

THE LEGEND OF
ST SIMON STOCK AND
THE SCAPULAR DEVOTION

From the first to the second naïveté

Paul Ricoeur (d. 2005)

“first naïveté”

→ wonder

critical reflection

→ rejection; or

“second naïveté”

→ a new wonder

an example: the creation story in Genesis

First naïveté:
The traditional story

Simon Stock, 1165-1265

At 12 he began to live as a hermit in the hollow trunk of an oak, became an itinerant preacher, entered the Carmelite Order, and spent several years on Mt Carmel.

In 1247 he was elected the sixth prior general of the Carmelites.

On Sunday 16 July 1251 the Blessed Virgin appeared to Simon in Cambridge, England. In prayer he asked for some privilege for his Order, offering the prayer *Flos Carmeli*.

The Virgin appeared surrounded by a multitude of angels and bearing the scapular of the order in her blessed hands, saying: “May this be to you and to all the Carmelites a pledge, that whoever dies wearing it will not suffer eternal fire, that is, wearing this, he will be saved.”



The Sabbatine Privilege

The Virgin Mary appeared also to Pope John XXII, as recorded in his Bull *Sacratissimo uti culmine* of 3 March 1322, and promised that those who wear the scapular and fulfill two other conditions (chastity according to their state of life, and the daily recitation of the Little Office of Our Lady) will be freed from Purgatory on the first Saturday after death.



Scapular miracles

1. Another Scapular miracle took place in 1845. In the late summer of that year, the English ship, *King of the Ocean*,* on its way to Australia found itself in the middle of a hurricane. As wind and sea mercilessly lashed the ship, a Protestant minister, with his wife and children and other passengers, struggled to the deck to pray for mercy and forgiveness, as the end seemed at hand. Among the crew was a young Irishman, John McAuliffe. On seeing the urgency of the situation, the youth opened his shirt, took off his Scapular, and, making the Sign of the Cross with it over the raging waves, tossed it into the ocean. At that very moment, the wind calmed. Only one more wave washed the deck, bringing with it the Scapular which came to rest at the young man's feet...

... All the while the minister (a Mr. Fisher) had been carefully observing McAuliffe's actions and the miraculous effect of those actions. Upon questioning the young man, he was told about the Holy Virgin and her Scapular. Mr. Fisher and his family became determined to enter the Catholic Church as soon as possible, and thereby enjoy the same protection of Our Lady's Scapular. This they did shortly after landing in Australia.

2. A French priest had gone on a pilgrimage when he remembered that he had not brought his scapular. Even though he knew that he would be late to celebrate Mass, he returned to pick it up, for he could not even imagine himself on the altar of Our Lady without wearing his scapular. Later, while celebrating the Holy Sacrifice, a young man approached the altar, pulling a weapon and struck the priest from behind.

To his astonishment, the priest continued to celebrate Mass as if nothing had happened. The believers thought at first that the bullet had miraculously missed the target, but then it turned out that it had gotten stuck in the small brown scapular that the priest had refused to leave behind.

Critical reflection

St Simon Stock

- no contemporary evidence
- first mentions by prior general John Grossi:
 - 1390: Simon Stock, from England; buried at Bordeaux; worked many miracles
 - 1413/26: Saint Simon of England; 6th prior general; had scapular vision; buried in Bordeaux
- he could not have been prior general in 1251 (Godfrey)
- local cult in Bordeaux around tomb and relics from about 1423; Scapular Vision included from perhaps 1430s; in England from 1440s; increasingly strong devotion from about 1500

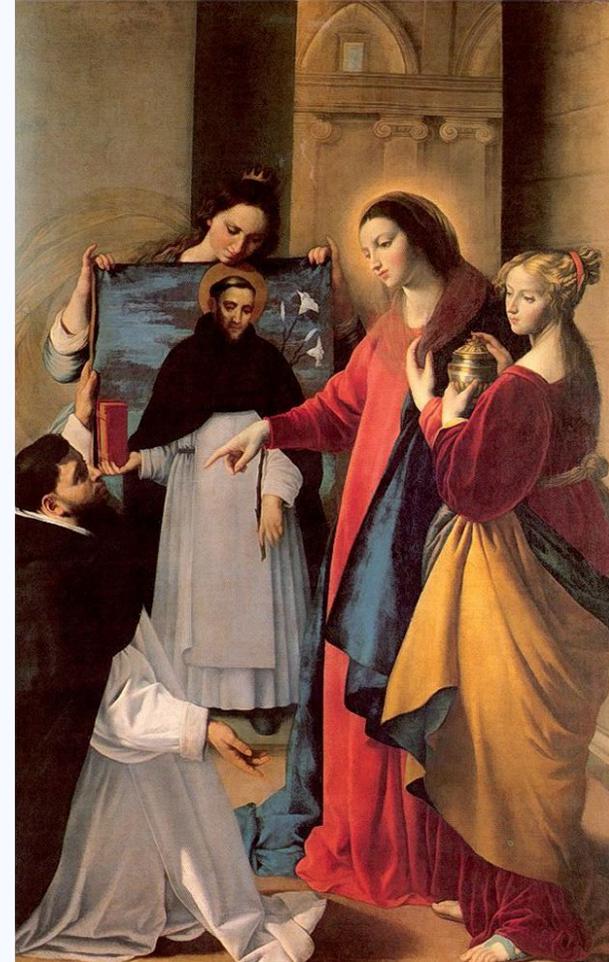
Richard Copsey, "Simon Stock and the Scapular Vision." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50 (1999): 652–83.

Scapular

The scapular, originally a kind of apron, seems to have been part of monastic dress from the 5th century or so. Symbolically, it was usually said to represent “the yoke of Christ”: this was the meaning given it in the Carmelite clothing ritual at profession (with no mention of the Scapular Vision or Mary).

By the 14th century it was a relatively common claim of religious orders that their habit had been given them by the Virgin Mary (Dominicans, Cistercians, Servites, etc.)

Juan Bautista Maino, *The Virgin Mary, with Sts Mary Magdalen and Catherine, show the habit to Bl. Reginald of Orleans in 1218* (ca.1629), Madrid, Prado.



In the famous Cambridge debate of 1375, the Dominican John Stokes claimed that the Dominican habit was given by the Virgin Mary, but the Carmelite John Hornby did not argue that the Carmelite scapular was from Mary, suggesting that the tradition of the vision to Simon Stock was not yet known.

Hornby defends the title “Order of Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary” and the idea of Mary as Sister.

The Sabbatine Privilege

Historians now universally agree that the tradition about Mary appearing to Pope John XXII (1316-1334) and promising to release Scapular wearers from Purgatory on the Saturday after death is a fraud.

John XXII actually denied the existence of Purgatory in the Beatific Vision controversy (and later retracted).

The bull seems to have been forged by Sicilian Carmelites in the 1430s, and attributed to exactly the wrong pope, but the “Sabbatine Privilege” was soon extremely popular.

There were soon scandals and theological arguments, as well as doubts about the authenticity of the bull.

Ludovico Saggi, *La Bolla sabatina: ambiente, testo, tempo* (Roma: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1967).

In 1602 and 1609 the Portuguese Inquisition prohibited books promoting the Sabbatine Privilege and the bull of John XXII. The Roman Inquisition followed.

1613 the Holy Office forbade the Carmelites to preach the bull, or to depict Mary descending into Purgatory, and it was allowed to say only that the care of the Blessed Virgin for members of the Scapular Confraternity extended even after death, and especially on Saturdays.



The conditions for trusting in such a favour (1613) are that the recipients “die in a state of grace, wear the Carmelite habit, observe chastity according to their state in life and recite the little office of the Blessed Virgin; if they cannot recite it they are to observe the church fasts and abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Saturdays, unless Christmas falls on these days.”

Many papal approvals of the Scapular followed over the centuries, but always omitting reference to the vision of John XXII as the foundation of the “Sabbatine Privilege”.

The second naïveté: new wonder

- The scapular is a form of the Carmelite habit, and brings an affiliation with the Order, which has always called itself the “Order of Brothers (and Sisters) of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, dedicated to a life of discipleship of Christ, as Mary’s was.
- It is therefore principally a sign of commitment to a Christian way of life, in companionship with Mary, “first among the disciples of the Lord” and Mother of Christians.
- It should no longer be linked with the vision of St Simon Stock (dubious) and even less with the vision of John XXII and the “Sabbatine privilege” (fraudulent).



T. I. P. 327.
*Religieux Carme de l'Ancienne observance,
en habit ordinaire.*
78. R. B. G. S.

- Even more, the magical and superstitious elements which gradually crept into the popular understanding of the devotion must be purified.
- Nevertheless, even these legendary visions are ultimately about perseverance in Christian life until the end.
- Historically, from about 1500 the Carmelites used the scapular as a pastoral strategy for the creation of Christian community (the Scapular Confraternities), which became extraordinarily numerous. The scapular was their uniform.
- These confraternities were concrete communities engaged in prayer, sacramental life, and works of charity, 16th-19th centuries.

- This explains why, unlike other sacramentals, scapulars are not simply blessed, but the wearer is enrolled in the Scapular Confraternity, and once enrolled, subsequent scapulars do not require a blessing.
- This is the current rite of enrolment, approved in 1996:

“Receive this Scapular, a sign of your special relationship with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whom you pledge to imitate. May it be a reminder to you of your dignity as a Christian, in serving others and imitating Mary. Wear it as a sign of her protection and of belonging to the Family of Carmel, voluntarily doing the will of God and devoting yourself to building a world true to his plan of community, justice and peace.”



- As a a sign of affiliation to the Carmelite Order, the scapular is also an invitation to explore one of the great traditions of Christian spirituality:
 - open to the mystery of God's presence;
 - as a hearer and doer of the Word;
 - as a disciple of Jesus;
 - with a contemplative attitude to life;
 - guided by faith, hope and love;
 - responsive to the needs of others;
 - in a spirit of prayer;
 - in closeness to Mary and the saints.