

'Christ is God', if true or meaningful at all, must be of universal validity.

In brief, then, we need understanding, not mere rebuttal. The issues are important and Ratzinger's case deserves more serious consideration. The suggestion (Kerr, p. 299) that the obscure writings of theologians have little effect anyway is disingenuous. Obscure and difficult writers (even theologians) sometimes influence prodigiously: Marx, Luther, Paul, Aquinas. If they were all uninfluential, it would be pointless for *New Blackfriars* to propagate the views of this particular 'British group of Catholic theologians'.

Dante and Two Friars: Paradiso XI — XII

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*Based on a lecture given in Italy on the 800th anniversary
of the birth of St Francis**

A contemporary of Dante's, opening the *Divine Comedy* for the first time, would probably have expected to find St. Francis among *le beate genti*, or at least to hear his praises sung by them, and that independently of any particular interest in the Franciscan Order, such was the esteem in which 'il santo d'Assisi' was held. St. Dominic, on the other hand, an incomparably less popular figure, is unlikely even to have crossed the mind of such a reader except, perhaps, in connection with the well-known confraternity he founded. For the average Catholic of those times, Dominic had already become what he has remained, one of those holy 'founders' about whom one knows or cares little, well-nigh obscured as they are by the universally accepted and venerated institutes which they founded. Even the Dominicans themselves seem, on the whole, not to have fully appreciated the extraordinary character of the man to whom they owed so much. Apart from the biographical sketch in the *Libellus* of Jordan of

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Saxony (d. 1237), Dominic's immediate successor in the government of the Order—a sketch which was historical rather than hagiographical, written that is to describe 'the origin of the Order of Preachers'—and from the depositions by the witnesses at the two Processes, at Bologna and Toulouse, prior to his canonization in 1234, biographical material concerning Dominic is sparse, or, rather, scattered piecemeal among conventional legendary accretions. Significant in this connection is the relative scarcity of explicit references to St Dominic in the encyclical letters written to their subjects by successive Masters General of the Order between 1240 and 1320 or thereabouts, for in them, more often than not, his name remains implicit in hortatory references to 'piissimi nostri fundatores' or 'patres spirituales', almost as if the Order of Preachers had originated from a committee of which Dominic had been no more than 'primus inter pares'.¹

In fact, the Dominican Order was the creation of Dominic Guzman alone. As much in love with Christ as his 'collega' from Assisi (*Par.* XI, 119), Dominic, unlike Francis, possessed the constructive and organizational gifts of a great legislator. By the summer of 1220, the year before his death, the constitutional structure of the Order of Preachers, especially as regards its wise adaptability to changing circumstances, was substantially complete. The only other intellect to leave a comparable mark on the Order was, strangely enough, the entirely speculative one of St Thomas Aquinas—to the extent, that is, to which, historically speaking, the Dominican 'phenomenon' displayed a particular 'forma mentis'. It is therefore curious that, once the Franciscan Order had been founded, the man who exercised perhaps the strongest formative influence on it in the 13th and 14th centuries—I mean, of course, St Bonaventure—possessed a striking combination of the two contrasting gifts of thinker and administrator, a fact which we know did not escape Dante, for, having placed the 'seraphic doctor' in the second circle of the Sages in the heaven of the Sun (where he is obviously a counterpart to St Thomas in the first), he makes him say of himself in XII, 128—9:

ne' grandi offici

sempre pospuosi la sinistra cura

('who in great offices ever put last the left-hand care'—i.e. riches and honour; cf Prov. 3, 16).

The rapid consolidation of the Dominican Order as compared with the considerably less smooth and straightforward evolution of the Friars Minor is not Dante's concern. Instead, he attaches great weight to the very existence of the two orders: in both panegyrics, the figure of the saint is presented less as a personality than as the representative of an idea destined to become embodied in the Church, the Spouse of Christ, in order to bring it into closer conformity with

its Model. In other words, Dante throws into strong relief the ecclesial, Catholic, aspect of the two saints, not so much in the individual panegyrics as in the overall presentation. This is already apparent at the end of the tenth canto from the reference to the *Sposa di Dio* who

surge

a mattinar lo Sposo perché l'ami

(the 'bride of God' who 'rises to sing matins to the bridegroom that he may love her'). This reference links the liturgical prayer of the Church militant with the choral song of the Sages in the heaven of the Sun, and is echoed, in the following canto, in the lines with which St Thomas introduces the two panegyrics:

La providenza che governa el mondo ...

però che andasse ver' lo suo diletto

la sposa di colui ch'ad alte grida

disposò lei col sangue benedetto

in se sicura ed anche a lui più fida,

due principi ordinò in suo favore,

che quinci e quindi le fosser per guida.

('The Providence that rules the world ... in order that the bride of him who with loud cries' —cf Mark 15, 37 —'wedded her with his sacred blood should go to her Beloved secure in herself and more faithful in him, ordained on her behalf two princes to be her guides on either side'.) Two princes, then, become two founders, each possessing his own particular brand of spiritual perfection, the one relating to the affective soul and the other to the cognitive:

L'un fu fatto tutto seraficio in ardore;

L'altro per sapienza in terra fue

di cherubica luce uno splendore.

('The one was all seraphic in ardour; the other, on account of wisdom, was on earth a splendour of cherubic light'.)

The reference to the two highest angelic orders relates our saints respectively to the third and second persons of the Trinity, in accordance with the theological tradition whereby the 'proper name' of the Holy Spirit is love and that of the Son is wisdom;² and according to which of all the angelic orders the cherubim and the seraphim represent the highest created participations respectively in the love and wisdom of God. These, reflected on the human level, become precisely the 'ardore' of Francis and the 'luce' of Dominic. I would add that, as I believe I have shown elsewhere³, the entire heaven of the Sun—where we now are—is conceived by Dante as a created 'reflection' of the 'procession' of the third divine Person from the second, of the Spirit from the Son, of subsistent Love from the Logos. When itself reflected at the human level, this becomes the ideal of human wisdom—the perfect coinherence of intelligence and

love—realized once and for all in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. The point of reference, therefore, and the perfect exemplar for the whole of Dante's solar heaven, and particularly for Cantos XI—XII, is Christ himself, to whom Francis and Dominic, each in his own way, bear the relation of images, the former that of Christ-Love and the latter that of Christ-Wisdom. All that is implied in the tercet last quoted, which in turn serves as a prelude to the unifying one that follows it, in which Thomas declares the panegyrics that he and Bonaventure are about to pronounce to be interchangeable: that is, that the one about St Francis will in a certain sense apply to St Dominic, and vice versa. It is a very important declaration.

*De l'un dirò, però che d'amendue
si dice l'un pregiando, qual ch'om prende,
perch'ad un fine fur l'opere sue.*

(‘I shall tell of the one, since to praise one, whichever we take, is to speak of both, for their labours were to one end’.) The ‘opere’ in question are clearly those which each saint accomplished on behalf of ‘la sposa’, the Church, the promotion of whose spiritual well-being, therefore, was that one ‘fine’ to which both had dedicated themselves, while operating in his own way in accordance with his own highly personal vocation, and so realizing a certain unique likeness to Christ. For Francis, the ‘Poverello’, the object of love was the Man-God who chose to make himself poor (2 Cor. 8, 9), and for Dominic the incarnate Word, Teacher of Divine Truth. Love of poverty, therefore, is Francis’s distinguishing feature, whereas Dominic’s is love of faith, especially in the doctrinal sense.

From the theological point of view—and also from the literary one, in the view of Umberto Bosco in his recent analysis of the eleventh canto⁴—it is possible to find something abrupt and even restrictive in Dante’s placing of the stress almost exclusively on St Francis’s poverty. Theologically speaking, things seem to me to run more smoothly and evenly in the case of Dominic; that is to say, the transition from the great introductory tercet ‘L’un fu tutto serafico in ardore’, etc. to the panegyric of St Dominic seems to be made in a way that is more direct and even more intelligible. It is more direct in that, if Dominic was ‘cherubica luce’, the faith too, of which he was enamoured, is in itself light and knowledge—albeit *sui generis*—whereas if ‘serafico ardore’ means glowing charity, it is not quite so immediately obvious that this in itself implies a practice of poverty to the level of that of St Francis. Also it is more intelligible, because from this concentration on virtually one aspect only of the personality of the two saints it is undoubtedly that of St Francis that is in danger of appearing somewhat diminished—given, theologically speaking, the unparalleled universality of the Christian precept of charity (cf Romans 13, 8—10) and, biographically, the marvellous

richness and sweep of the charity practised by St Francis.

Here I touch, I know, on a doctrinal issue—that of the relationship between voluntary poverty and spiritual perfection—which at one time deeply divided the two orders; think, for example, of the great P.J. Olivi's attack on the Thomist approach to poverty or, on the other hand, of the stonily hostile attitudes to the Franciscan 'spirituals' of the most 'Thomist' Pope of that time, John XXII, the very one who canonized Aquinas two years after Dante's death. And Dante himself puts into the mouth of Bonaventure (XII, 124—6) a reference to this very issue, over which the Franciscans were themselves divided for many years. It would not be appropriate for me, here, to side with one or other party or position; all I shall do is draw attention, where necessary, to this or that doctrinal point as it affected the position of the two orders at a time when Dante was already planning this section of the *Paradiso* containing, as it does, as much blame as praise.

The concentration I spoke of on a single virtue typical of each of the saints takes the characteristically medieval form of two parallel allegories, that of the loves of Francis and Lady Poverty, and that of the marriage, celebrated at the *sacro fonte* of his baptism, between Dominic and Faith : twin allegories which, by recalling the union of the dying Christ with the Church (XI, 32—3) underline, together with the Christ-likeness of the two saints, their common ecclesial vocation. This web of relationships between Christ, Francis and Dominic is here fundamental; but its insistently allegorical expression, especially in the panegyric of St Francis, is such as to cause a number of modern readers to complain in terms similar to those used by E. Auerbach in a rightly celebrated study³. Umberto Bosco's negative assessment of Dante's portrait of St Francis is, however, deserving of greater attention, for in it the distinguished critic lists a whole series of 'mancanze' due to excessive 'biographical schematization' and concludes that 'the "ardore serafico" mentioned at the beginning remains substantially devoid of narrative and poetic development'. This judgement seems to me somewhat unfounded—particularly at the point (to which I shall return) where Bosco finds out of keeping with St Francis's 'specialissima l'umiltà' the poet's use of the adverb 'regalmente' to describe the way in which in XI, 88—92, the

fi' di Pietro Bernadone ...

... sua dura intenzione

ad Innocenzio aperse

(the 'son of Pietro Bernardone opened his stern resolve to Innocent')⁴. But it is undoubtedly true that one must have prior knowledge of the historical and biographical sources and background if both panegyrics (not only that of St Francis) are to be appreciated more than superficially. In fact Dante never draws more than implicitly either on

the countless near-contemporary recollections of the man Francis or, in the case of Dominic, on the submissions to the various processes prior to his canonization made by those who had known him personally. Indeed, where Dominican sources are concerned, he may well have looked no further than one of the various reworked versions either of Jordan of Saxony's original *Libellus*, written twenty years or more after Dominic's death, or even of the official *legenda* approved by Master General Humbert of Romans in 1254–56⁶, which in this respect corresponds, though at a lower literary level, to St Bonaventure's *Legenda maior*, (recognized by all as having been of prime importance to Dante as a source for the life of Francis). In other words, it may well be that in both cases Dante was content to use texts that, in addition to being somewhat late, had already become highly stylized and schematized and, at least in the case of Dominic, contaminated by legendary accretions. It is true that, as an Italian and Tuscan, Dante would have felt a good deal less remote from Francis than from Dominic, thanks to the persistence of a rich and living Franciscan tradition of edifying anecdotes in Italy as a whole and in the central regions in particular. But this does not seem to have impinged greatly on him when he was writing the *Paradiso*.

At all events, there is an intrinsic and specific reason to account for the element of the impersonal that we all sense to some extent in both panegyrics. The formal pointer to this is the fact that, unlike all the other prominent figures in the *Paradiso*, Francis and Dominic are presented *in absentia*—and therefore, of course, in the third person. And even though, by choosing to present them in this way, Dante may well have foregone a splendid opportunity for displaying his gift for high drama, the fact remains that he was mainly concerned with a precise and predetermined design, consisting essentially in two points: that the entire discourse on each saint should be divided into two logically connected parts, a laudatory premise (the protasis) and a condemnatory conclusion (the apodosis); and that both these parts should be historical, in the sense that the speaker in each case would base his account of one or the other on the real historical life of the saint in question, and then go on to comment, as a historian, on the order that saint had founded—in other words, to describe, in effect, the actual situation around 1300. Furthermore, given the division of each discourse into praise (protasis) and blame (apodosis), it would have to hinge on a contrast between a model of sanctity achieved in the past and a present state of degeneration, both conceived of as moments in a historical process. A further necessary consequence was that, to quote Auerbach, 'the concrete personal side of the Saint had to be subordinated to his office and revealed only through' it; hence 'Dante did not describe an encounter with the saint ... but wrote a life, a hagiographical account'. And again: 'in the two biographies the

person is subordinated ... to the mission to which each had been called'.⁷

I stress the historical aspect of the cantos we are considering; for the rest, this approach is normal in the *Commedia*, whose basic theme is a real *homo viator* in the process of meriting reward or punishment from divine justice (*Epist.* XIII, 25). In the poem, moral—and therefore polemical—exhortations are inseparable from history, and, from the last few cantos of the *Purgatorio* onwards, the historical phenomenon that is more frequently focussed on than any other is the Church, viewed not from the outside but by one who, 'pius in Cristum, pius in Ecclesiam, pius in pastorem' (*Monarchia* III, iii, 18), ventures to pass judgement on the most noted and revered ecclesiastical institutions. The diatribes which follow the two panegyrics are thus part of a much wider polemic, the same one that also takes up the whole of the third book of the *Monarchia* as well as the great letter to the Italian Cardinals (*Epist.* XI) which was written at about the same time as the central cantos of the *Paradiso*.

The underlying motive for this whole 'anticlerical' polemic on the part of the mature Dante was his extremely 'unworldly' conception of the Church. As the Spouse of Christ, it is of its nature wholly intent on attaining the *supernatural* end revealed by him, the vision of God in the world to come; in the meantime the ideal type and sole model of the Church militant on earth is the earthly life of Christ 'tam in dictis, quam in factis' ('both in words and in deeds') to quote *Monarchia* III, xiv, 3. Now, not only did Jesus say 'My kingdom is not of this world'—which for Dante was enough to confute any of the Church's temporal pretensions—but he expressly forbade his Church to own temporal goods of any kind when he said to his Apostles 'Carry neither gold, nor silver, nor money' (Matthew 10, 9—10; *Monarchia* III, x, 14—17). This interpretation of the Gospel passage brings us back to Dante's celebration of St Francis, put though it is into the mouth of St Thomas.⁸ For, though Francis did not need to wait for Dante before being almost identified with the Christian ideal of voluntary poverty, there can be no doubt that, by stressing this aspect of his sanctity, the poet also had in mind his own ideal of a poor Church nakedly following the naked Christ. How could the man who had defined the 'form' of the Church as being nothing other than the earthly life of Christ have done anything except turn with mingled joy and bitterness to the figure of one in whom his entire century saw the imitator *par excellence* of Christ? On the other hand Dante would certainly never have allowed himself to subordinate St Francis to a political thesis. It is true that during the last ten years of his life his faith went hand in hand with his yearning for a reform of the Church through a restoration of the Empire, but on the one hand Dante was thinking then of the Empire itself as a *sacred* thing, and on the other

we must distinguish various phases in his spiritual development. Around 1308 he was still able, in the *Convivio*, to discuss the Empire at length without making the slightest reference to the Church. At different ages, very different ideas and sentiments were associated in his mind with faith in Christ: ideals of chivalry as a young man; his passion for Lady Philosophy when he was writing the *Convivio*, which gradually developed into the combined ethical and Christian passion that predominates in the *Commedia*.

It is likely that Dante succumbed to the fascination of St Francis fairly early in life. However, if it is permissible to distinguish, in Francis, between the contemplative and the penitent, and the former as presupposing the latter, then it seems to me that it was Francis' ecstatic contemplation of God through his creatures that first drew the poet to him; and that it did so, to some extent, through the Franciscan scholasticism of the time. When he recalled, in the *Convivio* (II, xii, 7), the 'scuole de li religiosi' ('school run by religious') where he had first learnt to philosophize, Dante was certainly thinking of the Franciscan school at Santa Croce, even though, through lack of documentary evidence, the extent of its influence on him remains uncertain, whereas there are clear signs at several points in the *Convivio* of some of his intellectual debts to the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella, where he was presumably initiated into the study of the two deceased giants, Albert the Great and Thomas, and where one of the professors, De' Girolami, had studied under Aquinas in Paris.

However, even the evidence from the *Convivio* alone does not necessarily rule out the possibility that Dante may have found either at Santa Croce or through reading some Franciscan master a leaning towards the kind of religious metaphysics, with its neo-platonic slant, expounded in Book III; in which, moreover, it is not difficult to find what one might describe as 'Franciscan-sounding' expressions. Take, for example, this splendid assertion in II, ii, 8:

E però che ne le bontadi de la natura e de la ragione si mostra la divina, viene che naturalmente l'anima umana con quelle per via spirituale si unisce ... etc.

('Because the divine goodness shows itself in the various goodnesses of nature and of reason, it comes about that the human mind of its very nature seeks union with those goodnesses'.) Compare this with Bonaventure's description in his *Legenda maior*, IX, of a typical aspect of St Francis's piety (an echo of the *Cantico delle Creature* perhaps?):

Contuebatur in pulchris Pulcherrimum ... inauditae namque devotionis affectu fontalem illam Bonitatem in creaturis singulis, tamquam in rivulis, degustabat.

('He beheld in beautiful things Him who is the most beautiful ... by

the impulse of his unexampled devotion he tasted that fountain of goodness that streams forth in every created thing’.)

On the other hand, granted that the *Convivio* contains a vision of the created world resembling the Franciscan one, it does not contain the penitential element in the latter. When all is said and done, Christ crucified is missing. There is a complete change in the *Commedia*. Admittedly, there is no break in continuity with the purely contemplative aspect of the Franciscan heritage. (We can hear it, for example, in the ‘Padre nostro’ recited by the proud penitents in the *Purgatorio*, which so obviously seems to echo St Francis’s own Canticle—compare *Purg.* XI 4—5 with the reiterated ‘Laudato sie, mi’ Signore’ in the Canticle—as well as hear it in other more explicit celebrations of God the Creator, such as *Paradiso* I, 1—3). All the same, in the build-up to the direct presentation of St Francis himself, Dante stressed heavily his ascetic side and in particular his strange love for the universally hated Lady Poverty (XI, 58—60, 64—72), though in my view he does not do so with quite so one-sided an emphasis on *this* love as Bosco seems to think in the passage already referred to.⁹ The critic’s contention is that ‘the essential character’ of the true Francis, ‘his being and wishing to be another Christ, *alter Christus*’ is ‘almost completely missing’ from Dante’s portrait. ‘Of the many parallels of the life of the Redeemer and that of Francis ... only one’ (their common poverty) ‘survives in Dante’, with the result that in Dante’s account ‘the figure of the *alter Christus* remains in the background instead of being given the central and key position it occupies in Franciscan literature’. What, then, were the signs of the stigmata if not visible signs of conformity to the Redeemer? And did Dante not choose to make them the culminating point of his account?

*Nel crudo sasso intra Tevere e Arno
da Cristo prese l’ultimo sigillo,
che le sue membra due anni portarno.*

(‘Then on the rough crag between Tiber and Arno he received from Christ the final seal, which he carried in his limbs for two years’.) And as for Franciscan literature, one only needs to read the Prologue to the *Legenda maior* to see the stigmata declared almost officially to be the decisive proof of Francis’s having been an *alter Christus*:

Positus est perfectis Christi sectatoribus in exemplum
(‘He was set up as an example to them that follow Christ’). And this was not only because it was Francis’s custom to preach penance. He marks with a Thau the foreheads of men, for

*Verum etiam irrefragabili veritatis testificationis confirmat
signaculum similitudinis Dei viventi, Christi videlicet
crucifixi, quod in corpore ipsius fuit impressum.*

(‘For indeed the sign of likeness to the living God that is Christ crucified, which was imprinted on his body, confirms his

unanswerable witness to the Truth'.)

To re-read Bonaventure's fine Prologue is to recognize an element of truth in Bosco's protest. Taking the panegyric of Francis as a whole, the allegory of poverty occupies considerably more space than the poetically richer drama of the 'ultimo sigillo': of the total of 23 tercets, no less than 16 are taken up with the allegory and only 7 with the theme of the 'seals'. Note, however, that we are here presented with two quite distinct threads of narrative: the one that predominates at the beginning of the panegyric (58—87) and again at the end (vv. 109—117), thus keeping it together as a whole, and the one in the centre portion (vv. 88—108) which describes in three stages the founding of the Order of Friars Minor, a description which, to quote xxxi.v.121,

quasi di valle andando a monte

('as if climbing from a valley up a mountain') culminates with the imprinting of the counter-sign of the Crucified on Francis's living flesh and so also, symbolically and ideally, on the institute he had founded (vv. 106—108). Note, too, that this second narrative thread slips into the panegyric, so to speak, *from outside*, since it develops out of those earlier introductory verses (28—42) that describe the divine plan to raise up the two mendicant orders for the benefit of the Church; it thus corresponds exactly with the thread of the 'Dominican' narrative—contained in the panegyric in Canto XII—which also, naturally, springs from those earlier verses (XI, 28—42). On the other hand, once each of these narrative threads has entered its respective panegyric, it follows its own course; and it is specifically on the resultant divergences rather than on any differences there may be between the two allegories as such that anyone comparing and contrasting the two panegyrics should concentrate.

But before developing this point further, let us return, briefly, to the allegories—of Francis and Poverty, and of Dominic and Faith—and note three things: (1) In each case, the allegory is the most fanciful, and therefore the least historical, part of the respective panegyric. No one will take Lady Poverty for a historical personage; and as for the 'sponsalizie ... compiute' ('nuptials completed') between the infant Dominic and Faith (XII, 61—63), the account of them is inserted between two contiguous anecdotes (58—60 and 64—69) drawn from the collections of legendary material relating in particular—according to a familiar hagiographical pattern—to the Saint's birth and early childhood that gradually attached themselves, during the 13th century, to the all-too-short but reliable account of Jordan of Saxony. (2) The fact of Dante's having dipped into this legendary material at this point, coupled with his not having developed Dominic's biography to the same extent as he did Francis's, not to mention, to quote Bosco, 'a certain superabundance of literary

decoration, a certain slowness in the movement of the discourse' in the twelfth canto, are all the indications of there having been a greater spiritual distance between the poet and his theme in this canto than in the previous one; in short, Bosco is to some extent right when he says that the canto about Dominic 'seems much less "convinced" than the Franciscan one'. I say 'to some extent' because, as I shall go on to say, an important driving force behind Dante's praise of St Dominic seems to have escaped him. (3) In the Francis canto the allegory is far more conspicuous and structurally more important than in the Dominic one, where it makes only a brief appearance and is left undeveloped, almost as if it had been inserted solely for reasons of symmetry, so that from this point of view the portrait of Dominic appears to be subsidiary to that of Francis.

It is clear that the two panegyrics have in common a general design that is worked out differently in each case. The most obvious of these differences becomes apparent from the contrast between the two allegories, not only in themselves precisely as figures but, as we have seen, in the greater or lesser prominence given to each. Far more interesting, however, because more revealing of Dante's way of looking at the concrete historical episodes connected with the two heroes, are the differences in the way the narrative threads develop. Each of these comprises three moments: a preparatory phase when the saint becomes conscious of his own vocation; a decisive event, namely the approval of this vocation by, in Francis's case, both the Church and Christ, and in Dominic's case by the Church alone (at any rate explicitly); an epilogue consisting, in Canto XI, in the death of the hero and, in canto XII, of his renewed and victorious activity. Let us now look more closely at these three phases in order to bring out more clearly the figures of the two protagonists who both offset and complement each other.

I: Responding to God's call (Paradiso XI, 55—87; XII, 83—87)

Both passages concern the period of time between each Saint's conversion (or, in the case of the child Dominic, the first manifestation of it, XII 73—78) and his recourse to the Holy See to obtain official confirmation of his aspirations to found a new order in the Church. In the case of Francis, this period was relatively short, but it is drawn out in Dante's description, thanks both to the allegory of Lady Poverty and also to the interest the poet shows in the Saint's first companions (XI, 76—87). As for Dominic, the interest at the corresponding point is centred on the time he spent as a student at Palencia (about 1190—1194) or, rather, on the attraction felt by the young Castilian for his studies:

*Non per il mondo, per cui mo' s'affanna
di retro ad Ostiense ed a Taddeo,*

*ma per amore de la verace manna
in picciol tempo gran dottor si feo.*

(‘Not for the world, for which men now toil after the Ostain and Taddeo, but through love of the true manna, he became in a short time a great teacher’.) Note that the accent falls here not only on the intensity of the young man’s love for divine truth (‘la verace manna’) but also on its purity and single-mindedness—qualities which prompted him to despise other incomparably more lucrative studies such as canon law (l’Ostiense’) and medicine (‘Taddeo’). But, seen as alternatives to theology, it is clear that the disparaging allusion is principally aimed at canon law. And, in thus contrasting the latter with ‘la verace manna’, it is an allusion that is highly polemical. For, on the one hand, to call theology ‘la verace manna’ is equivalent, in Dante’s terminology, to identifying it with a certain participation here and now by our intellect in the eternal Wisdom, that ‘pan de li angeli’ referred to in *Paradiso* II, 11 (and cf *Purgatorio* XXXI, 128—9); and on the other hand, it is quite usual for Dante, in his polemics with the official Church, to link the excessive study of canon law with the neglect of true theology which is one of the gravest accusations he brings against the clergy, especially the higher clergy, of his day. ‘Your Gregory lies among the cobwebs’, he wrote to the Italian Cardinals. ‘Ambrose lies forgotten in the cupboards of the clergy; and Augustine along with him; ... and they cry up instead I know not what *Speculum*, and Innocent and him of Ostia. And why not? Those sought after God as their end and highest good; these get for themselves riches and benefices’ (Epist. XI, 16)¹⁰. Think, too, of the bitter invective which is sparked off, at the end of the ninth canto of the *Paradiso* (vv. 130—138), by that ‘maledetto fiore’, the gold florin, on account of which

*L’Evangelio e i Dottor magni
son derelitti, e solo ai Decretali
si studia, ...
A questo intende il pape e’ cardinali;
non vanno i lor pensieri a Nazarette,
là dove Gabrielle aperse l’ali.*

(‘... the Gospel and the great Doctors lie neglected, and only the Decretals are studied. That is what the Pope and the Cardinals dedicate themselves to; their thoughts don’t go to Nazareth, whither Gabriel once spread his wings’.)

Dante’s attack on human cupidity, especially among ecclesiastics, thus takes the form, in our two cantos, of an enthusiastic celebration of two champions, each in his own way, of the opposite virtue, ‘caritas seu recta dilectio’ (‘charity or right loving’), to quote the *Monarchia*, I, xi, 13: the ‘Poverello’ and

*l’amoroso drudo
de la fede cristiana*

(‘the ardent lover of the christian faith’), to quote the *Paradiso*, XII 55–6. Of the two, the role—in the sense indicated—of the first is more striking in that voluntary poverty is more directly contrary to the desire for gain than is a disinterested love for non-lucrative truths. Nevertheless, Dominic plays an equally important role in the general design of the poem, both as regards the concept of faith itself, as mediating to the soul what the *Paradiso*, XVIII, 108, calls that

vero in che si queta ogni intelletto

(that ‘truth in which every intellect finds rest’), and insofar as Dante uses the figure of Dominic—for example, in the *Convivio* IV, xv, 12—to impute

orribile infermitade ne la mente

(‘a horrible sickness of the mind’) to the upper clergy of his day.

II : Seeking recognition (Paradiso XI, 88–108; XII, 88–96)

The two heroes seek official endorsement of their ventures from the Holy See. We must distinguish here between the chronological and the moral aspects. The former is more strongly emphasized in the Francis canto, because in it Dante was very anxious to differentiate between official ecclesiastical approval and the miraculous ‘sigillo’ of the ‘Sommo Pontefice Cristo’—to quote the pregnant phrase used in the *Legenda maior*, which would seem to be echoed in verse 107. Hence the care with which the poet picks his steps from one to the other, and the way he distinguishes, in the first instance, between pope and pope, between Innocent and Honorius, thereby revealing himself to be at this point less an expert in rhetoric than a man who yearned for the Church to be reformed along Franciscan lines through the re-awakening within her of the Poverello’s own love for the ‘Supremo Povero’ who had appeared to him on Mount Verna. Dante’s parallel handling of Dominic’s appeals to the Holy See is much more casual; disregarding a historically important difference, he combines the Saint’s two crucial encounters (with Innocent III in 1215 and with Honorius III in 1216), not so much out of indifference to the facts of history as because his main concern here was to emphasize Dominic’s steadfastness of purpose, unswerving as ever in his disinterested love for divine Truth and, being by this time an experienced preacher and disputant, wholly taken up with the idea of spreading that Truth by means of a new Order with the glorious title of ‘Preachers’.

E a la sedia...

non dispensare o due o tre per sei,

non la fortuna di prima vacante,

non decimas quae sunt pauperum Dei,

addimandò, ma contro il mondo errante

licenza di combatter per lo seme ...

(‘And he appealed to the See not so as to dispense two or three out of

six'—i.e. given to the poor—'not for the chance of the first vacant post, not for tithes which belong to God's poor, but for leave to fight against the erring world for the seed'—i.e. for the Catholic faith.)

There is a further difference between the two parallel petitions for recognition. In Dominic's case, everything, including the rhythm, is concentrated on the *active* verb 'addimandò', whereas in the three-stage Franciscan account, the Saint begins by being exceedingly active (vv. 88—92) but is quite the reverse at the end when he becomes like wax beneath the divine seal (vv. 105—8). And if we compare the two 'active' moments, we see that Francis's activity consisted in his demeanour, austere and frank to the point of pride, in the presence of the Pope (and what a pope!):

*ma regalmente sua dura intenzione
ad Innocenzio aperse ...*

('royally he opened his stern resolve to Innocent'). In the case of Dominic, on the other hand, the accent falls on the *reason* behind his request, and above all on its moral quality, its single-mindedness. It is the Saint's state of mind, what he was thinking to himself, that is brought out in vv. 91—96 of canto XII; in the Francis canto, on the other hand, what counts is the impression he was making on the people present, on the Pope and the Cardinals: an impression of great and solemn dignity ('regalmente'). All the same, Bosco is quite wrong to see in the use of this adverb something incompatible with 'l'umiltà' of the real St Francis; in particular he is wrong not to see, or at least not to say, that Dante's Francis allows himself to speak as a king only because he feels himself, in his poverty, to be an authentic imitator and representative of the King of Heaven 'who, being rich made himself poor' (II Corinthians 8, 9). The royal dignity, in this sense, of poverty was a favourite theme of St Francis.¹¹ That 'regalmente' is, in fact, a master stroke added to Dante's portrait of Francis as *alter Christus* which, by being used to describe the Saint's attitude to the Pope, ingeniously anticipates his having his 'dura intenzione' finally approved—sealed—directly by Christ without the intervention of any human authority, not even that of the Pope (vv. 106—108)

III : Epilogues (Paradiso XI, 109—117; XII, 97—105)

Two markedly contrasting panegyrics: Francis dies, Dominic redoubles his activity 'quasi torrente ch'alta vena preme'—'like a torrent driven from a high stream'. Dominic had, in fact, already been dead for five years when Francis died (August 1221—October 1226), and the Dominican Order had been officially 'approved' for eight years before Francis received the 'ultimo sigillo' (December 1216—September 1224), so the sequence of historical events is adhered to fairly closely. As regards the content of the two passages, we need only note that each of the heroes retains his particular

symbolism to the end: Francis dies in the arms of his Poverty; Dominic—whose death is not mentioned—continues to wreak havoc ‘on the heretic thickets’, ‘ne li sterpi eretici’ (though in fact in the last years of his life, Dominic himself did not have much direct contact with heresy), and above all to cultivate, with his brethren, ‘the Catholic orchard’, ‘l’orto cattolico’. This is a backward glance at the early years of the Order but, since we are dealing with professional preachers, we should also recall the bitter condemnation of bad preachers uttered later by Beatrice:

*Non disse Cristo al suo primo convento:
‘Andate, e predicate al mondo ciance’;
ma diede lor verace fondamente;
a quel tanto sonò ne le sue guance,
sì ch’a pagnar per accender la fede
de l’Evangelio fero scudo e lance.
Ora si va con motti e con iscede
a predicare ...*

so that

*le pecorelle, che non sanno,
tornan dal pasco pasciute di vento.*

(‘For Christ didn’t say to His first following “Go and preach stuff and nonsense to the world”, but gave them a true foundation, and that alone sounded on their lips, so that in fighting to kindle the faith they made of the Gospel shield and spear. Now they go to preach with jests and gibes’ so that ‘the poor sheep that know nothing return from pasture fed on wind’.) This criticism in XXIX, 109—116, 106—7, which was later to be echoed by John Milton¹², is certainly aimed at Dominicans as well as others, and probably at them more than at others; it thus complements and clarifies the somewhat enigmatic comment Thomas makes about degenerate Dominicans as soon as he has finished the panegyric of ‘nostro patriarca’ (XI, 121—132).

Implied, clearly, in this criticism is the exemplar idea: Christ himself in the first place (‘Non disse Cristo’, etc.), then the Apostles (‘e quel tanto sonò, etc.) and finally, implicitly, Dominic. And there is a matching series of relationships on the Franciscan side (as, indeed, there is in the very concept of Christian sanctity, given that ‘none of us lives to himself’ (Romans 14,7) and every saint is such by conformity to the supreme Exemplar). Hence to distinguish between one saint and another is to discriminate types or modes of conformity or likeness to Christ. Now, that Dante did discriminate to some extent between our two saints is clear from the very fact that he furnished not one but two panegyrics of them. In the matter of discrimination, however, he went, explicitly, no further than that. All the same, there would seem to be the beginnings of further development in that direction in the idea of Christ’s *ownership* which appears in canto XII, 67—69:

*quinci si mosse spirito a nomarlo
del possessivo di cui era tutto.*

(‘From here a spirit moved them to name him by the possessive of Him to whom he entirely belonged’.) In other words, from his baptism onwards Dominic was wholly ‘of the Lord’, ‘dominicus’ in fact as well as in name. Then, too, the first gestures of the infant saint show him prophetically (cf v. 60) as he will be when grown up ‘messo e famigliar di Cristo’, ‘messenger belonging to Christ’s household’ (vv. 73–78). Nevertheless—and this is the crux of the matter—the relationship between the Dominic portrayed by Dante and Christ, though intimate, *always retains the clear distinction between servant and master*; in Christ’s ‘possesso’, his ‘possession’; he is his Master’s ‘agricola eletto ... per aiutarlola l’orto’, his ‘chosen labourer to help him in His orchard’; his ‘messo e famigliar’. And that is all. For the rest, these appellations match perfectly the concept Dominic himself had formed of his role in the Church, which was to revive in it the kind of evangelical preaching done by the Apostles and above all by St Paul. His favourite title of ‘brother preacher’ meant as much to him as the appellation ‘slave of Jesus Christ’ (Romans 1,1) had done to Paul.

In Francis’s case, however, this rigid subordination of servant to Master seems to have been in some sense superseded. The stigmata are presented as the distinguishing mark not so much of a servant as, in the fullest sense of the word, of a *representative*; as denoting the *ne plus ultra*—attained, paradoxically, by means of extreme poverty—of a conformity and likeness hinted at from the very beginning of Thomas’s panegyric:

*Di questa costa...
... nacque al mondo un sole
... Però chi d’esso loco fa parole,
non dica Ascesi, che direbbe corto,
ma Oriente, se proprio dir vuole!*

(‘From this slope’—the western slope of Subasio—‘... a sun rose on the world ... Therefore let him who makes mention of the place not say Ascesi, for that’s to say too little, but Oriens, if he would name it rightly’.) This is manifestly a symbolic allusion to Christ ‘Sol Oriens’, drawn from well-known biblical texts and above all from the verse in the Benedictus canticle that runs ‘in quibus visitatis nos Oriens ex alto’, ‘The dayspring from on high has visited us’. By comparison, the glory of St Dominic cannot but remain somewhat over shadowed.

Implicit in every sound Catholic devotion to the saints is the idea of a certain assimilation to Christ that is infinitely variable. In this respect it seems clear to me that Dante represents his Francis as ‘holier’ than his Dominic—whether or not he himself, as he wrote his poem, realized he was suggesting such a gradation. Dominic’s

assimilation to Christ always retains something of a faithful, trusted, tirelessly active servant to his master (XII, 67–78), whereas in the Francis canto, and particularly in verses XI 49–54 and 106–108, what seems undeniably to be suggested is a veritable identification of the Poverello with Christ, to the extent that he becomes in a very special way a living image of the Saviour, an *alter Christus*, in fact; an appellation which, moreover, had already been current for some time among the Franciscans themselves.¹³

But—to conclude—in another respect our two saints are, rather, on a par. I refer to their respective symbolic functions in the general framework—more theological than hagiographical—of the Heaven of the Sun. Within this, as we have seen, St Dominic portrays the sanctification of the intellective part of the soul—precisely through faith—and St Francis that of the affective part, so that one is presented as a ‘cherubica luce’ and the other as ‘serafico in ardore’. In the light of traditional Trinitarian theology, it is easy to move on from this distinction to that *in divinis* between the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity, between the subsistent Wisdom that is the Son, the divine Word, and the subsistent Love that is the Holy Spirit. It follows that, symbolically, St. Dominic represents in particular the human soul insofar as it is open to receive the influence of the Word, and St Francis the soul in a corresponding relationship to the Holy Spirit—a theme adumbrated, moreover, in the Prologue to the *Legenda maior*, where particular stress is laid on the fact that the stigmata were a special effect ‘of the admirable power of the Spirit of the Living God’.

- * This abbreviated and slightly adapted version of a lecture originally given in Italian in 1982 was translated by Sister Mary John Ronayne OP of Carisbrooke. Another version of the text will be published under the title ‘Dante’s Panegyrics of St Francis and St Dominic in the Divine Comedy (Paradiso XI–XII)’ in a collection of Dante studies. The translations of Dante which the Editor has added to the present version are taken from J.D. Sinclair’s edition.
- 1 *Litterae Encyclicae Magistrorum Generalium Ord. Praed. 1233-1376*, edited by B.M. Reichert OP (M.O.F.P.H., vol V), Rome 1900.
- 2 cf St Thomas, *Summa Theol.* 1a 34,2; 37,1; 39;8.
- 3 ‘The Celebration of Order: *Paradiso X*’, *Dante Studies*, XC (1972), pp. 109–124; reprinted in *The Two Dantes*, London 1977.
- 4 Florence, Le Monnier, 1979, pp. 172–9.
- 5 *Studi su Dante*, Feltrinelli, p. 241.
- 6 cf MOPH XVI, p. 355.
- 7 op. cit. p. 231.
- 8 Who, in fact, had rejected this interpretation, cf. *Summa Theol.* 2a, 2ae, 185, 6.
- 9 cf. note 4 above.
- 10 English version from *The Letters of Dante* translated by P. Toynbee, Oxford, 1966, where the letter in question is listed as no. VIII.
- 11 cf Celano, *Leg. seconda* I, 11; *Legenda maior* II, 10; *Scripta Leonis*, etc. ed. Brooke, pp. 92, 192; the passage from Bosco taken issue with here is in op. cit. pp. 173–4.
- 12 *Lycidias*, 123–5.
- 13 cf the passage from the Prologue to Bonaventure’s *Legenda maior* already quoted.