

of God, seen under its principal aspects. Whether there is question of one's own formation or of the instruction of others, we must use this doctrine with liberty of spirit. According to circumstances, temperaments and our degree of spiritual or of theological culture, we ought to pass over certain doctrinal aspects, to dwell at greater length on others, and sometimes even to modify the comparisons suggested. So acts the tailor: from his material he chooses the most suitable piece and cuts his cloth to each one's measure. If the stuff is good, and the clothes turn out well, the credit is not due to the tradesman, who made neither the material nor the suit: his role is but the modest one of intermediary: he simply passes on what he has received: *Ego enim accepi . . . quod et tradidi vobis. . .*

---



---

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sir,

It is with reluctance that one ventures to criticise Sr M. Laurence's appreciative review of *Dartford Priory* by the Dominican Nuns of Headington in the May issue of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, but it contains several surprising statements which, in the interests of historical accuracy alone, could not be allowed to pass unchallenged.

Sr M. Laurence writes: 'It is at least a debatable point whether St Dominic intended all his daughters to rest behind grille and enclosure walls'. We wonder if she is acquainted with Fr Bede Jarrett's *Life of St Dominic*, on p. 46 of which he says: 'The apostolate exercised by the nuns does not seem to have been intended to take them outside their monastery walls, for every early document speaks of the inviolability of their cloister, and the close and strict enclosure of the Sisters'.

Three of these early documents may be quoted here.

(1) In a letter to the nuns of Madrid, established 1219, St Dominic wrote: 'Let no one leave the convent; let no one enter it—unless it be the Bishop or any other Superior who may have come to preach or to make a canonical visitation' (*op. cit.* p. 52).

(2) Blessed Humbert, speaking of the nuns, declared: 'He placed these servants of God under the protection of the wonderful observance of strict silence and permanent enclosure!'

(3) The very *raison d'être* for the establishment of the monastery of St Sixtus was the non-observance of the law of enclosure by the nuns of Rome, and the Pope would not have entrusted this delicate task to St Dominic had not his nuns of Prouille already been famed for their strictness in this respect. What is now known as the Rule of St Sixtus dates in its present form to the Bull of Gregory XI given to the nuns of St Mary Magdalen in 1232, but it emanated from Prouille, and is substantially the same as the original rule drawn up by the saint himself. In it we read: 'Celle qui est recue comme soeur doit promettre l'obéissance, la stabilité dans le couvent et

l'Ordre, vivre sans rien posséder en propre et pratiquer le continence. *Elle ne devra jamais sortir de la maison où elle a fait profession, si ce n'est pour se rendre du couvent dans un autre couvent du même Ordre, et pour une cause nécessaire*. *Chroniques de San Sisto*, vol. i, 3, p. xviii; see also nos. 28-31, p. xxv.

Sr M. Laurence does not seem to be familiar with Blessed Cecilia's delightful descriptions of how, when the nuns could be kept in, but their relatives would not be kept out, the holy founder locked the convent doors and went home to Santa Sabina with the keys in his pocket, or of those family gatherings in the parlour of St Sixtus, when the Sisters sat on one side of the grill and the saint and the brethren on the other.

These examples surely supply conclusive proof that the three convents founded by St Dominic himself were placed under the strictest enclosure. The Constitution of Boniface VIII only extended to *all* nuns what he had imposed on his from the very first, this being one of several cases in which the Church has made known the practice of the Order, and the mode of life which he actually prescribed for his daughters is the only available evidence of his intentions in their regard. What he would have done in different times and circumstances, and whether he ever envisaged 'active religious' as we understand the term, can only be a matter for conjecture.

Sr M. Laurence also declares (and the same statement is made by Fr Bede, *op. cit.* p. 47) that Prouille, his first foundation, was perhaps primarily for the instruction of Catholic children and converted heretics, with study and monastic observance as means to this end'.

Père Danzas, O.P., in *Etudes sur les Temps Primitifs de l'Ordre de St Dominique*, iv, 4-5, 6 (note), and Père Mandonnet (Vicaire) in *St Dominique*, i, 104, have decisively refuted this theory. The relevant passages are perhaps too long for quotation, but both these eminent experts state quite categorically that there is not the slightest documentary evidence that St Dominic ever intended his daughters to keep schools or that they did in the early days; and that when children of any age were received it was always understood from the first that they would make religious profession on reaching the prescribed age. Mandonnet quotes the primitive constitutions of Prouille. 'Nous n'avons pas le coutume de recevoir des filles de moins de onze ans: si l'on recoit l'une ou l'autre avant cet âge pour éviter une grave chute ou pour procurer un bienfait spirituel, qu'on les nourrisse à part et qu'on les eduque avec soin jusqu'à l'âge de 14 ans' (*op. cit.* p. 104).

(It might be suggested in parenthesis that discussions as to the precise vocation of the nuns might be clarified, if the distinction were drawn between the immediate intentions of St Dominic in establishing the Convent of Prouille, when he found himself suddenly responsible for the spiritual and material welfare of a group of convert women in 1206, and the role which he ultimately assigned to

his daughters in the Order for which he sought Papal approval ten years later.)

The present writer is not qualified to discuss the history of the Third Order or Conventual nor the correctness of such appellations. Perhaps these, like that of 'Second Order', are of modern origin, and distasteful to those to whom they are applied, even while being adopted by authority. But the author of *The Conventual Third Order of St Dominic and its Development in England*, following Fr John Procter in his Preface to Mother Drane's *The Spirit of the Dominican Order*, states that the Conventual Sisters developed from groups of Secular Tertiaries (*op. cit.* p. 20) and although on what may be called domestic occasions the Superiors of the Order may be satisfied with distinguishing between the *Religious Brethren and Sisters*, and the *Secular Tertiaries* who are not bound by the vows of religion, yet on more formal occasions they observe the canonical distinction between *nuns—moniales*—with solemn vows, necessarily involving Papal enclosure, and *Religious Sisters* with simple vows. Thus the last Master General addressed the new Ceremonial for Clothing and Profession: '*Monialibus ejusdem Ordinis et sororibus Tertii Ordinis Regularis*' (sic).

The Franciscans and Servites, to mention only two, also have Third Orders Regular or Conventual, and what else is the *Tiers Ordre Enseignant* founded by Père Lacordaire?

These observations are in no way intended to belittle the invaluable work done by the many Congregations of Active Dominican Sisters and not least by those of the English Province, nor to suggest that such work is not in the direct line of the development of St Dominic's apostolic ideal. But in the interests of truth and historical accuracy it should be made clear to your readers that the only convents which were in fact founded by St Dominic were those of enclosed contemplatives, that there is no evidence that he actually envisaged any other vocation for his daughters, and that it is not to Prouille but to the secular Third Order that modern active Congregations must look for their origins—except so far as Prouille is the source and cradle of the whole Dominican Order.

I am, Sir,

Yours sincerely,

A NUN OF CARISBROOKE.