Comment

Damian Byrne OP (1929 – 1996)

Damian Byrne died suddenly in Dublin on 17 February. He was Secretary General of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors in Ireland, an important job that was not easy. He was just 67, and seemed younger. He neither smoked nor drank, and ate little. On 2 September 1983 he was elected 83rd Master of the Order of Preachers. He was 54 years old and had spent his Dominican life of 33 years in Ireland of course, and in the West Indies, in Mexico, where he was appointed provincial superior, and in Argentina. For the last years before his election as successor of St Dominic he had been provincial of the Irish Province.

At the end of the Chapter of 1983, a month after his election, Damian addressed the 150 or so members of the Chapter. He was now the Master of the Order. So where did he stand? What were his priorities? There is no doubt about his answers.

He believed that everything depended on the sense of community in the Order. Times, laws and customs may change, but that which holds together every generation and race must be the lively awareness of community. We must have 'great concern for this sense of community', he said. It is 'our greatest task to build up community life in the various provinces of the Order'. The union of hearts and minds will not be achieved by law nor by authority, but by justice and charity. It is lives of service and forgiveness that are the essential make-up of Christian witness that is the purpose of the Order.

At the end of his address, he nailed his colours firmly to the mast, where they stayed throughout his Mastership. 'I have one final request . . . The greatest thing you can do for me is to treat me as your brother, and avoid all forms of external honour, so that we may constantly remind ourselves of our brotherhood in the Lord and Dominic'. The sermon during the Mass of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the elective Chapter of 1983 was preached by Fr Ayo Maria Atoyebi, the Nigerian delegate. 'In my naive and simplistic opinion the greatest task before this Chapter is to motivate authentic living of the evangelical counsels in and outside the community. . . . We need a saintly Master, one who is full of the Holy Spirit, who will revive more and more the spirit of St Dominic in this noble Order'. How Damian's heart must

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have sunk after the election when he thought of these words and his responsibility.

For himself, he decided, there should be no external honour, no special place in choir and refectory, no standing up on his entry into a room. 'No external honour' indeed. And the result was plain for almost all to experience who visited the refectory, say, at Santa Sabina in those years. Where was the Master? Sitting down there, anywhere, and receiving from the brethren great respect and honour as the successor of St Dominic, or he was travelling all over the world, visiting the brethren. He went with the minimum of luggage, just a small bag that, one would think, had hardly enough for a week-end. His own personal poverty had an obvious Franciscan quality, and was quite unselfconscious. He practised what he preached. Visiting Santa Sabina was a great experience, unlike any other of my life; the community came from perhaps twenty different provinces of the Order, but were as though they came from one.

Bede Bailey OP

Aquinas and the Act of Love

Michael Nolan

Newman's Anglican days made him acutely aware of how the language of Catholicism sounds strange in unaccustomed and indeed suspicious ears and how readily misunderstanding ensues. Infallibility is taken to be a claim to be right on everything, the Immaculate Conception is confused with the Virgin Birth, and the remission of sins becomes a permission to continue in evil ways. It is, he saw, a general problem in dealing with the unfamiliar, and he wondered what a hostile foreigner would make of the maxims of the laws of England. Might he not, reading in Blackstone's incomparable Commentaries that 'the power and jurisdiction of parliament is so transcendent that it cannot be

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