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# 105

## EDITORIAL

### MINISTER GENERAL MICHAEL PERRY OFM

The new Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor is Fr. Michael Anthony Perry ofm, elected on 22 May 2013. He was Vicar General of the Order. His life experience includes a period of ten years missionary work in the Democratic Republic of Congo and also the service to the brothers as Minister Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province in the USA.

The election of a new Minister General comes at an opportune moment for the Order. Pope Francis has introduced a new style of leadership in the Church, which in a certain way is unique. That is not to say that other Popes lacked style of leadership, on the contrary! There were Popes who were noted for their humility and gentle style, like John XXIII and John Paul I. There were Popes who became missionaries and great leaders in difficult times, leading the Church forward in an ever-changing world, like Paul VI and Blessed John Paul II. Benedict XVI was reserved, but deeply reflective and clear in his theological outlook. Pope Francis promises to be a Pope for the people, and particularly for the poor. Ahead of him lies an arduous task, that of reforming the image of the Church as an institution. May God help him in this endeavour.

One can say that Minister General Michael Anthony Perry faces a similar challenge. Recently there were Ministers General who were humble and gentle, like John Vaughn and Giacomo Bini. Others were great leaders of the Order, like Konstantin Koser. Others were visionaries, like Hermann Schalück, whereas others were scholars and teachers, like José Rodríguez Carballo. Practically all have been on the move and have visited the Order frequently. Michael Perry's style is bound to be a continuation of all this, and yet he is also bound to be different. The reason is simple. The Order needs a different style of leadership. A style of leadership to face new challenges, trials, hopes.

The Franciscan Order needs a leadership with a clear vision for the future. This means a vision that takes into consideration the human side of Franciscan life. The Order needs less teachings, less documents, less legislation, less projects. It needs more humanity. More closeness to human suffering among the brothers. Closeness to the solitude of the ever-increasing number of elderly and sick brothers. Closeness to the relatively small number of friars in their 40's and 50's, who are the product of the upheavals of post-Vatican II, and whose vision is blurred with uncertainty. Closeness to young friars, who nurture high ideals but are prone to dissatisfaction because of lack of example on the part of their seniors and because of their conflicting sentiments between the radicality of the consecrated life and the allurements of an affluent and valueless culture from which they come.

The Order needs a Minister General who will help it to slow down in its frantic search for efficiency and to stop and reflect upon what its original mission in the Church and the world implies. Maybe also we need a General who helps the Order shun all temptations of publicity and personal fame, and rediscover the beauty of living together as brothers, in a fraternal and (why not?) in a conventual setting that has been sadly abandoned with the excuse that it is alien to our original charism. Hopefully new times for the Order are on the way.

*Noel Muscat ofm*

# THE CRUCIFIED WORD AND THE GIFT OF PIETY IN THE TEACHINGS OF ST. BONAVENTURE

Noel Muscat ofm

Saint Bonaventure was elected Minister General of the Franciscan Order on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1257. Towards the end of 1253 he had become regent master of the Franciscan house of studies in Paris, after he had acquired the *licentia docendi* as a result of the public presentation of the *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi*. This title, however, was only recognised officially on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1257, when Bonaventure was already Minister General and had withdrawn from the University of Paris. This, however, did not mean that he did not return to Paris during his years as General, from 1257 till 1273. Indeed, there were a number of instances when he resided in Paris and even delivered lectures at the University. He was there on the occasion of the general chapter of 1266, as well as to deliver his lectures on the *Collationes de decem preceptis* in 1267, on the *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti* in 1268, and on the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* in 1273.<sup>1</sup>

The *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti* were delivered during Lent 1268, precisely between 25<sup>th</sup> February and 7<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>2</sup> These conferences are a treatise on the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, composed in the typical style of a medieval orator and preacher. Our aim is not that of delving into the contents of these conferences, which contain rich Scriptural and theological insights into the Gifts of the Spirit and regarding the nature of grace. We would rather prefer to stop and reflect upon one particular theme of Bonaventure's theology that is present only in these conferences, and study it with reference to the Gift of piety as it is described in the same conferences as well as in other works of the Seraphic Doctor, particularly the *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*. This theme regards the notion of the Crucified Word (*Verbum*

*Crucifixum*), which is present exclusively in these conferences but which is also evident in Bonaventure's attention to the central position of Christ Crucified within the context of the study of the *sacra pagina*, which lead him to become not only a renowned theologian but also a mystic.<sup>3</sup>

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## *The Crucified Word in Bonaventure's Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*

The notion of *Verbum Crucifixum* is present in the first of the nine Conferences on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. As we have already pointed out, it is the only instance in the entire *corpus* of Bonaventure's writings that we find this notion being underlined within the Trinitarian theology of the seraphic doctor, centred upon the Uncreated Word (*Verbum Increatum*), the Incarnate Word (*Verbum Incarnatum*) and the Inspired Word (*Verbum Inspiratum*).<sup>4</sup>

Bonaventure starts off by stating that "it is certain that God, the original source of all, in creating humanity in his image and likeness in the state of innocence created humanity so close to God that humanity could be informed by grace through the Uncreated Word. But after humanity had fallen through sin, divine wisdom saw to it that humanity might be made fit for grace through the condescension of the Incarnate Word."<sup>5</sup>

The seraphic doctor is therefore concerned about the history of salvation as it unfolded according to God's divine plan after man had sinned and lost the original state of grace in which he was created. The act of reparation that was necessary in order to restore man to his pristine

dignity in the order of grace was accomplished by Christ, the Incarnate Word, who “condescended”, literally bowed down, came down, taking upon himself human flesh and becoming man.<sup>6</sup> However, Bonaventure insists that God’s will was that such an act of reparation would not be accomplished simply through the mystery of the Incarnate Word. This same mystery needed the supreme act of loving condescension of Christ who offered up himself as a sacrifice of reparation on the cross. Thus the Incarnate Word became also the Crucified Word, restoring us to the state of grace.

“Second, grace comes down to us through the Crucified Word. Not only were we unsuited to receive grace because of our ignorance of the divine precepts, but even more so because of our weakness and impotence and our desire for the things of this earth. Therefore God willed to provide some supports for us. In order to heal our infirmities God came down among us through the Crucified Word. The Apostle says in Ephesians 2:4-5: ‘God, who is rich in mercy, by reason of the great love with which God has loved us, brought us to life in Christ when we were dead in sin. It is by his grace that you have been saved.’ We have been brought to life in Christ through Christ, because Christ has triumphed over death. Death was not able to swallow him up. Rather, the fount of love swallowed up death. As it is written: ‘O death, I shall be your death.’ We cannot be healed or saved in any other way. Therefore, the Apostle says in Galatians 2:21: ‘I do not reject the grace of God, for if justice comes through the Law, then Christ has died in vain.’ But Christ has died in order to restore the dead to life for the reception of life and grace. Hence grace flows to us through the Incarnate Word and the Crucified Word.”<sup>7</sup>

Christ Crucified becomes the test for a genuine act of faith on the part of the disciples. Bonaventure shows how it is the Inspired Word, namely the power of the Holy Spirit acting in the person of Jesus Christ who in Scripture is the Word of life, that prompts the believer to adhere totally to the mystery of the humanity of Christ even to the point of believing in Christ’s divine power on the Cross.

“Grace arises within us through the Inspired Word. Even though ‘God sent his Son’ (Gal 4:4) in human flesh, still, unless you believe in him crucified, you shall not have grace ... Therefore, whatever the Father does or the Son suffers is nothing without the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup>

The origin of grace lies in the Trinity. The foundation of a holy way of life lies in keeping faithful to the grace that one receives freely and abundantly through the humanity of Christ, from the Father who is the originating Principle and the Holy Spirit who is the Gift or grace in those who welcome him in their lives.<sup>9</sup>

The texts concerning the Crucified Word are found within the context of Bonaventure’s teaching on grace, which he describes as a *gratia gratis data* (grace that is freely given) and a *gratia gratum faciens* (grace that makes us pleasing). In the *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti* Bonaventure speaks about sanctifying grace, which he describes as “grace which is freely given.”<sup>10</sup> In its intrinsic nature such sanctifying grace corresponds to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Bonaventure draws from Isaiah 11:2-3 according to the Vulgate edition, which as we know, adds the Gift of piety to the other six Gifts, placing it immediately before the Gift of the fear of God.<sup>11</sup>

Grace which is freely given, however, is not enough to preserve one in faithfulness to God through a holy way of life, since “grace that is freely given can exist together with mortal sin.” It is only through grace that makes us pleasing to God that we can truly enter within the dynamics of the fruits of grace. In the introduction to the second conference, concerning the Gift of fear of the Lord, Bonaventure explains this process as a “return to the highest source,” namely God. Just as sanctifying grace flows from the mystery of the Trinity, so grace that makes us pleasing to God leads us back to the Trinity in a kind of mystical circle whose centre is the Crucified Word. It is only through Christ crucified that we can return to God.

“With regard to the origin of this grace I have said it is nothing other than the best and perfect gift descending from the Father of lights (cfr. James 1:17) through the Incarnate Word, the Crucified Word, and the Inspired Word. And I said that the Word leads us back to the highest source ... Consequently the grace that makes us pleasing is the perfect gift.”<sup>12</sup>

Grace is freely bestowed through the merits of the Crucified Word in three ways, namely as “healing grace” through the seven sacraments, as “strengthening grace in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit,” and as “perfecting grace” through the seven beatitudes. As we have seen, the seraphic doctor

concentrates on grace that flows through the seven Gifts of the Spirit.<sup>13</sup> We shall now see how the Gift of Piety, in a particular way, is a sign of sanctifying grace through the merits of the Crucified Word.

### *The Crucified Word as a sacramentum pietatis*

Among the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Bonaventure holds piety in great esteem.<sup>14</sup> Although this Gift is included by the Septuagint and the Vulgate editions as a kind of quality regarding the Gift of the fear of the Lord, it demonstrates some peculiar characteristics which Bonaventure is quick to underline in the *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*.

The seraphic doctor gives us the following definition of *pietas*, piety, which is important to note in order not to fall into the temptation to regard piety in the contemporary meaning of the term (religious devotion or devout act), which is far removed from the rich theological significance contained in such a definition.

“Augustine says that in Greek ‘piety’ is the same as *theosebeia*, which is the same as worship of God. The worship of God consists above all in reverence for God, which does not exist without fear. One who worships God must, in reverence and fear, think of God in terms that are most exalted and most pious ... Therefore, I say that piety is nothing other than a pious sense of, a pious love of, and a pious service of that pious, first, and highest source. The supreme Good can neither be possessed nor worshipped without piety.”<sup>15</sup>

The virtue of piety as a Gift of the Holy Spirit is thus linked with the highest act of worship of the mystery of the Trinity in the life of the disciple. This kind of worship becomes authentic if it is worship “in Spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:23-24). In other words, it is piety inasmuch as it is concerned with the way in which Christ worshipped God when he became man. The Incarnate Word, the source of truth and life, is the way in which one can arrive at the Father through the Holy Spirit in an act of filial homage. This way, however, can only pass through the mystery of the Incarnate Word which becomes a Crucified Word.

Bonaventure explains how the origin of piety lies first in the uncreated Trinity, namely God the Father. Secondly it lies in the incarnate Wisdom, whom Bonaventure calls the *sacramentum pietatis*,

the sacrament of piety. Thirdly it is to be found in the Church sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We shall concentrate on the second origin of piety, namely that in the incarnate Wisdom, since it is here that we find the intimate link between piety and love towards the Crucified Word.

“The second source of piety is in the incarnate Wisdom. Hence the Apostle says in 1 Timothy 3:16: ‘Marvellously great is the sacrament of piety which was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, appeared to the angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, and taken up into glory.’ The mystery of human redemption accomplished by the Word Incarnate and Crucified is ‘a great sacrament of piety’ ... Because of piety (Christ) assumed flesh, ascended to the cross, rose from the dead, sent the Holy Spirit into the world, called the church to himself, freed all fitting people from misery – through piety ... The Son of God offered a holocaust, namely, himself for us. This is the ‘great sacrament of piety.’”<sup>16</sup>

The seraphic doctor is here commenting upon an ancient Christological hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16. The hymn celebrates Christ who is described as a sacrament or mystery of piety, of divine condescension, in his revelation to us as the Incarnate Word. Christ manifests himself in his human nature (in the flesh) through the mystery of the Incarnation. He is justified in the Spirit, namely his divinity as Son of God is fully revealed, in the mystery of his manifestation during Baptism in the river Jordan. His life on this earth was the announcing of the good news of salvation, revealed first and foremost to the people of Israel (appeared to the angels), and then to the gentiles, through the preaching of the apostles after Christ’s resurrection and ascension into heaven, through the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit present in the primitive Church. In this way Christ, fully God and fully man, becomes the object of faith in this world in the joyful awaiting in hope of his glorious second coming from his Father’s glory in the end of time. In this short hymn there is a splendid summary of the whole economy of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ, but at whose centre lies the power of revelation of the Holy Spirit, the true author of the apostolic evangelisation and of the subsequent formation of the Scriptures of the good news of salvation.

Bonaventure sees in all this process a sacrament of piety, an act of supreme mercy and



condescension on God's part, revealed by the Holy Spirit in the humanity of Jesus Christ, as the Incarnate and Crucified Word. Bonaventure is very explicit in seeing an intimate link between Christ, as a *sacramentum pietatis*, and the actions he accomplished in order to reveal this loving condescension of God, namely his Incarnation, his passion and death on the cross as a pleasing holocaust to the Father, his resurrection, the sending forth of the Holy Spirit and his continual presence in the Church and through the means of piety, the Word and the Sacraments.

When speaking about the Gift of fortitude, Bonaventure mentions the Virgin Mary and links her piety with her courageous act of offering her Son to the Father on the cross, when she stood by him to the very end.<sup>17</sup>

Piety, therefore, as a Gift of the Spirit, is expressed in a particular way in the loving act of self-offering of Christ on the cross. The Crucified Word is the sacrament of piety in which we are reconciled to the Father and formed into unity by the Holy Spirit. Thus in the Collations on the seven Gifts of the Spirit Bonaventure presents a detailed analysis of the mystery of redemption within the context of the dynamics of Christian discipleship through the power of the Spirit of the Crucified Word. What we intend to do now is to see how this process of sanctifying grace in Christ crucified as a sacrament of piety is presented by Bonaventure in the case of the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. We shall do so in a particular way by taking into account chapter 8 of the *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, where the seraphic doctor presents the virtue of piety as one of the outstanding qualities of Francis' life, as seen against the backdrop of the Crucified Word.

### *Piety and the Crucified Word in Bonaventure's Major Legend of Saint Francis*

Bonaventure presents Saint Francis as an outstanding example of piety in the *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, chapter 8. The seraphic doctor shows how the life of Saint Francis was a journey into God through the various hierarchic stages of purification, illumination and mystical union, with the help of the Christian virtues and under the continual gaze of the Crucified Word. Piety is presented as an outstanding virtue linked

with the second degree of the spiritual journey, namely illumination.

"True *piety*, which according to the Apostle *gives power to all things* (1Tm 4:8), had so filled Francis's heart and penetrated its depths that it seemed to have claimed the man of God completely into its dominion. This is what, through devotion, lifted him up into God; through compassion, transformed him into Christ; through condescension (self-emptying), turned him to his neighbour; through universal reconciliation with each thing, refashioned him to the state of innocence.

Through this virtue he was moved with piety to all things, especially to souls redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. When he saw them being stained by the filth of sin, he grieved with such tender care that he seemed like a mother who was daily bringing them to birth in Christ. And this was the principal reason for revering ministers of God's word: they raise up *seed for their deceased brother* (Dt 25:5), Christ, crucified particularly for sinners, and, with pious concern for their conversion, they guide them with concerned piety."<sup>18</sup>

The Scriptural context of 1Timothy 4:18 that Bonaventure quotes in this paragraph is linked with the virtue of religion, or better still, *eusebeia*, or piety. This term recurs ten times in the pastoral letters of Saint Paul (1Tm 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3.5.6.11; 2Tm 3:5; Titus 1:1). It is the equivalent in the pastoral letters of the expression "life in Christ" in the other letters of Saint Paul. This same text is explicitly explained by Bonaventure in the opening words of the third among the Collations on the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, namely that dealing with piety.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the aim of Bonaventure is that of presenting the virtue of piety in the life of Saint Francis within its biblical context of the virtue of true faith, or of religion, and in a particular way as a way of expressing life in Christ. It is this last note that is most interesting, since Bonaventure sees Francis' piety in close union with his life in Christ Crucified.

The effects of piety in Francis included the penetration of the mystery of Christ in his heart in such a way that Francis depended completely upon Christ's power; the uplifting of his soul into God through a spiritual journey of devotion (self-offering); the transformation into Christ through compassion (suffering-with); the condescension towards fellow human beings through self-

emptying; the reconciliation with all creation leading back Francis to the state of the primeval innocence of Adam before he sinned.

The virtue of piety prompted Francis to assume an attitude of mercy and empathy with persons who were sinners, in the same way that Christ had loved sinners by shedding his blood for them on the cross. Francis was firmly convinced that sinners were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Hence it was important for him to show condescension towards them through the virtue of piety. In a particular way Francis wanted to value highly the ministry of preachers, since through the preaching of the Word of the Cross, namely through their witness to Christ, the Crucified Word of salvation, they led back sinners to his friendship and to reconciliation.

In the *Breviloquium* Bonaventure explains this intimate link between piety and the power of Christ's cross on those who accept the Crucified Word in their lives. The text is found in section 5 of the *Breviloquium*, dealing with the notion of grace and the Gifts of the Spirit.

"The Gifts are seven in all for the sake of helping us to suffer in the same spirit as Christ. In accepting his passion, the Saviour was moved by the will of the Father, by the needs of men, and by the force of his own virtue. He was moved by the will of the Father, which he knew through understanding, loved through wisdom, and revered through fear. He was moved by our needs, which he understood through knowledge and compassionated through piety; he was moved not least by the force of his own virtue, which counsel rendered capable of foresighted choice, and fortitude, of vigorous fulfilment. And so the Gifts were properly seven."<sup>20</sup>

The Gift of piety, in the light of Christ's sufferings on the cross, became for Francis a way of reaching out to show Christ's tender affection towards sinners, poor and infirm. "Emptying himself through a wonderful tenderness of compassion ... in the sweetness of his pious heart ... he certainly had an inborn kindness doubled by the piety of Christ poured out on him. Therefore his soul melted for the poor and the infirm; to those to whom he could not extend a hand he extended his affection."<sup>21</sup>

Bonaventure speaks about Francis' piety as a force that moved irrational creatures towards him. Francis "embraced more affectionately and sweetly those (creatures) which display the pious

meekness of Christ in a natural likeness and portray him in the symbols of Scripture. He often paid to ransom lambs that were being led to their death, remembering that most gentle Lamb who willed *to be led to slaughter* (Is 53:7) to pay the ransom of sinners."<sup>22</sup>

Seen in this light, the Gift of piety in the life of Saint Francis made him conformed to the tender condescension of the Crucified Word. Indeed it made him a living icon of the same Crucified Word in his preaching and example of tender compassion towards all those who suffer and who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ on the cross.

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## Conclusion

Bonaventure's theology encompasses a Trinitarian view of revelation, centred on the event of the Incarnate Word. The seraphic doctor is faithful to his Franciscan calling when he builds up a systematic theological method in which the person of Jesus Christ stands at the very core of revelation. Christ reveals God as an Uncreated, Incarnate and Inspired Word. It is through his supreme act of condescension in the mystery of the Incarnation that Christ accomplishes God's will of redeeming humankind from sin.

The theology of the Incarnation in Bonaventure is not complete without his insistence upon Christ, who becomes a Crucified Word. In the mystery of the cross God reveals himself fully once and for all. Bonaventure is convinced of the necessity of the cross in the life of the disciples of Christ, and particularly in the Franciscan life.

No wonder that the notion of *Verbum Crucifixum* is developed in the *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, which speak about the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the effect of sanctifying grace in the life of Christ's disciples. We have seen how the seraphic doctor develops this notion, and particularly how he sees its importance in the case of the Gift of piety, to the point of appropriating Paul's definition of Christ as a *sacramentum pietatis*.

This notion of Christ crucified as the supreme expression of piety and condescension towards mankind is presented by Bonaventure particularly by taking the example of Saint Francis and his love for Christ on the cross. From the moment in which Francis gazed with tearful eyes at the icon of the Crucifix in the church of

San Damiano, his soul melted at the memory of Christ's passion. This tender piety became a life-long journey of faith which led him to receive the gift of the stigmata on La Verna, and prompted him to offer his own life for the salvation of all men and women, and indeed for the return of all creation into the embrace of Christ crucified. Thus Christ on the cross becomes for Bonaventure the key to understand the whole process of *exitus* (coming out) from God and *reditus* (going back) into God.

In this journey the Crucified Word stands out as the hermeneutical principle to understand how Francis followed Christ in his act of piety and condescension. It is also important to understand the inner meaning of the Franciscan evangelical calling, and to discover new ways in which we, Friars Minor, are called to give our own witness of fraternity and minority in our attitude of faithful condescension to the humility of God that confounds all human reasoning.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

1 Costanzo CARGNONI, *Vita e Cronologia di san Bonaventura da Bagnoregio*, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano. Filosofia, Teologia, Spiritualità*, a cura di Ernesto CAROLI, Editrici Francescane, Padova 2008, 67-87.

2 *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, Introduction and Translation by Zachary HAYES. Notes by Robert J. KARRIS (*Works of St. Bonaventure*, Vol. XIV), Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure University, NY 2008, 7-8.

3 Noel MUSCAT, *The Life of Saint Francis in the Light of Saint Bonaventure's Theology on the "Verbum Crucifixum"*, Edizzjoni TAU, Malta 1989; IDEM, *Francesco esemplificazione della Teologia Crucis di Bonaventura*, in *Doctor Seraphicus*, Bollettino d'informazioni del Centro di Studi Bonaventuriani (Anno LII: *La Teologia Crucis di Bonaventura e la sua attualità*), Bagnoregio 2005, 55-77; Ilia DELIO, *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's mysticism of the Crucified Christ*, Franciscan Press, Quincy University, Illinois 1998; IDEM, *The role of the Crucified in Bonaventure's doctrine of mystical union*, in *Studia Mystica* 19 (1998) 8-20; IDEM, *The burning love of the Crucified: Bonaventure's mysticism of the Crucified Christ*, Quincy, Illinois, Franciscan Press, Quincy University, 1999; Ctirad Václav POSPÍŠIL, *Crux, Crucifixus*, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, 287-289; Pietro MARANESI, *Verbum (Jesus Christus)*, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, 841-858, especially 847-848; Eduard PRENGA, *Il Crocifisso via alla Trinità. L'esperienza di Francesco d'Assisi nella teologia di Bonaventura*, Città Nuova, Roma 2009;

4 S. BONAVENTURA, *Collationes de Septem donis Spiritus Sancti* I,5: "Grace descends upon rational minds through the Incarnate Word, the Crucified Word, and the Inspired Word." We shall quote the English translation of Zachary Hayes with the title, section, paragraph and page number, thus: BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,5, 30. The critical edition of the *Collationes de Septem donis Spiritus Sancti* is found in DOCTORIS SERAPHICI S. BONAVENTURAE, *Opera Omnia*, Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, (Ad Claras Aquas) Quaracchi 1891, 455-503.

5 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,5, 30.

6 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,10, 35: "Christ brought himself back to his original source through humility (cfr. Phil 2:5-11)."

7 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,6, 31-32.

8 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,7, 32.

9 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,8, 33: "Therefore, if you wish to have the love of the Son, and of the originating Principle, and of the Gift that is the Holy Spirit, dispose yourself for grace. Whence does grace take its origin? I say that it has its beginning with the Father of lights, through the Incarnate Word, the Crucified Word, and the Inspired Word ... Therefore, the grace of God descends to us through the Incarnate Word, the Crucified Word, and the Inspired Word."

10 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,9, 34.

11 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* I,18, 43: "We propose to place ourselves in the middle and to speak about the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are the gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge and piety, and fear of the Lord."

12 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* II,1, 45-46.

13 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* II,1, 46.

14 BONAVENTURE, *Breviloquium*, Pars. V, Cap. V: "De ramificatione gratiae in habitus donorum", in DOCTORIS SERAPHICI SANCTAE BONAVENTURAE, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. 5, 257-258. English translation: *Breviloquium*, edited by DOMINIC V. MONTI, (*Works of St. Bonaventure*, Vol. IX), Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure University, NY 2005.

15 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* III,5, 67-68.

16 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* III,12, 75-76.

17 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* VI,15, 133: "As a woman 'who was strong and pious' (the Virgin Mary) paid the price. When Christ suffered on the cross to pay this price fully; to purge, to wash, and to redeem us, then the Blessed Virgin was present, accepting and agreeing to the divine will. It was agreeable to her that the price of her womb be offered on the cross for us."

18 BONAVENTURE, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, c. 8, par. 1, in FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *Early Documents*. Vol. II: *The Founder*, Edited by REGIS J. ARMSTRONG, J.A. WAYNE HELLMANN, WILLIAM J. SHORT, New City Press, New York – London – Manila 2000, 586-587. Subsequent references will be given as FAED II, plus the page numbers.

19 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* III,1, 65: "Train yourself in piety. For while bodily exercise is valuable in a limited way, piety is valuable in all ways since it has the promise of the present life as well as for the life that is to come.' These words come from 1 Timothy 4:7-8 where the Apostle points out two types of exercise that are fitting for the human person: one that is bodily, and the other that is spiritual. And he points out that spiritual exercise is to be preferred to the bodily as an exercise that is more noble and more useful."

20 BONAVENTURE, *Breviloquium*, part 5, chapter 5, in *The Works of Bonaventure*, II – *The Breviloquium*, Translated from the Latin by JOSÉ DE VINCK, St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N.J. 1963, 199-200. For a newer updated English version of the text, cfr. *Breviloquium*, edited by DOMINIC V. MONTI, (*Works of St. Bonaventure*, Vol. IX), Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure University, NY 2005.

21 BONAVENTURE, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 8,5 (FAED II, 589).

22 BONAVENTURE, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, 8,6 (FAED II, 590).

23 BONAVENTURE, *Collations Holy Spirit* IX,4, 185: "Do not, therefore, be wise concerning 'things that are of the earth' (Col 3:2; Phil 3:19), because Christ was crucified to do away with this kind of wisdom ... On the cross he taught how to spurn the wisdom of the world."



# FRANCIS AND BISHOP GUIDO I

*Felice Accrocca*

*Extracts from a paper by FELICE ACCROCCA, Francesco e il Vescovo Guido I, in Miscellanea Franciscana 112 (2012) 465-484.*

One of the less studied periods of the life of Francis is that of the decisive years of his conversion, namely of the time of his first interior upheavals, followed by the capture at Perugia, and the constitution of the first nucleus of brothers, when Bernardo, Pietro, Egidio and others joined him. It was the time during which Francis was living alone, without any companions. One of the crucial elements of those years was undoubtedly the relationship that the young merchant, who wanted to comprehend the divine will in his regards, had with the bishop of Assisi, Guido I. It regards a delicate aspect, since it deals with the complex theme of the relationship of Francis with the ecclesiastical institution.<sup>1</sup>

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## *The bishop of Assisi and the lack of interest of historians*

In reality the bishop of Assisi does not seem to have attracted the interest of historians. Nevertheless, the few references to him indicate how his figure is important in the life of Francis, so much so that both the ancient and modern biographers have considered his influence on the saint. If Paul Sabatier denied in a decisive manner all kinds of influence of Guido I upon Francis, on his part Johannes Joergensen, who was also influenced by the method of Sabatier, expressed a different opinion on the matter. In fact, he underlined the fact that, after the return of Francis from Rome, where he went as a pilgrim on the tombs of the Apostles, “the only person with whom, every now and then, Francis could open his heart was the bishop of Assisi, Guido, who probably became his confessor at the beginning

of his new way of life.” These evaluations, which were totally opposite one to the other, ended by reflecting a different approach of the two illustrious biographers regarding the Catholic Church and its institutions.

The most interesting results on the matter are those proposed by Nicolangelo D’Acunto. Through the testimony of the biographical sources, the scholar has underlined the diverse character of the prelate as it emerges from the accounts relative to the beginning of the conversion and of the life of the first fraternity and those that relate to succeeding years. From the diplomatic sources he has shown that, in reality, there were two bishops having the same name – Guido I and Guido II – with whom Francis entered into contact, and not just with one, as many had believed for so many centuries. D’Acunto held that Guido I is expressly mentioned for the last time in 1208, and that he was the bishop who played an active role in all the events of the very first years of the Franciscan history: from the conversion of Francis up to the vocational choice of Clare.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the confusion that for a long time has dominated the list of bishops of Assisi has left its mark on the readings of historians, who attributed to Guido I certain elements of the character of Guido II, and thus ended up by offering a prejudiced reading of the events that had as their protagonist the first one among the two bishops.

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## *From hagiography to history: a difficult but not impossible passage*

I would now like to return upon the biographical sources, in order to stop on some

central passages, the first of which has not been studied by D'Acunto. In this way I intend to reflect upon the relations between Francis and Guido I in a circumscribed phase of their existence, and exactly the period during which the son of Pietro di Bernardone was living without any companions. It is necessary to approach the biographical sources in order to take into account the complex factors that left their mark on their redaction, among which the tensions of the brothers with the secular clergy and the episcopate did have a primary influence. We see evident and marked traces of this in the writings of Saint Francis. We should also keep in mind that Guido II, who certainly had clear projects regarding the canonisation of Francis, had to abandon them quickly, to the point that he was not even present at the death of the saint, and after that moment the sources are silent about him.

There are evident traces of a recurrent tension during the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which produced a progressive marginalisation of the bishops of Assisi, Guido I and Guido II, on the part of the Franciscan sources. If we take, for example, one of the episodes which has been rewritten by the biographers, namely the meeting of Francis with Innocent III, it is possible to be aware that the figure of Guido I underwent a decisive change in many parts of these works, to the point of disappearing completely in the *Life of Saint Francis* by Julian of Speyer and in the *Major and Minor Legend of Saint Francis* by Bonaventure. Both authors were writing during moments of intense tension. In fact, Julian of Speyer composed his *Life* after the crisis of 1231, when Gregory IX was constrained to publish two letters in defence of the brothers – the *Nimis iniqua* (21 August, and rewritten in a more elegant form on 28 August) and the *Nimis prava* (22 August),<sup>3</sup> against the way that some members of the episcopate were treating the friars. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, on the other hand, wrote his *Legends* during difficult years, during which analogous contrasts had enkindled great polemics in Paris as a result of the writings of William of St. Amour against the mendicant Orders.<sup>4</sup>

### *The complex problem regarding the Legend of the Three Companions*

Among the most ancient sources, which

reveal themselves particularly precious for our research, we have *The Beginning or Founding of the Order (De inceptione)*, and especially *The Legend of the Three Companions*. These are two texts that are often considered together, but which, in reality are less homogenous than was previously believed. *De inceptione* is the work of Brother John of Perugia, disciple of Brother Giles. It was written before the death of Gregory IX, maybe during the generalate of Elias (that is, before 1239). The date 1240-1241, accepted by a great number of modern historiographers, is based on insecure data. Therefore it is a work that was born within the context of the companions of Saint Francis. *De inceptione* has many contents that are also found in the text that we know by the name of *Legend of the Three Companions*, whose paternity is still today an object of discussion. In fact, if in the past the discussion was between those who attributed the work to Francis' companions and others who regarded it as a later work, during these last years, since the chronological problem has been resolved (everyone agrees that the text is to be dated 1246), scholars have presented another hypothesis, namely, that the author was not a friar minor.

The discussion has been kept alive thanks especially to Jacques Dalarun and the author of this paper. In 1996, Dalarun placed the work within the influence of the Order and the circle of companions, and even went as far as stating – although with some doubt – that he would consider a *Legenda duorum sociorum*, which would be attributed only to Angelo and Rufino. More recently, Dalarun has moved in the same direction: regarding the *Letter* of the three companions of Francis, which the majority of codices associate with the text of the *Legend of the Three Companions*, the French scholar established a link between the date (11 August, feast of Saint Rufino, patron of Assisi) and one of the brothers who signed the letter, namely Brother Rufino. Dalarun also tries to play down the apparent contradictions between the indications given in the letter and the text of the *Legend*, including this last in the *dossier* sent to Crescentius of Jesi together with the memoirs of Brother Leo and other material. In a rather explicit way, Dalarun considers the *Legend* as the work of Brother Rufino by himself, and regards the section of chapters 17-18 as part of the original text.

According to me, instead, there is a whole series of data which points in the other direction. The author reveals a good knowledge of civil



institutions and of civil law, he is not very much in line with an hagiographic literary genre, he gives an unusual attention to the role of the bishop, whereas he shows little historical interest regarding some crucial events in the history of the Order. All these elements make us see in him not a Franciscan friar, but rather a personage from Assisi whose principal aim is that of correcting the negative image of the youthful years of the saint, and also of defending the good fame of his family and of the entire town, in order to make up for the interpretation that Thomas of Celano had given in *The Life of Saint Francis*.

According to Jacques Dalarun, it was the *milites*, or noble knights, who had the primary role in the writing of the work. Rufino, who was the material author, belonged to one of the knightly families of Assisi. Therefore it was natural that the nobles of Assisi were among those who took the initiative to respond to the letter of Crescentius of Jesi, calling for the collaboration of all those who had known Francis directly. It might have been these knights who entrusted someone, whose identity is difficult to ascertain, to write in an orderly manner their memoirs and to rewrite some episodes of the life of Francis. The *milites* must therefore have had a not indifferent role in the origin of the text, since they were the ones who entrusted the author with writing the *Legend*. This, however, does not restrict the possibilities only to Brother Rufino.

On my part, however, it remains difficult to think that whoever wrote the first sixteen chapters of the *Legend* was a friar; more so that he was one of the companions of Francis. The companions give witness as a group (in many episodes of the *Assisi Compilation*) and show themselves very sensitive to the internal contrasts of their own religious family, which were already evident during the last years of the life of Francis. Why would Rufino have been so scantily interested in the historical unfolding of the Order in such a way that he concentrated all his attention to the youthful years of Francis and to the first years of life of the group of brothers that gathered around him?

According to Théophile Desbonnets, there was an archetype document of the first sixteen chapters of *The Legend of the Three Companions*,<sup>5</sup> that the different copyists then rewrote in such a way that we arrive at two versions of the *Legend*. It seems that the first development was the nucleus

of the *Legend*, made up of the first sixteen chapters, and that was then developed autonomously in two different versions: the author-copyist who is at the origin of the *Sarnano version* has copied and manipulated the text he utilised. The same thing can be said regarding the so-called *traditional version* – which most probably was compiled by a friar who lived at the basilica of Assisi, - and which completes the work adding chapters 17-18.

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## *A trustworthy friend of Saint Francis from the beginning*

This preceding analysis has been necessary to present in a synthetic way the particular details of the text which we now know by the name *Legend of the Three Companions*, and of the possibilities that it offers in order to comprehend the relationship between Francis and bishop Guido I. The author of the first sixteen chapters of the *Legend of the Three Companions* seems to be less influenced than other biographers regarding the tensions between the secular clergy and the mendicants. This led him to assign to the bishop of Assisi a role that other biographers did not dare attribute to him: Guido I was the only person with whom Francis confided his process of discernment; it was the bishop who suggested to Francis how he should act in front of his father who had denounced him; from that moment the bishop became his guide (*dirigendo ipsum*), to the point that, when the citizens of Assisi persecuted him, Francis frequently went to look for the bishop and ask him for counsel with all benevolence; the same Francis, after the difficulties he faced because of Pietro di Bernardone, went to comfort the priest at San Damiano with the same words that bishop Guido I had addressed to him.<sup>6</sup>

The most significant affirmations, undoubtedly, were the ones in which the author refers to the bishop of Assisi as a guide and trustworthy friend of Francis. The author affirms that Francis, who was still at the beginning of his vocational discernment process, went to Rome as a pilgrim and changed his rich clothes with the rags of a poor beggar, and he sat down on the stairs of Saint Peter's begging for alms. When he went back to Assisi he began to pray to the Lord that he might indicate to him the way he should follow. "He did not share his secret with anyone; nor did he seek counsel from anyone, except from God alone, and, periodically, from the bishop of Assisi."<sup>7</sup> Certainly,

in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century such an affirmation would have appeared embarrassing to the brothers, who had experienced tension with bishops for a number of years; in fact neither Thomas of Celano nor Bonaventure mention it in their works, and neither do they mention Francis' pilgrimage to Rome.

One should also keep in mind what the *De inceptione* affirms, namely that the brothers – when they were still few – “suffered extreme want. Even their relatives and families would persecute them. Others from that city – great and small, men and women – would scorn and ridicule them as senseless and stupid, except for the city's bishop to whom the blessed Francis frequently went to seek counsel.”<sup>8</sup> These affirmations, that are also found in *The Legend of the Three Companions* 35 are certainly important, since they come from a source that conserved good information regarding the stories of the first brothers: John of Perugia, in fact, received his information from Bernard and Giles, companions of Saint Francis, who had been protagonists in the episodes that were narrated.

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## Guido I as the spiritual guide of Francis

In *The Legend of the Three Companions* we read that, after the open tension between Francis and his father in front of bishop Guido I, “the bishop, focusing his attention on the man of God's frame of mind and enthusiastically admiring his fervour and determination, gathered him into his arms, covering him with his mantle. For he clearly understood his deeds were prompted by divine counsel, and realised that what he had seen contained no small mystery. And so, from that moment, he became his helper, exhorting, encouraging, loving, and embracing him with the depths of his charity.”<sup>9</sup> With all evidence, in this passage the author utilises a text from the *Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano. Thomas, however, does not hint at a direct action in favour of Francis on the part of the bishop. Even the Sarnano codex – together with the codex of Barcelona, which is related to it – omits the words *ac dirigendo*.

As we have already affirmed, Guido I was totally involved in the meeting of Francis and his brothers with Innocent III. In fact, the version of Celano, according to whom the bishop of Assisi was unaware of such a journey, is highly



*St. Francis kneeling in front of Bishop Guido*

improbable. Taking into account his numerous relations with the brothers, which are evident from the sources, we would not be able to understand in what way Francis could hope to be admitted to the papal curia without the help of someone who was in the position of introducing him to the right persons. It seems that the account of *De inceptione*, which considers the bishop the true author of such a mission, at least in its initial phase, is more reliable. The relative tranquil atmosphere in the political scene in 1208-1209, could have given time to an expert canon lawyer such as Innocent III and his collaborators to be more sensitive to the radical evangelical requests of reformers such as Francis, and the journey of the saint and his companions to Rome might not have been the only episode. In such instances, the support of bishop Guido I of Assisi might have been indispensable for Francis and the brothers.

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## A confirmation by the Assisi Compilation

Paragraph 58 of the *Assisi Compilation* merits particular attention for what it states



regarding Francis' relation with bishop Guido I. We are dealing with a text which offers various problems. It was transmitted by a unique codex, which originally – according to an inventory written by Giovanni di Iolo in 1381 – was conserved in the public library of Assisi (in the Sacro Convento). The codex was composed of diverse documentary material, copied by many hands and compiled together during the same period (between Spring of 1310 and the first half of 1312), within the context of the *scriptorium* of the Sacro Convento.

The third section of the *Assisi Compilation* (50-120), except for the paragraphs coming from the pen of Brother Leo (AC 102-105) is the work of the companions of Saint Francis, and contains the documentary material that Thomas of Celano utilised for his *Memoriale*. Here we quote the central section of paragraph 58:

“Once when he was in Siena for treatment of the disease of his eyes, he was staying in a cell, where after his death a chapel was built out of reverence for him. Lord Bonaventure, who had donated to the brothers the land where the brothers' place had been built, said to him: ‘What do you think of this place?’ Blessed Francis answered him: ‘Do you want me to tell you how the places of the brothers should be built?’ [...] And he told him: ‘When the brothers go to any city where they do not have a place, and they find someone who wants to give them enough land to build a place, have a garden, and whatever is necessary for them, they must first consider how much land is enough for them, always considering the holy poverty we have promised, and the good example we are bound to offer to others [...] Afterwards they should go to the bishop of that city and say to him: Lord, for the love of God and the salvation of his soul, such and such a person wants to give us enough land so that we can build a place there. Therefore we have recourse to you first, because you are the father and lord of the souls of the entire flock entrusted to you, as well as our souls and those of the other brothers who will stay in this place. Therefore, with the blessing of the Lord God and yours, we would like to build here.’

The saint would say this because the good of souls the brothers want to produce among the people was better achieved by peace with prelates and clerics, winning them and the people, rather than by scandalising prelates and clerics, even though they might win the people. ‘The Lord,’ he used to say, ‘has called us to help his faith and the

prelates and clerics of holy Mother Church. This is why we are always bound to love, honour, and revere them as much as we can. For this reason let them be called Friars Minor because, in name as well as example and deed, they should be humbler than all other people of this world. From the beginning of my conversion, when I separated myself from the world and father in the flesh, the Lord put his word in the mouth of the bishop of Assisi so he could counsel me well in the service of Christ and comfort me.’”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, at the beginning of his journey of conversion, the young man Francis of Assisi had as his counsellor and comforter bishop Guido I.

## NOTES

1 R. RUSCONI, “*Clerici secundum alios clericos*”. *Francesco d'Assisi e l'istituzione ecclesiastica*, in *Frate Francesco d'Assisi. Atti del XXI Convegno internazionale* (Assisi, 14-16 ottobre 1993), Spoleto 1994, 73.

2 N. D'ACUNTO, *Il vescovo Guido oppure i vescovi Guido? Cronotassi episcopale assisana e fonti francescane*, in Id., *Assisi nel Medio Evo. Studi di storia ecclesiastica e civile*, Assisi 2002, 103-155.

3 *Bullarium Franciscanum* (ed. J.H. Sbaralea), I, Romae 1759, 74-75.

4 F. ACCROCCA, *Francesco e Innocenzo III. Il loro incontro nelle fonti francescane*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 109/1-2 (2009) 7-60.

5 TH. DESBONNETS, *Legenda trium sociorum. Edition critique*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 67 (1974) 38-144, text in pages 89-144.

6 L3C 16-24 (FAED II, 77-83).

7 L3C 10 (FAED II, 74).

8 L3C 17 (FAED II, 41).

9 L3C 20 (FAED II, 80).

10 CA 58 (FAED II, 159-160).

# THE II SERMON OF HOLY THURSDAY BY SAINT BONAVENTURE

Pietro MARANESI OFMCAP, *La congruità del dono dell'Eucaristia secondo la trilogia eucaristica di Bonaventura da Bagnoregio*, in *Italia Franciscana. Rivista della Conferenza dei Ministri Provinciali dei Frati Minori Cappuccini*, Anno LXXXI, No. 1 (gennaio-marzo 2006) 43-72.

## *The mystery of the Eucharist in the Breviloquium*

In 1256-57, ten years after the publication of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, and immediately before being elected minister general of the Franciscan Order, Bonaventure, regent master of the Franciscan chair in the university of Paris, was asked to offer to his students an abbreviated text (*Breviloquium*) in which he proposed a theological synthesis of what he had expounded in the four volumes of his *Commentary on Peter Lombard*. The work that Bonaventure produced represents a theological masterpiece, in which the author offers admirable summaries to the single Christian mysteries.

An excellent example of this is present in chapter 9 of book 6, where in a few lines the Franciscan doctor condenses the central elements of the Eucharistic mystery that he had explained in six long and articulate distinctions in the *Sentence Commentary*.

Bonaventure divides his treatise in two parts. In the first part he presents the static nature of the mystery, and connects the constitutive elements of the Christian faith, which are individuated both in the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine brought about through the words of the priest and translated in the term transubstantiation, as well as the attitude of faith and charity that the Christian should nurture in order to receive the Eucharist in a fitting manner.

In the second part Bonaventure attempts an organic intelligence of the dynamics that underline the mystery, in order to show the unitary logic that renders the various moments of the truth of faith intelligible. It is on this second part that we

concentrate our attention: in it, in fact, we find once more the question of the congruity of the mystery, where Bonaventure for two times utilises the terminology that we have encountered in the preceding texts. Here this is elaborated once again in the trilogy *sacrificium oblationis*, *sacramentum communionis*, and *viaticum refectiois*.

Bonaventure individuates the basis for understanding the Eucharist in the theological relationship that exists between the three sacraments of Christian initiation. If baptism is the sacrament of the birth of the Christian and confirmation is the growth into adulthood, the Eucharist represents the nourishment that accompanies the progress of Christian life. It is characterised as an expansion of love in three fundamental existential directions: above itself in devotion to God, outside itself in relation to the love of neighbour, and inside itself in love towards itself.<sup>1</sup> To these three existential ambits corresponds a triple nutritive function of the Eucharist, defined by Bonaventure as “sacrifice of oblation” towards God, “sacrifice of communion” towards the neighbour, and “viaticum of refreshment” towards oneself.

“Since therefore our nourishment, in that it is freely given to us, acts in each one of the faithful through the conservation of devotion to God, through love towards the neighbour and through love towards oneself; and the devotion towards God is exercised through the sacrifice of oblation, the love of neighbour through communion in the one sacrament, and love towards oneself through the viaticum of refreshment: therefore our reparative principle that this same sacrament of the Eucharist produces is given to us in the sacrifice of oblation, in the sacrifice of communion and in the viaticum of refreshment.”<sup>2</sup>



To this triple nutritive function linked with the mystery of the Incarnate Word as the most sufficient principle to feed the three ambits of human existence, there follows another Christological moment that Bonaventure assigns to the Incarnate Word as a most wise principle:

“Since the true principle of our reparation should not only be most sufficient, but also most wise, in such a way that all actions are ordered to it; therefore in this way this sacrifice was prepared and given to us in this way, as a Sacrament which expresses our viaticum, according to what is most convenient for the times of revelation of grace, for the state of our life and for our abilities.”<sup>3</sup>

The Eucharistic trilogy of sacrifice, of sacrament and of viaticum is therefore in direct relationship with the most perfect wisdom of the Incarnate Word since it constitutes the triple key to connect the Eucharistic sacrament with the three fundamental ambits of the Christian, who lives in the time of grace, in a state of itinerancy and in a limited and dependent ability linked with his condition as a creature. Bonaventure, however, does not remain faithful to this programme, in other words he does not analyse and verify the Eucharistic trilogy in all its three moments, but limit the application of the nature of sacrifice, of communion and of viaticum that is possessed by the Eucharist only to the time of grace.

In order that the period of time after Christ, in which the Christian lives, can become truly the time of grace, namely the time in which the nourishment that comes from God can truly feed the needs of the life of a man, it was necessary and fitting that in the Eucharist there should truly be the body and blood of Christ, otherwise the Eucharist would not be a true sacrifice, a true communion and a true viaticum, that is a true nourishment of the faithful in their relationship with God, with others and with themselves. One can also hold that the two passages of the *Breviloquium*, although they are connected to the two moments of the Incarnate Word seen as most sufficient and most wise, are related between themselves in a strict theological continuity. The theological congruity of the real presence (contained in the text) lies in close relationship with its nutritive function (contained in the first text). It is fitting/necessary that the bread and wine should truly be the body and blood of Christ, otherwise the Eucharist cannot realise its triple nutritive nature in order to nurture the three directions of human love, directed

towards God, towards others and towards oneself. The existential nutritive function of the Eucharist for the three ambits of Christian life leads us to the foundation of the dogmatic moment of the real presence of Christ in its triple nature of sacrifice, sacrament and viaticum.

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## *The Sermo de Corpore Christi*

This sermon is dedicated to the mystery of the Body of Christ. It constitutes one of two theological sermons among the most developed, which are published in the fifth volume of the *Opera Omnia* of Saint Bonaventure,<sup>4</sup> a clear sign of how much it was important for our author to deal with the argument of the Eucharist. Unfortunately it is not possible for us to know the date of composition of this text, and this difficulty impedes our ability to study in a diachronic manner Bonaventure's Eucharistic solutions in relation to other preceding texts. The literary genre of the text is that of a sermon, but it is not conditioned by the theological method as in the case of the *Sentence Commentary* and the *Breviloquium*, but by a preoccupation of the moral and spiritual kind guided by an allegorical reading of the Bible as the basis for an interpretation of the Eucharistic mystery. Therefore, in this text Bonaventure is not very much a theologian but he rather becomes an exegetical scholar and a teacher in spirituality of homiletics. At the same time he remains faithful to the imposition that we have already seen in preceding texts and in particular in the *Breviloquium*.

A global vision of the method used by our doctor and also by the thematic structure of the sermon is found in the first two numbers of the sermon, where Bonaventure, departing from verses 8-10 of Psalm 106, proposes a structure in six points regarding the mystery of the Eucharist:

“This sermon confesses the mercy of the Lord and his wonderful works with the sons of men, in which 1) he gives food to the hungry soul, 2) the soul is nourished by good things, 3) to enlighten those who sit in the darkness, 4) and in the shadow of death, 5) and those who are tied up in mendacity and 6) chains.”<sup>5</sup>

In the six parts of God's intervention in favour of man, Bonaventure sees parallel allegorical and concomitant elements in the Eucharistic mystery. In fact the text describes

six situations of mankind's misery in which God intervenes by donating Himself in the Eucharist.

1) In order to satisfy mankind's hunger, as an effect God fills men with His presence. Therefore he is man's fulfilment. The body of Christ is fulfilling in an abundant manner (*pinguedo*) in that it fills man's hunger.

2) In order to satisfy mankind's misery, as an effect God nourishes mankind and gives Himself as food under the species of bread which comforts (*conforativum*) mankind's misery.

3) In order to help those who sit in darkness, as an effect God enlightens them. He becomes their light and becomes as sweet as honey in order to purify their eyes that they might see (*mel = quid oculorum purificativum*).

4) In order to help those who lie in the shadow of death, as an effect God reconciles them to Himself. This reconciliation is accomplished by the Paschal lamb, Christ who in the Eucharist is the *agnus paschalis quid immolativum*, who immolates himself for mankind's reconciliation.

5) In order to alleviate the needs of those tied up in mendacity, as an effect God gives Himself through the power of His operation. In this way He enriches mankind. The Eucharist becomes the richness of heaven in order to enrich those who beg for alms (*thesaurus = quid desiderativum ad ditionem mendicantium*).

6) In order to alleviate the needs of those who are chained, as an effect God treats mankind with tenderness. The Eucharist is the heavenly manna, which in its sweetness melts those hearts which are chained by iron fetters (*manna = quid liquefactivum, valet ad mollificationem cordium ferreorum*).

This is a very important text for our observation on the mystery of the Eucharist. Bonaventure underlines the first figure of the Eucharist, that in which the mystery of the body and blood of Christ is compared to the *pinguedo*, which with its penetrative power, fills and feeds those who hunger. In some way one can say that the penetrative and nutritive power of the Eucharist as that which fills in an abundant way is in strict connection with the congruity of the real presence of Christ which renders the sacrament of the altar a true nourishment. However the objective of Bonaventure is not like that we have seen in the two preceding theological texts, namely that of demonstrating the usefulness of this presence, but leaving from such a presupposition of faith, it tries

to evidence the fruits that it brings to the human soul. In a certain way we can say that it lies in continuity with the first part of the text of the *Breviloquium*, where the nutritive function of the Eucharist lies at the centre and finds its assurance exactly in the real presence. In his development of the theme Bonaventure organises the demonstration of the nature of *pinguedo* (fullness) through the repetition of the trilogy *viaticum refectiois*, *sacramentum communionis*, and *sacrificium oblationis*.

The three functions of the Eucharist as *viaticum* for nourishment, sacrament of communion and sacrifice of oblation, are related to the same existential ambits that we have already listed in the *Breviloquium*, thus confirming the theological validity of the Eucharistic trilogy and its fundamental structure in this work. The only diversity between that theological text and this sermon lies in the accentuation of the "for us" leaving aside the "in itself" of the mystery. For Bonaventure it is not a question of showing in this spiritual text how the Eucharist is truly a sacrifice, sacrament and *viaticum*, but also to show its triple characteristic of nourishment for the Christian. It is not the theological element, but the moral-spiritual element that lies at the centre of the proposition offered in the sermon.

We now take a brief look at the three moments of the Eucharistic mystery by proposing the structure of the three texts.

The first function analysed in number 4 regards the nature of *viaticum refectiois* that is contained in the Eucharist. By its nourishment man can arrive at the love of oneself. The biblical text which refers to the hidden meaning of this function is found by Bonaventure in Gen 49:20: "Rich is the food produced by Asher: he will furnish food fit for kings." Departing from this text the seraphic doctor individuates four characteristics of the Eucharistic bread, given to man as a *viaticum* of refreshment in order to acquire a series of virtues capable of renewing his soul and making it capable of loving itself. These characteristics include the capability of governing one's soul, the capability of being enlightened, the power against concupiscence of the flesh, and the power against all kinds of malice.

The interesting conclusion of Bonaventure is the following: "The power of this bread is that of changing man into Christ, since it is highly blessed because of its essence and it beatifies others through grace." Bonaventure's proposal, therefore, is characterised as a moral text, where anthropology,



seen in the tension between human poverty and its renewal, passes through the spiritual power of the Eucharist. In this reading Bonaventure repeats what had already demonstrated in the *Breviloquium*, where he had affirmed that the body of the Incarnate Word restores the spirit of man. In the text of the *Sermon* he makes the same analysis in a more spiritual and moral form, and confirms that only by “the force of that bread” one can arrive at the profundity of the heart of man – where human weakness also dwells – in order to unite him with the person of Christ and make him participate in Christ’s beatitude. Thus anthropology is united to Christology through the Eucharist.

The successive analysis in number 5 deals with the function of the Body of Christ as a “sacrament of communion” nurturing man in his love towards neighbour. In fact, “as the abundance of food makes the body grow, so the body of Christ helps the soul which eats of it with devotion to grow and expand.”<sup>6</sup>

The biblical text of reference is that of Jeremiah 31:14: “I shall refresh my priests with rich food.” The text does not have the aim to be occasion to subdivide the treatise, but it serves only as a point of departure in order to evidence the ecclesial function of the Eucharistic sacrament:

“The richness and abundance that refreshes the soul of priests is what we call the Sacrament of the altar. Every worthy soul that receives it is inflamed to charity which makes it expand in a powerful way in all possible ways.”

The continuation of the verse of Jeremiah, which reads “and my people will gorge themselves on my lavish gifts” offers to Bonaventure the point of departure for the exposition of the ecclesiological value present in the Eucharist which is a sacrament of communion:

“This is what everyone calls the entire Church, both the militant and the triumphant Church. The soul of the priest is abundantly filled with the power of this Sacrament of the richness of love, and the same power will fill the entire Church of those who are good.”

The specification of the widening of this love towards neighbour is proposed through the use of six spatial directions, as signs of the radical expansion of the love towards the Church in its entirety. This love (1) spreads above to heaven in order to honour the Saints, (2) spreads below to purgatory in order to redeem those who are waiting there, (3) spreads to the right for the salvation of

our friends and benefactors, (4) spreads to the left for the salvation of our enemies and persecutors, (5) spreads behind us for the salvation of our ancestors, and (6) spreads in front of us for the salvation of all those who are predestined.

It is interesting to note the spiritual note referring to the ecclesial element. If in the *Breviloquium* the ecclesial element linked with the Eucharist as a sacrament of communion was essentially united with its mystery of Christological relation, where the origin from which mutual love comes to us, individuated in the relationship with the Head, is specified, in the *Sermon* the underlining is placed on the wideness of ecclesial communion created in the single members by the nourishment received by this sacrament of communion. In this sacrament, in fact, is realised a widening of love, in the sense that in this sacrament the affection of the single person reaches all other persons. Therefore, at the centre of the *Sermon* Bonaventure does not discuss the theological argument of the origin of ecclesial communion, but rather the spiritual dynamics of the relational fruits of the sacrament, which embraces the entire Church, both the pilgrim and the triumphant Church.

The third function of the body of Christ is that of being a sacrifice of oblation. This is described in numbers 6-7 where Bonaventure presents the ability of the Eucharist to nourish in man his devotion to God.

“As the abundance of fire in which the wind blows draws the flame up high, so the most divine Eucharist, when it received by a devout heart, snatches it to the devotion of God.”<sup>7</sup>

By making use of the text of Psalm 62:5, where we read: “all my longings fulfilled as with fat and rich foods, a song of joy on my lips and praise in my mouth”, the Franciscan doctor observes: “so the body of Christ, since it fills the soul with the richness of devotion, it also fills externally the lips with divine praise.”

Nourishing oneself with the body of Christ should lead one to spiritual joy of praise to God, which is in need of an ordered process of growth in four stages, which are allegorically included in the biblical text, of which four spiritual fruits of praise of God are born, namely rectitude of intention, custom of prayer, communion of devotion and the consequent thanksgiving.

In this last text we see with greater clarity the diverse interpretative consequences of the Eucharistic mystery departing not from a

theological perspective, but from a spiritual one, namely not from a will to demonstrate the mystery, but to make of it an exhortation of life directed at devotion and to a spiritual relationship with God. In the text of the *Breviloquium*, in order to demonstrate the usefulness of the real presence of the Eucharist considered as a “sacrifice of oblation” Bonaventure had connected this mystery with its content, namely with the sacrifice of the cross as a true and insuperable pure, placid and full oblation. In the *Sermon*, on the contrary, the sacrifice of oblation regards the soul that is uplifted to the perfect praise of God through the nourishment of the Eucharist as an act that leads it to a perfect and multiform thanksgiving.

In conclusion: the same division of three parts regarding the Eucharist which is utilised in the *Breviloquium* stands at the basis of the homiletic-exhortative proposal of Bonaventure, whereas the approach of biblical allegory serves to arrive not at theological demonstrations but at the spiritual wonderment of affective nurturing to which the Christian should arrive when he contemplates the three moments of the unique Eucharistic mystery.

## Conclusion

The point of arrival of the theology of Bonaventure regarding the usefulness of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is represented by a trilogy in which we find a summary of the three fundamental functions of the gift of the Eucharist relative to the same number of ambits in human life: the Eucharist is the sacrifice of offering for devotion to God, it is a sacrament of communion for love towards one's neighbour and it is a *viaticum* of spiritual restoration for love of oneself. The texts have shown a formative process that departs from the *Sentence Commentary*, where we have seen the three ambits we have mentioned emerging, but without arriving at a precise and ordered terminology. A first elaboration of the terms is met in the *Paschal sermon*, where the fundamental themes of the *Commentary* are refashioned according to a more adequate and functional terminology. The process of establishing the three Eucharistic themes is a point of arrival in the *Breviloquium*, where Bonaventure reutilises the three Eucharistic themes giving to them a definitive terminological structure linked with the

three human nutritive functions. In the theological sermon *De corpore Christi* the elaboration of the preceding text is confirmed in its global structure, although it is no longer applied to a strictly theological context, but rather to a spiritual and ascetic context. In these last two works there is a fixing of the trilogy read once again in two different contexts: in the *Breviloquium* we find at the centre the “in itself” of the mystery, while in the *Sermon* the underlined aspect is the “for us” of its actualisation.

In these last two texts Bonaventure undoubtedly arrives at the realisation of the elaboration of the Eucharistic mystery fixed in the trilogy utilised and presented theologically in the first text and spiritually in the second text. In this way the Franciscan doctor proclaims that the Eucharistic mystery has a nucleus supporting its content, which can be faced by diverse elements that converge among themselves in proclaiming the same love of God manifested in Christ who remains present in the gift of his body and his blood. The Eucharist as sacrifice, sacrament and *viaticum* leads us back to the “in itself” of the reality which is hidden in it and which is realised in the real gift of Christ as true nourishment. As a consequence it represents “for us” the gift of the power of love with which mankind can nourish itself if it wants to build new and authentic relations with oneself, with others and with God.

## NOTES

1 *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* I,4 (*Opera Omnia* V, 297). English translation in BONAVENTURE, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Introduction, Translation, Commentary by Philotheus BOEHNER, (Works of St. Bonaventure, Vol. II), The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, NY 1998, 41: “Our mind has three principal ways of perceiving. In the first way it looks at the corporeal things outside itself, and so acting it is called animality or sensitivity. In the second, it looks within itself, and then it is called spirit. In the third, it looks above itself, and is then called mind.”

2 *Breviloquium*, VI,9 (*Opera Omnia*, V, 274a).

3 *Ivi*.

4 The five theological sermons include: *De triplici testimonio sanctissimae Trinitatis* (V, 535-538); *De regno Dei descriptio in parabolis evangelicis* (V, 539-553); *De sanctissimo corpore Christi* (V, 553-566); *Christus unus omnium magister* (V, 567-574); *De plantatione Paradisi* (V, 574-579).

5 *De corpore Christi*, 1 (*Opera Omnia* V, 554).

6 *De corpore Christi*, 5 (*Opera Omnia* V, 553).

7 *De corpore Christi*, 6 (*Opera Omnia* V, 556).



# FRANCIS, THE BROTHERS, AND THE ANGUISH OF SOLITUDE

## Chapter 4 THE "OFFICIUM PRAELATIONIS" AND FRANCIS' FAITHFULNESS TO THE RULE

The composition of the *Later Rule*, or *Regula bullata*, at Fonte Colombo in 1223 is described by Francis' companions as one of the tense moments of his life. The literature coming from the pen of the Spirituals, who considered themselves to be the true disciples of Francis' ideals as handed down by his intimate companions, has to be read with a critical eye against the background of historical events unfolding in the Franciscan Order at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Yet it remains a proof that the saint was indeed facing a dilemma when it came to writing down the final draft of the Rule, after a long period of development of his ideal from 1209 till 1223. From the Sources coming from this section of the Order it seems that Francis was very much alone at this crucial moment of his life.

It is true that Francis sought the expert advice of persons such as brother Bonizo of Bologna, who was a jurist at the University of Bologna, and it is also a well-known fact that Cardinal Hugolino had a major role in the drafting of the Rule. The saint, however, did not write the Rule in an academic setting, but rather preferred the hermitage of Fonte Colombo and the quiet company of his most intimate brothers, who remained the witnesses of the facts as they occurred.

Two Sources, in particular, are concerned with the writing of the Rule and the tensions that developed on that occasion, namely the *Assisi Compilation* 17 and the *Mirror of Perfection* 1 [Sabatier edition]. The two texts are quite similar, but we shall choose the later text, namely that of the *Speculum*, since its date of composition, namely 1318, corresponds to one of the most difficult moments in the history of the Order, coinciding practically with the condemnation of the Spirituals by Pope John XXII in 1317.

"After the second Rule which blessed Francis wrote had been lost, *he went up a mountain*

(Ex 24:18; Mt 5:1) with Brother Leo of Assisi and Brother Bonizo of Bologna to make another Rule, which he had written at Christ's instruction.

A group of many ministers came to Brother Elias, who was the vicar of the blessed Francis. 'We heard that Brother Francis is making a new Rule,' they told him, 'and we fear that he will make it so harsh that we will not be able to observe it. We want you to go to him and tell him that we refuse to be bound to that Rule. Let him make it for himself and not for us.'

Brother Elias replied to them that he did not want to go because he feared the rebuke of blessed Francis. When they insisted that he go, he said that he refused to go without them; so they all went together.

When Brother Elias and the ministers were near the place where blessed Francis was staying, Brother Elias called him. Brother Francis responded, and seeing the ministers, he said: 'What do these brothers want?' 'They are the ministers,' Brother Elias answered, 'who heard that you are making a new Rule. They fear that you are making it very harsh, and they say and say publicly, they refuse to be bound by it. Make it for yourself and not for them.'

Then blessed Francis turned his face toward heaven and spoke to Christ in this way: 'Lord! Didn't I tell you, they wouldn't believe me?' The voice of Christ was then heard in the air, saying: 'Francis, nothing of yours is in the Rule: whatever is there is mine. And I want the Rule observed in this way: to the letter, to the letter, to the letter, and without a gloss, without a gloss, without a gloss.' And He added: 'I know how much human weakness is capable of, and how much I want to help them. Therefore, those who refuse to observe it, should leave the Order.' Then blessed Francis turned to the brothers and said: 'Did you hear? Did you hear? Do you want me to have you told again?' Confused and terrified, the ministers



departed blaming themselves.”<sup>1</sup>

The author of the *Speculum* states that the “second Rule” that Francis had written down had been lost. This fact is not easy to ascertain, except for what Bonaventure states in the *Major Legend of Saint Francis*, regarding Elias who lost the first draft of the *Later Rule*, thus prompting Francis to rewrite it. Besides the obvious Scriptural references to Moses who receives the tablets of the law twice from the hand of God, one is tempted to believe what the biographers state regarding the *Later Rule*. Maybe the first Rule that Francis wrote would refer to the *Earlier Rule*, as the point of arrival of a long development of legislation in the Order during the period 1209-1221. For us, it is more important to see what happened in Fonte Colombo. Let us follow Bonaventure’s account.

“Since he therefore wanted the Rule that had been taken from a more widespread collection of Gospel passages to be confirmed, he went up to a certain mountain led by the Holy Spirit, with two of his companions, to condense it into a shorter form as the vision had dictated. There he fasted, content with only bread and water, and dictated the Rule as the Holy Spirit suggested to him while he was praying. When he came down from the mountain, he gave the Rule to his vicar to keep. After a few days had elapsed, the vicar claimed that it had been lost through carelessness. The holy man went off again to the place of solitude and rewrote it just as before, as if he were taking the words from the mouth of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Bonaventure states that Francis went to Fonte Colombo (place of solitude) in order to condense the longer version of the Rule (the first Rule, or *Earlier Rule*). The Rule was written under the direct inspiration of the Spirit. Francis entrusted it to his vicar, namely Brother Elias, who lost it through negligence, and then Francis returned to rewrite it exactly as he had done the first time.

The first question which comes to mind is: why did Elias permit the Rule to be lost through negligence? It must have been strange that a man of the calibre of Elias, who was very capable as a man of government, would permit such an important document to be lost. Maybe it would be better to suggest that he permitted someone to make it disappear completely, and then go to Francis with the excuse that he had been negligent. But why would he do such a thing? Why was he so afraid of this new document? The answer is found in the account of the *Speculum* that we now

examine.

The author states that a group of ministers went to Brother Elias, complaining that they heard that Francis was writing a Rule which would have been harsh and difficult for them and the brothers to observe. The initiative of the protest, therefore, did not come from Francis’ vicar but from the ministers. They even went as far as threatening that they would not feel it in their conscience to be bound by such a Rule, and that Francis should write it for himself and not for them. The protest is to be understood within the context of the poverty controversy and of the Spirituals’ thesis that the Rule was to be observed without any comments, in a literal and strict way. The issue was a serious one. It was a question of a split within the Order between those brothers who regarded themselves as faithful followers of the founder and those who wanted a more moderate and practical way of life, which would be more helpful for the Order in order to increase its prestige and power in the Church. The ministers represented this group of brothers. Whether they were so adamant in their requests when Francis was still alive can be open to discussion. However, the episode seems true enough. Indeed, Elias appears to be weak in front of the pressure of the ministers. He did not dare to go and complain directly to Francis, since he was very well aware of the saint’s determination not to allow any discussion regarding the Rule. It could very well have been that Elias himself agreed with Francis, since he was, after all, his vicar. But since he was won over by the insistence of the ministers he agreed to go to Francis if they would all go with him.

The reaction of Francis to the request of Elias and the brothers was a harsh and clear one. The Rule was there to stay and it had to be obeyed to the letter. The brothers who considered themselves incapable of observing it should leave the Order. What is more forceful is the fact that this order came from Christ himself. Now from the *Later Rule* we know that Francis does not seem to have intended such a strict observance to be the condition for evaluating the vocation of the friar minor. Indeed in the same Rule he writes: “Wherever the brothers may be who know and feel they cannot observe the Rule spiritually, they can and should have recourse to their ministers.”<sup>3</sup> According to the Spiritual chronicler Angelo Clareno it was Pope Honorius III who had insisted on this verse in the Rule, modifying it from the

original version in which Francis had insisted that the brothers were to observe the Rule “literally” not “spiritually”.<sup>4</sup>

It is not easy to give a fair interpretation of the events as they truly might have occurred. The influence of the Spiritual group of brothers in the accounts we have quoted is certainly a determining factor. Apart from this, however, it is not an exaggeration to state that Francis did not deem the spiritual observance of the Rule sufficient in order to be faithful to the evangelical calling of the friars minor. In his *Testament* he is quite explicit about the fact that the Rule cannot be glossed over, that is, it cannot be commented upon as a spiritual text without any reference to its literal meaning.

The danger that the Order was facing was certainly coming from the group of learned friars, among whom there were the ministers, who could not understand how the Order could be of value to the Church if it remained locked within the intentions of the founder and did not develop its own interpretation of the same intentions. What the author of the *Speculum* is trying to say is that this issue was a real danger to the Order at a time when the very credibility of the radical evangelical calling of the brothers was being questioned by the highest authority of the Church.

What is of interest to us is that of showing the inner anguish of Saint Francis at seeing the ministers, who should have been the ones to promote his ideal, being ignorant and downright antagonistic regarding the core values of the Franciscan life. The nature of the *officium praelationis* as envisaged by Francis was that of being of service to the brotherhood, and hence of being faithful to the original intentions of the founder. When the same office became a source of power and prestige within the Church, it began to create problems for Francis. It seems that the phenomenon was occurring even when Francis himself was alive. His closeness of Elias does not contradict the fact that Francis was feeling sad that Elias was so weak in front of the intransigence of the ministers.

What is even more striking is the fact that Francis does not even seem to know who the ministers were. He explicitly asks Elias who the brothers who were accompanying him were. This is an indication that in 1223 Francis was already very cut off from the central governing body of the Order, made up of Elias, who had been vicar since 1221, and the ministers. Francis remained

certainly the charismatic leader of the Order, but he preferred to be surrounded by his more intimate companions and maybe also by brother Elias, but not by the ministers, many among whom maybe did not even know him personally. This fact explains the difficulty of Francis to relate to the ministers when they approached him, and even their own reluctance to approach Francis without the intermediary action of brother Elias.

Francis’ anguish at seeing the ministers, or prelates, misunderstand his intentions and the original values that he defended so strongly is best understood if we take up once more the decision of the saint to renounce to the office of prelate in the Order, and his sincere wish to obey to the point of asking to have a personal guardian in order to be sure of his faithfulness to be a true friar minor who obeyed the Rule. The account we take into consideration is found in the *Assisi Compilation*:

“Blessed Francis wanted to be humble among his brothers. To preserve greater humility, a few years after his conversion he resigned the office of prelate before all the brothers during a chapter held at Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. ‘From now on,’ he said, ‘I am dead to you. But here is Brother Peter di Catanio: let us all, you and I, obey him.’ Then all the brothers began to cry loudly and weep profusely, but blessed Francis bowed down before Brother Peter and promised him obedience and reverence.

From that time on, until his death, he remained a subject, like one of the other brothers. He wished to be subject to the general minister and the provincial ministers, so that in whatever province he stayed or preached, he obeyed the minister of that province. What is more, a long time before his death, for the sake of greater perfection and humility, he said to the general minister: ‘I ask you to put one of my companions in your place regarding me, so that I may obey him as I would obey you. For the sake of good example and the virtue of obedience, in life and in death I always want you to be with me.’

From that time until his death, he always had one of his companions as a guardian whom he obeyed in place of the general minister. One time he said to his companions: ‘Among other favours, the Most High has given me this grace: I would obey a novice who entered our religion today, if he were appointed my guardian, just as readily as I would obey him who is the first and the eldest in the life and religion of the brothers.’”<sup>5</sup>

This episode regards one of the important aspects of Francis' attitude towards minority and obedience. His ideal of the office of prelate is that of a humble service to the brotherhood in the spirit of what the Rule states with reference to the office of minister general of the Order.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Francis is aware that he is simply an instrument of service to the brothers, and that he has no privilege whatsoever once he is no longer responsible for governing the Order, but should humbly bow down to obey his own personal guardian even if he were unqualified for the office because of his young age and inexperience.

There is an episode that says much regarding Francis' inner anguish regarding the faithfulness of the brothers in the Order to his high ideals of Gospel perfection. The author of the *Assisi Compilation* sees in this episode a foretelling on the future of the Order on the part of Saint Francis:

"Saint Francis also said: 'A time will come when the religion loved by God will have such a bad reputation because of bad examples that it will be embarrassing to go out in public. Whoever comes to enter the Order at that time will be led only by the working of the Holy Spirit; flesh and blood will put no blot on them; they will be truly blessed by the Lord. Although they will not do works of merit, for the love that makes saints work fervently will have grown cold, still they will undergo temptations; and whoever passes the tests of that time will be better than those who came before. But woe to them who congratulate themselves over the appearance of a religious way of living, those numbed by idleness, those who do not firmly resist the temptations which are permitted to test the chosen! Only those who are tested will receive the crown of life, those who in the meantime are disturbed by the malice of the wicked.'"<sup>7</sup>

It seems that such a description of the wickedness of the Order is a faithful picture of the inner anguish of Francis at seeing so many brothers, particularly the ministers who had the office or prelate, give bad example by their outward appearance of holiness which was not a sign of the inner attitude of faithfulness to their Gospel calling. Francis would have suffered from such a situation during the latter part of his life more than from any other physical ailment, of which he was not spared, as we know from the Sources.

In spite of this, however, Francis still

remained firm in his resolve to serve the Lord to the very end and to continue loving the brothers. In prayer Francis found the strength and hope that kept him going. Although he would prefer to retreat from the majority of the brothers, he did not do so with a sense of bitterness, but rather because he was convinced that he needed to let go of the same brotherhood of which he was the founder to be able to entrust it fully to the care of the Lord. In this the inner anguish of Francis gave way to a ray of hope that is important to notice if we are not to make of him a solitary loner in the pursuit of Gospel perfection. If Francis believed in Jesus Christ, he also believed in the brothers and in their ability to conform their lives to Christ. His view of the future was optimistic as much as it was realistic.

## NOTES

- 1 MP 1 (FAED III, 253-254). Cf. AC 17 (FAED II, 131-132).
- 2 LMj 4,11 (FAED II, 558).
- 3 LR 10,7 (FAED I, 105).
- 4 ANGELO CLARENO, *A Chronicle or History of the Seven Tribulations of the Order of Brothers Minor*, Translated from the Latin by David BURR and E. Randolph DANIEL, Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure University 2005, 59-60.
- 5 AC 11 (FAED II, 125).
- 6 LR 8,4 (FAED I, 104): "If, at any time, it appears to the body of the provincial ministers and custodians that the aforesaid general minister is not qualified for the service and general welfare of the brothers, let the aforesaid brothers, to whom the election is committed, be bound to elect another as custodian in the name of the Lord."
- 7 AC 2 (FAED II, 118-119).



## A process of permanent conversion

“

*“Non confidare nelle tue ricchezze e non dire: Basto a me stesso. Non seguire il tuo istinto e la tua forza, assecondando le passioni del tuo cuore.”*

*Queste parole della prima lettura del Siracide lanciano una sfida a tutti noi, sia frati minori sia cristiani, di non affidarci in nessun'altra forza che quella dello Spirito di Dio. E' molto chiaro che la nostra fiducia deve essere fondata sempre ed esclusivamente sulla misericordia e l'amore di Dio. Questo fondamento non è una novità per noi cristiani, in quanto, battezzati in Cristo, rinasciamo con la consapevolezza di questa nuova identità, cioè di essere figli e figlie di Dio-amore.*

*Allo stesso tempo, l'offerta di Dio per sua misericordia, secondo l'autore sacro del Siracide, ci obbliga ad entrare in un processo di conversione permanente, cioè di partecipare all'esperienze della misericordia di Dio che si prolunga nel nostro cammino di tutta la vita, vita di un figlio o figlia 'minore' chiamati ad andare nel mondo per dare testimonianza di quello che il Signor fa per me, per noi, e per invitare la fraternità universale ad affidarsi nelle Sue mani.*

*In che cosa consiste questa testimonianza? Significa testimoniare la propria esperienza di misericordia e condivisa con tutti quelli che incontriamo nel nostro cammino della vita – i giovani affamati di un senso della vita; gli anziani assetati di qualcuno che gli doni nuovi spazi di vita; i poveri ed emarginati desiderosi della riconoscenza della propria dignità umana, e non per ultimi noi frati che sempre abbiamo bisogno della testimonianza condivisa e fraterna della misericordia di Dio.*

*Leggiamo nel documento post-capitolo del 2009, Portatori del Dono del Vangelo, numero 7, che “Fin dai primi giorni la Fraternità si scopre chiamata ad annunciare quello che vive. Tommaso da Celano narra che subito alle origini, quando i fratelli erano solo in otto, avvenne il primo invio per il mondo. Francesco e i suoi diventano così annunciatori ed evangelizzatori.”*

*Questo sarà un tratto caratteristico della vita francescana, ... E' itineranza, è simpatia per il mondo, dal quale non si vuole fuggire, ma nel quale si riconosce piuttosto il proprio chiostrò, è condividere la vita dei poveri e di quelli che si trovano lungo la strada.*

*Diventare una fraternità profetica; dare testimonianza della nostra fraternità come luogo sacramentale della presenza di Dio; imparare insieme come leggere i desideri e le sofferenze del nostro tempo; lasciarci abitare dal Vangelo che è Gesù Cristo; in questo modo possiamo diventare mistero vivente dello Spirito di Dio donatoci dal Padre per il Figlio, veri figli e vere figlie di Dio della misericordia e dell'amore.*

*First Homily of Fr. Michael Anthony Perry ofm  
Minister General  
OFM Curia, 23 May 2013*

”

## Abbreviations

### Writings of St. Francis

Adm	Admonitiones.
CantAudPov	Cantico Audite Poverelle.
CantSol	Canticum fratris Solis.
LaudDei	Laudes Dei Altissimi.
BenLeo	Benedictio fratri Leoni data.
EpAnt	Epistola ad sanctum Antonium.
EpCler I	Epistola ad Clericos (Redactio prior).
EpCler II	Epistola ad Clericos (Red. posterior).
EpCust I	Epistola ad Custodes I.
EpCust II	Epistola ad Custodes II.
EpFid I	Epistola ad Fideles I.
EpFid II	Epistola ad Fideles II.
EpLeo	Epistola ad fratrem Leonem.
EpMin	Epistola ad Ministrum.
EpOrd	Epistola toti Ordini missa.
EpRect	Epistola ad populorum rectores.
ExhLD	Exhortatio ad Laudem Dei.
ExpPat	Expositio in Pater noster.
FormViv	Forma vivendi sanctae Clarae data.
Fragm	Fragmenta alterius RegulaeNB.
LaudHor	Laudes ad omnes horas dicendae.
OffPass	Officium Passionis Domini.
OrCruc	Oratio ante crucifixum.
RegB	Regula bullata.
RegNB	Regula non bullata.
RegEr	Regula pro eremitiis data.
SalBMV	Salutatio beatae Mariae Virginis.
SalVirt	Salutatio virtutum.
Test	Testamentum.
UltVol	Ultima voluntas S. Clarae scripta.

### Sources for the Life of St. Francis

1C	Tommaso da Celano, Vita Sancti Francisci.
LCh	Celano, Legenda ad usum chori.
2C	Celano, Memoriale in Desiderio Animae.
3C	Celano, Tractatus de Miraculis S. Francisci.
LJS	Julian of Speyer, Vita Sancti Francisci.
OR	Officium Rhythmicum S. Francisci.
AP	Anonimo Perugino.
L3C	Leggenda dei Tre Compagni.
CA	Compilatio Assisiensis.
LMj	S. Bonaventura, Legenda Maior S. Francisci.
LMn	S. Bonaventura, Legenda minor S. Francisci.
SP	Speculum Perfectionis.
SC	Sacrum commercium S. Francisci.
ABF	Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius.
Fior	Fioretti di San Francesco.

### Sources for the Life of St. Clare

BICl	Blessing of St. Clare.
1-4LAg	Letters to St. Agnes of Prague..
LCl	Legend of St. Clare.
PC	Acts of the Process of Canonization.
PrPov	Privilege of Poverty.
RegCl	Rule of St. Clare.
TestCl	Testament of St. Clare.

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**Cover picture:**

*An affresco in Lecce showing St. Francis of Assisi*