

THE UNIVERSITY IN ST. DOMINIC'S PLAN

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S the work of all great men slowly cools and crystallizes in the crucible of time it can be more accurately analyzed and evaluated. It is interesting and appropriate in the year which marks the seventh centenary of the canonization of St. Dominic to examine the work of one who has influenced his own time and that of the following generations to such a marked degree. The following study is not intended to be an original work. It attempts, rather, to sum up briefly pertinent data gathered from sources chiefly non-Dominican and in some instances non-Catholic. It is significant that seven hundred years have passed before the authors herein mentioned published their appreciation.

A revived interest in learning, changing political and social ideas, new currents of thought from the infiltration of Arabian, Moslem and Jewish influence, together with the rediscovery of the early Greek philosophical doctrines, constituted the cultural background into which St. Dominic was introduced upon entering the University of Palencia as a student. His was an age of incredible achievement in the intellectual order, the thirteenth century. The era just previous to his own had sown the seeds of a virile, energetic mental activity. "Gradually, in the twelfth century, the Aristotelian philosophy, and especially the Aristotelian logic implying a more rationalistic method of treatment, invaded the field of philosophy, and then that of theology."¹ Herein we witness the flowering of Scholastic theology, and

"we may associate this, the reconciliation between science and religion, between rationalism and traditionalism, with the disciples of St. Dominic, and ascribe it to the educational methods which were the work of St. Dominic himself. Indirectly St. Dominic was one of the greatest educational leaders of the Middle Ages, if not the greatest, in enlisting contemporary science in the service of religion. . . . It is true that the foundation of Scholastic theology lay in the work of Peter Lombard and Robert Pulleyn, who were known as 'Masters of the Sentences,' but it received its complete and final formation at the hands of the Dominican, St. Thomas Aquinas, and his work was only rendered possible by the system due to St. Dominic, who first began the regular training of clergy

¹ O'Leary, *Life and Times of St. Dominic*, Introduction, p. 20.

in philosophy in order to use them as missionaries to heretics. The Masters of Sentences made orthodox use of logic, and so removed it from the category of things suspect to the orthodox; the Dominicans did the same work with the whole range of philosophy."²

Of the thirteenth century, Maurice De Wulf in his excellent treatise, *Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages*, writes: "It is now generally agreed, that the thirteenth century marks the climax in growth of philosophical thought in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. With the decade 1210-1220 begins a development of extraordinary vitality which extends over a period of one hundred and fifty years."³ These striking words are particularly forceful coming as they do from an eminent historian of philosophy. He specifically identifies the decade which measured the very peak of St. Dominic's apostolic career with that same which inaugurated the glories not only of the thirteenth century but of the whole magnificent medieval period. May we not wholeheartedly accept, then, the tribute of the Protestant O'Leary, when he says: "We take St. Dominic, therefore, as the Christian educationalist of the thirteenth century, and in that aspect a man great, both as a Christian and as an educationalist. The avowed aim of the Order he founded was 'study as a preparation for preaching, preaching as a means of saving souls.'"⁴

Most present-day historians agree that the thirteenth century was indeed colorful, perhaps the most picturesque of all time. But into that brilliant kaleidoscopic scheme of things there stole a dark-some ray of gloom. It was the Albigensian heresy. Following the trade routes from the East into Southern Europe, it spread its black influence chiefly in Languedoc. It, too, was a revival, but one which brought not Life. Rather it brought Death. Professing to shed new religious light, this deadly ray seared its way into the heart of Christian doctrine even as its predecessor Macedonian Manicheanism, had attempted to do.

"For according to these neo-manicheans, the world, instead of being the creation of a beneficent God, was the work and remained the toy, of a malevolent being; the Mystery of the Trinity disappeared in the dualism of two eternal principles, that of good and that of evil; the work of the Redemption and of Calvary had been nothing but a sham, a divine being having been incapable of suffering in the flesh or of dying. . . . No harmony was therefore possible between the Catholic and Albigensian creeds; the one was bound to kill the other; and it was because he perceived this clearly that St. Dominic devoted himself with so great zeal to preaching against the heresy."⁵

² *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

³ P. 62.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, Introduction, p. 12.

⁵ Guiraud, *St. Dominic*. (Translated by DeMatteos) p. 23.

In the language of today St. Dominic might be termed an 'opportunist.' For decidedly he understood the conditions of the time in which he lived, and decidedly he took advantage of the means at his disposal to deal with those conditions. The Albigensian heresy insinuated itself among the classes and masses alike, not alone by the practices of rigid asceticism on the part of its leaders, the 'perfecti,' but chiefly through the dissemination of its inviting tenets by a system of education which extended itself so thoroughly that even little girls scarcely able to talk were assiduously trained in its doctrine. As though to fight fire with fire, St. Dominic looked to the rising universities. There would he take the child of his dreams, as yet unborn, clothe him in the protective garments of truth, send him forth a new, domestic crusader with the invincible weapon of a finely trained mind.

"It was exactly to overset science by science that he gathered his disciples around him. Far from avoiding the subtleties of the schools, he deliberately sought them. As soon as he was established in the house of Peter Seila in Toulouse, the first university town he had visited since his own student days at Palencia, he took his little band of six to the lectures on theology given in the schools of the city by Alexander of Stavensby, an English professor of great note at that time. . . . This was done before St. Dominic had obtained papal approval for his infant society or indeed had even solicited it. . . . It was precisely the exposition of the deepest mysteries of the Kingdom of God that he meant to be the exact purpose of his mission and that of his followers."⁶

If the Albigenses would attempt to destroy the foundations of faith, Dominic would and did strengthen and protect them.

With the attainment of papal sanction for his Order, Dominic promptly began to whip his plans into shape. And St. Dominic was a master organizer, possessing constructive genius for government, the influence of whose policies are felt even at this day in the very Constitution of the United States. He wanted an Order of Preachers to propagate the truths of faith, to defend the Church against every and any form of error; before he died, less than a decade after its foundation, the Order was housed in every country in Europe. He had organized a plan of attack; he had executed it to perfection.

G. R. Galbraith describes the plan of St. Dominic:

"Dominic de Guzman was a saint, and further, one with a great fund of common sense. He was inspired with a burning desire to win back heretics to the Church. He went about this mission with great wisdom. He wanted to organize a company of preachers, a body of men amply fitted to meet the Albigensians on their own ground. Everything, therefore, was to be made of secondary importance compared to the preparation of these missionaries, by study and technical training, to become first-rate preachers. St. Dominic quashed at the outset the current monastic conception that it was necessary for the good of

⁶ Jarrett, *Life of St. Dominic*, pp. 81, 82.

the monk or friar himself that he should do so much manual work each day. This he regarded as merely so much waste of time. His preachers were specialists. . . . Again St. Dominic decided that the services in the Church, which took up so large a part of the monk's day, should be said rapidly. . . . As in Martini's picture in the Spanish chapel he thought of them as dogs—dogs to drive back into the fold those sheep who were wandering to destruction. To be consumed by a noble impatience, to create an efficient machine; so to impose your conceptions on the minds of your followers that generation after generation merely amplifies your original plan—is a great achievement. The key-note of the Order of Preachers, its life, its government, and its history is to be found in the prologue of the *Constitutiones* drawn up by St. Dominic. 'Cum ordo noster specialiter ob predicationem et animarum salutem ab initio noscatur institutus fuisse, et studium nostrum ad hoc principaliter ardentissime summo opere debeat intendere ut proximum animabus possimus utiles esse.'¹

Again, the same author:

"His example, his teaching, and the fact that he founded the first house of his Order in Toulouse, the hotbed of heresy, all show quite clearly that he meant his followers to devote their lives primarily, not to confirming the faithful, nor to converting the heathen, but to reconquer for the Church, those who within the bounds of Christendom had been led away from the true faith. The Albigensians could be called erring, they could not be called ignorant. To the Churchmen the only criterion was the body of doctrine revealed to the Church, and officially explained by the Pope. The Albigensians set up another criterion, human reason, the individual understanding. They were not then so much uninformed as over informed. They were suffering, according, to the Catholic views of the day, from an overweening pride in their own intellect. They were formidable adversaries. It was essential, therefore, that the Catholics who set out to vanquish them should be well-armed. They should know what the heretics believed, what questions they would probably ask, and above all be sure of the answers given by the Church. The faith as explained by them must be self-consistent, and must be put forth in a reasonable way. The preachers must be well-educated, eloquent, cool-headed in an argument, but fervent and ready to stand by their faith even unto death. This was a high calling, and to become in any way worthy of it a man needed both great natural qualities and a strenuous course of preparation."²

The genesis of St. Dominic's plan to use the universities to supply this "strenuous course of preparation" shall be delineated a bit further on. But here, a few words on his penetrating perception of the need in general for study, as one of the chief means of obtaining the purpose of his organization. In his celebrated *St. Dominic*, Guiraud writes:

"He never forgot that the work of preaching necessitates profound study in those who practice it; he himself had studied for long [about seven years] at Palencia, and had written a Biblical Commentary before engaging in learned controversy with the heretics. . . . The Friar Preacher must, like himself unite knowledge to piety, and conquer heretical obstinacy by argument as well as by good example. Study was to be one of the principal occupations of the

¹ *The Constitution of the Dominican Order*, pp. 6, 7.

² *Ibid.* p. 162.

novice; knowledge one of the most redoubtable weapons of the Dominican. With this end in view the new Order was to seek such places of learning as Bologna and Paris for their intellectual influence extended over the whole Christian world and attracted to their midst and about their professorial chairs, students of every tongue and nation. Established in such centers, the Dominican convents would be at once homes of study and of prayer. When their hearts and minds had been trained and prepared, the Religious might spread themselves abroad over the whole civilized world thanks to their international relations formed at the Universities and to the prestige they had won by their studies. When St. Dominic founded the houses of Paris and Bologna, he had a clear conception of this plan, for he gave them as heads Master Matthew, 'a learned man ready to meet every point of doctrine,' and Blessed Reginald, Doctor of Laws, and formerly a professor of Law."⁹

Barker sees a reflection of this idea expressed in the earliest recorded Constitutions of the Order, 1228, which are reasonably adjudged to be in closest accord with those drawn up by the Saint in 1220, which unfortunately are not available;

"Dominican studies were arranged on the following plan. In each convent there was a doctor, who gave lectures which all the friars, even the prior, must attend, and which secular clerks could attend: larger convents were termed *studia sollemnia*. The studium generale in a university was conducted by a master or by a regent, and two bachelors, one a *biblicus*, who lectured for a year on the Bible, the other a *sententiarius*, who lectured for two years on the Sentences. The work done by the Dominicans on biblical concordances and on the exegesis of the Sentences was the fruit of such lectures. It is this organization of studies which has led one writer to call St. Dominic, 'the first minister of public instruction in Europe.'"¹⁰

To Toulouse, we have seen, the efficient master rushed his first disciples. Shrewd as he was ardent, Dominic had promptly appraised the work of the Institution there. Nor was he mistaken, for even as early as 1229 this same University was advertising its claims to greatness by issuing circulars (substantiated, at least, partially in fact) "setting forth its superiority to Paris."¹¹ This much even before the final approbation of his plan by the Holy See.

Immediately upon receiving Papal sanction, St. Dominic hurried off to Paris a still fresher contingent. Dominic pitched his tent, as it were, right at the headwaters of the rushing torrent of learning pouring forth from the University of Paris, the very parent of the universities of Northern Europe. According to the reckoning of that institution itself, its origin as a university dates from the Royal Charter of Philip Augustus, 1200. In October, seventeen years later, immediately after the General Chapter at Prouille, Dominic sent Mat-

⁹ Pp. 103, 104.

¹⁰ *The Dominican Order and Convocation*, p. 29, n.

¹¹ Haskins, *The Rise of the Universities*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

thew of Paris and three others to establish a house at this University, whose phenomenal rise had been broadcast throughout the whole of Christendom.

In the midst of thousands of students the first disciples of St. Dominic passed unnoticed during the period directly following their arrival. But the tremendous assiduity with which they applied themselves to study shortly attracted the attention of the University. In fact, it was the illustrious professor of theology, Jean de Barastre, dean of St. Quentin's, who first gave roof to the infant Order. He had established a hospice some years previous to their coming, 1209, dedicated to St. James; this he quickly donated to their cause.

Here mention must be made of a distinctly Dominican contribution to university organization. Reference is made to that College system which survives today most noticeably at Oxford, Cambridge, Dublin and Louvain. Dominic had sent four Friars, shortly to be followed by three more, to pursue courses at the University. Enrolled at the University, the Brethren pursued their higher studies. At St. James, however, over and above their Conventual life with its choral obligations, Dominic instituted courses complementary to those regularly attended at the University. In the above-mentioned institutions, we find today tutorial lectures in the Colleges supplementing the professorial lectures in the University, and also the discipline of the College added to that of the University. There were no Colleges earlier than that of St. James, not in the sense in which we understand them. Previous to St. Dominic's unique and progressive example, students merely lodged and prepared their academic assignments in nearby hotels, 'hospices,' with no formal instruction or discipline away from the University classroom. "No proper college at Paris, Oxford, or elsewhere is earlier than the Dominican institution at Paris, for it was the model of all."¹²

Promptly after their establishment in the Convent and College of St. James, the Friars, officially incorporated in the University, stimulated an intellectual activity, the echoes of which have distinctly reverberated throughout the generations that have followed their exceptional epoch. The Dominicans gave a powerful stimulus to the development of philosophy and theology. Sweeping forward under the dynamic influence of their Saint, the Dominicans crowded their cloisters with white-robed university professors and students. Roland of Cremona in 1229, and John of St. Giles in 1231 secured for the

¹² O'Leary, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

Order its first Chairs in Theology. The catalogue of Stanes which was published by Denifle easily convinces the reader of the astonishing productiveness of the province founded at Paris.

The University of Bologna dates from approximately 1120. More moderate than Paris was the progress of its rise, but by 1200 it shared equally the renown of its Northern confrere. Like Paris, its curriculum was varied, but whereas the former concentrated especially upon philosophy and theology, Bologna specialized in law, civil and ecclesiastical. With this in view, even conservative historians regard the University of Bologna equally as eminent as Paris. "The university of that town [Bologna] was as celebrated as the one in Paris; the reputation of its jurists and canonists was widespread. In the time of St. Dominic, Odofredo of Benevento and Albert of Pavia lectured on civil law with much brilliance; the archdeacon Tancred, John of Spain, Gilbert of England, Chiaro di Sexto, John the Teuton and Raymond of Pennafort; and Roland of Cremona [later professor of theology at Paris] and Moneta on the liberal arts. . . . By reason of its profound learning and its European renown, the University of Bologna, was, as in the case of Paris, destined to attract Dominic's attention. It was after the Feast of Easter, 1218, that he decided to send there from Rome, three of his Friars."¹³

The choice of the University of Bologna, which institution, according to Haskins, Rashdall and other writers, represents in many respects "the most brilliant achievement of the intellect of medieval Europe,"¹⁴ indicates still more clearly the shrewd insight and academic acumen of Dominic. As at Paris, the establishment of his Order at Bologna was marked with incredible success. Practically all the representative professors listed above hastily donned the white and black of the Friar Preacher. Intelligent, cultured, religious gentlemen, they did not for long mull over the program presented them by St. Dominic. Recognizing the inherent genius and the obvious sanctity of the man, fully aware of the problems of the day and their solution in his plan, the members of the University faculties, not to mention the more plastic students, flocked into the Order. Chronicles of the time assure us that "complaints began to be made that the chairs of the professors would soon be emptied, and it would be found that the Friars were the teaching body of the city."

From Toulouse to Paris to Bologna; through Spain, France, and Italy, onward plunged the flood of Dominic's great vocation. Three

¹³ Guiraud, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹⁴ Rashdall, *Universities* as quoted by Haskins, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

brief years, 1216-1219, saw his providential plan permeating most of Europe. But still his burning desire for an enlightened laity through an educated clergy flamed under the consuming impetus of the Holy Spirit. From Toulouse he carried his program in 1219 on to Palencia, his alma mater. That town impregnated by his plan soon gave birth to still another colony of the now prolific Friars Preachers. From Paris he sent Gilbert across the channel to England with explicit orders to begin a foundation at Oxford.

Brother Gilbert de Frassiniet, in the company of twelve other Friars, reached Canterbury in 1221 where he was received graciously by the Archbishop. He preached before him and with his assistance selected a house in Oxford. Once more the Dominicans entered into the struggle against error, armed with the sword of truth. Once more they established convent and school and once more they affiliated themselves with the University. Perhaps the most striking immediate result of this particular move of St. Dominic was the foundation of the King Edward Schools.

In conclusion it might be well to recall that the general purpose of St. Dominic was to save souls by preaching the Word of God. It is hoped that this inadequate study has reviewed the particular means he had in mind for accomplishing that intention. He wished to remedy the defects of the current method of preaching, that of denunciation and moral exhortation, by substituting a "highly cultured attempt to interpret the truths of Catholic Faith in the language of contemporary thought." To popularize theology, to explain it, to feed the faithful from the abundance of the Church—such was his purpose. To equip a zealous following with all the spiritual and intellectual benefits of the day, to supply them with the advantages of Conventual and University training—such was his plan. "He made no secret of his desire to attract particularly the brilliant university folk to his Order, precisely because he knew that in that age of wild speculation and eager discussion this was the type of worker that could best secure his object, that from their ranks could alone be successfully gathered the preachers best fitted to move and convince that generation of hardy thinkers, inflamed by the passion of logic and captive to nothing else than the free expression of truth."¹⁵

"St. Dominic is inextricably involved in the Order he founded; the work of Thomas Aquinas and the great scholastics was the logical outcome of the line of work laid down by Dominic himself. He had

¹⁵ Jarrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 154, 155.

to meet a tide of rationalism against which the breakwaters of old tradition and the fulmination of anathemas were powerless; he devised an educational system which not only stemmed this tide, but turned its waters into the stream which worked the mill of Christ. The work of St. Dominic rendered possible a newer and broader theology which rejuvenated the Church, which revived preaching and apologetics, and inaugurated an improved system of education. It won the universities—at first the product of a movement unsympathetic towards the Church—for the Church, and laid down the first foundations of a proper theological training of the clergy.”¹⁶

¹⁶ O’Leary, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

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