

SAINT TERESA AND THE DOMINICANS

The influence of the spirit of Saint Dominic on Teresa of Jesus, the mystic saint of sunny Avila, was far greater than is generally known. The Dominican spirit permeated her interior life, her writings and her reforms. Her principal confessors were Dominicans, and it was they who infused the sweet temper of simplicity into her interior life; it was they who directed the trend of her writings and were, in great part, responsible for the Thomistic tone sounded throughout her compositions; it was they who contributed much towards the wise moderation of Teresa's reforms. And since Saint Teresa appeared in history in the threefold character of saint, writer and reformer, it will be well for us to trace the Dominican influences of her life with these three roles in mind. Let us inquire into and weigh the Dominican influence on Saint Teresa's sanctity, her writings and her reforms.

I

Saint Teresa was a great saint, one of the greatest saints that God's Church has ever produced. She shines like a star of the first magnitude. She reached the highest summits of sanctity. She is not only a saint; she is besides a teacher of sanctity. She is not only a mystic; she is the personification of the sublimest mysticism. She is not merely a holy woman; she is a Doctor of Mystical Theology, a leader and a guide through the most secret paths along which God leads His chosen friends.

She belonged wholly to her beloved One—she was a real and true Teresa of Jesus. And Jesus, taking her own name, called Himself Jesus of Teresa. No wonder, then, that Teresa journeyed heavenwards so rapidly. No one but her beloved Saviour could guide this soaring eagle in the way of perfection. He Himself was her main spiritual director. But He chose many agents and instruments to share this name and office.

Saint Teresa was personally acquainted with all the greatest men of her times in Spain—and there were many distinguished both in sanctity and science—from all of whom she sought counsel and advice. But no one took such a great part in the direction of her life as Saint Dominic's sons. She received advice

and encouragement from thirty Dominican confessors during her whole life. The Dominicans were her first directors—they converted Teresa de Ahumada into Saint Teresa of Jesus. Let us see how and when.

Father Vincent Barron, O. P., was her first confessor during the early days of her youth, before she became a Carmelite. He was also the confessor of her saintly father, and she, doubtless, went very often to the Dominican Convent of "Santo Tomas," where her father's confessor dwelt. Moreover, she tells us herself that when she was favored with a great grace in that Dominican church, she was thinking "of the many sins which in times past she had confessed in that house."¹ And in that chapel where Our Lady and Saint Joseph revealed to her that the sins she had there confessed were blotted out, there is a confessional with this inscription: "Here Saint Teresa used to come to confession."

When she was twenty-one years old she took the Carmelite habit in the Convent of "La Encarnacion." Three years later her religious fervor cooled and her lukewarmness lasted seven years. In 1546 her father died. She assisted him in his last moments. At the death-bed was Fr. Barron. What happened on this occasion, Saint Teresa tells us after having described the state of relaxation of her soul. "I believe that a certain Dominican friar, a most learned man, has greatly merited in the eyes of God; for it was he who roused me from this slumber."² . . . "This Dominican Father, who was a very good man, fearing God, did me a very great service; for I confessed to him. He took upon himself the task of helping my soul in earnest, and of making me see the perilous state I was in. He sent me to Communion once a fortnight; and I, by degrees beginning to speak to him, told him about my prayer. He charged me never to omit it; that, anyhow, it could not do me anything but good."³

Saint Teresa, then, owed her conversion and her first steps in the way of perfection to the advice and encouragement of her Dominican confessor. Later on, Father Barron was her confessor during some years in Toledo.

Seven years after her conversion our Saint was for the first time favored with visions and revelations. During this very

¹ Her own Life, XXXIII, 16.

² Ib. XIX, 19.

³ Ib. VII, 27.

critical period in her life, her confessor, Father Alvarez, S. J., was timid and frightened, and troubled her exceedingly. He told her once that all her visions were mere dreams. Another confessor commanded her to despise the apparitions, because he thought they were works of the devil. In these desolate moments Saint Teresa sought and found encouragement in another Dominican. This was Father Peter Ibanez. "I had recourse to my Dominican Father; for I could rely upon him, because he was a learned man. I told him all about my visions, my way of prayer, the great graces our Lord had given me, as clearly as I could, and I begged him to consider the matter well, and tell me if there was anything therein at variance with the holy writings, and give me his opinion on the whole matter. He reassured me much, and, I think, profited himself."⁴

Fr. Ibanez not only bade her to be of good courage and approved her spirit, but also undertook her defense and wrote a treatise to prove with forceful theological arguments that she was led by the spirit of God. This document is a very valuable one, for it was written when everybody—even her own confessors—thought that she was deluded by Satan. Henceforward Fr. Ibanez, influenced by his saintly penitent, became a most spiritual man, "For though he was exceedingly good, yet from this time forth he gave himself more and more to prayer" . . . "and where he reassured and consoled me formerly by his mere learning, he did so now through that spiritual experience he had gained of supernatural things."⁵

The saint relates how she had visions concerning this saintly Dominican.⁶ Once she saw Our Lady putting a robe of exceeding whiteness on him. She also says that he fell into ecstasy every time he said Mass, and that St. Thomas was with him at his death. Again, she saw that his pure soul was carried up to heaven without passing through purgatory. Fr. Ibanez was also, "the most learned man here (in Avila), and there are few in his Order more learned than he."

Soon after Saint Teresa's first meeting with Fr. Ibanez she moved to Toledo, and there she met another Dominican, Fr. Garcia de Toledo, with whom she had occasionally shared her

⁴ *Ib.* XXXIII, 7.

⁵ *Ib.* 7-8.

⁶ *Ib.* XXXVIII, 15, 16.

spiritual confidence. But now Teresa's schooling was at an end; she no longer was a pupil but a great teacher of mystical knowledge. She relates the change she occasioned in her Dominican friend during her sojourn at Toledo. This change was the first achievement and the first fruit of her spiritual mastership. She undertook his betterment with earnest prayers. "When I had prayed with many tears," she writes, "that the soul of this religious might serve Him truly, I remember I said, 'O Lord, Thou must not refuse me this grace; behold him—he is a fit person to be our friend.' Our Lord wrought a complete change in this Father, so much so that he scarcely knew himself, so to speak." . . . "I trust in the munificence of Our Lord that great good will, by his means, accrue to some of his Order and to the Order itself. This is beginning to be understood. I have had great visions on the subject. I was with him once in the parlor when in my soul and spirit I felt what great love burned within him, and became as it were lost in ecstasy by considering the greatness of God, who had raised that soul in so short a time to a state so high. And now my soul, no longer able to bear the joy that filled it, went forth out of itself, losing itself that it might gain the more. It lost sight of the reflections it was making; and the learning of that divine language which the Holy Ghost seemed to speak threw me into a deep trance which almost deprived me all sense, though it did not last long. I saw Christ in exceeding great majesty and glory, manifesting His joy at what was then passing."

Saint Teresa kept a very close and lifelong intimacy with Fr. Garcia, who, having after some years been sent to Peru, communicated very often with his penitent by letter.

One of the most faithful friends and wisest directors of the Virgin of Avila was the great theologian, Dominic Bannez. "He was the confessor whom Saint Teresa appreciated more highly than any other, except St. John of the Cross."⁸ The saint hints this love very expressly. "No one must wonder," she says, "at some things which are done for the love of God, because that of Fr. Dominic Bannez is so strong in myself that what he judges

⁷ See the whole chapter XXXIV where she highly praises this Dominican. The Saint does not reveal his name; but there is every reason to believe it was Fr. Garcia.

⁸ La Fuente, Notes to the 71 Letter.

aright, I judge aright, and what he wants, I want; I do not know what will be the end of this enchantment."⁹

Fr. Bannez, in the declaration of her canonization, states the same: "No one may know better than this witness the particular favors and mercies bestowed upon Mother Teresa of Jesus, because he directed her many years in and out of confession."

We cannot discuss in detail the great influence exerted upon Saint Teresa by her thirty Dominican confessors, but it can be inferred from the few specimens we have offered.

II

Saint Teresa is not only a splendid example of holiness: "She ranks also as a miracle of genius, as perhaps the greatest woman who ever handled pen, the single one of all her sex who stands beside the world's most perfect masters."¹⁰

Her confessor, Fr. Bannez, used to say that she perhaps equalled St. Catherine in sanctity, and in her writings she excelled her.

With her wonderful power of analysis, and her enraptured vision of heavenly things, Teresa combined the loftiest mysticism with the finest practical sense. She has given us a clear insight into the progressive states and stages of the soul in the ways of perfection; and at the same time she has handled with matchless skill even the trifles of our petty life. Her style, adorned very often with a tinge of witty humor, is both sublime like the snow-capped mountains of her native Avila and simple as their valleys. Sublimity in doctrine, simplicity and clearness in style, are the outstanding features of her heavenly writings.

Saint Teresa taught because she was bidden to teach; all her books were written in obedience to her confessors, who knew the treasures hidden under the thick veil of her humility. And as the Dominican directors were nearest and dearest to Saint Teresa's innermost life, most of her books were written at the suggestion and bidding of Dominic's sons.

Saint Teresa's first work in date and worth is her own life—the masterpiece of the great writer. This book, entitled by the author "The Book of the Mercies of God," is worthy to rival the

⁹ Letter 44.

¹⁰ Fitzmaurice Kelli, "Spanish Literature," page 193.

"Confessions of St. Augustine."¹¹ This, Teresa's first literary offspring, is wholly and exclusively due to her Dominican confessors, who inducted her into a brilliant literary career.

Saint Teresa wrote her "Life" twice. In 1561 Fr. Ibanez ordered her to give him an account of her spiritual life. It was a simple relation and was not divided into chapters. Two years later, she says, "I was ordered by my confessor, the Dominican Friar Fr. Garcia de Toledo to write the history of the foundation of the monastery (St. Joseph's, Avila) together with other matters."¹² Then the Saint wrote her autobiography again, polishing it and dividing it into chapters. The book was addressed to Fr. Garcia and Fr. Bannez, who then lived in "Santo Tomas" and guided her soul. She alludes to and mentions them very often throughout the book.

Six years later, the "Life" was denounced to the Inquisition by some adversaries of the Saint. The book was forthwith given to two Dominican theologians, Fr. Castillo and Fr. Bannez, who undertook the defense of their friend. The latter annotated many marginal explanations in the Saint's MS., and wrote his "censure" in the blank leaves at the end. This MS., with the Saint's and Bannez' handwriting, is still preserved at the monastery of Escorial.

"The Way of Perfection" is the second book of our writer in order of time as well as in importance of doctrine. This little book may be called the "Vade Mecum" for her nuns, or the "Imitation of Saint Teresa." She tells us that she wrote this book with the permission and bidding of Fr. Bannez,¹³ who received and examined the first copies as she was writing it.

The "Book of the Foundations," as it is actually compiled, was written at the bidding of Fr. Ripalda, S. J.; yet the original idea of writing a history of her foundations arose in Fr. Garcia's mind, for he ordered the Saint to relate the story of her first monastery, St. Joseph's, Avila.

The book of the "Interior Castle" was also reviewed and approved by a Dominican, Fr. Yanguas. She wrote other short

¹¹ Of course, the doctrine of the Mystical Doctor is not so profound and dogmatic as that of the Eagle of the Doctors. It may be said that St. Teresa's Life keeps a middle way between the deep theological St. Augustine's Confessions and the charming, fragrant "Little Flower of Jesus."

¹² "Foundations," Prol.

¹³ "Way of Perfection," Prol. and Relation 7.

treatises at the request of, or with the approval of some Dominican.

The resemblance, and even the identity, between the Dominican Constitutions and the first constitutions of Saint Teresa is noteworthy. Most of its rules are simply translations of the Constitutions of the Friar Preachers.

Fr. Martin, O. P., adduces a parallel between the doctrine of St. Thomas and the doctrine of Saint Teresa, showing the conformity of their teaching.¹⁴ As a specialist in Saint Teresa's writings states, "The Thomistic substratum may be traced to the influence of her confessors and directors, many of whom belonged to the Dominican Order."¹⁵ That is why the Carmelites have ever been such close followers of the "Angel of the Schools." The Salmaticences are as Thomistic as Cajetan, Banez or Billuart.

It is remarkable that whenever Saint Teresa mentions any Dominican, she always calls him, "learned," or, "a deeply learned man." And she says, the reason why she chose the Dominicans as her confessors was because she always found in them the deep science and learning of which she was so fond. Their doctrinal assistance was unique and exclusively their own. Other religious Orders worked together with the Dominicans in making Saint Teresa a saint and a reformer, but the halo of mastership which adorns Saint Teresa's brow is chiefly due to the deeply learned Dominicans.

III

"In no modern society," says Macaulay,¹⁶ "not even in England during the reign of Elizabeth, has there been so great a number of men eminent at once in literature and in the pursuit of active life as Spain produced during the sixteenth century." This statement of the great English writer is as true regarding Saint Teresa as the other great writers of her age.

Saint Teresa, besides being a glorious saint and a prolific author, was an active reformer. No saint in the Church merits

¹⁴ "Sta. Teresa de Jesus y la Orden de Predicadores," Avila, 1909. This bulky volume is the most complete treatise on the subject we are dealing with. It has lent us the plan and many facts for our article. Fr. Martin is a specialist thoroughly versed in St. Teresa's writings.

¹⁵ B. Zimmerman, O. C. D., annotator and editor of her works in English.

¹⁶ Essays, vol. I.

these three titles as the "Saint of Avila." She stands alone holding in her hand this threefold palm. She is great in her sanctity; she is greater in her mystical writings, and she is the greatest of the religious reformers.

We have seen the influence of the Dominicans upon the saint and upon the writer; let us glance briefly at the reformer.

Saint Teresa had lived twenty-five years at the convent of "La Encarnation." Her transpierced heart, burning with desire for higher and for stricter observance of the rules of her Order, conceived the project of establishing a reform. She was commanded by God in several visions, which she recounts, to undertake this work. So the saint took the first steps and procured the leave of her Provincial. But no sooner had the project been launched than a furious storm fell upon her. A violent opposition was made by her sisters in religion. Clamors arose from the people; calumnies were uttered against her. "We had no one in the place," says the saint, "who would give us advice."¹⁷ Her own confessor, Father Alvarez, S. J., who was a spiritual man but exceedingly timorous, dared not oppose the torrent.

In this critical situation the saint sought and found encouragement in a Dominican. "Then both," (the saint and a friend of hers), says Father Ribera, "went to Saint Tomas, a principal Dominican monastery, and spoke to Father Ibanez, a very learned and religious man."¹⁸ "Having a great desire that he would help us," continued the saint, "I told him myself all we intended to do, and some of my motives. I never said a word of any revelation whatever, speaking only of the natural reasons which influenced me; his answer was that we should make what way it was to be done; and if our means were scanty, we must trust somewhat in God. If any one made any objections, they were to go to him—he would answer them; and in this way he always helped us, as I shall show by and by. His answer was a great comfort to us."

But the slanderous persecution against the saint grew harsher. The Provincial recalled his permission. But whilst "even among the persons of prayer, and, indeed, the whole neighborhood, there was hardly one who was not against us and did not think our work the greatest folly, . . . the saintly Dominican was as confident as I was that the work would be

¹⁷ Her own Life, XXXII, 19.

¹⁸ Life of St. Teresa, Bk. I, chap. XIII.

done; and as I would not speak of it, in order that nothing might take place contrary to the obedience I owed my confessor,¹⁹ he communicated with my companion, and they wrote letters to Rome and made their preparations."²⁰

Father Ibanez's assistance to the brave Castilian was a most striking and valuable one; striking, because he lent his generous hand to Saint Teresa's projects when everybody harassed and cried against her as a deluded visionary: valuable, because his influential position heartened the foundress and procured a Brief from the Holy See approving her designs. Saint Teresa had a heartfelt and lifelong gratitude for her benefactor; and we have seen how generously she rewarded his services.

Another instance of Dominican influence upon Saint Teresa's work is afforded by Father Banez. In the last days of August, 1562, a roaring tumult arose suddenly in Avila. The outcry of the people was a very fierce one. The governor hastened to summon the magistrates to ask their counsel concerning the danger that was hanging over the city. And what was this alarming danger? Simply four poor nuns had taken the veil and were installed in an humble dwelling. Yet this insignificant house was to be the cornerstone and the mother house of the great Saint Teresa's reform. That is why the devil stirred up so tumultuous an outcry against the saint.

In that solemn meeting were "assembled all the Orders—that is, two learned men from each—to give their opinion. Some were silent, others condemned; in the end they resolved that the monastery should be broken up. Only one—he was of the Order of St. Dominic—said there was no reason why it should be thus dissolved, and that the matter ought to be well considered."²¹ On the margin of the saint's MS. Banez annotated with his own hand: "This was at the end of August, 1562. I was present and gave this opinion. I am writing this in May, 1575, and the Mother has now founded nine monasteries." Banez had just come to Avila and had never seen the saint. He undertook her defense simply because he saw her righteousness and the rash decision of the

¹⁹ This was Fr. Alvarez, who had bidden her to give up her projects of Reform. Though Fr. Alvarez tested his penitent sharply, he was one of her best confessors. He was then an unexperienced young man, twenty-eight years old, and had just finished his studies at "Santo Tomas," Avila.

²⁰ Her own Life, XXXIII, 5.

²¹ *Ib.* XXXVI, 15.

assembly. His upright mind perceived the truth at once and his noble and fearless heart was courageous enough to plead for it publicly. His energetic speech, refuting one by one the governor's arguments, disarmed the anger of the assembly which on the spot revoked its decision. Hence, Banez came in contact with Saint Teresa and their first acquaintance ripened very soon into a close and sacred intimacy. The great theologian was the staunchest champion of the saint; four or five times he publicly and successfully defended her and her work.

During the six years which the saint abode in Saint Joseph's Avila—"the most tranquil of my life,"²² she says—her confessors were two Dominicans, Father Banez and Father Garcia, "both of them learned men and great servants of God."

The saint's second foundation was at Medina. Father Banez helped her to settle and smooth over some difficulties caused by an Augustinian Convent and by the Abbot of Medina, who was not in favor of a foundation with absolute poverty. Some of the assembly spoke severely against the saint, upon which Father Banez, reproving the defamer, spoke so warmly for her that the abbot granted his permission.²³

From this time on Saint Teresa began her active life, traveling unceasingly during fifteen years. She founded sixteen convents of nuns and fourteen of Carmelite Friars. We cannot enter the details of the important part played by the Dominicans in these foundations. It is enough to say that Saint Dominic's sons lent powerful and unsparing assistance to the saint, now bidding her to found a new convent, now settling irksome difficulties, and so paving her way to a new foundation, now advising and encouraging her.

The Dominicans not only helped the saint in the individual houses, but also influenced her in building up the whole reform. We will give some bare facts showing this influence. In 1669 the Dominican Pope, Saint Pius V, appointed two Dominicans Visitors Apostolic of the Spanish Carmelites—Father Peter Fernandez, Visitor of Castile and Father Francis Vargas, Visitor of Andalucia. As they were delegates of the Pope, they were entitled to overlook the authority of the Carmelite General. So for ten years the holy reformer was a subject of these two Do-

²² Foundations, Prol.

²³ Ib. III, 6, 7 and "Reforma," Bk. II, ch. V.

minicans. Her General had granted her permission to found only two monasteries of Friars; but the Visitors bade the saint to proceed in her reform, fostered so earnestly by the Dominican Pope. The saint, therefore, threw her sickle into the harvest and gathered up the richest fruits of her reform.

In 1571 Father Fernandez, seeing the desolate state of the monastery of the Incarnation, Avila, laid on the saint the heavy burden of being its prioress. When her term of office had expired, the Dominican Visitor ordered her to take hand again in the reform. But at this time a great storm "arose all at once, so that the Order was on the brink of ruin." The superiors and friars of the old observance violently opposed the saint's designs. Then her holy protector, Pius V, died. A new nuncio came, "whom God seemed to have sent for the purpose of trying us by sufferings." The saint was denounced by the nuncio as a restless, disobedient inventress of new doctrines tricked out with piety. At this critical moment Father Fernandez was the savior of Saint Teresa's work and good name. He suggested to King Philip II to take a hand in the affair. The turning-point of the struggle came when the king appointed four assistants to the nuncio, two of whom were Dominicans.²⁴ In the meantime Blancis, a Dominican cardinal in Rome, dealt with the Pope, who ordered a general chapter to be held under the presidency of Father Fernandez. As the Brief reached the holy man on his death-bed, another Dominican, Father John Cuevas, took his place. Father Cuevas convoked the chapter at Alcalá. He personally directed the sessions, decided the separation of the reformed Carmelites and promoted the election of Father Gracian—the chosen friend of Saint Teresa—as their superior.

Twenty months later the holy foundress died at Avila. But the reform, rescued by the Dominicans from the fiercest tempests, was now journeying unhindered on the high-road to success.

So the great prophesy of Saint Louis Bertrand, who wrote to the holy reformer, foretelling her that before fifty years her Order would be widespread throughout the Church, was accomplished. Saint Pius V, also, who, going up to heaven, appeared to

²⁴ These were Fr. Castillo and Fr. Fernandez. So great was the confidence of the Saint on them, especially on the latter, that she wrote: "When I saw that the king had named him (Fr. Fernandez) I looked on the matter as settled" (Foundations, XXVIII, 1-7).

her and promised to help her from his place of glory, kept his word faithfully. Her great countryman, the illustrious Saint Dominic, appearing to her many times, comforted her. Once, praying in the well-known Saint Dominic's cave at Segovia, Our Lord came nigh to her and said, "Entertain thyself with My friend," and left her with Saint Dominic, who showed great joy, grasped her hand and gave her his word to favor and help her in the reform. The Patriarch of the Dominicans often appeared to the Mother of the Carmelites in that grotto. She used to say that she had received so many and great favors there that she wished that she would never have to leave it.

Such was the great influence exerted by the Dominicans upon Saint Teresa.²⁵ The Church has highly praised it. "Saint Teresa accomplished such work of reform, aided by the help of the Preachers."²⁶ No wonder, then, that in return the grateful saint—who naturally was exceedingly thankful for the least benefit—felt such deep and tender love for the Order of her friend that she used to exclaim, "Yo soy la Dominica in pasione." Truly, she was Dominican at heart, as her friends, the Dominicans, are Carmelites at heart.

²⁵ We have purposely omitted the great prophetic visions that the Saint foresaw about "the great services which a particular Order would render in the latter days" (Life, II, 17-21).

²⁶ Brevarium, O. P., Oct. 15.

—Bro. John Labrador, O. P.

