

THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS

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III



THE Dominican coat of arms has a history. It was in the making long before it appeared, full-blown, on the Church of the Minerva at Rome in the fifteenth century. It may not be able, perhaps, to claim the antiquity of the arms of some religious orders,¹ but it bears, nevertheless, the impress of the early days of the Order. We might even say with truth that it shows the influence of St. Dominic himself in its heraldic elements. For it is, after all, a crusading shield, and Dominic de Guzman was nothing if not a crusader warring against sin and error. Like the knightly shields of old, it carries its own distinctive crusading cross—"a meet badge for all who pledge themselves to suffer for His sake."

Vexilla Regis prodeunt;
Fulget Crucis mysterium,
Qua vita mortem pertulit,
Et morte vitam protulit.

The earliest and nearest approach to what might be called Dominican insignia is the personal seal of St. Dominic used on his letter "Universis Christi, etc.," written sometime in 1208 while he was in Languedoc. Figure I² shows this seal as it has been reconstructed from authentic sources. It is round like the other seals of that period and shows an *Agnus Dei* in the center supporting a cross. The legend or inscription around the seal reads: (+) *Jhesu Christi et predicationis*, which properly interpreted is "The Cross of Jesus Christ and of preaching." Most of the

¹ Speaking of the arms of the Order of Mt. Carmel, the writer of *Carmel, Its History, Spirit and Saints* (New York, 1927), p. 184, says: "P. Saraceno in his 'Menologium Carmelitanum' shows the existence of the seal of the Order in the time of St. Denis, the second of the disciples of St. Elias, raised to the throne of Peter. This was about the year 267." If the writer means "seal" as a seal, this date may be accepted; but if the present coat of arms of Carmel is meant, as the context seems to indicate, such an early date is unwarranted, for armory had its earliest origin in the latter part of the twelfth century.

² Reproduced from Balme & Lelaidier, *Cartulaire ou Histoire Diplomatique de Saint Dominique*, I (Paris, 1893), p. 188.



Fig. I

documents of the Middle Ages were marked with the cross to denote a sort of consecration. The little cross on St. Dominic's seal may have been the root of the later black and white cross of the Order of Preachers. Another seal of St. Dominic on a document dated April 21, 1221, is oval in shape and shows the Saint in the center, habited and holding a pilgrim's staff.³ The legend reads: *Sigillum Dominici ministri* (or *magistri*) *predicationis*. The change in form and contents of these two seals is not surprising, for "the seals of ecclesiastics were usually engraved with their personal effigy, within a band containing an inscription indicative of the name and rank of the person represented. These seals were usually, but not invariably, vesica shaped (i. e., oval). . . . As early as the commencement of the eleventh century the Bishops of France had adopted great seals bearing their effigies."⁴

It was probably out of deep reverence and respect for the holy Founder who was the first to bear "the cross of Jesus Christ and of preaching," that later legislation of the Order permitted the Master General alone to use a crucifix on his seal.⁵ There are extant two seals,⁶ dated 1268, of John of Vercelli, the sixth Master General (1264-83), as examples of this privilege. Fr. P. Mandonnet, O. P.⁷ calls attention to the words of Fr. Albert Castellani, O. P., in his *Brevissima Chronica Magistrorum Ordinis Praedicatorum* of the early sixteenth century in which the following is found:

Innocentius III. dedit ordini nomen fratrum Praedicatorum, quia praedicaturi erant Jesum Christum crucifixum, et ideo dedit ordini, scilicet generali fratrum Praedicatorum, crucifixum pro signo sigilli. Qui, quidem generalis

³ Balme & Lelaidier, *op. cit.*, II (Paris, 1897), p. 115; Mamachi, *Annalium Ordinis Praedicatorum* (Rome, 1756), appendix, I, 70, n. 3; Mother Drane, *History of St. Dominic* (London, 1891), p. 427 also gives a fac simile of this seal.

⁴ J. Woodward, *Ecclesiastical Heraldry* (Edinburgh, 1894), p. 6.

⁵ *Acta Cap. Gen. Bononie*, 1240, in B. M. Reichert, *Monumenta Ord. Fr. Praed. Historica*, III (Rome, 1897 ff.), p. 17; "Nullum sigillum habet curiosum, nec excepto magistro ordinis, in sigillo suo faciat fieri crucifixum."

⁶ Arch. Nat. Nos. 9712, 9715, reproduced in G. R. de Fleury, *Les Couvents de S. Dominique au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1903), I.

⁷ Letter of April 14, 1929.

magister habet crucifixum in ordinis et officii sui sigillo. . . . Haec omnia habentur in chronica praefati reverendi fratris Jacobi de Susato ordinis Praedicatorum (of the fifteenth century, whose work Castellani took over in part).⁸

On the seal of the convent of Auxerre in 1398,⁹ there is a crowned figure holding a fleur-de-lys rod in one hand, and with the other presenting St. Dominic with a fleur-de-lys cross. This seal calls to mind the words of Canon Barry: "The Gothic king of ancient days was . . . before all things . . . a crusader. When he set out on an expedition he first came to the Praetorian, was met by the clergy, and prostrate before the altar prayed in secret. The bishop chanted a supplication for victory, and presented to the king a cross of gold, which was to be carried in front of him during the whole campaign and brought back in peace on its conclusion. St. Dominic, as the record tells, bore such a cross aloft at the battle of Muret, where Pedro of Aragon and the Albigensian cause went down."¹⁰

There is a very uncommon Dominican shield on the frontispiece of a Processional of the Order printed at Venice in 1494 (Fig II). It is probably the seal, transformed into a coat of arms, of Fr. Joachim Turriani of Venice, who was Master General from 1487 to 1500. "We are here for the first time in the presence of true arms," writes Fr. Mandonnet,¹¹ "and one finds in this picture the symbols of what will become the two coats of arms of the Order; the cross fleury of the Minerva, and the dog with other accessories in use in the seventeenth century or later. We have here, first of all, an heraldic shield, the two colors of the Order, and the crucifix of the seals of the Masters General which is most prominently displayed and which will transform itself into the arms of the Minerva in a cross fleury, excluding every other secondary element. We also find on this page of the processional, the essential elements of the second coat of arms—a shield, the colors of the Order, the dog of St. Dominic with the torch, but the lilies and palm are outside of the shield in the hands of the Blessed Virgin. . . . The diffusion of the processional would put into circulation the notion of arms for the Order, and it is from this shield that those who

⁸ In Martenè & Durand, *Veterum Scriptorum et Monumentorum Amplissima Collectio*, VI (Paris, 1739), col. 380.

⁹ Arch. Nat. No. 9724, de Fleury, *op. cit.*, I.

¹⁰ *Roma Sacra* (London, 1927), p. 102.

¹¹ Letter of April 14, 1929. The sketch reproduced here was copied from the processional by Fr. Ambrose Rounel, O. P., of Le Saulchoir, and kindly loaned for this study by Fr. Mandonnet.

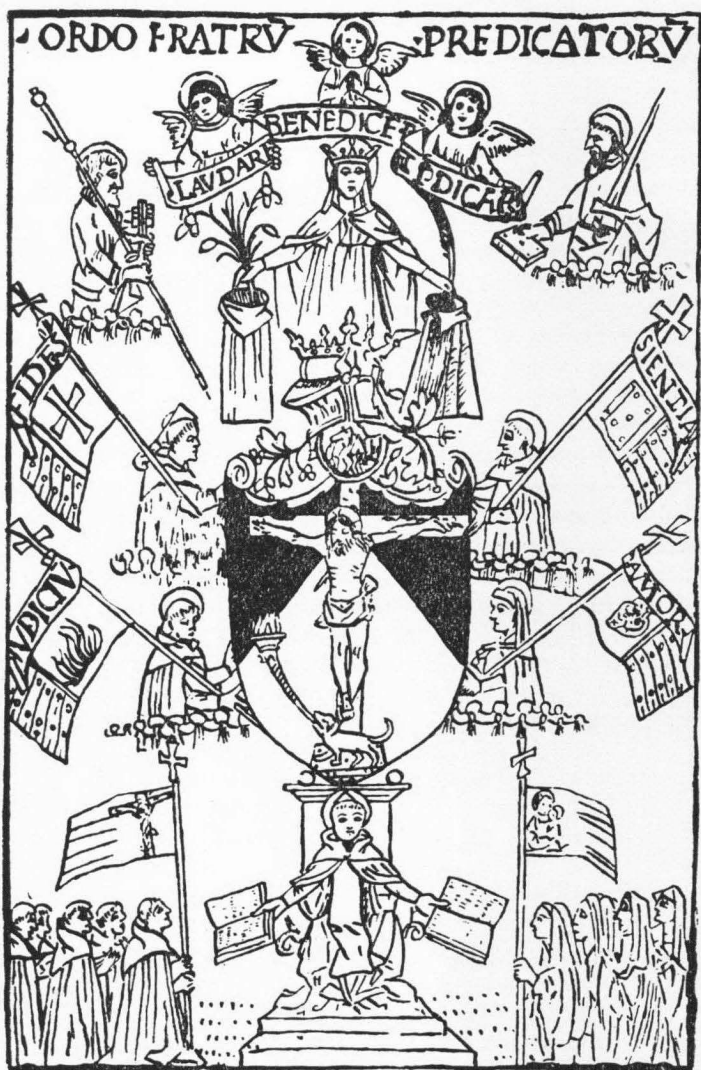


Fig. II

later made up the two blazons have drawn their ideas." It is not clear just how the crucifix would evolve into the black and white cross flory, for it is apparent that this cross was already existing long before 1494.

Returning now to the time of St. Dominic, we may find a better explanation for the origin of the Dominican insignia. Mamachi and other historians of the Order claim that St. Dominic himself organized or helped to organize the famous Militia of Christ in southern France about 1209.¹² According to the letter of approbation given by Honorius III, July 26, 1220,¹³ to a P. Savaricum and his companions, in which the Pope mentions the *signaculum crucis quod defert*, this new institute was to be a military order, after the manner of the Knights Templar, designed to combat heresy and to defend the liberties and goods of the Church. Its members were to differ from the Templars, however, in dress or habit, for as the latter used a white habit, the Militia was to use black and white as did the Friar Preachers.¹⁴ Commenting on this part of the letter of Honorius, Manachi says that just as the Knights Templar were dressed entirely in white with a red cross, the soldiers of the Militia were dressed in black and white, with a black and white cross,¹⁵ both the habit and the cross having been given to them by St. Dominic.¹⁶ The cross, as we have seen,¹⁷ was the proper and recognized ensign of the religious military orders, and, when used with the colors of their habit, constituted their coats of arms. It was in keeping with this honored custom that the Militia of Christ used a black and white cross as its distinctive emblem. We do not know precisely the original form of this cross (some heraldic authorities enumerate two hundred and eighty-five varieties), but it was probably the cross flory as we have it today. This was the popular form of the cross used by the French crusaders who made the fleur-de-lys the national emblem; it was also the kind

¹² Mamachi, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

¹³ Ripoli & Bremond, ed. *Bullarium Ord. Praed.*, VII (Rome), p. 2, *const.* xxxvi.

¹⁴ *ibid.* note 10: Vestibus enim albis utebantur Templarii, Fratres vero Militiae Jesu Christi albis, et nigris non secus ac Fratres Predicatores; vestiantur Milites, inquit Regula quae legitur in Gregorii IX Constitutione ccxi (*Bullarium*, vii, p. 11), mox laudata, panno albo in tunica, and supertunicali; in chlamyde vero nigro; and quoad chlamydes uxores eorum, quae se obligaverint ad hanc vitam, non differant in colore.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 236; Nam non vestibus modo, verum etiam aliis rebus a Templariis discrepabant, quod illi vestibus omnino albis, quibus crux rubra assuta esset, utebantur; nostri vero albis, nigrisque vestibus, quibus albi item, nigrisque coloris crux assuebatur.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 232, 233. Addidit vestibus qua parte ad pectus aptatae erant, albi, nigrisque coloris crucem.

¹⁷ DOMINICANA, XIII (1928), p. 275.

used by several military orders, notably the Knights of Calatrava and the Knights of Aviz.

After the death of St. Dominic, and his canonization by Gregory IX, July 3, 1234, the Militia was known as the Militia of Jesus Christ and of St. Dominic. By this time, no doubt, it had lost much of its military aspect and subsequently went under the name of Brothers and Sisters of Penance, or the Third Order. With this transition, the Dominican cross did not disappear, but was used for some time as the emblem of the more peaceful organization.¹⁸ Because the Militia and the Third Order were always so closely connected with the Dominican churches, even participating in the spiritual works and suffrages of the Friars, it is not strange that the black and white insignia of the knights became known as the insignia of the Order of Preachers. This would seem to be the case in Spain, at least, for according to Argote de Molina,¹⁹ a writer of the sixteenth century, "this holy order (Dominican) uses as its emblem the lily cross of the same colors as its habit, that is black and white—an emblem used also by the military knights founded by the same St. Dominic."

Sometime in the fifteenth century this Cross of St. Dominic, as it is often called, became an emblem of the Inquisition. This is evident in many ways. There is an old painting, probably of the latter part of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, in the National Gallery, Madrid, which from all appearances was intended to represent an inquisitorial scene such as an auto-da-fe. The black and white cross flory, mounted on a staff from which flows a banner, may be plainly seen in front of the Dominican Grand Inquisitor who is sitting on a high throne surrounded by theologians. The Spanish artist, Claudio Coello (1630-1693), painted a famous picture of St. Dominic holding a staff on the top of which is the black and white cross. This picture is in the Prado, Madrid. Whether it was the artist's intention to show the Saint as the first Inquisitor, or as the founder of the Militia of Christ, it is hard to say; but it was a theme, old long before Coello's time.

¹⁸ Mamachi, *op. cit.*, p. 234, reproduces a print of 1347 showing three men, whom he thinks are professed tertiaries, each wearing a *cross moline*; in the background are two shields divided per pale, black and white. As there is nothing to indicate the colors of the crosses, we should like to suppose that the artist was also careless in making the cross *moline* and not *flory*.

¹⁹ *Nobleza de la Andalucía* (Seville, 1588), p. 171, quoted by Antonio del Frate in *Rivista Araldica* (Rome), Dec., 1906, p. 768.

We are told that it was the fixed custom of the ministers of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, from the Inquisitors General to the *familiares*, to use the black and white cross flory in back of their own coats of arms, as did all the knights of the military orders.²⁰ It would appear from this that the black and white cross was not peculiar to the Order of Preachers or to the Dominican Inquisitors alone, but was the accepted symbol of the tribunal itself. This is the conclusion one would draw from the fact that the Franciscan, Cardinal Ximenez de Cisneros (+1517), Archbishop of Toledo and Grand Inquisitor of Spain, sometimes used the bi-colored cross in back of his own arms. A miniature of these arms is to be found in a manuscript in the Vatican Library.²¹ A letter²² from Señor Juan de Rujula, Spanish King of Arms, more positively connects the Dominican shield with the Inquisition: "We have examined a partial register in our archives, from which it can be deduced that the use of the shield gyronny with the cross comes from the Inquisition." A more thorough investigation of the heraldic archives would be welcome, and would undoubtedly throw much light on a hidden phase in the history of the Dominican coat of arms.

Since we lack definite information as to the time and circumstances which lead the Inquisition to adopt the emblematic cross of the Dominicans, an opinion may be ventured. From 1237 in Spain, and from 1251 in Rome, when the Friar Preachers were formally confided the tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition,²³ Dominicans have ever since been intimately associated with the onerous duties of the much-maligned institution. Now if the Militia of Jesus Christ and of St. Dominic held to its original purpose of stamping out heresy and used the black and white cross up to 1237, as it undoubtedly did, it is possible,

²⁰ cf. Juan Ignacio del Campo y Vega, "La Milicia de Jesu Cristo," in *Rivista Araldica* (Rome, 1907), p. 47. This writer quotes D. José Micheli Marquez: "a los Caballeros de Jesu Cristo y modo de vivir, imitan y observan los ministros del Santo Tribunal de la Inquisición, guardando y reverenciando el santo instituto que el Gran Patriarca Santo Domingo, invictos caballeros y honrando sus nobles pechos con la misma insignia." *Tesoro Militar de Caballeria* (Madrid, 1642), fol. 47.

²¹ Lat. 3807, fol. 61. cf. Urbano Gascon, "Lo Stemma del Card. Ximenez de Cisneros," in *Rivista Araldica* (Rome, 1906), p. 754.

²² dated June 1, 1928.

²³ The Roman Inquisition dates from the time of Innocent III (1194-1216). In 1542, Paul III declared it to be the supreme tribunal, and since then it has been known as the Congregation of the Holy Office. The Spanish Inquisition, properly so-called, it is from the time of Ferdinand and Isabella. cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Inquisition," and "Roman Congregation."

if indeed not probable, that the early Dominican Inquisitors inducted into their service, as petty officials, many members of the Militia. The frequent occurrence of the cross on the *milites* working in conjunction with the black and white habited Inquisitors, would have made one regard it as an emblem of the tribunal, so much so that in the course of time it was accepted as the badge of the Holy Office. As a matter of fact, the Knights of the Faith of Jesus Christ and of St. Peter Martyr of the early sixteenth century claimed direct descent from the original Militia of Christ. "They made up an association of holy persons who took a vow to carry the black and white cross in honor of Jesus Christ for the glory of the Catholic faith and for the confusion of heretics, and they depended on the Inquisitors General who had invested them with this cross. These knights or brothers were honored with the title of members (*familiari*) of the Holy Office and they used to add the cross to their own coat of arms (placing their arms on the cross, perhaps), honoring it as a true knightly habit. In France, the Inquisitor Generals were called Knights of the *Cross of Jesus Christ, of Dominic* and of *St. Peter Martyr* with all the formality proper to the knightly orders. Here the lily cross of black and white underwent some change, since it was marked with the XP (Chi Rho)."²⁴ The *familiari* of the Holy Office above mentioned wore, as the insignia of their rank during the seventeenth century, a metallic lily cross in black and white enamel, timbered with a royal crown, suspended on the chest by a ribbon, black for clerics and red for laymen. In the center of the cross was set a small shield or medallion of white enamel, composed of a Calvary Cross on the right of which was a sword, and on the left, a palm branch.²⁵ This small shield is considered by some to be the true arms of the Holy Office.

This much seems certain, however, that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the black and white cross was considered in Spain the mark of the Preachers as well as the emblem of the Inquisitors; while in Rome it was regarded as belonging

²⁴ F. di Broilo, "La Vere Insegne dei Militi di San Domenico," in *Rivista Araldica* (1907), p. 745.

²⁵ *ibid.* The writer adds: "Abbiamo sott'occhi patenti di familiari del Santo Uffizio dei secoli XVII, XVIII, e nelle miniature il testo si vedono ripetute le insegne che usar dovevano quei familiari, come distintivo del loro grado. . . . Queste insegne sono le vere ed uniche usate da duecento anni a questa parte dai familiari del Santo Uffizio, terziari domenicani e per privilegio cavalieri della fede di Cristo e di San Pietro Martire; sola diramazione del nobile istituto col quale San Domenico de Guzman volle tramandare ai posteri una palese testimonianza del suo ardore religioso."

to the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Now the Dominicans in Italy, either because they did not want to have a coat of arms so closely allied to the inquisitorial tribunal, or because they wanted something more symbolical, proceeded to make the Roman tradition or "incappato" arms the more popular. This was about 1500. But the Spanish Dominicans in Rome, cherishing the traditions that associated the holy Founder St. Dominic with the black and white cross, protested, as Fr. Berthier implied, against such an innovation. They did not lose an opportunity to display what they considered the true coat of arms of the Order, and boldly labelled it as such on the epitaphs of Cardinal Thomas de Vio (Cajetan (+1534) and Cardinal Schönberg (+1537) at the entrance to the Church of the Minerva: *Ordinis Praedicatorum Insignia Haec Sunt*. This was done between 1534 and 1540 during the pontificate of Paul III, when the Friars from the Iberian peninsula held high posts in the Tribunal of the Inquisition and took up residence in the piazza of the Church of the Minerva. In this way the Order acquired two coats of arms.

The traditional Roman shield, however, prevailed on everything Dominican until very recent years and has been referred to, even by heraldic authorities, as the shield of the Order of Preachers. Although unheraldic, it was symbolic of all that the Order held in reverence. Even Spanish Dominican books of the sixteenth century did not drop it, and often placed it beside the other shield, but seldom in the more honorable position. Of the four Dominican popes, only one, Benedict XIII (1724-1730), used the Order's coat of arms (i. e., Roman tradition) on his papal escutcheon. He placed it, minus the star and book, on the *chief* or upper part of his personal coat of arms. It is interesting to note that out of the twenty-nine cardinals created by him, sixteen bore his papal escutcheon as arms of patronage. Thus nine cardinals not belonging to any order, used the Dominican arms on their shields; one Franciscan, two Benedictine and four Dominican cardinals complete the list of those who assumed the arms of Benedict XIII. The Franciscan General, Laurence Cossa, who was made cardinal-priest in 1726, besides impaling the full arms of the Pope, added a small escutcheon of arms of the Franciscan Order. In like manner, Leander Porzia, Abbot of Monte Cassino, when he was created cardinal in 1728, used the full arms of Benedict XIII impaled with his own family coat, with a small shield of the Benedictine Order placed above

and partly upon it. Here we have a member of one religious order bearing the arms of another, and if we did not understand the circumstances under which they were used, it would be puzzling indeed. Cardinal Rouleau, O. P., Archbishop of Quebec, is the first Cardinal of the Order to use the shield gyronny with the black and white cross on his ecclesiastical coat of arms.

Having traced, as accurately as our limited information permits, the principal element in the Order's present coat of arms, a few words remain to be said about the other element, or what is known in heraldry as *gyronny*. The word itself, unless a specified number is given, means eight triangular pieces called *gyrons*, with the points meeting in the center of the field. Although quite common in Spanish heraldry, this peculiar device is of such rare occurrence outside of Spain that Planche²⁶ had to admit that he had not found a single example of a gyron in English heraldry. The Campbell clan of Scotland, however, seems to have exclusive right to a shield *gyronny or and sable*. The gyron originated in Spain in the eleventh century, according to the usual story. "The gyron dates its origin from the time of Alfonso VI, King of Spain, who in a battle against the Moors, had his horse killed under him, and was in great personal danger, until rescued and remounted by Don Roderico de Cissneros, who cut three triangular pieces from his sovereign's mantle as a memorial of the event, and afterward obtained permission to bear three gyrons in his coat of arms. He also took the name of *Giron* and his descendants have since been created Dukes of Ossuna."²⁷ A similar legend says that it was customary for the bodyguard of the Christian leader, to tear up his surcoat in the sheer joy of victory. Some pieces would be stained with the leader's blood, while other pieces would keep the original color, which explains why gyronny is always of two different and alternating tinctures. There is no explanation, as far as is known, for the gyronny on the Dominican coat of arms, unless it was the most striking and the most logical field on which to place the black and white cross. There might be something in the suggestion that it is a replica of the Templars' *Beauseant* or banner, per fess, *sable and argent*.

The eight-pointed star above the shield takes the place of the crest in the arms of nobles and knights. This star, some-

²⁶ *Pursuivant of Arms* (London, 1873).

²⁷ E. J. Millington, *Heraldry in History, Poetry and Romance* (London, 1858), p. 186, 187; also cf. D. Francisco Piferrer, *Nobiliario de los Reinos y Senorios de Espana* (2nd ed. Madrid, 1857), I. p. 28, 29.

times six-pointed, is the peculiar symbol of St. Dominic and is always placed on his forehead or above his head to distinguish him from other saints. The eight points may signify the eight Beatitudes of the holy Patriarch. The motto of the Order is *Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare*—to praise God, to bless His people, to preach His Gospel—a fitting device for an Order called “champions of the faith.” “Often the motto gives a clue to the whole deep meaning of the emblematic ensigns on the shield,” says Miss Millington,²⁸ “which are ‘full of utterance’ to the wise, and it reveals the religious faith, zeal and love of our ancestors, no less than their courage, loyalty, and thirst for glory.” The Order’s motto had its origin when the Cistercian Conrad, Bishop of Porto, hesitated to receive the new preaching friars. Turning to a Missal, he opened it at random and his finger fell on a line in the Preface for feasts of the Blessed Virgin; *Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare*. Without more ado, he embraced and welcomed the waiting friars. Sometimes *Veritas* is used as the motto—the forced verdict of an avowed enemy and persecutor, Louis the Emperor of Bavaria, a hundred years after the foundation of the Order: “The Order of Preachers is the order of truth.” “Truth,” says Canon Barry,²⁹ “is the watchword of St. Dominic, ‘Veritas’ a challenge no less defiant than austere. It is a challenge because an affirmation.”

As to the symbolism of the Dominican shield, little need be said, for whatever symbolism it had in the beginning has not been handed down by tradition. The usual symbolism given to its charges is as follows: the *cross flory* is said to signify one who has conquered or fruitful victory, duty and self-sacrifice; the *gyronny*, unity or working together for the commonweal. *Sable* or black denotes wisdom, silence, fortitude, sometimes penance and mortification; *argent* or silver stands for peace, purity, charity and sincerity. Hence we may say that the Dominican coat of arms typifies the victorious and unflinching spirit of the Order whose members of both sexes all over the world have ever worked in unity, preaching Christ crucified and teaching the wisdom and charity of the Cross, for the glory of God and the preservation of his Church for over seven hundred years.

²⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 316.

²⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 165.