Introduction

Fundamental to the purpose of St. Dominic and his Order–preaching and the salvation of souls–is the "assiduous study of sacred truth." From the beginning Dominic sent his friars to university cities, not to teach, but to learn. Jordan of Saxony, Dominic's successor in 1222, continued this distinctive character of the Order by recruiting from members of the academic community wherever he went. By 1239, with Raymond of Penyafort's revision of the Order's basic laws of governance, provision for study was "the unique feature of the primitive constitutions not found in the statutes of any other religious Order at the time." In addition, "the Dominicans, unlike other Orders, made study an essential part of their rule." Further, "With the Dominicans learning was not a luxury, but a necessity; the pursuit of learning was not a concession, but an obligation." The word "study", as understood by Dominic, meant striving with *zeal* to achieve a goal. It entailed serious engagement of the whole person with truth (Weisheipl 4).

Given this essential and continuing stamp of the whole Order, the lay fraternities are enjoined to engage as fully as possible in this charism in the fulfillment of each member's vocation.

The Early Masters of the Order

St. Dominic's emphasis on study was passed on in testimonies about his life and the early history of the Order. John of Spain's testimony for Dominic's canonization says that Dominic urged the brethren to study Scripture more than anything else. John reports that Dominic carried the Gospel of Matthew and the letters of Paul with him and knew them by heart (*Early Dominicans* 75).

Simon Tugwell in *Early Dominicans* points to early indicators that Dominicans emphasized study. Tension occurred within the Order over friars who emphasized devotions above study. One friar reportedly "turned silly because of his excess devotion" while neglecting his studies. Although Dominicans devoutly celebrated the Divine Office and were deeply devoted to Mary, the main purpose of the Order was preaching, which required study and knowledge to be credible. One of the earliest Dominican constitutions directed that the brethren be "intent on study, always reading something, or thinking about something, by day and by night, at home or abroad." Tugwell says that Dominic himself began the Order's tradition of recruiting new members in university circles, where young men were already disposed toward study.

Jordan of Saxony

Dominic's successors as Master of the Order continued his policy that preachers must study. Blessed Jordan of Saxony (?-1237), second Master, was a charismatic preacher and theology professor at the University of Paris when he entered the Order. While Jordan attracted mature, established scholars to the Dominicans, he was particularly interested in recruiting young university students. These young men would give the Order a future. They responded to Jordan so enthusiastically that he traveled with a supply of habits for those who wanted to be clothed after his sermons.

Jordan's recruitment of the young became a source of criticism because they were not as educated as older Dominicans. Jordan responded that these students were young plants who should be given time to grow through study. He rightly predicted that their preaching would bear even greater fruit than that of the older generation. His young recruits included St. Albert the Great (ultimately the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas) and Humbert of Romans, the illustrious fifth Master of the Order.

Unfortunately, not everyone in the Order shared Jordan's enthusiasm for study. In an encyclical letter of 1233, he complained about Dominicans who failed to study (*Early Dominicans* 123-124). Such brethren are "stupid in debates," because they engage in "unintelligent devotions" instead of study. Some preferred a life of leisure. Jordan warns that souls are lost when friars fail to study properly (and presumably lose their debates with heretics). Such brethren hide their grace of preaching "under a bushel basket" (Matthew 5:15), "wrapping the Master's talent in a napkin" (Luke 19:20).

St. Raymond of Pennafort

The third Master, St. Raymond of Pennafort (1175/80-1275), was responsible for two great achievements in Dominican study. After completing his term, he compiled the *Decretals*, an influential collection of canon law documents and rulings. During the Middle Ages, canon law was used more widely than it is today, often serving to resolve disputes between lay litigants. Raymond also persuaded St. Thomas Aquinas to write his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, a guidebook-catechism for preaching orthodox Catholic faith.

Humbert of Romans

The fifth Master, Humbert of Romans (c.1194-1277), wrote a preacher's manual, the *Treatise on the Formation of Preachers*, in which he discussed the connection between study and preaching. A preacher needs to study carefully about what he is to preach. The Apostles, taught by Jesus and visited by the Holy Spirit, were privileged in their preaching; later preachers have to think out their messages (*Early Dominicans* 205).

According to Humbert, a good preacher will stress what is useful, rather than subtlety, novelty, or philosophical points. He lists the kinds of knowledge a preacher needs to explain Scripture. In addition to knowing Scripture itself, a preacher must have knowledge of creatures, historical stories, the Church's precepts, and the Church's mysteries. The preacher must also know about the Holy Spirit, who teaches us "everything" and how to express it, just as he taught everything to the first disciples (216-218).

To gain all these forms of knowledge, preachers should use their periods of recreation for study and contemplation, not idleness (251-252). He defends the need to preach over all other Dominican activities. While preaching requires study, we must not limit ourselves to study alone. We should not decline to preach after study, since there is no good in wisdom that remains hidden (256-260) (cf. Sirach 20:32).

Albert and Thomas

The pinnacle of early Dominican scholarship was reached in the thirteenth century in St. Albert the Great (1206-1280) and his greatest student, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). They were known for integrating the rediscovered works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle into the body of earlier Christian learning, which had been dominated for centuries by the insights of St. Augustine.

Aristotle's works were lost to Europeans after the fall of the Roman Empire. Medieval Europeans knew about his logical works, but his other writings were unavailable to them. After the Crusades, Aristotle's writings were rediscovered in the Arab world, particularly in Spain. By Albert's time, Latin translations of Aristotle's works were available in Europe, but these translations, from either Greek or Arabic, posed a problem for the Christian West. They contained undigested pagan insights or the comments of Arab scholars who took positions contrary to Christian theology. Albert, like Thomas after him, tried to "synthesize" Aristotle with Christian doctrine, removing (or at least criticizing) the unchristian elements while accepting the rest of Aristotle's contributions. Albert wrote commentaries on almost every Aristotelian book including even the minor works on natural science. Furthermore, he wrote a few new treatises in areas where Aristotle had not ventured, such as botany.

Advocate of the natural sciences, Albert reintroduced Europe to Aristotle's findings on the sciences, and added contributions of his own. Unwilling to rely on deductive logic alone, Albert said that "experiment is the only guide" in finding the causes of natural events (Kennedy 3). Albert, teacher of the greatest Dominican theologian, Aquinas, first recognized Thomas' brilliance while reading some notes that Thomas had dropped. Told that Thomas' fellow students called the big, ungainly Italian "the dumb ox," Albert replied, "We call this lad a dumb ox, but I tell you that the whole world is going to hear his bellowing" (Newland 28).

Yes, the whole world has heard Thomas' bellowing. Overcoming his family's resistance to his joining the Dominicans, Thomas began his education under St. Albert at the University of Paris in 1245. He traveled to Germany during Albert's years as founder of the Dominican House of Studies in Cologne and Bishop of Regensburg. In 1252, Thomas qualified for the degree of Bachelor of the Sentences. He returned to Paris to study for the Master of Theology degree, which he earned in 1256, and served two three-year professorships in Paris. In between these Paris appointments, he wrote and lectured in his native Italy, sometimes preaching at the papal court (Newland 40).

The *Summa Theologiae* is Thomas' best-known work. It attempted a complete summary of the Catholic faith, and ultimately became the Church's primary reference book after the Bible. The *Summa* is divided into three parts, which are further divided into "treatises" about various subjects–God, the Trinity, Creation, the Angels, Man, Human Acts, Law, Grace, States of Life, the Incarnation and the Last Things. Thomas analyzes thousands of points of Catholic philosophy and theology, giving us the greatest fruit of Dominican study.

In more modern times, Pope Leo XIII added Thomistic philosophy and theology to the arsenal of Catholic truth. In his encyclical letter on *The Restoration of Christian Philosophy (Aeterni Patris)* in 1879, Leo said that if the enemies of the Church "can borrow their weapons from the arguments of the philosophers," so can the Church's defenders (8). And Pope John Paul II has written two very Thomistic encyclical letters, *The Splendor of the Truth (Veritatis splendor)* (1993) and *Fides et ratio (On the Relationship between Faith and Reason)* (1998). Thus, Dominican study, in a very real sense, has become a mission for the entire Church.

Catherine of Siena

In addition to friar-professors like Albert and Thomas, ordinary people engage in Dominican study. The illustrious and amazing St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), patroness of the Fraternities of St. Dominic, lacked a formal education. As a member of a lay group called Mantellate, she regularly attended liturgies and lectures

in her local Dominican parish. She was advisor to several popes, and later in life dictated her mystical reflections to secretaries in her book *The Dialogue* and in 381 letters. In 1970 Catherine joined Albert and Thomas as a Doctor of Church.

Why the Third Order Needs to Study

Given the fundamental place of study in the Order, its lay Dominicans participate in this distinct charism by teaching one another at chapter meetings through presentations and discussions on a multitude of topics. All chapter members engage in on-going formation, even as secular society today mandates life-long learning. Chapter membership demands it. Apostolic work in parishes and in the community at large requires it. Lay Dominicans serve as leaders in defending the Church against ignorance about its teachings and misinformation about Catholicism in the media. Sadly, such ignorance and misinformation about the Church's teachings are even widespread among Catholics themselves. At the start of the year of the Eucharist (2004-2005), Cardinal Jean Schotte of Belgium quoted an opinion poll claiming that 68% of French Catholics and 62% of American Catholics did not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (Schotte 25). Some surveys indicate this is not the result of a rejection of the doctrine but sheer ignorance of its existence. Lay Dominicans need to pick up the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the great papal encyclicals on the Eucharist, reflect on their teachings, and heal our own ignorance and that of our brothers and sisters.

Media misinformation about the Church can deeply affect the morale of Catholics. For instance, it is taken for granted that, under Pope Pius XII, the Church shamefully failed to oppose the Holocaust during World War II. However, many documented sources refute such charges. Have you read any of them? Further, the Church is still misrepresented by those who claim that Catholics are forbidden to read the Bible and that Catholics are not Bible Christians. Can you answer that one? Study by lay Dominicans can bring the Church into the marketplace to areas where religious cannot go.

Dominican study helps us to refute the secularism, consumerism, and relativism of our times. Washington, D.C. Archbishop Donald Wuerl, when he was the Bishop of Pittsburgh wrote: "All around us the secular world increasingly marginalizes the idea of transcendent truth, absolute values, and a spiritual dimension to life. We are called to counter this trend by proclaiming the reality of God, the Incarnation of Christ…and by giving witness to his enduring presence in the Eucharist" (Wuerl 15).

While Archbishop Wuerl proclaimed this goal to the Knights of Columbus, it is a very fitting call for lay Dominican study and preaching. Along these lines, Pope John Paul II wrote that nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from the democratic point of view (*Centessimus annus*, section 46, 65).

On the other hand, the pope also warns that "fanaticism or fundamentalism," especially of the coercive type, are also unchristian. What the pope is saying is that *truth* (the Dominican goal of *veritas*) is the mean between the extremes of relativism and fundamentalism. Dominican study allows us to use this mean to heal our polarized world.

What the Members of the Fraternities of St. Dominic Need to Study

Finally, we need to ask *what* members of Fraternities of St. Dominic should be studying. First, we must study Holy Scripture. The examples of Dominic and the early Masters of the Order make this clear. Saints Albert and Thomas wrote commentaries about many of the books of the Bible. Our Fraternities' rule counsels "listening to the Word of God and reading Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament" (no. 10a).

There are many ways to study the Bible. We might read several chapters a day, or we might meditate on short passages, using *lectio divina* or centering prayer. We may also study the Bible in groups with others. We can use commentaries, such as the *New Jerome Bible Commentary,* or the notes in Catholic bibles like the *New American Bible* and the *New Jerusalem Bible.*

We should study the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which is the Church's interpretation of revelation and tradition, nurtured over 2,000 years. The *Catechism* covers the entire range of topics in faith, morals, sacraments, and prayer, and is filled with citations from Scripture and Catholic theologians. Alongside Scripture, the *Catechism* is an indispensable source of Catholic truth with which every lay Dominican should be familiar.

We should study the treasures of our Catholic and Dominican heritage. In learning the history of the Church, we make ourselves aware of its contribution to civilization. We should also study the history of the Dominican Order (particularly the Fraternities of St. Dominic) the great writings and lives of our Dominican saints.

We must also study the contemporary world and what the Church teaches about its problems. Our rule advises "assiduous study of revealed truth and reflection on contemporary problems, in the light [of] Faith" (5). This may be done through studying the documents of the Second Vatican Council and papal encyclical letters, especially modern papal encyclicals. We must also keep informed about issues of social justice by following the Catholic press and reliable secular media.

Finally, Dominicans should know where to find valuable study sources; public and academic libraries are great places to start. The Fraternities of St. Dominic also have their own book service at the House of Studies in Washington. If Catholic colleges are in your area, ask for library privileges–it's worth a nominal fee. Also, explore Catholic web sites, including those of the Vatican, the Dominican Order, and those of Catholic organizations and publishers. Read the Catholic press regularly, starting with your diocesan newspaper. Above all, remember the Divine Spirit of the Living God is in the midst of all things.

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Some Basic Resources for Catholic Study

The New American Bible. Various publishers and dates, including New York: Oxford UP, 2004; also available online at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.htm>.

The New Jerusalem Bible: Standard Edition. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

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Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed. / rev. in accordance with the official Latin text promulgated by Pope John Paul II. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Washington, D.C.: [distributed by] United States Catholic Conference, c2000.

Walsh, Michael J. *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church.* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.

Flannery, Austin P. *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents.* 2 vols. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.

New Catholic Encyclopedia 2d ed. Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale Group, 2003. 14 vols. Also consult the first edition of 1967.

John Paul II Encyclicals with Study Tool:
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/index.htm
Full text of encyclicals.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:
<http://www.nccbuscc.org/> Official church statements.

Dominican web sites:
<http://www.op.org/>
<http://www.3op.org>
<http://www.op-stjoseph.org/>
<http://www.domcentral.org/>
<http://www.opsouth.org/>
<http://www.opwest.org/>

Thomas Aquinas - Summa Theologiae:
<http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/home.html>

Catholic sources online:
<http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/>

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the contributions of early Dominicans to study.
2. What is your purpose for study as a lay Dominican? Give some concrete examples of ways you can use the results of your study and contemplation.
3. What are the recommended sources essential for study by a lay Dominican? Why do you think it is important to study them?
4. In Module #4: *Our Chapter, Our Community*, you saw the role of community in lay Dominican life. Why is the study and discussion of important secular (sometimes controversial) issues within the Chapter community beneficial?
5. Why would you read current magazines, newspapers, or watch media presentations, etc. as part of your study?
6. Do you allot time each day to religious study – the Bible, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican II documents, encyclicals, etc.? If not, how can you begin to do so?

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141 East 65th Street
New York, New York 10021
www.3op.org *2006*