

# CHAPTER TWO

## THE LETTERS OF ST. DOMINIC

### INTRODUCTION

St. Dominic was a preacher, not a writer. Like Christ, he influenced others more by what he said and did than by what he wrote. Only four compositions from his pen have come down to us. The first is the primitive Constitutions of the Order. These are indirectly from his hand. The ideas and regulations of this document are certainly his; the words are perhaps those of Jordan of Saxony. The other three compositions are the letters presented in this chapter.

The first letter was sent to the nuns of Madrid in 1220. When he was in Spain in 1219, Dominic gave the habit to the nuns in whom the preaching of the friars had awakened a religious vocation. At the time, Dominic had no monastery for them. During their first year, they probably lived in their homes, assembling several times a day in the Dominican church to take part in the divine services of the friars. In 1220, the fathers, presumably acting under directions from St. Dominic, surrendered their priory to the nuns, enabling them to begin community life and establish their cloister. It was this event that prompted this letter.

The second and third letters appearing below Dominic wrote while working in Albigensian territory. Although written earlier than the Constitutions and the letter to the nuns, we place them in the last position here because of their brevity and because their official character does not reflect the Saint's own thought so clearly as do the Constitutions and the letter to the nuns of Madrid. The first of these two letters lists the penances which Dominic imposed upon Pons Roger, formerly of that Albigensian class called "the perfect," and now a convert to the true faith. The second is written to a similar convert. It reflects the Saint's care even about the temporal well-being of the faithful. In general, those who had been Catholics since infancy were slow to deal with converts from Albigensianism. The Toulouse furrier Raymond William of Hauterive, then, was in danger of losing his Catholic clientele because he had hired William Hugh, who, before his conversion, was commonly known to be an Albigensian inasmuch as he had worn the clothes characteristic of the members of that sect. In this regard, Raymond William had two problems which he presented to Dominic: (1) Could he employ William Hugh despite the latter's penitential status? (2) If so, would he be obliged to make this man do anything which would indicate this status (e.g., wear the crosses by which converted heretics were designated)? As is evident from the letter, Dominic answers affirmatively to the first question, negatively to the second question.

### TEXT

#### THE LETTERS OF ST. DOMINIC

#### I

Friar Dominic, Master of the Preachers, to the Beloved Prioress and the Entire Community of Nuns at Madrid: Health and Daily Progress. (11)

Greatly do we rejoice and thank God because of your holy life and because He has freed you from the corruption of this world. Daughters, fight the ancient adversary insistently with fasting, for only he will be crowned who has striven according to the rules. If until the present you have not had a place in which to live your religious life, now you can no longer be excused, because by the grace of God you have buildings suitable enough for living the religious life. From now on I want silence to be kept in the forbidden places, the refectory, the dormitory, and the oratory, and your law to be observed in all other matters. Let none go out through the gate and no one enter except the bishop or some prelate for the sake of preaching or making a visitation. Be not sparing of discipline and vigils. Be obedient to your prioress. Avoid talking idly to one another. Let not your time be wasted in conversation.

Since we cannot help you in temporalities, we do not want to give any friar the authority to receive postulants, but only the prioress with the council of her community. Moreover, we command our dear brother, i.e., Friar Mannes, who has worked so hard and has joined you to this blessed state, that he arrange and dispose everything as shall seem good to him, so you might live a most religious and most holy life. Furthermore, we give him power to visit and correct and to remove the prioress (if it be necessary) with the consent of the majority of the nuns; and we give him permission that he may grant dispensations in some matters, if it seems fit to him.

Farewell in Christ.

## II

Brother Dominic, Canon of Osma, the Least Among Preachers, Sends Greetings in Christ to All of His Faithful to Whom This Letter Comes,

By the authority of the Lord Abbot of Citeaux, Legate of the Apostolic See, who enjoined this function on us, we reconcile the bearer of this letter, Pons Roger, who has, by God's mercy, been converted from the sect of the heretics.

In virtue of the Sacrament which has been administered, we command that, three Sundays or days of major feasts, a priest march him, stripped to the waist and under continuous flogging, from the entrance to the city to the church. Moreover, we command him to abstain at all times from meat, eggs, and cheeses, or all things which are conceived from the seed of flesh, except on Easter Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, and Christmas, when, for the rejection of his former error, we command him to eat these things. He should keep three Lents each year, fasting and abstaining from fish. Three days every week, perpetually, he should fast and abstain from fish, olive-oil, and wine, unless bodily infirmity or summer heat makes a dispensation necessary. He should wear clothes which are religious in both their style and color, with a small cross sewed on each side over the breast. If it is opportune, he should hear Mass daily and, on major feast days, he should go to church for Vespers. Wherever he may be, he should praise God at all [canonical]

hours of night and day in the following way: seven times a day he should say the *Our Father* ten times, at midnight, twenty. He should observe total chastity and live at Treveille. He should show this letter to his chaplain every month. Moreover, we command the chaplain to supervise his life with diligent care, until the Lord Legate otherwise expresses his will on these matters. Should he refuse to observe these directives, we command that he be deemed a perjurer and a heretic excommunicated from association with the faithful. (12)

### III

Brother Dominic, Canon of Osma, Humble Minister of Preaching, Sends Greetings and Sincere Charity in the Lord to All of His Faithful to Whom This Letter Comes,

By the authority of this present letter, may the prudent judgment of your community know that we have granted permission to the furrier Raymond William of Hauterive to have William Hugh (who formerly wore the clothes of the heretics, as he himself confessed to us) live in his house at Toulouse as other persons do, until such time as the Lord Cardinal shall make more express command to us or to him, and as long as this does not bring infamy or damnification to the said Raymond William. (13)

1. [St. Dominic: Biographical Documents](#)
2. [The Libellus of Jordan of Saxony](#)
3. [The Letters of St. Dominic](#)
4. [The Process of Canonization at Bologna](#)
5. [The Process of Cannonization at Toulouse](#)
6. [The Nine Ways of Prayer for St. Dominic](#)
7. [The Miracles of St. Dominic](#)
8. [The Bull of Canonization of GREGORY IX](#)
9. [Prayer to St. Dominic](#)
10. [The Bulls of Approbation](#)
11. [The Encyclical Letter of Jordan of Saxony](#)
12. [The Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers](#)
13. [Bibliography](#)
14. [Notes](#)

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