

# Blessed John of Vercelli

By Paul C. Perrotta, O.P., Ph.D.



NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS  
Holy Name Society  
141 East 65th St., N.Y.  
1956  
\* \* \*

Nihil Obstat: John F. Ryan, O.P. Thomas Shanley, O.P.  
Imprimi Potest: Very Reverend T.S. McDermott, O.P., S.T.M., S.T.Lr., LL.D.  
Prior Provincial  
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Michael J. Ready, D.D., Bishop of Columbus  
Printed in U.S.A.  
\* \* \*

---

[Page 4]

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	5
HIS YOUTH.....	7
HIS EARLY APOSTOLATE.....	12
JOHN AS PROVINCIAL.....	18
THE INQUISITOR.....	24
CRUSADER.....	30
MASTER GENERAL.....	36
PAPAL TIMBER.....	43
LEGATE APOSTOLIC.....	52
ECUMENICAL COUNCILOR.....	59
THE HOLY NAME SOCIETY.....	64
CONCILIATOR.....	69
PATRIARCH.....	75
THOMIST.....	82
DEATH AND BEATIFICATION.....	89

---

[Page 5]

## FOREWORD

Little more than three years ago we at National Headquarters inaugurated a crusade of prayer in honor of the founder of the Holy Name Society, Blessed John of Vercelli. The objective of the crusade was to make him better known and to pray for his early canonization. From that time until the publishing of this pamphlet on his life, Blessed John has become known throughout the United States and in all countries where the Holy Name Society is established. On one of my trips to Europe last year, it was my pleasure to visit the town of Vercelli, about three hundred and seventy miles northwest of Rome. There I had the privilege of visiting with the Dominican Fathers and the places made sacred by the presence and work of our founder.

Now, after pretty nearly seven hundred years of the establishment of the Society, we are publishing a pamphlet on his life. This life has appeared in the Holy Name Journal in a series of articles written by the Very Reverend Paul Perrotta, O.P. They were so well received that we decided to put them in treatise form, in the hope that Blessed John will become even better known. A

saintly and scholarly man, the Sixth Master General of the Dominican Order, he traveled throughout all of Europe preaching devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus. Consequently, it is our fond hope and ardent prayer that Holy Name members throughout the world will obtain inspiration from this little life, and pray even more ardently that the objective we seek will shortly be obtained. We suggest that each member of the Society pray daily in his honor and for our intention.

On the Holy Name Altar in Saint Vincent Ferrer's Church in New York a Mass is celebrated every Thursday, in honor of [pg. 6:] Blessed John. Twice a year we have a solemn novena; one in May and one in preparation for his feast on December 1st. We ask particularly the readers of this life to join us on Thursdays in their prayers, and hope that they shall also join in the two novenas in May and in November.

The readers of this brochure may be assured that the priests at National Headquarters, as well as myself will remember their intentions in our prayers and Masses. We ask God to bless you who join in our devotions to our Holy Name founder.

HARRY C. GRAHAM, O.P.

---

[Page 7]

## CHAPTER I

# HIS YOUTH

PIEDMONT is a region of breathless beauty where the majestic, snow-capped Alps begin their bowing to their superior, the imperious noon-day sun of Italy, and level off to form the fertile plains of Lombardy. The sloping hills abound with chestnuts, while cattle fatten on the meadows which smile between the curtseying heaps. The air is light, pure and thoroughly exhilarating. It is a place of peace where men have been able to enjoy good fruits of the earth and have been inspired to lift up their minds to God by the example of the towering mountains before them. If snow and stream, mountain and meadow, cattle and chestnuts, sun and stars, and all non-rational nature bespeak, as the Psalmist says, the glory of God and praise His Holy Name, how can man, who is a little less than the angels, living in such surroundings, fail to join in the chorus of praise to the Name of Him from Whom these blessings came?

At the beginning of the Thirteenth Century, there nestled, as it still does, as a footstool of their mountain majesties, a small town called Mosso Santa Maria. Here, an old native family, the Garbellas, lived its quiet, pastoral life, breeding cattle and turning out dairy products. About the year 1200, there was born in this family a male child who was named John. He was a healthy baby who grew up clean and strong in that region of clean fields, pure, clear air, and rugged mountains. He showed himself to be a very intelligent boy, easily grasping the elementals of learning as they were imparted to him first at home and later in the parish school. Above all, he gave early indications of a nature profoundly religious. The doctrines of

Christianity not only satisfied his spirit but inspired him to intense piety. Eagerly he took up the chant of his mountains and meadows, pouring out of his heart in glad and conscious worship praises to the Name of Him Who towered above his native mountains. A tender devotion to the Blessed Mother, natural [pg. 8:] to and typical of the true lover of Christ, developed in him to become a ready and constant store of spiritual strength. His boyhood, consequently, was joyfully virtuous, spent in laying solidly the foundations of a career remarkable for its piety towards God and its achievements for man.

Since the boy had given evidence of possessing a high-order intelligence, the Garbella family, encouraged by the insistence of his local teachers and of those in Vercelli, the neighboring big city where he had continued his early study, determined to send him to the University of Paris. The chance of studying in Paris, desired by so many throughout the ages, was eagerly accepted by the lad. He determined to honor the confidence reposed in him by his teachers and justify the sacrifices made by his family in sending him to a far-away school.

Upon his arrival in the French capital, John, likely taking lodging in one of the many conventual hospices about, registered for courses in rhetoric and letters in the *Ecole Du Parvis*, a sort of prep school of the university.

All centers of learning carry their dangers to faith and morals side by side with their promise to advance one to the higher culture of manners, mind, and heart. John prized his health too greatly to ruin it by drink; he prized learning too highly to waste his time in frivolities and he prized purity too highly to lose it with harlots. He made rapid strides in letters, mastering several languages, and in good time advanced to the major *Ecole Du Cloitre*, which trained him in philosophy, theology, and canon law.

This training was invaluable, for the University of Paris, despite a few defects, was, many believe, the most celebrated of all medieval universities. To it came the best students to sit at the feet of celebrated professors. Long and famous is the list of those scholars who attended or served in the university at the time John of Vercelli studied in Paris. The free communication of ideas, the researches made there in all branches of science and his personal contacts with men of deep learning and broad vision enabled John to acquire the quality that stamps the man of high and liberal culture. His spiritual life kept apace with intellectual development, so that when he finally received his doctorate from the university he represented the best type of scholar which a Catholic educational system produces. [pg. 9:]

## **JOHN STARTS TO TEACH**

Having obtained the coveted degree of doctor probably at the age of twenty-three, John determined to remain in Paris to teach. He received the permission of the chancellor of the university to found his own school as an affiliate. On the slope of Mount Saint Genevieve, John opened a school in Roman and canon law which began to flourish. The policy of the university at that time was very liberal, allowing the formation of many affiliate schools. Many of them, however, in a short time failed. John's school attracted students by the quality of the instruction imparted.

There now occurred an event which was destined to change John's life. On Shrove Tuesday of the year 1229, a group of the students of the university, in a gay celebration of Mardi Gras, roughed up a tavern keeper. They were beaten in turn by his friends, whereupon the students rallied others to their side. They ran wild through the city, pillaging and molesting with abandon. So great was the disturbance that the queen regent ordered out soldiers to suppress the riot. These soldiers carried out the orders with more brutality than was warranted, killing several, among them two scions of prominent families, and wounding others. The university, faculty and students, joined in protest of this infraction of its autonomy. According to its charter, the university did its own policing. It protested to the queen, to the bishop and to the apostolic legate, the intrusion of the civil arm into its affairs but receiving no satisfaction it thereupon voted to close. John, as a member of the faculty, was constrained to go along with the decision. Soon Paris became an abandoned city, professors and students returned to their native regions or accepted invitations from schools elsewhere.

John naturally thought of returning home. Plans had been formulated in Vercelli for the founding of a university there, and the disturbance in Paris brought the opportunity of staffing it with celebrated teachers. Among those invited was John himself. Eagerly he returned to Vercelli and began teaching anew in his native country. [pg. 10:]

## **JOINS DOMINICAN ORDER**

There came to Vercelli at this time a most remarkable man. Jordan of Saxony. Saint Dominic had founded the Order of Preachers in 1216. Two years before his death in 1221, he had received into the Order this young, zealous German from Saxony. The Order unanimously elected this man, who was then about thirty years of age, the successor of Saint Dominic in the office of Master General. The man had an amazing talent, among other eminent qualities, of drawing men to the Order. At Vercelli, on this occasion, he gave a discourse which immediately captivated John. Through it, he heard a direct call from God to consecrate his life in religion, whereupon, with twelve other members of the university who were equally impressed by the eloquence of Blessed Jordan, he asked to be received into the Order. From the hands of the second Master General of the Dominicans John received and put on the habit of Saint Dominic. He was now a religious consecrating his talents and energies entirely to God's honor: he was a preacher dedicating his rhetoric to the praise of Christ's Holy Name. His boyhood virtue nourished by clean living in the clean air of his mountains now attained to the even purer heights of consecrated living.

Having been received into the Order, John was sent by Blessed Jordan to Bologna to begin his novitiate. Bologna had been Saint Dominic's early headquarters in Italy and was redolent with traditions of him. The Convent of Saint Nicholas there became John's new home, where under the inspiring leadership of lofty-minded superiors he began to make great progress in Dominican spirituality. He was professed in due time, taking most eagerly the vows which would nail him to the Cross. The doctor of Paris and Vercelli once surrounded by flattering students was now a humble religious under obedience to others, quietly pursuing studies more immediately directed to the science of God, namely, theology and sacred scripture. He was submissive to a discipline that would mortify the flesh and the will so as to give life to the spirit and allow God's own will to command his actions.

The Dominican spirit that pervaded Bologna entered deeply into his own soul to make and keep him forever a faithful exponent [pg. 11:] of the lofty purposes Saint Dominic had in founding the Preachers. During John's religious formation there, the solemn translation of the body of Saint Dominic took place on May 24, 1233. His love of and loyalty to the holy patriarch of Dominicans were greatly intensified when on that occasion he kissed the head of the uncorrupted body of the saintly founder before its reposition in the Basilica. The Basilica has become a national shrine famous for the magnificent tomb which the devotion of the Dominicans and the artistic genius of Italy have built around the revered body in the course of the years. The son, John, had much to do, as we will see in subsequent chapters, in the planning and building of that worthy monument to the great father, Dominic.

---

[Page 12]

## CHAPTER II

# HIS EARLY APOSTOLATE

IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER of 1233 held at Bologna, it was decided to accept the invitation of Canon Vialardi of Vercelli, to establish a Dominican convent there. Philip Carisio and John were sent there for the purpose. Father Carisio had been a canon in Vercelli and secretary to the bishop before he became a Dominican. Hugh, the Bishop of Vercelli, received them kindly and assigned to them an old convent, that of Saint Orsus, together with an adjoining small church, the Church of Saint Paul, situated near the Araldi gate outside the walls of the town. More friars were sent to aid in the work of establishment.

After restoring the dilapidated buildings to decent usefulness, the friars set about establishing normal conventual life. Father Philip was named superior, while Father John was appointed director of studies. It was the custom of Dominicans to found a school in all their convents. John's experience in Paris made him the natural choice for this important post, and quite soon the school was a flourishing one.

In 1245 Father Philip was named Provincial of Lombardy, Father John becoming superior of the convent in Vercelli. He set about to enlarge the church and convent, and Pope Innocent IV granted an indulgence of forty days to all who contributed to the pious enterprise. The manifest good will of the people encouraged John to move the location of the convent to a more central section of the city. He succeeded in doing this, the friars thereby taking their place in the heart of town, as Saint Dominic had counseled his Order to do. The old convent was turned over to Emily Bicchieri, a pious woman who had founded a monastery of Dominican nuns. She is now one of the Blessed of the Order.

At this point, the feud between the Ghibellines and the Guelfs broke out into new bitterness throughout Italy. Vercelli, like the rest of the cities, was affected gravely by it. Passions rose to a high pitch in the quarrel and it put a particular strain on ecclesiastical leaders to keep the populace from committing excesses. In [pg. 13:] the crisis, John demonstrated the greatest

prudence. With consummate tact he sought to reconcile the interests of the Ghibellines, who were partisans of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, and of the Guelfs, who supported the Papal cause. Both sides appreciated his sincere efforts.

In 1249, Hugh, the Bishop of Vercelli, died, whereupon Canon Vialardi, the benefactor of the Dominicans, became the new bishop. The Ghibellines started a virulent campaign against him, going to the length of telling the faithful not to pay a diocesan tax, on the pretext that some of the money might be used to further the legal procedure which the Church had inaugurated for the purpose of deposing the Emperor. Several abbots, canons and archpriests of the diocese went against their bishop. It was a very difficult situation for John as prior of the Dominicans. Exercising the greatest charity and diplomatic skill, he succeeded in keeping the Order free of the animosity of the rebels while in no way derogating from the loyalty he owed to the friendly bishop.

## INQUISITOR

In 1250, the Emperor died, and, although his sons continued the quarrel with the Church, the situation was somewhat eased since they did not command their father's prestige or qualities of leadership. Pope Innocent IV quietly proceeded to reconcile the cities he had placed under interdict for supporting the Emperor's cause. Among other things, he asked the Dominican Provincial of Lombardy to place at his disposal wise and able men to help him in the reconciliation. History has preserved for us four names among the ones suggested to him, namely, Peter of Verona, Vivian of Bergamo, Vincent of Milan and our John of Vercelli. In his letter to the future founder of the Holy Name Society, appointing him commissioner apostolic and inquisitor for the Republic of Venice, the Pope said:

Now that the chief instigator of the general persecution has departed, and tranquility has been restored to the Church, we should turn all our purposes to the glory of God and we should praise and glorify His Name both by words and by deeds. (Quoted in Mothon's *Vita*, p. 73).

John accepted the Papal appointment and with Father Vincent of Milan went to Venice to bring that famed city under obedience. They were benevolently received. However, evil men, particularly [pg. 14:] Ezzelino and Pallavicini, cruel lieutenants of the Emperor, were at work trying to keep the people in schism and even encouraging heresy. The situation demanded the utmost zeal and the cleverest diplomacy on the part of the Papal commissioners. John showed himself most adroit in meeting the problem.

On October 17th, 1251, the Pope consecrated the Basilica of Saint Dominic in Bologna. Peter and John attended. The Pope thanked the Order for its great service in the crisis. Peter was working very effectively in Cremona, while John's efforts in Venice were beginning to bear fruit. But new troubles ensued. The Pope indicated that he wished to visit Piacenza after the consecration in Bologna. Pallavicini succeeded in getting the inhabitants to refuse the Pope entrance and in getting himself appointed as chief of state. This affront to the Papal dignity counseled more stringent measures against the schismatics and heretics. The Pope wrote to the Provincial, Philip Carisio, appointing anew as inquisitors with extraordinary powers the four Dominicans mentioned above, and four others, among them, Father Raniero

Sacconi. This priest's career is most notable. He had been an heretical bishop doing much harm to the Church in his early years, but he had become converted by Dominicans, became a Dominican himself and thereafter, like another Paul, worked most effectively against the heretics.

In 1252 Peter of Verona was martyred by the heretics. The Inquisition doubled its efforts everywhere, and despite continuing efforts on the part of the enemies of the Church, it restored northern Italian to communion. In Venice, John worked prodigiously, bringing into the difficult task both intelligent direction and expansive charity. By 1259, Venice was at peace with the Vicar of Christ.

In 1254, the General Chapter assembled in Budapest and elected Humbert of the Romans as fifth Master General of the Order to succeed John Wildehausen. Saint Raymond Pennafort had succeeded Blessed Jordan as third Master General, but his regime, though brilliant, was short. Humbert was destined to become one of the Order's great generals. After his election, he made a visitation of Hungary and southern Germany. By 1255, he was back in Italy and held at Saint Eustorgius in Milan a General Chapter. John attended this Chapter. Humbert seemed instinctively to sense the greatness of this man and likely had a premonition [pg. 15:] that he would be the one destined to succeed him in the exalted office. He was impressed by the labors John was performing in Venice, and so he determined to employ his vast abilities immediately for the greater good of the Order of Preachers. Accordingly, he appointed John his vicar and sent him to Hungary as visitor. The Order there had flourished from the start, but now the Tartar invasions were beginning to devastate the land. John's work in Hungary was monumental, its good effects apparent even today after the course of six centuries.

Upon his return from Hungary in 1256, he was elected prior of Saint Dominic's Convent in Bologna. The fervor of his novitiate days there now flared up with greater intensity. He had become the guardian of the tomb of the saintly founder of his Order; he would try to be as well the sentinel of its spirit.

His administration of that great center of Dominican learning and piety was brief but excellent. He settled with skill a vexatious question that arose during his tenure. Since the question affected the primary purpose of the Order's founding, it may be interesting to discuss it in some detail.

The spiritual daughters of Saint Dominic had rapidly increased in numbers. As is remembered, the first establishment of Saint Dominic had been that of nuns. So numerous were the holy women who wanted to follow the pattern of his spirituality that monasteries of them were established in very many places. Wishing to retain an intimate contact with the brethren of the First Order, the nuns of the Second Order had gradually brought about a curious system, typical of the faith of the Middle Ages but astonishing to us moderns. They would choose as prior of their monasteries one of the fathers, who, assisted by confessors for spiritual direction and by laybrothers for financial concerns, governed and guided them in the retention of the Dominican spirit. Since the monasteries had become numerous, the priests employed in this work drained the manpower of the provinces for the more primary and pressing work of preaching. Furthermore, it removed them from living with their brethren in convents and tended to make them lead private, and, often, luxurious lives. The superiors of the Order became alarmed and legislated in the Chapters of 1233, 1234 and 1235 to remove the brethren from such work and leave it in the

hands of the local bishops. It was a stunning blow to the nuns who liked the system. [pg. 16:]

The powerful monasteries of Prouille, Madrid and Rome appealed immediately to Pope Gregory IX, while that of Saint Agnes in Bologna appealed to Jordan. The Pope was won over to their cause and he ordered Jordan to make an exception of these convents. Raymond, who succeeded Jordan, and John of Wildehausen, who succeeded him, both tried to get the exemptions rescinded, but to no avail.

The exemptions, quite meritorious for reasons of the intimate association of those convents with Saint Dominic, now began to multiply. Amicia de Yoigny, daughter of the great friend of Saint Dominic, Count Simon de Montfort, had established a convent at Montargis. She wished it to be governed by the brethren like the four great convents which had been exempted from the provisions of the constitutions. To accomplish this aim, she appealed to Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher, a Dominican himself and quite influential both in France and Italy. The cardinal was favorable to her plea and secured the Pope's permission for it. Later, seeing with anxiety the spiritual decline of many convents under the chaplaincy of diocesan clergymen, the cardinal saw to it that many monasteries in Germany, Austria and Switzerland were turned over to the brethren for spiritual direction. Thus the constitutions of the early Chapters became ineffectual.

## **JOHN BECOMES PRIOR**

There arose in the Order a divided opinion. Some wanted to keep in vigor the old constitutions forbidding direction of nuns; others felt that it was a necessary work. Alarmed by the situation, the leaders of the Order, meeting in Bologna in 1252, presented a strong and united petition to the Pope begging him to relieve them of the care of nuns lest their own Apostolic ministry, for which the Preachers were primarily founded, be neglected. Pope Innocent IV granted the petition and sent to the General, John of Wildehausen, a bull releasing the brethren from the burden of directorship over monasteries of nuns, with the exception only of the convents of Prouille in France and of San Sisto in Rome. He imposed severe censures on anyone who would violate the directive.

The nuns were quite disconcerted, but again, with feminine blitheness, they went about planning to revive the system of their desire. The death of Innocent IV and of John of Wildehausen gave them hope of succeeding. Humbert, the new Master General, gave them a sincere hearing when they approached him on it. Furthermore, [pg. 17:] the cardinal who had brought about the problem anew was his dear and intimate friend. Humbert keenly sensed that the system in the long run would harm the Order, and yet he could not rebuff completely the continuing pleas of the nuns and of the cardinal. He determined to effect a compromise. In the Chapter of 1255, he promoted the legislation that the Order would accept a monastery of nuns for direction provided that three successive Chapters voted for it. It was a reasonable softening of policy without vitally endangering the essential aim of the Order. This was the situation in 1256 when Blessed John became prior in Bologna.

The nuns of Saint Agnes Convent appealed to him to furnish them with a Dominican superior. Despite the early constitutions, they had been excepted

before, as we have seen, and now wanted to be excepted again, on a par with the Convents of Prouille and San Sisto. Their arguments were plausible. Founded by Saint Dominic himself as had been the excepted two other convents, the nuns had now for five years been deprived of direction by a Dominican priest. There still lived in the convent Sister Cecilia, the dear friend and biographer of Saint Dominic; the convent held the relics of Blessed Diana, who with Amata and Cecilia (all three of them now Blessed) , had been Saint Dominic's powerful aid in Bologna; and the convent's sweetest tradition and undoubted cause of its spiritual vitality was its dependence on direction from the brethren. Despite these meritorious claims, the Provincial, Father Carisio, had denied the request in view of the Papal decree forbidding under censure the taking of any new directorship. John felt that he was interpreting the mind of Saint Dominic in reference to these nuns of his predilection when he determined to sponsor their cause. The obstacle that stopped the Provincial was now obviated by the diplomatic ingenuity of the prior. John wrote to Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher, asking him to intervene for the nuns of Bologna. Agreeable, the cardinal made a formal request of Pope Alexander IV, who granted the favor. John was thereupon appointed prior of the Convent of Saint Agnes, while remaining prior of the brethren's convent, with the stipulation that he continue in the first capacity until the time required for the three consecutive General Chapters to vote to take the directorship of the convent, as Humbert's compromise legislation provided. Thus, in his own jurisdiction, John happily settled a vexing problem to the satisfaction of all concerned.

---

[Page 18]

## CHAPTER III

# JOHN AS PROVINCIAL

IN 1257, John was elected Provincial of the Province of Lombardy by the chapter held in Novara during Pentecost week. Since its establishment in 1218, the Province had flourished beyond all expectations. Next to the spade work of Saint Dominic himself, that of Blessed Reginald, whose privilege it was to receive from the hands of the Lovely Lady the scapular as the distinctive part of the white Dominican habit, was largely responsible for the remarkable growth.

Starting with the convent at Bologna, in two years the friars had spread out to Milan, Bergamo, Pavia, Piacenza, San Severino in the Marches, Verona and Brescia. Later, convents were opened in Faenza, Treviso, Padua, Parma, Forli and Iesi. In 1228, the Dominicans established themselves in Cremona; in 1230 in Venice; in 1233, as we saw, in Vercelli; and, shortly after, in Reggio Emilia and in Trent.

They gave themselves a short rest period in which to consolidate, but in 1242 resumed their expansion by founding a house in Friuli. Others followed in rapid succession: Modena in 1243, Ancona and Rimini in 1249, Cesena, Ascoli-Piceno and Ripatransone in 1250, Barlassina in 1252 and Alessandria in 1255. At this time the Province took in all the territory of the present extent of the Piedmont and Lombard Provinces, namely, from the Alps to Tuscany and from

the Ligurian Sea to the Adriatic. Each convent housed at least twelve religious as then called for by the Constitutions, which were scrupulously obeyed. The major convents, such as those of Milan and Padua, had about sixty friars each, while Bologna, already venerable as the primatial convent, had about two hundred. The total number of religious then under the jurisdiction of John of Vercelli has been estimated to be in the vicinity of six hundred.

The work of a Provincial is arduous. Analogous to a bishop, his care is the government of many separate establishments and of [pg. 19:] many types of men, the providing for their welfare and support, the promotion of various enterprises for the spiritual well-being of his subjects, the protecting of them against many dangers, some of which arise from their own green and excessive zeal. He must also safeguard the paramount interests of the Church and of the Order and be responsible for the administration of multitudinous details, keeping harmonious relations with ecclesiastical superiors, with fellow religious institutes and with the civil government. A Provincial must keep his men happy and busy, faithful to the ideals and Constitutions of the Order; he assigns them to residence and specific work, supervises their activities and leads them to endeavors calculated to promote their personal sanctification and the general good of the Province.

One of the very burdensome chores of the Provincial is the necessary round of visitations he must make. Through these visits the Provincial keeps personally acquainted with situations as they actually are and is able to give wise direction to the local superiors.

John of Vercelli assumed this responsible office of Provincial with characteristic zeal. Though he felt unworthy of the honor of the position, he determined to give himself unsparingly for the good of his Province. Knowing the great advantage that is derived when a superior keeps vigilant, he made it his immediate policy to visit the houses frequently. He is remembered lovingly as using in his travels, done mostly on foot, a walking stick. The silver topped stick, together with the emblem of the Holy Name, now has become his liturgical symbol.

## VISITATIONS

In his visits to the convents of his Province, John encountered personages who are famous in the annals of the Church or of the Order. It would be interesting to accompany him on a typical round of visitation. At Bologna, his old Canon Law professor, James Buoncompagni, was now bishop. In Venice, in the Convent of Saints John and Paul, James Salamoni, sole heir of an illustrious, noble family, was edifying all by his saintly life. In Bergamo, Father Pianamonte di Pellegrini, Count of Brembate, venerable for his age and holiness, was ruling his community with a gentleness truly Christ-like. He had received the habit from Saint Dominic himself and had been sent by him with Guala to establish the [pg. 20:] convent in Bergamo. The latter had been named the first prior, but when later he became the Bishop of Brescia, Father Pianamonte headed the convent and so admirable was his administration that he was retained in that office for more than thirty years. The convent of Bergamo under him became a training post for bishops.

Living in this convent was Algisio di Rosciate, who had become Bishop of Rimini, then Bishop of Bergamo. After nine years, he had begged permission of

the Holy See to retire so that he could spend the rest of his days as a simple friar. The diocesan chapter of Bergamo asked Father Pianamonte to name a successor. The prior proposed Father Ebordo, an elderly religious of his convent. The suggestion pleased the chapter and it sought permission of John, now Provincial, for the religious to accept the promotion. John gladly gave it, whereupon the Pope confirmed the election and ordered the consecration. Father Peter Scaligero was another friar of the convent who became a bishop. He ruled the Diocese of Verona and lived to be almost a centenarian. Father Pianamonte founded the celebrated Misericordia Confraternity, which still flourishes in Bergamo.

In Milan, the body of Saint Peter Martyr was making the Convent of Saint Eustorgio a popular shrine by reason of the many miracles wrought there. One of the friars was Father Ardizzone Salari, who had received the habit from Saint Dominic. He lived almost to his hundredth year and was famed for his great purity, attested by miracles. In Pavia, Blessed Isnard, who had died in 1244, was attracting many to his tomb through miracles wrought by God in testimony of the sanctity of His servant.

At Forli, John found among the religious Carino da Balsamo. This man was the one who had slain so cruelly with his own hands Saint Peter of Verona, the first martyr of the Dominican Order. After the foul deed, he had fled to Rome, but on his way through Forli had fallen sick, and fearing death, had asked for a priest, specifically for a Dominican. The prior of the convent responded, heard the confession of the assassin, and then imposed a startling penance: that he become a Dominican. The culprit burst forth into tears, protesting that he was unworthy of such a grace. The prior calmed him with the assurance that the Good Shepherd wanted him back in His fold and among the intimates of His flock. The killer accepted the proposal, recovered and became a religious, the prior alone knowing the secret of his past. Thereafter [pg. 21:] he lived a most exemplary life. He had been allowed to keep the dagger with which he had slain the martyr, his only possession at the time he entered religion. This odd patrimony, analagous to the dowry of a nun, kept him forever mindful of his need to do penance. After his death, several-miracles attested to his holy perseverance in expiating his awful crime.

At Genoa, John met James of Varazza, who was to succeed him as Provincial and who later became Archbishop of Genoa. He was a celebrated historian and preacher. Among his great achievements was the translation of the Bible into Italian. Also at Genoa, John encountered Father Boniface Fieschi, nephew of Pope Innocent IV. When a Cardinal, Innocent had opposed the lad's desire to become a Dominican, but the youth persisted in his religious vocation. Later, Pope Gregory X, noting his talents, sent him as Legate Apostolic to France and in 1274 made him Archbishop of Ravenna.

At Vicenza, our Provincial found Bishop Bartholomew Braganza, who had received the habit from Saint Dominic. He had become the theologian for Popes Gregory IX and Innocent IV, as well as the friend and confessor of King Saint Louis IX, whom he accompanied to Palestine. In 1256, he was made Bishop of Vicenza, his saintly fervor in no way diminishing. He died in 1270 and was beatified by Pope Pius VI.

At Modena, John saw Albert Boschetti, who also had received the habit from Saint Dominic. At the age of thirty, he was named Bishop of Modena. He suffered much in the civil wars between Guelfs and Ghibellines, being forced

to retire to Bologna for a while, but he was greatly instrumental later in effecting peace.

Such was the picture of John's Province in a remarkable age in the history of the Order, the first fervor still at high heat accomplishing the wonders for Church and society which Saint Dominic had charged his sons to dare through the triple formula of prayer, preaching and penance.

## **JOHN ESTABLISHES A STUDIUM**

John of Vercelli continued the expansion of the Province, opening convents in Turin, Chieri and Tortona. The founding of the convent in Turin was attended by a notable event recorded by Father Thomas of Cantimpre. One of the friars, lingering behind [pg. 22:] in the chapel after the brethren had gone to repose, was praying fervently when the Blessed Mother appeared to him. While personally overwhelmed by the apparition, sensing that he would be doubted by the brethren when he reported it, he asked the Lady please to appear to the whole community. Smilingly, she agreed and on three successive occasions showed herself to the members of the new convent. Naturally, a great devotion to the Queen of Heaven developed at Turin which characterizes the place to this day.

The convent in Vercelli expectedly received John's devoted attention. The church was still unfinished, so John set into motion plans to complete it. He asked the legate of the Holy See, Philip, Archbishop of Ravenna, for permission to conduct a drive for its benefit. Great success attended the drive, so the church was finally completed.

Following the example of the nuns of Saint Agnes in Bologna, the religious women of Marola and Campagnola in the Diocese of Reggio-Emilia approached Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher with the request that he see to it that a Dominican father be appointed superior in their monasteries. The fathers were against the proposal. Notwithstanding, the cardinal appealed to the Provincial. Diplomatically, John found a way out of the dilemma, devising a plan whereby instead of placing the convents under the jurisdiction of the Order they would be supervised by three visitators elected every three years by the Provincial Chapter. Armed with apostolic faculties, the visitators would provide a spiritual and economic direction sufficient to satisfy the nuns without involving the Order itself in their affairs.

In the spring of 1259, John crossed the Alps into France. A General Chapter had been convoked at Valenciennes in Flanders which met on June 1 under the presidency of the Master General, Humbert of the Romans. John attended this Chapter which, having been called particularly to discuss the studies of the Order, had invited five celebrated masters of the University of Paris. Their names are impressive: Saint Albert, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Blessed Peter of Tarantasia, who became Pope Innocent V, Father Peter Bonhomme and Father Fiorenzo. The Chapter passed many salutary laws on studies, John's own fine mind joining with the famous masters above named to shape the legislation and give it practical direction. The statutes were simply stated, were far- [pg. 23:] reaching in their wisdom and most fruitful in preserving in the Order a high-type of scholarship.

When John returned to his Province, he called a Provincial Chapter to meet in Bologna in order to execute the provisions of the General Chapter. He established at Milan a *studium generale* for all young students of his jurisdiction specializing in philosophy and law, while Bologna was to continue to be the center for theology. He showed great care in selecting promising students for the lectorate, or for special studies, but he was particularly attentive in the task of selecting competent teachers and promoting worthy lecturers to the masterate. Among the selections he made are the names of the following who have attained fame: Father Stefanardo da Vimercate, historian and poet; Father Emmanuel da Milano, famous orator; and Father Giorgio da Cassano, commentator on Aristotle.

Towards the end of 1262, Thomas Aquinas, as definator of the Roman Province, passed through Milan on his way to London for the General Chapter that was to meet during Pentecost week in 1263. The Angelic Doctor inspected the *studium* John had established in Milan and commented favorably on it. In memory of his visit, Thomas Aquinas wrote some verses in honor of Saint Peter of Verona, which later were sculptured on the tomb of the martyr. The *studium* justified both John's labor in establishing it and the Angelic Doctor's approval of it, for it produced many eminent scholars, among them Nicholas Boccasini, who became the ninth Master General, then Pope and finally was raised to the altar as Blessed Benedict XI. Father Americo of Piacenza, who became the twelfth Master General was also a student at the Milan house of studies.

---

[Page 24]

## CHAPTER IV

# THE INQUISITOR

JOHN'S vexing concern was his office of Inquisitor. The suppression of heresy has always been the serious responsibility of the Holy See over the whole Church and of the Bishop in his diocese. To keep the purity of faith in a region where it was imperiled, the Holy See began the practice, since the days of Saint Dominic, of appointing an inquisitor who as *alter ego* of the Pope or Bishop, depending on his commission, would take unrestricted charge of the task of suppressing the heresy. The success of Saint Dominic himself and of his brethren in this work counseled the Holy See to entrust the office mostly to Dominicans. Franciscans and others were appointed here and there, but by and large Inquisitors were Dominicans. Even the Emperor Frederick was impressed by the talents of the friars for this work that in 1224 he stated that the office of Inquisitor would be entrusted throughout his empire to the Dominicans.

Saint Dominic had been the exemplary Inquisitor. Loving the Faith with intense passion, he had moved not only with zeal but with expert practicality to preserve it against the onslaughts of heretics. His first technique was borne of his own personal integrity fortified by a spirit of humility and the practice of mortification. The second was a brand of preaching so clear, so reasoned, so convincing, that error had to be dispelled if the hearers were of good will. Truth, he felt, was its own best weapon and he continued this positive, gentle approach to the problem as long as he could. But when the

heretics themselves, unwilling to fight it out on rational grounds and to allow truth and grace to prevail, would resort to violence to keep the heresy alive, then Saint Dominic felt that they had to be stopped by force. Since in those days heresy was equally a civil offense as well as a spiritual defection, the arm of the government could be called upon to help suppress it. Saint Dominic did not shirk utilizing this power to preserve the most precious ornament of human society, the Faith. His lofty yet practical [pg. 25:] methods proved highly successful, giving to the Church and to the Order a definite pattern to follow under similar circumstances in the later period which we are now considering.

The quarrel of the Emperor Frederick with the Church accompanied by its attendant disorders encouraged the rise of new heresies, heresies too often sadly involved in political matters, which made it difficult on the part of people, and even of ecclesiastics, to distinguish clearly when the point was heresy or just a matter of political concern.

In John's time heresy in Italy was a vital issue. We have seen that Peter of Verona was martyred by the heretics. This is just a sample of the menace to Christian peace they represented. The Church had to wage a vexatious battle against her own powerful son, the Holy Roman Emperor, and against his successors over political issues, and at the same time stem a vicious tide of heresy which flowed in upon her as a by-product of the battle.

She called to her aid the Dominicans, who had already acquired a great name as sound, clear-headed theologians, brilliant preachers of the truth, champions of the Faith, and sons of the Church most loyal in their devotion to the Vicar of Christ. They had been born in the labor pains of a virulent heresy that threatened the life of the Church; they had destroyed that heresy through the effective methods adopted by their founder, and they possessed the best talents of heart and mind in the Church to cope with any new heresies. Accordingly, from the ranks of the apostolic sons of Saint Dominic, the Church chose her generals for the battle against heresy, giving them the title of Inquisitor. Their office was to seek out error when and where it might arise, expose both the person preaching heresy and the fallacy of his arguments, prevent its growth by closing communications among heretics and, when necessary, order them imprisoned. The FBI today is performing an office much similar to the one carried on by the Inquisitors. When a nation is threatened by subversive, secret elements, she must resort to a competent group of probers who can ferret out the plotters and from facts gleaned through their inquisition circumvent the evil designs of her domestic enemies.

As we have seen already, John had been named Inquisitor for Venice while he was Prior in Vercelli. When he became Provincial of Lombardy he had the added responsibility of proposing to the Holy See the names of men in his jurisdiction competent for the [pg. 26:] office of Inquisitor. He nominated them as wisely as he could. Though he hated heresy as earth's most grievous curse and though he was in full agreement that the one effective weapons against it was the Inquisition, he knew that unless this office were handled with the greatest skill and charity it could degenerate into an instrument of harm to the best interests of the Church. He had seen a growing unpopularity towards the Inquisition on the part of the Catholic population. Sometimes Inquisitors would be more zealous than prudent, ruthlessly onesided, and they would outrage a common sense of justice. Extreme severity, theoretically justifiable to a priest who loathed heresy, in the popular mind began to take

on the aspect of a persecution and thus won sympathy for the heretics. Further, in their excessive zeal, the Inquisitors sometime would cause the arrest of a man whose only fault was his political views at variance with papal policy. To a priest, this was "playing it safe" in saving the Faith, but to the people it was a foul suppression of their civic liberties. They began to resent those unfeeling priests, who sitting as magistrates wrapped in the black and white robes of their austere Dominican dignity, passed sentences of imprisonment, torture and death on their neighbors, friends, and relations. The Dominican Order, which had enjoyed the people's respect and love for the name it had made in its first forty years for sanctity, eloquence, and scholarship, now began to lose this respect. The people began to hate the Order, and in many instances worked violence on Dominicans and on their convents.

## **JOHN COUNSELS MODERATION**

The dismay John felt in this situation was not eased by his own most valiant efforts to inject a spirit of practical moderation. Several of his men disdained his counsel and proceeded as ruthlessly as before. They had Papal power to proceed against any heretic, no matter who he might be--a baron, a count, an abbot, a prelate, a bishop, or a fellow Dominican. They sent out a directive to all men in authority, to mayors, consuls, barons, counts, and feudal lords, to take an oath that they would see to it that in their jurisdiction the laws of the Church against heresy were enforced. If the region had no such laws on its books, they were to be enacted. The Inquisitors were to report to the Holy See on the manner in which the laws were enforced. If they were not, the civil [pg. 27:] officials were to be solemnly warned, and if, after a year the laws were still ignored they were to be summarily removed from office and others who would conform replace them. Naturally, turmoil ensued. Often when the Inquisitor would remove a civil official from office the legality of the action would not be recognized by the deposed or by the people, with resultant confusion of authority and civil disorders. In Parma the fury of the people against the Inquisitors was so great that they burned down the convent.

John was supported in his views by the local superiors, who having the care of their particular convents at stake as well as the welfare of the Order, wanted moderation in the campaign against the heretics. The Inquisitors however, flushed with apostolic authority, were mostly unanimous in advocating still sterner measures. This divided opinion on policy among the heads of the Order did not help the situation, but it does reveal that the Order had not gone entirely all out for severity. Wise heads, such as John's, looking far into the future, saw that the Church would reap more destruction than salvation from the policy of severity. They particularly disliked the practice of leveling easy excommunications and interdicts on groups and regions for the fault of a few individuals. The innocent sufferers of the penalties felt aggrieved, often to the point of holding the Church in contempt, which is the speedy road to schism and heresy, so that while the Inquisition kept many in the faith through dread of consequences it also forced out of it many who would have remained.

John faced a crucial situation in all this. On top of it all he was confronted at this point with a more sickening problem. Father Reinero Sacconi, whom we mentioned in Chapter II as a most zealous convert from heresy, was one of those Inquisitors most adamant for a stern and ruthless

policy. No persuasion of John to work judiciously had any effect. With John away at Flanders for the Chapter of Valenciennes, Father Reinero obtained from Pope Alexander IV a decree allowing greater severity in the treatment of heretics. When John returned he read with dismay the terms of the decree, "Ad Extirpanda De Medic, Populi," issued November 30, 1259. It ordered all municipal officials, three days after taking office, to establish an Inquisition of twelve members, to take an oath that they themselves would be sworn accusers against heretics and be assistants of the tribunal; they would remain in office six months, after which they would be replaced by [pg. 28:] others. If they were not satisfactory to the Inquisition they could be replaced at its will; during their six months' tenure they were to do nothing but occupy themselves seeking out heretics; finally, within ten days after leaving office, they were to prove in the presence of three delegates appointed by the new administration that they had faithfully discharged their office. John saw the impracticality of the decree and pleaded with Father Reinero to keep its enforcement in moderation.

But the old warrior disdained the advice and proceeded to enforce it harshly. He was burning with one desire: to break the power of "the new pagans," as he designated Manfred, Ezzelino, and Pallavicini, who were continuing the war of the Emperor against the Church. In his way of thinking, the Faith had to be preserved at all cost, even at the price of the welfare of his Order. We may at this point wonder how sound was his reasoning. Italy kept the Faith, as Spain did with Torquemada and Ximenes pursuing the same policy; but did they keep it thanks exclusively to the Inquisition? Was it worth the odium to which the Church fell heir in all Europe and which persists today in many parts of the world? Shall we ever know?

John saw the work of the local convents of his Province paralyzed in the conflict. All the good will and fame built up by years of apostolic labor among the people waned in the face of the opposition of the people to the methods of the Inquisitors. Loyal to the Pope, John could not ignore the harsh decree, but he sought valiantly to explain its provisions to the people in calm, rational tones. True to the spirit of Saint Dominic, he felt that preaching, not violence, was the answer to the problem. The Dominicans had been known to be gentle fathers, calm spiritual advisers, quiet scholars; now they were acquiring the reputation of fanatics, sadists, and monsters in the popular mind. In all his nominations for the inquisitorial office he sought to have it filled with men of discretion and practicality and he desperately tried to keep the Order united on a reasonable policy. However, the spirit of a strange age was against him. It was fanatically partisan, affecting heretic and orthodox alike and causing great spiritual damage which lingers to this day in the animosity many feel towards the Church and the Dominican Order. [pg. 29:]

## COUNSEL IGNORED

John's counsel for moderation had no effect on the Inquisitors. In fact they resented his attitude and began to attack him. Father Reinero, particularly, went to undue lengths to show himself right against the attitude of the Provincial and of the priors. He went to Anagni, where Alexander IV was staying, and obtained from him after an eloquent recital of all the fine things he was doing for the cause of the Church against the opposition not only of the heretics but of many Catholics, including some of his own Dominican brethren and superiors an order permitting him to use what- ever

Dominicans he needed for his work; and to command them to it in virtue of obedience, to penalize their refusal with excommunication, and to have himself and his Inquisitors withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the superiors of his Order in all things which affected the inquisitorial office. This order by participation was extended to the Franciscans as well as to all other Dominican Inquisitors.

It was not the Pope's intention in giving this unusual order to belittle the Provincial, for whom he retained a great admiration. He felt simply that the Inquisitors should be hampered in no way. For his part, John felt more relieved than perturbed by the order, a sentiment shared in by the Master General and other Provincials, for it relieved them of the vexatious problems arising out of trying to keep the Inquisitors in line. Inquisitorial work, in reality, was no longer the Order's responsibility. This is little understood or appreciated by people now, but the fact remains that the Inquisition as it developed after the days of Saint Dominic should not be attributed to the spirit of the Dominican Order. The Order's spirit is more truly reflected by the founder himself and by such clear-sighted sons as our John of Vercelli.

---

[Page 30]

## **CHAPTER V**

# **CRUSADER**

POPE ALEXANDER IV died on May 20, 1261. After an interval of three months, James Pantaleon, a Frenchman, was elected by a conclave held at Viterbo and took the name of Urban IV. He had been Patriarch of Jerusalem, witnessing there the many hardships which Catholics had to suffer both from the Saracens and from the Greek schismatics under their emperor, Paleologus. Pope Urban determined, therefore, to launch a new Crusade to free the Holy Land. He had marked as well the splendid work which Dominicans and Franciscans were doing in Palestine. Impressed by the evident apostolic spirit of these two new Orders, he resolved to confide to them the preaching of the Crusade.

Accordingly, he instructed Father Paperone who was acting as Vicar of the Order while the Master General was in Bologna for the General Chapter, to nominate able men for the work he had in mind. The Vicar thereupon submitted the names of the Provincials of France, Spain, Poland, Scandanavia and Lombardy, together with that of Albert the Great for Germany. The Pope was pleased with these nominations and proceeded to invest the Dominicans with the necessary authority. These men in their respective jurisdictions were to arouse enthusiasm for the Crusade, collect funds and equip an army.

In his letter of instruction to John, who was thus appointed Crusader for Lombardy, the Pope ordered him to send all his available religious throughout northern Italy to preach the Crusade, to collect the levies imposed on all ecclesiastical benefices, to release anyone from vows and censures which might interfere with his joining the Crusade, to equip the troops and in general supervise both the spiritual and financial details of the vast project.

Before accepting the appointment, John sought to have himself and his religious relieved of the financial concerns of the work. He cited to the Pope the former privileges given to the Order by other Pontiffs through which religious had been released from temporal [pg. 31:] details to dedicate themselves fully to spiritual matters. The Pope denied the petition, revoked all former privileges and commanded him in obedience to undertake every aspect of the commission. Naturally, John submitted to the Pope's will and went about the onerous tasks of collecting funds in the extensive region of his jurisdiction. He was given the title of Procurator General of the Crusade in Lombardy, which position carried with it great authority.

As a first step towards the accomplishment of his new responsibility, John thought it wise to establish his residence in Venice which, as the Queen City of the Adriatic, was the natural port to which the troops might converge and from which they might embark for the holy endeavor. He appointed the prior of the convent in Venice as his vicar in the enterprise so that when his duties as Provincial compelled him to journey to the various convents the work of the Crusade would not be interrupted.

With a general's skill he marshalled his resources and deployed his men to best advantage. Under his inspiring leadership, Dominicans raised their eloquent voices throughout all Lombardy, extolling the merits of the Crusade, arousing enthusiasm for it in the hearts of prince and pauper alike and coaxing from prelate and noble the money needed for the vast undertaking.

The need for money became enormous. The methods used to obtain it had to be not only smooth, skillful and persistent, but somewhat extraordinary. Besides the regular forceful appeals to the people's generosity, the Church encouraged liberal giving by granting special indulgences to those who proved generous according to their means. Furthermore, a direct appeal was made to have past sins atoned for more efficaciously by a sacramental confession, and by sacrificial almsgiving. Theologically this method is very sound, for hardly anything else proves the sincere contrition of a sinner so clearly as does the surrender of one's lawful temporal goods for charity. But the matter can be misunderstood by those who do not have the theological knowledge or Catholic attitude. The Church's appeal for almsgiving in atonement of sin is misinterpreted to mean that she pardons sins upon receipt of money contributions.

This precisely was the misrepresentation of those who two and a half centuries later, surrendering their Catholic mind for a national one, used the method as a pretext of justifying their break [pg. 32:] from Rome. It is distressing to contemplate how their attack on the doctrine of indulgences finally brought about the dissolution of the spiritual union of the nations of Europe.

Another method employed in John's day to collect money could be open even to more misunderstanding and scandal if one ignores the theology of it and concentrates on the mere human manner of its functioning. The preachers in their holy and eloquent appeals to the people to resolve to ensure the success of the Crusade often succeeded in having the congregation make a vow to go to the Holy Land as soldiers or as helpers.

As often happens, however, the enthusiasm one feels at a public rally wanes and cools when one finds himself again at home facing the grim realities of

life. Fathers of families, mothers, the diseased and the disabled who had made the vow as spontaneously as the young bloods in the heat of the appeal found that they could not keep their vow, much like those who at Liberty Bond rallies pledge themselves for sums beyonds their means. Yet the vow had been made and a vow in the thirteenth century was a serious matter of conscience. The Church ordained that they could be released from their vow to go to the Holy Land upon the payment of a sum of money. Those whose duties forced them to stay at home, those who on introspection found themselves too timid to face battle, those whose physical condition made it inadvisable to go, took advantage of the chance the Church offered them of getting a release from the vow. Instead of themselves they sent a contribution. Thus they obtained relief from an obligation in conscience while the Church obtained the financial support she desperately needed for the holy enterprise.

## **JOHN AND SAINT LOUIS OF FRANCE**

For the two remaining years of his Provincialate, John was heavily involved in this mixture of sacred and temporal concerns. A Crusade for him was a holy thing into which he felt constrained to put his best efforts as a priest. With the fervor of an apostle he kept preaching to all the spiritual advantages of a Crusade: the honor and glory of God, the freedom of the Church, the peace of Europe, the advancement of Christian civilization and the opportunities of grace for the individuals. He conducted the material side of his work as inoffensively as he could, keeping always within [pg. 33:] propriety and avoiding those scandals which in later years marked other collectors and which occasioned great detriment to the unity of Europe.

The Pope ordered John in particular to keep in close contact with King Louis IX of France, who had ardently resolved to lead his army into Palestine despite the failure of the previous Crusade. This monarch had made many fast friends among Dominicans and Franciscans. Now he added a new friend among them, for he saw in John of Vercelli a soul kindred and congenial to his own spirit by reason of the friar's deep love of God and energetic ability to further the honor of His Name. John supplied the King with monies and equipment as best he could. In several consultations between the two men plans were laid to give the Crusade greater impetus and to extend its appeal to all Europe.

The attitude of the Queen City of the Adriatic, at that time an independent and powerful republic, began to cause grave concern to the promoters of the Crusade. Venice was officially cool to the Crusade because it would jeopardize its commerce with the Orient. It was a case of business and its own provincial interests first before any spiritual good or the welfare of Christian Europe as a whole.

John's selection as Crusade chief for northern Italy was as felicitous as could have been made. When he had been Inquisitor years before, with headquarters in Venice, he had kept on the friendliest terms with the Doge and officials of the republic.

His own selection of Venice as the focal center of the Crusade had been made with a mind to please the officials there as well as for the reason of its natural advantage. He tried his best to arouse enthusiasm in them but their temporal concerns prevented them from seeing the spiritual force of his

arguments. He even tried to argue with them on their own grounds, pointing out that the Crusade would in the long run bring them commensurate commercial and financial advantages, but to the Venetian the bird in the hand was worth more than a brace in the bush. They were doing a brisk business now with the East, the Crusade would disrupt it, likely destroy it, and were the Crusade to be successful the trade would be open to too many Christian competitors. Hence they turned a deaf ear to John's pleadings, although he succeeded in obtaining from them full liberty of action in his office of high commissioner of the Crusade. [pg. 34:]

He directed the construction of a number of galleys which upon completion he dispatched to Port-Vendre and Cette on the French coast, to implement the navy of King Louis. Other ships were equipped and kept in the port of Venice, subject to requisition by the king. Louis showed great benevolence both for the ships sent him and for the chaplains appointed by John to accompany them. In appreciation, the monarch sent to the Provincial valuable books and relics. Among these were a piece of the true cross and some thorns from the crown worn by the King of Kings in the first and best of all crusades. These precious relics are still in the Dominican churches of Bologna, Vercelli, Milan and Savigliano. He had previously sent to Bartholomew of Braganza, who had been a companion during his first Crusade, one of the thorns. When the chaplain became Bishop of Vicenza he determined to build a church-convent of the Order as a fitting repository of the relic. In this he sought and readily obtained the cooperation of John as Provincial. The place was named appropriately the Holy Crown.

John's labors for the success of the Crusade were prodigious. He kept uppermost the spiritual element, never allowing physical exertions or material needs to rob him of his own interior communion with God. His preaching and his exhorting kept on a high level of piety. In his relations with prelates and princes he exercised the greatest prudence, with the result that though his business with them was often ungracious he managed to keep them friendly to him. In this he was of great use to the Church, for in the crisis she needed men who could smooth out problems without creating new ones.

## **A DELICATE MISSION**

Typical of his fine diplomacy animated by charity is the way he handled a delicate mission given to him by the Pope in the midst of all his preoccupations for the Crusade. The Bishop of Piacenza, Philip Fulgosio, had been accused by Alberto Fontana, the last Guelf mayor, of being in league with the Pallavicinis, the Ghibelline arch-enemies of the Church, who had taken over the city. Urban IV, ignoring the ordinary inquisitorial tribunal, directly ordered John to act as his personal agent in questioning the bishop. It was an explosive situation, for if the bishop were not [pg. 35:] handled with tact the fury of either the Guelfs or the Ghibellines would be aroused to new pitch. John was empowered to call the bishop to him for questioning. Instead, he thought it wiser to go to the bishop and talk the matter over as priest to priest. He found that the charges against the prelate had been exaggerated; that while the bishop had been misguided in some of his public conduct and had leaned politically on the side of the Ghibellines, he was fundamentally loyal. John eloquently pointed out how necessary it was to give the papal party an assurance of this loyalty. The bishop agreed and so the

conference ended amicably instead of stirring up a hornet's nest, John sent a favorable report to Rome and that ended the dangerous situation.

In the spring of 1264, John left Venice to go to Bologna to perform pressing provincial duties, among them to appoint Philip Carisio his vicar while he would be absent to attend the important General Chapter, convoked for Pentecost Week in Paris, to elect a new Master General. In the Chapter of the preceding year in London, Humbert had finally persuaded the definitors to accept his resignation. Reluctantly, the definitors, among them Thomas Aquinas, had acceded to the pleading of the Master General. He had ruled the Order for nine years, had done monumental work, and was now old and tired. His good friend Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher, was dead. Humbert felt no longer capable of guiding the destinies of a great Order, and so, like Saint Raymond before him, he asked to be dismissed. In those days there was no fixed term for a Master General or for the Provincials. They continued in office till death unless they were relieved either at their own request or by a General Chapter.

Humbert's retirement from office had a profound effect on John. He began to think about himself. He had been Provincial for seven years. Was it not time also for him to step down? His humility and democratic inclinations counseled the step, whereupon he formed the resolution to ask the General Chapter to relieve him of his burden.

With this thought in mind, en route to Paris, he visited his beloved town of Vercelli, then continued on to Turin, crossed over the Alps, descended into Savoy, entered Burgundy, traversed the pleasant fields of the Champagne laden with sprouting vines, and so arrived in Paris at the end of May.

---

[Page 36]

## CHAPTER VI

# MASTER GENERAL

ON JUNE 7, 1264, about thirty electors met in the chapter room of the Dominican Convent of Saint James in Paris under the presidency of Peter Tarantase, Provincial of France, who later became Pope Innocent V and a Blessed of the Order. John of Vercelli asked the Chapter to release him from the office of Provincial. It did so, but not in the way he expected for to his utter astonishment, the capitular fathers elected him Master General of the Order.

In Paris John had begged the fathers to reconsider their vote. Sincerely he did not want the office, wishing only for a few peaceful days in his beloved Piedmont. The Chapter brushed aside his remonstrances and so he entered into a new phase of his notable life.

His Province, and the whole Order for that matter, had anticipated his election with great satisfaction. Upon the arrival of the news of his selection joy was expressed everywhere. The family of Dominic knew

instinctively that it had a worthy chief who would carry on the best traditions of that exalted office of Master General.

John of Vercelli's first act was to send out a formal circular letter which announced his election and indicated the general policy of his regime. Its language reveals better than another's words the character of the man:

To all the brethren of the Order of Friars Preachers, who are loved intimately in the Heart of Christ, Brother John, their useless servant, wishes a continuance in increase of grace.

Contrary to my hopes, since I yearned for the sweetness of repose after my labors, I have found them increased rather than lessened after sustaining the burdens of Procurator of the Crusade and of Prior Provincial of Lombardy.

What will I say, my beloved, who are my brethren through a common profession, my sons through the office I [pg. 37:] have assumed and, justly, my fathers by reason of your abundant merits. You have chosen as the guardian of the vineyard me who have not guarded the personal vineyard of my own conscience. How can one who has not sufficed in small things measure up to many things? How can my weak shoulders which bent under the weight of light matters carry the load of the heavy? This wretched excuse of a man, by obligation and obedience, has taken an office whose predecessors have glorified it with great merit while I am bereft of all merit. Indeed, I am inferior in talent and poor in everything that is needed to honor the office.

I know what is expected of me, but I know not what I can do unless God helps me.

My fears at my inability should be yours as well, wherefore I beg you to give me the help of your prayers so that divine mercy may supply that which I lack in my own strength.

The living of a holy life, modesty in speaking and the disciplining of the mind send out a pleasing fragrance. Let nothing happen which might harm your holy living. Persevere in prayer, be faithful to study, so that with equal zeal you may ensure your own and your neighbor's salvation. (Mothon, pp. 181-4.)

The Order's and history's estimate of John's talents of heart and mind is quite diverse from his own. He proved to be a splendid type of leader true to the pattern of his five great predecessors. The praises of his contemporaries, sustained by the research of centuries, are not mere generalities but enter into the category of specific qualities of a high order definitely possessed and exercised by him. John's basic virtue was a saintly rectitude of purpose wherein effacing self he dedicated all his actions to God's glory and the honor of His Name. As Saint Thomas says, the conforming of self to God's will in all things is the secret of holiness. John possessed that spirit of conformity keeping him the model religious with a firm hold on true spirituality. This essential grace in soul was supplemented by many other divine favors. He possessed robust physical health, a deep, clear mind, a heart warm with charity. Though now sixty-four years of age, he was a tireless worker vigorously keeping himself to tasks of office. He was somewhat short in [pg. 38:] stature and he had become stoop-shouldered, but his face pleasingly radiated both alertness of intellect and kindness of heart. He still followed the austere rules of the Order fasting perpetually from meat, rising early, traveling on foot and avoiding any species of luxury.

## **JOHN REMOVES ABUSES**

John of Vercelli, as Master General, chose Father Batholomew of Faenza as his socius. This is an important office concerning which Humbert, John's predecessor in the office, had laid down exacting qualifications. A socius is the right arm of a General, his eyes, ears and very alter ego. Bartholomew was well qualified for these duties. John also appointed a laybrother from Vercelli to take care of physical details. These three now became familiar pilgrims of Christ traversing Europe, their baggage light in simple poverty but their purpose weighty to advance God's kingdom through the work of the Order.

The Dominican Order was popular then. Vocations were plentiful and outlets for the friars' talents were abundant. The Dominicans could be found everywhere, in universities, in city councils, in episcopal curiae, in courts of kings and in the pope's official family. While this was all quite flattering yet it represented a danger to the Dominican ideal since it removed so many men from regular, conventual living.

The Dominican Constitutions strictly forbade the friars to ride horses in those days. But those engaged in work among the great of Europe rode in retinue or by themselves in expeditious performance of missions imposed. John disliked the whole business.

While still in Paris after his election, John saw to it that the General Chapter passed a firmer act on this point. It provided that all brethren without exception would be gravely punished if they rode on horses or in carriages. Another act reminded them of the need to avoid the use of fine, costly material for their habits and other garments.

Before leaving Paris, he set in better order the studies at Saint James, the great *studium*. Forty years before when he was in Paris attending the University he had helped in the modest beginning of that school, which since had become famous and which in later centuries was to become an outstanding citadel of French and Christian culture. It was quite an honor to be appointed a professor [pg. 39:] there. At first the spirit had been purely international. Gradually, however, nationalism crept in and only French professors were appointed. John corrected this abuse ordering the prior of the Dominican Convent there to invite renowned scholars from all parts of Europe.

He corrected as best he could another abuse. Some friars were in the habit of rushing to the Holy See with their problems without bothering to go through proper channels. John sharply renewed the prohibition which forbade a religious from recouring to the Roman Curia without due permission. Similarly, he ordained that definitors bring to the General Chapter a copy of the acts of the last Chapter of their Province so that he could know on the spot with what fidelity the individual Provinces were observing the ordinations of the General Chapter and the prescriptions of the Master General.

Having attended to the first and immediate problems of his regime, John made his farewell call on King Louis IX, on the Archbishop of Paris, on the Chancellor of the University and other dignitaries before setting out on a visitation of the whole Order. Shortly after setting out he received the news that Pope Urban IV had died, October 21, 1264.

In the providence of God the cardinals on February 5, 1265, gave to the Church a new Pope whose love of the Dominican Order has not been surpassed by anyone. He was Guido de Gros, a Frenchman, who took the name of Pope Clement IV, whose early career was quite uncommon. Pope Clement had been a soldier in the French army, had married, sired two children and had seemingly settled down as a knight attendant on the king. One day he approached King Louis for a favor. The saint, with a discernment often accorded to holy persons, replied: "I have nothing to give you, for in a short while you will leave me to serve another king who will load you with his favors." Guido protested that Louis alone was his king. The saintly monarch smilingly dismissed him. The prophecy came true. Guido's wife died shortly after. An unaccountable urge drew the widower to seek Holy Orders. He was ordained a priest and soon after Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher consecrated him Bishop of Puy to replace the encumbent who had proved unfit for the post. Guido showed fine qualities as a spiritual shepherd, whereupon he was advanced to be the Archbishop of Narbonne, and later to be Cardinal Bishop of Santa Sabina. [pg. 40:] Pope Urban IV sent him to England as his legate in a special affair, and as he was returning from this mission, while in France, he was informed that the cardinals had elected him Pope. Disguising himself as a simple Dominican Friar and leaving his retinue, he sped on to Perugia, where he begged the cardinals to reconsider. But they, on the contrary, demanded he accept the office, whereupon he consented, and was crowned on February 22, 1265.

## **POPE BEFRIENDS DOMINICANS**

Pope Clement IV was intensely fond of the Dominicans. They had befriended him when he was a soldier, a courtier, a priest and a bishop. He had become the associate of some of the greatest Dominicans in the history of the Order and had remained perpetually edified by their piety, their learning and their warm friendliness. He determined to wear under his papal robes the white Dominican tunic and to keep all the constitutional fasts of the Order.

John was in southern France when the news reached him of the election of one so friendly to the Order. Rejoicing, he wrote a letter of congratulations to the new Pope, giving him an account of the conditions of Dominicans in the region of Toulouse where the Order had been born.

At Prouille, John of Vercelli found one of the nuns there to be the sister of Pope Clement. This holy nun had a vision wherein she saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a globe of fire descending upon the Dominicans when they would meet in General Chapter at Montpellier, May 24, 1265. The Pope hearing of the vision from her was impressed and wrote to John about it. This letter has been lost, but shortly after Clement sent a formal letter to the Capitular Fathers which is preserved and is remarkable for its expression of extreme veneration for the Order. Some quotes from it will indicate the deep love of the Pontiff for the family of Saint Dominic.

Clement, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to his beloved sons, the Master and Brethren of the Order of Preachers assembled in General Chapter at Montpellier, health and apostolic benediction.

. . . God Who is the true light which illumines every man coming into this world, established in the universal Church your Order as a blazing torch of the flame of love and as a light bright with the splendor of doctrine placed on the candelabra [pg. 41:] of religion most high so that it might singularly shine unto the cheer of all. Whoever are professed in such an Order and show

themselves Preachers in name and in deed are veritably a lamp to the feet of men. . . . These are they who possess the true word, an evangelical mode of preaching coupled equally with innocence of life. . . . Storms are all about Us and We fear the floods that threaten to engulf the bark of Peter. But while We fear for Our incapacity, We take comfort in the example of the Prince of the Apostles, by having recourse against the perils of the seas of the world to divine assistance which We invoke with prayers. To obtain this divine assistance, We rely particularly on your devotion, hoping in the special aid of your prayers, and We adjure in the name of the Lord your family to sustain, by the efficacy of your intercession before Jesus Who founded the Church with His Blood, Our own weak arms, as the arms of Moses were sustained. . . . For the rest, to reward with paternal benevolence this pledge of filial devotion which We exact from you, We wish that you consider as beyond question your own and your Order's possession of My special predilection, and We promise freely, with God's help, to do whatever We can for the well-being and prosperous state of your Order.  
Given at Perugia; April 23, 1265, in the first year of Our pontificate.

In response to this benevolent letter, John caused to be inserted into the acts of the General Chapter an order obliging all Dominicans to say a special prayer for the Pope.

The Order had established international houses of studies in Cologne, Paris and Montpellier. The Paris house thrived economically due to the generosity of King Louis and of his mother, Queen Blanche, but the other two suffered. The superiors in Cologne and Montpellier thus straightened tended to limit the influx of students. Each province had the right to send four students to the great schools. The superiors began to discourage their coming, welcoming indeed the students from their own nation but giving frosty reception to the foreigners. John appreciated the economic problems of these local superiors, but was adamant in his determination to keep the international character of the schools. In reviewing the acts of the Provincial Chapter of Germany, he discovered that the [pg. 42:] Provincial there, with the consent of the definitors, had sent back to their provinces many non-German students. John felt that he had to give a clear indication of his internationally-minded policy, so he summarily dismissed the Provincial from office and imposed on him the penance of fasting on bread and water for twelve days, while the definitors were given eight days of the same diet. He told the Germans he would visit the province to make sure that his orders were being obeyed and he fixed the locale of the next General Chapter of 1266 at Treves.

At the close of the Chapter at Montpellier, 1265, John addressed a letter to the whole Order. Some passages in it are worth quoting.

Having received the light from on high and placed as luminaries of doctrine in the firmament of the Church, let us not only receive the light, but as stars reflect it.

Let the innocence of life give to your preaching its best appeal, and remember that unless the constant spirit of penance prevail among us our preaching will get cold.

Avoid laziness and watch the little things. He who grows careless in little things little by little falls, and he who does not push himself to make progress, goes backward.

## CHAPTER VII

# PAPAL TIMBER

ON MAY 16, 1266, John opened and presided over the General Chapter of definitors held at Treves. In anticipation of it, on February 24, Pope Clement IV sent two letters, the first to John himself as head of the Order and the second to the Chapter to assemble at Treves. The first letter is one of the greatest eulogies ever penned. The Pope expressed his profound admiration for the Order in terms exceptionally tender. In his exuberant praise there is found a phrase which has been accepted as a prophetic appraisal of the greatness of Saint Thomas Aquinas who at that time was teaching in Italy and was hard at work on his Summa. The following is an excerpt indicative of the warm feelings of the Pope for the sons of Dominic:

Your Order is like an armed city in which dwells a people dedicated to the practice of justice. Its doors are opened to all who love the truth. You have girt your loins with justice; you are rich in grace which entitles you to a heavenly life, for you have been following in unparalleled manner the example and counsels of Christ. Your Order is a tabernacle made holy by the Most High in which He has fixed His dwelling. The Savior has made to shine among you a light which has become the salvation of the world. In this temple of God *there has arisen a star which shines like the sun*. Your Order is like the cedar of Libanus which astonishes the world by its height. They who repose under its branches are granted peace in the midst of the cares of human living and the splendor of the truth to them who seek to know God. In it are excellent workmen illustrious for the purity of life, tireless in labor, clean of every blemish of world and worthy of eternal glory. Your Order is a fertile field which produces abundant fruit and where the need of divine grace given to you so copiously has germinated with profusion. Wherefore, We love tenderly the Order of Preachers, with Our whole heart We prefer it, with paternal solicitude We watch over it, wishing to defend it against its enemies.

The second letter, addressed to the Chapter, contained regulations of intimate detail. Quite likely they are the suggestions which John passed on to the Pope, for they reveal a personal [pg. 44:] knowledge of the needs of the Order which only a Master General would know. The articles reflect John's wisdom in dealing with current problems. The regulations, approved by the Pope and imposed by his Apostolic authority, were:

1. The brethren who are assigned to work in the courts of princes and of prelates are to be men of mature age, virtuous, prudent and exemplary. If anyone of them is found wanting in manners or morals, he is to be recalled immediately.
2. No friar is to approach the papal court without the permission of the General. Further, this leave is to be granted only when there is actual necessity or evident utility.
3. The friars are to be in harmonious relations with the ordinaries of the countries in which they work and show themselves humble and helpful.
4. Only friars who are competent shall be approved for confessions and for preaching. Those who are unfit are to have their faculties cancelled.

5. Serious study shall always be cultivated in the Order, and where a studium generale has been established learned doctors must be assigned to it.

6. In each Province of the Order, the first care shall be for the salvation of souls, all abuses shall be repressed, strict observance of rule shall be enforced and harmonious community living preserved.

7. The habit of the Order is to be denied to those who lack virtue and learning since these are unfit for the high vocation and would bring dishonor on the Order.

8. Useless visits, journeyings and dangerous associations are to be avoided. The Chapter adopted the entire list of the regulations and promulgated them throughout the whole Order by incorporating the following ordination into its acts:

We command all our Priors Provincial and Conventual to see to it that these salutary ordinations of the supreme pontiff be carried out most meticulously. By custom, John himself wrote his own circular letter clarifying the order and exhorting the most faithful compliance with it. Some passages from the letter are notable.

We counsel you to be modest in speech, brave in action and not to yield to excessive confidence. Rather, be filled with a holy fear, for its neglect brings grave consequences. [pg. 45:]

Conscious of the grace of your vocation, diligently seek to preserve the fruit of your own good works, for the time is short wherein we must produce fruits of penance. Remember the curse on the fig tree, which though fair of foliage was empty of fruit.

Remember that by a voluntary profession you are obligated to the strict observance of the rule, hence with full serenity of spirit to your superiors' obedience and to your brethren in grace, those services of charity which though owed to all, should be shown especially to your companions in the faith.

In the same letter, John intimated that his health was declining. The incessant traveling on foot between the countries of Europe entailing climatic changes, irregular eating and alien types of foods, together with the vexations natural to his important office, began to take their toll. His remarkable constitution was weakening under the rigors of his incredible routine. Humbly, he referred to himself as a weak vessel about to be rent asunder by the storms of time.

He spent the rest of 1266 in Germany visiting its convents. An old problem newly reared its head, the problem of responsibility for the nuns. The convents of the nuns had multiplied. Most of them claimed to be under the jurisdiction of the Order, and it was difficult to determine the validity of the claims. The Constitution of 1255 had demanded acceptance by three successive Chapters. In many instances the resolution to accept a convent would be passed by one Chapter, then tabled or forgotten by the succeeding one under pressure of more important business. Some monasteries had been approved in seven or eight Chapters, but not in three successive ones. John tried to straighten out the legal complications but since they proved too bewildering he begged the Pope to give an easement. Favorable to the petition, Clement revoked the order of Innocent IV and empowered John to affiliate to the Order all those monasteries which he thought were entitled to the recognition.

## SAINT DOMINIC'S TOMB

After spending almost a year and a half in Germany, John started his return to Italy in the spring of 1267. The Chapter that year was to be held in Bologna to coincide with an elaborate ceremony planned to honor the great Patriarch of the Dominicans. When John had been prior in Bologna and Provincial of Lombardy, he had dreamed of building a worthy tomb to honor the Father [pg. 46:] of his Order. Shortly after becoming Master General, he had begun to actualize his dream. He wrote to all the Provincials asking them to collect funds for the purpose and to propose a worthy type of monument. Enthusiastically, all went to work on the pious project. The celebrated sculptor, Nicholas Pisano was hired. Notable on his staff of assistants was a Dominican laybrother, William Agnelli of Pisa, a talented artist. When John was at Treves, he was informed that the monument was near completion, whereupon he determined to fix Bologna as the site of the Chapter and to invite all the dignitaries of Europe to the ceremony of dedication, set for Pentecost Day, June 5, 1267.

The Pope granted extraordinary indulgences for the occasion and named the Archbishop of Ravenna as his legate. When John arrived in Bologna he found five hundred Dominicans gathered for the solemn rites, among them Thomas Aquinas, as definator of the Roman Province, and many high church dignitaries, nobles and an immense crowd of the faithful. The solemn ceremony made a deep impression on all and keeps its imprint in Dominican history.

The Archbishop of Ravenna opened the tomb under the white stone in front of the choir of religious, allowed John and others to kiss the remains, then in stately pomp transferred them to the new tomb in a wing of the basilica. This new tomb proved to be a marvel of artistry. It was in the form of an altar. The urn containing the remains was an oblong case of beautifully sculpted marble. Supporting it beneath in graceful larger proportion was a four-sided frieze carrying eighty exquisitely carved figures depicting six scenes in the life of Saint Dominic. It remains today one of the marvels of art. While the ceremony of translation was being performed in the church, the Bishop of Vicenza, Batholomew of Braganza, preached to a great multitude outside. It was a day of extraordinary joy for John. His own personal veneration for the great Patriarch was brought to new, delightful intensity, while he had the great consolation of seeing the same fervor displayed by so many. God indeed had blessed the work of Dominic and God was being honored in His saint.

There was one annoyance in the whole proceeding. Out of their fervor many wanted to possess a relic of the saint, and in misguided zeal began to appropriate some of the precious bones. John had to assert his authority and under censure forbade the taking of the least piece. [pg. 47:]

## TRAVELS AND REFORMS

Among the visitors to witness the solemn rites was a Father Vasinpace who had been a missionary in the Orient for many years. On his way to Bologna he had reported to the Pope on the state of the missions. The Pope was impressed by his report and wrote to John asking him to assign missionaries for work among the Tartars, the Saracens and the Hindus. After the ceremonies for Saint Dominic were concluded, John opened the General Chapter, taking up this matter among others. It was determined to study the question carefully and to

comply with the Pope's request as soon as possible. Another request which the Pope had made, namely, that the Order send to his court two theologians, was voted.

It was also voted that in view of John's decline in health a vicar should be appointed by the definitors of each chapter who could preside in John's place at General Chapters held in various cities of Europe, so as not to necessitate John's traveling to them. It was a wise provision, but it proved unnecessary. John was to live sixteen more years and, except for the Chapter of 1278 in Paris, which he had to miss on account of his being required to be in Spain by direct order of the Pope to negotiate peace between the kings of France and Castile, he actually presided at all the Chapters. Remarkable man indeed, to traverse in advanced age the distances on foot between Bologna, Viterbo, Paris, Milan, Montpellier, Florence, Budapest, Lyons, Bologna, Pisa, Bordeaux, Oxford, Florence, Vienna and finally Montpellier again places where the General Chapters were held in successive years.

On June 12, at the close of the Chapter, John sent the customary circular letter to the whole Order through the definitors. It was beautifully worded and very fatherly in spirit. It exhorted the brethren to watch their speech, to be industrious, to exemplify the best preaching, and, above all, to persevere in their quest of perfection.

He then presided at the Provincial Chapter of Lombardy, held immediately after the General Chapter. James of Varazza was named Provincial. During the Chapter, a request was received from the Pope that the Order send him three men expert in Oriental languages, of keen intelligence and prudent judgment, whom he [pg. 48:] would appoint as nuncios to the court of Paleologus, the Emperor of the Greeks, to affect a reconciliation. John determined to go to Viterbo, where the Pope had his court to discuss it personally with him.

His arrival at Viterbo was a great consolation to Clement. The two men had a genuine affection for each other and each could count on the other for whatever favor was demanded. While it will always remain essentially true that the sheep need the shepherd more than he needs them, at this point in the history of the Church the shepherd had dire need of loyal and competent friends. The Pope had been forced out of his own city of Rome by the troublesome Ghibellines and was hemmed in at Viterbo. Clement begged John to remain with him permanently to afford him the support and the good counsel he needed. John could not find it in his heart to refuse this request, so he stayed on till Clement died.

The Chapter of 1267, accordingly, was fixed for Viterbo. John took advantage of his presence at the papal court to obtain apostolic approval for imposing a uniform Dominican liturgy on the whole Order. It had been a vexatious problem. His predecessor, Humbert of the Romans, had worked hard collecting and unifying the points of a liturgy that best reflected both the earliest ceremonies of the Church and the spirit of his special Order. (Father Bonniwell of the Province of Saint Joseph in his scholarly work "The History of Dominican Liturgy," Wagner, 1944, cites the monumental efforts of Humbert to devise a proper Dominican liturgy.) Humbert's efforts to impose a uniform liturgy went for naught in the face of bitter local prejudice. John had continued the efforts. In the Chapter of Montpellier in 1265 he had put through an ordinance compelling all priors to secure the official ritual. Many disobeyed the order, preferring the old ways of their region. John now felt that only the supreme authority of the Pope could be effective, so he

appealed to Clement, who on July 7, 1267, issued an order imposing under penalty the adoption of a uniform liturgy. This settled the matter.

## CONSIDERED FOR CARDINAL

Another problem called for solution. Now and then a Dominican would be named to a bishopric. In those days, papal approval was not required. In some instances, the Dominican in [pg. 49:] question would not bother to secure the permission of his Provincial and of the Master General to accept the appointment. Recently there had been a case of it in France, some Dominicans having accepted episcopal consecration without leave of the Order. John determined to act vigorously in the case. He obtained from the Pope an order directed to the Archbishop of Albano, the Pope's cardinal legate a latere in France, to void the election of those men, to suspend them from office, to forbid them to exercise any episcopal power and to require that they appear at Viterbo to explain their misconduct. To correct the abuse for all time, John further secured from the Pope an apostolic constitution making it mandatory that religious first secure the permission of their superiors before accepting bishoprics.

If these things show John's vigor, others show his prudence. He had obtained from Pope Clement an order forbidding the erection of any other religious house nearer than some 300 *canne*, (approximately yards) to any Dominican house. This had aroused the antagonism of the other Orders which wanted to establish themselves in certain localities near to Dominican houses. The antagonism prompted exaggerated statements of the monopoly the Dominicans enjoyed; these led to calumnies, and the calumnies led to scandals. To ease the situation, John had the order mitigated to forbid the erection of another house closer than 140 *canne* to a Dominican establishment.

The stupendous growth in the century of their founding of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders, humanly, here and there, had excited the envy and the enmity of the diocesan clergy. Bishops and synods sought to restrict the growth and the influence of the Orders. Particularly obnoxious to the Ordinaries was the blithe disregard on the part of the religious of diocesan lines and rights. Accordingly, they legislated, restricting the movements and activities of the religious. Since such restrictions would tend to undo the primary purpose of the founding of the Order of Preachers as envisioned by Saint Dominic, John felt constrained to appeal to the Pope to vindicate the Dominican ideal. The Pope issued an apostolic constitution removing from all bishops the right to limit the privileges of the religious.

It is obvious from all this that the Order had found in Clement a most benevolent protector. It is equally obvious that the Order had deserved special consideration. At this point of history, [pg. 50:] Dominicans were the shock troops of the Papacy. They were called upon to perform every conceivable service and they performed it well. It was natural, therefore, for the Popes to be grateful to them.

On May 27, the General Chapter convened at Viterbo. Many of the provincials who were supposed to attend failed to appear, giving as an excuse the distance from their residences and the troublesome air around Viterbo. John had an ordinance passed that in the future they must attend unless the

gravest reasons prevented them. It was for this reason that he made it a personal point to attend them himself, no matter the inconvenience.

The Acts of the Chapter stressed the need of loyalty to the Holy Father, reminding the brethren that they were his main reliance in the troublesome times. They urged also a more charitable attitude towards other Orders; a less fawning type of preaching before princes; a vigilance lest bishops exercise too great an influence in the choice of superiors; and that preachers be appointed with great care. The Pope was to be prayed for in all Masses through the collect *pro papa*. John supplemented these Acts by wise counsels in a circular letter issued June 3, 1268. Among the counsels, of particular interest to Holy Name men, were: "Be not too prompt to talk; be more cautious, controlling your tongues."

On November 29, 1268, Pope Clement died. He had expressed the wish to be buried in the Dominican Church in Viterbo, but the cardinals disregarded the wish. The funeral was held in the Cathedral of Viterbo. For years the Order begged for the body of its great benefactor, but it was not till the election of a Dominican Pope, Innocent V, in 1276, that it was able to overcome the opposition of clergy and people. Reverently, the Dominicans took the body and built for it in their church in Viterbo, the celebrated La Quercia, a magnificent tomb.

After the death of Clement, twenty cardinals sought to name a successor, but partisan feeling and rancor were riding too high. For three years, a long interregnum indeed, they deliberated. The weirdest stories began to circulate. Some rumors had more plausibility. Among them was the one that Saint Bonaventure, the celebrated Franciscan cardinal, was elected, but declined the honor. Another, of special interest to us, is that John of Vercelli himself was seriously considered. The story is that two factions had developed in the sacred college, one headed by Cardinal Hubert of Cocconato, the other by Cardinal John Orsini. Neither faction [pg. 51:] commanded enough votes to insure an election of the first choices of each. Cardinal Hubert was a great admirer of John of Vercelli. Into his mind came the thought that perhaps he could rally enough votes around the name of John. He sounded out his colleagues and was overjoyed at their response. On the eve of the balloting he felt confident that John's election was insured, whereupon he sent his chaplain to the convent of the Dominicans to acquaint John with the fact and to have John hold himself in readiness for the call to the conclave. It seems, however, that the chaplain was indiscreet in telling the first Dominican at the door of the convent that John's election was certain. The news spread through the city like wildfire. Cardinal Orsini heard of it, and his anger at the maneuverings of Cardinal Hubert proved greater than his admiration for John, so he moved to oppose the election. He succeeded. It was only after many other ballotings that on September 1, 1271, the weary cardinals finally agreed on Theobald Visconti, Archbishop of Piacenza, who took the name of Gregory X.

There is a tradition that John had actually been elected, and declined. The above, however, seems to be the best history on the point. It is certain he was of papal calibre and enjoyed the admiration of all. It is equally certain that he made no move to be considered. He was too humble and wise to do that.

## CHAPTER VIII

# LEGATE APOSTOLIC

THE embarrassment of having been proposed by Cardinal Hubert for the Papacy moved John to quit Viterbo. His sense of loyalty to Clement had kept him at the Papal court longer than he desired, since many matters required his presence elsewhere. He journeyed to Orvieto, than to Florence, Lucca, Siena and Pisa making visitations of the convents therein located. At Pisa he boarded a ship for Marseilles and finally arrived in Paris for the General Chapter that convened May 12, 1269.

At this Chapter a strict ordinance was passed renewing the obligation to travel on foot without money and to abstain from meat even in traveling. The Order demanded giants in those days and John was a giant among them, religiously setting the example and proving that the severe constitutions could be observed without detriment to health. At this Chapter, too, he inaugurated a procedure which survives to this day and is highly reflective of his true humility and fine spirit of democracy. It had always been a rule that at Chapters there be a confession of faults even by the Master General. After this confession, the definitors had the obligation of accusing the Master General of any misconduct in office. To insure the greater freedom of this procedure, John started the custom of leaving the room after his own confession so that the definitors could discuss freely among themselves of what faults the Master could be accused. Then he returned and listened to their formal accusations in all humility. At Bologna two years before he had introduced this procedure as inchoative legislation. Now in this third successive Chapter it was confirmed and passed into a permanent constitution.

Attending this Chapter were six great theologians of the Order, Thomas Aquinas, Peter of Tarantase, who became Blessed Pope Benedict IX, Father Bartholomew of Tours, Father Bonomo, Father Gilbert and Father Baldwin. John took advantage of their presence by submitting to them a number of difficult moral questions on the proper procedure of superiors in cases when their subjects [pg. 53:] were accused of secret faults. The decisions of these Masters of Theology have since become regular procedure in religious government.

After presiding at the Provincial Chapter of France which followed the General Chapter, John devoted the rest of the year to the work of the Crusade with which the whole kingdom was preoccupied. The King, Saint Louis IX, despite his earlier failure, was resolved to try once more to redeem the Holy Land. John afforded him all the help he could. He was not only edified by the ardor of this last of the Crusaders but matched it with his own. The whole Dominican Order under John's leadership responded to the appeals of the saintly King. With this and with the many other pledges of support from neighboring kings and lords, the monarch was able to fix the first week of March, 1270, as the departure date of a vast armada. The expedition did sail from Aignes-Mortes and landed in Tunis, confident in its ability to march on to Jerusalem. But a plague began to infest the Christian camp, to which pestilence even the King succumbed. King Louis died on August 25, 1270, and with his death the Christian dream of redeeming the Holy Land died as well.

For the work of helping King Louis equip his armada, John had appointed Father Bartholomew his vicar in charge of actual management, so that John could be free to attend to the general business of the Order. After Louis sailed, John himself took ship to Pisa, from which he continued to Milan, where the next General Chapter was to sit. An old chronicle of that convent records John's preference for Milan as the meeting place of General Chapters for four reasons: first, its nearness to France, Spain and Germany; secondly, its fine, temperate climate; thirdly, its ability to provide sufficient food for its large number of guests; and, fourthly, its possession of spacious meeting halls.

The Chapter's first act was to deplore the fact that the cardinals had not as yet elected a successor to Clement. The Church was suffering greatly in her leaderless condition. John asked for prayers and had Masses offered for the intention of a speedy Papal election.

The Chapter then had to consider a grave internal matter. Father Bartholomew, whom John had appointed as vicar of the Crusade in France, had become involved in a scandalizing legal case. It seems that he had influenced a rich person to leave in his [pg. 54:] will an extraordinary amount of his estate to the Crusade. The legitimate heirs were thereby unjustly deprived of a legacy rightfully due them, hence they sued. Father Bartholomew, caught in these legal coils, attempted to throw the full responsibility of his act on John. For a learned Master of Sacred Theology it was an incredible dodge, but since the accusation was formally registered, the Chapter had to pass judgment on it. After a cursory review, it was inclined to dismiss the accusation and clear John completely. John, however, insisted on a full and impartial review. Accordingly, five competent judges were appointed: Thomas Aquinas, Robert Wilverby, who later became the confessor of the King of England and a cardinal, Father Latino Malabranca, nephew of the future Pope Nicholas IV and later a cardinal himself, Father Michael, prior of Lille, and Father Lambert of Liege, a great preacher. The judges found that Father Bartholomew had not followed the prudent and direct orders of the Master General, had acted mostly on his own authority and that the fault was entirely his. Further, he had compounded the fault by casting blame on his major superior. Bartholomew was deprived of his office and titles, was made incapable of holding future office, lost even his right to vote in council and was sentenced to a twelve-day fast on bread and water and the recitation of six psalters.

After the General Chapter finished its business, John presided at the Provincial Chapter of Lombardy. He sent out his customary circular letter, in which he touched mostly on the need of avoiding acts which might occasion envy of the Order on the part of the diocesan clergy, on the duty of preaching effectively and on the obligation of setting always a good example.

Soon after, John went to Bologna. Here, at the head of his brethren, he met the sad cortege which was bringing the body of Louis back to France. The remains of the gallant knight reposed in Saint Dominic's for the night, where they were venerated with great piety. From Bologna the cortege moved to Milan, to Piedmont, to Savoy, and finally to Saint Denis in Paris, where the body of the saint was entombed.

## **CHAPTER OF TEARS**

From Bologna, John also started a journey to France. He boarded a ship at Genoa and sailed to Provence, arriving in Montpellier [pg. 55:] for the General Chapter called there for May 24, 1271. Albert the Great already quite venerable, journeyed from Germany to attend this Chapter. Many other illustrious persons were present at this historic Chapter. In all, about 300 attended.

A movement was initiated to have a General Chapter meet biennially instead of every year. The Provincials felt that it was too much of a burden for them to travel so often. The proposal, however, was not sustained in succeeding Chapters, the tradition of an annual Chapter proving too strong to allow a change.

The Chapter of 1271 in Montpellier is called the Chapter of Tears. It was gravely distressed that no Pope had as yet been elected. The son and heir of King Louis, Philip, sent a letter to the Chapter, May 5, recounting the many sad events of the past year and asked the Order for prayers. John read the letter to the group and then added his own eloquent eulogy of King Louis. The Chapter decreed to entitle Louis as a Blessed and inscribe him in the martyrology as the first step in a movement to have him canonized.

John's customary circular letter to the whole Order after the Chapter stressed the need of penance, of persistent industry and of assiduous study of the scriptures.

## **GREGORY X**

Afterwards, he made a visitation of the convents in France. Towards the end of August, he crossed the Alps. He was in his beloved Piedmont when he heard the good news that the cardinals at last had agreed on a Pope. The man selected was Theobald Visconti, a simple cleric, who at the moment was with the crusaders in Palestine. The cardinals commissioned a Dominican and a Franciscan to bring him the news of his election. These two found him and gave him the message. He was quite stunned by it and was inclined to refuse the honor. However, the friars and the captains of the Christian host persuaded him to accept for the good of the Church. Consenting, therefore, to the call, he set sail for Italy, arriving in Brindisi, January 1, 1272. He was at Viterbo, January 20, where he was met by the cardinals. He proceeded to Rome, March 13, was ordained to the priesthood, consecrated a bishop, and on March 27 was crowned in Saint Peter's, taking the name of Gregory X. [pg. 56:]

John was particularly overjoyed by the event because he knew the new Pope and understood him to be very favorably inclined to the Order. He sent his felicitations and, speaking for the whole Order, pledged filial obedience to the new Vicar of Christ.

The Pope's first concern was to settle the muddled affairs of Europe. He had a keen desire to pursue the Crusade to redeem the Holy Land but felt that all efforts towards it would continue to be ineffectual as long as there was dissension at home. To remedy the situation, he determined to convoke a General Council. A fairly neutral city for its sessions was advisable. He did not reveal his mind on this officially for some time but quietly went about preparing Lyons for it. He appointed, since that See was vacant, the

Dominican Provincial of France, Peter Tarantase, as its Archbishop, for he knew he could rely on this great theologian to cooperate with him in every endeavor to bring peace to Europe.

## PEACEMAKER

The situation in Italy demanded some action even before the Council met. A fierce rivalry had sprung up between Genoa and Venice. These two most powerful cities of Italy were engulfing the whole peninsula in war. In an effort to bring peace between them, the Pope thought of using the good offices of John, whose reputation as a peace-maker was well known to him. Wherefore, he sent him an appointment as Legate Apostolic in a letter issued early in 1272, which read:

To our beloved son, the Master General of the Order of Preachers, health and apostolic benediction.

Confiding fully in the sincerity of your zeal and in your prudent wisdom in the management of affairs, We have commissioned you to labor for the pacification of Tuscany. We desire that you bring about the cessation of disorders which for a long time have existed through the rivalry between Genoa and Venice and between Venice and Bologna; that you negotiate among these cities a strong and lasting alliance. We believe that your efforts towards this end will be most successful.

John accepted this new responsibility with his accustomed zeal. He felt the Pope to be eminently right in tackling the problem [pg. 57:] between the great cities as a step towards the pacification of all Italy. Further, he felt that this work was the best challenge to the Dominican forte of preaching. What better work could the preachers do than to preach peace?

His first move was to go to Genoa. Genoa had been growing rich selling supplies to the Saracens, who needed them to repel the Christian invasions. It was the scandal of Christendom. The Pope had been angry over it, calling such riches maledicted, and excommunicated the rulers of Genoa. The Genoese, ever a commercial-minded people, were not greatly perturbed by the Pope's action and merrily went on selling supplies to the enemy at great profit. It was quite a difficult mission to convince merchant princes to give up material profit for a spiritual ideal and to persuade provincial-minded men to give up what was locally advantageous for the general good. But John was equal to it. He began a series of conferences with the leaders, following them by addresses to huge gatherings of the citizens. Gently and eloquently he appealed to the better Christian nature of all; he cited the spiritual arguments and he supplemented them with practical ones of a far-reaching statesmanship. The results were most gratifying. The Genoese agreed to tone down the traffic. John then went to Pisa, where the same success attended his efforts. He was able to write to the Pope that these cities had become well disposed to act for the good of Italy.

John remained in Florence all of that summer working as a peacemaker. The problem was even harder here because of the provincial pride of the Florentines. During his work here, he presided at the General Chapter which met in Florence on June 12, 1272.

In September, John went to Bologna, where he continued his peacemaking. Then he went to Venice, the scene of his earlier success as a peacemaker. Venice

had entered into a secret agreement with the schismatic Greek Emperor Paleologus though openly she kept assuring the Pope of her loyalty. To please the Holy See she forbade entrance to heretics, a matter of little concern to her, but continued meanwhile to take in gold from her trafficking with the enemy in the Orient. John brought to the attention of the Venetian masters that while such a policy was materially beneficial to Venice it was disastrous for the rest of Christian Europe, and in the long run would spell Venice's own ruin. The argument, so [pg. 58:] sensible in itself and presented so ably, carried the day. The Venetians promised to send ambassadors to the Pope, who was at Orvieto, to conclude an alliance with Genoa under his direction.

Having successfully concluded his mission in Venice, John crossed the Adriatic and came to Dalmatia, from which he proceeded to Hungary. He had heard of terrible conditions in the Balkans born of the ravages of the Cuman Tartars, whereupon he determined to visit these regions and offer what help he could to the distressed brethren and peoples. In Hungary he found that the Christian King, Ladislaus, was conniving with Paleologus. John spent most of 1273 visiting the convents in that region and trying to persuade Ladislaus to be loyal to the Catholic cause. The Pope ordered him to visit as well the King of Bohemia and seek to unite the two crowns. This king was greatly moved by John's eloquent words and, taking the cross from him, vowed to go to the Holy Land if the King of Hungary could be persuaded to stop the war against him. John kept pursuing this objective till other events required his attention elsewhere.

On May 18, 1273 the General Chapter met at Budapest. One of the acts of this Chapter was to proscribe the study of alchemy. The search for the philosopher's stone had eluded the seekers too long and it was felt that to try further would be to the detriment of more important studies.

In the customary circular letter which appeared following the Chapter, one sentence is very beautiful and worthy of note: "With the sickle of love cut away vice so that in the garden of virtue the seeds of justice can sprout forth into perennial fruitage." John also recommended the study of the Sacred Text and prompt obedience in imitation of Him Who in everything did the will of His Father and not His Own.

## CHAPTER IX

# ECUMENICAL COUNCILOR

WHILE John was at Budapest, he received a letter from the Pope dispatched from Orvieto, March 11, 1273. Forty important persons in the Church received the same general type of letter. The Pope had determined on an Ecumenical Council and wanted the best minds of the Catholic Church to prepare a schedule of discussion for the Council. In the letter to John, included among the prominent forty persons, the Pope explicitly directed: "Make a diligent investigation of all those matters concerning both the regular and diocesan clergy, the Christian faithful of both sexes, and the apostate adherents of

any sect or rite through whose work the Christian religion is being harmed. Do this yourself personally or employ competent persons to do it under you. Send these findings by trusted messengers under seal to Us, so that the Council will know clearly on what matters it is to deliberate and proceed to reform. Finish this mission at least six months before the time fixed for the meeting of the Council, so that it will have time to sift all suggestions proposed and prepare an expedite agenda."

In obedience, John began the work of writing out his findings on the ills that were harming the Church. He determined to call to his aid Humbert of the Romans, his predecessor in office, as one best qualified to voice the mind of the Order. Humbert prepared a masterly paper. After citing the desolate state of Christianity due in large part to past invasions and the continuing threats of Saracen hordes, he stressed the need of getting the Christian princes to unify their efforts against this external menace. The past Crusades failed in great measure because those who were sent to fight the enemy were the dregs of Christian society given more to vice than to knightly virtue. A new Crusade should be launched despite the objections of many who from past experiences felt that it could never be successful. It could be successful if all the Christian princes forgot their petty private concerns to unite their forces into one grand Christian army for the safety of the whole Church.

To the practical objection that Europe was already drained of [pg. 60:] resources and that another Crusade would only make matters worse, Humbert replied that there were four ways of raising money without hurting the economy of Europe:

1. By selling all the superfluous precious vessels and jewels of the Church. They were accumulating uselessly in museums and sacristies; they would never be missed.
2. By taking the revenue of one benefice from each collegiate group of benefices.
3. By unifying numerous small establishments into larger houses, thus avoiding unnecessary expense, the saving of which could be turned over to the Crusade.
4. By selling old abbeys which were no longer in use and which could not be restored.

The next grave concern of the Church is to bring about the reconciliation with the schismatic Greek Church. To this end, Humbert suggested:

1. Let Greek be learned by Roman Catholic scholars. In each diocesan curia there should be at least one official who knows Greek.
2. There should be assiduous reading of Greek books and translations of them into Latin should be multiplied.

On the subject of internal reform, Humbert aired these views:

1. No bishop should establish a feast without Papal sanction;
2. Except on Sundays and the most solemn of days, the faithful should not be exempt from servile works. Too many holydays were injecting the spirit of laziness into people and were affording them occasions of vice.
3. Liturgy should be made uniform. The Dominican liturgy had become uniform and was bearing its good fruits. The whole Church now should adopt an official liturgy for all the dioceses to prevent the confusion of regional rites and to vindicate the catholic spirit of the Church against the tendency of nationalism.
4. The Divine Office should be shortened so that priests may be able to devote more time to pastoral matters.

Humbert then proposed a remarkable code to govern the procedure in Papal elections so as to avoid the dangerous delays that had marked past conclaves: During a conclave, the cardinals are not to receive their income; if the election of a Pope is unduly delayed, other electors are to be admitted as provided by law.

On the question of Mendicant Orders, Humbert was of the [pg. 61:] opinion that their numbers should be reduced; only those that had received Papal approval should be allowed to continue. Monasteries of nuns without revenue should be suppressed; nuns should not go about Europe begging.

With reference to bishops, the former Master General felt that laws should be made more definite to compel their prompt removal should they prove unworthy. They should be subject to periodic canonical visitations, and should be enjoined to avoid luxury. Archbishops should call Provincial Councils to meet in the metropolitan church.

Humbert made the wise suggestion that an official and popular catechism should be composed so that the common people could know the essentials of the faith and their corresponding moral duties. Further, an official commentary on the Sacred Scriptures drawn from the Fathers should be prepared to guide the scholars and the preachers in uniform interpretation.

Finally, he broached on political matters. The Empire should be more definitely organized. In the death or removal of the Emperor, a vicar should be empowered to manage affairs till a new Emperor is elected. The Emperor should be content with Germanic regions. Italy should be under one or two kings elected by bishops and municipalities but subject to the overlordship of the Roman Pontiff.

All these items reflected not only Humbert's views on current issues but those of the Order. John, in appointing the venerable Humbert to make the report, wanted to show deference to the grand old General and at the same time take advantage of his great genius and vast experience. John's humbling of self to allow his predecessor to make the report, as the Divine Master prophesied, indeed exalted him later when the Council took up the recommendations and found them so worthy.

## **THE COUNCIL OF LYONS**

On April 12, 1273, the Pope held a consistory in which he informed the cardinals and the world that he had determined on Lyons as the meeting place of the Council. On the following day he signed a bull convoking an Ecumenical Council to meet there on May 1, 1274. In the call was a further order that bishops and abbots were to come without pomp. [pg. 62:]

Since his election, the Pope had not created any new cardinals. The college had not helped its prestige one bit by its long bickering over the recent election. The Pope was resolved to name most worthy men so as to restore the prestige of the college. Among others, he would name an outstanding Dominican and Franciscan. Thomas of Aquin, the blazing sun of Catholic scholarship, was approached, but the humility of the Saint made him decline, as he had declined so many other honors. The Germans wanted Albert; others wanted John himself. The Pope finally selected Peter of Tarantase, Archbishop of Lyons.

As the Franciscan, Bonaventure, the bosom friend of Thomas Aquinas and his valiant partner in many theological controversies, was selected by the Pope and named on Pentecost day, 1273.

When John heard of the selection of Lyons, he established it as the meeting place as well of the General Chapter to sit that year. He issued orders that the best minds in the Dominican brotherhood were to gather there to help in the deliberations of the Church. He empowered his fellow Dominican, the new Cardinal of Lyons, who was to be host to the Council, to order any Dominican to repair to Lyons to assist him. The Cardinal-Archbishop took advantage of this grant and called many to his aid, among them Thomas Aquinas, who was then in Naples. The Pope himself wanted this great light at the Council. Thomas left Naples to journey to Lyons, but on the way, as is well remembered, was stricken ill at Fossa Nova and died, March 7, 1274.

John himself started out from Budapest, visited other convents in Hungary and Germany on the way, and arrived in Lyons in February. It was a remarkable journey of six months, a fair part of it in winter, over mountains, by a man well into his seventies. His health had somewhat improved, and he continued to spend himself the more for the good of the Church and of the Order.

The Council of Lyons is an historic event in the history of the Church. It met for the consideration of three main problems: first, to bring back the schismatic Greek Church into communion with Rome; secondly, to launch a new Crusade against the Saracens; and, thirdly, to reform the internal discipline. Fifteen cardinals, the Latin Patriarchs of Constantinople and Antioch, more than seven hundred bishops (thirty of whom were Dominicans), seventy abbots and a thousand other prelates attended. The Emperor [pg. 63:] Rudolf and other kings of Europe sent their ambassadors and the heads of the temporal orders came in person. John as Master General of the Dominicans was there officially as a councilor with a right to vote on all matters. It was the largest assemblage of churchmen up to then ever to gather in council.

As a preliminary, the Pope on May 2, 1274 imposed a fast on all the members of the Council. On May 7, the first session was held. Peter of Tarantase, Albert and Bonaventure dominated the convention. The holiness of these men coupled with their keen intelligence permitted the business of the Council to proceed with harmony and dispatch. On May 18, the second session was opened, on June 7, the third. On June 24, the Greeks joined the Council. The fine minds of the Latin Leaders were a match for the subtlety of the Greeks and one by one the arguments supporting the schism were demolished. The Greeks capitulated and moved for reconciliation, to the joy of all. On June 29, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, the Pope celebrated a Solemn Mass. The epistle and gospel were sung in Greek and Latin; Bonaventure preached, and then when the organ caught up the intonation of the Credo the whole assembly of Greeks and Latins thankfully joined in its joyous singing. At the words, *Qui ex Patre Filioque procedit*, the two choirs raised their voices to the highest pitch and repeated three times this fervent confession of correct Catholic doctrine.

At the fourth session, held on July 6, good canons to regulate Papal elections were adopted despite the protests of the cardinals. Some acrimony ensued, but it was smoothed over by the suavity of the Dominican Cardinal-Archbishop of Lyons. The Pope's wisdom in making him a cardinal was now apparent.

On July 17, the Council met for its last session to consider the problem of the Mendicant Orders. Humbert's recommendations on this point, as on many others, were adopted. When the Council closed, all felt satisfied that a good work had been done.

It was apparent that the services of the two Orders, the Dominican and Franciscan, had contributed largely to the success of the Council. John's own work, while not recorded in detail, can well be calculated to have been monumental. As chief of the Dominicans his was the directing skill and the smooth diplomacy that largely helped to make the proceedings reach their happy outcome.

---

[Page 64]

## CHAPTER X

# THE HOLY NAME SOCIETY

AMONG the many historic acts of the Council of Lyons, one is of particular interest to us. The Council decreed that there should be paid more reverence to the Holy Name of Jesus by the Christian peoples. To give this decree effective execution, the Pope commissioned John of Vercelli to see to it that the devotion to the Holy Name be preached throughout Europe. John most warmly undertook this new assignment, resolving to dedicate the full preaching talents of his Order of Preachers to the sublime purpose of fostering in the hearts of Christian people a reverence for the Name which is above all names.

On November 2, 1274, he sent from Lyons to all the Provincials the following historic letter:

To his brother in Christ, \_\_\_\_\_ Provincial of the Preachers of the Province of \_\_\_\_\_, Father John, the useless servant of the brethren of the same Order, sends his wishes for eternal salvation.

Know that I have received the following letter from the Holy Father, the Supreme Pontiff:

Gregory, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to Our dear son, the Master of the Order of Preachers, health and apostolic benediction.

We have decreed recently in the Council of Lyons that one's entrance into church should be humble and reverential and that there be observed in the churches a dignified conduct so pleasing to God and beneficial to the faithful in a manner which will not only impress but even edify all those who go to church. Let them honor with special reverence that Name which is above all names, the only Name given by heaven to men for their salvation, which is the Name of Jesus, Who saved His people from their sins. Each one of the faithful, putting into practice for himself that which has been written into law for all, should, particularly when the holy mystery of the Mass is being celebrated, bend the knee of his heart openly by bowing his head whenever that Holy Name is pronounced. Wherefore, We recommend to your zeal and most warmly exhort by this apostolic letter that you and the brethren of your Order in every preaching of yours of the word of God to the people [pg. 65:] induce them with efficacious argument to this practice, for which you will merit the reward of a divine recompense. Given at Lyons, September 20, in the

third year of Our pontificate.

Wherefore, we, desirous of protecting the honor of God, of obeying this apostolic command, and of promoting in the neighbor an increase of devotion, beseech you to stir up your zeal—and if necessary, you can take this letter as a command—to the end that you personally see to it that this request of the Holy Father receives full compliance by having the preachers who are your subjects preach with convincing arguments and with scrupulous diligence the need of reverencing the Holy Name.

The Order, under John's inspiring direction, joyfully undertook this new mission. Societies were established in the churches of the Order, called at first Confraternities of the Holy Name, for the purpose of combatting the rampant blasphemy of the day. Eloquent sermons from the most gifted of the Preachers extolled the glory of the Holy Name and called on the people to show reverence for it under all circumstances. The spirit of piety revived in large measure among the people. The parish or conventual Confraternities established to consolidate these gains in a given place multiplied elsewhere and kept gaining more honor for the Name of the Savior. It was natural work for the Dominican Order. Its founder had dedicated his sons to preach doctrine to a people hungry for the truth. One of these sons, his own fifth successor, John of Vercelli, dedicated the Order anew to preach devotion with doctrine to a people desperately in need of spiritual uplifting.

The Holy Name Society, thus nobly conceived in the great Council of Lyons and given birth by the practical skill of John of Vercelli, has been a definite factor in keeping the spiritual element alive in the heart of the Catholic populace and in sustaining a healthy piety in every parish where it was established. As long as that work goes on, it will continue to be a resplendent glory of the Dominican Order and a notable personal achievement of John of Vercelli, to whom it owes its founding.

John remained in Lyons for several months after the close of the Council to attend to pressing Order affairs. One matter among others greatly disturbed him. It had been evident for some time that the spectacular rise of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders was exciting the fears and envy of many diocesan clergymen. John had often alluded to it in his circular letters admonishing his [pg. 66:] brethren to maintain happy relations with bishops and pastors. These prelates had succeeded in having the recent Council pass some acts restricting some of the generous favors granted to the Orders by benevolent Popes. Admitting the justice of the criticisms leveled against the Orders and wisely determining to remove the main bases of contention so that harmonious relations could exist between his Order and diocesan curiae, John had the General Chapter which convened in Lyons shortly after the close of the Council pass the following ordinances:

1. The brethren are not to preach in the same city when the bishop or a priest deputed by him is preaching;
2. The people are to be reminded to pay their tithes and other parochial assessments;
3. To recommend that a testator leave part of his goods to the diocese;
4. Not to encourage burial from any church other than one's own parish church;
5. Brethren who give any evidence of being imprudent are not to be approved for confessions or preaching;
6. Though they enjoy universal faculties, Dominican priests are not to hear confessions in a diocese without first obtaining faculties from the bishop;
7. They are not to absolve in reserved cases without the leave of the

diocesan chancery;

8. They are to recommend to the people to go to confession sometimes at least to their parish priest;

9. They are to give to their penitents a certificate which is to be presented to the parish priest testifying that the bearer has approached the Sacrament;

10. When the faithful choose a church of the religious for burial, part of the stipend according to law or custom shall be forwarded to the parish church.

In a secret letter sent to all Provincials, November 2, 1274, John urged them in the interests of peace to see to it that the above ordinances were scrupulously observed in their Provinces.

John's action, imitated by the Franciscans, was a remarkable display of prudence and good will on the part of the Orders. They did enjoy ample pontifical privileges which made them exempt from ordinary diocesan or canonical regulations. Of their own accord in this instance they voluntarily surrendered many of their [pg. 67:] privileges. What they surrendered was later made a matter of common law by the Council of Trent. They had wisely anticipated the trend in the discipline of the Church.

## **CONTENTION BETWEEN THE FRIARS**

While John was in Germany in the previous winter an event occurred in southern France which threatened to destroy the wondrous harmony that had existed between the Franciscans and Dominicans since their founding. In Marseilles, a Franciscan, Father De Maurin, was chief Inquisitor, with Father Bertrand as his chief assistant. In 1266, on the occasion of Father De Maurin's journeying to Rome on official business, two secular priests at the instigation of the subprior of the Dominican convent in Marseilles and another Dominican accused the Inquisitor before the civil tribunal of supporting policies which would in time withdraw the region from its allegiance to Charles Anjou, the rightful king, and hand it over to Manfred, the excommunicated rival. In defense of his chief, Father Bertrand cited the two diocesan priests before his tribunal, found them guilty and severely punished them. He also cited the two Dominicans. These refused to appear before his court on the plea that the matter was outside his jurisdiction. The Franciscan thereupon excommunicated the Dominicans and publicly proclaimed the fact.

The people were highly scandalized and feeling began to run high. The Dominicans appealed to Pope Clement, who out of respect for both Orders, immediately reviewed the case. He ruled that the two seculars were guilty of gross conduct, removed them from office and had them thrown into prison. He lifted the excommunication from the Dominicans but ordered their Provincial to transfer them to Paris, after apologizing to the Inquisitor. The Pope then severely scolded the Inquisitor for not respecting the appeal of the Dominicans to the Holy See and for his summary excommunication of them to the great scandal of the people.

Clement's prompt and just action, however, did not quiet the passions aroused in the controversy. The members of each Order began to say nasty things about the other and the feud began to assume alarming proportions. The beautiful friendship between them born of the affection of their two saintly founders for each other was in danger of dissolving dismally into rancor. The personal

[pg. 68:] love between Saint Francis and Saint Dominic had been the edification of Christendom and had given to their families a bond of fraternity that had kept them joyously united in their high purposes throughout the years. The friendship of Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas had but recently exemplified the sublime heights the initial love of the patriarchs had inspired in their sons. Now through one wretched misunderstanding the friendship among the friars was about to be broken.

Since the affair had reached an alarming stage by 1274, John, intensely desirous of preserving the traditional love between the Orders, moved effectively to restore harmony. Saint Bonaventure, the head of the Franciscans, had died in the course of the Council. His successor, elected in a General Chapter held by the Franciscans shortly after the close of the Council, was Father Jerome of Ascoli, who later became Pope Nicholas IV. John approached him on the matter and the two generals, both sincerely animated by a holy desire to bring peace to their distracted families, determined to issue a joint circular letter to all their sons. This issued from Lyons on November 5, 1274, and proved highly effective in quieting the disorder. In his 132d Psalm, David had sung: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Once more the brothers, children of saintly fathers, were dwelling in this fraternal peace.

---

[Page 69]

## **CHAPTER XI**

# **CONCILIATOR**

### **1. THE ANGELIC CORD**

TOWARDS the end of 1274, John left Lyons after his monumental work there for the Church and the Order. In the early days of 1275 he was in Genoa, from which place he went north again to his native region to spend the rest of the year amid his beloved mountains. He did not remain idle, for he had many convents to visit and much Order business to attend to, but here was a delightful opportunity for him to restore his health and revive his spirit mid the beautiful landscape of the place of his birth. It was the last time he was to see Vercelli.

As a mark of his affection for the convent of his native region and of the name he bore, he determined to give it a priceless gift. When the Angelic Doctor died at Fossa Nova in the previous spring on his way to Lyons, there had been found on his body the miraculous cord with which the angels had girded him after his triumph over temptation in the prison of his family castle many years before. It had been given to Aquinas with a pledge that never more would he be tempted to impurity.

The cord, together with the reply the great doctor had prepared against the Greeks for use in the Council, was sent to Lyons after the death of Saint Thomas. The masterly reply was used effectively to settle the Greek schism, while the cord was given to King Philip of France out of respect to him as

temporal host of the Council and in grateful memory of Saint Louis, his father, who had been a firm friend of Saint Thomas. In turn, Philip gave it back to John, feeling that it properly belonged to the Order. John, thereupon, determined to give it to the convent in Vercelli. Here it is venerated to this day.

Devotion to this cord of St. Thomas Aquinas has sponsored; especially through the Angelic Warfare Confraternity, a beautiful [pg. 70:] piety among the young called the Militia of the Angelic Warfare. Cords imitative of the cord of Saint Thomas are blessed and worn about the waist to protect the youth against temptations to impurity. Thus the Angelic Doctor still inspires our youth to the angelic virtue of purity.

After his stay at Vercelli, John journeyed to Bologna, where the General Chapter assembled, June 11, 1275. There was a dispute as to whether or not the large provinces should be divided. In a spirit of compromise it was determined to keep the provinces territorially intact but to relieve the Provincials by creating vicariates. A sharp order was issued to all brethren not to engage in politics. The situation in Italy had worsened. When the chapter opened, three thousand Bolognese had been killed in a battle with Faenza and Forli, so vicious had become the partisan spirit.

In his customary letter to the whole Order after the Chapter, John included the virtue of good speech among the many to which he inspired the brethren:

Let your conduct be in harmony with your preaching, so that the tongue working in agreement with the hands might render more efficacious your public activities. Thus will the seeds of preaching not remain sterile. Follow the path of that peace which the Savior has left us here.

## **FIRST DOMINICAN POPE**

After a stay of almost eighteen months, Pope Gregory had left Lyons in April and was proceeding by slow stages through France, Switzerland and Italy. When he reached Arezzo, he was ill and died there, January 10, 1276. Only three cardinals were in attendance, chief among them, Peter of Tarantase. In obedience to the regulations laid down by the recent Council, all the cardinals met in conclave ten days after. On January 21 the first ballot was taken, and it showed that Cardinal Peter of Tarantase had been elected. The Church had her first Dominican Pope, who took the name of Innocent V. He chose as his motto the verse from Psalm 24, *Oculi mei semper ad Dominum*, "My eyes are ever towards the Lord."

John was near Arezzo when he heard the great news. He and the whole Order felt intense joy at the promotion of a son of Saint Dominic to the throne of Peter. John hurried to Arezzo to pay homage to the new Pontiff. It was a touching scene to see John, [pg. 71:] who had been the superior of the new Pope, kneel humbly before him.

Likely at John's suggestion, the Pope passed through Viterbo on his way to Rome. The General pleaded anew for the body of Clement V. The curia there was still obstinate, refusing to yield the body to the Dominicans despite the clear provisions of the will and the order of Gregory X. Innocent V personally saw to it that the body of the great benefactor of the Order was

transferred to the Dominican church of La Quercia where a stately tomb was erected in his memory. The Pope reached Rome and was solemnly crowned in Saint Peter's on February 22.

John then approached his former subject for one personal favor, namely, to be absolved from his office. For twelve years he had headed the Order, spending himself without stint for its welfare. He was tired, his health was failing, and for retiring he had the example of all his predecessors. All of them, including Saint Dominic, had begged for dismissal. It had been denied to Saint Dominic and to Blessed Jordan; the Order had granted the resignation to Saint Raymond, but regretted it promptly and had passed a constitution forbidding acceptance except for obvious incapacity. Humbert's resignation had been accepted for that reason. John was now seventy-five years of age, but far from incapacitated. The Pope, who knew the spirit of the Order, determined not to act himself but to leave the matter up to the Order. Since the next Chapter was to meet at Pisa on May 24, he wrote it a letter empowering it to make the decision. The Chapter denied the request, hence John was constrained to continue as General.

Among the acts of the Chapter were a recommendation for an unflinching religious spirit, the non-multiplication of small houses, prompt punishment of scandalous behavior and the organization of workers for a new Crusade. The Pope had expressed his wish to undertake another Crusade despite the failures of the previous attempts to redeem the Holy Land, wherefore John and the entire Order pledged him their loyal support. In his customary letter to all the brethren following the Chapter, John paid high tribute to the Pope, their Supreme Pontiff and yet their brother. He inculcated as well a spirit of obedience to local bishops:

As we are all united by bonds of charity, we profess ourselves devoted to the prelates of the various churches who for their high office and for their great authority have a right to our reverence and honor. [pg. 72:]

The first Dominican Pope gave a promise of a glorious reign. Superbly fit for his high office, he set into immediate motion wise plans for a new Crusade, the reconciliation of Italian cities and for executing the decrees of the Council with respect to the Greek Church. He bid fair to restore for the papacy the power and the prestige enjoyed by Innocent III. However, God disposed otherwise. On June 22, he was dead after reigning only five months. The unaccustomed heat of Rome, so severe that year as to cause an epidemic of malaria, carried him away in the vigor of health.

When John heard of the tragic death, he hurried to Rome to assist at the funeral, which took place in St. John Lateran. On July 11, the cardinals met and elected Ottobono Fieschi of Genoa, who took the name of Adrian V. On being named, much to his surprise, he declared: "You have elected not a Pope but a dying man." Adrian was right, for he died within a month. To escape the malarial heat of Rome, he had sought refuge in the cool hills of Viterbo, but the epidemic sought him out even there. At Viterbo, the cardinals met to choose a successor.

Adrian had been one of the cardinals in opposition to the regulations of Gregory X concerning papal elections. He had openly expressed his determination to revoke the acts of the Council, but had had no time officially to issue a document to that effect. The cardinals felt that the

regulations were not obligatory on them in view of Adrian's private determination to abolish them, while the populace believed they should remain in force. These divergent views created a wretched situation. The people gathered to denounce the cardinals for refusing to be shut in conclave.

So angry was the demonstration that the cardinals determined to prepare a document attesting that Adrian had changed the regulations. They ordered Peter, Archbishop of Corinth, to read it to the people, and for greater assurance of success, they asked John, beloved of the people, to accompany him. John went, taking with him John of Varaschi, a native of Viterbo, who was Procurator of the Order. The people, however, would have none of the cardinals' attempt to explain a position so clearly at variance with their will. They broke up the procession of the archbishop, sent the two Dominicans unmolested to their convent, but beat up the archbishop so badly that he died from the beating a month later. This violence persuaded the cardinals to hurry to an election. They chose Cardinal Peter of Giuliano, a native of Portugal, who took [pg. 73:] the name of John XXI. He was a man of scientific bent, an author of books on medicine and mathematics. He, too, had been in opposition to the regulations, whereupon he formally rescinded them, an act that had unhappy results.

## JOHN AS CONCILIATOR

One of the Pope's first concerns was to prevent the war which was brewing between France and Castile. King Alfonso X of Castile had made his second son, Sancho, heir, ignoring the claims of his grandchildren by his first son, Ferdinand, who had died. The wife of Ferdinand, Blanche, the daughter of Saint Louis, appealed to her brother, Philip the Bold, King of France. He took up her cause, determined to punish the affront to his blood. The Pope foresaw that a war between these two Christian nations would make a new Crusade against the Turks impossible and would as well desolate Europe, hence he made a valiant attempt to prevent it. He commissioned John of Vercelli, as head of the Dominican Order, and Jerome of Ascoli, the General of the Franciscans, to conciliate the dispute. They were given ample powers, including that of the right to excommunicate the kings if they proved obstinate.

The two Generals were advised to proceed first to Paris without delay. Since they had to travel in retinue and with speed, necessity forced John to ride in a carriage for the first time in his life. The party sailed for Marseilles, whence it continued on to Paris, arriving there early in 1277. The French King received them kindly and gave assurances that he would not go to war if the rights of Blanche's children to the throne of Castile were respected. The conciliators then went to Spain. On the way, John stopped at Bordeaux to preside at the General Chapter which convened there, May 16. On that very day, John XXI died at Viterbo, the victim of a curious accident. He had had a palace quickly built for himself in Viterbo. While sitting in his apartment, the badly constructed roof caved in upon him. He was extricated from the ruins and died of his injuries a few days later.

The cardinals sent letters to the conciliators to proceed with the diplomatic task since that matter could brook no delay. They themselves, however, thanks to the action of John XXI in abrogating the regulations of papal elections, were delaying the election. [pg. 74:] The two Generals felt that it would be

idle to continue negotiations until a new Pope was elected, so they took up residence in Toulouse.

On November 25, Cardinal John Orsini was elected Pope, taking the name of Nicholas III. Four days after his election he wrote to the Generals warmly pleading with them to continue the negotiations so vital to Christian Europe. To assist them, he appointed a Nuncio to deal with the King of France and another to deal with the King of Castile. Despite the best efforts of the Nuncio accredited to him and of the two conciliators, John and the Franciscan General, the King of Castile remained obdurate, thus bringing the negotiations to an impasse. In an attempt to break it so as to avoid the war, the conciliators arranged for a conference with the agents of the two kings to meet in Toulouse on October 18, 1278. They would take definite action depending on the outcome of the conference.

At this point, the Pope himself made a move intended to further the negotiations but which brought to John a great disturbance of soul.

---

[Page 75]

## CHAPTER XII

# PATRIARCH

IN THE MIDST of their important negotiations to avert war between France and Castile, the Franciscan and the Dominican Generals received a distinct proof of the Pope's high regard for them. In March of 1278, the Franciscan General was named Cardinal, while on May 15 the General of the Dominicans was appointed Patriarch of the See of Jerusalem. This was an important post, for it carried with it the ecclesiastical, military, and civil government of the crusaders in the Orient. In announcing to the French King the appointment of John to Christianity's initial diocese, the Pope called him a man of great heart, of broad vision, illustrious for virtues and a leader of vast experience into whose hands divine providence newly and with greater responsibility than before entrusted the government of the Holy Land. This post had been held, up to his recent death, by Thomas Di Lentino, the Dominican prior who had given the habit to Saint Thomas Aquinas in 1243.

The bull appointing John to the office reads:

Nicholas, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to Our dear son, Father John, patriarch-elect of Jerusalem, Master General of the Order of Preachers, health and apostolic benediction.

The care of all the churches, the apostolic office entrusted to Us despite Our incapacity, requires above all that We be solicitous to provide worthy pastors whenever there is need. In order to perform with greater care this duty of Ours to the holy church of Jerusalem, We are constrained to consider its most special circumstances and Our own great special predilection for the Holy Land, whose spiritual welfare devolves principally upon the supreme shepherd of the Church, which We always nourish and to which We are ever increasingly obliged to dedicate Our zeal.

That church was in a special manner sanctified by the presence of the

Redeemer. He lavished in those places the abundance of heavenly gifts, wherefore from the good state of that church We have reason to [pg. 76:] hope for a greater well being and reviving in all of the Holy Land. Hence, the church of Jerusalem needs a shepherd whose vigilance breathes forth an odor of sanctity and whose words resound with sound doctrine, so that his example may edify and his words may mold people unto the practice of virtue, whose record of past achievements suggests new endeavors and whose present conduct merits the praise of all. The church of Jerusalem having been deprived of its shepherd through the death of the Patriarch Thomas of saintly memory, Our beloved sons, the prior and the chapter of the church of the Holy Sepulchre of Our Savior, have asked as Patriarch of Jerusalem, Our venerable brother Aiglero, of the Order of Saint Augustine, Archbishop of Naples, and for this purpose have informed Us of their resolution through special nuncios with a plea that We grant their request. Having examined the petition, for various reasons of superior urgency, We are unable in the present circumstances to accede to their desires. Upon thinking very seriously in what way We might promptly provide for the church of Jerusalem, for it should not be exposed to dangers by a protracted widowhood, after diligent and mature reflection, for the purpose of sending there a person well qualified to discharge the duties connected with that office, Our mind fixed itself on you, Master General of the Order of Preachers, in whose doctrine, praiseworthy life, mildness of manner, purity of habits, depth of wisdom, maturity of judgment and proven virtue afford Us the hope of finding combined all the quality which We have said were necessary for the shepherd of that church to possess. For which reason, to provide in salutary manner not only for the flock of the Savior in the church of Jerusalem, but also for the entire Holy Land, for whose welfare We hope that you will be able, with God's help, to spend yourself with your accustomed zeal and prudence, and thus accumulate more merit before the divine tribunal, We, with the advice of Our brothers, the cardinals, and in the fulness of Our apostolic authority, name you Patriarch and shepherd of the church of Jerusalem, in the Name of Him Who grants the necessary graces and meritorious guidance, with the confidence that through the laudable ministry of your collaboration the church of Jerusalem and the Holy Land will be kept safe from every harm and will ever continue to prosper both spiritually and materially...

Given at Rome, in Saint Peter's, May 15, 1278, in the first year of Our pontificate.

The Pope had not exaggerated the importance of the post. The muddled state of Europe and the rising impertinence of the powerful Saracens loomed as a new menace to Christianity. A strong, wise man, enjoying the esteem of Catholic princes, was needed. John was just that man. [pg. 77:]

## **JOHN DECLINES**

How did John react to the appointment? Those who knew the interior John were not surprised at what he did; those who only saw the exterior, skillful administrator, were surprised.

When John received word of his appointment, his decision was prompt. He refused it. To make sure that his own spontaneous desire was sound and in harmony with his conscience, he prayed earnestly for divine direction. The candid meditations confirmed his first impulse. His genuine humility made him shy away from an office so exalted, and his sincerity made him feel that he was incapable of living up to the expectations of the high office. In fact the thought occurred to him of taking advantage of the appointment by

stepping down from the post of General. In the various papal letters that accompanied the bull of appointment, the Pope had used the style: "To Father John, erstwhile Master General, Patriarch-elect of Jerusalem." He saw in that phrase, "erstwhile Master General," a release from his care as head of the Dominicans and proceeded to act accordingly. He announced to the Order that he was no longer its General and that in the next Chapter it should proceed to elect a new General. To give a practical proof of his position, he had his own personal seal as Master General broken. He genuinely desired to retire to a cloister to spend his last days in pious and restful meditation. His curia remonstrated, insisting that he was still General, but he kept insisting that he was not. This created a muddled situation in the Order, most of the brethren feeling that he still was in office while others agreed that the phrase used by the Pope had absolved him from office.

Dominican historians generally attribute John's refusal to accept the episcopacy alone to his deep spirit of humility. There are likely other reasons besides this fundamental one. As a practical minded man, he knew that he, nearly eighty years of age, could not cope with the complicated international situation of which Jerusalem was the focal point. Christianity was divided, the Turks were powerful, while the climate of the Levant had killed more Europeans than had even the Saracen sword. Furthermore, he wanted to give a lasting lesson to his brethren on true and primitive Dominicanism. Too many had become bishops; too many [pg. 78:] were desirous of the honor. He felt as Dominic had felt, as Thomas Aquinas had felt, that the episcopacy and a religious profession normally cannot mix. They, with Raymond of Pennafort, John the Teuton and many others of the Order's great, had steadfastly refused to become bishops, while Albert, forced to the see of Ratisbon, had resigned it as soon as he could. John had never before refused any task assigned him by a Pope, and there had been many assignments, taxing and difficult. For his own soul's peace and for the good of the spirit of the Order, he felt constrained to write to the Pope, refusing the dignity and begging the Holy Father to appoint someone else to Jerusalem.

The negotiations in the meantime continued. Cardinal Gerard of Parma was named to head the conference in Toulouse. The King of Castile objected to Toulouse as territory of his rival and therefore unnatural, whereupon to please him the conference was translated to Bordeaux, then not under the jurisdiction of the French King, but of the English. At this point, the Franciscan General, now Cardinal, fell ill and asked permission to return to Italy; hence John was left alone with Cardinal Gerard to conduct the negotiations. He was rather glad, for now he could assume a more modest mode of living and stay in his own convent.

However, these days proved to be the most vexatious period of his whole life. He knew that nothing could come of the negotiations, yet they held him for two years in futile diplomacy with men who wanted no reconciliation and with affairs that precluded his full attention to the business of the Order. His position in the Order continued mystifying. A letter from the Pope in answer to his letter of refusal now added to the confusion.

Nicholas, servant of the servants of God, to Our beloved son, John, Patriarch-elect of Jerusalem and former Master General of the Order of Preachers, health and apostolic benediction.  
We have received the letter in which you speak of refusing the patriarchal See of Jerusalem. You excused yourself for the delay in sending Us the relinquishing of the rights which you have from this See through Our election

of your person and you exposed the motives of your refusal. The statement stunned Us. With good reason, We marvel greatly that a religious, accustomed to live under the yoke of obedience and of regular discipline and one by whose example these things must be taught to others, have delayed thus far to submit to the voice of God made known by him who is His vicar on earth. How can you exact obedience from [pg. 79:] your subjects if you yourself refuse to obey him who has the right to command you? Indeed, We have greatly marvelled that you, after having undertaken so many difficult posts without ever refusing while you occupied a position quite humble in the hierarchy, should now decline to assume a rank more elevated and wherein through greater labors you can acquire a greater merit. Indeed, it surprises Us that a man so prudent and wise as you should cause the church of Jerusalem so much harm by its being left uncertain as to its shepherd by your turning your back on the office. Finally, without wanting to expose here all the reasons of Our wonderment, We marvel that by your hesitancy you allowed your Order of Preachers to be placed in an uncertainty as to the person committed to its government. Oh how little is your present conduct in harmony with the love and sacrifices for the Holy Land, which We know to be so deep and living in you. How unworthy of your piety and zeal is your refusal to work for those places which were sanctified by the presence of the Savior? And what? Have you dared refuse to take care of that region where Christ in His mercy healed the wounds of the human race? Where He with ineffable sweetness suffered all His pains and spilled His Blood to pay the price of our redemption? Think well and reflect: can such a conduct be consistent with the great reputation which you enjoy? see whether or not it places in danger your eternal salvation; consider the scandal given to all those who are murmuring about your conduct and openly ask: "Where is your zeal?" Certainly, We are pleased to praise the humility which prompts you to judge so harshly your own competence. However, We, full of confidence in Him Who gives strength to the weak, having heard the opinion of Our brothers, the cardinals, reject your refusal. We will that you be known as the person chosen by Us for the See of Jerusalem in absolute manifestation of Our authority. We will that henceforth you consider yourself the Patriarch-elect of Jerusalem, that you conduct yourself as such, and that, long as you may remain away from the Holy Land, you undertake, nevertheless, the government of that church and safeguard her interests.

## **COMPROMISE**

Peremptory order indeed! It was couched in words of precise command by him who had the supreme authority to command. One would think that in the face of it John could no longer lawfully or honorably decline. But he did.

He had to obey the more imperious voice from within. Long and ardently had he prayed before the Blessed Sacrament; it had made him thoroughly convinced that he should not accept the [pg. 80:] honor; wherefore having cleared his own conscience in the matter he resolutely persisted in his decision. Being a practical man, he took steps to make his decision prevail. He wrote to the new Dominican Cardinal, Latino Malebranca, who loved him so well, begging him to explain his position to the Pope. He also wrote in the same vein to Father John of Viterbo, Procurator of the Order, who enjoyed great favor with the Pope. Both these yielded to his plea and, obtaining an audience with the Pope, earnestly sought of the Pontiff that John be relieved of the See of Jerusalem. At the same time they begged him to keep John as head of the Order. The Pope was inclined to be testy about it, but finally was won over

to both points. He sent to John the following brief in which he absolved him from the care of the See of Jerusalem and at the same time enjoined him to continue as General of the Order.

Nicholas, servant of the servants of God, to Our dear son, Father John, Master General of the Order of Preachers, health and apostolic benediction. Our sincere affection for your person, together with Our zeal and piety for the church of Jerusalem and the Holy Land for the task of providing this church with a shepherd made us cast Our gaze on you with the hope that your presence, in recognition of your great virtues, would be for her, with God's grace, most useful in removing her miseries and in promoting her interests, and that you, placed by Us at her head, might have been able to undertake the salutary direction of affairs in the Holy Land. For that purpose, inasmuch as through your labors you had shown yourself clearly fitted for the welfare of both, your merits and your reward had grown apace. However, when you received the apostolic letters by which We destined you to this office, you alleged various reasons, you have sought to escape the load placed on you, and when We opposed these excuses, intending to persuade you to yield humbly to Our commands, you offered new ones, begging with insistent frequency and devoted fervor to be dispensed from the acceptance of the care, whose bigness you feared in your judgment to be beyond your strength. Since it is not Our intention to place on your shoulders an insupportable burden, acceding to your repeated pleas, and with the advice of Our brothers, the cardinals, and by force of this letter, We absolve you from the government of the church of Jerusalem and We declare you free and clear of any obligation in this regard. However, since We understand that you had read into our previously-cited letter and in others sent to you after your promotion by Our use of the words, "Erstwhile Master General of the Order of Preachers," in [pg. 81:] mentioning you, a conviction that you were free of the Generalate, so that in humility thereafter you have abstained from exercising that office, We want you to understand that by the use of the above-mentioned words We did not intend to release you from the office of General or in any other way absolve you from it, since that is not according to law. Wherefore, either of your own accord or constrained by Our commands, you must be resolved to comply with Our decision. For which reason, notwithstanding Our previous style of addressing you, you may and must freely exercise the office as you did before.

Given at Rome in Saint Peter's, February 4, 1279, in the second year of Our pontificate.

Thus John won his point of objection to the episcopacy but lost his claim to retire to the cloister as a simple friar. The Order rejoiced that, without any more doubt, it could have and hail him as its beloved General.

---

[Page 82]

## CHAPTER XIII

# THOMIST

UPON being excused from the duty of accepting consecration as Patriarch of Jerusalem, John reassumed his control of the Order and plunged more determinedly into the business of effecting a reconciliation between France and Castile. The vexing negotiations forced him to miss the General Chapter

held in Milan in 1278, the only one not presided over by him during his entire Generalate. It became quite apparent at the end of the winter of 1279 that nothing could come of the negotiations. The Pope was informed of this by the conciliators. He made one last personal attempt by writing to the two Kings, which gesture proving equally futile, the Pontiff released John from the concern.

John was now free to devote his full time to the affairs of the Order. He left Bordeaux for Paris, where the General Chapter of 1279 was to meet on May 27. It was destined to prove an important one in the history of the Dominicans. Much opposition, actuated by petty jealousy, had arisen to the doctrine of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor. If clearness of mind or firmness of character were lacking in the head of the Order at this moment, the Order might likely have lost its glory in its greatest son and its very unity.

John had always revered the Angelic Doctor for his great learning and his greater piety. He was shocked that now that Aquinas was dead, small souls, great as they were in learning as professors of universities or in positions as bishops and cardinals, began accusing Thomas of heresy. Whole-heartedly and magnificently, John rose to the defense of the Angelic Doctor. He knew the worth of the man at first hand, having worked with him in three General Chapters: at Valenciennes in 1259, in Bologna in 1267 and in Paris in 1269. He had consulted him often on moral problems, receiving always from the great saint a clear and sound solution. In this connection, one of the tracts had been dedicated [pg. 83:] to John, the XXII opuscle in the Pius V edition, concerning the formula of sacramental absolution. John knew well how valuable had been the work of Saint Thomas for the Church and the Order, hence he could not permit any disparagement of his fame by little foxes who thought that by debasing Thomas they could advance themselves.

Convinced from the start of Saint Thomas' soundness of doctrine, John had sought to make the *Summa* the official text in the schools of the Order. When fierce opposition rose to this endeavor, to play fair with all, he instructed the Capitular Fathers who met in Milan during his absence the previous year to make a thorough study of the case. The Chapter sent friars to England to dispute the matter with Robert Wilverby, the chief antagonist. This Dominican was made a cardinal by Nicholas III in the period of the dispute, hence he carried great weight. But John carried more. When the General Chapter met in Paris in 1279, after reviewing all the objections of the opponents of Saint Thomas, John, with that clearvision which saints enjoy concerning other saints and the welfare of the Church, had the Chapter pass the following act:

Since Father Thomas Aquinas of venerated memory has greatly honored the Order by his praiseworthy life and by his writings, it shall not be permitted that anyone in the Order speak in an irreverent manner about his person or his writings, even though some may not agree with his teachings. We therefore order the priors provincial and conventual, their vicars and visitators, to suppress abuses of this nature and to punish them severely.

The opposition continued for some time, but John's prompt and effective action had broken its back and preserved for the Church and for the Order the treasures of Thomism.

John had never visited England. He thought it opportune now to fix the local of the next Chapter at Oxford. In his customary circular letter at the close

of the Chapter in Paris, he expressed more eloquently than ever before his desire that the brethren retain the fervor of spirit in warring against the corrupting influences of the world. There are a few passages in it worthy of note:

With the zeal of novices, keep at spiritual studies as your vocation demands.  
[pg. 84:]

Dwell in the house of the Lord with happiness of heart, maintaining the unity of spirit, full of affection one for another, and walk ye along His holy paths in tranquility of soul.

Grow ye as sons not unworthy of your fathers.

Let no one take pleasure in the disgrace of another, talk not about another's faults, lend your shoulders to him who is about to fall, and to him who has fallen, refuse not your compassion and your hand to help him rise again.

Before leaving Paris, John had many talks with King Philip. The monarch was very gracious with John. Though inclined to impetuous anger and vengefulness, this son of the saintly Louis was amenable to the good advice of priestly counselors and entertained the most profound respect for the Order for all that it had done for his royal house, and particularly in its present promotion through John of the cause of the canonization of his father. To show his gratitude, Philip had a clause inserted in his will directing that his heart after his death be given to the Dominican convent of Saint James in Paris.

John then set out for Rome for personal consultations with the Pope. After visiting convents en route, he boarded a ship at Marseilles and arrived in Rome in the fall of 1279.

He was invited by the Pope to sit in on several consistories held to devise ways and means of settling the Castilian question. John had not seen much of Rome, hence he enjoyed thoroughly his brief stay in the Eternal City. Rome always offers to its guest or visitor of good will an inestimable gift: a greater conviction in the Faith and an apostolic desire to spread it catholicly throughout the world.

Nicholas III was as great an admirer of the Franciscans as Clement IV had been of the Dominicans. He solemnly approved their rule of poverty and, by special instance, incorporated an official interpretation of it in the code of canon law. The interpretation of what kind of poverty should be practiced by religious had caused many disputes among the Franciscans themselves and between them and other Orders. Anxious to stop the bickering which in support of a particular brand of poverty often violated charity, the Pope ordered John as head of the Dominicans to see to it that the criticisms cease. John was as anxious as the Pope to keep peace, so he wrote a circular letter to all the Provincials telling [pg. 85:] them that since the Pope in the exercise of his supreme jurisdiction had approved the rule of the Franciscans and had given it an official interpretation, wherefore anything said contrary to this interpretation would incur excommunication *ipso facto* reserved personally to the Pope, it behooved the brethren to obey and refrain from all comments on the rule.

During his stay in Rome, John actuated the long desire of Dominicans to have a convent in the central part of the city. Santa Sabina, where Saint Dominic had established his headquarters, and where fittingly his successor still resides, was on the outskirts of the City. In 1255, the Dominicans had been given an abandoned monastery of nuns by Alexander IV, near the Pantheon. A small church was built in 1276. Now in 1279, thanks to generous donations, John was able to lay the foundations of a great basilica which, since, has become the famous Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the heart and center of the industrious Roman Province.

## **JOURNEY TO OXFORD**

At the start of 1280, John took his walking stick to begin his long journey to Oxford. Though now eighty years of age, he possessed remarkable vigor abetted by a deep heart's joy. He had letters from the Pope accrediting him as Nuncio to the courts of France and England. Again, John was asked to seek the reconciliation of France and Castile and unite the Christian princes in a new, mighty effort against the Turks, as the Council of Lyons had directed.

Visiting all the convents he could reach on the way, by spring he found himself in Normandy, where he embarked for England. He took the opportunity to visit the convents in Scotland and Ireland. Returning to England, he convened the Chapter on June 9, in Oxford. During the Chapter, the controversy on Saint Thomas flared anew. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, John Pekom, a Franciscan, had been a bitter opponent of Thomism. The Dominicans had defended their brother against him, which brought about fierce disputes between the two Orders. John, who was a lover of peace, hated it all. He saw great harm in the disputes, especially when they concerned matters that were mainly speculative and of no great importance in theology. He warned all professors to be temperate and to occupy themselves more with solid [pg. 86:] truths than with idle questions. In his customary circular letter after the Chapter, he voiced some pertinent advice:

Check with the rein of silence this tendency to talk-fests and idle discourse.

Retire to the quiet of your cells and dedicate yourselves to the study of the Sacred Scriptures.

On his way back from Oxford, he visited convents in Flanders, Holland, and Switzerland, doing it more leisurely than was usual for him. By the spring of 1281, he was back in his beloved Italy, stopping at the convent in Milan. He lingered here a while, delighting to spend his time with the novices. He asked them to his table and spent hours in paternal conference with them.

While John of Vercelli was in Flanders, the Pope died. After six months of wrangling, the cardinals elected a Frenchman, Simon de Brie, who took the name of Martin IV. John now hurried to Orvieto to pay homage to the new Pope. He was a great admirer of both the Franciscans and the Dominicans. Now that he was in office, despite the frowning attitude of the episcopacy, he determined to revive the ancient privilege which these two Orders had enjoyed of having their members preach and hear confessions anywhere without the need of first securing the local ordinary's permission.

The General Chapter of 1281 was to meet in Florence. John went there to convene it, June 1. He found some grave abuses had developed, particularly in the Roman Province. With characteristic promptness, he denounced them. In a speech full of holy anger, he begged: "Let not the zeal of the Order grow cold. With shame, I say it that it has lessened in so many, whereas it should be warmer and regain the fierceness of the original blaze."

It seems that there was much vainglory in seeking titles. At this time the title of Preacher General was esteemed more highly than that of Master of Sacred Theology, for it carried more privileges and was eagerly sought. The Masterate, now the greatest gift the Order can give to its sons, at this time conveyed responsibility rather than honor. Saint Thomas had been a Master, but had no rights with it, nor did he seek any. The great never seek anything; the small souls do. The title of Preacher General was endowed with much honor and power, hence it was avidly desired and scheming was done to have it possessed. John found many who [pg. 87:] had been given it unworthily and suspiciously. With characteristic courage, he remedied the whole situation by a stunning action. He immediately took the title away from all in the Roman Province. In his circular letter after the Chapter, he explained his action:

We have been in darkness, my beloved, walking through gloomy and erroneous paths, serving more our own than the divine Will.

The preacher of the divine word must meditate faithfully day and night on the law of the Lord and with fervent prayer attend to a reading which is not idle but solid and useful.

In your conversations, even with strangers, let the knowledge thus gained be apparent so that correct manners may reveal the grace of God and the testimony of your deeds may render efficacious the word of the preacher.

The next Chapter was fixed for Vienna. It is almost incredible that this octogenarian should plan to walk the great distance it would require over mountainous terrain, in uncertain weather and through cities that were torn by civil strife. Typical of this latter situation was something that occurred in Sicily at this time. The fury of the natives there against the French drove them to slay in cold blood the adherents of Charles of Anjou and even to dismember women who were pregnant by French soldiers. The Pope himself mentioned this atrocity of the Sicilian Vespers in his bull excommunicating Peter of Aragon, who was seeking to dislodge the French king, and sent Cardinal Gerard to Palermo as his legate to quiet the disturbance. John himself was dismayed by the incident and wrote to the friars in Naples and Messina ordering them to abet the work of the Papal Legate to restore order in the distracted realm of the two Sicilies.

The situation in northern Italy had not improved. The old feud between Guelph and Ghibelline still flared fiercely, and the old problem of Inquisitors was still pertinent. The Holy See demanded that he appoint new men to cope with the situation. John's spirit had always been to seek to bring back the erring sheep through kindness and love. In his mind there kept ringing the constant advice of the Beloved Apostle, John: "My little children, love one another." The preaching of his patron saint molded John into the pattern of a man who would try with love to wrest a loyalty which [pg. 88:] force can never

effect. Obedient, he assigned his men when he had to for work in the Inquisition, but his own heart felt that it was not the lasting way to save.

For the last time in his life, John visited his beloved Lombardy. From its green plains he lifted his eyes to the mountains, and as his gaze went upward to the snowcapped peaks of the Alps his soul, pure as their driven snow, rejoiced that it had been his lot to translate their physical purity and majesty into the moral realm, first of his own conscience, and secondly of the conscience of men through his preaching and labors. It was a moment of solemn and sacred solace. With some human regret, yet with expansive spiritual joy he left those scenes forever to face whatever his brief remaining future had in store.

---

[Page 89]

## CHAPTER XIV

# DEATH AND BEATIFICATION

WHEN John arrived in Vienna to open the Chapter on May 17, 1282, he was greeted with joyous news. The Abbot of Fossa Nova, where Saint Thomas had died in 1274, had opened the tomb and found the body of the Saint intact and as fresh as in life, while giving off a pleasant odor, a clear sign of his sanctity.

In the Chapter, John ordered every possible acquiescence to the wishes of the bishops. He advised the brethren not to use the privilege of the Pope but to ask bishops for faculties. His circular letter after the Chapter is a long and beautiful one in which he incites the brethren to the practice of the loftiest virtues.

After closing the Chapter, John started out for Germany. His body now refused to follow the drive of his spirit. He was forced to take frequent rests. The weather played further havoc with his plans. His condition deteriorated, yet he was fully determined to make for Montpelier, where the next Chapter was to be held. The brethren, alarmed, begged him to indulge in a vehicle. It was unconstitutional, he replied: the Dominican in his poverty cannot ride on a horse or in a carriage. He must walk. The brethren, however, found a way out of the impasse, a credit as much to their sacrificial love of him as to their intelligence. Ingeniously they prepared a palfrey, set him on it, and then taking it upon their shoulders carried him to the next convent. The brethren there then took up the relay to the next convent and in this manner, perfectly constitutional, effective indeed, even if somewhat cruelly cumbersome, the Master General proceeded to Cologne, then to Strasbourg. He became weaker and weaker, but his mind remained clear, as his spirit remained undaunted. He knew he was on his last journey. It but filled him with joy.

Riding on the Saone, he came to Lyons, then on the Rhone to Avignon. By December of 1282, he was in Montpelier. The [pg. 90:] weather bettered. He enjoyed Christmas with the novices, for it was to be his last and he wanted to spend it with the infants of the Order. He gathered them often around him, giving them spiritual conferences and inciting them to the pursuit of

perfection in the holy vocation of the Dominion priesthood. For their particular benefit, he had a manual drawn up which proved very useful to the rising generation of Dominicans. It was his last personal act, very fitting with the tenor of his whole life.

## **LAST SERMON**

On June 6, 1283, the Chapter opened. John, now in his eighty-fourth year, feeble in body, presided with a mental vigor that would do credit to a man under fifty. The education of the novices came in for much discussion and regulation. He sent a letter to all the Provincials warning them to be solicitous on this point. Having discovered that abuses in the title of Preacher General existed here as they had in Italy, since the Provincial Chapters of Marseilles and Carcassone had created too many preachers, he revoked all the titles.

In his last circular letter, dispatched by him after the Chapter, we find many beautiful passages full of tenderness and sage advice. It was the Dominican, the General, the Holy Name man, the Saint preaching his last sermon:

Take up that silence which is found to be wanting in so many and check that wagging tongue. Wound yourselves not with discussions and worry not about false accusations. Let us present ourselves with fervent prayers before the Divine Majesty as men jealous of the Order in whose bosom we have been regenerated by Christ, and let us, above all else, take care lest the cold wind of evil kill with its chill the sweet buds of grace that have sprouted in our hearts. Rather, let us welcome the heat which comes to bring to maturity an abundance of fruits in the garden of virtue. Oh how we shall exult in the time of the harvest, particularly if we have planted with tears, for on our shoulders we shall be carrying the sheaves of joy. Remember me often, I pray you, so that the many defects to which my weak and fragile nature is subject may be covered by your suffrages and render me worthy to safeguard your welfare and the Order's as long as it is given me to live.

The grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the consolation of the Holy Spirit be with you always. [pg. 91:]

John spent the summer of 1283 in Montpellier trying to regain a bit of his physical strength, but the body which had sustained so many labors refused to improve. He grew weaker and weaker. With the coming of autumn, he thought of setting out for sunny Italy to escape the cold. He was anxious to get to Bologna where he had made his novitiate, where Saint Dominic, the father of his Order, dwelt in eternal peace in the tomb John had been honored to provide for him. The next Chapter had been fixed for Bologna with this in mind.

Bravely, then, in September, the General started out for Italy. A few days' march out of Montpellier, however, sapped all of his remaining strength, so he sought hospitality in a nearby Cistercian abbey where he was most honorably received and tenderly cared for. He fretted, nevertheless, for with death about to claim him, he found himself away from home. He wanted desperately to die in a convent of his own Order, so despite the friendly remonstrances of

the Cistercians and the filial concern of his brethren, he gave orders to be taken back to Montpelier.

With loving devotion, the brethren set him on their shoulders and began the journey back to the Dominican convent. When the group neared the priory, it found the whole community assembled in files outside, waiting to receive the sick General. As John saw the brethren lined up so sadly before their convent, he uttered a prayer of gratitude to God for having given him this favor, and then as he was carried through the files he spoke tenderly to them, saying, "It is God's will that I rest with you."

He was put to bed and attended with great solicitude. Though the flame of his corporal fire grew dimmer and dimmer his spirit's zeal flared up bright as ever. His mind remained clear, his speech and hearing normal. He was able from his sick-bed to utter edifying discourses and he kept inspiring all with his practices of piety.

On November 30, 1283, he sweetly expired in the company of his brethren. His great soul winged upward above the snow-capped mountains to the throne of Him Who dwells above all the heights of this world.

A magnificent funeral was given him attended by all the nearby dignitaries. A chronicler says that never in the history of the region had so much honor been paid to anyone else.

They buried him at the right of the high altar in the conventual church. This tomb became the focal center of a great veneration [pg. 92:] for John which sustained itself throughout the centuries. Not only the brethren, but other religious and the people themselves knew him to be a holy man, so they visited his tomb often, prayed there, and sought miracles through his intercession. Many were wrought, which all the more increased the devotion of the faithful.

The tomb of John of Vercelli tragically was desecrated in 1562 by Calvinists in the terrible religious war that raged in France. The heretics burst into the church, overturned everything, opened the grave, dismembered the body and then fired the church. It was completely destroyed, and not a trace remained, after the fire, of the body of John.

But more than a trace remains of his life. No one could eradicate the memory of a life so nobly lived for God. He was the perfect type of the apostolic religious, the true Dominican, the preacher of the word. The Holy Name had been the well-spring of his pious thinking and laboring. He had preached its honor in season and out of season. Therefore, rightfully he is given a name which for the Holy Name Society shall ever be dear, the name of Father, of Founder of a Society now so great, thanks to his labors.

John of Vercelli was beatified by Pope Pius X. That Pope himself has now been canonized. This has happened in our time. In our own time as well, may we see John advance to canonization, for if ever a man is worthy of the name of saint it is he who founded the Holy Name.

\* \* \*

**HOLY NAME PLEDGE:** Blessed be God. Blessed be His Holy Name. Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true man. Blessed be the Name of Jesus. I believe, O Jesus, that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I proclaim my love for the Vicar of Christ on Earth. I believe all the sacred truths, which the Holy Catholic Church believes and teaches. I promise to give good example by the regular practice of my faith. In honor of His Divine Name, I pledge myself against perjury, blasphemy, profanity and obscene speech. I pledge my loyalty to the flag of my country and to the God-given principles of freedom, justice and happiness for which it stands. I pledge my support to all lawful authority, both civil and religious. I dedicate my manhood to the honor of the Sacred Name of Jesus Christ and beg that He will keep me faithful to these pledges until death.

Holy Name Pocket Manual, Bureau of the Holy Name Society, 884 Lexington Avenue, NYC, 1914.