

**Blessed Diana and Blessed Jordan**  
**OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS**

**THE STORY**

**of a**

**HOLY FRIENDSHIP**

**and a**

**SUCCESSFUL SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

**by**

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THE VERY REVEREND

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**TO**  
**MY SISTER**  
**AND**  
**ALL DOMINICAN SISTERS**  
**MAY YOU FIND IN BLESSED JORDAN**  
**AS BLESSED DIANA DID**  
**A FATHER**                      **A GUIDE**  
**AND**  
**AN UNFAILING FRIEND**

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## INTRODUCTION

No complete life of Blessed Diana can be written. The facts are too few. Like most other Dominican nuns her life was hidden with God behind the walls of a cloister. What singled her out from her Sisters in religion was her share in the establishment of the Dominican Friars at Bologna and her friendship with Blessed Jordan of Saxony. But even these facts would not have kept her from falling back into the obscurity that hides almost all of our first Sisters were it not that Blessed Jordan wrote letters of spiritual direction to her and that these letters have been preserved. Fortunately for us they have been preserved, for they not only acquaint us with Blessed Diana but also with Blessed Jordan, the second Master General of the Order and the Friar who next to Saint Dominic played the greatest part in the extension of the Order and its intellectual orientation. It is true that we know a great deal about Blessed Jordan from the "Lives of the Brethren," but his letters throw ever so much more light on his activity and his great lovableness.

The first part of this book consists of an adaptation of the "Life of Blessed Diana and her Associates, Blesseds Cecilia and Amata" that was published in 1892, shortly after the public veneration that had long been given to these saintly nuns, received an official approval from the Church. This life was written by the late Very Reverend Father Cormier, O.P., at the

request of the late Cardinal Frühwirth, O.P., who was Master General of the Order at that time. It was their wish that the life be translated into all languages, and it is our happy privilege to have some part in fulfilling that wish so long ago expressed.

The second part of this book consists of the "Letters of Blessed Jordan of Saxony," most of which were addressed to Blessed Diana and her community. Blessed Jordan wrote many other letters; unfortunately they have not been preserved for they would have helped us to appreciate better the spirit that prompted those we have. The letters still extant no longer exist in the handwriting of Blessed Jordan; they have been discovered here and there, most of them having been preserved in manuscript copies at Wurzburg and Rome. The first attempt to print them was made in 1865 by Father Ceslaus Bayonne, O.P., to whom we owe much for his efforts in Dominican hagiography. To the Latin text of the letters he added a French translation and chronological notes. In 1891 Father Berthier, O.P., published the Latin text of the letters in a little book containing other writings of Blessed Jordan as "The First Beginnings of the Order of Preachers." He added no historical details nor did he make any attempt to arrange the letters in their chronological order. In 1924 Marguerite Aron published a French translation of the letters, arranging them in what she considered their chronological order and adding many interesting details that help the reader to understand when, why, and whence the letters were written. Later she published a life of Blessed Jordan entitled "Un Animateur de la Jeunesse au XIII siecle." In 1925



Doctor Altaner published a new edition of the Latin text of the letters; he left them in the order in which they stood in the manuscripts but added a series of valuable studies, in one of which he tried to determine as far as possible the date and origin of the letters. Finally in 1927 Father Mumbauer, O.P., published a German translation of the letters with introductory notes based on Doctor Altaner's edition. He did not, however, change the manuscript order of the letters.

The translation that follows was made from the text as edited by Doctor Altaner, with frequent references to the translations of Marguerite Aron and Father Mumbauer. The letters are arranged in a chronological order based on indications given by Marguerite Aron and Doctor Altaner. Critics still dispute about the correct arrangement of the letters; even though the present arrangement is not quite exact it is helpful to the reader for it makes evident the progress made by Blessed Jordan in his work of preaching, the development of his thought and of Blessed Diana's spiritual life.

The Latin of Blessed Jordan is the Latin of the Middle Ages, but it possesses a purity of diction, an ease and informality, and a natural imagery not often found in his time. It is not easy, however, to translate them into a modern tongue in such a way as to preserve all the characteristics of Blessed Jordan's style. Father Mumbauer admitted this even though he asserted that the style and construction of the letters are fundamentally German. Two things make them difficult to translate. First, they were written in haste; many of the sentences are long and involved.

Secondly, most of them are mosaics of more or less imperfectly coordinated texts of Holy Scripture, of texts that would come easily to the mind of a Religious who read his Mass and Breviary with attention and understanding. Most of these passages are not literal quotations but have been adapted to the subject under discussion and appear as the language of one who naturally expressed his thought in Biblical phrases. Doctor Altaner did us great service by tracing these passages to their source. We have borrowed his references and grouped them at the end of a paragraph so as to enable the reader to verify them if he wishes without distracting him by a continual reference to notes.

In his letters Blessed Jordan frequently quoted from the Cantic of Canticles. A few of these passages may surprise a reader, for the Cantic of Canticles is essentially a lovesong written with all the realism of Eastern imagery. However, since it is not a mere lovesong but rather a spiritual lovesong in which the author, under the inspiration of God, tried to describe as well as he could the search of the soul for God and her ineffable joy on finding Him, Holy Mother Church has inserted many of its passages into the liturgical prayers for feasts of the Blessed Mother and other Virgin Saints, those lovers of God in an eminent degree. The Cantic of Canticles also served as a sort of textbook for Mystical Theology which deals with the ways of the soul far advanced in the spiritual life. Hence Religious of that time at least were well acquainted with it and its interpretation. Saint Thomas Aquinas dictated a commentary upon it on his deathbed. It should not be

surprising then that Blessed Jordan made use of many of its passages.

Many readers will also be surprised at first sight at the terms of endearment with which Blessed Jordan addressed Blessed Diana and her associates at St. Agnes' Convent. They are unusual, it is true, but let the reader read on, he will find that Blessed Jordan addressed his brethren in much the same way. All people are dear to him because all are dear to God; all have been bought with a great price, and all the baptized at least are closely united to him in the Mystical Body of Christ. As the reader becomes better acquainted with the letters he will plainly see that they are not mere expressions of friendship but documents of high spiritual value; the expressions of friendship dim out gradually in the light of spiritual instruction so charmingly set forth by one burning with the love of God and of man in and for God.

These letters are not a connected and organized series of dissertations on the spiritual life; for the most part they are answers to questions and problems that troubled the souls of Blessed Diana and her associates, and emphatic repetitions of the principal points he inculcated during the conferences he gave to the Sisters while at Bologna. They contain, however, enough of detail to give us an idea of the general principles used by Blessed Jordan in his spiritual direction.

Blessed Jordan's spirituality was Christo-centric. Despite his great devotion to the Blessed Virgin he mentions her but seldom in his letters. It is devotion to Jesus that is the continual theme of his letters. Jesus is our Destination and our Way, Jesus is our Model,

Jesus is our Strength, our Hope and our Consolation. Jesus is our Life and the Nourishment of our life. Jesus is our only unfailing Friend; He may hide His Face from time to time, but it is only to prove our love, to give us an opportunity of gaining greater merit, of exercising ourselves more vigorously in the virtues of faith, hope, patience, and humble self-knowledge. Even though hidden He sees, He is not far away, He is giving secret help, He will show Himself again and soon, and then our joy will be all the greater because it was taken away for a time.

Union with Christ is not something attainable by our own efforts. Christ must invite us to unite ourselves to Him, and we are free to accept or reject that invitation. If we do accept His invitation, a union of such tenderness and mutual self-surrender is effected that it can be described only by saying that Christ is the Bridegroom of our souls and our souls are His brides. That is why Blessed Jordan, when speaking of this union and urging the Sisters to desire and strive to make it grow, continually alludes to and quotes the Canticle of Canticles. He was not singular in this, he was merely following the example of the Fathers. It was not due to a perverted sentimentality nor to a morbid trifling with erotic images; it was simply the expression of a conviction founded on faith that because of grace Christ lives in us and we in Him, that grace does in a way make the soul one with God and God one with the soul.

The great purpose of the spiritual and the religious life is the furthering of this union with God. All things else are of value only in so far as they tend to increase the union of the soul with God. A certain

amount of bodily mortification is necessary in order to curb animal life and to teach us what -a serious thing sin is. Discretion however must be our guide in the use of bodily mortifications; care must be taken not to break down the body and make it a drag on the soul. Of greater value are the interior virtues; on their practice no limit need be set. Charity, patience, humility, interior peace, and joy should be cultivated at all times. The same may be said about the saying of prayers and external devotions; to them also there must be a limit lest they dry up the soul; prayer itself, the lifting up of the soul to God, can be practiced at all times for all of our actions can be performed in a spirit of submission and love of God.

The secondary purpose of the religious life is the salvation of souls. One need not go out into the world to accomplish that; those in the cloister, the novice at his studies, the Sister or Brother engaged in manual labor can give very efficient help by the spirit of prayer which they put into their work. In fact, as Blessed Jordan intimates, the preacher will not be successful unless his preaching has been pointed with the arrows of grace won by the assistance of those not preoccupied by preaching.

Blessed Jordan's outlook on life is purely supernatural. All things are a reflection of God's beauty; they are instruments in His Hands which providentially work for the salvation of mankind. The world then is not something to be studied and loved for its own sake; it is only a place of pilgrimage where we must walk for a time while preparing ourselves for the joys of heaven. As a result joy and sorrow, prosperity and

misfortune are not merely things that happen, things we should love or hate for themselves; they are all favors from God, things He providentially permits or wills to preserve us from evil, to goad us on to the practice of virtue, to be a means of meriting a greater measure of happiness in eternity.

Blessed Jordan was not only the spiritual guide of Blessed Diana, he was her friend. That friendship was founded upon: 1. The mutual admiration that two noble characters cannot but have for each other. Both of them had the highest ideals and were ready for any sacrifice to live up to them.

2. Their mutual love for Saint Dominic. Both had been inspired by Saint Dominic, both had looked up to him as their Father, and on both of them Saint Dominic had placed high hopes. After Saint Dominic's death Blessed Diana naturally looked to Blessed Jordan for support and direction, and, to Blessed Jordan, Blessed Diana was a precious legacy from Saint Dominic.

3. Their mutual efforts to attain a common end. All who have read the life of Saint Dominic know of his founding convents of nuns at Prouille, Rome, and Madrid, and of the fatherly care he took of them. In his eyes they were not an Order distinct from the Friars but the two were rather separate divisions of one army, each with distinct duties and different arms, but both fighting together for the Kingdom of God. The Sisters were to be helpmates in the truest sense of the word. By their prayers and penances they were to win graces that would turn the words of the Friars into fiery darts, piercing the minds and the hearts of their audiences. In return for this help or even to make

them more efficient the Sisters were to receive, in accordance with Saint Dominic's plans, the fatherly care of the best of his sons. Blessed Jordan accepted wholeheartedly the idea of Saint Dominic. This is evident from his persistent attempt to prevent the Friars from giving up their duties as directors to the Sisters, and from his own repeated demands on the Sisters for prayer and penances to insure the success of his mission.

The friendship of our saintly Brother and Sister was not merely of this semi-official sort; it took on in time a more personal turn. As Father Mumbauer notes it was not an icy Platonic love but really human, a union of hearts that beat as one. What worried the one worried the other, what gladdened the one rejoiced the other. Their thoughts were full of each other; the hope of seeing each other made them happy, and parting was always painful to them.

To make this known to the world is surely according to the canons of modern hagiography which seeks to divest the Saints of the cold and almost unhuman mould in which the older hagiographies had cast them and to make us see them as they were, real men and women, making the same fight as we have to make with human nature and the trials of life, but with the help of God's grace more successful because more intent on the things of God. To those who object to the presentation to the world of such a friendship it might be said that the friendship between Blesseds Jordan and Diana was far from being unique; many other examples might be given: those between Saints Jerome, Paula and Eustochium, Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, Saints John of the Cross and Theresa, Saints

Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal. Such an answer, however, would hardly suffice; they wonder if the good of such a presentation can outweigh the danger it might cause to souls by giving them opportunities for self-deception.

From a Dominican point of view the fact that such a presentation really serves the cause of truth is all sufficient. Despite the strictures found in many books, a special friendship is not wrong in itself. No one will deny that there are dangers lurking in special friendships, even in those between persons of the same sex, just as there are dangers in the use of almost any thing on earth, but it is false and pernicious doctrine to condemn the use of a thing because it may be abused. Of the truth of that statement we in this country need no more proof. Those who have had experience can bewail not only the evil consequences of some special friendships but also of an undue condemnation of all special friendships. Because the very word has been made a bugbear and term of reproach many a good soul has been upset, has failed to develop and to do all the good it might have done with the stimulus and support of a strong and sympathetic friend.

People are different; some can go along through life almost alone, others need the support and encouragement of certain of their associates. So also with those who dedicate themselves to the service of God; to some of them God gives such graces of freedom from trial and worry, or of light, sound judgment, and strength of will that they seem to have little need even of a spiritual director-let them thank God. Others are not so favored; they are hard pressed by trials,



timorous, distrustful of self, they have need of almost constant direction and encouragement to develop and to do the work of God-to deny them the help of a true friend is to hinder the work of God. Why not recognize this, and instead of condemning unreservedly special or spiritual friendships why not instruct religious on the motives that should inspire a spiritual friendship and warn them against its dangers?

From the lives of Blesseds Jordan and Diana certain norms can be drawn up that may be helpful to souls and ought to allay any fears about the effect of their example. A spiritual friendship

1. Should lead to a greater love of God.
2. Should lead to a greater love and service of our fellowmen.
3. Should be a stimulus to a greater devotion to duty.
4. Should increase one's power of forbearance with the trials of life.
5. Should not be cultivated in secret or by questionable methods.
6. Should exercise strict self-control over sensible manifestations of love.

This is a point that may need emphasizing in this age of materialism and craze for sensible pleasures. Sensible manifestations of love and the joy that comes from the presence of a friend need not be sinful, but they must be controlled if the friendship is to remain pure and holy in God's sight. Friends must learn to be content with mutual service and with that secret understanding that unites hearts in sympathy with each other; they must remember that only in heaven, after their work is done, can they enjoy continuously each other's company.

7. It should be continually lifted up to the supernatural. A friendship between Religious is not merely the union of two human hearts but of two beings who are children of God, temples of the Holy Ghost, members of Christ's Mystical Body, and by their vow of consecration spouses of Christ, united to Him by bonds of love that should be greater than those of any human love. No one fully realizing his dignity as a Christian can, with the grace of God, commit a deliberate sin; no friendship that keeps Christ in view, that grows in union with Christ, that seeks Him as the great purpose of its existence can go wrong.

It needs only a careful reading of the letters to verify the fact that the friendship between Blesseds Jordan and Diana fulfilled the requirements outlined above. Is it then unreasonable to think that the presentation of that friendship will not be a danger but rather a sure guide to souls that need or are enjoying the help and sympathy of a friend! Is it not also worth while to make known to Sisters on earth the presence in heaven of a Blessed who sympathized with them, who understood their trials, and could give such wonderful help and consolation! Certainly they can go to Blessed Jordan with confidence; he will receive them kindly and give them powerful assistance.

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I wish to thank all those of my Brothers and Sisters in the Dominican Order whose constant help and encouragement has made this book a reality. They have made me experience the truth of the words of the Psalmist: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

## **CHAPTER I**

### **A DAUGHTER OF BOLOGNA, THE CITY OF THE LEARNED**

The thirteenth Century began in a period of social unrest and bloody revolution. Under the guidance of the Church, Europe had grown out of the barbarism into which the hordes from the East had plunged it, and now faced new problems that insistently demanded solution. Feudalism was dying; from its ruins nations were arising to take up the quarrels over unsettled boundary lines; the so-called lower classes, especially the artisans and the merchants, were growing in power and demanded from the nobility a voice in civil affairs. Even greater sources of unrest and mental agitation were the infant universities which were very popular with the lower classes because they opened up to these classes a career more promising than that of military life. By the end of the century however equilibrium was restored; most of the problems that had agitated thought and society were solved in principle and (to some extent) in practice. It was Saint Thomas Aquinas who made evident the harmony between reason and faith; it was Saint Louis of France who showed that order could be established in the nation, and it was he who put an end to the conflict between religious and civil authority within his domains. Because of these achievements, and others no less important,

the Thirteenth Century has justly been called the Greatest of Centuries.

In this work of bringing order out of chaos, Italy and especially the city of Bologna played a large part. Northern Italy was at that time the center of Christendom for it lay between France on the north and Rome on the South, between Spain and England on the West and the German Empire on the East. Bologna was truly the capital of Northern Italy, first because of her position which made her guardian of the Eastern passes through the Appennines and protector of the rich cities situated in the plain sloping to the Adriatic, and secondly because she was a center of learning.<sup>1</sup> The university of Bologna was the oldest in Italy. True, it did not go back to the Emperors Theodosius or Charlemagne as some have asserted, but at the beginning of the Thirteenth Century it could boast of a century of activity. There was only one other university, that of Paris, equal to its own. The two worked in different fields, for while the university of Paris, with which that of Bologna vied in attracting youths from all parts of the world, was the center of theological learning, the university of Bologna was the mother of legal lore. One of her most famous scholars was our own Saint Raymond of Pennafort who was so favorably impressed with the university that he dedicated his great Book of Decretals to its professors and students. How deeply the study of law entered into the life of the city can be gathered from the fact that at times women held chairs at the university; in the

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient coins of Bologna carry the inscriptions : Bononia Mater Studiorum, *Bologna Mother of Studies*.

fourteenth century, for instance, Novella of Andrea taught canon law, and in the eighteenth, Laura Bassi taught civil law.

It was during this century of great strivings, this age of extremes, this period high-minded and religious but also warlike and passionate, that Diana of Andalo was born. It was in Bologna, prominent socially, politically, and intellectually that Diana passed her life. She had every opportunity of coming into contact with all the vital forces of the time for she was a member of the junior branch, famous in itself, of the great family of the Carbonesi that traced its lineage farther back than the year 1080.

Andrew of Lovella was Diana's father. People called him "little Andrew," that is, Andreolo or Andalo, which became the family surname. Andrew's position and personal qualities made him a power in public affairs. He was appointed mayor of the mountain district around Bologna, an office that required not only prudence but courage, for in those days of party strife a mayor had to be a warrior as well as a statesman.

The name of Diana's mother was Otha, a short form of Ottavia or Octavia.<sup>2</sup> Diana had six brothers: Brancalion, Peter, Albizo, William, Castellano and Lodrengo, and one sister named Otha. Diana, the fifth in age, was born about the year 1201. Her oldest

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<sup>2</sup> Père Cormier states that Andalo was married twice, that the name of his first wife, the mother of Diana, is unknown, and that of the second wife, the mother of Castellano and Lodrengo was Agnes. Marguerite Aron insists that this is a mistake for Blessed Jordan of Saxony in his letters to Blessed Diana refers to Diana's mother as living and named Otha.

and favorite brother, Brancaleon, died as mayor of Genoa, and perhaps senator of Rome. Lodrengo was founder and first prior of a military order whose members were known as the *Fratres Gaudenti*.<sup>3</sup> Like his father he took part in public affairs and as overlord of the territory surrounding Bologna he ruled with so much tact, prudence, and justice that hostile factions threw down the arms and kept the peace. After serving as mayor of Modena, Siena, Faenza, Pisa and Reggio he was called to Florence to put an end to the constantly recurring disputes between the Guelfs and Ghibellines. Despite his efforts to remain impartial he was accused of favoring the Guelfs; a riot ensued and Lodrengo was deposed. Dante, the poet avenger of the Ghibellines, consigned Lodrengo to the Inferno together with Catalan, his associate.<sup>4</sup>

Of Diana's childhood we have no details, but the story of her life proves that she lacked none of the intelligence, courage, and greatness of soul possessed by her father and brothers. A cultural education enhanced her natural gifts. According to a chronicle written by one of her Sisters in religion she had an active spirit, a vivid imagination, deep emotions, a frank and sympathetic heart, and a will firm in the pursuit

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander IV and Urban IV in 1261 approved this order. Its official title was "The Militia of Mary, the Glorious Virgin." The title "Fratres Gaudenti" or "Joyous' Brothers" was partly derisory and partly a consequence of the fact that they were dedicated to the work of extending the glories or joys of Mary. It had the same spirit, rule, and purpose as the militia founded by Saint Dominic to combat the heresy of the Albigensians. The habit consisted of a white tunic bearing a white cross adorned with two stars.

<sup>4</sup> Inferno-Canto 23, verses 100-110.

of what are good and true and beautiful. Her features mirrored these fine qualities of soul which easily won and retained for her the respect and admiration of all who knew her. When she first appeared on the page of history she was just seventeen years of age, the darling of a rich family, fond of fine dress and rich jewels that enhanced her personal beauty and charm, enatnored of life and the world about her, good but not particularly pious, certain to be a great force for good or evil in Bologna. Just seventeen and looking at life with fresh, eager eyes she was waiting for the impetus that was to gather and carry the tremendous energies of her strong character and winning personality down some avenue of activity-then the Dominicans came to Bologna.

## CHAPTER II

### THE APOSTLES IN WHITE

In 1218 the Dominican Order was just two years old but it was already beginning to reap with joy what Saint Dominic and his first companions had sown in tears. Ten years had Dominic's Winter lasted; ten years of almost fruitless labor he had spent, with a few companions, among a sect of obstinate heretics in Southern France. During that time he had seen his first protectors taken away by death, his first companions discouraged by failure, and his own soul had gone through the fires of desolation. But now his Springtime had come, and with it came the fulfillment of a vision about his real mission. He and his followers were to be Apostles not of a mere province but of the world. Under the inspiration of God and with the approval of Innocent III and Honorius III Dominic established the Order of Preachers, and God was blessing the work by sending him many followers and causing new foundations to mark the path of his journeyings.

As founder of the Order of Truth, the Order devoted to teaching and preaching, Saint Dominic preferred to establish his sons in the larger cities and especially in the centers of learning, for it was there that Divine Truth met the most dangerous opposition, and could also find the most qualified champions. It



is for this reason that he placed his first communities in Toulouse, Paris, Madrid and Rome. Bologna was now appealing to his apostolic zeal. The Dominicans sent thither in 1218 began their missionary activity in the Benedictine chapel of Saint Proculus. Later they received the small church of Saint Mary in Mascarella to which was attached a hospice of Canons Regular. These Canons joyfully received the sons of Saint Dominic, who in turn repaid the hospitality shown them by daily examples of love of poverty, profound humility, and holy living.

The Friars still clothed in the white wool habit and linen surplice of the Canons Regular zealously took up the work of preaching. Results were instantaneous. Perhaps it was of them that Cardinal Vitry, a contemporary of Saint Dominic, wrote in his *History of the West*: "*At the gates of the city of Bologna there is a congregation of Canons Regular, dear to men and pleasing to God. By combining the work of preaching with the practice of the monastic life they are at one and the same time an Order of Preachers and of Canons Regular.*"

The hospice of Mascarella, later the site of the palace of the Dolfi, was not far from Diana's home. Leisure and a taste for the intellectual prompted Diana to go often to hear the new missionaries and to take note of the practical effects of their apostolate, but to induce her to give herself wholly to God required the burning zeal of a Blessed Reginald.

Reginald was first a celebrated Doctor of Canon Law at Paris, and later Dean of the chapter of Canons of Saint Agnanus at Orleans. As soon as he became

acquainted with Saint Dominic at Rome, he felt drawn to the Order and made a promise to enter as soon as possible. A fever brought him to the verge of death; but while Saint Dominic was already lamenting the premature loss of so promising a son, Our Lady visited Reginald, anointed him with oil, and cured him instantly. At the same time she showed him the habit that she herself had designed for the sons of her choice. By this heavenly favor that gave to the Order a new habit to symbolize its new spirit, Our Lady made Reginald an associate of Saint Dominic in the foundation of the Order.<sup>1</sup> Reginald's first mission was Bologna. He arrived there in December 1218, wearing the new habit, more monastic than the old, with its black mantle and Mary's emblem, the white scapular.

Moved first by curiosity to see the new preacher, then drawn and held by a burning eloquence, the people came in crowds to hear the sermons of Blessed Reginald. The whole city was in commotion. Some called Reginald an Elias because of his zeal, others called him a Paul on account of his powers of persuasion.<sup>1</sup> Wherever he spoke, at the convent, in the

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<sup>1</sup> The historicity of these events is attested by many contemporary documents, among them a bas-relief of the Tomb of Saint Dominic made before 1267 by William of Pisa, a Domini

can Laybrother. According to her "Dialogue" Saint Catherine of Siena received this message from Christ : "I gave him (Dominic) to the world through Mary. Yes, Mary, because it was she who gave him the habit. It was My goodness that gave her this charge."

'Blessed Jordan of Saxony, in his biography of Saint Dominic, says this of Reginald's preaching at Bologna : "He immediately began to devote himself to preaching. His words were like a mighty fire; they enkindled the hearts of others like a burning torch, so that there was scarcely anyone not inflamed by his eloquence. A new Elias seemed to have arisen at Bologna."

cathedral, or in the public square, Reginald set his hearers aglow. Professors and students from the university came to hear and remained as religious; even those who determined not to become religious fell willing victims to the charm of this man of God.<sup>3</sup>

Oratory appealed to Diana. She knew how to appreciate it for she too possessed the gift. *Most eloquent* her Sisters in religion called her, and by that they meant something more than mere talkativeness. Naturally then Diana became one of Reginald's most attentive and appreciative listeners. One day while Reginald was preaching on the vanity, pride and extravagance of women the sermon struck her to the heart. In his description of a woman of the world Diana saw what she might become unless she put a strong check on her own inclinations. Instantly docile to the movements of the Holy Spirit, she divested herself of all worldly adornments and went to Reginald for counsel on the best way of effecting a transformation of her soul. As she studied the interior life of the brethren, she felt more and more drawn to imitate it. She had truly changed; she was beginning to understand the wickedness of the world, its snares and temptations, and the sad state of the soul that lives habitually in forgetfulness of God, even though not in grievous sin. Her efforts were now to be devoted to an earnest quest after the one thing necessary, the salvation of her soul.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the Professors who entered at this time were Clarus of Bologna, Moneta of Cremona, and Reginald of Cremona.

## CHAPTER III

### A FRIEND IN NEED

Reginald's success soon proved that the church of Mascarella was too small and too poorly situated for the work of the Friars. Accordingly a better site was sought and found in the church of Saint Nicholas of the Vineyards. Just outside the city walls and half surrounded by vineyards this site was within easy reach of the people and yet afforded the Friars both room to expand and the quiet needed for their life of prayer. Two circumstances favored the acquisition of this site by the Friars. One was the presence in Bologna of Cardinal Hugolino, later Gregory IX, a nephew of the reigning Pope, Innocent III, who approved of the idea and won the consent of the Bishop of Bologna; the other was the request of the rector of the church, Rudolf of Faenza, to be admitted into the Order.

As often happens opposition came from an unexpected source; in this case it came from the family of Andalo who enjoyed the right of patronage over the church and owned adjacent property necessary for the erection of a convent. Strangely inconsistent with their reputation as promoters of the public good and as generous, pious Christians, they obstinately refused to surrender their rights. Fortunately for the Dominican Friars, they had within the very household of their adversaries a powerful auxiliary in the person of Diana.

Untiring in her efforts she was quick to note and use every favorable occasion for pleading the cause of the Dominican. Now by tears, now by winning smiles, and now by the most persuasive arguments she broke down opposition and finally won the wholehearted, even though slowly given, consent of her family to the new arrangement. The deed of transfer was signed on May 14, 1219, Friar Reginald representing the Dominicans and Peter of Lovello, Diana's grandfather, representing the family of the Andalo.

Since this transfer firmly established the Friar Preachers at Bologna Saint Dominic, with his usual farsightedness, decided that Reginald might be spared to assist another struggling community, and therefore determined to send him to the convent of Our Lady of the Camp in Paris. Realizing that this removal of Reginald to Paris would be keenly felt by the Friars and citizens of Bologna Saint Dominic, in August of the year 1219, went to Bologna to comfort and encourage the brethren in their grief over Reginald's departure. Not only the community but also many of the citizens of Bologna went out to meet Saint Dominic on his arrival. Some of them had not yet seen him but they knew of him for he had visited Bologna before, had multiplied bread there to feed the hungry brethren, and was known as a man of God, a man of boundless charity, a man whose lips bore truth, and whose very presence was a benediction. Although his eloquence was not, like Reginald's, a rushing torrent sweeping everything before him or a sword ruthlessly cutting down all obstacles in his path, his words were full of sweetness, light and vigor – the words of a

Saint, long tried by experience, mature in the ways of God. Every word he spoke planted deep in the hearts of his listeners something of the divine.

Diana, true friend and benefactress of the brethren, was soon introduced to Saint Dominic. His virtue and wisdom immediately won her entire confidence, and it was not long before she made known to him a desire that had been quietly growing in her heart – a desire to consecrate herself to the service of God in religion. After testing her and finding that she had a true vocation, Saint Dominic permitted her to make a vow of virginity and assured her that he would help her enter a convent of Dominican Sisters as soon as her parents consented. Diana took this vow solemnly before the altar of Saint Nicholas in the presence of Friars Reginald, Guala, and Rudolf of Faenza.

Not long after Diana's self-consecration to God Reginald left for Paris. He was no stranger there. The students still spoke of his learning, but now he was to edify them by his holiness and electrify them by his preaching. Here as in Bologna his unremitting apostolic labors were attended with the same marvelous results. All too soon however his earthly career came to a close. He had not even time to clothe with the habit of Saint Dominic two of his most learned and virtuous disciples, Henry of Cologne and Jordan of Saxony. He knew however that they had been won for God and would do much for the Order. Jordan for instance was destined to become the successor of Saint Dominic, to bring the Order to the zenith of its power, and to be the friend and director of Diana and her fellow-sisters in the convent of Saint Agnes at Bologna.

Under the guidance of Saint Dominic, Diana made rapid progress in the spiritual life. Externally she kept up the appearance of a lady of the world; inwardly she lived the life of a religious consecrated to God. In a spirit of self-denial and penance she wore an iron chain around her body, rose early, and prayed or worked in silence in her room until nine o'clock. The rest of the day she spent with her family and friends, especially with those ladies who had assisted at her profession and were becoming her disciples. Thus as in the primitive church there grew up around the convent of the Friars Preachers at Bologna a group of the faithful who had but one heart and one soul.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE VOCATION OF A DOMINICAN NUN

Diana was ill at ease. Not that there was anything blameworthy in her life, for she was following the directions of Saint Dominic, but because she found herself forced to take part in the vanities of a world that she wished to abandon. This division of her days between God and the world became more and more irksome for her as she learned to appreciate better the happiness of those who had given up all things for the love of God. Diana therefore renewed her petitions to Saint Dominic, pleading for permission to fly from the noise of the world to the quiet of the cloister. She begged him to found at Bologna a convent like that of the nuns at Prouille. There were many young ladies, she affirmed, willing to join her, and being sure of the consent and cooperation of her parents she pledged herself to furnish the necessary resources.

Saint Dominic placed the matter before brethren. Ordinarily, unless inspired by an interior light, he never acted without consulting them. Moreover he wanted their approval of this plan to build a convent for nuns with all the privileges of a house of the Order because that would assure the nuns constant help and direction even when he was absent. The brethren left the proposal to his good judgment. Instead of making his decision immediately the Saint replied: "*I must first*



*consult the Lord. We shall decide tomorrow."* Just as Christ before choosing His Apostles prayed to His heavenly Father throughout the night, so too, Saint Dominic spent that night in prayer. Then he assembled the brethren and said with the firm accents of one inspired by God *"My brothers, by all means a convent for nuns be erected here, even at the risk of leaving our own convent unfinished."*

The reasons why Saint Dominic was so eager to found a convent of nuns at Bologna can be gathered from the story of his conflict with the Albigenses. During his stay among them, he noticed what an important part women played in the spread of this heresy. The heretics made special efforts to win over ladies, especially those of high birth and good education. Those who dedicated themselves wholly to the work of the heretics were admitted to the rank of *"the perfect,"* given a special habit and placed in a convent to lead a sort of religious life. What powerful help these so-called Sisters gave can easily be imagined! They threw over heresy a cloak of sanctity, they became the spiritual guides of the lower classes of women, guarded the money collected for the work of propaganda, gave hospitality to and facilitated secret unions of the heretics. It sometimes takes fire to combat fire. Saint Dominic was soon convinced that the best methods to counteract the influence of these heretical convents was to found others for women of the true faith. By their pure, holy, and charitable lives the Sisters would diffuse far and wide the sweet odor of christian perfection; they would be beacon-lights of christian truth in

the country round about; they would further the cause of truth by providing an asylum for women converted from heresy and by educating young girls in the practices of virtue, thereby preparing them either to enter the cloister or to be the centers of Catholic life in the world.

Saint Dominic was meditating on these things even before he founded the Order of Preachers. Divine Providence showed its approval of his plans by sending his first postulants, nine ladies of noble birth just converted from heresy and anxious to be under his direction. God gave him a sign where the convent should be built. On the feast of Saint Mary Magdalen, July 22, 1206, after earnest prayer for direction Dominic saw a ball of fire descend and hover over the sanctuary of Our Lady of Prouille near Fanjeaux. Not long after, Dominic also established his first Friars nearby, being assured that there was no better center for their apostolic work than this spot pointed out by God and now a house of continual prayer.

Saint Dominic was not deceived in his high hopes.<sup>1</sup> The exemplary life of these first Sisters, the charm of their virtues, and their burning zeal for the salvation

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<sup>1</sup> In his life of St. Dominic, XVIII, Blessed Jordan says this of the Sisters of Prouille : "To this present day these handmaids of Christ offer a pleasing sacrifice to their Creator. The great vigor of their sanctity and the perfect innocence of their lives make them an example to men, a delight to the angels and pleasing to God." Blessed Humbert says also: "There the handmaids of Christ offered to the Creator a pleasing sacrifice by their strict cloister, punctual observance of the rule, continual silence; now working, now praying, but always with a clean conscience. They increased rapidly in number and merit, diffusing about them the odor of sanctity, and attracting many other women to establish other convents."

of souls merited for them the glorious title of Sisters Preachers. Through them God gave to Saint Dominic as He had to Adam a "*helper like unto himself*."<sup>2</sup> They were *true helpers* especially in the maintenance of the Dominican observances, the full burden of which Dominican nuns are called upon to carry and for which they must so well nourish a taste as to be an inspiration to the Friars whose apostolic work is often a hindrance to the practice of such observances.<sup>3</sup> They were *helpers like unto himself*, for they applied themselves so well to the work of becoming a living image of Saint Dominic that one who learned the secret of their prayer, observed the stamp of their work, heard them speak, or even saw them pass, could not help but say: "*There is the finger of Saint Dominic, there is his heart, there are his works, and there are his children.*"

This is the kind of work Diana dreamed about and loved, the work she was already doing but wished to have established in a convent under the direction and with the blessing of the Church. Every word of Saint Dominic fanned the flame already burning in her heart. She was filled with joy at the thought that the fourth Dominican convent for women would be founded on

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<sup>2</sup> Saint Albert the Great says that the figurative sense of this passage is far more true than the literal. For instance, the Blessed Virgin as Co-redemptrix was more of a help to Jesus, the second Adam, than Eve had been to the first Adam at the beginning of the world. So too in the Church pious women have a great work to do, and many of her greatest successes are due to their devotion.

<sup>3</sup> Thus did Blessed John Dominici write to the Sisters of the Corpus Domini, a convent he himself had founded : "How I envy your state of life, you who are cloistered and may not leave ! When may I return to my own city of Castello and enjoy the seclusion of my cell!"

the domain of her ancestors, and that it would be her work.

Just at this time Saint Dominic was obliged to leave Bologna for Rome. In order not to delay the work he left Friars Guala, Ventura of Verona, and Rudolph of Faenza in charge. Ventura was he who later heard the deathbed confession of Saint Dominic and vouched that the Saint had never lost his baptismal innocence. Rudolph had the honor of holding the Saint's head and wiping away the sweat of death. Guala saw the departing soul of Saint Dominic ascend into heaven. These Friars carefully developed the plans of Saint Dominic and were ready to begin the work when they unexpectedly met with a twofold opposition. First, the Bishop of Bologna refused his consent because the site did not appear suitable for a convent, and then Diana's parents stoutly refused to furnish the money for the undertaking. They also opposed Diana's plans for giving up the world and entering a convent. Many parents at this time considered themselves justified in determining whether or not their daughters should enter the convent with absolutely no consideration of their daughters' wishes. What the motives of Diana's parents were we do not know, but some ancient documents suggest that they already had planned a brilliant marriage for her.

Disappointed but by no means discouraged, Diana made vigorous use of the same means she had already used to induce her parents to sell their property to the brethren, but this time everything failed. Patience, prayers, tears, tenderness, and pleading proved in vain. Her persevering petitions received no answer but

abuse, reproach, and contradiction. In order to appreciate what this girl had to suffer on seeing her plans of founding a Dominican convent pitilessly and, as it seemed, irrevocably ruined it is necessary to understand how great are the attractions of the religious life to a sensitive, loving, generous soul, ever more and more enlightened as to the nothingness of the world. Moreover nothing in her childhood had accustomed her to the abuse she now had to endure. What was she to do? Give up her plan of entering the religious life? No, never! Suffering made her detest the world more than ever and increased her love for God. To give up her Divine Spouse now that He appeared to her despised and crowned with thorns was unthinkable. It might be impossible for her to erect a new convent or even to enter a community of Dominican Sisters, but she was still bound by her vow to enter religion. In order to keep that vow she made up her mind to enter some convent with a spirit and observances similar to those of the Dominicans. And if later a convent of Dominican Sisters should be erected in Bologna, well, she would be one of the first to enter it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> At that time it was not difficult to pass from one community to another and sometimes whole communities embraced the Dominican rule.

## CHAPTER V

### A GIRL WHO DARED

Not far from Bologna was a convent of Benedictine Sisters, called Saint Gregory's. Diana sought admittance to this convent hoping to find peace and the helps necessary to pursue the work of perfection. The Sisters of Saint Gregory's however dashed Diana's hopes by positively refusing to receive her, because they feared either the instability of Diana or more probably the wrath of her family. Checked again but still dauntless, Diana turned for help to a friend of Saint Dominic, the Friar Alberto Spinola.

At the foot of the Apennines, a few miles from Bologna stood a hill called Ronzano, an ideal spot for a cloister. The pure air and fertile soil insured the physical well-being of the Sisters, and the deep ravines, the far-distant horizons cut off by the blue Adriatic on the one side, and the white peaks of the Alps to the other, could not but raise their minds to God. In 1209 a pious woman of Bologna dedicated the hill to God by building thereon a chapel in honor of the Blessed Trinity. To the chapel she added a little convent

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. Marguerite Aron, "Un Animateur de la Jeunesse au XIII Siecle," p. 143. She identifies him with the "Brother Albert of happy memory," spoken of in the "Lives of the Brethren" (cfr. Eng. Trans. p. 70) who was a great friend of Saint Dominic and received from him an assurance of soon following him to heaven.

wherein she and other women of her own tastes dwelt apart from the distractions of the world. Later the chapel and convent were enlarged and given over to an order of nuns called the Canonesses of Saint Augustine of the Congregation of Saint Mark. These Sisters looked to Friar Alberto Spinola as their founder and director. At his request therefore they consented to receive Diana, but first she must find a way to go to Ronzano without making known her real intentions.

On the twenty-second of July 1220, Diana invited some of her friends to make a pilgrimage to Ronzano as a fitting way of celebrating the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalen. The proposal was accepted immediately. It would be a lark and at the same time give them an opportunity of a quiet talk with some of the nuns whom all loved and respected. As the young folk galloped off, no suspicion of any ulterior motive entered into the minds of Diana's people or her companions. Imagine then the surprise of her companions when, on their arrival at Ronzano, they saw Diana enter the cloister, receive the habit, and come back to the grille to bid adieu to friends! A messenger was sent immediately to her parents to let them know what had happened. How her people received the news you may easily guess! To see them as they rode wildly, in full armor, across the plain, one would think they were out to take an armed city instead of storming a convent of defenseless nuns. Angrily they ordered Diana to take off her habit and return with them to Bologna. She refused, tried to reason with them, begged with tears to be allowed to remain in her chosen retreat; but her people were inflexible. When words failed they used

force; Diana resisted, and in the struggle one of her ribs was broken. She was brought home, a victim of her love for God and virginity.

Diana was bedridden for almost a year; in fact she never fully recovered, but the physical pain she suffered was little in comparison with the mental anguish she had to endure. Her plans were ruined; her people cold and harsh; she was not even permitted to see any of the Dominican Friars to whom she might have unburdened her heart and received advice and consolation. It was only when Saint Dominic came back to Bologna that a little joy penetrated her prison wall. Her courage filled him with admiration and her sufferings moved him to compassion. Unable to pay her a visit he sought and found opportunity for sending her letters. He encouraged her to carry her cross patiently and to persevere in her vocation. He exhorted her to place all her confidence in God, quite assured that He would enable her to realize her wishes. How Diana must have read and reread these letters, heavensent, full of light, love, and fire! Hope revived in her heart. But alas, for Diana, another cross was being 'prepared for her. Even when writing these lines Saint Dominic was prey to the fever that was to take his life. In fact he died on the sixth of August 1221, a day of eternal joy for him, but for Diana a day of deepest grief, a fitting close to her year of suffering.

By taking Saint Dominic from her at this time God forced Diana to drink her chalice of sorrow to the last bitter dreg. God seemed to have enkindled in her heart this strong desire to enter religion only to desert 'her just when all the world was against her, when she



most needed light and support. One day He might give her some consolation, but the next He would take it away. Truly could she cry out: *"My God, Thou knowest that I love Thee and that I wish to belong to Thee alone. Why then has death twice taken away my guides and counsellors? Friar Reginald has long departed and now Thou dost rob me of Dominic, my father, my strength, my only consolation. What dolt Thou desire of me? What pleasure canst Thou find in rejecting a heart that seeks Thee so sincerely? If my desires are good, why dost Thou not grant them? If Thou dost not judge me worthy to realize them, why dost Thou not take them away from me? Yet, Lord, take them not away from me, for I love them; increase them rather, even though Thou mayest see fit to delay their realization for Thy greater honor and glory. O mysterious hope that grows in the face of difficulties, that consoles even when it desolates the soul, I feel that Holy Spirit has infused Thee into my heart and that I shall not be confounded! With Thee, O Lord, all is won just when all seems lost."*

## CHAPTER VI

### HOPES REALIZED

As soon as Diana recovered, her thoughts turned back to Ronzano which appealed to her as the ideal place to begin her life as a religious. It was dear to her because of memories of her struggle there with her family and because of reminiscences of Saint Dominic, who, tradition tells us, had visited the place and planted in the square before the Church two cypress trees-trees that grew to gigantic proportions and were cut down only during the anti-clerical revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century. Diana would have loved the place still more had she known that her brother, Lodrengo, the founder of the Fratres Gaudenti, was to spend the last twenty-six years of his life there in preparation for death, and that still later it was to be the site of a Dominican Priory, the place to which Friar Vincent Orsini, later Benedict XIII, fled from the honors and responsibilities of the cardinalate.

For Diana, thought was only the prelude to action; on the eve of All Saints, 1221, she escaped from her prison and returned to Ronzano. This time her parents left her in peace. Perhaps their cruel treatment made Diana no longer capable of shining in society; perhaps they surrendered to the dictates of affection and holy faith. At least Diana could begin her trial of the re-

ligious life, while patiently awaiting the foundation of a convent for Dominican nuns in Bologna.

Not long after God sent Diana a new guide and protector, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, then Provincial of Lombardy, of which Bologna was the capital. Jordan had already won great fame as a teacher and mathematician by the time the Dominicans came to Paris. Their piety, zeal, and manner of life appealed to him, and no doubt his meeting with Saint Dominic in 1219 made a deep impression upon his soul. Some months later he made into the hands of Blessed Reginald a vow to enter the Order but did not receive the habit until February 12, 1220, a few days after the death of Blessed Reginald. Because his brethren appreciated his talents Jordan was sent to the General Chapter held at Bologna on May 17, 1221. At that General Chapter Jordan was appointed Father Provincial of Lombardy, surely a charge very sacred to him, for there Saint Dominic had labored much and carefully, there he had died and was buried before Jordan could begin his administrative duties, and there Jordan was to find Diana, a cherished daughter both of Dominic and Reginald, the girl who knew how to will and to dare in the service of God.

Jordan's refined spirit could not fail to sympathize with the courage and devotion of Diana and he understood the role that the Sisters were to play, according to Saint Dominic's plans, in the development of the Order and its apostolic work. He soon set to work therefore to overcome the difficulties in the way of founding a convent of nuns, which did not prove so hard after

all, for no one could long withstand him. His noble carriage, affable manners, great learning, and undeniable sanctity gave him a charm that was irresistible. It was not long before the Andalo family promised to give their hearty cooperation to the project; the Bishop's opposition melted away when a new site was proposed, an oratory situated on a hill near the gate of Saint Proculus, that had been dedicated to Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr.

Since the grounds about the oratory were not spacious enough for all the requirements of conventual life, additional plots of ground were bought, but before these transactions were concluded, the convent was begun. It was very small, the Chroniclers tell us, but it was a beginning. Before it was finished Jordan had been chosen Master General of the Order at the General Chapter held at Paris on May 23, 1222.

When, on May 29, 1223, the octave of the Ascension, Diana with four other ladies of Bologna took possession of the new convent of Saint Agnes, she saw the dawn of a new day in her life. A month later, on the Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, she and her companions received the habit, the white tunic and scapular, and the black veil, from the hands of Blessed Jordan. Diana's heart was full of joy for now the promises of Saint Dominic were fulfilled and her hopes realized. This was a small beginning, but with Blessed Diana as soul and mainstay of the convent of Saint Agnes although never its superior, it acquired a momentum that in time made it famous not only because of its beautiful buildings but also because of the

number and quality of its members.<sup>1</sup> But the glory of those succeeding years never eclipsed that of the first days, when it was only a roughly built house, peopled by a few Sisters, heroic souls matured in tribulation and offering to God the first ardent affections of their religious life, under the impulse of those first graces that are never replaced. The convent of Saint Agnes was a continual source of comfort and joy to Blessed Jordan. It made him say later that "of all the cities of Lombardy, Tuscany, France, England, Provence and even almost of Germany, Bologna is, as it were, the unique and most sweet patrimony of my heart."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At one time there were as many as one hundred and fifty Sisters at Saint Agnes'. Many of these religious belonged to the nobility. The Chronicles of the convent tell of the favors granted to several of the Sisters. To one of them, a lay-Sister, feeling repugnance at the hard work she was obliged to do, Our Lord appeared, covered with scourges and bearing His Cross and saying "Behold, My daughter, My great suffering." This vision was a life-long inspiration to her.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 41, 1233.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **SISTERLY HELP**

The making of a religious is not a mere matter of time; it is a growth, in a particular form of the spiritual life that is quick or slow according to the amount of grace that God bestows, the qualities of soul possessed by the novice, and the ability of the director. Time and careful direction are necessary for the formation of one entering a community already established, and they are needed in a special degree by those who are called upon by God to be foundresses of a new community, by those whose task it will be not merely to follow along ways of spiritual life clearly marked out for them, but to tread a new path and to lead others safely along it. Moreover, if their foundations are to wax strong and be a source of Catholic Action for all times and in all places the original impulse given to new communities by a founder needs support and new supplies of energy from others—that is, the ideas, natural talents, and supernatural graces of the founders must be balanced by the lights and inspirations, natural and supernatural, of others experienced in the religious life and Catholic Action. So great is this need of balance in effort and inspiration, particularly at the outset of a new foundation, that God Himself at times takes a hand in promoting such a stabilization. The foundress then finds herself placed

under the direction of a stranger who may possibly introduce new ideas and new ways. This may surprise and pain the foundress and her first companions, this may be a big cross, but all in all it serves, according to God's Providence, as a baptism, a second birth, for the new community. Through the fires of this purification the new foundation emerges thoroughly supernaturalized. In it God, in all fullness, reigns alone.<sup>1</sup>

Blessed Diana knew well the need of such spiritual formation for herself and her companions. That is why she was so eager to be under the immediate direction and jurisdiction of the Dominicans; that is why she so continually sought counsel from Blessed Jordan; that is why she was always so happy to see him come to Bologna, so miserable when he left; that, too, is why Blessed Jordan kept writing to her. His direction would have been sufficient had Blessed Diana founded the first convent of Dominican Sisters. But she had not; there were several others in existence in which already was growing a Dominican spirit and tradition, not yet old enough to be fixed in set rules and constitutions, but better still, living and vibrating with the impulse of Saint Dominic himself. To these convents Blessed Jordan and Blessed Diana turned their eyes and made an appeal for spiritual assistance.

The circumstances that led to the foundation of the first convent of Dominican nuns, that of Prouille in France, have already been told. The second, that of

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<sup>1</sup> This is interestingly exemplified in the life of Victoire Therese Chupin, commonly known as "Bonne Mère," foundress of a community of Dominican Sisters in Paris, cfr. *Bonne Mère*, by Allivier, O.P. Eng. Trans.

Saint Sixtus in Rome, was also the personal work of Saint Dominic. For a long time there had been but little religious discipline among the women who wore a religious habit in Rome. These Sisters belonged to different convents but they did not live a community life. Prayers and penance was the work to which they had dedicated themselves, but it was an art they had never really learned or if they had it was almost forgotten by them. Pope Innocent III had tried in vain to reform conditions by gathering these religious in cloistered convents under a uniform rule and discipline; he found it easier to dominate emperors than to bend the wills of women. It was a work that called for patience, tact, and a gentle firmness of a rare quality. To Honorius III, Innocent's successor, Saint Dominic seemed to have the necessary gifts; his eloquence and sanctity had already won for him a power over souls in the holy city. Therefore he commissioned Saint Dominic to reform these convents in Rome, and gave him the support and assistance of three Cardinals.

Saint Dominic found himself beset with many difficulties; only small groups here and there would listen to him. In order to provide a convent where these groups could enter upon their new life in peace, he transferred his brethren from Saint Sixtus to the church of Santa Sabina and gave over the convent of Saint Sixtus to the Sisters. The first group brought thither were the Sisters of Our Lady in Trastevere who had been won over to the reform by the example of Blessed Cecilia Cesarini, a young religious of great talents and high aspirations. But they had consented to the transfer only on condition that they might bring the picture



of Our Lady, long revered at Trastevere, to Saint Sixtus and keep it with them. Shortly after their installation the picture was brought to them, but by night, for fear of the people who might resent the loss of what they looked upon as their treasure also. Somehow or other the news was spread about, and what was to be done in secret became a public procession. It must have been a wonderful sight; Saint Dominic, with a Cardinal at each side of him, followed by a long line of devout people all barefoot and bearing lighted torches, carrying the picture of Our Lady; the reception of the picture by the Sisters who, barefoot, also, came to meet the procession at the doors of their chapel at Saint Sixtus; the solemn installation of the venerated picture in the chapel itself. As Saint Dominic had foretold the picture of Saint Mary of Trastevere remained at the convent of Saint Sixtus.<sup>2</sup> The Sisters taking this as a sign of approval from Our Lady, gladly accepted the cloister, the Dominican rule and habit.

Happy were these Sisters who placed themselves under Saint Dominic's care. Like a true father he spared no effort to promote their spiritual and temporal welfare. When in Rome, even though the day had been laborious, he would come evening after evening to visit

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<sup>2</sup> This picture had long been venerated in Rome as the work of Saint Luke. During the pontificate of Saint Gregory the Great it was carried through the streets of Rome to allay a terrible pestilence. Several attempts had been made to transfer it from Trastevere to some other church, but it was always carried back by some invisible hand. That is why the Sisters regarded its remaining at Saint Sixtus as a sign from our Blessed Lady.

them; on his journeys he would collect little things that he knew would please them; he consoled them when sick, strengthened the weak and encouraged the strong, brought them wine to drink and even miraculously increased it that all might partake; most of all, however, he took the greatest care to teach them the ceremonies of the Church and the ways of the spiritual life. In order to help him in his work he called seven Sisters from the convent of Prouille, one of whom, Sister Blanche, a religious of great talents and high merit, he placed at the head of this new community that soon *grew* to number over a hundred Sisters.<sup>3</sup>

Saint Sixtus was naturally the convent to which Blesseds Jordan and Diana first looked for help. It was near, Roman, and possessed of a doubly Dominican Tradition, its own and that of Prouille. Hardly had Diana and her companions received the habit when Friars Rudolph and Guala were sent to Rome to present the request of the Sisters of Saint Agnes to the Sisters of Saint Sixtus for spiritual assistance. From a letter written by Blessed Jordan to Blessed Diana in August 1223, we know that the nuns of Saint Sixtus were willing to be of help to their younger Sisters in religion,<sup>4</sup> but the plan failed because Pope Honorius, fearful of losing even one of the examples of virtue at Saint Sixtus refused to permit any of the nuns to leave

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Chronicles of Prouille, Sister Blanche was a native of Toulouse. She had been married, but husband and wife separated by mutual consent to become religious. She was known for her love of silence and recollection, and is said to have taught her Sisters to make known their wants by signs and gestures to help them to overcome the loquacity to which women are prone. Annals of the Order, I, p. 562.

<sup>4</sup> cfr. Letter 5.

Rome. Then Blessed Jordan turned to Prouille where he found the same spirit of helpful cooperation<sup>5</sup> but from a letter written in January 1224, we learn that it was found inexpedient to send any Sisters from Prouille.<sup>6</sup>

The reason why Sisters were not sent from Prouille may have been due to a hope that Pope Honorius would change his mind. The Pope's refusal to allow Sisters from Saint Sixtus to go to Bologna had not discouraged Friars Rudolph and Guala. They turned for help to Cardinal Hugolino, the friend of Saint Dominic and Diana, who was always ready to take up their cause. Unable to refuse the repeated requests of one so deserving of his consideration as Cardinal Hugolino, Pope Honorius granted the petition. Moreover in spirit of magnanimity worthy of a Pope he went in person to Saint Sixtus, convoked the Sisters, and after telling them how much he regretted to lose even one of them, added that since he could no longer refuse to grant a favor for which so many were asking and one they themselves were willing to accord, they must choose under obedience and send the four Sisters whom they believed best fitted for the great work entrusted to them. The Sisters chosen were Cecilia, Amata Romana, Constantia and Theodora.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> cfr. Letter 7.

<sup>6</sup> cfr. Letter 10.

<sup>7</sup> Of these Sisters the best known is Blessed Cecilia. She was only seventeen years of age when she came under the direction of Saint Dominic. Saint Dominic highly appreciated her noble aspirations and powers of direction. The chronicles of Saint Sixtus tell how he gave to her two of the spoons of cypress brought from Spain "as if to point out that she was to serve sweet nourishment to two convents."

Joyous was the reception given them by Diana and her companions. They read with eagerness the rule brought to them, a rule not yet complete but pulsating with the spirit of Saint Dominic and recording the high ideals of the first Sisters.<sup>8</sup> This rule insisted upon the mutual love that should bind them together in God and a uniformity of observance that would bring beauty and order into their varied activities. The virtue of justice, that guardian of the law, restorer of disturbed order, and protector of the common good, received due consideration in the list of carefully graded faults supplemented by a list of as prudently chosen penances. A Sister who freely confessed her faults was to be treated more leniently than one who hid them; deliberate or habitual faults were more severely penanced than others; a deliberate lie or the habitual breaking of silence, for instance, was classed and penanced as a grave fault. Other points were regulated with the same care and prudence: the fasts and abstinences, the celebrations of the various feasts of the church, the hours of public and private prayer. Idleness was discouraged; prayer and work were to follow one upon the other. Murmuring over food and clothing was not to be tolerated. No one was to be received as a member of the community before she was eleven years old. For special reasons the Sisters could take charge of young girls until they were fourteen years of age; but after that they must either become Sisters or leave the convent. The cloister was to be

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<sup>8</sup> The text of this rule is found in the seventh volume of the Bullarium of the Order. It was sent by Gregory IX to the Sisters of Saint Mary Magdalen in Germany.

kept strictly; whenever necessity or the rule permitted any one to enter, he or she was always to be under surveillance of two of the older Sisters. A crown of immortal glory was promised to those who were faithful to the rule.

Diana and her companions not only accepted the written rule of Saint Sixtus, but they strove earnestly to imitate the example of the Sisters placed over them, to acquire the spirit, and to live according to the ideals that had vivified the communities at Prouille and Saint Sixtus. Behind their cloistered walls they strove to be a city apart. Within, there was a continuous exchange of gifts between heaven and earth: God sending down His graces and inspirations, they offering up their hearts and work. Penance broke the last links that might bind them unduly to earth, obedience kept them safe in their upward climb, charity made them mutually helpful along the way. The hours of prayer, public and private, enkindled and inflamed in them the fire of Divine Love, made them long to be loosed from the bonds of earth that they might join in the psalmody of the heavenly choirs. Within these cloister walls heaven and earth met, the natural and supernatural joined forces, as God had planned for man from the beginning. As in every city the talents and dispositions of the inhabitants are many and diverse so was it in this convent, but unlike most cities diversity of dispositions did not make this city apart a prey to factions. The Sisters were truly united by something that could not be seen but only felt, that could not be described, but nevertheless compelled reverence-it was the common spirit, breathed upon them by God

through Saint Dominic, a spirit that dominated and united all without effacing any of the qualities peculiar to each soul, a spirit that burned away the egoism of fallen nature only to make more brilliant the gifts and graces given by God to each individual.

The progress made by these Sisters of Saint Agnes in the spiritual life can be ascertained from the letters of Blessed Jordan who wove in with his words of direction and encouragement expressions of satisfaction over their loyal correspondence with the graces given them. Three of these Sisters distinguished themselves in a special way: Blessed Amata Romana whose vocation was the hidden life performed her ordinary duties with extraordinary perfection; Blessed Cecilia, a fervent soul ready for any emergency, was an accomplished directress; and above all, Blessed Diana, the foundress and soul of the community and yet never its superior, wore herself out seeking the welfare of her Sisters and ardently striving for sanctity. These three indeed personified qualities necessary in community life: sincere humility, an authority firm and prudent, and perfect charity.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE FIRES OF PURIFICATION

Whom God loveth He chasteneth. God sends trials to all those He loves; to some at the beginning of their lives; to others at its close; to still others frequently throughout the years of their pilgrimage at intervals that alternate with periods of peace and joy.<sup>1</sup> To Diana, because she was to attain heroic sanctity, was apportioned a continual and large share of the sufferings of the Cross. With Saint Francis Assisi she could say: *"The Lord has made me a target for His arrows; He has imprisoned me with His lances."*<sup>2</sup>

At one time she was terrified by the perils of war that endangered her and her foundation. Bologna, because of its attachment to the Pope, incurred the anger of Frederick II who in revenge suppressed its university

(1225) and made preparations to besiege it. The convent of Saint Agnes lay just outside the walls of the city, the center of fire from either side, and prey of a soldiery well schooled by their master in the art of desecrating anything dedicated to God. In her terror Diana naturally turned to Blessed Jordan, confident that he had but to go and speak to the Emperor and all

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<sup>1</sup> "The Imitation of Christ," 2, 9, 4 warns us of this that we may not be too much uplifted in times of joy or too downcast in time of tribulation.

<sup>2</sup> cfr. The Office of the Saint.

would be well. From Paris Blessed Jordan sent the following answer:

*"I have just heard of the tribulations and distress of the city of Bologna and of thee and thy Sisters. I am all the more deeply grieved over it because I know of no counsel or alleviation to give you in this affair except that which could benefit you from my prayers, sinner that I am, and from those of our brethren. I am confident these will be efficacious in the sight of God, for He is not accustomed to repel in time of need the prayers of His servants or to turn His ear from their supplications. Do not, therefore, be afraid, dearest . . . but be firm and strong, for Thy spouse is Emmanuel (God with us) Who does not desert those hoping in Him, as He Himself promised unto the consummation of the world."*

We know from an account in the *"Lives of the Brethren"* that Blessed Jordan was not afraid to meet and speak openly to the Emperor, but it was not prudent for him to interfere at just this time. *"The Emperor is a man who knows not how to respect or listen to religious, but rather, as he says, it is painful for him even to see them."* Then in order to distract her attention from the perils of war Jordan added news of the success of the Order in France: "I do not wish thee to be ignorant of the grace that the Lord has given the Order. . . . Even the Queen most tenderly loves': the brethren; she spoke in person with me quite familiarly concerning these affairs."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> cfr. Letter 17. *Lives of the Brethren*, p. 120-121, Eng. Trans.



As Jordan had promised, the Sisters were protected from all insults and misfortune during these troublesome times. Then another cross came to afflict Diana in respect to her Sisters' welfare which was even dearer to her than her own. They were feeling the privations of an extreme poverty. From the beginning they had had to depend on occasional gifts of charity. At first such gifts were sufficient for their needs. Then social troubles impoverished their benefactors, or people thought them sufficiently provided for, or the charity of the public was no longer stimulated by the novelty of their foundation. In any case they were now in distress, and no one seemed to care.

This state of affairs lasted until 1230. Then Providence, touched by their suffering and filial confidence, came to their help in an unexpected way. Pope Gregory IX commanded that the lands belonging to an almost extinct monastery directly under his jurisdiction be turned over to the Sisters of Saint Agnes. The document of transfer runs as follows: "*Considering the great needs of the poor Sisters of Saint Agnes who, have distinguished themselves by their honorable life, great devotion, and fervor and therefore deserve help, We give over to you, Orbano, procurator of the aforementioned Sisters, for the honor of God, of the Virgin Mary, of Saint Agnes, and of all the Saints, and as a sign of deference to the Pope, all the rights and possessions belonging to the monastery of Saint Adalbert, assigning and granting the usufruct therefore, for the support of the aforesaid Sisters. November 13, 1230.*"

In return the Sisters promised to give each year a pound of wax to the monastery.

Diana also suffered keenly from the loss of members of her family who were very dear to her; her brother Brancaleon died in 1225, her sister, Otha, in 1227, and her father, perhaps in 1229. Brancaleon was her favorite brother and a truly noble man. The Annals of Genoa, of which city he was mayor, speak of him as a *"fine and clever soldier."* Despite his delicate constitution he was always at the head of his troops in the frequent wars then waged. He died, universally regretted, of wounds received in the victorious battle fought near Asti against an invading enemy.

During these days of grief Jordan proved himself a true friend. As soon as he heard of Brancaleon's death he sent Friar Bernard to Diana and her people, with a beautiful letter of consolation. *"I pray and beseech Him to console the agony of your hearts, Who consoles His own in all their tribulations. It behooves us to have some sorrow in this life, as Saint Peter says, that we may become somewhat like to Him Who said: 'My soul is sorrowful even unto death!' Thy brother has been taken away that malice might not change his understanding nor the sham of this world deceive his soul. Do not be too much grieved, my dearest ones, as those who have no hope. Let your hope be full of immortality and ask God to give joy to your hearts."* In a letter that followed soon after, he expressed his joy that Diana had taken his words to heart and did *"not grieve too much"* over the death of her brother. At no time did Jordan forget that Brancaleon's widow, mother and sister also needed consolation; in fact he wrote a third letter begging Diana and her community *in your charity to take special care to bestow upon the*

widowed Lady Jacobin as much consolation as you can." <sup>4</sup>

The death of Diana's sister, Otha, occurred at about the same time as that of Jordan's dearest friend, Friar Henry of Cologne. It was a double blow; deep were the wounds caused. *"Greet my Lady Otha (Diana's mother)"*, he writes to Diana, *"and tell her that I would like to be with beloved Otha and beloved Henry. O Diana, both of them are better off than thou and I. They are in glory, we in misery; to them the victory, to us the battle; they are in the fatherland, we in exile."* <sup>5</sup>

In comparison with the former letters, that written to Diana on the death of her father is cold and unsympathetic; or is it only austere, expressing sentiments that he knew Diana was now able to understand and accept! *"Those who survive grieve over the death of their friends who die before them,"* he writes, *"but those who die first, just because they are dead, do not grieve over the death of those who die after them. Therefore, dearest, since thou has long preceded thy father in death, (for thou halt long been dead, if thy life has been hidden with Christ in glory while he has just died), it is fitting for thee not to grieve over his death. If thou dost grieve thou must consider thyself as not completely dead. This I do not say as if his death did not affect me; it does affect me, but principally on thy account. Admire the clemency of God Who takes from thee parents by nature, who are mortal, in order to give thee Himself as a spiritual and undying friend. See how He takes*

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<sup>4</sup> cfr. Letters 12, 13, 16.

<sup>5</sup> cfr. Letter 24.

*away what thou canst not hold in order to give thee the Sempiternal Whom thou wilt never lose."*<sup>6</sup>

Diana had another, a still more painful trial to bear, because it came from an unexpected source and accompanied her to the end of her life. It was the fear of being abandoned by the Order to which she had consecrated her energies. This unfraternal attitude toward the convent of Saint Agnes was not prompted by personal hostility to Diana and her companions; it was due to a disinclination on the part of the Friars to continue what was becoming the burdensome work of directing convents of Sisters in general. The avowed work of the Fathers was that of preaching and teaching, and naturally they looked with disfavor upon anything that would take them from the pursuance of their particular mission. Each of these convents, since they were strictly cloistered, called for the assistance of one or more of the Friars to care for its spiritual and temporal welfare; only the best could be assigned to that work. If there had been only a few convents of women the question might not have come up, but to the dismay of many, these convents grew in size and numbers by leaps and bounds. The Fathers saw many of their most capable members taken from the work of preaching and bound hand and foot to the care of Sisters. Possibly the fathers thus bound were loudest in their complaints; this at least is the conclusion that might be drawn from the picturesque and almost hyperbolic words of Blessed John Dominici in a letter to the Sisters of Corpus Christi, a convent he himself

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<sup>6</sup> cfr. Letter 30.

founded. *"Listen to what I have to say," he writes, "and for the love of Jesus Christ have pity on my painful wounds. I find three classes of Sisters, very different alas, in my dear convent of Corpus Christi, of which I am the slave, the servant, and the founder. To the first class belong those Sisters that are enemies of their own will, obedient, eager to do good and love Jesus. To the second belong a little group of lambs, persecuted by the cruel wolf, that is, tempted in various ways by the enemy of mankind. The third is made up of a band of religious who are worldly, proud, haughty, followers of their own wills, enemies of obedience and of the peace. Each one of these three groups pierces their unfortunate pastor with three nails similar to those that held the Lord Jesus Christ to the cross; they are three lances that surround my heart, and no matter in which direction I try to escape I am wounded. Have mercy, O Jesus; have mercy, you also, O Sisters who are the cause of these wounds!"*

Blessed Jordan understood and sympathized with the grievances of his brethren, but he resolutely opposed their radical solution of the problem. Perhaps it was because he understood better than they the role the Sisters were to play, according to Saint Dominic's plans, in the extension of the Order and the furtherance of their apostolic work; he was certainly influenced by his love for Diana and his need of her spiritual assistance. For several years his letters to her alternate with promises of protection and requests for

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<sup>7</sup> From a letter written later, one would surmise that there could be more painful tasks than that of directing Sisters.

prayers. In 1223 he assures her of his own sentiments by saying that he had not called Friar Ventura, her best friend, permanently from Bologna. In 1224 he obtained a decision from the General Chapter and the university of Paris, forbidding the Friars to give up the care of those convents which they had already taken under their direction. But the affair was not yet settled. Some time in 1225 Jordan writes to Diana: *"I am anxious about thee and thy Sisters, and I wish to know about all that may be against you. And thou, dearest daughter, be constant, trusting in the Lord. No matter what may disturb thee, no matter what may weigh thee down, God is in your midst and therefore be not troubled."*<sup>8</sup>

On December 17, 1226, Honorius III signed and sent the following letter to Jordan in favor of the convent of Saint Agnes.

*"Honorius, Bishop, Servant of the servants of God, to our dear son, the Master of the Order of Preachers:- Greetings and the Apostolic Blessing.*

*It has come to our notice that, despite the fact that our dear daughters, Diana, the Foundress, and certain other Sisters of the monastery of Saint Agnes, have made profession according to the manner of the Order of Preachers in the hands of Brother Dominic of holy memory, thy predecessor, with the firm hope and confidence of remaining perpetually under the guidance of the same Order, thou hast as it were abandoned the convent, the Prioress, and the other Sisters; and dost not, much*

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<sup>8</sup> cfr. Letters 5 and 15.

*to our surprise, fulfill in their regard the duties of thy office.*

*In order that these Sisters may not by thy fault be foiled in the hope they had during the life time of thy Predecessor and in conformity to his words and practise of belonging to the Order, We lay it upon thy discretion by Apostolic Letter and command thee to take under thy protection and correction those Sisters and their convent as well as the other houses of the Order confided to thy care.*

*Given at the palace of the Lateran, the sixteenth of the calends of January, in the eleventh year of Our Pontificate."*

This letter was written at the request of Blesseds Jordan and Guala, and we safely surmise that the tone of severity adopted towards Blessed Jordan was prearranged in the hope of softening the opposition of the brethren to the new regulation. The letter was forwarded by Blessed Jordan to Diana with joyful assurances of being "*even more solicitous for their welfare in the future.*" Diana thought she could now sing her "*Nunc Dimittis*" in peace, but in 1229 to her dismay she again found herself "*dropped*" by the Friars at Bologna. In 1228 the General Chapter held at Paris made a decree forbidding the brethren to give on their initiative the religious habit to women or to admit them to profession. The purpose of the decree was merely to check the hasty zeal of some of the brethren. Friar Stephen, Provincial of Lombardy, interpreted it as a command not to profess novices even in Dominican Convents already established. As soon as Blessed

Jordan heard of Friar Stephen's attitude, he sent him a severe letter, blaming him for giving too much credit to wagging tongues, explaining the occasion and purpose of the decree, and bidding him go in person to Saint Agnes Convent and reassure the Sisters of the protection of the Order as the Pope had ordained. To Diana he also wrote in a reassuring tone, explaining the decree and giving her permission to profess the novices in case the Priors would refuse to do so.<sup>9</sup>

The storm broke out again in 1234 and 1235. The brethren seemed to have taken advantage of the absence of Jordan, due to sickness, from the General Chapters of those years to pass decrees commanding the Friars in charge of the various convents of Sisters to return to their own monasteries. The first decree Jordan cancelled.<sup>10</sup> After the second the Sisters rose up in arms and made a united appeal to Pope Gregory IX, formerly Cardinal Hugolino, the friend of Diana, and with Jordan's help they won their case. Diana was no longer troubled on this point, but this curious dissension between the sons and daughters of Saint Dominic was not permanently settled until 1267.<sup>11</sup>

Because of their interest the following letters are appended, which were written by Gregory IX in favor of the convents of Prouille and Madrid at the same time when he confirmed the decree of Honorius III in support of the convent of Saint Agnes of Bologna. The

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<sup>9</sup> cfr. Letters 20, 21, 34, 33.

<sup>10</sup> cfr. Letter 51.

<sup>11</sup> For a complete account of this struggle, Mortier, O.P. Histoire des Maitres Generaux Vol. I.



letter in behalf of the Sisters at Prouille reads as follows:

*"Gregory, Bishop, Servant of the servants of God, to His beloved son, Brother Jordan, Master General of the Order of Preachers; Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.*

*"We know that thou art filled with the desire to pray continually for the salvation of souls. Therefore, We presume that We may seek of thee what We think, according to God, is good for the spiritual progress of Our beloved daughters in Christ, the Prioress and the Sisters of the monastery of the Blessed Mary of Prouille.*

*"Their petition, read before Us, tells Us that they were placed in the aforesaid convent under the inspiration of the admonitions and example of the Blessed Dominic, Master of the aforesaid Order, after they had renounced the vanities of this world and chosen to serve the Lord according to the Rule of the nuns of Saint Sixtus of Rome.*

*"Their petition also stated that up to the present a regulation made by the same Saint in their behalf has been observed, namely, that a Prior and four brethren, clerics of the same Order, should take charge of their temporal and spiritual welfare; but that now this Prior and the clerics with him have refused to preside over them because of some ordinance lately enacted in the General Chapter which forbade the brethren of the Order to take upon themselves the spiritual direction of women. Their intention in this matter seems praiseworthy, but it is not right for them to do away with*

*past arrangements that had their origin in the zeal for perfect charity; moreover it is greatly to be feared that if the accustomed assistance of the brethren be taken away from the Prioress and her community, afflicted as they are by poverty and exposed to frequent attack from the malignant the fruit of their labor will vanish and they will fail to make good progress in the future. Therefore, We beg thy Devotion, earnestly exhort thee, and notwithstanding the aforementioned ordinance command thee by Apostolic Letter, out of reverence to the Blessed Virgin and Saint Dominic (whose foundation deserves to be so watered with the dew of salvation as not to be injured by any violence of the storm), to bid the Friars who had the care of these Sisters reassume their work of directing the aforesaid Prioress and her Community, for they were the first of all those who turned to the aforesaid Order that Saint Dominic led by his holy teaching from the tempestuous waters of this world to the haven of security. May Our command be so fulfilled that they may obtain what they so fittingly demand and thou receive the abundance of the grace of eternal benediction. Given at Viterbo, the IX of the Calends of April."*

The letter in behalf of the Sisters at Madrid read as follows:

*"Gregory, Bishop, Servant of the servants of God, to His beloved sons, the Master General and Prior Provincial of the Friars Preachers of the Province of Spain:-Greetings and the Apostolic Benediction.*

*"By Our beloved daughters **in** Christ of the convent and monastery of cloistered nuns of Saint Dominic at*

*Madrid, it has been made known to Us that you, and the Definitors of your order, have deliberately and for no good reason taken away a few days ago the several Friars whom Saint Dominic, the Founder of your Order, had commanded to be placed over the aforesaid monastery in order to hear the confessions of the Sisters and to refresh them with spiritual food. For this reason they have been forced to call to their help secular priests, whose celebration of the sacred rites they attend with devotion, but from whom they refuse to receive the Sacraments and the spiritual direction of their souls, because of an ordinance made to them by Saint Dominic. Wherefore, by Apostolic Authority We command you to assign without delay and to depute to care for them some of the brethren, who by their wise counsels will be able to give them spiritual instruction and train them in the regular observances. Given at Viterbo, VII of the Ides of April, in the tenth year of Our Pontificate."*

The ordinance of Saint Dominic to which reference was made in the preceding decree was given orally, or it is a free interpretation of the following letter written by the Saint to the nuns at Madrid.

*"Brother Dominic, Master of the Order of Preachers, to our very dear Prioress and convent of Sisters at Madrid:-Greetings and increase of virtue.*

*f" We rejoice very much and We give thanks to God for the fervor of your holy lives, that God has drawn you from the evil of this world. Fight incessantly, daughters, by your prayers and fasts, against your ancient enemy, for she only receives the crown who fights correctly. Up to the present you have not had the con-*

*vent suitable for observing all the practices of our religious life, but you no longer can make such an excuse for you have, thank God, rooms sufficient for the complete carrying out of the regular observance. I command you, therefore, to observe silence in the places ordained, namely, in the choir, the refectory, and the dormitory, and to live in the others according to your constitutions. No one is to leave the monastery, nor is any secular person to enter the convent, except the Bishop, or some prelate to preach or to make a public visitation. Do not omit the disciplines or the vigils, and obey your Prioress. Do not be occupied with talking with one another, nor lose time in vain and useless conversations. And because we cannot relieve your temporal needs, we do not wish to be a burden to you, or to permit any Friar but only the Prioress with the consent of her counsel to have the power of receiving novices. We also command our very dear brother, Mannes, who hath labored much in this convent of yours and hath joined you in this most holy state to dispose, regulate, and ordain all things as it seems most helpful for you to live holily and religiously. We give him the power and jurisdiction to visit and correct you, to remove the Prioress, if necessary, with the consent of the greater part of the nuns and to dispense in all things as he judges necessary. Farewell."*

## CHAPTER IX

### THE GENTLE COUNSELLOR

Blessed Jordan was continually occupied with many affairs. He taught Holy Scripture to the brethren; preached to University students; presided over fifteen general chapters of the Order; organized missions in far-off countries; spent months travelling on foot visiting the convents of Italy, France, England and Germany; promoted the affairs of the Order with ecclesiastical superiors; acted as ambassador to Saint Louis of France and Frederic of Germany. All this he did without curtailing his hours of prayer, despite a delicate constitution and frequent attacks of malignant fever! This throws clearer light on the depth of a devotion and love that prompted him to care continually for the material and spiritual welfare of Diana and her associates. When at Bologna he never failed to instruct and encourage them to their great happiness. He could not be there long or frequently, but God, Who arranges all things for the good of those who love Him,<sup>1</sup> permitted this in order that they and we might have some fifty letters that throb with the warmth of his loving heart. And such letters! Despite the fact that they were written in haste, at irregular intervals, from the four corners of the world, they are in perfect accord; their dominant note is love of neigh-

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. St. Paul to the Romans, 8. 28.

bor; their fundamental note is love of God, and in particular love of Jesus, the Savior and Bridegroom of souls.

These letters of Blessed Jordan, so profound, so expressive, so naive and gracious, manifest such a love for the neighbor, and especially such an affection for Diana, that some might take alarm. Some may fear that this example will serve as a pretext to excuse dangerous, natural friendships that may, and sometimes do, lurk under the cover of spiritual direction and gratitude for assistance received. A distinction must be made between the holy affection that has so beautifully united not a few of the servants of God from that natural sentiment which is founded only on conformity of disposition, charm of conversation, vivacity of spirit, and other brilliant qualities, or which is motivated only by the secret pleasure man experiences in penetrating into the secrets of souls.

True spiritual friendship is born of grace; its imitation, of nature. The former seeks the spiritual perfection of the friend, the other only self-satisfaction; the former makes one think little of self, the other makes one fearful of not being properly appreciated and jealous of anyone sharing in the affection of the friend. The one is straightforward, hides nothing from God or superiors; the other develops in secret, hides itself in dissimulation. The one forges no bonds that duty will not loosen; the other values its bonds more than the call of God. The one is purified by the light of faith, of solitude with God, and by works of penance; the other, although full of the movements of fallen nature, believes itself in no need of purification and

wishes the joys of the Resurrection without the trouble of dying to self and being buried in God.<sup>2</sup>

Blessed Jordan furnishes us with a delightful example of true spiritual friendship, of a loving character glowing with the fervor of grace. His love embraced all men, especially the members of his spiritual family, and in a particular way, Diana. And no wonder! Her purity of soul, high aspirations, her courage in the face of obstacles, and her magnanimity in time of trial won for her the love of many another besides Blessed Jordan. There was moreover a mutual love for Blessed Reginald and especially Saint Dominic to draw Jordan and Diana together; in fact their love for Saint Dominic was the strongest bond, next to God, uniting them. In one of his letters, for example, Jordan gives the fact that he regarded Diana as a legacy from Saint Dominic as the reason for his continuous interest in her temporal and spiritual welfare.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bl. John Dominici, an experienced director of souls, pointed out to his spiritual daughters, the Sisters of the convent of Corpus Christi, what was of particular danger to their sex and state in life, namely the predominance of the sensible over the spiritual. "Seek to separate in yourselves, the spiritual from the animal, that which is precious from that which is of low value, sentiment from reason, and keep God directly in your view. Permit not the operations of lower part of nature to go under the name of higher ; otherwise there will be a twofold damage, for the good will be called evil and the evil good. Hence it sometimes happens that a soul accuses herself of what is virtuous and prides herself in her vices. Since you cannot depart from your convent, keep aloof from people, be intimate alone with the Saints." He did not however condemn their love for him, as their spiritual father, because he believed "you love me only because you believe that Christ dwells in me; if you believed the opposite, your love would change into a holy hate."

<sup>2</sup> cfr. Letter 7. cfr. Letters 23, 25, 26, 27 written to a Nun at Trier, and Letter 44 to the convent at Paris-as proof of Jordan's fatherly devotion to all who put their confidence in him.

Jordan showed his love for Diana in many different ways. As we have seen he never failed to keep the promise made in one of his first letters, *"Again I say to thee, do not fear. I shall be to thee a father and thou to me a daughter and a spouse of Jesus Christ, and n shall pray the Lord for thee that He may deign to watch over thee."* It was his custom, on leaving Bologna, to pay a farewell visit and ask for her prayers. These farewells wrung from him the following complaint. *"Whenever I must leave thee, I do so not without a heavy heart, and thou dost add to my pain for I see thee then so inconsolable. Why cause thyself such agony? Am I not with thee? Am I not thine in labors, thine in repose, thine when present, thine when absent, thine when praying, thine when gaining merit, and thine, I hope, when enjoying the reward? What wouldst thou do if I should die? Certainly, not even in bewailing my death shouldst thou be so inconsolable."* Once, but that happened to be the last time he could have said farewell, he is forced to write: *"In your charity, pardon me for not bidding you a formal adieu as was my custom. I acted thus to spare you and me, for I could not have stood without pain the abundance and rushing forth of your tears."*<sup>4</sup>

In his letters he always told her about his health, his travels, his preaching, and the successes of the Order. He never forgot to add details about any of the brethren in whom she might have been interested. He confided to her his sorrows, especially his grief over the death of his best friend, Henry of Cologne. In turn he

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<sup>1</sup> cfr. Letters 5, 39, 45.



questioned Diana as to the state of her health, and once added a striking word of sympathy, "*In thy foot, which I understand thou hast injured, I suffer. I warn thee to take more care not only of thy foot but of thy whole body.*" At another time he told her of a dream he had. "*It seemed to me that thou wert speaking to me in a way so true and full of understanding that I still rejoice when I think of it. Thou wert saying: 'The Lord spoke to me these words: I, Diana, I, Diana, I, Diana, and each time He added: I am good, I am good, I am good! Know that this seemed very consoling to me.'*"<sup>5</sup>

His tact and thoughtfulness, moreover, never permitted him to close a letter without adding a greeting or word of consolation to Diana's people and the many friends of the monastery of Saint Agnes, or without permitting his socius to give expression to his veneration for Diana. The conclusions to his letters have an interest all their own. They tell us of the growing influence of the convent of Saint Agnes upon the spiritual life of the women of Bologna; they make us acquainted with some of the brethren who might otherwise have fallen into oblivion; and they show us the hold that Diana won over the hearts of the Friars as they came to know her better. Brother Gerard's first greetings to Diana, for instance, read thus: "*I, Brother Gerard, greet thee devotedly,*" or "*Brother Gerard greets thee and recommends himself to thy prayers.*" Later he wrote: "*I, Brother Gerard thy son, greet thee,*" or "*Brother Gerard, thy son, greets thee cordially, thee and the Sisters.*"

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<sup>5</sup> cfr. Letters 24, 53, 52. cfr. Letters 23 and 25 for further details about the death of Henry.

In return for his paternal love and solicitude Jordan demanded of Diana a constant pouring forth of prayers before God. He did not ask for them however to obtain mere temporal favors. In fact he reproved her at times for her anxiety about his health and safety. *"Do not be anxious about me, for He who protects thee remaining at Bologna will also, I hope, protect me journeying hither and thither; for all that we do, whether it be thee remaining in the quiet of the cloister or me travelling in divers directions, we do only for love of Him."* And at another time: *"It does not at all please me that thou art so deep in anguish over my sickness. Dost thou not know that God scourgeth every son that He receiveth? Dost thou not wish Him to receive me among His sons? If thou wishest me to enter into the Kingdom, suffer me also to proceed along the way that leads to the Kingdom, for it is by many tribulations that we enter therein. Only commend me to the Lord and ask Him that whatever punishment I may have too undergo **in** the future may be turned into a help and a correction."* Again he writes: *"Pray for me frequently to the Lord, because I need it on account of my many defects. For I pray but rarely, and therefore beg thy Sisters to supply for my defect on this point also."*<sup>6</sup>

Occasionally he made a call upon her charity for some particular person.<sup>7</sup> He was incessant in his demands for prayers in behalf of the conversion of sinners and the extension of the Order. His letters frequently resound with passages like the following.

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<sup>6</sup> cfr. Letters 46, 48, 29.

<sup>7</sup> cfr. Letters 21, 50, 51.

*"Remind the Sisters to pray for the students of Paris in order that the Lord may open their hearts and make them easy to convert." "I give to thee and to them the task of faithfully beseeching the Lord that He may deign to strike the hearts of the clerics and draw them to Himself for their salvation, His glory, and the upbuilding of the Church and of our Order: of the hearts of those, naturally, whom He knows to be suitable for us. All of them are extremely cold. It is necessary for them to get elsewhere the fire they have not in their own hearts."*<sup>8</sup>

The prayers he requested were offered up continuously. How could the Sisters refuse the petition of one who would say to them: *"I have great confidence in your prayers, especially when you call upon Him with one heart and one mind"*; of one who shared with them the joy of seeing their prayers answered. And they were answered, often in unexpected ways. *"After I had long preached to the scholars at Padua and had seen little or no results, I was seized with discouragement and thought of returning. Then, behold, suddenly the Lord deigned to strike the hearts of many and to pour forth His grace. Ten have already entered the Order. We hope that still others, and excellent ones too, will enter."* *"Thy prayers and those of thy Sisters have been heard by God with great profit to us, for He has given us nearly thirty novices that are approved, lettered and noble. Likewise throughout the whole world, as is often told me, the brethren multiply and grow in numbers and virtues. Behold, how true it*

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<sup>8</sup> cfr. Letters 8, 3.

*is that the Lord restores to us a hundred fold of this, life, since for one brother that perchance we left in the world, we now receive more than a hundred, and better ones at that."*<sup>9</sup>

*Jordan not only asked for prayers for success, but because ingratitude was a vice unknown to him, every letter that told of his successes was a petition to the Sisters for prayers of thanksgiving. From Magdeburg he wrote: - "It consoled my spirit to find the convent well arranged and some novices recently received into the Order. For all this give thanks to God who pours forth so tenderly His mercy upon us at all times, granting us much greater gifts that we are worthy to receive from Him." This came from Paris: "On the very day I am writing to thee, the Brothers said that seventy-two novices had been received into the Order. For these I wish thee and the Sisters to give thanks to God."*<sup>10</sup>

*At all times, no matter whether he poured forth his charity or made demands on that of others, it is evident that he was dominated by the love of God. In fact it is in this highest form of love that he strove to make the Sisters advance with holy emulation. The chief obligation of their state in life was to advance in perfection, but as Saint Paul said, "the bond of perfection is charity."<sup>11</sup> Now the great model, source, and attraction of charity is Jesus Christ. And in fact, Jesus was the inspiration of those real poems in which Jordan so often sings of the glories, the sweetnesses, and the different forms of divine love. Love for God, and*

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<sup>9</sup> cfr. Letters 10, 4, 43.

<sup>10</sup> cfr. Letters 16, 55.

<sup>11</sup> cfr. Collossians 3, 14.

above all love for God in *Jesus, the Divine Spouse of souls*, he continually proposed to the Sisters as their peculiar vocation.

There is nothing a priori of course to prevent laypeople in the world from attaining to the heights of divine love, to the most intimate union with God. To them, as to religious, Saint Augustine addressed the following passage. *"No matter whether we look upon Clyrist laid in the crib, preaching on the lake-shores, torn by the scourging, hanging on the Cross, or buried in the tomb, always may we who believe see in Him a Spouse full of beauty."* Naturally however such an ideal has more power over the souls of religious. Because their vocation is the attainment of perfection, and the perfection of charity, the love of Jesus is bound to dominate over their hearts. Because of their scrupulous purity, their solitude, their penances, their striving after virtue, their marvelous progress in supernatural sensibility, there ought to be for them a sweet and powerful attraction in the title, so hardy and so comforting, of *Celestial Spouse* which they give to the Divine Saviour and which He accepts from their loving hearts.

Here we have the reason why Jordan spoke so often of the love of the God Incarnate, drawing us to Him, desiring to unite to Himself the fervent soul of one who goes to Him under the protection of the Immaculate Virgin. For it is only in her company that we can approach Jesus. *"My daughters will be led in after her, that is, after the Virgin Mary, after His Mother, chosen among all virgins. She is unique, His dove, His beautiful one, all fair and there is no spot in her."*

*She is full of charity and love, full of grace, blessed among all women, and the Lord is with her. After her will the spouses of Christ be led into the temple of the King that is not made with hands, where according to Isaias the Spouse rejoices over the bride: 'And your God will rejoice over you.' Like Mary we must strive to be worthy of such a favor. "In the sight of the Spouse may every stain be washed away, and every deformity rectified in a zealous culture of spiritual beauty, lest, which may God forbid, the sacred eye of the Spouse be but slightly offended. Let purity of heart, innocence of life, unity of religious practise, peace and concord reign among you. May unshaken charity dwell in you and sweet humility preserve you in all good. Then will the Son of God take His delight in your souls, while they are radiant with delights of virtue."*<sup>12</sup>

Contrariwise, said Blessed Jordan: *"The heart that lacks Christ is as straw threshed of its grain, for it is blown here and there by the wind, tossed by temptation. But the straw possessed of the grain is not blown away by the wind even when exposed to its gusts, for it is held down by the grain from being carried away. So also is the heart in which Christ dwells made stable by Him in order that it may not be torn out and carried hither and thither by the temptations that blow against it and whip it. Say therefore, and say it from thy heart: "Others may cling to those they will, but for me it is good to cling to my God."*<sup>13</sup>

Much of what Jordan wrote was prompted by his meditation on the feast day that was being celebrated.

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<sup>12</sup> cfr. Letter 8.

<sup>13</sup> cfr. Letter 22.

At Christmas he wrote: *"And thou, daughter, be consoled and comforted in the Lord and in the Babe Who has just been born to thee. Caress Him and make known thy needs to Him. Although He is small in body, yet He is great and supereminent in mercy and liberality, He who is blessed forever."* At another time he wrote of the Word Uncreated, and punned a little on the similitudes and contrasts between the Word of God and the word of man. *"I have not now the leisure to write a letter long enough for thy love. Yet I write to send thee the Word Abbreviated, made little in the crib, the Word made flesh, the Word of salvation and grace, the Word of sweetness and glory, the good and gentle Word, Jesus Christ. This Word read in thy heart, revolve in thy mind, and let It become as honey in thy mouth. There is another word, also short and brief: love speaking to thy heart and satisfying thy love for me."*<sup>14</sup>

Much more frequently, however, it was the picture of Jesus crucified that made his pages throb with reflections that show a profound knowledge of the human heart and a perfect acquaintance with Holy Scripture." At one time he bade the Sisters stand at the right Hand of Christ in order that they may be gilded from the stream flowing from out His Side; at another he portrayed *"Jesus, thy Savior, extended on the Cross as a parchment, written upon His bruises, painted by His Holy Blood. The lesson written thereon is charity,"* and he added: *"Where can the lesson of charity*

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<sup>14</sup> cfr. Letter 36.

<sup>15</sup> cfr. the Letters for all Scriptural allusions and quotations.

*be so well learned? Thou knowest better than anyone that no book is so love-urging. Upon it then fix all the force of thy mind; open and turn over the pages of. this book; read and thou wilt find in it what the prophet found: a lamentation for the tribulation He Himself bore; a song over the joys He prepared for thee by His tribulations, and a malediction for the death eternal from which He redeemed thee by His death. From His lamentation teach thyself patience; from His song, charity, for certainly He who wills thee to be a sharer of such joys should be loved by thee above all. Furthermore, v -hen thou findest thyself preserved from that malediction, what must follow If not a song of praise and thanksgiving?"*

Love for God must not only be fervent but it must also be discreet, if it is to be more than a fitful fire without lasting results. Experience had taught Jordan the value of discretion, for Satan had tempted him by turns to excessive mortification and to over indulgence. He also knew from experience that for souls like that of Diana the former was the more dangerous. Again and again did he send Diana counsels as the following. *"Do not fast too much from food and drink and sleep, but be moderate and patient in all things." "Straight and narrow is the path to life, and it behooves one to walk along it cautiously lest one turn off to the right by negligence or to the left by excess of zeal. of these two the one I most fear for you is that you chastise your bodies imprudently and then falling into the op-*

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<sup>16</sup> cfr. Letters 7, 42. The capital letters of ancient manuscripts were generally painted in red.



*posite fault, you be hampered on the way of the Lord that leads to the city of mansions eternal." "Fight therefore not only manfully but wisely also, because, as Solomon says, a battle should be waged with skillful prudence. And you will then fight prudently when you put the flesh under subjection not precipitately but little by little. It is by progressing from one to another of the spiritual virtues that, not in a single flight, but step by step, you will climb the ladder of perfection. Divine love is fostered not by corporal penances but by holy desires, pious meditations, and by the leaven of that sisterly love of which each one of you loves your neighbor as yourself." <sup>17</sup>*

In place of corporal austerities self-inflicted, Jordan continually recommended patience in the midst of the tribulations of this life. Nothing, he knew, was harder to bear, and yet nothing more profitable for salvation (if rightly used) than the petty trials and sufferings of everyday life. *"It is by tribulation,"* he wrote *"that we store up treasure in heaven, for when the day will come that will turn sorrow into joy, it is according to the multitude of our griefs here below that consolations will be measured out to the soul above. Moreover, by drinking of the bitter chalice of tribulation the soul becomes more pure, it grows more cautious in the face of the daily and manifold tricks of Satan, and above all it is rewarded more amply with divine consolations. Good therefore and desirable is the bitterness of tribulation which works patience, searches the soul, gives understanding to the afflicted, causes an increase of*

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<sup>17</sup> cfr. Letters 13, 18, 10. Also Letters 16, 27, 31, 37, 38.

*spiritual solace, and stores up abundant rewards of heavenly joy for the future life." In order to encourage them he frequently pictured Christ watching over them and ever ready to help them. "The Lord in whose service the war is waged, is your helper. What prince indeed, and especially one powerful in battle would not rise at once in defense of his little handmaidens, or his sisters, fighting because of Him and for Him too, despite their weakness, against his most cruel enemies, provided that at the first assault they did not fly but turned their faces to call on him?"*

Still more difficult to bear and still more profitable for the work of perfection are spiritual trials. Of these Jordan also wrote, lest the Sisters should fail to see in them a sign of divine love. "*Who among you,*" he said, "*even though for a time assailed by weariness, afflicted with hardness of heart, with the torrents of devotion dried up, would dare to say: 'My Lord hath abandoned me, and He hath no care for me because I do not feel the usual outpourings of love!' They may say this who are ignorant of His accustomed way in which He is wont to inflame the desire of His spouses. As I have often told you when I was with you, to this purpose does your Spouse withdraw Himself for a time that you may seek Him more ardently, and having sought Him you may find Him with greater joy, and having found Him you may hold Him more tightly, and holding Him you may not let Him go. . As Saint Bernard says: 'Even when a tribulation afflicts thee cruelly, believe not that thou are abandoned, but re-*

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<sup>18</sup> cfr. Letters 37, 18.

*member that it is written: I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him.*"<sup>19</sup>

Jordan knew how to keep up the courage of his spiritual daughters by presenting to them the joys of heaven, *"that celestial city, mansion secure, fatherland of all delights, where people do not murmur, whose inhabitants are not in need and whose citizens live in peace. Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God. Keep constantly in thy heart,"* he would write to Diana, *"and ardently in thy desire that blessed land of the citizens of heaven, that glorious storehouse of joy and exultation, that place truly filled with the light of supreme beauty surpassing all human intelligence, that country truly divine and worthy to be the dwelling place of him who was created according to the Image*

*of God."* Desire of heaven grew upon him with the years until it became a perfect longing. What more touching than the following passage taken from the last letter he wrote to Diana, the letter she never saw. *"O Diana, miserable is this present state that we endure, because we cannot love each other here without pain of heart, or think of each other without anxiety. Who will lead us to that fortress-city, to the city of the Lord of hosts, that the Most High Himself has founded where we shall no longer pant for Him or for each other? Here, each day we are lacerated, and the depths of our hearts are torn asunder. Our miseries force us daily to cry out: 'Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?' Yet it behooves us to bear this patiently, and as far as our daily duties permit to recol-*

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<sup>19</sup> cfr. Letter 19.

*lect our minds only in Him who alone can deliver us from our necessities, in Whom alone rest is found, outside of Whom no matter where we look, we find tribulation and an abundance of sorrow. Meanwhile let us accept with joy whatever may happen to make us sad, for according to the same measure by which our tribulations are meted out to us, will also be the joy that will be given us." "Soon will it end, soon will we see each other without end, before the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

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<sup>20</sup> cfr. Letters 18, 8, 56, 32.

## CHAPTER X

### LAST DAYS AND DEATH

With the help of God's grace and the direction of Blessed Jordan, Diana made great advances in the spiritual life. Exteriorly she became a perfect model of the religious virtues. Ancient biographers say of her: *"She was remarkable for the regularity of her life. All the little observances of conventual life, especially those established or recommended by Saint Dominic, she kept and induced others to keep with zeal. Profoundly humble, she thought herself the least of all and saw to it that she wore the poorest habit. She loved to keep in the background, never signing for instance any of the conventual documents except after the others. She was possessed by the spirit of poverty, completely detached from the goods of this world, and took her joy in privations of any sort."*

Her interior life does not seem to have been graced by those extraordinary favors, as ecstasy and visions, that have marked the last years of some of the Saints. On the contrary she often suffered from a feeling of being abandoned by God, a feeling which her humility made her regard as a chastisement instead of as a purifying trial. To encourage her, Jordan felt constrained

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<sup>1</sup> Part of Blessed Diana's coarse undyed cappa is still preserved at Bologna.

to write: *"If He seems at times to turn His Countenance from thee and to be a stranger to thee, regard this as a grace, not as a sign of wrath."*<sup>2</sup> To this purifying grace God added another, that of an extraordinary compunction for sin. In this she was like her spiritual father Saint Dominic, who according to Saint Antoninus, *"at times was unable to attend the conventual Mass with the brethren because he did not wish them to see the abundance of tears of f love he shed. He seemed to see Christ Incarnate on the Altar."*<sup>3</sup> Diana's *"Chronicle"* says: *"Diana was fervent and assiduous in prayer and meditation. At that time she was accustomed to shed so many tears that those who saw her could not help but be moved to piety and weep also."* Jordan was obliged to tell her to control her emotions which passing over to her Sisters, taxed unduly their nervous systems.<sup>4</sup> It was difficult however to arrest the impulse of God; she realized more and more the misery of life on earth and wept over it; she realized more and more the glory of heaven and wept again, but this time with hope. The succession of the sweet and bitter became in time her food and drink; it caused the life of grace to develop in her soul.

God caused the last flower to bloom in the garden of her soul, a desire for death. She felt the first stirrings of it after she received the letter of Pope Honorius in favor of her convent. Concerning it Jordan wrote the following words of wisdom: *"Now with greater security thou desirest to be dissolved and to be*

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<sup>2</sup> cfr. Letter 33.

<sup>3</sup> Biscioni, Letter VI.

<sup>4</sup> cfr. Letters 31, 38.

*with Christ. I am willing to have you desire this from the bottom of my heart, but I am unwilling to have thee hasten this end by excessive compunction and unmeasured bodily mortification."*<sup>5</sup>

When the work of purification was over, God called these two friends to Himself. Diana died first, on the eve of the Feast of Saint Barnabas, June eleventh, 1236, at the age of thirty-five.<sup>6</sup> At that time Jordan was in Palestine. Before news of Diana's death could have reached him Jordan died in shipwreck off the harbor of Acre, on the thirteenth of February, 1237. Neither enjoyed the consolation of a last visit before death, but both were spared the pain of feeling left alone in this vale of tears. Death was really their reunion in God, for from the letter commonly considered as the last one written to Diana, Jordan speaks with resigned sorrow not only of the improbability of their seeing each other again but of what was becoming the practical impossibility of their keeping in touch with each other by letter. Truly *"in their end was their beginning."*<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately we have no details of the last moments of either of these two Blessed. According to a letter written to the brethren at Paris, the two companions of Blessed Jordan perished with him.<sup>8</sup> Shortly afterwards their bodies were washed ashore; a supernatural light in the form of a cross shone over them. Those who were drawn to look at the prodigy noticed a delightful odor coming from their bodies, which

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<sup>5</sup> cfr. Letter 21.

<sup>6</sup> According to old archives of the monastery.

<sup>7</sup> "In My End is My Beginning" was a motto of Mary, Queen of Scots. Maurice Baring used it as the title of his biography.

<sup>8</sup> cfr. Aron, *Un Animateur de la Jeunesse*, p. 332.

odor continued coming from their sepulchres and clung for days to the hands of those who touched the bodies.. They were buried at Acre where unfortunately, so thoroughly did the Moslems sack that city, there are no remains even of the convent.

With a brevity that was unpardonable the Sister chronicler of Diana's life told us nothing of her last moments. *"After having passed thirteen years in the Order, Sister Diana, that venerable lady worthy of God, happily returned to the Lord. The Prior and the whole convent of the Friars Preachers at Bologna took part in her funeral. Her venerable body was placed in a wooden coffin and buried near the altar of Saint Agnes with all the honors of which it was worthy. The grief of the people over her death, the desolation of the Sisters and the brethren, we must pass over in silence in order not to draw out our narrative too much."*

Over the tomb of the Blessed was placed the following inscription in Latin.

*"Here lies Sister Diana of Andalo  
Who made the vows of religion in the hands of  
Blessed Dominic  
And built the Monastery of Saint Agnes  
In which  
She lived most holily for thirteen years  
And migrated to the Lord in the year 1236."*

In 1238 Saint Raymond of Pennafort was elected Master General in the General Chapter held at Bologna. After being told of the promises of Blessed Jordan to the Convent of Saint Agnes, he made a canonical visitation of the Sisters and received, for their



consolation, a renewal of their vows. The same favor was granted to them by Blessed John the Teutonic, who was made Master General after Saint Raymond's resignation of that office.

Under the generalship of Blessed John, about the year 1252, seventeen years after death of Blessed Diana, the convent was rebuilt in a more suitable place, nearer the city. The relics of Blessed Diana were transferred, placed as before near the altar and marked by an inscription similar to the preceding, except that the first line may have read: "*This is Blessed Diana.*"

At this time Sisters Cecilia and Amata were still living. The time of Amata's death is not known, nor is there anything exceptional recorded about her. It was her vocation to live a hidden life in the presence of God and to die without any title of distinction except that of being a perfect religious. God kept Cecilia, full of energy and intelligence, living to a good old age in order that we might so much the longer have a living witness to the life of Saint Dominic.

Sister Angelica of Bologna recorded various incidents of Saint Dominic's life as narrated by Blessed Cecilia. "*Here follows,*" she wrote, "*the miracles as related by Sister Cecilia who received the habit from: Saint Dominic, made her vows three times into his hands, and is still living among us, full of vigor and holiness.*" It is a simple story, unpolished but delightful for its candor and sincerity. It shows that Cecilia was a good observer and had a faithful memory. Not only are the smaller details of Saint Dominic's life and virtues given, but also the details of his personal appearance: the beauty of his face, the expression of his

eyes, his fine long hands, and his perfect tonsure. "*Sister Cecilia's words,*" Sister Angelica adds, "*are filled with such conviction that one cannot help believing what she says. What I, Sister Angelica of the same convent of Saint Agnes, have heard her say, I have written down for the honor and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and our holy Father Saint Dominic and for the consolation of the brethren. Excuse the style, for I am ignorant of grammar.*" Sister Cecilia died in 1290, at the age of eighty-nine.

United in life, Diana, Cecilia and Amata were also united after their death. They shared the peace and glory of the same tomb until 1510. In that year plans for the restoration or enlargement of the Church of Saint Agnes, forced the Sisters to open the tomb in order to move the coffins of their venerable Foundresses. To their surprise and sorrow they found nothing but a confused mass of dust and bones. There was even no way of distinguishing the head of Blessed Diana from that of the others to place it in the beautiful reliquary they had prepared for it. In their disappointment they had recourse to prayer, begging God to point out in some way which was the head of Diana. Almost immediately it was covered with a white liquid, the sweet perfume of which spread over their quarter of the city and attracted many of the neighbors to the convent. It was the sign asked for, and the head was

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the critics call Blessed Cecilia's narrative the unreliable "yarns of an old woman." But-does one have to be young to be reliable? And did Blessed Cecilia begin spinning these yarns only after she became old? And are Sisters so gullible and unobservant that they would not have noticed or objected to any noteworthy change or addition to the "yarns?"

placed for veneration in a special chapel. The narrative of this translation of the relics was given to us by Sister Martha of the Rose who, though not an eye-witness, reports the words of eye-witnesses and affirms before God the truthfulness of her account.<sup>10</sup>

In 1584 work on the church again demanded a disturbance of the coffin containing the bones of Blessed Diana and her companions. On the twenty-third of December, the Prior of the Church of Saint Nicholas, the confessors of the Convent, and all the Sisters carried in solemn procession around the cloister the relics which lay in their new casket of iron, and placed them in a richly adorned niche. During the procession the convent was again filled with the sweet perfume that came from the relics. God glorified His servants by still another wonder, told us by Sister Clementia Gozzadini who had prepared the relics for their new translation. *"While getting the relics ready for the translation I carefully collected the bits of dust and bone that remained in the old burial cloth, and placed them in a basket which I locked up in my cell. On going there that evening, at eight o'clock, during a very heavy rain, I saw it lighted up by an unusual brilliance similar to that of a full moon. On seeing this a cold shivering crept over me; I dared go neither forward nor backward. After a time I was able to kneel down and make the following protestation: If this is a holy vision, I give thanks to God for granting such favor to a sinner; If it is of the devil, I will place no confidence in it and leave all to God's judgment. Hardly had I*

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<sup>10</sup> Père Cormier gives the Latin texts of all these accounts.

*said these words when I was overwhelmed with joy.*" Naturally this vision increased the devotion of the Sisters to Diana and her saintly companions. In order that it might not be forgotten, the details were written down and placed with the holy relics.

It was the great revolution of France that necessitated the next translation, or better the rescue of the relics. In 1793 when the convents of Bologna were suppressed and their communities dispersed the reliquary containing the head of Blessed Diana was saved from vandals by the Marquis Philip Fibbia Fabri, a Senator of Bologna.<sup>11</sup> In 1888 after being examined and declared authentic by Cardinal Andrew Giovenetti, Archbishop of Bologna this reliquary was given to the Convent of Saint Nicholas by the heirs of the Marquis. Other relics of the three Blesseds may be found in the chapel at Ronzano. The reliquary containing the heads of Blesseds Cecilia and Amata was saved by Sister Therese Marie Monti Casignoli who brought it to the convent of Saint Sixtus at Rome, whither she retired with her sister, Sister Marie Seraphine, after long years of hopeless waiting for the restoration of her dear convent of Saint Agnes at Bologna. The authenticity of these relics was recognized on the seventeenth of October, 1825, by the Monsignor Joseph de la Porte Rodiana, Patriarch of Constantinople and Vice-gerent of the city of Rome. Thus Cecilia and Amata, six centuries after leaving the convent of Saint Sixtus, re-

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<sup>11</sup> At that time there were eight convents of Dominican Sisters in Bologna, one belonging to Sisters of the Third Order. Blessed Imelda's body was also saved from vandalage.

turned thither as a consequence of revolution. Thus does God do all things for his elect, makes Himself wonderful in His Saints, and watches with a jealous eye even over their bodies until the day of the glorious Resurrection!

## CHAPTER XI

### BEATIFICATION BY THE CHURCH

Religious Orders point with just pride to their heroes and strive to have the seal of Holy Mother Church stamped on the veneration they wish to pay to them. In this endeavor the Sisters have always played an important part. They use every honest means of spreading devotion to those they love and revere. They preserve precious details as records, relics, and chronicles, that would otherwise be lost and are often overlooked by historians. Blessed Diana begged for and preserved the staff, girdle, and breviary of Saint Dominic,<sup>1</sup> and Blessed Cecilia set down in writing the things she knew of him. They and their Sisters in religion prayed and worked for the canonization of their holy Father, and none experienced greater joy when he was publicly proclaimed as a Saint of God. In turn Blessed Diana and her two companions, Cecilia and Amata, were proposed as worthy of special veneration by their spiritual children at Saint Agnes.

Holy Mother Church sympathizes with this spirit of her children in the religious life. Because the glori-

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<sup>1</sup> In 1563 the Ven. Bartholomew of the Martyrs, Archbishop of Braga in Portugal venerated these relics, and also the relics of the three Blesseds of Saint Agnes, a fact carefully pointed out in the process of Diana's beatification. Lady Herbert has written a life of the venerable Dominican who was one of the protagonists of reform at the Council of Trent.

fication of the Saints increases the glory of God, manifests the inner power of His teaching and Sacraments, encourages and consoles the faithful in their trials and struggles for heaven, she is eager to put the seal of her approval on the devotion rendered to those who have led lives of heroic sanctity. Yet, to preserve her own credit and to guard the faithful from deception she is very careful to seek assurances of sanctity in the persons proposed for canonization. This was the reason why Pope Urban VIII laid down in 1634 strict rules for the process to be followed in the canonization of Saints.

After this decree no one could receive the least sign of public veneration before a certain part of the process had been concluded and approved by the Pope. The only exception to the solemn process was made in favor of holy people, who, living a century or so before, had been venerated as Saints since their death, but who had not yet been officially canonized by the Church. Naturally the same kind of investigation could not be made concerning their life and virtues as was made into the lives and virtues of people of more recent date. When such a person long since dead was brought up for beatification the Church required conclusive evidence of this person's having received an approved public veneration from time immemorial, that is, proof had to be given that at least the ecclesiastical authorities of the dioceses concerned had permitted their flocks to honor this person in their churches as a Blessed or a Saint from a time that preceded the *year* 1534. Proof of such an approved public veneration

was considered as sufficient to prove the sanctity of the person proposed for Canonization.

This latter mode is called the *equivalent* process of canonization. The person thus beatified or canonized is as much a Blessed or Saint in the eyes of the Church as one thus honored after the solemn process. The close of the equivalent process is not marked by the same festivities as the other, but that is because it is not the inauguration of public veneration but rather the approval of such veneration already existing **in** favor of the one concerned.

The *equivalent* process is not so easy a test as it seems. During the centuries Europe has been torn by many wars and almost continual strife. Convents and churches have been destroyed, libraries sacked, and records lost. As a result veneration paid to many a person died out, or the evidences of ecclesiastical approval of such veneration have been lost. It was always with some misgiving that the brethren discussed the possibilities of having Diana beatified, but veneration for her and for the early traditions of the Order finally prompted them to make the attempt.

In proof of Diana's sanctity and of an immemorial veneration to her the Fathers brought forward: 1. the anonymous "*Chronicle of Blessed Diana*" written about the year 1254 and attributed by some to the same Sister Angelica who took down Blessed Cecilia's words concerning Saint Dominic, 2. the story of the second translation of the relics as told by Sister Martha of the Rose, 3. the story of the third translation of the relics as given by Sister Clementia Gozzadini, who also left an account of miracles wrought by the Blessed, 4. the



pictures and books in which she was represented and spoken of as a Blessed, 5. the prayers composed in her honor, 6. the demand made even by Churches for her relics.

The miracles presented are given by Sister Clementia, sometimes in her own words, and sometimes in those of the one in whose favor the cure was granted.

*"A lay Sister named Sylvester, who had a great veneration to the three Virgins, once suffered from a dangerous fever caused by a tumor on her arm, which greatly disturbed the doctors. She begged the help of her Patrons, especially that of Diana, and promised a silver arm as a votive-offering. The next morning, to the astonishment of all, she was cured."*

*"On August 20, 1545, when my uncle, Bartholomew Supraninus, was given up by the doctors and lay at the point of death, I, Sister Sylvester, his niece, who regarded him as a father besought most earnestly the intercession of Our Lady, Saint Agnes, and Blessed Diana, the Foundress of our convent. The next night Saint Agnes and Blessed Diana came to the bedside of the sick man and bade him rejoice that he was not to die of this illness. Cured, he came immediately to the convent and said that there came to him Saint Agnes, beautifully dressed as a bride, and also a Sister who wore our habit. I found out that this happened the night I had commended the sick man to them."*

*"Father Laurence, our confessor, once suffered so much from a tooth that a surgeon was called to extract it, but his attempts were in vain. Since no other help could be given to relieve his most intense pain, we be-*

*sought the help of our Saint, promising a silver tooth in return. He was cured."*

*"When I, Maria Cattanei, was suffering so intensely that I was unable to move, I commended myself to Blessed Diana who died in the convent of the Reverend Mothers of Saint Agnes at Bologna. That night she appeared to me and blessed me. Immediately I felt better, sat up to greet her and without any pain made the sign of the Cross. Calling my servants to witness the happy vision, I rose from my bed and was soon completely cured. This happened on December 11, 1603."*

At the earnest prayers of Sisters Hippolyta and Ludovica who belonged to the Convent of Saint Agnes, their two brothers, Jerome and Alexander Ludovisi, were cured of dangerous illnesses through the intercession of Blessed Diana. Alexander became Archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal, and, in 1621, Pope Gregory XV. Naturally he was very gracious to the Sisters of Saint Agnes. He also permitted the whole Order to celebrate the feasts of Blessed James Salomon and Ambrose of Siena, and in Germany he promoted the veneration of Saint Albert the Great.

When the brethren obtained a recognition by the Sacred Congregation of Rites of the existence of an immemorial public veneration in honor of Blessed Diana, they began a new process to obtain permission to say Mass and the Office in her honor. As a ruse to obtain at least an implicit confirmation of the veneration paid to Blessed Cecilia and Amata they inserted a memory of these Blesseds in the Office and Mass in

honor of Blessed Diana that was presented for approval. The Promoter of the Faith however was on his guard and demanded an investigation of that veneration. Happily he was fully satisfied as to its liceity and antiquity, and then to the joy of all Dominicans he not only advocated giving them a memory but advised their being commemorated with Diana in the Mass and Office of June ninth. Permission to celebrate the triple feast was granted on December 19, 1891.<sup>2</sup>

Proud may we be of these, our wonderful and saintly Sisters, who are *"the flower of the human race-the flower still sweet with the morning dew, which has reflected nothing but the rays of the rising sun, and which no earthly dust has tarnished-an exquisite blossom which, scented from far, fascinates with its pure fragrance, at least for a time, even the most vulgar souls. They are the flower, but they are also the fruit, the purest sap, the most generous blood of the stock of Adam; for those heroines daily win the most wonderful of victories, by the manliest effort which can raise a human creature above all earthly instincts and mortal ties. And, along with their strength they have light, prudence, and true insight. They understand life without having experienced it. Who has taught them all these sad secrets? Who has taught these beings, at once so pure and so impassioned, at an age when the heart begins to be consumed by an insatiable thirst for*

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<sup>2</sup> During the first triduum celebrated in honor of Blesseds Diana, Cecilia and Amata, November 11-13, 1891, a curious incident occurred, the sudden death, on the thirteenth, of the

Very Reverend Peter Bartholomew Daria, O.P., a celebrated preacher, who had given the panegyric in honor of the Blesseds on the day before.

*human sympathy and human love, that such a thirst will never be satisfied in this world? Nothing but a Divine instinct which frees them by withdrawing them from us."*<sup>3</sup>

Now that the Church has beatified our Sisters, Diana, Cecilia and Amata we must not only rejoice but imitate them, we should enlighten our souls with the ideals they followed and beg of God the energy that made them triumph over all things, the world, the devil, themselves. We must make them better known, make their light shine before all men in order that all men may be led, as they were, to God.

And do you, dear and lovable Blesseds, bright intelligences, noble souls, generous characters, tender and sympathetic hearts, do you pray for us all! Develop in the Order of Saint Dominic that spirit of the first days, that true, childlike, deep, and pervading spirit which made you what you are. Remember the world also, that world which you left. Reawaken in it what was the motive power and honor of your life—a high conception of the Christian life, a holy zeal to realize it, a constancy to preserve it despite all obstacles and revolutions, despite the weakening of a perception of the supernatural, and the lowering of Christian standards. Then will even the world bow down before that Spirit of Saint Dominic which inspired you, and which Blessed Jordan so admirably defined in the concluding lines of his biography of Saint Dominic:

*"He welcomed all within the folds of his charity, and since he loved all, he was beloved by all. To rejoice*

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<sup>3</sup> cfr. Montalambert, Monks of the West, Vol. II, p. 732, 734.

*with those that rejoiced, to weep with those that wept, was a right he claimed for himself, so great was his love of God, his solicitude for his neighbor, and his compassion for the unfortunate. He made himself agreeable to all because he was truly just and never gave the least sign of insincerity or duplicity in word or action. May we imitate his example! May we give thanks to our Redeemer for having given us such a guide for our pilgrimage on this earth. Let us implore the Father of mercies in order that, under the influence of the Holy Ghost Who rules over the children of God, we may persevere in the way traced out by our Fathers and come to the same city of perpetual joy and eternal beatitude."*