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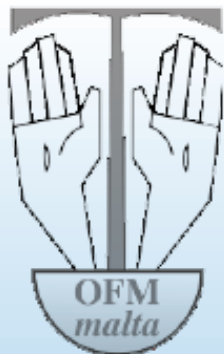
# *Spirit + Life*



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## EDITORIAL

### THE FRANCISCAN IDEAL OF REBELLION

It is not normal to associate the ideal of the Franciscan life with rebellion. We are accustomed to think of Francis of Assisi and his brothers as apostles of peace. At least this is the prevalent idea that results from the custom of reciting the so-called “peace prayer” mistakenly attributed to Saint Francis. What is more troubling is the fact that peace is normally seen as a passive acceptance of a status quo that does not disturb the plans of the main players in the card game of world history. We see world leaders advocating peace through denuclearisation, which means making others destroy their nukes while holding on to their own nuclear programmes, in order to act as big brothers who can save the world from tyrants. Obviously, this is not true peace, and can never be long-lasting. No wonder it generates rebellion, if not also violence.

There is no need to denuclearise the Church, of course. That is, if we do not understand the true meaning of disarming an institution from being adamant in defending the status quo of inertia. But this is precisely what Francis of Assisi did in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. When Paul Sabatier presented Saint Francis as a non-conformist layman at a moment when Franciscan studies were gaining momentum at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he was condemned as being a Protestant heretic who had no right to invade Catholic territory and present a view of sanctity that went against the traditional canons of holiness. His view has the merit of having opened up a new method for modern hagiographic literature, even with all his flaws and interpretations that have been rectified by more recent scholars of Franciscan history.

What is important to notice, however, is simply the fact that the rebellious nature of Francis of Assisi was contagious. He was not the only non-conformist, or eccentric saint. Or rather, he is the most non-conformist and eccentric saint who has been officially canonized by the Church’s institutions. His legacy includes many other brothers who were also saints in their own right, simply because they were non-conformist eccentrics who ended up by being considered heretics worthy to be burnt at the stake. Again, it was a question of an institution that felt that its status quo of peaceful inertia was being challenged.

Historians agree that the early 14<sup>th</sup> century was a period of great difficulty for the Franciscan Order. Just one hundred years after the death of Francis, his sons were being condemned as heretics by the institutions of status quo, whether they were the Church of Rome (or, rather, Avignon), or the political institutions at the service of theocracy, or even the same Franciscan brotherhood that had become a powerful force of inquisition, together with its Dominican counterpart. These poor brothers

were exiled to the remote regions of the Greek islands in the Aegean, or in Armenia, or on the Sila in Calabria or in the arid interior of the island of Sicily. Some others were even burned at the stake in southern France. From the Apennines of the Marches, to the Tuscan hills, to the Provençal countryside, they were persecuted by Popes and ministers generals alike in an organised witch-hunt against non-conformists. They were condemned and excommunicated, imprisoned and tortured, for a very simple reason, namely, that they were defending an ideal of evangelical poverty that had turned into an ideology in the academic circles of the universities and in the canonical legislation of the Avignon papacy.

The struggle had ancient roots. It was the struggle of the non-conformist minister general John of Parma, suffocated by his successor Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. The end result: John of Parma remained relegated as an imprisoned “blessed” of the Order, while Bonaventure rose to the rank of cardinal, bishop, saint and doctor of the Church. This is just one example of how rebellion was suffocated by those who wanted to exalt the dignity of worthy servants of the status quo.

Maybe we are not living in such a tension. Indeed, nowadays we deem as anachronistic and anti-Franciscan any attempt to create a distinction between the “us” and the “them” of non-conformist rebellion and status quo servitude. Even young friars, who should normally be full of life and new visions, have learned the hard lesson of keeping their mouths shut in order to be left in peace and maybe advance to a comfortable and prestigious position within their religious family. Those who feel left out, prefer a personal and intimate choice of conforming outwardly to a system that enslaves them, in order to get the reward of self-affirmation and freedom of action in their private moments. It is the temptation that Italians call “imborghesimento”, that is, of becoming an accepted member of the upper middle class.

The brothers who are called to be “ministers and servants” are often benign and kind in defending this kind of fake holiness, since it suits the interests of a peaceful existence in an otherwise troubled world. That is why nothing new ever happens. And if it does, it gets criticised as being destabilizing, just as happens in rare cases when a Pope happens to shun officialdom and status quo in favour of personal choices that seem eccentric. He gets criticized. He might be doing mistakes. Yet, he is courageous enough to try to bring about change. Just as Francis would do. Maybe the name Francis smacks of rebellion. It has done so for 8 centuries and still haunts all those who dream of a life of lethargic peace in which we destroy nukes in order to dominate with the new kind of tyranny that we call western-style democracy.

*Noel Muscat ofm*

# "HE WAS OF MEDIUM HEIGHT, CLOSER TO SHORT" FRANCIS AS DESCRIBED BY THOMAS OF CELANO

Felice Accrocca  
(*Miscellanea Franciscana* 114 (2014) 54-72)

Thomas of Celano was not only the first hagiographer of Saint Francis. We can state, with the full consent of everyone, that he lived his life *tout court* as the hagiographer of the Order. Although in 1266 the Order of Minors destined to forgetfulness his lives as well as all the other *vitae* of Francis that were in circulation at that moment, Thomas was never reduced to complete silence since his writings, even though not enjoying a wide circulation, were nevertheless well known. In spite of this, the *Vita beati Francisci* was published for the first time by the Bollandists only in 1768, while the *Memoriale* was published in 1806; lastly, although the so-called *Tractatus* was edited, it had to wait 1899 to be published. At that moment Thomas had returned to the centre of historiographic debate thanks to Paul Sabatier, who in 1894 had published his *Vie de Saint François d'Assise*, which marked a turning point in Franciscan studies. Leaving aside the many problems related to the "image" of Francis, in this study I will concentrate mainly on Francis as a man of flesh and bones, with his limits and even with the flaws of his character, which the first biographer has consigned to history.

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## *A specific attention to the corporeity of Francis*

Thomas did not have a personal closeness with Francis and his personal memories cover a limited number of years. Nevertheless, he left us with an extraordinary picture of the saint, which is even more clear than that painted by Cimabue in order to express the physical features of the Saint. Thomas describes the Saint as a normal man. "He was of medium height, closer to short, his head was of medium size and round. His face was somewhat

long and drawn, his forehead small and smooth, with medium eyes black and clear. His hair was dark; his eyebrows were straight, and his nose even and thin; his ears small and upright, and his temples smooth. His tongue was peaceable, fiery and sharp; his voice was powerful, but pleasing, clear, and musical. His teeth were white, well set and even; his lips were small and thin; his beard was black and sparse; his neck was slender, his shoulders straight; his arms were short, his hands slight, his fingers long and nails tapered. He had thin legs, small feet, fine skin, and little flesh. His clothing was rough, his sleep was short, his hand was generous" (1C 83: FAED I, 253). This is a most detailed and true description, as the reference to his short stature reveals, which contrasts openly with the *topos* of the handsome and tall hero which dominated in hagiography and in the description of heroic figures.

Thomas reveals a special attention to the corporeity of Francis, to his ability to preach also with his body, to the point of making of his body a tongue, as the same hagiographer said with a powerful expression, accentuating the dramatic aspects: "He filled the whole world with the gospel of Christ; in the course of one day often visiting four or five towns and villages, proclaiming to everyone the good news of the kingdom of God; edifying his listeners by his example as much as by his words, as he made of his whole body a tongue" (1C 97: FAED I, 266).

It was precisely this physical aspect, this concreteness of a man in flesh and bones that emerges, for example, in the episode of the sermon that Francis delivered in front of Honorius III and the cardinals. Thomas narrates that during the course of that most delicate sermon, Francis could not contain himself any longer for joy, and he uttered his words while moving his feet as if

he were jumping. The hagiographer refers the facts in an honest way, as they had been narrated to him. The fear manifested by cardinal Hugolino of Ostia in front of that scene was very evident: “He was speaking with such fire of spirit that he could not contain himself for joy. As he brought forth the word from his mouth, he moved his feet as if dancing, not playfully but burning with the fire of divine love, not provoking laughter but moving them to tears of sorrow. For many of them were touched in their hearts, amazed at the grace of God and the great determination of the man. The venerable lord bishop of Ostia was waiting fearfully, praying to God that they would not despise the blessed man’s simplicity; for both the glory and the disgrace of the holy man would reflect on himself, since he was the father set over the saint’s household” (1C 73: FAED I, 245-246).

Thomas insists that the Saint behaved in a way that was “non ut lasciviens” since it was burning with the fire of divine love, in such a way that his method of preaching did not arouse the laughter of the audience, but rather made his listeners cry with tears of sorrow. Such a precise detail shows the difficulty of the hagiographer in front of the unusual behaviour of Francis and is a proof to make us render this fact as authentic. Equally true is the note according to which, during the sermon, the cardinal was very apprehensive and was praying to God with great intensity that that kind of simplicity might not generate the contempt of his brother cardinals and of the Pope. The episode appears to be, therefore, the fruit of the witness that Thomas received directly from the same Pope who had commissioned the *Vita beati Francisci* and referred the episode in its integrity. Since it was the same Hugolino of Ostia, who had by now become Pope Gregory IX, Thomas certainly had little margin of space in his action if he had the intention to modify the content of his declarations.

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### *A predilection for the more dramatic aspects of his preaching*

Celano shows that he has an unusual predilection for the more dramatic aspects of the preaching of Francis, as is documented by some episodes in the *Memoriale*, which he wrote in order to complement, and not to substitute,

the *Vita Sancti Francisci*. The hagiographer underlines the fact that Francis often used to sing in French: “Sometimes he used to do this: a sweet melody of the spirit bubbling up inside him would become a French tune on the outside; the thread of a divine whisper which his ears heard secretly would break out in a French song of joy. Other times – as I saw with my own eyes – he would pick up a stick from the ground and put it over his left arm, while holding a bow bent with a string in his right hand, drawing it over the stick as if it were a viola, performing all the right movements and in French would sing about the Lord. All this dancing often ended in tears, and the song of joy dissolved into compassion for Christ’s suffering. Then the saint would sigh without stopping, and sob without ceasing. Forgetful of lower things he had in hand, he was caught up to heaven” (2C 127: FAED II,331). He also recalls the sermon that Francis gave to Clare and to her sisters at San Damiano, after repeated insistence from the part of his vicar, brother Elias: “While the holy father was staying at San Damiano, he was pestered by his vicar with repeated requests that he should present the word of God to his daughters, and he finally gave in to his insistence. The Ladies gathered as usual to hear the word of God, but no less to see their father, and he raised his eyes to heaven, where he always had his heart, and began to pray to Christ. Then he had ashes brought and made a circle with them round himself on the floor, and then put the rest on his own head. As they waited the blessed father remained in silence within the circle of ashes, and real amazement grew in their hearts. Suddenly he got up, and to their great surprise, recited the ‘Have mercy on me God’ (Ps 51) instead of a sermon. As he finished it, he left quickly” (2C 207: FAED II,379-380). Describing the modalities of his preaching, Thomas states that Francis’ “spirit kindled, with boiling heat, his whole expression, and his whole soul melting. He was already dwelling in the highest homeland, the heavenly kingdom” (2C 95: FAED II,310).

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### *The limits and needs of his physical frailty*

It is interesting to note that such aspects were generally kept silent by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, who not only refrained from referring to the physical description of Francis, but also



to the dramatic aspects of his preaching, which included a bodily participation in the announcing of the Word of God. After the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the minister general wrote the *Legenda Maior*, the Order was totally immersed in the activity of preaching; Bonaventure therefore considered it not opportune to repropose to the brothers such an example. In a more general way, we can say that he tended to keep silent about the “corporeity” of Francis, even with regards to those aspects that could sign a limitation or those needs linked with his physical frailty.

As an example we can take an episode that Thomas presents to us in all its details. Celano refers that Francis, who was recovering from an illness, could walk about in the house, by leaning on a stick; one day he went out for a walk, but could find no joy in beholding the beauty of the fields, the fertile vineyards and all that which was beautiful; he even went as far as considering it a folly to love such things, in such a way that he marvelled at his own inner transformation. It is only Julian of Speyer, among the posterior biographers, who takes up these notes of Celano, although in a less synthetic and lively form. He makes use of the words of Thomas, but he also tries to summarise it. He does not say that Francis made use of a cane in the house, but only that he walked outside leaning on a cane. Even the description of the beauties of nature is much less alive, in his work, than it is in the case of Celano. The following is a synoptic presentation of the texts:

“When he had recovered a little, and with the support of a cane, had begun to walk about here and there through the house in order to regain his health, he went outside one day and began to gaze upon the surrounding countryside with greater interest. But the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards, and whatever else was beautiful to see could offer him no delight at all. He wondered at the sudden change in himself, and considered those who loved these things quite foolish” (1C 3: FAED I, 185).

“For when he recovered a bit of his strength, but still needed the support of a staff to move about, he found that everything around him, which he used to find beautiful and desirable, was now the source of a certain loathing – and those who were fond of such things seemed foolish” (Jul 2: FAED I, 371).

On his part Bonaventure simply states that Francis’ body was afflicted by repeated sufferings

in such a way that his soul could receive the unction of the Spirit: “The hand of the Lord was upon him, and a change of the right hand of the Most High, afflicting his body with prolonged illness, in order to prepare his soul for the anointing of the Holy Spirit” (LMj I,2: FAED II,531-532).

In his meritoriously famous pages, Riccardo Bacchelli marked the distance between the paintings of Giotto and Cimabue, both of whom were attentive to the person of Francis, but with diverse aims and ends. “Giotto, as also Dante in the XI Canto of the *Paradiso*, give the epic and religious figure of Francis as a saint; a triumphant idea in the episodes of his life which pertain to the domestic and familiar order, both natural and earthly [...] But Cimabue, whether or not he had seen Francis with his own eyes, succeeded in having an intuition, a vision, a knowledge of him in his creative fantasy, and with such a truth of artistic and historical persuasion, so intimate and truthful, that it is impossible to doubt, Cimabue read and translated figurative images and spoken descriptions of those who would have lived with the Poverello. Otherwise it is not possible to imagine an image that makes us say: It is him!, as much as Cimabue succeeds in the case of Saint Francis. We feel that it is a portrait, an individuating image of a real and living person, a work of nature before that of art: it is Francis in flesh and bones, who corresponds to the precise and particular generic traits and descriptions that the biographies handed down to us regarding his physical person” (R. BACCHELLI, *Non ti chiamerò più padre. Il romanzo di San Francesco*, Jesus/Edizioni Paoline, [no place, no date] 811, 812-813).

I believe that, at the end of the day, the accurate physical description that Thomas makes of Francis in the *Vita beati Francisci*, was the inspiration of Cimabue. I also think that the distance marked by Giotto with respect to Cimabue is the same one that separates the portraits of Thomas and Bonaventure. Certainly, the descriptions of the Companions result more lively and realistic from those of Celano, since they give attention to minute details, like that, for example, linked with the pathologies that Francis suffered during the last years of his life. However, this does not take away the “humanity” of the portrait presented by Celano, a humanity which emerges more than the portrait of the young Saint, certainly marked by a kind of pessimistic moral attitude.

## *The Vita Beati Francisci: a pessimistic portrait of the young Francis*

In effect, in the *Vita beati Francisci* Thomas of Celano describes the youthful years of Francis in strong terms, underlining this period with a rather pessimistic vision “with an insistence that seems to have been willed by him rather than imposed by documentation” (E. P., *Un santo da leggere: Francesco d’Assisi nel percorso delle fonti agiografiche*, in *Francesco d’Assisi e il primo secolo di storia francescana*, Torino 1997, 80). The aim is that of exalting divine Grace, which had transformed a young man who grew up in selfishness and sin in a new knight of Christ.

The result is that of a portrait which is not benevolent at all, especially (but not only) towards the parents of Francis. Raoul Manselli was rather critical regarding the narration by Celano, which he judged as being “a moralistic amplification” of the affirmations of the *Testament*, and therefore incapable of presenting to us “a profile which is historically valid” in the life of Francis before his conversion (R. MANSELLI, *San Francesco d’Assisi. Editio maior*, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2002, 119). It is true, however, that under the cover of a moralistic language and the use of consolidated hagiographic models, the *Vita* conserves fragments of a concrete life experience.

Underlining the will of Francis to overcome all his peers in everything and with a good dose of vanity, the hagiographer presents a description which reflects the precise portrait of a young man coming from a comfortable life of a merchant, entirely given up to construct a good-looking image of himself. Celano affirms that Francis tried to be always first in games, in singing, in a refined way of dressing; he was also first in the use of scurrilous words. He portrays Francis thus: “Since he was very rich, he was not greedy but extravagant, not a hoarder of money but a squanderer of his property, a prudent dealer but a most unreliable steward. He was, nevertheless, a rather kindly person, adaptable and quite affable, even though it made him look foolish” (1C 2: FAED I, 183).

Thomas refers the attention that, during his youthful years, Francis showed towards the poor, towards whom he never refrained from being helpful. In this regard he even shows who Francis

felt guilty at having sent away – contrary to his own custom – a poor man who came in to beg for the love of God, and he decided there and then that he would never refuse anyone who would ask him anything for the love of God. The hagiographer states that Francis maintained this promise faithfully. What is revealing and more interesting is the note upon the character of Francis: Thomas states, in fact, that such an attitude was unusual in him, since he was a man who was full of courtesy: “quia curialissimus erat” (1C 17: FAED I, 195).

Certainly, the great exemplary patrimony inherited from the Agustinian tradition moved Celano to underline the pessimistic notes, and to amplify in a moralistic key episodes which might, in effect, have been more common and down to earth. For our hagiographer, God ended up by triumphing in spite of man, since human negativity could not impede the triumph of Grace. This, however, does not mean that his account lacks historical consistency (ACCROCCA, *Un santo di carta*, 59-64).

## *The Memoriale: a new characterisation of the young Francis*

It is true that the pages of *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (2C) have been the object of rivers of ink not only on the part of the modern biographers of the Saint, but also of the hagiographers and writers of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Responding to the request of the minister general Crescenzo da Jesi, around the years 1244-1246 the Assisi companions of Francis wrote down their *memoirs*, which are determining above all regarding the period of his youth and the first steps towards his journey of conversion. They were intent, without doubt, to correct the dark portrait that Celano had offered to the family of the Saint and to the society of Assisi.

Their narration has been transmitted by the first sixteen chapters of the *Legenda trium sociorum* (L3C). The difference of tone, with respect to the *Vita beati Francisci*, is clear-cut, and it is not necessary to concentrate upon it, even if both sources end up by converging on some basic characteristics (ACCROCCA, *I peccati del giovane Francesco*, in *Frate Francesco* 68 (2002) 191-210). These brothers from Assisi did not limit themselves to give back to Francis those characteristics that, according

to their way of thought, resulted more adhering to the historical reality, but they also narrated many other new facts. Their narration, which was later on entrusted to the pen of an editor who had been commissioned on purpose – according to me, he was a layman – and who remains anonymous, was sent to the minister general, and through him, arrived in the hands of Thomas of Celano, who had been entrusted with completing the *Vita beati Francisci*, which the hagiographer then accomplished with the writing of the *Memoriale*. Thomas (and, alongside him, the companions of the Saint, which appear to be co-responsible in this work), had to recognise the validity of that testimony, in such a way that he not only took over new episodes (and not only these) that had been handed over to him, but also welcomed (constrained or convinced?) the new characterisation attributed to the personality of the young Francis and of his parents. The result is that of an evidently divergent tone and impostation between the two works that were both written by the same author and on the same subject, even though there was a distance of nearly twenty years between one and the other.

Thomas definitely draws a portrait of Francis open to successive developments, capable of reversing his pace when the documentation handed over to him obliged him to change course. In his primitive work of writing he offered an ambivalent portrait of the personality of Francis and of the situation of the Order, and in this way left the door open for ulterior developments.

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### *The Vita beati Francisci: an open document with unedited traits on the personality of Francis*

In the *Vita beati Francisci*, the Order appears as if it is supported by divine grace, like a large cedar tree that widens its branches and rises up to the sky, or like a fruitful vine that spreads its branches in all directions (1C 100: FAED I,270). However, Celano does not hide any perplexity of Francis regarding the future development of his own religious family, as is seen in the case of the prophecy of the double vision of the sweet fruit and of the bad fruit that cannot be eaten, and by that of the fisherman who, upon returning from fishing, throws the bad fish into the sea.

Celano also conserves those traits and aspects of the personality of Francis which cannot be found elsewhere. These, in fact, constitute a unique element of the first effort of this writer. Among them we find not only the physical description of Francis, which then enjoyed an autonomous transmission, as is seen in the fact that it is found also in the codex B-131 of the Biblioteca Vallicelliana of Rome e in the codex E-60 of Sarnano (G. ABATE, *Nuovi studi sulla Leggenda di San Francesco detta dei «Tre Compagni»*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 39 (1939) 653). We also find the vision of the sweet fruit and of the bad fruit that cannot be eaten, which is quoted in the *Liber de Laudibus* of Bernard of Besse (I,14). There are also other aspects of what we can define as the popular religiosity of the Saint, as is evident in the episode of the miracle that occurred in the case of a woman of Sengemini, close to Narni.

Celano states that, once that he had arrived in that place, Francis received hospitality with other three brothers in the house of a God-fearing man, who enjoyed good fame. However, his wife was possessed by a demon, and all the inhabitants of the village knew of this fact. The man asked Francis to intervene in order to help him, and at long last succeeded in winning over his resistance (1C 69: FAED I,241-242). Up to this point the scene presents the usual characteristic. Less usual, however, is the modality with which Francis affronts the demon: he places himself in a corner, and he commands the other three brothers to stand in the other three corners of the house in order to block the demon from escaping. Thomas refers some words that placed in serious difficulty the successive hagiographers and which are certainly not possible to attribute to a re-writing of the same episode: “He called over the three brothers who were with him. He set one in each corner of that house. ‘Brothers,’ he said to them, ‘let us pray to the Lord for this woman, that God may shake off the devil’s yoke from her to His praise and glory.’ He added: ‘Let us stand apart in the corners of the house to prevent the evil spirit from fleeing or deceiving us by trying to hide in the corners.’” After having prayed, he commanded the demon to leave that woman, and the devil immediately obeyed him. Here Thomas registers an aspect which is difficult to ascribe solely to his pen. Francis, in fact, upon seeing the prompt obedience of the devil, believed that he had been deceived, and he immediately departed from that place full



of embarrassment. This action was not linked with humility, but with a tinge of self-love, since he escaped from that place since he believed that he had made a bad impression. What we can attribute to Celano's pen is instead the original note that all this happened through divine disposition, in order to impede that the Saint could boast in vanity of the result of his action. What surprises us more is the successive note, according to which, when the Saint returned another time to that village in company of brother Elias, he escaped from the woman who he had cured, while she was running after him desiring to speak to him, and she then kissed his footprints and rendered thanks to him and to God for the grace she had received. It was only upon the insistence of brother Elias that he finally accepted to speak to the woman, and thus could be assured by many of those present regarding the truth of the event of the diabolic possession and of the successive cure of that woman through his personal intercession.

Such an episode placed the hagiographer in difficulty. This is what I understand from his attempt to find a reason for the embarrassing escape of Francis. On the other hand, it is enough to see how the same event was re-written in the *Vita* of Julian of Speyer, and in the *Legenda Maior* of Bonaventure, in order to be aware of the freshness of the narration by Celano. For me it is more significant that, some years later, when he re-elaborated the same episode in the so-called *Tractatus de miraculis*, the same Celano took inspiration not from his first *opus*, but directly from the *Vita* of Julian (F. ACCROCCA, *Francesco e il demonio. La guarigione della donna di Sangemini*, in *Il Santo* 39 (1999) 221-241).

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## *The Memoriale, a precious treasure-chest*

The rhetoric and rhythmic prose which sustain his writings, and in which Thomas of Celano reveals himself as a master, do not annul the concrete humanity of Francis. In the *Vita beati Francisci*, the Saint lives with the man in flesh and bones, and the hagiographer does not suffocate this reality. Rather, he expresses it in all its extraordinary vitality. Around the mid-1240's the Order requested Thomas to complete the *Vita*, and he did so by writing the *Memoriale*. The first edition was composed around 1247, making use above all

of the testimony of the co-citizens of Francis and of other material of heterogenous origin, among which the most clear are the memories of some companions of the Saint – Leo, Rufino and Angelo – which they had addressed to the minister general, in a document accompanying a letter written in Greccio on 11 August 1246 (F. ACCROCCA, «*Viveva ad Assisi un uomo di nome Francesco*». *Un'introduzione alle fonti biografiche di san Francesco*, Padova 2005, 25; ID., *Un santo carta*, 173-291; R. MANSELLI, *Tommaso da Celano e i «soci» di Francesco: la «Vita II»*, in ID., *Francesco e i suoi compagni*, 60-61). Even though his work was not the result of a solitary effort, but was also supported by the Companions who helped him and who were, in a certain way, a guarantee for authentic truth, the work upon Celano's shoulders must have been enormous.

Thomas faced the many problems placed by the diverse testimonies by conferring to the work a new form, which was inedited with respect to his preceding effort. In particular, he decided to divide the work in two sections of very unequal length: the codex of Assisi distinguishes very clearly a first and a second part. One should, however, underline that such a division is not found in the Roman codex, which transmits the final edition of the *Memoriale*. In the first part Celano followed the chronological order, adopting the biographical genre. Then he organised his material taking as a theme the virtues of the Saint and the proper attitudes of his style, and thus gave life to a kind of *speculum virtutum* that could draw together in sequence many other episodes that occurred in a notable distance of time between themselves, both on the temporal and geographical levels. In the final section, he returned to follow the chronological order, when speaking about the illnesses and the transitus of Francis (the Roman codex also speaks about the canonization and translation of the relics, but the narration is interrupted, since the last folio is missing). The choices made by Celano enjoyed considerable fortune in Franciscan hagiography, not only because some decades later similar *specula* became popular, but also because Bonaventure adopted the same architecture in his *Legenda Maior*. Such a dependency upon Celano is often left in silence.

In the mid-1240's, the Order was aware of the need to interrogate once more those who had a direct contact with the founder. Thomas revealed himself as a precious witness of this effort, and in

many aspects, he remains a witness who could not be substituted. The *Memoriale* is therefore like a precious treasure-chest from which it is possible to extract a richness of episodes unthought of before. Many episodes appear, in fact, for the first time, while others are transmitted uniquely from this text since no other source refers to them, neither before nor after Celano. I would like to reflect precisely upon some of these *hapax* and briefly concentrate my attention on them, since they contribute to restore to us the profile of a man and a saint in all his completeness.

We could refer, for example to the malediction that Francis addressed to a robin, for which it is possible to find various points of contact with the other malediction that Francis addressed to a sow who had killed a newly-born lamb. A couple of robins had received crumbs from the brothers in order to nurture their chicks, but they had then abandoned them. The tiny birds had become familiarised with the brothers, and they would eat with them, until greed took possession of the bigger one (*maior*) which began persecuting the smaller birds (*minores*) in such a way that greed destroyed concord. In fact, this bird would grab all the food, and then it would drive the others away, leaving them without any crumbs. Francis pointed out to the brothers the perverse behaviour of this bird, and he prophesied that it would end up badly. Such a fact did happen since this bird drowned in a pitch full of water, when it tried to drink from it. As if this was not enough, “not a cat or any other animal was found that dared touch that one cursed by the saint” (2C 47: FAED II,279). In the same way Francis manifested his malediction and disapproval with regards to the sow that had used violence against a weak creature, and even in this case, no other animal approached its carcass to eat its flesh (2C 111: FAED II,231). In certain occasions, however, when the weakest ended up downtrodden under the feet of the powerful, Francis could also be very strict, and uttered severe maledictions (M.T. DOLSO, *Le maledizioni di Francesco*, in *Il Santo* 43 (2003) 601-602).

Another case of a strong language is that used when Francis addressed it to one of his companions, who according to the hagiographer was taking care of Francis’ illness and to whom the founder had entrusted the secret of his stigmata. The episode forms part of a section composed of events that have been transmitted uniquely by the *Memoriale*. The hagiographer narrates that “one

time a companion saw the marks on his feet, and said to him: ‘What is this, good brother?’ But he replied: ‘Mind your own business!’” (2C 135: FAED II,335).

I like to draw the attention to an episode that is interesting for multiple reasons, and which I here quote entirely:

“Whenever Saint Francis was being shaved, he would always say to the one who shaved him: ‘Be careful: don’t give me a big tonsure! I want my simple brothers to have a share in my head!’ Really, he wanted the Order to be held in common by the poor and illiterate and not just by the learned and rich. ‘With God,’ he would say, ‘there is no respecting of persons, and the Holy Spirit, the general minister of the religion, rests equally upon the poor and simple.’ He really wanted to put these words in the Rule, but the papal seal already given to the rule precluded it” (2C 193: FAED II,371).

It is interesting, first and foremost, to have an inkling regarding those elements that Francis desired to be included in some expressions of the Rule that for him were particularly significant. This was not possible to do since the text of the Rule had already been approved by a pontifical bulla. This detail is interesting, not only because it helps us to date the episode during the last years of Francis’ life, but above all because it throws light upon his desire to return to that process of continual integration and enriching that had led the friars along the drafting of the first Rule.

In effect, willingly or not, at the vigil of his death, when he was dictating his own *Testament*, Francis ended up by returning to a style that had characterized his religious family until 1223, by introducing new integrative elements in the Rule. The future tensions were to be born out of the interior contrast that was present, in some way, in the personality of the same founder.

The aim of this episode, in any case, is that of showing how Francis wanted his family to be open in the same way to the poor and illiterate as well as to the rich and wise. This is a clear affirmation, that constituted also a clear response to what had been codified in the legislation of the Order after the downfall of Elias (P. MARANESI, «*Nescientes litteras*». *L’ammonezione della Regola francescana e la questione degli studi nell’Ordine (sec. XIII-XVI)*, Roma 2000, 68-85).

In different occasions Thomas mentions the simplicity as a value and underlines how Francis was simple and illiterate, and in this way, he drew

from the sources available to him in a way that was generally faithful. After all, it was the same Francis who defined himself as ignorant and illiterate. The declaration that Celano attributes to him, namely that according to which the simple brothers could have a part of his head, must not therefore appear to as strange or unusual. It is highly improbable that it is the invention of the hagiographer. The same can be stated regarding the courageous affirmation on the Holy Spirit as being the true minister general of the Franciscan family. In spite of its evident contradictions regarding the legislation of the Minors, in an unexplainable way it appears substantially unchanged in the various editions of Celano, while many other texts of analogous style were instead submitted to a rigorous revision.

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### *Concluding remarks*

What emerges from the reading of the work of Celano is therefore a figure of Francis

who is, in many respects, original and down to earth, a man taken out from all schemes, capable of disorienting even the brothers who were closest to him. He is presented as a man of God who cannot be assimilated to human logic and who – once he arrives at the highest elevation of holiness – was capable of remaining faithful to his own humanity, to the point of making it difficult even to his own companions to understand him whenever they were tempted to make him fit into a common logic of good sense and judgment. He was a holy man who, like his Master, was destined to become often a sign of contradiction.

It surprises us how Paul Sabatier could have described Francis as having a “temperament irénique” that of a man who was so severe with his own brothers (P. SABATIER, *Vie de S. François d’Assise*, LIII). This is a judgment which is strongly ideologized, and that ended up conditioning – unfortunately – a great part of Franciscan historiography during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



# FRATRES IGNE CREMATI

Noel Muscat OFM

On 7 May 1318, exactly 700 years ago, four Franciscan brothers were burned at the stake in the market place at Marseilles, after having been condemned as heretics and disobedient brothers by one of their Franciscan confreres, the Inquisitor Michel Le Moine. Their crime was that of having refused to reject their belief that the way of life of the Spiritual *Fraticelli* was a faithful image of the life of absolute poverty of Saint Francis and the first brothers, modelled upon that of Christ and the apostles. Their stubborn resistance was seen as an open affront to the figure of Pope John XXII (1316-1334), who insisted that the Franciscans were to accept property in common just like all other religious orders. Their true persecutors, however, were their Franciscan brethren of the *Communitas Ordinis*, who saw in the Spiritual *Fraticelli* a danger to the progress of the Franciscan Order as a strong institution within the Church.

One of the foremost scholars on the theme of the Spiritual Franciscans, David Burr, has this description of the facts that unfolded in 1317-1318:

“In the spring of 1317, the Franciscans at Narbonne received a letter from Pope John XXII. It was not the sort of message they would have wanted to read. John ordered them to appear at the papal court in Avignon within ten days and explain why they had violently seized control of their house, ejecting their superiors in the process. The friars at Béziers, who had done the same thing, received the same letter. When the erring friars arrived at Avignon, what they faced was not so much a hearing as an ultimatum. John told them to obey; most did, and those who did not were burned at the stake. The first executions took place on May 7, 1318. Victims and inquisitor alike were Franciscans. It was very much a family affair” (D. BURR, *The Spiritual Franciscans. From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis*, The Pennsylvania State University Press 2001).

“Efforts of course had been made to secure their submission, but in vain, and it was not until November 6, 1317, that letters were issued by Pope John and by the minister general of the Franciscans, Michele da Cesena to the Inquisitor Michel, directing him to proceed with the trial. Of the details of the process we have no knowledge, but it is not likely that the accused were spared any of the rigors customary in such cases, when

the desire was to break the spirit and induce compliance. This is shown, moreover, in the fact that the proceedings were protracted for exactly six months, the sentence being rendered on May 7, 1318, and by the further fact that most of the culprits were brought to repentance and abjuration. Only four of them had the physical and mental endurance to persevere to the last – Jean Barrani, Déodat Michel, Guillem Sainton, and Pons Rocha – and these were handed over the same day to the secular authorities of Marseilles and duly burned. A fifth, Bernard Aspa, who had said in prison that he repented, but who refused to recant and abjure, was mercifully condemned to prison for life, though under all inquisitorial rules he should have shared the fate of his accomplices. The rest were forced to abjure publicly and to accept the penances imposed by the inquisitor, with the warning that if they failed to publish their abjuration wherever they had preached their errors they would be burned as relapsed” (H.C. LEA, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, Volume 3, Cambridge University Press 2010, 72-73).

These Franciscan brothers ended up in flames in the market place underneath the church of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules in Marseilles on 7 May 1318.

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## *Pope John XXII and his opposition to Franciscan poverty*

Jacques Duèze was born in Cahors, France, in 1244. He studied medicine in Montpellier and law in Paris, and taught canon and civil law at Toulouse and Cahors. He was consecrated Bishop of Fréjus in 1300. In 1309 he was appointed chancellor of Charles II of Naples, and in 1310 transferred to Avignon. He was favourable to the suppression of the Templars, and defended Boniface VIII and the Bull *Unam Sanctam* (18 November 1302). On 23 December 1312, Clement V appointed him Cardinal-Bishop of Porto Santa Rufina.

After the death of Clement V, and following a two-year long interregnum, Jacques was elected as the second and longest-reigning of the Avignon Popes on 7 August 1316, during a conclave of 23 cardinals in Lyon. Like Clement V he remained in France, residing in the Avignon palace of the popes.

John XXII was a powerful Pope and would not tolerate any opposition. He even arrived at condemning many of the writings of the Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart as heretical in the papal Bull *In Agro Dominico*.

As a Pope he remained famous for his staunch opposition of Louis IV of Bavaria, Holy Roman Emperor. Louis had sided with the cause of the Spiritual Franciscans, especially after John XXII had formally condemned them in the Bull *Quorundam exigit* of 7 October 1317. This political strife ended by making the whole Franciscan Order become opposed to the Pope, especially from 1328, during the time of Michele da Cesena, when a Franciscan, Pietro Rainalducci of Corbara, was elected as Antipope by Louis and took the name Nicholas V. He only reigned for a short time and was eventually pardoned by John XXII, but the Franciscans who upheld the position of the Order, notably Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham, were excommunicated.

The development of the row between the Order and the Pope was the result of an ideological approach to evangelical poverty, but it had been preceded by the revolt of the Spiritual *Fraticelli*. They were present especially in Provence and in the Marche of Ancona. The main exponents of the Spiritual doctrine were Peter John Olivi in France, Ubertino da Casale in Tuscany and Angelo Clareno in the Marches.

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## *The condemnation of the French Spirituals*

The Order held its General Chapter at Barcelona in 1313. Alexander of Alessandria was elected General in place of Gonsalvus of Valboa who had died suddenly. The Pope sent a letter to the Chapter, praising the Order, and commanding the new General to treat the leaders of the Spirituals and their followers with paternal mildness, and to promote them to the offices of the Order if they were thought worthy. Alexander, acting on this command, allotted to the Spirituals of Provence the three convents of Narbonne, Béziers and Carcassonne, where they could live by themselves separated from their opponents. But this peace did not last long. In 1314 both the Pope and the General died, and there was an unusually long vacancy in both positions.

The Spirituals in Provence were irritated at the fact that the superiors deposed by Clement V were

restored to office and dignities, even in the convents which had been handed over to the Spirituals by the preceding General. With the help of lay people, they expelled the friars of the Community from the convents of Narbonne and Béziers, reinstated their own superiors, and adopted a peculiar habit. Their adherents in Provence hastened to these two convents so that their numbers mounted to 120. When they did not obey the commands of their lawful superiors, they were excommunicated and their convents were placed under interdict. The newly elected General next tried mildness and offered them a full pardon. They answered with protests and appealed to the future Pope. When John XXII was elected, the Community brought their complaints against the Spirituals in Italy and France to him.

In April 1317, John cited by name 62 friars from the convents of Narbonne and Béziers to appear before him. Two additional friars came of their own free will: one of these was the notorious Bernard Delicieux (Dulcino). The 64 friars arrived in Avignon toward evening about the feast of Pentecost 1317, marched directly to the papal palace, remained there the entire night and waited for an audience. The result of the audience was a very unpleasant surprise for them. The six speakers of the group were immediately imprisoned: the remainder were handed over to the custody of the convent at Avignon until the Pope should decide what he wished to be done with them.

“The twenty-five recalcitrants were handed over to the Inquisition of Marseilles, under whose jurisdiction they were arrested. The inquisitor was Frère Michel Le Moine, one of those who had been degraded and imprisoned by Clement V, on account of their zeal in persecuting the Spirituals. Now he was able to glut his revenge. He had ample warrant for whatever he might please to do, for John had not waited to hear the Spirituals before condemning them. As early as February 17, he had ordered the inquisitors of Languedoc to denounce as heretics all who styled themselves Fraticelli or *Fratres de paupere vita*. Then, April 13, he had issued the constitution *Quorundam*, in which he had definitely settled the two points which had become the burning questions of the dispute – the character of vestments to be worn, and the legality of laying up stores of provisions in granaries, and cellars of wine and oil. These questions he referred to the general of the Order with absolute power to determine them. Under the minister general Michele da Cesena’s instructions, the ministers and guardians were to determine for each convent

what amount of provisions it required, what portion might be stored up, and to what extent the friars were to beg for it. Such decisions were to be implicitly followed without thinking or asserting that they derogated from the Rule. The bull wound up with the significant words, 'Great is poverty, but greater is blamelessness, and perfect obedience is the greatest good.'

The bull was the basis for the inquisitorial process against the twenty-five recalcitrants. The case was perfectly clear under it, and in fact all the proceedings of the Spirituals after its issue had been flagrantly contumacious – their refusal to change their vestments, and their appeal to the pope better informed. Before handing them over to the Inquisition they had been brought before Michele da Cesena, and their statements to him when read before the consistory had been pronounced heretical and the authors subject to the penalty of heresy. Efforts of course had been made to secure their submission, but in vain, and it was not until November 6, 1317, that letters were issued by John and by Michele da Cesena to the Inquisitor Michel, directing him to proceed with the trial. Of the details of the process we have no knowledge, but it is not likely that the accused were spared any of the rigors customary in such cases, when the desire was to break the spirit and induce compliance. This is shown, moreover, in the fact that the proceedings were protracted for exactly six months, the sentence being rendered on May 7, 1318, and by the further fact that most of the culprits were brought to repentance and abjuration. Only four of them had the physical and mental endurance to persevere to the last – Jean Barrani, Déodat Michel, Guillem Sainton, and Pons Rocha – and these were handed over the same day to the secular authorities of Marseilles and duly burned. A fifth, Bernard Aspa, who had said in prison that he repented, but who refused to recant and abjure, was mercifully condemned to prison for life, though under all inquisitorial rules he should have shared the fate of his accomplices. The rest were forced to abjure publicly and to accept the penances imposed by the inquisitor, with the warning that if they failed to publish their abjuration wherever they had preached their errors they would be burned as relapsed" (H.C. LEA, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, Volume 3, Cambridge University Press 2010, 72-73).

The fires kindled at Marseilles were a signal for the extermination of the Spirituals throughout Provence. We hear of burnings at Narbonne, Montpellier, Toulouse, Lunel, Lodvferre,

Carcassonne, Cabestaing, Béziers, Montreal. A band of a hundred and thirteen Spirituals were sacrificed at Carcassonne from 1318 to 1350. Wadding tells us that the Franciscan inquisitors alone burned one hundred and fourteen of the zealots in a single year (1323). And Angelo Clareno compares the indiscriminate frenzy of the persecutors to the fierceness of rabid dogs and wolves. The works of Olivi were condemned at the Pentecost chapter of 1319 at Marseilles. The result of the fierce persecutions were to stamp out the Spirituals in Provence.

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## *Persecution against Beguins*

The *Lectura super Apocalypsim* of Peter John Olivi is the major work of the Spiritual Franciscans of Provence, as an interpretation of the theology of history seen within the context of the persecution against the cause of the Spirituals. The use of the *Lectura* by the communities of Beguins in southern France was very widely spread, and was the cause of their persecution on the part of the Inquisition. From the acts of the Inquisitors, particularly those of Bernard Gui, we come to know of the importance of these Beguins, who were sympathetic to the Franciscan cause of the Spirituals. Many of them were also members of the Third Order of Saint Francis, and were very fond of Olivi and venerated him as a saint. In her study, *The Angel with the Book*, Louise A. Burnham states that 102 persons, many of them Beguins, were burnt at the stake because of their sympathies to the doctrines of Olivi. Among them the most famous were "the four Franciscan friars who had challenged the Pope, all the authorities of their Order and the Inquisitor of Provence, Michel Le Moine. All of them ended up in flames in the market place underneath the church of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules in Marseilles on 7 May 1318. What was their crime? That of having adhered to the belief in the holiness and teachings of Peter John Olivi. Their followers were immediately regarded as saints and martyrs" (L.A. BURNHAM, *The Angel with the Book*, in *Pietro di Giovanni Olivi Frate Minore. Atti del XLIII Convegno Internazionale della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani* (Assisi, 16-18 ottobre 2015), Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 2016, 384. 365. See also BURNHAM, *So Great a Light, So Great a Smoke. The Beguin Heretics of Languedoc*, Cornwell University Press 2008, 81-84).



# CYPRUS IN THE FRANCISCAN SOURCES

Noel Muscat ofm

The stories of the first brothers who shared with Saint Francis the adventure of the beginnings of the Order of friars Minor abound with curious episodes. Here we are choosing a particular event that occurred, seemingly, in the island of Cyprus, probably during the return journey of Francis from the East in the autumn of 1219. The brother who is the protagonist of the episode is brother Barbaro of Assisi.

Brother Barbaro was a native of Assisi, and is listed as one of the first twelve companions of St. Francis. He accompanied Francis during his journey to the East in 1219 (WADDING, *Annales Minorum*, an. 1219, n. 57). We have no further information regarding him. He is supposed to have died in 1232 and was buried at St. Mary of the Angels (WADDING, *Annales Minorum*, an. 1232, n. 23; *Analecta Franciscana* III, 252, note 1). He is also mentioned by Fr. Giacomo Oddi di Perugia, author of the *Specchio dell'Ordine Minore*, or *Franceschina*, written in 1480 (G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Franciscano*, Tomo I (1215-1300), Collegio S. Bonaventura, Quaracchi 1906 I, 18, note 1).

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## *The episode in 2 Celano 155: FAED II, 247*

“He used to affirm that the Friars Minor had been sent from the Lord in these last times to show forth examples of light to those wrapped in the darkness of sins. He would say that he was filled with the sweetest fragrance and anointed with strength from precious ointment whenever he heard of the great deeds of holy brothers in faraway lands. It happened that a brother named Barbaro once threw out an insulting word at another brother in the presence of a nobleman of

the island of Cyprus. But, when he saw that his brother was rather hurt by the impact of that word, he took some donkey manure, and, burning with rage against himself, put it into his mouth to chew, saying: ‘Let the tongue which spat the poison of anger upon my brother now chew manure!’ The knight was thunderstruck at seeing this and went away greatly edified; from that time on, he freely put himself and all he had at the disposal of the brothers. All the brothers observed this custom without fail: if any of them spoke an upsetting word to another, he would immediately fall to the ground and embrace the feet of the one he had offended, even if unwilling, with holy kisses. The saint rejoiced over such behaviour, when he heard the examples of holiness which his sons themselves produced, and he would heap blessings worthy of full acceptance on those brothers, who, by word or deed, led sinners to the love of Christ. Zeal for souls, which filled him completely, made him want his sons to resemble him as a true likeness.”

The episode in itself is very original. First of all, we are not told where it took place exactly. The mention of the island of Cyprus regards the knight, not brother Barbaro. But we also know that Barbaro accompanied Francis to Damietta in 1219, so the probability of this episode as having occurred in this Mediterranean island is real. Cyprus was an important centre for the Crusades since it lies close to the Palestinian coast. Particularly after the fall of Jerusalem in 1187, Cyprus became an important centre for refuge and a springboard to return to the Holy Land, at a time when the Latin Kingdom was confined to some pockets along the Palestinian and Phoenician coast (Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Acre, Atlit, Arsouf, Jaffa). During the period under consideration, Cyprus had been conquered by King Richard III the Lionheart, during the Third Crusade in 1191. For a brief period of time the island was ceded over to the Order of Templars,

but these had already handed it over to the royal house of Lusignan, which was to govern Cyprus from 1192 to 1489.

Second element is the crude narration of the event. Celano seems to underline Barbaro's penitential action in such a vivid way that it leads one to feel bouts of nausea at imagining what the poor brother did to himself in order to punish himself for having offended his brother. At the same time the action is seen as a courageous deed of heroic proportions, to the point of leaving the knight (maybe a Crusader) who witnessed it dumbstruck. It is important to see the historical details of this action in order to understand its significance even better.

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## *The presence of Francis and Barbaro in Cyprus*

Nicolò PAPINI, *Storia di S. Francesco* I, 75; II, 35, corrected Wadding and others who read *insula Cypru* with *insula Cipii*, a name that he applied to Bastia Umbra, a town close to Assisi. The name would have been linked with the *Cipi* or *Scifi* family. Paul Sabatier, in his critical edition of the *Speculum Perfectionis* p. 88 n. 2 observes that, during the 13<sup>th</sup> century Bastia was known as *Insula Romana* or *Insula Vetus*, but that it was never known by the name *Insula Cipii*. The Codex 686 of Assisi, bearing the *Vita S. Francisci* of Celano, plus the text edited by LEMMENS, *Documenta antiqua franciscana*, III, n. 54, as well as all the manuscripts and editions of the *Speculum*, clearly refer to the name *Cypru* or *Cipri*, and not to *Cipii*. The fact that this episode occurred in the island of Cyprus, a famous island of the Mediterranean and at the time kingdom of the Crusaders, is proved by Mariano da Firenze, Wadding and Paul SABATIER in the *Vie de S. François d'Assise*, c. XIII, p. 259:

"We do not know what itinerary they followed. A single incident of the journey has come down to us: that of the chastisement inflicted in the isle of Cyprus on Brother Barbaro, who had been guilty of the fault which the master detested above all others – evil-speaking. He was implacable with regard to the looseness of language so customary among pious folk, and which often made a hell of religious houses apparently the most peaceful. The offence this time appeared to him the more grave for having been uttered in the presence of a stranger, a knight of that district. The latter

was stupefied on hearing Francis command the guilty one to eat a lump of ass's dung with lay there, adding: 'The mouth which has distilled the venom of hatred against my brother must eat this excrement.' Such indignation, no less than the obedience of the unhappy offender, filled him with admiration" (P. SABATIER, *Life of St. Francis*, Translated by L. Seymour Houghton, London 1908, 227-228). Sabatier adds that this episode could have occurred during the return journey of Francis from the Holy Land to Italy.

The island of Cyprus was a safe haven for the Franciscans who escaped from the destruction of Acre by Sultan Al-Ashraf on 18 May 1291. According to Golubovich, in a manuscript of the Sacro Convento of Assisi, written by a Minorite, which he transcribed and dated to around 1335: "Fourteen friars Minor of the Order of St. Francis (martyrs in Acre). The Guardian together with the other brothers who returned from the city of Acre before its destruction, and who sailed to Cyprus together with many other clerics, religious and lay persons, since they were terrified that they would succumb to their weakness in the face of martyrdom in the hands of the Saracens; and since they did not want to renounce to their faith and to the sacrifice in the name of Christ, and were afraid of the punishments and torments, they rather chose to flee the town, as the Saviour had told his disciples who were still weak, and continue to venerate and adore Christ in the lands of peaceful kings. These fourteen brothers, therefore, constant in their faith, and for the sake of confessing the name of Christ and the true faith, while remaining steadfast, were martyred by the Saracens in their church and friary and were admitted to the glory of Christ and added to the list of martyr saints" (GOLUBOVICH I, 351-352).

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## *Another example of a self-inflicted penance*

It is not the first time that, in the Franciscan Sources, we meet with an example of a self-inflicted penance. Normally these kinds of penances were made when a brother went against the commandment of fraternal charity, as is the case in point of brother Barbaro. One of the interesting details about these kinds of penances is that of chastising the body with something revolting, many times having to do with the act of

eating. There is no need to delve deeper in the kind of revolting penance that brother Barbaro inflicted upon himself on the island of Cyprus, namely that of eating donkey excrement. We will here quote another example, this time from the life of Saint Francis himself, which throws light upon the ability of the first brothers to correct themselves through self-inflicted penances. It is the episode of Francis who ate from the same bowl as a poor leper whom he imagined that he had offended by indicating to brother James the Simple that it was not opportune to introduce lepers at Saint Mary of the Angels.

The episode in *The Assisi Compilation* 64 (FAED II, 166-167) is entitled: “He criticizes Brother James the Simple and as a penance eats with a leper”:

“Once when blessed Francis had returned to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, he found there Brother James the Simple with a leper covered with sores who had come there that day. The holy father had entrusted this leper to him, and especially all the other lepers who had severe sores. For in those days, the brothers stayed in the leper hospitals. That Brother James was like the doctor for those with severe sores, and he gladly touched, changed, and treated their wounds. As if reproving Brother James, blessed Francis told him: ‘You should not take our Christian brothers about in this way since it is not right for you or for them.’ Blessed Francis used to call lepers ‘Christian brothers.’ Although he was pleased that Brother James helped and served them, the holy father said this because he did not want him to take those with severe sores outside the hospital. This was especially because Brother

James was very simple, and he often went with a leper to the church of Saint Mary, and especially because people usually abhorred lepers who had severe sores.

After he said these things, blessed Francis immediately reproached himself, and he told his fault to Brother Peter of Catanio, who was then general minister, especially because blessed Francis believed that in reproving Brother James he had shamed the leper. And because of this he told his fault, to make amends to God and to the leper. Blessed Francis said to Brother Peter: ‘I tell you to confirm for me the penance I have chosen to do for this and do not oppose me in any way.’ Brother Peter told him: ‘Brother, do as you please.’ Brother Peter so venerated and feared blessed Francis and was so obedient to him, that he would not presume to change his obedience, although then, and many other times, it hurt him inside and out. Blessed Francis said: ‘Let this be my penance: I will eat together with my Christian brother from the same dish.’

While blessed Francis was sitting at the table with the leper and other brothers, a bowl was placed between the two of them. The leper was completely covered with sores and ulcerated, and especially the fingers with which he was eating were deformed and bloody, so that whenever he put them in the bowl, blood dripped into it. Brother Peter and the other brothers saw this, grew very sad, but did not dare say anything out of fear of the holy father. The one who wrote this, saw it and bore witness to it.”

Such actions of penance are a sign of the heroic nature of Francis and the first brothers.



# THE VIA CRUCIS OF SAINT LEONARD OF PORTO MAURIZIO, NAMELY, THE VIA SACRA SPIANATA ED ILLUMINATA

*Pietro Messa ofm  
Convivium Assisiense, 5 (2003), 175-190*

If we take into consideration the expressions of popular devotion in Christianity, it is clear that one of them, namely the *Via Crucis*, is one of the most widely-known. Wanting to go deeper in the significance of this expression of popular piety, we are obliged to mention the person who was the main propagator of such a devotion, namely the friar minor Leonard of Porto Maurizio. In his desire to encourage in everybody a journey of a more intense Christian life, he wanted to offer a simple and incisive method of meditation that he himself had experimented. Saint Leonard of Porto Maurizio and the *Via Crucis* are two names that are so closely interconnected that the study of one implies a thorough study of the other and vice-versa. In this perspective the writings of the Saint are the best instrument to understand not only his work of spreading of the *Via Crucis*, but also to make considerations on his efforts in the light of what happened later on. When one would like to do such a profound study, he laments that, except for the letters, of which a critical edition has been published, no other critical studies on his works have been undertaken, and thus one has to work on “raw material”.

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## *Bibliographical note*

Leonard of Porto Maurizio was born in Porto Maurizio, today Imperia, on 20 December 1676 and was baptised with the name Paolo Girolamo. When he was 12 he was sent to Rome where,

under the protection of his paternal grand-uncle, he studied literature and philosophy at the Collegio Romano of the Jesuits. He frequented the courses of some Roman orators, and then desired to embrace religious life. He was fascinated by the way of life of the Franciscan friars of the “ritiro” of the Blessed Bonaventura di Barcellona, known as “San Bonaventura al Palatino”, a hermitage close to the Colosseum of Rome, founded by this Franciscan Blessed in 1662. On 2 October 1697, when he was 21, Leonard began his novitiate in the friary of the Friars Minor Reformed of Santa Maria delle Grazie of Ponticelli (Rieti), taking the name of brother Leonardo. After the novitiate he continued his theological studies at the ritiro of San Bonaventura al Palatino in Rome. He was ordained priest in September 1702 and wanted to go as a missionary to China together with the companion Fr. Pietro Cortese da Vicovaro, but his superiors did not give him permission (cf. A.S. ROSSO, *S. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio e le missioni cinesi*, in *Antoniano* 47 (1972) 455-482). He got sick with tuberculosis, but he was cured through the intercession of the Virgin, by making a vow to dedicate himself to popular missions.

In 1709 he went to Florence, at the ritiro of San Francesco al Monte. From that place he began an intense activity of preaching and of opening new “ritiri”. He passed all his life in popular preaching and the consolidation and promotion of contemplative life in the ritiri: he used to state that his vocation was that of a mission, namely that of being always occupied for God, and of

solitude, namely that of being always occupied in God. In this work he was inspired by the spiritual experience of Saint John Joseph of the Cross, an Alcantarine Franciscan who founded the solitary hermitage of Piedimonte Matese, as well as by that of Blessed Bonaventure of Barcellona. On the example of this last Franciscan he founded the “Solitudine” of Santa Maria dell’Incontro, close to Florence, and also wrote constitutions for this new foundation. Pope Benedict XIV entrusted him with the preparation of the Holy Year of 1750, and in 1749 he preached missions and organised “tridui” (three days of prayer) in Rome. His preaching had fundamentally a moral characteristic, and he would insist upon the various duties and precepts that a Christian should observe. He died in Rome, in the ritiro of San Bonaventura al Palatino, on 26 November 1751. He was declared Blessed by Pious VI in 1796, and was canonized by Pious IX on 29 June 1867 (S. GORI, *Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, santo*, in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 7 (1966) 1208-1221; R. ARDILLA, *Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, santo*, in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* 5 (1978) 589-593; C. VAIANI, *La Via Crucis di San Leonardo da Porto Maurizio*, Glossa, Milano 2003 [“Collana Sapientia”, 10] 19-23). The critical edition of his Letters is entitled LEONARDO DA PORTO MAURIZIO, *Epistolario*. Edizione integrale promossa dal Centro Studi Leonardiani di Imperia, a cura di K. SOLTÉSZ FRATTAIOLI, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 2000.

## Saint Leonard of Porto Maurizio and the Via Crucis

The practice of the *Via Crucis* with the 14 stations of the cross originated in Spain during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was brought over to Italy in its definitive form by the Franciscan Salvatore da Cagliari (M.J. PICARD, *Croix (Chemin de)*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, II-2, 2576-2606; G. ATRIO, *Cuestionario histórico. España, cuña del Via Crucis?*, in *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 11 (1951) 63-69). This Franciscan was returning from Spain, and on 14 September 1628 he erected the *Via Crucis* in the friary of Monte delle Croci in Florence. Leonard of Porto Maurizio had been sent to that same friary at the end of 1709. During the Lent of 1710 the guardian Fr. Pio Batallón da Santa Colomba, a Spanish friar, entrusted Leonard with the preaching during the celebration of the *Via*

*Crucis*. Up till that moment this prayer consisted only in a simple initial exhortation in order to prepare the people to practice with devotion the *Via Crucis*, and then Leonard introduced some meditations for each station and thus began the work of spreading such a devotion.

This pious exercise profoundly influenced the Christian experience of Leonard, to such an extent that in the edition of the *Proponimenti* of 1728 he decided to “make every day the holy exercise of the *Via Crucis* with a cross upon my shoulders” and to introduce “this holy Exercise in all places”. For this reason, Leonard of Porto Maurizio, together with Saint Alphonse Maria de Liguori, became one of the principal apostles who spread the *Via Crucis*.

In the very beginning the *Via Crucis* was a privilege given to Franciscan churches. Leonard worked hard to obtain the privilege that this pious exercise be practiced everywhere in the Church. On 16 January 1731 he obtained from Pope Clement XII the Brief *Exponi nobis*, which authorized the erection of the *Via Crucis* in all churches. During his entire life Leonard personally erected 572 *Via Crucis*, that is “Crosses or Images that represent those Holy Places where the most beloved Jesus suffered the most cruel torments for our love” (LEONARDO DA PORTO MAURIZIO, *Via sacra spianta ed illuminata*, 14). The most important among them was the erection of the *Via Crucis* in the Colosseum, which was blessed on 27 December 1750, which was a Jubilee Year. On that occasion Leonard made a very solemn sermon in which he explained the value of this pious practice. These are the words of the preacher in one of his letters: “In the Colosseum, where tyrants have martyred more than forty thousand martyrs, in this place that was profaned, in order to restore to it the dignity it merits, we are now erecting a very beautiful *Via Crucis*” (LEONARDO DA PORTO MAURIZIO, *Operette e lettere inedite*, 191). As we read in the commemorative plaque placed in 1750 on one of the entrances, the Colosseum was declared by Popes Clement X and Benedict XIV as a place of the martyrdom of the first Christians. It was in this effort to restore to it its Christian dignity that Saint Leonard was allowed to erect the *Via Crucis* in the Colosseum. For Leonard the *Via Crucis* is a school of high Christian perfection that can be practiced by all. It is “the royal road to paradise”, “a perpetual mission”, “a battery against hell”. He supported the power of the *Via Crucis* for salvation

and to obtain divine benefits, and for this reason he brings the testimonies of Saint Albert the Great, Saint Bonaventure and the venerable Spanish nun Maria dell'Antigua. The ultimate aim of this devotion is conversion.

Through the pious exercise of the *Via Crucis* the faithful meditate upon "the great excess of his infinite love...which transcends all expression." They meditate upon the external sufferings of Jesus, but especially upon his internal sufferings that were caused by the love that he showed towards all of us. Leonard places himself in front of the Trinity, and thus contemplates the love of the Crucified:

"Eternal Father, you have given over to death such a dear Son: he is our eternal forgiveness! Eternal Son, here am I, the most cruel executioner who has nailed you to this hard wood: forgiveness. Eternal Word, forgiveness! Eternal Holy Spirit, here am I, who have been opposed with so much ingratitude to all the designs of your holy love: divine Paraclete, forgiveness!" (*Esercizi spirituali*, in *Collezione completa delle opere del Beato Leonardo da Porto Maurizio*, XII, Tip. Tiberiana, Roma 1854, 241-242).

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## *The Via Sacra spianata e illuminata*

The *Via sacra spianata e illuminata* represents the work of maturity inherent to the *Via Crucis*, so that in it we can see the fruit of the evolution that took place from the first model of 1715. It is composed of diverse parts and can be subdivided thus:

(1) Act of dedication to the Sorrowful Virgin Mary; (2) Advice to the reader regarding the difficulties that had to be overcome in order to see the validity of this pious exercise confirmed by the Popes and the conditions to be met so that it will be valid; (3) Brief instruction regarding the institution of the *Via Crucis* and the method of praying it; this part could be defined as the *praenotanda* for the same exercise; (4) The moments proper to the *Via Crucis*; (5) Exhortation to those who have pastoral responsibility in order to spread this Holy Exercise; (6) Pontifical documents in favour of the *Via Crucis*.

The parts which are the work of Saint Leonard himself and which show his spirituality and his thought are the first five.

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## *Dedication to the sorrowful Heart of the "Most Majestic Lady"*

The *Via sacra*, reddened by the most precious Blood of Jesus, is levelled to the solace of the sorrowful Heart of Mary. In the meditation of the passion of the Son, Mary occupies a particular place, since she is the Sorrowful Mother. The author dedicates his work to her, who witnessed martyrdom of sorrow, and who was the first one to follow this Way behind her Divine Son; by praying in this way one declares that he is a servant and slave of the sorrowful Virgin.

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## *Advice to the reader*

From the very beginning Leonard of Porto Maurizio presents the difficulties, or "hurdles", the "sinister interpretations of the Pontifical Briefs", "the contrasts", "the cloudly elements" that tried to be an obstacle to the spreading of the *Via sacra*. In spite of all these contrary elements the way is always levelled thanks to the declarations of Clement XII and the living Pope, Benedict XIV, and one can obtain indulgences for oneself and as a suffrage for the holy souls of Purgatory, in the same way as if one is doing the *Via Crucis* in Jerusalem. This link with the Holy City that historically saw the events of the passion of Christ, indicates the great value attributed by Leonard of Porto Maurizio to the concrete reality of the Incarnation; such a link with Jerusalem is evident even more in the fact that the Franciscans are the custodians of the holy places of Palestine. The author is preoccupied to inform the reader that the *Via Crucis* has the same indulgences of the Holy Sepulche and is ideally linked also with the indulgence of the Pardon of Assisi obtained by Saint Francis in the church of the Portiuncula. According to his judgment the indulgences are most holy, but further on Saint Leonard specifies that "this should not be the sweetest attraction to draw those persons who are more intellectually prepared, who take care of the grades of Grace more than of many indulgences." The conditions to obtain these indulgences are the following:

(1) "The *Vie Crucis* have to be erected by the Friars Minor, and one has to practice this pious exercise with modesty, piety and devout prayer." (2) "Whoever practices this Holy Devotion has to strive to be in a state of grace, since without it one



cannot be pleasing to God.” (3) All the Popes “are in agreement that the work involved in obtaining these Indulgencies as well as the meditation of the Passion of Our Lord had as their aim the act of venerating or meditating the Passion of Christ.” (4) It is requested that the faithful “walk physically from one Cross to another, visiting them one after another, whenever this is not physically impossible for them.”

The Prayer must be available to all, and this is the aim of this pious exercise: “Since the principal effect should that of praying, it is to be hoped that the spreading of the *Via Crucis* would introduce in the people the custom of meditation, and through this, the reform of the customs.”

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### *A brief instruction*

The *Via Crucis* is none other than “a devout representation of that sorrowful journey, that the beloved Jesus made from the house of Pilate to Calvary.” It is a possibility to go through the *Via Dolorosa* of Jerusalem for those who cannot go to the Holy Land. When one practices the *Via Crucis*, one “is contemplating with tenderness of heart all those torments and sufferings that [...] our most beloved Jesus suffered under the weight of the Cross, for our own good.” Whoever practices the *Via Crucis* must be involved with his imagination and affection, “with devout recollection, imagining that he is accompanying Jesus to Calvary, keeping one’s eyes fixed on the ground, with the crown of thorns in his hand, and with his heart turned to God.” For the great benefits that the practice of the *Via Crucis* entails, Leonard invites the devout to practice it every day.

The Crosses are fourteen, according to the number of the stations, namely the stops that Jesus made along his journey to Calvary. Leonard reminds also of the origin of this devotion and recalls the opinion of Adrcomius, according to which the Most Blessed Virgin was the first one who used to follow every day the *Via Dolorosa*.

Leonard proves the validity of this pious exercise, which he calls “queen of all devotions”, citing as another proof the revelations of Saint Bridget, an apparition of Jesus to a servant of God, Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Saint Albert the Great, the opinion “of a Parish Priest of a good spirit”, the Life of the venerable Spanish nun Maria dell’Antingua, and “a Parish Priest worthy of being believed.” In all this work one sees the

style of Saint Leonard, while he explains the diverse conditions with which one should practice this pious devotion, starting from the fact that it can be prayed publicly or privately.

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### *A practical and devout method to pray the holy exercise of the Via Crucis*

The scheme proposed corresponds to what is indicated in the preceding *Brief instruction*: it includes an entrance Antiphon, an act of contrition, the beginning of the journey. For each station: the enunciation of the station; the singing of the *Orme sanguine*; the antiphon *Adoramus te Christe*; meditation corresponding to the station; the recitation of the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be; the supplication *Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri*; the final singing of the *Stabat Mater*; the concluding prayer; benediction with the Cross.

The central part of the exercise is the meditation corresponding to each station. In the beginning there is a brief representation of the place which the particular station commemorates. There follows a detailed exhortation to consider the “submission”, the kindness, the affliction, the suffering, with which Jesus was living that particular episode. The devout person is then invited to reflect upon his wicked and sinful life, which was the cause of the same Passion, and how distant he or she is from the life of Jesus. To the “admirable submission, humbleness, patience, humility, piety, nakedness and excessive suffering” of Jesus one should consider the contrast of the “murmurings, impatience, lack of peace, pride, ingratitude, vanity, and unworthy behaviour” of the sinner.

The meditation is concluded by an invitation to turn “with the tears of the heart and with the expression of the tongue”, to the Lord in order to ask him the grace of a sincere conversion which would lead one to be confirmed to him. All the meditations in fact aim at leading the faithful, considering the sentiments of Jesus and Mary, to commit oneself in a programme of a true change of heart. The heart of man must learn to know and to be attracted to the heart of Jesus, therefore to be attracted to the intimacy of the mystery of the Passion.

The meditation of the fourteenth station contains the only reference to the Resurrection: “O my most pious Jesus [...] I adore you buried, and closed in the Holy Sepulchre; but I would also like

you to be closed in my poor heart, so that united to You, this holy exercise might help me to rise to a new life of grace, and I will be able to persevere in order to finally die in grace.”

As one can note, the resurrection is also conceived according to a moral perspective, as is usual in the author: he invites his readers to carry Jesus in their heart in order to rise to a new life. The resurrection is referred to the sinner, who dies because of sin, but rises again to a new life through grace.

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## Exhortation

Fully convinced of the effectiveness of the *Via crucis*, Saint Leonard addresses those, especially the members of the Order of Friars Minor, who are responsible for the care of souls. He begins his exhortation with a consideration of a lamentation for the situation of moral and spiritual degradation in which the faithful let themselves fall. In front of the world, which has become “a place of iniquity”, the preacher does not hesitate to propose the *Via crucis* as a remedy for such evils. The meditation of the sufferings that “for our love the good Jesus endured, gives light to the intellect and inflames the will.”

For Leonard the *Via crucis* is a remedy against moral decadence, and he proposes it without falling into moralistic exaggerations. If the preacher has to be incisive in denouncing sins and vices, at the same time it is always the love of God that can change the orientations of the heart. It is the consideration of the Passion, that is of God’s love, that can unveil “the stains of the heart”, “stimulate to correspond to such love [...], and thus win over every other desire of this world.”

To “the Prelates, Bishops, Archbishops, Parish Priests, Curats” Saint Leonard makes an appeal to spread the *Via crucis* by taking as a foundation the pontifical approvals. When he speaks to the Friars Minor he reminds them of the example of Saint Francis, the concessions made to the Order, the decisions of general chapters. For Leonard the minoritic Order in the Church has the historical duty of spreading the devotion towards the Passion, and this comes from the founder himself who received the stigmata as well as from the fact that the same Order is entrusted with the care of “the places sanctified by the most precious Blood of the Saviour.”

To the friars who were afraid that the spreading of the *Via crucis* also in the Parishes would

diminish the number of faithful who would go to the Franciscan churches, Leonard responds by stating that they should do all efforts so that “all the faithful can often think and carry stamped in their hearts the Passion of Our Redeemer.” The friars should strive to spread the practice of the *Via crucis* everywhere, and they should leave its celebration to the conclusion of the missions, by inviting the people, particularly in the twelfth station, “to ponder on the significance of a God who dies for me.”

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## Final considerations

Leonard of Porto Maurizio has the merit of having proposed to the faithful a practice of piety which helps in the journey of conversion and which also gives nourishment to spiritual life; he spread a method of meditation which has a clear Christological connotation and can be practiced by all. In the admonitions regulating the pious exercise of the *Via crucis*, he affirms:

“With this means Meditation becomes easier, and is introduced gently even in the case of the most uneducated and illiterate persons as a method of Mental Prayer. In fact, by looking at the Paintings, in which are illustrated with vivid colours the sufferings of the Saviour, they can be led to penance, and even for those who cannot read they become as if they were so many books, and with their effectiveness they can move the fantasy of the simple in order to feel compassion for the sufferings of the Redeemer.”

Leonard does not have the pretence of being a theologian, and his writings are witness to the lack of great and original theological reflections. His greatness is rather evident in the pastoral and missionary action. In the *Via crucis*, which originated in Spain during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and which found in him an untiring apostle who spread it, Leonard introduced in each station a meditative theme with an admonition that pushes one to an act of conversion. With him we see the passage from the simple *Via crucis* to a *Via crucis predicata* (G. CANTINI, *Un scelto operaio nella messe. S. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio e la sua predicazione*, Roma 1936, 62-72). Thanks to his ability to draw from authors that nourish the sentiments of Christian piety from the mystery of the cross and thanks to his pastoral ability to announce it to the faithful, Leonard can be

compared to the great Franciscan preacher who he called in familiar terms “my Bernardine of Siena.”

In his considerations for each station of the *Via crucis* Leonard wanted to unite to the announcing of the mystery the aspects of Christian moral values. For him the life of Jesus was the premise for an upright behaviour. Each reflection initially presents the event of the Passion on which one is called to reflect and in a second moment one can draw the consequences for moral life. Commenting upon the death of Jesus on the cross, Saint Leonard affirms: “How is it that there cannot be anyone in this miserable audience who, on the example of Jesus, will not give over his soul in order to forgive his enemy all the offences he receives from him? That is why I address you, sinner [...] may God who lead you to the *Via crucis* [...] in order to make you understand that He loves you, that He forgives you” (LEONARDO DA PORTO MAURIZIO, *Prediche e lettere inedite*, 92). While he recalls the moral teaching of the commandments, Leonard confronts them with contemporary problems, like those having to do with social justice or those linked with public degradation of morals.

One can affirm that, for Leonard, as Romano Guardini writes, the *Via crucis* helps those who pray not only to face the problem of suffering, but also to win over it “by knowing how to find once again in the single stations their own life” (R. GUARDINI, *Via Crucis*, Editrice Queriniana, Brescia 1992, 9). Saint Leonard can be defined an enthusiastic adorator of the Cross who knows how to involve his audience in the meditation of the “*excessus amoris*” and “*excessus doloris*” of the Crucified; this permits to him to introduce on a popular level a form of simple prayer, that precisely for this characteristic, was able to spread so rapidly.

However, this addressing in a special way the affective dimension by continually recalling the aspect of a superabundant love, as is evident in the sufferings that are linked to it, is able to relegate to a second place the noetic or intellectual dimension. Maybe our Saint lacked the ability to unite to a great fervour of love an equally intellectual judgment. Such an attitude acquires a relevant weight if one considers that in those years the phenomenon of Illuminism was growing, which introduced the need to walk along the light of reason. One can recognise a kind of screen between this emergent need of the light of reason and Saint Leonard of Porto Maurizio, for whom the *Via crucis* is “a light which enlightens the minds.”

Moreover, to the pious exercise of the *Via crucis* there lacks the paschal element of the Resurrection. The prayer concludes with “the Holy Sepulchre, in which the Most Holy Body of Jesus was placed.” The “sorrowful Heart of Mary” is desolate when “she sees herself deprived of her most beloved Son”. The faithful are invited to kiss the stone of the Holy Tomb, by making a great effort to deposit their heart in that place. Everything finds its conclusion in the Holy Tomb and the element of the Resurrection is not present. According to Cesare Vaiani this is the result of the fact that “in the passion and death of Christ Leonard reads in synthesis the entire mystery of salvation, with a unified intuition that leads one to the theological view of John’s Gospel, which recognises in the cross the glory of the Lord, which is the glory of a love without limit” (C. VAIANI, *La Via Crucis*, 82). It was only after many years, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that the need was felt to evidence the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection, and a fifteenth station was added, namely that of the Resurrection (F. RUIZ, *Croce*, in *Dizionario enciclopedico di spiritualità*, I, Città Nuova, Roma 1990, 677-678). Others conclude the pious exercise with Jesus placed in the Tomb of the Resurrection. Others still have substituted completely the meditation of the mysteries of the Passion with the mysteries of the Resurrection, and in this way the *Via lucis* was born, with the risk of falling into the opposite problem, namely that of underlining the Resurrection and forgetting about the Passion.

Another weak point of the structure of the *Via crucis* of Saint Leonard is the lack of biblical foundation and a link to the liturgical life. Some episodes are taken from tradition, while others which have a biblical foundation are omitted. The Benedictine monk Giuseppe Maria Pujati (1733-1824) wrote a *Via crucis* in which the stations that did not have a biblical foundation were omitted (the three times that Jesus falls, the Veronica, the meeting with Mary, the singing of the *Stabat Mater*). This formula that was more faithful to the biblical text was adopted by the bishop of Pistoia Scippione de’ Ricci because it was inserted in the programme of reform that culminated in the *Pistoia Synod* of 1786. Both the work of Pujati, as well as that of Scippione Ricci introduced strong polemical arguments in religious quarters.

Successively this lacuna was filled by adding to the reflections of each station some Gospel texts, which became ever more central in pious practice. In these last decades the practice of the *Via crucis*



has been reformulated by substituting the stations of devotional origin with others that evidence fundamental biblical episodes in the journey of the Passion, as are those of the agony of the garden of Gethsemane. In 1991, during the traditional *Via Crucis* of Good Friday presided over by the Pope in the Colosseum, a different structure of this pious exercise was adopted, in such a way that it was more faithful to the biblical text with respect to the classical 14 stations of the *textus receptus* (UFFICIO DELLE CELEBRAZIONI LITURGICHE DEL SOMMO PONTEFICE, *Via Crucis. Sette testi di Via Crucis presieduta da Giovanni Paolo II al Colosseo*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1995, 9).

Besides the effort towards the spreading of the *Via crucis*, Leonard of Porto Maurizio, on the steps of Franciscan spirituality, also strove to spread the need for the confirmation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. In this work he affirms that he was inspired by “the most subtle Scotus, who with a most particular light of heaven clarified the most high mystery of the Immaculate Conception” (LEONARDO DA PORTO MAURIZIO, *Panegirico della Santissima Annunziata*, in *Collezione completa delle opere del Beato Leonardo da Porto Maurizio*, III, 219). Leonard refers to John Duns Scotus, who affirmed that Mary is Immaculate since she was preserved from original sin (*preservatrix redemptio*) and for this reason she is the supreme glory of the redemptive work of Christ (L. CIGNELLI, *La mariologia di Giovanni Duns Scoto e il suo influsso nella spiritualità francescana*, in *La vita spirituale nel pensiero di Giovanni Duns Scoto*, Ed. Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose “S. Bonaventura”, S. Maria degli Angeli – Assisi 1966, 98-102; *La dottrina mariologica di Giovanni Duns Scoto*, a cura di R. ZAVALLONI – E. MARIANI, Edizioni Antonianum, Roma 1987 (“Spicilegium Pontificii Athenaei Antoniani”, 28). While affirming his dependency upon the thought of Duns Scotus, Leonard does not present the Scotistic arguments and does not give any theological details on the foundations of the truth of the Immaculate, not even in the famous letter written to Msgr. Alessandro Belmonte, secretary of the Briefs of Benedict XIV (S. GORI, *San Leonardo da Porto Maurizio apostolo della devozione alla Vergine Immacolata*, in *Palatino francescano*, San Bonaventura al Palatino, Roma 1980, 63-101).

Leonard could have linked the two realities by developing the scotistic idea that Mary

Immaculate is the best fruit of the Passion, and of Redemption, that is, of the mystery that is the object of meditation of the *Via Crucis*. Leonard had all the elements to help him unite the two realities, and if he had done this his spirituality and his work would have been a unified whole and more respectful of the harmony of all the aspects of Redemption. It is as though he lacked the ability to have a holistic view, a synthesis.

A possible trace for research, which we have just presented, can be of help to come to the knowledge of such a synthesis, which Leonard did not accomplish, between the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the practice of the *Via Crucis*. Such a synthesis, however, could have been conceived by one of Leonard’s admirers, like for example the Blessed Leopold of Gaiche, some friars of the *Reformella* (the movement of “ritiri” that developed through the work of Blessed Bonaventure of Barcellona, of which the friary of San Bonaventura al Palatino formed part), the same Pious IX, who was an admirer and often visited the retreat of San Bonaventura al Palatino (C. GUASTI, *Vita di S. Leonardo da Porto Maurizio*. Introduzione, note e aggiunte a cura di P. SEVERINO GORI O.F.M., Vita e pensiero, Milano 1951, 57).

Reading the works of Saint Leonard of Porto Maurizio and going through the episodes of his life, we grasp the Franciscan environment of the devotion to the Passion, to the Immaculate Conception, to Saint Joseph, but we also note the absence of the centre of the spirituality of Saint Francis of Assisi, namely that of looking at Jesus in order to understand his relationship with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. He never speaks of Jesus except in relationship of love that offers itself to the Father; the Passion is disassociated from the context of Trinitarian relationships. Thus, when the Christian is called to follow the example of Jesus, he is called to sacrifice, to offer his life, but more as a “solitary hero” than within an ecclesial reality which is an image of the Trinity. The Trinitarian dynamic of the Passion is lacking, and therefore, in a certain sense, the ecclesial dimension of the moral life that should be born of it. In this respect Saint Leonard is very far from Francis of Assisi, and is very much a son of his times, or, to express ourselves less drastically, with the words of Cesare Vaiano, he is “a man of the eighteenth century, who then discovers that he was a Franciscan.”

## The prophet becomes an emanation of the clergy

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These thirteenth-century saints were in fact true prophets. Apostles like St. Paul, not as the result of a canonical consecration, but by the interior order of the Spirit, they were the witnesses of liberty against authority. The Calabrian seer, Gioacchino di Fiore, hailed the new-born revolution; he believed in its success and proclaimed to the wondering world the advent of a new ministry. He was mistaken. When the priest sees himself vanquished by the prophet he suddenly changes his method. He takes him under his protection, he introduces his harangues into the sacred canon, he throws over his shoulders the priestly chasuble. The days pass on, the years roll by, and the moment comes when the heedless crowd no longer distinguishes between them, and it ends by believing the prophet to be an emanation of the clergy. This is one of the bitterest ironies of history. Francis of Assisi is pre-eminently the saint of the Middle Ages. Owing nothing to church or school he was truly theodidact, and if he perhaps did not perceive the revolutionary bearing of his preaching, he at least always refused to be ordained priest. He divined the superiority of the spiritual priesthood. Francis's official historians have done for his biography what Giotto did for his little sanctuary. In general they have done him ill-service. Their embellishments have hidden the real St. Francis, who was, in fact, infinitely nobler than they have made him to be. Ecclesiastical writers appear to make a great mistake in thus adorning the lives of their heroes, and only mentioning their edifying features. They thus give occasion, even to the most devout, to suspect their testimony. Besides, by thus surrounding their saints with light they make them superhuman creatures, having nothing in common with us; they are privileged characters, marked with the divine seal; they are, as the litanies say, vials of election, into which God has poured the sweetest perfumes; their sanctity is revealed almost in spite of themselves; they are born saints as others are born kings or slaves, their life is set out against the golden background of a tryptich, and not against the sombre background of reality.

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Paul Sabatier  
Vie de Saint François d'Assise  
Preface

## 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.

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**Cover picture:**

*Fresco portrait of St. Francis, by Cimabue. Lower Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi*