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Rt. Rev. Langton T. Grace (1814-1897)

In the Shadow of Archbishop John Ireland: Langdon Thomas Grace, O.P., Second Bishop of St. Paul

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Over the last decade, our *Bulletin* has carried several biographical narratives of the sons of St. Dominic who became bishops in the nineteenth century Church in America. The Roman authorities drew heavily from the small but talented band of Dominican friars attached to the fledgling Province of St. Joseph. Langdon Thomas Grace, a native of Charleston, South Carolina, became the second bishop of St. Paul.¹ In that capacity, Bishop Grace not only served as an energetic prelate in what then was called

the upper northwest, but he also was the mentor and sponsor of one of the most important American churchmen of the turn of the century, Archbishop John Ireland. One historian referred to Bishop Grace as “one of the ablest prelates in America.”²

The Early Days

Langdon Grace was born of Irish parents in Charleston on November 16, 1814. His parents, Thomas³ and Margaret Grace, were natives of

County Kilkenny. The family settled first in Charleston, where Langdon's father, a schoolmaster by profession, directed the education of his son. It was said that young Langdon sprang from "genteel stock."⁴ Eventually the family settled in Cincinnati. Dominican historian Victor F. O'Daniel suggests that Langdon's father was probably a lay professor in the Cincinnati college founded by Cincinnati's Bishop Edward Fenwick.⁵ He also suggests that young Langdon appears to have been a student at this institution and first met the Dominicans there. Discerning that he had a religious vocation, Langdon journeyed to the Dominican priory of St. Rose in Springfield, Kentucky, where on June 10, 1830, taking the religious name of Brother Thomas, he received the Dominican habit and embarked on his novitiate year. He was not yet sixteen years of age. Receiving the habit of St. Dominic at this vestition ceremony along with Langdon were two Native Americans from what was then called the northwest. A year later, Brother Thomas was professed as a Dominican.

Off to Rome for More Study

Brother Thomas studied the normal rubric of courses common for Dominican students at the time. Since the priory at St. Joseph's in 1834 was made an official *studium generale* of the Dominican Order in the United States, one wonders if Brother Thomas Grace undertook any of his studies in Somerset. Furthermore, one wonders how rigorous this program of study was, given the fledgling stage of higher education in the United States in this era, especially in the mid-west. These issues were compounded in Roman Catholic institutions, which were struggling to survive, let alone develop a rigorous and stimulating intellectual curriculum. Hence, in 1837 the Dominican superiors decided to send Brother Thomas to Rome in order to continue his studies "at the center of Christendom."⁶ This was the first attempt to have American Dominican students educated abroad, an

innovation that may have come about through the prodding of the Dominican Master General.⁷ Another Dominican, later to achieve an element of both fame and misfortune in the Province of St. Joseph, Nicholas Raymond Young, was also sent to Rome at this time. One can surmise that Grace and Young were considered to be the future shining lights for the Dominicans in the United States. O'Daniel also suggests that possibly the future plan of having a college in Ohio, which eventually became the short-lived St. Joseph College in Somerset, was the principal motive behind sending Grace and Young to Rome. The erection of St. Joseph's into a *studium generale* certainly required the addition of Dominicans with the appropriate academic degrees, in this case, the Lectorate. Whatever the reasons for Grace's journey to Rome for study, James Michael Reardon writes glowingly about Grace as a student in Europe:

His solid but unostentatious piety and his intellectual brilliancy moved his superiors to send him to the Minerva College, Rome, in June 1838, to complete his studies for the priesthood.⁸

Writing about Grace's journey to Italy, with educational stops mostly in Rome and Perugia, O'Connell is less sanguine about the quality of clerical education:

The quality of clerical education available in the Italy of the 1830s and 1840s was not particularly good, but it compared favorably with what a young friar might have received among his poverty-stricken religious brethren in Ohio.⁹

Once in the eternal city, Brother Thomas was assigned to the important Dominican International House of Studies, known as the Minerva. He was ordained there in December, 1839. Yet the environment of Rome was far from healthy for the young American. In 1840, he was stricken with small pox, which "brought him to death's door." Richard Pius Miles wrote, concerning the health of Father Grace:

I am just preparing to leave Rome for Naples. F. Grace will accompany me... he is just recovering from small pox ... his face is as spotted as the star spangled banner.¹⁰

Once recovered from the disease, he continued his studies at several Dominican priories in Italy. O'Daniel discussed Grace's phenomenal academic record while a student priest in the following way: "The scholastic chronicles of all three of these houses show that the young 'Yankee' priest made a splendid record—religious, industrious, intellectual."¹¹

Working in Italy for St. Joseph's Province

While in Italy, young Father Grace kept in touch with his confreres in the Province of St. Joseph. One interesting episode centers on Grace's critical analysis of the proposal that Samuel Mazzuchelli put forward for a new Dominican province to be located near the mound of Sinsinawa in southwestern Wisconsin and Galena in northwestern Illinois. Guided by missionary zeal, Mazzuchelli sought to establish his new province with what would appear to be few connections with the traditional rites of the Dominicans. Mazzuchelli wished for the new secular priests in his proposed foundation to take their novitiate while staying outside the cloister and to continue wearing the cassock rather than the white habit of the Dominicans. In discovering this proposal, young Father Grace took it upon himself to write to the Master General and counter point by point the arguments put forward by Mazzuchelli. In the end, however, Mazzuchelli left Rome with the dispensations he sought and he proceeded to southern Wisconsin to establish his new province. This province of St. Charles failed rather quickly and Mazzuchelli once again became affiliated with the Province of St. Joseph. What is interesting in this saga of Dominican brothers is that in 1858, this time with the support of the then Bishop Grace of St. Paul and Bishop Martin Henni of Milwaukee, among others, Mazzuchelli tried to re-establish the Province of St. Charles and continue the college

that he had founded in Sinsinawa. None of this was accomplished. Nonetheless, this exchange indicates the sense of Roman workings that Grace had absorbed during his years in Italy.

In the autumn of 1844, Father Grace was awarded the Dominican Lectorate in Sacred Theology. Shortly thereafter, he set sail for his return voyage to the United States along with several other Dominicans, among whom was his American brother in religion, Nicholas Young.

Back in the Saddle in the U.S.

There is some evidence that Grace spent some time in Somerset at St. Joseph's on his return from Europe. Nonetheless, with a Lectorate in hand, Grace was assigned to St. Rose Priory in Kentucky, where he had become a Dominican novice some fifteen years earlier. There he undertook both teaching and pastoral obligations; the latter would determine much of his later Dominican priestly life.

His stay in Kentucky was rather short. In 1847 he was assigned to the important parish of St. Peter in Memphis. There he replaced Rev. Joseph Alemany, who was transferred to St. Rose Priory to assume the duties of novice master. In 1849 Grace was named pastor and superior of the Dominican community in Memphis. He held this position for a decade.

As pastor of St. Peter's parish in Memphis, Grace served an important role. He was a gifted preacher. O'Daniel remarked, "He was an excellent preacher; and his sermons were classical, as well as practical and instructive."¹² Thomas Stritch wrote, "The spirit of St. Dominic hovered over the development of Catholicism in Memphis..."¹³

Travel by horseback was the hallmark of American clergy of all faiths during the first half of the nineteenth century. The circuit riders of Methodism are well known in the annals of Ohio history, for example. Grace was no exception. He traveled by horseback through much of western Tennessee, eastern Arkansas and northern Mississippi. These long hours in the

saddle made the young pastor rather well and widely known in the area. Stritch wrote that young Father Grace “gave the parish the stability it needed;” furthermore, “he loved Memphis, and was loved by Memphis.”¹⁴

The Magnificent Church of St. Peter’s

Langdon Thomas Grace was also a builder, and the Gothic Church of St. Peter was constructed under his watch as pastor. This church was highly regarded for its architectural style and was once listed as one of the more important examples of church architecture in the United States. Grace engaged the renowned architect, Patrick Keely, to design it. Keely would go on to design dozens of churches in the United States, including several cathedrals. Keely “became the favorite architect of the Dominican Order.” Stritch also notes that this religious edifice is a “remarkable building for so small a Catholic population,... (and that it is an) architectural masterpiece” and credits its construction to Grace’s distinguished leadership abilities.¹⁵ A writer for *The Catholic Telegraph* of Cincinnati wrote that this church was to be “...one of the most splendid edifices west of the Alleghenies... it was to have two towers, each one hundred feet high, surmounted by a chime of bells.”¹⁶

The church was dedicated on January 17, 1858, with Bishop Martin J. Spalding the preacher for the event. Later Spalding wrote to Archbishop John Purcell in Cincinnati in the following glowing terms about the new church: “The church of Father Grace is truly beautiful, one of the prettiest parish churches of America.” Stritch provides a rich description of the church:

Memphis St. Peter’s is Gothic, romantic, lush, ardent, heavily decorated, bursting inside with arches and statues and lunettes and trefoils and tall lancet windows busy with dramatic stained glass scenes. The exterior is bold and fascinating, with its twin crenellated towers and beautifully proportioned central façade, basic brick covered with stucco lined to



St. Peter’s Church in Memphis

resemble stone. Each tower is pierced with charmingly varied openings, contrasting nicely with the big window of the center, under which is the small but emphatic entrance. The nave is plain, and the transept, with its long windows which echo that of the façade, is perhaps a little thin to match up to the rambunctious and imaginative facade.¹⁷

Reflecting on the church-building proclivities of the nineteenth century Dominicans within the confines of the United States, Coffey wrote the following:

Spending fortunes, collected in the East, to build magnificent churches in the Western Wilderness had been a Dominican characteristic for a long time. At one time or another, St. Joseph’s; St. Rose; St. Thomas, Zanesville; and St. Peter’s, Memphis; have been rated, by traveling reporters for the Eastern (and Western) Catholic Press, among the most beautiful churches in the country.... None of the other backwoods churches ever came close to the Dominican.¹⁸

Coffey also notes that with this exorbitant church spending, the Province of St. Joseph was in “perpetual financial embarrassment.”

Bringing the Dominican Sisters to Memphis

Grace was instrumental in bringing Dominican Sisters to Memphis, where they undertook the important role of educating the young. Grace was able to secure the services of six Dominican sisters, three from the convent of St. Catherine in Springfield, Kentucky and three from St. Mary's in Somerset,¹⁹ who founded a school for girls, called St. Agnes. An advertisement for the new school appeared in the *Memphis City Directory* for 1855:

This institution is Catholic, but as its object is to afford educational advantages, irrespective of religious creeds, no influence beyond that object will be exercised. Discipline and order only will require attendance at divine services on Sundays.²⁰

With this academy in southwestern Tennessee, the influence of the pioneer Dominican sisters from Somerset was reaching beyond the confines of Perry County.

Father Grace also was the founder of an orphanage, again staffed by the Dominican Sisters. And in 1880 the Dominican Sisters organized and staffed the first school for African American students in Memphis. Writing about the importance of Grace to the church in Memphis, the then provincial, James Whelan, noted the following:

St. Peter Martyr in the State of Tennessee in the Diocese of R. Rev. Bishop Miles, about 900 miles from St. Joseph's, is under the spiritual charge of our Fathers. A magnificent church is now nearly finished and a new church for the German population about to be commenced. There are only 3 Fathers. Father T. L. Grace is prior, and I presume when his time expires there will be a necessity of reappointing him as no one else can attend to its affairs now as well as himself. The Sisterhood of St. Agnes' Monastery in the city, about 2 miles from the Convent of St. Peter's, has about 9 sisters and a very flourishing school. They are under the spiritual and temporal guidance of Rev. Fr. Grace.²¹

That Grace was a superb administrator is apparent from even a cursory reading of the historical documents.

On the Road to Being a Bishop

O'Daniel notes that this energetic Dominican friar was attracting the attention of the American hierarchy because his name was frequently found in their correspondence as a person with potential for a bishopric. His years in Memphis were regarded as times of "solid achievement." O'Connell referred to Grace as a "cultured and bookish clergyman... (who was) habitually courteous and amicable... (who) got on well with most people."²² Grace's name, so some historians have written, appeared on a list of possible candidates for the bishopric of Monterey, a position that was given to another Dominican of the province, Joseph Alemany.²³ Reardon, however, denies that Grace was on this *terna*. Grace's name did appear on the short list for the Diocese of Quincy in Illinois, along with the name of another Dominican from the province, Charles P. Montgomery. Reardon also notes that in 1858 Grace was considered to be appointed the Coadjutor Bishop of Nashville, to serve with his Dominican colleague, Richard Pius Miles.²⁴ An episcopal appointment finally came in January, 1859, when Langdon Thomas Grace was named the second Bishop of St. Paul. Three days earlier, Blessed Pius IX had reached into the paltry numbers of St. Joseph Province Dominicans and named James Whelan to succeed his fellow Dominican, Richard Miles, as bishop of Nashville. In commenting how hard these appointments afflicted the struggling province of St. Joseph, Coffey writes:

To understand just how badly the loss of men like Grace and Whelan hurt the province, it is necessary to know . . . that . . . the province was left with only twelve active priests.²⁵

Apparently Grace refused this appointment, sending the letter of appointment back to Rome. But the appointment letter was returned to

Memphis, reaching Grace in June 1859. Coffey writes that “The Pope, however, insisted that the Diocese of St. Paul needed him more than the Province of St. Joseph.” This second time Grace could not refuse, and he accepted the position. Joseph Kelly, a Dominican colleague who served as President of St. Joseph’s College in Somerset, wrote in his diary: “Father Grace has just received his bulls for St. Paul’s the second time. He must go now. *Roma locuta est. Causa finita est.*”²⁶

Whelan and Grace were two of the three priests who had received the Lectorate in Theology, which enabled them to teach in the *studium*. Hence, not only was the province decimated from the perspective of active personnel, but it also lost two of its members capable of conducting the educational program of studies necessary for the training of future Dominican priests.²⁷

What is interesting at this juncture is that the voting members of St. Joseph’s Province wanted neither Grace nor Alemany to be their provincial. Both, of course, became successful members of the hierarchy. The strained council meetings are difficult to understand from the present vantage point of over one hundred fifty years. It also appears that by this time Grace was becoming more aligned with the position advanced by Alemany and Mazzuchelli that what the Church in the United States needed most of all was workers in the vineyard and not monks or friars studying in the cloister.²⁸ That this differed from what was perceived as the classical Dominican vocation is apparent. This conflict on fundamental principles would divide the aspirations of the American Dominicans well into the twentieth century.

(To be concluded)

NOTES

1) As far as I can discover, there has never been a major biography of Bishop L. T. Grace written. In the summer of 2003 while attending an institute at the University of St. Thomas, I discovered a thesis in the library of St. Thomas Seminary in St. Paul; Bishop Raymond Lucker may have written this while

he was a student at the seminary. Sometimes the texts refer to “Thomas Langdon Grace” while other references have “Langdon Thomas Grace.”

2) Marvin O’Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), p. 65. This passage is also found in the *Northwestern Chronicle* in an issue dated April 10, 1875; see *The Pastoral Letters of Bishop Thomas Langdon Grace*, compiled by Bishop Raymond A. Lucker, privately printed at New Ulm, MN, 2001. O’Connell’s biography of Ireland is a fascinating narrative on the history of the American Church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

3) Reardon writes that the future bishop’s father’s proper name was “Pierce Grace.” Every other source discovered in writing this narrative biography referred to “Thomas Grace” as the father. James Michael Reardon, *The Catholic Church in the Diocese of St. Paul* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1952), p. 137.

4) O’Connell, p. 63.

5) Victor F. O’Daniel, *The Dominican Province of St. Joseph: Historico-Biographical Studies* (New York: The Holy Name Society, 1942), p. 210.

6) O’Daniel, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

7) Reginald M. Coffey, O.P., *The American Dominicans: A History of Saint Joseph’s Province* (New York: St. Martin de Porres Guild, 1970), p. 180.

8) Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

9) O’Connell, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

10) Coffey, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

11) O’Daniel, *op. cit.*

12) *Ibid.*

13) Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee* (Nashville: The Catholic Center, 1987), p. 109.

14) *Ibid.*, p. 94.

15) *Ibid.*

16) The issue is from December 18, 1852.

Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

17) Stritch, *op. cit.*, p. 94

18) Coffey, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-313.

19) *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110. For a biography of Whelan, see the author’s sketch of his life in the *Bulletin*, Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 6, 7 and 8 (June, July and August, 2003).

20) *Ibid.*, p.110.

21) *Ibid.*, p. 303.

22) O'Connell, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

23) For a biography of Alemany, see the author's sketch of his life in the *Bulletin*, Vol. XXX, Nos. 9 and No. 10 (September and October, 2005).

Reardon (p. 140) denies that Grace's name appeared on the *terna* for Monterey in either year.

24) Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

25) Coffey, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315.

26) Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

27) Coffey spends an extended amount of time on this topic in his history of the American Dominicans at pp. 306 ff.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 249.

Baptisms at Wills Creek, Coshocton County, 1837-1900

(Continued, from Vol. XXXIII, No. 4)

1875, continued

October 29 at Bernard Bordenkercher's, Wills Creek, conditionally, Mary Adeline Bordenkercher, daughter of Benjamin and Ann, born Oct. 27; spon. Levi Bordenkercher and Mary Royer. JMJ

November 30 in the church of St. Nicholas, Wills Creek, Prosper Royer, son of Prosper and Mary, born Oct. 10; spon. Christopher and Julia Royer. JMJ

1876

January 30 in the church of St. Nicholas (Wills Creek), Joseph Milton? Salrin, son of Joseph and Mary, born Dec. 16; spon. Christopher Royer and Malinda Salrin. JMJ

February 29 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, James Ambrose Sherrer, son of Joseph and Mary, born Sept. 16, 1875; spon. George Dolick and Mary Royer. JMJ

April 30 in the church of St. Nicholas, Barbara Elizabeth Salrin, daughter of Andrew and Martha Jane, born March 10; spon. Augustus Salrin and Leona Chevest? (or perhaps Mevest?) JMJ

June 7 (no place given) Lilly Mary, born Aug. 5, 1875, daughter of John Berton and Mary Jane Browning; spon. Eugene and Mary Berton. Rev. F. Bender

June 29 in the church of St. Nicholas, Elizabeth Curry Royer, daughter of Adam and Susan, born Dec. 1, 1875; spon. Augustus Salrin and Elizabeth Shue. JMJ

July 16 in the church of St. George, Michael Bordenkercher, son of Wendel and Elizabeth, born May 11; spon. James and Elizabeth Bordenkercher. JMJ

August 5 in the same, Dora Elizabeth, daughter of John and Catherine Cognon, born July 10; spon. Nicholas Cognon and Barbara Dole. JMJ

October 26 in the church of St. Nicholas, Joseph Nicholas Baptist Salrin, son of Baptist and Ann, born Sept. 21; spon. Nicholas Marraine and Mary Salrin. JMJ

November 28 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Henry Edward Ashbaker, son of Joseph and Mary Magdalen, born Oct. 24; spon. Henry Ker and Elizabeth Schue. JMJ

1877

February 25 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, George Noah Martine, son of Michael and Elizabeth, born Nov. 12 last; spon. George Dolick and Margaret Dole. JMJ

March 15 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Rachel Agnes Royer, daughter of Dominic and Elizabeth, born Feb. 2; spon. Peter Dole and Elizabeth Dolick. JMJ

April 19 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, George Sylvester Ker, son of John and Rachel, born Feb. 25; spon. William Bordenkircher and Catherine Ashbaker. JMJ

April 29 in the church of St. Nicholas,

Agatha Lahna, daughter of Jacob and Sarah, born March 9; spon. John Sherrer and Elizabeth Schue. JMJ

Same, Stella Mary Berton, daughter of Eugene and Mary, born March 21; spon. Francis Louvray and Ann Davier. JMJ

May 29 in the church of St. Nicholas, W.C., Mary Elizabeth Berton, daughter of Justin and Margaret, born April 15; spon. Ferdinand Davier and Mary Bigelow. JMJ

October 8 in the church of Mary Most Holy (Wills Creek), Francis Sylvester Bordenkercher, son of Bernard and Ann, born Sept. 28; spon. Christopher Royer and Catherine Bordenkercher. JMJ

Same, Clement Wilfred Amore, son of Francis and Mary, born Sept. 24; spon. Bernard Bordenkircher and Ann Royer. JMJ

December 30 in the church of St. Nicholas, Bertha Agnes Wagoner, daughter of Joseph and Rose, born Nov. 23; spon. Christopher Royer and Johanna Wagoner. JMJ

1878

February 27 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Albert Bordenkircher, son of James and Elizabeth, born Feb. 14; spon.

George Sherrer and Elizabeth Bordenkircher. JMJ

April 21 in the church of St. George, Alexander Ernest Nicholas Salrin, son of Baptist and Ann, born March 21; spon. Christopher Royer and Mary Morraine. JMJ

April 30 in the church of Mary Most Holy, Wills Creek, Julia Adrienne Court, daughter of Andrew and Mary, three months old; spon. Joseph Dolick and Julia Salrin. JMJ

May 30, John Josue Mortine, born April 22, son of George Mortine and Helen Keltz; spon. Henry Hiser and Rachel Ashbacker; residence St. Mary's, Wills Creek. T. J. Lane

June 30, Harvey Ed Royer, born Feb. 26, son of Adam Royer and Susan —?; spon. Christ. Royer and Julia —?; residence St. Nicholas, Wills Creek. T. J. Lane

June 30, Andrew W. Salrin, born May 27, son of Andrew Salrin and Martha Clarke; spon. "—" David and Mary Biglow; residence St. Nicholas, Wills Creek. T. J. Lane

June 30, Frank Berton, born Jan. 5, 1878, son of John Berton and Mary Browning; spon. Frank Lauvray and Melinda his wife; residence St. Nicholas, Wills Creek. T. J. Lane

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