

## THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS

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BRO. CHARLES M. DALEY, O. P.

### II



THE Dominican coat of arms belongs to that fascinating, yet rather complicated branch of general armory known as ecclesiastical heraldry. It was necessary during the Crusades, as we have already seen,<sup>1</sup> that the knights and their leaders be distinguished from their foes on the field of combat by means of conventional emblems, which, during the early part of the thirteenth century, became permanent and hereditary coat of arms. At first thought, then, it may seem incongruous that the Church, established by the King of Peace, should have permitted her hierarchy, even though of the nobility, the use of coats of arms distinctly of military origin and primarily intended as rallying emblems on the battle field. But when we consider that "the life of man upon earth is a warfare"<sup>2</sup> against the powers of darkness, it seems only proper that the Church militant should allow her organized forces of prayer and good works to be distinguished by means of heraldic insignia somewhat after the manner of the crusading knights. Even St. Paul would have us "labor as good soldiers in Christ Jesus,"<sup>3</sup> and as such, he bids us put on "the armour of God,"<sup>4</sup> having our loins girt with truth, and wearing the breastplate of justice—in all things taking the shield of faith.

The "shield of faith" and the cross of Christ were, from the earliest times as they are today, the first distinctive marks of the true Christian. The ecclesiastics and the religious communities of the Middle Ages, however, saw in the rising vogue of heraldry a further suitable means of personal identification, at the same time decorative and capable of expressing religious symbolism charged with the mysteries of faith. "Whether

<sup>1</sup> DOMINICANA XIII (1928), No. 4, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> Job. vii, 1.

<sup>3</sup> II Tim. ii, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ephes. vi, 13-17.

carved in stone or wood for the adornment of the church, or glowing in their proper colours in the stained glass, woven into hangings, or embroidered on vestments, or even enamelled on the sacred vessels to preserve the memory of a pious donor, the use of armorial insignia assumed very considerable importance from an ecclesiastical point of view.”<sup>5</sup>

Some church dignitaries, it is true, belonged to noble and princely families, and as members of these families they had a prior claim to paternal coats of arms in their own right. On occasion, too, they used them in warfare, especially in Germany and France during feudal times, for the liege-bishop was sometimes called upon to furnish his quota of men to protect church or country, and frequently led his cohorts to battle. Then he was distinguished from other leaders by his own personal coat of arms emblazoned on his shield or helmet just like other knights. Several instances of these “fighting prelates” are recorded in history,<sup>6</sup> but lest this picture of a medieval bishop going to war seem strange in our day, we might recall that General Leonidas Polk (1806-64), the first Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana, commanded Confederate forces in many engagements during the Civil War.

About the middle of the thirteenth century, we find cardinals, bishops, and religious institutions gradually acquiring or assuming coats of arms although they did not need them from a military point of view. For, as Woodward<sup>7</sup> points out, “the adoption of a definite device was found both by religious and civil dignitaries and communities a very convenient way for indicating their status upon the seals attesting the authenticity of the charters and other documents to which they were appended. Not only this, but the use of seals became compulsory by law. The *Statutum de apportis religiosorum* (35, Edward I., 1307), enacts that every religious House should have a common-seal, which should be in the custody not of the abbot only, as had been the case before, but of four others, ‘de dignioribus et discretioribus,’ of the convent; and that every grant to which this seal was not affixed should be null and void.”

<sup>5</sup> Rev. J. Woodward, *Ecclesiastical Heraldry* (Edinburgh, 1894), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Dr. Felix Hauptmann, “Das Dominikanerwappen,” *Analecta, O. P.* (Rome, 1925), p. 224; also Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 36; see Ayrinhac, *Church Legislation in the New Code of Canon Law* (New York, 1923), Nos. 293 and 302 for church legislation on this point.

<sup>7</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Although ecclesiastical heraldry developed almost coevally with general heraldry, it was not until its utility upon seals was apparent that it became a fixed institution among the clergy and religious bodies. Hence it was not so much to show off "blue blood" or noble patronage, or as mere ornaments of ostentation, as some have believed, but as simple marks of distinction, particularly in the cause of Christ, and of a certain dignity, perhaps, in His kingdom that induced the Church militant to tolerate armorial insignia. Some bishops and cardinals, when they had no personal arms, invented a coat composed of purely religious symbols of their patron saints or of their church; others arbitrarily assumed significant charges to express their name, birthplace or benefactor. It was a simple matter, too, for religious orders in order to keep up with the trend of the times, to translate their habit or the colors of their habit in heraldic terms which even the unlearned could understand and respect.

Since we are about to consider the origin and development of the Dominican insignia, it will be an interesting prelude to learn how a few other religious orders acquired armorial devices. As an example of what might be called a "papal grant" we have the shield of the Trinitarians. The Order of the Most Holy Trinity for the Redemption of Captives, was founded in 1198 by St. John of Matha and St. Felix of Valois. Its members wore a white habit set off with a blue and red cross on the right breast. The habit, together with the colored cross were of miraculous origin and received papal approbation from Innocent III, (1198-1216).<sup>8</sup> "His Holiness," says Dugdale,<sup>9</sup> "did forthwith ratify the Order, and by his command they assumed the white habit, having on the breast a Greek cross of red and blue; the three colours signifying the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity; the white, the Father Eternal, the blue, which was the traverse of the cross, the Son as Redeemer; and the red, the charity of the Holy Spirit." It required no extra effort for these Red Friars, as they were called in England because of the predominant color of the cross, to assume later a coat of arms: *Argent, a cross pattée, the perpendicular gules, the traverse azure.*

As an example of royal grant we have the arms of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy, or the Mercedarians. This Order was founded in Spain in 1218 by St. Peter Nolasco, together with St.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Second Lessons of St. John (Feb. 8), and of St. Felix (Nov. 20).

<sup>9</sup> cited by Mrs. Jameson, *Legends of the Monastic Orders* (London, 1900), p. 218.

Raymond of Pennafort and King James I. of Aragon. It practically adopted the white habit of its Dominican co-founder, St. Raymond, but received as its shield the personal coat of arms of its royal founder and patron, James I., "El Conquistador." It is blazoned (described in heraldic terms): *Paly of eight, argent and gules; on a chief of the first a cross pattée of the second.* In other words, it is composed of eight vertical stripes, alternately silver and red; the chief, or the strip across the top, one-third of the shield in depth, is of silver on which is placed a red cross, small in the center but wide at the ends.<sup>10</sup>

The Order of Preachers can boast of two coats of arms which have persisted in use from very early times, but unlike the orders mentioned above, it has no tradition or document, as far as it can be ascertained, to show just when, how or where these arms originated. Like Topsy, it seems, they "just grew up." Sometimes they have appeared side by side in the books and on the monuments of the Order; sometimes they have been used on the same escutcheon; seldom have they been consistent in usage and in design. As a result of these irregular and haphazard customs we have confusion and undue complication of what should be simple and effective heraldry. Nevertheless, the history of these two Dominican shields is gradually unfolding, and what has come to light in recent years is of no little popular interest.

The correct coat of arms of the Dominican Order is, without a doubt, the one used today, consisting of a black and white "lily cross" with four black and four white triangles, called *gyrons*. In heraldic blazon it reads: *Gyronny of eight, sable and argent, over all a cross flory counterchanged.* The cross is said to be *counterchanged* because the black portions of it overlap the white gyrons, and vice versa. This shield with the inscription *Ordinis Praedicatorum Insignia Haec Sunt* may be seen today on the façade of the Dominican Church of the Minerva at Rome, gracing the same slab on which is carved the epitaph to Cardinal Cajetan (+1534). It has, in addition, a border of four black and four white sections, alternating with the gyrons, with eight *pellets*,

<sup>10</sup> Major Arthur de Bles, in his *Saints in Art* (New York, 1925), p. 135 reproduces a portrait by Zurbaran from the Ehrich Galleries, of Dom Miguel del Pozo, a member of this Order, garbed in the white habit with the arms of "El Conquistador" suspended from his neck. Without this medallion of the emblem of the Order, one would think it a portrait of a Dominican friar. Mrs. Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 221, also gives a copy of this coat of arms.

or black roundels, counterchanged. No precise date can be given for the appearance of this shield on the Minerva, but it is generally believed to have been placed there the same time as the epitaph to Cardinal Cajetan, that is, about 1534. Although this is the earliest record of this shield as a shield, it must have been regarded in Spain long before as the correct coat of arms of the Order, for the Spanish Dominican friends of Cajetan who wrote his epitaph also took pains to emphasize that "this is the badge of the Order of Preachers."

We shall refer to this shield as the *Spanish tradition*, for it is essentially of Spanish origin. The cross flory and the gyron are quite common in Spanish heraldry, but seldom if ever seen in Italian armory. It seems very probable, then, that this shield was used by the Spanish Dominicans long before it made its *début* in Rome. Fr. J. J. Berthier, O. P. is of the opinion that it was placed on the façade of the Minerva as a protest against the introduction of other "fantastic arms," and, he adds, "they were quite right in doing so."<sup>11</sup> Despite its antiquity, its beauty and its true exemplification of good heraldry, this shield did not begin to enjoy universal popularity until it was printed on the title page of the *Analecta Ord. Praed.* in 1893. If this and its subsequent appearance on other official publications of the Order, give it any "official" sanction, we should rejoice with those who are fostering correct ecclesiastical heraldry that the proper shield of the Order has at last been fittingly recognized and adopted. It is thought that Fr. Berthier was largely responsible for its recent revival. This shield will be treated of at greater length in the concluding paper.

The other shield of the Order, which we shall call the *Roman tradition* for obvious reasons, has been the more popular for centuries despite the fact that it is less beautiful and less heraldic than the Spanish tradition. Originally it was quite simple: *Argent, chapé sable*, that is, a black mantle-like effect across the top separated in the middle and revealing a white or silver background. This was merely the heraldic designation of the habit of the Order, black over white. In this form it closely resembled the early Carmelite shield, which was just the opposite: *Sable, chapé argent; sable*, or black, because the tinctures of heraldry do not admit brown, the proper color of the Carmelite cape. Such a coat of arms is known in Italy as the "stemma *incappata*." Rev. Dr. Carlo Santa Maria, the editor of an Italian

<sup>11</sup> *L'Eglise de la Minerve a Rome* (Rome, 1910), note, p. 30.



Fig. II



Fig. I



Fig. III

heraldic review, writing about the Carmelite shield,<sup>12</sup> believes that the Carmelites used an "incappata" before the Italian Dominicans, although he says that Papebroch (a learned Bollandist of the 17th century) affirms, without proof, that the Carmelite coat of arms is an imitation of the Dominican.

Without entering into the discussion, we may point to the Roman tradition shield used by the first Dominican cardinal, Hugh of St. Cher, who was raised to the cardinalate by Pope Innocent IV in 1244. This coat of arms, which is reproduced (Figure I) from the monumental work of the learned Dominican historian, Alfons Chacon, better known as Ciaconius,<sup>13</sup> leads one to believe that the early Dominican shield is contemporaneous with the rise of ecclesiastical heraldry, and thus it may be said to be one of the oldest of the religious orders. Whether the Roman tradition appeared before 1244, remains to be seen.

In the course of time, this shield of the Order evolved from the rather simple original design to the more complicated affair of the seventeenth century, which period is known as the "decline of heraldry." In this evolution, we first see the palm branch and the lily rising

<sup>12</sup> "Lo Stemma dell'Ordine Carmelitano," *Il Mone Carmelo* (Rome, 1917), p. 170 ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Vitae et Res Gestae Pontificum Romanorum et S. R. E. Cardinalium* (Rome, 1617) edit. by A. Oldoinus, S. J., II. col. 120.



from the center base of the shield, with the letter "P" surmounted by Omega in the center of the shield. Later, the palm branch and the lily were moved to the center of the shield and crossed, with a gold star added in the chief. Nicholas Bocasini, created cardinal in 1295, represented the Dominican Order on his coat of arms by simply dividing the chief into two equal parts, one white, the other black. As Pope Benedict XI., he used the same escutcheon.<sup>14</sup> The ninth Dominican cardinal, William of Macclesfield, an Englishman, in 1303 used the Roman shield with a fess ermine for a difference, placing a star in the base.<sup>15</sup> As this early shield should be of interest, it has been reproduced as given by Ciaconius in Figure II. William Peter of Godinus, created cardinal in 1310, took as his personal coat of arms the full Dominican arms with the dog and torch, as shown in Figure III.<sup>16</sup> These are the only Dominican prelates who assumed the Dominican coat of arms until 1605, when Jerome Cardinal Xavier, a Spaniard,<sup>17</sup> used the same escutcheon as William of Godinus, except that the dog is facing the other way. Other symbolic complements were added from time to time, until the final stage shows the Roman tradition shield in gala array with dog and torch, ball and cross, book, crown, lilies and palm, a star, rosary and sometimes a black and white cross flory in back of the whole affair. In this form the shield surely expresses characteristic traditions of the Order, which, to anyone the least conversant with the life of St. Dominic and the early history of the Order, is self-evident symbolism, but from the viewpoint of heraldry it is overladen and unsuitable. One European authority says that it is "ugly and unheraldic"; while an American has called it more bluntly an "abominable atrocity."

It is worth while to observe briefly how this shield varied in different places. "The Dominicans when in Italy," says Dr. Santa Maria, "substituted the 'incappata' for the military cross,<sup>18</sup> adding also symbolic emblems. . . . At Santa Maria Novella in Florence, they added instead, the star and the sun (an old coat of arms of the time), and at St. Mark's, also in Florence, the star and the winged

<sup>14</sup> Ciaconius, *op. cit.*, II, col. 330, 339.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* II, col. 353.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* II, col. 384.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* IV, col. 413.

<sup>18</sup> Reserving the details for another time, we may note that this same opinion is held by Dr. Felix Hauptmann of Friburg University, an authority on European heraldry (cf. *Analecta O. P.* 1925, p. 228), and by other recent writers who say that the Spanish tradition shield is older than the Roman tradition. In Rome, however, the simple black and white "incappata" certainly seems to antedate the cross flory and the gyrons, at least in popular usage.

lion, holding the book of the Gospels. On the arms that appear in the *Decrees for Spain and Portugal*, Seville, 1595, we find, in addition to three stars, a border composed of alternated dark and light triangles. This is in conformity with the Spanish tradition, and calls to mind the border of silver and black that surrounds the old Dominican coat of arms of Spanish origin on the façade of the Church of the S. Maria sopra Minerva. . . . At Milan we have the Church of S. Eustorgio where St. Peter Martyr is buried and where once the Provincial of Piedmont lived, and here we find the 'incappata' with the dog and (under the dog) the knife of St. Peter Martyr with three crowns. In the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie of the Dominicans of Lombardy we find an 'incappata' with the dog (in baroque style)."<sup>19</sup> According to a French writer,<sup>20</sup> the convent of Dominicans at Monbason, registered their arms is: *d'Argent, chapé de sable, à deux étoiles d'or en chef, et un chien couché de sable en pointe, tenant en sa gueule un flambeau de même allumé de gueules*. The convent of Dominican nuns in the town of Chalon-sur-Saone, used as its arms: *Argent, St. Dominic habited sable*; while those at Semur and Beaune: *Azure, St. Catherine of Siena (or, at Semur; argent, at Beaune)*.

Before concluding this paper, it will not be out of place to say a few words about the coats of arms of the Guzman and the d'Aza families, for it is commonly believed that the shield of the Order founded by St. Dominic ought to have some root in the shields of his lineage. A glance, however, at the Guzman arms (Figure IV) as copied from a reliable Spanish book on heraldry and genealogy,<sup>21</sup> shows nothing similar on either Dominican shield. The top and lower triangles are blue, each containing a checkered caldron of gold and red, with seven serpent heads at each handle; the sides are of silver with five black tufts, called *ermine*. The d'Aza arms<sup>22</sup> (Figure V) show a little more resemblance to the Spanish Dominican shield, if we consider the cross. This is a gold field with the cross of Calatrava

<sup>19</sup> In a letter to the writer, August 27, 1928.

<sup>20</sup> d'Hozier, *Armorial General de France*; cited by Woodward, *op. cit.* p. 420.

<sup>21</sup> D. Francisco Piferrer, *Nobiliario de los Reinos y Senorios de Espana* (2nd ed. Madrid, 1857), I, p. 18, No. 29; *Escudo flanqueado; gefe y punta de azur y una caldera de oro jaquelada de gules con siete cabezas de sierpe en cada asa; flancos de plata y cinco arminios de sable en aspa o sautor*. These arms are later than St. Dominic's time.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* I, p. 126, No. 355 *Escudo de oro y la cruz de Calatrava; orla de plata y diez aspos de gules; bordura de oro y diez calderas de sable*.



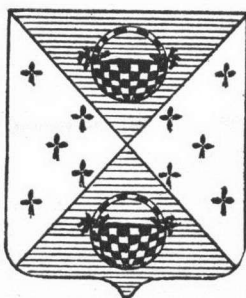


Fig. IV

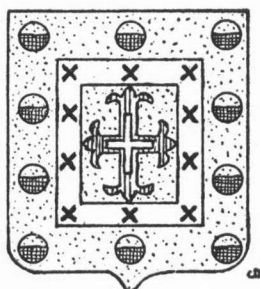


Fig. V

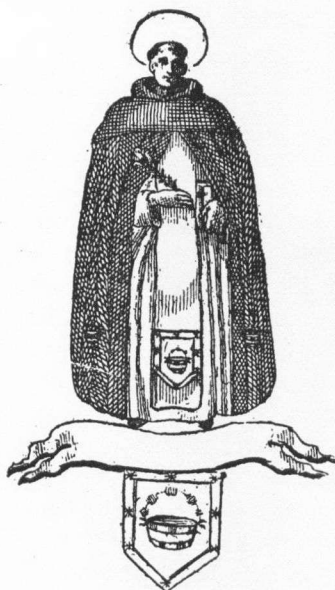


Fig. VI

(a red cross flory); surrounded by a small border, or *orle*, with twelve red crosses and a larger border of gold with twelve black caldrons.

Seldom do we see pictures of the sainted founders of religious orders with coats of arms on their habit, much less one of St. Dominic. But the accompanying illustration, (Figure VI) taken from Mamachi<sup>23</sup> is of interest, for it shows what he calls the Guzman arms near the bottom of St. Dominic's scapular, on the edges of his cappa, and again beneath the scroll. It is difficult to make out the charges, but they look like a caldron on a silver field surrounded by a border with eight eight-pointed stars. Mamachi says this picture is found in a Spanish book of the fourteenth century, adding that "it is unbelievable that an artist had dared to place the Guzman insignia on the cappa and scapular of Dominic, unless the fact of his being a member of that family had been common knowledge at that time."

<sup>23</sup> Thomas M. Mamachi, O. P. *Annalium Ordinis Praedicatorum* (Rome, 1776), p. 12, 13.

It is of little moment whether the holy Patriarch, St. Dominic, was of Spanish nobility, or whether he was entitled in his own right to bear the Guzman arms, as long as we know that he was noble in character, noble in purpose, and noble in ideals. He was, moreover, a faithful and courageous crusader in the cause of Christ and of His Church, and as such he had a right to bear the crusading cross and the shield of faith. Like St. Paul he fought a good fight, he kept the faith and he was rewarded with a crown of justice. It is not surprising, then, that his disciples should adopt a coat of arms that would fittingly express and always remind them of his priceless heritage, *Veritas et Caritas*.

(To be concluded.)

