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A General Idea of the Order of Friars Preachers

The Catholic church, considered from the point of view of the hierarchy which governs the christian body, is called the "teaching church." This is the name which tradition gives her, and Jesus Christ himself so called her in the famous last words which he addressed to his apostles: "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have told you. " Her very title alerts the hierarchical church to the fact that her principal ministry is to teach, because it is from teaching that faith comes, and faith is the source of all the other christian virtues. The sacraments themselves are meant to give light to the soul as well as warmth. Now Catholic teaching, to be complete, needs apostles, pastors and doctors. The apostle brings the truth to those who do not yet know it: he is a traveller, going about like Jesus Christ himself through towns and villages, talking with people and preaching, announcing that the kingdom of God is near, using a language which is suited to the ideas of the peoples to whom he dedicates himself. The pastor teaches the flock when it is already formed: he stays in the same place, available day and night to his people. His language is that of a man who is perfectly sure of the community of ideas which unites him to the assembly of the faithful, so he does not invoke pagan traditions and the evidence of secular poets, as St Paul did before the

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(1802-1861)
Essay on the Re-Establishment
in France of the Order of the
Preachers,
(Original french, Paris, 1839)
Edited by S. Tugwell OP
Dominican Sources,
Blackfriars Publications,
Oxford 1983.

Areopagus, he invokes only Jesus Christ, "the author and perfecter of Faith." The doctor is responsible for teaching the clergy and for defending the truth by means of scientific controversy. He is a man of study, spending his life amid the deposit of tradition and contemplating, from the highest point of view possible to the human mind, the divine connection which binds together all the phenomena and all the ideas which make up the movement of the universe.

These three modes of teaching, different in their methods but united in their objective, are represented by the three great apostles, St Peter, St Paul and St John. [...]

At the beginning of the church, these three great functions of apostolic, pastoral and scientific teaching were not normally separated. [...]

The order created by St Dominic is not, then, a monastic order, but an association of friars, combining the strength of common life with the freedom of external action, apostolate with personal sanctification. The salvation of souls is its primary objective, and teaching its principal means. "Go and teach," said Jesus Christ to his apostles; "Go and teach," repeated Dominic. His disciples have to undergo one year of spiritual novitiate, followed by nine years of philosophical and theological studies to prepare them for a competent performance in pulpits and

universities. But, although preaching and teaching are their two favourite weapons, no work which is useful to their neighbours is outside their vocation.

In the order of St Dominic, as in the Roman republic, "The welfare of the people is the highest law." This is why, except for the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which are a necessary bond in any religious association, the rules of the order do not of themselves bind under pain of sin, and superiors have a permanent right to dispense people from them, so that the yoke of common life will never interfere with the freedom to do good. [...] And secondly, if God were to grant us the power to create a new religious order, we are sure that, after much reflection, we should discover nothing

newer or more adapted to our time and its needs than the rule of St Dominic. Nothing about it is old except its history, and we should see no need to torment our mind simply for the pleasure of dating from yesterday.

St Dominic, St Francis of Assisi and St Ignatius, in adapting the religious state to the propagation of the gospel by teaching, have exhausted all the basic combinations in which this adaptation could be expressed. You might produce new habits and new names, but you will not change the real nature of these three celebrated societies. If the history of the Friars Preachers is vulnerable to certain objections in the minds of our contemporaries, the same is true of the history of the church at large.