

- Vecchio' de'Medici, 1389-1464, published in 1992, illuminate many aspects of a man whose delight was to keep people in the dark. We look forward to the forthcoming publication of Susan McKillop's book.
- 8 Gutkind, op.cit., pp.82-5, seems to be the first to avail of the information given in Traversari's *Hodoeporicon*, printed in 1581 and more recently in Dino Traversari's *Ambrogio Traversari e suoi tempi*, 1912.
 - 9 Macchiavelli, Niccolo: *Istorie Florentine*, IV, 7, cited by Belle, p. 21; I have quoted from Morley's English translation, 1891, p. 222.
 - 10 Wegener, W.J.: 'That the practice of arms is most excellent declare the statues of valiant men' in *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 1993, p.151, and see her footnote 75 for Cambi's suggestion that the three sets of images were still on the Bargello wall in the 1490s.
 - 11 Cammerer-George, Monika: *Die Rahmung der Toscanischen Altarbilder im Trecento*. 1966, pp.187, 188. I am indebted to Mr. George Mayer for translating the relevant pages.
 - 12 Belle, op.cit., p. 317.
 - 13 Orlandi, op.cit., p. 52
 - 14 Lapaccini, Giuliano O.P.: *La Cronaca del Convento di San Marco*. Biblioteca Laurenziana No.370; printed (first part only) in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, LXXI, Vol.I, disp.1 del 1913, edited Raoul Morcay, p.23 for Cosimo's expenditure.
 - 15 Vasari, Giorgio: *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. 2nd ed., 1568; Penguin edition, 1965, translated George Bull, Vol.2,p.200: "Cosimo de'Medici was among those who loved and admired Fra Angelico . . ."

A New Interpretation of Fra Angelico

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Part I

Guido di Pietro, known to posterity as Fra Angelico, was born of peasant stock in Mugello, probably around 1400. He and his brother trained as illuminators and miniaturists and, when Angelico was about 21, they joined the Observant Dominican community of San Domenico in Fiesole above Florence. Professed as Brother John, Angelico's 'pastoral work' while studying for the priesthood was to paint for San Domenico, Sta Maria Novella, and elsewhere. These early commissions made him famous and funded his workshop. If he was still learning priestcraft he was also still learning to paint: for his skills as an illuminator were little preparation for altarpiece design, a duty laid on his shoulders along with his Dominican scapular. So he became acquainted with the works of his contemporaries such as Masaccio, Masolino, Gentile and Sassetta.

His most important contact, however, was Cosimo De Medici, a patron not only of the arts but of the religious orders, especially the more radical mendicants. On return to power in 1434, he set about installing the Observant Dominicans in Florence, renovating an abandoned monastery for them which was to represent "the best in Christian humanism".

Cosimo financed the painting by Angelico and his team of the whole San Marco complex. From 1438 to 1452 Angelico and his shop made over fifty paintings in fresco and tempera for San Marco. Taken together they make up the largest group of related works by any Italian renaissance artist to survive today. No other known body of monastic decoration from any time or place rivals the extent and complexity of this project. Although dispute continues over which works constitute his complete corpus, their dates, and how much was done by assistants and students, it is clear that Angelico supervised or completed hundreds of works himself, some enormous, some small but with intricate detail. Were this achievement not enough, he was also a major influence on the next century of artists, from Domenico Veneziano and Piero della Francesca to Michelangelo. The frescoes and paintings of San Marco are still vibrant; their vivid simplicity and strength is still astonishing and accessible to the viewer more than half a millennium after their composition. For this reason it is easy enough to extract the works from their context and treat them as if they were painted for the Uffizi gallery or the Louvre. And so commentators have largely ignored the convent which was the proper setting, for which the works were made.

William Hood's *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (Yale University Press, 1993) is the first study to take the conventual context of the works seriously. From the camera of Nicolo Battaglini have come some excellent colour pictures of the most important works, as well as fascinating details and shots of the cells, corridors, chapter rooms and stair-wells which are the home of the works. Professor Hood offers us a complete guided tour of the priory from room to room, explaining their uses, the way of life which conditioned the choices of subjects and styles and gave the works much of their significance. A decade of research by one of the world's leading Angelico scholars has yielded a fascinating text which provides unprecedented insights into the didactic programme of Angelico, his superiors and patrons.

The art of Fra Angelico has made a comeback in recent years. Until recently the only books available in English on the painter were those by Sir John Pope-Hennessy (*Fra Angelico*, 1952 and *Angelico*, 1974) and Christopher Lloyd (*Fra Angelico*, 1979). After the fashion for Byzantine icons in the late '70s and early '80s, the Christmas card, calendar and coffee-table book manufacturers have turned to early renaissance Western art for their subjects. Angelico's images seem to suit the market: colourful, easily intelligible and not too challenging. Tourists likewise now normally include the Priory of San Marco among the 'musts' to be ticked off in the three days or so in which they "do Florence". But until now no-one has brought together a sense of the place and of the art in an authoritative work. Hood succeeds in doing so. Read with the new works by Didi-Huberman and Bonsanti (both 1990) which Hood so graciously recommends, we have a new key to interpreting Angelico's San Marco corpus.

Hood's approach

Hood the art-analyst scrutinizes well Angelico's use of colour, his technique in tempera and fresco, his solutions to particular visual problems, his use of advanced vanishing-point perspective, his naturalistic depictions of physiognomy, architecture and scenery, and so on. He notes that "our disposition to believe that visual illusions are real, even when we know better, is the legacy of artists like Fra Angelico" (p. 278). However, he proposes the radical thesis that stylistic categories are "irrelevant to interpreting Fra Angelico's work in the ambience of the Dominican Order and its corporate aesthetic and symbolic expectations" (p. x) and specifically seeks "to pass over some important issues (like the degree of Michelozzo's or even Alberti's importance for Fra Angelico) [and] to avoid drawing tight conclusions about either style or subject matter" (p. xi). This may frustrate some more traditional art critics. Hood is more interested in what the artist was trying to say to his fifteenth-century viewers.

We know very little about Angelico the man. Dominicans are fairly coy about promoting their more heroic members; Angelico though commonly called 'Blessed' was only formally beatified in 1982. When non-Dominicans have written about him—such as Vasari in the 16th century and the Anglican critics of the 19th century—there has been some imaginative hagiography but little hard fact. Even if he is an unembarrassed admirer of Angelico's work, Hood the biographer and social historian has not presumed the myth. He seeks to understand Angelico's art in the context of the social history of fifteenth century Florence and the ideological history of the Observants for whom Angelico was a principal propagandist. By describing the ideals, daily rituals and pictorial traditions of the friars he throws important new light on the paintings. This is, in fact, where Hood is at his most persuasive and enlightening. He might, however, have said more about the wider ecclesiastical and socio-economic context: the tumult and consolidation in the church; the Florentine renaissance with its great commercial, political and cultural ferment; the personalities of the bankers, bishops and popes to whose stars Angelico hitched his wagon; the nature and significance of patronage.

Hood's grasp of Angelico's intellectual and spiritual milieu though unprecedentedly rich is still incomplete. He certainly examines the *institutional* tradition out of which Angelico speaks, attempting to get into the genius of the observant Dominican reform through understanding its *practices*; and better than anyone before him he succeeds. What is lacking is a thorough examination of the *doctrinal* tradition out of which the painter preached, an attempt to get into the mindset of the observant Dominican reform through its articulated *beliefs*: in particular its all-pervading Catholic Christianity, and more specifically its Thomism.

Secular art criticism is often suspicious of theology even as a hermeneutic for such overtly religious art as Angelico's. Thus what struck

one reviewer (Nicholas Penny in the *TLS*) as Hood's "unostentatiously profound sympathy for the values of the friars", contributing enormously to his magisterial interpretation of Angelico's works, was lambasted by another reviewer (Keith Christiansen in *The Spectator*) as "pious adulation" reflecting the author's seduction by irrelevant sentiments; what the first praised as "the sacerdotal care with which every sentence has been crafted", the second judged "self-indulgent", "opaque", "inflated" language called forth perhaps by pious religiosity. Indeed Christiansen can tag as 'ominous' the very choice of a chapter title "Nature and Grace in the Art of Fra Angelico" as if the mention of specifically *religious* motifs make a study less respectable. Whether driven by prejudice or just plain ignorance, art criticism which fails to take seriously the specifically religious in religious art fails to take the art seriously too.

Politically correct or not, Hood is right to recognize that one can not understand works like Angelico's without understanding what they assumed, what they were trying to express, indeed preach, and how they would have been received by their intended viewers. This has been the manifest gap in most Angelico criticism to date. Hood demonstrates that Angelico was a specifically *Dominican* painter. He shows how Angelico manipulated his painted vocabulary to meet the particular needs and uses of the public, the patrons, the friars, novices and lay brothers to whom the various parts of the church and priory were assigned. Thus by examining the Dominican life-style, theologies, spirituality and devotional practices of the period, Hood is able to cast new light on the significance on the art-works.

David Ekserdjian in *The Times* commends Hood for having "steeped himself in Dominican theology of the period, as exemplified by the writings of Saint Antoninus". Actually, after a brief summary (p. 24) of Antoninus' thought there are few references to it in the rest of the work: Hood declares that there is no reason to think Antoninus was "specially sensitive visually" (which, as he should know, tells us nothing about how strong his opinions would have been about art), nor that he "cared very much about painting" (he very likely cared about its impact). The author gives even less attention to the works of Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas and John Dominici who were the prime intellectual influences in the Order at the time and undoubtedly much studied by Angelico himself.

Hood's thesis

Hood's thesis is as follows. Art-works helped fifteenth-century Florentines to know who they were, embodying not just some overt subject like the Madonna and Child, but their own variety of interdependent social relationships. But artists are more than mere mirrors or reporters: they can be very active agents in the history of subjectivity. Renaissance artists (and Hood's Angelico is not a mediæval but a mainstream renaissance man) used new techniques to locate the viewer's imagination in the temporal and spatial domain of the representation itself,

and mimetic devices to signify things beyond what they described, mining each other's work and appropriating meaning as well as form and function.

Angelico had his own overt and hidden agendas. What Hood wants to do is understand how Angelico thought as a painter, what he was up to, "to go beneath the surface events of the artist's life in order to construct a credible account of his intentions, both as an artist and as a friar" (p. 1). So we must (a) look long and hard at the paintings themselves, their composition, drawing, colour etc; and (b) take seriously the claims and aspirations of the Dominican friars as those found coded expression in the works. So the book's principal concern is with Angelico's art as an expression of the Dominican community and tradition.

Hood's Angelico was conservative, determined to appropriate the energies of two mythical golden ages: the apostolic generation and the first generations of Dominicans. His 'programme' was to supplement through art the various verbal and behavioural strategies designed to constitute a particularly Observant Dominican subjectivity. Hood is right to be wary of reading too much of Dominican theology into the paintings as if they were merely illustrations for Aquinas' or Antoninus' *summas*—the same complaint, of course, might be made (and has been made) about his own eisegesis of Dominican customs into every painting. But he exaggerates the divide between theology and mores, between doctrine and life as when he declares his hermeneutical dogma that the vision Angelico aimed to present is "to be sought in behavioural customs rather than in theological abstractions. . . not in theological texts but in practices of liturgical custom" (pp. x and xii). If only Hood had pursued both!

Nonetheless he does pursue the first well. In his Introduction and first two chapters, Hood outlines the history of the Dominican observance up to and including the fifteenth century, and its particular incarnation at San Marco. He offers a reconstruction of the priory and church, apportioning functions to each space so as better to understand the expected audience of each artwork:

Ties of kinship and commerce, of preaching and politics, inevitably penetrated the institutional membranes that separated the outside world from these urban cloisters. Freedom of access, however, was greater from the inside out than from the outside in. The plans of monastic and mendicant buildings articulated the graduated degrees of intimacy that someone from the outside might enjoy within the resident community. A kind of boundary, each space carried its peculiar charge of social possibilities as well as its peculiar limitations and the art made to go in those places precisely observed the canons of decorum regulating the composition of the audience intended to behold it. (p. 2)

The book then interprets each of the works against the background of its predecessors whether elsewhere in Dominican or other art, or elsewhere in

Angelico's own corpus: there are three chapters each on the altarpieces, the cloister and chapter rooms, and the cells. In each case Hood distinguishes the 'given' traditional elements and Angelico's novelties. Far from being 'extraneous' as Keith Christiansen has claimed, this material is central to the author's case and provides it with invaluable support. A good example of the benefits of Hood's historical scholarship is the light he is able to cast upon the *San Marco Altarpiece* by his study of the *Annalena Altarpiece*. He offers a convincing new theory of the provenance of the latter work which makes it, as it were, a trial run for the former. No commentator before him had offered an even remotely satisfactory hypothesis.

In the last chapter Hood concludes his itinerary of San Marco with a discussion of the *Madonna and Child with Eight Saints* and the *Annunciation in the north corridor* (he regards the latter as Angelico's masterpiece), using these two works to summarize his themes and to demonstrate Angelico's technique. In an appendix we are offered a copy of the Observant Constitutions—a fascinating and often quite amusing document—the importance of which he notes at the beginning:

because the Constitutions are subject to frequent amendment by the General Chapters that met every few years, and because those amendments reflect changes in the Order's self-definition over time, it is very important to work with a version of the Constitutions as close as possible to the period one is studying . . . Students of the period are thus singularly fortunate that the copy of the Constitutions made for San Marco in 1445 has survived. Its entire text is reproduced here, with a translation, as an appendix. (p. 7)

What Hood fails to mention here (though he does so in the fine print at the back of the book) is that the translator, Fr Simon Tugwell, O.P., insists this copy of the Constitutions is not that commissioned in 1445 at all, but from much earlier, well before the foundation of the Observant houses in Cortona, Fiesole and Florence. Given how crucial Hood has said it is to have a near-contemporary version, this makes his 'near enough is good enough' response to Tugwell at the end of the book (p. 279) rather weak. The rule includes some very severe laws on the obligations and ascetical practices of the friars; we are not told how seriously it was taken (Hood seems to assume it was followed closely). Constitution 52 decrees:

Our brethren are to have moderately sized, lowly houses. Nor are there to be any notable curiosities or extravagances in our houses in such things as statues, pictures, and decorated pavements, which all disfigure our poverty. If anyone goes against this henceforth, he will be liable to the punishment due to a very grave fault.

It is unlikely that Antoninus and Angelico were held to have committed a very grave fault in the magnificent building and decorating of San Marco:

the punishment due was self-proclamation in chapter, baring oneself to be beaten at the superior's pleasure, eating gruel on the refectory floor, lying prostrate before the door of the church as the brethren entered, and excommunication from the community.

Painter, preacher, saint

Fra Angelico was a preacher and saint. There is no doubt that faith inspired all his works and that they were offered first and foremost as acts of devotion, prayer, theological study, contemplation, worship. They were also acts of preaching. The mediæval slogans "in a picture those who know no letters may yet read" and "painting is the literature of the laity" were largely true; but one should notice that much religious art was directed first and foremost to God (as an act of worship) and even when it was overtly didactic it was often directed to quite sophisticated viewers as much as to the illiterate. There were even more pragmatic reasons for good religious art: as John Dominici declared, painting was a reasonable source of income for poor Observants, and as Antoninus observed, devotional pictures were a way of encouraging people to want to come to church.

Angelico died in Rome on 18 February 1455. He was buried in Sta Maria sopra Minerva, near the body of the Observant movement's founder, St Catherine of Siena. Later there would be placed nearby the *Risen Christ* carved by his admirer Michelangelo (who, on viewing Angelico's north-corridor *Annunciation*, declared: "this man goes to heaven to find the subjects of his works"). Admired even during his lifetime for saintly virtue, he was soon after known as 'the Angelic Painter' (hence 'Angelico'), paralleling 'the Angelic Teacher', St Thomas Aquinas. As a tribute to his holy life and his evangelical painting, Angelico was beatified and named Patron of Artists on 3 October 1982 by Pope John Paul II, who declared his paintings miracle enough to satisfy the requirements of law—like Aquinas whose writings were declared miraculous and sufficient to warrant canonisation.

There is more here than a mere similarity of posthumous nicknames and praises. Angelico was a thoroughly Thomist painter. Amongst his last works was the papal chapel of Nicholas V in the Vatican. On the ceiling he painted evangelists and doctors of the church, patrons of preaching and teaching. Amongst them he dared to paint Aquinas, who though two centuries dead would not in fact be declared a doctor for another century (by another Dominican saint, Pope Pius V, in 1567). Angelico was in fact one of the principal promoters of the cult of Aquinas, as images of the latter abound in his works. But this was no mere personal attraction. Angelico loved both Thomas his sainted brother and Thomas' magisterial teaching. (Cf Pope Pius XII, "*Address at the Opening of the Vatican Exhibition of Fra Angelico*," 1955).

Surprisingly little has been written to date on Angelico's theology. Until now his critics have either dismissed him as a pious sentimentalist or treated him more respectfully as a father of the secular Renaissance, rarely

adverting to the religious message which his work unconsciously presumed and, more importantly, consciously preached. Hood's book marks a turning point in Angelico studies. No critic after Hood will be able to ignore his Dominicaness. The next step will be for the critics to recognize his theology: in particular his Scripturalism and his Thomism.

It has been observed often enough that Angelico painted no secular paintings: no portraits, no landscapes, no recreations of pagan myths. Apart from those lives of the saints read in the Divine Office, he took all his subject matter from the Scriptures as interpreted in the tradition. By the end of that century San Marco was a world centre of Scriptural languages and scholarship. Many of Angelico's paintings refer to particular identifiable pericopes. But he did not merely paint these texts as if they were illustrations for a children's bible story-book: he offered an exegesis, an interpretation by selection and nuance, a doctrinal meditation on the *sacra pagina*; and he provided an enduring image which people took to the text when they read or heard it in future. So it was that Pope John Paul II in his *motu proprio* on Angelico's beatification described his corpus as "a *summa* of divine mysteries in colours rather than words, a Scripture-inspired profession of faith."

The reference to a *summa* is, of course, another pointer to Aquinas. The early fifteenth century saw a renewed commitment to Thomism in the Dominican Order and this would have been central to Angelico's own intellectual formation during those crucial years in Fiesole. Angelico's Thomist worldview affected his aesthetics. He combined much of traditional Byzantine and Gothic styles with increasingly influential Renaissance techniques, following traditional iconography in many respects, but departing from it in other ways—as Hood admirably demonstrates. The mindset which allowed this, however, was not so much Renaissance humanism as a thoroughly Thomist dialecticism, seeking to reconcile apparent tensions between the preaching matter of religious art and the new forms of expression sweeping through the West which would inevitably affect its content. Thus, for example, Angelico readily used the new methods of rational reconstruction of visible world in three-dimensional space, without going all the way with naturalism, so as to preserve a sense of the mysterious and the ineffable. He expressed mediæval mysticism in humanistic terms, and *vice versa*: a painter's insight into development of doctrine. Several writers have sought to establish a gradual transition from late Gothic traditionalism to Renaissance innovation in Angelico's art, and to date his works accordingly; but there was no simple unidirectional 'progress' of this sort. Rather, Angelico readily switched between styles, as when more or less contemporaneously painting the thoroughly Renaissance semi-public paintings for San Marco and the more austere and mystical cell frescos.

Art-critics (not Hood) have commonly characterized Angelico as 'other-worldly', but this is to underestimate the influence of his social and ecclesial environment, his Thomist attitude to the world, and his concern

to preach to real people. The Dominican Order was founded in direct opposition to the dualist sects. The friars preached that we should not view the material world as evil or manifesting a struggle of uncertain outcome between good and evil. Rather, as Aquinas taught, God is immanent in and knowable through nature; he has found it advantageous “to transmit things of God and spirit by means of corporeal similitudes” because they are thereby more accessible to human consciousness; to object to such worldliness is blasphemous, for “to slight the perfection of created things is to slight the perfection of their Creator”. As writers such as Eco (*Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 1986) have demonstrated, contrary to the puritanical picture some have of the Middle Ages, there was in the friars’ worldview a radical openness to creation. Angelico prompted people to recognize God not by escaping the world, but in their own experience of the world, as refined by faith and meditation; to bring their religious and cultural baggage with them to prayer and contemplation and see it echoed in the Florentine architecture, scenery or costume; to be ‘at home’ in the heavenly scene. Visually mimetic images were used analogically, that is to signify things at once familiar and yet transcendent. His work, like that of many of his contemporaries, helped Florentines to know who they were by mirroring the beholders and their world, embodying their various relationships and ideologies, and yet calling them to conversion. Grace healed, elevated and perfected nature. Thus when Hood isolates correctly Angelico’s use of natural imagery he might profitably have added some analysis of the ideological posture that made this possible:

By rendering nature as though it were already perfected and thus impassible, Fra Angelico found for the San Marco altarpiece a uniquely eloquent metaphor of the Heavenly City. It expressed what were for him and his Dominican brethren eternal and therefore inarguable (*sic*) truths. His artistic language further proposed that these verities did not lie beyond the possibilities of human experience, but were rather extensions and, in a certain sense, natural conclusions of it. The search for this language had motivated Fra Angelico’s development as an altarpiece painter from his earliest work for San Domenico in Fiesole, and he was never to move beyond the level of its achievement at San Marco . . . [He endeavoured] to represent the ineffable beatitude of paradise in a way that neither compromised its unchangeable perfection nor withdrew it altogether from the grasp of ordinary and sinful mortals. In so doing, [he] predicated new visible forms for the intuitions of a consciousness already disposed to apprehending eternity in the moment . . . [and] revealed the images of things less often seen than hoped for, here conjured before the eyes as much for the sake of delight as of devotion. (pp. 116–121)

It is hard for us grasp the mediæval integration of values: that for someone like Angelico the transcendentals were never actualized

sporadically and accidentally but adhered to being as coextensive metaphysical properties. He knew none of the modern disjunction between the beautiful and the functional (which has so corrupted architecture): whatever the logical distinctions, the beautiful, the useful and the good are always present in same thing; thus a work of art or craft was always at once beautiful in itself and functional. Beauty for the Thomists was an objective reality, even if, as they well knew, it requires a viewer (perhaps a cultivated viewer) to be appreciated. It is first and foremost a transcendental, an attribute or perfection of God, even if known through creation which participates in it. From the sensual beauty of things in their natural perfection we can therefore abstract the unseen. As Eco has observed in *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (1988):

The Medievals inhabited a world filled with references, reminders and overtones of Divinity, manifestations of God in things. Nature spoke to them heraldically . . . Nature was seen as a vast allegorical representation of the supernatural, and art was put on the same level . . . (pp. 53, 61)

Beauty consists in resplendence of form, and includes unity, due order and proportion, light, colour and clarity. It delights the senses, pleases the imagination and emotions, impresses itself on the memory, and satisfies the reasoning mind; the *visio* of seeing the beautiful is a kind of knowledge or restful contemplation. The mediævals were especially sensitive to the profound psychological importance of the senses, manifest as much in the liturgy of the period as in the writings of the theorists, with its high art, drama and liturgical action, rich vestments, music, responses and silence, incense and bees wax, oil lamps, and the rest. Again this is alien to the post-enlightenment mindset, with its obsession with the functional, the intelligible and the wordy, vainly seeking even in art and liturgy to exhaust the mystery and articulate the ineffable. In Angelico's time art was at the service of a liturgy which was seen much more as an invitation to step into another world, to participate even now in the world to come, to be immersed in mystery, through the feast of sensuality which surrounded the worshipper.

So the theological aesthetics of Angelico were highly complex. One might note two further aspects: the central importance of light as a Scriptural metaphor for divine glory, presence and revelation; and the code of colours, often reflecting the rarity and expense of the paints and their ability to catch the viewer's attention. *Hyperdulia* for Mary was expressed by using a very expensive blue (made of lapis lazuli) or red (made from silver and sulphur), while *latria* for Father, Son or Holy Ghost could be expressed through gold or silver paint.

Angelico the Dominican and Thomist believed in *Veritas*—truth, whether revealed or natural, eminently knowable by the rational mind made by God to know truth, just as the senses were made to perceive beauty. The painter sought, therefore, to provide lucid, vivid, readily

accessible stimuli to meditation on the sacred truths, free from the distracting or the opaque. John Dominici and Antoninus both taught that painters should adopt a clear, economic style, attractive but devoid of imaginative heresies or vanities (there are, for instance, few animals in Angelico's work). Late mediæval spiritual exercises were often of a visualizing kind: scenes from the life of Christ, for instance, were often visualized by the person praying, and present or remembered 'holy pictures' facilitated this practice. Praying with religious art, whether for the literate or illiterate, paralleled the tradition of *lexio divina*. The painter was a professional visualizer of the sacred stories, encountering no empty canvas in the viewing-public's mind, but having to take into account and have visual 'dialogue with' the public imagination.

From the beginning of their preaching against the Albigenes, the spirituality of the friars was essentially Christocentric and incarnational: it emphasized the importance of Christ's coming *in the flesh* for our salvation. Through the assumption of human nature, he made amends for our sin, made possible our adoption as children of God, and revealed himself as the road of truth which will lead us, through passion and resurrection, to an endlessly happy life with the Father. Thus a certain frankness, a realism, which has little appeal to our more squeamish age, was a feature of Angelico's Passion art. Furthermore, God became man because this was the best way for him to liberate us from the author of sin; to cure our presumption and pride; to heal our wretchedness; to teach us the dignity of human nature unsullied by sin; to increase our faith, hope and love; to set us an example of living well; to bring us to the true and happy goal of life: beatific union with God for all eternity, a full share in His own godhead. Thus painted homilies on the life and death of Christ told not only of the salvific centrality of those events, but of virtues to be acquired by the viewer (*cf.* Alce, *Homilies of Fra Angelico*, 1983). There is an eschatology here too: not of the apocalyptic sort characteristic of St Vincent Ferrer and Savonarola, but more optimistic. The heavenly host of angels and saints features throughout Angelico's works not merely as witnesses and inspiration, but as the *destination* for the faithful onlooker.

In part II, rather than speaking further in the abstract about Angelico's theology and practice, I will examine two works to which Hood turns his attention: the *San Marco Altarpiece* (ch. 5) and the north-corridor *Annunciation* (ch. 12). My thesis throughout, however, is this: Angelico preaches through the medium of art a spirituality largely missed by his critics, which focuses on the way to the *beatific vision*. The 'way' proposed may take forms as various as those of Observant friar, pope or lay person; but it will ultimately be inspired and made possible only by appropriation of the incarnation and passion of Christ. Thus Angelico's art is a kind of *spiritual map* or *how to* series, drawn in the idiom of a fifteenth century, Florentine, Thomist, observant-Dominican friar, and declaring: *this is how to get to heaven*.