



SOLEMN CONFERRING OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER IN SACRED THEOLOGY

# DOMINICANA

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## THE MASTER IN SACRED THEOLOGY IN THE ORDER OF PREACHERS<sup>1</sup>

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BECAUSE thou hast called wisdom friend and as a lover of wisdom hast sought to be espoused to her, behold God gives her to thee as spouse that she may be with thee always and possess thy heart."

At the end of this solemn sacrifice, these words of the Dominican Ceremonial will be addressed to Father Paul Augustine Skehan, Procurator General of the Order of Preachers, as they have been addressed to his predecessors and contemporaries in the illustrious company of Dominicans who have merited the title of Master in Sacred Theology. With the approval and the blessing of our Master General who honors us today by his presence, Father Skehan is assigned a function and a title that have traditionally held first rank in the Order of Preachers and have marked the intellectual elite of the Catholic world. Within our own Dominican family, we must be reminded today of Albert and Thomas, of Peter of Tarantaise and Vincent Ferrer and a long line of others who have faithfully and eminently fulfilled the intellectual apostolate of the Dominican Order and added to its glory. This is an occasion of rejoicing and congratulation for the latest recipient of the *Magisterium*; for all of us it may well be an occasion of re-dedication to the ideals and traditions this degree signifies.

I feel there is no need for me to extol Father Skehan in a per-

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was delivered by the Rev. Matthew Hanley, O.P., on the occasion of the solemn conferring of the degree of Master in Sacred Theology on the Most Reverend Paul A. Skehan, O.P., Procurator General, by the Most Reverend Emmanuel Suarez, O.P., Master General of the Order.

sonal way. His qualifications and attainments are clearly attested by this very fact: that the supreme authority of an Order that has always been justly jealous of its prestige has deemed it fitting to admit him to the honored company of Dominican Masters in Sacred Theology. We can offer no greater praise, for in Dominic's religious family the Master in Sacred Theology has ever held a high place both as teacher and as counsellor and guide, and not without reason.

Dominic had instituted an order of preachers, men destined by their vocation to defend the faith and destroy heresy; men destined by their vocation to dispel the darkness and chaos of error wherever it be found, whether in the university or in the market-place; men destined by their vocation to battle for souls, for the spread of the faith and the church of Christ. In the plan of Dominic, the Friar Preacher must set himself to convince men's minds of the truth, not simply to attain that victory but to win their souls, and if the battle for souls was to be waged largely in the arena of human wisdom, the Dominican must be prepared for just such a battle. As an apostle, as a crusader, he must go into the conflict armed from head to foot with learning, having whetted his sword in his regular religious life and in conscientious study. He must go into battle endowed with a profound reverence for and a keen appreciation of wisdom and truth; he must be guided by the clear light of reason and the clearer light of revelation.

But as he appreciated the value of learning so did Dominic realize the hazards and dangers in such a career—intellectual pride, intellectual aimlessness, love of novelty and of apt phrases masquerading as wisdom—and against those dangers he would arm the sons he loved. So it was that the wise and saintly Dominic insisted on holiness and virtue; so it was that he demanded that his brethren temper and purify their souls in the fire of regular monastic observance, that liturgical prayer and meditation, mortification, and penance along with regular study should mark the years of preparation of the Friar Preacher for his mission. Virtue and learning—there were the safeguards and the assurance that Dominic's sons would faithfully fulfill their high vocation as champions of the faith and true lights of the world.

It is not surprising that in such an organization dedicated to truth and sanctified learning, the Master in Sacred Theology should hold so prominent a place. The Constitutions demand in one proposed for this title, eminence in doctrine, exemplary religious observance, prudence and skill in conducting the affairs of the Order. It is expected that one who has studied and taught for the years required, will manifest in his life the ideals Dominic proposed. He will have sought wisdom

as friend and spouse, and wisdom will have prepared his mind and heart both to ponder truth and to guide and lead others.

To ponder truth, because it is the office of wisdom to consider the highest causes, to judge rightly all things and place them in their proper order. All that is attained of course by diligent human effort. But there is a higher wisdom, a more perfect wisdom from above which attains to God more intimately by a sort of union with Him and it was this wisdom Dominic would have his sons seek; it was this wisdom that would guarantee that his sons would be not only men of learning but men of God, intent on saving the souls of others. It is true that a measure of the gift of wisdom is wanting in no man in the state of grace but there are higher degrees of wisdom that make for apostles and leaders and guides, a wisdom that helps in the contemplation of divine things as well as in the direction of human affairs. For that wisdom, virtue is indispensable for, as the Book of Wisdom warns us: "Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul nor dwell in a body subject to sin." If Dominic's sons would grow in wisdom they must first grow in charity and that wisdom and that charity combined would produce the apostles Dominic sought and souls needed, apostles who would, in the words of St. Paul: "Walk with wisdom toward them that are without."

Faithful to that teaching and that tradition, the masters of old taught wisdom and virtue; and out to others they went with wisdom, not content to confine their teaching to the classroom. There is no more shining example of that than the great Master, St. Vincent Ferrer. As a teacher in Valencia he drew enormous throngs to his lectures but far better is he known as the "angel of the judgment," sweeping vast throngs off their feet as he spread the gospel through France and Italy and his native Spain. And when they did not go forth themselves, the Masters forged the weapons for the battle against heresy and placed them in the willing hands of their brethren, heroic apostles like Francisco de Capillas whose feast we celebrate today because three hundred years ago today he laid down his life to become the first martyr of China. Thus directly and indirectly the labor and the glory of the leaders of Dominican intellectual life; thus the justification of Honorius' prophetic approval that the sons of Dominic would be champions of the faith and true lights of the world.

To this ideal of virtue and learning we must re-dedicate ourselves in our own time. Secularism of the twentieth century outlaws Almighty God from His created world as effectively as did Albigensianism of the thirteenth and as these saintly apostles of the past restored God to His world, so must we if, like them, we set ourselves earnestly

to the task of pursuing wisdom and virtue and with their apostolic zeal carry both to a world that sadly needs both.

To Father Skehan, the latest member of our Province to be made a Master in Sacred Theology, in the name of his brethren and many friends, we offer our congratulations, our good wishes and our prayers for his continued success in his Dominican vocation.