



Meeting of Saints Dominic and Francis at Rome

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## THE TWO WHEELED CART

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“But when Peter saw the strong wind, he was afraid; and as he began to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And Jesus at once stretched out his hand and took hold of him.”

—Matt.: 14, 30-31.



PETER'S cry to the Lord was to be echoed many times down through the ages by his successors, as they in their turn faced the murky blackness of the tempest. Many men today, terrified by the cacophony of mechanical warfare, would assert that Pope Pius XII faces the most troublesome of all the storms. Yet many of his predecessors, who now lie so peacefully beneath St. Peter's dome, could tell of appalling storms in which the cry, "Lord, save me!" was wrenched from their lips. The Lord heard them all in different ways, but He always heard them. One whom He heard in a particularly wonderful manner was Pope Innocent III who reigned in the early thirteenth century.

Christian Europe was threatened from without by the sword of Islam; from within heresies were eating like moths into the fabric of the seamless Robe of Christ. Even these impending disasters could have been faced with some degree of equanimity if the beleaguered Pope could have relied on a devout and loyal Christian people for support. But the deadly disease of indifference was rampant, and a worldly and selfish clergy could not, even had they so wished, effectively cope with the perils which threatened Christianity. Here and there simple and devout men heard or read the message of Christ, and started out to do and to preach, but without authority. Preaching is a heady wine, as Arnold Lunn puts it, and since the

entire Christian apostolate rests upon the notion of *being sent*, it is not surprising to read that this unauthorized preaching, coupled with abysmal ignorance, eventually led many of these self-styled apostles to pride and to heresy. Those who might have been the foremost warriors of the Church of Christ became formidable enemies. The Waldenses, for instance, started out quite legitimately; but soon weird interpretations of Scripture, and the preaching of women caused the Bishop of Lyons to silence them. They retorted, "We ought to obey God rather than men," and a new heresy began. The Pope could look for no aid from the civil power, for powerful emperors fought vigorously to make the Pope subservient to selfish imperial policy. They pillaged countrysides which were under Papal protection, sacked monasteries and convents, and dared to threaten the person of the Pope himself.

In the face of such serious and drastic problems, it would not be surprising if Pope Innocent had dreamed a dream. It was really more than a dream; it was a nightmare. The legend has it that Innocent dreamed that the mother-church of Christianity, St. John Lateran, was tottering and falling to ruin. He held out helpless hands, and cried, "Lord, save me!" But then the dream took a peculiar turn. A little man appeared, walked to the crumbling walls, and re-established the Church by supporting the great wall with his back. The identity of this man, whom Innocent is subsequently supposed to have recognized, is a matter of controversy.<sup>1</sup> Irrespective of this, had the dream been truly a prophecy of the restoration of the Universal Church, two little men arm in arm would have supported the decaying walls with their joint effort; for as it happened several centuries later, Machiavelli, certainly no friend to the Church, was to attribute the revival of Christianity to the influence of these two men.

Each was very different from the other. One was a layman; the other, a cleric. One was gay and exuberant, filled with the romance of the new towns which were just springing up; the other, a cherub in his learning. One was Francis of Assisi; the other was Dominic of Guzman. Yet, in spite of, or perhaps on account of these differences, these two were friends. Their meetings were brief, and no record has been left of them. There has been much poetry and imaginings about midnight in one of the great basilicas of Rome, and without trespassing the bounds of historical fact, it may well be supposed that two men, two great saints, raised up at the same time

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<sup>1</sup> cf. *St. Dominic and His Work* (tr.)—Pierre Mandonnet, O.P., p. 423.

by the Providence of God for special missions which were really the same, should meet, recognize the sanctity and the work of God in each other, and each love the other with an inexpressible love.

Such a friendship, or at least the spirit of it, was not destined to perish, even with death. A great spiritual son of Francis, Bonaventure, was a cherished friend of one of Dominic's great spiritual sons, Thomas. Both were the most learned men in their own generations. Both loved the image of God in the other, and both confessed that all their knowledge proceeded from a common source, one great Book, as they said, the Crucifix.

Since, as Lacordaire says, an Order is but the immortal reflection of a man raised up by God, the Orders of Francis and Dominic have reflected the mutual love of their Patriarchs. On the Feast of St. Dominic, the Franciscan Fathers are the celebrants of the solemn Mass of *our* Father Dominic in the Priors of the Preachers; two months later on the Feast of St. Francis, the Dominican Fathers are the celebrants of the solemn Mass of *our* Father Francis in the Friaries of the Minors. After dinner, the Friars of both Orders, who fill the refectory with an unaccustomed mixture of brown, black and white habits, sing together a special Antiphon for the regular *Laudate* Psalm:

*"Seraphicus Pater Franciscus et Apostolicus Pater Dominicus,  
Ipsi nos docuerunt legem, Tuam, Domine!"*<sup>2</sup>

After each verse the choir takes up the refrain, "The seraphic Father Francis and the Apostolic Father Dominic have taught us Thy law, O Lord!"

This mutual affection of two great Founders and two great Orders could not fail to leave a lasting imprint on art. Fra Angelico, in one of his exquisite paintings, now hanging in the Mellon Art Gallery in Washington, has immortalized the meeting of his own Father Dominic and his Father-by-adoption, Francis. Many murals and larger paintings designed to catch the medieval spirit have blended well the Franciscan and Dominican habits. This is especially notable in paintings dealing with the life of St. Louis, king of France, that same King Louis who said that, could he but divide himself, he would give half to St. Francis and half to St. Dominic. But if art attempted to immortalize this affection, literature in general, and hagiography in particular, seized upon it as an appropriate and symbolic device for telling a story. The great Dante, in his imaginary

<sup>2</sup> *Processionarium S.O.P.*, p. 458.

peregrinations through the other world, encountered in Paradise two great Doctors of the Church, one called Seraphic, and the other Angelic. The poet, mindful of a certain celestial courtesy, allows St. Bonaventure to celebrate the praises of St. Dominic, and in the next Canto, his friend St. Thomas returns the compliment by discoursing on the life and character of St. Francis.

However, this symbolism is not confined to the middle ages. Modern hagiography, though much different in form, has retained the notion of the close friendship between the Minors and the Preachers. There was a difference, nevertheless, for when interest in the lives of the Saints revived in this century, there was less emphasis on the miraculous and more on the mystical element of their lives. There was less legend and more fact which had to be unearthed by the laborious historical research from the accumulation of tales which had come to be almost inextricably bound up with the actual lives of the Saints. This process, although it is undoubtedly to be commended in that it provided more substantial and solid bases for imitation of the Saints, was forced to pass over St. Dominic very lightly, because so little in the nature of substantiated fact could be discovered about him. His own writings have been lost. Chroniclers of his time make mention of the magnitude of his achievement, but seem to have saved their verbiage for the more romantic figure of the gay Troubadour of Christ, the Blessed Francis. Then, in modern times, the figure of St. Francis became the object of a sentimental attachment, especially in non-Catholic countries; while the character of St. Dominic came to be misunderstood and maligned. For these reasons, when the moderns came to write of the Friar Saints, they indeed wrote of Francis in terms of Francis, but wrote of Dominic in terms of his greatest work—his Order. For Dominic has indeed lived on in the very spirit of his Order so intimately that the peculiar genius of the Order always bespeaks him, so in each of his numerous sons and daughters who have been raised to the altars of the Church, there is something of the father.

Chesterton, for one, recognized the vital connection between Francis and Dominic when he said, "They are like Heavenly twins, irradiating the same light from heaven; seeming sometimes to be two saints in one halo."<sup>3</sup> Yet, Chesterton himself, after he had written of one Twin, St. Francis, wrote for a companion volume not the life of the other Twin, but of one of the sons of that Twin, St. Thomas. Joannes Jorgensen, the Danish convert, found it easy to

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<sup>3</sup> *St. Thomas Aquinas*—G. K. Chesterton, p. 35.

write of St. Francis, for even the Sultan admired the Little Poor Man who made every tree, every flower, every blade of grass a stairway to God. But when Jorgensen came to choose the associate of St. Francis in literature, he chose not St. Dominic, whose directness of approach seemed to frighten him, but St. Dominic's greatest daughter, one who was like St. Francis, a stigmatist, the seraphic Catherine of Siena.

The parallel in the development of the two Orders is best seen in a series called the *Friars Saints Series* which was started in 1910 with the help and collaboration of the Franciscan and Dominican Provincials in England. The project was not completely successful, nor was it ever completed. Nevertheless, several excellent little volumes did result from the attempt, and it is interesting to note the *rapprochement* of the proposed titles. A life of St. Bonaventure quite naturally appeared with a life of his good friend and fellow Doctor, St. Thomas. A life of St. Anthony of Padua, who was known for the number and magnitude of his miracles, had for a companion work the life of the great Dominican thaumaturge, St. Vincent Ferrer. The life of St. John Capistran, who in 1454 led the Christian army in Hungary to victory over the Turks, was paralleled by St. Pius V, also a great warrior, who like Moses of old, prayed the Christian forces to the great naval victory of Lepanto in 1571. A proposed life of St. Bernardine, who effected reform both religious and social in Siena and its environs, was to have as its twin the life of St. Antoninus, who did the same work in Florence. St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, the writer of great ascetical works was to find a companion in St. Raymond of Pennafort, the writer of Church Canons.

Now Dante, who has been said to have put Aquinas into verse, thus speaks of the two great Founders:

. . . *Where one is*  
*The other worthily should also be;*  
*That, as their warfare was alike,*  
*Alike should be their glory.*<sup>4</sup>

But more than this, Dante realized the inner unity, the complementary nature of the two Orders, and he expresses this most clearly when he calls them

. . . *that two-yoked cart.*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Divina Commedia*—Dante Alighieri.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

Here is the truth, here is the essence of the friendship with all its accidental manifestations. Francis and Dominic manned one cart, the cart being crippled and almost helpless when manned by only one of the team. Although there is bound to be some degree of error in such a vague generalization, we might say that Dominic was to speak to a man's intellect, Francis to his will, or as he would perhaps say, his heart. But the appeal to the one without the other would not be to the whole man, the whole Christian. The Christian must have faith, for one cannot love something or someone totally unknown; but the Christian must have charity, too, for faith without charity is dead. The purpose of the two-yoked cart was, as Dante says, the defense of holy Church. Dominic was sent to appeal to men who were living ascetic, mortified lives, but who taught falsehoods that led to frightful consequences. Francis was sent to restore to a world grown cold a heart of charity.

Father Reeves, O.P., in his comparison of the philosophies of the Franciscan and Dominican schools, expressed quite succinctly, the complementary nature of the two Orders.

The difference between the two schools, and the two saints at the head of each is no more than the difference between St. Dominic and St. Francis. The difference is often explained by reference to the mysticism and poetry of the Franciscans and the stern intellectualism of the Dominicans. But this will not do. Stern intellectualism is not opposed to poetry and mysticism. St. Thomas was a rare poet and mystic, and St. Bonaventure a very good philosopher. The difference must be sought in the diverse *yet complementary* natures of the two Orders. The Friars Preachers were founded to win to Christ the minds of men whose wills were good; the Friars Minor to win to Christ the hearts of men whose morals were relaxed, but whose minds were as well informed on Catholic doctrine as that of Saint Francis himself. . . . From the first it was evident that though the emphasis was different, the two were doing the same work. As the Orders developed the difference was further emphasized, yet at the same time the resemblance became more marked. . . . It was left for the genius of Dante to show that the difference, though real, is in effect no difference.<sup>6</sup>

The Church has recognized this inseparability of the Franciscan and Dominican spirits. When the priest returns to the sacristy after

<sup>6</sup> *The Dominicans*—J. B. Reeves, O.P., p. 72; *italics mine.*

Mass, there are certain highly indulged prayers, which though not obligatory, are strongly recommended. After the recitation of the famous Canticum of the Three Young Men and a Psalm with versicles and prayers, two short Thanksgivings for Holy Communion are said. One is the prayer of St. Thomas; the other, of St. Bonaventure. The first is a prayer of a thinker, who, though in love, pauses to analyze his love and express it in careful terms. The balanced phrases, the universality of the requests, the poised humility and reverence bespeak a calm and serenity like that of the Master Who listens to the prayer. The second is the prayer of a lover, who pours out his love in turgid, redundant phrases, so full of love that he thinks only of expressing it. The meter is hurried, breathless, and the sobs and sighs of raptured love can be heard in the sweet repetition. As Father Reeves puts it, "St. Thomas sang and prayed to the piping of St. Francis, but with emphasis on the part played by the mind in both song and prayer; St. Bonaventure philosophized as sedately as any Dominican, but was all the time emphatically a philosopher with a heart."<sup>7</sup>

This is no coincidence. With God, nothing happens by chance. He, in His ineffable Providence, has raised up those two great Orders of Friars at the same time for the same work. St. Catherine, the seraphic virgin of Siena, dictated her famous *Dialogue* in ecstasy, in such fashion that God the Father is said to have spoken through her lips. And in this *Dialogue*, God the Father is quoted as speaking thus, "Of a truth Dominic and Francis were two columns of the holy Church."<sup>8</sup> This statement requires no elaboration. It goes back to Dante's happy metaphor, the two-yoked cart. And both metaphors expressly state the purpose of the union, the reason for the friendship—the defense and support of holy Church. The testimony of the ages asserts that these two, and their children, have done well the work God gave them to do. As Chesterton says of St. Francis and St. Thomas - - - and it could well be applied to St. Dominic:

"Yes, in spite of the contrasts that are so conspicuous . . . the great fact of medieval history is that these two men were doing the same great work; (one in the study and the other in the street) . . . they were bringing Christianity into Christendom."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *loco. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *The Dialogue* (tr.)—St. Catherine of Siena, p. 301.

<sup>9</sup> Chesterton, *op. cit.*



Dominic, who wandered all over Europe, and Francis, who included in his travels a trip to northern Africa and Palestine, even in their own lifetime had accomplished a gigantic task. They had set in motion, as Chesterton says, the forces to bring back Christianity to Christendom. These forces did not die with them, but continued on through the ages, in a cycle of declines and perpetual renewals until they stand today, despite seven centuries, fresh and full of all the enthusiasm and vigor of youth. And they stand, not as a picturesque relic of a romantic past, but as forces ready to fight the new enemies of holy Church. Yet in reality, no enemy of the Church is new. The Franciscan knows that the indifference and laxity his fervent heart meets are radically the same as those his beloved Father met. The Dominican recognizes in the modern errors only old heresies in new dresses, heresies that his beloved Father and all his older brothers have met. Together they will fight; together they will triumph as their Fathers have triumphed before them, and together they will sing that sweet melody which rises with gracious harmony to those two Princes of the celestial court,

“The Seraphic Father Francis and the Apostolic Father Dominic; they have taught us Thy law, O Lord!”