



Reviews

A PECULIAR KIND OF MISSION: THE ENGLISH DOMINICAN SISTERS, 1845–2010 by Anselm Nye, *Gracewing*, Leominster, 2011, pp. xiv + 338, £25.00, hbk

Commissioned by the Dominican Sisters of the English Congregation of St Catherine of Siena to write their history, Anselm Nye, librarian at Queen Mary College, University of London, has turned to good account his skills as an archivist to write this thoroughly documented and very readable book.

More than a hundred congregations of Dominican Sisters were founded in the nineteenth century, sometimes initiated by a Dominican friar or a bishop but mostly by an individual woman who had discovered for herself the ideals of St Dominic. The best known in England is Mother Margaret Hallahan (1802–1868). Born in London, the only surviving child of first-generation Irish immigrants, she was baptized in the Sardinian Embassy Chapel. Her father, a porter for a wine merchant, died in 1813 at the age of thirty-five, his health undermined by drink and tuberculosis. Her mother died a few months later. The orphan was soon in domestic service. Eventually, in 1829, she accompanied her then employers to Bruges, where there was a flourishing English Catholic community, — ‘attracted’, Nye tells us, ‘by the lower cost of living, particularly that of educating their children’. Margaret was to try her vocation with the English Canonesses of St Augustine, where a daughter of her employers went to school, but left after a week when she found that as a lay sister she would not say the Divine Office.

Nye does not explain when or why Margaret’s ‘ardent desire to be received as a Dominican tertiary’ emerged. Perhaps the documentation does not exist. Perhaps, if we may speculate, some part was played by Fr Bernard Moulart OP, prior of the house at Tienen, even at the earliest stage. In 1844, as Nye reports, Margaret was to return to Belgium, consult him, and probably obtain from him copies of various Dominican constitutions. Then, in 1849, Moulart visited her first stable community, instructing them in Dominican observances, teaching them the Dominican *Salve Regina* and so on. However her vocation originated, she was counseled by the English-speaking chaplain at the famous Beguinage until he felt she was ready to make profession as a Dominican tertiary, which she did, on the feast of St Catherine of Siena, 30 April 1835, in the hands of another priest, himself a Dominican tertiary.

Soon afterwards Margaret suffered a complete breakdown. She even spent some months as a patient in a hospital for incurables, at Lovendegem, run by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary. Perhaps, Nye speculates, their combination of contemplation with action inspired Margaret. Instead of returning to her employers, anyway, she strove to establish a community of Dominican tertiaries, with the sanction of the local friars, but her efforts came to nothing. Now aged forty, and after more than twelve years in Belgium, Margaret returned to England to establish Dominican life for women. Her former employers’ family put her in touch with Mrs Amherst of Kenilworth, a wealthy benefactor and mother of a future bishop. She recommended Margaret to William Bernard Ullathorne, the Benedictine monk and future bishop, under whose protection, with many setbacks, she founded one community after another, until given a small house in the quiet country town of Stone in Staffordshire in 1853 by James Beech of Longton

(five of whose grand daughters would become Dominicans) she was able to build the convent where she was to die in 1868.

Nye has no reason to mention this but Mother Margaret proved a great support to Bl John Henry Newman, as early as 1852, when he was found guilty of libel in the Achilli trial, fined £100 and left to meet expenses amounting to about £14,000. She was 'a regular old brick' as Newman's friend Ambrose St John told him.

Newman appears as the guide and friend of Catherine Anne Bathurst (1825–1907), the founder of another congregation, of which there were to be five. More than eighty letters from Newman to her survive. She could not have been more different from Mother Margaret. The daughter of a general, grand daughter of an earl, and a godchild of the Duke of Wellington, she belonged to a large family, with brothers in Anglican orders. Received into the Church at Farm Street she made her first communion in Paris while staying with the Duchess of Norfolk. Her breakfast companions that day included Henri-Dominique Lacordaire OP and Gustave de Ravignan SJ. In 1861, through the brother received at Birmingham Oratory and by then mission priest at Stone, Catherine tried her vocation there but had to leave as a result of a breakdown following the suicide of her only surviving sister. By 1868, after several false starts, she was co-founder of a Dominican community in Ghent. Since relations with the local bishop were tense, it must have come as a relief when she was invited by Cardinal Henry Edward Manning in 1877 to open a house at Harrow. She persuaded him to allow girls at the school to sit for the Oxford and Cambridge local examinations.

The other foundresses were equally remarkable. There were of course hundreds of women, as Nye shows, some who spent a few months, others a whole life-time, in the five distinct, autonomous congregations, with their mother houses Stone, Stroud, Leicester, Harrow and Portobello Road. All five of the original buildings still stand: Stone, the only one occupied by the Sisters; Stroud, converted into workshops and therapy rooms, with the Sisters nearby; Dane Hills, Leicester, a residential care home; Harrow, converted into St Dominic's Sixth Form College with the original building an office block; and Portobello Road, now the Colegio Espanol Vicente Canada Blanch.

Religious orders and congregations have always split, for good and less good reasons, just as they have also merged, sometimes with reluctance. As Nye notes, in the wake of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, there were moves towards centralization. In one type of union a smaller group is absorbed into a larger, as the West Grinstead Dominicans submerging their identity to join the Congregation of St Catherine of Siena of Newcastle, Natal: see *Being driven Forward: the story of Mother Rose Niland and the foundation of the Newcastle Dominican Sisters*, by Columba Cleary, Eleanora Murphy and Flora McGlynn (Boksburg 1997). In the other kind of union each group gives up its distinctive identity to give birth to a completely new entity. The Bishop of Nottingham had come to believe that the weakness of the Leicester congregation (as he perceived it) would best be dealt with by amalgamation with a stronger congregation. After delicate negotiations the five congregations amalgamated in 1929: the plan by which the unification was to be phased in, and for which the Sisters had voted, was overridden by the Vatican, with the result that a few left the Order, recruitment for whatever reason declined, and a certain unhappiness persisted for years.

The War came, and then Vatican II and its aftermath, which accelerated the unexpected process by which the Sisters exchanged their corporate apostolate for individual missions: from schools entirely staffed by Sisters collectively, to roles in parish administration, seminary teaching, university and hospital chaplaincy, catechetical instruction of the deaf, the study of St Thomas Aquinas, and much else, apostolates which usually depend on an individual's personal abilities and interests.

There is an odd reference to 'a Miss Gulson' (p. 123), a legacy from whom allowed the Sisters to engage the eminent Scottish architect Reginald Fairlie (1883–1952) to design the convent at Myreslaw Green, Hawick (completed in 1912, vacated by the Sisters in 1986, now a residential care home). This must be Miss Helen M. Gulson, who inherited the Hawkesyard estate in Staffordshire from her uncle Josiah Spode IV and bequeathed it at her death in 1896 to the Dominican friars. Miss Gulson and her uncle were received into the Catholic Church in 1885, at Stone as it happens.

As Susan O'Brien lamented, in her essay in *From without the Flaminian Gate: 150 years of Roman Catholicism in England and Wales, 1850–2000* (London 1999), a valuable collection that surveys the scene and would fill out the background to this story, the place of women religious in recent years is little understood. Yet, throughout the greater part of the decades covered in this book, religious sisters did far more than bishops, priests or any pope, or anyone but their parents, to form the faith of the vast majority of ordinary Catholics. To the handful of histories that exist of religious congregations in England Anselm Nye has made a valuable addition.

FERGUS KERR OP

THE LOGIC OF DESIRE: AQUINAS ON EMOTION by Nicholas E. Lombardo OP, *The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2010, pp. 319, £31.50 pbk.*

The classical theological tradition in general, and St Thomas in particular, are frequently if erroneously seen as the enemies of the passions, the repressors of feeling, and the deniers of desire. Yet those who think of Aquinas as a dry scholastic would do well to note Templeton prize winner Nicholas Lombardo's claim 'that the theme of human affectivity and its perfection by virtue is one of the major organising principles of the *Summa* – that is not just one of many themes, but a theme of central importance to his project' (p. 198).

On reading *The Logic of Desire* it is hard to remain unconvinced of this. Lombardo expertly shows how for Aquinas the dynamics of desire, appetite and affect are not only essential to normal human functioning, but are intrinsically good and equally essential aspects of our God seeking; they 'direct being toward its *telos*' (p. 26). In a *Summa* whose structure is seen as moving from God, to creation and humanity, through Christ back to God, the power of this idea becomes self-evident once the connection between appetitive movement and our natural desire for the good is grasped. 'Appetite is inextricably linked to being and goodness' (p. 27), and is 'the engine driving the *exitus-reditus*: both in the divine *exitus*, since it flows from an act of God's will, and in the creaturely *reditus*, since appetite motivates creation to return to God' (p. 30). 'As a doe longs for running streams, so my soul longs for you, my God' (Ps 42). By contrast, and here is an interesting idea, evil is 'not just . . . a privation of goodness but also . . . a frustration of appetite and the consequent disintegration of being, insofar as evil blocks appetite from attaining its natural *telos* (p. 30). Thus, '(o)ur sins against God are also and always sins against our deepest desires' (p. 242). So much, so positively stated, then, by a supposed despiser of affect.

Yet I suspect all this may be less obvious to those who fail to see the (teleological) point of emotion, or who having severed its connection with reason, treat it as a 'mere' sentiment to be privately indulged perhaps, but a major impediment to rationality. It may be equally hard to grasp by those who view emotion as an enslaving tyrant to be ascetically overcome or a disrupter to be repressed. But those who more positively value feeling might be reassured: according to