

# EX | FONTE

Journal of Ecumenical Studies in Liturgy

VOLUME 4 | 2025

## REVIEW

Innocent Smith,  
Bible Missals and the Medieval Dominican Liturgy  
(Manuscripta Biblica 12), Berlin – Boston 2024

JULIA A. SCHNEIDER



exfonte.org

### *How to Cite*

SCHNEIDER, Julia A., Innocent SMITH, *Bible Missals and the Medieval Dominican Liturgy* (Manuscripta Biblica 12), Berlin – Boston 2024, in: *Ex Fonte – Journal of Ecumenical Studies in Liturgy* 4 (2025) 143–151.

DOI [10.25365/exf-2025-4-7](https://doi.org/10.25365/exf-2025-4-7)

### *Reviewer*

Julia A. Schneider is the Medieval Studies Librarian at the University of Notre Dame. Her research interests include medieval liturgical forms, intellectual history of scholasticism, and the medieval Dominicans, as evidenced by her dissertation, written on a thirteenth-century treatise on the liturgy by Albert the Great.

### *Reviewed Book*

Author	Innocent Smith
Title	Bible Missals and the Medieval Dominican Liturgy
Series	Manuscripta Biblica 12
Place	Berlin – Boston
Year	2024
Publisher	De Gruyter
Pages	XI + 503
ISBN	9783110792218
eISBN	9783110792430

## Review

Innocent SMITH, *Bible Missals and the Medieval Dominican Liturgy* (Manuscripta Biblica 12), Berlin – Boston 2024

JULIA A. SCHNEIDER

The study of the history of the Dominican Liturgy has recently undergone a significant revival,<sup>1</sup> due, in part, to a broader awareness of pre-Vatican II liturgical uses and rites, but also owing to an intensified interest in the Order of Friars Preachers in the Middle Ages and their influence on many aspects of medieval Christian culture. In *Bible Missals and the Medieval Dominican Liturgy*, Innocent Smith provides a thorough treatment of the subject matter that fills in gaps in manuscript studies, the history of medieval liturgical books, the codicological history of biblical texts in the Middle Ages, and comparative study of medieval liturgical forms. Smith's stated goal is "to have contributed to a deeper understanding of the significance of both the bible and the liturgy in the lives of medieval Christians by means of a careful study of manuscripts that synthesize biblical and liturgical texts in a single volume" (11). These synthesized texts are referred to as bible missals.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Eleanor J. GIRAUD – Christian T. LEITMEIR (eds.), *The Medieval Dominicans. Books, Buildings, Music, and Liturgy* (Medieval Monastic Studies 7), Turnhout 2021; Claire T. JONES, *Ruling the Spirit. Women, Liturgy, and Dominican Reform in Late Medieval Germany* (The Middle Ages Series), Philadelphia 2018, and the thorough and lush study by Jeffrey HAMBURGER et al., *Liturgical life and Latin Learning at Paradies bei Soest, 1300–1425. Inscription and Illumination in the Choir books of a North German Dominican Convent*, 2 vols., Münster 2016.

Smith's treatment is presented essentially in two parts, although it is not divided that way. The first part contains a prologue, six chapters in which he lays out his project for the reader – the data he has gleaned and the conclusions he draws from its analysis – followed by an epilogue in which he draws larger conclusions and posits work that needs to be completed to enlarge the picture he has provided of these texts and their use. The prologue functions as a brief introduction to the genre of bible missals, with a sketch of the range of contents and identifying features of the codices studied, along with some background on the Order of Friars Preachers (the Dominicans), and, finally, the context of manuscript production in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Six chapters of analysis and comparison of the codicological features and contents of these manuscripts follow, wrapped up by the aforementioned epilogue. Each chapter's analysis includes many tables and, occasionally, other diagrams, all of which support his exploration and help the reader carry the comparative data forward to see clearly how Smith arrives at his conclusions. He provides the same type and level of data presentation for each chapter, serving to make what could be an extremely dense treatment much easier to read and follow. The second part of the work includes a complete catalog of the thirteen identified Dominican bible missals, along with three appendices of summary catalogs (non-Dominican bible missals, early Dominican missals, and 13<sup>th</sup>-century missals cataloged by Leroquais), concluding with a bibliography, lists of abbreviations, transcription notes, tables, figures, and indices. The catalog and appendices expand exponentially the amount of information that the reader has at their finger-tips to evaluate Smith's analysis and conclusions, and serve as independent reference tools as well.

In Chapter 1, *Bible Missals and the Medieval Liturgy* (12–50), Smith covers the “material and liturgical features [of thirteenth-century bible missals] [...] [s]howing how they relate to the broader range of thirteenth-century bibles and thirteenth-century missals” (12). Here, he lays the groundwork for the rest of his study by looking at the features of forty bible missals and comparing them to both bibles and missals produced during the same period. By collecting comprehensive data on the features described, including the liturgical use (Dominican, Franciscan, Cistercian, Augustinian, Gilbertine, local use of Paris, local use of Prague, or liturgical

rite/use unidentified), liturgical texts and their typology, location of the liturgical texts within each manuscript, type of decoration, origin and provenance (ownership details), and several points related to the size, shape, and number of leaves and sharing that data in thirty-four tables and five supporting scatter diagrams, Smith handily leads the reader through to the conclusion that most bible missals can be attributed to a particular liturgical tradition. Further, the predominant number of bible missals belonging to the mendicant tradition replicates the origin and many of the decorative features of bibles produced in the thirteenth century, although more bibles were produced in the latter half of the century while more bible missals were made in the first half (49). In comparison to missals produced in the thirteenth century, there are fewer correlations to be drawn with regard to size and potential use, although he points out the salient features of Dominican bible missals in particular.

Investigating the dating of early Dominican Mass books is the subject of the second chapter (51–67), in which Smith uses similar methods to those employed in the first chapter: analyzing the contents of the manuscripts. He begins with an overview of what is known concerning the history of the early Dominican liturgy from the Order's foundation through the reform of Humbert of Romans in 1256. The development of the Dominican liturgy is closely aligned with the Order's legislation, according to Smith, since the constitutions were living documents that were often modified by the General Chapters (51). This gives a stable base of external data to corroborate the timeline of liturgical development, which, in turn, can be used to establish a reliable timeframe for the production of the books. To do this, Smith uses the criteria of observances for anniversaries of the dead, the celebrations of the feasts of St. Dominic (died 1221, canonized 1234), and of St. Peter Martyr (died 1252, canonized 1253) since additions and changes in the observances of these anniversaries and festal celebrations can be dated with relative security, based on external sources. Thus, they help establish evidence that "assist[s] in determining a tentative chronology of Dominican bible missals and pre-Humbert missals" (67). This careful analysis using select criteria also allows Smith to elucidate the liturgical content of the bible missals in comparison to that of the pre-Humbert missals more generally.

In the next two chapters, Smith builds on this investigation into the aforementioned feasts and observances in these manuscripts by probing the liturgical texts for the Mass of St. Dominic in Early Dominican Mass book (Chapter 3, 68–98) and for Pentecost and the votive mass of the Holy Spirit (Chapter 4, 99–151). He delineates and compares the contents from the formularies in Dominican bible missals to those in the pre-Humbert missals. “These case studies enable a nuanced assessment of the diversity and unity of pre-Humbert Dominican liturgical sources” (68). Through Smith’s analysis of the propers for the Feast of St. Dominic (August 5), its octave, and the feast of his translation (May 24), patterns and commonalities emerge; in the chapter’s conclusion, he indicates that the most diverse parts of these liturgies are the chants and readings, while the most stable are the orations. For Pentecost and the votive mass of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, the sources are generally more uniform and stable across time and source type. Smith not only compares the contents of the Dominican bible missals to pre-Humbert Dominican missals, but also to parallel texts in the other (non-Dominican) bible missals. To aid the reader, along with the tables included along the way, Smith summarizes the high points of his analysis and references to broader liturgical practices conveniently after each section. In spite of the stability of the texts in Dominican liturgical sources, Smith notes “there are several distinctive variants among Dominican sources that are important for understanding the transmission of early Dominican liturgical books and identifying Dominican sources” (98). In the end, this set of case studies shows that the readings, orations, and chants were stable in the Dominican books, and point to an early stability in Dominican liturgy, especially as compared to contemporaneous non-Dominican sources. The case studies in these two chapters provide a good foundation to the study of the *Ordo Missae* in the next chapter (152–187).

Smith looks at the contents of the Dominican sources pre-Humbert for the Mass that make up the *Ordo Missae* – actions, prayers, readings, and chants, both variable and set – in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter to provide a further point of comparison between the full missals and the bible missals. The varied contents of *ordines missae* in medieval liturgical manuscripts make a one-to-one comparison between individual codices difficult, since consistency is a rarity. Smith analyzes these fixed and variable texts in this

chapter and, by also incorporating additional details like the use of musical notation and the type(s) of decoration, he expands the points of comparison to good value. This enables him to show that, while the *Ordo Missae* varies considerably across these texts, some generalities can be distinguished, especially between the full missals, which tend to have a fuller representation of the entire *Ordo Missae*, and the bible missals, which tend to focus on variable texts and include prayers and rubrics from the Canon to the end of the Mass. Given the relatively small size of Dominican bible missals and the shorter version of the *Ordo Missae* typically found therein, one can draw the conclusion that any priest using them would have known most of the fixed parts of the Mass by heart, but that the bible missals would have given them access to the propers and other texts they might need (especially those for the Eucharistic liturgy) to aid their memories in liturgical celebration (187).

In Chapter 6 (188–199), Smith asks the question likely on the reader's mind, fortified by the breadth and depth of analysis presented previously concerning these manuscripts and their contents: "What Were Bible Missals For?" The extant number of these hybrid texts suggests that medieval clerics (including Dominican and Franciscan friars) and literate laypeople found them useful in some capacity. Smith goes on to posit the "affordances" or potential uses indicated by the contents and physical aspects of the books, citing legislation, hagiographical materials, and liturgical evidence to support his understanding. The most obvious of these affordances is the reading and studying the bible. This is a likely use, given that sources indicate that Dominicans were encouraged to own personal bibles. But Smith asserts that they would offer other uses, e. g., for liturgical purposes, where celebrants might have used them to prepare for or celebrate mass and as an access point to the readings, prayers, and chants for the Divine Office; as part of this discussion, Smith's delineation that many bibles owned by Dominicans from this time included supplementary texts for the Office with the Psalter, providing corresponding examples from two of the Dominican bible missals (including images) that are indicative of that very practice (191–193). Further, Dominican bible missals might provide material for the preparation of preaching, since having the biblical text and prayers could aid with determining themes for sermons (197). Finally, bible missals might also function as sources of

meditative prayer or private devotion; in support of this, Smith cites the example of Gertude of Helfta, who describes her own practice of praying the orations privately (198). Although we know of no explicit contemporary descriptions of the use of these books, Smith asserts that “[t]he rich liturgical content of bible missals suggests that they played a significant role in the spiritual lives of medieval users, highlighting the enduring power of these manuscripts as tools for worship, contemplation, study, and devotion” (199).

In his epilogue (chapter 7, 200–202), Smith indicates that bible missals make up a significant portion of thirteenth-century missals, but that “more research is needed to fully utilize the evidence offered by these manuscripts for studying the development of the Dominican liturgy and the broader medieval liturgical tradition” (200). This foundational study has laid the groundwork for that research through its identification of a typology of bible missals (including Dominican and non-Dominican manuscripts), as well as through an examination of aspects of their makeup and contents that will offer assistance in the analysis of other manuscripts. Smith provides recommendations for further research, including suggested studies of the epistle and gospel lists, of marginal liturgical annotations in the bible sections of these manuscripts, and examination of their calendars. In addition, broader comparative study of thirteenth century missals (or missals in general) would also be welcome. One hopes that Smith takes some of this research on, given the success of this project.

Appended to the narrative analysis are the scholarly apparatus that together form the second part of the book. They include, most impactfully, the manuscript catalog of the Dominican bible missals (203–407), which delivers a comprehensive paleographical and codicological description of each one of the individual Dominican bible missal manuscripts, along with images and current bibliography. Appendix 1 provides a summary catalog of the non-Dominican bible missals (408–431), appendix 2 is a summary catalog of pre-Humbert Dominican missals (432–445), and appendix 3 provides a summary catalog of 13<sup>th</sup>-century missals cataloged by Leroquais (446–449). The supplementary material also includes a bibliography, lists of tables, and indices. The catalogs, especially the first, qualify this work as an essential reference tool for the study of Dominican liturgy,



medieval bibles, and the medieval missal. Given the fact that descriptions of liturgical manuscripts and bibles in published catalogs are so often blatantly inaccurate, the catalogs provide a major contribution to liturgical and manuscript studies on their own, but in addition to the groundbreaking analysis in the first seven chapters, they make this a work that any scholar of Dominican liturgy or medieval liturgical manuscripts will need to consult.