



## Wisdom has Built her House: A Theological Meditation on the Priory Church of the Holy Spirit, Oxford

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The priory church of the Holy Spirit was the dream of fr Bede Jarrett OP; begun on 15 August 1921, some 700 years after the Dominicans first came to Oxford, it was opened on 20 May 1929. Fr Bede obviously appreciated the power of beauty to attract one to God, and he lavished much thought and care in establishing a priory and church in the *centre* of Oxford. Like Blessed Jordan of Saxony, Second Master General of the Order of Friars Preachers, who visited Oxford in 1230, fr Bede had hopes for a “good catch”<sup>1</sup> of vocations from the University and city, and he believed that the beauty of the buildings in which the friars lived their religious lives would be of some import. Thus he wrote that “the idea is to convert the young men [in Oxford] by pandering to his love for the picturesque – a Priory to the Holy Ghost, the white forms, the chanted office, lectures, sermons etc”.<sup>2</sup> There is another hint of fr Bede’s appreciation for the beauty of architecture and the theology expressed in art and architecture, thus making it a form of preaching. In a letter written on 2 August 1929, he said that “Fra Angelico used his paint brush, and St Thomas Aquinas his philosophy, and Lacordaire his voice. These all are effective and perhaps the voice less effective than the other two. It’s so soon only a memory”.<sup>3</sup> The art of Blessed Angelico, then, and the writings of St Thomas have an endurance that the sermon does not have. In this essay, I shall attempt to show how the priory church in Oxford, combining the beauty of the fine arts and drawing upon the wisdom of Dominican masters, is an enduring sermon in stone, and how it was hoped that this would help in the conversion and salvation of “young men” in Oxford.

The nave of the church is separated from the narthex by a stone wall that supports the gallery above it. Carved into the arches that open into the nave are the arms of the then reigning pontiff, Pius XI,

<sup>1</sup> Vann (ed.), *To Heaven with Diana!* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2006 reprint), 96.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, Bellenger & Tugwell (eds.), *Letters of Bede Jarrett* (Oxford: Blackfriars Publications, 1989), 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

and the reigning king, George V. Between these archways are little shields, each bearing a letter, forming the sentence: “Pasce agnos meos”, which is from John 21:15. As such, it could be seen to refer to both the pastoral ministry of the Petrine office as well as the pastoral role of the good and wise ruler. Fr Bede Jarrett certainly intended that the phrase should bring to mind the ministry of St Peter and his successors, and also the faith of St Peter, who, prompted by the Holy Spirit, confessed Jesus to be the Christ. Bede points out that this is an example of “Peter’s faith leading to wisdom”<sup>4</sup> and as we shall see, wisdom is of central importance in ‘reading’ this church. St Thomas’ had taught that “the gift of wisdom presupposes faith, because ‘a man judges well what he knows’”<sup>5</sup>, hence faith comes before wisdom. So too the narthex comes before the church. One enters the church through the archway surmounted by the papal arms, indicating that one entered the Church in the faith of St Peter, and shepherded by his successors.

Entering into the church itself, one is struck by the overall form of the building. Leonard Elton, writing in *Artwork* in May 1931 described it as “a single space without aisles . . . full of white daylight falling on cream-coloured stone”.<sup>6</sup> The church is simple, uncluttered and austere; it is bright and spacious, and one’s eye is instantly drawn to the High Altar, which is the focus of any true church building. As Elton noted, “Colour . . . is reduced to a block of red marble for the altar”.<sup>7</sup> The building, Gothic in form, has a minimum of decoration and ornament, according to the medieval rules of the Order.<sup>8</sup> This simplicity and poverty aimed to allow the beauty of wisdom itself – in preaching and the liturgy – to shine through. Fr William Hinnebusch OP notes that the Dominican church was to be “at once a building suited to its function and characterized by architectural dignity and beauty”<sup>9</sup>, and the basic function of the Dominican church was to a place in which to preach the Word, both in the sermon and in the liturgy, where the Word was proclaimed in song and made flesh in the Eucharist.

Medieval Dominican churches were thus essentially “preaching halls”, and this church follows in that tradition. Hence, what is said of the Dominican church in Dubrovnik (built in 1301) can also be said of Blackfriars church: “Dominican churches usually reflect a special spirituality that emphasizes the essential and discards all inessential

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished notes from the archives of Oxford Priory.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (henceforth ‘ST’), IIa IIae, 45, 1, from <<http://www.newadvent.org/summa>>.

<sup>6</sup> Elton, *Oxford Architecture Today* in *Artwork* (11 May 1931), 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See Bryce, *The Black Friars of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: T&A Constable, 1911), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Hinnebusch, *The early English Friars Preachers* (Rome: Santa Sabina, 1951), 157.

external and internal ornamentation that detract from the concept of simplicity and functionality. As a rule, they are spacious and especially suited to the optimal transmission of the preacher's words".<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Hinnebusch has noted that medieval English Dominican churches "took the form of two parallelograms, the nave with slender arcading and aisles, and the choir which was usually aisleless and square-ended". Such an arrangement left the nave "entirely free for the people... and view of the preacher was practically unhindered".<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the ground plan of our church almost mirrors that of the medieval Brecon Priory. Moreover, in conformity with the instructions of the 1239 General Chapter, there is only plain glass in the windows of the church, which allows much natural sunlight to enter the building. Hence Hinnebusch concludes that "light, space, and openness are the characteristics of the preaching naves in the churches of English friars".<sup>12</sup>

These preaching naves, then, exist for the preaching of the Word, and as I have said, I think this indicates both the preached sermon and the Eucharist and the choral liturgy which take place in the church. In a letter to Blessed Diana, a Dominican nun, Blessed Jordan similarly looks to several senses of the word, *Verbum*, saying: "I send you a very little word, the Word made little in the crib, the Word who was made flesh for us, the Word of salvation and grace, of sweetness and glory, the Word who is good and gentle, Jesus Christ and him crucified, Christ raised up on the cross... Read over that Word in your heart, turn it over in your mind, let it be sweet as honey on your lips; ponder it, dwell on it, that it may dwell with you and in you for ever."<sup>13</sup> Thus, Blessed Jordan encapsulated the spirituality of the Dominican vocation which unites prayerful contemplation of the Word and study of the Word for the purpose of preaching the Word. The church, then, is the house in which the Word is contemplated and preached in the Liturgy, and it is closely connected to that other house of contemplation, the Priory (and library) in which the Word is contemplated and preached in study and the religious life in community. Both kinds of contemplation are essential for the Dominican; they mutually flow from one to the other and have their end in preaching. As such, it is not accidental that the Priory library has a door giving access to the church gallery.

The preacher is to preach the Word of God, but to do this well, he must first seek Wisdom, which we have seen is one of fr Bede's emphases, for only if he is filled with the spirit of wisdom will he

<sup>10</sup> Krsaić, *The Dominican Priory in Dubrovnik* (Dubrovnik: Dominikansi Samotsan Sv. Dominika, 2002), 33.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, Hinnebusch, 136f.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Vann, 95.

preach with understanding and knowledge to those who seek truth. As it says in Ecclesiastes 12:9f, “Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find pleasing words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.” This, surely, is the calling of the friar preacher, and to so he must attend to seeking wisdom, both in the library and in the church.

St Thomas says that “the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God.’ Wherefore it is evident that wisdom is a gift of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who will “will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13), and so it is the Holy Spirit who instructs the faithful and gives them wisdom. Hence, the dedication of the church to the Holy Spirit is fitting and points out the One who gives wisdom, as well as the One to whom wisdom is sought. So too, the priory church is the place in which wisdom is sought and given through the preaching of the Word and the Sacrament. The iconography on the gallery balustrade, carved in stone by Alec Miller, depicts these activities of the Holy Spirit as the giver of wisdom. In the central panel, the Spirit in the form of a dove, sends forth seven gifts which are shown as stars emanating from seven rays of light. The chief of these seven gifts of the Spirit is wisdom, which is a “[perfection] of the human mind, rendering it amenable to the promptings of the Holy Ghost in the knowledge of things Divine”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Wisdom gives to human beings a divine perspective on things, and it is this that the friar needs both for his religious life and to preach the Gospel. The panel on the left of this depicts fire, which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit taken from the account of Pentecost in Acts. St Thomas says that “the Spirit descended on [the apostles] in tongues of fire to indicate the proliferation of grace through teaching”<sup>16</sup>, and the Friars Preachers follow in the apostles’ footsteps as teachers and preachers of grace, as St Dominic is called, having received the gift of wisdom. The third panel, on the right side, shows an eagle flying towards the sun. St Albert the Great explains that “this bird is a high flyer and has a vision so sharp that it can gaze into the orb of the sun”.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the eagle is sometimes regarded as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, or of the soul, borne on the wind of the Holy Spirit and directed towards the contemplation of the light of divine truth. Again, the Dominican friar is called to be such a soul, guided by the Spirit into all truth. Running under these

<sup>14</sup> ST IIa IIae, 45, 1.

<sup>15</sup> ST IIa IIae 68, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: part II*, 20, lect.4 (Petersham, MA: St Bede’s Publications, 1980), 611.

<sup>17</sup> Albertus Magnus, *On Animals, volume II*, book 23 (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1547.

carved stone panels is a frieze of carved flowers, fruit and vegetation, perhaps as a symbol of life coming from the Holy Spirit who is the “Lord and giver of life” (Nicene creed).

Having considered the Holy Spirit as the giver of wisdom, we may now consider Wisdom itself. St Thomas says that although “Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one wisdom, just as they are one essence”, even so, “wisdom especially belongs to the Son because the works of wisdom in many ways agree with what is proper to the Son. Through the wisdom of God the hidden things of God are made manifest and the works of creatures are produced, and not only produced, but restored and perfected”.<sup>18</sup> The preacher in the Dominican church makes manifest the hidden things of God in two ways: through preaching the Son, and through celebrating the sacraments. As we have said, through these activities that take place in the church, the Word of God, his Wisdom, is preached and made manifest. As such, the church is the place where wisdom is sought and found, made known through the efforts of the Friars Preachers. Humbert of Romans, fifth Master General of the Order, indicated the preachers’ need for wisdom when he said that preaching “elevates itself to the things of God which infinitely surpass everything else. Also the Divine Wisdom tells us: ‘Hear, for I speak of great things’ (Prov 8:6). Great things indeed, are the mysteries of the Trinity of God, His Unity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and other subjects which nothing can surpass in dignity”.<sup>19</sup> These divine things are given through the gift of wisdom, which is “the manifestation of divine things”<sup>20</sup>, and they are revealed in contemplative study and prayer. For the preacher can only preach *if* he has first contemplated the things of God. As fr Paul Murray OP states: “What we preach, then, are not just truths *about* God. We preach a wine of truth which we have actually tasted ourselves, and have drunk with living faith and joy”.<sup>21</sup>

The place of contemplation, in which the Dominican friar tastes the goodness of God, as well as meditates on the Word of God is the church, and especially the choir. We have noted how the Dominican church is divided into two rectangles: the nave and the choir. We can see in this the two aspects of Dominican life: apostolic and contemplative. Thus we move from the nave, where the friar preaches and into which he processes during the *Salve* Procession after Compline, to the choir. Here, he contemplates the Word of God, both in the Scriptures and in the Blessed Sacrament. Sitting in choir for the

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Prologue of Thomas Aquinas, from <<http://www.op-stjoseph.org/Students/study/thomas/Sentences.htm>>.

<sup>19</sup> Humbert of Romans, *A Treatise on Preaching* (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1955), 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, *Sentences*, Prologue.

<sup>21</sup> Murray, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality* (London: Continuum, 2006), 166.

Divine Office, as the psalmist says, “Blessed is the man [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). However, the choral Office is not just a contemplation of the Scriptures, but it is also a preaching of it, for the friars in choir proclaim the *mirabilia Dei* both to one another antiphonally, and to those in the nave.

The Stations of the Cross in the nave represent the *Via Dolorosa*, and there is a movement towards Calvary, to the high place of the Altar, for it is here that the *fons et culmens* of the Christian life, the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Lord’s Passion, is celebrated. The Altar is the focus of the church and of the friar’s life, for it is at the Altar that the friar contemplates the wisdom and goodness of God. Fr Bede Jarrett OP chose a red marble for the Altar called ‘Rouge Incarnat du Languedoc’. This is especially fitting because the Languedoc was where St Dominic began preaching the goodness of the material world because of Christ’s Incarnation against the dualist heresy of the Albigensians. The Altar, of course, is also the place where Christ takes flesh, veiled under the form of bread and wine, in the Eucharist. In the centre of the Altar is the Tabernacle, domed and veiled like a tent, so that the Word made flesh has indeed “pitched his tent” amongst us.

Proverbs 9:1-5 says: “Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids to call from the highest places in the town, ‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’ To him who is without sense she says, ‘Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed’”. Therefore, we see that the church is the house which Wisdom has built, and the seven pillars within are the seven sacraments which are celebrated in the Church. In Blackfriars church, the east window behind the Altar has seven lights, which may be seen as a symbol of these seven pillars set up by Wisdom, or even the seven spirits before the throne of God.<sup>22</sup> The sacraments are proper to the end of Wisdom, which as we have seen is perfection, i.e., life with God. Thus, St Thomas says that “The fourth thing that pertains to the wisdom of God is perfection, whereby a thing is conserved in its end... The attainment of the end requires preparation, by which whatever is not appropriate to the end is removed; thus Christ too, in order that he might lead us to the end of eternal glory, prepared the medicine of the sacraments, by which the wound of sin is wiped away.”<sup>23</sup> All is prepared by Wisdom for a sacrificial feast of bread and wine, the Holy Eucharist, and the maids whom Wisdom has sent out into the town to gather people in

<sup>22</sup> See Revelation 1:4.

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, *Sentences*, Prologue.

are the Friars Preachers. This gathering function of the preacher is also mentioned in Humbert of Romans although there he used the image of the barking dog, the *Domini canes* who “ought to run here and there devouring souls and gathering them into the Church”.<sup>24</sup> The feast which Wisdom, that is, Christ, has prepared for all people is the Mass, and it is in this feast which is a representation of the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

As St Thomas says: “the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ’s Passion according as a man is made perfect in union with Christ Who suffered”.<sup>25</sup> In this sacrament of the Altar, Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross is represented and the memory of his Passion is renewed. Hence in the capitals around the Altar of Blackfriars church, the symbols of the Passion of Christ are carved; similarly in Leicester’s Priory church of the Holy Cross, symbols of the Passion borne by angels surround the Altar. For the Cross is the ultimate manifestation of God’s wisdom, and a focal point for any preacher and indeed for the church as a house of wisdom. If we would contemplate the wisdom of Christ, then we must look to Christ Crucified for our salvation, and participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. St Paul said: “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18f). The Cross is preached not just in sermons but above all in the action of the Church’s sacred liturgy, the Eucharist, “which is a remembrance of the Passion now past”.<sup>26</sup> St Thomas said that “it was necessary [for our salvation] that there should be at all times among men something to show forth our Lord’s Passion”<sup>27</sup> by which mystery we are saved. This showing forth of the mystery of our salvation in the Mass is thus the most excellent preaching of Christ Crucified for our sakes. Moreover, in the Blessed Sacrament, St Albert the Great says that “the whole Christ is truly contained, with His whole ‘face’ full of graces”<sup>28</sup> extending to all of human life and transfiguring it with the beauty of his living Presence. It is for this living Word that the church exists, and so, it is fitting that the moment one enters Blackfriars church, one’s eye is drawn immediately to the Altar from which this wonderful sacrament is ‘preached’ and the wisdom of God is made manifest to us.

Wisdom, according to St Thomas, is manifest in one who is able to “judge and set in order all things according to Divine rules”.<sup>29</sup> God,

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, Humbert, 52.

<sup>25</sup> ST IIIa, 73, 3.

<sup>26</sup> ST IIIa, 73, 4.

<sup>27</sup> ST IIIa, 73, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Saward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 108.

<sup>29</sup> ST IIa IIae, 45, 1.

of course, does this most simply and perfectly as he is wise. As right ordering is proper to wisdom, we would expect a church that *points* to wisdom to be ordered. We have seen previously that one of the formal requirements of beauty is *consonantia*, which is ‘right proportion’ or ‘harmony’. In St Thomas, this has the idea of proper ordering and fittingness. Therefore, wisdom may be said to be beautiful because it is ordered rightly. This idea is echoed in the alabaster (c.1450) of the Annunciation that adorns the Lady chapel, which bears the inscription: “Decor vitae est in sapientia”. The idea is that one’s life is made beautiful because it is well-ordered by wisdom, i.e., ordered towards God and divine things. This well-ordered life is the fruit of wisdom, and a person who judges well regarding divine things is thus someone whom we call ‘wise’. The church reflects this order and harmony in its use of the Gothic form, which emphasizes symmetry and right proportions. It is also expressed in the ‘functionality’ that we have said is typical of the Dominican church, for by functionality, we mean that something is fit for its purpose or ordered towards its proper end. Conversely, without wisdom, one is rendered ugly and dis-ordered by sin. This is especially vividly portrayed in the Stations of the Cross which depict the Roman soldiers and Pilate as barely human, disfigured and distorted by sin.

The alabaster of Our Lady, which we have mentioned above, is a fitting icon of our reflection thus far, for we see the Father sending the Holy Spirit to Our Lady who is kneeling with an open book of the Scriptures on a lectern. She is turned towards the angel, her hands open in an *orans* position, and her face is serene and sublimely beautiful. Here, the friar encounters the paragon of Christian contemplation, for the Virgin Mary is the one who has received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and ponders the things of God in her heart, so that she gives birth to Divine Wisdom incarnate. Following her example, the preacher aspires to be attentive to the Scriptures and open in prayer to the inspiration of God, so that he too may bring the Word of God to birth in his preaching. Thus the Constitutions of the Order say: “[The Virgin Mary] is an example of meditation on the words of Christ, and of acceptance of one’s mission”<sup>30</sup> Full of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and having given birth to the Wisdom of God, her life and indeed her very being *are* thus beautiful. In contrast to those who are made ugly by sin, Our Lady, who is sinless, is exceedingly beautiful, so that we can sing: “*tota pulchra es Maria*”.

Wisdom, as we have seen, is a gift of the Holy Spirit, ordering us according to wisdom. Thus the Collect for the Mass of the Holy Spirit says: “*da nobis in eodem Spiritu recta sapere . . .*”. The

<sup>30</sup> *The Book of the Constitutions and Ordinations of the Brothers of the Order of Preachers*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2001), 67§2.



Scholastics defined art as “*recta ratio factibilium*”<sup>31</sup>, ‘right reason about things to be made’. The artist, then is one who shapes matter according to reason ordering, making it into a thing of beauty. So, the Holy Spirit may be likened to a divine artist, shaping us with his gifts in the image of Jesus Christ, the Divine Wisdom. St Thomas also says with St Augustine that “‘The Son is sent, whenever He is known and perceived by anyone.’ Now perception implies a certain experimental knowledge; and this is properly called wisdom [*sapientia*]”.<sup>32</sup> As such, to be wise, one must contemplate Christ and come to a knowledge of him, primarily through the Scriptures and the Eucharist. For through the Eucharist “our mind is filled with grace”, and we are given to see the wisdom of God shining from the Cross. The Friar Preacher, then, who seeks to be a wise preacher, following in the footsteps of Christ (whom Dominican tradition says was the first Friar Preacher), must first contemplate the wisdom of God, and having received the gift of wisdom from the Holy Spirit, he can then hand on the fruit of his contemplation as a thing of beauty to others, not least through the witness of his own ordered and grace-filled life, which is indeed like a work of art crafted by the Divine Artist. Hence, Humbert of Romans said that “[The preacher’s] life ought to be a shining light to all men and he should preach to them by word of mouth and, above all, by good example, in the manner described by St Paul: ‘... among these you shine like stars in the world, holding fast the word of life ...’ (Phil 2:15f)”.<sup>33</sup> He also said that “preachers, [like stars], ought to illuminate the earth in the night of this world”.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, stars are a motif carved in various places around the church, *also* as an allusion to St Dominic who was seen in a vision to have a star on his brow; thus St Dominic, the father of the Friars Preachers, is called “*lumen Ecclesiae*”.

This brings us to the final quality of wisdom and of beauty that we shall consider in this essay: *claritas*, which is ‘clarity’ or ‘brightness’. As we have said, Blackfriars church is a bright and spacious place, full of clarity and light. Together with *consonantia* and *integritas*, these three requirements of beauty<sup>35</sup> are found in Blackfriars church, making it a beautiful building. However, light is also an image of wisdom and divine illumination. As the Collect for the Mass of the Holy Spirit puts it: “*Deus, qui corda fidelium Sancti Spiritus illustratione docuisti...*”; we are taught by the light of the Holy Spirit, who gives us wisdom. Moreover, St Thomas explains that the Son, who is Divine Wisdom, is called light. He says: “Since, then,

<sup>31</sup> ST Ia IIae, 57, 4.

<sup>32</sup> ST Ia, 43, 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, Humbert, 38.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> See ST Ia, 39, 8.

the divine Wisdom is called light (for it consists in the pure act of cognition, and the manifestation of light is the brightness proceeding therefrom) the Word of divine Wisdom is named ‘the brightness of light.’<sup>36</sup> Thus, the light and brightness that characterizes Blackfriars church is a symbol of that divine Wisdom which illumines our mind, for which we are seeking, and whom we find in contemplation.

Contemplation, in the Dominican tradition, is closely related to study. Indeed, fr Francisco de Vitoria OP said that “genuine contemplation is reading the bible and the study of true wisdom”.<sup>37</sup> In this statement, Vitoria reminds us that Dominican contemplation is done both in the library and in the church, for as I have tried to show, the church is where we contemplate true wisdom, notably in the sacred liturgy where we encounter Christ, the divine Wisdom. Through the Eucharist, in which the memorial of Christ’s Passion is renewed, we encounter the Wisdom of God and we are given the gift of wisdom, as our minds are illumined and we learn to be wise. Humbert of Romans stresses the importance of prayer in the life of the preacher when he says: “a preacher, therefore, who wishes to benefit his listeners, ought to have recourse above all to prayer”<sup>38</sup>, for he cannot hand on what he does not first receive from God. What we learn in contemplation and study is then handed on in preaching, for this is the purpose of the Friar Preacher. St Thomas draws upon the image (which we have already seen) of the preacher as a light when he thus says: “For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one’s contemplation than merely to contemplate”.<sup>39</sup>

The Dominican church is therefore both a place of contemplation and the place to hand on the fruits of contemplation. In this way, it is also an icon of the Virgin Mary who is the exemplar and model of one who has both contemplated the Word of God and preached the Word, giving birth to Jesus Christ. Dominican tradition holds that “the Virgin Mother of all love both cherishes with a special affection and watches over this Order which she has founded”<sup>40</sup>, and so the sons of St Dominic look to her with filial devotion, and make their Profession to her, the Mother of all Preachers. Moreover, as we have seen, the Dominican church is a preaching hall in which the wisdom of God is celebrated, sought, received, and preached. The priory church of the Holy Spirit in Oxford follows in a long tradition of Dominican churches dating to the earliest days of the Order which

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, 12, from <<http://www.op-stjoseph.org/Students/study/thomas/ContraGentiles.htm>>.

<sup>37</sup> Murray, *Preachers at Prayer* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2003), 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.*, Humbert, 36.

<sup>39</sup> ST IIa IIae, 188, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Conway (ed.), *Lives of the Brethren* (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1955), 36.

have served the Order of Friars Preachers in this way. It is the place *par excellence* where the friar can follow fr Bede Jarrett's advice: "Practise now while you can that art of looking for God which is the art of the saints; we only find Him when He shows Himself. That's His doing, ours is the search".<sup>41</sup> If one thus seeks wisdom *in the house of wisdom*, then one shall find that, as Solomon said: "I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:7). Hence, both the vocation of the Friar Preacher and this church of the Friars Preachers will have achieved their proper end, i.e., to be ordered towards "preaching and the salvation of souls".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Op. cit.*, *Letters of Bede Jarrett*, 149.

<sup>42</sup> Fundamental Constitution of the Order of Friars Preachers, §II, from <[http://www.dominicans.ie/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=27](http://www.dominicans.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=27)>.