

in spite of everything. At 11 a.m. it was obvious that this time the situation was terribly serious. The order was given to dump the oven; those who wanted to go to their homes could do so. I went to see the oven crew which was looking at the half-melted metal, just dumped. They looked as if they were going to cry: 'Hell, we shouldn't have dumped it, should we?'

The 19th of September, ordinarily a national holiday, we were ordered back to work. Many of us discovered we'd been suspended. The trade union had been dissolved, the participation system along with it. The wage increase, due the 1st of October (which would have restored our purchasing power in relation to the inflation increase), had been annulled. The following Saturday all were obliged to work without being able to claim overtime. The working week was extended to 57 hours.

Those workers who did return, came at bayonet point. The Junta ordered the 'patriotic' among the workers to denounce any 'subversives'.

Something died September 11, 1973, in Chile: it was this hope, these aspirations to a better, more fraternal and more just society. This newly recognised dignity and confidence in ourselves, these new possibilities which enabled us to control and direct our production . . . that was the subversion and that was the sin of the 'roto', the crime of the poor of Chile.

Great was the sin and dearly have we paid for it. Chile has lost some of its noblest leaders, leaders who in spite of their failings and contradictions had recognised in us something worthy of confidence, something with possibilities of development, the essential dignity of all those created in the image of God.

Priorities in Religious Life —An Alternative View

by Denis Keating, O.P.

Once the primacy of the existential witness provided by the quality of community life is firmly established, the community can undertake, either corporately or individually, *any of the works of mercy*. *Material services* have their place, but this is very definitely a secondary one. What people DO by way of work, projects, etc., is irrelevant to the apostolic dimension of religious life. This apostolate, as I have tried to stress in various ways, is exercised in and

through the quality of common life. Any specific *works of social benefit* that members undertake, either individually or collectively, are entirely secondary.¹

'Any of the works of mercy', 'material services', 'works of social benefit'; how many Dominicans, how many other religious, will recognise their work in those descriptions? Is this the kind of choice between community life and work that they are offered? How does it come about that such a false choice is both approved and supported?² How is it that the break-down situation, which is what the 'choice' between community life and work is, can be seen as offering relevance and a future to Dominican, and other, communities? (In what follows I shall write mainly from what I believe to be a Dominican point of view. I doubt if any one writer can cope with a topic as broad as 'religious life'; I am even less convinced that a male is going to provide the solutions for either female congregations or joint 'communes').

The Dissociation of Life and Work

In a document elaborated at the first general chapter of the Dominican Order we find the following words:

The visitors have to render account . . . of the brethren they have visited. Are they living in continual peace, diligent in study, fervent in preaching; what is their reputation, the fruit of their efforts? Are the observances respected?³ The brethren who are considered capable of preaching shall be presented to the chapter . . . The brethren who live with them shall be carefully interrogated, as to the grace God has given them for preaching, their studies, their religious sentiments, the warmth, resolution and intensity of their charity.⁴

Jordan of Saxony described the rule of the Preachers as 'To live a godly life, to learn and to teach'.⁵ For him Dominic was someone who, through boundless charity, had consecrated himself 'by the vow of perpetual poverty to apostolic observance and evangelical preaching'.⁶

The first general recommendation of the Order by Honorius III spoke of 'the useful ministry' of the Preachers, and of their religious life 'pleasing to God'.⁷ In the same year, 1218, we find 'a description

¹*What Is Religious Life?—Ask the Scriptures*, by Jerome Murphy O'Connor, O.P., p. 15 and p. 67 (my italics).

²*Priorities in Religious Life*, by Fergus Kerr, O.P., *New Blackfriars*, October 1973.

³*St Dominic* by M-H Vicaire, O.P., p. 309.

⁴*ibid.*

⁵p. 261.

⁶p. 394.

⁷p. 280.

of the Order—its ministry, which was the office of preaching, and its religious life under the aspect of poverty'.⁸

Whatever else these quotations imply, they take for granted a basic continuity of life and work. They see no conflict between the two, there is no dichotomy. This sense of continuity is maintained in the latest edition of the Constitutions of the Order:

By virtue of our profession we continue the work of the apostles: we follow their way of life in a fashion evolved by Saint Dominic: a common life together, dedicated by profession to the gospel counsels. . . .⁹

There is no divorce, then, either in the original documents of the Order or in the most recent formulation of its vocation between life and work; the two are one.

Is this continuity of life and work, and of tradition, rejected in the articles I have referred to simply because of the narrow frame of reference adopted by Jerome Murphy O'Connor? Or is it that the break-down, the discontinuity, is within the argument itself? It seems to me that *What Is Religious Life?* leaves religious communities as isolated as when the article began; that it leaves the position of religious fundamentally unchanged. It is claimed that 'the prime source of tension in religious life' is the interaction of the individual with the community',¹⁰ as I shall try to show, the question religious communities should be directing their energy towards is that of their relationship to the world.

Witness

For Jerome Murphy O'Connor the poverty of religious communities can 'provoke admiration and respect on the part of those outside'; he also writes about the witness value of celibate love which obliges outsiders to ask 'What makes them different'? he speaks of the 'curiosity' religious communities arouse. He also claims: 'Visibility is of the essence of existential witness, since it is a non-verbal affirmation'. Perhaps we can look at these points in the light of the New Testament and some of the problems facing our society today.

'Respect and admiration' may be attitudes worth winning; but, there is one aspect of witness which is stressed in the New Testament and which is ignored by *What Is Religious Life?* In the Last Discourse of John's gospel we read:

If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you (15.18). If they persecuted me they will persecute you (15.20)

⁸p. 281.

⁹*Constitutions and Regulations of the Order of Preachers*, p. XXV. (I have not seen the original text.)

¹⁰*WHAT Is Religious Life?* p. 67.

. . . the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God (16.2).

In Matthew's gospel we find :

. . . you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour (10.19).

Finally, in the book of Revelation, one of the consequences of witnessing to the gospel is portrayed :

I, John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1.9).

The witness that christians are called to make involves a threat to the established order, wherever that order is equated with injustice or oppression. They are not only to be in society, but are to change it—and, where necessary, oppose it. This is because the 'essence' of christian, and therefore religious, witness is not visibility but *revelation*.

The light that is Christ is not only visible, it also reveals. It shines in the darkness, a darkness which hides and is the cover for neglect and exploitation. The light that is Christ is a light 'coming into the world'. It is not only to be looked at, to be visible; it is also to make visible. And this revelation is achieved not only by light; it is also brought about by the word.

If we take the problem of loneliness in our society, a growing and demoralising phenomenon, we can see how 'visibility' may only make the situation worse. Those who are lonely can often *see* the christian community, and its place of worship. They can see christians, and others, greeting each other by word and touch, by presence. Yet, if the visibility is not added to by the same form of greeting, their loneliness is only confirmed and perhaps heightened. It is a sign that they are, and will remain, alone.

There is, indeed, a place for 'non-verbal affirmation' in christian witness; surely Charles de Foucauld showed this about sixty years ago? Today, Mother Theresa is the most immediate example. There are situations where grief or suffering demand such a presence; there is a being-together which reaches into silence. But, there is also a place for those who witness to the condition of human lives by speaking for the people discriminated against; who oppose those responsible; who bring the light of the gospel to bear on situations which would otherwise remain in darkness. It may be less dramatic,

it may even seem remote from the conditions it is trying to illuminate; yet, witnessing through the word is still an essential part of the mission of the Church and of religious communities.

The fact is that we are dealing with *millions*, not hundreds or even thousands. There are sections of our society who cannot or who will not come to the 'visibility' offered by religious communities. The unemployed, the sick, the elderly, the homeless are often helpless or without the means of creating community. A recent report in *The Catholic Herald* drew attention to 'the twelve million people in Britain occupying slum dwellings'. The response of dioceses and religious orders to an appeal by the bishops to make land available for housing was described as 'generally disappointing'.¹¹ Those living in conditions destructive of family life are unlikely to feel that there is anything remarkable about the quality of a community life which is established with the help of adequate material means; the unemployed wants work before having his attention drawn to a group of people who may never suffer the effects of his own situation.

For those who are neglected or ignored in this way, often their only hope initially is for someone to speak up for them. For others, language is access to life and community. If we think of the many immigrants in this country, especially women and children, who are affected socially and educationally by language difficulties, then a 'non-verbal affirmation' by itself is insufficient.

Visibility and the non-verbal, therefore, are not criteria that can be fruitfully applied to the Dominican vocation. This is a service of the Word; its 'visibility' often *is* its language, whether in the form of preaching, writing, or talking. To be true to the gospel, a great deal of this must take place outside and reach beyond any particular community; and the preparation for it must of its nature frequently be unseen, and remain so.

The weakness in the argument seems to me to go farther. The attempt to form 'reconciling communities' will alter little; the numbers are too small, the lives of the majority of people will remain unchanged. More than this, it will lead to a form of apartheid. This is an inevitable outcome of the method adopted. On the one hand, we will have an extremely small number of people living with the basic necessities of life—food, light, space, heating, community; on the other, a large number of deprived and financially insecure people, discriminated against by their environment, left behind in the race for reasonable living conditions. Religious will always be a small section of society, attempting, among other things, to witness to the reconciling power of Christ. But, we can easily exaggerate the social effects of that witness, especially when many of those around

¹¹*Catholic Herald*, October 5th 1973.

us are materially worse off than we are. Nor should we channel that reconciling power predominantly to ourselves. As long as we do that the authorities and powers in our world will know that, in more ways than one, religious are safe. (Whether religious communities ever become places of reconciliation surely depends on whether people join them rather than that they *see* them; one crucial test of this will be the appearance, or non-appearance, of coloured immigrants in our communities.)

Separation and Creation

. . . there is a very profound reason why poverty and celibacy were chosen as the structural elements of religious life.¹²

Whatever the historical truth of that statement, the Dominican Constitutions state: 'So in our profession only one promise is made, namely obedience to the master of the Order and his successors according to the laws of the Order'.¹³ This is in keeping with the 1932 edition, which says that the vows of chastity and poverty are implicit in that of obedience. It is perhaps not without significance that the three chapters dealing with the vows in *What Is Religious Life?* are concerned with 'authority, celibacy, and poverty'. To have considered obedience more fully might have brought the discussion onto a subject which is usually ignored—separation. (I should add that my own interpretation of obedience is concerned with the horizon given in the quotation from the Constitutions above; it is national, or international, rather than a dialogue between the local superior and community. Obedience seems to me to be connected with new life; it paves the way for this. So, it is concerned with separation; and demands the laying down of one's—previous—life. If we think of the sacrifices demanded of the elderly in religious communities today, in the uprooting of old customs or even themselves, the only long-term justification can be the creation of new life. By their obedience they have created the space for a new expression of their own tradition.)

Separation is at the heart of and implicit in many of the relationships and situations of religious life (as it is elsewhere in human life). One of those situations is work. For example, the religious who is also a preacher finds Christ in his or her work, as well as in community relationships. He is there in the gospel, in the text to be studied, preached, prayed; he is there in the word as well as in the flesh. Even after the pooling of ideas, the exchange of reflections in a community or 'team' of preachers, there is still the individual's contribution to be made. The act of creation which is involved in preach-

¹²*What Is Religious Life?* p. 59.

¹³*Constitutions*, p. 6.

ing or writing demands the same asceticism it demands of other writers and speakers; separation is one part of this. In religious life it is a separation supported by community, and continuous with it; it is none the less necessary for all that.

Jerome Murphy O'Connor rightly rejects what he describes as 'techniques of togetherness'. Togetherness, interpreted as a *movement towards the members of one's own community*, has been one of the main emphases in religious life over the last few years. If this is over-emphasised, then certain other values may be lost sight of. For example, the concentration on relationships within particular communities can, paradoxically, lead to isolation and lack of communication in the wider unit of the province. It could be that the possibly more arduous task of reconciliation and joint action in this wider unit could be put aside in the search by individual communities for their own witness to reconciliation. (Put aside unconsciously, that is). But, such an over-emphasis on relationships within particular communities can also turn attention away from one of the most significant contributions religious can make to the work and witness of the Church. They are distinguished not only by what they have to give, but also by what they have to *lose*.

The availability of religious lies in this: that, among communities in the Church and in the world, we should not be held back by our ties and relationships with one another. This should mean that if a new territory, either of work or geography or relationships, has to be opened up, then religious should be among the first available; we are expendable. (Not destructively, as if it didn't matter what we did; but creatively, in so far as we see the demands made on us by the gospel in a particular situation). In a world where people are separated by migration, by migrant labour, by war, by political and other persecution, religious should have something to say. They themselves are separated by the gospel; for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Is Love Enough

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13, 34-35).

Unless we balance these words with other aspects of the life and work of Jesus, we can end up with an oversimplified view of the needs of human beings and of their relationships. In the same gospel, for example, we find him saying:

I came that they may have *life*, and have it abundantly. . . . For this was I born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear

witness to the *truth* . . . if the Son makes you *free*, you will be free indeed.

What Is Religious Life? has some fine passages on responsibility and prayer, and the relationships and concern that follow from seeing the connection between the two. It also brings out very well the way dependence on the community through poverty points the way to a deeper dependence 'on the level of (one's) very being as a Christian'. But, its account of the place of the affective life, of love, in community seems to me to oversimplify the variety of needs any community or human being must fulfill to live fully. It also has in it the power to create expectations that cannot be met, and the consequence of which could be break-down for the person concerned.

The oversimplification can be found in such phrases as: 'Without bread and love man cannot live' (p. 59). On the same page: 'Just as the religious is productive in material terms, so he must also be productive in affective terms. These two areas cover the fundamental needs of humanity'. Can human needs be summed up in the 'material' and the 'affective'? Could we put the causes that people fight and die for under those two headings? Have they not sought their own versions of liberation? A freedom from colonialism or slavery. . . . Human creativity in art, or music, or literature seems to somehow escape these rather limited headings.

If we limit ourselves to personal relationships which are concerned with the material or affective witness of the community it is hardly surprising that work, the exchange of ideas which have anything to do with the mind, the existence or the necessity of culture, should all recede into the background. Life and relationships are mediated as well as being directly personal; they need not always be an exchange between *contemporaries*. There is a way of sharing which, at the same time, 'keeps us apart'; and which cannot be confined to the material and affective. A common interest in literature, or music, or politics, surely need not be motivated by or necessarily lead to *affective* ties? There can be a common cause which binds people together; and that cause need not necessarily be themselves and their relationships? I said earlier that little place seemed to be given in *What Is Religious Life?* to the creativity of religious; its account of human relationships ignores the way in which religious and any human beings, may be united by the creativity of the past.

Religious communities are only made up of people in transit. It is to be hoped that they attempt to put into practice the ideal outlined by Jerome Murphy O'Connor: 'Love only grows through mutual exchange in a community of love, and this is what the Christian community is meant to be'. But, if particular communities and individuals have a *constant* expectation of some sort of affective experience, then they are setting themselves a goal that cannot be

realised. The strain that such a goal imposes is reflected in the following passage, which only ends up by using economic imagery completely divorced from christianity: 'Psychic capital cannot be measured as accurately as money, but the analogy is not too remote. Unless all the members of the community produce to the limits of their affective capacity, the quality of the community's life—which is its *raison d'être*—will diminish' (pp. 61-2). I do not believe that any individual religious is guaranteed, or should expect, an affective life which meets his wishes in possibly even the majority of communities in which they live. Nor do I see why religious communities should not expect to undergo, in their own way, the difficulties and question marks that a married community of love is subject to.

Perhaps the pressures on communities to make themselves their first concern (in the sense of having to *choose* between themselves and their work), derives from a failure to consider particular communities in the context of the wider community to which they belong, whether at a provincial or Order level. If we make the individual community the basic unit in our examination, then greater demands are made on it—in terms of love, mutual support, care. But, if we consider the life of a province, for example, as the basic unit, then the individual community is placed in a setting in which other sources of ideas, prayer, strength, begin to appear. There is no escape from reconciliation within the community to which one belongs; it would be pointless to preach reconciliation otherwise. But, I would suggest that it is only at the level of a province, or a similar unit, that the question of what communities *do* becomes inescapable.

Vision of Community

For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility . . . that he might reconcile us to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

This passage from Ephesians 2, 13-16 is quoted by both Jerome Murphy O'Connor and Fergus Kerr; but, are the perspectives it opens up to be equated with reconciliation in religious communities?

There is a passage in *What Is Religious Life?* in which every grouping in the Church, bar the family and religious communities, is dismissed as being incapable of 'existential witness' as Paul attributes it to the local Church. Diocese, parish (and therefore along with them bishops and secular priests?), cannot practically demonstrate true community. Of the two groups that remain in the argument, the family is then rejected. The conclusion is: 'As things stand at present, religious life is the one force calling the parish and the diocese to true community' (p. 12). In a search to give married life its

fullest place in christian witness, the following example is offered: 'In certain cases the superhuman dimension of Christian love may be inescapable, for example, in the fidelity and devotion shown to a partner who is a permanent invalid . . .' (p. 57).

Religious are entitled to explore their place in the life of the Church; they may even want to conclude that their witness *potential* is what gives them their unique place. But, what does it contribute to the upbuilding of community to run down other vocations in the Church in the process? Are people who work in and for a parish or a diocese, likely to work with a group who say that they are *the* witnesses in the Church today? This sort of argument is not only disruptive of community in the Church, but it leaves religious communities over against the other members. If religious are to re-examine their part in the witness of the Church, they should surely do it in a way that attempts to bring out the fullness of the mystery.

The abstracting of religious from society and the Church seems to me to be due to the 'atomic' approach that is adopted when considering community. If we *begin* by considering each individual community, whether in the Church or religious life, as the one to which we belong, then we lose the richness of our own lives and that of the gospel. However vague it must seem, we are members of mankind; it is this community that Jesus came to reconcile. Even if religious wished to, they could not *choose between* directing that reconciling power to themselves or to others. We are in community for that wider community, as well as for ourselves. It is the *universal* significance of the work of Jesus that is drawn attention to by Pannenberg in *Jesus—God and Man*; 'Only Jesus' universal significance makes it possible for the hearer of the proclamation to find himself in the figure of Jesus, to have community with Jesus . . . the theological greatness of a Paul is expressed in the fact that he could find and exhibit a fundamental element of Jesus' universal significance precisely in the event that seemed to the Corinthian Gnostics completely inappropriate to divinity, namely, in Jesus' cross' (p. 205). We cannot limit the power of the cross.

The Irreversibility of History

The Dominican Order was founded for 'preaching and the salvation of souls'; or we can say that it was 'set apart in view of the profit of the universal Church, for the ministry of the gospel'.¹⁴ Whichever phrase we choose from the origins of the Order, there can be no denying that when it came into existence it extended and belonged within the preaching tradition of the Church. The reformulation of

¹⁴*Clergy Review*, August 1973.

this initial vocation will obviously be attempted throughout the history of the Order. Whatever shape this reformulation takes, it cannot be that *what* the Order does is irrelevant; what it does is, to some extent, already given. To move away from that is to found a different order.

In a recent editorial *The Clergy Review* drew attention to 'the off-hand dismissal of the study of theology' illustrated by the distribution of the National Catholic Fund¹⁴. Out of £47,500 the sum of £250 was devoted to theology. The editor goes on to affirm the continuing value of a *theological* contribution by religious orders to the Church in England: 'An interest in the study of the actual content of revelation, as distinct from some of its fringe benefits, incidentals and accidental associations, has in this country been left almost entirely to the religious orders and, in a patchy and unconvinced sort of way, to the seminaries'.

When faced with the seeming remoteness of a life which hinges on the Word of God, which is preoccupied to such a degree with the reading or writing or speaking of words, the social solution to the question of witness can appear far more immediate or relevant; the quality of life may be a more tangible theme. Yet, some religious orders or congregations may have to accept that the power of their social witness is extremely limited today; or they will have to revise that witness in the light of conditions around them.

We are facing a situation where religious are talking more and more within a circle of religious. To examine new possibilities, this is obviously a good thing. But, who is the gospel for? There is an early portrait of Dominic which shows him 'always ready to announce the word of God, by day, by night, in the fields and along the roads, in short everywhere'. Such a vision can find no place in a theology of religious life which attempts to separate the quality of community life from the work into which it flows. Discontinuity of life and work is an implicit preparation for death; as many people discover when they are forced to retire. Retirement into community is another version of isolation from the world; an isolation which seems to me no less at the end of Jerome Murphy O'Connor's article than it was at the beginning. We may decide to abandon the vision of our founders; but, whatever we do, let us not domesticate it.