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Archbishop DiNoia, O.P. On New Vocations

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 22, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Archbishop J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P., gave a conference at the Provinicial Chapter of the St. Joseph Province last June on the subject of new vocations to that province. Those who are unfamiliar with the archbishop may recall his giving the homily at the Red Mass earlier this month here in Washington. Those familiar with him, will be unsurprised by the eloquence and the passion of his conference. It is available online here [1].

I was especially intrigued by the archbishop's discussion of the challenges the Dominican Order faced in the nineteenth century in the United States, how the model of territorial parishes in the United States had to be accepted and adjusted to by the Dominicans, whose primary charism had been otherwise. He calls for scholars to investigate that history more closely and I concur. DiNoia's discussion is another reminder that while most of us post-Vatican II Catholics see what went before in monolithic terms, there was an enormous variety, and enormous challenges, in earlier times too. And, at least today, we are not dealing with the fallout from the French Revolution and Napoleon. (Although, let it be noted, today we also have no Consalvi capable of grappling so deftly with the challenges we do face!)

The one criticism of the text I have is that while discussing the reasons the Church must brook no compromise with an ambient culture that is hostile to the faith, Archbishop DiNoia could have spent more time examining how the Church is to engage the culture. For some reason, the on-line text does not contain these words that I have in my written copy, and I think they are crucial. "For Dominicans, the critique of the ambient culture cannot be satisfied simply with rejection. It must move on to evangelical engagement." This is an important, even a vital, point. It brings to mind something cardinal george wrote in his book "The Difference God Makes." There, Cardinal George wrote: "We have to form people with a genuine love of today's city and love of our culture itself. Even with its demonic elements, the culture must be loved, because you cannot evangelize what you do not love." (p. 182.)

Many will not agree with Archbishop's analysis of the trends in the culture or the Church, but even those who disagree must recognize the force of his arguments. Whether they persuade or not, they should counsel. I have long believed that Archbishop DiNoia is one of the three smartest people I know, and this text illustrates some of why I think that. I do not always agree with him, but I cannot fail to acknowledge both his learnedness and his brilliance. There is an invitation here to serious thought and prayer.

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