

## HUGH OF ST. CHER

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**T**HE BEGINNINGS of a religious order are more apt to be studied and better understood than its later developments. And yet, significant figures of that formative period tend to be overlooked if they shared the stage with other, more famous collaborators. One such "less famous collaborator" in Dominican beginnings was Hugh of St. Cher.

### *Doctor of Law*

Medieval chroniclers allow us no greater precision as to the date of Hugh's birth, than to say it was "near the end of the 12th century." The place of his birth was the town of St. Cher, in the Province of Burgundy (later, Dauphiné), in southeastern France. Of his family, we know only that they belonged to the nobility, as the fact of his education testifies. His early schooling was entrusted to the monks of the local abbey, and at the age of about fourteen he set out for the University of Paris.

The next twenty years of Hugh's life were spent at the University, where he eventually became a master in the Faculty of Law. By the year 1224, however, he had transferred to the Faculty of Theology, where we find him listed as a "biblical bachelor." As such, working under the supervision of a master of theology, he read sections of Sacred Scripture to the students, and expounded the literal meaning of the text, on which the master would later elaborate. At this time also, or shortly before, he was ordained to the priesthood.

### *Becomes a Dominican*

Hugh took the Dominican habit on January 22, 1225. He came to the Order with a complete education and the even more eloquent recommendations of maturity and experience. It is with little surprise, then, that we learn his novitiate year was shortened somewhat, a prac-

tice more common than than would be tolerated today. He was elected provincial of the French Province in 1227, two years after entering the Order. Matthew of Paris, the first and only "abbot" the Order ever had, was prior of St. Jacques when he died in 1227. Peter of Rheims, provincial of France until then, was elected to succeed Matthew, and Hugh took over the post vacated by Peter.

From 1229-1230, Hugh continued his association with the University, as a "sententiary bachelor," under Roland of Cremona, the first Dominican master in the Faculty of Theology. In this capacity, Hugh taught the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, and his *Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentences* dates from these years. In 1230 his term of provincialate expired, and when Roland was assigned to the Dominican Studium in Toulouse the same year, Hugh took his place as master of theology in Paris. At the same time, he was elected prior of St. Jacques. From 1230-1235 he continued to hold one of the two chairs of theology entrusted to the Dominicans, the other being held first by the Englishman John of St. Giles, and later by Guéric of St. Quentin.

### *Scripture Studies*

If Hugh were to be forgotten on all other scores, his work in Sacred Scripture alone would assure him a high place in the annals of scholarship and the traditions of the Friars Preachers. Beginning at this period of his life and extending for many years to come, he conceived and carried into execution three immense projects in the field of Sacred Scripture. The first was a commentary on the Bible. Beginning with Genesis and ending with the Apocalypse, he explained each line of the sacred text, "finding" therein the four senses in which Scripture can be interpreted, and frequently indicating alternative possibilities.<sup>1</sup> His gigantic work is especially noteworthy in that it is the fruit of *his own* meditation: while not neglecting, and certainly not ignorant of, the interpretation given particular texts by the Fathers of the Church and latter-day scholars, Hugh's originality was one of the chief characteristics of his commentary. It was reprinted many times up to the 17th century, a witness to the value of his scholarship.

### *First Verbal Concordance of the Bible*

Between 1238 and 1240, Hugh finished work on his *Concordance of the Bible*: an alphabetical listing of all the words found in the (Latin) Bible, and after each entry, a list of all the places where that word occurred.<sup>2</sup> This work was intended primarily, it would seem,

for the theologians and Scripture scholars (a *real* concordance would be more helpful for preachers), as one of the techniques used to determine accurately the meaning of a particular word in a particular context involves a comparison of all the different contexts in which the word is found in scriptural usage, with all the various shades of meaning it can support.

From a purely technical point of view, his concordance left something to be desired, as is frequently the case in pioneer projects of a scholarly nature. But he had indicated the path to be followed, and the next two verbal concordances to be published (both by Dominicans) were more by way of improvement of Hugh's methods than of stark originality.<sup>3</sup>

### *Correctory of Sacred Scripture*

To these immense projects Hugh added a third of still greater immensity and originality: a correction of the Latin Bible then in use in the schools of Christendom. The Latin Vulgate text of St. Jerome, dating from the late 4th century, was recognized as the official Latin version of the Scriptures. But St. Jerome's Vulgate, copied and recopied countless times, had undergone many changes, mainly by the incorporation of marginal glosses into the actual text, and the substitution of variant readings from non-Hieronymite sources, resulting in a plethora of different versions all purporting to be faithful renditions of St. Jerome's Vulgate. Long before the 13th century the need had been felt for a critical text that would reestablish the original wording of St. Jerome.

Hugh used as his sources the glosses of St. Jerome and of other Fathers, the oldest Vulgate manuscripts he could find (several dated from the 4th century), as well as Hebrew, Greek and Syriac manuscripts. His procedure was to compare the texts popular in his time with these older versions, and make the necessary corrections, deletions, annotations, etc. However, Hugh, in company with many of his contemporaries, did not know that the Vulgate was essentially the work of St. Jerome. Hence, in seeking to determine the Vulgate text, he would often by-pass St. Jerome in favor of some other source which he thought closer to the original. As an integral reestablishment of the Vulgate text, therefore, his "correctory" was woefully deficient in many respects. Yet his intention and the principles he employed in textual criticism place him several centuries ahead of his time.

According to certain chroniclers of the period, including St. Antoninus, Hugh was assisted in this project by 500 fellow Domini-

cans. Though the figure is obviously exaggerated, he could not have accomplished such an undertaking without the assistance of many of his brethren. And we do know the name of at least one of them—Theobald of Sexania, a convert from Judaism, who was subprior of St. Jacques at the time, and helped Hugh with his work on Hebrew manuscripts.

Today, when we are more and more convinced of the necessity of *cooperation* in intellectual pursuits, it is more than merely interesting to reflect that this gigantic project inspired and executed by Hugh of St. Cher was the first communal Dominican work in an intellectual sphere.

### *Vicar General of the Order*

In 1235, after five years at the University, Hugh was elected provincial of France a second time, and reelected in 1238. Meanwhile, Bl. Jordan of Saxony had died at sea, February 13, 1237, leaving the Order temporarily without a master general. A general chapter met in Bologna the following year to elect a successor. According to certain chroniclers, the capitular fathers divided their votes between Albert of Cologne (St. Albert the Great) and Hugh of St. Cher, the Germans voting unanimously for the former, the French for the latter. The deadlock was solved the next morning by a "compromise" candidate, St. Raymond of Pennafort. (The story is generally discounted by historians today.) At the general chapter of 1240, also at Bologna, Raymond asked to be relieved of his duties as master general, pleading old age (he had been 63 when elected to the post). The chapter accepted his resignation, and Hugh of St. Cher served as vicar general of the Order until John the Teuton was elected to succeed St. Raymond at the general chapter of 1241, in Paris.

### *First Dominican Cardinal*

The scene now shifts from the limited range of one nation and one religious order to the universality of the Church itself. The College of Cardinals had dwindled in numbers to seven. On May 28, 1244, the vigil of Pentecost, Pope Innocent IV created twelve new cardinals, among their number, Hugh of St. Cher. He was made a cardinal-priest, with the Title of Santa Sabina.

According to one version of the story, Aimeric, Archbishop of Lyons, had retired to the monastery of Grandmont. The chapter of canons in Lyons elected Hugh as his successor. But when the election results were forwarded to Rome for confirmation, Innocent nominated him to the cardinalate.

These were trying times for the papacy. Innocent had been forced to flee Rome at the approach of the German emperor, Frederick II. The Pope turned to France, where Frederick's armies had not yet penetrated. The papal court accompanied him, including ten of the new cardinals. Hugh and Odo, cardinal-priest of Tusculum, the only Frenchmen among the new cardinals, joined the papal cortege in Susa, a village in Piedmont. There, on November 12, they received the insignia of their new office, and continued on with the papal entourage, which finally arrived in Lyons, December 2. The Pope and his court were received there with the greatest popular acclamation. The following year, Innocent presided at the First Council of Lyons, the thirteenth ecumenical council in the Church's history, and the first in which a Dominican participated.

During the five-year Lyonese sojourn of Innocent IV, Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher was given a number of commissions of varying importance. One was a mitigation and adaptation of the Rule and liturgy of the Carmelite Order. It is a noteworthy fact that when finally St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross initiated the famous Carmelite Reform in the 16th century, their intention was a return to the Rule drawn up by Hugh of St. Cher. St. Theresa writes in her *Life*: "We observe the Rule of our Lady of Mount Carmel, without any mitigation, such as Friar Hugh, Cardinal of Santa Sabina, ordained, and Pope Innocent IV confirmed" (ch. 6).

### *Cardinal-Legate in Germany*

One of the important acts of the First Council of Lyons had been the deposition and excommunication (for the second time) of Frederick II. In his place, Innocent IV had supported Henry Raspe, Margrave of Thuringia. Henry died in battle soon after, and the Pope's choice settled on William of Holland. He was anointed King of the Romans at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1247, at the age of twenty. His good personal qualities, high birth, riches and family alliances boded well for the future of strife-torn Germany. He was supported by all the nobility who intended to comply with the Council's deposition of Frederick.

When Frederick died in 1250, his son Conrad claimed the imperial crown. Innocent wrote to all the nobles of the House of Swabia, Conrad's chief supporters, informing them he would refuse to recognize Conrad, and proposing William of Holland instead. Hugh of St. Cher was then sent by the Pope to convey the same message personally to the princes concerned, to secure their agreement, and obtain whatever other support he could for William. Thus in 1251, Hugh, as the

Pope's legate, began a difficult and dangerous three years of nearly constant travel and negotiation. His territory included, besides present-day Germany, the whole of Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Burgundy and Arles. The mission furthermore was ecclesiastical as well as political: he was charged with investigating and correcting where necessary many alleged abuses in various dioceses, monasteries and convents.

By the spring of 1254 Hugh was able to return to Rome, his mission completed. Practically all the nobility of the German empire had rallied to the cause of William. In July, Innocent invited the emperor-elect to Rome for the imperial coronation at Christmastide, but the Pope died three weeks before the appointed day.

### ***Enter: Thomas Aquinas***

In 1251, John the Teuton, as master general of the Order, asked Albert the Great to select a candidate for the position of bachelor of theology in Paris. Albert, who had had St. Thomas with him for about five years and was fully convinced of his genius and maturity, sent the name of his young protégé to the master general. When John hesitated, as Thomas was unknown to him, Albert wrote to Hugh of St. Cher, asking him to persuade the master general to make the requested appointment. Hugh and John met in 1251 or 1252, while Hugh was on his legatine mission in Germany, and Thomas' appointment followed soon after. William of Tocco, St. Thomas' first biographer, relates: "At the instance of the Lord Cardinal Hugh, the master accepted him (Thomas) as bachelor in the Studium of Paris, writing him and ordering him to prepare himself to teach the *Sentences*." Thus, by Hugh's mediation, Thomas Aquinas was launched on his public career, taking up the duties of a bachelor of theology under the Dominican master Elias Brunet.

### ***Corpus Christi***

To skip back a few years, Hugh, when provincial of France, journeyed to Liège, in Belgium, in 1240, for the canonical visitation of the Dominican priory there. His visit was to have Church-wide significance before many years had passed.

An Augustinian nun in Liège had received, so it was reported, divine apparitions in which Our Lord had asked for a special feast in honor of the Holy Eucharist. The nun was Juliana of Mount Cornillon, beatified by Pope Pius IX in 1869. Despite theological and ecclesiastical approval, the movement to inaugurate such a feast as Juliana had described met with violent disapproval in the city of

Liège and throughout the diocese. The fact that the movement stemmed from Juliana had become known, and this was the main reason for the opposition; the novel proposals came from a *woman*, and a visionary at that! Juliana became the fable of the diocese; her visions and proposals became the object of local sarcasm and derision. The common people were also stimulated in their derisive attitude towards her by the false accusations of Roger, the prior of the Augustinian canons in a monastery adjacent to that of Juliana's canonesses. An official episcopal inquiry was eventually held, which resulted in acquittal for Juliana, and penance for Roger.

Throughout the local disturbances and debates, which soon spread even to the universities, Hugh showed himself a stout defender of Juliana personally and of her plan for the special feast. In lectures and sermons, he insisted the feast was "willed by God." In the schools, the debate centered, not on the personal character of Juliana, but on the propriety of such a feast as she proposed. After all, was not the Eucharist honored every time Mass was celebrated, and especially on Holy Thursday? Hugh had an answer: "Although this venerable Sacrament is commemorated daily with fitting devotion, still it would be appropriate that once a year it be commemorated in a more special and solemn manner than on ordinary days, or Holy Thursday, when the Church is more occupied with the *Mandatum* (Washing of Feet) and the memory of Christ's Passion. Since the saints, whose memory is venerated daily in litanies, Masses and private prayers, have special feasts when their merits are celebrated in a special manner, surely it is not incongruous that the Holy of Holies have a special feast, in which whatever veneration was neglected It on other days may be carefully supplied for."

Is there not an echo of this in the Office for Corpus Christi later incorporated into the Church's liturgy? "Although there is special reference to this Sacrament on Holy Thursday, the remainder of that day's Office pertains to the Passion of Christ, with whose veneration the Church is occupied at that time. And so, in order that the faithful may celebrate the institution of so great a Sacrament with an entire Office, the Roman Pontiff Urban IV . . . has decreed that the memory of the institution be celebrated on the Thursday after the Octave of Pentecost. . . ."

Ten years passed, but Hugh had not forgotten the affair, and had been championing its cause whenever the occasion provided. In 1251 or 1252 his duties as papal legate brought him to Liège once again. He was shown the Office composed by the monk John of Cornillon, and fully approved it. Acting on his legatine powers, he

sent a circular letter to all the ecclesiastical authorities under his jurisdiction, ordering the celebration of the Feast of the Most Holy Sacrament, for the Thursday after the Octave of Pentecost, and enjoining the proper office for it drawn up by John of Cornillon. Then, to overcome the resistance that had manifested itself in Liège, he himself officiated at the ceremonies there with great pomp and circumstance, calculated to impress the people and dispel their misgivings once and for all. Afterwards he sent a second letter to all his territories, describing his own procedure in Liège, and soliciting zealous imitators everywhere. His example proved successful: the new feast became one of the principal religious observances in Liège, and the movement for its universal celebration was happily initiated.

#### *With Alexander IV*

The ten years that Hugh had faithfully served Innocent IV had not gone unobserved by Alexander IV, who was elected to the papacy near the end of 1254. During the seven years of this pontificate, Hugh never left the papal court. We find his name subscribed to 45 papal bulls issued by Alexander.

Under both these Popes, Hugh was involved in the disputes at the University of Paris between the religious Orders and the secular professors. When William of St. Amour, the leading antagonist of the regulars, wrote *The Perils of the Latter Times*, a bitter invective against the religious Orders, it was sent to Rome for examination. Hugh was one of the four cardinals commissioned to pass sentence on it. The sentence issued was one of condemnation, and the book was burned publicly in the presence of the Pope. Hugh was also a member of the commission that condemned *The Eternal Evangel*, another product of the secular-regular disputes in Paris.

#### *Cross-Purposes*

By a papal bull of February 3, 1255, Alexander IV gave Hugh the unprecedented power "to examine their (the Friars Preachers') Rule, their Constitutions and Customs,<sup>4</sup> and to choose from these texts what is most important and useful, and to reduce this to one single Rule, or to dispose of it in some other way, according as it will seem good to you, for the inviolable preservation of this Order and its perpetual stability." It is evident from the bull, furthermore, that Hugh had taken the initiative in this novel undertaking. Perhaps he was alarmed at the tendency towards early extinction manifested in many of the young religious societies and associations of the day, mainly because of their lack of a strong, unified rule. Fearing a similar



crisis impending for his own Order, owing to its tripartite legislation (the Rule of St. Augustine, plus the two "distinctions"), he wanted to make a synthesis of the three documents.

Despite papal approval, despite Hugh's undoubted devotion to the Dominican Order and its spirit, despite his experience with civil and canon law, the vigorous disapproval of the project by the Order at large effectively prevented its realization. Humbert de Romans, master general now, was especially opposed to it, and his *Exposition of the Rule of St. Augustine* and *Exposition of the Constitutions* were probably intended by way of reaction to Hugh's ideas.

By a unique privilege, the Order had been granted the power to change its own Constitutions without recourse to the Holy See, and the friars saw in Hugh's one-man project the first step towards losing this valuable prerogative. From the vantage point of seven centuries' experience, it seems the friars' point of view was certainly the better one. Hugh's sincerity and disinterestedness in the matter cannot be called into question, but the subsequent history of the Order has certainly more than cast a doubt on the wisdom of his proposal.

#### **Urban IV**

Alexander IV died May 25, 1261. The College of Cardinals, reduced to eight members, took three months to elect his successor. There is good evidence that one of the reasons for the lengthiness of the proceedings was the refusal of two of its members to accept the papacy. These were the English Cistercian cardinal, John Tolet, and Hugh of St. Cher. Finally, in August, the electors looked outside their own ranks and selected James Pantaleòn, who took the name Urban IV.

As James Pantaleòn, he had been archdeacon of Liège when the movement for the feast of Corpus Christi had first appeared. Subsequently he had become bishop of Verdun, then patriarch of Jerusalem. Juliana had died three years before his coronation, but a friend of hers, a recluse named Eve, appealed in her name for the universal celebration of the new feast. Urban, who had been one of its strongest defenders from the beginning, soon acceded to her wishes and inaugurated the Office and Mass of Corpus Christi. On September 8, 1264, the feast of Corpus Christi was definitively universalized.

#### **Finis**

Hugh, active to the end, died in Orvieto, March 19, 1263. The general chapter of that year assigned him the same suffrages as for a master general. A little more than a year later, his tomb was opened to

transfer his remains to Lyons. His body was found intact and without the least corruption. Received in Lyons, it was put in a new tomb by Cardinal Guy Foulques (Fulk, or Fulconi). Seven years earlier, the canons of Puy had elected him bishop of that diocese. Guy, uncertain as to whether he should accept or not, had turned to Hugh for advice, promising to abide by his decision. Hugh had decided in his favor, and the pope had confirmed the choice. Two years after Hugh's death, Guy Foulques was elevated to the papacy as Clement IV.

Thus—in bare outline—the life of a great churchman, legislator, reformer, religious, superior, theologian, exegete, preacher, writer, statesman, confidant of popes. For Fra Angelico at least, Hugh's biblical achievements were his greatest claim to fame. He included Hugh in a tableau of the Crucifixion, with the aureole of a blessed, and the title *B. Ugo, Postill.* (Blessed Hugh, Commentator).

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Actually, not *every* line of Scripture has all four senses—literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical—which is a somewhat inaccurate division to begin with. Hugh frequently omits the anagogical sense.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh's was a *verbal* concordance, as opposed to a *real* concordance, which lists the *things* (events, persons, objects, etc., regardless of their verbal expression) mentioned in Sacred Scripture. The first *real* concordance was compiled by St. Anthony of Padua, c. 1230; Hugh's was the first verbal concordance.

<sup>3</sup> Three English Dominicans, students in Paris at the time—John of Darlington, Richard of Stavensby and Hugh of Croyndon—produced the second verbal concordance, c. 1250, spelling out the implications of Hugh's work. The third was by Conrad of Halberstadt, c. 1310.

<sup>4</sup> The primitive Constitutions of the Order, called officially *The Institutions of the Friars Preachers*, or the *Book of Usages*, was divided into two parts, called "distinctions"; the pope's reference to "Constitutions and Customs" apparently designates these two "distinctions."