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# DOMINICANA

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## FOR HIS ETERNITY AND OUR TIMES



HE priest realizes that time is full of eternity perhaps more than anyone else. As Cardinal Manning observed, "If the time of all men is full of eternity, the time of a priest is full not of his own eternity only, but of the eternity of multitudes both known and unknown to him." To be all things to all men, to the child, the grown-up, the aged—to be the realization of past hopes, the help in present needs, the inspiration of future efforts, all this is the burden of the priest, a burden quite beyond the ken of time alone. So it is when he receives the sacerdotal unction, the young Levite does not accept a symbol that comes and goes, but an ineradicable chrism—an eternal priesthood, which definitely links up his work with eternity.

The Dominican religious called to the sacerdotal state shares this tremendous patrimony. In a sense, he is doubly wedded to eternity, as a priest and as a religious. In his absorbing book, *The Spirit of St. Dominic*, Père Clerissac gives a definite and comprehensive notion of the ideal of the Order which is summed up in one phrase: *Fidelity to the Absolute*. This fidelity to truth in its highest principles and in its ultimate consequences soars over and above the contingencies and singularities of life to something excelling time and space—infinite Truth, Truth that the Dominican must defend with all the tenacity of the Lord's watchdog.

But the Dominican, in his fidelity to the Absolute, cannot condemn the affairs of this relative world. He cannot forget that his eternal priesthood must also be a timely priesthood with an influence that permeates the whole social fabric. With his brother priests, he hears the words of Pius XI:

"Our present Encyclical (On the Catholic Priesthood) finds a natural place among these others, opportunely supplementing them. The priest is, indeed, both by vocation and divine

commission, the chief apostle and tireless furtherer of the Christian education of youth; in the name of God, the priest blesses Christian marriage, and defends its sanctity and indissolubility against the attacks and evasions suggested by cupidity and sensuality; the priest contributes most effectively to the solution, or at least the mitigation, of social conflicts, since he preaches Christian brotherhood, declares to all their mutual obligations of justice and charity, brings peace to hearts embittered by moral and economic hardship, and alike to rich and poor points out the only true riches to which all men can and should aspire. Finally, the priest is the most valorous leader in that crusade of expiation and penance to which we have invited all men of good will."

No small task, this being "front line ministers of the Gospel."

How can the young Dominican priest possibly shoulder such a gigantic responsibility? Trained in the theology of the Angelic Doctor, a theology that embraces all creation for God, and disciplined by a monasticism which integrates human personality in the name of unselfish service, he steps from his cloister into the active ministry with confident stride. His fidelity to the Absolute is the key to the unlocking of the mysteries of practical life. It is, says Père Clerisac, "a promise of triumph in our spiritual and even in our practical life. Many discerning people must have been struck by the freshness, innocence, and disinterestedness of those who have spent years in the study of metaphysics. When they come into the real world they hardly realize its faults, its hideousness, its sufferings, or its deceptions. They seem to be quite oblivious of all the petty concerns of life." This happy inexperience is the root of a great optimism, which mothers a zeal to make good things better. With such optimism, the young ecclesiastic takes the "cosmic oath of allegiance" which Chesterton claims is necessary for any "cosmic act of reform." "A man must be interested in life, then he could be disinterested in his views of it. 'My son, give me thy heart'; the heart must be fixed on the right thing: the moment we have a fixed heart we have a free hand."

This rich optimism gives special unction to the three great powers of the priesthood—the power to consecrate, the power to pardon, and the power to teach. How can he feel pessimistic who, alone of all men, has authority to call God down from heaven upon the altar, and to help gracious Divinity hide beneath bread and wine for men's sake?" "Wondrous things are these, so wonderful they surpass wonder," as St. John Chrysostom says. The power to pardon likewise reflects the generosity of the priest's "cosmic act of alle-

giance." Into his ears are poured not only the protestations of the childlike, the poor and single of heart, but also voices as from hell—degradations so loathsome which mankind will tell to none but him. And yet, with God-given puissance he raises his hand in absolution, and souls black as night glisten with the brilliance of the midday sun—a joy that should make pessimists shudder.

The priest not only consecrates and pardons. He teaches. One of those "unwearied heralds of the good tidings which alone can save and advance true civilization and culture," he proclaims, in error's very midst, the truth which solves life's greatest riddles and points the way to the good "which death but secures and renders immortal." (Pius XI). This is especially true of the sons of the saintly Dominic, who set out to fill men's minds as full of truth as they could hold. The Friar Preacher may teach through preaching, or preach through teaching, but preach or teach he must. Only a confirmed optimist can do justice to the tidings he has to announce. "Do not think," counsels Père Clerissac, 'that the masses of the people are incompetent to receive an intellectual message; experience proves that simple minds may be profoundly penetrated by deep dogmatic teaching, just as they may be reached by rationalistic propaganda. As the priest separates the Eucharistic Elements without any particle being bereft of the Divine Substance, so also the Dominican apostle ought to break the bread of the word and give it to the little ones without any crumb being bereft of the substance of divine truth."

Ordination to the priesthood is, then, a momentous event. He who took leave of the world years ago returns to it. Because man appreciates things only by isolating them, the friar fresh from the cloister appreciates the world because he has avoided its crowded ways. Now he knows the needs of his time because he has tapped the wisdom of eternity. He is the affirmative answer to a question put by Chesterton in *The Everlasting Man*: "Can he hate it (the world) enough to change it, and yet love it enough to think it worth changing?" He is a priest of the stamp asked by the late Holy Father. "The priest," said he, "must be graced by no less knowledge and culture than is usual among well-bred and well-educated people of his day. This is to say that he must be healthily modern, as is the Church, which is at home in all times and all places, and adapts itself to all." He realizes that the world, in all the generosity of self-accusation, will love him most because he courageously hates its sins. He will work in time, but for eternity, and a boundless optimism born not so much of youth as of fidelity to the Absolute, will spur him on. He will outstrip the most idealistic social thinkers by telling people

that they are preciously more than potential supermen; he will astound his hearers by informing them that they are really destined to be sons of God and heirs of heaven. And what is most important, he will, with his unparalleled powers of consecration and pardon and teaching, be able to make them so. He is the man for the times, because he is an eternal priest.