

THE CHARACTER OF DOMINICAN ACTION

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TWO QUOTATIONS will serve to show the pertinence of investigating the character of modern Dominican activity.

"For years we have known and deplored the fact that religion was the least interesting and the most poorly taught subject in our curriculum."¹

And on the other hand we read of Mother Margaret Hallahan, O.P., foundress of the English Congregation of St. Catherine at Stone:

"The next day she came the children were repeating by heart the Latin hymns of the Blessed Sacrament, and were getting through them at rather a rapid rate. She sat down and asked them how much they understood of what they were saying, and gave them a beautiful instruction on these hymns, and the reverence with which they should be recited. 'It made me feel,' writes the Sister, 'how little I understood of the real spirit in which these children should be trained.'"²

The difference between the sister teacher and Mother Margaret was not one of a method; it was one of a life. Mother Margaret was a contemplative, and her skill in teaching is seen in this: that, faithful to the motto of the Order, she was giving the children the fruit of her contemplation.

Such activity might well be the radical solution to the problem of religious education in our schools today; it might well be the solution to increased fruitfulness in other spheres of Dominican activity. At least, it is worth examination.

The essential character of all Dominican action is set forth in the Friars' Constitutions. The ends of the Order are many, but each is subordinated to the general ideal. The first and general end is: "as we are shown by the Rule . . . that we should be one soul and one heart in God, that we should be found, namely, perfect in charity." This end is shared by all Christians. The special end of the Order is "preaching and the salvation of souls," and this end is shared by all

¹ Sister M. Madeleva, C.S.C., *Journal of Religious Instruction* May, 1943.

² Mother Francis Raphael Drane, *Life of Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan* page 250.

religious Orders engaged in any of the works of the active life. The third Dominican end, which indicates the form of the Dominican action is: "preaching and teaching from the abundance of contemplation," and this end is shared by all contemplative orders, Franciscans, Carmelites, or Benedictines, for example. The fourth end, the one which is proper and peculiar to the Dominican Order as its own special work is: "to teach and defend the truths of the Catholic faith."³ Summing up then: *Dominican action is the preaching and teaching of the truths of the Catholic faith, from the abundance of contemplation, for the good of our neighbor's soul, and ordained toward, and flowing from, divine Charity.*

It is this measure which must be applied to the apostolic work of the Order today as it was in the 13th century when this section of the Constitutions was written. This is the test of Dominican action.

The consideration of the Dominican ideal as "preaching and teaching from the abundance of contemplation" poses at the start a special problem in modern times of including within the ideal: 1) those who are not preaching or teaching, and 2) those who are not contemplating. It is but one part of the larger problem: how traditional Dominicanism is united and reconciled with modern conditions unheard of in the middle ages when the Order was born, and greatly flourished.

In particular, it will be convenient to confine ourselves to two special modern activities: a) the Christian education of youth, and b) the exercise of the corporal works of mercy, i.e. nursing, orphanages, and the like, works which are usually considered as alien to a contemplative community, and proper to a strictly active order. The problem, restated in these terms then, is this: how is it possible to consider the education of children, the care of the sick in hospitals, and orphanages, as flowing from the abundance of contemplation, and as preaching and teaching, which St. Thomas and the Friars' constitutions explicitly determine Dominican activity to be.

The problem is worthy of a solution, if one can be had. It is a real problem because its answer can vitally influence Dominican activity. The question, let it be said at the outset, is not whether these works are Dominican, but why and how they are. The solution is not

³ *Constitutiones S.O.P.*, Romae, 1932. Passim in no. 2, 3, and 4. The Friars' Constitutions are the ultimate norm of Dominican life in all the parts of the Order. What is contained in them in letter and explicitly is contained in other constitutions and in the Third Order Rule, at least in spirit and implicitly. We have cited from the section *General Norms* of the Constitutions which especially indicate the spirit of Dominican life.

sought to confirm what is already evident. If in the loving Providence of God, working through prudent superiors, a community undertakes a work, that work becomes Dominican and can be done in a Dominican way. The solution is sought, however, as a guide to action. It is an attempt to show the application of the traditional Dominican ideal to the modern Dominican apostolate, to show the reality of the special Dominican contribution. If there is a lack of integration between the ideal as traditionally understood, and as it influences and informs this modern work, it is perhaps because the connection between them has not been shown, or sought. In a concrete situation, Dominicans who consider the ideal cannot but admit that it is to contemplate and then to hand over the fruits of that contemplation to others. Placed in a hospital, they find it difficult to connect this ideal with the work at hand; and as a result, both the ideal and the work suffer. It is the case of the pianist who is forced by circumstances to practice carpentry; both his art and the carpentry are the worse for it.

First then, as to the fruits of contemplation themselves. Contemplation is a union effected through faith and love. It is a loving, and a seeing, of God. And corresponding to these qualities of contemplation, the fruits of contemplation will be: something divine, something of love, and something of truth. In the order of truth, contemplation gives the soul a knowledge of God which is intimate and which penetrates Him, Who is most knowable, in a profound way; and it grants a certitude that what it sees is true, a certitude greater than any other on earth. In the order of love, God is known to be in Himself the greatest of all goods, the most lovable Being, known thus not speculatively, but practically, from experience. The sufferings of Jesus, for example, have been present to some Dominicans in all their moving reality; and with this understanding of Christ's Passion these Dominicans have had at the same time an ardent love of Him who could suffer so much for them. It is precisely these two qualities which a contemplative brings to souls with whom he comes in contact. The truth of God, that others may know Him; the goodness of God that others may love Him. This is the reason why preaching is the work par excellence of contemplatives, and the reason why preaching demands contemplation as its superabundant cause. For the preacher's task is to bring these qualities to souls: truth, and a motive for acting on the truth, love.

Contemplation then is one and the same in all. There is but one God; and the principle of contemplation is the Holy Ghost, who is One. But there may be differences in the thing or attribute of God contemplated, the Passion, the Fatherhood of God and so on. Never-

theless, the act of contemplation, contemplation formally taken, is one; in men and women, in Dominicans, Franciscans, in all.

In the process of handing over the fruits of contemplation, in the apostolate, which looks to souls, we find, on the other hand, a manifold variety. Here is the order of the active life; and as forms of the active life compatible with the end of a contemplative order St. Thomas places two, preaching and teaching.

Preaching is the work to which Dominicans are especially called. For this they were instituted, and to this end all their activity is ordered except for the act of contemplation which is an end in itself. All forms of Dominican apostolate are in some way preparatory for or extensive of the preaching vocation of the Friars.

A second activity, mentioned in the Friars' Constitution as the end of the order, and indicated by St. Thomas as compatible with contemplation, is teaching (*doctrinae*). It is here that we find the place of most of the modern Dominican apostolate which is exercised outside of the pulpit.

Traditionally, this has been understood as the speculative teaching of sacred doctrine. The presence of such intellectual lights in the Order as St. Dominic, St. Thomas, St. Albert, St. Raymond, and St. Antoninus, all of whom were theologians of the highest calibre has cast the thought of the Order that this was Dominican teaching *par excellence*, and so it is. And therefore all teaching done outside of theology has its order to this science.

But the teaching of sacred doctrine is not an activity which is confined to the professor's rostrum in a *Studium Generale*, as modern Dominicans clearly show. It is carried on in books, in the press, in radio, through labor unions, through every medium of communication. It is a work which is extended to clerics and lay-folk, to the university and high school, to the scholars and the workers. To be loyal to their contemplative vocations, Dominicans must teach (in one way or another) God's truth.

The teaching of divine truth is the special type of contemplative teaching; and this is common to all Dominicans. The mode or manner of teaching this truth, on the other hand, varies according to the means at hand, or the psychological character of the teacher. Some men are better teachers than others; some more apt at teaching young men than old; still others, at a loss in the classroom, find their power in the intimate contact of a study club, or of the confessional. Among psychological differences which divide humans, however, the greatest is that which divides men from women. And for this reason the teaching and the handing over of things contemplated will be different

for Dominican Sisters than it is for Dominican Friars.

That men and women are psychologically different needs little buttressing. Sincere writers have asserted it for ages, and most recently it has been the subject of a papal letter to the whole Church. The exact mode of this difference, the precise character of these psychological differences between men and women is a subject about which there is not perfect clarity or unanimity. There is a traditional doctrine on this matter, however, and it has been summed up recently by a young lady Catholic writer :

"Man's capacity for theory, for forming an abstract and comprehensive view is matched by woman's practical sense and gift for detail. . . . Man leaves the imprint of his personality in the creation of his mind—works of science and art, monumental buildings and commercial empires. . . . Woman is not interested in abstract or technical achievements, but in persons, and in bringing persons to God."⁴

Stated in another way, men are more concerned with universal things, with ideas; women with particulars. Men are facing toward the external world, drawing themselves out toward it; women face away from the world and draw things toward themselves. Men, as a rule, are theorists; women practical. In men the intellect is more dominant; in women the emotions. Men are attracted to ideas, women to persons and things.

Thus the handing over of the fruits of contemplation will take place in a way consonant with these two psychological modes. The Friars will deal in speculative doctrines, will study and teach them; the sisters in occupations consonant with their talents, in caring for children, in the care of the sick, the education of girls and women, and the like.

There is an historical fact which may enlighten St. Thomas' analysis of the role of contemplatives in giving to others the fruits of their contemplation. While he lived, the role of religious women was confined to the cloister. If women were contemplative, and there were many Dominican convents in his time, they remained cloistered. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century with Third Order foundations in America, England, Germany, and France, that this form of Dominican life became a stable part of the Dominican family. It is significant that Mother Margaret Hallahan in Coventry in 1844, Fr. Samuel Wilson and Mother Angela Sansbury in Kentucky in 1822, and Mother Josepha in Brooklyn in 1853, to cite only a few,

⁴ Janet Kalven. *The Catholic Digest*, Vol. 10, No. 3, January, 1946, pp. 43-44 passim.

were forced to take a Second Order Rule, and adopt it to the use of a community of Dominicans who would exercise an active apostolate in the world.⁵ The conventual Third Order vocation is something relatively new in Dominican history. St. Thomas, and European theologians generally, confine their treatment of the role of women in the Order to those engaged in the strict contemplative life.

If, then, Third Order Sisters are Dominicans, and it is unequivocally asserted that they are, they are bound to seek contemplation; and if the form of their apostolate is the Dominican form, "to give to others the fruit of their contemplation," then this handing over must be done in a way which is natural to women; and is not to be restricted necessarily to the speculative teaching for which the Friars were instituted, and which they exercise preeminently in the Church today.

Thus Dominican Sisters engage in teaching children, in conducting orphanages, in the care of the sick poor, and in general in a program of the works of mercy. These are most in harmony with their psychological talents, and in these works they give to others the fruit of their contemplation.

It must be noted, however, that here is a case of the more and less. Not all women fall strictly into one type, nor do all men. Some men are not speculative, while some women are. But the generality is in favor of this division. Thus it is possible for Dominican Sisters to exercise an intellectual apostolate in philosophy, in theology, in letters and in the natural sciences. This apostolate is a present day reality whose vitality and worth cannot be ignored, and whose necessity presses on the consciences of educators of young women today. It is in their speculative teaching and study also that they approximate more closely the ideal for which the Order as a whole was instituted, the teaching and defence of the truths of the Catholic faith. This work was offered to women in general also by the Holy Father in his recent talk on the duties of women. It is therefore more abundantly shared and exercised by religious women charged with education. But taking the community of Friars and Sisters, the psychological differences are verified, and with them, the differences in the forms of the Dominican apostolic vocation.

The application of these principles to the field of the education of children, and to the social and corporal works of mercy becomes clear.

⁵ There are striking exceptions to this rule. Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli, O.P., composed a rule for the Sinsinawa congregation from a European Third Order rule and his own commentary, adapting it to American life. This was perhaps the first Third Order Rule, written as such, in the United States.

The end of a Catholic school is something more than a training in the arts and sciences. This might well be gotten in a public school. Catholic schools are engaged primarily in the religious formation of the students, and a sound training in natural disciplines is part of the wholeness which such a school should give. The first reason for the Catholic school is the communication of religious truth and religious ideals. It is to form in the students, to a degree compatible with their abilities, the mind of Christ in all things. This end has been stated over and over again. It is stated clearly and decisively by Pope Pius XI in his *Encyclical on Christian Education*. Its importance is reflected in the present struggle of the Bishops in Europe to retain religious schools. It is the reason why a school was built before a church in the early days of the Church in the United States. Catholic schools are essential to the Church's over-all work of bringing Christ to souls. This work, fundamentally the work of a preacher, is the work of a Dominican.

But the end of a school is not something foreign to the end of its individual teachers. In order that a school accomplish a task it is necessary that each individual teacher accomplish it. If they themselves do not, it will never be a reality. The end of the school is the formation of new Christs; it is also the end of each individual teacher. And the formation of Christ in the mind and heart of the student, by doctrine, by discipline, by exhortation, by encouragement, and by understanding and example, is a work for which contemplatives are suited, and which is consonant with their vocations. Teaching offers them an activity which can flow from their contemplation, not only as directed by it, as all activity must be, but as a means of handing over the very things contemplated themselves.

American Dominicans have an example and encouragement in this field. Fr. Samuel Wilson and Mother Angela Sansbury, the founders of the St. Catherine congregation, established a community of Sisters expressly to teach school and educate. To achieve this end, Fr. Wilson, a Master in Sacred Theology, placed the sisters under a contemplative rule, prescribing the long monastic fast from September till Easter, and in addition, the midnight recitation of the Office. Teaching in Kentucky, in his mind, was to flow from contemplation. And unique among Dominican historical documents is the protestation drawn up by Sister Joseph Dillon of the Holy Name Congregation in Benicia in 1856, that as soon as could be she desired to live a contemplative life, with enclosure and solemn vows, "the same vows as the nuns of St. Dominic and the religious men of his Order make." Her resolution was but the fruit of the spirit of the whole congregation, at

that time busily engaged in teaching school.

The Dominican school will differ from any other Catholic school then in this: primarily in the contemplative discipline of the teachers; and secondarily, as a result of this, in the vitality of the teaching of religion and doctrine, and in a more intrinsic order of everything that is taught to the formation of sanctity in the students.

The relation of a Dominican hospital to the Truth, to choose another case, is more remote than that of a school, but it is real nevertheless. The corporal works of mercy have always been powerful sermons. We read in the Gospels that Our Lord went about preaching and doing good. The relation between preaching and doing good is intimate; and there is no complete apostolate which expects to be effective unless it is accompanied by a love of the suffering. Thus the full Dominican apostolate which is to the whole world, to the intelligent, to the weak in mind, to the common man, to the poor, to the suffering—if it be integral—has a place for these works.

Dominicans need only to recall the example of St. Catherine of Siena who, even while she was counselling Popes, was visiting the sick. And at this time she was the model of the contemplative life overflowing into action to which all Dominicans aspire. Mother Mary Hallahan, whose Dominican instinct was sure and strong even though she was at a loss sometimes to offer sound reasons for the things she did, took nursing and the care of the sick as the most important work of her infant congregation in Stone, England.

The relation of mercy to truth is seen analytically in the task of a preacher. His end is two-fold: to enlighten, and also to provide motives for action. And these two elements are included in the fruits of contemplation: truth and love. Both must be given to others by a contemplative. The teacher of speculative theology is occupied almost exclusively with the truth, and clarity is his aim. Secondarily he is communicating love. At the other end of the horizon of Dominican activity, the nurse is concerned with truth, but is primarily concerned with the motive for accepting the truth, love. St. Thomas and St. Catherine, who represent the Word and the Spirit in the Trinity of the Dominican ideal, are the two poles of orientation of this life.

But there is a yet more fundamental reason for contemplatives in hospitals. The crucial doctrine of Christianity, as seen from below, perhaps the most mysterious one, is the mystery of suffering. Our Lord revealed it to the Apostles only after he had confirmed them in their belief that he was God. St. Peter, in the name of the Church, proclaimed Our Lord's divinity and Messianism. Only then did Our Lord reveal to them that he would suffer and die and rise again. Then

he told them that suffering was the condition of Christian life common to all men. Finally he confirmed his teaching by the Transfiguration (Matt. 16, 13—17, 8).

Suffering stands at the core of Christian life. It cannot be understood or explained by reasons, for there are none visible. They are all hidden in the mind of God. Suffering must be accepted joyfully.

But the motives for accepting suffering must be taught to the sick by those around them. To receive suffering as a sign of God's love is heroic. It can be done only if the afflicted is aided by the example, the exhortation, the understanding and the prayer of those who surround him while his suffering and labor is worst. Who are more needed than contemplatives?

Contemplatives, then, are at home near a sick bed. What they know of Christ's suffering, God's plan for souls, and God's Providence, they must communicate. Nor will their knowledge be speculative if it is to do good; it must be practical and informed by love. Their love of God, overflowing in the care of the sick, and their intimate knowledge of His ways, will provide the sick person with the only intelligible motive for accepting his cross. If contemplation is to flow to souls in a manner consonant with the psychological qualities of the contemplative, it is in the care of the poor and the sick, where women find themselves most at home and doing womanly work, that its communication will bear the most fruit.

A still greater necessity for contemplative nurses is seen in the condition of modern medicine. Medicine, in its hyper-materialistic pre-occupation with the body of man, has neglected his soul. It will sacrifice everything to comfort and physical well-being. It scarcely recognizes that the source of man's life, his soul, is immaterial; it cannot understand that man has an end and purpose in life which is not measurable on clinical reports. Its techniques become more and more scientific, and less and less human, every year.⁶

To restore medicine to its foundations requires a radical approach. Since the fall of man, it is impossible to bring men to human action, unless God is first brought to it. There is very little moral good that can be accomplished without grace; there are few natural reasons that can reclaim secular medicine to its proper order. Grace and supernatural forces alone are capable.

⁶ For a more profound analysis of modern medicine as seen under the faith cf. Biot, Rene, *Medicine and the Human Person*. Integration, Vol. II No. 7, Aug. 1939, p. 9; and Michaels, Peter, *Design for Christian Living*, the Torch, March, 1946, p. 4, and April, 1946, p. 6.

Supernatural motives must be provided for doctors and nurses, to restore them to their work as instruments of God's mercy, to whom the salvation of one soul is worth more than a hundred human lives. Such a radical outlook demands radical example and radical teachers—alone among men contemplatives are these.

Contemplative theorists alone can provide the conviction necessary to restore medicine to its proper position in the hierarchy of human values—and contemplative nurses alone can teach Christian suffering, and the motives for it, to patients whose suffering and desire for relief are equalled only by a surgeon's desire to alleviate even at the sacrifice of a better, moral, good.

The ancient tradition is verified, then. *Contemplari et aliis tradere contemplata* is a vital sign for modern Dominicans; and it imposes on them a challenge as it did on the numberless Friars who in the early days, and all the days since, swept across the world. A white wave of truth they were, contemplatives, for the first time in history cloistered in the world, to bring it back to Christ by the brilliance of their doctrine, and the fire of their love.

And Dominican Sisters, busy in numberless schools, hospitals, homes, and social centers in America have the same symbol as their guide. In forms of activity unknown to the first Dominicans at Prouille, they can remain faithful nevertheless to the mode of life determined by their common founder and father. In a way consonant with their talents and psychological qualities they teach the truths of the Catholic faith from the abundance of contemplation. The pattern of Prouille, in its twentieth century American material can be verified in Boston, Little Bend, and Middletown, U.S.A. Its source is contemplation, its result fruitful teaching and a merciful loving care of the sick, its purpose charity and the good of souls.