

## **“VERITAS THROUGH FABULA”**

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Conveying Catholic and, more specifically, Dominican charism and values as viable and meaningful life approaches in contemporary society is best achieved through mimetic and not through didactic means. Also, contemporary students nurtured since they were toddlers on visual media, are inclined to reject out-of-hand, polemical discourse as pedantic and arcane, even when it is based upon authentic and real life experience.

But such reluctance is not really new. Even in medieval society, the Catholic laity, most of whom could not read, had a penchant for sermons that were laced with anecdotes and exempla; these, featuring episodes, however apochryphal, from the lives of the saints. As one Dominican critic observes: “Without stories we should lose our memories, fail to find our place in the present and remain without hope or expectation for the future.” Thus, he says, “as Dominicans, we form a group of our own storytelling capacity.” (Schillebeeckx, 1)

After providing an historical context for the study of fabula as vehicles of veritas, this paper clarifies how literary works can be utilized to convey, gloss and illuminate Dominican spirituality as well as to underscore the value of fictional works in educating for a just and compassionate world in an increasingly and distressingly secular and bureaucratic/technical world largely antithetical to claims of justice and compassion. Two modern works, Morris West’s *The Devil’s Advocate* and Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*, will be discussed at length as examples of works that lend themselves to such treatment and purpose.

In no less an author than Geoffrey Chaucer (1343 -1400), we enjoy the literary flowering consequent upon the earlier transition from didactic sermonizing to a more subtle interweaving of the treatise/sermon and narrative story-telling. Chaucer’s so-called virgin narratives, as in *The Physician’s Tale*, contain much that was commonplace in treatises of virginity, but concomitantly tell spell-binding stories to convey and inculcate the moral point that the preservation of chastity and maidenly virtue cannot be compromised without dire spiritual consequences: “The pathetic speech in which Chaucer’s heroine Virginia chooses death rather than dishonor is modeled on such examples of the self-sacrifice of Virgin martyrs as are found in stories cited by St. Jerome by the Franklin;” also, “a good parallel is furnished by the account of St. Pelagia in the treatise of Ambrose.” (Robinson, 727)

Renowned as The Order of The Preachers of the Word, even early Dominicans understood the value of fabulist analogues for purveying and inculcating the truth. While its founder Dominic Guzman (1120-1223) did not write any books, he left behind “a living legacy in the Dominican movement.” (McGonigle, ix). The Order’s mission was to proclaim the gospel through a life of study, community and preaching, each of these activities being nourished and fructified through the agency of prayer. Mottoes were associated with the order from its inception by Dominic, and it was, therefore, incumbent upon its members to laudare (to praise), benedictare (to bless) and, most importantly, predicare (to preach) for the salvation of souls. (McGonigle, x). Central then to Dominic’s vision for the Order was his fervent belief that “the renewal of Christian society necessitated communities of men and women committed to living the apostolic life,; Moreover, “a major component of apostolic life was the preaching of the gospel by members of communities that lived in evangelical poverty, who were devoted to contemplative prayer and engaged in constant study of the Word of God. (McGonigle, xx).

Plain and simple, the mission of the Dominican Order, which Dominic Guzman inaugurated, was to proclaim the Word of God through preaching, teaching and example. Dominican spirituality, centered on the Word of God, found subsequent expression in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart. The Dominican program, which emphasized both contemplation and active proselytizing, required a hard-to-achieve calibration of apparent opposites. As Thomas McGonigle points out, “The fulfillment of Dominic’s vision of a community of contemplative preachers requires a careful balancing so that the active preaching dimension and the contemplative prayer-study dimension are held in creative tension.” (xx). And, for Dominic, study was indispensable to guarantee the doctrinal preaching and necessary to deal with intellectual challenges to the Catholic faith.

Dominican values, therefore, that are emphasized and conveyed by emergent religious literature of the 11 and 12 cc. include:

- the importance of the ideals of study, prayer and community
- belief in the dignity of the individual and all creation
- the search for truth essential to the vision of Dominic
- compassion and service to the poor

All of these values common to the founding and evolution of the Dominican Order are embedded in sacred literature and in much of the secular literature of the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> cc. when the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed a dominance in Western Europe. While not as conspicuous, these values are prominent in modern literature with a Christian orientation, although perhaps not immediately recognizable therein as indigenous; however, to qualify, these same values are not necessarily unique, even collectively, to the Dominican Order.

Making extensive use of *exempla* as a means of conveying truth to the poor and illiterate was Dominic Cavalca (1270-1342). Father Cavalca embodied the mission of the Dominican Order. Devout, unpretentious, committed to the poor and to the saving of souls, Dominic entered the order in the last years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century: "He did not take the academic degree since his talents seemed to have been more for popular preaching than for scholastic teaching . . . In 1300 he helped reform the nuns of the Convent of St. Anna and also of the Convent of Misericordia [in Pisa.] . . . He had a special concern for the prostitutes of the city and, by his preaching, was able to convert many of them, some of whom he gathered in the Dominican convent of St. Martha." (Ashley, 1)

It is, however, in his emphasis on exempla over precept in his preaching and writing that Dominic Cavalca, who has been described as one of the better prose writers because of the harmony and purity of his style, is of singular importance here: "As a preacher, Cavalca's first effect was to provide preachers with a supply of exempla, often to the modern taste very far-fetched, by which the dry bones of medieval sermons were often fleshed." (Ashley, 2) Cavalca's writings were the product of his preaching. His purpose, he delineates, as follows: ". . .since I am undertaking this work only for the benefit of simple and unlearned lay people not skilled in literature, I proceed simply taking care to speak usefully rather than elegantly." Eschewing a dignified style, he says: "For if the bread is wholesome and the opinions true, I care little for the outer crust or a picturesque and nicely ordered style." (Ashley, 2) This view gave Cavalca *carte blanche* to introduce exempla into his preaching to captivate his audience. In place of eloquence, the Dominican preachers held the attention of their audiences with entertaining anecdotes. According to Benedict Ashley, R. Montana classes Cavalca's *Lives of the Fathers* with Franciscan Fioretti and says "it relates the deeds of the saints with an almost childlike wonder in the tone of a fable." (Ashley, 3) Dominican James of Voraigue (1230-1298) also adhered, it is worth mentioning, to the practice of using exempla to drive home the creative, the incarnate and the revealed word.

Moral points would be illustrated by appropriate narrative examples or exempla. It is worth noting that in Italy, as later in England, the Dominicans, preachers by vocation, were able to hold the laity in thrall by relating entertaining anecdotes, thereby spicing up their sermons: "that the jokes in the telling of these sermons were often made at the expense of the local [parish] priests, whose resentment they aroused, should come as no surprise." (Saul, 196)

Accordingly, the transition from entertaining exemplum to engrossing novellino (really, a short story) was not long in coming. Initially the exemplum was a short story embedded in a religious discourse and rounded off with a homily: "Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale* was, for example, a widely diffused compilation of such exempla, furnished with suitable moralizing tailpieces." (Brand and Pertile, 33) Gradually, the exemplum separated itself from its shell and, free from its inhibitory casing, became an autonomous art form: "The *Conti di Antiche*, for instance, is "a curious assembly of 20 anecdotes about rulers, among them, Saladin, Henry II of England and various Roman heroes, such as Scipio, Pompey,

Caesar and the fictional Tristan.” (Brand, 34) Needless to say, the literature is becoming less religious and more secular and in the Novellino, the moral conclusion, once outside the story, has become an integral part of the ending; however, “. . . the displacement of the center of gravity was not to stop there . . .; later, in [Boccaccio’s] *Decameron*,...narrative interest would find itself transferred from the moment of climax to the circumstances leading up to it.” (Brand, 35) In this context, it is clear that the Novellino is a crucial phase in the evolution to our modern narrative.

“Had we but world enough and time,” we could go on to chronicle the continued secularization of literature and the development of the full blown novel from the more compact novellino of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> cc. What I propose though is a jump start into 20<sup>th</sup> century literature in order to press my argument that, today even more than in the past, using select literary texts provide a fruitful and effective way to preach/teach towards a just and compassionate world within the context of a Dominican education. There are caveats to this approach, however. The literary works selected must be amenable to such explication—that is—while their content may be secular, they must have a Christian character, for, as Edward Schillebeeckx observes, “Dominican spirituality is only valid insofar as it takes up the story of Jesus and brings it up-to-date in some way.” Also, the fiction dealt with cannot be ephemeral stuff; it must have a philosophy. By that, I mean it must offer a realistic, if not profound, portrayal of life; it must scrupulously avoid what George Meredith called the extremes of *rose pink* and *dirty drab*. The artist cannot be content with merely presenting suffering in his works; he has also to explain and to account for it.

Let’s begin then with Morris West’s eighth novel, *The Devil’s Advocate*, published in 1959, and arguably second in popularity only to *The Shoes of The Fisherman* in 1963. Incidentally, West came to his fictional career after spending 12 years in a monastery of The Christian Brothers, taking annual vows, but leaving before taking his final vows. Not incidentally, the content of his fiction reflects his knowledge of and preoccupation with the bureaucracy and rituals of The Roman Catholic Church.

The basic plot line is simple enough. Diagnosed with terminal cancer in his late sixties by his English physician, Monsignor Blaise Meredith, Prefect of Congregations at The Vatican in Rome, is given six months to a year to live. Arriving back in Rome, Meredith discovers that his Superior, his Eminence, Eugenio Cardinal Marotta has no intention of letting him retire and lapse into an easeful death; rather, the Cardinal intends to appoint him to be his *devil’s advocate* in the cause for beatification of a young man, Giacomo Nerone, killed by partisans in the remote mountain village of Gemello Minore. Though seriously ill, Meredith accepts the Cardinal’s charge and subsequently departs Rome by train for the desolate, mountainous region of Calabria. The rest of the fiction vividly describes his efforts to dredge the truth concerning Giacomo from reluctant villagers and to take the deposition of compliant witnesses.

Thematically, the novel is multi-layered and complex, and its straight-forward plot line belies its subtlety. While the action of *The Devil’s Advocate* purports to be retrospective with its elderly priest protagonist exploring the life of Giacomo Nerone, the novel’s real focus is on the present and, specifically, on the spiritual regeneration of Blaise Meredith. A priest for twenty years, Meredith finds himself woefully unready for his scheduled rendezvous with death: “The frightening truth is that

Monsignor Meredith is unready to meet his God. For many years he has accepted the forms and conventions of Catholicism and lived securely within the walls of the Church, reassured that if one submits to its logic and discipline, one walks eventually in the way of salvation." (Goldsmith, 199) Described by no less an authority than himself, Meredith is "cold", impersonal, aloof and "little troubled by passion." He has never been unhappy," never hungry for anything .... and withdrawn from the human family." (West, 9) Perceiving Meredith to be in dire straits and suffering from spiritual atrophy, Cardinal Marotta assigns him for that reason, the position of devil's advocate. Steeped himself in church bureaucracy and officialdom, Marotta is nevertheless, discerning enough to diagnose the contemporary Church's illness: "We have lost pity and fear and love." (West, 33) The antidote to the spiritual malaise affecting the church and, particularly its religious, is service to others; he tells Meredith consolingly: "Among men, perhaps you will find the cure for your sickness of spirit". (West, 34) Cardinal Marotto's advice to Monsignor Meredith – "A man who cannot love his fellows cannot love God either" (34) – is sound enough, but the reader of the novel feels compelled to add: "Physician, know thyself".

Clearly, Monsignor Blaise Meredith must learn again to relate to others; He must discover the value of being an integral and functional part of a living, organic community –this, as a first step to his own spiritual knowledge and redemption, for if he cannot bond emotionally with a community, he can hardly minister effectively to its members. In the larger view, Meredith's primary mission in going to the rustic village of Gemello Minore with its mostly backward and impoverished inhabitants is to be a witness to the work of the living God. His sleuthing into the life and qualifications for beatitude of Giacomo Nerone, while related, is secondary and tangential. In Dominican speech, before Meredith can adequately preach and proclaim the word of God, he must be able to pray fervently, from the heart. At first, in the shadow of death, he finds prayer virtually impossible: "...prayer had become an arid act of the will." (West, 52) It is not until Meredith involves himself as Gods' emissary in the lives of the village's inhabitants that he gains the self-forgetfulness that engenders true prayer. For the son of Giacomo Nerone, who is the quarry of the libidinous painter Nicholas Black, he asks deliverance into his safe-keeping: "Take me, God! Make me what you want... a wonder or a mockery! But give me the boy – for his Father's sake." (West, 315)

Study, as with prayer, a hallmark of the Dominican traditions, is also part and parcel of his spiritual repertoire but, once in the village, his proper study is no longer of books but of men and their motives. Too long has he languished in Vatican libraries, like an archivist in a sea of parchment. Now, to fulfill his mission, he delves into the foibles, vulnerabilities, passions and sins of those who know Giacomo Nerone as a means of taking the man's spiritual measure. Among these are Dr. Aldo Meyer, the Jewish-born atheist and humanist; Nina Sanduzzi, previous mistress-lover of Giacomo and mother of his son; Paola, the errant, wayward son; the countess Anne Louise de Sanctis, the local resident Padrone, and Nicholas Black, the gay, sardonic aesthete and painter.

If Monsignor Meredith is a veritable Dante embarked on a spiritual journey, then Aurelio, Bishop of Calabria is, de facto, his Vigil and helps to ready him for his descent into the underworld of Gemello Minore. Aurelio is a frank, down-to-earth social progressive, who favors the use of science to deal with social problems. That his favorite piece of literature, excepting the Bible, is Thomas A Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* speaks to his cut-to-the-chase view of faith as a harbinger of social action. He

confesses to Meredith: "I understand goodness, but I am unfamiliar with sanctity." (West, 48) In keeping with the Dominican tradition, Aurelio emphasizes the preaching and teaching function of the religious; more importantly though, with the Dominicans, such as Cavalca, he advocates the vernacular, the *lingua franca* of the people and not the polysyllabic, formulistic Latin of the Church to communicate between clergy and laity. So passionate is Aurelio about the causes and consequences of the communication breakdown that he launches into a virtual tirade: "It is a difficulty which grows greater, instead of less, and which inhibits even the healing intimacy of the confessional... We talk to the people every Sunday, but our words do not reach them, because we have forgotten our mother tongue. It wasn't always like this. The sermons of St. Bernardine of Siena are almost unprintable today, but they reached hearts, because the truth in them was sharp as a sword, and as painful." (West, 85-86) To Aurelio, "the hand of God writes plainly and simply for all men of good will to read." (West, 120) Aurelio encourages the ailing Meredith, who is initially his guest at his country manor, to relax and enjoy God's creation before beginning his commission, and Meredith's days at Aurelio's are "the happiest of his life." (74) Aurelio advocates the simple life, the life of the shepherds in Virgil's *Eclogues* and acceptance of its realities and even its vulgarities. Monsignor Meredith is a quick study. By the end of his brief stay at the Bishop's, Meredith weathers Aurelio's interrogation about Giacomo's prospects for sainthood and, in doing so, becomes passionate. For perhaps the first time in his life, he thinks with his heart. (West, 95) Aurelio succeeds in transforming the previously reclusive Blaise Meredith from being a mere passive representative of the Church to being a man in communication with his God.

In the course of the fiction, each of the major positive characters Meredith meets contributes in some way to his moral edification and spiritual growth. From Aldo Meyer, he learns patience with the villagers, as demonstrated by his forbearance of the crude-mannered and barely sufferable parish priest Father Anselmo, an alcoholic and from Giacomo's lover Maria Sanduzzi, the consolations of a quiet, inextinguishable love. Upon reaching the village, Meredith puts his accumulated Church knowledge and his recently acquired and maturing interpersonal skills to work. His patience with the boorish Father Anselmo ripens into compassion: "...this was what they [parish priests] became when age weakened the faculties and decay crept in... who could love this shambling old wreck? ... Meyer cared." (West, 190)

It is to Morris West's credit as an artist that, while acutely aware of the age old conflict of good and evil, he does not present the conflict in simplistic terms, but in the muted and nuanced ways of the realist.

Those characters inclined towards evil are not without some redeeming characteristics that, given the right impetus, might tilt them towards goodness. Once Meredith has acclimated himself to his new surroundings in the village and at the Countess' villa, where he is her guest, Meredith challenges the solipsistic, decadent painter Nicholas Black's hegemony over Giacomo's son Paolo: "Narcissus in the pool saw himself no more beautiful than Nicholas Black." (West, 203) Black deludes himself into believing that his fascination with the beautiful boy Paolo is born of a disinterested paternal urge to better the lad, thereby denying his ulterior sensual motives. The percipient Monsignor Meredith sees through his subterfuge. The Countess' designs on the boy to revenge his father's rejection of her blandishments are also challenged by Meredith.

While it may not qualify as preaching in the Dominican sense, the oblique counseling technique Meredith employs with the Countess enables her to maintain her dignity at the same time it divests her of her lust for revenge and of her carnality towards Paolo. At the end of Meredith's eloquent "preaching"---appeal--- to her better self (in which Meredith uses his own dark night of the soul as an exemplum) the Countess compliments him: "How do you understand all this? I've never heard a priest talk like this before, "and later "You're the first man in my life who's helped me." (West, 335) Blaise Meredith dies before he has completed his official investigation into the cause for beatification of Giacomo Nerone, but what is really important is that Meredith only began to live when he became involved in the community of Gemello Minore. It speaks volumes that one of Meredith's final requests is to be buried in a simple earth grave in the grotto, near his saintly predecessor Giacomo Nerone, and not in one of the storied vaults of Rome reserved for its high priestly caste. In the final analysis, Monsignor Blaise Meredith has completed his mission, and he has contributed, as an effective preacher and *fisher of men* must, to the conversion and the saving of souls. Among his accomplishments in the pursuit of a just and compassionate world are the restoration of grace and reconciliation with Rome of old Father Anselmo, the redirection of the Countess from the perilous path of seduction and the rescuing of Paolo from the lascivious clutches of Nicholas Black. Purportedly about Giacomo Nerone, *The Devil's Advocate* is really all about Monsignor Blaise Meredith and his spiritual regeneration, a regeneration that is sparked and sustained by service to others.

The transition from Morris West's sacerdotal, somewhat stable world to the war-wrought, ultra-secular and chaotic world of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955) requires of the reader in search of Dominican values a protean imagination, one that countenances broad, sweeping parallels and correlations and one that tolerates anachronisms. Unlike *The Devil's Advocate*, the plot line is less linear and, at times, hyphenated by flashbacks. The story is told from the first person point of view of Thomas Fowler, a British war correspondent reporting on the war between the French and the North Vietnamese.

Fowler has found a niche in Vietnam he had never known in England, and he does not want to return to his native land. He is estranged from his British socialite wife Helen, from whom he seeks a divorce. He is living with a beautiful, young and sensuous Vietnam girl less than half his age. Fowler feels old. It would be an understatement to say he is steeped in cynicism. He is jaded and desiccated and, were it not for his amorous relationship with his femme fatale Phuong, his life—he opines—would no longer be worth living. The loss of her would be the beginning of death. Phuong, the girl, has an almost narcotic effect upon him, easing his mental anguish and pain.

The advent of the young American Pyle into Fowler's circle of associates, mostly journalists, complicates his bland existence. When Pyle falls in love with Fowler's material girl Phuong, Fowler feels pressure either to make her a marital offer or to release her from their open-ended relationship. Jaundiced by the world's ugly wars, which he is obligated to report to earn a salary, Fowler seeks refuge in off hours from the panoramic suffering through sex with Phuong and the pipe of opium she nightly prepares for him. Like Monsignor Meredith at the beginning of the previous fiction, Fowler is very much a social recluse. He is introverted, shy and desires human commerce only with Phuong.

Naturally Fowler is possessive of Phuong; he is also taken with the young American Pyle's innocence and apparent lack of guile: "It occurred to me," observes Fowler, that "he [Pyle] was quite possibly a virgin." (Greene, 42) At the House of Five Hundred Girls, Pyle is mortified and outraged when he realizes the pretty girls soliciting his attentions are not debutantes but prostitutes. Meanwhile, Fowler suffers from self-contempt. When he observes Phuong dancing with Pyle at the Grand Monde, his love for her is revived after a period of dormancy. Like Monsignor Meredith, Fowler has distanced himself from love and from the human community. Greene's sinners, of which Fowler is ostensibly one, are unconsciously in the throes of searching for a God, a first cause, even while they vociferously deny the existence of a supreme being. Fowler's animus towards all things religious and his rants towards Catholicism in particular and its sacraments, such as confession, attest to his inquisitiveness about faith and his envy of those who find solace in it. To a priest, he expostulates: "If I believed in any God at all, I should still hate the idea of confession. Kneeling in one of your boxes. Exposing myself to another man. You must excuse me, Father, but to me it seems morbid—unmanly even." (Greene, 57) Clearly, Fowler cannot reconcile the existence of God with the muddle he sees: a wartime world where injustice and evil run rampant. One particular horrific scene for Fowler comes when, after a fire fight of the French with the Vietminh, he discovers two casualties: "...in a narrow ditch, we came upon what we sought: a woman and a small boy. They were very dead. He was about six years old and he lay like an embryo in the womb with his little boy knees drawn up. 'Malchance,' the lieutenant said." (Greene, 63) But, in a God-created world, there can be no accidents; ergo, the source of Fowler's refusal to believe in God.

In contrast to Fowler, a jaded realist, Alden Pyle is a purblind idealist, a visionary with a pragmatic agenda. A romantic through and through, Pyle accepts the view that society can be changed only by undergoing the trauma of blunt force surgically applied, much as the romantic poets initially gave credence to the French Revolution as an expeditious way to purge society of its pernicious elements. As a young man in government service he has read the works of York Harding, a proponent of a philosophy that exhorts the use of no-holds barred action to counteract serious political and military threats, a credo that postulates that winning is all that matters, whatever the means, providing the cause is just. Pyle is honest to a fault, when it comes to romance. He joins Fowler on the battlefield of Phat Diem for the express purpose of telling him he has fallen in love with Phuong. For Alden Pyle, the young American in the Economic Aid Mission, all is fair in war but not in love. In matters related to love, he is decorous and formal; he behaves honorably, chivalrously, like a knight errant in a medieval romance.

Green's Pyle, the quiet American, reminds the reader in some ways of Fitzgerald's Gatsby. Both are single-minded in their pursuit of their objectives, romantics; yet, both resort to nefarious means to achieve their ends—Gatsby, by his connections to the mob and Pyle, by his raising of a *third force* under the unscrupulous Cao daist General Thé to embattle both the French and the Communists. Both are enigmas: Gatsby to Nick and Pyle to Fowler. But while I am in no way suggesting an equivalence here, Christ too was an enigma to his disciples. As Melville says in his novel *Pierre*, Christ was the first and only chronometrical [not horological] man. Christ upset the status quo. Without Alden Pyle's intrusion into his world, Fowler would have remained self-complacent, a hollow man. He would not have had to experience and deal with a major life crisis, one which forced self-reflection, contemplation.

As Cavalca reminds us, “prayer consists chiefly not in words, but in desire.” (Ashley, 4) Fowler feels guilt over Pyle’s death in much the same way Monsignor Meredith experienced a sense of guilt after Nicholas Black’s suicide, for which he felt partly responsible. Applicable to Fowler in Cavalca’s observation that “it is often the worse sinners who are justified rather than the righteous who are proud, because the sinner through suffering is more docile to listened to the preached word of God, to follow good example and to submit to singular grace.” (Ashley, 5) Fowler’s basic posture in life can be reduced to one word—“non-involvement.” Not until he temporarily loses Phuong to his *adversarial friend* Alden Pyle—after he has been caught in a callous lie—does Fowler become more aware, more involved and more empathetic with other human beings as a result of the sufferings they endure. When he traces acts of terrorism and their awful casualties to the independent provocateur General Thé and, from him, to Pyle and the Economic Aid Mission—the Mission is a front for a third force in Vietnam to oppose the French occupiers and the communists—he finds himself inextricably involved. He discovers a conscience. For what he perceives to be a greater good or a lesser evil, he set Pyle up for liquidation. At the very least, he is tacitly involved in a conspiracy to deliver Pyle to the opposition. Ironically, Pyle had previously saved Fowler’s life, and that makes Fowler’s act seem all the more egregious. Tellingly, Fowler endeavors to assuage his sense of guilt before Pyle’s assassination by rationalizing that providence (another word for God’s agency in the universe) might intervene in some way. Before Pyle leaves Fowler’s apartment, the latter thinks: “I handed back the decision to that somebody in whom I didn’t believe. You can intervene if you want to—a telegram on his desk, a message from the Minister. You cannot exist unless you have the power to alter the future.” (238)

Greene’s *The Quiet American* does not lend itself to discussion of Dominican values in literature as readily or as obviously as does West’s *The Devil’s Advocate*, but there are some parallels, already pointed out, between the two. “How would I *teach* the novel,” I ask, in a Dominican college classroom? Certainly I would ask many questions, such as:

--“Is the kind of prayer Dominicans espoused non-existent in *The Quiet American* or has it assumed a less traditional, more subtle (perhaps camouflaged) form?”

--Can the narrative itself, really an exposition in the first person, be taken as an extended prayer, almost a full confession by Fowler of his tacit complicity in Pyle’s murder? If so, and if prayer, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, brings one to wisdom, then has Fowler progressed in wisdom by the end of the events he relates?

--To what extent are the events in the novel—the sufferings and the casualties and the protagonists moral conflicts reflective, however obliquely, of Christ’s sufferings and sacrifice? A tenet of Dominican spirituality is that one of the chief consequences of sin is a darkening of the intellect. Before being able to repent, the sinner must be illuminated through the Cross as to what he/she should love and what hate?

In endeavoring, within the context of Dominican education, to teach towards a just and compassionate world, I find that, using literary texts with a secular context, yet with a Christian character, a viable and effective way (1) to bring the student to an awareness of the complexity of human life and to an

understanding and appreciation of the difficult and critical life choices one is frequently called upon to make, and (2) to awaken the student to purposeful and responsible individual and social action in response to world injustice and suffering. Put succinctly, this literature provides models for selfless action in conformity (though admittedly not exclusively) with the Dominican mission of inculcating through teaching and example.

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