

# Diabolical Doubt: The Peculiar Account of Brother Bernard's Demonic Possession in Jordan of Saxony's *Libellus*

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*Jordan of Saxony's Libellus, first produced in 1233, has struck scholars as an unwieldy combination of hagiography and early Dominican history. Compounding its somewhat awkward nature are its various jumps in chronology and idiosyncratic biographical asides. Perhaps the most idiosyncratic of them all is Jordan's lengthy account of Brother Bernard's demonic possession. While this account provides the setting for the institution of the Dominican custom of chanting the Salve Regina after compline, it is difficult to see at first glance what benefit the story as told would have had for Jordan's audience. Upon closer inspection, however, some method appears in the madness. From a pedagogical point of view – the Libellus is described in the mid-thirteenth-century *Vitas fratrum* as a journal Jordan read to novices in Paris – the revelation of Jordan's various attempts at identifying the demon's wiles suggests a master willing to allow his students to witness his own doubts about how to proceed. Furthermore, the possessed brother shows a remarkable capacity to imitate ideals central to Dominican identity, in so far as Jordan reveals such ideals in his Libellus: a master of theology, a charismatic preacher and a prospective saint. This essay offers a close analysis of this perplexing narrative, describing the significance of the various demonic phenomena and Jordan's reactions to them, and reflecting on the pedagogical implications of the portrayal of Jordan's uncertainty.*

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In Sabina Flanagan's recent study on doubt in 'the Long Twelfth Century', she reflects on the paradoxical capacity of uncertainty to engender confidence.<sup>1</sup> While medieval authors generally sought to eliminate doubt from their texts, Flanagan highlights the 'Doubting Thomas' episode in the Gospel of John (20: 24–31) as a rare example in which doubt is praised in medieval sources for its positive

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<sup>1</sup> Sabina Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith: Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century* (Turnhout, 2008), 12–13, 143–4.

contribution to belief.<sup>2</sup> Thomas's unbelief is interpreted as a providential opportunity to demonstrate certainty. In this case, potential doubts about the resurrection are pre-emptively answered for the gospel's audience. Doubt – albeit in a controlled environment – is employed for the sake of greater certitude. Here I shall discuss how Jordan of Saxony (d. 1237), master general of the Order of Preachers, uses uncertainty in a similar capacity in the concluding narrative of his *Libellus*. This otherwise peculiar account of Brother Bernard's demonic possession provides a setting in which doubt is employed pedagogically to engender confidence in the order's mission.

Jordan probably produced the first redaction of the *Libellus* in the spring of 1233.<sup>3</sup> In the prologue (§§1–3), he explains that it was written to satisfy the many brothers who desired an account of the origins of the order's institutions and its first friars. The *Libellus* appeared amid a surge of devotion to the cult of Dominic of Caleruega (d. 1221) that would lead to the translation of his bones within the church of St Nicholas of the Vineyards, Bologna, in May 1233 and his canonization in August 1234. Taking this context into account, scholars have been perplexed by the text's peculiar combination of early Dominican history, hagiographical tropes and biographical asides.<sup>4</sup> Most peculiar of all is Jordan's decision to conclude the *Libellus*, not with a laudatory passage on Dominic's great example for the brothers, but with an episode centred on Jordan's encounter with another brother, Bernard, and the demon that possessed him (§§110–20).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>3</sup> The standard edition is *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. Heribert Christian Scheeben, Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica [hereafter: MOPH] 16 (Rome, 1935), 1–88. Translations of this text, and all others, are my own. For recent discussions relating to the date of the production of the *Libellus*, see Simon Tugwell, 'Notes on the Life of St Dominic', *AFP* 68 (1998), 1–116, at 5–33; Giulia Barone, 'Il *Libellus* de initio Ordinis fratrum Praedicatorum e lo sviluppo dell'Ordine nel primo cinquantennio', in *Domenico de Caleruega e la nascita dell'Ordine dei frati Predicatori. Atti del XXI convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 10–12 ottobre 2004* (Spoleto, 2005), 431–40; Luigi Canetti, 'La Datazione del *Libellus* di Giordano di Sassonia', in Giovanni Bertuzzi, ed., *L'origine dell'Ordine dei predicatori e l'Università di Bologna* (Bologna, 2006), 176–93; Achim Wesjohann, *Mendikantische Gründungserzählungen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Mythen als Element institutioneller Eigengeschichtsschreibung der mittelalterlichen Franziskaner, Dominikaner und Augustiner-Eremiten*, Vita regularis 49 (Berlin, 2012), 372–84.

<sup>4</sup> Most notably Heribert Christian Scheeben, 'Der literarische Nachlass Jordans von Sachsen', *Historisches Jahrbuch im Auftrag der Görres-Gesellschaft* 52 (1932), 56–71, at 61–2; C. N. L. Brooke, 'St Dominic and his First Biographer', *TRHS* 5th ser. 17 (1967), 23–40, at 24–6; Tugwell, 'Notes', 11.

Simon Tugwell has suggested that the odd conclusion to the text is indicative of the rushed and unfinished nature of its composition.<sup>5</sup> With the important exception of Jordan's encomium to his deceased friend Henry of Cologne (d. c.1225–9?), the majority of the events mentioned in the *Libellus* occurred no later than 1221.<sup>6</sup> This gives the impression that the text was initially something akin to a journal, in which Jordan recorded some of the order's earliest memories.<sup>7</sup> He seems, however, to have been motivated as much by pedagogy as by posterity.<sup>8</sup> In the *Vitas fratrum*, a mid-thirteenth-century collection of Dominican stories, Gerald de Frachet (d. 1271) recalls that he had been present when Jordan read from his *Libellus* to Dominican novices in Paris.<sup>9</sup> As the overarching purpose of the *Libellus* was – at least in part – to benefit recent entrants into the order through a recollection of its past (§§2–3, 109), it is reasonable to conclude that Jordan was employing the story to teach the novices about what he thought it meant to be a member of the Order of Preachers.

Most helpfully for present purposes, what Jordan read on that occasion was none other than the culminating sequence of the Brother Bernard narrative (§§116–18), in which the demon's deceits are finally overthrown by means of divine intervention.

Gerald must have gone back to the official rendering of the *Libellus* to recollect the story, as much of his account follows the text verbatim. However, it is striking that all references in the original

<sup>5</sup> Tugwell, 'Notes', 19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 18–23. See Canetti, 'La Datazione', 178–9; Simon Tugwell, *Pelagius Parvus and his 'Summa': A Preliminary Enquiry and a Sample of Texts*, Dissertationes historicae 34 (Rome, 2012), 172–3. As Tugwell has pointed out, the account of the translation of Dominic's bones in 1233 that Scheeben appends to his edition of the *Libellus* (§§121–30) is not part of the original text: 'Notes', 8 n. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Barone, 'Il Libellus', 439.

<sup>8</sup> John Van Engen, 'Dominic and the Brothers: *Vitae* as life-forming *Exempla* in the Order of Preachers', in Kent Emery Jr and Joseph Wawrykow, eds, *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans: Representations of Christ in the Texts and Images of the Order of Preachers* (Notre Dame, IN, 1998), 7–25, at 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Vitas fratrum* 3.33 (B.-M. Reichert, ed., *Vitae Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum necnon Cronica Fratrum Ordinis ab anno MCCIII usque MCCLIV*, ed. B.-M. Reichert, MOPH 1 [Rome, 1896], 1–320, at 126). Despite Reichert's use of the title *Vitae fratrum*, this collection originally circulated as *Vitas fratrum*. For a brief reconstruction of its convoluted manuscript tradition, see Simon Tugwell, 'L'évolution des *vitae fratrum*. Résumé des conclusions provisoires', *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 36 (2001), 415–18; idem, ed., *Miracula sancti Dominici mandato magistri Berengarii collecta. Petri Calo legendae sancti Dominici*, MOPH 26 (Rome, 1997), 32–9. On the basis of his ongoing reconstruction, Tugwell identifies Gerald as being responsible for this particular story: personal communication, 19 November 2014.

text to Jordan's self-doubt are conspicuously absent from Gerald's account. For instance, Gerald's recollection jumps from Jordan's description of a sweetness that seemed to permeate the latter's bones to a request that God would reveal its origins, entirely bypassing Jordan's original admission that he had been stupefied (*stupefactus*) and dismayed (*percussus*) by the phenomenon (§118). By omitting Jordan's uncertainty in the face of demonic falsehood, Gerald's rendition becomes but one of many stories, repeated with verve by a number of mid-thirteenth-century Dominican authors, which display Jordan's confident engagement in spiritual warfare.<sup>10</sup> For our purposes, however, Gerald's narrative provides two important insights: Jordan had used the original story to instruct novices and Gerald appears to have omitted all reference to Jordan's doubt in his revision of the story.

The story of Brother Bernard's possession is set shortly after Jordan's account of Dominic's death in early August 1221. We find Jordan on the road to Bologna in order to fulfil his newly appointed role as prior provincial of Lombardy. Upon arriving at the convent, Jordan discovers Brother Bernard. Possessed and tormented by the fiercest demon, the friar was being harassed by horrible frenzies and disturbing his brothers beyond all measure. Jordan explains that God, 'in his divine mercy, had undoubtedly provided that trouble to produce endurance in his servants'.<sup>11</sup>

Jordan's explanation, with its allusion to Romans 5: 3 ('but we also boast in our tribulations, knowing that trouble produces endurance'), informs his text's audience that no matter what takes place in the narrative, they may be certain not only of its divine sanction but also of its providential purpose. This explanation also makes clear that Jordan himself had no doubt about how to interpret the narrative. This helps to enforce an important distinction in the episode between Jordan-as-narrator, who in an assured manner interprets the events as they are happening, and Jordan-as-protagonist, who grows increasingly uncertain as the demon's machinations become more

<sup>10</sup> See *Vitas fratrum* 3.28–34 (ed. Reichert, 122–8); Thomas de Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus* 2.19.2, 2.57.46 (ed. George Colvener, 2 vols in 1 [Chantilly, 1627], 569–70, 572–80); Étienne de Bourbon, *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus* §§188, 189, 229 (*Anecdotes historiques. Légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Etienne de Bourbon*, ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche [Paris, 1872], 101–2, 164–5, 197).

<sup>11</sup> '[Q]uam tribulationem haud dubium operande patientie servorum suorum misericordia divina providerat': *Libellus* §110.

sophisticated. Doubt in this text is employed within a controlled environment.

Jordan continues the story with an explanation of how the possession came to be (§111). He relates that Bernard told him that he had been so tormented by the sorrow of his sins that it was suggested to his heart that, as a form of purgation, he should seek demonic possession. Although Bernard's mind was initially revolted by the proposition, he finally gave his assent, and with God's permission he was immediately assailed by a demonic spirit. The demon began a series of trials, but not initially by means of the frenzies Jordan first described. Instead, the narrative reveals a strategy in which the demon fabricates ideals central to the identity of the order – the theologian, the preacher and even the prospective saint – in order to lead the community into falsehood.

Jordan recounts that, through the brother's mouth, the demon 'vomited out ... many marvellous things, including such profound opinions concerning the Holy Scriptures that they might deservedly be considered utterances praiseworthy enough to rival those of Augustine'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Bernard uttered these even though he was unskilled in theology and ignorant of the Bible. In effect, the possessed brother played the part of a *magister theologiae*.

The demon's eloquence was not exceptional. Barbara Newman has drawn attention to a variety of thirteenth-century *exempla* that record demoniacs expounding upon theological subjects despite their lack of learning.<sup>13</sup> For instance, in the *Dialogus miraculorum* of Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. c.1240), there is a story of a possessed woman who, despite being illiterate, pointed out the phrase in the missal that bound 'her master' in hell.<sup>14</sup> Caesarius reports that this miraculous event was a source of great edification to the woman's audience.<sup>15</sup> In Jordan's account, however, the demon plays a more devious role – one characteristic of an ancient Christian tradition, in which demons seek to undermine the devotion of the holy by means of pretended

<sup>12</sup> 'Multa miranda per os eiusdem demon euomuit. Interdum quoque, licet obsessus ille non foret in theologia peritus et sanctarum velut inscius scripturarum, adeo tamen per os eius profundas de scripturis sanctis eliciebat sententias ut huiusmodi etiam per Augustinum edita laudabilia merito censerentur': *Libellus* §112.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Newman, 'Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century', *Speculum* 73 (1998), 733–70, at 749–53.

<sup>14</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum* 1.5.13 (ed. Josephus Strange, 2 vols [Cologne, 1851], 292).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

holiness.<sup>16</sup> In this case the demon's false 'holiness' has a distinctly Dominican resonance, playing upon theology's central role within the order.

By 1221, the order had already established a theological presence within the university milieu in Bologna.<sup>17</sup> By 1231, they would have two chairs of theology in Paris and one in Oxford. Jordan himself had been a bachelor of theology at Paris and had received many students into the order as a result of his recruiting efforts at the university.<sup>18</sup> In fact, we can claim with some confidence that the majority of the novices to whom Jordan read his story in Gerald's account were, or had been, arts students, probably still in their teens, who were now being directed toward theological studies.<sup>19</sup> Brother Bernard, however, was unskilled in such matters (§112), which is what made his behaviour so striking. The demon made it appear as if Bernard had fulfilled the highest calling a friar could accomplish through study: to become a master of theology. It would have been a master's prerogative, beyond even that of the convent's doctor of theology, to give an authoritative theological opinion (*sententia*) and to ascertain a truth not open to all, but hidden below the surface of a text (*profunda*).<sup>20</sup> That the possessed did this in a manner consonant with Augustine is particularly worthy of note, for Augustine was not only the authority behind the Dominicans' rule, but also the foremost patristic authority in Latin theology.

Jordan-as-protagonist, however, is not fooled by this first trial. He sees through the falsehood by drawing attention to the brother's pride. Jordan-as-narrator explains that Bernard gloried greatly in himself whenever anyone lent an ear, which incidentally reveals that some did listen. Indeed, he records that on one occasion the possessed

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2003), 12–14. For an early example, see, in this volume, Charlotte Methuen, "The very deceitfulness of devils": Firmilian and the Doubtful Baptisms of a Woman possessed by Demons", 50–66.

<sup>17</sup> M. Michèle Mulchahey, 'The Dominicans' Studium at Bologna and its Relationship with the University in the Thirteenth Century', *Memorie Domenicane* 39 (2008), 17–30, at 23–4.

<sup>18</sup> *Vitas fratrum* 3.11–13 (ed. Reichert, 108–10).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 3.42 (ed. Reichert, 141). See M. Michèle Mulchahey, 'First the Bow is Bent in Study ...': *Dominican Education before 1350* (Toronto, ON, 1998), 54–9; William A. Hinnebusch, *The Early English Friars Preachers* (Rome, 1951), 266.

<sup>20</sup> See Monika Asztalos, 'The Faculty of Theology', in Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, ed., *A History of the University in Europe, 1: Universities in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2003), 409–41, at 410–11; Mulchahey, 'First the Bow', 39–40.

offered him a contract: if Jordan were to stop preaching, he would cease being a trial to the brothers (§113).<sup>21</sup> Jordan recounts his own self-assured response: ‘God forbid that I would enter into a pact with death or make a treaty with hell! Despite your intent, the brothers will benefit from your trials and will grow strong toward a life of grace, because trial is the life of men upon the earth.’<sup>22</sup> Jordan’s retort appears to draw from Gregory the Great’s tropological interpretation of Job 7: 1 (‘[Trial] is the life of man upon the earth’), where ‘trial’ (*tentatio*) is understood to refer to spiritual warfare.<sup>23</sup> But while the reply is ostensibly directed toward the demon, it is clearly intended for the benefit of the text’s audience. It demonstrates the master’s confidence in the face of demonic attack and his intent to reinforce the spiritual significance of the order’s mission. The message appears to have been well received. We find it repeated in Étienne de Bourbon’s *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus* (1250–61) and in the *Vitas fratrum*, albeit without any mention of the demon’s mimesis or of Jordan’s later doubts.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Jordan’s confidence, the demon continued to spread his wickedness in the brothers’ hearts (*in cordibus nostris*, lit. ‘our hearts’) by means of his false words (§114). Here too the demon struck at something integral to the Dominican community: the rule’s apostolic exhortation for the brothers ‘to live in perfect unity in one heart’.<sup>25</sup> And so Jordan confronts the demon a second time, demanding to know why the demon had redoubled his efforts even though the brothers were aware of his intentions. The demon offers a spirited rejoinder: ‘It is I who am aware of your falsehood! For the moment you reject and condemn what I offer you, but after a while, my wicked devices will trip you up so easily that you will receive it

<sup>21</sup> I have chosen to translate *tentatio* as ‘trial’, but its other meaning, ‘temptation’, is equally valid in this setting, i.e. a temptation to depart from the right path. For the use of *tentatio* in the second sense see the Vulgate of Matt. 6: 13; 1 Tim. 6: 9.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Absit ut fedus cum morte ineam aut pactum faciam cum inferno. Tuis temptationibus te nolente fratres proficient et ad uitam gratie conualescent, quia tentatio est uita hominis super terram’: *Libellus* §113.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob* 8.6 (CChr.SL 143, 385). Note that the usual reading of the biblical text is *militia*, not *tentatio*. Gregory explicitly prioritizes the older reading *tentatio* in his moral interpretation of the text.

<sup>24</sup> Étienne de Bourbon, *Tractatus* §118 (ed. de la Marche, 101–2); *Vitas fratrum*, 3.30 (ed. Reichert, 124).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Primum, propter quod in unum estis congregati, ut unanimes habitetis in domo et sit vobis anima una et cor unum in Deum’: *Regula sancti Augustini* 1.2 (L. Verheijen, *La Règle de Saint Augustin*, 1: *Tradition manuscrite* [Paris, 1967], 417).

with joy!<sup>26</sup> Jordan now breaks from the narrative to address his text's audience. With an allusion to Ephesians 6: 10–17, he instructs 'soldiers in Christ' to take heed, as they are not fighting against flesh and blood but against the spirits of wickedness. They should learn from the unflagging assiduity of their enemies to continue in their fervour and to avoid any inclination to laziness.<sup>27</sup>

The exhortation to learn and to persevere would have resonated powerfully with an audience of novices, seated before their master. They had just been told of the demon's strategy and its effects. They had observed Jordan's steadfast confidence in the face of demonic opposition and the demon's equally steadfast determination to continue until even the master was led into falsehood. The novices are challenged to learn from the master's story. Will they persevere on the path they have chosen, or will they grow lazy and prove vulnerable to the demon's deceptions?

Thus far, Jordan-as-narrator has described a demon capable of imitating a master of theology. Next, we find the demon adding to his repertoire by playing the part of a gifted preacher (§115). It sometimes occurred, Jordan relates, that the possessed friar 'used such effective language as if in the manner of preaching'.<sup>28</sup> By means of his way of speaking and his piety, he 'drew abundant tears from the hearts of those who heard him'.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, and to add a further dimension to the deceit, Jordan says that sometimes the sweetest aromas, beyond all human invention, would imbue the possessed.

Once again, the demon's behaviour is not exceptional. Other thirteenth-century *exempla* also describe demoniacs preaching sermons of impeccable orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the origins of these stories, Newman notes that they function primarily as a form of clerical self-criticism, which acts to reinforce the pastoral and homiletic expectations emerging in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>31</sup> A

<sup>26</sup> 'Et ego cognoui figmentum tuum. Quod semel oblatum tibi respuis et contempnis tandem mea supplantatus improbitate facile et gratanter admittes': *Libellus* §114.

<sup>27</sup> '[D]iscant ex ipsorum hostium sedulitate continua, suum e contra continuare fervorem et vitare spiritus in se torpentis ignaviam': *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> '[T]am efficacibus utebatur velut in modum predicationis sermonibus': *Libellus* §115.

<sup>29</sup> '[U]beres elicuerit lacrimas de cordibus auditorum': *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Newman, 'Possessed', 753–62; cf. Aviad M. Kleinberg, 'The Possession of Blessed Jordan of Saxony', in Miri Rubin, ed., *Medieval Christianity in Practice* (Oxford, 2009), 265–73, at 271.

<sup>31</sup> Newman, 'Possessed', 755, 768.



representative example is found in Jacques de Vitry's *Historia occidentalis*, where a German demoniac preaches the truth of the gospel in order to demonstrate the local clergy's incompetence.<sup>32</sup> The point of Jacques's story is clear: it is to chasten inept ecclesiastics so that they might better fulfil their pastoral role. Jordan's purpose, in contrast, is more to exhort than to criticize.

For a Dominican, preaching was not simply a function, but a gift of special grace that had to be identified by the superiors of any prospective preacher.<sup>33</sup> The portrait of Henry of Cologne, found earlier in Jordan's *Libellus*, powerfully illustrates its significance: 'This is brother Henry on whom the Lord lavished a great and wonderful grace in regard to his preaching to the clerics of Paris, whose living and effective speech most violently penetrated the hearts of those who heard it.'<sup>34</sup> Henry's abilities as a preacher were consonant with his holy behaviour. Jordan recounts his manifold virtues: obedience, patience, meekness and charity, amongst others (§78). In fact, Jordan's laudatory exposition of Henry's word and example, and the substantial attention he devotes to him in the *Libellus*, suggests that Henry is being held up as an exemplar.<sup>35</sup> It is all the more remarkable, then, that the example of this 'angel' – as Jordan refers to Henry – is so successfully imitated by the demon that possesses Brother Bernard.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the false preacher appears to mislead at least a portion of his audience. Jordan recounts that those who heard him were brought to tears, an expression of devotion that the *Libellus* otherwise associates with Dominic (§§12, 105), Henry (§74) or the brothers' response to the antiphon *Salve Regina* (§120). But it is not only profound theology and pious preaching – and the genuine devotion that they produce – that are within the demon's grasp; so too is the appearance of sanctity.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques de Vitry, *Historia occidentalis* 5 (*The Historia occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry: A Critical Edition*, ed. John F. Hinnebusch [Fribourg, 1972], 86–7).

<sup>33</sup> Simon Tugwell, 'The Evolution of Dominican Structures of Government III: The Early Development of the Second Distinction of the Constitutions', *AFP* 71 (2001), 5–182, at 107–9.

<sup>34</sup> 'Hic est frater Henricus, cui multam atque mirabilem in verbo suo ad clerum Parisiensem dominus largitus est gratiam, cuius sermo vivus et efficax audientium corda violentissime penetrabat': *Libellus* §77.

<sup>35</sup> *Libellus* §§66–85; see Grado Giovanni Merlo, 'Gli inizi dell'Ordine dei Predicatori. Spunti per una riconsiderazione', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 31 (1995), 415–41, at 438–9.

<sup>36</sup> *Libellus* §§67, 74, 78.

Up to this point, Jordan-as-protagonist has remained unconvinced. He has confronted the demon, even if he has not been able to repel him. Indeed, he does not seem formally to have tried, as there is no description of an exorcism in his account. However, in the second part of the episode (§116, which Gerald later revised for the *Vitas fratrum*) the demon's plan to undermine Jordan's confidence finally succeeds, and it is here that the full depth of the protagonist's uncertainty is revealed.

Jordan-as-narrator explains to his audience that the demon covered the possessed brother with a sweet fragrance so that it seemed as if an angel – and not a demon – was responsible. When the fragrance then surrounded Jordan, the demon intended him to mistake it as a sign of his own sanctity rather than a diabolical concoction. And so, just as planned, when the sweetness appeared, Jordan was at a loss: 'Confused, and in great uncertainty, I was distrustful of its merits. Yet still I was hesitating, unsure of how I should proceed. Surrounded by the wonderful fragrance, I scarcely dared to extract my hands [from my sleeves], afraid to lose that sweetness, which I did not yet understand.'<sup>37</sup> Jordan-as-narrator goes on to explain that one day, when he was carrying the chalice in preparation for the mass, this same sweetness so enveloped him that he felt overwhelmed by its power. But, he explains, the 'spirit of truth' soon put a stop to the 'spirit of malice' (§118).

Jordan recalls that he began reading Psalm 34, which, he notes instructively, is effective for repelling trials.<sup>38</sup> He was ruminating on the line (v. 10), 'All my bones will declare, Lord, who is like you?', when suddenly such a sweetness enveloped him that it appeared to permeate through to the marrow of his bones. Jordan was initially uncertain (*incertus*), then stupefied (*stupefactus*) and dismayed (*perculsus*). He prayed that the Lord would come to his aid and show him whether this was the demon's work, for like the poor man (quoting

<sup>37</sup> '[E]go multa perplexus ambiguitate diffidebam quidem de meritis, sed tamen hesitabam incertus quocumque pergerem mira circumfusus fragrantia uix ipsas manus audebam extrahere ueritus eam de qua nondum conscius eram mihi perdere suauitatem': *Libellus* §117. In Gerald's rendering, Jordan hides his hands (*ipse manus suas absconderet*), presumably in his sleeves, which helps to clarify what Jordan means when he recalls that he 'scarcely dared to uncover (his) hands': *Vitas fratrum* 3.33 (ed. Reichert, 126). I have rendered *qua nondum conscius eram* as 'which I did not yet understand', rather than the more literal 'of which I was not yet aware', as it reflects the sense of Jordan's explanation better.

<sup>38</sup> 'Iudica domine nocentes me': Ps. 34: 1 (references to the Psalms follow the Vulgate numbering); see John Cassian, *Conferences* 7.21 (SC 42, 264).

Ps. 71: 12) he had no other helper.<sup>39</sup> However, Jordan informs his audience, as soon as he finished praying, ‘[i]nwardly I received such a great enlightenment of spirit and, through an infusion of truth, such indisputable proof that I was completely secure, that I had no doubt (*nihil ambigerem*) whatsoever that all these things were the fabrications of the deceitful enemy.’<sup>40</sup> Jordan then informed (*certum fecissem*, lit. ‘made him certain’) the possessed brother about this diabolical trial.<sup>41</sup> Immediately, the aromas ceased, and so too did the demon’s mellifluous words. In their place, Brother Bernard began saying evil and shameful things and, when asked why, responded that there was no longer any point in pretending. Thus ends the peculiar account of the possession of Brother Bernard.

We have observed a demon capable of manifesting Dominican ideals by offering profound theological exposition and inspiring sermons. We have also seen how some of his audience – probably Bernard’s brother friars – were unaware of the falsehood. What is the implication? Is Jordan suggesting that the fulfilment of these Dominican ideals does not necessarily provide a reliable indication of a good and faithful friar, let alone of God’s inspiration and blessing? How would a novice be able to discern the falsehood of a theologian or preacher? What if even the manifestation of sanctity – otherwise held to be a sure indication of God’s blessing on the order – was a diabolic ruse?

Jordan-as-narrator had explained to his audience that the demon had intended Jordan-as-protagonist to presume his own sanctity. A friar familiar with Cassian’s *Conferences* would know that a monk could often be tempted to cultivate a misguided belief in his own holiness.<sup>42</sup> Presumption, then, is certainly a concern. But, as with the demon’s other strategies, it appears that something more directly relevant to the order is also intended. Within the opening paragraphs of the *Libellus*, Jordan describes Dominic as having been pervaded since his childhood by an odour of sanctity (§5). Indeed, amongst Dominic’s

<sup>39</sup> ‘[Q]uia eruet pauperem a potente et inopem cui non est adiutor’: Ps. 71: 12.

<sup>40</sup> ‘[T]antum recepi spiritus illustrationem intrinsecus et tam indubitatum per infusam veritatem plene securitatis indicium, ut iam omnino nihil ambigerem cuncta haec fraudulentis hostis exitisse fragmenta’: *Libellus* §118.

<sup>41</sup> ‘[F]ratrem illum certum de diabolica tentatione fecissem’: *Libellus* §119.

<sup>42</sup> Jordan refers to Cassian’s *Conferences* as a book Dominic valued highly: *Libellus* §13. For examples detailing the dangers of presumptive holiness, see Cassian, *Conferences* 2.2, 2.5 (SC 42, 112–14, 116–17).

fellow canons in Osma, his manner of life was held to be like ‘sweet-smelling frankincense in the days of summer’ (§12).<sup>43</sup> As it stands in the text, the parallel between Dominic’s odour and the demon’s fragrance is strongly suggestive, but this power of association could veer toward provocation when we consider that the *Libellus* was probably issued during the General Chapter in 1233, when Dominic’s tomb was opened and the witnesses described their wonder – and their relief – when Dominic’s corpse was found to emit a marvellous fragrance.<sup>44</sup>

Luigi Canetti has suggested that the episode of Brother Bernard’s possession was told with Dominic’s cult in mind.<sup>45</sup> But if Jordan were attempting to vouch for the authenticity of Dominic’s sanctity on the basis of the sweet fragrance at his tomb, demonstrating that a demon was capable of fabricating such aromas would seem a strange way to do it. Rather than being directed toward the cult of Dominic, then, we might better understand the quandary if we continue to follow the logic of Jordan’s narrative. To the false theologian and false preacher, we may add, finally, the false saint.

In Jordan’s account it is his own sanctity, not Dominic’s, which is being doubted. Indeed, it is Jordan who is doing the doubting. The candid evocation of his own uncertainty is remarkable. One wonders how his audience of novices might have responded. The *Vitas fratrum* includes a variety of stories, many of which involve Jordan, in which novices experience significant opposition, both spiritual and temporal, upon entering the Order of Preachers.<sup>46</sup> The *Libellus*, too, describes the initial consternation of the devout man and his two friends who had trained Henry of Cologne when they learned he had entered an order about which they knew nothing (§76). Had it not been for a divine word, spoken to them while they prayed, one of them would have gone to Paris in order to bring Henry back and divert him from his indiscretion.<sup>47</sup> Many Dominican novices, especially those drawn

<sup>43</sup> ‘[Q]uasi thus redolens in diebus estatis’: *Libellus* §12.

<sup>44</sup> *Litterae Encyclicae 1234*, §§8–10 (*B. Iordanis de Saxonia, Litterae encyclicae anni 1233 et 1234 datae*, ed. Elio Montanari [Spoleto, 1993], 259–60); Angelus Walz, ed., *Acta canonizationis S. Dominici*, MOPH 16 (Rome, 1935), 89–194, at 130–2, 135–6. On the probable confirmation of the *Libellus* by the General Chapter in 1233, see Tugwell, ‘Notes’, 12–13.

<sup>45</sup> Luigi Canetti, *L’invenzione della memoria. Il culto e l’immagine di Domenico nella storia dei primi frati Predicatori* (Spoleto, 1996), 309–20.

<sup>46</sup> *Vitas fratrum* 2.21, 3.18, 3.42, 4.7, 5.17 (ed. Reichert, 81, 114–15, 143–4, 168, 201–5).

<sup>47</sup> ‘[V]adens Parisius ipsum ad hac indiscretionem, ut videbatur, averteret atque retraheret’: *Libellus* §76.

from the universities, would have found themselves in a similar position: their parents or benefactors would have had higher hopes for them than their entry into a recently founded religious order devoted to poverty and preaching.<sup>48</sup> It was in this uncertain environment that questions of doubt and certainty would have been felt most acutely.

In the concluding narrative of the *Libellus*, doubt is diabolical in origin. This is made emphatic by way of contrast. In the culminating sequence, God is the source for Jordan's indisputable proof, while the demon's aromas are the cause of Jordan's uncertainty. Throughout the narrative, what ought to be certain is made uncertain through demonic deceit. The demon systematically fabricates the ideals in which a Dominican might find his identity: the theologian, the preacher, and even the prospective saint, all for the sake of leading the brothers into falsehood. Even Jordan-as-protagonist, after an assured beginning, is at a loss. And yet, this all takes place within a controlled environment. The master, vindicated, is telling the story and a broader pedagogical strategy is at work. From the beginning, Jordan explains that the demonic possession was granted by divine mercy to prove the brothers' endurance. It is a point he reiterates, both in his rejoinder to the demon and in his exhortation that the brothers not slacken in their fervour against the attacks of the enemy. Indeed, Jordan tells them that they must learn from these attacks. But what are they to learn?

The short answer is that they must endure, even in the midst of uncertainty. If they fail to do so their demonic opponents will take advantage of their spiritual torpor and lead them into falsehood. If they continue faithfully and pray for assistance, as Jordan does in the narrative, even the most convincing deceit will be overcome by divine intervention. But beyond this lesson there is yet a further point being made, and here it is worth returning once more to those novices in Paris. Perhaps they were unsure of their choice; perhaps they were facing opposition from their parents and benefactors. In this uncertain setting, the master suffuses their decision to enter the order with profound spiritual significance. Demons are determined to undermine it. God is determined to uphold it. If they fail to continue with

<sup>48</sup> See *Vitas fratrum* 3.14 (ed. Reichert, 110–11); C. H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (London, 2013), 127. The opposition of Thomas Aquinas's parents to their son's choice of vocation is perhaps the most famous example of this phenomenon: see Guillelmo de Tocco, *Vita s. Thomae Aquinatis* 7–9, in D. Prümmer, ed., *Fontes vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis notis historicis et criticis illustrati*, fasc. 2 (Toulouse, 1911), 71–3.

total commitment, they will prove susceptible to diabolic machinations. If they endure, God will be their security. It is no wonder then that the account of Brother Bernard concludes with the chant, at compline, of the *Salve Regina*, an antiphon designed to stir up fervour among the brethren and to ensure divine favour (§120).

In the last analysis, the episode is perhaps not quite so peculiar after all. Jordan told the story to novices in Paris, and so it is clear that he intended it to contribute to their vocational formation. In this respect it is consistent with the intent of the *Libellus* to benefit recent entrants into the order through a recollection of its past. Jordan assured the brothers that God intended the episode to produce endurance, but what proves remarkably germane to his pedagogical purposes is the role of doubt. The demon's partially effective fabrication of Dominican ideals and Jordan's candid admission of uncertainty are employed, however paradoxically, to engender confidence in the Dominican vocation. Indeed, Jordan's divine deliverance at the narrative's height provides the surety. In this respect then, the master's account of the demoniac, like others found in contemporary *exempla*, has essentially 'dramatized the eternal warfare between God and Satan ... and provided reassuring proof that God was winning'.<sup>49</sup> Newman has interpreted many of these demoniac accounts, especially those dealing with preaching, confession and the eucharist, as serving ultimately to confirm the pastoral agenda of the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>50</sup> Jordan, it would seem, is more interested in securing the brothers' total commitment to the Dominican order. The episode illustrates that they can be certain that the order is doing God's work, that it is a 'secure path of salvation' (§69). Doubt may ultimately be the work of the devil, but it has its uses.

Gerald de Frachet, in contrast, seems to have had little use for doubt in his rendition of Jordan's narrative in the *Vitas fratrum*.<sup>51</sup> As noted above, he removes from the *Libellus* all traces of Jordan's uncertainty, and also passes over the demon's initial success. Perhaps Gerald, or Master General Humbert of Romans (d. 1277), who oversaw the creation of the *Vitas fratrum*, was embarrassed by Jordan's admission of doubt.<sup>52</sup> It is more probable, however, that Gerald omitted

<sup>49</sup> Newman, 'Possession', 768.

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

<sup>51</sup> *Vitas fratrum* 3.33 (ed. Reichert, 126).

<sup>52</sup> Humbert, in particular, seems to have suppressed names and edited stories in the work because they could have proved controversial or embarrassing: see Tugwell, 'L'Évolution',

uncertainty from the narrative because his version of the story was intended to contribute to a portrait of Jordan's sanctity and thus served a rather different purpose.

On the whole, the *Vitas fratrum* was designed to function in a similar manner to the *Libellus*. Humbert explains in his prologue that the stories of past friars compiled and edited therein were offered for the consolation and spiritual progress of present and future brethren.<sup>53</sup> That having been said, however, the portrait of Jordan that emerges in the *Vitas fratrum* is tantamount to that of a prospective saint. Jordan receives substantially more attention than either Dominic or Peter of Verona (d. 1252), who at the time of the text's composition and its subsequent revisions (1255–60) were the order's only saints.<sup>54</sup> In the third part of the *Vitas fratrum*, which is devoted entirely to Jordan, he is introduced as a 'holy and remarkable father', a 'mirror of all religious observances and an example of every virtue'.<sup>55</sup> Various and lively accounts of Jordan's virtues, visions and miracles populate the work as a whole.<sup>56</sup> Gerald's portrait of Jordan's sanctity is consistent with the notion that the order had once considered initiating a canonization process for the late master.<sup>57</sup> Jordan could well have been the order's second saint, had Peter of Verona not been martyred in 1252 and swiftly canonized by Pope Innocent IV the fol-

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417; idem, ed., *Humberti de Romanis Legendae sancti Dominici*, MOPH 30 (Rome, 2008), 53–5, 316–18.

<sup>53</sup> 'Sane multimoda fratrum de diversis nacionibus relacione frequenter ad nos pervenit, quod multa contigerunt in ordine et ordinis occasione, que si scripto commendata fuissent, multum valere possent in perpetuum ad fratrum [sic] consolacionem et spiritualem profectum': *Vitas fratrum* (ed. Reichert, 4).

<sup>54</sup> Tugwell, 'L'Évolution', 414–17. Van Engen notes the textual imbalance between Jordan and Dominic: 'Dominic and the Brothers', 16. For a reappraisal of Peter of Verona's life and cult, see Donald Prudlo, *The Martyred Inquisitor: The Life and Cult of Peter of Verona (†1252)* (Aldershot, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> 'De sancto ac memorabili patre nostro fratre Iordane ... dicimus eum tamquam speculum totius religionis et virtutum exemplar': *Vitas fratrum* 3.1 (ed. Reichert, 100–1).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1.7, 3.1–42, 4.10, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.24, 5.2, 5.4 (ed. Reichert, 60, 100–46, 173–7, 179–80, 187–8, 192–3, 195–6, 216, 253–4, 270–1).

<sup>57</sup> The Dominican General Chapter in 1245 sought stories of any miracles attributed to either Dominic or Jordan, which has been interpreted to mean that the order was preparing to seek Jordan's canonization: see B.-M. Reichert, ed., *Acta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 1: *Ab anno 1220 usque ad annum 1303*, MOPH 3 (Rome, 1898), 33; Tugwell, ed., *Miracula*, 29–30; Viktória Hedvig Deák, 'The Birth of a Legend: The so-called *Legenda Maior* of Saint Margaret of Hungary and Dominican Hagiography', *Revue Mabillon* 20 (2009), 87–112, at 98.

lowing year.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the stories Gerald originally collected were intended to contribute to the late master's canonization process. In any case, Gerald's revision of Jordan's narrative must be interpreted within this hagiographical setting, in which the protagonist's doubt was probably inadmissible.

Jordan's engagement with the false aromas is but one of six stories in the *Vitas fratrum* in which the late master overcomes demonic opposition,<sup>59</sup> proving himself to be a worthy successor to Dominic. In the second book of the *Vitas fratrum*, the order's saintly founder assuredly dismantles diabolical falsehoods and sends his demonic opponents into confusion.<sup>60</sup> Jordan's uncertainties would have proved anomalous in comparison, for following Dominic's example, it was the demons who should have suffered confusion. Gerald's revision of Jordan's story is in keeping with the hagiographical norms of the *Vitas fratrum*. In conclusion, then, we may make a final observation about the nature of doubt in the two narratives. In the *Libellus*, the demon's deception and Jordan's self-doubt both hinge on Jordan's presumption of sanctity. In Gerald's rendering, however, it is the absence of doubt that proves the saint.

<sup>58</sup> For Pope Innocent IV's eagerness to promote an anti-heretical saint, see Prudlo, *Martyred Inquisitor*, 77–9. Interestingly, Prudlo notes that the initial steps for Peter's canonization were 'entirely non-Dominican': *ibid.* 77.

<sup>59</sup> *Vitas fratrum* 3.25–33 (ed. Reichert, 120–6).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 2.14–17 (ed. Reichert, 77–9).