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DOMINICAN ELOQUENCE YESTERDAY AND TODAY

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THE first chapter of the Constitutions of the Dominican Order contains a sentence that is worthy of careful consideration: "Our Order is known to have been instituted especially for preaching and for the salvation of souls." Herein we find the reason why Dominic drew to himself none but priests. His plan was a bold conception, something entirely original. His followers were not to be pious laymen addressing simple words of moral exhortation to the people, but rather skilled and carefully trained theologians, prepared to defend truth with arguments that could not be shattered and ever alert to expose the subtle sophism of heresy wherever it should raise its head. This condition is unmistakably set forth in the canonical confirmation issued by Pope Honorius III, on December 22, 1216: "Considering that the religious of your Order will be the champions of the faith and the true lights of the world, we confirm your Order." Commenting upon this point, Father Bede Jarrett, the learned English Dominican, says: "Boldly the Sovereign Pontiff puts as the very reason of his approval the novelty and dangerous vocation undertaken. The work of Rome has always been best done when she has trusted her children. St. Dominic was put on his honour not to fail in loyalty to the Holy See. He lived up to his knightly oath of fealty."¹ It was this same distinguished Pontiff who conferred upon Dominic and his followers the official title of Order of Preachers, a name which clearly signifies their purpose in the Church and their mission to the world.

¹ *The Life of St. Dominic* (London, 1924), p. 83.

It is an historical fact that prior to the time of St. Dominic doctrinal preaching was considered an episcopal prerogative. The activities of the older religious orders, such as the Benedictines, were confined to their particular monasteries and the adjacent territory. If at times they were sent on papal missions, commissioned to preach against the heretics, or empowered to carry on some work of evangelization, such endeavors were exceptions to their established monastic rule of life. They were primarily contemplatives cut off from the world and seeking to alleviate the sad condition of society through the medium of their schools and through the efficacy of their prayers and penitential exercises. Dominic Guzman, within whose bosom throbbed the heart of a saint and a statesman, realized that the needs of the time called for action, vigorous action. Consequently his idea of a religious body of men was a break with the past. For him there must be an harmonious fusion of the contemplative and active life. His followers would be priests, members of a world-wide order, of the highest learning, with truth as their motto, and whose mode of life might be summed up in the phrase "*contemplata aliis tradere*" (to give to others the fruit of their contemplation). In passing, we may note that the Angelic Doctor says that "that form of active life in which a man, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation, is more perfect than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ."²

The early Dominicans were aflame with the apostolic spirit enkindled from the white-heat enthusiasm of Dominic. They considered their vocation an extraordinary one, their mission as divinely inspired. Some of them showed such marvellous zeal and fervor that they could not eat without qualms of conscience unless they had preached that day to many or to few. They were preachers to the world. All places and all seasons furnished opportunities for announcing the word of God. They preached whenever and wherever an audience could be assembled, whether in the great cathedrals, in the smaller churches, at the university centers, in the busy market place or along the country roadside. Humbert of the Romans, the fifth Master General of the Order, recommended the brethren to adapt their sermons to everybody. Furthermore, he says that of all the works under-

² St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 40, a. 1 ad 1 am.

taken by the Friars preaching is the most important since it is the most fruitful, and especially because it dominates all the rest as the end dominates the means. In view of the great achievements wrought by the members of the Order in the field of preaching, this same superior could well write to his religious in the year 1260: "We teach the people, we teach the prelates, we teach the wise and the unwise, religious and seculars, clerics and laymen, nobles and peasants, lowly and great."³ In a word it is not an exaggeration to say that there is not a more glorious page in the history of any religious body in the Church, be it old or new, than the story of Dominican eloquence during the early days of the Order's existence. And, if during the long course of the centuries many competitors have arisen to share the laurels with the Friars Preacher, nevertheless, none has surpassed and few have equalled them in their own special vocation, that of champions of the truth and faithful preachers of the word of God.

Just as a spark fanned by a stiff breeze becomes a mighty conflagration spreading with lightning-like rapidity and transforming everything in its path, so also the eloquence of the Order of Preachers cast its influence over the world. However, during the course of this brief paper but a few of Dominic's illustrious sons may be mentioned; the remaining multitude must await the dawn of another day when their glorious achievements will be recalled for the inspiration and edification of the generations of the future. Blessed Reginald of Orleans and Blessed Jordan of Saxony are excellent types of the first brethren. The former by his burning eloquence attracted vast congregations to him. As a result vocations to the Order were very numerous, so much so, that it became a popular saying that it was not safe to listen to Master Reginald's sermons if one did not wish to take the Friars' habit. The latter preached with extraordinary success especially at Paris and was instrumental in the reception of the holy habit by many learned members of the University. He was on intimate terms with the Ghibelline Emperor, Frederic II, but this fact did not prevent him from courageously reproving that proud monarch because of his sinful life. In the year 1230, his apostolic labors were extended to England where he preached at Oxford. As at Bologna, Paris, and the other university centers, here too the power of his words

³ *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1913), Vol. XII, "Preachers."

and the holiness of his life led the most cultured men in the land to resign their professorial chairs and embrace the religious life.

Owing to a peculiar yet traditional Dominican spirit of indifference as regards the public recognition of the praiseworthy achievements of its own members, the name of John of Vicenza has all but passed into the realms of oblivion. Still in his own day, the labors of this humble friar reconciled countless souls to God and contributed in no small degree to the lustre that gathered about the pulpit activities of the Friars. Of him an ancient historian remarks: "Never since the time of Our Lord Jesus Christ, were there seen such multitudes gathered together in His name, as were assembled to hear this friar preach peace. He had such power over all minds, that everywhere he was suffered to arrange terms of reconciliation; and through reverence for him the greater part of the multitude used to listen to him with bare feet. Many who had been mortal enemies, moved by his preaching, of their own accord embraced and gave each other the kiss of peace."⁴

Undoubtedly, the fame of Peter of Verona has been preserved to us through the decree of the Church raising this saintly and eloquent preacher to the highest honors of the altar under the title of St. Peter Martyr. Thomas de Lentino, one of his early biographers, says that the preaching of Brother Peter fell upon the souls of the people like "spring rains, accompanied by the lightning of his miracles." Thousands were attracted by the magnetism of his eloquence so that the cathedrals and churches were not large enough to accommodate the audiences that desired to hear him. As a result, many of his sermons were delivered in the city squares and from the porches of public buildings. Pope Gregory IX appointed him to the office of general inquisitor, and later his religious superiors sent him to combat the Manichean errors. Although continually calumniated and persecuted by the enemies of the Church, nevertheless, he refused to be silenced and vigorously pushed forward his campaign in defense of the true faith and in opposition to the prevalent vices of the time. Not a few of his sermons were accompanied by miracles. He preached at Ravenna, Venice, Milan, Rome, Bologna, Genoa, and Como. In fact he became the great apostle of the Italian peninsula.

The eloquence of Dominic's sons was by no means restricted to southern Europe, for it was not later than the Second General

⁴ Anon., *Life of St. Dominic* (New York, 1892), p. 247.

Chapter of the Order, held in Bologna during the year 1221, that the English Province was instituted and a group of the brethren sent to that northern country. We are told that the Archbishop upon receiving them, when he learned that they were Preachers, ordered Gilbert, the head of the little band, to preach before him in a certain church where he himself was to have preached that very day. The prelate was so edified by the friar's sermon that during the remaining years of his episcopate he favored and promoted the Order and its work. On all sides the Friars Preacher met with extraordinary success. This was due in no small measure to the fact that the English then, as today, were a sermon-loving people. The outstanding names of those early days are Wallace, Bromyard, and Gorham. However, few authentic chronicles of the active apostolate of the Friars have come down to us because, in the words of a well-known English Dominican: "A stillness holds those broken records of the past. Perhaps future labours may lay bare many details now buried, but the probability is that, as they would all best have wished, all, except the colored miniatures of Cifrewas and the as vivid miniatures of Trivet, everything is forgotten and unknown."⁵

"The Apostle of the North" is the just title that has been bestowed upon the great Dominican and apostolic preacher, St. Hyacinth. The story of this friar's labors seems almost incredible. His eloquence was unsurpassed and bore a rich fruit in its harvest of souls. Like many of his religious brethren, he enjoyed the gift of miracles. By his preaching, heresy, error, and vice were dispelled, and the light of faith enkindled through a stretch of territory which even in this age of rapid travel is rightly considered a far-flung battle line. He evangelized Poland, Prussia, Russia, Pomerania, Lithuania, Denmark, Norway, and Scotland. In his life the expression of Matthew Paris was literally realized, for "the whole world was his cell and the ocean his choister." It was such an apostolate that influenced Pope Gregory IX to request "all the princes and peoples of the North to follow the instructions of the Friars Preacher, those saintly Apostles who have drawn you from darkness of error into the path of truth and justice." Hyacinth is indeed the St. Paul of the Dominican Order, never satisfied, always in search of new fields to conquer for Christ. On one of his missionary expeditions he realized St. Dominic's great ambition of preaching to

⁵ Bede Jarrett, O. P., *The English Dominicans* (New York, 1921), p. 105.

the Cumans, and then continued on through Turkestan, Tartary, and Thibet as far as the great wall of China.

In Christian art, St. Vincent Ferrer is depicted with wings, an allusion to the angel of the Apocalypse "flying through the midst of heaven, having the eternal gospel, to preach unto them that sit upon the earth, and over every nation, and tribe and people: Saying with a loud voice: Fear the Lord, and give him honor, because the hour of his judgment is come."⁶ Furthermore, tradition and the sanction of the Church have styled this eloquent Friar Preacher "The Angel of the Last Judgment." The marvellous effect of his sermons can scarcely be described. "Himself consumed with zeal, he inflamed a people that had grown old and cold in sin; with all the fiery eloquence of an ancient prophet, he pitilessly lashed the iniquity of a sinful generation. The effect was so great at times that the eloquence was stopped by the very outburst it created."⁷ His converts numbered more than a hundred thousand. Many obstinate and public sinners were so moved by his words that, prostrating themselves upon the ground, they tearfully sought pardon for the transgressions of a life time. His preaching led twenty-five thousand Jews of Spain alone into the true fold of Christ. While in the same country Saracens to the number of eight thousand renounced their errors and received holy Baptism. The deep contrition and the spirit of perseverance manifested by his converts was little short of miraculous.

Since the time of the Apostles few if any of the great saints of God have wielded such a powerful influence over the hearts and minds of men, have exercised the gift of miracles to such an extraordinary degree or have reaped such an abundant harvest of souls as this "Angel of the Last Judgment," St. Vincent Ferrer of the Order of Preachers.

As a pulpit orator and as one whose fervid eloquence spent itself in the interest of Christianity and in a spirit of uncompromising opposition to the paganism and immorality of Humanistic tendencies, the name of the Dominican Jerome Savonarola dominates the entire Middle Ages. The rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate flocked to hear him. Many rose at midnight and patiently awaited the opening of the church doors in order not to be deprived of the opportunity of listening to this friar whom they looked upon as a prophet sent from God.

⁶ Apoc. xiv, 6-7.

⁷ The Novices, *Dominican Saints* (Washington, 1921), p. 246.

The Scriptures were the storehouse whence he drew the inspiration for his powerful sermons, and as an expositor of the sacred texts he stands without a peer. Florence was the chief scene of his labors as it was of his triumphs and later of his fall, for these same frivolous Florentines proved themselves unworthy of the ministrations of such a man, and he was burned alive in their midst. But as Lacordaire, his religious brother, says: "In vain was he burned for his virtues and his glory rose higher than the blaze of the pile."⁸

The continued faithfulness of the Friars to their mission of preaching and their courageous defense of truth in the face of all obstacles led even in the early days to a play upon the name Dominicans; they were called *Domini Canes* (the watch dogs of the Lord). Because of this acknowledged loyalty to the See of Peter many offices, oftentimes onerous in themselves, were intrusted to the Preachers. Pope Honorius III appointed St. Dominic as the first Master of the Sacred Palace, an office which during subsequent centuries has always been discharged by a Dominican. The Commissary of the Holy Office is a Friar Preacher. And although the activities of the Order as regards the Inquisition have been used by many misguided critics as a target of reproach, nevertheless, it should be remembered that this office was undertaken at the express command of the Chief Pastor of Christendom. Furthermore, it furnishes unquestionable proof of the confidence of the Holy See in the teaching and preaching of Dominic's sons. The origin of the Holy Name Society dates back to the Council of Lyons in the year 1274, when Pope Gregory X, through a letter addressed to the Dominican Master General, Blessed John of Vercelli, commissioned the Friars to preach devotion to the names of God and of Christ. An outstanding characteristic of every Dominican is the manifestation of a true and filial love for the august Mother of Our Lord. This has found expression in the common heritage of the Order, the devotion of the Holy Rosary, which during the long lapse of seven hundred years has been preached in every corner of the earth.

These instances are but a few examples of the wonderful spirit of coöperation exercised towards the Papacy and the Church by the great Patriarch Dominic and his white-robed followers, a point which has been curiously emphasized by Matt-

⁸ H. D. Lacordaire, O. P., *A Memorial to the French People* (New York), p. 87.

hew Paris who rather scornfully says: "The Friars Preacher, impelled by obedience are the fiscal agents, the nuncios and even the legates of the pope. They are the faithful collectors of the pontifical money by their preaching and their crusades and when they have finished they begin again. They assist the infirm, the dying, and those who make their wills. Diligent negotiators, armed with powers of every kind, they turn all to the profit of the pope."⁹

It naturally follows that an Order whose members have been ardently devoted to preaching should also contribute generously to the field of homiletic literature. Among the oldest of these productions are the *Distinctiones* and the *Dictionarius pauperum omnibus praedicatoribus pernecessarius* of Nicholas of Biard, the *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus* of Stephen of Bourbon, the *De eruditione praedicatorum* of Humbert of the Romans. A modern authority terms this last-named work the first of its kind and the greatest of the Middle Ages.¹⁰ The *Distinctiones* of Nicholas of Goran comprises a volume much used by his contemporaries also by students and preachers of a later date. It is very frequently quoted in fifteenth-century English sermons. Maurice of England is the author of another *Distinctiones*, a volume containing the explanation of more than a thousand texts of Holy Scripture. The *Summa Praedicatorum* is the work of the Englishman John Bromyard. It is considered a veritable fund of information on all mediaeval teaching, as well as containing items of history and legendary anecdotes, invaluable for any writer on that period. *Biblia Pauperum*, from the pen of Nicholas Hanapis, although exegetical in a certain sense, is primarily a homiletic aid. The historian Echard attributes *Seminarium Praedicationis* to Hugh of St. Cher. During the fifteenth century the example books of John Herolt were much favored and widely diffused. Finally, mention must be made of the excellent work of John a San Gimignano styled *Summa de exemplis et similitudinibus rerum*.

At this time it has been our purpose merely to hint at some of the homiletic writings given to the Church and to the world at large by the Friars Preacher. But the historical works of the Order together with many other ecclesiastical and profane authors offer ample sources whence the interested student may draw much fuller and equally interesting details.

⁹ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, loc. cit.

¹⁰ Anscar Zawart, O. M. Cap., *The History of Franciscan Preaching and of Franciscan Preachers* (New York, 1927).

Truly it was with prophetic vision that Dominic planned a body of religious whose sphere of activity should be coextensive with the Church. Consequently the story of Dominican eloquence is the story of seven hundred years. Whether the mind wonders back to the formative period of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, or whether we but glance over our shoulder into the early days of the generation that has just passed, the facts are the same, the white tunic and the black mantle of the Friars Preacher are seen in the leading pulpits of the civilized world. A score of illustrious names loom above the horizon of the Church in the nineteenth century. Who has forgotten the Dominican Lacordaire, the prince of preachers, the champion of the religious life in France, a man whose wonderful eloquence fanned into flame the flickering and slowly-dying faith of the French nation; Monsabré, the celebrated pulpit orator of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, remarkable both for his popularization of dogmatic theology and for the immense audiences held completely under his sway; or Père Didon, the more recent glory of the French pulpit, faithful son of St. Dominic and richly endowed with all the natural gifts requisite for a successful orator? The content and delivery of their message bore witness to the apostolic zeal which consumed them. Their watchword was truth; their sole quest in life, the salvation of human souls. Extending his labors over the close of the nineteenth and the opening years of the twentieth century, the eloquence and influence of the German Father, Bonaventure Krotz, was universal in the Fatherland. "His influence expanded as far as the German-speaking people. His eloquence was demanded everywhere—from Berne to Hamburg and from Breslau to Vienna. Nearly all the great cities of Germany, the great centres of industry and the centres of learning alike were, at one time or another, blessed with a sermon, mission or retreat preached by this man of God." About this time the standard bearer of Dominican eloquence in Belgian was Père Raymond Marie Biolley. He was a man of broad culture, a preacher thoroughly skilled in the art of sacred eloquence. But if he knew the fine points of pulpit oratory, it was not upon such things that he depended for the success of his labors. It was simply that while preaching he lived with his hearers, felt with them, sympathized with them, and they knew it. He became all things to all men that he might gain souls to Jesus Christ.

Although it has been said that the speaker and his audience

are twins, born and dying on the same day, nevertheless, the name of the celebrated Irish Dominican, Father Thomas Burke, seems to have escaped this common fate of mortals, for after a lapse of nearly half a century his memory is still cherished and the rich eloquence of his words vividly recalled throughout the length and breadth of two continents. During the year 1871, this renowned preacher visited the United States. The American people immediately recognized his extraordinary talents and crowds assembled to listen to his sermons and to attend his public discourses. Before returning to his native land this zealous friar, pledged as he was to defend truth, replied to the misstatements and misrepresentations of the English historian Froude and compelled that benighted sower of discord to depart in disgrace from our shores. Perhaps the greatest testimony that can be tendered to the eloquence of this saintly priest is contained in the tribute paid to his memory by Cardinal Manning: "And now we shall no more hear that eloquent voice—eloquent, because so simple, for in all he spoke for God. He remembered God and forgot himself. It was the eloquence not of study or self-manifestation, but of a great soul filled with God and speaking for God. The whole man spoke, and yet in pathos and beauty and light of what he spoke we never remembered the speaker. He concealed himself, as it were, and therefore moved and swayed the hearts of those who heard him."

Our own beloved country has offered exceptional opportunities for the organization and development of the apostolic ministry and the Friars Preacher have not failed to realize the possibilities of such a field. American youths have donned the white habit and, trained in the schools of the Order, have gone forth to preach with that power and eloquence characteristic of the Friars even from the days of St. Dominic. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to pay formal though just tribute to the living, but it is our solemn duty to record some of the mighty deeds of our holy dead.

The pioneer of Dominican eloquence in the United States was none other than the first provincial of St. Joseph's Province, the Very Rev. Samuel Thomas Wilson. He possessed gifts of mind and heart such as are seldom found in one man. His sermons were eloquent outpourings of a deeply religious and cultured nature. Another pulpit orator of those early days and one of the greatest preachers that the country has ever known was the convert-priest and ex-soldier, John Augustin Hill. His dis-

courses were masterpieces of sacred eloquence. Crowds of every religious belief flocked to hear him with the result that much of the prevailing anti-Catholic sentiment was removed and the cause of the Church greatly advanced. The Right Rev. James Whelan, O. P., previous to his elevation to the see of Nashville, Tennessee, had established an enviable reputation as an orator. He was gifted with a keen intellect, an excellent voice, and a fine personal appearance together with a burning zeal to realize the great end of his Order, the dissemination of truth. Most Rev. Thomas Louis Grace, O. P., second Bishop of St. Paul, Minnesota, and titular Archbishop of Sinuia, by his sermons, retreats, and eloquent lectures clearly manifested that his vocation to the Order of Preachers was not misdirected.

Both as a reward for work well done and as a seal of the Order's approval for extraordinary apostolic labors the degree or title of Preacher General is often conferred upon those who, besides being noted for their model lives, have preached to the people for some years with marked fruit. It is one of the oldest titles in the Order since mention is made of it as early as the General Chapter of Paris held in the year 1234. The degree is regarded as a pledge of distinction and carries with it appreciable privileges among the sons of St. Dominic. It is signified by the initials P. G. placed after the name of the priest thus honored.

In 1881, this degree was conferred upon four distinguished preachers and veteran missionaries of the province: the Very Rev. Fathers James V. Edelen, Jeremiah P. Turner, Hugh F. Lilly, and Charles H. McKenna. Happy are we in our recollections of the last named, the saintly apostle of the Rosary and the Holy Name, a priest whose long years of preaching rendered his name a household word in almost every Catholic home in the land; a Dominican whom Cardinal Gibbons styled "the greatest missionary that America has ever produced." For forty years another American confrère, Father Clement A. Splinter, labored on the parochial missions and much of the success accruing to our missionary activities today may be traced back to the solid foundations laid under the guidance and inspiration of this worthy Friar Preacher. An illustrious pulpit orator of the past generation was the Very Rev. Arthur V. Higgins. In his life the ideal Dominican was exemplified. He was considered one of the leading scholars and theologians of the country, while his sermons and lectures possessed that rare beauty of thought

and purity of diction which portray the master mind. The learned and eloquent Father Laurence F. Kearney was indeed the Monsabré of St. Joseph's Province. A theologian without a peer, he was likewise an orator of the first rank. Among the many other American Dominicans whose remarkable labors in the pulpit and on the lecture platform were devoted to the interests of Catholicity in America, we may mention the Preachers General Peter A. Dinehan, Edward P. De Cantillon, John P. Moran, and John B. O'Connor, also Fathers James V. Daly, James A. Rooney, and James Louis O'Neil. In a word, the eloquence of countless native Friars Preacher has held aloft the banner of truth and added a full share of glory to the seven-centuried fame of the Order of Preachers.¹¹

The annals of practically every country in the world contribute to the history of Dominican eloquence. It is a vast study, a glorious achievement, the history of seven hundred years. And who will say that the long day of such eloquence is drawing to a close? Like the Church itself the Dominican Order has stood the test of the years; like the Church stretching out to the very extremes of the earth, its strength is derived from the perfection of its unity. Is it not therefore but reasonable to presume that the future will be but a reflection of the past, that other Vincents, other Lacordaires, other Burkes, other McKennas will rise up in our midst to carry on in fulfillment of Dominic's plan—to preach Christ and Him crucified until time shall be no more?

¹¹ We are deeply indebted to the Very Rev. Victor F. O'Daniel, O. P., S. T. M., for much valuable data pertaining to St. Joseph's Province.

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