

sons as you, but I do not ask for a minute longer than the time that providence has allocated to me.

All that I demand of your filial piety is that you pray for me to be faithful right to the end to those principles, characteristic of a father and a bishop, which I have set before you today, like Samuel of whom we read:

'Here was a prophet of proved loyalty, and ever his word came true, such vision had he of the God that gives light . . . there must be an end at last to his life and to the age he lived in; but first he would make profession with the Lord and his Anointed for witnesses' (Eccli. xiv, 18-22).



## SAINT DOMINIC<sup>1</sup>

FELIX WATTS, O.P.

*Doth not wisdom cry aloud and prudence put forth her voice? Standing in the top of the highest places, by the way, in the midst of the paths, beside the gates of the city, in the very doors she speaketh, saying, O men, to you I call, and my voice is to the sons of men! O little ones, understand subtilty, and ye unwise take notice! Hear, for I will speak of great things, and my lips shall be opened to preach right things. My mouth shall meditate truth and my lips shall hate wickedness. (Prov. viii, 1-7.)*

**M**Y dear brothers and sisters in St Dominic: I think that the Dominican vocation is the hardest of all, because it is the vocation of an apostle. It is true that all of us suffer from the results of Adam's sin. We can cry with the apostle of the Gentiles, 'Who is weak, and I am not weak?' We are all engaged in the struggle with our adversary, who goes about, like a roaring lion, to devour us. There is no Christian vocation, no Christian life, which does not bid or require us to do battle with the devil. But, whereas some may overcome him by flight, others by patient and silent endurance, and others may derive refreshment in the battle from the protection and seclusion of the cloister; the friar preacher is required to go like Samson, and fall upon the lion with his bare hands; and (seemingly impossible feat) to rend it, as one

<sup>1</sup> A sermon preached to the Dominican Tertiary Congress at Hawkesyard in August, 1958.

would a kid, in pieces. The fight is hard, the battlefield the open vineyard of the Lord, and the consolations few.

To fight thus requires courage and strength; and, as we go forth to battle, we are painfully conscious of our weakness and cowardice. Yet we advance into the heart of the fray in fear and trembling; knowing that without our master we can do nothing; and that if we are to overcome the world as apostles are meant to overcome it, this can only be done in him who has already overcome it and judged the prince of this world, because he is the holy mighty one, the holy deathless one; one whose hand was strong enough to be laid upon the cross to carry it, and whose courage great enough for him to be laid upon the cross, to be nailed to it. Then, we can do all things in him who strengthens us.

But meanwhile, as we fight, it is in the very providence of God himself that the fact of our own weakness should be forced upon the mind of each one of us; nor is the weakness apparent only in each. The order, whose habit we wear, is affected by it: and when we try to live the life the order requires of us, to fight the fight enjoined by its apostolic purpose, we find that we are mysteriously unable to achieve the single-mindedness in conflict upon which the outcome of the battle depends; we are constantly thwarted in our endeavour by our failure to live up to the ideals which the companionship of apostles, which is ours and to which we are called, imposes on us.

In our own midst, then, there is strife, because in our own hearts, in our own selves, there is strife. People, members of the same chapter perhaps, do not get on; we do not see eye to eye. We may be surprised at that; but why should we be surprised? How could it be that we see eye to eye with one another if we cannot see eye to eye with him who beholds all? I mean God, our creator. When in our own communities, then, there is strife, it is because in our own hearts, in our own selves, there is strife; the strife of the war of the flesh against the spirit; the spirit lusting against the flesh, and the flesh lusting against the spirit, as St Paul tells us; that lusting, that strife, which is born of original sin. That lustfulness is there because the flesh is so good, the spirit is so good; and because the spirit is so good it can lust and strive so well against the flesh, and the flesh too can lust and strive so well against the spirit.

We find ourselves, then, a little band of apostles, fallen human

beings, it is true, but apostles, nevertheless, in a fallen world; we are indeed under the same condemnation of weakness as those whom we wish to save from condemnation. They can point to us, and quote with force the proverb, 'Physician, heal thyself'. We find ourselves disconcertingly unable to point to the Khrushchevs, Malenkovs, and Hitlers of this world, and say: 'There, you are evil, I am good', because if this is the case with our own lives, our own deeds, the inward history of our own hearts condemns us. And yet, this is still true; that we are apostles. I am an apostle. 'Indeed, I am not worthy to be called an apostle', St Paul says, 'because I persecuted the Church of God.'

We cannot condemn the persecutor in the heathen, if the persecutor in ourselves is not dead. What has the life of St Dominic to teach us, embarrassed as we are by this difficulty? When he went, led purposely out of his way, through the thorns that scratched and cut his feet, and as he went, sang songs, as we read in his office, and were reading the other night, I think he gave us a solution. When the calamity of original sin took place, because all the glory of God's creation was to be returned back to God through the tongue of man, whom he had created to appreciate and enjoy that beauty, and whose duty it was to praise him for the creation he had made, that was frustrated; that could not take place; the stones and the trees and the stars and the sun and the moon had to remain tongueless, because man himself had lost the tongue with which he could praise God; sin had made praise die on his lips.

Sin again had destroyed human society. The society which had grown up in the place of that which God had made was a society which had lost its unity because it had lost its God. Man himself was fragmented, split, scattered into parts, into body, into soul, had lost his unity. It was because St Dominic had discovered the unity of the stones, the moon and the stars with God, of the thorns and the briars with God, that as the thorns and the briars lacerated his feet he could still find a voice to praise the God that had created them.

In the midst of the desolate ruin of society which was the South of France, a ruin which had first stimulated St Dominic to the foundation of a preaching order, an order of apostles, in the midst of those who had lost their tongues to praise their creator, he still found tongue to praise the creator for them. In the place of his

fallen nature, which had lost its tongue to praise its creator, he found in his own heart, through the grace of the sacraments, the indwelling Blessed Trinity; and knowing that the Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, dwelt within him, had reconciled all the scattered and broken parts of his own nature, he found in the God who dwelt in him by grace, in the God who had re-created him out of the bits which sin had left, that had remoulded and refashioned him in the image of Christ, a tongue to praise that same God. And, therefore, the mouth of the just, as we sang in his mass, shall meditate wisdom, and his tongue speak prudence. His mouth meditates the wisdom of God; the wisdom of God who had created the world, but who, when the world had fallen to bits through sin, had recreated it again in grace to a yet more glorious, yet more noble pattern than the first had been. His mouth speaks prudence; because he is one chosen to direct those whose feet led to the valley of the shadow of death, back into the way of peace, into the way of reconciliation to God; and the fervour of the love which inspired his apostolate found its outlet in the overcoming of sin in himself first of all, and then in others. In himself by self-discipline and mortification; in others by preaching the word, and by encouragement, by kindness, and by love. And having overcome sin in himself, he was able to overcome sin and heresy in the society in which he lived.

It was not as though he took all the honour and glory of the battle to himself; that is certainly not the way of saints. He chose a little band of apostles, and with those he shared his ideas; and he was not merely sharing ideas and ideals; he was sharing the life of Christ of which he was the outward and so perfect expression because he had its inward spirit to the fullest degree. He shared it with that little band, and because it was the spirit of Christ that dwelt in that little band, therefore it grew. As we sang in the hymn yesterday: 'this is the little fountain of water which grew into the greatest of rivers, until it filled all Europe'; it went past Europe into the east and into the west so that the sound of the voice of the sons of St Dominic went out to the uttermost parts of the earth; and there it is still to this day.

And here we are in twentieth-century England, an England which is living on the aftermath of its Christian tradition, a tradition which it has repudiated; we are living in a land of

spiritual desolation, just as St Dominic was seven hundred years ago and more. Is it not right that the spiritual desolation in which we live should awaken in our hearts the same desires, the same sentiments, as they awoke in the heart of St Dominic? Can we say that they have done? Are we as anxious for the salvation of our neighbour as St Dominic was? Are we as anxious for our own salvation as was St Dominic? The first, perhaps, is the more important question, because obviously on the first comes the solution of the second. Have we the same purpose, the same apostolic spirit? Are we as ready to praise when the thorns lacerate our feet? That is the meaning of the Dominican liturgy, you know. It is all very well to come into the choir and sing the mass and office of St Dominic, but when we are alone, when we are carrying on our apostolate unappreciated and unknown, forgotten perhaps by the majority, when the thorns lacerate our feet, do these songs and these antiphons rise to our lips with the same readiness with which they rose to the lips of St Dominic? I don't know. All I know is that when I ask myself those questions, my own Dominican life makes me feel deeply ashamed, especially when I look at it in the light of the example of St Dominic; what I know, and what I have read about him. God help me! God help all of us!

Surely it is time that we renewed our fervour. How many of us live in towns where there are prisons; have you ever been to visit prisoners? How many of you live in the middle of discord? Have you tried to make peace? I ask myself and you these questions. How many of you live near sick people, Catholic, non-Catholics, it does not matter who they are; God loves them all; have we used the opportunity to visit them? Some of us have the substance of this world; have we been as free in disposing of it to those who need it, and as prudent, as we should have been?

Then there is the example of our daily lives. What about that? Do we preach Christ in our daily lives? What about the life in our chapters? Are we united, or do we hang upon unessential differences and allow division to creep in?

All these questions then, let us ask ourselves; let us re-examine ourselves, and let us freely condemn ourselves in so far as we fall short; and may the Spirit of truth, who alone can convince us of our own wretchedness and inadequacy as apostles and as Dominicans, lead us to a fuller and more vigorous expression of the life

of the order, of the life of St Dominic in England, that through our society the Dominican order, a redeemed society, part of the mystical body of Christ, we may set an example to the England that has lost a sense of society, that has degenerated into a mere bureaucracy; so that we as Dominicans may bring back the life of society to the nation to whom in the beginning St Dominic sent Friar Gilbert de Fresnay, and in which, to which, the Dominican order, before the reformation, contributed so much; may our contribution be not less than that of our brethren before that religious calamity. This depends on our own personal example, our own sincerity, the fullness with which we live our Dominican life. May St Dominic grant that fulness of Dominican life in us as he would have us live it.



### A NOTE ON CONVERSION<sup>1</sup>

YVES CONGAR, O.P.

**C**ONVERSION means by and large changing the main principle which governs the shape and direction of a human life. As such it may be for better or for worse; a man may commit himself to evil, he may decide against God, he can adopt Marxism, if he is a Catholic he may turn to Greek Orthodoxy or to Protestantism, if he is a Christian he may become a Jew or join a religion alien to our tradition. In short, what a psychologist may call a conversion, a moralist or canonist may call an apostasy.

Moreover, a distinction can be drawn between a religious conversion and a moral conversion. The first is a matter of our ideas concerning God and the economy of salvation, a change of mind and an intellectual conviction which usually leads to the acceptance of the teaching of a religious body, and agreement with its practices. The second is a matter of putting moral principles into practice. This shift of behaviour can happen outside a religious context, or it may go with and be intimately related to a religious conversion, or it may take place within a religion hitherto professed but scarcely lived, and is then sometimes called a

<sup>1</sup> This article first appeared, in a different translation, in the American Jesuit Quarterly *Thought*, for the spring of 1958, and is published here by kind permission of the editors.