

THE PASSION FOR GOD IN THE EARLY DOMINICANS

by Donald Goergen, O.P.

Tradition hands us an image of Dominic as a joyful friar. Both Cecilia, the first to make profession in Dominic's hands in the new monastery of San Sisto in Rome in 1221, and Jordan of Saxony describe Dominic as cheerful.¹ I will focus, however, not on Dominic's cheerfulness but on his sadness and disappointments.

The Sadness of Dominic

Is there anyone here who has never been disappointed? Disappointment is a fairly universal human experience. Even God in the Book of Genesis is so disappointed with humanity that God says, "I regret that I ever created them" (Gen 6: 5-6). Let us then look at Dominic in southern France prior to his establishing an order of preachers.

The Cathars² first became an organized church in the Languedoc in 1167 when Cathar bishops were appointed for Toulouse, Carcassonne, and Albi, the city from which the name "Albigensians" came and which was first applied to the Cathars in 1165.³ A little over thirty years later, 1198, Innocent III became pope at the age of 37. In 1203 two Cistercians, Pierre de Castlenau and Raoul de Fontfroide, were sent to Languedoc by Innocent III on a mission of conversion. With them were their servants and retinue. The next year the pope sent a third, Arnaud Amaury, Abbot of Citeaux. The following year,

¹ See Vladimir Koudelka, Dominic, trans. and ed. Simon Tugwell (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997): 56-60, an excellent introduction to the story of Dominic. "By his cheerfulness he easily won the love of everybody," Jordan says. Koudelka, 59. Jordan of Saxony, On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers (the Libellus), (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982): 26 (the Libellus, # 104).

² Malcom Lambert, The Cathars (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 1998). Steven Runciman, The Medieval Manichee (Cambridge University Press, 1947).

³ Aubrey Burl, God's Heretics, The Albigensian Crusade (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Pub. Ltd., 2002): 15-16.

1205, Foulques de Marseilles, a former troubadour, became bishop of Toulouse. In Spring (March) of the next year Dominic and his bishop, Diego, accidentally met the three papal legates in Montpellier, where their methods of preaching were challenged and a new form of preaching began to take shape. In late December (the 30th) of 1207 Bishop Diego died and Dominic was on his own. The years, 1208-1215, following the death of Diego and prior to the establishment of the order in the diocese of Toulouse, must have witnessed Dominic wrestling with profound sadness.

Disappointment, even disillusionment, is not necessarily bad for us. Disillusionment is an encounter with a level of reality that we prefer to avoid. Disappointment can re-direct where we search for meaning in life. A sage in India says, "It doesn't make any difference how fast you're going if you're headed in the wrong direction." Teilhard de Chardin wrote that all the raptures of the world are not as effective as the "icy chill of a disappointment" in teaching us that it is God alone that we seek. "Blessed, then, be the disappointments which snatch the cup from our lips; blessed be the chains that force us to go where we would not."⁴ As we ponder the years 1208-1215, an eight year period, I do not see Dominic as discouraged, which is a loss of courage, but as disappointed, even disillusioned.

Diego has died. Dominic has settled in Fanjeaux, a Cathar stronghold, an "inferno of heresy," as one writer describes it,⁵ where Dominic and Diego had established the hospice/nunnery for some converted Cathar Good Women, whom Catholics

⁴ "The Mystical Milieu," (1917) in Writings in Time of War (New York: Harper and Row, Pub. 1968): 131-32. Ibid., 127: "The power to appreciate and to open the heart is indispensable to the awakening and the maintenance of the mystical appetite. But all the raptures they bring put together are not so effective as the icy chill of a disappointment in showing us that you alone, my God, are stable. It is through sorrow, and through joy that your Godhead gradually assumes, in our sentient faculty, the higher Reality it possesses in the nature of things, but which it is so difficult even for those who are most fully initiated to put into words."

⁵ Aubrey Burl, 58-59.

sarcastically called "les parfaits" (the perfect), the oh-so-perfect ones.⁶ On January 14, 1208, Pierre de Castlenau, one of the three papal legates, was assassinated. He was canonised the following March 10. The same day Pope Innocent called for a crusade. The holy preaching was ineffective. It would now be holy war and one of the most brutal religious wars in history. And where was Dominic?

Accumulated disappointments make us either cynical or contemplative. Cynicism is self-protective. We avoid going deeper into the truth of things, fail to discover God in them, never get beyond the loneliness, the emptiness, and the sorrow. The struggle with disappointment is primarily a spiritual struggle. One of the most significant challenges in our spiritual lives is how to reach out and embrace someone, something, that disappoints or hurts us. Vladimir Koudelka wrote that Dominic during this brutal religious war did not lose heart.⁷ Jordan of Saxony reported the same.⁸ Now it is always possible that Dominic was simply a lunatic, but if not, he then manifested a courage and hopefulness that "the signs of the times" did not warrant. And during the brutal holy war, where was Dominic? Most noteworthy is that Dominic never joined the crusade.

Arnaud Amaury, the Abbot of Citeaux, the third of the papal legates, had been appointed in March of 1208 the spiritual leader of the crusade. On July 22, the feast of Mary Magdalene, in 1209, the Te Deum having been sung, the massacre at Béziers took

⁶ Aubrey Burl, xv-xviii, 3-12.

⁷ Koudelka, 6.

⁸ "While the crusaders were in the land, Brother Dominic remained there until the death of the Count de Montfort, constantly preaching the word of God. And how many insults he endured there from wicked men! How much plotting of theirs he made light of! On one occasion, finally, when they were threatening him with death, he replied calmly, 'I am not worthy of the glory of martyrdom, I have not yet merited such a death.' Later on, when he was passing by a place where he suspected that perhaps they were lying in wait for him, he went on his way singing cheerfully." Jordan of Saxony, the Libellus, # 34. Koudelka, 76-78.

place, 15,000 slaughtered in three hours, women and children not spared, not even the Catholic population. Arnaud Amaury reported cheerfully that neither age nor sex was spared and expressed no regret over the massacre.⁹ By mid-August of that same year, 1209, partly due to fear of another Béziers, Carcassonne surrendered to the crusaders after two weeks¹⁰ and in that same month Simon de Montfort, from one of the aristocratic dynasties of northern France, was chosen to lead the crusade, a military genius, exceptionally devout Catholic, ruthless man, and now Viscount of Béziers and Carcassonne. He made his headquarters at Fanjeaux, in the vacant castle of a Cathar lord which had been deserted by the time he arrived.¹¹ Simon also became a benefactor of Dominic who baptized Simon's daughter Petronilla in 1211 and blessed the marriage of his son Amaury three years later.¹²

1209 - 1210 - 1211.¹³ Dominic limps along from town to town, unostentatiously, preaching, trusting in the power of truth, unsuccessful, holding debates, some lasting for days, making a handful of conversions, fostering peace. Was he disappointed? disillusioned? discouraged? Dominic never joined the crusade. He never followed the church's lead from holy preaching to holy war. There is naturally the question of what to do with disappointment in order to avoid the road to cynicism, for it is not a question

⁹ Aubrey Burl, 39-45. Joseph Strayer, The Albigensian Crusades (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1971): 62-63 writes, "It is not true that the leaders of the Crusade shouted: 'Kill them all; God will know his own!' But the German monk who invented this story a few years later accurately reported the mood of the crusading army. In reporting the victory to the pope, the legate Arnaud Amaury said cheerfully that neither age nor sex was spared and that about twenty thousand people were killed. The figure is certainly too high; the striking point is that the legate expressed no regret about the massacre, not even a word of condolence for the clergy of the cathedral who were killed in front of their own altar." Also M.-H. Vicaire, O.P., Saint Dominic and His Times (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964):138 on the number slaughtered.

¹⁰ Aubrey Burl, 48-55. On the first campaign of the crusade at Béziers and Carcassonne, also see Strayer, 55-72.

¹¹ Aubrey Burl, 59.

¹² J. R. Maddicott, Simon de Montfort (Cambridge University Press, 1994): 1-7, the book being an account of Simon de Montfort IV, son of Simon de Montfort III, the one who befriended Dominic. Vicaire, 145.

¹³ See Vicaire, 137-63, esp. 142-63.

of whether we will be disappointed in religious life but rather of how we address it. This challenge will be either the beginning or the end of a profound spiritual journey.

With Raymond VI, the Count of Toulouse, again excommunicated on February 6, 1211, at the Council of Montpellier, the decree confirmed by the pope on April 17, and Catholic services in the city unable to be held due to interdict, Bishop Foulques left the city for four years, not to return until February 4, 1215,¹⁴ the following April witnessing Dominic founding a diocesan order of preachers. Dominic just wouldn't give up. War was ravaging the countryside, the pope had decided on a crusade, and Dominic continued and expanded his mission of preaching. In March of 1212 Arnaud Amaury had become Archbishop of Narbonne. Dominic had not joined the crusade. Nor had Dominic acquiesced to being made a bishop.¹⁵ Dominic's life itself had been threatened yet Dominic remained committed to a mendicant, itinerant, evangelical life, in a countryside ravaged by war, hatred, and greed. The crusade collapsed, more or less, by 1224. Dominic was then dead.

What sustained Dominic day in and day out, month after month, year after year, when there were few conversions, when his program for preaching proved inadequate to the task at hand, when the church itself concluded that only war could accomplish the task? Where was his mind, his heart, his soul, his human spirit? How did he remain a joyful friar? When we read the early Dominicans, it is not so much a passion for God that is first noticeable but a lack of passion, in contrast to the writings of someone like Bernard of Clairvaux. Even with the Rhineland mystics, save perhaps for Suso, there was remarkable restraint, a sobriety in both Eckhart and Tauler. The passion for Dominic

¹⁴ Aubrey Burl 89, 92, 142.

¹⁵ The question of whether Dominicans should become bishops or not was an issue from the beginning. Dominic refused several bishoprics himself. See Albert and Thomas, Selected Writings, ed. by Simon Tugwell, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988): 18. Also Vicaire, 152.

and the early Dominicans seems to have been a passion for truth. This is the underlying Dominican passion. I do not know who said it anymore, I attribute it to Augustine, "Plato amicus, sed magis amica veritas"(I love Plato, but I love truth more), but this is very Dominican, "amica veritas," my friend Truth. It is no accident that "Veritas" became one of the mottos of the preaching friars.

Just as it is possible to be passionate about truth, it is possible for that passion to be misguided. It did not take long for this to happen among the early friars. I refer to Dominican involvement in the Inquisition. Holy preaching had been superceded by a holy war which was then superceded by the holy inquisition. Just as the crusade was a complex historical reality, the Inquisition was even more so. One ought to heed the advice of Lord Acton: "The prime historical fallacy is judging the past with the ideas of the present."¹⁶ Nevertheless our involvement in the Inquisition manifested how a passion for truth can also be misled.

Dominic died in Bologna on August 6, 1221. The holy war against the Cathars ended a few years later.¹⁷ Simon de Montfort himself had died earlier, before Dominic, in 1218, his corpse taken to Carcassonne and buried in a chapel of the cathedral St.-Nazaire. By 1233 the Inquisition had been more or less established, although one cannot say that it was actually founded at any one moment.¹⁸ Before 1233 the bishops were primarily responsible for investigating heresy; after 1233 the responsibility was vested more and more in specially appointed inquisitors who were most often drawn from the Order of

¹⁶ J.S. Cummins, A Question of Rites, Friar Domingo Navarette and the Jesuits in China (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 1993): 11.

¹⁷ Some accounts state that the war ended in 1224. This refers to the end of involvement on the part of the de Montforts. The siege of Avignon by King Louis VIII and its fall took place in 1226 and Louis died a couple months later. Some note the treaty in Paris of 1229 as the conclusion of the crusade. The siege and fall of Montségur (1243-44) was the end of any armed resistance by the Cathars.

¹⁸ Aubrey Burl, 179-90. Strayer, 143-62.

Preachers.¹⁹ Pope Honorius III had confirmed the Order in 1216. Honorius died in 1227, succeeded by Gregory IX who established a Catholic university or secular studium generale in Toulouse in 1229 and its faculty of theology was placed in the hands of Dominicans.²⁰ It was to be an institution to help in the ongoing battle against heresy. In the early 1230s friars were obtaining houses in Toulouse which could serve as tribunals. The earlier house given to Dominic by Peter Seila would now serve such a purpose as well.²¹ The Inquisition was established by the pope, entrusted to the Dominicans, and became official on April 20, 1233, a little over ten years after Dominic had died. A little over a year later, on August 5, 1234, Dominic was canonized, a great honor for the Dominicans of Toulouse and an inspiration to their cause.

Would Dominic have approved?²² He had never joined the crusade, as far as we know never preached the crusade,²³ never chose to be bishop. Dominic saw the truth of the gospel as manifest in an evangelical way of life, a life of voluntary poverty. Where would his love of truth have taken him if he were still alive ten or fifteen years later? The pope himself had established the Inquisition. But the pope had also called for the crusade. Dominic was no crusader. Nor were the early friars. Would Dominic have been an inquisitor? Or how far would he have cooperated with later inquisitorial methods?²⁴

¹⁹ History of the Church, ed. Hubert Jedin, 10 vols. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), vol. 4, 208-16.

²⁰ Cf., M. Michelle Mulchahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study," Dominican Education before 1350 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1998): 357, 359, 371. In 1229 Gregory IX created a studium in Toulouse and in 1233 granted it the right to confer a universal license. Also see Strayer, 136-137.

²¹ Vicaire, 169; 490, n. 41.

²² J.S. Cummins, op. cit., 17: "It is ironical that an intellectual order, founded to correct error by reasoned persuasion, should have been chosen to suppress dissent by force." Cf., Vicaire, 483, n. 69.

²³ Vicaire, 147, 151.

²⁴ On the procedures and penalties of the Inquisition see Strayer, 148-50. The inquisitors were first to preach and promise light penances to those who voluntarily confessed. One of the signs of repentance was to name anyone whom the penitent thought might be a heretic or an associate of a heretic. Those accused could clear themselves only by confession and revealing more names. The inquisitors rapidly accumulated long lists. Those who confessed quickly and talked freely were given light penances. Those who resisted had to wear the yellow cross exposing them to the public. Those who confessed only after

Preaching had produced feeble results and made few inroads among the Cathars. Nor had the crusade been successful in annihilating them. The Dominicans were sufficiently learned to handle the debates. Methods of investigation emerged, forms of punishment evolved, e.g. the wearing of the yellow cross as a sign of heresy. The so-called delivery to the secular arm was frequently a euphemism for the death penalty which along with torture became sanctioned. There were never that many Dominicans among the early friars who were inquisitors;²⁵ there really were never that many inquisitors, often only two for several dioceses, but in 1233 the people of Cordes threw two Dominican inquisitors down a well and in 1234 the Dominican convent in Narbonne was attacked. In 1235 citizens of Toulouse expelled the Dominicans from the city. We need not delineate details. Let us simply remember that Dominic was a joyful friar, but that his joy was sadness transformed and not sadness denied, and that the passion for truth can keep one on the middle path but can also become misguided.

Preachers Seeking Truth

The early growth and expansion of the friars was amazing. Thomas Aquinas himself was born (between 1224 and 1226) not long after Dominic died. One tends to think of Thomas as a man of pure reason. "Passion" is not a word we might ordinarily apply. Thus I was pleased to find that precise word used by Fergus Kerr to describe Thomas, "The imperturbable Buddha-like serenity attributed to him in the standard iconography is belied by the surviving manuscripts in his own hand: physical evidence of raw

the threat of death were imprisoned for life which meant forfeiting property with its economic consequences. Those who relapsed or refused to recant the penalty was the relaxation to the secular arm which required that unrepentant heretics be burned at the stake. Also see René Weis, The Yellow Cross, The Story of the Last Cathars, 1290-1329 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

²⁵ In the early fourteenth century Bernard Gui was inquisitor at Toulouse from 1308-1323 and the author of a manual for inquisitors.

intellectual energy and passion."²⁶ Thomas had probably never met a Cathar. His own theology was an excellent response to Catharism however. He would have been aware of the role of the Order in the struggle against Catharism and may well have met friars who had been or were inquisitors.²⁷ Thomas' stupendous theological output primarily manifested the Dominican love of truth, mea amica veritas. This love more than anything helps us to understand Thomas as it did Dominic. Thomas did not live in an ivory tower. He was more than aware of the politics of his day, of the struggles between emperor and popes. His family lived on the conflict-stricken border between the papal states and the kingdom of Sicily and was involved in the tensions. There were also the power struggles within the theology faculty in Paris between diocesan clergy and the new friars of which Thomas was intimately a part. There were the conflicts with the Aristotelians and his contact with Muslim learning. Thomas by no means lived in a narrow world. Within that world and among those conflicts, however, Thomas remained a seeker. That truth was his concern is reflected in his own opening comments to the Summa Contra Gentiles.

I have set myself the task of making known, as far as my limited powers will allow, the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside the errors that are opposed to it. To use the words of Hilary, "I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of God."²⁸

This pursuit of truth, this sense of duty toward God, is equally well reflected in Thomas' decision later in life to discontinue writing, not that what he had written was unworthy but that he now himself had come closer to Truth inexpressible: "I cannot do any more.

²⁶ Fergus Kerr, After Aquinas, Versions of Thomism (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2002): 2-3. Also see Kenelm Foster, ed., The Life of St. Thomas (London: Longmans, Green, 1958): 22, where he writes, "To turn from that conventional impassive countenance to the handwriting of Aquinas -- surviving in such abundance - may surprise one by the contrast: 'traquil' is hardly the word for this ferociously rapid script."

²⁷ Kerr, 4-5. Thomas O'Meara, Thomas Aquinas, Theologian (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997): 1-40.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith (Summa Contra Gentiles), Book One (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962): 62 (Bk I, Chap 2). The quote from Hilary comes from De Trinitate, I, 37.

Everything I have written seems to me so much straw compared with what I have seen."²⁹

A significant obstacle to cultivating this passion for truth in our contemporary culture is its narcissism. It is hard to be passionate about God when the most interesting thing in life is one's self. We are not only the only superpower in the world but we are also the most self-absorbed people in human history. The sense of narcissism is contained in Oscar Levant's question to Gershwin, "Tell me, George, if you had to do it all over again, would you still fall in love with yourself?"³⁰ A narcissist is a sensitive self convinced of his self-importance. Nobody tells him what to do. It involves grandiosity, the need for admiration, feeling special with a sense of entitlement. Narcissism is nourished by an anti-hierarchical, egalitarian, relativistic pluralism since these suggest I can do my thing and you can do your thing. Ken Wilber has named this disease boomeritis and it is not confined to boomers.³¹ He writes:

To put it simply: boomeritis is pluralism infected with narcissism. It's the very high truths of pluralism completely corrupted and derailed by an ego that uses them to entrench itself firmly in a place where it can never be challenged because there is no objective truth that can get rid of it.³²

Our worlds tend to be narcissistic and therapeutic but that was not true for Dominic, "the humble servant of the preaching,"³³ who poured his gifts into the brotherhood. He did not retain perogatives in decision-making and gave priority to a capitular form of

²⁹ Kerr, 1. Cf., James Weisheipl, Friar Thomas D'Aquino, His Life, Thought and Works (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1974): 320-323.

³⁰ Ken Wilber, Boomeritis (Boston: Shambhala, 2002): 19.

³¹ For his critique of narcissism, see Ken Wilber, Boomeritis (Boston: Shambhala, 2002): 19, 34-37, 44, 102, 124-25, 132 149-50, 168-74, 286, 291, 365, 378 ; and a more terse treatment in A Theory of Everything (Boston: Shambhala, 2001): 17-32. Also see "The Guru and the Pandit, Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber in Dialogue," in What Is Enlightenment? (Fall/Winter, 2002): 39-49; and Elisabeth Debold, "Boomeritis and Me," in What Is Enlightenment? (Fall/Winter, 2002): 55-63.

³² "The Guru and the Pandit," 42.

³³ Koudelka, 7. Vicaire, 172.

government. Dominic did not found an Order of St. Dominic. The Order was not about him. It was about the preaching, about truth, about God. As Dominic said and instructed the brethren, we are called to speak only with God and about God -- cum Deo et de Deo.³⁴

It is noteworthy that Albert the Great, who had a span of knowledge in a wide variety of fields perhaps broader than any other Dominican, never seemed pre-occupied with himself. Even as bishop, when entitled to travel horseback, he chose to go by foot, leading him to be known among the locals as Boots, the Bishop.³⁵ His passion for truth was unconfined, because for him the whole world was theology.³⁶ Eckhart's lack of self-reference to personal spiritual experiences has led to debates about whether Eckhart can legitimately be called a mystic.³⁷ Bernard McGinn writes, "Eckhart very rarely speaks in the first person about his own God-consciousness, but he everywhere speaks out of his conviction of the need to become one with Divine Truth."³⁸ One gets the feel that the early Dominicans knew that it was not about themselves, that it was and always had been and would be about God. Their passion lay in the gospel itself. They lived, like Paul, for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9: 23). The proclamation and credibility of the gospel were enough for them. For us four gospels are not enough. Instead we have 180 gospels; you can have yours, I'll have mine, and deep inside I know which of the gospels is the better. After all, we all know that there really isn't a

³⁴ LCO, # 1/II. Cf., Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents, ed. Francis Lehner, O.P. ((Washington D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1964): 247 ("The Primitive Constitutions, Pt II/ 31).

³⁵ James A. Weisheipl, "The Life and Works of St. Albert the Great," in Albertus Magnus and the Sciences, Commemorative Essays 1980, ed. James A. Weisheipl (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980): 38.

³⁶ Albert and Thomas, Selected Writings, ed. by Simon Tugwell, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988): 29, quoting from Albert's commentary on Matthew 13: 35.

³⁷ Cf., Bernard McGinn, The Mystical Thought of Mesiter Eckhart, The Man from whom God Hid Nothing (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2001): 21-22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

gospel, there are only interpretations of them, it's all a question of hermeneutics and the bottom line is always my interpretation. After all, it's all about us. Each of us becomes the center of the universe. Each community defends its autonomy. I recall Charles de Gaulle's comment: How can you expect someone to rule a country that demands it have 352 different kinds of cheese? Our version would be: how can we expect the province to have a focus when there are 180 of them?

The Prayer of Martha

Is there any way to break through narcissism? The prognosis for clinical narcissism is bleak but cultural and spiritual narcissism can be broken by contemplative living. As a guide for this detachment from self, I choose Eckhart and his interpretation of Martha in the sermon on the text from Luke (10:38).³⁹ Traditionally Martha had been seen as the exemplar of the active life and Mary that of the contemplative life. For Eckhart, there was in Mary an unspeakable longing for God. Martha, however, manifests a more matured spirituality. When Martha says of Mary, "Lord, tell her to help me," it is said out of affection and concern for Mary. Martha understood Mary better than Mary knew Martha for Martha had been where Mary now is. Mary was stuck, still attached to spiritual consolations. Christ was not rebuking Martha but reassuring her that Mary would come eventually to the spiritual maturity out of which Martha lived. A mature spirituality engages the world and does not withdraw from it. A truly Spirit-filled person, grounded in the ground of his soul but active in the world, is living a deep communion with God. Martha is not simply "in the world," she is present in the world in a different way, a grounded way that has broken through narcissism.

³⁹ Meister Eckhart, Sermons and Treatises, trans. M. O'C. Walshe, 3 vols (London: Watkins Pub., 1979): I, 79-90. Also translated in Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher, ed. Bernard McGinn, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1986):338-45.

Martha was maturely grounded and wanted her sister to be so grounded as well, which grounding is put to the test so to speak in our presence to the world, Lacordaire's and Chenu's présence au monde grounded in a présence ^ Dieu,⁴⁰ Dominic's own cum Deo et de Deo again. This is at the core of Dominican life and Eckhart's appreciation of Martha. Martha was afraid that Mary would dally on the spiritual journey and not come to the place where contemplari overflows into tradere. Martha was so well grounded that her activities were not a hindrance to her; Mary was not yet so well grounded that she could take the risk of leaving her sitting. Mary had just entered the school of Dominican contemplation and had not yet graduated from it. Mary had in one sense been a "Martha" of the popularly understood sort before becoming Mary, but now was being grounded more deeply in order that she might truly be a Martha, a Preacher. For Eckhart, to be free of the concerns of the world is neither possible nor desirable. What is possible and necessary is that ministry be grounded in deeply contemplative living.

There is a rhythm manifested here in Eckhart. There is the active life, then contemplative life, and then the active contemplative life. As Bernard McGinn indicates, "Eckhart broke through the traditional distinction between the active life and contemplative life...creating a new model of sanctity...."⁴¹ For Dominican contemplation is realized in fruitful action and engagement with the world. Activity is not a distraction from but rather fulfillment of contemplation. Like Eckhart's bullitio, it overflows into ebullitio. Contemplatio boils over into traditio. There is no either-or, no one without the other. McGinn writes, "Eckhart not only abandoned the notion of tension-filled

⁴⁰ Cf., Donald Goergen, "Spirituality of Edward Schillebeeckx," in The Praxis of the Reign of God, ed. Hilbert and Schreier, 2nd ed. (Fordham University Press, 2002): 117.

⁴¹ Bernard McGinn, The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart, The Man from whom God Hid Nothing, 156.

oscillation between action and contemplation but daringly asserted that a new kind of action performed out of a 'well-exercised ground' was superior to contemplation, at least as ordinarily conceived."⁴²

We all start out as Marthas in the commonly understood sense, but when called to integrate Mary, we easily flee and fail to progress towards being the mature Martha of Eckhart's understanding. One cannot become a spiritually mature Martha by bypassing the contemplari and jumping too quickly to the tradere. The contemplative dimension of life is not a life of leisure and spiritual consolation but rather a radical confrontation with one's false self, one's narcissism, one's emptiness and nothingness. Jung himself emphasized that "meditation" requires coming to terms with the unconscious, which means with one's shadow, which is usually a fundamental contrast to our conscious personality; and that the first fruit of confronting this shadow is melancholy. This is for Jung the beginning of the magnum opus. If one stops here one will never get beyond this "dangerous impasse."⁴³ It is simply a reminder that a descent into hell must precede the ascension into heaven. It is humanly comprehensible why we run from facing this.

I fled Him down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears

I hid from Him, and under running laughter.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 158.

⁴³ C. J. Jung, "Mysterium Coniunctionis," in The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, vol. 14, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1970): 497 - 533.

⁴⁴ Francis Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven," in Diana Culbertson, ed., Invisible Light, Poems about God (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2000): 125-30.

Rather than emptying ourselves, and accepting and befriending our emptiness and aloneness, we fill ourselves with drugs, sex, thriller movies, anything to avoid the truth about ourselves. We settle into cynicism or leave the Order. The truth is painful to face and we never come to that truth which sets us free.

The challenge for us, it seems to me, is not the active, engaged side of our lives, but the contemplative, empty, grounded-in-God side. We have forgotten or neglected the graces that come from the practice of profound silence.⁴⁵ I like to say as friars that we are good at tradereing but not as adept at contemplariing, but if we are not contemplariing, what is it that we are tradereing?⁴⁶ When I was young in Dominican life, I thought of Dominican spirituality as captured in the expression "contemplative in the midst of action." Much later in Dominican life I was surprised, and even offended, when I heard a young Jesuit describe his spirituality in those terms. I thought, "Well, how can they!" Only after further reflection did I see that it does fit Jesuit spirituality better. They are called to be contemplative in the midst of action. We rather are to be active in the midst of contemplation. The contemplari, the grounding, the cum Deo are the foundation on which we build and from within which we preach.

It should be no surprise that the veneration of Martha was particularly prominent among Dominicans. Jacobus of Voragine (1230-1298), the thirteenth century Dominican provincial and later archbishop, had already included the Martha legend in his Golden Legend (the Legenda Aurea), the most popular book of the Middle Ages after the Bible: how Martha with her sister Mary, identified then as Mary Magdalene, along with their

⁴⁵ Donald J. Goergen, "Retrieving the Practice of Silence," Review for Religious 59 (Nov-Dec, 2000), 566-74.

⁴⁶ One of the mottos of the Order of Preachers: "Contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere." See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, II-II, q 188, a 4-6.

brother Lazarus, following the resurrection of Jesus, travelled by ship to the south of France, landing near Marseilles, where Martha became a prominent preacher and subdued a ferocious dragon in the Rhone river for the people between Avignon and Arles. Between 1264 and 1334 seven General Chapters of the friars reminded Dominicans to celebrate well the feast of St. Martha, for she seemed to be particularly Dominican, an active contemplative preacher, like the active contemplative founder of the Order of Preachers himself.⁴⁷ The veneration of Martha in southern France was centered in Tarascon and in Prouille, where of course she may have served as a model for converted Cathar women. It was during this period that Eckhart himself produced his own interpretation of Martha. In the fifteenth century Fra Angelico placed Mary and Martha both awake along with the sleeping Peter, James and John in Gethsemene in a cell at San Marco.

Contemplative living suggests self-forgetting, letting go of my self-pre-occupation in which the most interesting thing to me is a conversation about myself, which reminds me of Ambrose Bierce's definition of a bore: someone who's not interested in me.⁴⁸ There is for us this challenge of how to get outside ourselves. We live our lives in "flatland,"⁴⁹ to borrow a phrase again from Ken Wilber, a horizontal world in which there is little room for transcendence.

The Early Dominicans in the Americas and Bartolomé de las Casas

⁴⁷ Cf., M.-H. Vicaire, "Contemplative Prayer in the Life of St. Dominic and the First Friars," in The Genius of St. Dominic (Nagpur, India: Dominican Publications): 144-50. Also, Jean-Claude Schmitt, "St. Dominic's Gestures at Prayer," in Modi Orandi Sancti Dominici (Zurich: Belser Verlag, 1995), on the nine ways of prayer of St. Dominic.

⁴⁸ Ken Wilber, A Brief History of Everything, 17.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 41. Also Boomeritis, 53-54, 294-95, 370, 420. Also Ken Wilber, The Marriage of Sense and Soul, Integrating Science and Religion (N.Y.: Random House, 1998): 9-11, 56-57, 60, 114-15, 134-36.

Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), with whom we associate a passion for justice, and understandably so - he taught that injustice is always a mortal sin⁵⁰ - reveals that within the Dominican passion for justice there is the passion for truth. Las Casas longed to tell the truth about the plight of the indigenous peoples, about their humanity and dignity, and about the true nature of the conquista. He linked his own conversion to justice to a deepened reflection on the Word of God, particularly on Ecclesiasticus 34: 21-27,⁵¹ and to the preaching of the early Dominicans in the Americas. Las Casas refers to the same text from Ecclesiasticus later in his condemnation of African slavery,⁵² to the sinfulness of which he had to be awakened as he had previously been awakened to the sinfulness of the encomienda system. His passion for the truth and his attentiveness to the gospel were the sources of his continuing conversion. Whereas he had earlier in life accepted the system of encomienda, so he had accepted slavery, but his commitment to truth led him to become the only person in the sixteenth century to denounce black African slavery.⁵³ The passion for God manifests itself in many ways, as the pursuit of truth, a thirst for justice, and the appreciation of beauty.

Las Casas' own description of the power of Dominican preaching that so influenced him reads:

⁵⁰ Bartolomé de las Casas, The Only Way, ed. Helen Rand Parish, Sources of American Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1992): 165.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 188. Also see Gustavo Gutiérrez, Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993): 45-57, for the account of the conversion. The text from Ecclesiasticus (the Book of Sirach) reads "If one sacrifices ill-gotten good, the offering is blemished; the gifts of the lawless are not acceptable. The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the ungodly, nor for a multitude of sacrifices does he forgive sins. Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes is the person who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor. The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a murderer. To take away a neighbor's living is to commit murder; to deprive an employee of wages is to shed blood."

⁵² Bartolomé de las Casas, The Only Way, 201-208. Also see Gutiérrez, 77, 319-30.

⁵³ Bartolomé de las Casas, The Only Way, 202.

He [Las Casas] began to reflect on the misery, the forced labor the Indians had to undergo. He was helped in this by what he had heard and experienced on the island of Hispaniola, by what the Dominicans preached continually -- no one could, in good conscience, hold the Indians in encomienda, and those friars would not confess and absolve any who so held them -- a preaching Las Casas refused to accept. One time he wanted to confess to a religious of St. Dominic who happened to be in the vicinity. Las Casas held Indians on that island of Hispaniola, as indifferent and blind about it as he was on the island of Cuba. The religious refused him confession. Las Casas asked him why. He gave the reason. Las Casas objected with frivolous arguments and empty explanations, seemingly sound, provoking the religious to respond, "Padre, I think the truth has many enemies and the lie has many friends."⁵⁴

Las Casas was of course describing the early Dominicans in the Americas, Pedro de Cordoba, Antonio de Montesinos. At first there were only four. These friars had already denounced the encomienda system in 1511, three years before Las Casas himself. Pedro de Cordoba, then twenty-eight years old, had been put in charge of the first four friars, and Las Casas describes de Cordoba as mature in virtue and inspiring in his quest for God.⁵⁵ The "quest for God,"telling the truth about God, is what it was about. The first evangelization had betrayed God. The conquest was not only a question of greed, arrogance, and misuse of power; the conquest misrepresented God. In Las Casas, as with the early friars in the Americas, as with others in the Dominican tradition, the passion for God was manifest in their passion for truth which was manifest in a passion for justice. The pursuit of truth and the pursuit of justice were not two separable pursuits. Mary and Martha represent one integrated quest. This single quest is both mystical and political, a political holiness as Schillebeeckx refers to it⁵⁶ or an integration

⁵⁴ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 197.

⁵⁶ Schillebeeckx's understanding of "political holiness" and the relationship between mysticism and politics as well as liturgy and social justice can be traced in Christ ((New York: Crossroad, 1980): 762-821; On Christian Faith (New York: Crossroad, 1987): 47-84; and in Church: The Human Story of God (New

of both mysticism and prophecy as Richard Woods speaks of them.⁵⁷ The active contemplative is both active and detached: able to surrender. Living for God implies that our works are not about us but rather part of a greater work in which we are but participants, instruments of the Spirit.

It is an over simplification, but I want to speak about three periods in Christian history. In the first period, the first three centuries, we were a persecuted church. Then, sad to say, the post-Constantinian church eventually became a persecuting church. We fought to maintain a supremacy over the world and eventually came to the point where we felt we could dictate to the world, the sole arbiters of the true and the holy. Error had no rights and only we were without error. This triumphant church endured through the Second Vatican Council. But the challenge facing us now, since Gaudium et spes ("The Church in the Modern World"), is the awareness that a persecuting church can no longer survive. We are not persecuted, although in parts of the world we are and even at times in secular societies, but we nevertheless have more in common with that early period of church history when the world was not our domain. We did not call the shots. Now we must learn how to be church in a new era.

Something new is being born. It is neither the old church, the Baroque church as Tom O'Meara calls it,⁵⁸ nor the post-Vatican II church of liberal American Catholicism.⁵⁹ It will be neither liberal nor neo-conservative. Those categories will no longer apply. Those old wineskins will not do. Dominic's vision of church was years in the making. It

York: Crossroad, 1990): 66-99, 179-86. Also see Johann Baptist Metz, A Passion for God, The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity (New York: Paulist Press, 1998): 162-163, also 150-74.

⁵⁷ Richard Woods, Mysticism and Prophecy, The Dominican Tradition (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998).

⁵⁸ Thomas O'Meara, A Theologian's Journey (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

⁵⁹ Cf., e.g., Philip Jenkins, The Next Christendom, The Coming of Global Christianity (New York: Oxford University Press: 2002). Also see the review by R. Scott Appleby, The New York Times Book Review (May 12, 2002): 16.

was to be neither crusader nor Cathar, neither a rejection of the truth of the Catholic tradition nor an ecclesial status quo. We must recall that Dominic's times were a period in the history of the persecuting church and the Albigensian crusade surrounded him daily. He remained faithful to the church, but not the church as it simply presented itself to him. He knew as well as any its weaknesses. Nor did he align himself with the methods of the crusaders in his commitment to evangelical preaching. He had to discover in the midst of a church that no longer worked how to be church in a new key. He helped to give birth within an increasingly triumphalist church to structures that Cistercian and Benedictine abbeys were not able to effect. Our challenge is somewhat similar, and our question similar as well. Are we willing and able to give birth to the church of a new era, not Dominic's era, but our era, but like Dominic to act as midwives with the awareness that neither conservative nor liberal models are the answer.

The deep challenge facing us is how to be church in a world that neither persecutes us, at least not openly, nor which is able to persecute openly. What does it mean to be faithful to the gospel in an age when authenticity is the virtue that gives witness and hypocrisy the vice that appals? We must begin by admitting that we can be part of the hypocrisy, that we may be part of the church that must be left behind, unless we can give witness, as Dominic struggled to find what witness meant for him in his world in his period of history.

This brings me back to the contemplari. Have we structured our lives, communally, apostolically, and governmentally with little room for the Holy Spirit to lead? A friend of mine likes to say, "Move at the pace of guidance."⁶⁰ Our pace leaves little room for discerning wisdom. We are in the process, let us say the throes, of re-defining the Order

⁶⁰ 'Move at the pace of guidance' comes from the work of Christina Baldwin, The Seven Whispers: Listening to the Voice of Spirit.

for a new era in the life and history of the church. It may be that the Order will simply be a remnant out of place in a world of emergent evolution. But the idea that the Order embodied, the need to which it responded, the need to stand in medio ecclesiae and speak a truth not only to the world but to the church itself, that need remains. The first step in our recovery from triumphalism has to be the deep conversion that we do not have the answers, but that confidence in God, our passion for God, and trusting in the Spirit can lead us toward the truth.

The Path of Perseverance

In 1577, less than twelve years after the death of Las Casas, Portuguese Dominicans on their way to Madagascar were invited to open a convent in Mozambique. Father Jo c o dos Santos mentions 20,000 baptisms in the early years.⁶¹ Obviously detrimental to evangelization was the fact that Portuguese priests and religious participated in the slave trade. The Secretary for the Propaganda Fide wrote to the Portuguese ambassador for the Kongo in 1833: "The greatest hindrance of the missions is the slave-trade, operated by the [Portuguese] Christians of Angola. It renders our religion odious to the Africans who keep in mind their chains instead of seeing the freedom brought to them by Jesus Christ."⁶² The first regular Dominican mission to the Philippines, comprising thirteen priests and two lay brothers from Spain, arrived in Manila in 1587, ten years after the Portuguese left for Madagascar. Two Dominicans had arrived earlier, in 1581, with a pioneer Jesuit group, one of whom was Domingo de Salazar, the Las Casas of the Philippines and appointed the first bishop of Manila in 1579. In 1611 the Dominican

⁶¹ On early Dominicans in Africa, see John Baur, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa (Nairobi, Kenya: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994): 82-83, 85, 92-99.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 95.

University of Santo Tom s was established.⁶³ I want to focus briefly, however, on the story of the early friars in China.⁶⁴ When we think of the mission to Asia, we often think of Jesuits, particularly Francis Xavier (1506-1552), and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) who arrived in China in 1583, and the entire "Chinese Rites Controversy" the interpretation of which is ordinarily today more favorable toward Jesuit practice. It has been said that never has such a controversy occupied so much of the church for so long a time. China was in the beginning a Jesuit monopoly by papal decree until 1633. Already in 1600 Clement VIII had begun to break the monopoly by permitting friars to enter China under certain conditions. Thus the seventeenth century witnessed the height of the China controversy.

The history of the controversy is too complex to go into here. There was a whole list of hatreds involved, beginning with the hatred of heresy, followed shortly thereafter by that between Jesuits and Dominicans, and then that between the Spaniards and the Portuguese. The Jesuits worked under the patronage of the Portuguese; the friars under Spain, and at a time when Spain and Portugal were at war with each other. When a Spanish Dominican met a Portuguese Jesuit, it was a recipe for trouble.⁶⁵ The Portuguese had been the first to arrive in East Asia, first in Goa, then in Macao. The Philippines had been evangelized primarily by the Spanish.

The history of Jesuit and Dominican animosity is not a pretty one in the history of the church and is deeply connected to the failure of the mission to China. The pride of both Orders was at stake. Diderot (1713-1784), the French encyclopaedist of the eighteenth

⁶³ Rolando V. de la Rosa, O.P., Beginnings of the Filipino Dominicans (Quezon City, the Philippines: Don Bosco Press, 1990): 60-62.

⁶⁴ J.S. Cummins, A Question of Rites, Friar Domingo Navarette and the Jesuits in China (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 1993). To assess well this controversy, this work by Cummins is necessary.

⁶⁵ So a French Jesuit once remarked, *ibid.*, 66.

century, said, "You will find every possible kind of Jesuit -- yes, even unbelievers -- but you will never find a humble one."⁶⁶ We know that to be false of course as today we confess our own sins of pride. As had happened in Japan, however, so in China, converts could see themselves as Jesuit-Catholics or friar-Catholics.⁶⁷ In his Tratados Domingo Navarette gives witness to the hostility.

Amongst other things, some years ago [1623] the Jesuits and some laymen went with firearms against our Dominican priory there [Macao]. The friars closed the doors, and to defend themselves exposed the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance in a window overlooking the plaza.

But when the attackers saw this they countered by giving the order: 'Genuflect and fire.'⁶⁸

Although Jesuits differed among themselves over their own China policy, their predominant approach was one of accomodation.⁶⁹ Grounded in probabilism,⁷⁰ they considered the Confucian and Chinese rites not idolatrous and probably not superstitious. They were cautious about displaying the crucifix. The challenge remains with us yet today: how far does one go toward accomodation in interreligious dialogue?

Domingo Fernández Navarette del Rosario, born in 1618, eight years after Matteo Ricci's death, professed as a friar in 1635, followed in the footsteps of Spanish Golden Age Dominicans like Francisco de Vitoria (1485-1546), Melchior Cano (1509-1560), Domingo de Soto (1494-1560), and Luis de Granada (d. 1588). He decided to volunteer for the mission in the Philippines. He was 28. His passion for justice had been deepened by his reading of Las Casas. In the Philippines the friars had their own Las Casas to imitate, Bishop Domingo, a protector and defender of the native peoples. Navarette spent nine

⁶⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 169. Also see 214 for similar references. There is also a proverb, "Guard your wife from the friars but watch your wallet with the Jesuits" (27, n. 11).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 48-90.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 38-41.

years in the Philippines, both up country and as a lecturer at the University of Santo Tom s. In 1657, with poor health, forced to return to Europe, he embarked on a ship set for India but only arriving in Macassar, in Indonesia, nine months later. When another ship arrived from India, from Goa, taking Jesuits to China, Navarette decided to go to China. There he became the most capable of the Dominicans in seventeenth century China.

We cannot take up Navarette's missionary career here, his own mission policy and his love for the Chinese people. He later wrote, "Every day in Europe we witness barbarities never seen in those people, who are dismissed among us as savages."⁷¹ He gave his life to an encouraging and discouraging mission. When Navarette finally returned to Europe in March of 1672 the journey from Macao to Lisbon had taken over two years. He was 54, having left at age 28. Dominic's years, 1208-1215, could be seen as years of failure -- the failure of the Preaching. Yet Dominic persevered. Las Casas' defense of the Indians, by all accounts one could consider it a failure, intermittent successes but yet a failure to convince the Spanish court and save the indigenous, but Las Casas persevered. Navarette, the China mission destined to fail, persevered and like Las Casas took the controversy in his writings back to Rome and Europe. This grace of perseverance manifested itself among the early Dominicans. But given the failures and disappointments, for what ought one persevere?

The answer is what Pope Paul VI considered the most fundamental form of preaching: witness.⁷² Had Las Casas not persevered, we would not have his witness. It is not our "active life," whether that be successful or not in the eyes of the world or the brethren,

⁷¹ Ibid., 92. See also 212.

⁷² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* ("On Evangelization in the Modern World"), par. 21, 41.

that most matters.⁷³ What matters and remains and perdures is the witness of our lives. This is what calls for grounding in contemplatio. Contemplation is a growing, deepening awareness of an active, illuminating presence in our lives and our capacity to surrender to that guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is something that undergirds the praedicare, the tradere, and it is a life offered without anything being withheld. This is what the early Dominicans did, Dominic and those who pledged their allegiance to him and to the brotherhood.

I am reminded here of the Tibetan Buddhist prophecy of the Shambhala warriors.⁷⁴ At a time when the earth and the world hang in the balance by a thread and there is the danger of falling back into a state of barbarism with its increased capacity for annihilation, Shambhala warriors will come forth. They will not be recognized. We will not know who among us may be one of them. Their only weapons will be mindfulness, egolessness, and compassion,⁷⁵ the fruits of contemplation. They do not fear the pain of the world. Their mission is healing. These Shambhala warriors are the active contemplatives in our midst. I invite each of us to become a Shambhala warrior and take up our birthright and responsibility as Preachers of the Word of God. It is not a question of Dominic the preacher, Thomas the theologian, Eckhart the mystic, Las Casas the defender of human rights, Navarette the missionary, for each is a theologian, each in the end a pastoral theologian, a contemplative, mystical theologian, each desiring justice and love in God's world. The spirituality of the Preacher is an integral spirituality.

There is not a Mary and a Martha, only Mary-Marthas.⁷⁶

⁷³ Mother Teresa said, "God doesn't ask me to be fruitful; God asks me to be faithful."

⁷⁴ Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, Coming Back to Life, Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World (Stony Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998): 60-61. See Chogyam Trungpa, Shambhala, The Sacred Path of the Warrior ((Boston: Shambhala, 1988).

⁷⁵ Cf., Sogyal Rinpoche, The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying ((San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

⁷⁶ Thomas Kelly, a Quaker, in A Testament of Devotion (HarperSanFrancisco,1992): 46, speaks of "this Martha-Mary life."

The Gift of Mercy

My sense of ourselves is that we are very much like the early friars, deeply talented, gifted men, fragile and wounded, not all outstanding but all called to be part of something bigger than ourselves, each with his own life to offer a great work that is beyond our doing. I recall a Jewish midrash on the Moses/Sinai story (Ex 31:8; 32:19; 34:1, 29; 40:20; Deut 10: 1-5). After Moses had broken in anger the first tablets God had given him, what became of those broken, shattered tablets? The whole ones given later were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. The midrash narrates that so were the broken ones. Both sets of tablets were placed in the Ark. Each of us, each community and province, church and world, we are both broken and whole. We do not always see our brokenness as a gift. We hide it and it remains unhealed. But it too is to be an offering to the Lord. Out of Dominic's sadness arose a vision that he as a Shambhala warrior had come to bestow. Out of Las Casas' pain, suffering and solidarity with the indigenous, the prophetic words were preserved: Are they not human too? God works equally well within our pain as within joy, perhaps even more so.⁷⁷ As Pema Chödrön, an American Buddhist nun, poetically puts it: "This genuine heart of sadness can teach us great compassion....This continual ache of the human heart --/ broken by the Loss of all that we hold dear/ Is this not a blessing?"⁷⁸ We might ask our question as the early friars in the Americas did theirs, following in the footsteps of Dominic, "Is sadness not a blessing too?"

⁷⁷ See Teilhard de Chardin, note four.

⁷⁸ From "Genuine Broken Heart," by Ani Pema Chödrön. Also see Chödrön, When Things Fall Apart, Heart Advice for Difficult Times (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), where she speaks about "A fearlessly compassionate attitude toward our own pain and that of others," and "leaning into the sharp points," ix-x.

What God has in mind for each of us is ultimately grounded in the awareness that it's not about me, not even about us. The pledge of future glory is experienced in this life as the workings of grace or mercy. Is the passion for God not ultimately a yearning for mercy? I was invited to speak about the passion for God in the early Dominicans. But I have focused only on one side of the twofold sense of the word passio. It means ardor, excitement. Its other meaning as you know is "suffering," the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The passion for God is in the end suffering for God, a freely accepted suffering as a dimension in the life of a Shambhala warrior that feels for the world, a "suffering with" the world, and "suffering for" God. There is no life worth the journey that cannot count the cost. We are not here for us. It's not about me. There's something more of which you and I are but a small but essential part.

We are aware that opinions vary in the history of mystical theology over whether it is love or truth, will or intellect, that reigns supreme in our quest for God. Perhaps we ought not be surprised that Eckhart viewed neither as supreme. He writes:

Now the question is: Wherein does blessedness lie most of all? Some masters have said it lies in knowing, some say that it lies in loving: others say it lies in knowing and loving, and they say better. But we say it lies neither in knowing nor in loving: for there is something in the soul from which both knowledge and love flow....⁷⁹

Of course, for Eckhart, this was always the ground of the soul and the birth of the Word in the ground. But what other name might one give this ground from within which our passion for God, for truth, for justice, for beauty originates? In another sermon Eckhart named it "mercy."

Whatever God works, the first breaking forth is mercy, not in the sense of his forgiving someone their sin or of one person's showing compassion for another person. Rather, the master's meaning

⁷⁹ M. O'C. Walshe, II, 272 (Sermon 87) ; also contained in Meister Eckhart, The Essential Sermons, ed. Bernard McGinn, 199-203 (Sermon 52).

is that the highest work which God performs is mercy. A master says that the work of mercy is so closely related to God (granted that truth, abundance, and goodness name God) that one [such name] names him better than the others. The highest work of God is mercy....

Love takes God just as he is good. If the name goodness were removed from God, love would be at a loss what to do. Love takes God with a coat on, with a garment on. The intellect does not do this. The intellect takes God as he is known in it, but it can never encompass him in the sea of his unfathomableness. I maintain that above these two, knowledge and love, is mercy.⁸⁰

This is not far removed from Catherine of Siena's experience of God.

O immeasurable love!

O gentle love!

.....

I know that mercy is your hallmark,

and no matter where I turn

I find nothing but your mercy.⁸¹

And in her Dialogue: "O mercy! My heart is engulfed with the thought of you! For wherever I turn my thoughts I find nothing but mercy!"⁸²

Is this then the beginning or the end of our quest? Is not our desire ultimately to know mercy? To know God as mercy is to discover, within our passion for God, God's passion for us, again in the twofold way of understanding passion. As Denys Turner writes of Augustine, so of all of us. The primary agent in Augustine's seeking God is not Augustine but God.

⁸⁰ Meister Eckhart, Preacher and Teacher, ed. Bernard McGinn, 253-254 (Sermon 7); also contained in M.O.C. Walshe, II, 188-89 (Sermon 72). Also see Bernard McGinn, The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart, 152-53.

⁸¹ Catherine of Siena, The Prayers, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), no. 9, p. 69, also p. 72 of same prayer.

⁸² Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (New York: Paulist, 1980), ch. 30, p. 72.

It is because -- indeed, emphatically, it is only because -- God has been and is seeking out Augustine that Augustine seeks God; if, for Augustine, his seeking is always for God, his seeking is before that from God.⁸³

Indeed, our passion for God can only be understood in the context of God's passion for us. It seems to me this is what the early friars understood. It was not about them. It was about God's overwhelming love for God's creatures: praedicator gratiae. The King James Bible translates Micah 6: 8 (To act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with God, [JB]) as "to love mercy." Mercy is the tender heartedness of God, the tenderness of God, that we find imaged in the heart of flesh that we seek to replace our hearts of stone (Ez 11: 19). To love mercy. Does this not undergird Dominic's life as well as his preaching? Is this why Dominic chose not to join the crusade or even become a bishop? When we live centered, grounded, out of a contemplative heart, when we find ourselves bathed in baptismal water, all we can ask is what we asked for at the time of our religious profession. When Andrew Carl tomorrow is asked: "What do you seek?" we will remember what we all seek, what we have always sought, as we pray together with him and respond: "God's mercy and yours."⁸⁴

⁸³ Denys Turner, The Darkness of God, Negativity in Christian Mysticism ((Cambridge University Press, 1995): 59. Also see his chapters six and seven on Eckhart.

⁸⁴ From the Rite of Religious Profession in the Order of Preachers. This question and response were already contained in the Primitive Constitutions of the Order. Cf., "Primitive Constitutions," in Saint Dominic, Biographical Documents, ed. Francis Lehner, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1964): 220 (Distinction I, chap 13).