

THE WAY OF TRUTH

THOUGH it is eminently true that there is but one way for all men through the tangled wilderness of human life, namely the way that has been opened and trodden by Him Who declared: *I am the Way*, nevertheless there is a sense in which it is true to say that the ways of God are as diversified as the individuality of those who seek Him. All are Members of the Mystical Body of Christ, but the hierarchy of place and function within that Body comprehends, and indeed demands, a variety of state and action that covers all the needs and capacities of human nature. It is not a difference of way, but rather a difference of emphasis. In its essentials the Christian life and the Christian ideals are the same for all men—union with God through union with the God-man; but in its variety of emphasis the Christ-life which men are called to lead is a jewel of a myriad facets.

It is in this sense of emphasis, therefore, that we may speak of Dominican spirituality as the Way of Truth, without wishing to appropriate that quality exclusively to the Order of St. Dominic. The word *Veritas*, the distinctive motto of the Order, undoubtedly sums up the ideal which St. Dominic realized in his own life and set before the members of his Order as the essential means of their sanctification and of their apostolate. Into how great a tree this mustard seed can grow is made strikingly clear in a notable work of the late Père Joret, O.P., which has recently appeared in its English translation.¹ It is a work addressed primarily to Dominican Tertiaries living in the world, but it proves itself to be a treatise on the spiritual life based upon principles so essential to the intelligent appreciation of the foundations of all spirituality that its appeal will be far wider than the modesty of its author allowed him to think, embracing not only all the cloistered members of the Dominican Order but many outside its ranks.

¹ *Dominican Life*. By F.-D. Joret, O.P. Authorised Translation. *With a Foreword by* Father Bernard Delany, O.P., Provincial. (pp. xii—311. 7s. 6d. Sands & Co.)

In the circumstances, however, one is not surprised to find that his treatise presupposes to some extent the elementary principles upon which it rests, so that we think it worth while to elaborate somewhat at least the most important one of all, that namely which emerges from an accurate understanding of the implication of "Truth" in this context. Perhaps the philosophical approach to this understanding will prove the most satisfying; it is, at any rate, undoubtedly the Dominican one.

Truth stands for perfect adequation between a mind knowing and an object known. Where the mind is one which depends upon the actuality of the object for its knowledge, as is the case with the human mind, the truth resultant upon a perfect adequation between the two is situate in the mind and is a real quality thereof; any lack of adequation, on the other hand, is reducible to some defect in the mind and leads to falsity therein. This is what we usually mean when we speak of truth or falsity. But there is also another aspect of truth, less familiar, perhaps, but more fundamental. It consists in that relation of adequation which created things bear to the mind of the Creator; it results from the perfect reproduction in objective reality of the idea pre-existing in the mind of the divine Artificer, and it has its analogy in the work of the human artificer. This is truth in being, ontological truth, and is a quality that resides not in the mind knowing but in the object known. The point to observe is that truth in both aspects is a quality or perfection resident in the subject of which truth is predicated and this quality or perfection represents a unity of likeness with the object known or the mind which preconceived it, as the case may be.

Knowing always supposes a oneness of this kind; as Aristotle perceived, and still more clearly St. Thomas, to know a thing is in some sense to become it; and the recognition of this oneness by a created mind constitutes logical truth, which is thus the immediate outcome of a oneness of being (accidental, of course) shared by the knower and the known. This entitative basis of truth is still more manifest in ontological truth, for the latter is

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synonymous with the actual being of the subject in which it resides, including both the accidental and the substantial modifications of that being. To quote both the Philosopher and the Angelic Doctor again: "As each thing is in respect of being, so it is in respect of truth." The reason for this conclusion is, according to the former, because "the principles of eternal things . . . are the cause of the being of other things," and according to St. Thomas, because things are said to be true in this transcendental sense insofar as they correspond with their prototype in the mind of God Who created them, in other words, to the extent that they actually are what God intends and desires them to be.

We may now apply these philosophical notions of truth to the matter in hand. It is clear, first of all, that the search for truth is the search for God, because a thing is truly known only when its ultimate causes are known, and these are to be found only in God. Knowledge is valuable, is indeed true knowledge, only when it leads immediately or remotely to a greater knowledge of God; but any knowledge can lead to a greater knowledge of God if it is true in the completest sense. Secondly, it is clear that truth implies something much deeper than mere knowing; it implies being. In the logical order progressive attainment of truth, properly understood, is a progressive attainment of union with God in the realm of intellectual being; and if that attainment of truth is inspired by Charity, that union with God is in the realm of supernatural being, representing a mode of raising the mind and heart to God. In the ontological order truth is the actuality, perfection, being, of the creature as measured by the prototype in the divine mind. It might appear that this latter adequation was absolutely necessary, that in point of fact the thing made by God must be in every respect what He intends and desires. But, without here entering into the theological analysis of this mystery, we may say that in one instance of creation at least there is room for a lack of adequation—the case, namely, of the creature created with the use of a free-will. Though in all that pertains essentially to his nature man is true to the divine idea, yet in all that falls within the province of his

free choice he bears within him the capability of finding the ultimate perfection designed for him by God or of falling short of it. Man is free, therefore, to become true in the completest sense, free to attain to a perfection of supernatural being in an eternal union with God, for this is God's intention and will in creating him. And if freedom is the dearest heritage of man, the apparent sacrifice of this freedom, which the pursuit of ultimate Truth implies, is the only one guarantee of its retention and perfecting: "*the truth shall make you free.*"

Our Lord said of Himself: "*I am the truth.*" The hypostatic union of the two natures in the Person of God the Son exhibits truth in its supreme mode, for therein the divine Prototype and the perfect Ectype of man are joined in a union closer than that of body and soul. He is the Word of God, the Image of the divine mind, and therefore through Him all things were made; it is through oneness with Him that truth is found in things. When man had fallen from this truth it was, in the inscrutable designs of God, through a new kind of union with the Word that man should be re-created in this truth of being. "*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.*" As men have been redeemed through the instrumentality of the human nature of the Word, it is through union with this humanity that man will again find the perfect truth which is union with the divinity. Christ our Lord is, therefore, the Way, the very Door, through which all must pass to become true, to be what God would have them be.

This is, in very skeleton, the implication of that fundamental principle which must underlie all spiritually, and it is to this one essential thing above all others that Dominican spirituality is directed. It is, as we have said and as must be obvious, a question of emphasis, for it would be ridiculous to suppose that it could be excluded from other ways of spirituality any more than the *Pax* of the Benedictines, the *Caritas Dei* of the Franciscans or the *A.M.D.G.* of the Jesuits could be excluded from the Dominican way. But this emphasis shows itself as distinctive in the ideals and life of that Order; explains its devotion to study, especially of

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Holy Scripture, Theology and Philosophy; explains its devotion to preaching, teaching and the apostolate in general, together with its equally profound devotion to the choral Office and the liturgy; explains its more than ordinary devotion to the Mother of God and to her Rosary, as well as the multiplied suffrages for the dead. It explains, too, the simplicity and freedom of the Dominican method of private prayer, especially of contemplative prayer, with its doctrinal and liturgical inspiration, the very definite attitude towards mortification and penance, the comprehensiveness of its manifold activities, the marked characteristic of a sane and balanced outlook on life combined with a disinterested pursuit of objective truth, and the external variety of type in its members.

All these facets of Dominican life (which we set down as ideals, whatever shortcomings there may be in practice) are enlarged upon by Père Joret in the book to which we have already called attention. In the chapter entitled: "On Conforming our Whole Life to the Truth" the author deals with the primary moral virtue, Prudence, as a practical means of reducing Truth to the sphere of everyday affairs. "It is of very little use to study truth and to make it the subject of our meditation," he observes, "if we rest content with contemplating it as mere dilettanti, without regulating our life according to what we know. We must do the truth in charity, St. Paul tells us, and St. John insists that we must walk in truth. St. Dominic seems to be borrowing the Beloved Disciple's terminology when he says: "I have no greater joy than to learn that my children are walking in the truth." All his life our Father set us a wonderful example of that course." There are definite pitfalls in pursuing this path of truth. "Sincerity must beware of being self-assertive. Frankness must avoid degenerating into harshness which is wounding to the feelings of others." Though "charity is the starting point for everything in Christian conduct . . . the foundation which nothing can replace," yet supernatural Prudence is "the means through which the good impulses of divine love are realized in the details of daily life . . . To that end it seeks the happy medium

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between the extremes to which our human passions are ever tending." Some might be tempted to imagine that this view of the spiritual life will stifle enthusiasm. But "do not be afraid that the happy medium implies mediocrity," says the author. "For the ends are ever in view, those magnificent ends which charity prescribes. Prudence selects the means of attaining those ends . . . And yet even in the use of the very best means exaggeration is quite possible . . . "The excellence of a religious rule," writes St. Thomas, "lies not in the rigour of the observances practised, but in the perfect adaptation of these observances to the end aimed at." . . . For the same reason the ideal does not mean wearing oneself out by mortifications and prolonging pious exercises to an extraordinary extent. All that should be regulated by the holy virtue of prudence . . . It is by the acts of prudence that we are enabled to introduce truth into our life."

This common-sense attitude to life, natural and spiritual, this effort to recognise and follow an objective norm in total disregard of any subjective bias or of the obstructive reactions of others, this devotion to cold truth, is a notable characteristic of the great saints of the Order, like St. Dominic himself, St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Catherine of Siena. For those at least who are acquainted with the lives of these saints, examples innumerable will leap to the mind. But this same characteristic is the reason, too, of much of the misunderstanding and even misjudgment that the Order has suffered from its earliest days. It is precisely this that brought St. Thomas under suspicion in certain quarters; though, as he himself observes apropos of a philosophical dispute in an *obiter dictum* worthy of greater fame: *Quicquid horum sit non est nobis multum curandum, quia studium philosophiae non est ad hoc quod sciatur quid homines senserit sed qualiter se habeat veritas rerum.*" It is this same characteristic, again, that has made Torquemada the sinister archetype of all Dominicans in the minds of many for generations past. But this one can almost excuse—the objective impartiality implied in such a thing as the Inquisition is foreign to what is common enough to be normal in human nature. Moreover it represents a very

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high ideal and at the same time easily lends itself to abuse; from both these angles the lesser sons and daughters of St. Dominic may often fall short in practice. This book of Père Joret is primarily intended to raise a beacon of guidance and encouragement to the Dominicans of to-day that they may both know and practise the high ideals of the Order to which they have been called; and it should serve its purpose well. But it also affords a wealth of teaching and spiritual direction for all who are prepared to take an objective view of the Christian life and of its obligations. The Way of Truth is straight and very narrow, but here is one of the guides to whom all may trust themselves confidently.

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