

Chapter I

FEMALE DOMINICAN IDENTITIES (1200–1500)

SYLVIE DUVAL*

AFTER A LONG period during which the most prestigious and perfect religious model was that of the monk, the Gregorian reform was an attempt to renew the pastoral mission of the Church, as well as to restore its independence from lay powers. Reformers, and above all the papacy from Gregory VII (1073–1085) onwards, put the sacerdotal function and the figure of the cleric at the centre of the ecclesiastical institution. Whereas the monk had its female counterpart in the nun, the figure of the priest was exclusively male and could not be adapted to women. As a result, male ecclesiastical models evolved significantly during the later Middle Ages: the role of the parish priest was redefined, new mendicant orders were invented, and a new gendered theological knowledge, taken from the universities,¹ was promoted. Reciprocally, the female religious model did not—at least officially—evolve. In order to be considered as “religious persons” women had still to enter a monastery and become nuns.

Through this re-evaluation of the clerical model, the Church redefined the relationship between clerics and lay people, as demonstrated by conciliar decisions from the Gregorian reform onwards.² Lay people became more directly connected to the clerics, who had to administer to them the holy sacraments such as communion and absolution regularly. As a consequence, the religious obligations of the laity increased; simultaneously, believers became more demanding of their priests,³ of the preachers they listened

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1 See Stabler Miller, “Mirror of the Scholarly (Masculine) Soul.” On the use of gender in medieval church history, see Lees, ed., *Medieval Masculinities*; Bennett and Karras, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*.

2 On the evolution of the relationship between clerics and lay people, see Vauchez, “Les laïcs au Moyen-Age entre ecclésiologie et histoire,” and his *Les laïcs au Moyen Age*.

3 The Pataria, a movement of lay people who, in the archbishopric of Milan in the end of the eleventh

Sylvie Duval is Marie Curie fellow at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. She received her PhD in History in 2012 (from the Universities of Lyon and Florence) with a dissertation, subsequently published, entitled “Comme des anges sur terre. Les moniales dominicaines et les débuts de la réforme observante” (2015). She has been a member of the École française in Rome and a fellow of the Fondation Thiers in Paris. She currently teaches Medieval History at the University of Milan. Among her publications are *La beata Chiara conduttrice* (2016) and *Women and Wealth in Medieval Pisa* (2018).

to, and, in the end, of their own faith and religious knowledge. This means that even if the Gregorian reform tended to exclude women from ecclesiastical institutions, it also made it possible for lay people,⁴ women as well as men, to feel more concerned about religious matters. Consequently, women as lay people did take part in the “revival” of the faith⁵ that occurred at this time, and to building a new relationship between churchmen and lay people. This is why the “religious movements” highlighted by Herbert Grundmann involved both men and women: we should indeed bear in mind that the meaningful socio-cultural categories of that time were not only the difference between sexes and gendered models, but also the distinction between clerics and lay people.⁶ Women, who could not be clerics, were by definition “lay.”⁷

The history of Dominican women enables us to better understand the evolution of the place of women within the Church at the end of the Middle Ages. It sheds light on the particular relationship between a category of clerics explicitly devoted to the spiritual care of lay people (the Dominican friars) and some groups of religious women who were gradually placed under their spiritual authority.

Two bulls officially enabled women to be part of the Order of Preachers (the “Dominicans”), or at least to be associated with it. On February 6, 1267, Pope Clement IV issued the bull *Affectu sincero*. This set down the conditions under which some nuns, officially called *Moniales Ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura et instituta Fratrum Praedicatorum viventes/degentes*, were placed under the spiritual government of the Order of Preachers.⁸ On June 26, 1405, the bull *Sedis apostolicae*, issued by Pope Innocent VII, officially recognized the existence of a Dominican “order of penance,” submitted *in spiritualibus* to the Order of Preachers; it promulgated for these lay men and women a particular rule, contained within the text of the bull.⁹

These two bulls must be interpreted differently, because they are the result of two different processes and contexts: firstly, that of the assignment of the *cura monialium* (the care of nuns) to male orders, which was promoted by the papacy during the thirteenth century through *Affectu sincero*; and secondly that of the beginning of the Observant reform as the context for *Sedis apostolice*. These two “moments” shed light on the evolution of the place and role of religious women within the Order of Preachers.

century struggled against simoniac and married priests, is emblematic of this phenomenon. See Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Age*.

4 Grundmann in his famous study, *Religious Movements*, sees the Gregorian reform as a key moment for the development of the lay religious movements.

5 Vauchez, *Les laïcs au Moyen Age*.

6 See Lett, “Les régimes de genre.”

7 Let me emphasize here that women, even if professed nuns, were not clerics, even if they were considered as *religiosae personae* and benefitted from special ecclesiastical privileges.

8 *Bullarium Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, ed. Ripoll (hereafter *BOP*), 1:481.

9 *BOP*, 2:473. On the rule of the penitents, see Wehrli-Johns, “L’Osservanza dei domenicani”; also Lehmijoki-Gardner, “Writing Religious Rules as an Interactive Process.”

This essay questions the widespread idea, put forward by Herbert Grundmann,¹⁰ that Dominicans (like other medieval religious orders) were apparently reluctant to integrate women within their order, and offers new perspectives to the history of religious women during the later Middle Ages.

***Affectu sincero*, 1267**

At the beginning of the thirteenth century Dominic of Caleruega did not create any order or category of nuns that would become officially associated to the Order of Preachers. One can have no doubt, however, about Dominic's concern for religious women. His involvement in the foundation or re-foundation of various female communities (Prouille in 1206/7; San Sisto in Rome in 1221; Madrid ca. 1220) shows clearly that he considered female religious life as an indispensable element of Christian society, and as a valuable spiritual help for "active" male clerics.¹¹ But, as a cleric of his era, educated under the principles of the Gregorian reform, he believed that female religious communities could only be monastic. He insisted above all on the necessity of enclosure and did not introduce new ideas about the religious mission of women. Women's communities had therefore to be submitted to the spiritual government of clerics, such as the Dominicans, Cistercians, the canons regular, or secular clerics.¹² The other great "mendicant" founder of this same century, Francis (although not a cleric), had a comparable attitude towards religious women, since he never officially associated female communities to his own order.¹³

By the middle of the thirteenth century, some members of the Order of Preachers claimed however that Dominic had founded a "female branch" for his order.¹⁴ This invented tradition was meant to justify the association of female communities to the Order, in a context that had greatly changed since Dominic's death in 1221. This interpretation was supported by the nuns of those monasteries founded by Dominic (Prouille, San Sisto of Rome) who did not want the friars who were taking care of their spiritual and temporal life to abandon them¹⁵ and who were seeking papal approval

10 See Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 90.

11 See Cariboni, "Domenico e la vita religiosa femminile."

12 On the first years of the Prouille community, when the sisters were under the *cura* of various clerics, see Vicaire, "Prouille fut-il un couvent double?"

13 The Damianites, and later the Clarissan Order ("Poor Clares"), were far more "creations" of the papacy than the Order of Friars Minor (the Franciscans). In her rule, Clare respects the strict papal norms about female monastic enclosure. On the genesis of the Order of St. Clare, see Alberzoni, *Chiara e il papato*, and Andenna: "Dalla *Religio pauperum dominarum*."

14 This is particularly so of Humbert of Romans, Master General from 1254 to 1263. He asserts in his sermons that Dominic did create a female branch to his Order. See Cariboni, "Problemi d'identità," 169.

15 On the conflict between the Friar Preachers and the nuns, see Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, chapter 5; de Fontette, *Les religieuses à l'âge classique du droit canon*, 90ff.; Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*, chapter 1. See also Frank, "Die Dominikarinnen." For Frank, the process of regularizing the

for their “incorporation” into the Order of Preachers.¹⁶ However, many other members of the Order did not want the nuns to be incorporated: the *cura* of numerous religious women would prevent the friars from fulfilling their main preaching, so they believed.¹⁷

From the 1220s the “female religious movement” had become increasingly important and new female religious communities were spreading in all countries. From Gregory IX (1227–1241) onwards, the papacy managed to find legal and practical ways to supervise and control such communities. As a result, the need for clerics to take on the care for the nuns’ souls increased: female communities were more numerous, and the need for them to be supervised by clerics grew too, according to the way the papacy looked at religious women. The “old” Benedictine model of the previous centuries, which left the nuns’ monasteries governed by powerful abbesses, more or less independent from male government, was not promoted for the numerous new female communities during the thirteenth century. The new mendicant orders, along with Cistercian monks, had to accept the spiritual charge over these numerous female souls.

How difficult was this task? The organization of female Cistercian monasteries suggests that the male involvement remained limited: male abbots rarely ended up controlling the nuns’ way of life.¹⁸ Likewise, the bull *Affectu sincero* that regulated the terms of the association between “Dominican nuns” and Friar Preachers suggests that the number of friars implied in the *cura monialium* was not so great.

The controversy between those who did not want the nuns to be part of the Order of Preachers and those who claimed that the Preachers had to care for them was solved in 1267 (after a first attempt in 1246).¹⁹ The bull *Affectu sincero* enabled the female communities to be associated with the Order of Preachers in a very flexible way. Their complete “incorporation” into the Order was no longer proposed (even if, as we will see, many possibilities remained open). According to the bull, the friars bore certain legal duties: they were merely obliged to control the observance of the constitutions in the female communities once a year (*officio correctionis et reformationis*). Nuns had to follow the rule of St. Augustine (as the friars did), to which some Constitutions were added,

Dominican nuns did not allow them to be freed from male domination (“Männerherrschaft”), which is why he described their union to the Dominican Order as an “Anschluss an einen Männerorden” (125).

16 The concept of *incorporatio* could have been a key problem in the conflict. The final bull of 1267 does not use this term, which had been used in some earlier bulls regarding the nuns, and it is clear that the solution adopted consciously avoided any possibility of “full incorporation” of women within the Order. See also Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns*.

17 This was especially the case in the German provinces of the Order where numerous female communities were founded. On this topic, see the letters of Jordan of Saxony, second Master General of the Order, to Diana degli Andalò, prioress of a “Dominican” monastery in Bologna: *Beati Iordani de Saxonia Epistulae*, ed. Walz.

18 See Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns*, chapter 6.

19 *BOP*, 2:26. The content of this bull, promulgated by Innocent IV, is very close to that of *Affectu sincero*, and perhaps more precise. This bull does not contain however the new official denomination of Dominican nuns. It was promulgated before Humbert composed the new rule for all Dominican nuns and had it approved by the General Chapter in Valenciennes (1259). It was reconfirmed by Nicholas IV in 1289.

written especially for the Dominican nuns by the Order's Master General, Humbert of Romans, in 1259 (*instituta fratrum praedicatorum*).²⁰ Preachers were made responsible for the spiritual care of nuns, but the bull allowed them to appoint chaplains whenever this was deemed necessary. Finally, friars were not obliged to reside in the nuns' monasteries, and they were not responsible for the temporal care of the female communities. Considering this, the care of nuns was a rather light burden on the Order: nuns were officially placed under the spiritual care of the Dominicans and they had to observe the Dominican constitutions. That is why all Dominican nuns, from 1267 onwards, were canonically called *moniales Ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura et instituta fratrum praedicatorum viventes* (nuns of the Order of St. Augustine, living under the care and the constitutions of the Friar Preachers) and not, for example, *moniales ordinis praedicatorum* (nuns of the Order of Preachers).

The bull of 1267 did not lead the friars to abandon those early monasteries in which they had been present since the beginnings of the Order. It allowed them instead to adapt their *cura* to the specificities of the various communities and contexts. That is why we find a great variety of Dominican nunneries at the end of the Middle Ages, even if all Dominican nuns had officially the same canonical title and status.

The small community of friars that took care for the nuns of Prouille did not leave the monastery,²¹ even if the 1267 bull permitted them to do so. On the contrary, the prestigious community of Prouille gave birth to other monasteries, built on the same model. The "Prouillan" communities were great monasteries often founded by kings or queens; they were permanently supervised by a small community of friars who lived in a nearby convent attached to the nunnery. In this kind of monastery, typical of kingdoms like France, Aragon, and Sicily,²² friars were responsible for both the spiritual and temporal care of the female community: far more than the obligations contained in the bull *Affectu sincero*.

The great majority of the other Dominican convents however had no male community attached to them, and the friars who held the spiritual care of the nuns usually came from the nearest house and shared their task with secular chaplains. Since the small communities of *moniales ordinis sancti Augustini etc...* were numerous in certain provinces of the Order (mainly in the Germanic and north-Italian provinces), it could happen that some of them, even if officially under the spiritual care of the Dominican friars, in reality had no relationship with the Friar Preachers. A solution to this problem was found in the province of Teutonia (Germany) where most of the Dominican monaster-

²⁰ See *Constitutiones Sororum*, ed. Mothon.

²¹ About Prouille see Peytavie, "Construction de deux lieux de la mémoire dominicaine"; Tugwell, "For Whom Was Prouille Founded?"

²² The main monasteries of this type were the French ones like Rouen (founded in 1261 by King Louis IX) and Poissy (founded by King Philip IV in 1304); in Aragon Saint-Agnes founded by queen Blanche in 1299; in the kingdom of Sicily and the Angevin territories, the monastery of Notre-Dame of Nazareth, founded in Aix-en-Provence in 1292 by King Charles II. These monasteries, founded with the help of some nuns from Prouille, gave birth later to other communities based on the same model (as in Naples with the monastery of San Sebastiano). This was also the case of the only Dominican English monastery, Dartford (near London).

ies were not “Prouillan.” There, the provincial, or sometimes even the Master General of the Order, appointed special vicars to supervise the nuns’ convents. This was the case, for example, of Master Eckhart who, in 1313, was appointed vicar for the nunneries of Strasbourg.²³ Vicars were responsible for the spiritual guidance of the nuns (sermons, spiritual education),²⁴ but not the daily spiritual tasks (masses, sacraments) which were, as in the other provinces of the Order, the duty of secular chaplains. Being a vicar for nunneries or the prior of a Prouillan monastery could even launch a prestigious career in the Order.²⁵

Such a “flexible” approach to spiritual direction did not necessarily need official approval. Dominican friars indeed took spiritual care of other religious women, besides the nuns whose spiritual guidance was officially committed to them. Penitents, beguines, and even nuns from other religious orders, especially Cistercian nuns,²⁶ had spiritual links with the Friar Preachers. Undoubtedly Friar Preachers were greatly involved in the spiritual care of religious women in the Late Middle Ages, even if “Dominican nuns” were not canonically “incorporated” into their Order.²⁷

The canonical status of Dominican nuns is best understood as part of the papal politics of the *cura monialium*, which aimed to set up a large clerical network to control female communities, but which did not give women (or only marginally so) new religious missions and identities. Officially, all religious women had to lead, more or less, the same enclosed life, as confirmed by the famous *Periculoso* decretal in 1298.²⁸ Historians of female religious life in the Middle Ages should see “religious orders” as mainly traditional male structures. When Humbert of Romans, Master General of the Order of Preachers, wrote the nuns’ Constitutions in 1259, he followed the scheme of the constitutions of the friars, but he did not include in this text the articles relating to preaching activities, nor the need for education and intellectual training. As a result, the Constitutions for Dominican nuns are just a “standard” rule for enclosed religious women, and do not contain the characteristic features of the Order of Preachers.

23 On the link between Master Eckhart and religious women, see de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, 303–16. See also Fassler et al., *Liturgical Life and Latin Learning*, 69–70.

24 See Hamburger, “La bibliothèque d’Unterlinden.” The role of Johannes Meyer, vicar of several observant nunneries during the mid-fifteenth century, must be pointed out. Among other works for nuns, he wrote an adaptation of Humbert of Romans’ *De officiis* for religious women; see Johannes Meyer, *Das Amptbuch*, ed. DeMaris.

25 See Coulet, “Un couvent royal.” For the province of Teutonia, where for some years the friars who were responsible for the *cura* of female communities claimed to be part of these monasteries, see Creytens, “Les convers des moniales dominicaines,” 37.

26 Cistercian nuns had been linked to the Friar Preachers since the beginnings of their Order. This is the case in particular of St. Lutgardis of Aywières (d. 1246), a friend of Master General Jordan of Saxony. Her *Vita* was written by another Dominican friar, Thomas of Cantimpré. I thank Claire Rousseau (Maison Seilhan, Toulouse) for this information. On the links between mendicant friars and Cistercian nunneries in the diocese of Liege, see Bertrand, *Commerce avec Dame Pauvreté*, 506–15.

27 See further, Duval, “Les Dominicains et les femmes.”

28 See Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*.

The distinctive features of the recently established male orders could not be adapted to religious women. Women were not allowed to preach, and even if they could read and write some spiritual works if they wanted to, they were not (officially) considered as potential spiritual guides for Christian people. Neither could they lead a life of poverty as Franciscan friars did. Even if Clare of Assisi obtained the privilege of poverty and wrote herself a rule which was deeply inspired by the Franciscan ideal (1253), Pope Urban IV imposed upon Clarissan nuns a new rule in 1263 which got rid of most of the originality of the rule written by Clare. The process which led to the regularization of the Poor Clares is surprisingly similar to the one leading to the formalization of the Dominican nuns: the same involvement of popes, the same “deal” with the friars, who were not obliged to reside in most of the Clarissan monasteries,²⁹ and, then, the same traditional monastic life for all nuns. Unlike the Dominican nuns however, the Clarissan nuns benefitted from the official creation of a new order and of the canonization of their foundress.³⁰ As a result, the life of Dominican and Clarissan nuns was not very different from that of Cistercian nuns, who were in some regions more numerous than the “mendicant” nuns.³¹ Clarissan nuns, Dominican nuns, Cistercian nuns: at the end of the thirteenth century, these denominations refer almost exclusively to the identity of the male clerics who were officially in charge of the souls of the nuns, and not to significant differences between these three “female orders.”³²

Sedis Apostolice, 1405

We all know, however, that during the Late Middle Ages innovation in religious life was carried out by women as much as by men. During the whole period with which we are dealing, *mulieres religiosae*, beguines, penitents, and anchoresses were numerous, even if they did not benefit from an officially recognized and approved canonical status. They were largely tolerated, and some of them exerted a real spiritual authority upon lay people and even upon some clerics.

In medieval cities, a great number of penitents, mainly women, existed, with different local names (e.g., *mantellate*, *pinzochere*).³³ Penitents were lay people who chose to lead a religious life without any monastic vows (unlike the beguines). Their life was relatively independent from clerical control, but it was recognized as a religious one by

²⁹ Except in Assisi and other powerful communities, whose prestigious history looks like that of the “Prouillan” monasteries. See Alberzoni, *Chiara e il papato*.

³⁰ See Roest, *Order and Disorder*, 63–73.

³¹ The reason why Dominican, Clarissan, or Cistercian nuns are more or less present in a particular area is probably due to various local (social, political, and historical) features that determined how the *cura monialium* was locally “distributed.” See Freed, “Urban Development.” On the case of the Champagne region, see Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns*.

³² “Women’s *vita religiosa* was always regulated only when joined to male houses, in coalition with monastic orders. The women’s religious movement could thus only be incorporated into ecclesiastical rules by joining it with an existing male order.” From Grundmann, *Religious Movements*, 90. See also Duval, “Pour une relecture.”

³³ See Benvenuti Papi, *In castro poenitentiae*; Elm, “*Vita regularis sine regula*.”

lay people and even by the secular authorities.³⁴ Since 1289 (through the bull *Supra montem*),³⁵ these penitents fell under the Order of Friars Minor but, in practice, many of them were spiritually directed by other religious, mainly Dominican friars.

When the reforming movement of the Observance began at the end of the fourteenth century, spreading across almost all religious orders, the situation of the penitents evolved. All the mendicant orders created “third orders” of penitents officially associated to them, with specific rules and constitutions; these associations received papal approval.³⁶ Dominican penitents were officially recognized as part of the Order of Preachers in 1405 (the bull *Sedis apostolicae*) thanks to the efforts of Thomas of Siena, a disciple of St. Catherine.³⁷

The linking of penitents to the Order of Preachers placed these lay people under the spiritual *cura* of Dominican friars (with parish rights exempted), and gave them some specific constitutions to follow (under the “rule” written and approved by Thomas of Siena). Moreover, those who chose to live together (most often women) soon became “regular tertiaries”: they lived in convents under the control of Dominican friars.

The Observance can be seen as a general reassessment of religious orders, and as a reaffirmation of their responsibility (and influence) over various religious persons, particularly over religious women.³⁸ Forms of religious life that were not officially controlled by a regular order, such as beguines or anchoresses, began to disappear, or at least their members began to diminish significantly.

The Observant reform spread in Dominican nunneries too. The female reforming movement, carried out by nuns as well as by friars, led to stricter rules of enclosure, and to stricter control of female communities, thanks to a wider use of vicars³⁹ and, from

34 As a result, in particular in some Italian cities, some of these “semi-religious” persons gained an exceptional status with regard to taxes and military service. See Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, chapter 4.

35 On the effect of the bull *Supra montem* upon Dominican penitents, see Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitatis*, and his *Dossier de l'ordre de la pénitence*.

36 The Augustine penitents or tertiaries were regularized by papal bulls in 1399 (women) and one in 1470 (men), the Dominicans by ones in 1405, the Servites by ones in 1424, and the Carmelite by ones in 1476. See Boaga, “Tiers-Ordres séculiers.”

37 *BOP*, 1:481.

38 On the Observance, see Mixson and Roest, eds., *A Companion to Observant Reform*, and Duval, Morvan, and Viallet, eds., “Les Observances régulières.”

39 Vicars are explicitly mentioned in the *Ordinationes* composed in 1397 by Raymond of Capua for the Observant nuns: “Volo, ordino et decerno quod quilibet provincialis in provincia sua, quia merita fratrum et conditiones melius cognoscit, infra quindenam a notitia presentium pro quolibet monasterio sororum nostrarum vel pro pluribus ubi commodè fieri poterit, deputet et assignet unum confessorem principalem seu vicarium de ordine fratrum immaculati nominis et honeste conversationis, zelatorem animarum et sue religionis, qui huiusmodi pefatam clausuram monasterii sibi comittendi infra mensem a notitia commissionis sibi facte ad expensas ipsius monasterii reformari faciat, claves custodiat, introitum et exitum secundum formam superius et in ipsis sororum constitutionibus expressam diligenter respiciat [...]” Quoted in Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*, 572–73.

the 1450s onwards, thanks to the creation of the “Congregations of Observance.”⁴⁰ The Observance led friars to reinforce their control upon female communities, both nuns and tertiaries. The bull *Affectu sincero* was not modified, but local documents and the decisions of General Chapters⁴¹ show that Dominican friars paid greater attention to the religious women who were committed to them. But did this also lead to a reaffirmation of the “Dominican identity” of religious women who were associated to the Order? The fact is that friars were more present in nuns’ monasteries. Some female communities that were officially under the spiritual care of Friar Preachers, but did not want to submit to closer control of their discipline and spiritual life chose to leave the Dominican Order (and passed under the control of local bishops).⁴² The emphasis put on the specific liturgy of various orders, in particular within the Dominican Order, during the fifteenth century can be understood as an attempt by both nuns and male reformers to reaffirm a specific identity for Dominican nuns.⁴³

Some attempts were made by Dominican women to create a new type of community: that was the case, for example, of the blessed Colomba of Rieti (d. 1501), an Italian Dominican tertiary who founded a community of religious women in Perugia, and who actively participated in the spiritual life of the city.⁴⁴ However the authorities of the Order soon instructed Dominican tertiaries to lead a life that resembled that of enclosed nuns as much as possible.⁴⁵

We could point at the same phenomenon in the case of Clarissan nuns. In the Franciscan Order, Observance took various forms and spread little by little through different congregations.⁴⁶ In Italy and in France some nuns believed that the moment had come to return to the rule of St. Clare and to abandon that of Urban IV. Above all, they wished to return to the practice of Holy Poverty cherished by their spiritual mother. Their attempt, however, succeeded only partially. The main male observant leaders⁴⁷ did not

40 The friars who governed these congregations showed great concern for the reform of the female monasteries. Secular authorities were called upon whenever they wanted a Dominican female monastery to be reformed. The first observant Dominican congregation was the Lombard one (see Fasoli, *Perseveranti nella regolare osservanza*, 55–62; see also Mortier, *Histoire des maîtres généraux*, vol. 4 covering 1400–1486).

41 See Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre* for the case of the Tuscan observant monasteries; for the General Chapters, see *Acta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. Reichert, vol. 3 covering 1380–1498. See in particular, the decisions of the General Chapters of the late fifteenth century (that is, when the Observant friars became powerful within the Order).

42 See the cases of some German monasteries in Barthelmé, *La réforme dominicaine*, 60–64.

43 Jones, *Ruling the Spirit*.

44 Casagrande and Menestò, eds., *Una santa, una città*.

45 *Acta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. Reichert, vol. 3 for 1380–1498, 424 (Ferrara 1498).

46 See Roest, *Order and Disorder*, chapter 4. On the use of the rule of St. Clare, see also Andenna, “Francescanesimo di corte.”

47 For John of Capistran, strict enclosure had to be considered as the most important thing for observant nuns, even if this could raise problems for the practice of Holy Poverty. See Roest, *Order and Disorder*, 184.

consider the rule of St. Clare as suitable for the observant nuns, because its strictness on poverty could threaten the respect for strict enclosure. However, some Clarissan women did manage to return to the rule of St. Clare (the Colettines), but they slightly modified it in order to prevent the nuns, even the *converses*, to leave their monastery to collect alms.⁴⁸ Male reformers of orders (i.e., Dominican, Franciscan, Benedictine) insisted that the only way for women to achieve a real religious life was to live in a strictly enclosed monastery.

Beyond the Canonical Framework: Is there a Dominican Identity for Women?

If there was a Dominican identity for women during the Middle Ages it lay beyond the canonical framework. In other words: if some women, or female communities, claimed to be “Dominican women,” their belonging to the Dominican tradition lay not solely in their canonical association to the friars, but rather in their own will to achieve some of the typical ideals of the Dominican movement.

Here we can start from the most famous Dominican woman of the Middle Ages, Catherine of Siena. Catherine was a penitent woman (a *mantellata*), belonging to a little community in Siena that was linked to the spiritual *cura* of Dominican friars from the local house of San Domenico. As a penitent, she was not *stricto sensu* a member of the Order of Preachers since, as we have noted, penitents were only officially associated with the Order in 1405, twenty-five years after Catherine died. However, her Dominican identity cannot be denied. This link was obvious for Dominican friars who were contemporaries of Catherine: otherwise, they would not have considered it necessary to control her orthodoxy during their general chapter of 1374 in Florence, and they would not have asked Raymond of Capua to follow her and to be her main confessor. Moreover, Catherine was identified by lay people as a “mantellata,” that is as a pious woman who wore the characteristic black coat of the Order of Preachers.⁴⁹

The case of Catherine shows that medieval religious orders attracted many more individuals to their sphere of influence than those who were canonically part of them.⁵⁰ The official creation of third orders in the fifteenth century “regularized” a lot of different semi-religious conditions, not just the “penitents” as defined in the bull *Supra montem* of 1289. By the end of the Middle Ages, there were many different kinds of lay persons related (officially and/or in practice) to the religious orders: oblates,⁵¹ recluses living near the monasteries,⁵² various communities of pious persons who were spiritually linked to communities or single preachers. Consequently, the religious categories as

⁴⁸ Lopez, *Culture et sainteté*, 222.

⁴⁹ See Vauchez, *Catherine de Sienne*.

⁵⁰ See Bouter, ed., *Les mouvances laïques*.

⁵¹ See de Miramon, *Les “donnés” au Moyen Age*.

⁵² Italian recluses often lived next to major monasteries, as was the case for example of two Pisan *beate*, Maria and Gherardesca, linked to the Camaldolese in the early thirteenth century: see Caby, “La sainteté féminine camaldule.”

described in the papal bulls should be understood as an ideal (regulated) representation of a complex reality and not as a description of this reality.

If one tries to better understand the complexity of the medieval religious world, one has to use different sources where the “official” categories built by the canonists are not used (or only marginally so). The language of lay people such as poets, novelists, notaries, merchants, or ordinary people writing their wills sheds a different light on how the “religious life” was in reality lived and perceived in medieval societies. Lay people clearly identified some female communities (nuns and penitents) as linked to the Preachers, whether these communities were officially committed to the Order or not. I wrote above that “nuns of the Order of St. Dominic” did not exist. This expression however can be easily found in notarial documents, where the nuns whose Dominican identity was universally recognized get commonly described as *moniales ordinis Sancti Dominici*.⁵³ Notaries indeed, especially the humbler ones, reproduced terms in use, and not those of the papal bulls. The lay perception of religious identity did not necessarily correspond to the ecclesiastical one. Some communities of *Moniales ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura etc....* were not considered to be “Dominican,” whereas others, like those of penitents and even some beguines, were considered to be linked to the Friar Preachers.

The difference between lay perception and canonical documents can be explained by different facts. First, by the effective practice of the spiritual *cura* by the friars themselves. The *Affectu sincero* bull, as we noted, was flexible: friars were allowed to delegate the spiritual tasks they had to fulfill towards the nuns, but it did not prevent them taking an active part in the spiritual care of other religious women who were not canonically associated to their order. That is why some beguines could be considered as religious women linked to the Dominicans in the towns where friars were particularly involved in their spiritual *cura*, for instance in Paris.⁵⁴

Second, female communities could be remarkable enough in the eyes of lay people to have their own denomination, with no need to refer to the male order to which they were officially linked. This was the case for communities that already existed before they were affiliated to the Order of Preachers,⁵⁵ or even for communities that had always been linked to them but were perceived as independent. We can cite the expression *moniales ordinis Sancte Marie de Pruliano* which occurs in the notarial documents of the Languedoc, not only referring to the nuns of Prouille, but also to those of St. Marie of Prouille of Montpellier, a Dominican monastery founded in 1288 by the Prouille community.⁵⁶ Obviously, this phenomenon occurred not only for the Dominican monasteries, but also for other female communities.

⁵³ For example, the Pisan monastery of San Domenico, in Archivio di Stato di Pisa, Opera del Duomo, n° 1302, fol. 525v (not. Giuliano Scarsi, year 1419).

⁵⁴ Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*.

⁵⁵ For the interesting example of the female communities linked to the Friar Preachers in Milan, who were called (among other names) “domine albe” (White Ladies), see Alberzoni, *Francescanesimo a Milano nel Duecento*, 152–53 and Duval, “Vierges et dames blanches.”

⁵⁶ See Primi, “Le Prouillan montpelliérain.”

Finally, we should take the perception of the religious women themselves into account. Did they consider themselves as “Dominican women”? The answer lies in documents written by these very religious women. These sources are not rare, at least in the Late Middle Ages.⁵⁷ Medieval Italian nuns themselves wrote many of the documents that are still preserved in the archives of their communities.⁵⁸ Some documents about penitents survive: in Italy, penitents wrote their wills or had them written down by local notaries.⁵⁹ Literary documents can also be used, including necrologies,⁶⁰ chronicles,⁶¹ and *Vitae* written within the communities.⁶² These documents usually reveal different aspects of the female Dominican identity. Most of the women who were committed to the spiritual *cura* of Dominican friars did perceive themselves to be part of the Order, and they were often proud of this affiliation (e.g., they did not want to be cut off from that *cura*). What is more, some nuns who were not officially affiliated to the Dominican Order, but who followed the Dominican constitutions of 1259 considered themselves as Dominican, as was the case of the convent of St. Gallen during the observant period.⁶³ Dominican penitents too, even before the official association of the “Order of Penance” to the Friar Preachers in 1405, affirmed in their wills that they belonged to the local Dominican community.⁶⁴ This Dominican identity however was not an exclusive one. Dominican nuns or penitents indeed could be related to other orders by particular links of friendship or devotion, as was case of the observant nuns of San Domenico of Pisa who maintained a relationship with the Bridgettine⁶⁵ community of the Paradiso in Florence.⁶⁶

57 See the trilogy by Blanton, O'Mara, Stoop, eds., *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue, The Kansas City Dialogue, and The Antwerp Dialogue*; and Fassler et al., *Liturgical Life and Latin Learning*.

58 See Duval, “Scrivere, contare, gestire.”

59 Rava, “Eremita in città.”

60 For the necrology of the Venetian monastery of the Corpus Christi, see Bornstein: *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent*.

61 See Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, and Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls*.

62 See Duval, *La Beata Chiara conduttrice*.

63 See Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls*, 124–29. Huijbers introduces the *Chronicle* and the *Schwesterbuch* of St. Gallen, written by some nuns of the community during the second half of the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century.

64 As was the case in Venice, in Pisa and in Siena. For Siena, see Clark Thurber, “Female Reclusion in Siena.” For Venice and Pisa, see Duval, “Done de San Domenego,” 397, and Duval “Caterina da Siena,” 261–80.

65 The case of the Order of St. Bridget (*Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris*), officially approved in 1370, is very interesting: it was founded as a double order for both clerics and enclosed nuns. St. Bridget's rule however was never applied in its original form. A few years after the foundation of the first monasteries in Europe, the Papacy suppressed the “double” communities. See Cnatingius: *Studies in the Order of St. Bridget of Sweden*, I, 22ff.

66 Piattoli, “Un capitolo di storia dell'arte,” 4.

Moreover, the archival documents from San Domenico's show that the Pisan nuns regularly spent about the same amount of money to celebrate the feast of St. Bridget as they did for that of St. Dominic.⁶⁷

* * *

Religious identity for women is a complex topic since the medieval canonical framework did not permit women their own religious mission—only that of being a cloistered nun. Many religious women, however, managed to gain a distinct religious identity, at least in the eyes of lay society. The gap between the canonical framework and the “socio-religious” identity of women should remind us that medieval religious orders were gendered (male) juridical structures, to which women could only be imperfectly associated. In order to understand female religious life as it was in reality, we have to consider and integrate a variety of historical sources, which can refer to different identities of religious women: canonical, social, or self-perceived ones. Such an approach can result in confusing answers to questions such as: which women can really be considered as “Dominican”? Those who were officially linked with the Order or those who perceived themselves as Dominican? The apparent contradictions can be meaningful. Religious women indeed could fall, at the same time, both within and without the official canonical framework.

67 It appears under expenses for food and candles, and for the priests who celebrated the masses (Archivio di Marco, Florence, Fondo del monastero San Domenico, n° 4, “Libro di entrate e uscite 1430–1480” under the expenses for the summer months, since the feast of St. Dominic is on August 8, and the nuns celebrated St. Bridget's feast on July 23). See also Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*, 473. For further information about the links between the Bridgettines and the Dominican nuns in Pisa, see Roberts, *Dominican Women and Renaissance Art*.

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