18. DENYS THE CARTHUSIAN

Anselm Stoelen

DENYS THE CARTHUSIAN was born in 1402 or 1403 in the village of Rijkel, in the Flemish north-east of Belgium. After attending the nearby abbey-school of Sint Truiden (St. Trond), he completed his studies at Zwolle, *c.* 1416–21, where the daily spiritual influence of the practical *devotio moderna* did not quench but rather encouraged an already growing desire for recollection and interior prayer. In 1421 we find him, still too young for the Carthusian life, studying *in via Thomae* at the university of Cologne, taking a Master's degree in 1424, and, even more important, finally conquering a violent moral crisis which echoes in his writings in many expressions of unaffected humility. In 1424 or 1425 he became a Carthusian at Roermond, where he died on 12 March 1471.

During all these forty-six years he lived the quiet, regular life of a Carthusian, enjoying the solitude of his cell and leaving it, as a rule, only three times a day, for matins, mass and vespers. His early biographers tell us that "according to the rigour of the old rule" he did not take any sleep or rest after matins, but saved that time for study and prayer. This could be misunderstood. Following the introduction, at the end of the twelfth century, of the daily conventual mass, and, towards the end of the thirteenth century, of the daily individual low masses, Carthusian life at the beginning of the fifteenth century differed from both the old and modern observances in one important point. In order to ease the strain of the long uninterrupted series of offices, an hour's rest after lauds and before prime and conventual mass was permitted. Since, at this time, the "midnight" office had not yet been adopted by the Carthusians, the period of sleep before matins was still by far the longer. Denys, therefore, did not, as has too readily been assumed, regularly give up half of his sleep; he merely did not avail himself of the recent permission with which his robust constitution could dispense. "My head is

of iron, and my stomach of brass," he used to say when his friends expressed concern about his diet. And they had good reason to do so: he liked his game very high—but that game, of course, was fish—and as to his vegetables, he was not put off his food by conditions, dwelt upon with some relish by his biographers, which would have ruined the appetite of others.

Denys had to sacrifice the quiet regularity of his Carthusian life only during three relatively short periods. First, when, as procurator, he had charge of the temporal administration of the house and of the spiritual direction of the lay brothers. This happened, not about 1458, as has generally been supposed, but while Denys, as a young priest, was writing one of his books on the praises of Our Lady, about 1433. We are not told how things and people fared under his providence; we can only make a good guess from the reputation he made as a great despiser of money, *maximus pecuniae aspernator*, and from the exuberant hymn of thanksgiving with which he celebrated his release. Some eighteen years later, from September 1451 to March 1452, the Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa insisted on taking Denys with him on his reform visitation, as a papal legate, through the Rhineland and the Low Countries. Finally, in 1465, Denys was chosen as one of the little band sent out to start the foundation of 's Hertogenbosch (Bois-le-Duc), which he governed from 1466 to 1469, when failing health forced him to resign. In 1458 he played an important part in the reconciliation of the Duke of Guelders with his son. But nothing in the documents supports the assumption that Denys was the procurator of Roermond who, on that occasion, went to see the Duke and made him agree to an interview with his son. The role of Denys was purely spiritual. He prayed and received through an angel a message from God which he transmitted to the two parties. Henceforth he was known as "the man who speaks with the angels."

His literary activity began about 1430, with a treatise on recollection during office in choir. His last work, on meditation, was written in 1469 after his return to Roermond. Leaving aside the three interruptions mentioned above, during which his literary output would have lessened considerably, we can say that he had at least thirty-two years for quiet and regular work. If we take into account the very simple nature of many of his writings there seems, therefore, to be little need to speak with some of

his biographers of a great miracle, *ingens miraculum*. At the same time, the catalogue of his writings is most impressive;[1] and as he became more widely known as a man of learning and a spiritual director of repute, his correspondence, often with very important personages, ecclesiastical and lay, steadily increased to alarming proportions. Hence the question arises: how could such activity fit within the framework of a purely contemplative life?

On this subject Denys has expressed his mind repeatedly and clearly:

> Considering how divine, salutary and meritorious it is to teach, exhort, redress, convert and save others by one's preaching, and because by the kind of religious life I have professed I cannot leave the enclosure and do not possess the privileges required for preaching, the less I can do these things by word of mouth, the more I wish to do them by writing, correcting and dictating. . . . It is true that the purely contemplative life has greater dignity and stability than the purely active one. But a way of life which includes both contemplation and action is the highest of all, provided that the activities we choose are such as presuppose the perfection of the contemplative life and are the fruit of the plenitude of contemplation. . . . Even our own Carthusian statutes make this perfectly clear.

Denys was right when he appealed to the statutes. Whereas St. Benedict underlines only one aspect of work in the life of the monk, namely, its ascetical importance—idleness is the enemy of the soul—Guigo I, author of the fundamental Statutes or *Consuetudines* of the Carthusians, *c.* 1116–20 (?), impresses upon his religious the duty of working in a spirit of devotion to the Church: "*Dei verbum manibus praedicemus*, Let us preach the word of God by our hands. With every book we write, we produce in our place a preacher of the truth." Pius XII, as recently as 1956, in a letter to the Prior of the Charterhouse of Vedana, gave the same directives. Apostolic prayer, penance and contemplation, undoubtedly. But that is not all. The old monastic maxim, *Ora et labora*, and the motto of St. Thomas, *Contemplata tradere*, apply just as well to the Carthusian. By the example of his virtues, but also by his literary productivity, *studiorum vestrorum commentationes*, he must contribute his share to help his fellowmen.

[1] The works of Denys in the modern edition (Montrieux-Tournai-Parkminster, 1896–1935) extend to forty-two large volumes, with two volumes of *Indexes*.

The literary contribution of Denys was exegetical and theological, as well as ascetical and mystical. The catalogue of his works includes more than a hundred items. We find first a full Commentary on Sacred Scripture, written between 1434 and 1440 and between 1452 and 1457.[1]

Next in importance we have, *c.* 1459–64, a *Collectarium* (usually called *Commentarium*) of extracts from the medieval commentators on the "Books of Sentences" of Peter Lombard. The personal remarks added by Denys show his intellectual independence. Yet he seldom abandons the *Doctor Sanctus*, as he calls St. Thomas, on a point of real importance, and it is only by misreading the facts that it has been possible to describe him as a Thomist converted to Albertinism. Further, among the longer works, we meet a complete set of sermons for seculars and religious, *c.* 1452; commentaries on the works of the Areopagite, *c.* 1465–67, on the *Scala Paradisi*, *c.* 1453, and on the *De consolatione philosophiae* of Boethius, *c.* 1465; a revision of the *Instituta* and the *Collationes* of Cassian, *c.* 1450; and a *Summa fidei orthodoxae*, *c.* 1468, which is nothing more than a summary of the *Summa theologica* of St. Thomas.

Amongst his most important *opuscula* is his treatise, written *c.* 1430, on the gifts of the Holy Ghost (the gift of wisdom plays a prominent part in the mystical doctrine of Denys) and two works on Our Lady, which both comprise several chapters on the special graces of contemplation of Mary, but fall short of a clear acknowledgment of her Immaculate Conception.[2] We may also mention two works on the Carthusian life, *c.* 1435–40 and *c.* 1455–1460, the first of which was unjustifiably quoted by Fénelon in defence of his Explanation of the Maxims of the Saints; three books on the authority of the Roman Pontiff, *c.* 1440–47 and *c.* 1465, which were quoted as a vindication of Bossuet's Defence of Gallicanism, but wherein Denys professes the subordination

[1] In 1440 or 1441 Denys wrote his *Protestatio*, explaining to his Superiors the spirit in which he had undertaken his work on Sacred Scripture, and asking to be permitted to finish the work. The long interruption in this work may have been due to the fact that Denys was under a cloud at this time. The general chapter of 1446 refers to some unspecified abuses and transgressions committed by Denys and another monk.

[2] On this issue, Denys was not prepared to abandon the fundamental positions of many of the great scholastics until, in his work on the Sentences, he finally bowed to the authority of a decree passed some twenty years before, in 1439, by the pseudo-council of Basel.

of the Pope to the general council only in very extraordinary circumstances, at the same time, however, attributing the privilege of infallibility not to the Pope personally but to the Church. Like Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, Denys was favoured with visions referring to the imminent punishment of the Church. These are recorded in an appendix to his letter to Catholic princes, 1454. Some twenty other writings of his deal with the reformation of the Church on all its various levels, ecclesiastical and social. One of these writings was addressed, in 1467, to Isabella of Portugal, widow of Philip the Good. Denys's treatise on the last things (*c.* 1455–60) was a favourite book of Leo XIII—a work viewed with suspicion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the inquisition in Spain and Italy. Denys had not been satisfied merely to repeat with approval the famous vision of Purgatory by the Monk of Eynsham; he had extended to the souls of all those who were responsible for the sins of others the punishment of remaining uncertain in Purgatory about their eternal salvation, a psychological torture which theologians are not prepared to admit in more than a very few exceptional cases.

The treatise on Contemplation, *c.* 1440–45, deserves a special mention. It was not one of his popular works, but its substance passed into one of the most widely read of his minor writings the *De Fonte lucis*, *c.* 1455. The *De contemplatione* was first published in 1534, and never had a second edition until it was reprinted by the Order, together with several other of the spiritual writings, in 1894. This treatise gives the most comprehensive outline of Denys's views on the mystical experience.

Denys has been called the Ecstatic Doctor, *Doctor Ecstaticus*. His early biographers tell us that he had many ecstatic experiences which not infrequently lasted several hours. He himself has described some of his visions and ecstasies: one series of three, during the office of matins on 23 December in the successive years 1441–3, referring to the state of the soul of a deceased priest buried in the choir of the Roermond charterhouse; another series of three, during conventual mass on the feast of the Purification, 2 February 1454, on Passion Sunday, 22 March 1461, and on the third Sunday after the octave of Easter, 3 May of the same year, referring to the fall of Constantinople and the evils of the

Church; finally, during the night before Epiphany, 1458, the vision of an angel which has been mentioned above.

The first two experiences of the first series were visions which Denys saw, fully awake, with his bodily eyes, but which remained invisible to his neighbour; the third was of a purely intellectual nature, with such complete alienation of senses as he had seldom experienced before: "I could not open my eyes, I could not say the psalms, I could not stand upon my feet." We are not told how long this ecstasy lasted. The second series of ecstasies seems to mark a progress upon the first: all three were purely intellectual experiences in the way now usual to him, *more sibi solito*. The first two consisted of a mental dialogue which took place between God and the soul. Denys says that they lasted the whole length of the conventual mass. He adds that regaining consciousness was a very painful process, and that the whole experience of the expression of the divine wrath against the corruption of the Church left him so depressed and weak that he could not take his meal before the evening.

Denys's earliest biographer, Peter Dorlandus, a Carthusian monk of Diest, who died in 1507, quoting from what seems to have been a written account of revelations, tells us that Denys, like Eliseus, had frequent musical ecstasies. Some special occasions are mentioned: one in 1469 in the church of 's Hertogenbosch, provoked by the playing of the organ; two more, without date, one induced by the singing of the Carthusian *Veni sancte Spiritus* at the ceremony of a novice being conducted to his cell; the other by the anthem *Suscepimus Deus misericordiam tuam*, which must have been the Introit or the Gradual of the feast of Candlemas. From the same source, and from an answer of Denys to his closest assistant, Dom Charles of Herck, we learn also that Denys had many visions of deceased souls and many a tussle with the devils.

Denys knew that the revelations he received and the ecstatic phenomena which accompanied them were not necessarily connected with sanctifying grace. They were *gratiae gratis datae*, intended directly for the spiritual benefit of others. But he attached great value, both religious and apologetic, to those ecstatic experiences which, according to the rules laid down in his treatise on the discernment of spirits,[1] were to be considered

[1] *De discretione spirituum*, *c.* 1458.

as the natural condition of the essential mystical state; natural, that is, as a result of the weakness caused by the original fall of mankind. If human nature had not been affected by sin, it would have been able to stand up to the stresses caused by the mystical experience. This was the case with the Blessed Mother of Christ. In her, unitive experience did not upset the balance of natural activities, and she enjoyed it without any suspension of the normal operations of her physical and psychological faculties. With one notable exception, however. The beatific vision, the direct vision of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, which, according to Denys, was frequently granted to Our Lady during her life on earth, and also, at least once, to Moses and St. Paul, perhaps to St. John, and possibly to some other saints, necessarily required the suspension of the normal conditions of the natural life. Denys does not explain how that suspension manifested itself outwardly. But for Denys the meaning of the word *ecstasy* was not restricted to the effect of certain modes of mystical experience on the senses and other natural faculties. For him, ecstasy meant above all the final stage in the invisible and ineffable meeting and union of the soul with God. The call to contemplation had come very precociously to Denys. In a Dialogue on the Passion, the Saviour reminds him of the early days of his vocation:

> How often, when you were still a little boy and hardly capable of distinguishing between right and left, did I send you graces of internal visitation, of heavenly illumination, of loving fervour, of contemplative admiration, of hidden consolation, as you now recognise with wonder, more than in the past. Moreover, when you were hardly ten years old, I inspired you with that desire to enter the Order in which you now live. If it had been in your power, you would at once have fulfilled that aspiration. And for that I praise you. Indeed you cannot forget how often in the meantime, when you had been rebuked, you looked back with tears and sighs at the church of the convent as long as you could catch a glimpse of its tower. Yet, during that period of delay you committed serious sins, and you would have sinned much more grievously if I had not filled your heart with at least a servile fear, so strong that you came to regret that you could not sin without great apprehension and remorse. And now for so many years I have thus acted and still act with you, and I show myself to you, as you well know.

Unlike other great mystics, Denys has not left us a direct description of the privileged moments of his most intimate dealings with God. But if we approach the study of his doctrine on contemplation in a disposition less of theoretical curiosity than of religious sympathy, we soon realise that here we have the faithful echo of a deep personal conviction and the authentic resonance of an enthralling spiritual venture. The gradual development of the views of Denys on contemplation has been analysed elsewhere. Here we must limit ourselves to a general and synthetic description of the essential mystical experience as understood and lived by one of the most fervent admirers of the Pseudo-Areopagite. This disciple of Plotinus who, at the beginning of the sixth century, wrote under the name of the Athenian convert of St. Paul, thereby securing in mystical matters an unrivalled authority throughout the Middle Ages, had completely carried away the fifteenth-century Carthusian. Denys was convinced that the teaching of the Pseudo-Areopagite was a direct reflection of the experience of the Apostle when he was caught up to the third heaven. He gave to the doctrine of the Pseudo-Dionysius a more systematic, or perhaps we ought to say a more technical expression. It is, however, certain that in so doing, the Carthusian laid bare his own soul and its most intimate aspirations. Traditional teaching and personal experience are here fused into one harmonious and convincing unity of introspective theology at its best. For Denys, contemplation in the highest sense of the word (which, after his patron, he always calls mystical theology) is the exercise of the negative knowledge of God. by which a soul, in the heroic degree of love of God, with the help of the gift of wisdom, and stimulated by a special grace of illumination, is brought into unitive ecstasy.

The concepts of positive and negative theology—positive and negative knowledge of God—are in themselves, says Denys, purely philosophical. They have no necessary connection with the supernatural elevation of man, and may therefore be verified in the heathen or in the sinner, as well as in the saint. Negative theology supposes the positive which considers God as the infinitely perfect cause of all created perfection. It applies to him, in an absolutely exalted and pure degree, all the concepts which we borrow from our knowledge of creatures, either by our natural power of intelligence, or under the illuminating guidance

of faith; the only condition being that these concepts should not contain in themselves anything unworthy of God. At this stage we cannot yet speak of contemplation, except in a loose and analogous sense. Simple knowledge of God can very well exist without sanctifying grace. A theologian who lives a sinful life may possess such knowledge in an eminent degree. Still more, he may have received his knowledge, for the benefit of others, as a special gift from God. But even if we possess sanctifying grace with the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, our knowledge of God will remain cold and purely speculative until it belongs to us in an intimate, living, experimental way, as the children of God.

To transform and to sublimate in this way our knowledge of God is, in Denys's view, precisely the function of the gift of wisdom. When we are born anew of the Spirit, we receive in our soul a kind of superior, Christian instinct which allows us to appreciate and to savour,[1] in the things of the faith, the connaturality established by sanctifying grace between the soul and the supernatural world of God. It is the role of the gift of wisdom, or sapience, to develop the subtlety and the promptness of this new sensitiveness. When a soul who has acquired a certain proficiency in the ways of God, and is already on intimate loving terms with her creator, is visited by a special, actual grace of illumination, the soul, helped by the gift of wisdom, at once reacts with love and joy. The knowledge of God in that soul may be very imperfect from a purely scientific and abstract theological point of view, but the illuminative grace and the gift of wisdom impart to this knowledge a warmth and vitality of meaning which make it no longer merely speculative and theological, but truly religious. It is thus that this positive knowledge really becomes contemplation.

But it sometimes happens that a soul who has once tasted God finds that there is no lasting peace in this first adoration of her creator and saviour. No matter how much she mentally purifies the perfections of creatures in applying them to her Maker, she is uncomfortably aware of how far short they fall of the excellence and simplicity of the divine being. She is full of fear that, in spite of all her endeavours, anything created might defile the idea of God. She doubtless knows that the Cause, God, must in some way or other contain the effect, the created perfection. But the purity

[1] In Latin: *sapere;* hence: *sapientia,* better rendered by *sapience* than by *wisdom.*

of the divine truth compels her to turn aside from the contemplation of the divine perfection through the mirror of the created world. Stimulated yet again by illuminative graces, she turns to the "negative way." Whilst her reason says: "God *is* almighty, God *is* wise, God *is* good," the contemplative soul, with the help of the gift of wisdom, stammers out: "God is not almighty, God is not wise, God is not good. All these qualities have been borrowed from creatures, and then purified; but I shall never be able to purify them thoroughly enough to be applied to the infinitely perfect object of my love. God is . . ." And here the loving soul cannot go further. She remains buried as in a thick "cloud of unknowing." She is happy to rest thus impotent and silent, knowing very well that this impotence itself is the deepest and purest surrender of the creature to its God. Then the ineffable experience takes place. It is love that has brought the soul so far. And now if her love is sufficiently purified, from the bedrock of humility, love, not knowledge, shoots upwards, through the cloud, towards the perfect union with the infinite Being of the Beloved: "Love enters and penetrates where knowledge remains outside." But here all attempts at description must cease, because, as Denys insists, he alone can understand these things who has received them.

Denys knew that illusions are easy in this matter, and that it is only in exceptional cases that the authenticity of mystical experience can be recognised with certainty. He believed that it was not possible to say anything about the duration of mystical union, except that it is usually very short. He knew that, in this state itself, there are different degrees of perfection; but that none of these, not even the highest one, can bear any comparison with the immediate vision of God. He frequently emphasised that no degree of human holiness on earth could lay claim to the graces of contemplation; and that the soul may have reached the most eminent degree of perfection without receiving from God that special grace of illumination which would lead it to the mystical theology. He also says repeatedly that the grace of contemplation does not depend upon the natural endowments of man. A soul which, naturally speaking, might be described as ignorant and coarse, could just as well be elevated by God to the highest state of contemplation. Finally, he insists that usually the soul must prepare itself carefully for contemplative graces over a long period

of time. Yet, sometimes God does not wait, but takes a recently converted or still imperfect soul and helps it, or even as it were forces it to reach at once to the sublimest degree of mystical theology.

Denys's unqualified admiration for the Pseudo-Areopagite, and the experience of his own psychological temperament, have never allowed him to hesitate in expressing his preference for the negative contemplation, mystical theology, as compared with the positive contemplation, whose degrees, culminating in lofty consideration and loving adoration of the Blessed Trinity, are described in several of his works. At one time, in the period when he wrote the treatise on contemplation, he even went so far as to reserve the mystical theology exclusively to the superior, unitive way, assigning the positive contemplation to the relatively inferior, illuminative way. But in the end he dropped this forced and fallacious parallelism, realising no doubt that the pure, unitive love of God does not discriminate between the two ways of reaching the Beloved, as long as it finds its food and its inspiration in the essentially twofold approach of the human soul to the One Truth and Goodness.

Habent sua fata libelli. The first edition of the commentaries of Denys on the Gospels was dedicated, 14 March 1532, to Henry VIII. It has been suggested that this homage was inspired by the prior of the London Charterhouse, John Batmanson, whose letter to Denys's editor, Dirk Loer, vicar of the house of Cologne, was printed in the 1532 edition of the commentary on Acts. It is true that the prior and community of the London Charterhouse are recommended by name to Henry in the dedicatory letter of the Gospel commentary. But we must note that in the same year 1532 the *Opera minora* were dedicated to Clement VII and Charles V, and the *Contra perfidiam Mahometi* to Ferdinand of Austria. It was only natural that the "Defender of the Faith" should not be forgotten. We do not know whether the royal theologian ever cast his eye over the pages of the bulky volume. If he did, he may have been chagrined to discover that the unsuspecting Carthusian sought his patronage for an interpretation of Leviticus xx. 21 which knocked the bottom out of his claim against the validity of his marriage with his deceased brother's wife. The prohibition of Leviticus, says Denys, applies only as long as the brother lives, and becomes an order to marry the widow if the brother dies without issue.

Prior John Batmanson died in November 1531. The new prior, John Houghton, wrote to Dirk Loer on 13 July 1532, congratulating him on his edition of Denys and placing a substantial order for copies. Loer's grateful answer is dated 15 September 1532. More letters were exchanged, as we gather from the dedication to Thomas Cromwell, with which Loer, apparently still unaware of the approaching tragedy, prefaced the edition of Denys's commentaries on the Sapiential books. The date was 24 June 1533, ten days before the excommunication of Henry VIII by Clement VII. Once more the vicar of Cologne made it a point to recommend the new prior of the London Charterhouse and his community to Cromwell's benevolent patronage. In one of his letters to Dirk Loer, John Houghton had highly praised the Lord Chancellor for his kindness, and this praise was duly quoted. We know that Cromwell did not wait very long to change his attitude towards the saintly prior, who was hanged, drawn and quartered on 4 May 1535.[1]

Neither in England nor on the continent were the works of Denys destined to play a direct role in the front line of the Reformation battle. New troops and new methods were needed for that purpose. But the providential part of Denys in that struggle was none the less an essential one. In an effort to stem the tide of moral deterioration and to prevent the disaster which he saw was threatening the whole of Christendom, he had, with true prophetic freedom, warned the princes, the clergy and the Pope, respectfully but unequivocally. He had instructed and advised the faithful, reprimanded and encouraged the religious, put his pen at the service of the missionaries in the field. When the storm finally broke over the Church, his place was on the home front, where his printed works prolonged his influence. God alone knows how much evil he was able to forestall, how much good to keep alive and bright. But we may recall that, before the end of the sixteenth century, his Gospel commentaries had seen nineteen editions, the epistles of St. Paul twenty, the rest of the New Testament seventeen, the Old Testament at least four, and the Psalms six. In the same period his Sermons were printed four times, and ten of his practical spiritual works from nine to thirteen times, with a record figure of twenty-seven editions for the treatise on the last

[1] Bl. John Houghton is one of the Forty Martyrs, whose cause for canonisation is now proceeding.

things. The life of the Church persists through the centuries without any break in continuity: the promises of her divine Founder pledge her immortality. But at decisive moments of her history the arteries carrying the vital flow of her apostolic tradition develop dangerous strains which threaten to become breaking points. Then God raises up the men whose vocation it is to strengthen the channels of the living truth, and to ensure that life continues to flow and to reach all the members of the Mystical Body.

19. BERNARDINO DE LAREDO

Kathleen Pond

AN OUTSTANDING FIGURE among the precursors of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross in the field of mystical writing in Spain was Bernardino de Laredo,[1] who belonged to the Franciscan school of spiritual writers of which St. Peter of Alcántara and Osuna are the best-known examples in the Peninsula. Himself influenced by the Victorines and later by Hugh of Balma, the Carthusian, and Harphius, Laredo's own influence through his writings extended to St. Teresa, Jerónimo Gracián and Tomás de Jesús among the Carmelites, Juan de los Ángeles, like himself a Franciscan, Juan Falconi, the Mercedarian, and possibly to the Augustinian, Alonso de Orozco. The evidence for his influence on St. John of the Cross is inconclusive.

Not very much is known about Laredo's life. Born of a distinguished family in Seville in 1482, he became a page in the service of a Portuguese nobleman, the Conde de Gelves, but as early as the age of twelve felt an attraction for the Franciscan Order. The major-domo of the Gelves' household dissuaded him from trying to enter the Capuchin province of Los Ángeles in southern Spain and he then devoted himself to study. He followed first an Arts course and then studied medicine. Some authorities have assumed that this took place in the university of Seville, but there is no positive evidence to show that this was so. Laredo seems, indeed, to have been largely self-taught. He developed an enthusiasm for the study of theology and Holy Scripture and his writings show a knowledge of ecclesiastical Latin. Throughout his studies Laredo was assiduous in the practice of virtue and when one of his companions, a doctor in Laws, took the religious habit and became a Franciscan lay-brother, Bernardino's original vocation returned to him with such

[1] It is possible that the surname, *de Laredo*, is an indication that the family originally came from the small fishing port of that name in the province of Santander.