

Dominican Personalities

Dominicans show a variety of personalities and interests. You could recreate the history of the Dominican Order, Europe, and the emerging Third World by studying members of the Dominican family, so broadly did they answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" that Jesus answered in the parable of the Good Samaritan. As you read about them, study your own feelings. Do you admire these Dominicans? Do you feel to some degree the same concerns? Do you feel enriched as you read some of the things they wrote? If so, you probably will feel at home as a member of the family. Present-day Dominicans may not all be such outstanding saints as these famous ones, but you'd be surprised (or would you?) how many very special people you'll meet.

Some outstanding Dominicans in the past are:

- o in the 12th century

St Dominic himself, Bl. Reginald (who had a vision of our Lady, who gave him the habit for the Order), Bl. Diana, Cecelia, and Amata, nuns in one of the first monastery of Dominican nuns, St. Stephen, the first martyr, Bl. Jordan of Saxony, the second Master-General of the Order.

- o in the 13th century

- Raymond of Penyafort, who, like Dominic, was first a canon, then a Dominican. At the pope's command, he prepared a collection of existing canon law, he was an early Master-General of the order, and a peacemaker among feuding families and cities.
- Thomas Aquinas, the great teacher, scholastic, and mystic, wrote many theological papers and the standard theological text, the SUMMA THEOLOGICA
- Albert the Great, Thomas's teacher, had encyclopedic interests; wrote over 1000 works on the natural sciences, music, art, and theology.

- o in the 14th century

- Catherine of Siena, active mystic, wrote "The Dialog" containing conversation and instruction by the Father to an inquiring soul. She was an intrepid peacemaker between warring towns and classes in Italy and she forcefully counselled the pope to return to Rome from Avignon, where the popes had resided for 70 years.
- Raymond of Capua, Catherine's spiritual director and Master-General of the Order at the time of the Schism in the Church when there were two popes. He supported the pope in Rome, the pope generally acknowledged as the legitimate pope.

- St. Vincent Ferrar, charismatic preacher, from Spain, toured Europe with thousands of followers, preaching repentance. He was called and considered himself the "angel of the Apocalypse." He supported the pope living in Avignon! And the Church canonized him anyway!

o In the 15th century

- St. John Dominici, leader of reform in Italy, trying to offset the abuses caused by the papal Schism, the Black Death that devastated Europe, and the laxity among the clergy.
- St. Antoninus, prior of the convent in Florence where Fra Angelico and Savonarola lived, later Archbishop; he was a moral theologian, an historian, and a teacher; wrote many letters of instruction and encouragement to nuns
- Fra Angelico, the artist who painted beautiful scenes from Scripture on the walls of the Dominican priories/convents around Florence.
- (By the way, it was a Dominican Archbishop, Diego de Deza, who sponsored Christopher Columbus at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella! And Dominicans were already teaching at the university at Salamanca about the roundness of the earth.)

o in the 16th century

- Pope (St.) Pius V, the pope shortly after the Council of Trent and at a time when the Moslem Turks were invading eastern Europe. He worked for the reform of the clergy, and reintroduced the Rosary devotion. During the naval Battle of Lapanto between Christians and Turks, he prayed and urged others to pray the Rosary, and Our Lady is credited with giving the victory to the Christians.
- St. John of Gorcum, martyred with 18 other Catholics at the hands of Protestants, during the bloody religious wars in Europe between Protestants and Catholics.
- Bartholomew de las Casas, a missionary in the 1600s who defended the Africans being brought to the New World as slaves.
- St Louis Bertrand, novice master and later missionary with the Spanish in the New World.
- Bl. Bartholomea Bagnesi and Bl. Osanna of Cattaro, lay Dominicans; in Spain, another lay member was Louisa Borgia, called "the saintly duchess", the sister of St. Francis Borgia.

o in the 17th century

- St. Rose of Lima, mystic and ascetic; St. Martin de Porres, lay brother and mystic, who was a great friend and helper of the poor - New World saints from Peru.
- St Louis de Montfort, French priest and Third Order member, who preached widely on the "true devotion to the Bless Virgin Mary", and advanced the Rosary devotion.
- Bl. Alphonse Navarette, missionary martyred in Japan in 1617.
- Bl. Francis Capillas, missionary and first martyr in China in 1649.

o in the 18th century

- This was a time when the Dominican government became more centralized (just like the governments of Europe), life went on much as before, but there was a certain stagnation. Missions continued, some sisters and nuns went to foreign lands, but mostly, in this time before the French Revolution, the Order looked too much to the past.

o in the 19th century

- Pere Lacordaire, who re-established the Dominican Order in France after the disastrous anti-clericalism of the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic days.
- Dominic Fenwick led a group of four Dominicans to the U.S., to the pioneer state of Kentucky.
- Several groups of priests, Dominican laity, and lay Catholics were martyred in IndoChina, and many of these individuals have been beatified. Vietnam had a flourishing Dominican community before the war, and the community still struggles to maintain an existence.
- Bl. Bartolo Longo, a lay Dominican in Italy, who founded many homes for homeless children and was an outstanding spokesman for the Catholic faith at a time when that was not a popular stance.

o in the 20th century

- Pere Legrange, French pioneer of Biblical scholarship and founder of the Ecole Biblique, which produced the widely acclaimed Jerusalem Bible, among other major scholarly works.

- Maisie Ward, career woman of 20th Century America, co-founder of the Sheed and Ward Publishing Co., a highly respected publishing house for Catholic authors.
- Yves Congar, Marie Dominic Chenu, Edward Schillebeeckx, were among the fifty Dominicans who participated in Vatican Council II as bishops and theologians. There are many, many Dominican authors of many, many influential works today, as well as many, many missionaries.
- The Maryknoll Sisters, established for missionary work in the far east in the 20th century, who live a Rule based on the Dominican Rule. The Rule was chosen because it was the most flexible of the Rules for women's congregations at that time.
- Rev. Norbert Wendell, who gave spiritual leadership to Dominican laity in New York City for many years, and also conducted a television program there.
- and ?

Dominicans rarely call attention to the contributions they make and rarely initiate the process to declare a person blessed or a saint. It may seem this list is boastful, but it intended more to show the rich variety of vocations fostered by Dominican spirituality.

There have been controversial figures also. Thomas Aquinas was in trouble in his day. Henry Suso and Meister Eickert preached a way of praying and living that supported German mysticism, but which also caused their works to be banned for a time. Savonarola, in Florence in the 1400s, was burned at the stake by the civil authorities for preaching against the decadent influences of the Renaissance. Dominicans who participated in the Spanish Inquisition have been maligned for centuries. Today, theologians Yves Congar and Schillebeeckx were Periti (theological consultants to bishops at Vatican II), yet they have been silenced for a time and their writings put under close scrutiny; they have come through the examination process still in union with the Church. So, if you join the Dominican family, you join a family of strong, loving personalities, who were willing to risk a lot for their neighbors, but who treasure loyalty to the pope and the Church.

Dominican tradition tells of the vision Dominic had of his vast family: he saw the courts of heaven peopled with many religious, but none of his own and he began to weep. "Why do you weep so bitterly?" our Lord asked him, "I have given your Order to My mother." Then our Lady opened her mantle, seemingly as vast as the heavens, and there beneath it was an immense multitude of Dominican religious.