

various tasks it fell to him to perform and by his readiness to work with other people.'

39 C.N.L. Brooke 1974 p. 231–2.

40 Vicaire 1955 p. 19.

41 See Vicaire 1964 p. 376–95 for a full narrative of the canonization process and sources.

42 *Acta* p. 114–17.

43 *Acta* p. 116.

44 See Vicaire 1955 p. 197–8 for an analysis of this process.

45 *Acta* p. 169.

46 See Vicaire 1964 p. 387, n. 44.

47 *Acta* p. 190–4.

48 *Acta* p. 193.

49 Jordan 122.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

MOPH — Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica (Louvain-Rome-Paris 1896—).

RRP — C. Ryan ed. *The Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities, 1150–1300* (Toronto 1989).

## Religious in the Local Churches: Pointers from Aquinas

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### I

The saint we are honouring today would have found the theme of this lecture all too familiar.<sup>1</sup> St Thomas Aquinas was personally involved in the lively, indeed fierce, medieval debates that surrounded the first appearance of the Franciscan and Dominican friars in the life of the Church. Then, as before and since, religious did not always fit in immediately or obviously into the established patterns of diocese and parish. At the time of St Thomas some argued that all the attributes of the antichrist and his ministers were to be found in the new Mendicant Orders.<sup>2</sup> In Cambridge there survives a medieval manuscript with an

illumination showing Archbishop FitzRalph, its author and a critic of the friars, faced by Mendicant friars mingled with devils.<sup>3</sup> At about the time St Thomas was writing his first polemical work, soldiers had to be sent to protect the Paris Dominicans at Saint-Jacques from riots and demonstrations. Troops had to patrol his inaugural lecture, and on Palm Sunday 1259, as he preached, St Thomas was heckled by someone trying to get a hearing for the seculars' case.<sup>4</sup> No wonder that he went into the matter of when and by what means religious can defend themselves.<sup>5</sup>

St Thomas's own experience as a Dominican friar was gained in different dioceses, indeed in different countries. He dealt repeatedly with the position of religious in the Church, especially in three polemical works, in Quodlibetal disputations and in the *Summa Theologiae*, going well beyond the controversy over the organisation of university teaching in Paris. To guide our own exploration, we might do well to start with how St Thomas approached the task. Some problems have a way of recurring. In particular, he had to fight against two errors, the kind of mistakes still made today.

On the one side, St Thomas opposed the view that holy monks had all hierarchical and sacramental powers without relationship to the Pope and the bishops. In its extreme form, this is a kind of anarchy on the part of religious, the view that they inhabit a Church quite separate from that shaped by papal and episcopal authority. The second view rejected by St Thomas was that monks and religious were not suited to carry out priestly functions and that, even if authorised by bishops, they could not absolve or preach. In its extreme form, this is the kind of view that makes religious utterly peripheral to the apostolate unless firmly controlled by the parish clergy.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, there was much use made of the tradition that the bishops were the successors of the Apostles, while the parish priests were the successors of the 72 disciples. St Thomas thought that this did not apply to parish priests only, because Christ did not assign the 72 to definite parishes.<sup>7</sup> It was held by some that parish priests, like bishops, obtain their jurisdiction immediately from God.

St Thomas wrote a great deal on the place and value of religious in the Church, but a few further pointers strictly relevant to our theme will have to suffice. Part of what his opponents failed to see was that religious life has a *variety* of meanings, and that there is no one mould out of which all the rich and diverse forms have come. Not all religious seem to have realised this either. In the *Summa Theologiae*, at II-II q. 171, St Thomas turns from considering the virtues and vices that all men and women have in common to the differences amongst them. Religious life is to be placed in this context, heralded by the Pauline texts on the diversities of graces, the varieties of working and ministries. St Thomas

has to explain and defend the novelty of the friars. I should like to take from St Thomas the notion of God-given diversity, to put it at its strongest, and make it the theme of this lecture.

Still in the *Summa Theologiae*, (II-II q 188), St Thomas devotes an entire question to the subject of the different kinds of religious institutes. As was his method, he begins by listing some objections to this notion of difference. They are interesting objections, not far from what religious still hear said about them today. We can consider three of them.

The first objection is that there can be no diversity in that which is possessed totally, and a religious vows all that he has to God. So there is only one religious institute, not many. St Thomas replies that there is diversity in the various ways someone can serve God and dispose himself or herself to do so. The second objection has an obvious appeal. It goes like this. Things identical in essentials are differentiated only accidentally. No religious institute lacks the three vows, so institutes only differ accidentally. St Thomas's reply is brilliant. He says that we can dispose ourselves in various ways to observe each of the vows; for example, someone can dispose himself for observing the vow of continence by solitude or by community life. So there is diversity among religious institutes. The third objection is popular too. Whatever leads to confusion should be eliminated from the Church and the diversity of religious can be confusing. St Thomas replies that variety would lead to confusion if different institutes were needlessly directed to the same end and with the same means. However, it has been wisely decided that no new institute is to be founded without papal approval.

Even this brief account should show just how worthwhile St Thomas still is as a guide to religious life in the local church: his approach was Scriptural and theological yet responsive to contemporary events. As religious, and indeed all Catholics, are invited to prepare for the 1994 Synod of Bishops by considering the *Lineamenta* proposed for it, a huge number of topics has come up. A recent issue of *Briefing* summarises many of them.<sup>8</sup> The value of adopting this Thomist intuition about diversity, variety is confirmed by Vatican II's approach. Virtually the first point that the conciliar decree on religious life makes is:

'In God's providence, therefore, there developed religious communities so remarkably distinctive in character, that the church was equipped for every good work (see 2 Tm. 3,17), and disposed for developing the body of Christ (see Eph. 4,12). Further, the church, in all its gifted variety . . . outwardly displayed the manifold wisdom of God (see Eph 3, 10).'<sup>9</sup>

## II

The basic question is going to be this — how much diversity can a local Church take? This is a question that can be answered at various levels, from the Trinitarian to group dynamics and from that of ecclesiology to that of justice. And it should be answered at all these levels. Simply to make a start, the mystery of the Trinity gives us a glimpse of God's own life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as communion in love without rivalry, while group dynamics teaches us the need for mutual discovery and adjustment when people with different backgrounds and expectations mingle. From ecclesiology there emerge a plurality of vocations in the Church, the difference between sacrament and charism, the existence of structured patterns of authority as well as the less predictable promptings of the Spirit. The virtue of justice makes us consider carefully the distribution of benefits and burdens in a local Church, the responsible use of human and financial resources, the importance of accountability, and the value of the common good.

Just by approaching the question in this way we can immediately see the complexity and the challenge. Few of the answers will be definitive, because the reality of religious life is constantly changing as is the surrounding Church and world. New forms of consecrated life, of which religious are only one kind, are constantly calling for discernment: today as in the medieval times when St Thomas had to struggle to get his chosen way of life accepted. At the heart of the debate between St Thomas and the secular masters was their reluctance to accept the new, that which escaped the established categories. They favoured what Congar has called '*un immobilisme ecclésiastique*'.<sup>10</sup>

For St Thomas a pressing issue in religious life was the entry of young boys; for us today, as is recognised by the *Lineamenta*, a most pressing issue is surely the changed perception of women. To take a few examples. This changed perception has led to much rethinking of the rules about 'enclosure' by both women and men religious, for different reasons. It also increases the desirability of having women religious in every diocese cooperating with the male, because clerical, episcopal vicar for religious. It could be that a paradoxical result of the abandonment by many women religious of various institutions such as schools and nursing homes formerly run by them, in favour of individually pursued apostolates, has been to make them more exposed and insecure in the larger Church. Women religious have less 'space' which is specifically their own. The English and Welsh description of the current situation says, among other things:

'Religious women experience frustration when clergy or other lay people seem suspicious or fearful of collaboration, and some have been deeply hurt when collaboration breaks down, leaving them feeling insecure and rejected . . . Consecrated women also feel that they lack ways of participating in decision-making in the church. . .'  
(*Briefing* p.10)

No doubt different geographical areas will set different agendas. Here is how some novel elements have been perceived in one region:

'Among new forms of consecrated life beginning to emerge, many responses expressed interest in forms of mixed community which include those living the consecration of marriage along with those living the counsel of celibate chastity, and forms of consecration which are temporary in nature, involving covenantal promises rather than vows . . . There are also possibilities with regard to communities which are inter-congregational or ecumenical in character.' (*Briefing* p.11)

Perhaps we can group a number of issues connected with the theme of religious in the local Church under two broad headings. The first concerns the importance of giving religious their rightful autonomy, the second deals with the necessity of avoiding anarchy. In the words of Vatican II, on the one hand it is for the Church's good that each religious foundation has its particular spirit and function, but on the other hand all foundations are to enter into the life of the Church (*Perfectae caritatis* 2).

### **Diversity is God-willed: Autonomy**

As well as Scripture, St Thomas made good use of canon law in his theological treatments of religious life.<sup>11</sup> We should follow him in this too, especially as the renewed canon law on religious to be found in the 1983 Code has much of value in it. Did we but know it.<sup>12</sup> To say that in the Church there are many institutes of consecrated life, with gifts that differ according to the graces given them, is in fact to quote canon law (canon 577). Canonically speaking, older religious were brought up with the idea that exemption was the key to the place of religious in the local Church. Exemption never meant what a lot of people thought it did, but in any case it is no longer the pivot. The key concept now (canon 586) is the rightful autonomy of life enjoyed by every institute, an autonomy to be respected and safeguarded by everyone, including the diocesan bishop.

What is this autonomy for? Like all institutions in the Church it is to preserve God's gifts for the benefit of the Church and the world.

Consecrated life belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. More specifically, rightful autonomy means that each religious institute has its own discipline and can preserve whole and entire its 'patrimony'. Here, then, is another key term. The patrimony of an institute is the mind of its founders and the dispositions concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute which have been approved by the proper authority, together with its sound traditions (canon 578).

This surely must be the way forward for religious in the local Church: to offer themselves as part of the life and holiness of the Church, faithful to their patrimony and enjoying a rightful autonomy of life. In this they will converge with all the other ways there are of being Christian, because the essential characteristic of religious life is that following of Christ enjoined by the gospel. It is by means of a constant return to the sources of Christian life in general that religious life is to be renewed.

Religious do not inhabit a Church different from that of other Catholics, they do not live by a different gospel. Yet theirs is a specific way of life. However pressing the need of a local Church, there must not be a distortion of the graces God has wanted to give. Vatican II reminded religious that they should try hard to ensure that through them the Church more effectively shows forth the real Christ — to believers and to unbelievers — in prayer on the mountain or announcing the kingdom of God to the crowds, in healing the sick and wounded or turning sinners to a better life (*Lumen Gentium* 45). Everyone is to respect the patrimony of each institute. God will meet unmet needs in his own good time. The external works of the apostolate are to be undertaken by religious within the limits of the character proper to each form of religious life (*Christus Dominus* 35).

What can go wrong is that either some of the religious themselves or others in the local Church fail to recognise the variety of patrimonies. Religious then become basically odd-job people, denatured, losing their identity fast. Different kinds of religious become interchangeable because they represent nothing more than a generalised sense of being in vows. You will recall that St Thomas had to meet the objection that all religious are basically the same, differing only in accidentals. No. Each religious institute has its spirituality, its way of combining prayer and activity. In his day, St Thomas also had to meet the criticism that religious go about commending themselves or their institutes. This is how one of my brethren advised Dominicans to keep a proper sense of identity. Obviously other kinds of religious must have the same sense of their own identity:

'It has always been essential to our sanity that we should be jealous of our own tradition but not be envious of others. It is only in those moments when we lose our jealousy for the special mystery that is ours, when we neglect our own life-story, that we start imagining we are imitation Benedictines or Jesuits or social workers or charismatic groups. And to do this is to lose touch with the life-giving depths, the mystery, in our own tradition and to gain nothing of importance in exchange.'<sup>13</sup>

### **Diversity is not disintegration: Anarchy**

Having established the rightful autonomy of life to be respected by everyone, we can consider the fruitful integration of religious in the larger Church. The risk here is that of anarchy, in the name of diversity. History shows numerous instances of how tension and conflict have accompanied the unfolding of religious life in the Church. The local Church has to contain a variety of institutions, each with its own momentum, its sense of identity and purpose, its own way of doing things. When Rome tried to reorganise the Scottish seminaries in 1917, there was opposition from the bishops to the establishment of a new minor seminary for all Scottish dioceses at Fort Augustus to be run by Benedictines. The bishops thought the monks unsuited for seminarians because their methods allowed 'too familiar intercourse between students and their superiors'.<sup>14</sup>

Vatican II was clear about the importance of good relations between religious and others, especially the hierarchy. The 1978 document *Mutuae Relationes* is still an indispensable guide in all this, but as the English and Welsh experience shows, the strength of communion which exists in dioceses varies and includes some areas of pain and conflict.<sup>15</sup> Candidly, it is admitted that 'much remains still to be done' to realise to the full the directives of *Mutuae Relationes*. (*Briefing* p.17) In this, our age is not unique. Cardinal Manning would not let the Sisters of the Sacred Heart take charge of a poor school in his archdiocese. They had to pass into Southwark territory, to return after his death and take possession of his dismantled seminary and his beloved college of St Charles. 'Such are the revenges of obedience and prayer', reflected Shane Leslie.<sup>16</sup>

Pathologies develop for various reasons. One cause of disintegration is when religious adopt a disdainful aloofness, masquerading as an understanding of exemption. This is incorrect as canon law and as theology. There is only one particular Church, only one diocesan bishop, only one Catholic Church, only one Pope. Exemption is not an entry into limbo — exemption is now to be understood as the withdrawal by the Pope of institutes of consecrated life from the governance of local

Ordinaries, *and* the subjection of them to himself alone or to some other authority (canon 591). Put bluntly, exemption means swopping superiors, not doing away with them. Cardinal Manning could be scathing as well as perceptive about some religious:

‘They are Papal by their vow, but in their spirit they are less Papal than anti-episcopal. The claim of special dependence on the Pope breeds everywhere a spirit of independence of local authority’.<sup>17</sup>

In trying to reconstruct the context of the conciliar statement quoted earlier, that religious institutes are to enter into the life of the Church, one commentator remarked on how religious Orders, like all defined communities, have a tendency to cut themselves off from their surroundings, in this case from the ordinary life of the Church. They tend to cultivate their own life in a one-sided manner, to be aware only of their own activities, to propagate their own devotions and recognise only their own saints, to gather round themselves a group of patrons and benefactors or a spiritual clientele — in other words, concludes Friedrich Wulf, to form a Church within the Church.<sup>18</sup>

### III

Most religious will come into contact in hundreds of ways with others in the local Church. The experience of those South of the border has been that religious carry out a wide variety of ministries and roles in the local Church, often working in full-time collaboration with clergy and other lay people, or with voluntary leaders and associates. These include parish pastoral work, catechetical leadership and ministry, liturgical formation and leadership, chaplaincy work in schools, colleges, universities, prisons and hospitals, work with small groups in pastoral formation processes, ecumenical initiatives and spiritual formation, the ministries of spiritual direction and counselling, the care of the elderly, of families and young children, of single parents, those with special needs, and work with young people. With accuracy and candour the document from England and Wales for the 1994 Synod lists both positive experiences and difficulties. (*Briefing* p.19)

Vatican II laid down some principles for healthy mutual relations (*Christus Dominus* 35). When religious are legitimately called upon to take up works of the apostolate, they are obliged to fulfil their duties in such a way as to be auxiliaries of the bishops and working under them. Religious who are sent into the external apostolate ought to be filled with the spirit of their own religious life and should remain faithful to the observance of their own rule and to dependence on their own superiors. The bishops themselves must not neglect to insist on this.



When it comes to public liturgies, the fulfilment of their pastoral duties, and the well ordered care of souls, religious come under the jurisdiction of the bishops. There is no scope here for discussing all the relevant matters in canon law and in *Mutuae Relationes*. It is the basic principles that have to be grasped first. Any resulting difficulties can then be resolved in truth and in love. If two elements making for good mutual relations had to be picked out, they must surely be (i) full consultation and (ii) careful arrangements.

We are beginning to grasp that the Church does not have missions, but *is* mission. A particular aspect of the presence of religious in the local Church is, of course, that many of them have wide horizons by belonging to international institutes. They are also to have wide horizons because they should place themselves at the shifting frontiers of the work of evangelization and human advancement. They are prophetic. There is a good but rather neglected Roman document from 1981 on this aspect, and it explores the option for the poor and for justice, the social activities and work of religious, involvement in the world of work, and direct involvement in politics.<sup>19</sup> It is easy to see how involvement in controversial issues can itself become a matter for controversy in the local Church. Religious frequently find themselves living very close indeed to the dramas which torment those to whose evangelical service they are consecrated — and being at the edges, religious risk being criticised from within for going too far out. Congar's apt description of the Mendicant friars as belonging to a diocese without frontiers, extends to many other religious.<sup>20</sup>

St Thomas Aquinas reflected over many years on his own experience as a member of a new religious Order which had to struggle for acceptance. To envisage him as a rarified, cloistered academic would be to ignore the facts of his life as a friar and to suppress the range of his writings. The works of St Thomas, as we now have them, are the literary deposit of intellectual, social and theological debates and explorations that were not uniformly placid or meditative. He concluded two of his polemical works on religious life in much the same way, and in this too he is instructive. He said it would be very acceptable to him if anyone should want to reply publicly and in writing to his ideas because there is no better path to the truth. Here is a Christian believer open to the full force of reason.

- 1 This is the text of the Aquinas Lecture, established by the Glasgow Dominicans, delivered at Strathclyde University Chaplaincy, Glasgow on 22 January 1994.
- 2 The background to the debates between seculars and Mendicants, as they affected St Thomas, is sketched in J. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino* (Washington, 1983). The three main polemical works by St Thomas can be dated to 1256 for the *Contra*

- Impugnantes*, 1269-1270 for the *De Perfectione*, and 1271 for the *Contra Retrahenses*. The texts are in the Leonine edition *Opuscula II: Opera Omnia* XLI (Rome 1970). See also L.E. Boyle, 'The Quodlibets of St. Thomas and Pastoral Care' *The Thomist* (1974) 232-256, especially p.251.
- 3 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 180, fol. 1r. Interestingly, in all three of his polemical works St Thomas attributes part of the difficulties to the devil's interference.
  - 4 J-P. Torrell, 'Séculiers et Mendians ou Thomas d'Aquin au Naturel' *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* (1993) 19-40.
  - 5 *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum et Religionem* XV; St Thomas refers to Acts 23:17f in saying that religious, like the the Apostle Paul, can be protected by armed troops. Also *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* (Marietti ed. Turin 1949) V q.13 a.1.
  - 6 *Contra Impugnantes* IV, 6.
  - 7 *Summa Theologiae* II-II q.188 a.4 ad 5: Cf *De Perfectione Spiritualis Vitae* XIII, *Contra Impugnantes* IV.
  - 8 '1994 Synod on the Consecrated Life: Results of the Consultation' *Briefing* 23 (1993) 1-23.
  - 9 N. Tanner (ed), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London 1990) II, 939.
  - 10 The classic theological analysis of the debates St Thomas was involved in is Y. Congar, 'Aspects ecclésiologiques de la Querelle entre Mendians et Séculiers dans la seconde moitié du xiiiè siècle et le debut du xive' *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* (1961) 35-151.
  - 11 C. Molinari, *Teologia e Diritto Canonico in San Tommaso d'Aquino* (Rome 1961).
  - 12 R. Ombres, 'Iusta Autonomia Vitae: Religious in the Local Church' *The Clergy Review* (1984) 310-319.
  - 13 H. McCabe, *God Matters* (London 1987) p. 239. For St Thomas's description of a proper, Christian sense of belonging to a religious institute see *Contra Impugnantes* XIII.
  - 14 J. Darragh, 'The Apostolic Visitations of Scotland' *The Innes Review* (1990) 7-118 at p. 50.
  - 15 A. Flannery (ed), *Vatican Council II: More Post-Conciliar Documents* (Leominster 1982) II, 209-243.
  - 16 S. Leslie, *Henry Edward Manning. His Life and Labours* (London 1921) p. 294.
  - 17 S. Leslie, *op.cit.* p.295. Manning was in fact speaking about the Jesuits, but his point goes further.
  - 18 F. Wulf in H. Vorgrimler (ed), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (ET London 1968) II, 301-370 at p. 338.
  - 19 A. Flannery (ed), *op.cit.* II, 260-284.
  - 20 Y. Congar, *art.cit.* p. 149.

#### St Bonaventure : A Correction

In a recent article on Aquinas and *mas occasionatus*, (*New Blackfriars*, March, 1994) I stated that the topic was not discussed by St. Bonaventure nor by Duns Scotus. This was written in error. Bonaventure deals with the matter in 2 *Sent* 20,1,6. He too uses the word *occasionatus* and offers the same response: the male semen may be out of line with nature (*praeter naturam*), but the generation of a woman is neither *praetur naturam* nor *contra naturam*, but is *secundum naturam*. It is good to know that both the greatest Dominican and the greatest Franciscan theologian rejected the suggestion that a female is defective.

Michael Nolan