

Text for the Times: *Study and Dominican Life*

The following is a translation of the Introduction to the new 'Ratio Studiorum' (Course of Studies) for the houses of study of the Order of Preachers.

The Task of the Order is Study

'Our study should be principally and zealously directed towards fitting us to be of use to the souls of our neighbours.'

According to this early tradition, study is one of the proper means for forwarding the Order's special task of preaching the Word of God for the salvation of the world. Apostolic preaching, the passing on of God's truth to the world of men, necessitates a deep and thorough knowledge both of revealed truth and of the teachings and ideas of men. The task of studying belongs in the first place to the whole Order as such: to our Order there is committed a theological and doctrinal role. As Cajetan wrote in the 1513 General Chapter, 'Let others enjoy their own privileges; but if we are not commended by sacred learning, then our Order is finished'. It is therefore of great importance that there be formed amongst us well-trained brethren, able to assist the Church in her teaching office. Study is such an essential means in the Order that a clerical brother will not be living up to his calling and not fit to go out on his apostolic work unless he holds study in high esteem and applies himself to it properly. This is how to understand St Dominic's command that the brethren 'must be so given to study that by day and night, in the house or on a journey, they should be reading or thinking about something and trying as far as possible to commit it to memory'.

Study is a specific element of Dominican life

The first place among the means peculiar to our life, a life both contemplative and apostolic, is held by study.¹ In the Order study is a real observance, as manual labour used to be in monastic orders, a help in keeping the three vows better. Our study, rising out of love of God and our neighbour, is a great aid to contemplation, since it cleanses the mind from error and enlightens it by directing a man towards the consideration and enjoyment of the living God. Conversely, a contemplative

¹*S.T. II-II, q.188, a.5*

life is a stimulus to study because the believer will seek an understanding of his faith and the lover will want to know his beloved more intimately. Lastly, a deeper knowledge of the truth will increase zeal for souls and so fit a Friar Preacher for living his apostolic life in accordance with St Dominic's rule of 'speaking only with God or about God'. This is why the Constitutions propose study to us as a specific part of our calling. In their zeal for preaching the word of God the brethren should accordingly increase their devotion to study, their love of contemplation, their community life and their religious observance, so that Dominican life as a unified whole may grow and prosper.

The Study of Sacred Truth

Our study, that service of the mind which we render to the Gospel of Christ and the faith of his Church, should concern itself with all branches of truth, both divine and human. Theology, sacred teaching, deals with them all; it is the science of God, which takes cognizance of all things and understands them in their relation to God himself.

Holy Scripture

God's words and deeds are presented to us in Holy Scripture, to the study of which the Friar Preacher must apply himself with all his might. Scripture, divinely inspired, is the Word of God offered to men, and in it, together with Tradition, there is contained divine Revelation; from this divine Revelation as the Church proposes it to us our theological knowledge must spring. Since our study is directed towards the contemplative life, it should be nourished as far as possible by the reading and meditation of the Bible. But the riches of the Scriptures will be better appreciated if we understand what the authors themselves meant their words to convey, and this demands intense and continual study, with all the help that scientific exegesis provides. A sound and extensive biblical formation is absolutely necessary for effective apostolic action, especially nowadays when the faithful are being encouraged to read the Bible and take a delight in it.

Speculative Theology

Every kind of sacred learning that touches on the history, life and mystery of the Church should be held in respect and carefully cultivated. We must seek to understand the whole of divine truth as it is revealed to us and to penetrate into it more deeply so that we can present it to men in all its fulness and its saving power. This investigation and explicitation of Revelation is the task of theology, for to be a theologian means to understand the significance of the things that God has revealed to us and their interconnection, to defend them against attack and to bring under their aegis all the truths discovered by human endeavour in the

past and at the present day. As St Thomas reminds us, 'Every truth, no matter who declares it, comes from the Holy Ghost'.² Therefore our speculative theology retains its value and shows its greatness in any age and should be regarded by all of us as the peak of the whole of theological study.

Philosophy

Our study must also be concerned with all the branches of knowledge that treat of man, the world and God in the light of reason, since these are necessary for the progress of theology itself and for the dialogue with contemporary man, whose salvation is the chief concern of our calling. Amongst these disciplines philosophy has pride of place because it is concerned with the quest for the highest causes of things. Philosophy by itself justifies its methods and has its own ways of reasoning in reaching the truth; in its own right it can seek out and arrive at truth. But the study of philosophy is also a preparation for understanding how God's Revelation is the superabundant answer to all man's questionings, and it provides us with an indispensable tool for producing a theological synthesis, since the theologian has to take up into the light of faith what has been discovered and held by natural reason.

St Thomas, the Master of the Dominican Order

For directing our minds in this mission of seeking and teaching the truth we have an outstanding master in St Thomas Aquinas, whom the Popes have proclaimed as guide for the studies of the whole Church. We, though, because of the apostolic mission and doctrinal tradition of the Order, owe our own Doctor special respect and faithfulness. This faithfulness should be expressed not only in learning, maintaining and promoting his teaching but also in making our own study a sort of overflow and continuation of the task in which the holy Doctor excelled and gave us a model to imitate when he joined together things old and new, created a synthesis between faith and reason and showed such devotion to Christ and to the Church.

Advice to Lecturers and Students

The example of St Thomas should be an encouragement to lecturers to apply themselves to their studies to the best of their ability and to endeavour to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the task of lecturing and training the brethren; they should also remember that they have been given responsibility for research into sacred learning and for its progress so that they may provide for the well-being of the Church, and by discriminating between various schools of thought make the truth clear for

²S.T. I-II, q.109, a.1, ob.1 et ad 1

the men of our time. But while they bend all their efforts to studying the things of God and fulfilling their doctrinal role in the Church, they need to realize that the Word of God is the highest of all truths and has an unlimited scope; so they should remember their own limitations and take good care to cultivate humility of mind and that virtue of 'studiousness' which curbs useless curiosity and intellectual pride.³

We exhort the brethren to make good use of their years of study and gladly apply themselves to intellectual work, for when they have finished their formal studies they should be properly prepared for effective apostolic work, and nowadays this demands the utmost personal commitment to study throughout their lives.

If we do all these things, we shall be found faithful to our calling.

(translated by Godric Preston, O.P.)

³S.T. II-II, q.166 and q.167

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