

DOMINICAN EPITAPH

PETER GERHARD, O.P.



HE WONDER is that it didn't happen sooner. Dominic had intended his brethren to be expendable. He had not stowed his first little group safely away; he sent them off, shocked and saddened at the dispersal, to preach or to study. Now one of the brethren had been slain, Peter of Verona one of the Italian Brothers, Inquisitor General of all Italy for the past nineteen years. But it was thirty years since the death of St. Dominic. *The Lives of the Brethren* is filled with accounts of threats made against the Friars by heretics; accounts of assaults are recorded in primitive manuscripts; we know Dominic himself narrowly missed martyrdom on at least two occasions. Now the prize that eluded Dominic had come to a son to whom he himself had given the habit, to a man whom later generations would know as Peter Martyr, the first Friar Preacher to die for the faith. It was a good thirty years in coming, and we say, the wonder is that it didn't happen sooner.

It will be the aim of this short article to explain what we mean by this. 1952 is the seventh hundredth anniversary of the death of Peter Martyr. Everyone in the Dominican family is familiar with the details of his life and death. We will not analyze them again here except in an oblique way. For we do not propose to describe *who* Peter of Verona was, but *what* he was. His death makes complete sense if it is once grasped just what a Dominican by profession is; it makes no sense whatever, it is the most flamboyant theatrics—to write *Credo* in one's dying blood—if his Dominican formation is forgotten. Dominic's resolution was to conquer the heresies that were sapping the strength of the Church. To do so, he realized that a corps of trained theologians was required. The time for moral exhortation had passed. "Love God" is the best advice in the world, but it does not convert heretics. What was needed was a disciplined body of men who could and would preach dogma, who could refute the heretics by having mastered both their doctrines and those of Holy Church. This was what was needed; this is what

Dominic provided. It was not chance that the Dominicans¹ took complete charge of the various Inquisitions; it was not chance that Peter of Verona was named Inquisitor General of Italy. It is too much to say that St. Dominic founded the Order of Preachers precisely to be Inquisitors, but he did found them to defend the faith, and if the Inquisition was the Papal instrument for the extirpation of heresy and the defense of the faith then the Dominicans belonged on the several inquisitorial staffs. Peter was not slain because he came from Verona. He was not slain because he was a Dominican. He was slain because, as Inquisitor General, he was winning back to the true faith too many of the heretics of northern Italy. He was not slain because he wore the habit of St. Dominic but because he was doing the work of St. Dominic.

Clearly to see all this demands that we look closely into the times of Dominic and Peter.

St. Dominic, as everyone knows, conceived the idea of founding the Order of Preachers as a result of his contact with the Albigensian heresy then raging in southern France. "His example, his teaching, and the fact that he founded the first house of the Order in Toulouse, a hot-bed of heresy, all show quite clearly that he meant his followers to devote their lives primarily, not to confirming the faithful, nor to converting the heathen, but to reconciling to the Church those who within the bounds of Christendom had been led away from the true faith."² These heretics were not ignorant men. That was precisely the trouble. They laid too great stress on the human reason, the individual understanding. Faith was contemptible. They scorned the acceptance of revealed doctrine. But they were formidable adversaries. They were led by a number of apostate bishops and priests; the clergy who remained faithful to the Church were altogether unequipped to battle them on intellectual grounds, and the faithful lay Catholics who during this time sought to supply for the defects of the clergy through apostolic preaching had only zeal with which to meet the sophistic arguments of the heretics. Zeal is seldom enough. Truth must be championed. It does not triumph over error merely by being truth; it must be defended by competent men, and on the same level on which it is

¹ It is an anachronism to call the Friars of this time Dominicans. We ask our readers' indulgence for using the term throughout this article.

² *The Constitution of the Dominican Order*, by G. R. Galbraith, U. of Manchester Press, 1925, p. 162.

being attacked. In the south of France, and throughout Christendom generally, the Church was losing the souls of men by default.

It was essential, therefore, that the Catholics who set out to convert the heretics should be well-armed. They must know what their opponents believed, and why; they must know what questions and objections they would probably advance; above all, they must know the teaching of the Church. The faith as it was explained by them must be self-consistent, and it must be put forward in a reasonable way. The preachers must be well-educated, eloquent, cool-headed in an argument, but ready to stand by the faith even until death. This was a formidable calling; to be worthy of it a man would need not only great natural gifts but a strenuous course of preparation as well. And Dominic knew it.

Unfortunately, Dominic was one of the few who knew or cared. The condition of preaching in the thirteenth century was deplorable.³ For centuries it had rightly been insisted that only the bishop, by reason of his office, could preach. Other than the bishop, only those delegated by him were allowed in the pulpit. To preach without the bishop's authorization was recognized as a sign of heresy. What if the bishop were lax about his responsibility in this matter of preaching? What if he preferred hunting, as many in these times did, to preaching? What if he made no provision for delegated preachers to take his place? What indeed, but that the souls of his flock withered up for lack of instruction and encouragement. In some places, the bishop left the whole matter of preaching in his diocese to agents who rented out the job, frequently to heretical priests. All flavors of heresy were available for sampling and an ignorant people disposed toward novelty in the domain of religion were eager to sample. Precisely at this time when a zealous and well-educated clergy was needed, it was not at hand. Perhaps it would be better to say *because* it was not at hand, and because so many bishops preferred the hunt to the pulpit, and luxury to poverty, and because preaching, when given at all, was delivered in the Latin that no one but clerics understood—because of all these things heresy was extensive and souls were eager for doctrinal preach-

³ For this account of the state of the clergy, and of preaching in general we drew upon the essay of Father Ladner treating of these matters in *St. Dominic and His Work*, by Pierre Mandonnet, O.P., translated by Sr. M. Benedicta, O.P., B. Herder, 1944, pp. 120-137.

ing. Rarely did the people hear a sermon that touched on problems of the day; rarely did any preacher attempt to guide souls, confused, many of them, by the throbbing economic and social transition that the age was experiencing. When such a man appeared his church was packed. And when such a man appeared, the jealous and resentful clergy of the neighborhood slandered him as a charlatan and set in motion the machinery to still his disturbing and accusing voice.

But if the clergy were lazy and uneducated, the heretics knew their false doctrines thoroughly and were dynamic in spreading them. Both the Albigenses of St. Dominic's time and the Cathari of St. Peter's day violently attacked the Catholic Church. Their doctrines were almost identical. Both were based on the Manichean dualism. There were two principles of being in the universe. The bad principle was the source of all evil. He created the human body and is the author of sin. To him must be attributed the authorship of the Old Testament. The New Testament came from the good principle. The good god created human souls, but the bad god imprisoned them in human bodies. There was no such thing as hell. How could there be? All souls were divine by nature, and so eternal punishment for them was unthinkable. Ultimately they would all be liberated. To accomplish this redemption, the good god sent a man named Jesus Christ, a most perfect and noble man, but for all that, a creature. This Jesus did not have a true human body because bodies are evil. All matter, in fact, is evil. He had what looked like a body—it fooled everybody—but in reality it was made up of some mysterious element called celestial essence. With this celestial essence he penetrated the ear of Mary! It was only apparently that he was born of her, only apparently that he suffered on the Cross. To enjoy the fruits of the redemption that this man Jesus had won for us, it was necessary to belong to his church: the Albigensian church. The sacramental system of the Catholics was nonsense. The soul could be purified during life only by the rite of the *consolamentum* or consolation of the Albigenses.

In addition to this doctrinal system, there was a severe moral code. The faithful must abstain from all flesh meat. Long and strict fasts were enjoined. The "perfect" were to keep perpetual chastity. This distinction between the "perfect" and the ordinary faithful made it very convenient to spread a doctrine which might otherwise have been very difficult to popularize. Fasting, abstinence, perpetual chastity are difficult ideals to sell

to mankind in general. But to be of the elect, that is to say, a true Albigensian, one had only to promise that sometime before death he would embrace the perfect observance of the code in all its rigor.

It is extremely difficult for us today to take this entire doctrine very seriously. It is utterly absurd. Yet in its day, men clung tenaciously to it and fought viciously for it. They died for it. Is it not a tragedy to willingly die for something which is objectively false?

Unless we force ourselves to the realization that the Albigensian heresy was to Dominic's day what Communism is to our own however, the labors of the early Dominicans will have a tinge of unreality about them, the Albigenses will seem like paper figures on a cardboard France. But if we are impressed by the urgency of the crisis, we will understand why many laymen of good will were inspired to take up the preaching office, some with, some without episcopal permission. Unfortunately, the results were grievous.

One of these preaching groups was formed by a certain Valdes of Vaudois. Here was a layman, utterly ignorant of theology, with no training in philosophy, but with a heart full of zeal for the defense of the faith. He and his followers undertook to remedy the deficiencies of the clergy by attempting their own exposition of the truths of faith. Begun with noble intentions, and even approved by Pope Alexander III, mistaken zeal soon led to false explanations of the faith. Bitterly resenting the continuous criticism and opposition of bishops for whom they had lost all respect, they declared that they would serve God rather than man. Soon they were in full heresy and defiant in it. The sad part is that in heresy they lost none of their ardor. Like crusaders, men and women alike swept over all Europe, making converts and attacking the wealth and corruption of the Church.

Almost the same thing happened with another group of laymen known as the Humiliati, who likewise had organized to preach the truths of the faith. Burning with enthusiasm but lacking theological training they soon advanced deceptively simple explanations of profound mysteries, *explanations* of the Trinity that a child could grasp. Knee-deep in dangerous teachings of all kinds, they were finally suppressed. Innocent III later reinstated them but limited the subject matter of their preaching to moral exhortation. Dogma they were to leave severely alone. They were allowed to go about from town to town, calling upon

all to praise God, to love Him, to serve Him more fervently, and to their credit it should be said that they did this perseveringly and well.

Not for this did St. Dominic found the Order of Preachers. There was place in the Church for the preaching of moral reform, but that place was not southern France.

Just when St. Dominic hit on the idea of a society of men dedicated to doctrinal preaching and the refutation and conversion of heretics we cannot say. Without any question it grew out of his experience with the disheartened monks of Citeaux whom Dominic, together with his Bishop, Diego of Osma, had joined early in 1205. These Cistercians had undertaken an apostolic ministry, despite the fact that St. Bernard had expressly forbidden preaching, only at the urging of Innocent III. The holy Pontiff saw in the great abbey a fortress of impregnable strength. He wrote to the abbot describing the ravages of heresy and the indolence of prelates; he begged him to accept the mission of converting the Albigenses. The abbot did accept, reluctantly perhaps, and with misgivings.

The Pope's great hopes were doomed to disappointment. When Dominic and Diego came upon the Abbot of Citeaux and his monks, together with the papal legates, they were all deeply discouraged at their lack of success. They were willing to admit failure and ready to return to their monastery. The silent monks of Citeaux were dismayed at their inability to make palatable the bread of the Lord, the true nourishment of the soul, to men who were starving for it. To possess something of great value, and to be unable to convince others that it *is* of great value—this is surely tragic. The monks knew the truth, the goodness, and the beauty of God; in all probability there were saints among them; but they were not equipped to dispose men who were intellectually proud to listen favorably to the exposition of the faith. To the clever objections of the heretics, based on equivocation, the monks had no answer. There is no priest who does not dread to hear it said of him: "Father is so sincere *but* . . ." What follows on the "but" completely negates and destroys whatever precedes it. Sincerity is a wonderful gift. But sincerity alone? Zeal alone?" *Libera nos, Domine!* "Father is so sincere *but* . . ."; but he doesn't know his dogmatic theology, or he doesn't know his apologetics, or his principles of valid exegesis; or else he's living in the seventeenth or the eighteenth or the nineteenth century, not today.

A Cistercian monk is called to a vocation of silence, prayer, and manual labor. This, until the present at least, and certainly at the time of which we are speaking, was the canonically approved way for him to attain perfection. He was not born to the pulpit, nor did his training within the monastery prepare him for it. Accustomed to the quiet and peace of the cloister, in the turbulence of the public square he was harassed, humiliated and hamstrung. He personally was made to look ridiculous. The faith he had hoped to defend was made the object of ridicule.

So, from his experience with these suffering monks, Dominic learned what type of man must be formed to fight heretics. He must be everything that these monks were, and more. He must be as much in love with God as these Cistercians were. But to this perfection of the will he must add the perfection of the intellect, knowledge. The intellectual virtues as well as the moral virtues must shine forth in him. How Dominic planned to mold this type of man is immediately evident to anyone who compares the Constitutions of his Order with that of the Premonstratensians and that of the Cistercians. From both of these Dominic borrowed heavily.

The Dominican Constitutions are the explication in the concrete of what is laid down in very general terms in the Rule of Saint Augustine. Whole sections of the Dominican Constitutions were borrowed, word for word, from the Constitutions of Premontr . But there are vast differences. The Premontr  document legislated in great part concerning the minute regulations of the daily life of the canons. Every moment was to be occupied in a certain way. How to get up in the morning, how to go to bed at night; how to eat, how to pray, how to work; how to go out to work, how to come back; how everything. Because the institutions of Premontr  had themselves borrowed largely from monastic constitutions and ceremonials, the lives of the canons were guided like those of monks. St. Dominic was not interested in forming monks. There were monks enough. He wanted his Friars to convert heretics. The object of his institute was to be an other-regarding rather than a self-regarding one. So, much of what he found in the regulations of Premontr  he deleted. Everything in his constitution would be subservient to one object: preaching. His Friars were to be preachers, an order of preachers. And to be preachers, they must study.

Was ever a *means* so glorified! For St. Dominic, study was a means to an end. Like a ladder. The remote or ultimate end was

the salvation of souls. The more proximate end, itself a means relative to the ultimate end, was preaching.

The Constitutions are impregnated and dominated by this notion of study. Study, study, study. Instead of attempting to fill up each moment of the day by legislation, the idea was to leave as much time as possible in each day free for study. Humbert of Romans would write: "So zealously must studies be pursued that in their interests the sterner obligations of the Order are to be dispensed, not only lest the studies should fail, but even lest they should suffer."⁴ The Divine Office, moreover (and this was scandalous to traditionalists), was to be said quickly. Not irreverently. But let it move along, lightly, sweetly, swiftly. Again, all for the sake of study.⁵

No mention was made of manual work. When we come to that paragraph in the constitution of Premontre, we find that St. Dominic dropped it completely. He did not even bother to copy it out. There was no point in wasting the time of his highly trained men even on the necessary domestic labor. He would borrow from other orders the system of having a sufficient number of conversi, or lay brothers, who would be truly members of the Order and who would attain to their perfection by handling the manual work. Father Dominic was in favor of turning over the entire administration of all the property of the Order to the lay brothers. In this he was overruled by the brethren, but it indicates his mind: let somebody else handle mundane matters; the Friars must preach.

Then there was the matter of dispensations. In the long history of monasticism dispensations had come to be regarded in somewhat the same light as mortal sin: they were to be avoided at whatever cost. To seek one on the part of the subject was to deviate from the common life, to be singular: the word sent an involuntary shudder down the religious spine; to grant one on

⁴ Humbert of Romans, *Opera*, vol. II, p. 26 (1263), as quoted by Bede Jerrett, *Life of St. Dominic*, Benziger Bros., London, 1924.

⁵ "Cantus iste debet esse devotus, cum quadam dulcedine et suavitate, non autem cum rigiditate et asperitate, nec voce nimis alta, sed mediocri. Ne fratres devotionem amittant et studium eorum minime impediatur, cantus iste debet fieri breviter et succinte. . . ." *Constitutiones S.O.P.* No. 573.

"Et in Capitulo Gen. Bononiae 1220 sub S. Dominico Patre nostro ordinata fuit, ut Fratres nostri . . . magis circa studium et libras versentur quam circa Responsoria et Antiphonas decantandas." *Constitutiones, Declarationes et Ordinationes Capitulum Generalium Sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, Rome, 1862, p. 455.

the part of the superior was a sign of laxity, arbitrariness and dissipation.

So St. Dominic made the dispensation a *principle* of religious life. The prior could arrange that the daily chapter of faults should not be held if it interfered with study. The prior could dispense the brethren from the observance of any particular rule if he considered it was necessary for his studies. Even fasts could be broken if they interfered with a Friar's work.⁶

The purposefulness of Dominic is revealed by all this. Everything was relentlessly ordered to the end he had in view: preaching to heretics. In 1216 the Order had been confirmed as an Order of Canons Regular holding property. In the first general chapter of 1220 this right to hold property was renounced and poverty was embraced. This may have been due to the influence of the Friars Minor of St. Francis. But if St. Dominic copied St. Francis in this matter, the attitudes of the two men were vastly dissimilar. For St. Francis, poverty was an object in itself. Not so with Dominic. "St. Dominic consented to the surrender of temporal goods only because he thought it would make his followers more free to study and to preach. If he had reached the conclusion that wealth, when properly used, is a liberator and not a tyrant, he would have refused to consent to this change."⁷

The *raison d'être* of the Order of Friars Preachers, it should be clear from all this, is the preaching of the truths of faith, primarily to heretics.⁸ Indeed, the Order takes as its work, the pursuit of all truth; the entire history of the Order and not merely the life of any one of the brethren can be explained in terms of contemplation, and devotion to truth. Every religious institute has its own spirit. The Benedictines and the Carmelites, the Jesuits and the Franciscans all have the same ideals: to give honor and praise to God, to save the souls of others, and in doing this to save their own souls. But the paths by which they seek to accomplish these ends take different directions. To those souls

⁶ General Chapter of 1220. Cf. *Analecta*, vol. 2, p. 622.

⁷ Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁸ "Et Bononiae 1242 ord. 6 ita fuit mandatum: 'Item (scilicet ordinamus) quod Fratres se exercent studiosius in iis quae sunt contra haereticos et ad fidei defensionem.'" Fontana, *op. cit.* p. 218.

"He (Dominic) was a light which I gave to the world by means of Mary, placed in the mystical body of the Holy Church as an extirpator of heresies." (Italics mine.) *The Dialogue of Catherine of Siena*, translated by Algar Thorold, Newman, 1943, p. 298. The words are those of God to Catherine.

that have an especial love for truth, God offers the Dominican Order which has ever sought, espoused and defended immutable truth.

Truth consists in the perfect adequation of mind and things. When the statement "It is raining" actually adequates the state of the weather at that time, then it is a true statement: the idea reflects the reality. When a piece of furniture conforms perfectly to the plan in the mind of the cabinet-maker, it is a true production: the reality reflects the idea. Thus, not only in the spoken and written word but in things as well, and in symbols, truth can be found. The Friar Preacher, if he is to be true to his vocation, must be watchful for the truth, not only of thought—as expressed in philosophies, in theologies or in scientific hypotheses—but of things—human acts, political and economic trends, governments, education, art, everything—judging of their truth or falsity by considering first whether or not they are in conformity with the intention of God as it is known to us through Revelation and through the teachings of that Church to whom the interpretation of Revelation was given, and secondly by considering the natures of things, particularly the nature of man.

Any scientific theory of the beginning of the universe that denies creation, therefore, is false. Any social theory that defends the killing of millions today as a step towards a better society tomorrow is false. Any educational theory that denies the freedom of the will or the efficacy of grace is false. A Dominican operates always from the home base of truth, with his activities, of whatever nature, anchored to the antecedent contemplation he has made of truth, both the Uncreated Truth, and the truth of things. The Dominican sees God as the fundamental and pivotal truth, the first Cause of whatever else that exists; he sees God as the final cause of all things; he sees God as communicating not only being but also the proper operation of each created thing; and he sees Him as continuously conserving in its being whatever enjoys being. He sees man as created to the image and likeness of God. He sees all lower nature as subject to man and ordered to man.

The world of truth is the Dominican's arena. And of all truth, that especially which is divine truth, our holy faith. The secular clergy of Dominic's day could preach but would not; laymen should not, but did. The instrument that Dominic now presented to the Holy See could, would, and did. It was, to use

the phrase of Philip Hughes, "a society of professional theologians"⁹ put at the service of the Holy See and the faith.

In 1233 Pope Gregory IX, initiated in Provence and in northern Italy, the tribunal that is known today as the Inquisition. There is some evidence for saying that St. Dominic himself was the first Inquisitor.¹⁰ If so, we must conclude that the new institution did not swing into high gear until 1233. In that year the Dominicans were charged with full responsibility for the Inquisition in Provence, and in the same year Peter of Verona was named as Inquisitor General of all Italy. These two facts speak eloquently of the use the Holy Father made of the new Order. From what we have already seen, it can hardly excite surprise that the sons of Dominic were assigned to this rôle. The trained theologians of St. Dominic would be as much at home in stamping out heresy as is a fly in a bakery shop.

The work in Provence from 1233 on was merely the direct continuation of what St. Dominic had himself initiated in 1205. The work in northern Italy, on the other hand, was altogether new. Yet the outlines of the story were much the same. The odor was identical: heresy. The Cathari, like the Albigenses, taught that matter was evil. They adopted the same answer to the problem of the existence of evil in the world that the Albigenses had chosen: there must be two gods, one good, one evil. The supreme misfortune was physical life. Starvation, or for that matter, any form of suicide was virtuous. In all of its other principal doctrines, there was substantial conformity with those taught by the Albigenses. And there was more than doctrinal similarity. We are told that when members of the Cathari were apprehended by either ecclesiastical or civil authorities—they attacked both—and were offered the choice of submission to the Church or death, they arrogantly chose the stake. Thrown into prison, they would try to convert their jailers. Throughout the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, increasingly severe penalties were enacted against them with no success. This was the people to whom Peter of Verona was sent.

Looking at the picture now it is not too hard to see St.

⁹ *A Popular History of the Catholic Church*, Macmillan, 1940, p. 114.

¹⁰ "Sacrum Inquisitionis Officium ab Apostolica Sede Ordini nostro demandatum, primum Inquisitorem obtinuit S. P. Dominicum, qui ab Innocentio Papa III anno Dom. MCCXVI tali fuit munere decoratus, cujus fuit etiam confirmationem ab Honorio IV consecutus. In coelum vero sublato eadem S. Patre, a Summis Pontificibus plures alii ex nostris in diversis orbis terrarum partibus fuere Inquisitores instituti." Fontana, *op. cit.* p. 231.

Dominic living on in Peter of Verona. He had received the habit from the hands of Dominic. Listening to Dominic preach one day in Bologna, and learning that he had dedicated his life to the conversion of heretics, Peter, then only sixteen, had resolved to join the Order. His own mother and father were heretics. How could he better thank God for the grace of the faith than by giving his own life to teaching others what he had been given? All his life he had breathed heresy, and hated it; now he would join an organization that hated it. And he did.

What training did he receive? First of all, solid grounding in the Sacred Scriptures. This was the *sine qua non*. The biographers of Peter tell us only that he had a remarkable memory, one of those that will retain everything deliberately impressed upon it. Dominicans from the beginning have been solemnly urged to memorize everything that may be of use in the salvation of souls: the Scriptures certainly, tracts in scientific theology, the teachings of the Fathers, of the Councils. Peter already knew the teachings of the Cathari: he had had to learn them at home. He knew they were false. To this he now needed to add precisely what the Dominicans had to give: an ordered exposition of the truths of the faith based on the best exegesis; sound metaphysical arguments deriving from first principles; and for those who would be untouched by either of these, forceful *ad hominem* proofs—morally persuasive appeals. The Order had more than this to give too. Striking evidence is afforded by the number of saints and blessed it produced during this, its golden age.¹¹ It was not enough to know truth. One must love it, and God above all. A Dominican "never attacks a man, in order to get rid of an idea; he does not criticize what he is not certain to have correctly understood; he does not lightly turn down objects as unworthy of discussion; he does not take arguments in a more unreasonable sense than is necessary from their terms. On the contrary, since his business is truth and nothing else, his only care will be to do full justice even to what little of truth there is in every error."¹²

Immediately following his ordination, Peter was assigned

¹¹ 6 Saints, 78 Blessed from the establishment of the Order until 1300.

¹² We apply here what Mr. Etienne Gilson says of the virtuous philosopher in his *Wisdom and Love in St. Thomas Aquinas*, Marquette Press, Milwaukee, 1951. pp. 31, 32. Students of St. Thomas will recognize in these words a beautiful description of the Angelic Doctor, but it should be applicable to every Dominican.

to preaching. This is very interesting to the modern Dominican student. Does this assignment to preaching mean that Peter was not a brilliant student? If one were to judge by the practise of many provinces of the Order at the present day, one might conclude that this was the case. Nowadays the Order directs its best students to continue their studies, and then assigns them back to teaching succeeding classes of Dominican students, in much the same way that the farmer saves ears of his corn to plant as seed the following year, in the hope each year of improving the crop. There is a strong temptation to conclude, therefore, that Peter was not a brilliant student. But this would not necessarily be true. The urgency of the crisis was so great during his time that the Order might easily have directed its very best minds into the preaching office.

Whether or not he was a brilliant student is beside the point: he *was* an excellent preacher. And he himself would not have worried about his capability: to those who do what in them lies, God always gives His grace. And every man, whatever his vocation, always receives the grace to meet the demands of that vocation.

We have already indicated that Peter knew the doctrines of both the Church and of the heretics. He fearlessly defended the one; the other he mercilessly riddled. The boy had now grown up. The boy whom heretic parents had carelessly allowed to go to Catholic schools had learned his lessons well. The *Credo* he had recited as a boy to his horrified heretic uncle he now cherished as his proudest possession. Everything else he had surrendered to Lady Poverty.

In most people's minds, Dominicans and the Inquisition go inseparably together. There is good reason, assuredly. In Peter, a young Dominican only 27 years old had been made head of the Inquisition in Italy. Because modern heretics look upon the Inquisition as something diabolical, the Friars Preachers are the devils who conducted it. Torquemada was Satan incarnate. Many good Catholics, even today, have uneasy misapprehensions concerning the whole subject of the Inquisition. They look on it as a skeleton in the Church's closet; the less said about it the better. A more wholesome attitude would be to distinguish the use of the Inquisition from its abuse. Remember, the Inquisition was a special ecclesiastical tribunal established for only one purpose: to eradicate heresy. When the subject comes up in conversation with non-Catholics, we must make certain that

everyone understands just what Inquisition is meant, in what country, in what century. It makes all the difference in the world. There were times when the Inquisition was conducted unscrupulously, when it was accompanied by cruelty, when it was motivated by hate and rapacity rather than love of the faith. We need not defend these abuses. But the Inquisition in general was a beneficial influence, and even a necessary one.

Heretics today stress unduly the *abuses* that came from the Inquisition. We need not expect heretics of today to sympathize with measures taken against the heretics of yesterday. Modern heretics ignore the fact that religion is not totally subjective, that it must conform to certain objective norms. There was no difficulty on this score during the times in which the Inquisition was exercised. As Belloc correctly observes: the history of Europe and the history of the Church are the same thing approached from differing viewpoints. In the Middle Ages Europe was Catholic. No one questioned that the orthodoxy and the purity of the faith should be guarded. But moderns do not see in the Church a perfect society, equipped with a divine mandate to teach all nations, a mandate based on an authentic Revelation. Nor do they admit that the first and most important duty of the Church is to retain, totally uncorrupted, the original deposit of faith. Present-day heretics decry the narrow-mindedness and intolerance of the Church in even initiating such a thing as the Inquisition.

If it is intolerance to love and cherish truth and hate error, then truly the Church is intolerant. Truth has to be, and is, naturally intolerant of error, in precisely the same way and for the same reason that good is intolerant of evil. Enmity of nature is involved. It makes a difference to the individual but not to the truth that the man teaching error is acting in good faith. We are not here concerned with motives. Error is error. Dominicans every week, in listening to the reading of the Rule of St. Augustine, hear the admonition: "Let love of the sinner be ever united to hatred of his sin." Error is a sin against the truth. The principle guiding Peter of Verona and all the other Dominicans functioning as Inquisitors, therefore, was: Love the heretic, because he is the image of God; but hate the heretic's doctrine.

Is this a distinction without a difference? Not at all. It is possible, of course, that a man may himself sin by excess in his

opposition to what is false. Perhaps he attacks the man, instead of the error. Charity is the only safeguard against this.¹³

"It was a heavy burden of responsibility—almost too heavy for a common mortal—which fell upon the shoulders of an inquisitor, who was obliged, at least indirectly, to decide between life and death. The Church was bound to insist that he should possess, in a pre-eminent degree, the qualities of a good judge; that he should be animated with a glowing zeal for the Faith, the salvation of souls, and the extirpation of heresy; that amid all difficulties and dangers he should never yield to anger or passion; that he should meet hostility fearlessly, but should not court it; that he should yield to no inducement or threat, and yet not be heartless; that, when circumstances permitted, he should observe mercy in allotting penalties."¹⁴

"... that he should meet hostility fearlessly . . ."; for nineteen years of gruelling work among the benighted heretics, Peter of Verona met hostility fearlessly. Alone or with another Friar, he hiked from town to town, preaching in the churches to the faithful, strengthening them in their faith, exhorting them to good example; addressing the assembled populace in the public plaza, arguing with hecklers; praying for divine help to answer any objection shouted by a hostile audience that would sooner have slit his throat than give him the quiet in which to speak.

It was the same everywhere the brethren went. We today have no adequate notion of the violence of those days, the cheapness of human life. A man might expect violent death any day. When we read, for example, of the kindness of various women to members of the Order, and of the enthusiastic reception of the itinerant Preachers by crowds waiting outside the city walls to escort them to the plaza for an immediate sermon, we conclude that the popularity of the brethren must have been universal. It was not. The Friars Minor and the Friars Preachers were both much loved by the faithful, but among the heretics they were always in grave danger.

St. Thomas, in treating of martyrdom, points out that martyrdom is an act of the virtue of fortitude.¹⁵ To be an Inquisitor

¹³ Cf. "The Dominican Spirit" by Conrad Pepler, O.P., in *Blackfriars*, March, 1945.

¹⁴ Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. VIII, 1910 edition, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ II-II, 124, 2.

in the first place demanded learning. It also demanded virtue, and especially fortitude. For a man of God to preach to Catholics today, in fine churches with public address systems, is no strain on fortitude. Nor is it difficult to preach to women religious eager to learn how to serve God more fruitfully. Such assignments are a pleasure. But to preach to hostile audiences, to tell them that the things they hold dear are false, as Peter had to do—this required both physical strength and the supernatural virtue of fortitude. Peter, exhibiting the virtue of fortitude in heroic degree, was realizing one of the prized ideals of his Dominican vocation to truth. "Martyrs," says St. Thomas, "are so called as being witnesses, because by suffering in body unto death they bear witness to the truth; not indeed to any truth, but to the truth which is in accordance with godliness, and was made known to us by Christ: wherefore Christ's martyrs are His witnesses."¹⁶

Almighty God, referring to Peter of Verona, said to St. Catherine of Siena: "Look at My Peter, virgin and martyr, who by his blood gave light among the darkness of many heresies, and the heretics hated him so that at last they took his life; yet while he lived he applied himself to nothing but prayer, preaching and disputing with heretics, hearing confessions, announcing the truth, and spreading the faith without any fear, to such an extent that he not only confessed it in his life, but even at the moment of his death, for when he was at the last extremity, having neither voice nor ink left, having received the death blow, he dipped his finger in his blood, and this glorious martyr, having not paper on which to write, leaned over confessing the faith and wrote the Credo on the ground. His heart burned in the furnace of My charity, so that he never slackened his pace nor turned his head back, though he knew he was to die, for I had revealed to him his death, but like a true knight he fearlessly came forth onto the battlefield. . . ."¹⁷

What is a Dominican but a man consecrated to the truth, and of all truths, to that which is divine? And the truths of the faith are the primary truths of life. Faith, we know, is a word embracing not only that *which* we believe, but that *by which* we believe. In the first case, faith refers to the whole body of truths

¹⁶ II-II, 124, 5. Translation by the English Dominicans, Benziger Bros., 1947.

¹⁷ *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, "A Treatise on Obedience," p. 300.

which we hold. In the latter case it refers to the virtue which so perfects the intellect that it assents to truths, not on the basis of evidence but merely on someone's authority. Peter of Verona devoted his life to the preaching and defense of the truths of our holy faith. As a Dominican how could he have done otherwise? *The whole orientation of the Order from the time of its foundation was to truth.* To defend the faith! But no one can defend the faith who does not himself believe the truths of the faith. To accept the fact of the Trinity, say, demands the virtue of faith: the two things are correlative. Picture this Dominican, then, cut down by an assassin on the road from Como to Milan, writing in his own blood: *Credo*. It seems fantastic. A dying man should make an act of contrition. Or he should offer a prayer for God's mercy towards himself, for God's forgiveness towards his murderer.

Peter Martyr made an act of faith. His last act upon earth was the key to his whole life. As a boy he had said the *Credo*; he made it now his epitaph. To that Order which had as its ideal the protection of the faith he had given his life. His martyrdom symbolized his life. *Credo* is a glorious epitaph for a Dominican martyr: it identifies him with the Divine Proto-Martyr, the crucified Christ: "For this was I born, and for this have I come into the world: to bear witness to the truth."¹⁸

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Année Dominicaine for April 29, pp. 773-815.

Drane, Augusta Theodosia, *Life of St. Dominic*. London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne. No date.

Jacquín, Père, O.P., *The Friar Preacher Yesterday and Today*, translated by Hugh Pope, O.P. London: Washbourne, 1915.

Joret, F. D., O.P., *Dominican Life*. Westminster, Md.: Newman Bookshop, 1947.

Mortier, R. P., O.P., *Histoire des Maîtres Généraux de L'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, Vol. I. Paris: Picard et Fils, 1903.

Ricaud, M. A., O.P., *Frère Prêcheur*. Toulouse: Depot general, 1950.

Townsend, Anselm, O.P., translator, *Dominican Spirituality*. Milwaukee: Bruce, 1934. In particular, "The Character and Principles of Dominican Spirituality," by the Very Reverend Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., S.T.M.

Walz, A. M., O.P., *Compendium Historiae Ordinis Praedicatorum*. Rome: Herder, 1930.

¹⁸ John, 18: 37.