

LEGENDA DE ORIGINE

Introduction

The *Legenda de Origine Ordinis fratrum Servorum Virginis Mariae* (LO) – a title added by the copier at the end of the document – or Introduction to the *Legenda beati Philippi servorum beatae Virginis Mariae* – as the title at the beginning has it –, narrates the history of the beginnings of the Order of the Servants of Mary: the experience of the first group of the seven from 1233 to 1249/51 and consequent developments up to 1267, the beginning of the Generalate of Saint Philip Benizi.

The LO has come down to us through one manuscript, preserved in the Servite General Archives in Rome. It is a copy, as can be seen from the mistakes made in various places by the copier. The manuscript comes from the 14th century more precisely, perhaps, 1375 when a parchment was purchased in Florence for a copy of the “book of the beginnings of the Order” (F. TOZZI, *Libro degli spogli, segnato A*, in the year 1375).

The document, as it has come down to us, must have been drawn up shortly after 1317, as the author himself tells us. “This year”, he writes, “the body of one of these fathers of ours was solemnly moved, and by divine providence I happened to be present” (LO, 4). This was the translation of the body of Saint Philip Benizi which happened in the 10th of June 1317 in Todi, as the *Legenda* “toscana” or “vulgata” of the saint tells us (no. 33).

Fra Peter of Todi, prior general from 1314 to 1344, was present at the translation. The document is usually attributed to him, even though other authors have been suggested.

The text is easily divided into three parts:

A. An introductory part, consisting of the preface and chapters I-II (nos. 1-14), centered on the figure of Saint Philip Benizi and his relationship with the Order, of which the honor and the obligations deriving from the fact of having been founded directly by “Our Lady” are underlined.

B. A central part which is a real *Legenda de Origine* and which sketches out, without any precise references to people or dates, the spiritual journey and the first developments of the first group of Servites: chapters III-XII (nos. 15-49).

C. A third part consisting of chapters XIII-XV (nos. 50-62), primarily of a historical nature, taking up the theme interrupted at chapter II, clarifying the role of Saint Peter of Verona in the evolution of the original group of Servants in the years 1244-45 and the successive steps of its development into juridically recognized communities, up to 1267, on the basis of those concessions granted by the popes from 1255 onwards, which foreshadowed the structured that the Order would assume after the approval of Benedict XI in the bull *Dum levamus* (1304).

As can be seen, the document contains more than what we could expect when we read its title. But this, as has been said, is not the real title of the work; the copier who wrote the codex that has come down to us, added it at the end. The LO is more than a history of the origins of the Order. In the introduction (nos. 1-6) the author says he wishes to collect examples of the “fathers” of the Order among whom the most famous is Saint Philip: he promises to write immediately afterwards a *legenda* about him, which at present we do not have.

The LO is therefore a composite work which connects together the figure of Saint Philip and the beginnings of the Order with the intention of demonstrating this thesis: the Order has been directly founded by the Virgin who made use for this purpose of seven men specially gifted with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and who intended this Order, “hers” in a special way, to be illuminated by the teaching and by the holiness of Philip, and who disposed that the Order should begin in the same year as the saint was born, 1233, and that it should be completed in all structures at the time when Philip entered 1254. To prove this thesis made more believable by a few

adaptations of dates and facts, the author makes use of the testimony of one of the Seven, Alexis, whose life and death in 1310 he describes.

The document which we have is not therefore either a simple *legenda del beato Filippo*, as the title at the beginning would have us believe, or a *legenda de origine Ordinis* as the final sentence declares. A deeper analysis of the content, of the lexicography and of the morphology has demonstrated the different layers of the text in which the final editor has inserted more ancient documents, either citing them literally in some cases or interpolating them in others. This editing explains the diversity of styles and theological thinking in different parts of the LO, the different ways of referring to the Scriptures, to the Fathers, and the narrative sources, the repetitions, or contradictions and the forced connections.

In the course of the research on the text it became ever clearer that there was, beyond the 14th century presentation, a more archaic text going back to a time just after the community experience of the Servant culminating in the stay at Monte Senario.

This ancient nucleus, the real *Legenda de origine*, is centered in the religious experience of “our glorious fathers”, beginning from the time when they were still living in the world (nos. 20-21, the last two paragraphs of chapter III), and then recounting their friendship and their retreat from the world (chapter VI: nos. 29-31), their community life outside the gates of Florence and later at Monte Senario (chaps. VII-IX: nos. 35-35), the decision of receiving new brothers and opening new priories (chap. XII: nos. 46-49).

This 13th century section has not only a different vocabulary but also a different theological and spiritual basis. It is a theocentric concept, based on the penitential and contemplative journey of those who began the Order, beginning from an act of entrusting themselves to the “Queen of Heaven, the most glorious Virgin Mary, mediatrix and advocate” (no. 18), and continued with the search, like Abraham, of the holy mountain where they can have a meeting with God and, in Him with their brothers. There is constant reference to Holy Scripture and, even if some of the citations are common place in the literary and religious ambient of the age, this is original and allows us to penetrate more closely into the heart of the monastic life lived on Monte Senario.

Only this ancient section speaks about Monte Senario. The author names it Sonario (no. 41) or Sonaia (no. 42) even though he knows the popular name of Monte Asinario, which he considers a corruption of the original title. The documents for the period 1241-1246 in our possession are an exact reflection of this situation: the use of *monte Asinario* in documents outside the Servite Order, a particular and significant use of *monte Sonaio*, *Sonaia* and *Sonario* in the documents that pertain to the Order. After 1256 all mention of the mountain disappears from the documentation of the Order itself; therefore the fact that the editor of the central section of the LO seems to be so well informed about the different forms of the same name and demonstrates also a direct knowledge of the place, indicates the great antiquity of this section. Monte Senario seems then to be at the height of its vitality: from the mountain there spreads the echo of the holy life of the glorious men that lived there and up to the mountain come people who want to draw light from their lives or even to share more concretely in their experience.

A different spiritual climate is found in the parts that can be attributed to the final editor, that is the forward, chapters I-II, part of the third chapter, the final chapters XII-XV and the connecting chapters IV-V and VII. Here at the center have to be found the action of the Virgin and the fundamental events of the life of Saint Philip, who is the great model presented for the imitation of all Servants. The final 14th century editor, therefore, has incorporated in his work preceding narrative sources which go back to a time close to the origins. He declares that he has made scrupulous investigations by means of friars who knew these times, in particular, fra Alexis, one of the Seven. He asked him for much information about the origins of the Order; this he subsequently wrote down on a piece of paper which, through an unfortunate accident, was lost (no. 26). He also cites a very important source for the reconstruction of the origins *De origine Ordinis*, written by Saint Philip; but this document too was lost through unknown causes or perhaps even through the carelessness of the friars (nos. 13 and 14). In reality the author well knows of the existence of this document of

which he makes use in his work and which, in all probability is to be identified with the ancient nucleus of the LO.

His intention is to create a work able to offer a synthetical vision of the origins and of the development of the Order. By means of the mention of the repeated interventions of the Virgin, the commitment to Marian service, the figure of Philip and the witness of fra Alexis, he seeks to harmonize the Marian character which the Order already had at the start of the 14th century and the fundamental primitive elements. This attempt to study the original inspiration in the light of the new historical circumstances has given rise to a work of great dedication, the expression of a rich religious personality well-grounded in theology and philosophy, and concerned to preserve the Order in faithfulness to the holy life of which his glorious fathers remain undoubted models.

Editions

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TEXT

In Praise of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ

**INTRODUCTION TO THE LEGENDA
OF BLESSED PHILIP
OF THE SERVANTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

1. **O**ur purpose here is to extol a group of godly men¹ who, second only to the Lord², deserve to be called our spiritual fathers. It was they who begot us, in the Order, by the holiness of their word and example. It was they who, like fathers, watched over us and saw to it that we had spiritual food for our nourishment; they took in hand our upbringing in knowledge, art and science, pointing out to us the best and surest way to attain a holy life. This they did in the Order by offering themselves to God, every thought, word and deed, in humility of heart³. They chose the path of truth⁴ and lived according to its laws without wavering.

Willingly dedicating their whole lives to the Lord, they made our Order in their own day pleasing to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Even more, through their prayers they won this favor: that the Order would continue after them and into the future, God willing, and would count saintly friars among its members.

The Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary were pleased by the lives of these godly men who began our Order and graciously accepted the service they so wholeheartedly gave. We are able to prove this, first of all, by the fact that even while they were alive the Lord enhanced their lives with many wonders and miracles. When they were dying, signs and other prodigies showed that their souls were very dear to him. And afterwards he proved beyond doubt that these fathers of ours were with him in eternal glory by working through their merits yet more signs and wonders.

2. If we can keep before our eyes the word and example with which these fathers of ours spiritually begot us; if we can learn about how they lived and made themselves and the Order pleasing to the Lord, then we will find ourselves speaking and acting like they did and everyone will be able to see that they have left behind sons who resemble them⁵. It will be obvious that we have taken their example, doing everything in humility of heart; that we too have chosen the path of truth, living according to its laws without wavering; and that we like them have willingly dedicated our lives to the Lord and made the Order and ourselves in our own day pleasing to God and Our Lady. By our constant prayers we will assure that the Order will continue after us too.

Just as they gave us an example to live by, we too have to leave an example for those who come after us in the Order, urging them to do the same for their successors and so on from one generation to the next. If we and those who come after us can do this, great good will come to the Order. It will be a source of tremendous joy to Our Lady; she will be wonderfully consoled in us⁶, her servants, and we will be honoring her with our service, showing the world that she is worthy of

¹ The expression “godly men”, is taken from *Sir* 44, 1, and is used frequently in the *Legenda* to indicate the “fathers” of the Order, that is, those who were the initiators or outstanding men in the early years of the Order. The reference to Sirach is a literary commonplace of the period and is found in similar medieval narratives. These initial paragraphs (nos. 1-6) introduce an account of the examples of these “fathers”, from whom the figure of St. Philip emerges. The narrative of the true origins of the Order begins only with paragraphs 7 and 8.

² *Sir* 1, 3 (Vulgate). “Who hath searched out the wisdom of God *that goeth before all things?*” (Douay Version).

³ *Mt* 11,29. The adverb “coraliter” (here translated as “humility of heart”) is of Latin and Provençal origin. It is used often in thirteenth century Italian literature, and occurs ten times in the *Legenda*. It indicates both the heart of the person and the profound bond which unites the members of a community so that it becomes precisely “one heart”.

⁴ For the “way of truth” see *Ps* 119, 30; *Tb* 1, 3; *Wis* 5, 6; 2 *Pt* 2, 2.

⁵ *Sir* 44, 10-13.

⁶ 2 *Mc* 7, 6 (which cites *Dt* 32, 36). This passage is reflected better in the Douay (Vulgate) version.

every reverence. The Lord himself will be moved to endow our Order with constant spiritual gifts and graces, evidence of how pleased he is with it.

There is yet another point to be made. When people come from the world to our Order, as to one of the six biblical cities of refuge⁷, and find in it without fail friars who are life-giving in what they say and do, they will be attracted to the Order by the gentleness of the example and instruction. They will never want to go away, either in body or in spirit, from this city of refuge until the end of their lives when their souls, now dead to the world and sin, will be called by Christ the High Priest⁸ to unending life and be restored to complete liberty.

3. The time is fast approaching when those who lived with these blessed men, those who heard their words, saw their deeds and acts of virtue, will no longer be with us. As these eyewitnesses grow fewer and fewer, there will soon be no one left who has firsthand knowledge and can tell us stories about their lives. When I realized that the remembrance of them was in danger of being lost to the friars of our Order – and even though I felt unworthy and little suited for this task and had to rely solely on the protection and help of the Lord – I felt obliged to dedicate all my energy to search out the details of their amiable lives. Within the limits of my modest ability, I wanted to put the results into writing and make it available to any who wanted to progress in perfection, leaving a lasting record of them for all who will come afterwards.

I have done this work in a spirit of reverence and out of the profound love I have and feel I should have towards these men; I am one who has personally experienced no small gain from each one of them. I can see that this will be very useful for my Order and for all the friars of the Order who I know are eagerly looking for such information. Besides, by doing this I may be able to obtain from the Lord, through their merits and intercession, grace and glory for my soul.

And what will I have accomplished? The friars of our Order will be able to find in the Order itself a biography of these men whom they were never able to know personally. Seeing reflected therein, as in a flawless mirror⁹, the image of their soul, the readers will nourish the beauties they see there and root out with tears of penance the defects that become apparent.

4. There is yet another reason for my decision to take on this task, even though I know I am not worthy. This year the body of one of these fathers of ours was solemnly moved¹⁰, and by divine providence I happened to be present. During the ceremony and before my very eyes, God worked many miracles through the merits of his saint. I will say more about that later.

But what I saw convinced me that I should research his life and miracles, leaving in writing for the friars a record also of this great man. In fact, I could probably be accused of ingratitude if I did not do this, at least to the best of my ability, after having received such a special grace from him and having been an eyewitness to such miracles. St. Gregory says: “What experience makes impossible, love supplies”¹¹.

Now, many godly and praiseworthy men may have been fathers, in a spiritual sense, in the Order, even before those I intend to propose here for our imitation, and many others have also come after them. Still, more than all the others in our Order, these deserve to be held up as models for our friars, because they were more noted than the rest for their virtue and for what they said and did.

I would apply this first and foremost to blessed Philip. He is justifiably put ahead of all the others as a model for the Order because he gave himself without stint to its essential obligations and

⁷ For the cities of refuge see *Nm* 35, 6; *Dt* 19, 1-10; *Jos* 20, 1-3.

⁸ *Heb* 4, 14-15; 9, 11.

⁹ For the image of holiness as a mirror in which the soul can see its true self, see Gregory the Great, *Moralia sive Expositio in Job*, I, II, chap. 1, n. 1 (in PL 75, 553-554) from which the *Legenda* has taken several expressions. See also St. Augustine, *Exposition on the Psalms*, 103, 1, 4-6; *Discourse* 49, 5; and also at the conclusion of the Rule: “As in a mirror, you will be able to see in it [the book of the Rule] whether there is anything you are neglecting or forgetting”.

¹⁰ The translation of the relics of St. Philip Benizi was promoted by Fra Peter of To-di, the final redactor of the LO and prior general from August 1314. He was in To-di in June of 1317. The *Legenda* “Vulgata” of St. Philip, no. 33 (*Monumenta OSM*, II, Bruxelles, 1898, p. 81), gives the precise date of the translation: 10 June 1317.

¹¹ Gregory the Great, *Homilia 21 in Evangelia*, 1 (in PL 76, 1169-1170). The LO does not cite the entire quotation. It omits the second part of the phrase (“charitas ministrat”).

in so doing served Our Lady faithfully and perfectly. Consider his chastity; his example urges us to curb the desires of the flesh. Reflecting on his poverty, we come to count as refuse¹² all the riches of the world. And his obedience teaches us to submit our will to the Lord.

5. I was filled with a desire to find out (and other friars urged me in this direction) as much as I possibly could about the life of this blessed man and with the greatest possible certainty. So, in this very same year I visited every house of our Order accessible to me, places where I had heard there was still any friar who had known him personally while he was alive. Some perhaps had lived in the same house with him or perhaps had accompanied him on his trips. I talked to them in great detail about his daily life, his death, his miracles. From their very own mouths, from these trustworthy men, I gathered what little information they still remembered. It was little, I say, in contrast to the many, many virtuous and miraculous things he did in his lifetime.

Of course, the main reason I found so little information was that more than thirty-two years had passed since his death. Few and far between were the friars I could track down who had lived at his time and were with us still. But among them I was able to find some who were very trustworthy, of exemplary and holy life. From these then I gathered my facts, everything I could find on the life of the holy man. I ascertained that other persons were also in agreement with these facts. But much time had already passed and the few people I have mentioned did not remember much about his life and miracles.

There was another very particular obstacle to my research. This holy man had an amazing habit of keeping his miracles and pious works hidden from his brethren, so that only on the rare occasion when he could not prevent it were they aware of them. Very meager therefore were the facts that came to the attention of the friars. I gathered up what little there was, as I have said, like so many fragments¹³ left in the memory of these few friars. I have put them into some kind of order and sequence as well as I could, sometimes keeping chronological integrity, other times making some changes I felt necessary.

6. I decided that I should write as thorough a biography of blessed Philip as possible. This meant that I had to investigate not only his life while in the Order but also his family and the events of his earlier years. And so I made a visit to the city, to the very street and house where he was born and raised, where he lived right up to the time he entered the Order. I found there a surviving nephew of his, a certain Fra Forte¹⁴, who was almost eighty years old. And on the same street I interviewed another venerable old man named Fecino. He too, like the nephew, was a well-respected man of holy life. In spite of his almost one hundred years, he had all his wits about him and his memory was good. He had a house of his own on that street and had always lived near the home of Philip. From both of these men I got many reliable facts about his family and his activities as a young layman.

I have laid out this story in fifteen orderly chapters. This way, those who are interested will be able to follow his life in detail; and others who want to use this book as a spiritual vade mecum will be able to find easily selections they want.

Chapter One THE HONOR AND DIGNITY OF OUR ORDER

7. The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ is, in a general way, a refuge for each and every sinner, and without doubt she obtains from her Son the mercy they ask

¹² *Phil* 3, 8.

¹³ *Jn* 6, 12-13

¹⁴ Fra Forte, in the world known as Forte da Sommaia, made his profession in 1315. In 1317 he deposited a sum of money at SS. Annunziata in Florence for his sister Buta, who had been born illegitimately. This is deduced from the book of *Ricordanze*, an administrative register of SS. Annunziata for the years 1295 to 1332.

through her intercession¹⁵. She is also known as the Mother of all who are just; she wins grace for them and for this they love her with all their hearts. And thirdly, she is recognized as the sovereign Lady of all who serve Christ in any religious Order whatsoever, since it is in her that they trust and are assured of the eternal glory which she will ask of her Son. All this notwithstanding, she is a special refuge, the only Mother and sovereign Lady in a most singular way for the members of our Order, be they sinners or just or faithful servants. Our Order, after all, is uniquely dedicated to her, in fact rightly takes its name from her.

Now, it is certainly true that the members of all other Orders – sinners, just and servants of Christ – invoke Our Lady in time of need. She is a refuge for all of them, a Mother and a sovereign Lady for all. It is she who obtains from God mercy for sinners, grace for the just and glory for those who serve her Son, whenever any of them call on her. And yet, as anyone can see who runs down a list of the various Orders, they all have some particular saint, the founder of each of the Orders, to whom these other religious turn. It is this founder who is for them that special refuge, that father of their own, that unique sovereign when they want to ask God something for themselves or for their Order through his intercession. But the friars of our Order, consecrated to Our Lady in a special way and called by her name, do not recognize any saint as the founder of the Order, but only Our Lady herself. They are singularly dedicated to her. She is their special refuge, the only Mother and sovereign to whom they can and should turn in their needs for themselves or for the Order. In any normal need, our friars petition Our Lady like everyone else, the sinner looking for refuge, the just for a mother and the ever faithful servant for a sovereign; and she responds as she does for everyone else, with mercy, grace and glory. But when they want to ask for particular help for themselves or their Order, they turn to her, now their special refuge, Mother and Lady. Of course they have blessed Philip and those many other godly men who began our Order, all of whom were in the Order before them, men noted for their virtues, merits and miracles. It could be thought that they would look to such as these in their greatest personal or community needs. But none of these, none, laid the original foundations of Our Lady's Order. Not one of them could be considered such a special saint of the Order as to be an object of devotion to all the friars in the Order's ranks from its beginning to its end. Remember that there were many men in the Order even previous to those that we are here calling our fathers on the basis of their merits and the miracles they worked. But of these earlier friars, some were surely sinners, some were just, and some were servants of Our Lady in their constant quest for perfection. As such, they too were in need of mercy, grace and glory. But could they in these situations turn to saints who had not yet even appeared on the scene? It is obvious that these early members of her Order had no special saint of their own except Our Lady, that no one in fact could have been called the founder of the Order, that no one was ever venerated by all the friars of the Order from the beginning.

8. It is clear from what has been said that Our Lady never intended to give the friars of her Order any special saint as its founder. This implies that, while she shows herself a refuge, a mother and a sovereign to all the friars of her Order the same as she does to everyone else, asking of her Son mercy, grace and glory, at the same time our friars should turn to her as to a very special refuge, their only Mother and sovereign Lady when they want to ask particular help for themselves or for the Order.

What a glorious thing it is to belong to Our Lady's Order! To be among those who know that she is not just an ordinary advocate for them, but one who has a special care for each of them and for the Order. But this privilege carries with it an obligation. More than those of other Orders, the friars of her Order are to be holy in her sight and excel in pious works. Called to serve a Lady so great that she deigns to take this special care for them, they are likewise called more than others to

¹⁵ Paragraphs 7 and 8, which explain the particular relationship existing between the Order of Servants of Mary and the Virgin Mary, are similar in terminology and mentality to the spiritual and hagiographical writings of the Cistercians and Dominicans, two orders which are more specifically Marian.

purity of heart¹⁶. Woe and shame to those friars who, in spite of belonging to this marvelous Order of Our Lady, boldly soil their own souls and stop others from living blamelessly. If only they will repent and turn to her immediately, they may prevent her, in her justifiable anger, from taking them without warning from this life and consigning them to punishment in eternal fire as they deserve. On the other hand, happy are those friars who live in this Order and remain pure, encouraging others to do the same. It should fill them with joy to continue walking this road, knowing that the misguided members of the Order who are obdurate in their wickedness will be doubly punished, while the good who persevere in their purity of heart will be rewarded more than others.

Chapter Two

HOW THE BEGINNING OF OUR ORDER AND THE BIRTH OF BLESSED PHILIP OCCURRED SIMULTANEOUSLY

9. The scene had been set and the moment had come when the Blessed Virgin Mary saw fit to bring together the first friars of her future Order, an Order that was to be singularly dedicated to her. They were to separate themselves from the world and in doing so bring to birth her Order. But she likewise wanted to provide for its future: a light shining with heavenly brightness was to arise at the very same time as she was bringing these friars together to begin her Order. This light was to be blessed Philip, who was born in the same place as the Order began. The timing was perfect, because just when the young Order would have grown to such a size that it could be held together only by enlightenment and doctrine such as his, Philip would be ready in age and sanctity; ready to give light, like a lamp on a stand¹⁷, to those who were already in the Order when he joined it and to those who would enter afterwards. He would teach them by word and example how to make themselves worthy to serve Our Lady and receive from her their reward. When he came into the Order he was to fill it with light and all the friars would catch the glow of his brilliance and intelligence. They too would be enabled to give worthy service to their Lady, which is completely in accord with the nature of the Order.

10. At that time Our Lord Jesus Christ had already gifted the world with two great luminaries, blessed Dominic and blessed Francis. These two had founded the religious Orders which bear their names and the whole world was benefiting by the brilliance of the life and intelligence of the friars that belonged to these Orders. Both had finished their allotted mission and had gone to eternal life, Dominic in 1221 and Francis in 1226. By that time their Orders were already so far advanced in virtue in the sight of God that their friars, known as men who preached the truth and lived exemplary lives, were beginning to combat the current heresies disturbing the Church. One of the most outstanding of them was blessed Peter Martyr; he was just beginning to gain notoriety as a powerful protagonist for Christ and great opponent of heresies¹⁸.

The Lord himself had decided that the time was ripe to raise up a house in honor of his Mother, the Virgin Mary, an Order consecrated to her name. Because the friars brought together in that Order would have to learn how to give fitting service to their Lady, he put before their eyes a shining example of such service. He gave them Philip.

11. Blessed Philip was born in the year of the Lord 1233, during the pontificate of Pope Gregory IX¹⁹, in the province of Tuscany and in the city of Florence. Our Lady willed that her own

¹⁶ Cf. *Ps* 101, 2

¹⁷ *Jn* 5, 35; *Mt* 5, 15; *Mk* 4, 21; *Lk* 8, 16. The image of the lamp and lampstand is found several times in the LO (cf. Nos. 13, 50, 56, 58). It places the story of the origins of the Order in close relationship with St. Philip. Gregory the Great had already applied this image to St. Benedict in the second book of his *Dialogues* (in PL 66, 130).

¹⁸ St. Peter of Verona began his apostolic activity between 1232 and 1234. More will be said about him in nos. 33, 50-53, and 58 of the LO.

¹⁹ Ugolino of Segni was pope from 1227 to 1241 with the name of Gregory IX.

Order, one specially consecrated to her and even bearing her name, should begin in that same year, in that same province and city.

O lovely Lady, what is this you are doing? You are making your future servant a replica of your Son and clearly showing how great he will be someday and what a wonderful servant he will be to you! From the very first moment you gave birth to Jesus of the Jewish race in Israel, he immediately began to gather the people and the neighbors around himself. He was still in the manger and already the shepherds came from Judea²⁰ and the Magi from the East²¹. This people, this family he was to instruct and redeem when he had reached maturity; and he would leave them, after his passion and death, his teaching and his example of how they ought to live. In the same way, when blessed Philip was born in Florence of Tuscany, you immediately began to gather around him people and neighbors from the same province and city, the first members of your Order. When he had matured and begun to reflect the brilliant wisdom of your Son, he too would instruct and govern this family until the day he died. And even after death he would leave behind him a teaching and an example of how they should serve you worthily.

O my Lady, Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom are we to give the credit for this amazing similarity between your servant Philip and your beloved Son, Jesus Christ? I am astonished, seeing a servant of yours put on a par with your Son like this! I am overwhelmed and I cannot imagine what could be behind it all. Surely it cannot be attributed to any merit of your servant; he was just a new-born infant. Nor could your Order take any credit for it; it was just at its beginnings too. Though my wonder and admiration never cease and I am totally unable to explain this phenomenon, yet with all due reverence to you, dear Lady and my Mother, I dare to speculate. I grant that you wanted to show how full of merit and dignity your servant blessed Philip and the Order specially dedicated to you would someday be, and that they were full of virtues and heavenly gifts in your sight. As such, they would be most deserving of honor; that I cannot deny. Yet, the principal reason can be none other than your own kindness and mercy. It was simply your good pleasure, without any merit on their part, to honor your servant Philip and the Order specially dedicated to you, by arranging this striking likeness to Jesus at the time of his birth.

12. I came to the conclusion that blessed Philip was born in the very same year that Our Lady's Order began by some simple deductions. He died in the year of the Lord 1285, the second year of the pontificate of Pope Honorius IV²². Not long before his death he had remarked in passing to Fra Bonaventure of Pistoia, while they were in the priory at Orvieto²³, that he was fifty two years old. If we subtract his fifty two years at death from the year 1285, it appears that it was in the year of the Lord 1233 that blessed Philip came into the world. Which, as I said earlier, is exactly when the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary began. But how do I know the date of the beginning of the Order? Well, for many years before his death I had asked a lot of questions of Fra Alexis²⁴, one of the seven who first began our Order²⁵. He told me that the Order originated six full years before the total eclipse of the sun in Italy. It is a well-known fact that this celebrated eclipse occurred in the year of the Lord 1239, the thirteenth year of the pontificate of

Pope Gregory IX. Going back before the eclipse by these six years, we again arrive at 1233, unequivocally, as the date when Our Lady's Order began, the very same year in which blessed

²⁰ *Lk 2*, 8-20.

²¹ *Mt 2*, 1-12.

²² James Savelli, pope from 1285 to 1287. In the last months of his pontificate he granted a series of privileges to our priories in Borgo Sansepolcro, Bologna, Foligno, Siena, Cafaggio, and Lucca. He thus made the survival of the Order more secure in a moment of uncertainty.

²³ The Servants of Mary obtained the church of St. Peter in Vetera on 27 September 1260 from the bishop of Orvieto. In 1265, perhaps for security reasons, they moved inside the city walls and built the church and priory of St. Mary's.

²⁴ Cf. *Introduction*.

²⁵ The number "seven" occurs in several other hermit communities in the Middle Ages, for example St. Bruno and his six companions. It is also found in the biographies of St. Francis. It has a symbolic value deeply rooted in the religious consciousness of the period, so that probably the beginnings of a religious group naturally sought for the number seven.

Philip was born. What I said above is therefore obvious, that the birth of Our Lady's servant and the origin of her Order occurred simultaneously.

13. I heard many friars say that while he was still alive blessed Philip had written in his own hand a little book called *On the Origin of the Order*²⁶, in which he told the full story of how Our Lady's Order began and of how it grew and prospered up until the time that he himself entered. Many of our friars told me that they had seen and read it, and so for some time I lived in the hope that I would find it. But in this I have had no success. Later I heard from one of the friars that he had had the book for a long time, but had lost it through unfortunate circumstances.

14. How could I in any way adequately describe in writing, to my own satisfaction or that of all the friars, how our Order began and grew until the time of blessed Philip? I was faced with two problems: first, that the earliest friars, those whom Our Lady had herself chosen to begin her Order, and most of their immediate successors, were already dead; and then, that the friars, apparently out of negligence, had lost the book on the origins of the Order written by blessed Philip.

And yet if I wanted to honor Philip and benefit the friars as I had so willingly undertaken to do, by writing his life, this depended not a little on having information on how our Order began, grew and fared until the time of his generalate. I have had to rely on the incomplete facts I still remember hearing at various times from many of the older friars during these twenty-two years that I have been in the Order. Some of these men are already dead, a few others are still alive. But my primary source has been Fra Alexis, whom I mentioned before as one of the first friars of our Order. Though it is imperfect and far from exhaustive, I am happy to have done this work and to be making it available to the friars who have been pressing me for it.

Chapter Three

THE NUMBER OF THE FRIARS WHO BEGAN THE ORDER AND THEIR HOLINESS AS LAYMEN BEFORE THEY CAME TOGETHER

15. We have already made it clear that the Order of the Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary originated in the province of Tuscany and the city of Florence. For a better comprehension of what was to follow, we have considered, though only briefly and in a general way, the nature of religious life and some few pertinent facts about it²⁷. There remains to explain, for the benefit of those interested, how the Order began. I take up this task now with trust in God and great devotion and reverence.

We start with the fact that there were in Florence, in the province of Tuscany, seven men, each of them worthy of respect and honor. As the conjunction of the seven stars of the Pleiades brings to an end, in a spiritual sense, the rotation of Arcturus²⁸, Our Lady brought them together and precisely through this forming of one spirit and one body she started the Order that was to be her own and that of her Servants. We could wonder why Our Lady chose to begin with a group of seven. I have no doubt that it was to convince everyone that she wished her Order endowed in a special way with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was to make clear that down through the ages she would keep it alive, as one generation followed another each with a number of men rich in these seven gifts of the Spirit. A final motive was to witness to all that she would love this Order of hers, filled with these same gifts, until the end of time, the so-called seventh age²⁹.

²⁶ Cf. *Introduction*.

²⁷ In truth, the author has not treated this subject.

²⁸ *Jb* 38. 31. The number of the stars in the Pleiades and the relationship with Arcturus or Orion – two particulars which Job does not provide – are inspired more exactly by a commentary by Gregory the Great, *Moralia sive Expositio in Job*, 29, 31 (in PL 76, 515-519). There the seven stars are considered as signs of the gifts of the Spirit and of the New Testament, while Arcturus symbolizes the Old Testament and the tormented path followed by the Church

²⁹ The division of history into seven ages goes back to St. Augustine: cf. Books 11-18 of *The City of God* and also in *Genesis against*

16. There are four aspects under which we can consider these men before they came together to begin our Order: one is in regard to the Church, another in regard to civil society; a third in regard to honor given Our Lady and finally in regard to their spiritual perfection.

We look at them first in their relationship to the Church. All the members of the faithful live out and preserve their faith within the Church in one of three states: some are virgins, choosing continence and never entering into marriage; others marry; and still others, freed from the bonds of marriage either through mutual consent of the spouses or through the death of one of them, choose for love of God to live in chastity for the rest of their lives. We find that these seven men of ours, before they came together, were living good lives in all three of these states. A number of them had decided to observe virginity or chastity for life and so remained unmarried; others were already married and the rest were widowers.

What an expression of great and wonderful love! What a tremendous mystery! Our Lady, in selecting these men to begin our Order, had chosen to reveal through the number seven that her Order's perfection should always consist in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. But now she had something else to reveal to the whole world, intimated in the fact that these seven men came from all three states of life: that anyone, no matter what his condition in the faith or in the Church, no matter whether sinner in need of healing of soul or saint looking for growth, would be welcome to this Order of hers. Anyone who fled to it as to the furthest of the six spiritual cities of refuge and remained there, faithful in his service to her until death, would be rewarded by herself and by her Son with grace and glory. So much for the first aspect.

It is to this that the little book of the old constitutions³⁰ which they observed in the world before they came together is referring when it says, "Because some of them were married and therefore unable to pursue a stricter way of life, they decided to choose a middle and more common way, easy for both the married and unmarried to observe".

17. Another way to consider these men during the period before they began our Order is in regard to their place in civil society. The well-being of the state and its citizens requires the mutual exchange of the goods of this world, and to make this exchange easier and more beneficial, various forms of business and crafts have been developed all over the world.

Before they came together, these seven men of ours were merchants, trading and exchanging goods. But then they found the pearl of great price³¹. It would be more correct, perhaps, to say that, inspired by the Holy Spirit, they understood from Our Lady how they were to obtain that pearl, our Order, by creating a life together, one in mind and body, and revealing it eventually to the world. To obtain the pearl really meant to let Our Lady use them to establish the Order, to introduce it eventually to the world and to make it known to all who wanted to give her worthy and faithful service.

With this realization, they not only sold all their possessions and gave them to the poor, as the Gospel counsels³², but they also dedicated themselves with joy and firmness to the faithful service of God and Our Lady. These men who had trafficked in worldly goods were to discover in their life together, one in mind and body, how to turn their talents to the business and craft of gaining souls for the Lord and Our Lady³³; while to those already in union with God they taught how to stay that way and how to give faithful service to the Lord and Our Lady. (It would be blessed Philip who would bring such craftsmanship to its highest perfection and would pass it on to the friars after him who wished to serve God and Our Lady faithfully.) They became dealers in

the Manichees 1, 23-41. It retraces the week of creation, so that the seventh day is the Sabbath day of rest for humanity. This vision of history was amply developed in medieval theology.

³⁰ We have no further information about this legislative text, other than another reference to it in no. 18, relative to service to Mary. It probably served to regulate the penitential life of persons living in the world.

³¹ *Mt* 13, 45-46.

³² *Mt* 19, 21; *Lk* 12, 33.

³³ This new work, that is, to bring men and women to the service of God and Our Lady, is the profession which the fathers left their followers as an inheritance, as is stated in paragraph 1

heavenly merchandise, loving the souls of all who needed salvation. This is what we have called the second aspect of their life.

18. A third consideration is their reverence and honor to Our Lady before the beginning of the Order. There has been at Florence for a long time now a certain society which honors the Virgin Mary. Because it has been long-standing and has had many holy members, both men and women, it has acquired, in a rather unique way, a special title of eminence. And so, even though there are many other societies of Our Lady in Florence, each with its own generic Marian title, this particular one has the special name of “The Greater Society of Our Lady”³⁴. It was to this group that these seven men who began our Order belonged before they came together and within it that their exceptional love for Our Lady found expression.

Since it appears evident that our Order had its origin in Tuscany and the city of Florence and in fact from the Greater Society of Our Lady, it follows that all our friars should wholeheartedly love and honor that city and province and its citizens, that society and its members. That God preserve these places and sanctify these people should be their constant and devoted prayer.

But on the other hand it is also true that the people from the province of Tuscany, from Florence in particular and especially the members of the Greater Society of Our Lady have an obligation to appreciate the great favor Our Lady has bestowed on them. They should respect all the friars of the Order of the Servants of Saint Mary and the Order itself throughout the world, never stinting in their efforts to procure for this Order whatever would bring honor to the Virgin and benefit to the friars.

Bologna is renowned because it was there that blessed Dominic began the Order of Preachers, and Assisi likewise for blessed Francis and the Friars Minor. In the same way Florence can boast of its blessed Philip, of these seven men and the Order of Our Lady which originated there.

And just as the Bolognese have to promote the Order of Friar Preachers as much as they can, and the people of Assisi have to help the Order of Friars Minor for the same reason, so too the Tuscans, but especially the people of Florence and the members of the Greater Society have a special responsibility to help Our Lady’s Order grow. It was among them that it was first planted, like a treasure specially commended to them by Our Lady. In her honor and out of reverence for her, they should assist it and preserve it in Florence and all over the world.

This third aspect of their life, their reverence for Our Lady, appears in the little book of constitutions mentioned once before. There we read: “These men were not unaware of their imperfections, which is precisely why they did the wise thing: in total devotion they humbly placed themselves and their hearts at the feet of the Queen of Heaven, the glorious Virgin Mary. It was she who would have to mediate for them and, in her abundant love, supply for their own deficiencies. It was for her to reconcile and commend them to her Son and, taking pity on them, win for them a wealth of merit. That is why the moment they bound themselves to honor God through service of the Virgin Mary they wanted to be known as the Servants of Saint Mary, and adopted a specific rule of life on the advice of prudent men”.

19. The fourth and final aspect under which we can consider the life of these men before they began our Order touches on the very question of why, later on, they were able to do such a worthy job of founding our Order: they were prepared for it by their own personal perfection.

To be perfect in God’s sight is a matter of how one lives, of whether one’s life is imbued with Christian religion. Any higher, supernatural life, whether baptismal or penitential in origin, can

³⁴ This society, which was perhaps founded by St. Peter of Verona during his stay in Florence, appears for the first time in a document of 28 March 1245. In this document Arrigo di Baldovino and two other lay “Servants of Saint Mary” donate the hospice of Santa Maria in Fonte Viva to the society of the Virgin Mary, whose members are also called “Servants of Saint Mary”.

only be seen to exist in the steady practice of true Christian religion³⁵. “Unless our faith is firm”, says Isaiah, “we will never understand”³⁶. Much less will we be able to know this supernatural life.

Baptism is the sacrament of faith, since through it faith is acquired, or, should I say, is given by God. Penance on the other hand is the regaining of faith lost through heresy, or sometimes it is a return to faith’s pristine beauty, lost through sin and restored through purification. As already stated, true Christian religion consists in the practice of the supernatural life, whether originating in baptism or found through penance and contemplation on the Passion of Christ, to such an extent that we bind ourselves to God for divine worship.

With such thoughts as background, it can be said that these venerable men, the first fathers of our Order, were perfect Christians even before they came together and began our Order. For they possessed the virtue of true Christian religion by reason of the penitential life they had voluntarily adopted. Even if not every one of them had preserved baptismal innocence, they had already begun to comprehend the supernatural life of grace through the practice of religion. They had by this time already bound themselves to God for love of him, or, to express it better, they never allowed themselves to lose sight of the bonds they had previously assumed. They dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to the worship of God. They had the virtue of Christian religion, beyond any doubt. A virtue is a habit one chooses to practice³⁷, something a prudent man thinks about, determines by his reason. These godly men, the first fathers of our Order, were divinely inspired to think profoundly about the virtue of religion and they chose it, like a precious pearl they had stumbled upon and treasured. In their desire to possess it forever they exchanged their very selves and all they owned³⁸.

In everything they did they used their powers of reason as best they could, guided not by the prudence of this world but by what uncreated Wisdom itself taught them in the sacred words of the Gospel. And so, as I say, they really were religious persons and to that extent were perfect in God’s sight and acted accordingly. For virtue is that which perfects its possessor and makes his works good³⁹.

Yet another proof that they were habitually religious persons lies in the consideration that something which is a habit causes joy or grief in the process of being performed⁴⁰. This was the daily experience of these godly men, for we cannot imagine what joy it gave them in the Lord to realize that in everything they did they were steering the course of moderation; or if at times they wandered from this middle course, or even thought they had done so, with what tears of contrition they corrected themselves. This experience of joy and sorrow ought to convince us that, with God’s inspiration and Our Lady’s help, they were men who had the habit of religion.

20. This habitual living of true Christian religion impelled them to dwell ever more profoundly on the supernatural life of grace and glory. For such is virtue’s⁴¹ compelling power that it makes those who possess it want to spend time in the contemplation of heavenly life.

Their virtue fortified what was already their natural inclination towards contemplation. They chose the “better part”⁴², set aside all concern for the things of this world and sought to know and

³⁵ Literally “habit of Christian religion”. Habit is an important concept in Aristotelian ethics. By nature the human person has the capability of virtue and vice; the capability or potentiality is actualized by exercise, that is, the repetition of a series of acts of the same type. The repetition of these acts creates a customary way of acting (*ethos*) and the result of this repetition is a habit, which remains in us as a quality or disposition or stable thought which then facilitates acts of the same type. The “habit of Christian religion” is therefore a vital and stable orientation which faith, concretely lived and reaffirmed each day, creates in the person.

³⁶ *Is* 7, 9.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6: “Virtue then is a state of deliberate moral purpose, consisting in a mean relative to ourselves, the mean being determined by reason, or as a prudent man would determine it”. Instead of “in medietate” (a mean) the LO has “in mente”. This definition of virtue was taken up by St. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 58, art. II, n. 4.

³⁸ *Mt* 13. 43-46.

³⁹ *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6.

⁴⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 3.

⁴¹ The text here has the difficult term of “domina”, due perhaps to a mistaken reading by the copyist or, more probably, to the Aristotelian source.

possess only heavenly goods⁴³. Their aim was to live and communicate only with spiritual men and such as were willing to share spiritual thoughts with them, so that they could say with the Apostle, “We have our citizenship in heaven”⁴⁴.

On the basis of this love for the heavenly life, a life they now knew through contemplation, they bound themselves and their very souls to God. Perhaps it would be more correct to say, they tried to keep themselves inseparably bound to him; for they already loved the Lord so much that their greatest fear was the suffering of being separated from him. The thought of living longer in this world distressed them and they looked forward to death so that they could be with God. Like the Apostle, they could say in their eagerness to be united with him, “We long to be freed from this life and to be with Christ”⁴⁵.

21. Bound thus to God and made over into perfect men of religion, it now became their aim to preserve this habit of religion by bringing it to its logical conclusion; and so they dedicated themselves totally to the worship of God.

There are two kinds of divine worship. One is broader in scope, proper to all the laity, to all men and women who are striving to keep free of sin after their baptism or possibly after their conversion. The other is the worship proper to those who enter a religious institute, who not only keep themselves free of sin but take on the obligations of the three religious vows. Their single-minded goal is to serve God.

Now, these religious men, the first fathers of our Order, while still living at home, were united to God through love of the supernatural life and did more than dedicate themselves to the broader kind of divine worship. They loved God above all else⁴⁶; they oriented absolutely everything they did towards him; they honored him in every thought, word and deed.

And so, attributing to the Lord all the good they did and acknowledging it as a gift from him, they lived according to the first or broader type of divine worship. But in actual fact, they were preparing themselves for the second. For the time was soon to arrive when they would come together to live, bound forever by the three religious vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, and would freely give themselves to one duty only, to serve Our Lady.

Chapter Four

WHY ONLY SEVEN MEN WERE CHOSEN TO BEGIN OUR ORDER; THEIR LOWLINESS; AND THE ORDER’S THREE NAMES

22. This, my dear brothers, is the kind of heritage we have, such godly men as the first fathers of our Order, so outstanding even before they came together to begin the Order. The dignity and the nobility of our fathers! With what reverence we should all remember them! Their character and their merits were such that Our Lady deigned to use them to found her own Order, the Order of her Servants.

Admirable men, pointing out so well for us the path to perfect life that I earlier compared you to a spiritual Pleiades! It was for this that Our Lady brought you together, one in mind, to begin her Order. She wanted you in a spiritual sense to bring stability where the impious were wandering around in circles like Orion and to show the straight path that leads to heavenly glory!

⁴² Cf. *Lk* 10, 38-42.

⁴³ “To know and possess only heavenly goods” is a variant of “vacare Deo”, that is, to be free from all things in order to dedicate oneself to God. This is an expression which occurs often in the Middle Ages to indicate the commitment and sense of contemplation. For “vacare contemplationi” (to dedicate oneself to contemplation) cf. no. 30 of the LO.

⁴⁴ *Phil* 3, 20.

⁴⁵ *Phil* 1, 23.

⁴⁶ *Dt* 6, 5; *Mt* 22, 37. See also the beginning of the Rule of St. Augustine: “Before all else, brothers, we must love God”.

Now, the Pleiades are made up of seven stars and are part of the constellation Taurus, whose house the sun enters in the month of April, on the fifteenth to be exact. This means they begin to appear on the horizon in the springtime, just when the sun is getting warmer, opening up the earth and making it arable, causing the trees to burgeon and blossom. That is what these godly men who began our Order were like, a spiritual Pleiades, seven stars in the heavens. It was a time when Christ, the Light of the World, was beginning to bring new light and warmth to the earth through the two contemporary luminaries I mentioned before, blessed Dominic and blessed Francis⁴⁷. The cold winds of disbelief were dying down and the warmth of charity, almost extinct, was coming back, thanks to their preaching and humble example. It was a time when the earth which is the human heart was beginning to open to the warmth of the sun of justice and to accept cultivation by these two saints who tilled for God and furrowed human hearts. The Orders of the blessed Dominic and Francis were, even in the lifetime of their founders, like two trees flowering in virtue and blossoming into men who were already ridding the Church of heresy.

It was in just such a spiritual springtime, as I say, when just such things were happening, that our seven fathers appeared on the world's horizon. With the passing of time they were to rise in virtue (we indicated this earlier) and in merit in the sight of God. They had the precedents set by the two luminaries I have already mentioned and by the friars who belonged to the Orders they had founded and who were already beginning to preach boldly the Word of God. By the time blessed Philip was born in 1233 these seven laymen had reached such a level of perfection that they were themselves like spiritual stars, capable on their own of diffusing rays of God's word and examples of humility, drawing others to a life of perfection by the way they lived.

The fact that Our Lady decided to begin the Order of her Servants with these men exactly in the state in which they were already living, is the surest indication possible of how perfect and pious they were. For if they had not reached a height of sanctity above that of others and were not already pleasing to her and her Son at the time she planned to begin her own Order, she would not have chosen them over others to lay the foundations of this great Order which was to be dedicated to her and to be named after her.

23. If it must be said that no one knows of any miracles performed by these men while they were still alive, or at the moment of death or even after death, this does not take away from what we have just said about their perfection and piety. It is possible that some of them, or even all of them, did miraculous things at one time or another. But since this would have been a long time ago and the older members of our Order have died, it is not likely that any of these miracles would have come to my notice to pass on. Besides, the working of miracles is not the only sure sign of perfection and perfect piety. If that were the case, no one could be called perfect and truly pious unless God at one time or another worked miracles through him; and everyone knows that that is not true. The gift that all perfect and pious persons are given is that of loving God above all else, of preserving charity towards all and remaining sincerely humble. Our Lord never said, "Learn from me..." to raise the dead or to give sight to the blind, but rather "...for I am gentle and humble of heart"⁴⁸. Somewhere else he says, "I have given you an example...; such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other"⁴⁹.

It appears that many people are going to try to use miracles as a proof of perfection and piety at the Last Judgment and will say, "Lord, have we not cast out devils in your name? Have we not raised the dead?"⁵⁰ and this sort of thing. Yet, they will hear from Christ, in proof that the working of miracles is a false criterion of perfection and piety, "I tell you, I do not know you"⁵¹. Out

⁴⁷ The literature of the time saw in the renewal brought about by Francis and Dominic a new period in the history of the Church, symbolized by the gifts of the Spirit, according to the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore († 1202), which found a hearing especially in Franciscan circles.

⁴⁸ *Mt.* 11, 29. The gospel text is read in the light of the comment of St. Augustine in his *Discourse* 69, 2.

⁴⁹ *Jn* 13, 15.34.

⁵⁰ *Mt* 7,22.

⁵¹ *Mt* 25, 12.

of my sight, you evildoers”⁵². Obviously they could not receive such a frightening reply if the working of miracles were any kind of proof of perfection and piety.

24. There is another reason, perhaps the most convincing of all, why we have never heard of these men working any miracles, perfect though they may have been. I remember that I mentioned this earlier: that Our Lady did not want any of those holy and perfect men who openly work miracles to be the founder of her Order. She wanted it to be clear that she alone is the founders of the Order specially dedicated to her name.

This did not happen without reason or by chance. Rather, we maintain, it was arranged this way by God and Our Lady. All Orders are named after their founders and Our Lady’s Order is named after her. It was only right then, that this Order have no one who by intention founded it, other than herself.

I can demonstrate the truth of what I am saying. If the foundation of Our Lady’s Order were to be attributed to anyone other than to herself, it would have to be to these seven men, precisely because of their perfection. Besides, they were the Order’s first members. Yet how many times did not Fra Alexis, one of the seven, say to the friars that it would be wrong to accredit the foundation to the group of the seven first friars or to any single one of them. I heard this myself from his own lips. These were his exact words: “Neither I nor my companions ever intended to found a new religious Order or for that matter to attract a lot of others to us when we came together originally. We were under the impression that our divinely inspired purpose in going to live together was simply to flee the world and fulfill the Lord’s will better and more easily. For that reason, only Our Lady can be given the credit for beginning the Order and the only name we should have should come from her: The Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary”.

25. There seems to be a contradiction here, in that we are also referred to as the Order of the Friar Servants of the Virgin Mary. But, in actual fact, our Order has three different names. One comes in a generic way from the rule of life we follow; the other comes in a special way from the activity proper to the members of the Order; and the third in a unique way from its founders, Our Lady.

It is not unlike the case of the Order of Preachers: their generic name comes from the rule they follow, the Order of Saint Augustine. At the same time they have a special name, derived from what the friars do, the Order of Friar Preachers. And finally, they have that unique name which is taken from their founder and they are called the Order of Blessed Dominic.

In parallel, our Order too has three names. The generic name is based on the Rule of Blessed Augustine⁵³ which has been observed by us since the very earliest times: it is the Order of Blessed Augustine. At the same time it has a special name based on the particular activities of its members, the Order of the Friar Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Finally, there is the unique name assumed from its founders, Our Lady herself, and it is called the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Our own conclusion is that this last title is the proper one. To call it the Order of Blessed Augustine is to remain in generic terminology. The Order of the Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary admittedly does have a special quality about it. But I think we have demonstrated convincingly that the only proper and unique name by which it should be universally called is the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

⁵² Mt 7, 23.

⁵³ At that period the expression “Rule of St. Augustine” designated the legislative text attributed to the saint (The Rule of the Servants of God), to which was added the opening expression of the *Ordo monasterii*, a contemporary text which was thought to be the work of St. Augustine: “Before all else, brothers, we must love God and our neighbor because these are the greatest commandments”. Ardingo, the bishop of Florence, between 1243 and 1247 approved for the friars of Monte Senario some “statutes” which were to be observed “always under the Rule of St. Augustine”.

Chapter Five

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF FRA ALEXIS, ONE OF THE SEVEN FIRST FRIARS WHO
 BEGAN THE ORDER, AND THE REASON HE LIVED TO SUCH AN ADVANCED AGE⁵⁴

26. Several times already we have mentioned Fra Alexis. Of the seven men through whom Our Lady saw fit to begin her Order, all perfect men and worthy, he was the only one still alive when I entered the Order. Our Lady was pleased to preserve this Fra Alexis from death until our own day so that on his testimony we could know how our Order began and so pass down from one generation to the next until the Day of Judgment this memory of our beginnings.

With this very thing in mind, I personally questioned him many times about the earliest days of the Order. I was afraid that when Fra Alexis died, the information about our origins would be irretrievably lost and those of us who were his contemporaries would be guilty of ingratitude.

One day in particular I went to him in his cell specifically to gather such information. Attentively and eagerly, one point after another and as well as I knew how, I questioned him about all the essential facts of the Order's origin. As he spoke I wrote everything down in my own hand on a piece of parchment. I used to read this parchment frequently afterwards and with great interest. In fact, I reviewed what I had written there and thought about it so often that I memorized it. But then the devil did his work. One day I was sitting at the well at our house in Siena⁵⁵, devoutly reading this parchment; I always carried it with me. Suddenly, by the envy of the devil⁵⁶, without any warning the sheet flew out of my hands, went up a bit into the air and straightway fell into the well. I was heartbroken.

Of course, the result of this loss was that, with the passage of time, I have forgotten many of the details that were in that document. On the other hand, I had memorized the essential points on the origins of our Order exactly as Fra Alexis had narrated them to me. These I am now going to pass on faithfully, like a great, long-awaited treasure, so that our friars in the future will remember them. I feel particularly constrained at this time to fulfill Our Lady's will by doing this.

27. I learned about the kind of life Fra Alexis lived from my own experience, from seeing it with my own eyes. He was a man who moved those who knew him by the example he set. He was a living proof of the perfection and piety I earlier ascribed to him and his companions. In view of his advanced age, his poor health and the long time he had borne the heat of the day⁵⁷ in the Order, he could have been forgiven if he had quite naturally wanted quiet, food in keeping with his infirmity, warm clothing and a soft bed whereon to rest his feeble body. But in fact he sought just the opposite, a sign of his perfection and piety. He never asked for special delicate foods but was content with the normal food of the community. It was his wish always to eat in the refectory. If at times when he was seriously ill he could not go to the common refectory with the other friars, he still remained content with the ordinary food served in the community. At the most he would collect some herbs from the garden, warm them and eat them from time to time to relieve his old and frail body of the chill, but he never sought fancier food than this.

He shied away from soft clothing⁵⁸, yet tried to strike a happy medium in matters of dress, wearing neither the clothes of a beggar nor those of a noble. Alexis refused to have a soft and comfortable bed as his weakened condition seemed to demand. In fact, it was well known by all

⁵⁴ The title continued with the phrase "and the names of his companions and the time of their death", but the copyist cancelled this phrase with a series of dots, since it no longer corresponded to the contents of the chapter.

⁵⁵ The priory in Siena, called St. Mary's or St. Clement's, was founded in 1250 under the patronage of Bonifilius, the local bishop. This was shortly after the foundation of the Florentine priory at Cafaggio. Cafaggio and Siena were the first two foundations made by the community at Monte Senario.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Wis* 2, 24.

⁵⁷ *Mt.* 20, 12

⁵⁸ *Mt* 11, 8.

who ever lived with him that he used wooden planks instead of a mattress⁵⁹ and coarse covers in place of sheets.

Unlike most people of his advanced age, he did not shirk physical labor; on the contrary, he always worked hard and took on more than he could ever handle, much to the dismay of the other friars. Although, as we have said, he was a man of such great perfection and was revered by all the friars as one of the first seven whom Our Lady used to begin her Order, yet he remained humble and loving in everything he said and did and never let this esteem rob him of his humility.

Lowly or difficult though they be, he tried his best to fulfill all the duties of the common life, like the least of the friars. As long as he could, Fra Alexis insisted on taking his turn when it was his day to go out into the streets to beg for bread or do any other work expected of a stronger and younger man, even though the other friars often attempted to stop him. He tried to keep pace with the others in performing in the community all those duties which the world considers base. Thus he showed his love for the brethren and the humility he had in his heart; thus he left an example to do likewise to all friars who want to serve Our Lady faithfully.

28. Fra Alexis lived to an extreme old age. He lived to see the Order grow in numbers and holiness of friars. And at the end he went to his Lady, the Virgin Mary, joyfully, assured that there awaited him the reward of his faithful service. In the last moments of his life, something happened that demonstrates the depth of the contemplation and the purity of this man and his companions. I heard about this from one who was at his bedside when he died, Fra Lapus of Florence, the nephew of Fra Sostenes. Just before his death, Alexis cried out in a loud voice to the friars who surrounded his bed that he saw angels approaching him looking like pure-white birds, beautiful beyond words. Amidst these birds and angels stood Christ, a lovely child wearing a golden crown with a cross on it.

Alexis lived almost 110 years, surviving until the year of Our Lord 1310. This means that from the time he joined the others at the beginning of the Order until his death, Fra Alexis lived in our Order almost seventy-seven years⁶⁰.

Chapter Six

HOW THE SEVEN, STILL LAYMEN, CAME TO BE OF ONE MIND; HOW THEY PREPARED THEMSELVES AND FINALLY CAME TOGETHER TO LIVE

29. Each of the seven was living separately in his own home in Florence, living so perfectly and piously that Our Lady thought it fitting to begin her Order with them. They did not even know each other, residing as they did in different parts of the city. However, because Our Lady's providence was directing them to establish her Order, and the will as well as the work of the group to which they belonged seemed to demand it of them, they gradually came to be of one mind in perfect friendship and the bonds of love⁶¹, one first with another and finally all together. Given that they were all already so alike in the practice of perfection and piety, it was fitting that loving friendship should bind them together to be of one mind; even more so because Our Lady was before long to bring them together to establish our Order.

There are clear indications that in establishing our Order, they were united in perfect loving friendship, for such friendship drew them to agree completely with each other in good will and love

⁵⁹ The *Constitutiones Antiquae* permitted the sick to use a mattress (chap. XI). For the frugal, humble, and penitential life of Fra Alexis see also the prescriptions of the *Constitutiones Antiquae* regarding fasting (chap. VII), food (chap. VIII), and clothing (chap. XII).

⁶⁰ The paragraph ended with an uncompleted phrase which was then cancelled by the copyist with a series of dots: "the names then of the six companions of Fra Alexis [who] with him [began] our [Order]...".

⁶¹ *Hos* 11, 4.

on every issue both human and divine, which is what pleases God. They could not bear being away from each other, separated for even an hour, without feeling quite uneasy.

Their friendship made them so one in mind that they tried to please each other in all things human and divine. And then this loving friendship impelled them to leave all earthly things and put them out of mind. Going even further, it left them with a definite resolve that would enable them to dwell happily together not only one in mind but actually in the same place, supporting each other in example and deed and by what they said to one another. This resolve would lead them one day to be renewed in mind and body in heavenly glory with Christ, for love of whom they had been united in such friendship.

30. Moved by divine grace, they now came to just such a definite resolve: that it was their will to come together to live and thus save their souls by a life of continual penance that would end only in death. They did not make this decision lightly or haphazardly, but after mature and solid deliberation; Our Lady was leading them on to this in a very special way. So that they could spend the rest of their lives without reproach in the service of the Lord, doing his will, they used considerable care and spiritual concern in taking what measures were needed to attain this end with justice and in freedom.

The first of these measures necessary for their much desired coming together was to disengage themselves by disposing of their properties and making arrangements for their families. They decided to keep absolutely nothing for themselves when they came together, so they gave their families whatever was needed and the rest went to the poor and to various churches.

Those of them who were still married obtained the consent of their wives to release themselves from their marriages according to the prescripts of the law. Then they gave up their wives, who likewise freely consecrated themselves to the service of God.

But even beforehand they anticipated what they would have to do to assure, as it were, that once they had come together they would be able to continue in the service of the Lord. Each of them in his own house began to practice and train himself in the various things they would do together afterwards. They disposed of their expensive clothes and for the first time all dressed in simple cloaks and tunics of gray cloth. They put off their fine linen shirts and wore instead hair shirts next to their skin. They ate and drank little; in fact, they limited themselves to what they absolutely needed. Chastity they observed perfectly, abhorring the demands of the flesh that could lead them to sin. Their thoughts, words, feelings, deeds, all were controlled as they strove to find the mean between doing too much and not doing enough. They learned to please God and him alone during the long nights and days they spent in prayer. They avoided the hubbub of the world and the company of worldly people and frequented instead the churches or secluded holy places where they could be more undisturbed for contemplation. Finally, they sought out men of exemplary life from whom they could expect sound advice and affirmation of their godly resolve; with them they conferred regularly and told them what they were planning to do.

31. They had now completely liberated themselves, had shaken free of the world in both mind and body; they had made the necessary arrangements and could go ahead with their plans without scruple of conscience, in perfect justice; and with great foresight they had familiarized themselves with all the practices they intended to observe after they came together. When the day that they had agreed upon finally dawned, a day chosen under the inspiration of God and Our Lady, they were filled with reverence and fear of the Lord. First, they offered fervent and heartfelt prayer for what they were about to do. And then these men, already one in mind, fulfilled the desire that had been long in the planning: they began to live together under one roof.

Just outside the city gates of Florence there was a small house. It was in a corner of the cemetery of the Friars Minor to the right of their church, at the far end of their plot. The Friars Minor were not using the entire cemetery yet, since their Order was still young. It was in that little house and on that day just referred to that they came together and first began the Order of the

Blessed Virgin Mary, the Order of her Servants, fulfilling thus their desire to be one. It was at this time blessed Philip was born.

Chapter Seven

HOW, WHEN THEY CAME TOGETHER, THEY WERE IMMEDIATELY GIVEN THE SPECIAL NAME OF OUR ORDER

32. My brothers, there is a wonderful thing all the friars of our Order should know and speak about frequently with pride. It is this: that right from the beginning, when these godly fathers of ours first came together to begin our Order, as we have just described, all the local people immediately began to call them by the familiar name, Friar Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They themselves never knew where or with whom the use of the name originated. This only serves to prove that it was not initially given to the first fathers of our Order by any human person, but by Our Lady herself, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Moved by God, the people ratified it and immediately began to use it, a name never conferred by anyone. We have already explained how Our Lady did not want the credit for founding her Order to go to any person, but only to herself. In the same way, it was only right that its name should be chosen and given to the friars of the Order by none other than herself and her Son.

So, from the very first moment these first friars of her Order, who are also our first fathers, came together to live, Our Lady saw to it that this name was made known through the common and popular acclamation of the people; it was the name she had already chosen. These friars of her Order, our first fathers, were in a special way to be called her Servants.

33. It can be shown that this name did not originate with any person, but with Our Lady; for when I specifically questioned Fra Alexis about the Order's name, including whence it had originally come, he said to me, "I was never able to find out nor could I or anyone else ever demonstrate that this name originally came from any human source. And so, I recall that the other friars, my companions, and I always believed that it was Our Lady herself, and she alone, who gave it to our Order".

Now, Alexis was among those first seven friars who came together to start our Order, so it is hard to believe that he would have been completely unaware of it if the Order's name had originated with some person. The friars of our Order should firmly believe that the name of the Order was initially chosen by Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, and graciously bestowed on us. And this belief should be confirmed in what we say and do; otherwise we could appear ungrateful for such a singular favor.

We will see later that Our Lady herself witnessed to the truth of what we are saying. When she appeared in a vision to her devotee, blessed Peter Martyr, and showed him the habit we wear and the rule we follow, she also confirmed that it was originally she herself who had given this name to our Order.

34. My dear brothers and fathers, we should take care and investigate thoroughly what we are doing when we take our religious vows and assume this name which commits us to serve the Virgin. We should examine ourselves carefully ever afterwards to make sure we are not failing in the honor we should be giving to so great a Lady. There are some friars who seriously and with pure hearts take this name of service of Our Lady; in honoring her by their service they above all enhance the reputation of her Order. But on the other hand, others are so bold as to take on the title carelessly and with bad intentions and care little about giving Our Lady her due honor; these friars are doing all in their power to disgrace and disfigure the Order of the Virgin Mary.

We ought to give recognition, but with all modesty, to the great name Our Lady has given us. If only we would live up to our responsibility to serve Our Lady, the great Virgin Mother, we would always appear before her pure in heart and body, filled with reverence and fear. In this way the whole world would see that her Order is worthy of honor, and we ourselves would come to receive from her hands the reward reserved for those who serve her faithfully.

Chapter Eight

THEIR PERFECT LOVE FOR GOD, SELF AND NEIGHBOR

35. God, in his special concern for our first fathers, had prepared them perfectly by the three steps indicated earlier⁶². Now that they were together, their immediate goal was to set their priorities in fulfilling the commandment of well ordered love⁶³.

The first object of all their affection was God himself. They loved him with their whole heart. They were one in their total attachment to him and desired nothing outside of him and nothing except for his sake.

But they also loved him unfailingly with their whole soul. They transformed every movement of their bodies and their awareness of the whole world of the senses into praise of God. And thus, his glory was behind their every sentiment. To him alone they gave the credit for all their good works.

And finally, they loved the Lord unceasingly with their whole mind. All the powers of their intellect or reason to research and discover were put at his service. He was the only one they wished to serve forever and consequently the only one they held in awe as their Lord⁶⁴.

36. On the other hand, their love for their own spirit had its proper place too. First of all, they helped the spirit in its battle against the flesh: they performed works of penance so that the flesh, which is constantly struggling against the spirit⁶⁵, would not win dominion. Furthermore, they practiced virtue as their spirit led them, trying to avoid excess of any kind. On whatever path the spirit wished to go⁶⁶, they trod eagerly, forcing the flesh to follow the spirit. And finally, like the Beloved Spouse, they submitted themselves to the spirit in the intimacy of their conscience⁶⁷, guarding the entrance to the chamber of their senses from foolish distractions. They wanted no worldly cares to enter and disturb the privacy of their contemplation.

They tried to treat their body too with a well-ordered love. So, they gave it just food enough to keep it from balking like a beast of burden under the load of penance to be carried. They whipped the body along in the direction the spirit wanted to go, keeping it always well-disciplined; and with discretion they burdened it with penance, not allowing that it should feel unfettered like a wild ass foal that runs wanton⁶⁸.

37. Last of all, there was the question of their works of charity towards neighbor. They actively searched out the needs of others; being men of compassion, they provided whatever they could for the spiritually or physically underprivileged. A neighbor was like a brother or sister to

⁶² The “three steps indicated earlier” seem to refer to paragraph no. 31 where the community life of the Seven begins only after three conditions are realized: freeing themselves completely from the world, arranging their families and possessions according to justice, and familiarizing themselves with the practices they intended to observe

⁶³ About well ordered love, see St. Augustine, *The City of God*, 15, 22; 19, 13; *On Christian Instruction* 1, 22-41.

⁶⁴ *Dt* 6, 5; *Mt.* 22, 37.

⁶⁵ *Gal* 5, 17.

⁶⁶ *Ez* 1, 12.

⁶⁷ Literally “on the bed of conscience”, an allusion to *Sg* 3, 1

⁶⁸ The corporal penance of the Seven is drawn in the light of various passages of Scripture: *Sir* 33, 25 (necessary food); *Ps* 45, 7 (scepter of justice); *Jb* 11, 12 (the foal of the wild ass). The norm for corporal penance is discretion (equilibrium), the ideal of the great monastic tradition.

them, so they abided by the rule to do to others as they would want done to them and forgave any offenses committed against them. They were sensitive to the spiritual condition of others, rejoicing with the just and commiserating with sinners; they affirmed the just in their goodness and brought the sinners back from the precipice of their misery.

38. All of this indicates that their love for God, their own spirit, their neighbor and for themselves was in correct order. Clinging to God in perfect love, they gave their all in doing good. In the face of injuries, they never flagged in patience and endured everything in a spirit of resignation. When an easy life lured them, they practiced strict continence, shunning the comforts of flesh and world. They never permitted themselves any laziness but were consumed in a fire of suffering that would not let their spirits grow lukewarm. Seeing ignorance all around them, they gave their goods generously to help others in time of need. While others may have been immersed in things of this world, they were careful and prudent, not seeking honors nor wanting to go back to what they used to own. Surrounded by inconstancy, they remained steadfast and persevering, convinced that separation from Christ's love would be the worst thing that could happen to them.

39. Like a flourishing tree, they had strong roots sunk deep in humility, for it was love that guided their intentions. With David they could say such words as, "I love you, Lord, my strength"⁶⁹. Stronger still was the trunk, their hope of eternal life, for it was love again that determined their actions. They could exclaim with Job, "Even if my maker should slay me, I will continue still to hope in him"⁷⁰. But strongest of all was the foliage, reaching to the heights of charity, for it was love that made them rejoice in trials, happy to suffer for Christ, their supreme joy. Like the Apostles leaving the Sanhedrin⁷¹, they went out rejoicing in mind and heart.

Again, they were like the prudent virgins⁷² with their lamps already prepared in their hands. The vessel was polished in that they kept their heart pure and ready to receive the beloved guest; then, they filled it with oil, that is, with devout heart they joyfully awaited the coming of the Beloved; they lit the lamp with fire when, with eagerness and fervor they went out to meet Christ coming into their heart; and finally, they held up their lamp to shed light, the light which was their good example to others and their contemplation of divine truths. Christ was at the door knocking. With tear-filled eyes they opened and received him into their heart, conscious of the great grace he was giving them and rejoicing in the presence of so great a Spouse⁷³. In a word, they were an example of holiness to everyone. This example kindled the fire of love in others and drew them to the love of Christ.

Chapter Nine

HOW EXCESSIVE CONTACT WITH SECULARS MADE THE SEVEN DECIDE TO MOVE TO MONTE SENARIO

40. The people had great respect for them. Seeing their well balanced love for God, themselves and neighbor, both men and women visited them daily, seeking their help or looking for instruction in their words and example, asking of them prayers or spiritual direction. These visits and requests became so frequent and time-consuming that they became a great distraction and a constant hindrance to the contemplative style of life they wanted.

⁶⁹ *Ps.* 18, 2.

⁷⁰ *Jb* 13, 15. The LO here adds the title "my maker". The author may have been citing from memory (as occurs in other places), and he might have had in mind other passages of Job where this title is found (4, 17; 32, 22).

⁷¹ *Acts* 5, 41.

⁷² The passage of *Mt* 25, 1-10 is combined with *Lk* 12, 35-36. Paragraph 46, with out reference to the parable of the virgins, takes up again this anxious waiting of the Seven which becomes a vast echo attracting many people to Monte Senario

⁷³ Cf. *Mt* 25, 1-10.

These godly men who began our Order began to think they had fled the land of worldly pleasures, had separated themselves from family after considerable efforts to overcome their hesitations and other obstacles, only to find themselves inhibited by all these visits from moving on to the land shown them by God. They had already made the step of leaving property and family, physical comforts and superficial conversation⁷⁴. Now, they decided, they also had to leave the house of their fathers⁷⁵ and give up contact with the world if they were to go on unimpeded to the land of the living⁷⁶ to which God was calling them⁷⁷.

They were by this time one in spirit and heart⁷⁸; they loved God above all, honored him in everything they did, kept their mind set on him always. But these crowds of people were causing them concern: were they displeasing God by all these distractions? But the same God who had led them in love to come together, to leave lands and family, and to be such an inspiration to the people, now inspired them with a single will to leave even their father's house, that is, to withdraw from the secular environment. Whenever they paused from their prayer and contemplation for a restful moment to speak of God together, they found themselves mutually encouraging each other in regard to the resolve that was forming in their minds. Among other things, they said, "Come, brothers; come, let us leave this place of doubt and danger. With God's help we must find some other, some out-of-the-way place where we will be able to do what has always been our desire"⁷⁹. This deeply-felt resolve continued with them for a long time, but they did not know what to do about it or where they could go to fulfill it. And so, they put their trust in God alone, knowing that it was he who took care of them, and committed themselves completely to him.

At last the God who always provides for those who love him, intervened and inspired them to want the very thing that was for their welfare. He who fulfills the desire of those who fear him⁸⁰ when they confide in him alone, went even beyond the desire of these fathers of ours; for he not only inspired the very desire in them, but he fulfilled it as well, like the provident father he is. He pointed out to them a place which accorded with their desire and which he had long had in mind; and then he gave them the means by which they would be able to live there.

41. About eight miles out of Florence there is a mountain called Sonario. The name comes from the sonorous effect of the wind through some of its caves. At first it was called Monte Sonaio, although the word was soon corrupted by many of the local people into Asinario, adding an unnecessary "a" at the beginning and changing the "a" to "i"⁸¹.

It was this mountain that God inspired our fathers to seek⁸². They were to go there, to live there, to fulfill there that wish of theirs for a life of solitude.

This mountain is higher than the others around it⁸³ and so even from far off they saw it as the mountain intended for them by God.

When they went up to inspect it, they found at the top a delightful though small level area, a spring of very fine water off to one side and a surrounding grove of trees so well-arranged that it might have been planted by hand. Being isolated from where people were living and having this location at the top so suitable for practices of penance, it seemed to them the perfect place to fulfill

⁷⁴ *Eph* 4, 14.

⁷⁵ *Gn* 12, 1, 4; cf. *Acts* 7, 3.

⁷⁶ *Ps* 27, 13.

⁷⁷ Already by the ninth century monastic texts present the penitential pilgrimage toward solitude as Abraham's journey from his homeland to Canaan.

⁷⁸ *Acts* 4, 32.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Mk* 6, 31-32

⁸⁰ *Ps* 145, 19.

⁸¹ Cf. *Introduction*.

⁸² *Gn* 22, 2.

⁸³ *Ps* 125, 1-2.

their resolve. It was as if God himself had prepared⁸⁴ this mountain for them and they were overwhelmed with thanksgiving.

Their search was ended, now that they had found a place that suited their needs. There was no more to say except, “Let us go out to see this place the Lord has prepared for us, up to this mountain of the Lord⁸⁵, this place where we can practice our penances”. Full of joy and fear of the Lord, they said to one another, “Why are we waiting? Come, let us leave the city and abandon worldly cares. We will not stop anywhere between here and there, nor look back on what could harm us, but go straightway up the mountain⁸⁶ of the Lord which God himself has marked out for us, where we can do his divine will in all things, just as we wish”.

With this in mind, they went up the mountain and at the top immediately constructed a small house suitable to live in. Abandoning the house they had previously had in Florence, they moved up to the mountain to live there together.

Chapter Ten

HOW THIS MOUNTAIN AND ITS NAME SUITED OUR ORDER

42. It was very appropriate, this Monte Sonaio, as God’s choice of dwelling place for our first fathers. The place itself matched their spiritual ascent and the name the sound they effected.

First, the place was a reflection of their own spiritual ascent. In the beginning they had been in the valley of tears; there they were cleansed through contrition, made clean and fit for the ascent. In this valley they prepared their hearts to move up higher⁸⁷.

After their conversion, they came up to the plain of good morals, where the anointing of the Holy Spirit taught them⁸⁸ everything they needed to know. They became men of meekness and walked this plain, this house of God, in integrity of heart⁸⁹.

They then came to reside in the hills of virtue, where they ate and were refreshed by all kinds of spiritual food. Filled in this way with heavenly gifts, they could say, “Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear”⁹⁰.

And now, finally, it was fitting that they ascend the mountain to stand watch in contemplation. There they would be enlightened, filled with the spirit of wisdom and understanding⁹¹ and surrounded by the sweet odor of heaven’s joy. Looking ever to God⁹², their prayer would be, “We are at a loss what to do, hence our eyes are turned toward you alone”⁹³. This is what was meant when it was said that this mountain place was appropriate to their spiritual ascent.

43. But we also said just now that the very name of the mountain was appropriate. What a pleasant sound they made when they answered with prompt obedience God’s call and invitation to know and love him: “Speak, Lord; your servants are listening”⁹⁴. Sweet the sound their fervent devotion echoed back to him when the Holy Spirit breathed on them and inspired them to holiness: “Cast me not out from your presence, and your holy spirit take not from me”⁹⁵. And how delightful to

⁸⁴ *Is* 2, 2.

⁸⁵ *Is* 2, 3.

⁸⁶ *Gn* 19, 14-17

⁸⁷ *Ps* 84, 6-7.

⁸⁸ *I Jn* 2, 27.

⁸⁹ *Ps* 101, 2.

⁹⁰ *Ps* 27, 3.

⁹¹ *Is* 11, 2.

⁹² *Ps* 25, 15.

⁹³ *2 Chr* 20, 12.

⁹⁴ *I Sm* 3, 10.

⁹⁵ *Ps* 51, 13

others was the sound their hands made in setting good example and taking up so many holy tasks⁹⁶: “We are the fragrance of Christ wherever we go”⁹⁷. Other friars of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary who came later, taking their lead from these seven men, were to arouse the whole world with their sound (by which we mean their words and example) and draw it to Christ. They were to be seen in the world as people who live in the praise of God, singing out in their own day these timely words: “Come, O House of Israel, let us walk in the light of the Lord”⁹⁸. How appropriate it was then that men who produced such lovely sounds for God, self and neighbor (even as the friars that follow after them must do throughout the world) should be given by God and begin at this early date to live in a place that echoed with sounds and even had a corresponding name. Clearly, for them it was a Monte Sonaio. It fit perfectly the story of their spiritual ascent and the sounds their life could be said to be producing. God had prepared it for them and wanted them to live there.

Chapter Eleven

THE THREE DWELLINGS OF PERFECTION WHICH THE SEVEN BUILT

44. This mountain was now to be their home, and as such needed to be made habitable. So they built there three dwellings, one a material building, the others mystical and moral⁹⁹.

The first was their actual house. It was constructed of modest materials on the very top of the mountain and along the lines God had shown them. The location itself was well supplied with spring water. There was a surrounding meadow of green grass and a beautiful grove of trees. It was blessed by God with healthy, fresh air. When it was completed, our fathers began to live there.

What is meant by the other dwelling, the moral, was the special indwelling of Christ in the soul of each one of them. The pattern of this dwelling was shown to them on the mountain¹⁰⁰ which is Christ. It was built by Wisdom it-self¹⁰¹, founded on the heights of love and situated in the heart of each of our fathers. Its building materials were the composite of their virtues, its supports were their observance. The interior was decorated in lustrous purity and the exterior in splendid good works. When this dwelling was completed, Christ himself lived in it.

The mystical dwelling they built was that unique assembly of friars we call our Order. This dwelling was in the main built by Our Lady. It was founded on the humility of our fathers, constructed of their oneness of mind and heart, held together by poverty, adorned by purity. Since its completion this dwelling is supposed to be occupied by a long succession of holy friars following each other down to the Day of Judgment.

45. This last mentioned dwelling, all the friars of our Order, is identified by the special name of the Order of the Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It began, of course, when these fathers of ours personally came together. But it was on the mountain that it was eventually propagated¹⁰² by them and in the following way. They had already settled themselves up there and were finding no small joy in the pleasant place God had pointed out and prepared for them; they were daily making progress in virtue¹⁰³. What happened then is that by divine providence their way of living¹⁰⁴ awakened

⁹⁶ The movement of the hand alludes to David who played the harp to alleviate Saul’s sadness (*1 Sm* 16, 23). Here it is a symbol of the exemplary life of the fathers, now become a melody bringing joy.

⁹⁷ *2 Cor* 2, 14-15.

⁹⁸ *Is* 2, 5

⁹⁹ The LO is inspired by chapter 25 and 26 of *Exodus*, which describes the construction of the ark and the tabernacle, whose model had been presented to Moses on Mount Sinai. Monte Senario is now the new Sinai

¹⁰⁰ *Ex* 25, 40; 26, 30; *Heb* 8, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Prv* 9, 1.

¹⁰² *Is* 54, 3

¹⁰³ *Ps* 84, 2-3.8.

¹⁰⁴ *Mk* 16, 20.

in the people, even from a distance, love and devotion towards our fathers. Their reputation drew the people to want to see them even more than had been the case when they were living close to them in the city.

Word of their holiness and virtue drifted down to the people like pleasant music or sweet perfume. Consequently, many of these people, devoutly tracing such lovely sound and scent, were drawn to search out eagerly the source thereof¹⁰⁵. Large numbers of people from Florence and the surrounding areas converged on the mountain¹⁰⁶. “Why are we hesitating?”, they said to one another, “to go out to visit these servants of the Lord from whom such fragrance of virtue is emanating? Why do we not get to know them? Come, let us take ourselves to this Monte Sonaio, sonorous and sweet-smelling mountain of the Lord. When we get to the top we will find there¹⁰⁷ those godly men whose reputation has reached our ears. We can learn the ways of the Lord from the words we will hear there, words aflame with charity, and guided by their holiness we can make a firm decision to walk the paths of the Lord¹⁰⁸. In everything we do from now on we can follow the example to be shown us on the mountain of the Lord by these servants of his”.

How happy and wonderful was this era of our fathers! It was sustained in a special way by the hand of God; it was ordered in all things according to his will; it saw large numbers of people even from a great distance being attracted¹⁰⁹ to them by the reputation of their sanctity.

Chapter Twelve

HOW THE EXAMPLE OF OUR FIRST FATHERS DREW SOME PERSONS TO THE LOVE OF GOD AND OTHERS TO THE DECISION TO JOIN THEIR RANKS

46. The people kept coming from all sides to these godly men who began our Order and each of them carried back some spiritual benefit¹¹⁰ according to his own particular needs.

There were those, first of all, who changed their way of life when they saw such good example. Comparing their own lives as in a mirror, they became conscious of their own sinfulness. This is not surprising! Observing how our fathers spoke and acted, they learned to shun the duplicity rampant in their own world and to practice instead evangelical simplicity, to hate all vice and love tenderly every virtue. They saw that at least these seven men were not deceivers masking their real feelings behind stratagems, obscuring their meaning in ambiguous words, passing off the false as true or making the true seem false. They observed rather that they were truly simple persons without pretensions, who said what they meant, loved the truth and detested falsehood. They saw too that they were generous in sharing their possessions, more ready to endure evil than to commit it, not looking to take vengeance for past injuries but thinking it gain to suffer insult¹¹¹ for the sake of the truth¹¹².

There were others who went to our fathers to talk intimately about God and heaven. Such persons could not conceal for long the resulting increase in their spiritual fervor but indicated it by unmistakable signs, for within their hearts they experienced a new happiness and were filled by God with unspeakable joy. Although they knew not how to express all this, they could not suppress it either and could only sigh and hint at their fervor and joy. This was the spiritual approach of our fathers: first of all, a worthy place must be prepared for Christ, which means the heart must be kept

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Sg* 1, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Is* 2, 2-3.

¹⁰⁷ *Lk* 2, 15.

¹⁰⁸ *Is* 2, 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Sg* 1, 3.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Mt* 13, 8.23; 25, 15.

¹¹¹ *Acts* 5, 41.

¹¹² This entire passage is based on Gregory the Great, *Moralia sive Expositio in Job*, x, 29 (in PL 76, 947).

pure. Then the soul must await the Beloved with joy by filling the heart with loving devotion and run out to meet him when he comes as a friend, which means to kindle in the heart a desire for fervor. The next step will be that the soul, with tear-filled eyes, will open to the Spouse who stands at the door knocking. This will be done by casting light on the heart through good works toward neighbor and contemplation of heavenly truths. And finally, the soul in its innermost depths will receive the Spouse with honor by loving him as the Supreme Good and rendering him its complete obedience¹¹³.

47. There was yet a third type of visitor, the men who, attracted by the virtue they saw in our fathers and moved by what they said and did, recognized them as friends of God and loved them. What's more, they pressed them to be allowed to serve God with them on that mountain and to live there together with them. No wonder these visitors felt called to leave the world this way and join them: they could see our fathers were endowed with incomparable gifts and totally intent on the things of heaven.

The gift of fear of the Lord made them humble¹¹⁴: they put away ambitious thoughts and associated with the lowly¹¹⁵.

Through the gift of piety came meekness: they did not resist God but rather longed for him and revered him as their most dear Lord.

The gift of knowledge enlightened them and led them to mourn in sorrow for the things they had misused.

Through the gift of fortitude they hungered and thirsted for justice; they tried to draw their joy from true possessions and to break free of the shackles of the present life.

They also had the gift of counsel, which made them merciful; they forgave those who injured them and procured from both God and men whatever could help such persons, in the expectation of receiving a like treatment from God.

Then there was the gift of understanding, through which they were graced with purity of mind and body; cleansed in spiritual vision, they were already capable of contemplating heavenly realities.

And finally, they were crowned with the gift of wisdom so that they became lovers of peace; they no longer allowed base instincts to oppose the spirit but with thoughts of love rejoiced in obeying God in all things and always¹¹⁶.

Is it any wonder then that many, attracted by these gifts of the Holy Spirit with which the seven were endowed, were prepared to join them and never leave their company?

48. Ever since they had started to live together there had been numerous signs to assure these godly men who began our Order that the Lord was always taking care of them, and so they were certain that whatever happened to them happened by divine providence. When therefore so many came to them from all sides asking to join them for the love of heaven¹¹⁷, they realized that this deep-seated resolve to share a life of penance with them was also of the Lord's doing. And now for the first time the thought occurred to them that Our Lady in her own quiet way had not brought them together only to acquire and pursue their own personal holiness. Rather it had been God's plan

¹¹³ This passage repeats the theme of the second part of no. 39, and stresses the religious experience of the absence or presence of Christ, the Beloved, the Friend, the Spouse. The biblical background is provided by the spouse's voice in *Sg* 2, 8-10; 3, 1-4; 5, 1-2; by the parable of the virgins in *Mt* 25, 1-12; by the groanings of the Spirit which are made one with the eager expectation of creation, in *Rom* 8, 26-27; and by Christ who stands at the door and knocks, in *Rev* 3, 20.

¹¹⁴ *Mt* 5, 3. The LO interprets the "poor in spirit" as the "humble", following Augustinian exegesis.

¹¹⁵ *Rom* 12, 16.

¹¹⁶ *Is* 11, 2-3 (gifts of the Spirit) and *Mt* 5, 3-9 (beatitudes) were placed together by St. Augustine in his commentary *De sermone Domini in monte*, 4, 11 (in PL 34, 1234-1235; CCL, 35, p. 9-10).

¹¹⁷ The expression "for the love of heaven" (literally: "for the love of the heavenly homeland") is found in the bull of Innocent IV *Ut religionis vestre novella plantatio* of 17 August 1254, a document which tried to safeguard the original contemplative inspiration of the Servants of Mary. The "richness of a life of contemplation", toward the end of this number, recalls the "delights of holy contemplation" of the papal letter.

in inspiring them to settle on this beautiful mountain so suitable to their life of penance that they should accept into their ranks others who wanted to seek holiness too. This would mean that a new Order, begun by Our Lady through their instrumentality, would begin to spread. By their word and example, as well as that of the friars who would follow in the Order, they would call many back from error and lead them to the practice of perfect virtue. Thus would they direct them to know and love God and come to possess the kingdom of heaven.

It was surely no easy thing for them to abandon the richness of a life of contemplation to take up the care of others. Yet because they wanted to do the Lord's will in all things and recognized that this was indeed his will, they prepared themselves to accept new friars, men whom they knew were well-established in the fear of the Lord. In fact, at that time they actually admitted some of them.

49. Our fathers were undoubtedly of the opinion that, out of reverence for God who had prepared it for them in the first place, Monte Sonaio should never be abandoned, either by themselves or by the friars who were to come later to our Order. Yet at the same time they could see that the place would never be large enough for themselves and the friars they had already accepted into the community; not to speak of the others they intended to take in later. Thus were they constrained to acquire other places as residences for themselves and the brothers present and future. This also entailed that they had to take up apostolic ministry.

Wanting to keep close to the Lord, these godly men, our first fathers, came down from the mountain of worldly pride, down to humility, which is the base of all virtue¹¹⁸. They built a dwelling on this foundation of humility and raised it up high on charity, the peak of all virtue. With the Lord's help they made arrangements that were practical and at the same time fostered their spiritual life. Determined in all this to carry out the Lord's will, they received into their community many friars and associates, such as they and the Lord deemed suitable. At the same time, as the Lord seemed to be indicating this to them, they opened some other houses, places suitable to their penitential way of life.

Chapter Thirteen

HOW OUR LADY SHOWED IN A VISION TO BLESSED PETER MARTYR THE HABIT AND RULE TO BE GIVEN OUR FRIARS

50. By this time those godly men who began our Order had accepted many friars into their company and were living in quite a few places which they had by then acquired. Before long blessed Philip would be entering our Order, bringing light to it like a lamp¹¹⁹ specially prepared for it. But meanwhile the house itself, that is to say, our Order, was not yet finished and ready to receive him. This was because our friars as yet had no definitive habit, one they were to wear forever, unmodified. Nor did they yet have a rule under which to take vows and be guided. It was then that God sent his servant, the blessed Peter Martyr of the

Order of Friar Preachers¹²⁰. He was to be the one to inform them and assure them about the habit they were to wear from then on and the rule they were to profess and follow in the future.

¹¹⁸ The descent from the mountain of worldly pride to the lowest point of humility is taken from St. Augustine, *Discourse*, 69, 2-3

¹¹⁹ *Mt.* 5, 15; *Lk* 8, 16; 11, 33.

¹²⁰ The author of the LO correctly gives the year 1244 for the arrival of Peter of Verona in Florence, even if later this date is wrongly joined with the entrance of St. Philip into the Order, which is fixed as 1254. Peter of Verona was in Florence from 5 April or from the summer of 1244, perhaps called by Bishop Ardigno and the Dominican inquisitor, Fra Ruggero Calcagni, at a time when emperor and pope were in open conflict and anti-heretical measures were seen also as opposition to Emperor Frederick II. At Florence some orthodox lay groups worked with Peter of Verona, and among these was a group of "Servants of Saint Mary" which included, according to the LO, the founders of the Servite Order.

51. During the pontificate of Innocent IV¹²¹, blessed Peter Martyr was commissioned by the Pope to preach against the heretics who were cropping up at that time, especially in Italy, and beginning to publicly inveigh against Catholic doctrine. In the year of the Lord 1244, in the course of fulfilling this duty, he came to Florence.

While there, he concentrated all his talents of preaching and disputation on uprooting these heresies and proving the validity of the faith. The Holy Spirit worked in him and spoke words of truth through his mouth; thus he confounded the heretics, eradicated every vestige of their heresies and reaffirmed the truth of the Christian faith.

Those godly men, our friars, frequented Peter's sermons and in this way became aware of the fervor of the Holy Spirit in him. They were so moved by love for him that they made themselves known to him and accepted him as a dear friend. In fact, they chose him as their special father and protector and sole consultor for their spiritual welfare. He on his part made inquiries into their mode of living and found out all that had happened to them since they had started living together. Their perfection and holy piety became known to him as intimately as if he knew their consciences in confession. Visiting them frequently in the place where they were living, he was inspired by how they lived in complete peace and harmony and by their constancy¹²² in the fear of the Lord. Having assured himself that their life was in accord with accepted customs¹²³, he adopted them as his spiritual sons.

52. The events of their past about which he now learned and the sanctity which he could see for himself filled blessed Peter with a hope that through them no small honor would come to God and considerable benefit to mankind. Yet he could not overlook the fact that they had neither a definitive religious habit to wear nor a rule which specifically bound them, although they did have a name, one which the people had been commonly applying to our Order ever since they had first come to live together.

He was very devoted to them and felt particularly responsible for them, and so he offered fervent prayers to God and Our Lady for a habit, a rule and a name for them. Since it was for love of her he had accepted this singular responsibility, he especially pleaded with Our Lady that, for love of her Son, she give him some indication if indeed, out of all men in the world¹²⁴, she had chosen these friars of ours to serve her in a special way, as the name commonly given them by everyone seemed to indicate. If she intended also to use them to start an Order for her honor and glory and to dedicate it uniquely to her name, he asked that she reveal to him the habit they should wear, the rule they should follow and the name by which they should ever after be called.

Blessed Peter Martyr persevered in this prayer, shedding abundant and devout tears, and asked that Our Lady reveal these things to him. So too, those godly men who began our Order and the other friars who had by now joined them, continued, on the instructions of blessed Peter, to make similar supplications in prayer, fasting and good works.

Thus it came about that the glorious Virgin Mary, invoked with such great devotion, appeared in a vision to blessed Peter and confirmed everything about which he had asked her. She told him that she had chosen these men above all others for her special service – they and those who would come after them in the community – and that she had in particular obtained from her Son that an Order begin with them and be founded for her honor and glory and dedicated to her name. Then she went on to show him the habit. It was the habit we are still wearing, the one the friars of our Order should continue to wear always as a sign of the humility of the Blessed Virgin Mary and an

¹²¹ Sinibaldo Fieschi, pope from 1243 to 1254. For his favorable action regarding the Servants of Mary see his two letters of 17 and 18 August 1254 (*Ut religionis vestre and Compatientes paupertati vestre*).

¹²² Cf. *Acts* 1, 14; 2, 42.

¹²³ The early community of the Servants was located at Cafaggio, outside of the city of Florence, in a house which was different from the one which was constructed at the time of the final redactor of the LO. It was a fraternal community of penitents not yet juridically organized, since it did not have a true rule or its own habit.

¹²⁴ The choice of the Servants in the midst of the men of the world perhaps was suggested by the choosing of Israel among all the peoples of the world; cf. *Dt* 7, 6; 14, 2; 26, 18-19

unmistakable symbol of the pain she suffered in the most bitter Passion of her Son. Finally, she disclosed that they should be given the Rule of Blessed Augustine to follow¹²⁵.

53. This man so devoted to God and Our Lady, the blessed Peter Martyr, awoke from sleep and realized that Our Lady herself had assured him in a vision about everything he wanted to know. Breathing a devout prayer to God and Our Lady, he gave infinite thanks for such a wonderful favor. When he rose in the morning, he very devoutly and with great joy celebrated Mass in honor of Our Lady as an expression of gratitude. He then took as companion a confidential friend of his and went to where we still have our property in Florence. To our friars gathered in their house, the one where they were then living, Peter spoke of his vision of Our Lady regarding the future of our Order, the habit they were to wear and the rule they were henceforth to follow. He also revealed that the special name of Servants of the Virgin Mary by which they were known had originally come from Our Lady herself and thereby he confirmed on her authority that they should always retain this name unchanged. Urging them to give thanks to Our Lady for such a great favor and commending himself to their prayers, the man of the Lord then returned home with his companion.

Chapter Fourteen

THE ENTRANCE OF BLESSED PHILIP INTO THE ORDER AND ITS CONSEQUENT PROGRESS

54. The mission of evangelization given to blessed Peter Martyr brought him not only to the people of Florence but to other cities of Italy as well. And so, after he had rid Florence of heresy through the power of the Holy Spirit working in him, he went to Milan. There he stayed for a long time, preaching the word of the Lord and proving the truth of what he was saying by many signs and miracles. In this way he put down the heretics in the eyes of everyone. In the end, after fighting the good fight like a true soldier of Christ, he finished the race, the duties he had been given, in a most commendable way. He honored God to the end and kept faith with him with all his heart. Armed with the palm of martyrdom he joyfully went to the Lord to receive his merited crown of righteousness¹²⁶. The venerable martyr, blessed Peter, died in 1251, the first year of the pontificate of Pope Alexander IV¹²⁷. In his own *Legenda* you will find the full account of his life in his Order and how the Lord worked miracles at his death and afterwards, to show his holiness and to confirm the truth of his preaching. The location of his burial place is also noted there.

55. The friars of our Order now had a rule to profess and to follow, a distinct habit (which the Order is never to abandon) and a name, the one they had had from the beginning but now were to retain, as Our Lady had shown this to be her will. Our Order was therefore like a house ready to receive the lamp¹²⁸ God had prepared for it and in the strength of its light to go forward in the sight of God and men. Blessed Philip, this lamp, was already twenty-one years of age, and our fathers had by now passed an equal number of years in the service of the Lord since they had first begun their life together. Thus, in the year 1254, the first year of the pontificate of Pope Alexander IV¹²⁹, blessed Philip, in an unbelievably humble and sincere way, entered our Order. I hope to be able to tell of this in his own *Legenda*.

¹²⁵ With the giving of the habit and the Rule of St. Augustine, the community of penitents, Servants of Saint Mary, acquired a juridical position.

¹²⁶ 2 *Tm* 4, 7-8.

¹²⁷ The martyrdom of Peter of Verona occurred on 29 April 1251, which corresponds to the eighth year of Innocent IV.

¹²⁸ *Mt* 5, 12; *Lk* 8, 16; 11, 33.

¹²⁹ Another inaccurate date, for virtually all of 1254 was under the pontificate of Innocent IV. Alexander IV was elected on 12 December of that year.

Chapter Fifteen

HOW AFTER THE ENTRANCE OF BLESSED PHILIP INTO THE ORDER, PRIVILEGES
WERE OBTAINED ONE AFTER THE OTHER;
AND HOW HE WAS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED GENERAL

56. From that moment on, the growth of our Order was to be dependent on the virtue of blessed Philip. When benefits began to come to the friars at the very same time as he entered the Order, the truth of this fact became obvious to everyone. As we saw earlier, it was at the same time and in the same province and city in which blessed Philip was born that Our Lady had brought our fathers together in order to form, through their unity, a new spiritual house. This Philip, now come of age, was to light up that house by his word and example, like a lamp put on a stand within it¹³⁰. He was to be the model and the legislator of how in the future the friars of our Order were to serve Our Lady worthily.

Immediately after blessed Philip's admission, and fortified by his virtue, the friars approached the Roman Curia, which was at that time in Naples, and obtained from Pope Alexander IV, then in the first year of his pontificate, the Order's first privilege. It allowed them to build on all their properties the necessary buildings, oratory and bell tower, as well as to establish a cemetery¹³¹. We can see therefore how much good blessed Philip's prayers brought to the Order from the very first moment he entered.

We should mention that before Philip's entrance into their community, our friars had many properties of their own but they were not yet allowed to build oratories or bell towers, nor establish cemeteries on them. And although they had set up altars for their own spiritual needs in their houses, with diocesan approval, they were not yet able to do so by virtue of any apostolic privilege. Now however they were given this authority, not only for the places they already occupied but for all their places all over the world in the future.

57. Wanting to keep his learning hidden, blessed Philip had sought admission to our Order as a lay brother and he lived for almost four full years in the habit of a lay brother. None of the friars believed him to be anything else. Of its nature, however, a light cannot long remain hidden, but makes its brightness seen. And so, as I hope Our Lady will help me describe it in his own *Legenda*, the extent of Philip's learning came to be revealed by Our Lady. Side by side with his progress before God and men¹³², our Order found itself growing in a natural way too, from good to better. At the same time that Philip's learning became public, that is, in 1258, our friars went again to the Curia, then at Anagni, and obtained another privilege from the same Pope Alexander IV, now in the fourth year of his pontificate. This allowed them to accept for burial whoever chose to be buried on their properties¹³³. This second privilege presupposes and confirms the first, that is, the one that originally allowed our friars to possess ecclesiastical property with oratory, bell tower and cemetery. It extended the scope of the first privilege for the benefit of the laity and confirmed that the properties we held were indeed ecclesiastical.

¹³⁰ *Mt.* 5, 15; *Lk* 8, 16; 11, 33.

¹³¹ This was certainly not the first privilege the Holy See granted the Order. The bull (*Vestre devotionis precibus*), of 26 May 1255, was addressed to the prior and friars of Monte Senario, and it does not speak of bells, contrary to what the LO affirms

¹³² *Lk* 2, 40.52.

¹³³ The bull (*Religionis vestre*) is dated 1 April 1259. The privilege of burial, one of those most opposed by the parochial clergy for economic reasons, had been requested by the general chapter of 5 September 1257. The Pope therefore gave his response about a year and a half later

58. Although Our Lady, through the merits of blessed Philip, had now provided the friars of our Order this first privilege regarding the building of places and the second regarding the burial on our properties of those who requested it.

There still remained the fact that they did not have apostolic authority to convene a general chapter and elect a prior general during it. Ever since they had received the habit and rule from Our Lady through blessed Peter Martyr they had held chapters whenever necessary. In their pious simplicity and ignorance of the law, they had elected priors general in these chapters, going each time to the Curia to have the election confirmed. But now the time was approaching when Our Lady intended to put blessed Philip on the lamp stand which is our Order. It would be essential that by the time of his election the friars of our Order already have apostolic approval to hold chapters and there to elect generals with power to correct friars and to do all the other things that pertain to this office. For that reason, Our Lady conferred on the Order another favor, broader in scope than the earlier ones, through the merits of blessed Philip. This took place about the time that Philip, despite his unwillingness, was promoted to the priesthood.

59. It was the year of the Lord 1263, the second of the pontificate of Pope Urban IV, and blessed Philip had already been ordained a priest. Fra James of Siena¹³⁴, elected prior general by the friars in a general chapter, went to the Curia with some of the other friars of our Order to be confirmed in office.

At that time the cardinal protector of our Order was Ottobuono of Genoa¹³⁵, titular of Saint Adrian's. He knew well that our friars had never received the privilege even to convene a chapter for electing a prior general, but he also knew they were men of great sanctity. Inspired by Our Lady (the merits of blessed Philip were also at work), Cardinal Ottobuono decided that this was the time to obtain from the Pope this privilege for our Order.

Therefore, when our friars appeared in the consistory and were kneeling before the Supreme Pontiff and the cardinals to ask this privilege, Cardinal Ottobuono earnestly begged the Pope to grant it. The Pope replied that giving such a privilege was the same as approving a new Order. When he heard this, the cardinal answered, "Upon my soul, my lord, grant this privilege to these friars; for, from what I have seen of their sanctity, they are entirely worthy of such generosity on your part". Then, when all the other cardinals rose to their feet and asked that the privilege be given for love of Our Lady and respect for Ottobuono, the Supreme Pontiff replied, "Because my lord Ottobuono says he has such absolute proof of the sanctity of these friars, it is my will, for love of the Virgin Mary whose Servants they are commonly called, that they receive this favor".

Now, before our friars rose to leave the presence of the Pope and cardinals, Fra James of Siena was specifically confirmed in office by Pope Urban himself. Although the Pope had approved their petition, this act made even more graphic the favor he had granted. Thus James obtained the singular grace of being the first prior general to be confirmed by the Supreme Pontiff¹³⁶.

60. The Lord rewarded Cardinal Ottobuono even in his lifetime for the favor he did in asking this privilege for us, for three years later, on the death of Pope Urban IV in 1266, he was unanimously elected Supreme Pontiff by all the cardinals and took the name Adrian V. But "lest

¹³⁴ James of Siena was the third prior general (1257-1265), after Filiolus (or Bonfilius) and Bonayunta. He presided at the chapter of 5 September 1257 which favored the development of apostolic activity. During his generalate the Order began new foundations in Umbria, Tuscany, and in Bologna. He gave his resignation at the general chapter of May 1265.

¹³⁵ Ottobuono Fieschi († 1276) probably succeeded his cousin, Cardinal William Fieschi, as protector of the Order. A cardinal protector had the responsibility, given him by the pope, to help a religious order in case of external need and to watch over the internal life of the order cites only the three which are also found in the bull *Dum levamus* of 11 February 1304, with which Benedict XI definitively approved the legislation of the Order. On the other hand, those letters which could have jeopardized the future of the Order after the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 are not recorded here.

¹³⁶ It might be noted that of the numerous papal letters given to the Order, the LO

wickedness pervert his mind or deceit beguile his soul¹³⁷ if he remained long in such a high position, the Lord brought his life to an end quickly. So, after a pontificate of only one month he was taken by the Lord to receive his reward for the favors and good he had done.

61. After he had obtained the privilege referred to above, Fra James of Siena governed the Order very well for two years. After him, Fra Manettus of Florence was elected; it was the year of the Lord 1265, the first of the pontificate of Pope Clement IV¹³⁸. Fra Manettus was a very holy and devout man, handsome and refined¹³⁹. For confirmation in office he went to the Curia, which at that time was at Perugia.

But after two years of governing the Order in a very holy way, he resigned and blessed Philip was unanimously elected prior general of our Order. It was therefore in 1267, the third year of the pontificate of Pope Clement IV that blessed Philip was elected. He went to the Curia, then at Orvieto, and was with due honor confirmed in office by Pope Clement.

With the help of God we hope to write also blessed Philip's own *Legenda*. There we will describe how he was elected, for how long and in what way he governed the Order once he had been confirmed as general; and finally, how he died.

62. Praise to the blessed and glorious Virgin Mary. It has now been shown how our Order began and how it grew until the moment blessed Philip was put at its head.

To the praise and honor of the same Virgin Mary and with her help, this work has been completed. We proceed now to narrate the life of blessed Philip as we promised earlier¹⁴⁰.

To the praise of the Virgin Mary

here ends the Legenda of the origin of the Order

of Friar Servants of the Virgin Mary.

Thanks be to God. Amen¹⁴¹.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Wis* 4, 10-11.

¹³⁸ Cardinal Guy Fulcodi, a native of St.-Gilles (Gard) at the border of Provence, was pope from 1265 to 1268. The support given to the Servants of Mary, and also to the other mendicant orders, aligned as they were with the propapal Guelf party, must be seen also in the light of the political events of that time: the invasion of Italy by Charles of Anjou and the return of the Guelfs to Florence.

¹³⁹ Fra Manettus, prior general in the general chapter of May 1265, belonged to the first generation of Servites, as is attested by his participation in the chapter of 7 October 1251 at Cafaggio. The LO esteems him as a holy man and this explains why he has been inserted into the list of the Seven Founders of the Order. The mention of his refined nature perhaps suggests the reason for the brevity of his generalate.

¹⁴⁰ With this conclusion the final redactor restates the character of the LO as an introduction to a life of Blessed Philip (cf. paragraph 6).

¹⁴¹ This second conclusion, which confirms the title of *Legenda de origine Ordinis*, is clearly an addition made by copyist.