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CHAPTER II

The Order of Preachers in Formation (1205-14)⁽¹⁾

It was late in the year 1204 when Diego de Acebes, bishop of Osma, arrived in Rome, homeward bound from a mission which he had just completed in Denmark (1203-4).⁽²⁾ Alphonso IX, king of Castile, had asked Valdemar II for the hand of a Danish princess for his young son, Ferdinand. In the summer of 1204, when the prelate undertook a second journey for the purpose of conducting the princess to Spain, he found that death had claimed her.⁽³⁾ Having notified his sovereign of the unhappy event, Diego went on to Rome accompanied by his suite. He intended to make his *ad limina* visit and resign his see in the hope of going to preach the gospel among the Cuman Tartars.⁽⁴⁾

Innocent III was not used to hearing such requests from the bishops of the time, and he must have looked with awe upon the exceptional man whom Providence had directed to his throne in the very hour when his solicitude for the evangelization of Languedoc was battling for endurance over the discouragement of his legates.

THE TWO CASTILIANS

Prominent in the train of Acebes was the young thirty-five year old subprior of the cathedral chapter of Osma, Brother Dominic of Calaroga.⁽⁵⁾ His brow radiated intelligence; his countenance, strength and kindness. Perhaps the Pope already knew something of the tenor of ecclesiastical life at Osma, for early in his reign (May 11, 1199)⁽⁶⁾ he had by letter encouraged and confirmed the petition of the chapter to be transformed into a chapter of canons regular; at that time Acebes was the prior of the chapter under the episcopacy of Martin de Bazan. From the beginning the priests of Osma seemed disposed to second Innocent's reforms which he sought to introduce among the clergy everywhere when he took possession of the Apostolic See.

It was not to the work of converting the Cumans that the Pope assigned Diego de Acebes after refusing to accept his resignation, but to the conversion of the heretics in the south of France. In answer to the plea of his disheartened legate, Peter of Castelnau, that he be allowed to return to his abbey, Innocent III wrote a little later (January 26): "Stay where you are; at this hour action is better than contemplation." In this same spirit the Pope persuaded the generous Bishop that it was more urgent to preach to the Christians of Languedoc, who were in the way of perdition, than to the pagans along the Dnieper and the Volga. The Pope was aware of the Cistercians' disinclination to the ministry of preaching and their unpreparedness for it, especially in such untoward circumstances. Under the direction of the Bishop of Osma and with the cooperation of his young subprior, the project had some chance of success.

Innocent's favor and hopes must have centered particularly on Brother Dominic, whose zeal, knowledge, and virtue had been recommended by Acebes. "Even then he shone like a brilliant torch among the other canons,"⁽⁷⁾ wrote Jordan of Saxony, Dominic's first

historian and his successor in the government of the Friars Preachers. Acebes was then probably already a man of advanced age, since he died two years later. On the other hand, though of remarkable maturity, Dominic was in the full vigor of youth and appeared to have a long future before him.

The Castilian pilgrims were well acquainted with southern France since, in fact, they had already traversed it three times in less than two Years. Dominic had even converted his heretical host, as he passed through Toulouse.⁽⁸⁾ With the two Osma's the Pope decided upon a plan for an apostolic mission. Before going to Languedoc they were to visit Cîteaux to induce the Cistercians to give the collaboration requested by the Pope in his letters to the Abbot General, Arnold Amaury, on the preceding January 29 and May 31.

The Bishop of Osma and his companions left the Eternal City at the close of 1204 and started on the road to Burgundy. At Cîteaux, Diego and Dominic aroused interest in the project of sending missionaries as soon as the way would be opened by the two new apostles. To maintain unity in the undertaking which had been entrusted to Cîteaux, Diego himself took the habit of the Order before his departure⁽⁹⁾ and set out with his followers for Languedoc.

At Montpellier, a very Catholic city, the travelers found the three legates, who were thoroughly discouraged. That was, it seems, either in December, 1204 or January, 1205. When the papal legates had recounted the story of their failure and their weariness, the Bishop of Osma pointed out the need of changing their method: no longer to rely, or to rely less, on the uncertain support of the bishops and the civil authorities, but to appeal directly to the people by preaching and example; in a word, to begin an evangelical ministry. The new way of life proposed by Acebes required their daily travel on foot as mendicants, instruction of the faithful by frequent sermons, and public discussion with the ministers and leaders of heresy.

The legates objected to the novelty and the practical difficulties of this program. Devoted as they were, however, to the Catholic cause, they were ready to support the enterprise if the Bishop and some of his followers were willing to start the program and lead the way. The public business to which the legates had to attend by order of the Holy See and the adjustments involved as a consequence, did not leave them much time for more than an intermittent collaboration in the mission work. Nevertheless they planned to give their cooperation where it would be most useful.

THE MISSIONERS

The legates and the Bishop of Osma dismissed their equipages and their numerous servants, the ordinary accompaniment of travel with high ecclesiastical dignitaries; in the manner of the apostles, the mission band left Montpellier to enter the districts infested by heresy.⁽¹⁰⁾ The missionaries' itinerary can be traced for more than a year, marked as it was by the holding of public debates which history has recorded. The apostolic preachers contended with the leaders of each heresy successively at Servian, Béziers, Carcassonne, and Montréal; but these were only the principal points. Between times along the way they preached to the faithful and to the heretics.

A great debate had just been held at Montreal, and the mission was still functioning in that vicinity in the month of March, 1206, when the first legate, the Abbot General of

Cîteaux, arrived, accompanied by twelve abbots, who had brought with them several monks in the hope that their assistance would be useful. The need of this collaboration had been foreseen by Innocent III when he requested it of the Abbot General two years before. It was what the latter had agreed to give, once the Bishop of Osma and Dominic had prepared the way.

To the work of this new and important contingent of missionaries was added the active collaboration of the new Bishop of Toulouse, Foulques, himself a Cistercian, who had taken possession of his see a month earlier (February 5).⁽¹¹⁾ Foulques was destined to take a most important part in the religious history of southern France. When at length St. Dominic found himself alone as the last heir of the Mission enterprise, the Bishop would be his strongest support in his efforts to plan and realize the project of founding the Order of Preachers.

The suddenly augmented band of missionaries was dispersed, each being assigned his field of labor and his activities. Doubtless the Cistercian abbots worked with all good will in their apostolic venture, and some good resulted from it. Nevertheless, according to the testimony of several contemporaries, in their endeavor they encountered serious obstacles. The tenacity of the heretics on the one hand, and on the other their own inexperience in a ministry alien to their vocation, thwarted the impotent efforts of the dozen abbots. Early in the summer, after three months of service, they returned to their monastery. The burden of the mission again fell on the shoulders of the Bishop of Osma and Brother Dominic and their few first-hour followers.

Dominic was then exercising his zeal at Fanjeaux and neighboring places. This town, built on a rugged height, was one of the most active centers of the heresy. In the month of July, Dominic won back to the faith, "by his word and example," so say contemporary chronicles, an important group of girls and noble women. With nine of them, he founded a convent a short distance from Fanjeaux. For this purpose the Bishop of Toulouse gave him the church of Our Lady of Prouille, near which the new convent was established.⁽¹²⁾ By this move Prouille became the first stronghold in the midst of heretical country. This house would serve as an operational base and a radiating center for the apostolate of Dominic and his few companions. From the beginning, the monastery received a name which was later transmitted to the Dominican monasteries of the fathers; that name well describes the part it was to play. In the legal documents of the time, Prouille was usually referred to as *Sancta Praedicatio* (the Holy Preaching).⁽¹³⁾

The departure of the Cistercian abbots, the efficacy of St. Dominic's preaching, and the establishment of Prouille convinced the Bishop of Osma of the necessity of providing more liberally for the new developments. He decided to return to his own diocese, from which he had been absent for two years and a half, in order to collect spiritual and material help for the work in Languedoc.

THE POPES IDEA

Diego de Acebes had taken upon himself the management of the apostolic preaching and the responsibility for it. His going left the mission without a head. In the absence of their Bishop, Dominic and his companions dared not assume authority to continue the work alone; the office of preaching, according to canon law and custom, was to be carried on only under the direction of the ordinary of the diocese. The legates themselves possessed no official written instruction for this purpose and, after the failure of the mission of the twelve abbots

and the departure of Acebes, perhaps they were inclined to doubt whether the undertaking could survive. At this juncture, Raoul, the third legate, who was evidently in closer contact with the missionaries, referred the matter to Innocent III and asked for instructions. The Pope did not hesitate an instant. In his letter of November 17, 1206,⁽¹⁴⁾ he strongly ordered his agent to promote preaching with all his power through the ministry of men judged fit for this office. Evangelical preaching, as defined by the Pope, corresponded to what Diego de Acebes and Dominic had established and practiced: imitation of the poverty of Christ, simplicity of garb, an ardor to instruct the people by the example of their lives and the teaching of the word. It was the first time in feudal Europe that the Holy See sanctioned such a procedure. The canons had forbidden begging by clerics and monks; but the present was a time for momentous decisions, and Innocent III was equal to taking them. By a single stroke of the pen, he revived the primitive form of the apostolate in Christian society. The startling innovation was deemed necessary to cope with the dangers of the hour. Following a summary of this letter of November 17, 1206, a recent biographer of Innocent III appends this observation: "These few lines expressed exactly and precisely the habit of thought which produced St. Dominic and created the first mendicant order."⁽¹⁵⁾ If a slight chronological error had not concealed a part of the truth, Luchaire would have seen that this letter had, in fact, been issued in direct confirmation of the mission of St. Dominic and his companions after the departure of the Bishop of Osma. This letter would even have been an express foundation of the Order of Preachers, if it had been addressed to Brother Dominic instead of the legate Raoul; but the Curia had its designs on Dominic and was awaiting the propitious moment, which seemed not yet to have struck. At any rate, the letter of November 17 was a prelude and a kind of virtual foundation of the Friars Preachers, the idea of which, we are told in the primitive sources, was already conceived in the first days of the apostolate of Acebes and Dominic, and, it might be added without fear of error, in the mind of Innocent III.

Acebes died (February, 1207)⁽¹⁶⁾ shortly after his return to Osma, where he had gone on foot. Perhaps his arduous labors in Languedoc prematurely hastened his end. The legate Raoul preceded him in death. One after the other, every support had given way round Dominic, and the great apostle was left alone in the field, having worked, more faithfully than anyone, in the shadow of his Bishop.

There began for Dominic in 1207 what might be called the "Prouillian" years. It was a period of eight years, hidden from the view of history by the tumult of the Albigensian crusade. After the assassination of his legate, Peter of Castelnau (January 15, 1208), Innocent III finally called the Christian barons to arms against the heresy and its instigators. Meanwhile Dominic was living apart from the whirl of the armed struggle and its political complications, dedicating himself without rest to the apostolate.

He devoted himself first of all to the formation of the nuns at Prouille and to the organization of their convent. The bishops, Simon de Montfort, leader of the crusade, his lords, and even ordinary folk contributed donations of various kinds in favor of the sisters and the "Holy Preaching." Dominic preached to the faithful of the environs and by his word and example converted a notable number of heretics to the Catholic faith. About fifteen official documents give a record of the conversions and enable us to estimate the importance of the results.⁽¹⁷⁾ The Catholic people openly showed their esteem for Dominic, and several times he was obliged energetically to refuse election to bishoprics. By vocation an apostle, he prayed, worked, and waited. He knew his hour would come, and each day brought it nearer.

The time was at hand early in 1215 when, with heresy vanquished, calm began to appear in the stormy sky of southern France.⁽¹⁸⁾ A great council opened on January 8 at Montpellier. When it was over, the papal legate, Peter of Benevento, returned with the Bishop of Toulouse to his episcopal city. The council had legislated on matters of heresy and the reform of the clergy. Foulques was eager to put into execution the designs of the council. By appointing Dominic and his companions preachers in the Diocese of Toulouse, he sought to execute the instructions which the legate had brought from Rome. The former subprior of Osma thus found himself at the head of the first group of diocesan missionaries known to Christian Europe. The bull of convocation for the Fourth General Council of the Lateran had been issued April 19, 1213. Evidently Innocent III, in formulating the program, determined to present as already realized the project he intended to impose upon the bishops of the council. Fully cognizant of the difficulties the bishops would face in instituting diocesan preachers, he would propose the "Friars Preachers" to solve the problem for the whole Christian world.

THE ACT OF TOULOUSE

By an official document, which is still extant,⁽¹⁹⁾ Bishop Foulques constituted Brother Dominic and his companions preachers in the Diocese of Toulouse. They were to extirpate heresy, combat vice, teach the faith, and train men in good morals. For the attainment of this end, they proposed to travel on foot, religiously practicing evangelical poverty and preaching Christian truth. Bishop Foulques granted the preachers and those who would join them a part of the ecclesiastical tithes required for their needs, with the condition that they restore at the end of the year what they had not used. He felt bound thus to provide for those who chose evangelical poverty for Christ and were laboring by word and example to enrich others with heavenly gifts. Among the needs to which they would have to apply these funds, Jordan of Saxony listed books as of first importance.⁽²⁰⁾ Thus the name, the office, and the means which, in a short time, would constitute the Order of Preachers were clearly defined in Bishop Foulques' official document. A few months later⁽²¹⁾ the Holy See simply extended to the universal Church the institution which Foulques had established in his diocese, borrowing not only the thought, but even, so to speak, the very formula of his decree.

While Foulques was raising the spiritual structure for preaching in his diocese, a material foundation was also being secured. On April 25, Peter Seila, a rich bourgeois of the city, divided his property with his brother. To St. Dominic and his successors he gave his own house, one of the city's most beautiful buildings, where the community of new Preachers was already installed. Finally, he himself joined the band of missionaries.⁽²²⁾

The Toulouse Preachers must have numbered seven at that time in accordance with Dominic's plan for their doctrinal instruction they attended the lectures of Alexander Stavensby, whom Foulque had to put at the head of his episcopal school to conform to the academic decrees of the Third Lateran Council (1179) and to demonstrate, as already complied with, a measure which the next council (Fourth Lateran) would re-enact and define. Master Alexander who afterward became a professor at Bologna and later bishop of Coventry (1224-38), in a dream saw seven stars appear, rise in the heavens, and increase in magnitude to light up the whole world. The next morning Dominic and his six companions came to him and took their places among his hearers.⁽²³⁾

The founding of the apostolic missionaries of Toulouse marked a step toward the institution of a body of preachers according to the evangelical spirit for the service of

Christian society. The desires of Innocent, Diego de Acebes, St. Dominic, and Bishop Foulques were approaching realization. Toward the beginning of September, 1215, Foulques, minister of the Church of Toulouse, and Dominic, minister of preaching, as they styled themselves in their official documents,⁽²⁴⁾ set out for the Fourth Lateran Council.

CHRONOLOGY (1204-8) ⁽²⁵⁾		
	Certain	Probable
Judiciary commission of Diego into diocese of Astorga	Jan. 12, 1204	
First journey into the Marches		summer, 1204?
Diego in Castile (?)	Dec. 8, 1204 Feb. 17, 1205	
Second journey into the Marches		summer, 1205?
At Rome		winter, 1205-6
At Montpellier	1206	end of May
Disputes at Servian, Béziers, Carcassonne, and departure of Peter of Castelnau	1206	June-July
General chapter of Cîteaux	Sept. 14, 1206	
Peter of Castelnau signs peace at Villeneuve	October 27, 1206	
Dispute at Montréal	late March, early April, 1207	
Arrival of the dozen abbots	April, 1207	
First charter of Prouille	April 17, 1207	
Peace overtures in Provence by Peter of Castelnau	late April, 1207	
Abbot of Mt. Ste. Marie at Pamiers	June 12	1207
Guy of Cernai at Carcassonne	June 24	1207
Death of Raoul de Fontfroide	July 9, 1207	
First departure of Cistercians	1207	July
Diego at Pamiers	1207	August
Arnold goes to Marseilles	Aug. 21, 1207	
Diego in Spain	1207	October
Departure of most of the abbots	1207	October
Death of Diego	Dec. 30, 1207	
Assassination of Peter of Castelnau	Jan. 14, 1208	

NOTES

1 The chronology of the years 1205-8 presents serious difficulties; nearly every historian attempts a new system. That of Father Mandonnet, skillfully worked out, seemed acceptable. We feel now, however, that we should question it as we have that of Scheeben. See table at the close of this chapter.

2 Perhaps 1204-5.

3 See pp. 355 ff.

4 For all that followed, see *infra*, pp. 405 ff. 20

5 Jordan of Saxony, *De principiis ordinis praedicatorum*, no. 14; Laurent, *Historia diplomatica S. Dominici*, no. 2.

6 Laurent, no. 1; Potthast, no. 697.

7 Jordan, no. 12.

8 *Ibid.*, no. 15.

9 *Ibid.*, no. 18. This taking of the habit may be viewed as a symbolic act. In all probability Diego did not wear the habit; otherwise Peter of Vaux de Cernai would not have failed to note it, as Scheeben rightly observes. Cf. *Der heilige Dominikus*, p.429.

10 Cernai, *Historia Albigensis*, nos. 20 f.; Jordan, no. 20; Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques*, nos. 82, 251. See *infra*, pp. 405-21.

11 Puylaurens, *Historia albigensium*, no. 7; Gams, *Series episcoporum*, 638; Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 488.

12 Jordan, no. 27; Humbert, *De vita regulari*, no. 19; Laurent, nos, 5-7, 11.

13 Laurent, no. 6.

14 Potthast, no. 2912; Laurent, no. 3. According to our chronology, this letter arrived before Diego's departure and has another significance.

15 Luchaire, *Innocent III*, p. 89.

16 Perhaps December 30, 1207.

17 Balme and Lelaidier, *Cartulaire ou histoire diplomatique de S. Dominique*, I, 171-73, 187, 271 f., 468, 470, 484.

18 See *infra*, pp. 422-46.

19 Laurent, no. 60

20 Jordan, no. 39.

21 Lateran Council, can. 10. See Hefele-Leclereq, *Histoire des conciles*, V, 340 Schroeder, *Councils*, p. 251.

22 Laurent, no. 61.

23 Cf. Humbert, *Legenda Sti. Dominici*, no. 40; Nicholas Trivet, *Annales sex regum Angliae*, p. 222; Echard, *Scriptores O.P.*, I, 11; Balme, I, 509-12. It was probably this master who signed a charter of the Preachers at Bologna, June 7, 1221. Cf Laurent, no. 150.

24 Balme, I, 484; Laurent, nos. 11, 60.

25 This table represents Father Vicaire's concluding page for his Study on the Chronology of this four-year period. The Study is one of those not included in this English edition. See Pierre Mandonnet, *Saint Dominique*, Paris, 1938, "Etude I," pp. 83-88. (Translator's note.)
