his sons with the light of science?" And continuing, He supplied the answer: "At the table of the Cross."

Nor should this use of the word "contemplation" discourage people. In these days of bustling activity the modern mind, attuned to the apparent exigencies of a craze for speed, has developed a peculiar antipathy to prolonged serious reflection. Modern man is too apt to balk at the word "contemplation." With rather a vague idea of its meaning, he is inclined to categorize it exclusively as part of the cloister schedule. This is, indeed, a perversion of a fundamental truth of the spiritual life, for contemplation is nothing more than an ordinary process in the life of the normally religious man. As in the physical life there is a normal growth from childhood and adolescence to maturity, so in the life of the soul there should be a normal ascent from one to the other of the three traditional ways of the spiritual life: the way of beginners, of proficients, and of the perfect.

Essentially the ordinary interior life of grace is not different from the mystical life which we are inclined to regard as something extraordinary. In the normal way of development in the life of grace there must be no halting but a definite progress. Accordingly as charity grows in the soul, there must be a corresponding increase in the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. Spiritual contemplation follows in the normal course. It is not as some suppose a special gift which belongs exclusively to the way of the perfect. Rather, infused contemplation is obtained, when, having successfully passed the way of beginners, the soul enters upon the way of the proficient.³

No matter how much our lives are filled with activity, we should never renounce the contemplative aspect of our spiritual life. Spiritual writers tell us that we often deprive ourselves of a more perfect spiritual life because we do not give to God the generosity that is required. It is precisely because we must lead active lives in the world that we have further reason for being more attached to the contemplation of divine things. "Those who are engaged in the active life should not renounce contemplation on the ground that they are not contemplatives. On the contrary, they have a further reason for being attached to contemplation, a more pressing need of prayer. If it should happen that the conditions of their life render access to the highest forms of contemplation more difficult, the substance of contemplation will not be denied them on that account; and they should ask of the divine mercy the grace of a sufficient intensity of interior life for their very activity, at least in its mode of production, to proceed from the superabundance of their contemplation."⁴ Thus it is that our very activity flows from the charity that is begotten in the same spiritual life; our actions, in their elevated state, assume a permanence of value that they cannot possibly have when there is a divorce between knowledge and religion. And when activity is caused by spiritual principles, no separation occurs to break the unity of the spiritual and active spheres. There is no decrease in the spiritual life, but rather an addition. The boon conferred on mankind in this manner is incalculable and surpasses all human values. For the soul that thus works for God "there glows a

³ cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (Milwaukee, 1939), p. 419.

⁴ Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

knowledge which radiates afar in a word of fire . . . this is knowledge which produces love just as the Word, in God, breathes the love of His Father,"⁵

It is the actions of such men as the holy Dominic and his saintly followers that live for ever. They were mystics and contemplatives but never day-dreamers. Their actions played no small part in controlling the destiny of the world, because they were souls steeped in the sweetness of contemplation. They shine in the firmament because they were truly learned and they are as stars for all eternity because they instructed many to justice.⁶ There are still many vacant places in the firmament of holiness where even moderns, if they will, may place the star of their lives.

⁵ Townsend, *Dominican Spirituality* (Milwaukee, 1934), p. 120.

⁶ Daniel, I, XII, 3.