

ICONOGRAPHIC SOURCES

INTRODUCTION

The earliest venerable Marian icons were painted shortly after the Order was founded. They were the work of great artists such as Coppo of Marcovaldo, Cimabue, Duc-cio of Boninsegna and others, and they were done for the most important churches of the Order, in Siena, Orvieto, Bologna and Florence.

They portray “Her Majesty”, i.e., the Mother of the Lord with her Child in her arms. She offers and is the Seat of truly incarnate Wisdom; she is the Queen of mercy. The icons present a synthesis of the spirituality of the Servites: they turn to her to reach her Son and to offer him to others. The icons were usually placed on the main altar. Acts of devotion, also called “reverences”, prescribed in the Order’s legislation, were made to the icons, especially the solemn *Salve Regina* at the end of Evening Prayer¹.

The miniatures in the Choir Books of Siena and Bologna, which date to the period shortly after the works of Coppo, give colorful evidence of the place of the Virgin in early Servite iconography. She is the root of Jesse, in whom Christ really took flesh as he came to be part of human history.

Mary’s role in the mysteries of the Incarnation and of salvation finds expression in the portrayals of the Annunciation², the beginning of the work of redemption, and of *Mary and John at the Foot of the Cross*³, the highest sharing in the mystery of Christ who takes on and redeems all the faults and sufferings of humankind.

In the first decades of the fourteenth century, as images of the Madonna with Child were evolving toward the tender and affectionate forms of early humanism, the historical-spiritual synthesis found in the *Legenda de Origine* is given iconographic expression in the altar platform of Thaddeus Gaddi in Florence. Mary is in widow’s garments; beside her are St. Augustine, whose rule the Servites follow, and St. Peter Martyr, the spiritual guide of the First Fathers. She accepts the Seven Founders’ gesture of homage and devotion and takes them under her protection.

At about just the same time, there is the Todi fresco in which St. Philip Benizi, the Order’s Blessed par excellence and whose remains are in Todi, appears as the interlocutor, in the passage from purgatory to the glory of paradise, between the Virgin of the purified souls, who is wearing a crown and a star studded mantle, and the apostle Peter, the keeper of the keys of heaven.

The elements presented in relief on the marble sarcophagus of Blessed Joachim, the humble lay-brother of Siena, take us back to the everyday practice of religion in which constant communion with God leads to taking on oneself the burdens and sufferings of others.

The accompanying notes are offered by way of documentation.

Bibliography:

D.M. MONTAGNA, *Le antiche icone mariane dei Servi (sec. XII-XVI). Verso una riscoperta*, in *Moniales Ordinis Servorum*, 13/15 (1982-1984), p. 13-20.

¹ At St. Mary of the Servants in Bologna the icon *Our Lady of the Salve* is called the *Virgin of Tenderness*. It is considered to be a work of the 14th century but could also be from the 15th century.

² The churches of the Annunciation in Pistoia and Florence

³ The fresco of Julian of Rimini in the chapter room of the monastery in Forlì

ICONS

1. COPPO OF MARCOVALDO (known between 1259 and 1280)

Enthroned Madonna with Child or Her Majesty, said to be of *Bordone* (1261).

Done when the Prior General was James of Siena (1257-1265).

Siena, St. Mary of the Servants.

The Mother of God, in a dark robe with geometric folds traced in gold and with a white veil covering her head, is portrayed sitting on a splendid throne with a lyre-styled back, her feet resting on a cushion. Her sorrowful and gentle gaze – which was altered by a painter of Duccio's school – is turned out toward the viewer. With her left hand, which is almost completely covered with a white cloth with reddish decorative lines, she holds the Child, as she delicately takes one of his tiny feet in her right hand.

Jesus's gaze is turned more toward his Mother. He holds the scroll of the Law in his left hand and raises his right hand in blessing. Both their heads are surrounded by haloes.

What earlier was simple decorative lining of the folds now becomes a dynamic pictorial element and contributes to the fullness of the icon. The design is very fluid and light; the tonal aspects, delicate and always well matched.

Standing out from the gold colored background are the Michael and Gabriel: the first, the angel associated with man's expulsion from Eden (*Gen* 3, 24); the second, the angel who announces redemption (*Lk* 1, 26-38). It was in Mary that the Word became flesh (*Jn* 1, 14) and brought about salvation. The two small angels seem to make a gesture of greeting and veneration with their hands. One of them is holding a globe, a symbol of the world.

The great master, "the most significant and eminent Florentine predecessor of Cimabue's painting", succeeded in conferring on the Byzantine *Panaghia Angeloktistos* style, which the *Madonna of Bordone* recalls, an intense expressivity made up of grandeur and gentleness.



2. COPPO OF MARCOVALDO (known between 1259 and 1280)

Enthroned Madonna with Child (1268).

Done when Philip Benizi was Prior General (1267-1285).

Orvieto, St. Mary of the Servants.

The same Coppo painted another Madonna – the second of his three certain works – at St. Mary of the Servants in Orvieto, probably in 1268.

The iconography is of the same kind as the preceding work, though the style of execution is more evolved but less grandiose. Here the Mother holds the Child on her right side. On her head surrounded by a halo in relief she is wearing a jeweled crown with colored leaves. Two angels, each holding in his hand a slender flowered branch, are seen from the waist up at the sides of the broad backed throne. There is in this work a robust texture which is obtained through the dense clouds that emphasize the formal characteristics and lines of the Byzantine tradition. This gives the great master's work a completely new expressive and dramatic intensity.

The Enthroned Madonna with Child of Orvieto follows the outlines of the Byzantine Hodegitria icons, but it surpasses them with its careful and powerful denseness, the heavy shadowing and the sharp lines that hold up the objects. Where the line becomes sharper, as in the golden rays of the garments, it takes on a new significance of movement. The Virgin Mary, Lady and Queen, is also the Seat that holds the uncreated Wisdom. Her bowed head and the gesture of her hand point to Christ, who blesses with one hand and holds the scroll of the Word of life in the other. The Virgin is clothed in a golden mantle that gives expression to her dignity as Mother of God. The white veil on her head draws the light reflected from the gold, which is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, on to her gentle and sorrowful face⁴.



⁴ Cf. A.M. DAL PINO, *Madonna santa Maria e l'Ordine dei suoi Servi nel primo secolo di storia (1233-1317ca.)*, in *Studi Storici OSM*, 17 (1967), p. 22-24.

3. CIMABUE (known between 1272 and 1302)

Enthroned Madonna with Child or Her Majesty (1287 ca.).

Done when the Prior General was Lotaringo of Florence (1285-1300 ca.).

Bologna, St. Mary of the Servants.

The majestic Madonna of Bologna is very similar to Coppo of Marcovaldo's iconographic work and shows intense expressivity, great gentleness and a new grandiosity. Cimabue introduces something new in his composition technique: he presents the image from a slight angle, so that despite the golden background there is depth to the perspective.

Behind the throne there are two angels in symmetrical positions and with beautifully colored wings. Together the angels hold up and present to the faithful the Mother of God, throne of mercy.

The position of Mary's body, the Child's posture, the obvious weight of the Child that makes his Mother lift her knees so he can reach up to gently stroke her face: these are elements of a clearly human relationship full of gentleness that prepares for future interpretations of the affective relationship between mother and child⁵.

The Child is standing, is not blessing and is turned toward his Mother, holding on to her golden mantle. She delicately holds one of his tiny feet in her hands. The red cushion that Mary is sitting on is a sign of her dignity and serves to lighten the structure of the icon.

The deep intensity of her gaze, the almost sculptured quality of the horizontal and vertical folds of her garment, meant to emphasize the balanced movement of her knees, and the delicate gesture of Mary – these are the inventions of an artistic genius.



⁵ Cf. R. D'AMICO, *Devozionalità e circolazione culturale nel Duecento a Bologna: La Maestà di Cimabue a Santa Maria dei Servi*, in *Studi Storici OSM*, 31 (1981), p. 273.

4. DUCCIO OF BONINSEGNA

(known between 1278 and 1318)

Madonna with Child.

Montepulciano, St. Mary of the Servants.

Originally the icon was supposed to show the Virgin in full.

She is portrayed “bending slightly over the Child, wearing a full blue mantle with a Greek-style star at the forehead and a white embroidered silk veil – a thoroughly Tuscan novelty. The veil falls over her hair and is so long that it gently wraps around and frames her beautiful face, which is painted in ivory white with a touch of red in her cheeks and with delicate ashen shadows.

The Child is lively and pensive, seated on her left knee, with his gaze outward toward the viewer. With his right hand he takes hold of the edge of his Mother’s veil, which he draws over his shoulder as women do their shawls”⁶.

If the work of Duccio of Boninsegna can be considered the final and greatest episode of the “Greek manner” in Tuscan painting, it is also true it appears worthy of a place beside the innovative work of Cimabue and Giotto and as opening the way to the coming splendid flowering of the Siena school. This is due to its precocious assimilation of later Gothic taste for the serpentine, wavy line, its rich content of humanity and its expressive immediacy.

The *Madonna with Child*, with the airy lightness of the Mother’s delicately regal bearing, the rich linearity of her clothing, and the soft magic of the colors in miniaturistic fineness, recalls the poetic fascination of the grandiose Madonna in Siena’s cathedral.



⁶ Cf. R. TAUCCI, *Il convento di Santa Maria di Montepulciano e i suoi ricordi*, in *Studi Storici OSM*, 2 (1934-1936), p. 27.

5. SEGNA OF BONAVENTURA

(known between 1298 and 1327)

Madonna with Child.

Siena, St. Mary of the Servants.

Segna of Bonaventura, Duccio's pupil and nephew, takes over his master's types and forms but translates them in a personal way despite his fundamental faithfulness.

His interpretation emphasizes the lyrical and decorative aspects of Duccio's work. By stylistically lengthening various aspects he creates an effect of melancholy on his personages' faces.

Like Duccio and Simon Martini, Segna inherits the molds of Byzantine classicism, but as can be seen on the Virgin's mantle, there is a Gothic, serpentine curving in the folds of the garment and a novel way of creating atmosphere.

The color range is more varied and expressive, and the lines and supports are carried out exquisitely, with exemplary refinement and richness.

Segna of Bonaventura pursues a more tangible human attitude, but at the same time there is a new accent of calm and severe grandiosity.

There is another *Madonna with Child* in the Collegiate museum of Casole d'Elsa which is due to either Segna or his studio. It was once in the local Servite church of St. Peter's, then at the Annunciation (see the icon on p. 412).



6. SIMONE MARTINI

(1284-1344)

Madonna with Child, Four Saints and Angels (1325 ca.).

Orvieto, St. Mary of the Servants (now in the Gardner Museum, Boston).

Martini's art flows back and forth, gently unsettled, between accents of more strong texture and accents of more persuasive spaciousness, with delicate inlays of color. The textured quality of his evident in the Madonna in fresco in the hall of the municipality of Siena. The work gives full expression to the gentle and flowered elegance of the new Gothic art. The second accents can be seen in the *Madonna with Child* that is presented here and which the artist painted with the help of Lippo Memmi for the Servite church in Orvieto in the years 1321-1325.

It is one of his most striking and precious creations. The figures are portrayed in the upper half of their bodies, and they filled with unending, subtle variations – they are like the variations of an interior “time”.

The icon, extraordinarily fascinating especially because of the Virgin's beautiful face – very realistic, a perfect oval, with luminous skin, delicate red in the cheeks, large light-filled eyes lost gazing into the distance – takes over Eastern elements of the Hodigitria.

Unusual is the textured strength of the folds in the white veil that comes out forcefully from under the evening blue mantle edged with golden light. Equally striking is the Child's luminous rose with intense streaks of light and color.

All the refinement of Simon Martini's is evident in the delicate gesture of the Mother who hands three roses to her Son as he affectionately and lovingly strokes her face. The gesture brings out as well the purity of Martini's painting, which constantly recalls the intensity of the interior life and the transcendent value of the painted image.



7. LIPPO MEMMI

(known between 1317 and 1356)

Madonna with Child.

Siena, St. Mary of the Servants.

Lippo Memmi's Madonna stands at the center of a polytych which the Servites commissioned the painter to do. The commune of Siena decided in a meeting on 16 October 1319 to contribute one hundred Lire to the total cost of more than three hundred Lire.

Lippo Memmi, one of the most surely identifiable pupils of Simon Martini, takes up in this *Madonna* procedures and details of the master's *Annunciation*, which is now held in the Uffizi museum in Florence.

The same large decorative rose is found on the Virgin's right shoulder. The mantle frames the face with same golden edging and the background appears as if it were riddled with little holds – a technique of Martini. The whole typology of the Virgin is Martinian: the pointed nose, the perfectly oval face, the long eyes. The right hand in particular – tapered, gentle, very thin – reflects Martini's influence

There is a gentle humanness of atmosphere in this work. Mary appears as the mystical throne of Wisdom, according to the Eastern typology of the Hodigitria, but portrayed here with harmonious and intimate cadences.

The white of the Virgin's head covering is very precious, as it falls in soft and gathered folds. The formula *Ave Maria, gratia plena* decorates the edge of the dark mantle⁷.



⁷ There is hardly need to recall the use made of this prayer in the *Legend of Blessed Joachim of Siena*.

8. BERNARDO DADDI

(known between 1312 and 1348)

Our Lady of Succor.

Florence, Basilica of the Annunciation.

This Florentine painter, active in the first half of the 14th century, was related from the beginning to Giotto's art, then drew close to the Siena school. His small sacred images which remain are brilliant with precious tints harmonized with purity of style, sober rhythms and an enchanting range of color.

With the *Madonna with Child*, which was placed in the 16th century on the altar of the chapel of Our Lady of Succor in the Basilica of the Annunciation, he arrived at a style characterized by lively and shaded coloring, delicate composition rhythms and spacious poetic cadences. He thus gives very coherent expression to his subtle religious feelings and to his simple and intimately felt devotion.



9. GANZO OF FAZIO

(known between 1302 and 1317 ca.)

Tripartite Relief with Episodes from the Life of Blessed Joachim (1310 ca.).

Siena, National Museum (formerly the sarcophagus of the Blessed's tomb in St. Mary of the Servants in Siena).

The three panels portray the following episodes:

- the young man Chiaramonte, kneeling humbly and fully intent on the partially opened monastery door, seems "to beg for the grace to be allowed to enter"⁸. (In the 16th century interpretation, it is Blessed Joachim who, as he returns one night from visiting a sick person and is not heard by the friars, sees the door miraculously fall to the ground. The Blessed, however, is in fact wearing secular clothes in the episode.)

- The miracle at table. Struck by a sudden illness, the Blessed falls to the ground in front of the friars, who are seated according to the custom of the time on the inside of the table. You can see the partially turned over table, the tableware clinging to it, and the gesture of help and admiration expressed by the friars present⁹.

- The Blessed is serving at the altar when he is struck by the same illness at the elevation of the host. He falls backwards, but the candle he is holding remains upright¹⁰.

The last episode, although it happened before the second, is presented in the third panel. More animated and with more characters, it lends itself to protecting the second scene. The habit worn by the friars has the cowl sewed at a palm's length down the chest; it makes one unique garment together with the connected monastic mantle. This is in conformity with what the *Constitutiones antiquae* say about clothing.



⁸ *Legend of Blessed Joachim of Siena*, n. 3; cf. F.A. DAL PINO, *I tre rilievi con storie della vita del b. Gioacchino da Siena conservati presso la locale Pinacoteca*, in *Spazi e figure lungo la storia dei Servi di santa Maria (secoli XIII-XX)*, Rome 1977, p. 527-537.

⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 9

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

10. ANONYMOUS UMBRIAN

(middle of the 14th century)

The Blessed Virgin, Blessed Philip Benizi, St. Peter and the Souls in Purgatory (1346).

Todi, St. Mark's (now St. Francis monastery).

The hill of purgatory, presented in part according to the legend of St. Patrick, is divided vertically and has seven caves in which the souls being purged are freed from the seven capital vices.

At the top of the hill there is a saintly bishop – some say it's Patrick – who lets something that symbolically alludes to the Church's suffrages penetrate down into the caves arranged on two levels through a kind of chimney pot.

In front of the exit can be seen the bridge of purgatory, according to the vision of the 12th century Monte Cassino monk Alberic. At a short distance on the left there are the merlons of a city and on the steps is seen the Redeemer surrounded by adoring angels.

At the exit from the hill, the souls, wearing a white tunic, present themselves to the Virgin, who is wearing a white star studded mantle. A much larger figure, the Virgin bends to crown with flowers one of the souls kneeling at her feet.

Philip Benizi is at Mary's side, with the halo of rays that adorns the blessed. With his left hand he holds up a myrtle branch (some say it's olive), and with the right hand he guides a soul already crowned by the Virgin to St. Peter who starts it on its way to the gateway of the heavenly castle, paradise¹¹.



11. THADDEUS GADDI († 1366) *Our Lady of the Servants* (1332-1334).

Cafaggio Monastery in Florence, disappeared¹².

Platform for the main altar at St. Mary's at Cafaggio in Florence.

“At the middle of the platform, the Mother of God is depicted as she orders the Seven Founders of her Order to wear the black habit in memory of the sorrows she suffered at her Son's passion. The scene is arranged as follows.

The Blessed Virgin is standing in the center, with two angels in human form at the sides. On the right is St. Augustine with a book in his hand: the Servite Order took his Rule; on the left is St. Peter Martyr, promoter of the Order. A short distance away on one side there appear three religious wearing the black habit the Servants of Mary used to wear¹³. Three other friars are standing on the

¹¹ Cf. E.M. CASALINI, *Iconografia di san Filippo Benizi*, in *Da una “casupola” nella Firenze del sec. XIII. Celebrazioni giubilari dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria. Cronaca, liturgia, arte*, Florence 1990, p. 109-111; cf. also C. GRONDONA, *Todi storica e artistica*, Todi 1981, p. 200-207

¹² The work is described and interpreted in a Latin text printed in 1717 and here translated.

¹³ Elsewhere the text says: “The cowl small and tight, the habit or scapular shorter than the tunic, the mantle tight”.

opposite side. All are kneeling and gazing very devoutly at the Blessed Virgin Mary, at whose feet a seventh friar of the same Order is kneeling. The imposition of the habit is signified by the Virgin's spreading with the right hand her black veil over the shoulder of the friar".

The painting is a pictorial transcription of the *Legenda de Origine*, which was written at about the same time, in or close to the year 1334.

At the Virgin's sides, together with the angels who recall the Byzantine iconographic motif dear to Coppo of Marcovaldo, can be seen the saintly legislator Augustine and St. Peter Martyr, the councilor who guided the first decisions of the Seven Founders.

The Virgin is standing and is dressed – an important historical observation – as the laws against lavish ostentation in 14th and 15th century Florence prescribed for widows: a white head covering closed under the chin and a black mantle covering the woman from head to foot. Mary is not portrayed holding the Child precisely because she is in the state of widowhood, as is clear from the mantle that covers her¹⁴.

The friar who is kneeling with folded hands is already wearing the complete Servite habit. He offers homage, for himself and for the other six off to the sides. They surely represent the whole Order.

His gesture is related to the symbolism of the mantle and to the rite of feudal investiture. The Virgin accepts the service which the Seven offer and she becomes their Lady, Advocate, Patron, Mediatrix.

Gaddi's Madonna has "servants", not slaves. They are vassals, i.e., free men who voluntarily place themselves at her service for the sake of a spiritual good. As their Lady, she accepts their service and with the gesture of the mantle commits herself to protecting them¹⁵.

SEGNA OF BONAVENTURA (known between 1298 and 1327)

Madonna with Child.

Casole d'Elsa, Collegiata museum (formerly in the Servite churches of St. Peter and of the Annunciation)



¹⁴ The works of Coppo and Duccio also portray Mary with the black mantle and garments characteristics of widowhood in the Middle Ages. The morning prayer of the time includes these words of Mary: "Now give me a black mantle, for I have been so abandoned and widowed by my Son".

¹⁵ Cf. E.M. CASALINI, *La Madonna dei Servi*, in *Studia historica minora*, II, Roma 1962, p. 18-23.

CHOIR BOOKS

SIENA, ST. MARY OF THE SERVANTS

Choir Book *F*, *Day Antiphony*, c. 1, (1271)



The First Sunday of Advent, miniature of the letter *A* (*Ad te levavi...*). Above, the Father who is blessing; below, nine saints looking upward; and in the center, a woman, probably the Blessed Virgin, looking straight ahead (*Virgo mater Ecclesiae*).

Choir Book *F*, *Day Antiphony*, c. 21v., (1271)



The Birth of Christ, miniature of the letter *P* (*Puer natus...*). In the center, a large image of Our Lady resting; above, Christ in the manger with two angels at the sides; at the manger, an ox, a donkey and a shepherd; below, St. Joseph and a woman who is washing the child.

Choir Book *F*, *Day Antiphonary*, c. 205v., (1271)



The Ascension, miniature of the letter *V* (*Viri Galilei...*). Above, in an almond, the Redeemer, supported by two angels, is blessing; below, the apostles in two groups divided by a shoot with leaves (the shoot of Jesse); among the leaves, a white cross.

Choir Book *G*, *Gradual of the Saints*, c. 5, (1271)



The Purification, miniature of the letter *S* (*Suscepimus Deus...*). Above, two angels and a shoot with leaves between them; below, the Presentation in the Temple with St. Joseph, Mary with a black mantle, Simeon with the child Jesus in his arms, and Anna.

Choir Book *G*, *Gradual of the Saints*, c. 28, (1271)



The Assumption, miniature of the letter *G* (*Gaudeamus omnes...*).

Above, the bottom of an almond held up by two angels, and the edge of the Blessed Virgin's garment, from which a cord is falling and taken hold of by one of the apostles; within the *G*, the apostles in two groups beside a shoot with leaves.

Choir Book *G*, *Gradual of the Saints*, c. 30, (1271)



The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, miniature of the letter *S* (*Salve sancta Parens...*).

Above, Christ, between two angels, imparting a blessing; below, the apostles pointing upward, divided into two groups, a shoot with leaves in the center (Mary, shoot of the root of Jesse).

BOLOGNA, ST. MARY OF THE SERVANTS

Choir Book *A/bis*, *Advent Antiphonary*, c. 1v., (1270 ca.)



Response of the I Nocturn, miniature of the letter A (*As-piciens...*).

Above, Christ with halo with a cross within it; below, four persons, two with haloes and two without, raise their hands toward the Messiah who is to come; in the middle of the group, a shoot with a small white cross above it, an explicit allusion to the fact that the Messiah will be born of the Virgin Mary (*Isa 11, 1*)

The miniature for the Birthday of the Blessed Virgin expresses the basic theme: the Virgin of Nazareth, true creature and fully woman, was born to give birth out of the line of David and her own flesh to the Son of God made man for the salvation of humankind, as the people of Israel continue to call on the God of Abraham to send from on high the promised liberator.

The doctrine of a real and not simply apparent maternity is made explicit through the symbolism of the root of Jesse (cf. *Isa 11, 1*) from which comes the flower who is Emmanuel (cf. *Isa 7, 14*).

Every time a depiction of the reality of Mary's maternity and of Christ's humanity leaves an opening for doubt or misunderstanding, the root of Jesse takes the place of the woman Mary. The root flowers in Jesus, Savior of humankind, and brings forth the fruit (the little white cross on the plant) of our redemption.

So that the image of Mary who presents her Son to the Father in the temple as new sacrifice and new victim does not lead to misunderstanding regarding the identity of the victim and offering, in the miniature of the Presentation two angels are portrayed venerating the plant of Jesse that comes to fruition in the cross.

At the Ascension, the Virgin's presence is symbolized by the plant, for if Mary had been portrayed as woman in this miniature, Christ would continue to have been misunderstood as an angel or phantasm, as certain heresies of the time preached¹⁶.

¹⁶ J. DELUMEAU, *Rassicurare e proteggere. Devozione, intercessione, misericordia nel rito e nel culto dell'Europa medievale e moderna*, Milan 1992

The miniature of the Assumption describes Mary's journey body and soul to heaven. According to the apocrypha, the cord the Virgin lets fall for the apostle Thomas as she ascends on high is a tangible sign of the corporeity that goes up from the earth.

Another point not to be missed here is that in this Assumption the shoot of Jesse is no longer a symbol but rather a sign that recalls what was a reality, a mission that has found its earthly fulfillment. That is why there is no longer the little white cross shining on the plant that we see in the other miniatures with the root of Jesse.

Why was it that the Servants of Mary – at a time that can not be precisely determined, but perhaps in the 1270s – made use of a symbolism which, even if it was often employed in the literature of the time, was not widespread in iconography?

The answer is given implicitly in the *Legenda de Origine*. The author speaks emphatically both of heresy and of St. Peter Martyr, in order to establish the time the Order of Servites was born and to make clear the orthodoxy of the Seven Founders.

The new Manichaeans (Cathari and Patarines) were attacking Christology and also consequently the human and divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin. Christ was neither God nor true man but rather an angel adopted by God and given human appearance. In this view Mary was simply an instrument, a passageway without any real bond with the Jesus Christ born from her¹⁷.

It was consequently the Christological dogma regarding salvation that was being attacked.

The councils clearly condemned such heresies. The vigilant concern for orthodoxy made itself felt in the religious sensitivity of an Order that was born in Florence (always somewhat of a den of heresy) in the name of the Mother of God, bearing her name, dedicated and committed to her service, and concerned with proclaiming the exact place of the Virgin in salvation history.

Consequently, the decision to give expression in figurative language and in such fundamental texts as Choir Books to the Order's Christological and Marian orthodoxy is assurance that we have here, not some kind of passive devotion, but a creative contribution to local religious culture by the Servants of Mary at forty years from their founding.

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¹⁷ Cf. M. PETROCCHI, *Storia della spiritualità italiana (sec. XIII-XX)*, Rome 1984.