

Conference Report “Dominican Culture, Dominican Theology: The Order of Preachers and Its Spheres of Action (1215- ca. 1600)”

For many months, it remained unclear if the next Annual Conference of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theology would be in-person or virtual. The four-day conference was originally planned for June 2020 in Copenhagen. Much of the work had been done and the program was ready, when Covid-19 thwarted the plans of the organizers (Florian Wöller, Copenhagen; John Slotemaker, Fairfield; Ueli Zahnd, Geneva). Before long and with renewed energy, they started to organize a hybrid version for 2021, and again this was done with great effort and competence. Then, a few months before the start of the conference, the university informed the organizers that it sadly could not allow the in-person event to proceed at its campus. Thereupon, it was decided that the conference should be completely virtual. This with a heavy heart and not without some frustration, until it became clear that almost all speakers and visitors were willing to participate nevertheless! The end result: a fantastic four-day online congress with over a hundred people present and all of them in great spirits. The visit to Nyhavn, Frederik’s Church, and Christiansborg Palace would have to wait, *desværre!*

The title of the program, “Dominican Culture, Dominican Theology,” was well-chosen and very much in line with the aim of IGTM: this was not going to be a theological conference *sec* but a theological conference that would connect ideas with norms and behavior, spirituality with materiality, and intellectual works with other manifestations of Dominican achievement. As the title and the subtitle “The Order of Preachers and Its Spheres of Action” suggested, furthermore, discussions would revolve around interactions between thought and practice and between members of the Order and outsiders. In the words of the call for papers: “the Dominicans, by means of preaching, focused on engaging with the broad community beyond the convent walls. The result was a hitherto unseen interpenetration of a religious order into the intellectual as well as cultural realities surrounding it. The Dominicans soon became a driving force in medieval culture and their influence can be found in the practical, intellectual, and material aspects of European culture, from art to philosophy, from politics to the economy.” The conference started on Wednesday (29 June 2021) with a welcome address by Carsten Selch Jensen (Dean of the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen), Krijn Pansters (Chairman of IGTM), and the organizers (Florian Wöller, John Slotemaker, Ueli Zahnd), as well as an opening lecture by M. Michèle Mulchahey (Toronto) on *Dominican Life, Learning, and Art in Fourteenth-Century Florence: Jacopo Passavanti’s Santa Maria Novella*. This inspiring lecture, painting a colorful picture of Dominican

religious and intellectual culture in the later Middle Ages, set the tone for the source-oriented and at the same time wide-ranging and interdisciplinary approach of the conference.

In line with the organizers' conception of a variegated Dominican "sphere of action" shaped by a "cultural" theology (in the context of a "theological" culture), the program – a program, that, in the words of the call for papers, was neither going to "focus somewhat narrowly on the intellectual tradition as expressed in the works of a few members of the Order," nor to "create the often repeated cliché of Dominican theology as, for the most part, Thomism" – consisted of six sessions: (A) Dominican Theology and Its Production; (B) Theology and Culture of Dominican Preaching; (C) The Institutional and Legal Constitution of the Order; (D) The Materiality of Dominican Culture and Theology; (E) Dominicans in Debate; and (F) Dominicans and the "Other(s)." Apart from Session C, which consisted of only one section of four papers, these sessions contained one or more parallel sections with papers and/or panels. The general arrangement of these papers, all being presentations of original research by (young) Dominican specialists, was therefore such that the conference moved from reports on specific theologians discussing specific matters (e.g., Albert the Great on the generation of Jesus; Thomas Aquinas on petitionary prayer and divine providence; Durandus of Saint-Pourçain's critiques of Aquinas' theology of marriage; Guerric of St. Quentin's Postill on Lamentations; Berthold of Moosburg's debt towards Thomas of York's concept of wisdom; St. Vicent Ferrer on the Vigil of John the Baptist) to specific places (e.g., Province of Aragon; thirteenth-century Rouen; fourteenth-century *Ruhrgebiet*) and specific objects (e.g., The musical frescoes of San Marco, Florence; The depiction of Dominican saints in medieval Scandinavian art; Death and burial in Dominican habits), to specific episodes (e.g., The Grabow Case – a Dominican self-image at the Council of Constance; The ambivalent attitude of the Dominican convent St. Jacques towards the Jews; The missionary activity of the Dominican Order in the Safavid Empire). With such a complete program, it was possible for all participants to either hear colleagues offer new interpretations on well-known themes or get immersed in highly specialized, not less interesting, discussions.

Five of these six sections also contained a keynote lecture: (A) Isabel Iribarren (Strasbourg), *The Monzon Affair (1387-1403) and the Construction of a Dominican Thomist Identity*; (B) Carolyn Muessig (Calgary), *How the Other Half Preached: Examples of and Responses to Dominican Female Preachers in Premodern Christianity*; (D) Marika Räsänen (Turku), *Rethinking the Relic in Late Medieval Dominican Culture*; (E) Volker Leppin (Tübingen), *Just a Squabble of Orders? Dominicans, Augustinians and the Early Reformation*; and (F) Johnny G.G. Jakobsen (Copenhagen), *Friars Preachers as Vanguard*

Towards Pagans, Jews, Muslims and Heretics. These lectures, together displaying the breadth, depth, and wealth of cutting-edge Dominican research (in the words of the call for papers: “engaging in a truly interdisciplinary discussion that explicitly included the legal, institutional, material, artistic, and devotional aspects of the concept of Dominican theology”), thus highlighted the subject of a particular session, showcasing the shared domain of the papers in that session and functioning as logically ordered flagposts in an intelligently designed, highly pleasing program. The program furthermore included the members’ meeting of IGTM (open to all), during which the board was re-elected and the conference plans for the next years (Munich 2022, Torun 2023) were presented by the prospective organizers.

The general atmosphere was equally pleasing. One of the smart features of the program was “wonder.me,” a tool for breaks that one sees more and more at virtual conferences. In a kind of Zoom break-out room setting, participants can steer their avatar over a virtual (Copenhagen) campus into the “coffee corner,” the “conference office,” or some other pop-up room. One is catching up with a friend or discussing practical matters with the excellent student-assistants, and all of a sudden a colleague from Rome or Tübingen shows up in the same room: hello! There were many more benefits due to the flexibility of virtual meeting, such as being on time in a section, having the possibility to greet someone “face-to-face” or in the chat before the start of the meeting, and even disappearing for a short while when absolutely necessary, for whatever reason. Like the Franciscan conference the week before and the Leeds congress the week after, this virtual conference was so *easy*. It was also cheap (free access), social (expanded global accessibility), and ethical (reduced environmental impact). The organizers and sponsors of this conference deserve much praise for making this great four-day event possible. A fantastic volume in the “*Archa Verbi Subsidia*” series is to be expected. Even though in the end a live event turned out to be impossible, the appealing presentations, good discussions, friendly exchanges, and warm and animated conversations usually found at regular events were certainly not absent from this wonderful week of sharing Dominican expertise and enthusiasm online.

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