



*Journal of Franciscan Culture*  
*Issued by the Franciscan Friars (OFM Malta)*

119



Quarterly journal of  
Franciscan culture published  
since April 1986.

Layout:  
John Abela ofm  
Computer Setting:  
Raymond Camilleri ofm

Available at:  
<http://www.i-tau.com>

All original material is  
Copyright © TAU Franciscan  
Communications 2017

## Contents

- Editorial ..... 2
- The Shrine of Trsat ..... 4
- The General Chapter 1217  
and the Franciscan presence  
in the Holy Land ..... 7
- Pilgrims and Strangers in the  
world ..... 13
- “Fratelli Minori Rinnovati” .. 19
- Francis, Cardinal Hugo and  
the Papal confirmation of  
the Rule..... 23

# 119

## EDITORIAL RESTRUCTURING

The global response to the lack of vocations and our dwindling numbers in the Order of Friars Minor is that of uniting our resources and joining forces. Inter-provincial houses of formation have been established and an inter-Franciscan university is in the pipeline. Many provinces have been merged into megaprovinces, in France, Germany, Spain, and Northern Italy. These provinces cover extensive regions. There is even talk of a megaprovince in the USA. Are they the best solution for the future of our Order? Many friars at the helm or at the grassroots would say “definitely so.” I beg to differ.

For these last decades the Order of Friars Minor has been facing a crisis of restructuring. We have come up with various terms, like “ridimensionamento” in Italian and “refounding” in English. The intention was certainly sincere on the part of many, both on the institutional level and at grassroots level. In front of the ever-increasing demands made upon the Order’s organs of government and upon its activity, in the face of the ever-growing need to become more professionally oriented, we realised that we could not hold on to all we have had during times when it was relatively easier to find personnel to fill all the blanks and when vocations were fairly abundant.

The result has been an intelligent analysis of the situation, with the decision to act now before it is too late. In other words, many think that uniting forces and resources, that being more focused on the core issues of our identity, is the only way to go forward. But this approach inevitably leads to the need to restructure our physical presence in the various entities of the Order, and in the face of dwindling numbers it concretely means closing down friaries and concentrating our efforts on a better distribution of personnel and activities. One concrete result has been that of diminishing the number of friaries in any particular province. We seem to have gone beyond this stage now, and we have arrived at the decision to merge provinces, indeed to dream of merging even the entire Franciscan family of the First Order.

A close look at the history of our Order shows that we were never experts in unification. I am often tempted to state that our Order has always been a confederation of Provinces. This mentality is seen as divisive and harmful to the growth of the Order. Yet the Order had great missionary endeavours when these were left to the initiative of individual provinces. Now we face so-called international missionary projects which have been limping along but have never really taken off. The case of the Custody of the Holy Land is an exception, but only because throughout its long history it has recruited friars from all Provinces, respecting their sense of belonging both to its mission and to their respective entities, and also respecting a juridical structure in which

“national” groups were tolerated and responsibilities in government were fairly shared among them. Any attempt to level this structure will simply mean that less friars will be encouraged to stay and work in the Holy Land.

History is the greatest teacher of experience, but it seems that many people find it hard to learn the lessons of history. The “unification” of the Order of Friars Minor by Pope Leo XIII in 1897 was a milestone in Franciscan history. Indeed, the internal division of the Order seemed anachronistic even in those days. Yet, even though the ideal that the Order strived for was good, the methods used were flawed. Unification was imposed from the top in such a way that there was hardly any time for most friars to absorb and digest the sour pill of changing minds and hearts and maybe also changing physical presence. The subsequent history of the Italian provinces up to the years following the Second World War is a well-known fact. It is only since some decades ago that old wounds have healed for the simple reason that the friars concerned are now dead.

With all due respect, the same mistake has been largely done in the case of the forced unification of the Secular Franciscan Order fraternities. Again, it was unification from the top, unification imposed. It did not work. And it still does not work. It could work on the institutional level, in making up the appearance of a unified Order. But whoever knows the SFO on the regional and local level is well aware that what keeps the clock ticking is the sense of belonging to a limited group of Secular Franciscans in a particular geographical setting, and not to an anonymous mass of Tertiaries who insist on being “autonomous” from the Franciscan families that produced them historically.

I know that this reasoning is seen as divisive and outright anti-fraternal, that the way forward will continue that of being merged into one ecumenical family in which past differences will be considered anachronisms, if not scandals, to forget and bury forever. Let future history judge us, however. The results of our actions will be felt by the coming generations, who will decide whether we were truly prophetic in our vision.

The merging of provinces into megaprovinces will not solve the problem of vocations. Indeed, it is the other way round. Vocations are born when a group of friars give witness to Franciscan conventual life and ministry in a limited environment in which the people see the friars and know them. Having a vocations animator running like crazy from one point to another of a megaprovince, even if he is surrounded by collaborators, will not produce many results. It is only the humble witness of a fraternity living and working in a limited region that can draw vocations. And let me remind those who think differently to ponder upon the comments of a distinguished scholar of Franciscan history, Don Felice Accrocca, who is now Archbishop of Benevento. He once said that the mistake of us friars was that we have abandoned the small friaries and churches we had in the countryside villages to move and concentrate our efforts in the large cities, where we remain anonymous and irrelevant. Vocations are born in more simple environments and not in a sprawling metropolis. If we want to think big, let us not forget to act small. With all due respect, megaprovinces will not work.

*Fr. Noel Muscat ofm*

# THE FIRST STOP OF THE HOLY HOUSE OF MARY WAS AT TRSAT, CROATIA, 650 YEARS AGO (1367-2017)

*Noel Muscat ofm*

On 10 December the Church celebrates the feast of the so-called “Translation” of the Holy House of Mary from Nazareth to Loreto. The famous Italian Marian sanctuary, perched on a fortified hill overlooking the Adriatic Sea in the Marche region, close to the port of Ancona and the town of Recanati, is known as a centre of pilgrimage and devotion.

The history of the transportation of the Holy House from the Holy Land to Europe is linked with the end of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, when the city of Acre on the Palestinian coast fell

into the hands of the Saracens on 18 May 1291 and the Christian population and Knights Templars and Hospitallers either had to flee to Cyprus or were massacred. That was the end of Christian domination in the Holy Land.

Among the various relics of Holy Places which the Crusaders tried to transport to Christian Europe, that of the Holy House of Nazareth marks one of the most famous. Archaeological evidence has been presented to prove that the stones that make up the Holy House at Loreto were brought over from the Holy Land. The Franciscan archaeologists of the



*Icon of the Virgin Mary  
of Trsat*

Holy Land Custody who conducted excavations in Nazareth, particularly Fr. Bellarmino Bagatti ofm, were of a different opinion. More recent studies on the stone relics at Loreto have indicated them to be the remains of the holy house built right in front of the Grotto of the Annunciation in Nazareth, marking the place where there was an altar during the Crusader era, namely an altar in the crypt of the Crusader basilica right in front of the Holy Grotto, witnessed also by the pilgrims Abbot Daniel (1106-1107) and Ricoldo di Montecroce (1288-1291), who states that there was an altar at the Grotto of the Annunciation and another altar dedicated to the Archangel Gabriel. But this is not the aim of our short presentation. We will not talk about the Holy House of Loreto as regards its archaeological value, although no doubt its historical and devotional value is to be highly appreciated and respected.

What is more interesting is the fact that the Holy House was initially transported not to Italy but to Croatia. The sanctuary of Our Lady of Trsat (Svetište Majke Božje Trsatske) is located on a 135 metre high hill close to a fortified castle built by the Frankopan Counts of Krk. The sanctuary and castle overlook the river Rječina, which gives its name to the town and port of Rijeka in Croatia. Tradition holds that the Holy House was transported by angels from Nazareth to this place on 10 May 1291, just before the fall of Acre. It remained on this hill until 10 December 1294, when the Holy House was again transported across the Adriatic Sea to the Italian coast, first to Recanati and then to Loreto.

In 1223 the Frankopan Count Vid II of Krk received Trsat as his own property from King Andrija II of Croatia-Hungary, and built there a fortified castle. Below the castle the Frankopans built a church, dedicated to St. George, Martyr, which is the parish church of Trsat. The castle of Trsat was built on the site of an ancient Roman fortress (called Tarsatica, the Latin name for Trsat). It was acquired by Senj Captain Gašpar Raab in 1528 and was a stronghold against the Turks and to preserve the independence of Trsat. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century it belonged to the Hapsburgs.

The loss of the Holy House was an occasion of deep sorrow for the local population. People continued to pray in the church that was first built on the spot in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. As a concrete sign of their devotion Pope Urban V donated an icon of the Virgin Mary to the church



in 1367. This is the icon that is still venerated today at Trsat, and this year, 2017, marks the 650 anniversary of its arrival at Trsat.

The venerable icon shows the Madonna suckling the Divine Child on the central panel. It is attributed to St. Luke, as are many other icons of the Virgin Mary. It was crowned on 8 September 1715. flanked by four panels, two on each side, depicting the Annunciation and the Crucifixion, together with other saints in the two panels at the bottom. This bottom section shows the Church as the result of Mary's merciful care and obedience to the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption. On the right are images of St. Peter, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Paul. On the left stand St. Nicholas, St. Bartholomew and St. Stephen, deacon.

The church was enlarged by the Frankopan Prince Martin in 1453, and forms the oldest section of the present church, namely the central nave. The Prince is buried in front of the holy shrine and image, and many other members of the noble Frankopan princely family are buried in this church. After some years, in 1468, the monastery adjacent to the sanctuary was given to the Franciscan friars, who have been the guardians of the Sanctuary ever since. The friary was rebuilt after the fire of 1629, and the church itself with the hallowed area of the Sanctuary as it stands today was built after

1726. The rich baroque main altar was placed in 1692. In 1707 a monumental metal gate and railing was placed on the late gothic triumphal arch, and above it, in 1714, hangs a painting by the Venetian artist C. Tasca, depicting the Annunciation and the Transfer of the Holy House. The altarpieces of St. Michael and St. Anne, placed left and right of the triumphal arch, were painted by the Swiss artist S. Schön in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

One can also arrive at the Sanctuary of Trsat on foot by climbing the 561 Stairs built by Petar Kružić, from the river Rječina up the hill to the Franciscan friary. There are gothic and baroque

chapels besides the Stairs, which were built as votive chapels.

On 8 June 2003 Pope St. John Paul II, on a pastoral visit to Croatia, stopped to pray in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Trsat, which is considered to be the “Croatian Nazareth” and which is also under the custody of the Franciscan Friars Minor. The shrine of Trsat belongs to the Franciscan Province of Saints Cyril and Methodius of Croatia. As a commemoration of his visit a large statue of Pope John Paul II – Pilgrim to Trsat, was erected in May 2005 by the sculptor Ante Jukica.



*Svetište Majke Božje Trsatske*

# THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1217 AND THE FRANCISCAN PRESENCE IN THE HOLY LAND

*Noel Muscat ofm*

The Franciscan presence in the Holy Land can be traced back to 1217. This year the Holy Land Custody is celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the presence of the friars Minor in the Province of Syria, formed as a result of the deliberations of the general chapter held at the Portiuncula on Pentecost, 14 May 1217. According to a well-founded tradition, the first friars arrived in the Crusader port of Acre under the leadership of brother Elias, who is thus considered to be the first minister provincial of Syria, the entity which was to develop into the province of the Holy Land, known as the Custody of the Holy Land since the publication of the Bullae *Gratias agimus* and *Nuper carissimae* of Pope Clement VI on 21 November 1342.

Based upon this tradition, historians place the arrival of Saint Francis in the East during the Fifth Crusade in the summer of 1219 in the port of Acre (Akko/Acco), known by the Crusaders as Saint Jean d'Acre, where the Franciscan province of Syria had its headquarters. Pilgrims to Acre can still see the remains of the mediaeval Pisan port, where according to this tradition Francis would have been welcomed by brother Elias and the brothers before departing once more by sea along the Palestinian coast to the Crusader camp in Damietta, on the Nile Delta in Egypt. Ever since the tragedy of the battle of Hattin on 4 July 1187 and the subsequent surrender of Jerusalem to Saladin on 2 October 1187, the Latin or Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem had been reduced to a handful of fortified cities and castles on the coasts of Palestine and Lebanon, including Jaffa, Caesarea, Arsouf (Apollonia), Atlit (the *Castrum Peregrinorum*), Acre, Tyre, Sidon Tripoli, and Antioch. They were the last Crusader strongholds in Palestine. One by

one, they eventually succumbed to the Saracen conquest. Antioch had already fallen in 1268. Acre itself fell to the forces of Al-Ashraf Khalil on 18 May 1291.

In the meantime, however, Franciscan friars never abandoned the Holy Land, and returned regularly in small numbers for periods of time while the minister provincial resided in Cyprus. Their presence is well documented by Franciscan sources, discovered and studied in a particular way by the Franciscan historian Girolamo Golubovich.<sup>1</sup> Our intent is that of portraying the beginnings of the Franciscan presence in the Holy Land as a direct result of the decisions taken by the general chapter of 1217.

---

## *The earliest signs of Franciscan presence in the Holy Land. The pilgrimage of brother Giles of Assisi*

According to the *Vita Prima* of brother Giles of Assisi, this humble Franciscan was the first friar to set foot in the Holy Land and also visit the Sepulchre of Jesus in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The account of his visit to the Holy Places is given by Arnald de Sarrant, author of the *Chronicle of the XXIV Ministers General of the Order of Friars Minor*: "Giles also received obedience from blessed Francis, so that he and a companion could go and visit the sepulchre of the Lord Jesus and the other places of the Holy Land. While he was staying for some time at the port of Brindisi, in order to wait for a ship to take him on his crossing, he acquired a pitcher, which he filled with water, and afterwards

he went along the town crying: 'Who would like to have a drink of water?' He would then accept all those things, which were necessary for his livelihood and for that of his companion. After crossing over he visited with the greatest devotion the sepulchre of the Lord and the other holy places. When he arrived at Acco, he stayed there and worked for a living. He used to make reed baskets, which are used by the people of that town. He also used to carry the dead to the cemetery and to carry water in the town. With this work he would acquire bread and other necessities of life. Whenever he could not acquire anything, he would then 'have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door.' After these events he returned to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula."<sup>3</sup>

This visit by brother Giles was certainly a one-off instance of a very temporary Franciscan presence in the Holy Land before 1217, but it does mark an important beginning, especially for the fact that Giles succeeded in visiting the Holy Sepulchre during a period in which it was off-limits for Christians.<sup>4</sup> Maybe this is the only example of a Franciscan visit to Jerusalem in this early period of the Order's history. The friars who arrived in Palestine after the chapter of 1217 were confined to the Crusader enclaves, even though they might have ventured into the lands of the 'infidels' for missionary endeavours. We have some examples of early Franciscan martyrs in the Holy Land who were killed by Saracens *in odium fidei*, as was the case of brother Philip of Le Puy, who was martyred in Ashdod in 1288.<sup>5</sup>

---

## *The missionary expeditions resulting from the general chapter of 1217*

According to the Franciscan chronicler Jordan of Giano: "In the year of Our Lord 1219 and the tenth year of his conversion, in the chapter held at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, Brother Francis sent brothers to France, Germany, Hungary, Spain, and the other provinces of Italy to which the brothers had not yet gone."<sup>6</sup> This is a reference to the chapter of 1217, since 1219 would rather refer to the thirteenth year of Francis' conversion. We know that Jordan of Giano went as a missionary to Germany after the chapter of 1221, but the first friars who were sent on pioneering missionary expeditions were sent by the chapter of 1217.

From the same Jordan of Giano we come to know that the first missionary expeditions beyond the Alps were a failure, maybe because of lack of adequate preparation on the part of those who volunteered to go as missionaries. The friars in France were suspected of being Albigensian heretics, but they were eventually accepted by the local bishops, particularly after Pope Honorius III sent the Bulla *Cum dilecti* (11 June 1218) to defend the orthodoxy of the friars Minor.

In Germany and in Hungary the first missionaries experienced all kinds of tribulations. Unfortunately they went to these regions without knowing the local languages, and therefore were taken to be Cathar heretics and driven out, and had to return dejected and demoralised in Italy. In Hungary the friars were taken as simpletons, and the local shepherds saw them they beat them with their sticks, sent their dogs to case them and left them half naked. At length they also had to return to Italy.

It was only in 1219 that the first organised missions to the countries beyond the Alps began to bear fruit and usher in an era of permanent Franciscan presence, which was immediately welcomed by everyone as a blessing. The friars soon entered the university cities, particularly Paris, and established houses of study and became preachers and scholars of theology.

In Spain and Portugal we know of a stable Franciscan presence at least in 1219. Francis himself had tried to go to Spain in 1213, but had failed in his endeavour and had to return to Italy. In 1219 we know that there were a group of friars Minor living in the hermitage at Olivais in Portugal, close to the town of Coimbra. It was during that year that five friars went into the Moorish domains in Andalusia, in Seville, with the aim of crossing the sea to go and preach to the Saracens in Morocco. Jordan of Giano gives us the account of the martyrdom of Berard, Peter, Adiutus, Accursius and Ottone in Marrakesh, in the Sahara Desert of Morocco, on 16 January 1220.<sup>7</sup> At Olivais the Augustinian canon Fernando (who would become Saint Anthony of Padua) met the friars for the first time and received his vocation to enter the Order of friars Minor and leave as a missionary to Morocco.<sup>8</sup>

---

## *The first Franciscans in the Province of Syria*

Jordan of Giano documents the arrival of brother

Elias and a group of friars sent to the regions of *outremer* (beyond the sea) in 1217 (he omits the mistake of stating that it was in 1219). Among these pioneers in the Holy Land he mentions brother Caesar of Speyer, who would later become a missionary and minister of the German province after 1221.

“Brother Elias was appointed minister provincial by Blessed Francis for the territory beyond the sea. At his preaching there, a certain cleric by the name of Caesar was received into the Order. This Caesar, a German born on Speyer and a subdeacon, was a student of theology under the master Conrad of Speyer, a preacher of the crusade and afterwards bishop of Hildesheim. While Caesar was still in the world, he was a great preacher and a follower of evangelical perfection. At his preaching, while he was still in his native city, certain married women, putting off their ornaments, began to live humbly; their husbands, however, became angry and wanted to hand him over to be burned as a heretic. But he was snatched away by his master Conrad, and returned to Paris; afterwards, crossing the sea after the usual journey, he was converted to the Order at the preaching of Elias, as was already mentioned, and he became a man of great learning and good example.”<sup>9</sup>

The Sabatier edition of *The Mirror of Perfection* states: “When the chapter that sent many brothers to regions overseas (*provincias ultramarinas*) had ended.” This is a further proof that, by 1217, many friars had volunteered to go as missionaries in two distinct directions, namely, or beyond the Alps (beyond the mountains) or to the East (beyond the sea). Indeed, we have the example of brother Giles who, already in 1215, as we have seen, went as a pilgrim to the Holy Land, and who would then volunteer to go to Tunis in 1219. According to the scholar E. Lempp, the aim of the first mission to the East, led by brother Elias, was not exactly that of founding a new province in favour of pastoral activity among the Christians of Palestine, but rather that of working for the conversion of the ‘infidels’ to the Christian faith, even to the point of going through the experience of martyrdom.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in Acre and in other Crusader towns of Palestine there were other priests and religious, and the ecclesiastical institutional framework was well organised. The entry of the mendicant Orders, particularly the Dominicans and Franciscans, can only be understood within the context of missionary evangelisation. In the case of the friars

Minor, it seems that the period following the Fourth Lateran Council up till Francis’ departure for the East in 1219, was marked by an intense missionary activity, proof of which is chapter 16 of the *Earlier Rule*, which is the first documented legislative text in a religious order speaking about missionary evangelisation.

We do not know exactly where the first Franciscan friary in Acre would have been located, at least in the very beginnings when Elias arrived. The Franciscans later on had their own church and friary in the quarter of Montmusard.<sup>11</sup> This was a new residential quarter founded in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century on the northern section of the town, with its own fortifications. Already in 1206 there was in Acre a Dominican friary located north of the Templers’ quarters, while a Carmelite friary was also established in the Montmusard quarter at about this same time.

Brother Elias certainly founded the friary of Acre, and maybe also other residencies for the friars in Antioch, Tripoli, Beirut and Tyre.<sup>12</sup> The jurisdiction of brother Elias was that of minister of Syria, since this was one of the provinces that the Order had established as a result of the general chapter of 1217, when for the first time, the Order was divided into various entities. According to the Franciscan historian Heribert Holzapfel, the provinces of the Order in 1226, the year in which Saint Francis died, were 12 in all, 6 in Italy and 6 beyond the Alps and beyond the sea, including (1) Tuscia (Umbria and Tuscany), (2) Marches, (3) Lombardy, (4) Terra di Lavoro (Naples), (5) Puglie, (6) Calabria (and Sicily), (7) Outremer (Syria), (8) Spain (and Portugal), (9) France, (10) Provence, (11) Germany (and Hungary), (12) England.<sup>13</sup> England was formed as a province after 1224. In 1217 most of the other regions listed were considered as bound to become distinct entities of the Order.

The Province of Syria was also known by the name of Province of Outremer, or Province of Romania. It included the entire Middle East, namely Constantinople, Greece and the Aegean islands, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Antioch, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and the other regions of the Levant. Thus it included a very large area, most of which was under the control of the Saracens, or else under that of the Byzantine Empire. The Latin enclaves during the end of the Crusader period were small, and could be found mainly along the coast of Palestine, Lebanon, and in

Cyprus. In 1217 Acre was still a flourishing centre and indeed could be regarded as the capital of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. From Acre, Elias and the first friars who accompanied him could organise their missionary work far afield, although we do not possess precise information as to their movements in this early period of the Franciscan presence in the Holy Land.

According to Golubovich, Elias remained in the East during the period in which Francis was present in Damietta, but returned to Italy together with Francis, Caesar of Speyer, and Peter Cattanio in 1220. Scholars of Franciscan history are not in agreement regarding the exact date of Francis' return to Italy after his meeting with the Sultan of Egypt Malik-al-Kamil in September 1219. Many opt for a date immediately following this event, that is, before the onset of winter of 1219, but others, like Golubovich, prefer 1220,<sup>14</sup> thus giving Francis time to return to Acre and embark on his return journey with Elias and the brothers, travelling along the Adriatic coast (where a number of Franciscan friaries record Francis' stop-overs during this journey, such as Lezhë in Albania and Split in Croatia) and arriving in Venice (San Francesco all'Isola) in time before the general chapter on the feast of St. Michael, 29 September 1220, when Francis renounced the leadership of the Order and appointed Peter Cattanio as his vicar. After Cattanio died at the Portiuncula on 10 March 1221, during the general chapter of Pentecost, 30 May 1221, Francis appointed brother Elias as vicar.

After his return to Italy Francis appointed as successor to Elias in the province of Syria brother Benedetto da Arezzo as minister (1221-1237 c.).<sup>15</sup> The fact that Francis took back with him to Italy three of his closest collaborators is a sign that he had sent some of his best and most qualified brothers to the mission of Outremer. Both Peter Cattanio and Elias were entrusted with the government of the Order after Francis renounced his leadership in 1220. Elias was vicar throughout the period 30 May 1221 – 23 May 1227, that is until the general chapter of Pentecost that followed the death of Saint Francis on 3 October 1226, when Giovanni Parenti was elected as minister general of the Order.

The presence of friars Minor in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem during the early years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century is highly significant. It shows how fond Francis was of the mission of evangelisation in

the lands "of the Saracens and other unbelievers." The enthusiasm created by the Fifth Crusade was also a key factor in the need to cross the sea and settle in the Holy Land,<sup>16</sup> which was considered as a Christian domain that was threatened by the onslaught of Islam, particularly after the loss of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187. The link between the Franciscan presence and the Crusader spirit cannot be concealed or misunderstood as, unfortunately, often happens in studies regarding the visit of Francis to Damietta and his relationship with Islamic religion and culture.

We do not possess much information regarding the brothers who were permanently residing in the Province of Syria during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Jerusalem and the Holy Land remained important for the entire Christianity. At the same time, the evangelising ministry of the Franciscans in the East was directed towards different aims, and not only towards the Holy Land in a specific sense. What we do know is that, after 1220, brother Benedict of Arezzo, as we have noted, was present in Antioch as minister provincial of the Province of Syria and successor of brother Elias. Before 1221 a certain Andrea, *ultramarinus de civitate Achon*, entered the Order and was present in Parma, together with Balian of Sidon, for the baptism of the famous Franciscan chronicler Salimbene de Adam. According to William of Tyre, in 1228, two friars arrived in Acre, sent by Pope Gregory IX, bearing the sentence of excommunication of Emperor Frederick II. Both friars were brutally killed by the same Emperor as an act of revenge against the Pope. Other Franciscans suffered persecution from the same Emperor, whenever they tried to side with the Pope in their missionary expeditions in the Holy Land.<sup>17</sup>

One cannot understand the missionary spirit of Francis and his brothers, which enabled them to settle in Acre in 1217, in the midst of the Templar and Hospitaller Orders, under the jurisdiction of the King of Jerusalem and of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and within the mercantile and political maneuvering of the Italian maritime republics of Pisa, Genova and Venice, without understanding also the fact that the crusading spirit ran in the blood of ordinary Christians during that time.<sup>18</sup> To state that Francis, and indeed, the friars Minor at large, lived "among Saracens and other non-believers" simply for the sake of being friendly to them, and not daring to preach Jesus Christ and the Gospel, is preposterous. Indeed, Francis and his brothers

did not rule out the possibility of announcing the Gospel to the point of suffering even martyrdom. They did not seek martyrdom for its own sake, but they never ruled it out as a possibility. To renounce this truth is a downright rejection of the spiritual motives behind Francis' repeated attempts to cross the sea and send his brothers to the East. The year 1217 marks the beginning of a glorious legacy that still lives on in any genuine Franciscan friar. After 800 years it is still important in order to understand the genuine significance of Franciscan life and witness in the Holy Land.

### *The temporary Franciscan presence before the establishment of the Custody*

On 1 February 1230 Pope Gregory IX sent the bulla *Si Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* to the Patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem, as well as to the Legates of the Holy See and the Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Priors, Superiors, Deans, Archdeacons and other Prelates of the Church. In the document he invited them to welcome the friars Minor with benevolence, particularly since they were held in high esteem by the Holy See in their endeavour to evangelise the Saracens. Their presence in the East was important to safeguard the future of the Holy Places. One should remember that, from 1229 to 1240, Emperor Frederick II and the Egyptian Sultan Malik al-Kamil had established a truce, during which Christians could take over Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth and worship in the Holy Places. It is to this period that historians normally assign the first semi-stable presence of the Franciscans in the Holy City of Jerusalem, in a friary that was situated in the whereabouts of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> stations of the *Via Dolorosa*, according to the testimony of the Dominican pilgrim Ricoldo di Montecroce.

Another important date for the early Franciscan presence in the Province of Syria is 1263. During the general chapter of Pisa, presided by St. Bonaventure, the friars decided to limit the territory of the Province of the Holy Land to Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, and to divide it into Custodies, comprising the Custody of the Holy Land (Acre, Antioch, Sidon, Tripoli, Jerusalem and Jaffa). This state of affairs continued until 1291, when the friars had to flee to Cyprus after the fall of Acre.

From the island of Cyprus the minister of the Province of the Holy Land continued to take interest in the mission of the friars and to send small groups to the Holy Places. In this he was helped by royal concessions. The Sultan Bibars II (1309-1310) donated the church of Bethelhem to the friars, but they could not take possession of it because the Sultan died. In 1322 Jaime II of Aragon made an agreement with the Sultan Melek el Naser of Egypt to give the custody of the Holy Sepulchre to Aragonese friars, and in 1327 this concession was extended to all friars Minor. Thus we can state that in 1327 the Franciscans were temporarily officiating the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.

Pope John XXII issued a bulla on 9 August 1328, in which he gave permission to the minister of the Province of the Holy Land, residing in Cyprus, to send two friars each year to try to officiate in the Holy Places. This was the concession that prepared the way so that in 1333 the Sultan of Egypt gave permission to brother Roger Guérin of Aquitaine to begin negotiations to acquire the Cenacle, an action that would become possible through the generous offers of King Robert of Anjou and Queen Sanchia of Majorca. This date marks the beginning of the stable and permanent presence of the Franciscan friars in the Holy Land Custody.

### NOTES

1 G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Franceseano*, Tomo I *Annali di Terra Santa dal 1215 al 1300*, Collegio S. Bonaventura, Ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi, 1906, pp. VIII-579.

2 *Vita beati Aegidii Assisiensis*, in L. LEMMENS, *Documenta antiqua franciscana*, I: *Scripta fratris Leonis socii S.P. Francisci*, Quaracchi 1901, 37-63. *Vita I*, 324 is essential ("ivit etiam ultra mare et visitavit terram sanctam"). *Vita III*, 77 states that Giles accomplished this pilgrimage "cum devotione maxima", and *Vita II*, 222 "cum devotione magna et reverentia." It is probable that Brother Giles was the first Franciscan to visit the Holy Land: G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca bibliografica di Terra Santa*, I, Quaracchi 1906, 105. Regarding the date of the pilgrimage, Golubovich chooses 1215, whereas others indicate 1213-1214. According to him brother Giles was: "il primo Minorita che abbia posto piede nella Terra Santa per visitare il S. Sepolcro e i Luoghi Sacri della Palestina."

3 *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, in *Analecta Franciscana* III, 77: "Post haec ad Sepulchrum Domini Jesu et alia Terrae Sanctae loca obedientiam et socium ad eundem obtinuit a beato Francisco. Dum autem ad portam Brundisii devenisset, et ibi per aliquod tempus moram contraheret navem exspectans, interim unum urceum acquisivit, in quo portans aquam ibat per civitatem clamando: 'Quis vult

emere aquam?’ Et pro mercede corporis necessaria pro se et socio recipiebat. Postea transiens, Sepulchrum Domini et alia loca sacra cum devotione maxima visitavit. Cum vero in civitate Achon moram contraheret, de labore suo, ut consueverat, vivere conabatur. Faciebat enim quasdam sportas de iuncis, quibus illi homines utebantur; portabat enim defunctos ad cimiterium et aquam per civitatem; et pro istis panem et alia necessaria lucrabatur. Quando autem haec facere non poterat, recurrebat ‘ad mensam Domini petendo eleemosynam ostiatim.’ Deinde ad sanctam Mariam de Portiuncula est reversus.” English text in: *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Ministers General of the Order of Friars Minor*, English translation by N. MUSCAT, TAU Franciscan Communications, Malta, 2010, Vol. I, 101 (Digital print in 2 volumes).

4 G. BASSETTI-SANI, *San Francesco è incorso nella scomunica? Una bolla di Onorio III ed il supposto pellegrinaggio del Santo a Gerusalemme*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 65 (1972) 3-19.

5 *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, in *Analecta Franciscana* III, 416. *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Ministers General*, Vol. I, 559.

6 JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, 3, in *Thirteenth Century Chronicles*, Translated by P. Hermann, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1961, 21. Latin text in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca*, I, 38. This date is probably incorrect. It is more likely that Francis sent the brothers to these places in the Chapter of 1217. Cf. *Analecta Franciscana*, introduction to Vol. II, pp. XXV-XXIX.

7 *Passio sanctorum martyrum Berardi, Petri, Adiuti, Accursii, Othonis, in Marochio martyrizatorum*, in *Analecta Franciscana*, III, Appendix I, 579-596. English translation: *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Ministers General*, 779-806.

8 *Life of Saint Anthony “Assidua”*, by a Contemporary Franciscan, Introduced by V. GAMBOSO, Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 2006<sup>2</sup>, 22-25.

9 JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, 9, in *Thirteenth Century Chronicles*, 24-25. Latin text in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca*, I, 38.

10 E. LEMPP, *Frère Élie de Cortone. Etude Biographique*, Librairie Fischbacher, Paris, 1901, 39: “Ce chapitre eut lieu en 1217, comme le prouve l’itinéraire d’Hugolin. Je doute qu’il faille voir dans ce chapitre celui dont parle Jourdain de Giano, car la France, l’Allemagne et la Hongrie ne sont pas des *provinciae ultramarinae* ... Il peut sembler extraordinaire que les frères soient allés vers les infidèles avant de se répandre dans les pays chrétiens, mais c’est là un fait historique: déjà en 1212 Saint François

voulut aller en Syrie, et plus tard au Maroc. Egide aussi se rendit à Tunis avant que des missions fussent envoyées au Maroc, et qu’Elie et ses compagnons se rendirent en Orient. Le but de la mission d’Elie n’était en aucune façon, comme le supposent les éditeurs des *Analecta Franciscana* (t. II, p. XXIX), la fondation d’une province de frères parmi les chrétiens de Palestine, mais bien comme pour toutes celles dont nous venons de parler, soit la conversion des infidèles, soit plutôt l’espérance du martyre. C’est ce qui ressort d’une manière certaine de tous les témoignages.”

11 J. FOLDA, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land. From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre 1187-1291*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 183.

12 S. VECCHIO, *Elia d’Assisi*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 42 (1993), in URL [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elia-d-assisi\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elia-d-assisi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

13 H. HOLZAPFEL, *Manuale Historiae Ordinis fratrum Minorum*, Friburgi-Brisgoviae, 1909. According to R. B. BROOKE, *Early Franciscan Government. Elias to Bonaventure*, Cambridge University Press, 1959, 129, the total number of provinces in 1226 was 13 (with the addition of Aquitaine).

14 G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca*, 38, note 4: “Frate Elia, recatosi in quel tempo (1217) in Siria, lo troviamo tuttavia colà sino all’arrivo del Santo, col quale poi riprese la via d’Italia verso la fine del 1220, o al più tardi verso il marzo 1221.” He quotes JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, 14: “Beatus Franciscus, assumptis secum fratre Helia et fratre Pethro Cathaniae et fratre Caesario, quem frater Helias minister Syriae, ut dictum est supra, receperat, et aliis fratribus, rediit in Italiam.”

15 G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca*, 81. Benedetto of Arezzo entered the Order in 1216 and died around the year 1280. He was the first Minister of the province of the Marches of Ancona (1217) and then he was Minister of Syria (1221-1237 c.). It was Benedetto who requested Thomas of Celano to compose the *Legend of Saint Francis for the use in the Choir*.

16 *I Francescani e la crociata*. Atti dell’XI Convegno storico di Greccio (Greccio, 3-4 maggio 2013), a cura di A. Cacciotti, M. Melli (Biblioteca di Frate Francesco 15), Milano 2014.

17 A. MUSARRA, *Outremer dinanzi a Francesco. Gli Stati Latini di Terra Santa e la predicazione minoritica in età pre-custodiale*, in *Frate Francesco* 82 (Aprile 2016 – n. 1), 7-25, especially page 15.

18 G. LIGATO, *La Crociata e il primo secolo Franciscano in Terra Santa nella Cronaca di Frate Salimbene de Adam*, in *Frate Francesco* 82 (Aprile 2016 – n. 1), 77-104.

# "PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS IN THIS WORLD": THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS IN THE VISION OF SAINT FRANCIS

Noel Muscat ofm

The episode of the Risen Christ who appears to two disciples on their way to the village of Emmaus appears specifically only once in the life of Saint Francis. It is Brother Thomas of Celano, in his *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, known also as *The Second Life of Saint Francis*, written in 1246-47, who refers to Francis who imitates Christ who walks as a pilgrim on the road to Emmaus. The episode narrated by Celano is that of Francis who begs for alms from his brothers in the hermitage of Greccio. Celano, however, does not mention Emmaus in an explicit way. It is Saint Bonaventure, in his *Major Legend of Saint Francis*, written in 1260-63, who makes use of the text of Celano, and who specifically mentions the pilgrim of Emmaus.

We shall try to examine this unique episode in the life of Francis, on the basis of these two sources, with the aim of contextualising it also within the choice of a poor and itinerant life, which Francis proposed for himself and for his brothers. After having examined the texts of Celano and Bonaventure, we shall also study other texts from the Writings of Saint Francis. These texts enlighten the episode of Greccio, and make us understand how the call to itineracy is, in a certain way, the proper characteristic of the Franciscan life, and how the evangelical poverty embraced by Francis and the first brothers upon the model of that of Christ and the apostles finds its *raison d'être* precisely in itineracy, in a journeying as "pilgrims and strangers" on the footprints of the Risen Christ, who manifests Himself in His Word and in the breaking of Bread.

---

## *The text 2 Celano 61*

Since Thomas of Celano is the first biographer who narrates the episode of the hermitage of Greccio, which occurred in an unknown year of the life of Saint Francis on Easter Sunday (or else on Christmas, as we shall see), we shall first present this event of the life of Saint Francis in 2 Celano 61:

"On a certain Easter Day the brothers in the hermitage of Greccio set the table more carefully than usual, with white clothes and glassware. The Father came down from his cell and went to the table. He saw that it was elevated and elaborately decorated, but he did not smile at all at that smiling table. He secretly tiptoed away, put on his head the hat of a poor man who was there at the time, and with a staff in hand, went outside. He waited outside, at the door, until the brothers had started eating. They were accustomed not to wait for him when he did not come at the usual signal. As they began to eat, that true poor man cried out at the door: 'For the love of the Lord God, give alms to this poor, sick pilgrim.' And the brothers replied: 'Come in, man, for the love of Him you invoked.' He quickly came in, and showed himself to those dining. You can imagine the surprise the pilgrim provoked in those home-bodies! The beggar was given a bowl and, sitting on the ground by himself, placed his dish on the ashes. 'Now,' he said, 'I am sitting like a Friar Minor!' And he said to the brothers: 'The examples of the Son of God's poverty should move us more than other religious.

I saw here a table all prepared and decorated, and recognised it as not the table of poor men who go door to door. The chain of events proves that he was like that *other pilgrim who was alone in Jerusalem* on that same day. And he certainly made *the hearts of his disciples burn as he spoke* (Lk 24:32)”<sup>1</sup>.

Both Celano and Bonaventure speak about the event as having occurred on Easter Sunday. Their aim is clear: they want to speak about the experience of mendicity of Francis who dresses up like a pilgrim, in the light of the Easter experience of the Risen Christ who “begs for alms” while waiting to go into the house of Clopas and of the other disciple who accompanied him. In the *Assisi Compilation* the text mentions the *pascha nativitatis*, that is, Christmas.<sup>2</sup>

As he does in other occasions, Francis makes a kind of symbolic prophetic action, which helps the brothers to understand immediately his intentions. He assumes the form of a poor pilgrim (with the typical hat and staff) and waits for the lunch hour to beg alms from the friars. The action of Francis appears to be a kind of delicate reproach in front of the refined table prepared by the brothers (according to the *AC* because a friar minister was visiting). Francis prefers to do a concrete gesture more than to scold the friars. His attitude is that of an itinerant beggar who begs for food, and who sits on the ground when he is invited at table with the “rich”, who Celano calls “home-bodies”. What strikes us most is not the fact that Francis asked the brothers to give him food, but the fact that he did such an action by dressing up like a pilgrim who has no fixed abode.

Celano immediately offers an explanation for the prophetic gesture of Francis, when he says that Francis “was like that *other pilgrim who was alone in Jerusalem* on that same day. And he certainly made *the hearts of his disciples burn as he spoke* (Lk 24:32).” Therefore, his intention is precisely that of presenting Francis as a faithful disciple of the Risen Christ, who became a pilgrim along the road on which the two disciples were travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the evening of Easter Sunday, with the aim of touching upon their hearts by his words. One can speak about the “pedagogy of the pilgrim of Emmaus,” which is highly evident in Luke’s account. As Christ opened the eyes of the two disciples in the moment when he broke bread with them and after he had inflamed their hearts with his word, thus Francis, as a poor pilgrim, begged for a piece of bread broken by

the brothers and ate it sitting down on the floor in order to remind them of the specific nature of their calling to imitate the poor and pilgrim Christ.

## *The text of the Major Legend of Saint Francis 7,9*

In the account of the *Legenda Maior*, Saint Bonaventure depends upon the text of Celano, but reworks it in his typical theological and mystical style. A reading of the text will help us to discover some particular elements in the interpretation offered by the Seraphic Doctor:

“Once, on a holy Easter Sunday, while he was staying at a hermitage that was so far from any houses that he could not conveniently go begging, he begged alms from the brothers, like a pilgrim and beggar, mindful of him who *that day* appeared in the guise of a pilgrim (Lk 24:13) to his disciples travelling on the road to Emmaus. When he had humbly received it, he taught them with sacred eloquence to continually celebrate the Lord’s Passover, in poverty of spirit that is, his passing *from this world to the Father* (Jn 13:1), passing through the desert of the world like *pilgrims and strangers* (1Pt 2:11) and like true Hebrews.”<sup>3</sup>

We notice that Bonaventure does not follow the same episode of Celano in a faithful manner. He says that Francis was living in a remote hermitage, away from human habitations, but does not mention the hermitage of Greccio. However, he agrees with Celano in saying that it was Easter Sunday. When he motivates the action of Francis who presents himself to the brothers as a poor pilgrim, he does not minimally mention the refined care of the brothers to prepare a special meal, but simply states that Francis could not go out to beg for alms, and therefore he begged his food from his own brothers like Christ begged it from his disciples when he appeared to them on the road to Emmaus under the guise of a pilgrim. Bonaventure is more explicit when he speaks of this episode by mentioning by name the village where the two disciples were directing their paces when they encountered Jesus.

The mystical tone of this episode is seen in a particular manner when Bonaventure presents Francis who speaks and teaches the brothers as Jesus had done on the evening of Holy Thursday, when he accomplished his passage from this world to the Father. He quotes the text of John 13,1ff.

where Jesus is shown washing the feet of the apostles before suffering His Passion. Therefore, Bonaventure unites in one event the two principal moments of the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection, and shows us how Francis unites himself in an intimate way to Christ in his passage, when He chose “to pass from the desert of this world in poverty of spirit.” Bonaventure also states that Francis admonished his brothers to be like “pilgrims and strangers,” referring directly to the text of 1 Peter 2:11. As we shall see, this verse was very dear to Francis and he quotes it in his writings. Bonaventure also refers to the brothers as “true Hebrews,” namely, true members of the people of God who make their paschal exodus with Christ in His death and resurrection.

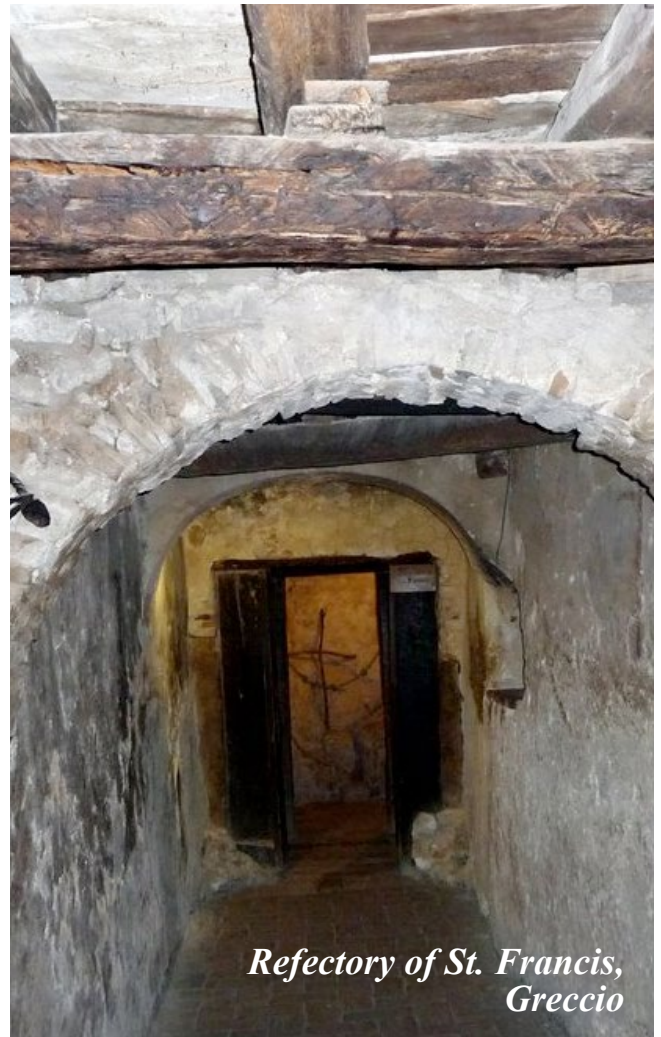
This is a typically bonaventurian approach. It can clearly be seen in the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, where in chapter 7 Bonaventure mentions this journeying after Christ in His Paschal Mystery.<sup>4</sup> The experience of Francis on that Easter Sunday was an encouragement for the friars not only to imitate the poverty of the pilgrim Christ on the road to Emmaus, but also to enter into His Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection through the gesture of mendicity and by breaking bread in the family of the poor. Bonaventure states that Francis instructed the brothers with these words, and thus presents him as one who imitated Christ, who opened the ears and eyes of the two disciples of Emmaus by revealing to them the mysteries of Scripture verified in His paschal event.

The Eucharist is not mentioned in an explicit way. However, it would not be a mistake to note in this text a reference to the eucharistic banquet as food offered for the life of the poor ones who follow Jesus along the road of His cross, death and resurrection. In this way Franciscan itineracy is presented as a journey of discipleship that leads to the light of Easter after having gone through the desert of the cross.

We shall now try to contextualise these texts of the Franciscan Sources in the light of the Writings of Saint Francis, which speak about itineracy and poverty.

### *The journey to Emmaus reflected in the Writings of Saint Francis*

We do not meet with any explicit reference to the episode of Emmaus in the Writings of Saint



*Refectory of St. Francis,  
Greccio*

Francis. However, it is quite evident that Francis speaks about the life of the brothers as a life of pilgrims. This note of itineracy, which, as we have seen, marks the most typical characteristic of the Franciscan Gospel vocation, is expressed in a particular way in the Rules that Francis has written, namely the *Earlier Rule* of 1221 and the *Later Rule* of 1223.

In chapter 14 of the *Earlier Rule*, Francis presents us with some Gospel text which marked a milestone in his evangelical calling:

“When the brothers go through the world, let them take *nothing* for the journey, *neither knapsack, nor purse, nor bread, nor money, nor walking stick. Whatever house they enter*, let them first say: *Peace to this house* (cf. Lk 9:3; 10:4-8; Mt 10:10)”<sup>5</sup>.

These Gospel texts, which refer respectively to the words that Christ addressed to the 72 disciples in Luke’s Gospel and to the 12 apostles in Matthew’s Gospel, were the same texts that Francis had found in the Missal of the church of San Nicolò together with Bernard of Quintavalle, his first companion, and which he also heard in the Portiuncula chapel

on 24 February 1208 during Mass on the feast of the apostle Saint Matthias.<sup>6</sup>

Note that, for Francis, these texts were so important that he inserted them in his *Earlier Rule* of 1221, in the chapter which is entitled precisely “How the brothers should go through the world.” It is the chapter which speaks in an explicit way of itineracy, founded upon the experience of Christ and his disciples and apostles. This is the foundation of the *apostolica vivendi forma*, which marks the *proprium* of the evangelical intuition of Francis of Assisi, and which can also be seen in the context of the journey of Christ and his two disciples towards Emmaus. After all, the journey to Emmaus is a journey of discipleship, in which the master and the disciple assume the attitude of pilgrims and strangers travelling along the roads of this world.

This element of pilgrimage in the world is even more evident in the text of the *Later Rule*, in chapter 6, where Francis speaks about going to beg for alms:

“Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. As *pilgrims and strangers* (1Pt 2:11; Heb 11:13) in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go seeking alms with confidence, and they should not be ashamed because, for our sakes, our Lord made Himself poor in this world.”<sup>7</sup>

When Francis speaks about the vocation of the friars Minor to a form of poverty without any possessions, he quotes two text from the New Testament, which speak about the Christian vocation as a pilgrimage. The fundamental text is that of 1Peter 2:11: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” We know that Peter wrote his First Letter “to God’s elect, living as strangers in the diaspora” (1Pt 1:1). Thus, the attitude of the disciple described in these verses is that of one who knows that he is a pilgrim in this world, and as a consequence, has nothing that he can call his own. Francis interiorised this attitude in his personal choice of radical poverty, expressed as a journey along the roads of this world, where he and his brothers beg for alms in order to be able to administer the Word of God to the brothers. The meaning of being strangers and pilgrims is profoundly biblical, and reminds us of the experience of the people of Israel in the desert, namely the paschal experience of freedom from slavery (“fleshly lusts which war against the soul”)

in order to arrive at the promised land. This was the same experience of Christ, who appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and who then left the world to ascend to His Father, but who remains with us to nurture us with His Word and with the broken Bread.

The reference to the Letter to the Hebrews 11:13 refers to the experience of faith of the patriarchs: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” In this context the author speaks about the faith of Abraham and of his descendants, as well as of the itinerant experience of our father in the faith, who left his homeland in order to search for a new life in the land that God indicated for him.

Francis applied this vision of pilgrimage in the faith and in the search of God’s will in the case of the friars, who go along the roads of the world to preach Christ with their life and with their words. He speaks explicitly about almsgiving, and situates it within the context of the search for faith, of a spiritual pilgrimage in which the brothers feel that they are “pilgrims and strangers” in this world and depend solely upon divine providence. It is interesting to note that, when he speaks about begging in the *Earlier Rule* 9, Francis describes the life of Christ, together with His Mother and the apostles, as a journey in which they beg for alms:

“When it is necessary, (the brothers) may go for alms. Let them not be ashamed and remember, moreover, that our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Son of the all powerful living God, set His face like flint* (Jn 11:27; Is 50:7) and was not ashamed. He was poor and a stranger and lived on alms – He, the Blessed Virgin, and His disciples.”<sup>8</sup>

Francis refers to Christ as “a poor and a stranger,” a characteristic note of the apparition of the Risen Christ to the disciples of Emmaus, where Jesus could not find a place to lay his head for the night, and was welcomed as a poor pilgrim and stranger by Clopas and the other disciple. In welcoming this poor guest who had already spoken to them along the way, the two disciples recognised the face of the Lord who then broke Bread. The brothers who live in this spirit of poor pilgrims and guests, of strangers who are in search for their true homeland, are also a concrete sign of this evangelical attitude that leads them to recognise Christ in the broken Bread and say: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us

on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Lk 24:32).

Another reference to this spirit of precarious existence in the following of the Risen Christ is given to us by Francis in his *Testament*, when speaks about the dwellings of the brothers:

“Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. *As pilgrims and strangers* (cf. 1Pt 2:11; Heb 11:13), let them always be guests there.”<sup>9</sup>

Once more, Francis makes use of the texts of 1Pt 2:11 and Heb 11:13, in this case referring to the way in which the friars can choose dwellings out of necessity, but always in the spirit of poor pilgrims. Christ was poor and asked for hospitality in the house of Peter in Capernaum, in the house of his friends in Bethany, and He was also welcomed in the house of Clopas on the evening of Easter Sunday. The brothers imitate the example of Christ when they are convinced that they are guests and pilgrims, also in those moments in which they find themselves at ease in the houses that welcome them, or even in their own friaries, as was already happening when Francis was still alive. The journey from one place to another, the passage from one obedience to another, becomes a journey of faith in the following of the Master who teaches with His Word and administers the Bread of life, if He is welcomed with the same spirit of detachment from all that which gives security to life in this world.

### *The journey to Emmaus in the experience of the Franciscan life*

The biographers of Saint Francis speak about this itineracy as a proper characteristic of his intentions as transmitted to the brothers. We again have some new examples from Celano and Saint Bonaventure, which illustrate this fact. Celano writes:

“He did not want the brothers to live in any place unless it had a definite owner who held the property rights. He always wanted the laws of pilgrims for his sons: to be sheltered under someone else’s roof, to travel in peace, and to thirst for their homeland.”<sup>10</sup>

As usual, Saint Bonaventure is more mystical in his interpretation of Franciscan itineracy, and he insists on the fact that the brothers are pilgrims and

strangers in this world, and also on the fact that this pilgrimage is a paschal journey:

San Bonaventura, come al solito, è più mistico nella sua interpretazione dell’itineranza francescana, insistendo pure sul fatto che i frati sono pellegrini e forestieri in questo mondo, ma anche sul fatto che tale pellegrinaggio è un passaggio di carattere pasquale:

“Often when he spoke to the brothers about poverty, he would insist on the saying of the Gospel: *The foxes have their holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head* (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). Because of this, he taught the brothers to build, like the poor, poor little houses, which they should inhabit not as their own but, like *pilgrims and strangers* (1Pt 2:11; Heb 11:13), as belonging to others. For he would say that the law of pilgrims was to be sheltered under someone else’s roof, in thirst for their homeland, and to travel in peace.”<sup>11</sup>

The spirit of itineracy, expressed in being pilgrims and strangers in the style of life and in the choice of the dwellings of the brothers, remained a very strong element in the question of faithfulness to the beginnings of the Order, shown by the brothers a century and a half after the death of Saint Francis, when the *Fioretti* were composed. In a text which certainly depends upon the words of Bonaventure, the author thus describes the ideals of the primitive Franciscan fraternity:

“Saint Francis and his companions were called by God and chosen to carry in their hearts and preach with their works and words the Cross of Christ. They appeared to be, and were, crucified men, both in their habit and in their austere life, in their deeds and their works. Therefore they desired to endure shame and scorn for love of Christ rather than honours of the world or reverence or empty praise. Instead they rejoiced over insults and were saddened by honours. In this way they went through the world as *pilgrims and strangers* (1Pt 2:11; Heb 11:13), not carrying with them anything besides Christ crucified. And because they were of the true vine, that is, Christ, they produced great and good fruit: the souls they won for God.”<sup>12</sup>

An eyewitness of the life of the friars Minor of the first generation was Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre in the Holy Land. When he describes the life of the first brothers, he also speaks of the fact that they were pilgrims. His witness is very precious, given the fact that it comes from the pen of a non-Franciscan witness, and therefore from a

person who saw the Order from outside and tried to understand the novelty of this way of life. The following text comes from one of his writings, the *Historia Occidentalis*, composed roughly in the years 1221-1225:

“And so the Lord has given back a hundredfold to his servants in this world; on this road they are travelling he keeps his eyes fixed on them, so much so that we ourselves have seen fulfilled to the letter in them what has been written: *the Lord loves the stranger, providing him food and clothing* (Dt 10:18). Indeed, people consider themselves fortunate if these servants of God do not refuse to accept alms or hospitality from them.”<sup>13</sup>

The journey to Emmaus remains for us, Friars Minor today, a challenge to make us live our Gospel calling as pilgrims and strangers, as “mendicants of meaning” who beg for the alms of the Word and of the broken Bread from Christ, who accompanies us along the roads of this world. Our Order has reflected upon this proper characteristic of our calling, particularly in the final document of the extraordinary general chapter of 2006, entitled *The Lord speaks to us along the journey*. Here we quote a paragraph of this document, which can enlighten the significance of being pilgrims with Christ, as applied to our Franciscan life today:

“*The Lord speaks to us along the journey* is not only a title. It is the icon of Emmaus that has accompanied us along the course of this Chapter. We have learnt to express our fears with freedom in the context of a shared faith, and to pose questions regarding our style of life. Our heart has opened up to the mystery of the other, as a place of salvation. We have welcomed the surprise of the interior force that comes forth from Easter, and that makes us return to our brothers and sisters with renewed trust. *The Lord speaks to us along the journey* is a reminder, an experience, a journey, a mandate, an invitation that continues to resound in our hearts. Emmaus is the journey, ancient but always new, that we want to accomplish with each and every one of our brothers.”<sup>14</sup>

The event of Emmaus remains emblematic in the life of Saint Francis and in his evangelical proposal to friars Minor. We have underlined the importance of the journey along the roads of the world, in a spirit of pilgrims and strangers, a journey that is expressed in the vocation to evangelical itineracy. At the same time, such a journey demands a mendicacy of meaning in the life that we friars have embraced, in which we

need to be nourished by the Word and the broken Bread that the Master and Pilgrim, namely the Risen Christ, can administer to us to strengthen our hearts and inflame our hope.

Within the context of the Christian life, which is a journey of discipleship, sustained by the Word and the broken Bread in the Eucharistic celebration, the calling of us Friars Minor on the example of Saint Francis becomes an eloquent expression of how we undertake this journey in the spirit of poverty, as pilgrims and strangers who know that this present world does not pertain to them, but that they are journeying along the experience of the paschal passage of Christ towards the Easter that has no end.

## NOTES

1 THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (2C), 61, in *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*. Vol. II: *Francis the Founder*, New York – London – Manila, 2001, 287-288 (= FAED II, 287-288).

2 *Assisi Compilation* (AC) 74 (FAED II, 175): “One day a minister of the brothers came to blessed Francis who was then staying in that same place, in order to celebrate the feast of Christmas with him”.

3 ST. BONAVENTURE, *Major Legend of Saint Francis* (LMj) 7,9 (FAED II, 582-583).

4 ST. BONAVENTURE, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 7,2: “Towards which propitiatory he who looks at it with a full conversion of face, by looking at him suspended upon the Cross through faith, hope and charity, devotion, admiration, exultation, appreciation [*appretiationem*], praise and jubilation; makes the Passover, that is the *transitus*, together with Him, to pass over the Red Sea through the rod of the Cross, from Egypt entering the desert, where he tastes the hidden bread, and rests together with Christ in the sepulchre [*in tumulo*] as if exteriorly dead, sensing [*sentiens*], nevertheless, as much as is possible according to the state of the way, that there is said to the thief hanging on a cross with Christ: *Today you shall be with me in Paradise* (Lk 23:43).”

5 *Earlier Rule* (ER) 14,1-2 (FAED I, 73).

6 THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Life of Saint Francis* (1C 22) (FAED I, 201-202); 1C 24 (FAED I, 203).

7 *Later Rule* (LR) 6,1-3 (FAED I, 103).

8 ER 9,3-5 (FAED I, 70).

9 *Testament* 24 (FAED I, 126).

10 2C 59 (FAED II, 286).

11 LMj 7,2 (FAED II, 578).

12 *Fioretti* 5 (FAED III, 575).

13 JACQUES DE VITRY, *The Order and Preaching of the friars Minor*, in *Historia Occidentalis* II, c. 32, 12 (FAED I, 584).

14 *The Lord speaks to us along the Journey*. Document of the OFM Extraordinary General Chapter (La Verna – Assisi, 15 September – 1 October 2006), n. 3.

# THE "FRATI MINORI RINNOVATI"

*English translation and adaptation of the presentation of the "Fratelli Minori Rinnovati." Credit official website: <http://www.fratiminoririnnovati.it/storia-della-comunita.html>*

*The information given does not in any way reflect the opinion of our on-line Review Spirit + Life, but aims to demonstrate a fairly recent development of a Franciscan reform within the context of Franciscan history.*

The Second Vatican Council, in its decree *Perfectae caritatis* on religious life, promoted the renewal of religious life according a continual return to the sources and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and to an adaptation of the same institutes to the changed conditions of our times (PC 2). Such a renewal, however, did not always yield the fruits that had been hoped for. After the end of the Council on 8 December 1965, the Church went through a difficult period of crisis in which religious life was also involved. Cardinal Daniélou, in an interview on Vatican Radio in 1972, said: "We are facing a serious crisis of religious life: we cannot speak of a renewal, but rather of a decadence. We need to put an end to all decisions that go contrary to the directives of the Council. Where this seems to be impossible, it is not right to refuse the right to those religious, who want to remain faithful to the Constitutions in their respective Orders, as well as to the directives of Vatican II, to constitute distinct communities. In those cases where the superiors show opposition to legitimate requests, a recourse to the Pope would be more than justified."

In that same period Pope Paul VI multiplied his exhortations to carry out the true renewal of religious life as wanted by the Council. "The desire to take away from religious life all forms of ascetical practices and exterior signs in order to render it, as is normally said, more human and more conforming to our times, is infiltrating itself here and there in the modern mentality of some Christians, even religious, and can lead to that naturalism that does not understand any longer the folly and the scandal of the Cross (cfr. 1Cor 1:23), and that believes that it is reasonable to conform oneself to the ways of life of the world. This is also a note of religious perfection that assumes particular significance in the Capuchin ascetical

school. It is the note of textual faithfulness to those forms, and God willing to the spirit of the primitive Franciscan observance, that had been defended even before the Protestant crisis through an internal reform that was led by the desire to observe to the letter the Rule and Testament of the Founder Saint Francis" (Homily for the Beatification of Ignazio da Santhià, 17 April 1966).

These and similar words of encouragement were immediately welcomed by a small group of Franciscan friars. On 5 June 1968, three Friars Minor Capuchins, brothers Crescenzo da Jesi, Bonaventura da Gangi and Mario da Ostra, obtained from their superiors, permission to live together and to observe *sine glossa*, that is, literally, the Franciscan Rule. After a few months brother Tommaso da Pollena, who had been master of novices for fifteen years in the Capuchin Province of Naples, joined the group, as well as brother Antonio da Cittaducale. After an initial period in which they lived in the guest quarters of the Capuchin Clares monastery of Fabriano, they transferred to the small church of Santa Maria in Civita, some 3 kilometres from Fabriano. This was the moment of the birth of the "Movimento di Fabriano." The newsletter of the Italian Capuchins described the life of the brothers of Fabriano: "According to their method, the Capuchins of Fabriano have not requested to acquire their dwellings, or any other guarantee for their continuity. For now they are content to restore the place and render it habitable, and then they will remain until Providence decides otherwise. Was not this sense of provisional existence one of the characteristics of Saint Francis? In this way one of the dimensions of Franciscan life of the origins has been rediscovered, and now these brothers are trying to live it once more in the present context."

In truth the experience of Fabriano revealed

itself to be the classical point of the iceberg within the Capuchin Order regarding the complex problem of the “return” to the Rule. Soon it became a crossroads of meetings, correspondence and visits. For a certain number of years the Fabriano experience became a point of reference for many persons, and a symbol of the spiritual and structural anguish in religious life in the years following the Council.

The life of the fraternity of Fabriano was inspired by the Proposals of Franciscan life, in which – based upon the underlying principle of the integral observance of the Franciscan Rule – the commitment to renewal was oriented in three directions: poverty, contemplation and community life. From the very beginning, the brothers of Fabriano acquired from the Capuchin Minister General brother Clementinus von Vlissengen, approval of their way of Franciscan life and permission given to the Ministers Provincial to welcome eventual requests from other friars who wanted to join them. Thus the movement of Fabriano was the starting point of similar experiences.

On 12 September 1969, at Bagnella di Omegna (Novara), a new experience of Franciscan renewal was born, upon the initiative of two Friars Minor of Piedmont, brother Umile Minola and brother Leone Girotto. On the Review *Vita Minorum*, brother Umile described the beginnings of this “Little Fraternity”: “Our mini-friary has been arranged in a simple way from an old recreational centre for workers, that has been acquired for our use by the local secular clergy. We do not present ourselves disguised as priest-workers, but as friars, with our habit and barefoot... When people saw us working hard together with their young people who spontaneously offer us a helping hand, or when they see us in the factory with many anti-clerical workers, being content to eat our midday lunch with them by sharing the food that Providence never withholds from those who nowadays try to despise money; or else when, at one o’clock at night, when people go out noisily from the tavern in front of the small church close to our dwelling, they noticed that there was a light on because the brothers were reciting Matins, all these persons began to realise that God can be Someone who is very real in the lives of human persons... from those moments we witnessed many moving returns to the practice of the sacraments.” When brother Leone left this experience after only four months,

the programme of poverty and prayer continued with the witness of brother Umile together with brother Carlo Crevaroli, a stable member of the “Small Fraternity” since October 1970. In order to help the minoritic community of Bagnella, from time to time a Capuchin friar from Fabriano would come, even if only on a temporary basis. The fraternity, however, closed its doors in July 1973, when the brothers who were its members decided to join the Frati Minori Rinnovati some months after the establishment of the “Pia Unione.”

Let us now take a closer look at the events that led to the birth of this new Franciscan family. Since 1969 brother Tommaso da Pollena multiplied his journeys (he would hitchhike by taking lifts) along the entire Italian peninsula, looking for friars whom he could encourage and inspire, in order to strengthen the ideal of Franciscan renewal. The results he hoped for, however, were not always in proportion to his efforts. There were many opinions regarding the way in which such a renewal could be realised, even within the same “movement.”

In the spring of 1971, Don Guccione, parish priest of Torretta, a small village of the countryside of Palermo within the dioceses of Monreale, expressed his wish to host a group of friars from the Fabriano movement in his parish. The friars welcomed this invitation with joy. Thus, brother Tommaso and brother Bernardo da Novi Velia, a student of theology of the Capuchin Province of Salerno, who had been his novice, went to life in Torretta. After a few weeks, in order to meet the demands for studies of brother Bernardo, they transferred to the periphery of Palermo, in the area of Sant’Isidoro, in a poor dwelling consisting of two rooms that Don Guccione had rented for them. At the end of 1971 they were joined by brother Benigno da Canicatti and brother Onofrio da Bolognetta (who remained for only a few months), both of who were Capuchins from the Province of Palermo. In this way the fraternity began to move ahead towards a good numerical and spiritual consolidation.

The common aim of the first brothers was that of observing in a literal way the Rule and Testament of Saint Francis, while remaining within the Order of Friars Minor Capuchins, with a structure that would enable them to receive novices, forming them to their way of Franciscan life and faithfulness to the Rule. After many attempts to be given permission to be officially recognised by the Minister General according to this way of life,

they realised that their requests were in vain.

The solution to this impasse was found in an indication given by the Holy See, namely, that of leaving the Order of Friars Minor Capuchins by requesting a dispensation of their vows and beginning anew as a religious family. In the meantime, in March 1972, between hopes and many difficulties regarding the form of poverty and penance that they embraced, the community of Sant'Isidoro had received a confidential assurance that the Sacred Congregation for Religious was following the experiment with a certain benevolent attitude. Such an attitude meant a prelude for the official approval by the Church, and this encouraged the brothers to continue in their endeavour.

Two months later, the Archbishop of Monreale, Monsignor Corrado Mingo, declared that he was willing to welcome the friars of Sant'Isidoro in his diocese: "I declare that I am willing to welcome under my jurisdiction in order to constitute it as a Religious Association of Diocesan Right under the title of Frati Minori Rinnovati all those friars of the three Franciscan families who would like to live in an integral way and *sine glossa* the Rule of the First Order of Saint Francis of Assisi, according to the primitive traditions of the Franciscan Order, updated according to the mindset of the Second Vatican Council and the repeated exhortations of the present Pope Paul VI" (Letter of Monsignor C. Mingo, 27 May 1972). Finally, during the month of July, the first three brothers, Tommaso da Pollena, Bernardo da Novi Velia and Benigno da Canicatti, were joined by brothers Carmelo da Morano Calabro, Girolamo da Caccamo and Cristoforo da Palermo. This group of six Capuchin friars were the pioneers of the family of Frati Minori Rinnovati, who made this decisive step. On 1 July 1972 Don Guccione transmitted to the Secretary for the Congregation for Religious, Monsignor Mayer, their request for secularisation. After these facts they began to write the provisional Statutes of the future Pia Unione, inspired by the Proposals of the Fraternity of Fabriano. When they obtained the dispensation of their vows from the Holy See, our brothers, on 8 December 1972, made an express request to the Archbishop of Monreale to erect the "Pia Unione dei Frati Minori Rinnovati." The canonical establishment was made on 23 December, although the official date of the beginning of this family was requested for the vigil of Christmas. Around three months

later, with the explicit approval of Pope Paul VI, the Congregation for Religious conceded, with a special indult of the Holy See, that "the religious, who in particular circumstances, separate from their Institute, can conserve their vows, and the Church, in force of a special indult, recognises them as religious, in spite of the fact that their union with their Institute has ceased. This same recognition, with a particular concession, can be extended also to the vows already made in the Pia Unione from those who have requested and obtained the separation from their Order" (Letter of Monsignor A. Mayer, 4 April 1973).

In the first days of July 1973 brother Umile and brother Carlo joined the Pia Unione, and thus closed definitely their experience as a fraternity at Bagnella di Omegna. Brother Carlo Maria describes what he experienced in those early days:

"On 3 July 1973 we arrived in Sicily. We had to face many mysteries and questions! What were we to face? We certainly knew that we were going to live in a friary (a friary *sui generis* of course) where there were other brothers who we already knew, having lived with them for some time in Piedmont. The journey lasted 25 hours, and particularly the heavy heat of the south, for me who was accustomed to the mild summers of the north at the feet of mountains or on the lakeshore, made us feel tired and exhausted. We were welcomed at the station and accompanied to Sant'Isidoro. The church was already in an advanced state of construction, and the train wagons and huts were not yet completely arranged. All the structures stood in open countryside, without any sign of shade from trees or other buildings. The same day when we arrived we settled in a stifling hot train wagon. It was so hot that we felt the heat would make holes in the metal sheets; that was the first day when I tasted the Sicilian heat! It was to be for us a rather hard life for about six months. There were workmen who were building the church, the boundary wall of the friary and the kitchen. We used to help them as we could while keeping faithful to our timetable of prayer, including the night office. It was understandable, therefore, that we were exhausted because of the work and heat. Sometimes I took my turn to cook in the kitchen, and there was not always all that was necessary to cook. Then I began to sew the friars' habits, in the midst of countless difficulties because of space... With God's help we arrived at the feast of the Immaculate Conception, when we

inaugurated the church and transported the kitchen from the metal hut to a properly built room. We had arranged the train wagons, which serve as a dormitory, as well as the wooden hut with our internal chapel, all included within the cloistered area. How can I describe those first months? It is difficult for me to do so! Without doubt there was the enthusiasm of the beginnings, and then we were a group that was so heterogeneous that we could only live together as a result of a miracle of the Lord and the desire to live the Franciscan ideal of the origins. We hailed from different parts of Italy, and we had received a diverse method of formation and education, and above all, we came from different Orders... As I have already stated above, we felt united by a common ideal, namely that of following Francis and his Rule. If the Lord has truly wanted this Franciscan movement, we are

the proof that God can write straight on crooked lines, and that He makes use of the poorest and most miserable persons to show his omnipotence and that everything comes from Him; we are just unworthy servants! We have only done what was our duty to do.”

On 11 June 1983, the Archbishop of Monreale, Monsignor Salvatore Cassisa erected the Pia Unione dei Frati Minori Rinnovati in a Religious Institute of Diocesan Right, and definitely approved the Constitutions on 2 June 1989. In 1979 the Frati Minori Rinnovati opened their first community in Colombia; in 1984 the Institute founded a mission in Tanzania. In 2009 the Institute was present in Italy (3 Fraternities), in Colombia (3 Fraternities) and in Tanzania (1 Fraternity), and was made up of 51 members, of whom 18 priests.



# FRANCIS, CARDINAL HUGO OF OSTIA AND THE PAPAL CONFIR- MATION OF THE RULE

*Felice Accrocca*

*This is a summary of the study by Felice Accrocca, Archbishop of Benevento, “Francesco, il Cardinale Ugo di Ostia e la Conferma Papale della Regola”, in Collectanea Franciscana 86/3-4 (2016), 433-460.*

The pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216) marked a turning point in the relationship of the Roman Curia with the resurgent reform movements, mostly of a lay nature, that had been sidelined during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Innocent III saw the usefulness of some of these movements, particularly the new mendicant Orders of the friars Preachers and friars Minor, for the pastoral activity of the Church in need of reform.

---

## *A strange paradox*

This approach by the Pope was not without its difficulties. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) published its 13<sup>th</sup> Constitution: *Ne nimia religionum diversitas*, with the aim of curbing the proliferation of heterodox pauperistic reform movements, by trying to draw all the new religious orders under the umbrella of the classical religious families embracing the Rules of St. Augustine, St. Basil and St. Benedict. The same founder of the Preachers, St. Dominic of Calaruega, had to accept the Rule of St. Augustine.

The case of St. Francis of Assisi was different. He obtained a derogation of the Council decree, which amounted to not less than a unique papal privilege,

and gave him the possibility to build upon the original *forma vitae* that had been orally approved by the same Innocent III in 1209. The question of privileges was a hot potato in the Order. The memories of brother Leo, transmitted in the *Assisi Compilation*, give us an inkling of this tension. To those brothers who begged him to ask for a special papal privilege in favour of the preaching ministry of the friars Minor, Francis answered: “For my part, I want only this privilege from the Lord: not to have any privilege from any human being, except to show reverence to all and, by the obedience of the holy Rule, to convert everyone more by example than by word” (AC 20: FAED II, 134).

Yet, by this very statement, Francis was paradoxically requesting a privilege, namely that of being dispensed from the Conciliar decree in order to observe a Rule based on his Gospel intuition, which was radically different from the monastic ideal.

---

## *Francis and “his” Rule*

The famous biographer of St. Francis, Paul Sabatier, insisted upon the gap between Francis and Cardinal Hugo. After Francis died and Hugo became Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241), the official interpretation of the Rule was relaxed to make it easier for the Order, led by the influential brother Elias, to develop into a powerful organisation at the service of the Holy See. Yet it was the same Hugo who had supported Francis’ exuberant

Gospel reform and even helped him write the Rule. It seems that between these two great men there was a dialectic tension, since they were different in sensibility and formation, but they both possessed an intense religious passion and a total dedication to the Church.

From the very beginning Francis looked at the

Church of Rome as a natural point of reference to the *fraternitas* that was being born around him. He obtained the approval of his *propositum vitae* that eventually grew to become the *Regula non bullata* of 1221, which was not approved by the Pope since its aim was to be a preparation for a definitive document.

*Giotto, Bardi Chapel,  
Scenes from the Life of Saint Francis:  
Confirmation of the Rule, c.1320*



In *De inceptione* 44 (FAED II, 56), John of Perugia states that, although the friars had an approved *forma vitae*, they still met great difficulties on the part of the bishops whenever they ventured in their missionary activity, particularly after the chapter of 1217, since their Rule was not yet confirmed by the Holy See. This was when Cardinal Hugo entered the picture. Upon his initiative Francis eventually wrote a Rule which was confirmed by Pope Honorius III. Yet the *Legend of Three Companions* 62 (FAED II, 105) states: “(Cardinal Hugo) called blessed Francis to him and took him to the Lord Pope Honorius, since the Lord Innocent was now dead. He had another rule – composed by blessed Francis as he was taught by Christ – confirmed by the same Lord Honorius with a seal solemnly affixed.”

While *De inceptione* insists that it was the Cardinal who *fecit scribi aliam Regulam*, the *Leg3Comp* states that Francis wrote the *Regula bullata* as he was taught by Christ.

---

## The disagreement during the Chapter of Mats

Francis wanted to have “his own” Rule. Yet, brother Leo tells us that, during the Chapter of Mats (traditionally 1221, but according to Miccoli in 1221 and according to Accrocca, Lorenzo Di Fonzo, on Pentecost 1223: L. Di Fonzo, *Il famoso capitolo delle stuoie O.Min. nel 1223*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 98 (1998) 367-390), the friars tried to speak to Hugo telling him to convince Francis to accept the Rule of Benedict, Augustine or Bernard (*AC* 18: FAED II, 132-133). Francis was adamant that he would not accept to have any other Rule than the ideal embraced since the very beginning. At this “the cardinal was shocked, and said nothing, and all the brothers were afraid.”

According to Leo, these friars whom he qualifies as *sapientes et in scientia docti*, were asking the Cardinal to implement the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council. They were not asking for any special dispensations, and Hugo could hardly reject their requests, being president of the chapter precisely to see to it that the Order abided by the Church’s legislation. In front of Francis’ resolute answer, however, the Cardinal desists from defending these learned brothers. He remained silent in front of the *novellus pazzus in mundo*, as Francis described himself, in his urge

to follow the folly of the Gospel according to the logic of the *sapientia crucis*. He even went as far as stating that God would send his *castaldi* (police), namely the demons, to punish these brothers!

This situation of tension is also shown by Thomas of Celano in *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* 188 (FAED II: 366-367): “Once a brother asked him why he had renounced the care of all the brothers and turned them over into the hands of others as if they did not belong to him. He replied: ‘Son, I love the brothers as I can, but if they would follow my footsteps I would surely love them more, and would not make myself a stranger to them. For there are some among the prelates who draw them in a different direction, placing before them the examples of the ancients and paying little attention to my warnings. But what they are doing will be seen in the end.’”

Francis certainly did not wish to go against the Church’s decree stating that whoever wanted to live a religious life had to accept one of the rules already approved by the Holy See. But at the same time, as he expressly states in the *Earlier Rule*, Francis was convinced that the Rule was inspired by Christ: “On behalf of Almighty God and of the Lord Pope, and by obedience, I, Brother Francis, firmly command and decree that no one dare delete or add to what has been written in this life” (*ER* 24: FAED I, 86).

Certainly, Francis was aware of the limitations of the Rule. He knew that the Rule could not legislate all aspects of the Gospel life. We find indications of this fact in the *Letter to a Minister* and in the *Letter to the Entire Order*. In his *Testament*, which Gregory IX in *Quo elongati* (1230) states was written *circa ultimum vitae suae*, Francis insists that this same *Testament* had the aim to help the friars “to observe the Rule we have promised in a more catholic way” (*Test* 34: FAED I, 127).

---

## The decision of Cardinal Hugo

Cardinal Hugo remained silent in front of Francis’ intransigence, not so much because he was embarrassed, but rather because he had to ponder very attentively on such a complicated issue. He was aware that the only way open for him was the most risky one, namely that of helping Francis to rework the text of the Rule in such a way that it would arrive at receiving papal confirmation. That is why, in *Quo elongati*, Gregory IX had to

insist that “while we held a lesser rank (that of Cardinal protector Hugo), we stood by him both as he composed the aforesaid Rule and obtained its confirmation from the Apostolic See” (FAED I, 571). The same document of confirmation of the Rule, the bulla *Solet annuere*, conserved at the Sacro Convento in Assisi, according to Attilio Bartoli Langelì, *La Solet annuere come documento*, in *La regola di frate Francesco. Eredità e sfida*, a cura di P. Maranesi – F. Accrocca (Francisalia, 1), Padova 2012, 91, is a proof of the efforts of Hugo to circumvert the rigid decree of Lateran IV and adapt it to the unique intuition of Francis of Assisi.

Such a courageous decision could spell danger for the Roman Curia, but it was rendered possible thanks to a *fictio iuris* of which even Francis was aware. In fact, Innocent III in 1209 had been very prudent. He promised nothing to Francis and the brothers, but told them that he would re-examine their position later on after having experienced the results of their way of life. Thus he had left a door ajar so that his successors would be able to legislate this new way of life. The fact that a Council had intervened in 1215 to prohibit new religious forms of life did not deter the Holy See from applying the wise principle of letting history decide, more so since this was a case brought forward to its attention 6 years before Lateran IV.

---

### *The friars Minor saved by a “fictio iuris”*

Jacques of Vitry tells us in 1216, that “the brothers of this Order assemble once a year in a designated place to rejoice in the Lord and eat together; with the advice of good men (*bonorum virorum*) they draw up and promulgate holy laws and have them confirmed by the Lord Pope” (*Letter written in Genoa*, FAED I, 580). *De inceptione* 37 (FAED II, 51) states that: “On Pentecost all the brothers used to gather for a chapter near the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. At the chapter they would discuss how they could better observe the Rule.”

The prudence of the Church, however, is evident in the fact that Honorius III twice addressed the bulla *Cum dilecti* (11 June 1219 and 29 May 1220) to bishops, inviting them to welcome the friars Minor as true Catholics who were recommended

by the Lord and by the Apostolic See. John of Perugia, in *De Inceptione* 44, states that after the chapter of 1217: “ministers were elected and sent with some of the brothers throughout almost all the provinces of the world where the Catholic faith was practiced. In some of the provinces they were received, but were not allowed to build houses. From others they were expelled, because people feared that the brothers were not faithful Christians, for the brothers did not as yet have a rule confirmed by the pope” (AP 44: FAED II, 56).

The fact that the Rule was approved after a *fictio iuris* is evident from the very opening sentence of the *Earlier Rule*. Although finalised in 1221, when Innocent III had been dead for 5 years, it states: “Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his successors” (ER 1,3: FAED I, 63). In 1221 Francis was still referring to the fact that, way back in 1209, Innocent III had orally approved his *propositum vitae*, and therefore the *Regula non bullata* was simply a continuation of this same experience already approved by the Church.

It could only be the powerful mediation of the Cardinal of Ostia to help Francis reach his objective. Hugo himself had to face major difficulties, but his juridical ability and the weight of his personal authority helped Francis go through the trial. When Honorius III confirmed the *Regula bullata* on 29 November 1223, in the bulla *Solet annuere*, he clearly stated an undeniable fact: “We confirm with Our Apostolic Authority, and by these words ratify, the Rule of your Order, herein outlined and approved by Our predecessor, Pope Innocent of happy memory” (LR Bulla *Solet annuere*: FAED I, 99).

The hagiographic sources for the life of St. Francis confirm this methodology followed by Francis and Hugo of Ostia. Let it suffice to mention just one example. In his *Officium Rhythmicum Sancti Francisci*, Julian of Speyer composed this magnificent second antiphon of the First Vespers of St. Francis: *Coepit sub Innocentio, / cursumque sub Honorio / complevit gloriosum; / succedens his Gregorius / magnificavit amplius / miraculis famosum* (“Innocent set him on the course / That in the reign of Honorius / Splendidly achieved its aim. / Succeeding these, Pope Gregory / Heaped on him honours greater yet, / When miracles brought him fame”) (FAED I: 327).

## Counter-witness in consecrated life

“

We are facing a ‘haemorrhage’ that is weakening consecrated life and the very life of the Church. The abandonment of consecrated life worries us. It is true that some leave as an act of coherence, because they recognize, after serious discernment, that they never had this vocation. However, others, with the passage of time, have less faithfulness, very often only a few years after professing their perpetual vows. What has happened? The first factor that does not help maintain faithfulness is the social and cultural context in which we move. We live immersed in the so-called culture of fragmentation, of the provisional, which leads us to live in an “à la carte” way, and to be slaves to what is fashionable. This culture fosters the need to always have “side doors” open to other possibilities; it feeds consumerism and forgets the beauty of the simple and austere life, very often causing a great existential emptiness. A third conditioning factor comes from within consecrated life itself, where alongside much holiness — there is much holiness in consecrated life! — there is no lack of situations of counter-witness that render faithfulness difficult. Such situations, among others, are: routine, weariness, the burden of managing structures, internal divisions, the search for power — status seekers — a worldly way of governing institutes, a service of authority that at times becomes authoritarianism and sometimes ‘laissez-faire’. If consecrated life is to maintain its prophetic mission and its appeal, continuing to be a school of faithfulness for those near and far (cf. Eph 2:17), it must maintain its freshness and the novelty of Jesus’ centrality, the appeal of spirituality and the strength of mission, show the beauty of following Christ, and radiate hope and joy. Hope and joy. This shows us how a community is doing, what is inside. Is there hope, is there joy? It is going well. But when there is less hope and there is no joy, it is a bad thing.

Pope Francis

Message to Plenary Assembly

of the Congregation for Consecrated Life

28 January 2017

”

## 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 eremitoriis 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.

**Editor: Noel Muscat OFM**

All correspondence should be  
addressed to  
[muscatnoel@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:muscatnoel@yahoo.co.uk)



**Cover picture:**

*Remains of the Pisan Port in Acre, where St. Francis landed in the Holy Land, 1219*