

BEADS & PRAYERS
THE ROSARY IN
HISTORY & DEVOTION

JOHN D. MILLER

Beads and Prayers
The Rosary in History and Devotion

The Evolution of the Marian Rosary

The Psalms

Christians continued Jewish practice of praying at various hours of the day out of which grew:

The Liturgy of the Hours

Psalms 'Three Fifties'

150 *Paternosters* substituted for the psalms in the twelfth century

Paternoster beads

The Our Father
(Matthew 6.9–13)

The Hail Mary
(Luke 1.28, 42)

Angelic Salutation and Elizabeth's greeting

Little Office of Our Lady (c. 1050)

Ave Maria – first part

Ave attached to *Paternoster*

Chains of Hail Marys with genuflections

Ave beads and chaplets

The Beads

Secular
Counting devices
worry-beads

Religious
Hindu/Jain

Christian
(fourth century)

Jesus Prayer

prayer-rope

Marian psalm psalter

Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1299)

Devotio Moderna
vita Christi meditations

Cistercian nuns (c.1300)
vita Christi meditations

Adolf of essen (1398)
vita Christi meditations

Observant reform movement
(fifteenth century)

Dominic of Prussia (1409–15)

The 50 Jesus clauses

Rosary confraternity (1468–70)

Alain de la Roche

The rosary gains great popularity through spread of confraternities

The rosary approved by Pius V (1569)

The fifteen 'mysteries' (1483)

The second part of Hail Mary (1493)



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To the Woman of the Gospel,
Our Mother and Advocate

Chronology of the Development of the Rosary¹

1750 BC Various devices for counting prayers found in most cultures from the earliest times.

1700–1450 BC Beads found in the Aegean culture of Crete, probably for decorative usage rather than prayer.

AD 300–400 The earliest recorded prayer to the Blessed Virgin (c. 300): ‘We fly to thy patronage, O Holy Mother of God [*Theotokos*], despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all danger, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin.’

Anthony the Great (251–356) supposedly invented the Byzantine rosary: a circular string of knotted wool used in conjunction with the Jesus Prayer. Abbot Paul, a hermit of Thebes in Egypt (d. 347), used a pile of 300 pebbles.

431 Council of Ephesus declares Mary as *Theotokos* (God-bearer). Devotion to Mary increases as a result.

500–600 Akathistos Hymn, written sometime before 560.

The two greetings, that of the Angel and that of Elizabeth, found in the Liturgies of St James of Antioch and St Mark of Alexandria, may go back to the fifth, or even fourth, century. Also found in the Liturgy of the Abyssinian Jacobites, and in the ritual of St Severus (538).

- c. **600** Egyptian Coptic ostrakon bears in Greek the following inscription: 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, because you have conceived Christ, the Son of God, redeemer of our souls.'

- 659** Grave of Abbess Gertrude in Nivelles (Belgium) contained beads.

- c. **782** Monks of St Apollinaris would say 300 *Kyrie eleisons* and *Christe eleisons* twice a day in gratitude for the Pope's benefactors.

- c. **1050** The Angelic Salutation and the greeting of Elizabeth as a prayer formula became popular through the recitation of the Little Office of Our Lady, consisting of psalms, Marian hymns and antiphons, in which the *Ave Maria* is frequently used as a versicle and responsory.

- c. **1080** Lady Godiva, on her death, leaves a string of beads to be hung on the image of Our Lady in the Abbey: 'The circlet of gems on a string she fingered them one by one so as not to fall short of the right number of prayers.'

- 1096** The *Ancient Customs of Cluny*, collected by Udalrio, record that on the death of 'any brother at a distance', every priest is to offer Mass and the non-priest monks either to say 50 psalms or repeat 50 times the *Paternoster*.

- c. **1100 and after** Illiterate lay brothers recited Little Psalter: 150 *Paternosters*, or 'Three Fifties', replacing the 150 psalms.
 Paternoster cords often carried.
 Paternoster knots and beads integrated into a structural framework: 150 *Aves* spaced into decades or groups of ten. Wooden and clay beads replace knotted cords among the people.

- 1128** Templars, if unable to attend choir, are to repeat the Lord's Prayer 57 times. On death of a brother, each knight to recite the *Paternoster* a hundred times a day for seven days.

- c. 1130** Marian psalters (150 rhymed four-line stanzas, each beginning with the word *Ave*, each addressed to the Blessed Virgin, but paraphrasing at the same time some thought from the psalm to which it corresponds).

1140 St Aybert (d. 1140) bent his knees in prayer a hundred times a day while repeating the *Ave*.

1160 Saint Rosalia (relative of Emperor Charlemagne) buried with a string of little beads that end in a cross.

In England and the Netherlands, the full scriptural half of the *Ave* is becoming a formula of prayer: 'Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.'

1200-1300 The *Ancrene Riwe* (rule for anchoresses, c. 1200) includes directions for 50 *Aves* divided into sets of ten, with prostrations and other marks of reverence.

The Legend of St Dominic tells how in 1214 Dominic was given the rosary by the Blessed Virgin in order to convert the Cathars.

Guilds of bead-makers had been established (e.g. Guild of Paternosterers). Paternoster Row and Ave Maria Lane near St Paul's in London.

The name '*Jesus*' added to the Angelic Salutation. Development attributed to the initiative of Pope Urban IV (1261) (confirmed by the granting of an indulgence by Pope John XXII (1316-34)). Formula becomes '*Jesus Christus. Amen.*'

c. 1300 Manuscript containing a collection of 98 *vita Christi* meditation prayers recited by the Cistercian nuns at the cloister of Saint Thomas on the Kyll.

German vernacular Marian psalter gives for the first time scenes of the life of Christ inserted within a traditional litany of praise to the Virgin.

1347 Earliest surviving representation of prayer beads in England is on the effigy of Blanche Grandisson at Much Marcle, Herefordshire.

- 1347** Approx. date of a Viking colony excavated in North America, where a clear round bead is believed to be part of prayer beads worn by a Viking woman.
- 1350s** Beads now being worn in Germany for adornment rather than devotion. Augustinian canon of Osnabruck outlaws the wearing of coral rosaries around the neck.
- 1380** The French royal inventories list rosaries of enamelled gold encrusted with jewels.
- 1390s** Chaucer says of his Prioress:
- Of small coral about her arm she bare
A pair of bedes, gauded all with green,
And thereon hung a broch of gold full shene.
- c. 1400** Prayer beads more universally called 'rosaries'. Rose gardens and garlands associated with the Virgin Mary.
- 1408** Death of Carthusian Heinrich Eggar. In a vision Mary had taught him to say a 'psalter' in her honour and first to say a *Patemoster* and then the ten *Aves* repeated fifteen times. This he communicated to a Carthusian prior in England. This psalter became common in England.
- 1409–15** Dominic of Prussia (1384–1460), composed a series of 50 Jesus clauses to accompany the *Ave* prayer.
- 1441** Statutes of Eton College (founded by Henry VI) required the scholars to say daily the complete psalter of the Blessed Virgin, containing a *Credo*, fifteen *Paters* and 150 *Ave Marias*.
- 1468–70** Alain de la Roche (Alanus de Rupe) (c. 1428–75), a Dominican, founds his first confraternity: 'the Confraternity of the Psalter of the Glorious Virgin Mary' at Douai.
- 1475** Confraternity founded by Jakob Sprenger in Cologne on 8 September 1475 gains support of Frederick III and approval of Papal

CHRONOLOGY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROSARY

Legate, Alexander of Forli, in 1476. The brotherhood spreads quickly throughout Europe.

1476 The Papal Legate grants to the Cologne confraternity indulgence of one quarantine for reciting the rosary.

1478 Pope Sixtus IV grants indulgence of seven years and seven quarantines and extended indulgences to apply to souls in purgatory '*per modum suffragii*'.

1483 Dominican rosary book, *Our Dear Lady's Psalter*, reduced the 50 meditation points to 15, all of which, except the last two, correspond to the present mysteries: the Coronation was combined with the Assumption and the Last Judgement was the fifteenth mystery. (The word 'mystery' is first used by Alberto da Castello, in 1521.)

1493 Second part of the Hail Mary found in *Compost et Kalendrier des Bergiers*, published in Paris (later translated into English and printed by Richard Pynson (1506) as *The Kalender of Shepardys*): 'Hayle Mary fulle of grace God is with the, thou arte blessyd amonge women and blessyd be the fruite of thy wombe Jesus. Holy Mary moder of God praye for us synners. Amen.'

1517 Luther challenges the interpretation of indulgences as preached by Tetzel; nails 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg on 31 October.

1519 Luther denies the primacy of the Pope and the infallibility of General Councils, in the Leipzig Disputation with Johann Eck. (Luther excommunicated 1521.)

1520 Pope Leo X gives rosary official approbation.

1531 Tenochtitlan (Mexico): Our Lady of Guadalupe visits Juan Diego, and her exquisite image is set on the fragile cloth of his garment. (Recent studies suggest a rosary is draped across her

praying hands. Most of the rosary is worn under her garment, only 21 beads show.)

1543–63 The Council of Trent inaugurates the Counter-Reformation.

1559 Pius V gives the Dominican Master-General exclusive control over the rosary confraternities. The blessing of rosaries was reserved for Dominicans or priests having special faculties (continued until 1984).

1569 Pius V, in Bull *Consueverunt Romani Pontifices*, officially approves the rosary.

1572 Pius V establishes Feast of Our Lady of Victory on 7 October, following defeat of the Turks at Lepanto (1571). Victory attributed to the Blessed Virgin through the public recitation of the rosary.

1573 Name of the feast is changed by Gregory XIII to 'Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary' and feast transferred to the first Sunday of October. (Since 1969 it has reverted to 7 October.)

1575 Bull of Gregory XIII makes special arrangements for persecuted Catholics of England for the Jubilee year of 1575. (They are required to say either the rosary or the Corona of Our Lady.)

1600–1700 The *Gloria Patri* (by 1613) and the Apostles' Creed are added to the rosary. Overall configuration and prayer sequence of rosary become more uniform.

1627 Louis XIII orders public recitation of the rosary during Huguenot rebellion at La Rochelle. (Fifteen thousand rosaries distributed to the troops with set hours of prayer.) Rebellion crushed.

1673 St Louis de Montfort born in Brittany. He preaches the rosary and writes *True Devotion to Mary*, *The Secret of Mary* and the *Secret of the Rosary*, still popular today.

1683 Jan Sobieski, King of Poland, invokes Our Lady of the Rosary and defeats Saracens as they storm the gates of Vienna and threaten Western Europe.

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- 1716** Charles VI appeals to Our Lady of the Rosary and conquers the Moors at Peterwardein.
- 1717** Following victory on Corfu, Pope Clement XI extends the Feast of the Holy Rosary to the whole Church.
- 1830** Catherine Labouré (Rue de Bac) is instructed to produce Miraculous Medal.
- 1854** Definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (8 December). Pius IX promulgates Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*.
- 1858** In Lourdes (11 February) Bernadette Soubirous has first vision of a 'beautiful Lady'. (25 March) The Lady identifies herself: '*Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou*.'
- 1879** Apparition of Mary with St Joseph, St John and an altar on which stands a young lamb appears in Knock, Ireland. During her visit, the people recite the rosary – the 'Irish Catechism'.
- 1883–98** Pope Leo XIII promotes the rosary as the 'most glorious and effective prayer' for those who want to reach Jesus through Mary. He encourages family rosary and advocates the beads as an antidote to rationalism and liberalism in twelve different Encyclicals and five Apostolic Letters.
- 1917** (13 May) A Lady with a rosary in her hand appears to three young children in Fatima, Portugal. She exhorts them to 'Say the rosary every day, to obtain peace for the world and an end to the war'. On 13 October the apparition says: 'I am the Lady of the Rosary.' Fatima prayer is added to each decade of the rosary.
- 1937** Pope Pius XI Encyclical Letter *Ingravescentibus malis* exhorts use of rosary in the struggle against communism.
- 1942** Patrick Peyton, the rosary priest, begins programme of family prayer and rosary devotion that leads to formal rosary crusades in the late 1940s.

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- 1950** Pius XII Definition of the Assumption: *Munificentissimus Deus*.
- c. 1960** *Mysteries of the Rosary* meditations on the rosary composed by Pope John XXIII.
- 1962–65** Second Vatican Council.
- 1974** Pope Paul VI, in *Marialis cultus*, recommends rosary, but says ‘the faithful should feel serenely free in its regard’.
- 1981** Medjugorje (Yugoslavia) apparitions. The Blessed Virgin makes most insistent call to ‘Pray, pray, pray.’
- 1987** John Paul II renews devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, the Pope gives an extensive teaching on Mary in anticipation of the Marian year 1988.
- 2001** Following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September of this year, Pope John Paul II asks that during the month of October everyone say the rosary daily for peace.

Note

1. This chronology is based on the web page, ‘Journaling the Beads’, see www.rosaryworkshop.com/HISTORYjournalingBead.htm

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Introduction

A 'rosary' means but one thing to a Roman Catholic today. It is a circular string or chain of beads composed of five decades of small beads separated by five larger beads with a pendant attached, consisting of a cross or crucifix, and a chain of two large and three smaller beads. This device is used to count the prayers recited in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary while meditating on scenes from the life of Christ and His Mother. A complete 'rosary' requires three repetitions of this chaplet, covering the full fifteen 'mysteries of salvation'. Pope Pius XII called it 'the compendium of the entire Gospel'.

The Eucharist remains the summit and source of Catholic worship with the Liturgy of the Hours as the Church's official prayer. Pope Paul VI tells us that after the Liturgy 'the Rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers'.¹ Indeed, the rosary is the most popular and universal pious devotion in use today. Since Pius V gave it official approval in 1569, many Popes have promoted the rosary prayer, especially at times when the Church has been under threat.

The aim of this book is to examine the origins, development and background of the rosary with particular reference to the Marian rosary in common use today. It will sometimes be designated the Dominican rosary to acknowledge that it was the Dominicans who promoted it and to distinguish it from variants

associated with other orders. It evolved into its present form during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but it is a flexible spiritual tool which can be adapted to current needs.

In the English literature one may find accounts of the origins of the rosary, but none are complete. Indeed, the definitive history of the rosary is yet to be written. Fr Herbert Thurston SJ, writing in *The Month* between 1900 and 1916, is the most important source in English. He had available to him the work of the Bollandist Fr Thomas Esser, published in German between 1884 and 1906, the earlier studies of Daniel Rock in his book *The Church of Our Fathers* and Edmund Waterton's comprehensive history of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, *Pietas Mariana Britannica*. Franz M. Willam claims to have produced 'the first complete history of the origin and development of the Rosary' in *The Rosary: Its History and Meaning* (1948; available in English translation 1953). This is an important work, but disappointing in that it is not well referenced. *The Rose-Garden Game* (1969), by Eithne Wilkins, is an important contribution, focusing on the symbolism associated with the rosary. More recently, Anne Winston-Allen studied the German vernacular literature of the late Middle Ages, throwing more light on the origins of the rosary at that period. Her book, *Stories of the Rose*, published in 1997, is informative and lavishly illustrated. A future scholarly examination of the history of the rosary would include a review of the German, French, Italian and Spanish sources. Though one may find in various works of reference, such as the original version of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* and the more recent *Theotokos* by Michael O'Carroll, the essential details, there is no one comprehensive account of the overall history of the rosary and its associated prayers. This work aims to draw together the information and insights of these researchers and others to whom I refer in the text, and present a scheme to show how the four main streams of origin and

other influences came together in the fifteenth century.

Before proceeding to our main study it will be convenient to consider the meaning of the various words used in connection with the rosary:

The word **chaplet** comes from the French *chape* (*un petit chapeau*): a covering or cap, a form of headgear, and hence, a crown, wreath or garland. By the middle of the twelfth century, 'chaplet' can be found referring to prayer beads or to the spiritual exercise of reciting chains of *Aves*.

The word **rosary** may have come into use from the German *Rosenkranz*, meaning a rose garland or wreath, or *Rosenkrenzelin* – a small garland or wreath. The term was certainly in use before the beginning of the fifteenth century. The Latin form *rosarium* meant 'a rose garden' or 'an anthology of prayer or verse'. Today a **rosary** is used to denote a set of rosary beads of five or fifteen decades. However, the term may be used for any sort of prayer beads.

From Italy we have a **corona** – a crown, and less commonly, **sertum** – a wreath.

Bead or **bede** is, according to Waterton, an Anglo-Saxon word, but the dictionary² suggests that it is derived from the Old English *gebed*, from the German *gebet*, related to the Dutch *bede*, meaning 'prayer'. The words 'bead' and 'prayer' are connected by association with the rosary, as each bead represents a prayer.

To **bid**, as in the 'bidding prayers' of the Mass, from the Old English *biddan* and German *bitten*, is 'to ask'. To **bid the beads** (*bedes byddying*) is to say one's prayers.

All night she spent in bidding of her bedes
And all the day in doing good and godly deeds
(Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*)

Ich bidde my bedis.

(William Langland, *Piers Plowman*)

Beads-folk, bedesmen or bedeswomen are those who pray for others, especially for their benefactors. A **bead-house** may be a chapel or an almshouse, from the practice of giving alms to the residents who would in return offer their prayers in gratitude. For a consideration in one's will, a **bedesman** would regularly pray for the repose of one's soul. A **bead-roll** is a list of persons to be prayed for. In the sixteenth century it was common practice to sign one's correspondence 'Your obedient bedesman', or 'Your poor bedeswoman'.³ We have examples in the letters of Sir Thomas More, writing from prison, and the Franciscan John Forrest, Confessor to Queen Catherine of Aragon and one of the English martyrs. Although in our old English documents 'the bidding of beads' does not necessarily imply the use of the rosary, nor indeed any devotion whatever to the Blessed Virgin, yet from the thirteenth century this was commonly the sense.

We **tell** our beads as we go, that is, we keep a 'tally', count our beads (Old English *tellan*; German *zahlen*). Otherwise we 'say' or 'recite' a rosary.

A **pair** of beads is a set of beads. A circle of beads hanging from one's belt looks like a pair of parallel strings of beads.

Because of his name, some have attributed the rosary to the Venerable Bede, but this is groundless. A more plausible explanation is that he received his name from his assiduity in prayer.

To those readers who have reservations about Catholic devotion to Mary and her role in the history of salvation may draw I their attention to what Cardinal Newman had to say:

INTRODUCTION

Mary is exalted for the sake of Jesus. It was fitting that she, as being a creature, though the first of creatures, should have an office of ministration. She, as others, came into the world to do a work, she had a mission to fulfil; her grace and glory are not for her own sake, but for her Maker's; and to her is committed the custody of the Incarnation, this is her appointed office – 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son: and His name shall be called Emmanuel.' As she was once on earth, and was personally the guardian of her Divine Child, as she carried Him in her womb, folded Him in her embrace, and suckled Him at her breast, so now, and to the latest hour of the Church, do her glories and the devotion paid to her proclaim and define the right faith concerning Him as God and man. Every church which is dedicated to her, every altar which is raised under her invocation, every image which represents her, every litany in her praise, every Hail Mary for her continual memory, does but remind us that there was One who, though He was all-blessed from all eternity, yet for the sake of sinners, 'did not shrink from the Virgin's womb'.⁴

Mary is honoured by the Church because it was she who was chosen by God and agreed to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word: 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1.38). By her wholehearted response to the Holy Spirit she became the medium by which the one Mediator and Saviour, Jesus Christ, came into the world. The Church presents Mary to us a model disciple and a 'type' of the Church. In promoting the rosary devotion, the Church invites us to meditate with Mary on the life of Christ, because she 'kept all these things, pondering them in her heart' (Luke 2.19).

The rosary has been part of my prayer life since childhood. My interest in the history and development of the rosary was aroused initially by Gabriel Harty's excellent short book

Rediscovering the Rosary, and more recently by a lecture given at Aylesford by Dr Sarah Boss in July 1999. This work began as a 30-minute talk on the history of the rosary given to a group of ‘over-sixties’ in September 1999. In preparation I began to read around the subject, in particular the series of articles by Fr Thurston, ‘Our Popular Devotions’, published in *The Month*. One article led to another, and so on. It was a happening rather than a planned exercise. I hope the reader will find the subject as interesting as I do.

Notes

1. Paul VI, *Marialis cultus* (1974), n. 54.
2. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.
3. Edmund Waterton, *Pietas Mariana Britannica: A History of Devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Marye, Mother of God* (London: St Joseph’s Catholic Library, 1879).
4. J. H. Newman, *Sermons and Discourses* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1893), Vol. II, p. 252, in F. M. Willam, *The Rosary: Its History and Meaning*, trans. E. Kaiser (New York: Benzinger Bros, 1953), p. 165.

Origins of the Rosary

The Legend of St Dominic

For 400 years or more it was generally accepted that the rosary as a Marian prayer was given by the Blessed Virgin to St Dominic in a dream to assist him in his effort to convert the Cathars. This story was to be found in the lesson for the Feast of the Holy Rosary in the Roman Breviary and was attested by various Popes down to the rosary Encyclicals of Leo XIII (1878–1903).

St Dominic (c. 1172–1221; canonized 1234), born in Calaruega in Old Castile, joined the Augustinian Canons of Osma and became sub-prior. In 1203 he went on an embassy with Bishop Diego on behalf of Alfonso VIII, King of Castile, to ask for the hand of a noble lady of the 'Marches', most probably the Marches of Denmark, for the king's son Fernando. In this they were successful, and were sent again the following year to arrange the marriage. However, on their arrival they found that the lady had since died.¹

In the course of his journey Dominic had encountered the Albigenses in southern France. (The Albigenses followed the heretical teachings of the Cathari, denying the humanity of Jesus.) On his return from northern Europe (1203–5), Dominic became involved in a mission to the Albigenses in the region of

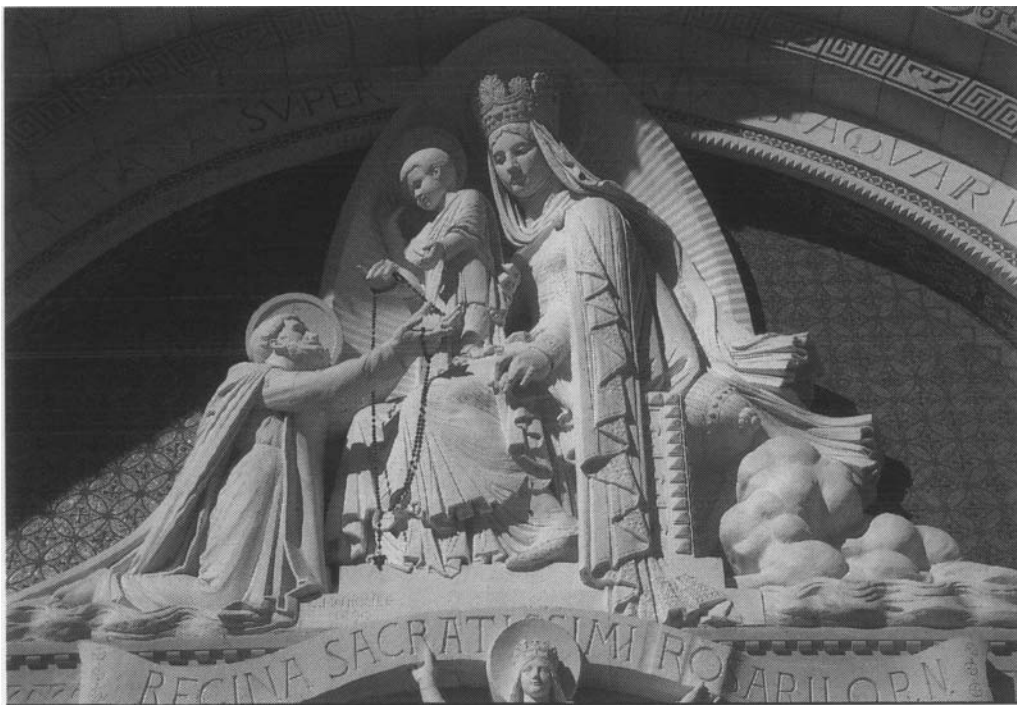


Figure 2.1 Mary giving the rosary to St Dominic

Source: Photograph by author

Toulouse. He adopted a new style of evangelization as an itinerant mendicant preacher and founded a community which was formally established in 1220. The Order of Preachers maintained elements of monastic observance, but dropped manual labour in favour of study and preaching.

Dominic's mission to the Cathars was not a success and, according to the legend, in the year 1214 he retired to a cave in the woods near Toulouse. After he had spent three days in fasting and prayer, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him, accompanied by three queens and 50 maidens – the number clearly corresponding to the pattern of the psalter. She raised him up and kissed him, and, in the style of medieval mystical eroticism, quenched his thirst with milk from her chaste breast. She then told him that not intellectual thundering against heresy but rather a gentle remedy against sickness was required: 'Therefore if you will preach successfully, preach my psalter.' The Blessed Virgin then vanished together with her entourage. Restored and armed with the rosary, Dominic went forth and reconverted the Cathars to Catholicism. The Cathari, who did not believe that Christ was a real man, born of a real woman (such as he, Dominic, had now experienced her to be), were to be persuaded by the statement proclaiming: 'And blessed is the fruit of thy womb'.

An alternative version of the Virgin's words is given by Augusta Drane:

Wonder not that until now you have obtained so little fruit by your labours; you have spent them on barren soil not yet watered with the dew of divine grace. When God willed to renew the face of the earth, He began by sending down on it the fertilising rain of the Angelic Salutation. Therefore preach my Psalter of 150 Angelic Salutations and 15 Our Fathers and you will obtain an abundant harvest.²

She continues:

For that it was through his hand that the Blessed Virgin Mary delivered to us, her children, the devotion of the holy rosary, is the firm and constant tradition of the Church supported by a weight of authority which can hardly be called into question without temerity. Nevertheless it cannot be presented with those precise details of times and circumstances which are demanded in a narration of historic fact.³

Quoting Danzas, Augusta Drane goes on to be more frank: 'The rosary has no history, and will probably never have one.'⁴

The Bollandist Fr Thomas Esser, writing in the 1890s, examined the origins of this Dominican legend, and Fr Herbert Thurston reviewed the evidence very fully.⁵ He came to the conclusion that there is a complete absence of St Dominic's name in connection with this devotion until 250 years after his death; there is no mention in biography, recorded sermons, in the documents for the process of canonization, nor in paintings or sculpture. None of the many early Dominican saints used the rosary as such, though many of them did recite a multitude of *Aves* counting on a knotted cord or circlet of beads. For instance, Blessed Benvenuto Bojani said a thousand *Aves* a day and two thousand on Saturdays, and in addition 700 *Paters* and 700 *Aves* – each hundred for a different intention.

In 1908 Fr Thurston examined further data on the possible connection of the rosary with St Dominic.⁶ He drew attention to a document which was reputed to be a contemporary poem written immediately after the battle of Muret (1213). The original document no longer exists, but a book published in 1693 by a certain Fr Benoist professes to be a copy of the original. According to the version of this poem published by Fr Thomas Esser in his *Rosary Book* (published about 1900), the

unknown author of the poem pays a tribute of gratitude to St Dominic, on the grounds that the victory was due to his prayers and his rosary, as follows:

Verse 4

<i>Dominicus rosas afferre</i>	So soon as Dominic
<i>Dum incipit tam humilis,</i>	begins to bring roses,
<i>Dominicus coronas conferre</i>	For Dominic quickly hastens
<i>Statim apparet agilis.</i>	to twine wreaths.

Fr Thurston surmised that perhaps Benoist had made an error when copying the poem. On consulting the original text of Fr Benoist, he found that the first word of the third line of the stanza was in fact '*Dominus*', 'Lord'. Dominic brings the roses and the Lord weaves them into a wreath to crown the victors. It was the copyist of Fr Benoist who had been in error. There is no warrant for supposing that St Dominic was familiar with the practice of saying 50 Hail Marys, and describing the prayers as 'roses' or the whole exercise as a 'rosarium'.

The linkage between the rosary and St Dominic would seem to have been proposed by Alain de la Roche, a Dominican friar and founder of the first rosary confraternity in 1468–70. What is certain is that from that time onwards the Dominican Order of Preachers were the main promoters of the Marian rosary.

The Origins of the Rosary

If it was not St Dominic who gave us the rosary, where then did it originate? A full review of the story of the rosary will show that there was no one point of origin, rather it evolved over a long period and from a variety of sources. The multiplicity of streams of development and other influences are depicted in the Frontispiece to this book (p.ii). If we were to

compare it to a river system, there are four main rivers or lines of development. Three have their source in scripture and one in the use of prayer beads. The psalms and Jewish liturgical tradition flow into the Liturgy of the Hours of monastic practice out of which come the Marian psalm psalters and the *Paternoster* beads. The Our Father was always a central prayer in Christian devotion, being incorporated in the celebration of the Eucharist and the Divine Office. In the twelfth century, with the growth of monasticism and the many lay brothers, the recitation of 150 *Paternosters*, counted on a knotted cord or string of beads, was substituted for the psalms.

The Angelic Salutation and Elizabeth's greeting of Mary are found in the Eastern Liturgy from perhaps the fifth century. They are again found in the Little Office of Our Lady, which grew in popularity at the beginning of the second millennium. From about 1050 the Angelic Salutation, with or without Elizabeth's greeting, begins to be used as a popular prayer form, initially perhaps being added to the end of the Our Father. Then the *Ave* develops separately as a greeting to the Blessed Virgin, as popular devotion to Mary grows in the twelfth century. One suggestion is that, being essentially a salutation, the *Ave* was said as an accompaniment to a series of genuflexions repeated 150 times. Alternatively, the *Ave* came to be said as a chaplet of 150 salutations counted on a circlet of beads. The name of Jesus is added in about 1261, so that the prayer commonly ends with 'Jesus Christ. Amen.' The second part of the Hail Mary dates from the end of the fifteenth century and its current form was fixed in the sixteenth.

The use of beads as a counting device is probably universal. It is known that prayer beads were used in Hindu practice from about 1750 BC. We can date the Christian use of beads to the fourth century and the Jesus Prayer has survived to the present day being counted on a knotted woollen rope.

Two streams of Marian devotion continue to flow and develop: the Marian psalm psalter and the *Ave* chaplet.⁷ Furthermore, during the fourteenth century the practice of meditation on the life of Christ is an important spiritual development and is taken up by the Devotio Moderna movement and the Observant reform movement. There is a confluence of these three streams when another Dominic, a Carthusian monk, joined meditation on the life of Christ with the repetition of the *Ave Maria* in sets of 50 prayers sometime between 1409 and 1415. This is the essence of the modern rosary. Further experiment and development continued until the rosary was formally approved by Pius V in 1569.

We will now begin a more detailed examination of the origins of the rosary, following it from this confluence of practice and influence through to its general acceptance by the Church. We will then study the elements that constitute the rosary.

Life of Christ Meditations

Exactly when the life of Christ (*vita Christi*) meditations, the essence of the modern rosary, became part of the rosary is a matter for debate. Anne Winston has contributed to the understanding of this problem by her study of the German vernacular texts of the Middle Ages.

Marian legends of the twelfth century tell of pious individuals being rewarded by the Blessed Virgin for the practice of reciting strings of *Aves*. It was believed that hearing these words brought Mary delight by recalling to her the joy of the Incarnation. The 'Marien Rosenkranz' legend in the German Passional (1280-1300) describes, for example, the reciting of chains of *Aves* as the act of creating a symbolic wreath for the Virgin. In this tale, 50 *Aves*