

the beginning of a more active Apostolate. "Let your light so shine before men . . ." It is not by arguments that the world will be converted. When the first Christians began to leaven the world of antiquity the pagans did not say: "Listen to their cogent reasonings!" They said: "See how they love each other." They could not at once see that behind that love for each other there was that greater love of the First Commandment; but they saw their union with God reflected in their love for their fellowmen. It is by this warm apostolic love springing from the hidden source of contemplation and radiated into the world by the contemplative that the world will be converted. For he, who has for long years been a Tabernacle in which the Lord was present and active, indeed, but still hidden, will one day become a Monstrance, showing him forth in his life and in his very being.

It is this that the world to-day needs more than any other thing. The rush to films and dancehalls is often only the perversion of the God-given desire of the human soul for beauty and love. To live a contemplative life in the world means to show to it, simply by living it, the true life for which man was created, and thus to win souls to their Creator. *Contemplata aliis tradere*—this vocation which St. Thomas regarded as the highest is surely the one best suited to this end; and the more souls in the world embrace it as far as their circumstances and capacities permit the greater will be the hope of bringing back a paganzed world to its Lord.

H. C. GRAEF.

DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVES

THE perfection of the Christian life consists essentially in Charity; principally in the love of God, secondarily in the love of our neighbour. (*Sum: Theol: II-II, 184, 3*). The source and exemplar of all Charity is the Uncreated Love which is the very life of the Blessed Trinity, while its plenitude is possessed by the Soul of Christ, of whose fulness we have all received. Each Religious Order strives in its measure to reproduce some aspect of this "Charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge" (*Eph. 3, 19*), the contemplative life pertaining directly and immediately to the love of God, while the active life is more immediately concerned with the love of our neighbour. (*II-II, 182, 2*). Yet St Dominic, by founding an Order whose purpose was contemplation ordained to the Apostolate—*contemplari, et contemplata aliis tradere*, has perhaps come as near as is humanly possible to combining the two lives and the double aspect of Charity, in a single vocation. St Catherine, herself an outstanding example of the realisation of the

Dominican ideal, had this brought home to her, when in a vision she saw St Dominic emanating from the heart of the Eternal Father, and resembling even in features the Word Who proceeded from his mouth. The Eternal Father explained to her: "My only Begotten Son devoted all his life to the salvation of souls . . . Dominic, my adopted son . . . taking on himself the office of the Word, directed all his efforts to the salvation of souls . . . That was the chief object that led him to plant and to train his Order. Therefore I tell you that in all his acts he may be compared to my Begotten Son."

But St Dominic, mindful of the loftiness of his aim and the limitations of human nature, believed that man alone was incapable of achieving his ideal, so he gave to his Friars helpers like unto themselves, Sisters living the same Rule and having the same ultimate aim, but occupied solely with the "one thing necessary", listening to the Word which the Brethren, having heard, must also preach. This was a new departure in the history of the Church, for although women had often adopted a Rule already followed by men, this was the first instance of their being incorporated from the outset into the essential structure of an Order. The Friars Preachers and their Sisters Preacheresses are but two branches of the same tree. "*La Sainte Prédication de Prouille*," comprised both the one and the other, and as Père Mortier remarks: "To the Sisters as to the Brethren, Peter and Paul had said in the person of Dominic, their common Father, 'Go and preach'." Their ultimate aim is the same—to further the glory of God by the salvation of souls; and in all essentials their life is the same too. The same vows and Rule, the same solemnisation of the Divine Office, the same penances, the same spirit of prayer and poverty, the same filial submission to the Master General of the whole Order. Only the act of preaching, and the study which is the necessary preparation for it, are reserved to the Brethren; and even from these the Sisters are not wholly excluded, since they are encouraged to study, and the example of their lives may often times be a more potent sermon than any words. But because of the limitations of human nature, a certain specialisation is inevitable, and the equilibrium of the whole Order is maintained by a division of labour between the parts, which makes the vocations of Friar and Sister in a sense complementary. Each acts at once for, and through, the other, so that they are mutually necessary, and neither alone would be truly Dominican. The whole Order prays, or suffers, or preaches in the member who performs these functions, and the principle of vicarious action is the basis of the whole organisation.

Veritas—Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare: the Dominican ideal has been summed up in these mottos. The truth, i.e. God himself, must be known and loved before he can be preached to others. He must be possessed before he can be given. He is sought in study and prayer, and once found is loved and praised for his own sake. All this belongs to the contemplative life. Then he can be manifested to others by preaching, and his grace imparted in the sacraments, which is the work of the Apostolate. Thus, contemplation is the source of action, prayer that of the Apostolate, and by a mysterious coincidence the Sisters were established before the Friars, and their Constitutions were the basis of those later amplified for the Brethren. From its foundation in 1206, until the confirmation of the Order in 1216, Prouille, where St Dominic had installed a group of women converts dedicated to a life of prayer and penance, was the Saint's home and he its Prior. The spiritual and temporal welfare of his daughters were his first concern even amidst his preaching labours. Here his plans for an Order of Preaching Friars were matured; here the first Brethren assembled to choose their Rule, and here they bade farewell to their Father before dispersing to the ends of the earth. "Prouille is a source, and such would henceforward be the function of the Second Order." (Danzas). Recognising this, St Dominic and the early Fathers wished the Sisters to be wherever the Brethren had established a centre, sheltering them with the out-stretched wings of prayer and penance, like Cherubim above the Ark. He even considered their role to be the more essential, and declared to the Brethren at Bologna: "We must build a Convent for the Sisters at any cost, even if it means suspending the construction of our own." In a like spirit, Cardinal Howard founded a Convent of Nuns as soon as the Friars of the English Province had been re-established,⁽¹⁾ and Fr. Bede Jarrett combined the return of the Brethren to Oxford with the introduction of the Sisters. Thus, the hidden and sacrificial life of continual prayer and penance of the Nuns provides what the Friars, drawn into the turmoil of the world, are unable to perform, maintaining the equilibrium between contemplation and action, and serving as a sort of Jacob's ladder by which the Apostle ascends to God and brings God to men.

According to her Constitutions, the Nun must "strive after Christian perfection; and by means of that perfection implore for the labours of the Brethren abundant fruit in holiness." All else

1. This was at Vilvorde in Belgium in 1660. The Community came to England in 1794, and finally settled at St. Dominic's Priory, Carisbrooke, I.W. in 1866. In 1922, a foundation was made at All Souls Priory, Old Headington, Oxford.

is a means to this end. By her profession she is dedicated as a holocaust, offering "all that she has, and all that she loves, and her entire life to the Almighty" (St. Gregory) to be consumed in his service as a victim of love. Her aim is to make her whole being a gift, like the Being of God himself, and in so far as it is a gift, it will also be a sacrifice.

First, a "sacrifice of praise" in union with him who is the Eternal Praise of the Father, and this achieved principally through the Liturgy which is the "Voice of the Word, passing through the lips of the Church" (Dom Marmion). The solemn recitation of the Divine Office is the centre of the Nun's life. By it she exercises Charity towards man as well as towards God, for it is the most potent form of intercessory prayer, and the most fruitful source of grace. Then, a sacrifice of propitiation, filling up what is wanting in the sufferings of her Crucified Spouse. With him she is nailed by love to the Cross of her Profession, and the life of penance and mortification—fasts, abstinence, vigils, silence, etc.—and above all the life of obedience, are the means whereby she presents herself, soul and body, "a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God." (*Rom.* 12, 1). At the same time, they are a necessary predisposition for the life of prayer and contemplation. Finally there is the life of interior prayer and recollection, making possible the "devout and continual contemplation of our Lord, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier," (*Constitutions*, 1) a life of union with Christ in *societate Sanctae Trinitatis*, and this in a sense combines the other two. Such a complete preoccupation with the things of God renders abundant glory to him, it is a most potent means of sanctification ("Walk before me and be perfect," was the command given to Abraham); and it involves a degree of interior mortification far more crucifying than any corporal austerities. The perfection of the Nun's sacrifice will be the measure of the perfection of her love, and it will be a love embracing every soul, and burning to subdue every creature to the yoke of Christ. "For them do I sanctify (or sacrifice) myself, that they may be sanctified in truth." (*John*, 17, 19). It will be a projection of that love for which St. Dominic prayed continually, "deeming himself only a real member of Christ's Mystic Body, when he could expend his whole being in gaining men as his Lord Jesus had spent himself for them on the Cross" (Bl. Jordan).

And so, in the train of Mary, Co-redemptrix, and Queen of Apostles and Martyrs, the Dominican Nun by her life of prayer, praise and sacrifice, shares in the active life of her Brethren, helping to obtain the graces necessary to make them fruitful apostles.

Like the Valiant Woman, she weaves for the members of her own household the double garment which makes them just and blameless before God, and secures for them the graces necessary in their dealings with the world—wisdom to confound error and refute heresy, and patience in the midst of trials (St Albert). The early Brethren fully understood her function. "Pray for me often and faithfully," wrote Bl. Jordan, St Dominic's successor as Master General, to Bl. Diana, foundress of the Convent at Bologna, "inasmuch as I need your prayers by reason of my many faults and shortcomings, for I seldom pray, and therefore I beg you and your Sisters to make good my deficiencies in this respect. Pray that the Lord . . . by his grace may enable us to secure the salvation of souls, for this is the object of our labours in which you will partake by your prayers." The position remains the same to-day, and the apostolic zeal of the modern Friar will be fruitful only if supplemented by the prayer and penance of his Sisters. The more widespread the action, the more intense must be the contemplation from which it flows. The Order of Preachers provides what is perhaps the classic example of the application of this truth, but while the world knows at least something of the life of the Friars, it is for the most part ignorant of that of the Nuns.

That life, while by no means devoted to spiritual activities alone, is truly "contemplative", since all in it is directed to the contemplation of the Truth (cf. II-II, 180, 1), and to facilitating an intimate and unbroken union with God, which should normally reach its perfection in the gift of infused contemplation. Yet one who lives this life is truly a "contemplative" even if she never attains to a state of contemplative prayer.

The Divine Office is the clock regulating the Nun's day which, paradoxically enough, may be said to begin shortly before midnight, when she is roused by the words "Benedicamus Domino", the first sounds which break the silence being a reminder of one of the great duties of her life—the adoration of praise. At midnight the *Opus Dei* begins with the recitation of Matins, followed by Lauds, sung on great Feasts, and by Pretiosa which is the solemn dedication to God of the work of the coming day. At about 1.15 the Sister retires to rest, to be reawakened at about 5.30. At 6 the Angelus rings out in praise of the Incarnate Word and his Immaculate Mother, significantly recalling at the outset two characteristic Dominican devotions, and throughout the day the Convent bell will remind the outside world of God and of those dedicated to his service. After half an hour's mental prayer, some of the Little Hours are recited, and at 7 comes the central act of the

day, the Conventual Mass, sung when possible, to which all else leads or from which it proceeds. Here the Nun, nailed by Love to the Cross of her Profession, and united in the intimacy of Spouse to her Beloved Who is Priest, Victim, and Mediator, is identified with him in that Sacrifice of Praise, offered on behalf of every creature, whereby all praise and thanksgiving is rendered to the Father, the world is redeemed, and a spiritual progeny is born of the union of Christ and his Bride. And the Sacrifice is consummated in a Communion of Love, of which all her day should be a continuation and from which all her actions should proceed. Her whole day and every detail of it should be nothing less than the Mass in action.

At 8 o'clock breakfast is taken, but on all Fridays throughout the year and daily from Holy Cross (Sept. 14) until Easter, this consists only of dry bread and coffee! House-work follows, and, until the vocation of Lay-Sister is again appreciated at its true value, a large share of manual labour falls to the Choir Sisters. At 9 comes Sext or None, usually accompanied by Office of the Dead, Chapter of Faults, or Rosary. The rest of the morning is spent in household tasks, needlework, gardening, etc. A visit to the Blessed Sacrament at 11.45 is followed by dinner at 12, but before proceeding to the Refectory, prayers for the Dead are recited, a duty much insisted upon in the Order. After the singing of Grace, the meal is taken in silence save for the reading of some spiritual book. Meat may never be served in the Refectory, and should any Sister be dispensed from the abstinence, she takes her meal elsewhere. Otherwise there are no restrictions as to food, and the Constitutions direct that the dishes must be sufficient in number and quantity to enable the Sisters to sustain the fast. Grace after dinner, begun in the Refectory, is continued as the Community go in procession to Choir, thus linking up the meal with that "Sacrum Convivium", partaken of in the morning, and commemorated before each Hour of the Office. None follows except on fast days.

From 1 to 2 is the hour of common recreation, free, joyous, and at times even hilarious. At 2 the bell sounds for Siesta, a period of "profound silence", when speech is forbidden, and movements must be as quiet as possible. The Sister must spend it in her cell, resting or working according to choice. Vespers at 3 are usually sung, and often followed by Benediction. The afternoon is spent in necessary work until Spiritual Reading at 5, which is followed by Mental Prayer at 5.30, from which at 6 the community go to the Refectory for Collation, the evening meal. Recreation at 7 is taken indoors or in the garden—fresh air and exercise are en-

couraged—and at 7.30 Compline and the Salve Procession, so dear to every Dominican, bring the day's prayer and labour to a close. Then the big bell tolls while the *De Profundis* is recited, ushering in the profound silence of the night, and reminding the living of the dead, and of their own approaching end. "Lights out" is at 9 p.m.

Such is the contemplative's day, unvaried week after week. The only variety is provided by the Liturgical seasons, except that on Sundays and big Feasts common work is reduced to a minimum, and the Sister is free to spend the time in prayer or any hobby in which she may indulge. For hobbies are not only tolerated but encouraged, since they provide a necessary outlet for creative activity. Days of Exposition and Retreat also come fairly often, and Christmas will bring recreation days when talents hidden for most of the year come into the open.

The life of the Lay-Sister, an indispensable member of the Community, is very similar to that of the Choir Religious, save that the Office of Our Blessed Lady replaces the Divine Office, there is no midnight rising, and dispensations from the fast and abstinence are easily granted, since the Sisters perform all the heavier manual labour.

Although St Dominic prescribed study as an occupation for his daughters, it does not figure in the modern Constitutions save for Novices. Yet almost every Sister has some free time each day, in addition to that on Sundays and Feast-days, which may be spent in study or reading, and the Library is accessible to all, nor are there any restrictions as to what may be read.

"His religion is a delightful garden, broad, joyous, and fragrant." The Eternal Father thus described St Dominic's Order to St Catherine. This spirit of freedom which pervades the whole life (even the Constitutions do not bind under sin) is accompanied by a peace and joyousness which illustrate another paradox of the religious life. For when the very right of self-determination has been surrendered by the solemn vow of Obedience, then the soul, the slave of Love, enters into the joyful liberty of the children of God. Dead to self, the Nun is indeed another Christ, "conformed to the obedience of the Word", sharing in his work of the glorification of the Father and the salvation and sanctification of men, sharing even in the mode of the activity of him in whom to be is to act. For her very holiness, of which the essence is surrender to, and possession by God, is the means whereby she achieves the end of her vocation, her contemplation is her action. The words of the Apostle to his converts may well be addressed to her: "You live in an age that is twisted out of its true pattern, and among such people you shine out beacons to the world, upholding the message of life." (*Phillip*, 2, 15. R.A.K.'s tr.) S.M.A., O.P.