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*The Marian Spirituality of the Medieval Religious Orders:
Medieval Servite Marian Spirituality*

MEDIEVAL SERVITE MARIAN SPIRITUALITY

Conrad Borntrager, O.S.M.*

By the thirteenth century, Marian devotion was so much a part of the religious culture of Western Europe that it was present in all the new religious foundations of this exciting period. Some of these religious foundations showed by their very titles that they had a special devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. One of these was the Order of Servants of Mary, or Servites as they are more commonly called today.

In order to understand better the Marian element in the spirituality of the Servants of Mary, some clarifications are necessary:

1) The Marian spirituality within the Servite Order must be seen in relation to the general Marian devotion within society at large, to other elements of Servite spirituality of this period, and in particular in relation to the other mendicant orders, especially to the Franciscan and Dominican Orders both of which had a notable influence in the foundational years of the Servite Order.

2) As the name of the Order of Servants of Mary itself suggests, the essential relationship between the friar and Our Lady is that of *servus* to *Domina*: Servant to his Lady. And since this was not a new appellation, it is necessary to study first its roots in the biblical notions of *servant* and *service of the Lord*, and especially Mary as Servant of the Lord, and then trace the development of service in relation to Our Lady in Western Christendom, at least from the treatise on virginity by St. Ildephonsus of Toledo in seventh-century Visigothic Spain, down through the monastic usage to the thirteenth century.

3) It is also necessary to keep in mind that the Servite Order, unlike most other orders of the period, had a "formational" period

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(that is between the foundation and the final approval by the Holy See) which was very long, almost sixty years. This was due mainly to two factors:

a) First, there was a gradual evolution within the Order: from a lay confraternity (before 1245), to an eremitical foundation on Monte Senario which followed the Rule of St. Augustine (1245 to 1256), and then back down into the cities of central and northern Italy and Germany (after 1250). As it moved into the cities, the Order began to follow the patterns of the major mendicant orders. This evolution from an eremitical community with strict mendicant poverty to a more active religious order with less emphasis on the contemplative and penitential dimensions as well as the legal aspects of poverty was complete by the 1260s or 1270s, but certainly before the Second Council of Lyons in 1274.

b) Secondly, the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 suppressed all mendicant orders except the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustinians. This made it necessary for the Servants of Mary to ignore a previous papal approval, as a mendicant order, in 1251/1252, and to gradually seek a new papal approval, which was eventually given in 1304 by Pope Benedict XI.

Thus the normal formational period would have been from 1245, when part of the lay confraternity evolved into a true religious order, with diocesan approval before 1247 and approval by the Papal Legate in Tuscany in 1249, to 1251/52 when it received the approval of Pope Innocent IV. This was a period a less than ten years. But because of the evolution within the Order, and especially because of the restrictions of Lyons II, it was necessary to set aside the earlier approval and begin over.

4) Finally, the usual types of sources—such as letters of popes, cardinals, bishops, notarized acts of various types, legislative and liturgical sources—are certainly important, but it is especially necessary to understand the latest studies regarding the *Legenda de origine* (LDO), the earliest narrative account we have of the foundation of the Order, and therefore of its spirituality.¹

¹The Latin text of the *Legenda de origine* can be found in *Monumenta Ordinis Servorum Sanctae Mariae* (Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1897-), 1:55-106. An English trans

Historians have generally held, from internal evidence, that this unsigned and undated narrative is the work of Prior General Peter of Todi, who was present in 1317 when the remains of St. Philip Benizi were exhumed and placed in a chapel of the Servite church in Todi. This experience inspired him to seek into and write down the origins of the Servite Order as a prologue to a life of St. Philip.

But in the past forty years, historians have shown that this narrative is the work of two, or possibly three, authors, the last of which was Peter of Todi. They believe that the central section of the *Legenda* dates back to perhaps 1256/1257, but certainly before the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, and therefore it gives an almost contemporary account of the spirituality of the Seven Holy Founders on Monte Senario. It is thought that Peter of Todi, the final redactor, merely inserted one or possibly two earlier compositions into his final version, without giving the earlier writer or writers credit. Some hypothesize that one of the authors might be St. Philip Benizi himself.² This earlier section then becomes a point from which further evolution can be judged.

We shall therefore look especially at three periods of the formation of the Servite Order to note the development of the Marian element of Servite spirituality: first, from the lay confraternity to the first community at Monte Senario; second, the evolution which took place in the small, new Order in the late 1250s and 1260s; third, the period after the Second Council of Lyons, 1274.

1. From a lay confraternity to the first community on Monte Senario

The confraternity to which the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order belonged while still laymen involved in business

lation is found in *Origins and Early Saints of the Order of Servants of Mary: Writings of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. by Christopher M. Ross, O.S.M. (Chicago: Friar Servants of Mary, 1984), 3-68. This has recently been reprinted, with added explanatory footnotes, in *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of St. Mary*, Vol. I. From 1245 to 1348 (Vicenza, 2000), 189-262.

²For a brief summary of this question in English, see Peregrine Graffius, O.S.M., "Introduction" to *Origins and Early Saints*, xix-xxvi.

and living in Florence (then one of the important commercial centers of Europe) was characterized by the penitential spirit common to the Brothers of Penance with whom they were in close contact, by a spirit of service exercised through the administration of a local hospital or hospice, and by a Marian spirit as shown by the name of the group, the Servants of Saint Mary. When these three elements of penance, service, and devotion to Mary were linked to a desire for greater poverty, prayer, and contemplation, the Seven withdrew from the confraternity and formed a community which soon became a recognized religious foundation, first outside of the walls of Florence and then on Monte Senario, about twelve miles north of Florence. At this point the only evidence of a Marian spirituality was precisely through the name of Servants of Saint Mary, which was an integral part of their orientation toward prayer, penance, and poverty.³

The oldest part of the *LDO*, which treats of the experience on Monte Senario, is virtually without references to Our Lady, except for the name of the Order. The *LDO* gives two explanations for the origin of the name: In one place Fra Alexis, one of the Seven, is quoted as saying that he could never discover a human source for the name and therefore he and his companions believed it was Our Lady herself who gave the name to the Order.⁴ This paragraph, however, is the work of the final redactor of the *Legenda*.

In another place the *Legenda* quotes from a rule book which, it says, the Seven observed while still in the world. No further information about this "rule book" has been found. This quotation gives an explanation for the title, couched in clearly medieval terms:

³See Franco A. Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria dalle origini all'approvazione (1233 ca.-1304)* (2 vols.; Recueil de travaux d'histoire et de philologie, 4e série, fasc. 49-50; Louvain: Bureau du Recueil. Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1972), 1:761-796; summary on pp. 895, 1325-1326. This is the most complete study of the early years of the Servite Order.

⁴*LDO*, par. 33.

Fearing their own imperfection, upon wise counsel, they [the Seven] humbly brought themselves with the most complete heartfelt devotion to the feet of the Queen of Heaven, the glorious Virgin Mary, that she, as mediatrix and advocate, might reconcile and commend them to her Son, and filling up their imperfection with her abundant love, might mercifully obtain for them an overflowing fullness of merit. Thus it was that, for the glory of God, giving themselves over into the service of the glorious Virgin His Mother, they wished henceforth to be called Servants of Saint Mary, taking up a way of life upon the counsel of wise men.⁵

This quotation then gives a clue to the earliest Marian spirituality of the Order.

The ultimate motive for their action is the glory of God, but the immediate motivation is the fear of their own imperfection. That is, they are aware of their own powerlessness to achieve their purpose. Their motivation is similar to that displayed in feudal society whereby an individual placed himself as a "servant" or vassal in the service of a more powerful ruler, because he recognized his own inability to protect himself from the predators of society. This passage uses the familiar feudal terms of commending oneself and giving oneself into the service of another (*mancipare*), and Mary is given the titles of Advocate and Mediatrix. The tone of this passage contrasts, for example, with the writing of St. Ildephonsus of Toledo, in seventh-century Visigothic Spain. The motivation there is more positive:

Jesus, my God become Son of Man, grant me so to serve your Mother, that You may accept this service as done to you. May she so order my life that I may be confident of pleasing You. May her rule so guide me in this life that You may be Lord for all eternity.⁶

⁵LDO, par. 18. Dal Pino believes this text has characteristics of both the earlier and later redactions, and so concludes that it probably belongs to the earlier version but has been considerably modified by the later writer (*I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 1:282-285), while par. 33 is from the hand of the final redactor (pp. 317-320). But Peregrine Graffius believes that both 18 and 33 are from the hand of the second of three authors, writing between 1274 and 1285 (see "Introduction," p. xxv).

⁶*De virginitate*, chap. XIII (PL 96:105-110).

By the time of the great Marian prayers of St. Anselm of Canterbury (+1109), the all-prevailing sense of sinfulness on the part of the author, who identifies himself as a servant of Our Lady, is clearly evident. The sinner who knows his guilt and the justice of Christ the Judge turns to the Mother of Christ to be his advocate, because she is the one closest to the mercy of her Son's heart. One commentator on this prayer notes that the rest of Anselm's theological writings indeed makes clear the unity between Mary and her Son; but then she adds: "After Anselm, this unity was lost in the West, and became a source of division—mercy belonged to Mary, justice to her son."⁷

Although the basic relationship of sinner to Christ and Mary in this quotation from the *LDO* may be in the tradition of St. Anselm, it depends more immediately upon the writings of St. Bernard.⁸ In the thirteenth century this monastic tradition of service to Our Lady was expressed both by entire groups and by individuals. For example, the lay group from which the Seven Holy Founders came bore the title of Servants of Saint Mary, as did a contemporary religious order in Marseille, with the title of the Servants of Saint Mary, Mother of Christ; there was a convent of women in Gubbio, called the Servants of Saint Mary, which was founded by Blessed Santuccia in 1262, and also a lay society of Servants of the Glorious Virgin in Bologna in 1281.⁹

Individuals continued to take this title upon themselves, as for example, St. Francis who is explicitly called "Servant of the Virgin Mother of God."¹⁰ Among the examples of Mary's intercession found in the *Vitae Fratrum* of the Dominicans, some are couched explicitly in terms of service to Mary. For example, one friar tells Our Lady that he entered the Dominican Order in order

⁷*The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, translated and with an introduction by Sister Benedicta Ward, S.L.G. (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 62.

⁸See F. Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 1:706, n. 416, and pp. 282-284.

⁹The most complete exposition of the tradition of service to Mary is found in Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 1:681-706.

¹⁰Cited by Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 1:703.

to serve her and her Son.¹¹ In another instance a friar was tempted to leave the Order and he reminded Our Lady that while in the world she helped him, now she seemed to have abandoned her servant.¹²

Another nuance which this title might have had was suggested by the Dominican historian Gilles Meersseman in relation to the foundation of various Marian confraternities by St. Peter of Verona. He said that the title designated pious lay people who wished to devote themselves to defending Our Lady who was being attacked by the Patarines.¹³ By emphasizing that Mary was truly the Mother of God, they effectively proclaimed that Jesus was both human and divine.

To summarize: in this earliest period, the Marian devotion of the Seven and their followers was expressed in terms of service to Mary, a concept which was current in Western spirituality at least from the seventh century and especially in the monastic circles of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. But it was intimately linked with a spirit of poverty, penance, and prayer. From this passage in the *LDO*, it is clear that the Founders of the Servite Order first experienced this relationship with Mary and then, because of it, took the name of Servants of Saint Mary, rather than taking the title first and then trying to determine its meaning.

¹¹"O beatissima virgo, ut tibi et filio tuo servirem hunc ordinem intravi." *Vitae Fratrum in Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica* (Romae: Institutum Historicum Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1868-), 1:40.

¹²"O domina, in seculo iuvisti me, et modo derelinquis servum tuum." *Vitae Fratrum*, in *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica*, 1:43.

¹³G. Meersseman, "Études sur les Anciennes Confréries Dominicaines. III. Les Congrégations de la Vierge," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 22 (1952): 9 (cited by Peregrine Graffius, O.S.M., in "The 'Corona Gloriosa Virginis Marie': An Historical Study with Some Doctrinal Conclusions concerning Our Lady's Crown of Five Psalms. Part II," *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 13 [1963]: 7). The Patarines were dualists, believers in a principle of good and a principle of evil. Because they believed all matter is evil, they held that Christ could not have taken on flesh, died, or risen, and Mary herself did not have flesh like others, but had come down from heaven (see Raffaello M. Taucci, O.S.M., "La vita religiosa in Europa al principio del XIII secolo," *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 5 [1953]: 44).

2. Evolution of the Marian spirit in the period before the Second Council of Lyons

When some of the friars descended from Monte Senario in 1250 to form communities in Florence and Siena, and then later in other cities of central Italy, the original spirit of poverty, penance, and contemplative prayer, proper to an eremitical foundation like Monte Senario, was adapted to fit new circumstances. In fact at a general chapter of 1257, the capitulars sent two friars to the Roman Curia to obtain the reversal of restrictions placed on their apostolic activities with regard to hearing confessions of the faithful (especially of women), admitting them to services in their churches, and permitting burials of the faithful in their churches.¹⁴

It was during this period that the Constitutions received their general structure. Although the earliest version of the Servite Constitutions (*Constitutiones antiquae*) which we possess today, in its present form dates from about 1295, many of the articles are of a much earlier date. In fact, several of the chapters of the Servite Constitutions were borrowed from the Dominican constitutions of Raymond of Peñafort and also from decrees of the Dominican general chapters up to 1256-1257 (but not from later decrees) and from the Franciscan constitutions of 1260. It would seem, therefore, that the basic structure dates from around 1260. This is important to note, because the first chapter of the Servite Constitutions was entitled "De reverentiis Beatae Mariae Virginis." This codified the Marian practices of the Order, and although we cannot be sure that all the practices listed in 1295 were present in the period before the Second Council of Lyons, it appears probable that this Marian chapter in its substance was already present.¹⁵

¹⁴This notarized document can be found in Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 2:227-228.

¹⁵See Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 1:1050-1051. He had treated this subject earlier in his article "Il 'De Reverentiis Beatae Mariae Virginis' nelle Costituzioni dei Servi di Maria," *Studi Storici O.S.M.* 5 (1953): 202-253. Dal Pino also studied the Marian practices in the Servite Order in his article "Madonna santa Maria e l'Ordine dei suoi Servi nel 1° secolo di storia (1233-1317 ca.)," *Studi Storici O.S.M.* 17 (1967): 5-70. This article was reprinted, with a few minor changes and updated bibliography, with the title "Madonna

And of course it is impossible to know how many of these practices indeed date from the Monte Senario experience itself.

The *reverentiae* to Our Lady found in the first chapter of the Servite Constitutions recall the eight *servitia* listed by the Dominican Humbert of Romans in his "Expositio super constitutiones fratrum praedicatorum." In his commentary, he lists these eight *servitia* or services to Our Lady:

1. That they praise, bless and preach Mary and her Son, through the office of preaching.
2. That the first office in the morning and the last at night be the office of Our Lady.
3. That they have a special procession daily in her honor after Compline.
4. That they bow at her name.
5. That they always and everywhere recite her office standing.
6. That they make their profession and obedience also to her: "I make profession and obedience to God and Blessed Mary . . ." (He then adds that this is not found in other orders.)
7. That on Saturdays the entire office in the church be of Mary, unless for some legitimate reason.
8. That when anything is sung in church about Mary, the friars should sing more devoutly and more solemnly.¹⁶

The Servite *reverentiae* to Our Lady bear some similarities to the *servitia* of the Dominicans, and they give an idea of the types of Marian devotions by which the friars expressed their dedication to Our Lady and on which they nourished their spiritual lives. These were also the devotions to which the lay people who frequented the Servite churches would be exposed:

santa Maria e l'Ordine dei suoi Servi nel loro 1° secolo di storia (1245-1317 ca.)," in *Spazi e figure lungo la storia dei Servi di Maria (secoli XIII-XX)*, Italia sacra, 55 (Rome: Herder, 1997), 69-147.

¹⁶Humbert of Romans, *Opera de vita regulari* (Rome: Typis A. Befani, 1889), 2:70-71.

- Mass of Our Lady on Wednesdays and Saturdays.
- Vigil of Our Lady, recited every evening, and the *Salve Regina* sung at the end.
- The Hail Mary, up to “the fruit of thy womb,” is recited at the beginning of each canonical hour of the Divine Office and at the beginning of readings.
- Every priest who had not sung the Mass of our Lady should read the Mass.
- Commemoration of Mary is made at Vespers and Matins, except on feasts of a double rank.
- The *Salve Regina* is recited at the end of every hour of the Divine Office and after the conventual Mass. It is to be sung at the end of the Vigil of Our Lady or after Compline.
- Every church of the Order and the principal altar of each church are to be dedicated to Our Lady.
- When the office of Our Lady is omitted because of the celebration of a more important feast, the friars are to recite it with devotion in small groups.
- As with the Dominicans, the religious profession of vows is made “to Almighty God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to the whole court of heaven . . .”

Franco Dal Pino, who has written the most complete history of the foundation of the Servite Order, presents the following summary: As the type of apostolic activity was patterned more and more on that of the other mendicant orders, the original eremitical and contemplative aspects of the Order were weakened, although they were still expressed in the modest style of life lived by the friars. On the other hand, the Marian characteristic became stronger, especially in the liturgy. This was expressed also according to the type of contact the community had with the lay people. This development was due in large part to St. Philip Benizi, prior general from 1267 to 1285, and was codified in the legislation of the period, perhaps due also to the initiative of the same

Saint. And because of this, the final redactor of the *LDO* presents St. Philip as the model for all friars.¹⁷

3. The Marian spirit of the Order after the Second Council of Lyons (1274)

In the period shortly before or surely immediately after the Second Council of Lyons (1274), all traces of the original mendicant poverty professed by the friars were necessarily removed from the legislation of the Order, although there is evidence that in many places the friars continued to live a very poor life. The original papal approval of 1251/1252 could no longer be used, since it mentioned mendicant poverty. Some bishops of the period were of the opinion that the Order of Servants of Saint Mary was indeed included in the decrees of the Second Council of Lyons, and they refused to permit the friars in their dioceses to receive novices.

But by 1277 the prior general, St. Philip Benizi, was able to obtain written opinions from three canon lawyers of the Roman Curia to the effect that in their opinion that Order did not fall under the restrictive decrees of the Second Council of Lyons. With copies of these opinions in hand, the Order was able to maintain its position and even make some new foundations.

In the succeeding years the Order was gradually able to reassert itself and even to expand, due to the benevolence of individual bishops and then to the popes who, at first, would grant apostolic protection to individual houses, at times identified only as being "of the Order of St. Augustine" (that is following the Rule of St. Augustine). When the title "Servants of Saint Mary" was used it was invariably accompanied by the reference to the Order of St. Augustine, to show that it was indeed an approved foundation. Thus, as the original emphasis on poverty, penance, and contemplation waned, greater stress was put upon the Rule of St. Augustine¹⁸ and the Marian

¹⁷See Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 1:1326.

¹⁸On the importance of the Rule of St. Augustine in the spirituality of the Order in the thirteenth century, see in particular the introduction by Lamberto Crociani, O.S.M., to *La regola di s.*

character of the Order. In 1290, the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV confirmed an earlier letter of Urban IV in 1263, permitting the Servite Order to celebrate a general chapter in which a prior general could be elected. And, finally, in 1304, Pope Benedict XI, a Dominican, gave final approval to the Order. The only elements of the past which he recalled in the Bull of approval were that the friars professed the Order (i.e., Rule) of St. Augustine, which was approved by the Church; that, because of their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, they humbly called themselves her servants; and that they had drawn up constitutions in honor of the same Virgin Mary.¹⁹

Even though the official approval of the Order gives scarce indications of the spirituality of the Order, the final redactor of the *LDO*, Peter of Todi, now provides a complete exposition of service to Mary, which dominates the sections of the *Legenda* written in the early fourteenth century. The Marian spirituality of the *Legenda*, together with that of the contemporary or near-contemporary lives of Saint Philip Benizi, Blessed Joachim of Siena, and Blessed Francis of Siena, has been studied by Fr. Pedro Suárez.²⁰ He first examines the role of Mary in general, as presented by the *Legenda*:

Mary is seen essentially as Mediatrix, a singular role which she performs in the present divine economy. This mediation, which is derived from her divine maternity, possesses both a theocentric (Christocentric) and instrumental character.

Mary is considered as a means both in presenting to God the needs of men who, conscious of their own imperfections, implore and invoke her to reconcile them with her Son or obtain what they desire, and in making the graces requested descend upon them or disposing them for the fulfillment of the Divine Will.

Agostino: testo e traduzione italiana (Florence: SS. Annunziata, 1983), 5-22, and his *Le origini della spiritualità dei Servi di Maria (1233-1304)* (Florence: SS. Annunziata, 1983), 20-23.

¹⁹The text of the Bull "Dum levamus" (February 11, 1304) may be found in Dal Pino, *I frati Servi di s. Maria*, 2:131-136.

²⁰Pedro Suárez, O.S.M., "Spiritualità mariana dei frati servi di Maria nei documenti agiografici del sec. XIV," *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 9 (1959): 121-157 and 10 (1960): 1-41.

In the first aspect, ascending mediation, Mary is pictured as an instrument of men and in the second aspect, descending mediation, as the instrument of God. This concludes with men giving thanks to God, once more by means of Mary.²¹

Fr. Suárez then analyzes the role of Mary with regard to the Order of her Servants. According to the *LDO*, it was in honor of Mary that God decreed to found a new Order. And Mary prepares for the following out of God's will by selecting the seven Florentine merchants, by gathering them together, by intervening with regard to the name, rule, and habit of the Order, and finally by giving a "light" to the Order, St. Philip Benizi. Fr. Suarez then concludes that Mary is the true and only foundress of the Order.²²

This parallels the Dominican experience in which Mary obtains from her Son the Order of Friar Preachers.²³ This same understanding of the role of Our Lady in the foundation of a religious Order can be found also in more recent times. The Ven. Jean Claude Marie Colin, the founder and first superior general of the Marists, formulated a declaration at the chapter of 1872 that: "The undersigned members of the General Chapter of the Society of Mary, declare to all Marists, present and to come, that they are happy solemnly to recognize that Mary, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, is their true Foundress, and to choose her again, by an act entirely spontaneous, as their first and perpetual Superior."²⁴ That the human founder or foundress of the religious order should consider God himself, Jesus, or Mary as the true founder or foundress should not surprise us. Fabio Ciardi in his study on founders as men of the Spirit gives as the first general characteristic

²¹Suárez, "Spiritualità mariana," *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 9 (1959): 157.

²²Suárez, "Spiritualità mariana," *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 10 (1960): 9-10.

²³The first section of the *Vitae Fratrum* is entitled "Quod Domina nostra ordinem fratrum praedicatorum impetravit a filio (*Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum historica*, 1:5). This same thought is repeated by a certain unnamed monk (p. 7) and again on pages 8-9.

²⁴Marcellin Gury, *The Life of the Venerable Father Colin*, translated by a religious of the same society (St. Louis: Herder, 1909), 336.

of founders of religious orders that they themselves feel so inspired by the Spirit that they truly see themselves as mere instruments in the hands of God.²⁵

Fr. Suárez continues his summary of the relationship of Our Lady to the Order she had founded—according to the *LDO*—by noting that, after the actual foundation, Our Lady, as every other founder, exercises a special mediation in heaven between her servants and God.²⁶

Mary also occupied a privileged place in the lives of Servite saints and blessed before they entered the Order. She intervened at their births in some symbolic way. At an early age they manifested a particular love for her which brought them little-by-little to dedicate themselves to her completely. After their entrance into the Order she continued her care, helping them to realize in the most perfect and complete way possible the ideal proposed to them.²⁷

Fr. Suárez concludes that, according to the *Legenda*, the *servitium Dominae nostrae* is not presented as an end in itself but as a means of realizing the true ideal of all Christian life, the *Servitium Domini*. Mary truly leads her servants to the Lord.²⁸

It is striking, for example, that when the *LDO* presents the life of St. Philip Benizi and St. Alexis as models for those who wish to serve Our Lady faithfully, it presents, not a series of Marian devotions, but their entire life as religious. St. Philip (par. 4) is the first and highest model for the Order, for “he gave himself without stint to its essential obligations, and in so doing served Our Lady faithfully and perfectly” (emphasis added). The “essential obligations” are spelled out immediately after: the living out of the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Chapter five of the *LDO* describes in considerable detail the way Saint Alexis lived the

²⁵See Fabio Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito: Per una teologia del carisma di fondatore* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1982), esp. pp. 120-131. His conclusion (p. 131) is that there is a “convincimento di ogni fondatore sull’origine divine della propria famiglia religiosa e sulla propria strumentalità sulla grandezza dell’opera di Dio e sulla propria nullità.”

²⁶Suárez, “Spiritualità mariana,” *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 10 (1960): 15.

²⁷Suárez, “Spiritualità mariana,” *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 10 (1960): 34.

²⁸Suárez, “Spiritualità mariana,” *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 10 (1960): 37-38.

common life, not wanting any special treatment regarding food, clothing, comforts, or physical labor, in spite of his considerable age (according to the *LDO* he was one hundred-and-ten when he died). It was precisely in fulfilling well the duties of everyday conventual life that "he left an example to do likewise to all friars who want to *serve Our Lady faithfully*" (emphasis added).

Thus we may say that the service of Our Lady to which they pledged themselves by their profession as her Servants led them to fulfill perfectly the obligations of religious life. And of course they expressed this devotion to Our Lady also in various devotional acts during the day, as specified in the first chapter of the Servite Constitutions.

4. Two further observations

1) According to the *LDO*, in the section attributed to the final redactor, the Dominican St. Peter of Verona received a vision about the name, habit, and rule which the Seven Founders were to follow. The black habit signified the humility of Mary and the pain she suffered in the most bitter Passion of her Son.²⁹ The Life of St. Philip has him reply to two Dominicans who questioned him about the Order to which he belonged by saying they followed the Rule of St. Augustine and wore the habit of the widowhood of Our Lady.³⁰ This might have been a natural interpretation of the black color of the habit, or perhaps it was borrowed from the Dominicans who had the same interpretation for the black part of their habit.³¹

²⁹*LDO*, par. 52.

³⁰*Legenda beati Philippi*, par. 8. The Latin text of the *Legenda beati Philippi* was edited in *Monumenta Ordinis Servorum Sanctae Mariae* (1898), 2:60-83; the passage cited here is on page 71. An English translation is found in *Origins and Early Saints*, pp. 68-79, with the cited passage on page 72; this *Legenda* was reprinted in *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of St. Mary*, pp. 263-286, with the cited passage on page 272.

³¹*Tractatus de approbatione ordinis fratrum Praedicatorum*, written between 1260 and 1270, ed. by T. Käppeli, O.P., in *Archivum fratrum Praedicatorum* 6 (1936); see pp. 149-150 for the reference to the interpretation of the black part of the Dominican habit. This is quoted by Suárez in "Spiritualità mariana," *Studi Storici* O.S.M. 10 (1960): 9, n. 26.

This aspect of devotion to Our Lady, namely to her sorrows, increased in importance, and by the period of Renaissance in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it was becoming a central aspect of the spirituality of the Order. By the Tridentine period, and especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it all but eclipsed the notion of service to Mary as the central organizing point of Servite spirituality. This was true virtually until the Second Vatican Council, when the Servite General Chapter of 1968, restored this aspect of Servite spirituality, using the words suggested by Fr. Giovanni Vannucci, O.S.M.:

In our commitment of service, the figure of Mary at the foot of the cross shall be our model. Since the Son of Man is still being crucified in his brothers and sisters, we, Servants of his mother, wish to be with her at the foot of those countless crosses in order to bring comfort and redemptive cooperation. (Art. 319, Epilogue)

2) At one meeting of Servite historians, Franco Dal Pino reflected on the question of why the early Servants of Mary were not absorbed into other religious orders. For example, they were closely connected to the Franciscans through the Brothers of Penance. Why did they not just enter the Franciscan Order? According to the LDO, the Dominican St. Peter of Verona was their advisor and, through him, Our Lady confirmed their name and revealed their habit and rule. The early Servite constitutions borrow heavily from the Dominican constitutions. Why did not St. Peter simply invite them to become Dominicans? Because they started out as an eremitical community on Monte Senario following the rule of St. Augustine, they were similar to other such Augustinian groups. Why then did they obtain a special letter of protection with confirmation of their own legislation from Pope Alexander IV on March 23, 1256, just two weeks before his letter *Licet ecclesiae catholicae* (April 9, 1256) which confirmed the "Great Union" of the Augustinian hermits? Why did the Servants of Mary seek out and obtain a specific exemption from this union, instead of joining the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine?

These questions remained unanswered. We could formulate hypotheses and suggestions, but we have no sure knowledge of why the early Servants of Mary felt so certain of their special calling that they were not absorbed into the Franciscans, Dominicans, or Augustinians, in spite of evident similarities, or why, after the Second Council of Lyons, they worked slowly but steadily to assure that their Order would not gradually fade away as was the fate of other even larger and more important orders. Surely, the early friars of the Servants of Saint Mary must have been convinced of their own special calling and of a spiritual orientation different from the larger groups surrounding them.