SECTION II

THE DEVELOPMENT AND ARTICULATION OF MENDICANT IDEALS
CHAPTER FOUR

MENDICANCY AMONG THE EARLY SAINTS OF THE BEGGING ORDERS

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As Dominic of Caleruega lay dying in Bologna, surrounded by his faithful friars, he offered to them all that he had in life.1 “These are the things which I leave you in rightful possession, as my sons and heirs: have charity, keep humility, possess voluntary poverty!”2 The unanimous testimony of the early writers of the Dominican tradition gives witness to how deeply the founder loved poverty, though for Dominic, as for his followers, poverty remained a means to an end, a way to live out humility and detachment while focusing on the primary aim of the order: the salvation of souls.3 In the various lives of Dominic, stories of poverty (or the sole instance of his begging) are intended to present facets of the holiness of the founder, not to try to establish a pattern for imitation. Indeed the hagiographers among the Preachers, as a whole, deprecated the centrality of either begging or poverty in the lives of their saints. Dominic’s vitae, and those of the saintly members of his order, are far different from those of St. Francis, who made poverty and begging such a centerpiece of his mendicant programme. One would expect the Franciscans to do

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2 Pedro Ferrandi, “Legenda Petri Ferrandi,” in Monumenta Historica sancti Patris nostri, Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica 16 (Rome: 1935), 248–249. Later repeated in Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger, (New York: Arno, 1969), 426, afterwards GL (There is a newer translation of GL by Christopher Stace (London: Penguin, 1998), but it includes only selections of the whole text). Both Ferrandus and the GL end with an imprecation against those who would introduce wealth into the order. As John Van Engen points out, this speech was first revealed in Ferrandus in 1239, and is not in earlier sources, however the vita of Ferrandi is the first formal life of Dominic. See his “Dominic and the Brothers: Vitae as Life-forming exempla in the Order of Preachers” in Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans, eds., Kent Emery, Jr. and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: 1999), 12.

3 There is a large consensus on this point, both among Dominican and non-Dominican historians, even though the Founder’s relationship to poverty has remained a very contentious point, see R.F. Bennett’s summary of the debate in his The Early Dominicans, (Cambridge: 1937), 31–51, as well as William Hinnebusch’s The History of the Dominican Order, (New York: Alba House, 1966), vol. 1, 147–155.