

READING FOR DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY

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IS SPIRITUAL READING really necessary in Dominican spirituality? Admittedly this is an odd way to begin an article on Dominican spiritual reading. Yet the answer to this question is perhaps even more surprising. A glance at the classic sources of Dominican spirituality will reveal little or no mention of spiritual reading—as now understood—as an exercise of the interior life. The fact is that Dominicans of earlier centuries—most of our saints included—were unfamiliar with such a thing as formal spiritual reading.

Spiritual reading like meditation or fixed times for mental prayer is a relative newcomer to Dominican spirituality. Earlier centuries would have found it somewhat ridiculous to assign a special period of the day to mental prayer. After all, a Dominican is a contemplative by vocation and to assign a special period to contemplation is similar to assigning a fixed time for breathing or living. Likewise Dominican religious and tertiaries and any Catholic intellectual attracted to the ideals of the Order are dedicated to the pursuit of sacred truth. The assiduous and prayerful study of sacred things, this uniquely Dominican means to sanctity, is a life-long project. Why then plan a spiritual reading program for those whose study should perform the same function?

The answer is that spiritual reading, like meditation periods, is an emergency measure, an exercise made necessary by the changed conditions of modern life. Never before have there been so many distractions around us, so little of the spiritual. The spirit of recollection has become a rarity. It is quite reasonable in such an atmosphere as ours to assign a particular period to mental prayer in order to guarantee a certain minimum of recollected prayer for each day. Similarly, the danger inherent in any intellectual vocation, that of a proneness to intellectual pride or intellectualism, is even more pronounced today. In a civilization given to specialization and departmentalization, a hurried and noisy pace, it is only too easy to confine study, even of the most sublime divine truths, to cold and abstract speculation. Dominican study, which should be personal, total and contemplative, ordered to the greatest charity, can easily become impersonal, a purely intellectual exercise and not a work of mind and heart together.

This danger of intellectualism has been recognized from the very beginning of the Order. Blessed Humbert in writing on study devoted as much attention to a condemnation of science without virtue as he did to the importance of study and science itself. The classical Dominican remedy to dry and impersonal study has been the Divine Office. Spaced throughout the day and night, a devout and solemn recitation of the Divine Office quickened the devotion of the brethren and helped keep their study a continuous and ascending spiral of increasing knowledge and love of God. Far from impeding study, frequent recourse to liturgical prayer enriched and restored the balance between the intellectual and affectual life. For, as Father M-V. Bernadot, O.P. points out, ". . . the truth for which the religious searches in books he finds in the liturgical formulas, no longer abstruse but living, clothed with love, more suggestive, more penetrating."¹ St. Thomas recognized this in his method of study. He made rare use of the dispensations from choir duties to which his great work entitled him. He stated the reason himself: "I renew my devotion that I may later elevate myself more easily to speculation."

Dominican spiritual reading then is an attempt to regain this spirit of prayerful study, the contemplative spirit. It is a remedy for the inroads of modern living on study time, recollection, the liturgical and contemplative atmosphere. If the vicissitudes and exigencies of modern life do not allow us proper time or dispositions for prayerful study, daily spiritual reading will guarantee interior development. If the study time is available but for various reasons the development of virtue is not proportioned to the increase in knowledge, then spiritual reading works to restore the balance between growth in the knowledge and the love of God. In short, Dominican spiritual reading is a modern supplement to the Dominican life of study. Like that life of study it is ordered to divine contemplation which is itself ordained to the greatest charity, so great that it overflows to others: *contemplata aliis tradere*.

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Having considered the place and need of spiritual reading in Dominican spirituality, we might now ask what reading should be done. The previous article outlined in general terms the "what" for spiritual reading. We shall try here to outline more particularly what should be read by Dominican religious and tertiaries or any intelligent Catholic attracted to the Dominican ideal.

The first place in Dominican reading, as in study, is held by Sacred Scripture. A knowledge of the inspired word of God is basic

to any growth in the interior life just as it is basic to any acquisition of sacred truth. If we go directly to the Scriptures we are following the Dominican tradition and capturing the Dominican spirit. St. Dominic manifested an extraordinary love for the Bible, particularly the Gospel of St. Matthew and the Epistles of St. Paul. Since the liturgical spirit is so much a part of Dominican living, special emphasis should also be laid on a study of Scripture in relation to the liturgy. This would include the Psalms, the lessons from the Old and New Testament used in the Divine Office and Mass (particularly the beautiful lessons of the Advent and Lenten liturgy), the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul. The use of commentaries on Scripture, suited to personal needs and capacities, as well as periodic reading of a life of Christ should round out this section.

Secondly, reading should be done for a specifically Dominican spiritual background. The primary source and guide will always be St. Thomas. Whether he is read directly or not depends on individual capabilities. At any rate, in order to insure a broad, solid foundation with no notions foreign to the Dominican spirit, there had best be regular reading of recognized masters of the spiritual life, preferably Dominican or Thomist. Such would be the classical works of Louis of Granada, O.P.; *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life* and *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* by Father Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.; *This Tremendous Lover* by Dom Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.; Dom Marmion's *Christ, the Life of the Soul*. Again, the choice of one or another basic work depends upon the capacities and taste of the individual.

After this reading for the "total view," attention should be paid to sectional reading. This would include works on mental prayer and contemplation for growth in the life of prayer, various writings on the Mass and the Sacraments, the virtues, as well as on Dominican devotions. Also included would be reading of lives of the saints with principal attention given to Our Lady, St. Joseph and the saints of the Order. The latter will provide us with concrete examples of Dominican spirituality and present its ideals in a particularly human setting. The book-list found elsewhere in this issue provides specific titles to choose from on this section.

Lastly, special attention ought to be paid to reading on our particular office in life: the priest on the priesthood and Mass; the religious on the religious life and the vows; the lay person on the duties of his state and work in life. All sections taken together with this last should then blend into an integral, broad and solidly doctrinal foundation in the interior life.

A discussion of Dominican spiritual reading would be sadly incomplete if some thought were not devoted to the "how" of this exercise. The way we read is equally if not more important than what we read; how well we read is infinitely more important than how much.

A testimony of the spiritual life of St. Dominic, "The Nine Ways of Prayer," provides us with a succinct and beautiful summary of the proper way to read:

"Our father . . . withdrew to some solitary place, to his cell or elsewhere, and recollected himself in the presence of God. He would sit quietly, and after the sign of the cross, begin to read from a book opened before him. His spirit would then be sweetly aroused as if he heard Our Lord speaking, as we are told in the Psalms: 'I will hear what the Lord God will speak to me'."²

Notice first of all the close affinity between reading and prayer. The above exercise of St. Dominic comes down to us as his eighth way of prayer; it was done in the prayerful atmosphere of privacy and quiet; it was recollected and devout, preceded by the sign of the cross; it was attentive and meditative. It was, in effect, a prelude to prayer: ". . . he quickly passed upwards from reading to prayer, from prayer to meditation, and from meditation to contemplation."

Dominican spiritual reading then should be done thoughtfully, reflectively, meditatively; it corresponds to what is commonly called meditation. Like Dominican study it aims for a permanent acquisition of truth. If the reading is quick and superficial the time is wasted. Such, too, is the case if we fail to return to books that have benefited us for a second and even third reading. Along with the Gospel of St. Matthew and St. Paul's Epistles St. Dominic always carried the *Conferences* of Cassian, a classical work on the spiritual life. The *Conferences* were also fondly read and reread by St. Thomas.

If in our reading we come across sections that have particular applications to our lives, or thoughts that especially impress us, these can be underlined or jotted down in a notebook. The highlights of any work are thus set before us for future reading or reference. They are also singled out for possible use in mental prayer and can be really fruitful in establishing prayerful union with God if they have the power to grip the heart immediately.

Finally, we might note St. Dominic's attitude as a listener: "His spirit would then be sweetly aroused as if he heard Our Lord speaking." Since the Dominican vocation is an intellectual one, the tendency

is to think and reason too much in prayer and reading. We too often fail to listen. This is manifested in approaching spiritual reading with an overly-critical attitude, a tendency which would make spiritual reading as personal and affectual as an exercise in grammar. This is not to rule out discernment in reading. But once a reputable author and work has been chosen, then we should strive to read in a spirit of faith, seeking to profit by what is read rather than to criticize. As Father Lagrange points out, "The spirit of faith will make us see God Himself in spiritual works."³ This is the spirit that makes us a listener and not purely a critic, a disciple and not the master; spiritual reading remains what it should be: a work of mind and heart together.

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For a Dominican, then, spiritual reading pertains to his dedication to the assiduous study of sacred truth. It is as broad and sublime as the object of that study. Indeed, it encompasses all of sacred truth but in a personal and more concrete fashion. It is, therefore, an aid to his study, enlivening it, warming it, raising it more surely and easily to the prayerful heights which his vocation demands. It guarantees that every advance in learning is accompanied by a growth in virtue.

Moreover, this reading, like true study, is not hurried but reflective. Recollected and reverent, it is permeated with a spirit of faith and docility. The reader listens for the voice of God, meditates upon what is said in order to absorb and assimilate it. Dominican spiritual reading corresponds to what many modern authors term meditation—the beginning of mental prayer. It is profitable and useful only when it nourishes true contemplative prayer.

St. Thomas once likened all that he had written to straw. The same figure applies readily to spiritual reading. In a very real sense its content is as insignificant as straw, a vague imaging of the Reality that is God. In an equally true but more pointed sense, the matter of spiritual reading is dry and sterile of itself, like straw. Yet it is also capable of feeding a fire and warming the soul to heavenly things once it is sparked with the light of divine charity.

FOOTNOTES

¹ M. V. Bernadot, O.P., "The Place of the Liturgy in Dominican Spirituality," translated by Anselm M. Townsend, O.P. Bruce, 1934. p. 93.

² Andrew M. Kolzow, O.P., "The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic," *Reality*, Summer, 1956.

³ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. 1, translated by Sr. M. Timothea Doyle, O.P., B. Herder, 1957. p. 253.

SPIRITUAL READING PROGRAM

This program is directed toward a twofold objective: a solid foundation in the spiritual life in general; sectional or topical reading on *three* major areas of concentration—*Prayer; Liturgical Life and Worship; Obligations of State.*

I. BASIC FUNDAMENTAL READING ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

A. *Daily reading of Sacred Scripture*

1. *New Testament*—Christ in the Gospel (Frey: Conf. of Precious Blood); Gospels, Acts, Epistles (esp. St. Paul)
2. *Old Testament*—Read in the original context, excerpts used in ferial Masses during Lent and Advent.

N.B. The best modern version of the Bible is in French: La Sainte Bible (Les Editions du Cerf, Paris).

B. *Commentaries:* Use to check and supplement, not to supplant, daily reading of Scripture itself.

St. Thomas—On Sts. Matthew, John and Paul

Ceuppens, O.P.—On St. Paul

Voste, O.P.—On St. Paul

Bullough, O.P.—St. Paul and Apostolic Writings

Prat, S.J.—The Theology of St. Paul

Boismard, O.P.—Prologue of St. John

Martindale, S.J.—Gospel According to St. John

McNabb, O.P.—New Testament Witness to Our Lady

New Testament Witness to St. Peter

McKenzie—Two-Edged Sword

Robert-Tricot—Initiation Biblique

Heinisch—Theology of the Old Testament

The New Catholic Commentary

Hauret—Beginnings, Genesis and Modern Science

Vawter—A Path Through Genesis

C. *Life of Christ:* Periodic reading, perhaps annually during Lent and Advent, gives freshness and vitality to Scripture reading.

Oursler—Greatest Story Ever Told

Bishop—Day Christ Died

Farrell, O.P.—Only Son

Ricciotti—Life of Christ

Lagrange, O.P.—Gospel of Jesus Christ

Prat—Life of Christ

Didon, O.P.—Jesus Christ (2 Vols.)

Heris, O.P.—The Mystery of Christ
St. Vincent Ferrer—Christology from Sermons of St. Vincent Ferrer
Marmion—Christ in His Mysteries (Liturgical Life)
Goodier—Passion of Jesus Christ
 Public Life of Jesus Christ (2 Vols.)
Grandmaison, S.J.—Jesus Christ (2 Vols.)
Adam, Karl—The Son of God
 Christ, Our Brother
Leen—In the Likeness of Christ

- D. *Basic works of recognized masters of the spiritual life*
 Read two or three times weekly for 10-15 min.
 Three or four times weekly on other major areas of concentration
Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.—Three Ways of Spiritual Life
Jarrett, O.P.—Meditations for Layfolk
Harrison, O.P.—Credo
Farrell, O.P.—My Way of Life
 Companion to the Summa (4 vols.)
Sheed—Map of Life
Marmion, O.S.B.—Christ the Life of the Soul
Philipon, O.P.—Spiritual Doctrine of Marmion
Boylan—This Tremendous Lover
Petitot, O.P.—Introduction to Holiness
Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.—Three Ages of the Interior Life
Arintero, O.P.—Mystical Evolution
Buckler, O.P.—Perfection of Mary by Charity
P. Marie-Eugene, O.C.D.—I Want to See God
St. Francis de Sales—Introduction to the Devout Life
 The Love of God
Louis of Granada—Summa of the Christian Life
Faber—Collected Works
Rodriguez, S.J.—Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues
Tanqueray, S.S.—The Spiritual Life
 (St. John of the Cross; St. Theresa of Avila)
 (The Fathers: St. John Chrysostom; St. Bernard)

II. SECTIONAL OR TOPICAL READING ON THREE MAJOR AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

A. Prayer

1. *Mental Prayer*: Including spiritual reading, meditation, contemplation and related subjects.
Wilberforce, O.P.—An Easy Method of Mental Prayer
Ridolfi, O.P.—A Short Method of Mental Prayer
McNabb, O.P.—The Craft of Prayer
Boylan—Difficulties in Mental Prayer
St. Thomas Aq.—Three Greatest Prayers
Osende, O.P.—Fruits of Contemplation
Egan, O.P.—Meditation and the Search for God (Thomist Reader '57)
Valentine, O.P.—Whatever He Shall Say

- Lercaro, Card.*—Methods of Mental Prayer
Lcen—Progress Through Mental Prayer
Lieberman—Living With God
Houselander—The Comforting of Christ
De Caussade, S.J.—On Prayer
De Jaegher, S.J.—One With Jesus
Dehan, O.P.—The Living Water
Rohrback—Conversation with Christ
Guardini—The Lord's Prayer
2. *Marian Prayer*—Little Office, Rosary, Shrines, Cult of B.V.M.
 Read books annually, especially in May and Oct.
 Saturdays throughout the year
- Bernadot, O.P.*—Our Lady in Our Life
Hugon, O.P.—Sanctity Through the Rosary
McNabb, O.P.—Mary of Nazareth
Jarrett, O.P.—Our Lady of Lourdes
Schwertner, O.P.—The Rosary
De Marchi—Crusade of Fatima
Walsh—Our Lady of Fatima
McGlynn, O.P.—Vision of Fatima
Murphy, O.P.—Psalms of the Little Office
Bossuet—Devotion to the Blessed Virgin
Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.—Mother of Our Saviour
Philipon, O.P.—The Mother of God
Philippe, O.P.—Blessed Virgin and the Priesthood
Ryan, O.P.—Our Lady of Fatima
Most—Mary in Our Life
Palmer, S.J.—Mary in the Documents of the Church
St. John Eudes—The Admirable Heart of Mary
Lynch—A Woman Wrapped in Silence
De Montfort—The Secret of the Rosary
 True Devotion
Houselander—The Reed of God

B. *Liturgical Life and Worship*

1. *Liturgical Works*
Kilgallon & Weber—Life in Christ
Howell, S.J.—Of Sacraments and Sacrifice
Roguet, O.P.—Christ Acts Through the Sacraments
Fearon, O.P.—Graceful Living
Joyce—Catholic Doctrine of Grace
Jarrett, O.P.—No Abiding City (12 Lenten Conf.)
Marmion, O.S.B.—Christ in His Mysteries
Murphy, J. L.—The Living Christ
Pepler, O.P.—Lent: A Liturgical Commentary on
 the Lessons and Gospels
Weiser, S.J.—The Christmas Book
 The Easter Book
Pierik—The Psalter in the Temple and
 The Church
Guardini—The Church and the Catholic

Guardini—Sacred Signs
Parsch—The Church's Year of Grace

2. *The Eucharist*

a. *As Sacrament:*

Vonier—Key to the Doctrine of Eucharist
Bernadot, O.P.—From Holy Communion to the Bl. Trinity
McNabb, O.P.—God's Good Cheer
Joret, O.P.—The Eucharist and the Confessional
Louis of Granada, O.P.—The Blessed Sacrament
Bl. Julian Eymard—The Light of the Monstrance
Faber—Blessed Sacrament
Merton—The Living Bread
Houselander—The Passion of the Infant Jesus

b. *As Sacrifice:*

Daniel-Rops—This is the Mass
Chery, O.P.—What is the Mass?
Crofts, O.P.—The Fullness of Sacrifice
Roguet, O.P.—Holy Mass
Frenay, O.P.—The Spirituality of the Mass
Gühr—Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
Knox—The Mass in Slow Motion
Guardini—Meditations Before Mass
Parsch—Study the Mass
Jungmann, S.J.—The Sacrifice of the Church

3. *Penance*

Chery, O.P.—Frequent Confession
Manning, Card.—The Love of Jesus for Penitents
Wilson—Pardon and Peace
Scharsch—Confession as a Means of Spiritual Progress
Joret, O.P.—The Eucharist and the Confessional

C. *Obligations of State*

1. *Perfection*

St. Thomas Aq.—The Religious State
Lavaud, O.P.—The Meaning of the Religious Life
Marmion, O.S.B.—Christ, The Ideal of the Monk
Vann, O.P.—Awake in Heaven
Beutler—For Thee Alone (Retreat)
Leen—By *Jacob's Well* (Retreat)
Knox—A Retreat for Priests
Knox—The Priestly Life (Retreat)
Boylan—The Spiritual Life of the Priest
Montini—Priestly Perfection

2. *Vows and Virtues*

Marmion, O.S.B.—Sponsa Verbi
Regamy: Poverty
Valentine, O.P.—Religious Obedience
 The Apostolate of Chastity

- Ple, O.P.* (Editor)—The Religious Life Series
 Vol. 3 Obedience
 Vol. 4 Poverty
 Vol. 5 Chastity
- De Caussade, S.J.*—Abandonment to Divine Providence
De Jaegher, S.J.—The Virtue of Trust
Vann, O.P.—The Divine Pity

3. *Instruction of Youth*

(Obligation to cultivate, early in religious life, the necessary intellectual and moral virtues.)

- a. *Sertillanges, O.P.*—The Intellectual Life
St. Thomas Aquinas—How to Study (Letter)
Adler—How to Read a Book
Handren, S.J.—A Little Learning
Brennan, O.P.—Learning and its Permanence
Lennon, O.P.—The Dean Speaks
Donlon, O.P.—Theology and Education
Sheed—Are We Really Teaching Religion?
- b. *Brennan, O.P.*—The Image of His Maker
Hock—The Four Temperaments
Maturin—Self Knowledge and Self Discipline
Chery, O.P.—Frequent Confession
Kelly, S.J.—Modern Youth and Chastity
Valentine, O.P.—The Inside of the Cup

N.B.

1. All booklists are quickly dated—*keep this one alive*. It is not exhaustive—add to it and make it your own.
2. If impressed favorably on reading any book listed, follow that author when he has works on other subjects of interest to you. Especially true of your “basic” authors.
3. Keep abreast of *current reviews* of spiritual books :
 The Critic (Formerly Books on Trial)
 Dominicana
 Check Bowker and Co's. semi-annual list of all paperback editions.
4. *Helpful tips* may be gathered from :
Frank Sheed—Ground Plan for Catholic Reading
 Reading Plan for Catholic Parents
Boylan—This Tremendous Lover
 (Ch. IX—Seeking Christ Through Reading)
Sertillanges—The Intellectual Life (Especially Chap. VIII)
Dohen—Spiritual Reading (Cross & Crown, June 1958)
5. For Dominican authors and saints check annually the Dominican Calendar Booklist.
6. An excellent article and booklist on Bibliotherapy for children appeared in *The Critic*, Nov. 1957.