

## Marian Studies

---

Volume 52 *The Marian Dimension of Christian Spirituality, Historical Perspectives, I. The Early Period*

---

Article 13

2001

### The Marian Spirituality of the Medieval Religious Orders: Devotion to Mary Among the Dominicans in the Thirteenth Century

Denis Vincent Wiseman

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Wiseman, Denis Vincent (2001) "The Marian Spirituality of the Medieval Religious Orders: Devotion to Mary Among the Dominicans in the Thirteenth Century," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 52, Article 13.  
Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol52/iss1/13](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol52/iss1/13)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

## DEVOTION TO MARY AMONG THE DOMINICANS IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Denis Vincent Wiseman, O.P.\*

This paper explores the relationship between Mary and the Dominican Order in the thirteenth century. This period is especially poignant not only because the attitudes and practices that developed in this period have been foundational for what has followed, but also because we Dominicans possess a rich collection of early writings, some of which we call our folklore, the stories of Dominic and the early friars and nuns.<sup>1</sup> I will situate the Dominican devotion to Mary within the original purpose of the Order itself and trace the manifestations of this devotion as found in the actual practices of the friars, by examining the underlying Marian beliefs present in the first accounts, in the early art sponsored by the Order, as well as in the early Dominican theological reflections on Mary. Such practices and beliefs laid the foundation for the Dominican propagation of Marian devotions in the form of lay confraternities. I hope that these details—interesting to me as a member of the Order—will not prove as tedious as the slides or videos of someone else's family.

---

\* Father Denis Wiseman, O.P., is a professor at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. In 2001, he received his S.T.D., with specialization in Marian studies, from the International Marian Research Institute (Dayton, Ohio). His dissertation is entitled "*Al nome di Gesu Cristo crocifisso e di Maria dolce: Salvation and Mary in the Life and Writings of Catherine of Siena.*"

<sup>1</sup>Unfortunately, we do not possess any of Dominic's homilies or any of his writings other than a brief letter to Dominican nuns in Madrid and two succinct letters regarding the situations of converted heretics.

### 1. Dominic and the Foundation of the Order

In the early-thirteenth century, there was a stirring among many to recapture the experience of the Apostles, with a renewed emphasis on preaching, poverty, and a sharing of life in community reflective of Acts 2:42-47. Jesus' instructions to the disciples in Luke 10:1-12 found a resonance in both the orthodox and the heterodox, as preachers went out on foot, two-by-two, without money, begging for their food.

As a canon of the cathedral at Osma in Castile, Dominic frequently prayed for "an effective charity."<sup>2</sup> His awareness of the dire necessity of apostolic preaching came to him while he was traveling on a mission with his bishop, Diego. Passing through the Midi, they encountered the Cathars and Waldensians around Toulouse in 1203 and they were troubled by their encounters with heresy. Returning to the area in 1206, Dominic and Diego attached themselves to the Cistercian abbots who had been commissioned by Innocent III to re-evangelize the area, in an effort soon known as the "Preaching of Jesus Christ." It was Diego's insight that their preaching could be effective only if they matched the poverty of the itinerant Cathar and Waldensian preachers.

By late 1207, after Diego had died and the Cistercian abbots had returned to their monasteries, Dominic and a few associates were left to continue their apparently futile preaching mission with the entrenched Cathar and Waldensian elements. Diego had confided a group of women, some of whom were converts, to Dominic's care. In 1211 or 1212, Dominic established these first nuns of the Order in a monastery attached to the chapel of Notre-Dame de Prouille. Through his experiences of the next eight years, Dominic refined his vision of apostolic preachers, bound to poverty, com-

---

<sup>2</sup>For this background on Dominic's life, I am especially indebted to the following works: M.-H. Vicaire, O.P., *St. Dominic and His Times*, trans. Kathleen Pond (Green Bay: Alt Publishing, 1964); William Hinnebusch, O.P., *The History of the Dominican Order* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1965); and Simon Tugwell, O.P., *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

mitted to a common life, and grounded in the study of sacred truth. His small troupe, accepted as diocesan preachers by the bishop of Toulouse in 1215, was approved as an Order by Honorius III on December 22, 1216. Dominic died less than five years later (on August 6, 1221), but not before he had imprinted his spirit on his Order, including his strong love for Mary.

Some of the Order's early writings attribute the very existence of the Order to Mary's intercession. These writings recount visions, said to predate the Order, in which Mary is seen to plead for the world before an angry Christ and to obtain from Him the promise of preachers who would renew the world.<sup>3</sup> One might question the assumption in the accounts that Mary's compassion mitigates the anger of her Son, but the accounts illustrate the absolute certitude of these early Dominican authors regarding the importance of their preaching mission and of the relationship of that mission to Mary.

It is not surprising to find Dominic's personal devotion to Mary related to his ministry of preaching. In order to preach wherever possible, Dominic walked incessantly—through the Cathar and Waldensian territories of Southern France and Northern Italy, to Paris, to Madrid, and to Rome. And as he walked, he prayed. Brother Bonvisus, one of the witnesses for Dominic's canonization, recounts that when drenching rain and overflowing rivers made Dominic's walking difficult, he "praised and blessed God,

---

<sup>3</sup>Gérard de Frachet records a vision of a monk from before the foundation of the Order, in which Mary's pleas for the human race move her Son to relent His anger and to promise to send preachers and men of truth to the world. Gérard de Frachet, *Vitae Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum necnon Cronica Ordinis*, I, i, Monumenta Historica Sancti Patris Nostri Dominici, Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica, I (Brussels: E. Chartier & J. Schoonjans, 1896), 6-7. The volumes in this series will be identified in references by the initials MOPH. See also, *Lives of the Brethren of the Order of Preachers*, trans. Placid Conway, O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1955), 3-4. Humbert of Romans states that he received an account from an elderly Cistercian who recalled that, in 1207, while he was part of the Cistercian preaching mission within the Albigensian territory, he encountered a man who had a vision that lasted three days. The man reported to have witnessed Mary pleading for three days until Jesus agreed to provide the world a fresh hope. This was interpreted to be the founding of the Order. Humbertus de Romanis,

singing in a loud voice, *Ave Maris Stella*. And when he finished that, he began the *Veni Creator Spiritus*.<sup>4</sup>

Dominican tradition attributes the Marian character of the Order to Dominic. Constantine of Orvieto, in his *legenda* (written between 1246 and 1248), asserts that Dominic entrusted the entire care of the Order to Mary as its special patron.<sup>5</sup> On August 15, 1217, against the advice of his bishop and of Count Simon de Montfort, Dominic dispersed his small group of friars to Paris and to Spain from their first house in Toulouse. One doubts that Dominic chose this date for this auspicious event without reference to the feast of the Assumption.

Dominic had a decisive hand in the creation of the *Primitive Constitutions*, both in its initial version in 1216 and the refined version of the first Chapter at Bologna in 1220.<sup>6</sup> From a Marian perspective, what is most striking in the *Primitive Constitutions* is the formula for profession; the friar states: "I . . . make profession and promise obedience to God and to Blessed Mary and to you . . . the Master of the Order of Preachers." This practice was apparently unique, although the Premonstratensians, who named their churches in honor of Mary (as did the Cistercians), offered themselves in vows to the Church of the Mother of God at a specific designation.<sup>7</sup> The

---

*Expositio Magistri Humberti: Super Constitutiones Fratrum Praedicatorum*, xlii, in *De Vita Regulari*, II, ed. Joachim Joseph Berthier (Roma: Marietti, 1956), 135. Jacobus de Voragine repeats both accounts. Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, II, ed. Giovanni Paolo Mazzioni (Sismel: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998), 723-724. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by William Granger Ryan (2 vols.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 2:47.

<sup>4</sup>Testimony of Brother Bonvisus, *Acta Canonizationis S. Dominici*, XXI, *Monumenta Historica Sancti Patris Nostri Dominici*, MOPH, XVI (Roma: Institutum Historicum Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1935), 139-140. *Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents*, ed. Francis C. Lehner, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1964), 111-112.

<sup>5</sup>Constantine of Orvieto, *Legenda Constantini Urbevetani*, 31, MOPH, XVI, 308. Constantine of Orvieto, a Dominican, later became bishop of Orvieto.

<sup>6</sup>M.-H. Vicaire, O.P., "Appendix V," *St. Dominic and His Times*, trans. Kathleen Pond (Green Bay: Alt Publishing, 1964), 413-417. The initial parts of the Constitutions borrow heavily from the Constitutions of the Premonstratensians. Simon Tugwell has prepared a comparison of the two Constitutions showing the significance of what is borrowed and what is not, as well as those particulars that are particularly Dominican, such as the use of dispensation and the emphasis on study and on preaching. Simon Tugwell, O.P., "The Early Dominican Constitutions," appendix to *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 445-470.

<sup>7</sup>Pierre Felix Mandonnet, O.P., *Saint Dominique: L'idée, l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et cie, 1937), 226, n. 65.

profession of obedience to Mary is so natural to the Dominican spirit that the early authors recorded it without further explanation.

The conviction that Mary had a personal patronage over the Order was widely held, as is evident from the early accounts of Marian visions. Our approach to these accounts will be to identify the very rich underlying insights regarding Mary, recognizing, as did Prospero Lambertini (later Pope Benedict XIV, 1740-1758), that even revelations of holy people may contain both elements from God and elements colored by the person's imagination.<sup>8</sup> We must also admit that some accounts of visions may reflect more of the latter than the former; yet, even the accounts not fully authentic reveal the intuitions of the friars.

The source for two accounts is Blessed Cecilia Cesarini. In 1219, Pope Honorius III asked Dominic to gather the nuns of some smaller convents in Rome into a single observant community at San Sisto. Cecilia was seventeen years old at the time and was the first of the nuns to receive the habit from Dominic and make vows into his hands. Seventy or eighty years later, when Cecilia was living at the monastery in Bologna where she had been prioress, she dictated her recollections of the beginnings of the Order to a young sister.<sup>9</sup>

According to Cecilia, as Dominic was praying in the dormitory at Santa Sabina late one night, three women entered. The woman in the center began to sprinkle the sleeping friars with holy water. She explained to Dominic that each evening when they invoked her as the most gracious advocate, she prostrated

---

<sup>8</sup>Prosper de Lambertini, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione, et Beatorum Canonizatione* (Prati: Alber Ghettrus et Soc., 1829), 612. Lambertini, in his curial position in charge of canonizations, composed *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* as an exhaustive study of the Church's process of determining saintliness.

<sup>9</sup>Dominican historians from the time of Melchior Cano (d. 1560) have been cautious in accepting Cecilia's memories without reservation. In comparison with other sources, her recollections seem occasionally to be imprecise and embellished, and more prone to give a miraculous interpretation than do the others. It should be noted, however, that Cecilia's credibility was bolstered somewhat after the Second World War when examinations done on Dominic's remains confirmed Cecilia's description of his appearance.

herself before her Son, asking Him to preserve the Order. The two women who accompanied her were St. Cecilia and St. Catherine of Alexandria. As Dominic continued praying, he saw our Lord with Mary and religious of all the Orders except his own. When our Lord asked him why he was weeping, Dominic explained that none of his Order appeared to be in heaven. The Lord placed His hand on Mary's shoulder and said, "I have entrusted your Order to my Mother." Then, at Jesus' request, Mary opened her cloak and Dominic saw many members of his Order. Cecilia reported that the next morning Dominic gave the friars at chapter "a long and very beautiful sermon, exhorting them to love and reverence of the Blessed Virgin Mary." He related his experience, as he did later to Cecilia and the other nuns at San Sisto.<sup>10</sup> While the symbolism of being covered by Mary's mantle may also be found in the Cistercian tradition,<sup>11</sup> what is significant for our purposes is the conviction of Blessed Cecilia, one of the earliest members of the Order, that the Order was personally protected by Mary.

A variant on the account of the sprinkling appears in the *Vitae Fratrum* or *Lives of the Brethren*. Thirty-five years after the death of Dominic, the General Chapter at Paris (1256) requested priors to send accounts of any remarkable occurrences to the Master of the Order. These anecdotes were then edited by Gérard de Frachet in the *Vitae Fratrum*, which was completed before the General Chapter in Strasbourg in 1260. In the *Vitae Fratrum*, an unnamed friar sees the Virgin sprinkling the sleeping brethren; he is told that Mary has a special love for the Order because all the friars do or say begins and concludes with her praise. She asserts that she has obtained from her Son the guarantee that no member

---

<sup>10</sup>"Miracula S. Dominici Romae patrata et a Beata Caecilia romana descripta," in *Fontes Selecti Vitae S. Dominici de Guzman*, ed. Innocentius Taurisano, O.P. (Roma: Unio Typographica A. Manutio, 1923), 47-48. "Miracles of Saint Dominic," in *Saint Dominic: Biographical Documents*, ed. Francis C. Lehner, O.P. (Washington, DC: Thomist Press, 1964), 174-176.

<sup>11</sup>André Duval, O.P., "La dévotion Mariale dans l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs," in *Maria: Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, ed. Hubert du Manoir, S.J. (8 vols.; Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1952), 2:739.

of the order will remain for long in mortal sin.<sup>12</sup> This account indicates not only an assurance of Mary's protection of the members of the Order, but also informs us that the friars' ministry was pervaded by an awareness of Mary.

Gérard de Frachet emphasizes this theme of Mary's care for the Order in his account of Dominic's successor, Jordan of Saxony: "Our Master was as devout as possible to blessed Mary, since he knew how watchful she was concerning the development and care of the Order, over which he was in charge with her assistance."<sup>13</sup> The *Vitae Fratrum* attributes to Jordan a Marian devotion consisting of five Psalms whose initial letters collectively spelled the name *Maria*. Each of the Psalms was followed by the *Gloria Patri* and the *Ave Maria* with a genuflection.<sup>14</sup>

In his own description of the early years of the Order, the *Libellus de Principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, composed sometime between December 25, 1231, and July 3, 1234, Jordan explains that the practice of singing the *Salve Regina* after Compline was begun after the freeing of a friar from a diabolical possession:

This cruel harassment of Brother Bernard was the first occasion that moved us to establish the custom of singing the *Salve Regina* after Compline at Bologna. From there the practice spread through the province of Lombardy and eventually became general throughout the Order. How many tears of devotion have sprung from this holy praise of Christ's venerable Mother? How many hearts of those who sang or listened has it not melted, how often has it not softened bitterness and installed fervor in its place? Do we believe that the Mother

---

<sup>12</sup>Gérard de Frachet, *Vitae Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum necnon Cronica Ordinis*, III, xxiv, MOPH, I (Brussels: E. Charpentier & J. Schoonjans, 1896), 119. There is an English version of the *Vitae Fratrum*. However, as Bede Jarrett, O.P., remarks in the introduction to the 1955 edition: "The manuscript used by Father Conway was not always the best, in fact, it very often gives later and much more detailed versions of the legends, less sober, even at times exaggerated, and almost untheological." Bede Jarrett, O.P., "Introduction," *Lives of the Brethren of the Order of Preachers*, trans. Placid Conway, O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1955), xii.

<sup>13</sup>Gérard de Frachet, *Vitae Fratrum*, III, xxiii, MOPH, I, 118.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

of our Redeemer is pleased with such praises and moved by such cries? A certain man, both religious and trustworthy, has told me that, in spirit, he often saw the Mother of our Lord prostrate before her Son praying for the security of the whole Order, as the friars were singing: "Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us." I mention this so that the brethren reading it may be inspired to even greater devotion in praising the virgin.<sup>15</sup>

While the Cistercians had already adopted the custom of singing the *Salve* in processions after their chapters, the Dominicans placed its singing at the close of Compline, with a procession from the choir to Our Lady's altar.<sup>16</sup> The community knelt at the words "Turn then, most gracious advocate, thy eyes of mercy on us" and were sprinkled with holy water by the hebdomadarian.<sup>17</sup> This sprinkling is perhaps derived from Premonstratensian and Cistercian rituals.

Jordan's *Libellus* recounts Mary's role in bringing Reginald, a master of theology and dean of the cathedral chapter at Orleans, to the Order. During a serious illness in 1218, Our Lady healed him and, then, according to Jordan's account: "showed him the whole habit of the Order."<sup>18</sup> The *Legenda Petri Ferrandi*, composed by the Spanish Dominican, Peter Ferrandus, between 1235 and 1239, records the event, with the words of Mary: "Then she showed him the habit of the Order of Preachers. 'Behold,' she said, 'this is the habit of your Order.'"<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Jordan, *The Libellus of Blessed Jordan*, 120, in *Biographical Documents*, 82. *Libellus de Principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, CXX, *Monumenta Historica Sancti Patris Nostri Dominici*, MOPH, XVI (Roma: Institutum Historicum Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1935), 81.

<sup>16</sup>Henri Leclercq, "Salve Regina," in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, XV (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1948), 719.

<sup>17</sup>Humbertus de Romanis, *Super Constitutiones Fratrum Praedicatorum*, II, xlii, *De Vita Regulari*, II, 129-130.

<sup>18</sup>"Nichilominus etiam ei omnem huius ordinis habitum demonstravit." Jordan, *Libellus*, LVII, MOPH, XVI, 52.

<sup>19</sup>"Tunc ei habitum ordinis Predicatorum ostendit: 'En,' inquit, 'hic est habitus ordinis tui.'" Petrus Ferrandus, *Legenda Petri Ferrandi*, 35, MOPH, XVI, 235.

Taken literally, Jordan and Ferrandus may mean only that Mary indicated the order which Reginald should enter by showing its habit. However, these texts have come to be understood as meaning that Mary gave Reginald a new habit or an additional element to the habit. Jacobus de Voragine, in his *Legenda Aurea*, written about 1260, asserts that Dominic received the same vision as had Reginald: "He heard all about the master's [Reginald's] vision and adopted the habit the Virgin had shown: the friars had been wearing surplices."<sup>20</sup>

Bernard Gui, in his *Legenda Sancti Dominici*,<sup>21</sup> completed between 1324 and 1329, allows us to follow the evolution of the tradition into the early-fourteenth century. He specifies that Mary gave the scapular to replace the surplice: "Blessed Dominic and the other brothers, taking off surplices, in their place donned the white scapular as [their] distinguishing habit, retaining the capps above and the white tunic under it, which they formerly wore as canons regular."<sup>22</sup>

The suggestion that the friars once wore surplices may be found in the testimony of Brother John of Spain for Dominic's canonization in 1233. John includes the wearing of surplices, along with riding horses and carrying money on journeys, as practices that occurred at an earlier stage of the Order before strict poverty was agreed upon at the Chapter in 1220.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that, initially, Dominic and his first associates may have been bound by the mandate of the provincial council of Montpellier, in 1215, ordering canons to wear surplices.

<sup>20</sup>Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea*, II, ed. Giovanni Paolo Mazzioni, 728; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, II, 50.

<sup>21</sup>This work is contained in Gui's *Speculum Sanctoriale*, which was composed by Gui at the request of Bérenger of Landorre, Master of the Order, who wanted a more accurate book of saints because he found the *Legenda Aurea* dubious in some parts, according to Gui's biographer: ". . . cui ordinatio fratris Iacobi de Voragine diminuta et in plerisque dubia videbatur" (quoted by Simon Tugwell, O.P., *Bernardi Guidonis Scripta de Sancto Dominico*, MOPH, XXVII, 22).

<sup>22</sup>Bernard Gui, *Legenda Sancti Dominici*, 39, MOPH, XXVII, 257-258.

<sup>23</sup>Testimony of Brother John of Spain, *Acta Canonizationis S. Dominici*, XXVI, MOPH, XVI, 144.

The tradition that Mary either gave the entire habit or the scapular has been persistent in the Order. Stephen Salanhac, who died in 1291, describes Mary as the *felix huius ordinis vestitaria*, "the happy clothier of our Order."<sup>24</sup> This association between Mary and the habit also appears in Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue*, written between 1377 and 1378. In the *Dialogue*, God the Father speaks: "He was a light that I offered the world through Mary and sent into the mystic body of holy Church as an uprooter of heresies. Why did I say 'through Mary'? Because she gave him the habit—a task My goodness entrusted to her."<sup>25</sup>

If recent Dominican historians, such as Hinnebusch,<sup>26</sup> Tugwell,<sup>27</sup> and Vicaire,<sup>28</sup> are correct, Jordan's account was misinterpreted by later authors, and, in fact, the scapular was part of the original habit. However, even if the attribution of the scapular to Mary is not made by the oldest sources, the development of the tradition illustrates the desire within the members of the Order to see themselves bound to Mary by a particularly strong symbol. While the scapular may not have had a Marian significance originally, for the last seven-and-a-half centuries it has been a physical sign of Mary's personal protection for the members of the Order.

---

<sup>24</sup>Stephanus de Salaniaco, *Predicatores Gratosi et Famosi*, in *De Quatuor in Quibus Deus Praedicatorum Ordinem Insignivit*, ed. Thomas Kaeppli, O.P., MOPH, XXII (Roma: Institutum Historicum Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1949), 157.

<sup>25</sup>Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 158, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (New York: Paulist, 1980), 337.

<sup>26</sup>William Hinnebusch, O.P., asserts that the first friars adopted the habit of the canons of Osmia, which included a scapular with an attached hood. William Hinnebusch, O.P., *The History of the Dominican Order*, vol. I (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1965), 343.

<sup>27</sup>Simon Tugwell, O.P., in an excursus on the topic, demonstrates that the constitutions, as they existed in 1216, and thus before Reginald's involvement with the Order, included a description of the scapular, similar to the description of a scapular found in the constitutions of the Premonstratensians. Simon Tugwell, O.P., "Excursus I: Reginald's vision and the Dominican habit," in *Bernardi Guidonis Scripta de Sancto Dominico*, MOPH, XXVII, 224-225.

<sup>28</sup>M.-H. Vicaire, O.P., treats of the question in a footnote, asserting: "This account . . . progressively distorted, has finally come to signify, in accordance with a hagiographical theme to be met with in other orders, the showing of a new habit of the order (the scapular)." M.-H. Vicaire, O.P., *Saint Dominic and His Times*, trans. Kathleen Pond (Green Bay: Alt Publishing, 1964), 504, n. 56.

## 2. Daily Devotions and Artwork

An insightful glimpse into the daily Marian devotion of the Dominicans can be seen by looking at the commentary on the Constitutions of Humbert of Romans, the fifth Master of the Order, a work composed between 1263 and 1270. Of particular interest are his comments on the first distinction in the *Primitive Constitutions*. This passage begins: "When the first signal is heard, the brethren are to get up, saying Matins of the blessed Virgin according to the time of year."<sup>29</sup> The recitation of the Office of the Virgin was not unique to the Order, but the time and the place were. Humbert's commentary responds to criticism that the friars recited this prayer in the dormitory just as they were rising from their beds.

Humbert's explanation provides information on the practices of the friars. He asserts that saying Mary's Office under such circumstances was reverent, because the friars began the day in her service. He doubts that she who lowers herself to the sick would be displeased if the friars were sluggish or sleepy in their prayers or were getting dressed. He acknowledges that one of the reasons for reciting her Office in this way was to allow more time for the friars to study during the day, and he believes that the zeal which the friars manifest in her service and in the service of her Son should offset any other explanation.<sup>30</sup>

He then recalls all the ways in which the friars honor her—even above the ways of many of the other orders. First of all, he observes: "Unceasingly through the office of preaching, [the Order] praises, blesses and preaches her Son and herself."<sup>31</sup> Secondly, the *horarium* begins with her office and ends with the *Salve*; thus each day begins and ends with her. This allusion to beginning and ending each day with Mary, moves Humbert to recall the tradition

---

<sup>29</sup>*Primitive Constitutions*, in *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*, ed. Simon Tugwell, O.P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 457.

<sup>30</sup>Humbertus de Romanis, *Super Constitutiones Fratrum Praedicatorum*, I, xxiii, *De Vita Regulari*, II, 71.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 70-72.

of Mary's help to Dominic: "She herself was the greatest helper in beginning the Order, and it is hoped that she may lead it to a good end."<sup>32</sup>

Humbert cites the daily procession after Compline, the inclinations for her name, as well as the genuflections in the introit of her Mass, the *Salve Sancta Parens*. He notes that her office is always said standing, that no other order includes her in their profession, and that on Saturdays the whole office is that of Our Lady with a sequence, as at a special feast. He also remarks: "When anything concerning her is sung in Church, the friars sing more devoutly and solemnly, as is evident in the antiphons, the daily processions, and in the commemorations of her."<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Humbert does not include any reference regarding Mary and the habit.

The reason for reciting the Office in the dormitory was given to him by another friar who heard it from Dominic. Humbert explains: "Hardly anyone is so spiritual that he does not either frequently or at least occasionally experience carnal phantasms in sleep. It is expedient, therefore, for holy men, as soon as they wake, to occupy themselves in holy works that this phantasm may recede from their memories . . . . It is very probable that the Office of this most chaste Virgin is the strongest [help] against this sort of phantasm."<sup>34</sup> While the working of the unconscious in dreams may be better understood in our times, Humbert's observation provides us an insight into how the early friars sought Mary's help in resolving the manifestations of unconscious sensuality. Humbert identifies Mary as an important element in the integration these religious sought in chastity.

Mary was seen to have intervened in a dramatic way when Pope Innocent IV decided to revoke the privileges that had been granted the Dominicans and Franciscans. The day that he signed the bull *Etsi animarum* (November 21, 1254), he became paralyzed and he died on the following December 7. The new Pope,

---

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 70.

Alexander IV, reversed the decisions and expressed his affection for the Order.<sup>35</sup> Humbert, the Master at the time, addressed a letter to the Order which concluded: "I commend each and all of you to the grace of the Savior and to His most glorious Mother, our Advocate, who is believed to have been the special patron of the order in these days."<sup>36</sup>

In identifying the various ways by which the friars honored Mary in their prayers and preaching, their devotion must be seen as a component in the context of their essentially Christocentric piety, demonstrated in the Mass, the Office, and their times of personal prayer after Matins/Lauds and Compline. Their Marian consciousness did not divert their attention from Christ, but reinforced their awareness of Christ's salvific actions.

This can be seen in the Marian art of the Dominican churches. During its first fifty years the Order was not in a position to ornament its churches. However, by the end of the thirteenth century, a particular pattern emerged.<sup>37</sup> While the Benedictines preferred to portray the Coronation of the Virgin in the altarpieces of their choirs, the Dominicans favored the enthroned Virgin and Child.<sup>38</sup> In his book on the Dominican artist Fra Angelico, William Hood notes: "It was the custom . . . to dedicate the main altarpiece to the Virgin with the Child, accompanied by saints, Dominican and otherwise. However, the symbolic focus of these altarpieces was less Marian than Christological, and these Christological themes bore directly on the Dominican mission and the Order's own liturgical customs."<sup>39</sup>

While the Virgin and Child might occupy a central position in these altarpieces, the surrounding panels developed a central theme focused on Christ as Savior, depicting His Incarnation,

---

<sup>35</sup>R.P. Mortier, O.P., *Histoire des Maîtres Généraux de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, I (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1903), 449-459.

<sup>36</sup>Humbertus de Romanis, *De Vita Regulari*, II, 494.

<sup>37</sup>Joanna Cannon, "Simone Martini, the Dominicans and the Early Sienese Polyptych," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 45 (1982): 75.

<sup>38</sup>William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 61-63.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

Passion, Death and Resurrection, and especially the Eucharist.<sup>40</sup> Joanna Cannon's comments on the altarpiece at S. Caterina, the Dominican priory in Pisa, painted in 1320, illustrate this: "The Man of Sorrows is linked on the polyptych's vertical axis with God the Father, and Virgin and Child. This axis appropriately summarizes the main concerns of both the altarpiece and the Dominican Order: namely, teaching, based on the word of God, redemption, through the Incarnation, and—in St. Peter [Martyr]'s case—martyrdom in imitation of Christ."<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Thirteenth-century Theologians and Mary

We should not overlook the fact that the rich theological development which took place among the Dominicans in the second half of the thirteenth century, was nurtured in the devotional environment we have described. The pattern of Marian prayer Humbert describes, the Marian traditions recorded by other authors, and the authors themselves were well known to Albert (d. 1280) and his famous student, Thomas (d. 1274). Albert was received into the order by Jordan of Saxony. Portions of his personal biography are contained in the *Vitae Fratrum*,<sup>42</sup> and with Thomas and three others, he was appointed by the Master of the Order, Humbert, to organize the studies for the Order.

Albert's and Thomas's own Marian writings are marked by a reverence for Mary with particular reference to the Scriptural and patristic sources and a sober theological rigor. Their Mariology reflects their Christocentric vision. Commenting on Albert's section "On the Annunciation" within his treatise *On the Incarnation*, Hilda Graef observes: "Albert was the first to give Mariology its definite place within Christology."<sup>43</sup> Thomas discusses Mary's

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 107. For the side panels of these altarpieces, saints were chosen to demonstrate the Order's association with the ministry of the apostles. Thus, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul or another apostle might be balanced by Dominic and Peter Martyr, or Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>41</sup>Cannon, "Simone Martini," 73.

<sup>42</sup>Simon Tugwell, O.P., introduction to *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 4-6.

<sup>43</sup>Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (2 vols.; London: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 1:274.

role as Mother of God, her virginity, her marriage to Joseph and her sanctification within the context of Christ's Incarnation and birth in the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>44</sup>

Their theological perspective, especially their reliance on patristic tradition, made the liturgical celebration of Mary's Conception problematic for them. One of the difficulties was the generally held belief, inherited from Augustine, that original sin was transmitted through the concupiscence of the conjugal act.<sup>45</sup> Another difficulty was the Aristotelian idea of animation, according to which the embryo does not receive a human soul initially, making the possibility of receiving grace at conception impossible.<sup>46</sup> That the feast of the Conception was not celebrated by the Church in Rome and that Bernard had disapproved of the celebration were reasons not to accept it. Thus, Albert insists: "We say that the Blessed Virgin was not sanctified before animation: and saying otherwise is a heresy condemned by Blessed Bernard in his letter to [the canons of] Lyons, and by all the masters of Paris."<sup>47</sup> Thomas raises the essential theological question how Jesus could have been Mary's savior if she never experienced sin.<sup>48</sup>

Thomas held to the traditional opinion that posited a sanctification removing original sin at some point while Mary was in the womb of her mother. Thomas asserted that a second purification removed the *fomes peccati* (inclination to sin) completely at the time of the Incarnation.<sup>49</sup> Thomas granted the possibility of celebrating the feast of Mary's Sanctification but not of her conception.<sup>50</sup> When the feast of the Conception of Mary became

<sup>44</sup>See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, Questions 27-30, Q. 31, 4-5, Q. 32, 4, Q. 35, 3-6, Q. 37, 4.

<sup>45</sup>T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 27, 2, ad 4. Cf. Augustine, *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, I.

<sup>46</sup>T. Aquinas, *ibid.*, III, 27, 2.

<sup>47</sup>"Dicimus, quod Beata Virgo non fuit sanctificata ante animationem: et qui dicunt oppositum, est haeresis condemnata a Beato Bernardo in epistola ad Lugdunenses, et a Magistris omnibus Parisiensibus." Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in III Sententiarum*, vol. xxiii, B. Alberti Magni, *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Ludovicum Vives, 1894), d.3, a.4 sol., 47.

<sup>48</sup>T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 27, 2.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, III, 27, 3.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, III, 27, 2, ad 3.

celebrated in the universal Church, the Dominicans continued to celebrate December 8 as the feast of Mary's Sanctification, until this exemption was revoked by Gregory XV in 1622.<sup>51</sup> A stained-glass window in the Cathedral of Covington, Kentucky, appears to comment on the Dominican reserve. It portrays Pius IX declaring the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, with a Franciscan standing at his side and a Dominican kneeling as he receives the document from the Pope.

#### 4. The Dominican Lay Confraternities of the Virgin

Documentation from the early-fourteenth century attributes the founding of the Confraternity of the Virgin in Florence to Peter of Verona (Peter Martyr) in 1244.<sup>52</sup> The structure of these confraternities, which were attached to Dominican churches, was not uniform, as they were governed locally and had individual statutes. A certain number of *Paters* and *Aves* were specified to be said each day in seven sets, echoing the hours of the Church's liturgy.<sup>53</sup> These confraternities were effective ways by which the Order shared its Marian devotion with the laity. Joanna Cannon remarks that the altarpieces of the Virgin and Child may have been the focal points of devotions and the singing of *laudi* by the Marian confraternities in the Dominican Churches.<sup>54</sup>

In due time, these confraternities became the vehicle by which the Dominicans propagated the practice of the Rosary. The oldest preserved association of Dominic with the Rosary appears in a homily in the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Yet the practices from

---

<sup>51</sup>Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., "The Roman Catholic Dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception," in *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), 265.

<sup>52</sup>Gilles Gerard Meersman, O.P., *Ordo fraternitatis: Confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo*, II (Roma: Herder Editrice e Libreria, 1977), 922-924.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 1144.

<sup>54</sup>Cannon, "Simone Martini," 76-77, n. 55.

<sup>55</sup>The first recorded association of Dominic with the practice is found in the homilies of the Dominican bishop of Trèves, Jean de Monte, (d. 1442), who referred to St. Dominic's preaching on the *Psalterium Mariae*. André Duval, "Rosaire," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: Doctrine et histoire*, XIII (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 949.

which the rosary developed, such as the repetition of *Aves* or *Paters* and the use of cords to count them, were present among the Dominicans, as they were among other orders.

Alan de la Roche (1428-1475), a native of Brittany and a preacher and professor in the reformed province in Holland, made this more reflective manner of saying the *Aves* the daily prayer of the Confraternity of the Virgin. As the moderator of the confraternity at the Dominican church in Douai, Alan hoped to foster inner reflection that would accompany vocal prayers. This concern was also present in other movements at the time, such as the *Devotio Moderna*. Alan made the daily recitation of the *Psalterium Mariae Virginis* the principle obligation of the Confraternity of Our Lady and St. Dominic at Douai in Belgium. The Dominican contributions to the development and spread of the Rosary merit further explanation.

### Conclusion

The consistent theme which runs through the Dominican Marian legends and practices is the relationship between Mary and the ministry of preaching. Mary's prayers for the world initiate the Order, which she protects in a personal way. If the friars are expeditious in saying her Office, it is only that they might study and better preach her Son and herself. Even the Dominican position concerning the Immaculate Conception evolves from their apprehensions of diminishing Christ's saving power. The early Dominican convictions of their relationship with Mary can be summed up in the words of Humbert of Romans:

From these incidents, therefore, and from many others written in the *Lives of the Brethren*, it is seen, that she is the special mother of that Order which exists to praise, bless, and preach her Son, developing, advancing and defending the Order.<sup>56</sup>

The Order of Preachers continues to have a distinctive Marian devotion, as can be seen in our practices. Just as in the thirteenth

---

<sup>56</sup>Humbertus de Romanis, *Super Constitutiones*, XLII, in *De Vita Regulari*, 136.

century, our vows are professed not only to God but also to Mary. In priories, the *Salve* continues to be sung after Vespers or Compline, at funerals, and at the deathbeds of the friars and nuns. The full Dominican habit includes a fifteen-decade rosary, a sixteenth-century addition to the habit. The daily Rosary is prescribed by the Constitutions and is recited in common in many houses. Each year on May 8, there is a liturgical celebration of the Patronage of our Lady for the Order.

However, perhaps the most powerful image for Dominicans is the association of Mary with the preaching mission. In the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., the Priory of the Immaculate Conception, a figure of the pregnant Virgin stands above the lectern illustrating that she is the model for those who bring forth the Word. This is aptly expressed in the Dedication of the Order to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the General Chapter at the Shrine of Madonna dell' Arco in 1974:

In you the Word was made flesh, that same Word which we receive, contemplate, praise together and preach. Therefore, under your guidance we today devote ourselves anew to the ministry of the Word. Furthermore, we declare to you that, hearing with you the Word within ourselves and anointed by the Spirit, whose sacred vessel you pre-eminently are, we are consecrated in the name of Jesus Christ to the evangelization of the world.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup>*Acta Capituli Generalis Electivi Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum* (Roma: Curia Generalitia, 1974), 235.