

## DOMINIC, FATHER OF THOMAS

**A**T first sight St Dominic and St Thomas Aquinas stand in contrast. St Dominic lived the vigorous outdoor life of an apostle, while St Thomas spent his days in the lecture rooms of university cities. St Dominic has left behind him a splendid record of achievement, while St Thomas has contributed a mountain of manuscript. They seem opposed to each other as the great ruler to the noted scholar, as the practical apostle to the contemplative, so that one might be inclined to say that these two men could never have understood one another.

In fact, however, these two saints were not only of one mind but they stand towards each other in the relation of father and son.

The evidence of St Thomas's mind and character is contained in his writings, which amply cover the latter half of his life. The evidence in the case of St Dominic is more difficult to assess, but two circumstances make the task easier, for during the last twenty years of his life St Dominic was occupied with two main works, both surpassingly difficult. They were the conversion of the Albigenses, from 1203 to 1215, and the founding of his Order, from 1215 to 1221. The greatness of these tasks leaves no doubt that all the wisdom and energy of St Dominic were devoted to their accomplishment.

The problem which St Dominic set out to solve in Languedoc was complicated. A Christian country had been assailed by a revived paganism, whose success had bred heresy. Three main groups may be noted: Christians who had retained their faith; Christians who had lost their faith and had added Albigensian doctrine to the remnant of their belief; and the pagan Albigensians. All these three groups needed St Dominic's help. The faithful stood in need of his preaching so that they might be strengthened in their belief, by having the Gospel well taught and by witnessing the discomfiture of their adversaries. The heretics needed convincing of the errors into which they had fallen so that they might by repentance recover their former fidelity. The Albigenses themselves, holding a false philosophy which was incompatible with the teaching of Christ, had to be weaned from their rational errors, as a prelude to greater truth. So few were the preachers, that each had to attempt to succour all three groups.

Set up against the Catholic faith in Languedoc was a system derived from Manichean philosophy and oriental religion. This system rested on the conception of evil as a positive reality, and resulted logically in the idea of two gods, one good and one evil.

Mankind was the principle battleground in the perpetual warfare between these gods, since one part of man's nature, his body, belonged to evil, while his soul was good. From such a doctrine, only one system of ethics could proceed, an extreme anti-materialism. Suicide would need no defence, nor could marriage have one, in such a system. The rejection of contracts and organised civil government arose from the same principle. In practice, the *illuminati*, or saints of the Albigenses, showed an extraordinary ascetism of life which drew the admiration, though not the imitation, of the common people. However, since they rejected the Christian moral code, it was possible for those who found the burden of morality inconvenient to produce a more or less nominal adherence to the sect and follow their own inclinations. In this they were encouraged by the Albigensian teaching that a lawless use of material things was less evil than the use prescribed by law.

Any counter-measure would have had small chance of success unless it had been ready to meet the Albigenses on their own ground. Appeal to Scripture was vain, since St Dominic's opponents were only ready to accept the New Testament according to Manichean interpretation, which divested all the major truths of their meaning. The only possible method was the appeal to common sense and the reduction of the whole Albigensian position to obvious absurdity. It is not known how far St Dominic succeeded in this, but it is certain that his enemies found it necessary to add violence to argument. At the same time, the faithful, deriving comfort from success, needed strengthening in the faith, and especially in those dogmas which the Albigenses found most distasteful. During those twelve years the mind of St Dominic must constantly have been occupied with the relationship between revelation and common sense. The faith of this flourishing area of southern France was in danger of total collapse before the assault of a false philosophy and its resulting system of ethics. It was a false philosophy, not a false faith, which was casting out the true faith. The defence had failed, not so much in maintaining the faith, as in upholding common sense. Supernatural truth, though itself autonomous, is in some measure dependent in the mind of man on the principles of reason. The conditions imposed on St Dominic by the circumstances of this mission prove him to have been an excellent disputant. He entered his enemies' stronghold practically alone, disputed before adverse judges, and maintained the truth without the assistance of advice, or the authority of reference works, or of the peaceful atmosphere so helpful in argument. He conceded every advantage to his adversaries, and yet held his own. He could afford to be generous only because he possessed within himself—and in a degree ever increasing

as the years passed—the resources necessary for his work: a lively skill in dialectic, the capacity to assimilate the writings of others, and a profound internal peace.

In his long journeys on foot from town to town, in his nightly vigils before the altar, St Dominic acquired that constant serenity that has been so often recorded. His early training brought out his natural aptitude for argument, but the power to possess the wisdom of others is a rare faculty. There are many today who have retentive memories, and in St Dominic's day great feats of memory were still more common, but such a method of preserving the teaching of others is cumbersome and of little use in debate. St Dominic had gained a measure of independence from books at a period previous to his apostolic life, and the sale of his books at Osma had not only benefited the starving townsfolk but had forced on him a manner of study that would later be invaluable. A man who possesses books is apt to store up wisdom in his library, but he who is dependent on the libraries of others, must store up wisdom in himself. The short time St Dominic gave to reading had to be concentrated, and if he was to retain what he had read, he must meditate on the matter of his reading. He must build a library within his own mind, not by a classification according to author and title, but by the unity of ideas. He must seek to correlate one teaching with another, in order to reduce them, as far as possible, to the unity of one idea.

The doctrine of the Albigenses drew and held St Dominic's attention to the unity of faith and reason. The conditions of a solitary campaign forced him to reduce his thought, as far as possible to a single system. It can be asserted, therefore, that whatever St Dominic was able to achieve in his own thought, he must have realised the need for a clearly worked out system of theology and philosophy. A further fact strengthens this conclusion. The Albigenses, out of hatred for the body, had adopted an ascetism which impressed the common people. St Dominic's reply was to adopt an even more severe ascetism, out of love for the body; he replied by using the same weapons. But these errors were being supported by an appeal to philosophy, and therefore there can be no doubt that St Dominic would have sought to offer a philosophical refutation, by demonstrating that reason rightly used is not opposed to revelation, but rather points to it, and, in practice, can only reach its full development under the light of faith.

The founding of his Order is another valuable piece of evidence for our probing into St Dominic's mind after his thirteen years contact with the Albigenses. In 1217 the saint dispersed his first sixteen companions, and the destinations of these five groups of Dominicans are most significant. With the exception of the two who

were to remain at Prouille, all set out for university cities. Paris, Rome, Bologna, Madrid, and Toulouse were not only great towns: they were centres of learning. And the main preoccupation of the friars was shown unmistakably when in 1221 those who were sent to found the English Province of the Order passed through London and settled at Oxford. The universities were St Dominic's objective, and not only for the purpose of learning, but rather of teaching, for he had said that the seed must be scattered, not hoarded.

In order to understand St Dominic's purpose in so concentrating the first work of the Order on the universities, we must know something of their condition. It is a far cry from the University of Paris as it is today to the lively but haphazard assembly of 1217. For although the prestige of the university had never stood higher, yet the order and unity which had governed the schools of Paris three hundred years before had been largely lost. This was the result of two facts: the enormous increase in the numbers of schools and scholars, and the lack of a king wise enough to control so distinguished and powerful a body. Again, there was no adequate accommodation for the schools themselves, much less for the students, who had to make the best of any kind of shelter that might be available. The university, therefore, presented to the world the not uncommon spectacle of a brilliant academic gathering combined with a no less brilliant reputation for loose living and indiscipline. From its beginning it had centred mainly round the faculties of arts and theology, but great changes had taken place in the previous century. Logic had gradually come to take primacy of place among the arts, to the detriment of learning and scholarship. Law had become popular because of the advantageous posts which the lawyer could command, and theology had taken a new speculative direction, away from the traditional teaching of the Fathers. The new movement was largely influenced by men so diverse as St Anselm and Peter Abelard, and the new trend in theology had been given definite form in the middle of the twelfth century by the publication of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.

Paris was in travail. Until this new thing should be born, disorder was the rule. Young men were teaching strange doctrines to students with itching ears, and the traditional doctors were finding it hard to gather an audience. At this stage in her history, no man could predict the future of the university whose nominal unity, established over seventeen years before, was insufficient to divert the lively forces now threatening to break her in pieces. That the university survived with an increased prestige was due to two forces outside herself.

An old student of the schools of Paris was reigning as Pope

Innocent III. Almost the last act of his life was the promulgation of the statutes regulating the life of the university of Paris. That these statutes became practical law in the university can be largely ascribed to the coming of the friars. The suggestion that the Pope was largely responsible for this second factor is hard to resist, for it was in the same year, 1215, that St Dominic was in Rome to petition for the approval of his Order. Innocent had had ample opportunity to measure the genius of St Dominic; it is certain that they conferred together, and what is more likely than that the two men agreed on a common policy? In any case, the first Dominicans came to Paris within two years of the promulgation of the statutes, and in less than fifty years the friars had saved the university for the Faith.

The prime work of the new Order was preaching, and the title of preacher was assumed by St Dominic four years before the first approval of the Order. It might seem strange to regard university life as a suitable training ground for preachers, but this would be confusing the simplicity of St Dominic's intention. Preaching in his conception and experience was not merely intended for the support of the faithful, but was directed to all kinds and classes of men. Wherever men were prepared to listen, there was work for the preacher. It was therefore an absolute necessity that the Dominicans should be in full contact with the thought of the age; if all men were to give them a hearing, they must be masters of the current teaching. But the preacher must also be able to refute and convert error, lest his work be rendered useless by the undermining of principle. Consequently he must be in a position to learn at first hand the errors of his times; and in 1217 no better place could have been found than Paris. The entry of the Friars Preachers was inconspicuous enough. Long before the discordant elements of the university had woken up to the danger that threatened them, the Dominicans were fully mobilised. Moreover, there had been a series of quiet victories won by St Albert, whose work was to be completed by St Thomas. The conflict between the traditional school of theology and the new speculative trend was solved very simply by both schools having to recognise St Thomas and St Albert as masters of speculative theology who were at the same time steeped in the traditions of the Fathers. Likewise the Aristotelians were answered by the purer Aristotelianism of St Albert, and the Averroists were castigated by St Thomas for their faulty interpretation of 'the Philosopher'. When finally the presence of the Friars at the university was subjected to violent attack, the combined forces of St Albert, St Thomas and St Bonaventure were sufficient to carry the day.

In all this troubled period, the tactics of the Dominicans remained

the same. With truth as a living ideal, they readily acknowledged whatever they could find of truth in the position of their opponents, and sought to make it their own. So well did they succeed, that in all the major contests, they were able to use the weapons of their adversaries in their own defence. As St Dominic was willing to learn austerity from the Albigenses till he outstripped his masters, so was St Thomas content to learn from the Aristotelians, and also from both speculative theologians and traditional patristic professors, until he too surpassed his masters and resolved their antagonism in his own intellectual unity. This achievement he expressed in his *Summa Theologica*. But the *Summa* is not only a work like in spirit to that of St Dominic, nor is it only an answer to the problem of Faith and reason that the Albigenses provoked, but it is the justification of the whole of St Dominic's apostolate. The exquisite choice of words, the power and lucidity of argument, the vast scope of the work, are not as remarkable as the divine proportion of the matter. In that unity or balance, the whole virtue of the *Summa* consists, and the man who has once seen it need have no fear of argument. Trained according to the *Summa*, preachers can be commissioned to undertake the solitary apostolate, without support and without books, save only the sacred Scriptures. St Thomas has made it possible for other men to live as St Dominic lived.

St Dominic founded the Order of Preachers so that others might enjoy the fulness of life which had been given to him. Yet the ideal was so great that he himself was unable to establish it as perfect in all its parts. He needed the help of a company of great saints to complete what he had begun. Once completed, a multitude of men and women were required to maintain it. St Thomas has the honour of carrying the Dominican ideal in one respect to perfection. Trained in the Order, in life as in learning, he so well assimilated the Dominican ideal that he was able to demonstrate its reality, and add the glory of his accomplishment to the labours of St Albert and St Dominic. As the mind, turning from the greatness of later days, looks back to the small beginnings of Montpellier, where a dispirited company of apostles looked out on an ever-broadening sea of Manicheism, the memory of St Dominic's high courage returns. Unless he had had the eye of a seer, he could not know that the answer to all the problems was to be found at last, not in the walled towns and rusty roads of southern France, but in the magnificence of the capital city, in the splendour of a royal banquet, where a large friar, clad in the habit of a Dominican, suddenly woke from his dream and put silence on the court with a great cry, 'And that will settle the Manichees'. ROMUALD HORN, O.P.