

DOMINICAN STUDY

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## LESSON PLAN

### STUDY

#### **Statement of Lesson Goals:**

- I. To show that the element of study is deeply rooted in Saint Dominic and the background of the Order. Ultimately study is a spiritual quest into the realities of our life experience: What does God want? How will it be done? Saint Dominic made study a religious duty placing it beside prayer as a service of God.
- II. To show that study is an indispensable work in the spiritual life of every Lay Dominican. The Word of God must be etched into our living hearts, must become a lived reality enfleshed. This means more than intellectual reflection.
- III. To show that Dominican study must be understood realistically and seen not only as manageable but attractive for the average person. It is a way to excite change by forming new habits of thinking and behaving.

# S T U D Y

## OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Study as a Basic Part of the Dominican Charism
  - A. Saint Dominic's Use of Study
  - B. St. Thomas Aquinas Put the Capstone on Study
  - C. Some Historical Considerations
- II. Reasons To Study
  - A. Love of God (Our Growth in Holiness)
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- III. Considerations of a Novice
  - A. Hurdles and Motives
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    - 2. Scripture
    - 3. The Life of Saint Dominic and Lives of Dominican Saints
    - 4. Keeping in Touch

STUDYI. A BASIC PART OF THE DOMINICAN CHARISMA. Saint Dominic's Use of Study

Saint Dominic began his studies in Palencia in the liberal sciences we are told, and then turned to theology. Fr. Francis Lehner tells us "To these sacred studies he devoted four years during which he learned, with such continual eagerness, to drink from the streams of Sacred Scripture, that, in his untiring desire to learn, he spent his nights with almost no sleep at all and the truth which he heard made its way into the deep recesses of his mind, where it was held fast by his memory. Indeed, the things which he easily understood were watered by the pious bent of his mind and blossomed into salutary works."<sup>1</sup>

As a student, Saint Dominic annotated his textbooks with care. And yet when famine broke out in nearly all of Spain, moved with compassion and pity for the poor, as well as the divine precepts of love, he sold nearly all his possessions, even his books. By today's standards it is hard to know what this compares to when books, book searches, book stores (rare, new and used) and even discount and mail-order books are so readily available. But we do gain some appreciation of the sacrifice when we look at the times and realize that all books were painstakingly copied by hand. Many ancient monasteries and even some convents of nuns copied manuscripts on commission for others as a means of support, as well as for their own needs. Father Hinnebusch, O.P. notes that after the Order was founded, "The usual way for a friar to acquire a book, if he had the funds and permission, was to have it transcribed by someone else, either in the priory or outside."<sup>2</sup>

So here we have a picture of a young man of about twenty who is so absorbed in God that he will sit up practically all night studying the divine truths with a certain accuracy of mind carefully making his own notes in the margins, only to surrender these same books as if they were luxuries in order to help alleviate the suffering of those around him.

In all, Saint Dominic had a very thorough, formal education. He spent about ten (10) years studying at Palencia. Six years

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<sup>1</sup> The Libellus of Jordan of Saxony, #7 (as contained in "Saint Dominic" by Francis C. Lehner, O.P., Thomist Press, 1971, p. 10)

<sup>2</sup> THE HISTORY OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER, William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., Vol. II, p.211 (Alba House, New York, 1965)

were spent in liberal arts and philosophy, honing, stimulating, tempering, correcting and forming an accuracy of mind and expression. Four years were spent in the study of theology which Saint Dominic apparently absorbed wholly so that he grew quickly in holiness and an ardent zeal for God's cause. Upon his return to his native diocese of Osma, Saint Dominic, took the vows of religion as a Canon-Regular at the cathedral. He was probably about twenty-five by then and shortly after that he was ordained a priest.

Immediately he began a new course of study -- a course of study in the Holy Spirit. To the reading, studying and praying of Sacred Scriptures, the lives of the Fathers, meditations of Saint Bernard, writings of Saint Anselm - among the great works of that century that nourished western spirituality - Saint Dominic tapped a rich vein of spirituality when he began the thoughtful explorations of "The Conferences of the Fathers of the Desert" written by Abbot John Cassian. "With the aid of grace," writes Jordan of Saxony, "This book brought him a purity of conscience that is difficult to attain, to much light of contemplation, and to a great height of perfection."<sup>3</sup>

The nocturnal vigils of student days turned into nocturnal vigils of prayer as the heart of Dominic leapt from the pages of his study into the darkness of the night around him to search for, to grope for, and to speak to his God.

With these nightly vigils of love, Saint Dominic conceived a zealous and ardent thirst for the salvation of souls. When he began his missionary career in Southern France with Bishop Diego d'Acebes, we know Saint Dominic carried very little with him except for "the books needed for the canonical hours, for study, and for debating, should the occasion arise. Throughout his life Dominic carried the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistles of Saint Paul."<sup>4</sup>

Since our focus here is mainly on the effect of study on Saint Dominic and his regard and ready disposition to it, we may be inclined to the suspicion that what is emerging here is the picture of a kind of sacred egghead. So we must also see, then, that God set Saint Dominic in a precise way in the history of the Church.

Born of nobility, Saint Dominic had advantages which more humble ancestry would not have given to the twelfth century, among which was education. Blessed with a naturally good mind, Saint Dominic's education was thorough for the time, drilling him

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 191.

to keen mental agility, precision and observation. He possessed an innate sensitivity of both mind and expression which were further refined with his training. In addition, Saint Dominic had the sharpness of judgement, firmness of decision, and the poise and self-assurance of one familiar with the prerogatives and privileges of one who comes from a family of position and means.

We now see with a little more clarity the future founder of a religious order who was providentially fitted himself with the necessary undergirding for the work that was to come.

Yet if something of a strictly virtuous and cold intellect lingers in the vicinity, we need only remember one thing about Saint Dominic to dispel it - he wept. He maintained a reverential awe before the presence of the Allness of God, and God will have nothing to do with the 'hard of heart' or those who are filled with themselves. Saint Dominic wept. He wept because of the heat of the love distilling his very core. He could not come to God nor be mindful of Him that he did not weep. He wept when he offered Mass. He wept when he prayed. He wept for his sins. He wept for the sins of others. He wept and even sobbed out loud when he thought of God's fidelity which continues in spite of our indifference, truculence even, or negligence.

A key to partial understanding of this gift of tears can be found in the Eastern Christian tradition. Abbot John Cassian gives us an indication of what it is that was happening in Saint Dominic when he speaks of reasons the mind is excited to fervent prayer: "For often through some inexpressible delight and keenness of spirit the fruit of a most salutary conviction arises so that it actually breaks forth into shouts owing to the greatness of its uncontrollable joy; and the delight of the heart and greatness of the exultation makes itself heard even in the cell of a neighbor. But sometimes the mind hides itself in complete silence within the secrets of a profound quiet, so that the amazement of a sudden illumination chokes all sounds of words and the overawed spirit either keeps all its feelings to itself or loses them and pours forth its desire to God with groanings that cannot be uttered. But sometimes it is filled with such overwhelming conviction and grief that it cannot express it except by floods of tears."<sup>5</sup> Here is the prayer of Saint Dominic.

In the revelations of this secret by Cassian we come to a better understanding of the mind and thinking of Saint Dominic

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<sup>5</sup> NICENE AND POST NICENE FATHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
Vol. XI, "The Conferences of John Cassian", Chap. XXVII, p. 396  
and Chaps. XXVIII and XXIX, (Wm. B. Erdmans Publ. Co., October  
1982)

and the activity of God upon, within and through that thinking. The weeping of Saint Dominic is a spiritual gift. It is not the result of his study or fruit of his own resources. Rather it proceeds from the gospel as it is being etched by God on the living heart of Saint Dominic.

And if we are to be concerned with study we must also be concerned with thinking and it is evident from an early age Saint Dominic was not thinking about the comforts that would have been available in a household of some means, but even while he was still in the care of a governess, often gave her the slip at night to forsake his bed in favor of sleeping on the floor. This is a trait attributed to the rugged outdoor type, to athletes who are accustomed to living with pain, to soldiers in the infantry accustomed to daily hardships and to saints. It was to be a lifelong custom of Saint Dominic, the rugged athlete of Christ and crusader-soldier who would wield so persuasively the sword of truth.

The effects of his study are also seen in his thinking on the organization of the Order of Preachers, for ultimately study is a spiritual quest into the realities of our life experience: What does God want? How will it be done? Dominic would ultimately make study a daily duty of the community - one cannot preach what one does not know. He made study a religious duty placing it beside prayer as a service of God. It would occupy the place that manual labor had taken for centuries earlier among the monks. The vow of stability which bound a monk to his abbey and a canon-regular to his church was dropped to enable the itinerant preachers to work anywhere they were needed.<sup>6</sup> A spiritual infantry, they would travel light and would be able to move quickly to throw themselves into the breach, not to be held back by the burdens of corporate management or the dictates of seasons, following Christ in the same poverty and freedom of the apostles. In this way Saint Dominic saw how the active and contemplative life could be combined and yet remain principally within the contemplative sphere. An exciting thought! And here lay his genius for though the work of preaching and teaching is an active work, yet because it springs from truths of God studies and prayed, it is projected into the province of the contemplative. This is the meaning of the Dominican apostolate as we so often hear it expressed - *contemplata aliis tradere contemplananda* - to give to others the fruits of our contemplation.

We can see from all this what Saint Dominic did essentially was reach into the lived realities and varied experiences of his life as the son born of a holy and distinguished family, as a citizen of Spain and, therefore, under the influences of the

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<sup>6</sup> THE HISTORY OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER, William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., Vol. I, p. 121, (Alba House, New York, 1965)

historical, social and religious developments of the day, his life as a student, his "hidden" life and spiritual development as a canon regular, and the gradual development of a new way of seeing his vocation during his sojourn in the south of France preaching - he reached into the wholeness of these conscious realities to prayerfully sift, select and combine what he knew by experience was good, what would work or what was needed to make a harmonious whole in the creation of the Order of Preachers. Even the white tunic on the Dominican habit comes from the canons regular as does the daily obligation to recitation of the Divine Office.<sup>7</sup>

The final bit of clever thinking came when Saint Dominic established his communities of preachers in the cities which were primarily centers of learning. As soon as possible, Saint Dominic introduced his Preachers into teaching in the universities there. Since these were the source of most of the error of the day being taught, Saint Dominic was quick to grasp how important it was "to control the controllers."<sup>8</sup>

Saint Dominic was a many faceted man, religious and priest. In the end, it is very hard to get a clear picture of him in all his totality. He is elusive. While the features of his Order are clear and distinct, his own features remain just out of focus to the probing eye of the mind. In some senses, he is like smoke. It cannot be captured! It changes shape just when you think you know its shape and track. Saint Dominic has not left smudged fingerprints all over his Order, holding it rigidly in his grasp. Yet in a sense, the only way to see him is in the Order, in its individual members and branches and their various expressions of the Dominican Charism. In this way he does communicate himself.

Because we are thus frustrated, perhaps the affectionate response of Saint Dominic to us can be found in the words of St. John: "The bridegroom's friend, who stands by and listens to him, is overjoyed at hearing the bridegroom's voice. This joy, this perfect joy, is now mine. As he grows greater, I must grow less."

#### B. Saint Thomas Put the Capstone on the Order

St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, was born in 1225, four years after the death of Saint Dominic. He was born near Naples, Italy, and like Saint Dominic, he came from a noble family. From the beginning he was a boy with a probing mind.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 120

<sup>8</sup> Anonymous



"What is God?", he is reported to have asked at the tender age of five. He was sent away to be educated by the Benedictines while still quite young and then spent about five years at the University of Naples. It was there that he came in contact with the Dominicans and decided to join them. His parents, when they heard of his plan, were violently opposed to it. Count Aquino dispatched Thomas' older brothers who were army officers to intercept him on the road to France. He was then held prisoner by his family for a year in an effort to dissuade him from his intention. His sisters, who visited him regularly in the room where he was held captive, were quickly won over to his side. Aspiring to be a mendicant was an unseemly vocation to the mind of his parents, however. They presented alternatives and even tried to seduce him from the path he was bent on by introducing a lovely young woman into his room one night. St. Thomas took a burning brand from the fireplace and threw it at her. Then he vowed his chastity to God.

Thomas was a man who knew his own mind and as soon as he was released from captivity, he went straight to Paris to study under Albertus Magnus. St. Albertus Magnus recognized, when many others did not, Thomas' extraordinary genius. Because he seemed slow to his peers, he was sometimes made the butt of their jokes and called the 'dumb ox'. One day overhearing this, Albertus Magnus answered them saying, "One day this dumb ox will open his mouth and the whole world will hear." High praise from a man generally considered the most learned person of the whole medieval world! St. Thomas was his most famous student. When Albertus Magnus left for Cologne, Thomas went with him. Theirs is one outstanding friendship in the history of the Order. The extent of the affection, respect and shared vision they had of Truth is illustrated when the elderly St. Albert undertook the long journey afoot to Paris after St. Thomas had died to defend St. Thomas' writing.

Thomas Aquinas lived in a century of great intellectual controversy, provoked by the introduction of Aristotle's writing which had come to Europe with the Arabs and Moors. Aristotle was suspect. He was suspect because the translations were not accurate. He was suspect because the commentaries did not measure up to the accepted thought. He was suspect because of some error in his reasoning or incomplete reasoning. The Church's first defensive device, therefore, was to forbid the study of Aristotle!

In Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle met the Catholic perfectly equipped to stand up to him, to vindicate him, to distinguish him from his commentators, to understand his thinking where it was incomplete and show that it was in harmony with Catholic Doctrine. Using St. Albert's scientific distinction between philosophy and theology, he showed the world philosophy as based on reason and theology as based on the 'revealed word' of God.

But there are things that reason cannot discover or demonstrate to be true. Since God cannot err, St. Thomas concludes that when there was a conflict between reason and faith, faulty reasoning is the cause.

No one was ever better qualified to express what Dominican study, Dominican thinking, Dominican questioning and pondering are than St. Thomas. Some writers have called him the "second founder of the Order."<sup>9</sup> An exaggeration, of course. But while we have scarcely anything that Saint Dominic wrote, St. Thomas has left us volumes! And if we look in the moral part of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, we find the Order conceived by Saint Dominic, defined with perfect clarity - and placed at the head of the religious Orders!<sup>10</sup> And St. Thomas has profoundly influenced the thinking of the Order of Preachers. "What is God?", asked the little boy of five. And to the end of his life we find him pursuing the answer to that question and impressing on us all through the richness of his poetry, his hymns and his writings, the irresistible urgency to the same knowledge!

St. Thomas spent his whole life teaching and writing. The peculiar form of expression he gives to his various philosophical and theological works is called "Thomism". The Dominican spirit and the Thomist spirit are synonymous.

St. Thomas was a prodigious writer, yet in the middle of his most important work, he would stop at the request of a brother to compose a needed paper. One of his greatest works, *The Summa contra Gentiles*, he wrote to help the missionaries convert the Moors in Spain.<sup>11</sup> another great work of St. Thomas, *The Summa Theologica*, is a compelling appeal to the reader to search for and find the ground where God is, take off his shoes as God bid Moses, and be alone with Him. The knowledge, the lessons, the prayers which flow from this work speak to us of a man steeped in God and the things of God, one who points to what he has tasted and seen. The *Summa* is both highly systematic and breathtakingly beautiful teaching. Every possible obstacle that could be raised between God and God's love for us, falls before the charm, simplicity and striking force of Thomas' argument.<sup>12</sup>

Whenever St. Thomas himself would study, dispute, read,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, p. 11

<sup>10</sup> SUMMA Theologica, IIa-IIae, q. 188, art. 6.

<sup>11</sup> THE HISTORY OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER, William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., Vol. II, pp. 137 & 248, (Alba House, New York, 1965)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, pp. 300 - 301

write or dictate, he would first go aside and pray. When in doubt about a point in his study or writing, he would again have recourse to prayer, and when something in his study remained obscure he would implore the light from God that was needed to penetrate His secrets. In simple humility, St. Thomas, priest with the 'tongue of angels', acknowledged that all his learning came to him not so much from his own effort at study and research, but immediately as a gift from God.<sup>13</sup> Habitually watchful and complaining his need for God's direction or correction, St. Thomas reaches beyond himself in the nakedest humility always to point to the teaching authority of Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers throughout the Summa.

In an introduction he wrote in a book titled, On Prayer and the Contemplative Life, published at the beginning of this century, the Very Rev. Hugh Pope, O.P. offers us an interesting observation. "It is one thing to understand the thought (of St. Thomas) when expressed, quite another to think such thoughts and express them. Hence the declaration made by Pope John XXII when the question of the holy Doctor's canonization was brought forward: 'Such teaching,' he exclaimed, 'could only have been due to a miracle!' And on the following day in the Consistory, 'He has brought greater light to the Church than all the other Doctors; by one year's study of his writings a man may make greater profit than if he spent his whole life studying the writings of others!'"<sup>14</sup>

This gentle, generous and sweet soul was often to be found praying in tears before the crucified, much as Saint Dominic. St. Thomas, brilliant, deeply speculative, was also a priest with a remarkable prayer life. He gave us the wonderful Office of Corpus Christi with the glorious hymns, Pange Lingua, the Adoro Te, and Verbum Supernum. St. Thomas gave us the Tantum Ergo and the O Salutaris. And at the request of the Pope, he wrote the Liturgy for the Feast of Corpus Christi which Parsch, in his Year of Grace calls, "...like an artistically kept flower garden" and "a perfect work of art."

Prayer and theology come together ideally and effectively in the work of this great Dominican and so combine to sound the very depths of our souls, to plumb the cataracts and deep recesses where God softly draws his finger. It is supremely St. Thomas' way to work to move us from instruction or knowledge about God

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, pp. 302 - 303. Also The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church, John Arinterro, O.P., S.T.M., (B. Herder Book Co., 1951)

<sup>14</sup> ON PRAYER AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE, Very Rev. Hugh Pope, O.P., S.T.M., pg. 22-23. (R. & T. Washbourne, Ltd., Paternoster Row, London, 1914)

and into a conscious awareness of his presence. To move us from thinking about him to make us feel compelled to seek him...to be with him.

### C. Historical Considerations

A quick perusal of the history of the Dominican Order shows the tradition of study to have remained a strong component of the Dominican Charism, in season and out of season, in time of war and in time of peace, among the brightest and the best scholars the Order could possibly produce in every country and send to the universities to teach or the churches and byways to preach. But study nourished with equal vigor the spiritual life of those Dominicans less gifted intellectually or those who came into the Order by more hidden or humble routes. These, too, when they found their voice - and they would find their voice - would be heard in the world.

The first of this latter group to come to mind is St. Catherine of Siena, Patroness of the Dominican Laity and one of the two women Doctors named by the Church. This sprite bounces right out of the pages of the history books to capture one's imagination. Fr. Hinnebusch call her "one of the glories of the Dominican Order, (she) ranks high among mystics and spiritual writers. The total picture as well as the details of her life are guaranteed by a solid documentation that is scarcely matched for any other Fourteenth-century saint."<sup>15</sup> Hers is the only great voice heard during this sorry period of history in the Church. The 'why' of this brings to mind the line from the song "Where have all the young men gone?" The most important young man, the 42 year old Pope, Gregory XI, was in exile in Avignon, France. It is this that Catherine is most famous for. French popes dominated the throne of the papacy during the fourteenth century and the college of cardinals was packed with them.. It was a low point in papal claim to political independence when Catherine went to Avignon, ready to buttress the young pope's will and shore up his resolution to return to Rome and end the 68 year exile of the Papacy. Catherine succeeded in this mission.<sup>16</sup>

Catherine of Siena was born the daughter of a dyer. It was not a rich or noble family, but it was a family of far more than marginal means. They lived in comfort. Catherine's education seems to have been concerned mainly with the rules of conduct, proper mode of dress and the affairs of running a household. It was considered rather much of a nuisance to have a woman on your

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<sup>15</sup> The History of the Dominican Order, William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., Vol. II, p. 355, (Alba House, New York, 1965)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 358 ff.

hands any more educated than this. But there came a time, during a self-imposed exile of some three years, when she yearned to read. Catherine would have been approximately 16 years old. She asked a companion to teach her. To read meant that she would have to learn Latin as most of the works of the day were written in that language. Catherine apparently made little progress at first. And then one day, it is said, she picked up a manuscript and read it without any difficulty. The remaining strange thing is that she never could spell or even distinguish separate letters.<sup>17</sup> Fr. Hinnebusch suggests she read extensively the spiritual authors of the period. But he also makes clear that she did not directly use them in her own works but drew rather from her own thoughts which had assimilated their doctrine after much reflection.<sup>18</sup> But it is also clear from reading various accounts of her life that she was well tutored by her spiritual director (according to her capacity and as she grew) in what she needed to know to live properly her state in life. We also know she went to daily Mass and undoubtedly drank in every word the Friars preached! Returning home she surely would have reflected on them over and over again. And then applied herself gratefully to prayer, begging again for light from God Himself. From this little beggar's cup comes her famous DIALOGUE and we shouldn't be surprised that it has become one of the great spiritual treasures of the Church. Her prayer life was so intense that apparently she attracted the extraordinary attention of God in receiving the stigmata from Him and receiving His heart in exchange for her own! There is much to think on here.

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The life of one of the poorest of the poor of our Dominicans began as a medieval horror story. Blessed Margaret of Castello was born blind, crippled and a dwarf in the year 1287. Her life span was 33 years. When she was born her parents were horrified and ashamed of her and kept her hidden from the eyes of others. For a short while, probably until she was a toddler old enough to start exploring the house and the rest of her environment, she had the relative freedom of the house - or at least her part of it. But her parents, afraid that someone might see her, then shut her away in a dungeon-tomb in the far recesses of the house to keep her from the eyes of others. But little Margaret had friends. There was the servant who cared for her physical needs

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<sup>17</sup> Saint Catherine of Siena, Alice Curtayn, p. 22, (Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford, Illinois, 1980)

<sup>18</sup> The History of the Dominican Order, William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., Vol. II, p. 360, (Alba House, New York, 1965)

and the priest who came to care for her spiritual needs. The poor little blind thing had no way of knowing the distress she caused her parents whenever they saw her. It is the sweet innocence of a little child to always be on amiable ground with the world around her. In this same innocence, Margaret supposed her parents loved her. We may suspect that through the compassionate and tender care of the servant(s) assigned to care for Margaret that she received some of the necessary affirmation and validation for healthy psychological growth. Certainly the priest who brought her the news of Christ's love for her, delighted and lighted up her life. One can only wonder what the impact of the news of the Scripture, which tells us that God made us in His image and likeness, had on little Margaret. To be made in God's image and likeness means many things. It means that each of us, like God, has a uniqueness and individuality that is beyond parallel. It means that we have a relationship with all of God's creation, the world, its peoples, seasons, elements, animals, the burning stars of night, the rhythms of the rising and setting sun. It means a little girl has the goodness and holiness of God in the very core of her being no matter how twisted her body. To be made in God's image and likeness is to be called forth and to respond to that, to grow into the person God is calling us to be, spiritually, psychologically, intellectually. We must suppose that this priest was sent to educate Margaret's heart and mind to this single thing, God's love, since she never would be able to read or to learn her prayers from her mother's knee. This nameless priest gave Margaret the spiritual guidance her father had failed to provide. It would have to have substance for it would have to last a long time and carry her a long way.<sup>19</sup>

Observing her remarkable holiness when she was about five years old, her father made one last desperate grab at a straw. He suggested they take Margaret on a pilgrimage to the tomb of a holy Franciscan in a nearby town and pray that she would be cured. When no miracle occurred, the parents cruelly abandoned their little daughter in the Church. That night, when the Church was being locked for the night, it was cleared of all those lingering inside. Margaret found herself out on the street in the cold. She had been mainstreamed into the world of beggars.

Fortunately, a kind peasant woman named Grigia (her name means 'gray' in Italian and up until then the outlook had certainly been bleak), adopted Margaret into her large family where she made herself useful in spite of the fact that she was blind. Margaret had a naturally sweet and good disposition and the life of grace continued to be active in her, literally making her a gift to those around her. She exercised a kind of

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<sup>19</sup> The Life of Blessed Margaret of Castello, William Raymond Bonniwell, O.P., (Idea, 1979)

equilibrium among the other children. She was the leaven in the bread of this household. From her rich store of memory she brought out and shared with them her God, saying and teaching them to say psalms and prayers and instructing them in religion. Margaret reaches into the pockets of poverty to give all that she has.<sup>20</sup>

As Margaret grew, her reputation for holiness grew too. In time a community of Sisters in the town where she lived invited her to join them. Unfortunately, the atmosphere in the convent was not conducive to growth in the Spirit. Her intensely focused prayer life and tough penances were a reproach to the laxity she found there. Margaret found she could better achieve her end at home with Grigia amid the bustle and clamor of domesticity! Some time after this, Margaret did discover her vocation as a Lay Dominican and there were many who would seek her out to find solace in her prayers. Margaret is also credited with a number of miracles. But perhaps the most marvelous thing is that this young woman who was blind and whose heart surged into the darkness around her for God (in the same way that Saint Dominic's did 70 years before her), was granted extraordinary interior visions of His love.

## II. REASONS TO STUDY

### A. Love of God (Our Growth in Holiness)

As Christians we experience the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit on our endeavors through the theological virtues and the Gifts of the Spirit received at Baptism empowering and assisting us in ordinary things. Our human processes are improved. With the virtues there comes a clarity of judgement beyond what could be grasped by mere human intelligence or intuition. The virtues have within themselves the possibilities to judge whether a thing being proposed is good or bad.<sup>21</sup>

In Isaiah we see these gifts of the Holy Spirit foreshadowed:

"And the spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of

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<sup>20</sup> The Gospels according to St. Matthew (XII, 41 - 44) and St. Luke (XXI, 1 - 4). This story of the widow's mite exhibits that the value of an act is in its intention. God want us - not our money, gifts, etc.

<sup>21</sup> Summa Theologica, Cf. St. Thomas' various treatments of the "Gifts of the Holy Spirit" as habits, virtues and theological virtues. Also Lay People in the Church, Yves Congar, O.P., Ch. VI, pp. 271 - 323, (Christian Classics, 1985)

counsel and might, the spirit of the knowledge and the fear of Yahweh, and his joy shall be in the fear of Yahweh (piety)." (Isaiah, XI, 2)

We see "the spirit of God rest upon him." The same spirit of God that finds his rest in the Messiah as described in Isaiah, finds rest in each of us, takes up life in us, in the same way.<sup>22</sup>

The motive force of Dominican study is God's love. "God first loved us."<sup>23</sup> It is God who initiates and powers our fumbling for him by drawing us gently and by degrees into the reality of our relationship with him. We respond. We respond as best we can. As Father John Burke, O.P., Director of the Word of God Institute in Washington, D.C. says, "We are not a people merely trying to hold on to our Faith, but a people striving consciously to grow in it!"<sup>24</sup> Study is one form that expresses this striving of a Dominican. Study is to our spiritual formation and growth what food and water are to any growing thing, be it plant or human. We must have encouragement as well as crops must have rain in order to continue in a personal relationship with the Divine Muse leaving His scrollwork scattered in our hearts - carefully - where we can find it.

The study of our relationship with God may begin rather remotely as we look first at His creation of the world described in Genesis. It retains that safe quality of distance as we look around in the world today for the forms of positive transformation we recognize as the work of God - God breathing forth His spirit to recreate the earth.

But our study shifts down and moves from the activity of the Holy Spirit on the collective level and from nations, to the individual. Moses is transformed because he lets himself be guided by the mystery he has found on the mountain. And then one day while we're reading we find we are standing close enough to enter into the conversation when the prophets start in amazement and must come to terms with the living reality of God. The vital questions force upon them by his existence we find are as important to us.

Study of the Inspirer-Spirtor of all the good we experience engenders an enthusiasm and love to know even more. This is how

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<sup>22</sup> Summa Theologica, III, Q. 7, art. 1. Also Acts X, 38 and Isaiah, 61,1 (Luke 4, 1 & 18) "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me."

<sup>23</sup> 1 John 4, 19

<sup>24</sup> Bible Sharing, John Burke, O.P., p. 4, (Alba House, New York, 1979)



our love of God and belief in him increases: by knowing more than we knew before: or the increase comes when we know more clearly and with greater conviction. Like St. Thomas we begin to ask more and more audibly in our conscious mind, "What is God?" "What am I to him?" "What does God want?" The more we try to see into God and this relationship, I to God and God to me, the more perplexed, sometimes satisfied, but the hungrier we become. Our growth in understanding and the joyful appreciation that results whets our appetite for more.

Our study is not like reading a news story or a novel or even a textbook. It becomes, needs to be, thoughtful pondering, quiet brooding.

We are always making, as it were, new beginnings in this Spirit-directed groping for the Ineffable. And it is precisely because God is ineffable that is, too great to be contained in words, that our study inevitably turns from research about to search for, must go beyond we do not know what into a realm we have yet to discover. We are thrust, then like babies into the birthing channel of prayer.<sup>25</sup> We go with helpless hands, gripped in the molding contractions of prayer which seem to be inside and outside and all around us. And because we cannot, in a certain sense, see where we are going and do not know how to speak, the Holy Spirit pleads for us.<sup>26</sup>

Study is reflecting on new or deepening dimensions of our love for God and the discovery of His love for us as we are coming to better understand it. "In the beginning, the Spirit of God brooded over the water of chaos." The Spirit hovers, breathing and brooding upon the darkness of our understanding, and our confusion rests trembling-wet 'gainst his breast. Trust and submission are important in our growing relationship with Mystery.<sup>27</sup>

There is ever this quickening of spiritual consciousness. "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things", said the poet.<sup>28</sup> Over and over in the life of every Dominican the conversion experience is deepened or ignored, ungrasped or gratefully received in outstretched hands. It is an ongoing thing that animates, purifies, strengthens, takes us deeper and in so doing presses us with inescapable love. A change comes over us. It may show in a changed perspective or a change of

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<sup>25</sup> John 3, 4 - 8

<sup>26</sup> Romans 8, 26 - 28

<sup>27</sup> Summa Theologica, II - II, Q. 19, art. 9 ad 4um

<sup>28</sup> "God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

heart, effecting how we behave. We are open to God and He is effecting a deepening of feeling, a deepening of commitment to Him. In letting Him have His way, the truth of this love ultimately touches those around us, finds viable avenues to express itself, has at last, its reverberation in our neighbor.

B. Service of Neighbor as a Purpose

Study, prayer and service of neighbor (or apostolate), are all intimately connected in the life of a Dominican. In the DIALOGUE of St. Catherine of Siena, we learn something of the spirit our service of neighbor should take. Christ is addressing Catherine -

"You cannot give me the kind of love I ask of you. This is why I have put you among your neighbors; so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me - that is love them without any concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whatever you do for them I will consider done for me."

Now God is a God of surprises and in dealing with Him, one must be prepared for surprises! At first sight, Catherine has no objective or desire so engrossing or so paramount as the love of God. High on her list of priorities as we know from reading the account of her life, is the spirit of generosity in loving God and the things of God and the needs of His people. But God knows that generosity leads two lives: as it exists in our hearts and inspires our conduct, and as we are actually able to overcome our reluctance when it still lives in our hearts but seems to have very little influence on our conduct. So Jesus continues -

Your love should be sincere: You should love your neighbor with the same love which you love me. Do you know how you can tell when your spiritual love is not perfect? If you are distressed when it seems that those you love are not returning your love or not loving you as much as you think you love them."

Here is a gentle uppercut that jars our consciousness. The spirit in which we serve our neighbor and thereby serve God must be entirely without reserve. What is to be reserved? Can there be reserves with God? There is a question here of our having perhaps unconsciously set limits on what we will or we won't do. Perhaps we have mentally drawn a line. But nowhere in our contract with God does it say that He can go just so far with us and no farther! And when he does exceed our "limits" - and he will - just what then will we do? So it is good for us to begin by having the firm intention right from the outset of having no reserves with God, but to set before us a good theory of generosity. We will meet enough hard examples of opposition in our daily round that will make the whole idea repugnant. Of that

we can be sure.

"Pray always," St. Paul counsels.<sup>29</sup> Study feeds our prayer and study and reflection put us more readily at the service of our neighbor. Ideally, study, prayer and service of neighbor fuse in mutual support to form a whole new way of living and experiencing who I am and who God is. We may catch a glimpse of this if we go back to the beginning of this paper and take another look at Saint Dominic.

Dominic Guzman was bright, had a photographic memory, a great deal of natural docility and receptivity, a natural aptitude - far exceeding ours - and taste for the Divine, unlimited opportunity for study and advanced education and he applied himself diligently to make the most of it. But we see something else. After the founding of the Order, after the apostolate of preaching which all that study and reflection undergirds, we see another apostolate developed (almost invisibly) right alongside the apostolate of preaching - PRAYER. Everywhere Saint Dominic went, it is reported that he either spoke to or of God. Now this is radical. So is Saint Paul's "Pray always." But Saint Dominic, who carried Saint Paul's writings with him everywhere, knew that. Saint Dominic sometimes spent whole nights in prayer.

In the mid 1950's, a series of novels came out of Italy by Giovanni Guareschi, the first of which was titled, THE LITTLE WORLD OF DON CAMILLO. Throughout these books, the village priest keeps up a running commentary with God - and God with Don Camillo! - on everything that is going on in the village. Don Camillo, frequently in exasperation with the communist mayor, throws himself into heated and comical dialogue with God. He shares his every waking moment with God and God scolds him, chides him, advises him and loves him. The stories are charming. God and Don Camillo have a great time together and there is no question that the mayor is missing out on an awful lot of what the fullness of loving and living are because the sacred dimension is missing in his life. Here is a serious message artfully clothed as entertainment or light reading!

Commenting on this recently, author and lecturer, Father Francis X. Murphy, C.S.S.R., relates that we see the same thing going on in the life of Pope John XXIII. In his JOURNAL OF A SOUL, Pope John also seems to live two lives running side by side. In one he is in continual conversation with God. IN the other, he is doing his day to day affairs.

We begin to deduce that being with the Spirit-filled and Spirit-led Christ is the most important service we can give our

neighbor. This is the life lived in the Presence of the Father, life lived with the Indwelling Trinity, a constant prayer. The importance of being present to the God within over doing some service is not attributable to indifference to our neighbor's good, to laziness, or to lack of spiritual vitality. It is to see the 25th chapter of Matthew from a different slant, 'being' over 'doing'. It is important to be in Christ every morning that we walk out the front door. There are, as we stated elsewhere, the hard examples of opposition we often meet in our daily round so that the business at hand is searching Christ out in those we meet who are repellant! Not so hard the task of finding Christ in the gentleman sinner, the handsome fellow of amiable disposition, a good mind and the right political, professional or social credentials. St. Monica had her hands full with this type in her own son, St. Augustine! Harder hit are we by the homely one who is disagreeable and difficult to deal with. This one hits our emotions as well as our reason.

Study that breeds an attitude of prayer prompts spontaneous comments to God throughout the course of the day, is often in dialogue with him. This kind of prayer of Saint Paul and Saint Dominic and the imaginary Don Camillo, Pope John and St. Thomas does away with the wordy formality of the "...do thou vouchsafe to..." formulas and substitutes more personalized forms of praying or conversing with God. It may mean, too, that we resurrect some of the ejaculatory prayers of the 'olden days' or find simple prayers of our own that will serve our need to express to God our love and dependence on Him.

In this way when we put our study and reflection at the service of our neighbor, we find our apostolate right in front of us!

### III. CONSIDERATIONS OF A NOVICE

#### A. Hurdles and Motives

Our biggest hurdle is ourselves. This is not to say that a regular program of reading and study can always be easily fitted into our daily schedule, especially if we live with others who require our time and care or service. There is the very real obstacle of the daily grind, whether it be in the bakery, court room, board room, or a house full of children in the throes of teething or adolescence. The whole idea of study can get swept out of sight that fast and lost in brutal reality.

But it passes. If there is a grace given for this, whatever inconvenience arises will last only a little while. And always the desire will carry over. It is a little like standing on the bridge of a ship in a storm. When the bow pitches and plunges down through an oncoming swell, we lose sight of that part of the ship momentarily. But then she hurdles upward to be seen again

and stabilizes until the next trough and the next wave. The thing is to see that it can be done. More than that, we must want to do it. We must be able to see that the Dominican charism to ferret out and search for the ultimate truth in all things, which is God, through reading and study is for us. And more than that, this isn't a "Brain Club", but becomes the holy ground where the contemplative Dominican vocation begins to take shape, where we are given a taste of Dominican prayer and Dominican worship. Our study is a latch on a door which, when opened, the Holy Spirit takes us through to lead us by the hand whither He will. We begin to put less emphasis on exterior, legal, and social aspects of our faith and the 'quantitative' extension, to concentrate more fully on the spiritual aspects and quality of our life and the life in the world around us. We acquire a deepening religious consciousness through which the affirmation of God's personal love for us and those we love becomes more vivid and more real.

We must be able to see that our study - and the prayer that accompanies it - works hand in hand with frequent reception of the Eucharist and a ready reliance on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We know without a shadow of hesitancy that had we been present at the death of Christ or found Him at sunrise risen from His tomb, we would never be the same again. Though we are often filled with the real concerns of daily living and all the things we think we must have - from a pay raise or appreciation to a vacation and some peace and quiet - we know that if we suddenly found ourselves standing at Calvary, those concerns would all fade from our mind! Not only would the focus of our thinking shift, but we ourselves would be transformed.

To the extent that we are open to the death and resurrection of Christ in the Mass every day, we are transformed. God doesn't change in the Eucharist, I do and you do. Subtly. Little by little. The whole life of a Dominican is deliberately ordered to that change. This is what we are all about, what we are learning by our study: to be habitually present to God and letting that work its way in us little by little as our capacity permits.

Yet perhaps a shadow of doubt lingers. Perhaps there is something about our personal circumstances that makes us wonder if this is something, the Dominican vocation, that we can take up. Perhaps we feel unfit. Perhaps though I am the President of Socony-Mobile Oil, I have never read much scripture. Maybe I am a housewife who dabbles in art and helps with CCD but in the midst of sorting the laundry feel too plain, average and ordinary to make my way in the world of Dominican study. Maybe I am a laborer or an office worker with no formal education beyond high school and feel intimidated by the term 'study'. Maybe I am physically handicapped and disqualify myself out of hand as a suitable candidate to become a member of the Dominican Laity.

Now is when it is well for us to back up and remember Margaret of Castello. Could there be more adverse conditions than these under which holiness could flower than to be born female, blind, poor and helpless in the Middle Ages? Our first impulse would be to shake our head with great sadness and say she'll never make it. Physical survival alone would be a tremendous consideration. As for striving for achievement, usefulness and making her way in the world...it is all so overwhelming! (All the world's prizes - awards, degrees, letters, and praises - are given for achievement.) Therefore, it is outright ridiculous to worry about a thing like personal sanctification or to think that this girl can in any way assist others to fulfill the duties of their Christian lives. And we might as well suppose study a futile consideration when we look at this Dominican.

Because she was blind, life was different for Margaret. Learning about life was different. Her other senses had to take over seeing for her. Her intuitive sense was considerably sharpened. Overall, her general conscious awareness was heightened.

And Margaret could do the study of a Dominican! She could hear the Word of God as it was preached, take it into her heart, and finger it over and over. Margaret could pray for the insights she needed into the Word and the preaching she heard. Margaret acquired 'spiritual vision' and 'spiritual hearing' as Christ disclosed it to the disciples in the 13th Chapter of Matthew -

He said: 'A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the footpath; and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil, and it sprouted quickly because it had no depth of earth; but when the sun rose the young corn was scorched, and as it had no root it withered away. Some seed fell among thistles; and the thistles shot up and choked the corn. And some of the seed fell into good soil, where it bore fruit, yielding a hundredfold or, it might be, sixtyfold or thirtyfold. If you have ears, then hear.'

The disciples went up to him and asked. 'Why do you speak to them in parables? He replied, 'It has been granted to you to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven; but to those others, it has not been granted. For the man who has will be given more, till he has enough and to spare; and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has. That is why I speak to them in parables; for they look without seeing, and listen without hearing or understanding. There is a prophecy of Isaiah which is being fulfilled for them: "You may

hear and hear, but you will never understand; you may look and look, but you will never see. For this people's mind has become gross; their ears are dulled, and their eyes are closed. Otherwise, their eyes might see, their ears hear, and their mind understand, and then they might turn again, and I would heal them."

'But happy are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear! Many prophets and saints, I tell you, desired to see what you see, yet never saw it; to hear what you hear, yet never heard it...' (Matthew, XIII, 4 - 17)

It is certain Margaret heard this gospel read, certain she understood the three common obstacles to God's love striving to embrace us: hardness, shallowness, and entanglement.

But Margaret was not hard or indifferent; she was consciously open to God, and like St. Thomas, dependent upon his direction and correction of her thinking. She was not shallow. In thought and prayer she learned to grasp the inner meaning of the gospels. The Word of God reverberating in her interior self fitted her far beyond the sighted and those who consider themselves physically whole to be of help to others. As for entanglements, Margaret had none of the business, financial and romantic intrigues in her life that so often compete for our attention with God.

The parable stands as valid today as it did 2,000 years ago. Only hardness, shallowness and entanglements can hold us back from spiritual growth as a Christian. Dominican study must be understood realistically and seen as not only manageable for the average person, but also attractive. We don't come to this work already holy.

#### B. Good Habits

Firm habits of piety are better acquired by religious who live in community and whose prayer and worship are scheduled at prescribed hours in their day!

We can draw, however, from their example. St. Thomas tells us that habits are formed by repeated acts. We carry around with us in the baggage of our lives certain habits acquired over the years - prejudices, conditioned ways of reacting and thinking, inherited attitudes - that unconsciously color our whole way of living. If we were to try to go back and undo all the things that are undesirable, it would take a lifetime. We do better to use our energy to excite change by forming new habits of thinking and behaving which, as they grow naturally, displace what is found wanting.

The Rule of the Dominican Laity give seven (7) principal sources by which we grow in holiness -

1. Listening to the Word of God and the reading of the Scripture, especially the New Testament;
2. Active participation in the liturgical celebrations, and frequent (daily, if possible) sharing in the Holy Eucharist and frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
3. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours in union with the whole Dominican Family, and private prayer, such as meditation and the Rosary;
4. Conversion of heart through the spirit and practice of evangelical penance;
5. The serious study of revealed Truth;
6. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, according to the tradition of the Order, and to our Father, Saint Dominic, and to St. Catherine of Siena; and
7. Regular occasions for spiritual renewal.

If we look at the above list of seven principal sources, we can find ways to incorporate most of them into our daily life and in combination! For instance, if we were to attend Mass daily (#2), we would not only receive the Eucharist but we would also hear the Word of God (#1). Furthermore, we could fulfill the requirement of the serious study of the revealed truth (#5) if we were to read over the reading the night before, make a few notes for ourselves as to what is going on in those readings, perhaps have a good Catholic commentary at hand to clarify any questions, and then we can use these same notes after Mass the next morning (or at a later time in the day that is more convenient) for the recommended meditation (#3). These things seem to work together...it is left up to us to find the sheer determination and discipline to make it a habit to build them into the course of our day. Study of the daily readings carries us along with the mind of the Church. Meditation on these same readings brings with it personal application of the reading and generally, therefore, some spontaneous response bubbles up from inside of us.

Small prayers, short prayers that seem to pop from a kind of springboard inside are evidence of the exuberant Spirit within who is making more distinguishable the image and likeness of God in us. This is much as Cassian describes it and we have referred to it earlier in the life of Saint Dominic. The important thing is to fit the requirements of the Rule of the Dominican Laity to



our style of living and as we can, to acquire at least an attitude<sup>30</sup> of prayer and reflection on things studied. When it is impossible to study, impossible to take the time for prayerful reflection on the lessons in the readings because of crammed schedules, a colicky baby, or because the car needs to be towed and we wasted two hours waiting for the tow truck, the habit of study must not be allowed a holiday entirely! We might remind the Lord between moanings of our distress, that we will make it up to him...not because he needs it but because in so doing we are learning to be habitually present to him, learning that he is habitually present to us. And what is study for if we aren't learning that!

While we do have specific obligations as Lay Dominicans and we strive to develop habits to help us fulfill them, the General Declarations in our Rule tell us an important thing to keep in mind: "So that the Dominican Laity may embrace their obligations 'not as slaves under the law, but as free men and women under grace,' we declare that individual transgressions do not constitute a moral fault."

One last consideration in the formation of habits is that we should not allow our new found vocation with its study and practices of piety to inconvenience anyone around us. The thing to remember is that Christ called us "salt of the earth". But salt is used sparingly and it is used to enhance the flavor of that to which it is applied. Christ also called us the "light of the world" and then he said, "Let your light shine..." However, we aren't supposed to make a nuisance of ourselves by running around annoying everyone by shining it in their eyes and blinding them or otherwise disturbing them.

### C. Practical Study

#### 1. The Rule, the Declarations and the Statutes

In the Statutes for the Dominican Laity, we find the following statement under "Spiritual Life" -

"The purpose of the Third Order is the sanctification of its members and others. The spiritual life of tertiaries is guided by norms willingly accepted as means to that end, tried and proven to be effective by more than seven centuries of experience. These obligations offer several variations. None in themselves bind under sin. They are followed freely by joyful hearts, never to be regarded as rigid routines that threaten conscience or peace of mind. They are the spiritual bonds of unity with fellow tertiaries and

their Dominican forbearers - the Pilgrim Church and the Church Triumphant."<sup>31</sup>

Following this thought, a good first place to begin our study is with the reading of the Rule, The Declarations, and The Statutes of the Dominican Laity for the Province of St. Joseph. Attraction to Dominican Spirituality will bring with it of its nature an attraction to ideas out of accord with modern society. Because the Rule of the Dominican Laity, as well as The Declarations and The Statutes are not imposed legislation, they need to be thoughtfully explored, weighed, and examined with care in order that we may accept them completely intellectually and embrace them with a willing heart. If the idea is acceptable, hopefully we work up to the fulfillment, according to our capacity, in time. The thing here to take into consideration is the story of the widow's mite again! The value of how much can be done is in the intention. It's internal, not external. On the one hand, we are not to be overwhelmed by the Rule or scrupulous or legalistic in carrying out its recommendations. On the other hand, we cannot be stingy, small or slovenly with God. It's up to us to seek the grace of balance and clothe the day in it - and that day by day, one step at a time.<sup>32</sup> We need to see how this form of spirituality develops in our own life, actualizing the 'here and now' (as Father Schillebeeckx, O.P. calls it) of our relationship with God.

## 2. Scripture

Scripture is the font. The life of Christ is our study! We can study him in the marble sculpture of a Michelangelo or the paintings of a Tintoretto, Cellini, or Fra Angelico. But eventually we must get inside the story to stand beside Christ or hope for just the vaguest scent or hint of him. We must have knowledge first. The closer we associate with him in our thinking, the less we are able to say, "This is where we part company," because of rebellion, fear, misunderstanding, or selfishness. It is not possible to know someone and love him to leave him for something less. Like Peter, we may desert Christ; but like Peter we find we must come back! It is discovered as St. Augustine has already described, "We fear only to lose what we love or not to obtain what we hope for." Whatever divides, divides less and less often as we come to know God more in

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<sup>31</sup> The Rule, The Declarations and The Statutes of the Dominican Laity for the Province of St. Joseph of the United States of America, Part III, Statutes, p. 17

<sup>32</sup> Dominican Spirituality (or "The Counter-Thread" in the Old Religious Story as the Golden Thread in the Dominican Family-Story), Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., pp 1 - 5, (The Dominican Laity, Chicago, IL.)

Scripture - especially if we are following the daily and Sunday readings. We cannot help but love him more, we cannot help but uncover his personal love for us. As we consciously reach into the pages of scripture to touch Jesus, we will find ourselves more in touch with the anointing of the Holy Spirit long resting within us, the Gifts received at Baptism, Gifts that include Knowledge, Understanding, Wisdom, Counsel and Fear of the Lord. There will be unfettered in us the power of God, as it is given the children of God and we will discover the reality of that identity.

### 3. Life of Saint Dominic and Lives of Dominican Saints

If we want to know how to win the struggle aimed at the unhampered acceptance of God's gifts, we want to look at the example of our Holy Father, Saint Dominic, and the lives of other Dominican Saints, blessed and notables for inspiration. Their heroism and accomplishments are not only our history and our legacy as members of the Dominican Family, but point to possibilities beyond a superficial filiation, possibilities for development in our own time and history.<sup>33</sup>

As family reunions keep us in touch with our roots and legacies, so knowledge of the Family Dominic brings before us an unexpected treasury of spiritual relatives and fascinating stories. It is a time for pride when we learn that in the midst of the Reformation, it was a Dominican, Cardinal Cajetan, who stood astride the rift in the ground of Christianity and became Martin Luther's most formidable opponent! A bold and independent thinker, some of his writings are exciting modern students in a way they never did men and women of his time.

There are also the 'little knowns' with funny stories that really aren't funny - but can comfort us. For all the Prioresses who feel the burden of one too many terms, there is the story of Mother Mary Villani. She was Prioress for fifty-four (54) years. Because she was almost completely paralyzed, she governed her religious house for more than half a century while flat on her back.

Dominic of St. Thomas was an Ottoman prince who was kidnapped from his father's house as a baby. He came up in the Fisherman's net on Malta. His Christian captors would not permit the Sultan to ransom the little Mohammedan prince and heir to the throne. He resisted conversion until he was fifteen and had spent about two years in the care of the Dominican Fathers. He was baptized and entered the Dominican Novitiate two years later. Even so, a political tug-of-war ensued over him most of his life,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp. 4, 13, 17 - 19

holding up his ordination, inconveniencing his attempts to immerse himself totally in his spiritual life and embarrassing him at every turn.<sup>34</sup>

The story of the salvation history of each of these unusual persons began in the same way our own does - following Jesus in the footsteps of Saint Dominic. We each give our own unique expression to the Dominican Way of Life.

#### 4. Keeping in Touch

We do need to stay in touch as much as possible with what is going on in the Church, in the world, and in our diocese by reading a good Catholic newspaper - possibly we may need to read two of them with opposing views to arrive at the balance in some controversies.

Likewise it is important for us to receive and read the Torchlights to stay in touch as much as possible with the news of the Dominican Laity, for inspirational reading, and for its calendar of events as they are summarized.

Both of these sources are good ways to identify cassette tapes and books currently being published to determine what else it is we may need to read to round out our knowledge about a particular thing or deepen it. The Dominican Laity Office at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. (487 Michigan Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017) has a good list of cassettes and books which are available for purchase. Christian Classics in Westminster, MD 21157 (that's their entire address) can also be reached by phone (301) 848-0813 and are reprinting and reissuing a number of 'christian classics'. They are no longer a good source for used and out-of-print books. These can be ordered, or if they are not on hand, searched for, by Dr. Tom Loome, 320 N. 4th St, Stillwater, Minn. 55082, Tel (612) 430-1092. This is a very reliable source for old books that can no longer be found anywhere! It is run by a family that will try very hard to be helpful to you. Another source for old or used books is Catholic Library Sources, Box A3583, Chicago, IL 60690; also John Parrot, 281 - 1st St., Albany, NY 12206, Tel (518) 465-3144 stocks old, used and out-of-print books. Newman Book Store, 3329 - 8th St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017 Tel. (202) 526-1036 is well stocked with religious, spiritual, ministerial, philosophical, psychological, and educational publications currently being published and will be glad to order them for you if they are out of stock. (Remember a shipping charge will be added to the cost of the book you order.) One order will usually insure that you are added to their 'Mailing List' and you will

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<sup>34</sup> St. Dominic's Family, Sr. Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P., pp. 251, 446, 448 - 450 (Tan Books, 1983)

receive from time to time listings of newly published and/or currently available books with brief reviews to help you make a selection.

Retreats, Days of Recollection, and various other programs offered especially for the Dominican Laity are rich in opportunity to deepen our knowledge and strengthen our identity with Dominican Spirituality. The various Colloquia offered at the House of Studies in Washington, D.C. are especially exciting forums that draw questing Dominicans from every branch of the Dominican Family.

### SUMMARY

Saint Dominic bequeaths to us as Dominicans a spirit of devotion to study and truth. This spirit is aimed chiefly at the apostolate of formal preaching by the Friars. Like the Friars, members of the Dominican Laity need to habituate themselves to thinking about God, the Holy Trinity, and the things of God. We need to thoughtfully probe the meaning of our relationship to a God who calls us his 'children' and describes himself as Father to us. We need to apply our minds with gentle touch to the wounds of Christ...to feel him touch us back. We must breathe the very breath of the Holy Spirit breathing creatively in us. Indeed, this is the main business of life as we learned it early on from our catechism, "To know God, to love him and to serve him..." though this may sometimes slip our minds in time of stress or temptation.

Basically this is what we do if we are Dominicans. Indeed it is what we mean by study: that our life is rooted in the Word of God. We are always thinking about God (as much as it is possible, anyway), referring our everyday acts to him, making him the pole and reference of each and all things and persons that come into our experience. It takes time to raise our consciousness in this way, and so it must be done day by day, step by step. It is never finished. Without this stirring up of the spirit within, our very faith is in danger of becoming a petrified fossil. So it is a hundred times a week we ask ourselves, "What does God want? How shall it be done?"

Thinking about God and praying to him has the potential to become almost interchangeable. Study will sometimes lapse into prayer and our prayer will often refresh and renew our 'acquired need' (it will become a need as so many meals in a day!) to study.

Thus filled, we are prepared to give the overflow to our neighbor. Whether in prayers of petition or thanksgiving, formal teaching, or a simple smile of encouragement, Love becomes a need to communicate.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Saint Dominic's idea regarding study undergird prayer and the apostolate?
2. What is the Lay Dominican's obligation to study?
  - How can I build it into my life?
  - How will study itself carry over into the lived realities of my life?
3. How does study influence and color my attitude toward my neighbors' needs?
  - Do I perceive him/her in a new light?
  - Can I see study and prayer reinforcing attempts in new directions?
  - Can I see study and prayer easing self-correction?
  - Can I see study and prayer challenging me to positive growth in the Spirit?