

and shock his contemporaries; only now, three centuries later, are they beginning to be acknowledged as the only means of winning the soul of Asia. The tragedy is that this realization has come so late, and China once more is a country barred to Christ.



## THE FIVE BEATS OF EVERY APOSTOLIC LIFE<sup>1</sup>

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**A**FTER the apostles themselves, as we see them in their writings and in the Acts, who is there better than the Father of the Preachers to show us the laws of apostolic life? St Dominic in fact exhibits very strikingly certain realities which are most essential in such a life. They form what one might call the Law of the Five Beats. The more one meditates on it, the more one comes to think that it deserves to be classical.

### 1. *Hidden life in God with Jesus Christ*

Today the first 'beat' in order of time does not seem, for most apostles, to be contemplative withdrawal into God. They are in the world, they have experience of it, and grace presses them to proclaim the gospel to it. They begin with what was for St Dominic the second and the fourth 'beats': they can already taste the experience of combat for the faith. It is at this point generally that they feel the need for hidden inwardness with Christ; it is not first in time for them. Worth noticing is the fact that St Dominic himself, before the fulfilment of his vocation as a canon, of course heard calls to the salvation of mankind, but this was in the line of corporal mercy. The young man, at the university, could no longer 'study on dead skins while men are dying of hunger'; he sold his books, his irreplaceable manuscripts, to give them bread.

St Dominic lived in a Christian age and society when the ideal of course was 'apostolic life'—but this did not mean life consecrated to proclaiming the gospel to those who have never heard it. It meant imitating the primitive Christian community: the

<sup>1</sup> Adapted and translated by F. K. from *La Vie Spirituelle*, July 1959.

Church of Jerusalem at the time of the apostles, as described in the Acts: 'The company of the faithful were of one heart and one soul, and none called his own anything that belonged to him but they had everything in common' (iv, 32). Monks were understood to be perpetuating that life of poverty and fraternity, and the regular chapters of canons, being founded or reformed in St Dominic's time, were renewals of that grace.

So we have the future apostle in an 'apostolic life' which was not organized for the apostolate! It offers four striking characteristics, which ought always to be marked in the *milieux* in which the working out of an evangelical word takes place: it is enlightened by truth, fraternal, poor, and at prayer (specifically eucharistic and liturgical).

The community is first of all a focus where the lustre of the saving truth is concentrated. St Luke begins with that: the first Christians 'were faithful to the teaching of the apostles' (Acts ii, 42). Monasteries are where the divine Word is assimilated; they are centres of *lectio divina*. St Dominic, gathering together men who were to teach others, was later to make of his convents real schools, and of 'the assiduous study of sacred truth' one of the most essential elements of religious observance.

'Fraternal communion' in the Acts is correlative to the 'doctrine of the apostles' (ii, 42). Necessarily, since it puts into relief the greatest commandment, which is to love our brethren as Christ loves us (John xiii, 34; xv, 12).

Poverty is no less necessary. The most venerable of all Christian texts outside the new testament, the *Didache*, a sort of manual for those charged with the apostolate by the primitive Church, is not content, like the Acts (iv, 32), to set fraternity and dispossession together, it makes the connection between them explicit: 'You are to have all things in common with your brother and not to claim that they are yours, for if you are sharing the goods of immortality, *how much more* must you do so with corruptible goods' (IV, 8). The entire life of canons regular, embraced by St Dominic in the cathedral cloister at Osma, is built on this intuition. Their instigator, Gregory VII, characterized it by this formula: 'apostolic life, that is, common life'—meaning it of this common poverty.

The function of the community, itself commanding fraternity and poverty, is the worship of God. The primitive community

was 'day by day, with one heart, constantly in the temple' (Acts ii, 46), and deacons were instituted not only to free the apostles for 'the service of the word' but also to let them 'devote themselves to prayer' (vi, 4). This life unfolding to God and in mutual love breathes 'gladness and simplicity of heart' (ii, 46). This radiance and its attractiveness are a wonderful *apostolate*, independently of all apostolic activity: they 'increased those who were being saved' (ii, 47).

At Osma St Dominic's life was his prayer, but already an apostolic prayer. His best-informed biographer, Bl. Jordan of Saxony reports: 'God had given him a special grace of prayer for sinners, the poor and the afflicted. He took their misfortunes into an interior sanctuary of compassion. . . . One of his frequent and particular demands of God was that he should give him true, effective charity to put himself to winning the salvation of mankind, for he thought he would be truly a member of Christ only on the day he could give himself wholly with all his powers to gain souls, as the Lord Jesus, Saviour of all men, consecrated himself wholly to our salvation.' There indeed is the apostle's prayer. There is to be no opposition between his union with God and his activity among men: he never contracts out of mankind into God, and when he has to do with men they are never to distract him from God: he will put them in the mystery of salvation where he sees them in God.

The mediation the apostolic function consists of will always demand this return to hidden life with the Saviour. It will demand it more deeply and more hidden than ever as action extends and turns outward. On the roads, St Dominic often used to isolate himself from his companions. In the great Albigensian turmoil he husbanded Prouille, the place of rest and recollection; when he instituted his order he took remarkable care over the humblest acts favourable to recollection, austerity and concentration. He gave us this rule of apostolic mediation: 'Speak only with or about God', *aut cum Deo aut de Deo*. His conversation with God flung him among men to speak to them about God; this having to speak to them about God always flung him back into God to speak to him about men and to unite himself always more inwardly with him.

## 2. *The great ordeal*

St Dominic accompanied his bishop, Diego of Azevedo, sent

on an embassy by the king to Denmark. They crossed the Pyrenees; they crossed from a country of Christendom into a land infested with heresy. They experienced for themselves the catharism of which they had only heard tell in Castile. On the way to Toulouse they saw many churches abandoned; they realized the hostility of the people; certainly they talked with priests and bishops, some of whom were hardened by hatred and fear into a refusal to understand, others were opportunists, others again more or less conquered by the ideas one breathed everywhere in this country. What is terrible and decisive in such experiences is to discover the strength and attractiveness of error, the best people being led astray, to have firsthand acquaintance with the failures of the Church, the scandals to be met with, the disappointment she causes.

Of course a sensitive member of the Church is forewarned in the matter; he knows well enough that this drama is nothing less than the passion of Christ continued in his mystical body. He is more than forewarned, he already suffers the agony of it. St Dominic used to groan at night with appeals to the mercy of God. He experienced the drama of the Church personally in the depths of his soul because his depths were open, in love, to the great deeps of the Church. But it is one thing to pray, to suffer, in mystery, outside time, by enacting this drama, in time, only by an attitude of friendly helpfulness to those one meets, another thing altogether to discern some of the great *data* of human destiny as they are being realized in one's own time. To read some of the signs of the time is to become a prophet. The understanding one gains of them turns the passion of salvation into the effective action of this salvation, and one rises an *apostle*.

Today the men of whom Christ makes his apostles are not born in Christendom, or the little Christendoms they come from are only islands. They do not have to discover the inextricable mixture of better and worse which the Church has to achieve her discriminations in. But their attitude is usually not sufficiently that of faith, it is troubled by the passions of the time and does not go deep enough. Christ has to take them as he finds them. But how their frettings have to be purified! What a risk when they take their all-too-human crazes and grievances for prophetic intuitions! The ordeal tempers the apostle only if he undergoes it with a pure heart, if the echo that it awakens in him is not a tumult of partisan

claims and wrongs but participation in the sufferings of Christ, if his lucidity brings him even more gentleness than grief.

### 3. *Struggle for the faith*

So far as he survives his ordeal the apostle is put by the Lord into encounters in which the grace that awakens faith must pass through him. The game's opening move was St Dominic's finding himself in the presence of a convinced Albigensian, his landlord, on the evening of his arrival at Toulouse. What sort of match was this particular struggle for the faith? We cannot know, but we can make it a symbol for the third beat of apostolic life, that for which the apostle is made, where the Lord waits for him (where the devil waits too).

Here is a man who is in his adult conviction. The apostle must close with him—him, the real 'him', as he is, with his problems and his solutions. He obliges the apostle to think, to experience the supernatural realities by which the apostle lives, in terms of what is right in the landlord's conscience. The man must recognize in the apostle his better conscience; his own voice in the apostle's, but purer. The apostle has to enter into the reasons of this mind, this heart, these emotions, reasons so dizzily plausible that he *must* think as he does; reasons which wound the Church and crucify Christ. In refuting what is false in them the apostle must contrive not to wound him with the spite of his errors, but to substitute the truth for them in a way more *his* than the way his evil reasons, so much his own, had been. He must redirect the convictions by which the man lives, surpassing, deepening and opening them, rather than annulling them: making them open out into the full truth that makes us free. This is identification with the enemy (and his enmity is true and savage enough), more exhausting than the stretching of the prophet upon the child whose life he was to bring back (3 Kings xvii, 21; 4 Kings iv, 32-35). It is *battling for the enemy's victory*: to reconcile him back to the true self from which heresy estranged him, to the communion of saints. The apostle uses only those weapons of light (from which St Paul has taken great care to eliminate 'vengeance', 'jealous zeal' and 'inexorable anger') that are to be found in the lists of weapons of the spirit (I Thess. v, 6; Eph. vi; cf. Isaias lix, 17; Wisd. v, 17). 'I will not let thee go', the apostle says, 'except thou bless me' (Gen. xxxii, 26). A humiliating rout under mere

superiority of arguments would not be the victory of faith in this soul. This soul is infinitely precious because it is the image of God: it is *free*! Once set free, it must fulfil itself, with the whole spontaneity of its powers of life, in the light of Christ, in the deep peace of the Church joyfully recognized, and it must bless its liberator. In the morning the Albigenian landlord of the night before was a Catholic.

The apostle bears the wounds of such a night for ever, like Jacob lame for life at the angel's touch. He has had in full the decisive *apostolic experience*.

#### 4. *Sympathetic knowledge of the world*

The bishop and St Dominic pursued their road to Denmark, came back to Castile, turned again there and went on pilgrimage to Rome. Can you imagine, for men travelling on horseback at the beginning of the thirteenth century, what discoveries such a journey offers? Companion to a bishop, who is the ambassador to the king of Castile, St Dominic evidently talked with personalities who showed him the astonishing effervescence of the spirit at this epoch. At this time the human spirit, always growing at new points, freed the communes, developed the trade fairs, opened the universities, sent the great cathedrals soaring into the sky. So many different lands, so much wretchedness and scandal, so much sanctity! 'Whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise'—if the Christian must 'think about these things' (Phil. iv, 8), all the more must the apostle welcome them into himself. In his heart grows love for men, joy in their being so different, the urge to establish all these differences in Christ; love rent by their divisions, love inextricably sorrowful, enthusiastic, discouraged and full of hope, burning with zeal and at times with a lucidity so cruel that there is nothing but to see how to die as quickly as possible for the salvation of all these peoples.

The further we go, the more will progress in sympathetic knowledge of the world be the apostle's crucial test; a test of his faith, a test of his love. He knows in this twentieth century that immediate experiences are not enough, that human relationships as they appear on the surface give as false an impression of our real relationships, as the sky's appearance on a lovely night does of the giddily whirling galaxies, or as the tame stuff of which

things seem to be made gives of the formidable energy of its atoms. Man is outflanked everywhere and he knows that he is, that the effective powers are masked by their surface manifestations: psychic, economic, social, political, cultural powers. . . . Such is destiny.

There can be no question of resolving a problem like that as it requires in a few words. Let us simply indicate the spirit of the solution. What the apostle can learn about the world beyond his personal experience must be to his ideas, choices and applications, what hypotheses are in scientific research. They demand a continual come-and-go between them and experience. Without the broad views modern science and information can give, experience will always be scanty and misleading; they open it out, give it its meaning and direction. But they become valid for the sensitive man only in encountering his personal knowledge. Besides, one can no longer make a realistic effort today to respond to the demands of a particular situation without being obliged to get back closer and closer to tremendous causes which at first one had never suspected. If the apostle dares to see and understand, he is led 'where he would not go' (John xxi, 18); even to positions which would have horrified him at the outset, if he had suspected what they are. But broad views on the epoch one is living in are always subject to caution. Once again, let them be nothing more than hypotheses. Reflection on personal experience, on proved information, must be revising them all the time. In the apostle's decisions knowledge of the world must encounter the Christian sense, the sense of Church. The one will give (if we may put it like this) the dimension of breadth to the most modest action, the other will give it its vertical dimension, in the infinite height of the divine mystery and in the measureless depth of the human drama. If this is so, the apostle will say and do only the little he can modestly believe he is sure of. He will be giving out from very little but he will have a great soul. He will be weaving stitch by stitch with humble materials but they will have a chance of being those with which the Bride will be clothed on the last day (Apoc. xix, 8).

##### 5. *Taking over a distressed area*

The pope sent the bishop and St Dominic back into Languedoc. There is the fabric he charged them to repair. The great soul who

applies himself to his mission, however small it may be, is wonderfully enlarged by it. And how far will God sometimes not enlarge the mission? Certainly the mission St Dominic received was big but it was hopeless. He burnt himself up there for ten years, yet it was one of the places where the destiny of man and the Church was at play. He made the gospel fountain gush there again with its original vigour and perfect freshness; he concentrated on this point the light, the warmth, and the power he never ceased to find in the fountains of the Saviour, the experience he had gained of the world, his profound sense of the drama of his time. What did apparent checkmate matter? He renewed the whole apostolate. And soon it was not a province he was charged with. It was the apostolic function of the entire Church for the future that he was organizing into a regular order.

'To take over a distressed area': Fr Lebre's striking expression. The apostle must be obsessed about it and ask himself if it has become the formula of his life. It is always an orientated impulse that makes a great and fertile life. 'To want to establish the kingdom of God in one area': the priest cannot want to do anything else and must prune everything that is not this work. 'What makes man is that he is capable of choosing, and that he in fact chooses' (Fr Suavet).

The 'distressed area' can take many forms. Obviously it can be a tract of land. But 'one can want to establish the kingdom of God in the world of the workers, in the engineering world, in the diplomatic world, in the radio world. . . . The work one should be doing can be simply introducing sound elements which will help others to establish the kingdom of God in an area; their work will be more visible but the work of the man who makes the tool is no less real: an editor of the Dead Sea scrolls or of the *Summa* of St Thomas, a professor of theology, each has his task to perform.' The 'distressed area' can be a deficient zone lying in the kingdom of God: for instance, when a monk leaves his solitude or when he writes, his job is normally to remedy the lack of that profound inwardness with God he is specially called to and which every Christian should know something about.

Obviously our concern is to make the most of the major demand, which is to ensure the work of salvation, purely and simply, in its most vital urgency, and at the same time to recognize that innumerable apostolic workers are called to secondary



tasks which often are apostolic only very indirectly or in a trivial sense. Let them make certain of the authenticity of their mission, ask themselves if God by his Church is not calling them to some activity which is of greater importance for his kingdom and which remedies a greater distress more effectively. Ought they really not to be pushing the needle of the gospel deeper into the world, perhaps into one of its nerve-centres, or into an unbelieving *milieu* where the gospel is unknown, or into points where the faith is in grave danger? What a pity to see such vital powers lost in routine jobs, when there is no life in places where the forces of death do their work most vehemently! But the apostolic worker whose lot, all well considered, is an area he thinks a mockery—let him take it seriously in hand, let him carry this cross. 'Where love is lacking, let him put love.' What looks so small, let him do it 'big'. We have specified what that means and the most decisive effect of a reflection on the 'five beats' is to make the whole mystery of salvation re-echo in the most humdrum existences.

The apostle always risks losing himself in the means he uses to free others. It even happens that he does not see his task as freeing. Whether he practises the means in an old-fashioned way or contrives to renew his techniques, what he does is worth nothing unless his acts flow from his own renewal by the Spirit. The exercise of freedom is effective just so far as the Spirit is present to what he does and so far as he opens himself to it while he acts. The Spirit must be life for the apostle, as it is in him who is the living God. It sets the apostle at *high tension*. We mean by this a spiritual and theological tension, of which a fine effect, as it happens, is to calm emotional and even nervous tensions. The apostolic life demands rhythms which let liberating tensions renew their value and intensity—their theological value and their human value, which are correlatives for the apostle, being as he is essentially a *mediator* between God and men. And not only rhythms, but acts of simultaneous presence to extremes: the ordeal and the sympathetic knowledge of the world have their value and intensity only so far as the apostle touches the deep distresses and most divergent realities by the force of an attention and a love springing directly from the heart of God.

So we see the 'five beats' in apostolic life, not only following one another in the most varied orders, but sometimes distinct

and sometimes mixed. Analysis has the advantage of throwing into relief the principal *data* of the apostolate and in the most normal order of development, albeit not the most frequent. And, by starting with the hidden life from which everything must come, it recalls the privileged and most effective form of it. As the Word, having come from the Father into the world (John i, 9), returns to the Father after fulfilling his mission (xvi, 28), so the apostle must do everything in order that the fertilizing function of the Word (Isaias lv, 10) which he completes in the world may be worked out and renewed in a centre of divine life, in the *milieu* of the most evangelical life, home of fraternal love, prayer, poverty and study. You might say that the supreme law of the apostolic life is this: Together make your own spiritual *milieu* the kingdom of God and then go, bear the Word to the world: and then, in a mysterious but certain measure, you will make of this wretched world the kingdom of God.



## AEDDI'S LIFE OF ST WILFRID

EXTRACT TRANSLATED BY E. E. BARKER

**O**UR holy bishop came with all his companions to Frisia after a prosperous voyage: and there finding a great number of heathen, he was received honourably by Aldgisl their king. Then forthwith our holy bishop, by leave of the king, preached the word of God daily to the heathen: setting forth to them the true God, the Father Almighty, and Jesus Christ, his only Son, and the co-eternal Holy Spirit; and he taught plainly that there is one baptism for the remission of sins and that there is eternal life in the resurrection after death. And his teaching was greatly advanced in the eyes of the pagans: for there was at that time, when they arrived, an extraordinarily fruitful year in fishing and in all things; and the pagans attributed this to the glory of the Lord, whom the holy man of God preached. Then in that year they received his preaching; and he baptized in the name of the Lord all the chiefs, except a few, and many thousands of the common people; and there, following the apostle,