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Building the Imagined Community: Dominican Exempla and Theological Knowledge

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During the thirteenth century, preachers considered sermons to be among the most important methods of communicating written material to the unlettered. Within a sermon, the use of exempla—short stories used to illustrate a moral point—was a primary means of disseminating theological information, and throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the number of exempla compilations intended as preaching aids increased markedly. Exempla collectors such as Caesarius of Heisterbach and Stephen of Bourbon shared and re-used stories to disseminate theological knowledge. Despite the communal nature of exempla, individual stories were more than unidirectional theological transmissions or stock tales repeated

1 Different versions of this paper were presented at Goodly Worlds: Places, Topoi, and Global Riches Symposium (Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association), June 1998, Big Sky, Montana, and at the “Thirteenth-Century Europe” conference in St. Andrews, 2–4 July 1998.

with inconsequential variations. The ways in which each author presented individual stories changed according to audience, intent, the specific theological principle each author wished to illustrate, or the place that a particular exemplum filled in a thematic compilation. Understanding these nuances is crucial for understanding the ways in which exempla functioned as dialogue among clerics, and between clerics and the laity. Variations of exempla among individual collectors not only reflect order-specific interests and goals, but also reveal the elements of communication and negotiation by which exempla collectors built up a shared vision of the church. These exempla suggest how members of the Dominican Order "imagined" communities and how the practices associated with those ideas would affect the ideal community of the church. Preaching and the shared use of exempla created religious communities linked by a common theology and the beginnings of a network of shared associations—the embodiment of theological principles on a Europe-wide scale.

To illustrate this point, I will focus on several exempla concerning daily religious issues and practices, in particular those surrounding the concept of superstition. Most of these stories are taken from Book Four of the Tractatus de diversiis materiis praedicabilibus, compiled by the Dominican friar Stephen of Bourbon (d. 1261). I will compare them with versions of the same tales told by Caesarius of Heisterbach

(d. 1240) in his *Dialogus Miraculorum* and his *Libri viii miraculorum*, and with *exempla* found in the sermons of Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240). A comparison of these stories highlights the ways that rewritten and retold existing *exempla* embodied and disseminated order-specific emphases. In the case of Stephen of Bourbon, his stories were crafted to reflect the Dominican Order’s theology of education and perfectibility.¹

THE USE OF EXEMPLA

As a genre, exempla had their origins in the works of Aristotle as a rhetorical device. Early Christian writers also used exempla, in the form of parables. However, only in the twelfth century did preachers and monastic writers such as Honorius d'Autun and Jacques de Vitry consider exempla a defined, separate literary genre and discuss their function and elaborate rules for their use and assign them a prominent place within sermon structure. Preachers emphasized the religious function of exempla and associated their use with a number of spiritual benefits among both lay and monastic audiences. Exempla delivered religious precepts in a memorable form comprehensible to most audiences. In the early thirteenth century, the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach told of an abbot who chided his monks for listening with greater enthusiasm to a story about King Arthur than to unadorned theological treatises. Humbert of Romans, fifth master general of the Dominican Order, argued in De dono timoris that while lectures alone might easily be forgotten by the preacher's audience, the use of exempla helped the audience remember his words and moved them along the path of spiritual education and health. The Dominican inquisitor Stephen of Bourbon claimed a long list of virtues that fifteen centuries, thirty-eight surviving exempla collections out of forty-six had named authors or compilers. Of these, sixteen were Dominican, thirteen Franciscan, seven Cistercian, and two were secular clerics. For a recent extended treatment of Dominican educational practices, see M. Michèle Mulchahey, who notes that education and preaching were inextricably linked for Dominicans (M. Michèle Mulchahey, "First the Bow Is Bent in Study...", in Dominican Education before 1350, Studies and Texts 132 [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1998], 11).

1Mulchahey, 414–15. In the same place the author comments that exempla are "perhaps the single most common form of medieval narrative."


7Humbert of Romans, De Dono Timoris, 188–212 ff., qtd. in Welter, 72.
resulted from the use of exempla, including the audience’s detestation of vice in all forms and its willingness to have recourse to penance—and the church—as a means of correcting spiritual problems. Exempla, he argued, were the most effective means of imprinting proper theology on the minds of the preacher’s congregation; not only were they memorable stories, but they were actual embodiments of theological understanding:

The highest wisdom of God, Jesus Christ taught in deeds before words and he rendered the subtlety of preaching and doctrine almost corporeal, thick, and visible, fortifying and clothing it with different comparisons, parables, miracles, and exempla, so that his doctrine would be more quickly grasped, more easily understood, more strongly retained in the memory, and more effectively put into action.  

Humbert of Romans argued that exempla were not only a congenial means for transmitting ideas but could also serve to further bolster the preacher’s authority. To that end, the preacher ought never to use exempla unless he personally knew them to be true.  

By the thirteenth century, mendicant preachers found exempla so useful that they paid far more attention to their collection and use

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8Stephen of Bourbon, 13.
10Mulchahey, 462.
than had previous authors of preaching aids. Within the Dominican Order, conventual libraries were expected to make preaching aids, including exempla collections, available to preachers. Stephen of Bourbon's Tractatus de diversiis materiis praedicabilibus (1250) is the first Dominican collection specifically of exempla, as opposed to the occasional exemplum found in a sermon. However, the organization of the two works reveals some significant differences in environment, presentation, and goals. The most immediate difference is the intended audience of each piece. Originally intended as a calendar of saints, Caesarius's Dialogus is somewhat more limited in its intended audience and its scope than is Stephen's Tractatus. The Dialogus was designed for the education of other Cistercians and is written as an extended conversation between a Cistercian novice and an older monk. Most of the exempla pertaining to monks or the monastic life were drawn from Cistercian settings or experience. Despite this focus, Caesarius did not exclude laypeople from the Dialogus, and he related numerous exempla about them as well. The stories about the laity were mostly drawn from urban sources; there were few exempla concerning rural people. This use of urban settings might reflect the areas where the monks made, or expected to make, contact with the laity. In contrast, the Cistercians presented the stories about themselves within a rural setting of “withdrawal” from the world, although they were in fact highly integrated into thirteenth-century society.

By contrast, Stephen's Tractatus had no explicit framework that might limit it to a particular area or group. Stephen's intent was to

11Mulchahey, 191.
12Welter, L'exemplum. Other Cistercians who used exempla extensively but did not arrange them into an exemplarium were Alain of Lille and Helinand of Froidmont (see Mulchahey, 458. For mendicant use of exempla, see Schmitt, 5-23, esp. 23).
organize existing stories and make them accessible for preachers and scholars, and his context of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit aimed his exemplarium at preacher and audience alike. Unlike the Dialogus, Stephen's exempla drawn from religious life did not overtly favor any one order: representatives of mendicants and older orders alike appear in the Tractatus. Naturally, it is quite possible that many of Stephen's unattributed monastic exempla, such as that of a novice tempted to steal an item seen in a vision, came from stories told about members of the Dominican Order, but they were not labeled as such.¹⁴ Stephen's exempla concerning laypeople were similarly broad in scope, and many were either unique to the Tractatus or were the earliest version of a particular tale.¹⁵ Both traits allowed the collection to be applicable to a wide audience.

Stephen drew many of his exempla from his work as an inquisitor in the Dombes. Not only his activities, but also his location associated him with the papal reform movement and with concerns for the dissemination of uniform religious practices. During the thirteenth century, Lyon saw two major councils, in 1245 (the thirteenth general council) and in 1274 (the fourteenth). The Dominican priory at Lyon was involved in papal politics, as well as figuring centrally in the growth and organization of the Dominican Order; the priory counted as members not only Stephen of Bourbon, but William Peraldus, Masters General Humbert of Romans and Raymond of Penafort, and the future Pope Innocent V, Peter of Tarentaise. This context indicates that Stephen's collection was clearly meant to be used by the Order of Preachers as a whole, in situations far beyond the boundaries of his priory or his immediate region, whereas Caesarius of Heisterbach's linkages binding the monastic community at Heisterbach into a larger regional community. Mulchahey notes that, as a general rule, Cistercian exempla tend to focus on the direct moral lesson involved, whereas mendicant exempla usually contain more developed narratives (Mulchahey, 416).

collection had a more regional flavor (although clearly it, too, was used well beyond monastic or regional boundaries). Stephen’s collection served as a model for several others, including Humbert of Romans (d. ca. 1277), William Peraldus (d. 1271), Martin le Polonais (d. 1279), and Nicolas de Hanapes (d. 1291). 16

Although both exempla collections spoke to ongoing changes in the meaning of piety, the variations in their intended audience resulted in a concurrent difference in underlying assumptions, shown by the organizational structure of the tales in question. Caesarius of Heisterbach arranged his subjects in terms of the stages of the Christian life, ranging from conversion (the first chapter) to the afterlife (the last chapter). 17 Within this framework, many of his subjects, such as contrition, confession, or the sacraments, were discussions of the practices necessary for the Christian to maintain his or her spiritual state. Other topics, such as temptation, devils, and retribution, were discussions of problems individual Christians might face on a daily basis and the punishments meted out to those who strayed from those practices. Finally, Caesarius wrote about the components of the “mental frameworks” fundamental to the Christian life—for example, holy simplicity—and other elements of a Christian’s life, such as visions, miracles, and the Virgin Mary.

Like the *Dialogus Miraculorum*, the *Tractatus* is a thematically oriented compilation based on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. As Alan Bernstein has demonstrated, this collection is not merely a random gathering of stories, but a carefully crafted treatise in which each exemplum is specifically placed within a broader framework for

16Welter, 215–31. Humbert of Romans followed Stephen’s organization while compiling *Liber de dono timoris*, although he added many exempla and removed location-specific information from many others. This work was once attributed to Albertus Magnus under the title *De habundancia exemplorum* (Ulm, 1480).

17His subject headings are conversion, contrition, confession, temptation, devils, simplicity, Holy Mary, visions, the Eucharist, miracles, dying, and “retribution in the hereafter.”
maximum theological benefit for both clerical and lay audiences. In contrast to the focus of the Dialogus, Stephen’s Tractatus centered on the spiritual attributes that formed part of the Christian’s mental framework—the foundation of a Christian life—rather than on a chronological progression through the stages of that life. Nevertheless, by no means did Stephen ignore the more practical aspects of Christian life and theology. Each chapter presented a series of the problems a Christian might encounter on a daily basis (demons, superstition, temptation) and denoted a range of the specific remedies associated with those problems (confession, penance). For example, in his first chapter (“The Gift of Fear”) Stephen presented several types of Christian fear, from fear of God to fear of a future punishment. Within each section, Stephen provided exempla illustrating the practices Christians might engage in to achieve the appropriate frame of mind (or, as in the case of Purgatory, to avoid punishment). Stephen’s death in 1261 left the Tractatus incomplete—he had finished only four of his intended seven parts (fear, piety, knowledge, and strength [fortitude]; a fifth section on counsel remains unfinished). However, Stephen’s focus on the habits of mind and behavior and their correlation to concrete practices gave his work greater flexibility for the use of both preacher and lay audience alike and created a common framework of theological practice and understanding with which preachers could build an image of the church.

**Negotiation**

Building up a community is a long-term process, and part of that process is negotiation—overt and subtle—over norms and behavior. Exempla can reflect that process of negotiation, both among clerics and between clerics and laity. For example, in one anecdote Stephen described a Dominican friar who had once been a wealthy banker and who possessed a beautiful voice. The friar was tempted by the devil to

18 Bernstein, 84.
leave the order and become a priest so he might have a higher status and sing his own Mass. After long debate and struggle, Stephen concluded, the friar conquered his vocal pride and remained content as a friar.19 With variations of detail, this story also appeared in Caesarius of Heisterbach, who used it to explore the questions and fears of Cistercian novices.20

Both stories indicated that their authors were attempting to deal with clerical dissatisfaction in very order-specific ways. The protagonist of Caesarius's story was unhappy with the austerities of his order, and the Dominican friar felt keenly the humility caused by his mendicant status. Both stories reflected a dialogue about the options open to their protagonists, as well. The conversation, although overt in Caesarius's anecdote while only reported in Stephen's version, recorded the manner in which authority was debated even within the various monastic orders. The commonality of the story and the order-specific changes made to it by each author reflect the existence of such debate among clerics. They also show how generic tales could be changed by specific clerical compilers to reflect order-specific interests and goals, evidence of a conversation between clerics about the beliefs and practices of the church community.

**Comparisons: Theology**

Part of the negotiation of religiosity involved the way *exemplum* compilers coordinated audience, interests, and theological necessities within their stories. Reconstructing their strategies can help lay bare the “mental map” of *exemplum* compilers. The Dominican Order was founded specifically as an order of educated preachers. Only spiritual knowledge and theologically trained preachers could combat the disease

19Stephen of Bourbon, 190–91 [#219]. Stephen told a similar story about a cleric who, on the strength of a dream, wanted to become a bishop—a position for which he was unsuited [#268].

of heresy, and as a result Dominicans paid extensive attention to the processes involved in education. The Dominicans recruited from the universities educated men, already trained in the liberal arts, although the liberal arts themselves did not form part of specifically Dominican education. Throughout the thirteenth century the Dominicans refined an elaborate educational system aimed at perfecting their own preaching and theological skills in order better to serve the spiritual needs of the laity. Hence they also paid particular attention to the tools, methods, and rhetorical strategies that would best serve those goals. Among these were sermon structure, preaching methodology, and the appropriate use of *exempla.*

More than most clerics, the Dominicans showed their concern for education and teaching by underscoring new or reiterated theological stances. For example, Stephen related an *exemplum* in his chapter on the Gift of Piety that concerned a hermit who yearly on the eighth of September heard heavenly choirs praising God on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. The hermit revealed this occurrence to the pope, who decreed that the Nativity of the Virgin be observed.

The story of the celestial choirs is a common one. Ecclesiastics at Angers in France reported that in the early fifth century a man heard the angels sing on the eighth of September and, asking the reason, was told that it was the Nativity of the Virgin. Although no historical basis exists for the events of the story, the story was commonly known. The commemoration of Mary's Nativity actually began around the year 650, although the observance did not enjoy regular and popular use until the twelfth century. In relating the story, however, Stephen made explicit reference to new theological dictates, namely those of

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21 See Mulchahey, 3-70, for an extensive discussion of the goals of early Dominican educational practices and rhetoric. Mulchahey also considers the formation of a “Dominican interior life” and provides a detailed survey of specific Dominican scholarly subjects.

22 Stephen of Bourbon, [107].

Innocent IV, who instituted the regular observance of the Octave in 1245 at the Council of Lyon.

As a member of an order dedicated to Mary, and ever sensitive to new devotional practices, Stephen took the opportunity of a well-known Marian miracle to educate both cleric and laity in a recent reiteration of proper observance and to underscore the regularization of a devotional practice.

Dominican concerns for education coupled with sensitivity to current theology appear throughout Stephen of Bourbon’s practical use and arrangement of exempla. Taken together, these exempla show a range of behaviors and appropriate responses available to the preacher, and they demonstrate Stephen’s ability to rewrite them as needed to suit and reflect the needs of the locality. His pedagogy provided the preacher with a template that was quite clear, thus encouraging its application to a wide set of audiences. Although this strategy is clear throughout Stephen’s work, it can be seen especially well in his discussion of superstition.

Stephen’s sequence of stories on superstition geared toward various audiences began with a basic story intended to illustrate the fundamental inefficacy of divination. In this story, a fairly standard tale found in several collections of exempla, the soldiers of a king of Castile wanted to stop their campaign because they had seen an augury—a flight of crows—and felt that this boded ill for their campaign against the Muslims. The king told his troops that they should not put faith in crows but that instead they should trust in his experience, which was far greater than that of the crows. The king then proceeded to

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24 The octave was instituted by Innocent IV in accordance with a vow made by the cardinals in the conclave in the autumn of 1241, when Frederick II kept them prisoners for three months (Catholic Encyclopedia, “Feast of the Nativity of the BVM” [The Encyclopedia Press, 1913]).

25 Tubach, 109, motif #1356. The version told by Stephen is found only in his account and that of Jacques de Vitry (motif #1366), but it is similar to an earlier story told of Herod Agrippa (motif #1475). Another version adapted from Aesop is found in numerous manuscripts (motif #1360).
conquer the Muslims, proving the augury false.\textsuperscript{26} Stephen's immediate point was that augury was ineffective and that those who could claim the ability to foretell the future by any method were exerting unfair and illegitimate power over their contemporaries. Moreover, the story pointed out that not only was augury a deception, but it could also detract men from their Christian duty to withstand and attack the “infidel.”

Stephen placed this particular \textit{exemplum} first in his collection and used it as a general introduction to the subject of augury, rather than providing, as did his contemporary and co-religionist William Peraldus, an exhaustive scholarly list of the various types of divination and diviners. His usage is underscored by a comparison of this story with a nearly identical version told by Jacques de Vitry, whom Stephen claimed as his source. De Vitry added a short coda to the story, which directly drew the standard moral that not only are those who practice all forms of divination “miserable,” but so too are those who listen to diviners.\textsuperscript{27} Stephen, however, left out this coda, which his organization rendered unnecessary: through variation in his subsequent text.

\textsuperscript{26}Stephen of Bourbon, 314-15 [353]. “Cum rex Castelle congregasset exercitum et iret contra Sarracenos, occurrerunt exercitui grex cornicularum. Quidam autem milites regis suaserunt redire, dicentes quod malum eis eveniret, quod vincerentur ab hostibus si procederent, quia hoc cognoverant in garritu et volatu cornicularum. Iste cornicule vix habent quatuor annos; ego plus quam viginti annos pugnavi contra Sarracenos, et melius scio artem et modum pugnandi quam iste . . . expertus sum; de quo melius [mihi] debetis credere quam illis.’ Et procedens et contemptnens, vicit Sarracenos.”

\textsuperscript{27}J. Greven, \textit{Die Exempla der Sermones feriales et communes des Jakob von Vitry} (Heidelberg, 1914), #34, 25. The text reads: “—Quam vecordes et miseri qui non solum in garritu avium vel in extis et fimo animalium, sicut quondam pagani faciebant, sed in inferiori garritu hominum eciam auguria captant.” The story is also found in G. Frenken, “Die Exempla des Jacob von Vitry,” in \textit{Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters} 5.1 (München, 1914): #33. Other \textit{exempla} of de Vitry are collected in Th.-F. Crane, ed., \textit{The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry} (London, 1890).
he demonstrated concretely what de Vitry was forced to comment on abstractly.

It should be remembered that de Vitry was writing individual sermons in which each story needed to have its moral clearly drawn. The sermons were to be used as a model collection for other preachers, but they might also be addressed directly to layfolk. Stephen, on the other hand, was creating a compilation of exempla primarily for the use of other preachers in their sermons and for their edification when they met new circumstances and needed to contact new audiences or confronted new heretical practices. Hence he arranged his material in terms of the preacher's need to perfect his preaching. Stephen also provided a range of possible stories that illustrated a single theme to be added by individual preachers in their actual sermon, suggesting that the preacher ought to choose according to his audience's requirements—and its need for perfection. To this end, Stephen organized his stories about divination from the most general—this story, which attacks the basic premises of augury—to more specific tales. Through this arrangement he included many of the potential forms of communication between preacher and audience, covering forms likely to be understood by country folk, by market-goers, and by urban dwellers alike. Hence the moral for this borrowed story is self-evident to its reader and can be assumed from its context; the preacher would draw out the moral for a listening audience.

The tale of the king of Castile illustrated an error committed by the nonliterate who nonetheless "knew" how to read the "text" of signs.\(^{28}\) It was followed by two stories that concerned the same underlying error, augury, but that targeted more specific audiences. In the first story, a man wished that a friend of his, a Spanish scholar, would stay longer at his house. Knowing that the scholar believed in augury,

\(^{28}\)Stephen of Bourbon, 314 [353]. Stephen took this story from Jacques de Vitry (Greven #34, 24–25). This is a common story found in exempla literature; Tubach lists several examples of it. Stephen's story is listed as #1357, "Crow and King" (109). The de Vitry version is #1366 (109), "Crows as Bad Omen"; see also #1360 ("Crow in Borrowed Feathers") and #1475 (119–20) ("Hawk as Death-Omen").
one night his host climbed the roof and imitated a crow’s calls. Believing the cries to be genuine and a bad omen, the scholar felt constrained to remain in his friend’s house.²⁹ The second story was very similar and developed the same theme in a more rural area. This tale revolved around a sharp innkeeper who had rented his room to a rustic. The innkeeper had no other guests and wanted the man to stay on for several more days to increase the inkeeper’s own profits. To scare the rustic into staying, the host used a mooseblower to deceive his guest, telling him that it was a bad omen. When other guests arrived, the host told the rustic that the omens had changed and that he could go.³⁰

The same theological themes—the intrinsic inefficacy of augury and its fundamentally deceptive nature—are illustrated in all three stories. However, they speak to different groups. The story about the scholar might be expected to appeal to the urban and the educated, who might not empathize with a story about an easily deceived rustic or about uneducated soldiers and therefore might not apply the moral of those tales to themselves. A story about a better-educated man in such a situation, however, would drive home Stephen’s lesson. Yet in all the stories, different types of people are led to improper action because of the same set of assumptions. The structure of the error and the beliefs behind it, although not the particular practices, are identical across all social classes, and Stephen provided a means for the preacher to address each group.

Having told these and other tales, Stephen then tackled what he presented as the real, personal, and theological consequences of belief.

²⁹Stephen of Bourbon, 315 [354]. “Item audivi quod quidam scholaris hispanus, credens in auguriis, cum parasset iter suum ut rediret ad terram suam, quidam suus socius, super ostium domus ad modum corvi crochitans, diu eum retinuit, malum omen credentem hoc.”

³⁰Stephen of Bourbon, 315. “Item idem magister Jacobus dicebat quod quidam hospes receperat in nundinis unum provincialem in hospicio; qui, credens cum sibi utilem, cum volebat recedere, sonitum cum vesica faciebat; quo audito, provincialis, dicens malum omen, redibat. Tandem, advenien­tibus alis hospitibus, eum dimisit.”
in divination, thereby moving his readers and their audiences on to more sophisticated theological issues. For example, false beliefs could result in the growth of spiritual blindness—another category of sin gathered under divination and superstitio. Stephen presented a commonly known exemplum about an old woman who was admonished to go to confession. She replied that confession was, for her, an unnecessary precaution: she knew that she would live for five more years because she heard a cuckoo crow five times on the first day of May, implying that she did not need to confess until just prior to her death. Stephen commented that the woman's belief cost her dearly, for she died “thus deceived . . . without last rites or confession.”

A variant of this common tale was related by Caesarius of Heisterbach and concerned a laybrother who thought he would live for twenty-two more years because he heard a cuckoo crow that number of times. He decided to leave his monastery and to live in pleasure for twenty years, reserving the final two years of his supposed span for penance. Caesarius tells us that he died after two years, the length he had allotted for penance, without the possibility of redemption.

31 Stephen of Bourbon, 315 [56]. “Item refert de quadam vetula quod, cum graviter egrotaret et moneretur ad confessionem, dicebat se certam quod viveret per quinque annos adhuc, quia quinquies audiverat prima die maii le cucu quasi sibi respondentem. Cum autem jam non posset loqui, com­monebatur: clamabat cucu, ostendendo quinque digitos; et sic decepta, mortua est sine viatico et confessione.”

32 For the version told of a laybrother, see Caesarius of Heisterbach, Dialogue on Miracles, 3.1, Book 5, #17, 337–38. Wright provides samples of both versions (#41 and #84) in his collection of exempla, which were drawn from twelfth- through the early fourteenth-century sources. Wright does not attribute specific tales to specific sources, so it is impossible to determine whether Stephen’s version represented a time-specific break with the more monastic tradition shown by Caesarius, whether it merely represented a variant tradition, or whether his tales represented abridgments of the same stories found in the Tractatus and the Dialogus. Wright does cite general sources, ranging from the twelfth-century Cistercian Odo de Cerinton to the fourteenth-century Dominican John Bromyard, both English (Thomas Wright, Early English Poetry, Ballads, and Popular Literature of the Middle Ages, A Selection of Latin Stories [London, 1843], 8:42, 74).
Although both stories are clearly variants of the same motif, a superstitious individual deceived by the cries of a cuckoo or other bird, they differ both in significant details and in their underlying assumptions. Stephen’s tale emphasizes the problems caused by the avoidance of confession, whereas Caesarius’s story focuses on the problems caused by the pursuit of pleasure and the evasion of monastic discipline. However, Stephen’s broader topic was not only easily applicable to lay and cleric alike, but it also reflected his social environment, namely increased Dominican contact with the secular world, as well as the new requirement for yearly confession stated in Canon twenty-one of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. As well, it emphasized implicitly a particularly Dominican concern: the need to educate the laity about changes in official religious practices as well as in fundamental theological principles.

The Dominican interest in perfection and education is reflected in a second difference between the two versions, their assumptions about augury. Caesarius’s story reflects the traditional ecclesiastical position that all augury was demonic in origin. Not only is this clear from the text itself but also from Caesarius’s textual organization: he surrounded this anecdote with other stories about the danger and power of demons. For Stephen, on the other hand, augury was merely a mistaken belief. It might place the believer into danger of trafficking with demons, but it was not ipso facto demonic in character. Hence Stephen placed this story together with other exempla about the mistaken nature of augury, not with exempla about demons. As a mistaken belief, superstition was something for which each individual was spiritually responsible. The underlying theological basis of this set of exempla was an improper individual and local assessment of permissible human knowledge. Within the community of the church, individuals should not have knowledge of their life spans. Preaching and education, however, could remedy this presumption.

Education was needed not merely to reinforce a common concept of theology, but also to reinforce consensus about the growing legal influence of the church. Stephen recounted a story concerning a Bretonnais woman who had lost two of her young children. Her neighbors were convinced that there was a witch in the region who
killed children every year. When the woman’s third child was a year old, the woman set a trap for the supposed witch. Watching through the night, she saw an old woman trying to enter the house and was able to capture her in a large pot. In the morning the citizens, now convinced that the old woman was a witch, broke down her doors and dragged her out of her house. They then forced her to undergo the ordeal of hot iron and, when she failed, were ready to burn her. The old woman denied everything, saying that she was not aware of having committed any crimes. The local bishop, hearing of the case and knowing the woman, was able to show that the woman was not a witch. Instead, the criminal was a demon, who manifested himself in the form of the old woman. When ordered by the bishop, it withdrew from the old woman’s shape and burned. The bishop therefore was able to demonstrate to the townsfolk the real cause of the woman’s apparently fraudulent appearance and actions.

33Stephen does not say how the villagers thought she got home after having been trapped in a pot that night.

34Stephen of Bourbon, 319-21. “Audivi quod in Britannia Armorica minore accidit quod quedam mulier amisiset pueros duos, postquam compluvisset quilibet annum suum. Dixerunt ei mulieres quod hoc facerent striges, sanguinem eorum bibentes. Cum autem illa eis crederet, dixit eis quod, cum tercius quem habebat annum compleret, vigilaret tota nocte anni completi, super puerum ponens operculum ferreum do quo operiebatur ollam suam in igne, ut, cum veniret strix, ferrum calidum in eius, faciem imprimere t, ut facto mane, vidit intrantem per januam suam clausam vetulam quamdam sibi vicinam, lupum equitantem, accedentem ad cunabulum pueri; et mulier, simulans se dormientem, arrepto [ferro]. Impressit illud in faciem eius, que cum ajulato maximo recessit. Jam facto mane, convocatis vicinis et ballivis ville, deposit quierioniam apud eos. Ili autem, venientes ad ostium vetule, invenientes eum seratum et neminem invenientes qui eum aperioret, fragentes ea, rapuerunt dictam vetulum, habentem exustam genam ad indicem. Ferrum vulneri appositionem criminis imposicionem probabat ex veritate procedere. Vetula autem dicta cuncta negabat, dcens non esse se impositi criminis consciam. Episcopus, hoc audiens, conscienciam dicte mulieris noscens, adjuravit illam demonem qui huius facti actor fuerat, ut se et factum manifestaret. Tunc demon, in similitudinem vetule se transmutans, urgente episcopo, pelliculam combustam a facie vetule removit coram omnibus et sibi imposuit, et fraudam suam et causam eius omnibus verbo et facto patefecit.”
The story underscored several things. First was the by-now familiar theme of the deceptive nature of demonic powers, even when those powers had a tangible result, in this case, dead or missing children. The problem did not rest, however, where superstitious neighbors thought it had, in the supposed power of witches, as the old woman had no genuine power. Not only that, but her apparent participation in demonic activity was also an illusion or fraud on the part of the demon, who used her as a cover. Even the demon's power to kill could be banished by a representative of approved religion, namely the bishop. Finally, belief in the powers of *striges*, and like superstitions, nearly led the village to exacerbate their mistake by murdering the old woman.

Stephen emphasized the need for local education about proper beliefs by pointing out that the demon's powers were possible only through the permission of God (a standard caveat) combined with the negligence of the murdered children's mother—a statement of individual, this-worldly improper action and belief. The heroine of the story had lost two of her children through her own negligence as well as through her willingness to believe in witches. However, the tale contains several social resonances. The figure of a cannibalistic woman who in the form of an owl who preyed on children at night is, of course, very old. Norman Cohn cited two versions of this fable. One is found in Greek sources, although Cohn pointed out that the tone of these sources makes it highly unlikely that the authors took the story as anything other than a rhetorical device. A variant found throughout Western Europe eliminated the cannibalistic aspect and retained only the otherworldly powers and the ability to fly. This version focused on the "good women" who traveled wide distances at night, helping the good and hindering the bad. No cleric who wrote about this narrative considered it as anything other than a dream. Unlike his other *exempla* about the "wild hunt," however, Stephen did not pass this tale off as a dream. But he did join in another trend. By the thirteenth century, the story had become associated with demonic activity. The women the anecdote represented had become normal

and neighborly in appearance, and the story was set in a daily life, not in dreams or collective fantasies, where children did disappear or die for no apparent reason. This change gave the tale a greater sense of reality and validity at least among scholars, and quite possibly among audiences as well. By the fifteenth century, this story had become conflated with the legend of the beneficent night-women and the “wild hunt” and formed part of the constellation of beliefs labeled “witchcraft.”

In light of the issue of Dominican education, however, the story displays another instance of the need for education—the mingling of sacral and religious understanding, witnessed by the villagers’ willingness to invoke an older form of communal justice, the ordeal. Ordeals allowed the village to take communal action while concomitantly placing judicial responsibility on God. By the thirteenth century, with the growing influence of canon law and judicial procedure and an increasingly authoritarian model of government, ordeals had become less useful as sources of community justice. Justice was no longer spiritual in origin, but a product of human behavior. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 forbade clerical participation in ordeals. Stephen’s exemplum served to reiterate this proscription and expanded it to include the entire community. In doing so, he crafted subtle links between belief in the efficacy of an ordeal and superstitious beliefs. Like the supposed powers of diviners, witches, and demons, the ordeal neither worked nor provided justice. It was another example of genuine religious belief used for an inappropriate purpose, by inappropriate people. In the story, the bishop was a designated religious representative who succeeded in discerning not only the demon’s fraud, but also the community’s error.

36 Cohn, 206–7.
Despite his foray into a more Augustinian framework, in which *superstitio* was inexorably related to demonic influence, Stephen continued to reiterate the theme of individual responsibility for errors with a series of anecdotes cataloguing the various forms of superstitious beliefs. Again, his stories fell into very traditional and recognizable categories, although some of his variants were often unique to his *Tractatus*, and might have reflected some actual thirteenth-century local beliefs. Of these tales, the first set included simple reiterations of local beliefs ranging from visions and wild tales to heresy. While some of these beliefs could make individuals susceptible to demonic influence, not all did. In these stories, Stephen did not draw specific conclusions, although he did use the stories to contrast acceptable and nonacceptable beliefs. In the latter four stories, which discuss magical dream journeys and serious theological misunderstandings, Stephen reiterated both the traditional perspective that divination and other superstitions were ineffective and invalid, and the concept that individuals were educable and hence in some fashion responsible for their beliefs.

Stephen’s first story was actually a general list of the varieties of superstitious belief that he thought existed, had existed, or could exist, drawn from his reading of classical or theological sources or from his travels through the Lyon countryside. Preachers could easily use his collection to vary their *exempla* as needed: to criticize those people who claimed to be able to transform themselves into beings that emitted light from pinholes in their bodies, to refute people who believed that they could travel in dreams with Arthur or other beings, or to dismiss people who said that they saw fairy women in rings. Even in a list, the

38 Tubach, *Index Exemplorum*. Several of Stephen’s versions are sufficiently unique that Stephen’s *Tractatus* is listed as the sole source: for example, 1357, 1363, 4510, 4514, 5067.

39 Stephen of Bourbon, 321–22 [365]. Both items are from the same *exemplum*: “Item aliquando in similitudinem militum venancium vel ludencium, qui dicuntur de familia Allequini vulgariter vel Arturi. Audivi quod, cum quidam rusticus circa Montem Cati portaret facem lignorum ad lunam, vidit
element of superstition as not just false but as a willful deception of others and of self was evident. Throughout, Stephen used the verb ludo, which means both “to play” and “to deceive” or “ridicule,” to describe these beliefs. People “played that they transformed themselves” or “similar to this fiction.” Subsequent exempla provide fuller illustrations of some of these beliefs.

Stephen claimed to have drawn two of these more richly described tales from his own experience as an inquisitor. However, Stephen merely gave fuller versions of two types of superstitious belief, first as they related to heresy and second as they related to magical beliefs. In the first exemplum Stephen showed how heresy and superstition were intimately linked together. His informant related that he had been staying at a particular house and was led to a large, empty table. Several well-known people from his village as well as from surrounding villages were also there. Although it is unclear whether the man himself held heretical beliefs, his host and the other guests did. Stephen’s informant claimed that he had seen a black dog jump onto a table, run around it, and magically produce food. Stephen doubted this story and spoke to another man “of good character,” who confirmed it; finally, Stephen concluded that the diners’ prideful heretical beliefs had allowed a demon to delude them into concurrent superstitious beliefs. One form of pride had transformed itself into another, and both manifested the error that humans could know or control more than they legitimately—or naturally—could in actuality.

infinitam multitudinem canum venaticorum quasi post predam latrancium, post infinitatem multitudinem peditum et equitum; et cum quereret ab uno illorum qui essent, respondit quod essent de familia regis Arturi, ad cuius curiam propinquam venirent, ut ibi bene sibi esset. . . . Simile videntur facere mulieres compte in choreis."

"Stephen of Bourbon, “aliquando ludificant transmutando se in species.”
In his hunt for heresy, Stephen encountered another odd story.⁴¹ The bishop of Clermont told Stephen how he had captured a heretical woman, who had in turn accused her accusers of having participated in a ceremony in which they called up a devil and of having taken part in an orgy. Originally doubtful, the bishop and Stephen arrested the alleged participants, who denied everything, although the woman had been able to identify them by name.

Except for his literary presence within the *exempla*, Stephen did not provide more than cursory real-world results. In neither story did he refute the allegations by reference to trickery, nor did he present a particularly scornful tone. His conclusions were stereotypical in their reliance on demonic agency. However, in both *exempla* he displayed doubt and skepticism about the anecdotes he heard, only attributing them to demonic agency after he could not explain them himself. The tales did provide preachers with a balance to stories dealing with willful trickery—these demonstrated the same errors when actively linked with demonic activity. Important for this argument, however, Stephen’s *exempla* continued his practice of providing several variants of the same

⁴¹ Stephen of Bourbon, 322–23 [367]. This story is cited in Tubach’s *Index Exemplorum*, no. 1363. “Item quasi simile accidit in Alvernia, ubi multi fuerunt capti apud Sanctum Porcianum [Saint-Pourçain] et deducti apud Claremontem, ubi convocaverat me episcopus eiusdem loci, dominus Hugo de Turre. Quedam mulier, capta in quibusdam maleficiis, accusavit plures et illos qui capi detinebantur, dicens cum lacrimis quod magistram quamdam [habuerat] que eam frequenter duxerat ad quemdam locum subterraneum, ubi conveniebat multitudo hominum et mulierum cum luminibus torticiorum et candelarum, circumdantes quamdam casam plenam aqua que erat in medio, in cuius medio erat hasta affixa: et magister eorum adjurabat Luciferum per barbam suam et per potenciam quod veniret ad eos, et per multa alia; ad quam adjuracionem descendebat catus teterrimus per lanceam, et aqua cum cauda sua, vadens in circitu, omnes aspergebat, et luminaria omnia extinguebat; quo facto, quilibet eorum accipiebat illum vel illam qui ei primo occurrebat, et cum eo turpiter admiscebatur. Propter hoc dicti homines erant capti, qui hec omnia negabant, licet dicta mulier diceret eos ibi sepe vidisse convenisse.”
basic error, this time by gender: in the first tale, the protagonist was a man; and in the second, a woman. In both tales people of all levels within the community were involved in heretical practices and were susceptible to interpreting their world in a superstitious fashion.

Education remained a theme in a final set of exempla, a comparison of one of Stephen’s journey stories with one related by Jacques de Vitry.42 The story concerned a woman who believed that she could travel magically, as well as walk through closed walls and windows. Because of this alleged power, she claimed to have saved a sleeping priest from molestation by nocturnal beings. When she told the priest her belief, he trapped her inside the church and beat her, telling her that if she really could travel magically, then she could also escape his beating. Since she could not, her belief was false.

Neither Stephen nor Jacques de Vitry claimed that the woman was practicing any form of magic, but merely that she subscribed to a false belief.43 However, the two versions diverge concerning the source of her belief and in the moral each author draws from it. Jacques de Vitry made the contemporary association of such activity with demonic delusion. For him, the woman was the victim of deception by an outside agency, namely a demon, who showed the woman visions in her dreams.44 The woman herself was weak willed. Stephen’s

42 The story is also found in Bromyard’s sermons and in Vincent of Beauvais’s Speculum morale. Stephen of Bourbon, Tractatus 324 n. 2.

43 Textually, neither author used any standard word for magic (sortilegium, maleficia, etc.) save for the priest’s sarcastic comment in Stephen’s exemplum: “Exit from here, witch.”

44 Crane, ed., 112–13. The text of de Vitry’s exemplum is as follows: “Audi­vi de quadam muliere qui dicebat se cum quibusdam dominabus de nocte super bestias quasdam equitare, et multa terrarum spacia una hora pertran­sire. Demones enim in somnis illi illudebant, et talia ostendebant. Cum autem mulier illa quadam die in ecclesia, sacerdote suo diceret, ‘Domine, hac no­cte multum vobis profui, et a magna molestia vobis liberavi; nam, domine, ille cum quibus de nocte soleo ire cameram nostram intraverunt, et nisi aver­tissem et ipsas pro vobis rogassem, multa mala vobis fecissent.’ Cui sacerdos ait: ‘Ostium camere me clausum erat et seratum, quomodo intrare potuisti?’
version presented an older version of the night-rider folktale and argued that the woman had not been deceived by demons but rather wished to deceive the priest. She had had a silly dream, which she would not have believed had she known her catechism better. Therefore she was responsible for her belief. Moreover, she was using it to directly challenge the church hierarchy by taking on powers that properly belonged only to religious specialists. She was also willfully exercising her desires on another local inhabitant who was as well a representative of accepted religion—a serious trespass of ecclesiastical hierarchy into which she was led by a superstitious belief. This placed the responsibility for the sin on the woman herself and on her lack of practical theological education, and by extension placed similar responsibility on the audience who heard the story. By pointing out individual (not demonic) responsibility for sin, Stephen’s variation of this exemplum underscored the necessity for educating local inhabitants of both genders and bringing them closer to perfection by eradicating

Cui vetula dixit: ‘Domine, nec ostium nec sera potest nos retinere vel impedire quin libere ingrediamur et exeamus.’ Cui sacerdos: ‘Volo probare si verum est, ut de tanto beneficio te valeam remunerare.’ Et clauso ostio ecclesia ac fortiter serato, arrepto crucis baculo, cepit vetulam fortiter percutere. Cumque illa clamaret et misericordiam imploraret, ait sacerdos: ‘Exi ab ecclesia, et fuge, si potes ex quo sera vel ostium non potest te retenere.’ Et ita vetulam corripuit, et a falsa credulitate liberavit.”

“Stephen of Bourbon, 323–24 [368]. The text of Stephen’s version reads, ‘Audivi quod, cum quedam vetula, volens blandiri suo sacerdote, diceret ei in ecclesia: ‘Domine, multum debetis me diligere, quia liberavi vos a morte; cum enim ego vaderem cum bonis rebus, media nocte intravimus domum vestram cum luminaribus; ego, videns dormientem et nudum, cooperui vos velociter, ne domine nostre viderent nuditatem vestram, quam si visissent, ad mortem flagellaris vos fecissent.’ Cumque sacerdos quereret quomodo intraverant domum eius et cameram, cum ostia essent fortiter serata, ait quod bene intrabant domum januis clausis. Tunc eam invocans sacerdos intra cancellam, clauso ostio, verberavit eam cum crucis baculo, dicens: ‘Exite hinc, domine sortilega.’ Cum autem non posset, emisit eam sacerdos, [dicens]: ‘Modo videtis quod fatua estis, que sompnium vertitatem creditis.’”
Stephen took a generally commonplace, stereotypical story and altered it to address the perceived needs of a specific local area and thus allowed the specific behavior of a smaller area, such as women's extra-ecclesiastical devotions falling under a broad heading, not only to be seen and observed, but to enter the repertoire of any preacher who then read his text—a true negotiation of theological presentation.

The source materials for these stock ideas are important in this context. In *exempla* compilations, these versions of the "wild hunt" motif are often dismissed by historians attempting to reconstruct the actual beliefs or behavior of "the folk." These stories are among the most obviously stereotyped copies of classical myths or motifs, as can be seen by the number of their variations and by their use of figures from classical mythology. When considered as sermon material, they seem at first unlikely stories for conveying theological information in a comprehensible fashion. Diana is a pagan goddess, unlikely to be known to the average thirteenth-century villager. The "wild hunt" is perhaps more accessible; as both a Roman and a Germanic mythological motif, it is plausible that it remained part of the folk tradition. Herodiade, the second wife of Herod Agrippas, stepped straight from biblical stories, in which she is credited with telling her daughter Salome to ask for the head of John the Baptist as her reward.

"This story should not be taken to mean that Stephen did not believe in demons or their powers. Demonic stories are, in fact, abundantly cited in his text. That he appears to have taken a demonic story and eliminated its magical element underscores this reading of his text. The issue of the willfully deceptive nature of superstition, and its explicit challenge to a centralized hierarchy, is underscored by Humbert of Romans. Humbert notes that one superstitious person often leads others into the same error (De modo, 2, 98, 503F-G). In addition, it can lead women into a more prosaic error, namely illegitimate sexuality, which is (of course) far more damning if conducted with a priest (De modo, 2, 99, 505G)."
for her dance. Yet the potential accessibility of these images to an audience or their stereotypic (and hence suspect) nature was not really the issue for Dominican sermon literature, for none of the authors in this study, in particular Stephen of Bourbon, focused on the details of their stories. In fact, by separating the demonic and nondemonic stories and by presenting both as originating in fallacious beliefs or dreams, the Dominicans were admitting that the specific details really mattered less than the particular instance of the privileging of local ideas, practices, and volition over centralized concepts. This was reinforced by the implication that the individual was responsible for the state of his or her spiritual health and must be educated in order to meet that responsibility—women, too, although, as always, not formally. Furthermore, in the story of the woman who claimed she entered the priest’s house at night, Stephen took a generally commonplace story and altered it to address the perceived needs of a specific local area and thus allowed the specific behavior of a smaller area, such as women’s extra-ecclesiastical pseudo-religious devotions not only to be seen and observed, but to enter the repertoire of any preacher who then read his text.

This apparent responsiveness to local ideas and requirements appears in Stephen’s related exempla in yet another way. Stephen did not limit his repertoire of dream or magical traveling tales solely to the idea of a woman traveling with the “wild hunt,” although he did separate it out into the category of “general mistaken beliefs.” While Humbert of Romans textually associated this version of dream travel

These sources for the motif of this exemplum correspond nicely to the sources for the various magical traditions in medieval Europe. (See Cohn, especially Chapter 11, “The Night-Witch in Popular Imagination,” for a detailed discussion of the “wild hunt” motif.) Cohn argued that this story represented an actual, persistent peasant belief. However, he distinguished between theologians, who in general held the position that these stories represented dreams, and individuals who apparently believed that these occurrences actually happened. The experiences were not, however, actually physical occurrences (Cohn, Europe’s Inner Demons, 206–24).
exclusively with women (especially older women), William Peraldus and Stephen of Bourbon did not. Peraldus's extension was, as usual, rather mild. He used the standard story about women who felt that they rode at night with Herodiade as an introduction, much as Stephen used the anecdote about the king of Castile as a general format for his section on divination, but he did not mention the gender of the protagonist. In comparison, in his earlier catalogue of superstitious beliefs, Stephen went so far as to note two magical travel dream episodes with male protagonists—again, he seemed unwilling to condemn a gender out-of-hand, just as he was unwilling to make a blanket condemnation of a class. In an exemplum he described how he had heard of a man who claimed to see hunters riding along a road of moonbeams; asking the hunters who they were, the man was told that they were of Arthur's court. He tried to join them but fell down from the moonbeam road. In the same exemplum, he also reported that another man had seen similar riders, who seemed to be members of the same family. One of the riders had drawn the dreamer into the group, saying, "Stay close to me." Stephen said that the man claimed to "go there [i.e., with the riders] often."

Again, the ways in which Stephen widened the common exemplum indicate his strategy of providing the same lesson in a number of different guises, intended for different audiences, this time for men. Despite the gender of the protagonist, the underlying message remained the same. The Dominicans did not go so far, however, as to eliminate completely the rural bias of such tales, although they did mitigate them. Traditionally such tales were told of the unlettered. In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury noted that only the "rude" were susceptible to this form of error. The Dominicans in this study probably shared a

"Peraldus, Summa de vitis, 2, 3.36, 315b.
Stephen of Bourbon, 321–22 [365]. "Cum qua cum intrasset et obdormisset, inventi se, in manu excitatus, super facem lignorum turpiter jacentem ... ."
similar view, for none of them told versions of this tale located in “educated” or urban settings. They did not, however, make an explicit statement to that effect. In all probability, the linkage between social group and sin was already clear, and they did not have to draw it out further. It is possible, however, that the omission of such a limiting statement was deliberate.

Regardless of gender or social group, in every exemplum in this section of his work Stephen made it clear that he did not believe for a moment that these nocturnal dreams and visions were real. They might be remnants of older beliefs, or they might merely be foolish dreams. The specific acts described by the exempla were not Stephen's concern. He was interested in the form of the fundamental error—the claim that these individuals knew more than what they could legitimately or actually know and the resulting behavior that removed these individuals from their proper place in the spiritual hierarchy—and in presenting the different forms this same error might take, in order that his audience might then learn to avoid the error.

Conclusion

The exempla I have cited are standard types and do not tell us anything specific about particular individuals. They cannot be used as reliable indicators about the propensity of old women to be superstitious or novices to be dissatisfied and argumentative. However, it is precisely the variations of standard stories—stories that form part of the familiar mental repertoire of preacher and audience—that allow us to begin to delineate the communication strategies used by members of different orders to try to negotiate consensus about the community of the church. The changes each author made reflected his “habits of mind”: in the case of the Dominicans, the emphasis on perfectibility, education, and responsibility, supporting the centralizing process of the thirteenth-century papal reform movement. Within the formulaic genre of exempla, therefore, I argue that individual manipulations of the genre can be identified, corresponding to each writer's probable goal in writing and experience. The genre of exempla collections, in
the hands of the Dominicans, took a new direction. The texts reflect not merely the Dominicans' shifting understanding of superstition, but their growing sense of audience and mission, their self-definition as preachers, perfecters, and theologians, and their self-defined place as both active and contemplative mendicants. Moreover, the texts reflect a dialogue both among preachers and between preachers and the laity, which allows us to see the creation of centralized power as represented by an increasingly uniform theology. The negotiation glimpsed through these exempla, and their use in promoting orderspecific goals, was one strategy for building an "imagined" community of belief.