

THE SPIRIT OF THE ORDER

EVERY religious society into which God has breathed the spirit of life manifests its own peculiar characteristics. These are determined by the spirit of the institution, the spirit in its turn reflecting the ideal toward which the efforts of the society should be directed. The degree in which the ideal is kept living and unchanged determines the endurance of the society's spirit. In a word, the nobility and realization of an institution's ideal are the test of its dignity and vitality.

That the ideal of Saint Dominic has lived in his Order is certain, for at the close of seven hundred years of mingled suffering, labor, and



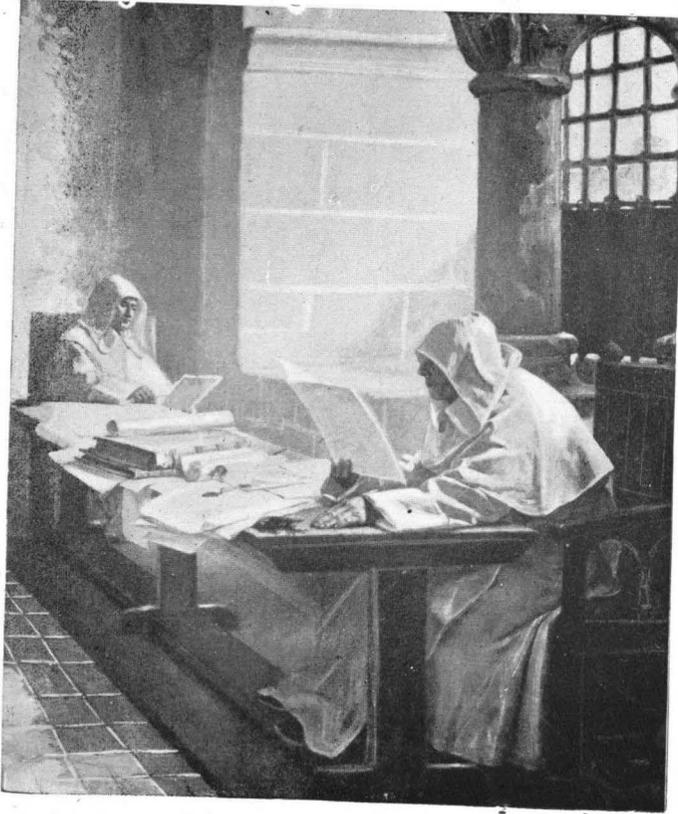
Saint Peter Martyr—Angelico

prosperity, the Order of Friars Preachers lives in the pristine vigor of its youth. With its spirit ardent and uncorrupted, it confidently fulfils its mission, as it has been fulfilling it since the day of its birth, because it has never altered nor lowered, nor disregarded the ideal which its Founder set, like a pillar of light, before its advance into the future.

Saint Dominic saw far when seven centuries ago, with his little band of followers, he laid the foundation of the Dominican organization. By virtue of his experience and knowledge in things human and divine, he perceived an urgent need in the world for an Order of a type hitherto unknown among the religious foundations of the Church. He answered that need, and provided for the shifting needs of time by giv-

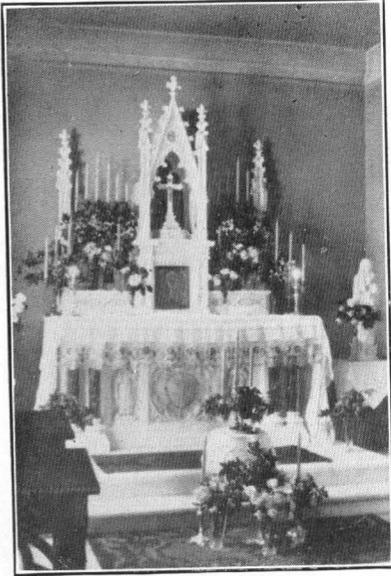
ing to his new Order a form possessed of a flexibility which, without affecting the essential characteristics of the organization, could mould itself into harmony with the movements of future ages.

Many of the elements incorporated in the new Order, Saint Dominic gathered from various sources, but the form and manner in which he combined them into a practical and harmonious whole, and the ideal by which he cemented them, were originally his conception. His Order has preserved the distinctive features which he gave it: the substantial union of clerical, monastic, and apostolic elements; the com-

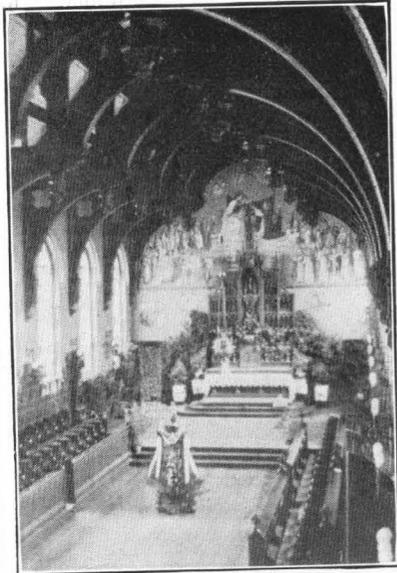


A Dominican Study

plete ordination of every factor to the dissemination of Truth through the activities of teaching and preaching; and the elective system and representative legislation. These features have endured in their original setting through the years of seventy decades, and through storms of persecution and upheavals of society, which either wrecked its fellow travelers or occasioned reorganization and numerous divisions in their households.



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These, then, reveal a most remarkable characteristic in the Order of Friars Preachers: its essential individuality amid the variety of its works; its cohesive resistance under the pressure of external disintegrating factors; its power of steady endurance when surrounded by the penetrating spirit of revolution in the social and political world. Nothing could be more indicative of the approving and watchful eye of Divine Providence; of the unifying effect of a seven century struggle to realize the ideal conceived by Saint Dominic.

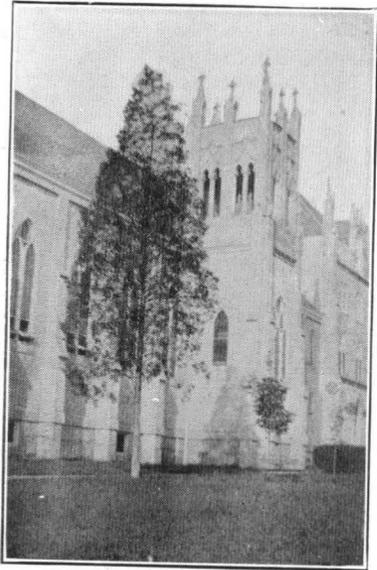
Most patent evidence of the sanctity of this ideal is the great number of spiritual children, renowned throughout Christendom because of their holy lives, their learning and apostolic labors, to whom Saint Dominic's Order has given birth. From its bosom star after star has flashed to take its place in the Heavens, until a galaxy of saintly Dominican lights, whose lustre shall never dim, encircled the spiritual Kingdom. They have done much to fulfill the prophetic words, given in the confirmation of the Order by Honorius III, that the Friars of the new Order were to be "the true lights of the world."

It is characteristic of the Dominican ideal, that those who have most perfectly realized it in their lives as a body, belong to no particular class of laborers in the Vineyard, but to all classes: saintly apologists, missionaries and reformers of society, fearless in their burning zeal for the Faith and in their love for souls; saintly mystics and ascetics, prostrate at the Fount of Divine Wisdom, and joying to suffer with the Saviour for the sins of the world; saintly scientists, philosophers, and theologians, tireless in their quest of truth and in their noble efforts to

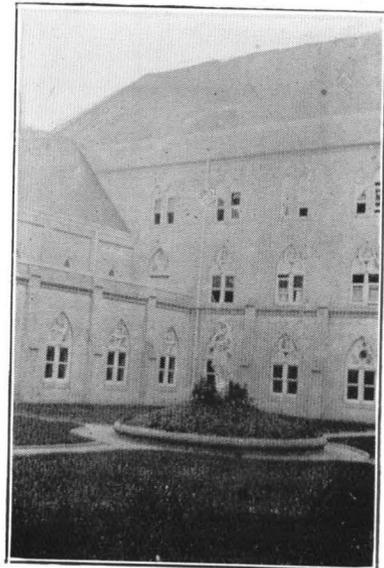
make Truth known; saintly servants of the humble and the weak, offering up their lives to help men to be happy; saintly counsellors and confessors to the princes of the earth, devoted to the cause of God and His people; saintly musicians, sculptors, and painters, contrasting by means of their masterly art the ugliness and penalty of vice with the beauty and reward of virtue; and all powerful apostles, profound mystics, brilliant Doctors, stern ascetics, ardent artists—converging in a mighty stream of holy effort with a single purpose: the preaching and teaching of truth by every legitimate means for the salvation of souls.

Great and holy indeed must be the ideal which after seven hundred years still binds in a solid unity every portion of the body to which it first gave vitality; great and holy the ideal in which every limb has been so firmly set that after ages of prosperity and adversity there are no detached branches; great and holy the ideal that can maintain, as an harmonious and substantial whole, a dual nature—contemplative and active—unchanged for seven centuries, and thus render two forces a source of doubled strength in the pursuit of truth for the enlightenment and salvation of men; great and holy the ideal that has borne such an abundance of fruit in every realm of saintly life.

As we look back over that great army of Saint Dominic's followers, and ask of its halo-crowned leaders the reason, we see every arm raise in one direction, and every index point to one Figure. It is the figure of the Christ, living, suffering, dying, to teach man the Eternal Truths of supernatural religion—to teach man the way to eternal happiness. This then is the Dominican ideal. It is the vivifying, unifying, sanctifying principle of every phase of Dominican life. It is the key to the



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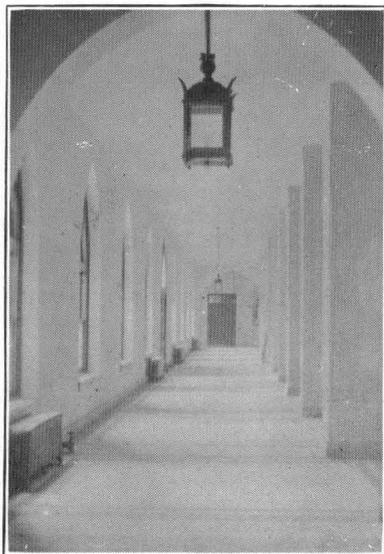
The Cloister Garth
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Dominican mind and heart. It is the goal of its spirit. Between spirit and ideal there exists an unique conformity. Hence the indissoluble concord of Saint Dominic's organization; for as was said this conformity is essential.

Since then the ideal of the Dominican Order is Christ, the Teacher of Truth, it is not surprising that its spirit is intellectual. To a certain extent, it is true, it is both penitential and emotive; but both these phases are controlled, dominated by the intellectual spirit of the Order in such a manner that they cannot impede concerted effort in the direction of the Order's supreme object, the salvation of souls. In other words, these two elements of religious life—physical austerities and external worship—are tempered to a

degree that renders them effective aids to the attainment of that object.

The originality of Saint Dominic's plan, probably more than in anything else, consists in the proportion and quality in which were blended these various principles of a contemplative and active life. The older religious Orders aimed almost exclusively at contemplation and monastic observance. More modern foundations have occupied themselves principally with the active life. In Saint Dominic's plan the contemplative and monastic life was made essential to active labor among God's children. The dependence is mutual. The one is so necessary to the other, that were they to be separated, or their relation altered by undue intensifying of the one to the weakening of the other, the



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Dominican spirit would be jeopardized. A brief word concerning the inner life of the Friar Preacher may serve to give an idea of this relation between contemplation and activity.

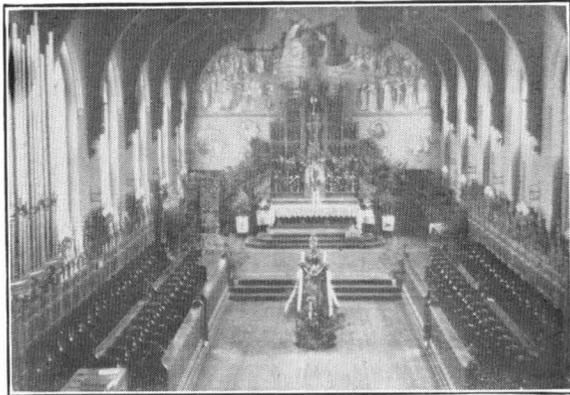
Saint Dominic built his institution upon the foundation of Christ's instructions to the Apostles; and he modelled its life upon the life of Christ Himself, Who so often sought prolonged solitude and prayer in the midst of His labors among men. The Man of God wished his followers to imitate that Life as perfectly as is possible to man's imperfect nature. They were to give a great part of their lives therefore to prayer and study, that they might go teach truth to all—mighty and weak, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, just man and sinner.

Among the most effective means by which the Friar Preacher is fitted for this work are the vows by which he binds himself to observe the evangelical counsels. By these vows he solemnly promises God to

practice until death poverty, chastity and obedience. He voluntarily embraces poverty and chastity, that his heart may be wholly detached and pure, and thus more responsive to the manifold graces with which God will constantly visit his soul; and, moreover, that he may be the more free to devote every effort of his life to the work to which his Master has called him. But this is not all. He makes his sacrifices complete, a holocaust. He surrenders his will, than which there is no faculty dearer to human self-love, into the hands of his superiors. Though his gift is great, his gain is greater, for he is now certain, that by obeying the commands of those whom God, in a special manner, has set over him, he shall in all things accomplish God's Holy Will and thus unite himself with the ideal of his Order. To obey them in simplicity of heart is to obey Christ (Eph. 6, 5).

To aid the Friar Preacher in the attainment of the spiritual perfection, for which by his vows he is bound to strive, there were added certain practices of personal mortification, such as abstinence throughout the entire year, the long fast extending from the Feast of the Holy Cross (Sept. 14) to Easter Sunday, the rule of silence, the night Office, watching, and the like. All practice of austerity and monastic observance, however, was to be made conducive to study and preaching. Hence the Dominican Constitution provides for individual dispensations, whenever the superior may see fit, and "especially when it is a question of things which may interfere with study, preaching, or the salvation of souls." This protection and enhancement, by faculty of dispensation, of the supreme aim of the Order gives a characteristic touch to the phase of monastic life which Saint Dominic linked to apostolic activity. It should be noted, however, that in the case of contemplation and study there was to be no dispensation, because prayer and the acquirement of knowledge are fundamental among the constituents of the inner life of the Friar Preacher.

Many of the regulations which affect the religious observances of the Order, as the one establishing that the Rule does not bind under sin, or the one regulating the choral duty, which provides that the Divine Office be chanted "reverently, yet quickly, so that the more time may be spent in study," must have sounded strange, coming as they



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did in the thirteenth century during the golden age of the purely monastic and contemplative Orders.

By far more strange, however, must have appeared the Dominican plan of government, based upon democratical principles at a period when birth and rank commanded every office and dignity in the state and strongly influenced the minds of the people. A notion of the spirit of the Dominican Order cannot be had without taking into consideration this system of government, unique in the harmonic interaction of monarchical and democratical factors; for it gives to the Dominican spirit another distinctive feature. It must suffice, however, since space will not permit an explanation of the application of these principles by Saint Dominic, to say that the Dominican organization has maintained from the days of Saint Dominic himself a popular elective system and representative legislation which were formed perhaps some five hundred years in advance of their time; and that the Constitution of the Order of Friar Preachers is recognized to-day as an unexcelled expression of well balanced government, and as a model of legal nicety and clearness.

The precision with which these Constitutions direct every phase of the Friar Preacher's life to contemplation and study in preparation for preaching and teaching is indicative of the spirit of the Order, and has given to the Order its intellectual atmosphere and renown. It is this characteristic of intellectuality to which the spirit of the Dominican Order is perhaps most frequently referred. And rightly so. For its intellect has been manifested so prominently in the lives of most of its saints that the great, loving heart which actuates all and sustains the Order's life is sometimes overlooked. The Dominican Order has a heart, ample and ardent. Without it, there could have been no mission; but like the dry bed of a stream that never flowed, it had been formed but useless. For the Christian, reason controls emotion; and at the same time the advance in knowledge, if it be legitimate knowledge, intensifies love. And because the intellect of Saint Dominic's Order is, as was the intellect of the Saint himself, so strongly developed, its affections are powerful and universal. Who can read its history without realizing something of the intense influence which the Dominican heart has had during seven hundred years in helping to make men happier? Who can study the lives of its Saints, weeping, laboring, suffering, dying, to save men from sin and lead them to God, without perceiving how the Dominican heart has bled and sacrificed itself in its love of God and man? Who can be witness to the beauty, piety, and solemnity of its ritual, without feeling how the Dominican heart has striven to express its sentiments of praise, love, and adoration?

But were all said that were possible to be said on the ideal and spirit of Saint Dominic's Order, it must remain but an attempt far from being adequate or worthy of the subject. Who can picture, even with brush and pigments, a soul? There is perhaps no better way to obtain an idea of what the ideal and spirit of the Dominican Order is than by becoming acquainted, through reading their lives, with its Founder and the Saints who were formed in its household; for their lives are the nearest comprehensible expression ever given to the Dominican spirit.

—Brother Basil, O. P.