

## THE DOMINICAN SPIRIT

THE Founder of the Dominican Order was a Spaniard of the thirteenth century, alive to the needs and conditions of his age and steeped in tradition. His spirit survives in his Order, and the friars of to-day still bear the mark of that Spanish modernity and strength.

St. Dominic was a man of his age, vital and 'modern.' The representatives of the Church in his day had been overtaken by time and in many ways left behind in an earlier age. The Church was losing ground because the churchmen of the time were unaware of current problems and consequently unable to find the right means to correct the bias of the spiritual force then working strongly among the people. The Cathari and Albigenses were the Communists of the thirteenth century, appealing to a general fraternity and calling for a purification of society with as much zeal and apparent asceticism as the Nazi, Fascist or Communist. They drew the people away from the Church. By their works you shall know them—works testify to truth. These men of austere life seemed to have the Spirit; the Church with its easy-going monks and ecclesiastics seemed in comparison to have betrayed its ideal. And for the heretic matter was evil; things of the flesh, things made by man for his use and delight, art and ritual, had come from the evil spirit of lies, and truth was not in them.

Then again the towns and cities of Europe were growing. Commerce had moved from the landlords in their rural stability and passed into the hands of the bourgeois traders of the larger towns, and the centres of culture had also been transferred from the great monasteries dotted over the countrysides of Europe to the nascent universities of the cities. New ideas were stirring in men's minds. The goings and comings of the new merchant class extended their mental horizons. They had freed themselves from the authoritarian rule of feudalism not only economically—establishing the city communes—but also intellectually. They were no longer content with the word of authority, the Bible and the Fathers; there were the pagan philosophers to show the independence of human reason, which on its own ground could not be forced. The solid authoritarian Romanesque was giving place to the nimble and nature-like Gothic. The new modern spirit was one of intellectual as well as economic freedom, scientific ardour, and social intolerance.

Meantime the Church in most of her lower clergy remained in

the feudal age. The monasteries had been the centres of spiritual energy, but almost unconsciously so. The monks had aimed at saving their own souls and in that salvation they breathed forth the odour of sanctity into a dormant countryside. The stable agricultural society had no need for missionary effort. The essential nature of the previous age was one of preservation, not of extension nor yet of active defence; and the brilliant exceptions to this were in fact exceptions and accidental. Truth stood still, supported on all sides by authority, but hindered from free and vital action. 'Preaching,' writes Père Mandonnet, 'which was the sole means of instructing the still illiterate people, scarcely existed at all. The cleric confined himself to repeating the Apostles' Creed and the Our Father on Sunday, and, when he was able, commenting weekly on them. At the end of the twelfth century the strange phenomenon appeared of preaching being handed over, in some dioceses, to lay associations, often heterodox.' (*S. Dominique*, I, 35).

St. Dominic, then, faced a world where to be modern was to have vitality, but a vitality gone astray in heresy, in false asceticism and in communism; while to be a Catholic was to be hidebound by ecclesiastical convention, a survival from a past age. The mission of the saint was to show that to be a Catholic was to be truly modern, truly ascetic, truly free. Truth could not be immobilised, bound by convention and stability, not to mention comfort and laxity. Truth must be possessed and, once possessed, allowed to work in modern, present day, vital surroundings. Truth is not a fusty tome of decrees and authority; truth is living; truth is a person. St. Dominic placed truth at the head of his order. His first biographer said that while he was yet a canon at Osma 'among the other canons he shone as a brilliant flame.' It was the flame that his mother had seen before his birth carried in the dog's mouth and setting the world alight, the flame of burning truth.

That was the first step and the last, the beginning and the end of the vocation of Dominic: possession of the truth, or rather possession by the truth. For his motto *Veritas* was not a label for a relative subjective abstraction, changing according to mood or external influence like the kaleidoscopic minds of most educated men today. Truth is an objective Person, the Word of God who made flesh and all other things like to himself and finally was made flesh, becoming like unto them. Contemplation comes first as well as last. In this Dominic could not improve on the Cistercian and Benedictine ideal, for contemplation is the necessary end of all mankind, and is in fact salvation. For many years Dominic remained a canon at Osma in quiet seclusion, in one of the strongholds of

the faith. His life differed little from that of the monk of Cîteaux or Cluny. In his pursuit of the Word there was no question of a merely abstract, intellectual process of equating his mind with God. The soul is enfleshed, incarnate, infinitely below the pure spirit of God, so that true knowledge and true worship of the divinity must be in symbol, *in aenigmate* as St. Paul says. The symbol, the human work of art and representation, is not a kind of attenuation of the truth. Here on earth the soul of man is united to a body so closely that the mind cannot work without it, and, particularly with regard to things higher than himself, he can only represent by signs the reality he contemplates and worships; but that representation is *true*.

So it is that Dominic established his Order as contemplative and liturgical. His brethren were to worship, love and contemplate the Word as he had done as Canon Guzman, Sub-prior of Osuma. His devotion to the Mass drew the attention of his earliest biographer, and the enthusiasm with which he sang the evening prayer of Compline was an inspiration to his first disciples.

Liturgy and art are, then, essential to the Dominican spirit as leading to and reproducing the truth and beauty of the Word. The Dominican devotion to the Liturgy, the art of Fra Angelico, Père Couturier, and the Tertiary Eric Gill, the stained glass of Blessed James of Ulm, are not accidental to the spirit that Dominic breathed into his Order in those turbulent times of Manicheism on the one hand and traditional monastic worship on the other. The material world was good in itself because made by God, but still more because it represented God and led back to him. This spirit, which gently embraces nature, redeems it and brings it back to God, was not opposed to the new science, the hard-headed rational thinking of the day. The two must be wedded, otherwise they become antagonized, as distinction becomes dichotomy; a poetic mysticism that is untrue will then capture religion, a materialism or the intellectual pride of rationalism will seize science in its flight. St. Dominic's first step, as soon as his disciples were organised into a group, was to send them off to school to learn divinity from Alexander of Stavensby, who later came to grace this country as a bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. And when they drew up their rule, the *Consuetudines*, the first need they legislated for was that of books.

The same spirit inspires the modern Dominics. For at least seven years, sometimes for nine or ten, they sit on the hard benches of the schools (their humanities already accomplished). There is no external activity, but there is the full choral recitation of the divine office centred round the Conventual Mass. The twentieth century's

thoughtless rush and bustle prove a severe and constant temptation to this grounding and fastening in truth. But the modern Dominican is only true to his vocation in so far as he preserves its original contemplative innocence. He must be possessed by the truth before all else. It is easy to be satisfied with a little knowledge *about* the truth and to use it for other purposes—that would be a betrayal of the founder's ideal for his followers.

But the simple concentration on contemplation practised by the monks was proving, in St. Dominic's day, inadequate and ineffectual in meeting the needs of the age. The monks had been sent abroad in the French Midi and the north of Italy, and their liturgy and daily monastic routine had been found insufficient preparation for the desperate plight of the faith in those parts. Twelve abbots with their retinues of many monks and servants had been sent out, a veritable army of followers of the Word to stem the onslaught of error, but they were as ineffective as their predecessors and after three months they gave up the uneven battle, capitulated and retired home. St. Dominic with his bishop, Diego, insisted to Innocent III. in Rome and to the Papal Legates in Languedoc that the only hope lay in adopting a new method. These monks were good and inspired by the right intentions, but for the rest they were hopelessly out of date; they were 'victorian,' pompous and wealthy. Their methods were those of the last century. The means of applying the truth to the passing ages varies. Men's symbols are not always the same, because men have different ways of representing the truth. We can admire the pictures of Sir Joshua Reynolds, but we cannot use his methods to-day. The thing to be signified is eternal, but the signs and symbols that represent it change. That is why we began by saying of St. Dominic and the Dominicans that they had a modern vitality steeped in tradition. St. Dominic adopted up-to-date methods to propagate eternal truth.

Herein lies the challenge to-day. The situation is very similar only more widespread. In this country, for example, the vast majority of men have forsaken the Word of God entirely. Religion has no interest for them. They are not positively antagonistic, because they do not know anything about it; it is as foreign to them as the domestic life of Queen Elizabeth is to the enclosed nuns of Monte Mario in Rome, and concerns them less. The almost universal default from Christianity is indescribable but recognised by all. And what is the Catholic reaction to this situation? So far it seems that its desperate nature has not been recognised; at least the twelve abbots are not much in evidence. As in the thirteenth century, the laity are active, if a little sectarian, but the clergy seem to rely on

old methods. For them life is still centred round Saturday afternoon and Sunday, the old methods of a stable society living round the parish church.

Let us glance at some characteristics of the new methods that Dominic proposed. First of all he saw that it is the truth that makes us free. He found that the method of the Albigenses was one of freedom from material ties. They moved about independently of home or locality. The needs of the body were limited to a minimum in an almost violent asceticism. In this way they were fully at liberty to follow their false conception of the truth. The saint saw in that method the secret of success, and determined that his men should be equally free, but through the positive Christian asceticism of the Cross. This meant a physical as well as a mental freedom. Mobility was as much a feature of the first Dominicans as it was of the first Jesuits. Between 1205 and 1220 St. Dominic was constantly on the move, always on foot—Toulouse, Rome, Bologna. His visits to Rome were as frequent as though there had been a modern train service. A little later, St. Thomas with his single and virginal devotion to study was up and down Europe like a modern tourist. But contemplation and study were uninterrupted by travel.

This mobility was consecrated and preserved by the Vows. The ties of human affection such as exist in family life were denied. Matthew Paris said with a sneer on his lips that the world was the cloister of these new friars—and so it was. Their home was the whole world; their wives, their mothers and fathers, their children were all mankind. The vow of chastity inspired by love ensured that universality. Poverty too made the first Dominicans economically rootless, so that they were not attached to any place or property. St. Dominic demanded complete poverty, not merely individual but as far as possible communal as well. A well-meaning donor was anxious to hand over some handsome revenues to the priory at Bologna, but St. Dominic would have none of it and gently returned the gift. Four walls and a roof were enough. Dividends were taboo because they hindered movement and often jeopardized truth. How can you preach a just social order when you are yourself battenning on the unjust increment of unjustly distributed wealth? Truth is compromised, whatever you say. Voluntary poverty was St. Dominic's answer to the Communism of his day.

Then, above all, the iron law of voluntary obedience brought final freedom of truth. The antithesis to the imposed obedience of the authoritarian state, this subjection was an identification of the will with God's will, for the mind could only be fully possessed of the truth if the will was possessed by the good. The other two vows

guaranteed the functioning of that one; for cut off from all earthly attachment, the Dominican became free to go wherever the Word demanded. Before his little band seemed fully formed, and when they were still less than twenty in number, the saint sent them to the four corners of Europe, into the cities, to the centres of culture, for thither truth called. The Friar could not please himself where he went, unshackled by family or property though he was. He was the voluntary instrument of truth; there was no choice, just as there is no choice in the perfect expression of the truth in external words and forms—the true *poietes* is compelled by his muse.

But the Dominican is also intellectually free precisely because he is wholly dedicated to truth. St. Dominic cut down the length of liturgical prayer, abolished the manual labour of the monks, and gave this time up to study. The perfection of his ideal is seen in St. Thomas, the great student. He and St. Albert the Great were following the genius of their Order when they adopted the truth that lay in Aristotelian philosophy. They had been taught to seek the truth in everything, to accept it when found, and to see it in its context with the whole of truth, in relation to the Word of God. Secure in the knowledge that nothing could gainsay that Word without being false, they were able fearlessly to probe into all the secrets of the natural order. This spelt complete freedom for natural reason, once it had had its bias towards error corrected by being linked to the supernatural mysteries of faith. This was the true intellectual freedom, which is absolutely necessary for the revival of philosophy. No truth; no new discovery can be feared as capable of refuting the faith; on the contrary, when fully and properly understood, it supports, illustrates and extends the faith, for all truth comes from the same source. Indeed all new discoveries, and every philosophy that has any truth in it, apply the eternal Word of God through an elaborate and more perfect set of symbols to the spirit of the age, which always, if unaided by grace, tends to select one aspect, a single symbol, erect it into an absolute, and so deny that it is a partial truth signifying the absolute. Dominic aimed at delivering men from this slavery, for Dominic was an apostle, and that is the chief function of an apostle. This is accomplished through the freedom of the mind to seek for its object in every sphere.

In modern times this spirit demands a use of the means that science and human ingenuity have provided. The mobility of St. Dominic's long marches across Europe translated into modern terms necessitates the use of modern transport (car, rail or plane), not for the sake of mobility, but in so far as the desperate plight of Chris-

tian faith demands. The modern Dominican is ready first of all to go to any centre of learning in any part of the globe, Pekin or Washington, Moscow or Rome, in search of truth, and then to be sent by obedience to any part of the globe where the opportunity of extending the kingdom of the Word exists. It means the unembarrassed use of the radio, the press, the film, the new arts and systems of symbols that the modern man can understand. That is why modern friars, with all their revolt against the injustice and corruption of the industrialism that has produced screen or radio, do not blush to make use of them. This does not mean that the modern Dominican should be caught up into the unthinking rush of industrial life, the absorption in material speed and efficiency. He can never allow himself to stray from the central path of contemplation. He is primarily a contemplative and must learn to speak with God, to retire to the tranquility of eternal truth, standing in the corridor of a crowded wartime train or sitting in the car that gives him a lift along his road. The ideal Dominican does not easily leave his meditation, but continuing to contemplate, sanctifies the means that Providence has provided for casting the seed of truth across the world.

Poverty too is needed as much to-day as in the early thirteenth century. For there is as little hope for the apostolate of a comfortable and well-to-do religious in an age impressed by the fiery words of Communism and horrified at the sordid lives of the industrial poor as there was for that of the monks of Dominic's time. The adoption of modern methods does not mean the adoption of modern standards. The symbol of the time is the poor life, but that symbol has been used to signify an exaggeration of a partial truth. The poor life must be shown to signify the poverty of Christ, as having nothing yet possessing all things. In France and Belgium Dominican fathers have for a time exchanged their habit for the cap and overalls of the factory worker; others have worked down the mines. Then it was by way of experiment, to learn the sort of life led by the poor worker, but it may have been the presage of something more permanent for redeeming the life of the poor worker and saving him from the false ideals of materialism. St. Dominic's firm stand against the offer of a regular revenue at Bologna may be taken up again in face of stocks and shares, banks and debentures. He died without a cell of his own, without even a habit of his own. The black cappa that covers a son of St. Dominic is a symbol of penance, of a thoroughgoing asceticism that cuts him off from the pleasures of the world. That dark pall hangs round him, for he is dead to the world, in the world yet not of it. His voca-

tion is to take the Cross in the crusade of the apostolate. The freedom of truth demands intense suffering and sacrifice.

At the present time the poor worker has come in a special way within the scope of the Dominican apostolate through the work of a secular priest, a Tertiary of the Order, who began the Apostolate of Christ the Worker and handed it over to the care of the Order.

The apostolate of intellectuals who like to discuss abstract theories far removed from reality, may seem to some to be the only field for the Dominican's intellectual labours. But St. Dominic's ideal was to go to the sources of great influence in contemporary society. It is arguable that the universities no longer remain the chief sources as they were in his day, and in any case the strength and vitality of contemporary movements like Communism lie in their cells among the workers. Hence the Dominican seeks contact with the leaders of the workers, and this is done through the Apostolate, which provides a centre of Catholic working-folk activity and at the same time opens the door into this society to the priest. But, to be Dominican, this poverty must be based on a solid intellectual foundation to meet the intellectual appeal of the false social gods of the day. The centre of the apostolate has certainly changed from the day of the Cistercian abbots in Languedoc; but the profound necessity of an intellectual apostolate is as pressing as ever. The Dominican Apostolate of Christ the Worker provides a centre for this method of recalling the worker to Christ.

There is one other aspect of Truth which characterises the spirit of St. Dominic and for which his sons have often been remarkable; that is the intolerance of truth. When the Pope saw the fighting spirit of these new champions of truth he naturally recognized in them the heaven-sent instruments of the Inquisition; and with that institution they have ever since been intimately bound up. There is no need to excuse this mark of the Dominican Order, though we do rightly disclaim responsibility for the excesses of the Spanish Inquisition. Truth is naturally intolerant of error, just as goodness condemns evil. Blessed Joan of Aza, the mother of St. Dominic, dreamed of the flame in the mouth of her son, the hound of the Lord, and whenever the Order has fulfilled the spirit of its founder the flame has burnt away the dross of error without compromise. There have been few Dominicans who attempted to mix the black and white of their crest and their habit into the weak colours of compromise. Even those who have themselves lapsed into error have usually followed the mirage of a flame and, like Giordano Bruno, held with tenacity to their false opinion even at the stake. The fallible champion of truth is always liable to excess in his opposition



to error. The safeguard is to be found, of course, in charity, but not in that form of charity which is ready to concede almost anything for the sake of a cheerful good fellowship. The love which can temper devotion to truth is a love that unites the will of man to the will of God, and so subjects man to the Word of God. Dominic did not condemn the weapons of de Montfort turned against the false Albigenses; he set himself to prayer to attune himself with the Word of God, that he might become the spiritual battleaxe of that Word wielded by God's will in him. The true son of this Father does not follow his own will-o'-the-wisp opinions and set them up as the objects of his devotion to truth. He surrenders himself to the Word in constant loving contemplation in the liturgy, and above all in the Mass, for which St. Dominic had an intense devotion. It is this that safeguards the constant study of the Order.

In the Rule of St. Augustine which St. Dominic chose as the basis of his Order the principle of intolerance is laid down: 'Let love of the sinner be united to hatred of his sin.' That hatred of sin must be strong and violent in the apostle of truth, but the love of the human person, the image of God, the object of Christ's redemptive act on the Cross, grows equally strong. St. Catharine with her band of loving followers grouped round her is perhaps the greatest example of this blending of love and hatred. She could write strong, almost bitter, letters to Father Raymund of Capua, the future Master-General and Beatus, when he showed signs of cowardice. Yet she always showed a tender affection for him and all her sons and daughters in Christ, and her compassion led her to stand by a condemned man and receive his head when it was severed from his body. The famous picture by Sodoma reveals this swooning ecstatic love but it passes over in silence the horror and indignation she felt at the foul lives of many of the clergy of her day. Pages of her Dialogue are devoted to an analysis of their sins, these 'temples of the Devil—they are incarnate devils, for by their sin they have conformed themselves to the will of the Devil.' The Word, through her lips, attacks those prelates who 'apply the ointment of soft words of encouragement alone without reproof' to the sinners in their charge. Ointment is to be applied after cauterisation.

This attitude to error and sin is not in prominence to-day. Toleration is the battlecry, toleration without distinction. Yet it often seems that toleration is only a word to describe a spirit of indifference. Men are seldom tolerant where matters that they consider vitally important are concerned, nor should they be, so long as their judgment be not warped. We are intolerant enough of Nazi doctrines and Japanese treachery, because we know that these diseases

endanger the heart of society and will bring ruin to all if allowed to continue. We are tolerant of other men's views of Christ, Redemption, the Trinity, largely because we do not consider such doctrines of vital importance, and imagine that we can live together in a grey state of compromise while differing completely in our faith. Such toleration is irrational and dangerous, a sign of mental decay and the predominance of sentiment. The Dominican intolerance of error is more required to-day than perhaps ever before; for only that can save our modern attempts at co-operation and 'reunion all round.'

Finally, we would call attention to one other important aspect of the traditional modernity of the Order of Preachers—its devotion to truth by means of the symbol. St. Dominic sent his sons to the towns to become masters of the science of the times and permeate the nascent universities of Europe as the salt to preserve them from corruption. St. Thomas baptized and modernized the rational truth of Aristotle. St. Albert the Great, also following Aristotle in this, delved deep into the physical sciences. But none of these men attributed great value to physical science; they were 'modern,' but modern thought was not then vitally concerned with atoms or microbes. A popular way of explaining away the short shrift St. Thomas gives to commerce and usury is summed in this sentence: 'the reason for this narrow outlook on trading was that in the Middle Ages commerce played but a small part in the life of the people.' The same accusation is made regarding the natural sciences. In fact, however, the traditional adherence to truth was not undermined by popular modern fancy. Certainly had St. Thomas lived to-day he would have written more on the morality of economics and social theories, and on the place of physical science in the totality of human knowledge, as Maritain does to-day, but he would never have been jockeyed into giving any of these greater importance than they deserve.

Indeed, the very insistence on analogy among modern thomists shows the Dominican spirit at its best. For that truth sets the different types of knowledge in their proper order without allowing one to trespass in the field of another. Above all, it attacks the material irrational principle that 'seeing is believing,' that nothing is true except it be provable under the microscope or by historical documents. Although the modern supremacy of science is inextricably bound up in the science of symbols, in hypothesis and hieroglyphics, the effect on popular thought is that the scientist has the first and last word on all matters of truth, that in fact his symbols are truth itself. This spirit of truth in material sensation and mathe-

matics combined with a distrust of 'misty' metaphysics and the true faith in things unseen, gives to men of science a supremacy which is completely topsy-turvy. The true attitude to the symbol as the passing reflection of eternal truth is lost in a welter of subjectivism. Hence the need for the modern Dominics who will not condemn science or scientific achievement, but will seek constantly to subject it to eternal verities of divine doctrine and human ethics. The true follower of St. Dominic does not despise the modern scientist or pretend to refute him on his own ground, but he does insist on the supremacy of the theologian and philosopher. That is where the relation of symbol and reality, of modernity and tradition, must play a dynamic part.

The spirit of the Order has been described by St. Catherine of Siena: 'Now look at the ship of thy father Dominic, My beloved son: he ordered it most perfectly, wishing that his sons should apply themselves only to My honour and the salvation of souls, with the light of science, which light he laid as his principal foundation, not, however, on that account, being deprived of true and voluntary poverty, but having it also. . . . He had chosen for his spouse Queen Poverty. But for his more immediate and personal object he took the light of science in order to extirpate the errors which has arisen in his time, thus taking on him the office of My only-begotten Son the Word. Rightly he appeared as an apostle in the world and sowed the seed of My Word with much truth and light . . . (Dominic) allied himself with My truth, showing that he did not desire the death of a sinner but rather that he should be converted and live. Wherefore his religion is a delightful garden, broad and joyous and fragrant' (c. 139).

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