

## THE THIRD ORDER OF SAINT DOMINIC

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LITTLE more than a decade ago the then reigning Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV, spoke thus of the Third Order of St. Dominic: "In the midst of the great dangers which on all sides threaten the faith and morals of the Christian people, it is Our duty to safeguard the faithful by pointing out to them those means of holiness which seem to Us the most useful and opportune for their defense and for their progress. Amongst those means We recognize the Dominican Third Order as one of the most eminent, most easy and most sure. Knowing the snares of the world and, not less, the salutary remedies flowing from the Divine teaching of the Gospel, the glorious Patrician Dominic was inspired to found it, so that in this association every class of persons might, as it were, find a realization of the desire for a more perfect life." In these words Pope Benedict summed up the entire activity of the Third Order. How well the Third Order of St. Dominic is suited to take a leading role in present day Catholic Action may be seen from the very origin and development of this important branch of the Dominican family and also from the fruits of its labors which have added lustre to the light of the Church for over seven centuries.

In speaking of the Third Order we refer to it primarily as an association of the laity, for as such was it first founded. Many difficulties beset the path of the student who would attempt to trace the history of the Third Order from one original source and this because of the fact that St. Dominic early in the thirteenth century was the founder of two distinct confraternities, namely, the Militia of Jesus Christ and the Order of Penance. Neither can with certainty claim to have been the one institution from which evolved the Third Order for both have been indiscriminately referred to in historical documents as the Third Order, and this is due in all probability to the similarity between the two in both rule and dress as well as to their common authorship. Evidence brought to light in recent years would seem to indicate that the Third Order was the result of a fusion of the two confraternities. Because of this fact and also because of a

difference in the aims of the confraternities the body of this article will be devoted to a short history of each.

The earliest mention given the existence of the Militia of Jesus Christ is made by William of Puy-Laurens, a contemporary of St. Dominic, who says such a society existed from the beginning of the crusade against the Albigenes. In describing its institution he writes: "The Venerable Bishop Foulques, desirous that his people of Toulouse be enabled to gain the indulgences of the Crusade like those who came from abroad and in order to dispel the heretics and combat the usurers, founded at Toulouse, in the year 1209, with the help of God and the approval of the legate of the Holy See, a great Confraternity." Although the Saint's name is not mentioned here there can be no doubt that Dominic took a leading role in the foundation of this confraternity. Foulques and St. Dominic were devoted friends and in all their apostolic work they were always so much united that historians have often attributed to one the creations of the other. Père Mortier in his *"Histoire des Maîtres Generaux"* also notes the intimate relations existing between the Saint and the Bishop, and because of the fact that they often consulted each other on important questions believes that such was the case in the formation this military confraternity. St. Dominic's connection with this confraternity is first definitely propounded by Blessed Raymond of Capua, the twenty-third Master General of the Order of Preachers. In his writings towards the close of the fourteenth century he attributes the foundation of the Militia of Jesus Christ to St. Dominic. The truth of this assertion is borne out by several other indications. It's rapid growth, especially throughout Italy, was particularly striking because of the fact that wherever it spread it was always connected with some Dominican Church. The first Pontiff to refer to it by the name of Third Order was Pope Innocent III. On the 28th of June, 1210, in his Bull *"Habuisse bajulos"* he approved and recommended the Third Order of St. Dominic, and he wrote to Count Simon de Montfort, a great friend of St. Dominic's, surnamed the 'Hammer of the Heretics,' to congratulate him on his entrance into this Order. This was certainly not a question of the Great Order but referred to the Militia, since Simon de Montfort was married, the father of a family and died gloriously on the field of battle, triumphant over the heretics at the siege of Toulouse.

This confraternity as established by St. Dominic, although of a military character, cannot be classed with such Military Orders as the Templars or Hospitallers, for aside from its military aspect it was to a great extent of a penitential nature. The members of the Militia

of Jesus Christ wore a habit consisting of a white tunic and over this a black cloak upon which was embroidered a black and white cross. Their lives were guided by a special rule given them by their holy founder. Like the Crusaders they bore arms but were allowed only to fight in defense of the faith. The heretics at this time, particularly the Albigenses, often forced their errors upon Christians by force of arms and it was primarily to overcome such evils that St. Dominic founded his military confraternity. As soldiers of Christ they followed the rule laid down for them, and their wives often joined them in their pious devotions. Because of their spiritual aid St. Dominic also admitted women into the Order. Blessed Raymond of Capua writes: "Since wives put obstacles in the way of their husband's fulfillment of their promises, St. Dominic made them swear to assist their spouses by every means in their power. He ordered both men and women to wear a black and white habit and imposed on them a certain number of Our Fathers and Hail Marys to be recited when they were unable to assist at the Divine Office."

The approbations issued by the Popes during its entire existence bear eloquent testimony to the great work accomplished by the Militia. Notable among these were the "Bull *Egrediens haereticorum*" of Pope Gregory IX, on December 22nd, 1227, solemnly confirming the approbation given the Militia by his predecessor, Pope Honorius III. On May 18th, 1235, the same Pope issued five different Bulls concerning the Militia. In the Bull "*Sacrosancta*" he takes under his special protection the Brothers and Sisters of the Militia of Jesus Christ; in the one "*Experimentis*" he confides the care of the Militia to Blessed Jordan of Saxony, the second Master General of the Order; the Bull "*Devotionis vestrae*" permits them to assist at ecclesiastical services during the time of a general interdict; another "*Quos pietate*" prohibits anyone from molesting these same Brothers and Sisters; and finally in the Bull "*Est Angelis*" he grants to the members of this confraternity an indulgence. It was, however, on May 24th, 1235, that Pope Gregory left, as a supreme legacy to the Militia which he loved so much, the celebrated Bull "*Quae omnium*," which contained a rule for the Militia and which declared in express terms that its observance was already in force.

Meanwhile, as the Militia expanded and flourished under the sagacious leadership of St. Dominic, there was another great movement on foot, the influence of which was already felt throughout Christendom. This was the rise of the Penitential Orders, properly so-called. From the eleventh century there can be found associations of seculars including both sexes connected with certain Congregations

of Benedictines who adopted for their end the cause of certain religious and pious works. Such lay associations are to be found in the twelfth century among the Premonstratensians, Templars and Humiliati. Early in the thirteenth century the Humiliati are the first to be called by the name of Third Order. It was not, however, until the time of St. Francis of Assisi that the penitential movement reached its greatest development. The preaching of St. Francis as well as his own living example exercised such a powerful attraction on the people that many of the laity manifested a strong desire to lead an evangelical life. To accomplish this end St. Francis organized a confraternity compatible with their state in life and gave them a rule animated with the Franciscan spirit of penance. But although the Order of Penance owed its origin to St. Francis it was not long before it spread far beyond the confines of the Franciscan Order. Many who had assimilated the spirit of St. Francis had to seek spiritual guidance or other religious and it is not surprising that those pious souls who gathered round the Dominican priories and aspired to Dominican ideals should seek the spiritual direction of the holy Patriarch, Dominic. The Order of Penance of St. Dominic came into being in much the same manner as did the other penitential confraternities named after the respective Mendicant Orders on whom they were dependent for their spiritual welfare. A common rule was drawn up for all the Confraternities of Penance in the year 1221.

Some of the prescriptions therein contained were, simplicity in dress, considerable fasting and abstinence, the recitation of the canonical offices or other prayers in its stead, confession and communion at least three times a year, and a prohibition against the carrying of arms and the taking of solemn oaths without necessity. Simple in form and general in character it was well enough suited to satisfy the aims and ideals of the Confraternities as a whole. In the year 1285 the need of systematizing and more firmly uniting these lay elements together with the idea of bringing about a more direct affiliation with the Order of Preachers led the seventh master general, Muñon de Zamora, to formulate a rule proper to the Order of Penance of St. Dominic. This rule had a more ecclesiastical character and firmly subordinated the conduct of the Brothers to the authority of the Preachers. By it the members were urged to foster an ardent zeal for the defense and propagation of the Faith, a prominent Dominican characteristic which was to distinguish the Third Order of St. Dominic throughout its existence.

Although originally working side by side and independent of each other, the Militia of Jesus Christ and the Order of Penance of St. Dominic appear to have been merged toward the close of the thirteenth century. Evidence to this effect may be gleaned from the writings of Blessed Raymond of Capua. Their subsequent amalgamation is hinted at by Pope Honorius III in 1221 and also by Gregory IX in 1228, on which occasions the Militia was designated as "the Brothers of Penance." A comparison of the rules of the two institutions, that of Gregory IX for the Militia in 1235, and that of Muñon de Zamora for the Order of Penance of St. Dominic in 1285, would, because of their striking similarity, lead one to support such an opinion. There is but one considerable difference between the two rules. The rule formulated by Muñon de Zamora for the Order of Penance expressly forbids the carrying of arms, allowing however for the one exception that might easily apply to the Militia, viz., in defense of the Church. The exact time or even the approximate time during which the fusion of the two confraternities took place is not known since even after the amalgamation of the two, the confraternity was commonly referred to as the Order of Penance. Not infrequently was it called "the Third Rule" and shortly after the close of the thirteenth century it is regularly designated by the name "Third Order of St. Dominic." From this double movement, therefore, was born the modern Third Order of St. Dominic.

Since the Third Order itself is the legitimate development of a twofold movement so too is its work of a twofold nature, namely, the preaching of penance and the defense of the Church. As a heritage handed down from the original *Ordo de Poenitentia* the preaching of penance as practised under Dominican influence may be distinguished in this, that it leaned toward the intellectual aspect of the Faith, attaining its end by a widespread dissemination of the mysteries of faith. The defense of the Church originally demanded physical force and was the reason why St. Dominic instituted his Military Confraternity whereas since that time up until the present day the Third Order has carried on the fight with the spiritual weapons of prayer and good works. The great influence for good exercised by the Third Order is clearly evident from the number of Blesseds whom it has given to the Church as well as by such jewels of sanctity as St. Catherine of Siena and St. Rose of Lima. As it exists to-day the Third Order is divided into two branches. The first branch is composed of Tertiaries who live together in community, following the common rule and who wear the habit; the second branch



comprises seculars, whether married or single, who live their ordinary life in the world according to their state, but who strive, as far as circumstances will permit, to lead a higher and more religious life than that to which they are already bound by the common law. "By the creation of the Third Order," says Père Lacordaire, "Dominic introduced the religious life into the heart of domestic existence. He furnished the people living in the world with the means for becoming truly religious in the world; that is to say, to live as perfect Christians, detached from the false philosophies of the world and in the continual performance of piety and of the other virtues attached to their state in life." No more worthy tribute can be made the Third Order of St. Dominic than to quote the words of Fr. Faber; "Those who are conversant with, indeed who find the strength and consolation of their lives in, the Acts of the Saints well know that there is not a nook in the mystical Paradise of our heavenly Spouse where the flowers grow thicker or smell more fragrantly than in this Order of multitudinous, childlike saints. Nowhere in the Church does the Incarnate Word show His 'delight at being with the children of men' in more touching simplicity, with more unearthly sweetness, or more spouse-like familiarity, than in this, the youngest family of St. Dominic."

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