

ST. DOMINIC, FOUNDER OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS (A.D. 1221)

St. Dominic was born soon after 1170 at Calaruega, then Calaroga, in Castile. Practically nothing is known with certainty of his father Felix, though he is said to have been of the Guzmán family; his wife was Bd. Joan of Aza, and the few particulars recorded of Dominic's birth and childhood are mentioned in these pages under the 8th day of this month, which is her feast-day. When he was fourteen years old he left the care of his uncle, who was the archpriest of Gumiel d'Izan, and was entered at the school of Palencia. While still a student he was made a canon of the cathedral of Osma, and after his ordination he took up his duties there. The chapter lived a community life under the Rule of St. Augustine, and their regularity of observance was such as to provide an admirable school for the young priest. His life there was, so far as is known, undistinguished by outward event, a gathering of strength and exercising of virtues for the labours that were to come; he seldom left the canons' house and spent much time in church, "Weeping for the sins of others, and reading and putting into practice the *Conferences* of Casian." When Diego d'Azevedo became bishop of Osma about 1201 he succeeded him as prior of the chapter. He was then thirty-one years old, and had been leading this contemplative life for six or seven years; it at last came to an end, and Dominic began his work in the world in unexpected fashion in 1204.

In that year Alfonso IX, King of Castile, chose the bishop of Osma to go as ambassador to Denmark to negotiate a marriage for his son. The bishop took Dominic with him. On their way they passed through Languedoc, which was then filled with the heresy of the Albigenses. He in whose house they lodged at Toulouse professed it, and St. Dominic, pierced to the heart with compassion, for the man, spent the whole night in discussion with him, and with such effect that with the light of morning came the light of faith, and the man abjured his errors. It is generally supposed that from this moment Dominic knew what work God required of him. Their embassy fulfilled, Bishop Diego and Dominic went to Rome to ask of Pope Innocent III leave to go to preach the gospel to the Cumans in Russia. The pope at once appreciated their zeal and virtue, but apparently exhorted them rather to choose the neighbouring harvest and to oppose a heresy which threatened the Church at home. On their return they made a visit to Citeaux, whose monks were the officially appointed organizers and preachers against the Albigenses, and at Montpellier they met the Abbot of Citeaux, together with two monks, Peter of Castelnau and Raoul of Fontfroide, who had been in charge of the missions in Languedoc; and Diego and Dominic confirmed their observations of why all these efforts against the heresy were fruitless.

The Albigensian system was based on the dualism of two opposing principles, good and evil, and all matter was regarded as in itself evil; therefore the reality of the Incarnation was denied and all the sacraments rejected: human perfection, so far as it was attainable, required complete abstinence from procreation and the minimum of eating and drinking; suicide was, indeed, a praiseworthy act. The rank and file of the Albigensians did not attempt any such austerity of life, but the inner circle of the "Perfect" maintained an heroic standard of purity and asceticism, against which the rather easy-going observance of the Cistercian monks looked mediocre. In the circumstances a reasonable use of material things was the wrong weapon for Christian orthodoxy to use: the good common people followed those who were obviously leading an heroic life for Christ's—sake and these were not the Cistercian preachers. When they saw this, St. Dominic and the Bishop of Osma invited these preachers to follow more closely the example of their opponents: to give up travelling with horses and retinues and staying at the best inns, with servants to wait on them. Then, when they had shown themselves worthy of being listened to, to use persuasion and peaceful discussion, rather than threats and overbearingness. The task was the more difficult and dangerous in that Albigensianism was a different religion rather than an her-

esy from Christianity, and in its more fanatical forms threatened human society. Dominic maintained that its spreading torrent could be stemmed, and God was pleased to make his preaching the instrument of His grace to open the ears and to soften the hearts of many. And the example he urged others to give he was the first to give himself.

A series of conferences was held with the heretics; they influenced some of the rank and file, but had little effect on the leaders. Soon Bishop Diego returned to Osma, leaving his companion in France. But before he went St. Dominic had already taken that step which was the first in the definite foundation of his order, by which the tide of Albigensianism began to be stayed. He was greatly concerned by the activities of women in the propagation of Albigensianism, and also by the fact that many girls were, on the one hand, exposed to evil influences in their homes and, on the other, were sent to Albigensian convents to be educated. On the feast of St. Mary Magdalen in 1206 he had a sign from Heaven, and in consequence of it within six months he had founded at Prouille, near Fanjeaux, a monastery to shelter nine nuns, all of whom were converts from the heresy. Near by was a house for his helpers, and thus St. Dominic began to provide for a supply of trained and virtuous preachers, for a shelter for converted women, for the education of girls, and for a permanent house of prayer.

The murder of the pope's legate, Peter of Castelnau, who was assassinated by a servant of the count of Toulouse, and other outrages, let loose a "crusade," with all the attendant horrors and savagery of civil war. The Albigensians were led by Raymund VI, Count of Toulouse, the Catholics by Simon IV de Montfort, *de iure* Earl of Leicester. Dominic himself had no illusions as to the efficacy or propriety of inducing Christian orthodoxy by military activity nor as is sometimes alleged, had he anything to do with the establishment of inquisitions in concert with the civil power, which was done in the Midi from the end of the twelfth century.¹ He never appears to have in any way concurred in the execution of any of those unhappy persons that then suffered. The original historians mention no other arms to have been used by him against heretics than those of instruction, patience, penance, fasting, tears and prayer; and he rebuked his ex-troubadour supporter, Fulk, Bishop of Toulouse, when he went on a visitation accompanied by soldiers, servants and sumter-mules, with the words, "The enemies of the faith cannot be overcome like that. Arm yourself with prayer, rather than a sword; wear humility rather than fine clothes." Three times efforts were made to raise him to the episcopate; each time he refused firmly. He was called to another work.

St. Dominic had now spent nearly ten years preaching in Languedoc, and as leader, though with no canonical status, of a small band of special preachers. All this time he had worn the habit of a regular canon of St. Augustine, and followed that rule. But he earnestly desired to revive an apostolic spirit in the ministers of the altar, the want of which in many was a subject of great scandal to the people, and a great source of the overflowing of vice and heresy. With this view he projected a body of religious men not like the monks who were contemplatives and not necessarily priests, but who to contemplation should join a close application to sacred studies and all the functions of a pastoral life, especially that of preaching. The principal aim of the saint was to multiply in the Church zealous preachers, whose spirit and example might be a means more easily to spread the light of faith and the fire of divine charity, and to assist the pastors in healing the wounds which the Church had received from false doctrine and ill-

¹ The Dominican order later received charge of the Inquisition with unwillingness. In 1243 they asked to be relieved of the commission, but Pope Innocent IV refused the petition. The provincial chapter of Cahors in the next year forbade the acceptance of any monies accruing from its work. The fifth master general, Bd. Humbert of Romans, instructed the friars to avoid its duties whenever possible. Only two of the inquisitors general of Spain were Dominicans: the notorious and somewhat maligned Torquemada was one of them.

living. In order that he might have means at his disposal Fulk of Toulouse in 1214 gave him an endowment and extended his episcopal approval to the embryonic order in the following year. A few months later Dominic accompanied Fulk to the Fourth Lateran Council.

Pope Innocent III received the saint with great kindness and gave his approbation of the nunnery of Prouille. Moreover, he drew up a decree, which he inserted as the tenth canon of the council, to enforce the obligation of preaching, and the necessity of choosing for pastors men who are powerful in words and works, who will instruct and edify their flocks both by example and preaching, and ordering that fit men be selected specially for this office of preaching. But to get approval for Dominic's project was no easy matter, especially as that very council had legislated against the multiplication of new religious orders. It is said that Innocent had decided to refuse but that, the night following, he dreamed he saw the Lateran church in danger of falling, and that St. Dominic stepped in and supported it with his shoulders. Be that as it may, the pope at last gave a guarded approval by word of mouth, bidding the founder return to his brethren and select which of the already approved rules they would follow. They met at Prouille in August 1216, and after consultation with his sixteen colleagues, of whom eight were Frenchmen, seven Spaniards, and one Englishman (Brother Laurence), he made choice of the Rule of St. Augustine, the oldest and least detailed of the existing rules, written for priests by a priest, who was himself an eminent preacher, St. Dominic added certain particular constitutions, some borrowed from the Order of Premontre. Pope Innocent III died on July 18, 1216, and Honorius III was chosen in his place. This change retarded St. Dominic's second Journey to Rome; and in the meantime he finished his first friary, at Toulouse, to which the bishop gave the church of St. Romain, wherein the first community of Dominicans assembled and began common life under vows.

St. Dominic arrived at Rome again in October 1216, and Honorius III confirmed his order and its constitutions the same year: "Considering that the religious of your order will be champions of the faith and a true light of the world, we confirm your order." St. Dominic remained in Rome till after Easter, preaching with great effect. It was during this time that he formed his friendships with Cardinal Ugolino, afterwards Pope Gregory IX, and St. Francis of Assisi. The story goes that Dominic saw in a vision the sinful world threatened by the divine anger but saved by the intercession of our Lady, who pointed out to her Son two figures, in one of whom St. Dominic recognized himself, but the other was a stranger. Next day while at prayer in a church he saw a ragged beggar come in, and recognized him at once as the man of his dream; going up to him therefore, he embraced him and said, "You are my companion and must walk with me. For if we hold together no earthly power can withstand us." This meeting of the two founders of the friars is commemorated twice a year, when on their respective feast-days the brethren of the two orders sing Mass in each other's churches, and afterwards sit at the same table "to eat that bread which for seven centuries has never been wanting." The character of St. Dominic is sometimes assumed to suffer by comparison with St. Francis. The comparison is a meaningless one, for actually the two men complete and are complementary to one another, the one corrects and fills out the other; they meet on the common ground of the Christian faith, tenderness and love.

On August 13, 1217, the Friars Preachers met under their leader at Prouille. He instructed them on their method of preaching and teaching and exhorted them to unremitting study, but in particular reminded them that their first business was their own sanctification, that they were to be the successors of the Apostles in establishing the kingdom of Christ. He added instructions on humility, distrust of themselves and an entire confidence in God alone, by which they were to stand invincible under afflictions and persecutions, and courageously to carry on the war against the world and the powers of Hell. Then, on the feast of the Assumption, to the surprise of all, for heresy was again gaining ground in all

the neighbourhood, St. Dominic broke up his band of friars and dispersed them in all directions. "Leave it to me," he said, "I know what I'm about. We must sow the seed, not hoard it." Four were sent to Spain, seven to Paris, two returned to Toulouse, two remained at Prouille, and the founder himself in the following December went back to Rome. He wished that he might now resign his part in the nascent order and go into the East to evangelize the Cuman Tartars; but this was not to be.

On his arrival in Rome the pope gave him the church of St. Sixtus (San Sisto Vecchio), and while making a foundation there the saint lectured on theology, and preached in St. Peter's with such eloquence as to draw the attention of the whole city. At this time a large number of nuns lived in Rome without keeping enclosure, and almost without regularity, some dispersed in small monasteries, others in the houses of their parents or friends. Pope Innocent III had made several attempts to assemble all such nuns into one enclosed house, but had not been able, with all his authority, to compass it. Honorius III committed the management of this reformation to St. Dominic, who successfully carried it out. He gave the nuns his own monastery of St. Sixtus, which was built and then ready to receive them, and which Innocent III had formerly offered them;² and he received for his friars a house of the Savelli, on the Aventine, with the church of St. Sabina. It is related that when, on Ash Wednesday in 1218, the abbess and some of her nuns went to their new monastery of St. Sixtus, and were in the chapter house with St. Dominic and three cardinals, a messenger ran in to say that the young Napoleon, Cardinal Stephen's nephew, was thrown from his horse and killed. The saint ordered the body of Napoleon to be brought into the house, and bid Brother Tancred make an altar ready that he might offer Mass. When he had prepared himself, the cardinals with their attendants, the abbess with her nuns, the friars, and a great concourse of people went to the church. The Sacrifice being ended, Dominic, standing by the body, disposed the bruised limbs in their proper places, prayed, rose from his knees, and made the sign of the cross over the corpse; then, lifting up his hands to Heaven, he cried out, "Napoleon, I say to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, arise." That instant, in the sight of all, the young man arose sound and whole.

A foundation having been successfully made by Friar Matthew of France at the University of Paris, St. Dominic sent some brethren to the University of Bologna, where, under the guidance of Bd. Reginald of Orleans, one of the most famous of Dominican establishments was set on foot. In 1218-19 the founder journeyed in Spain, France and Italy, establishing friaries in each country, and arrived at Bologna about the end of summer 1219, which city he made his ordinary residence to the end of his life. In 1220 Pope Honorius III confirmed Dominic's title and office as master general, and at Pentecost was held the first general chapter of the order, at Bologna, at which were drawn up the final constitutions which made the organization of the Friars Preachers "the most perfect of all the monastic organizations produced by the middle ages" (Hauck); a religious order in the modern sense of the term, wherein the order and not the house is the unit, and all members are subject to one superior general, its regulations bearing the unmistakable mark of the founder, notably in their adaptability and the rejection of property-holding.

Wherever the saint travelled, he preached; and he never ceased to pray for the conversion of infidels and sinners. It was his earnest desire, if it had been God's will, to shed his blood for Christ, and to travel among the barbarous nations of the earth to announce to them the good news of eternal life. Therefore did he make the ministry of the word the chief end of his institute: he would have all his religious to be applied to it, every one according to his capacity, and those who had particular talents for

² Innocent wanted the English Gilbertines to do this work, but they had been unable to undertake it.

it never to discontinue the office of preaching, except in intervals allotted to retirement that they might preach to themselves in silence. The vocation of his friars is “to hand on to others the fruits of contemplation,” and for this high work he prepares the religious by long habits of virtue, especially of prayer, humility, self-denial and obedience. It was a saying which St. Dominic frequently repeated, “That a man who governs his passions is master of the world. We must either rule them, or be ruled by them. It is better to be the hammer than the anvil.” He taught his missionaries the art of preaching to the heart by animating them with charity. Being once asked after preaching in what book he had studied his sermon, “In no other.” said he, “than in that of love.” Learning, study of the Bible, and teaching were from the beginning of first importance in the order: some of its chief achievements have been In intellectual work and the founder has been called “the first minister of public instruction in modern Europe.” But an eminent spirit of prayer and recollection has at all times been the characteristic of the Dominicans, as it was of St. Dominic, whose constant and most characteristic prayer was that he might have a true love of his neighbour and the ability to help others. He was Inflexible In maintaining the discipline he had established. Coming to Bologna in 1220, he was so much offended to find the convent of his friars in that city being built in a stately manner, not consistent with his Idea of the poverty which he professed by his rule, that he would not allow the work to be continued. This was the discipline and strength that was behind the rapid spread of his order; by the second general chapter in 1221 it had some sixty friaries divided into eight provinces; friars had already got to Poland, Scandinavia and Palestine, and Brother Gilbert with twelve others had established monasteries in Canterbury, London and Oxford. The Order of Preachers is still world-wide.

After the second general chapter Dominic visited Cardinal Ugolino at Venice. On his return he was ill, and he was taken to a country place for the better air. But he knew he was dying. To his brethren he spoke of the beauty of chastity, and, having no temporal goods, made his last testament in these words: “These, my much-loved ones, are the bequests which I leave to you as my sons: have charity among you; hold to humility; keep willing poverty.” He spoke more at length on this subject of poverty, and then at his request was carried back to Bologna that he might be buried “under the feet of his brethren.” Gathered round him, they said the prayers for the dying; at the *Subvenite* St. Dominic repeated those great words, and died. It was the evening of August 6, 1221; he was about fifty-two years old; and he died in that poverty of which he had so lately spoken: “in Brother Moneta’s bed because he had none of his own; in Brother Moneta’s habit, because he had not another to replace the one he had long been wearing.” It may be said of him after death what Bd. Jordan of Saxony wrote of him in life: “Nothing disturbed the even temper of his soul except his quick sympathy with every sort of suffering. And as a man’s face shows whether his heart is happy or not, it was easy to see from his friendly and joyous countenance that he was at peace inwardly. With his unfailing gentleness and readiness to help, no one could ever despise his radiant nature, which won all who met him and made him attract people from the first.” When he signed the decree of canonization of his friend in 1234 Pope Gregory IX (Cardinal Ugolino) said that he no more doubted the sanctity of Dominic than he did that of St. Peter or St. Paul.

Beginning with the life written by Bd. Jordan of Saxony, the successor of St. Dominic in the generalship of the order, there is a good deal of biographical material of relatively early date. Without particularizing, it may be sufficient to say that the more important elements will be found in the *Acta Sanctorum*, August, vol. i; in the *Scriptores O.P.* by Quétif and Echard; and in the *Monumenta O.P. historica*, vols. xv and xvi. Perhaps, however, the most generally useful contribution to the study of the history of the saint is the work in three volumes which Frs. Balme and Lelaidier published under the name of *Cartulaire de St. Dominique* (1893-1901), consisting largely of extracts and documents with pictorial illustrations. Unfortunately, however, the collection stops short

at his death, and the evidence given in the process of canonization by the friars who had lived with him. is not included. These testimonies which reveal so much of his interior spirit are printed in the *Acta Sanctorum* and elsewhere. The definitive work is now P. Mandonnet and H. M. Vicaire, *S. Dominique, l'idée, l'homme et l'œuvre* (2 vols., 1937-38). An abridged version of the biography in vol. i was published in English in New York in 1944. See further A. Mortier, *Histoire des maîtres généraux O.P.*, vol. i. The best original lives in English are by Mother Frances Raphael Drane (1891) and Fr Bede Jarrett (1924) and in German by M. Rings (1920), B. Altaner (1922) and H. C. Scheeben (1922). There are lives in French by Lacordaire (1840), J. Guiraud (1899; Eng. trans.), H. Petitot (1925) and M. S. Gillet (1942).

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