

July - September 2011

Spirit + Life



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

97



Quarterly journal of
Franciscan culture published
since April 1986.

Layout:
John Abela ofm
Computer Setting:
Raymond Camilleri ofm

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

All original material is
Copyright © TAU Franciscan
Communications 2011

Contents

- Editorial 2
- Brother Leo of Assisi,
Companion of St. Francis..... 3
- The Last Supper of St. Francis
and the image of the New
Adam (1)..... 10
- Life of St. Francis
of Assisi..... 17
- Quote 23

97

EDITORIAL

THE TRUE NATURE OF ONGOING FORMATION

There is no denying that consecrated religious life in the Church is at a crossroad. Many have blamed the shortage of vocations as the real reason for this crisis, but the true picture is very different. It is easy to blame external factors such as shortage of vocations in order to hide one's head in the sand and not face the true reasons for the crisis in religious life. The Order of Friars Minor is one of the largest religious families in the Church. Yet it has suffered from an acute decrease in numbers in these last decades. Indeed, since 1975 the Franciscan Order has decreased to nearly half of what it was then. True, religious Orders are all suffering from decreasing numbers, but the percentage of friars abandoning the Franciscan Order has been greater. So where is the problem? Maybe the real problem has to do with formation in the Order. Because of its true democratic character which is the pride of us Franciscans, the Order also faces the challenge of the danger of being fractured. It has been so for all its long life. I insist, interior freedom is the characteristic mark of the Franciscan and nobody will dare change this. But freedom does not mean disagreement over the fundamental values which make up Franciscan life. Unfortunately in some sections of the Order this is exactly what is happening. We are discussing what the identity of the Franciscan friar is, whether we should be a clerical or lay Order, whether we should continue praying in a conventual and monastic way or choose new forms of prayer, what does our poverty imply in practice. The end result is that we have been experimenting over and over again, and are arriving nowhere. Maybe we were better off when things were clear-cut in our legislation. Maybe it is high time we return to become a counter-current family, just as we were born in the radical choice of Francis of Assisi. To be fraternal does not mean to welcome everybody and everything without a criterion of healthy discernment. It means that our ongoing formation is fundamental, but that it cannot just be an aesthetic polishing of structures but has to go deep into the heart of our existence. It means knowing our tradition, loving our saints and teachers, loving our roots and never yielding to half-measures. It also means being proud of who we are without being haughty, but also clear in the fact that there is no such thing as vague expressions like "we are all the same". If we are religious Franciscans, we are not the same as others. We are different. We have to look different. We have to believe that our Franciscan habit is not an ancient mediaeval dress which is now out of fashion, that our liturgical prayer is not a practice adapted for monks but not for us, that our poverty is not just a slogan to be defenders of the poor without sharing their lot. Otherwise we will be lost in a new age of globalisation in which the logic of the cross is falling into oblivion.

Noel Muscat ofm

BROTHER LEO OF ASSISI, COMPANION OF SAINT FRANCIS (1)

Wieslaw Block

English translation and adaptation of a paper by Wieslaw Block, published in «Frate Francesco» 77/1 (2011) 7-32.

Brother Leo is a very important personage among the group of the first brothers of Francis of Assisi. His entire life was characterised by a special friendship with the Saint and by a profound life of prayer. This paper is based upon the affirmations of the Franciscan Sources and other texts of the period, and has the aim of describing the development of his spirituality, first during the period of his intimate closeness to Francis, and later, after the death of the Saint, as a living witness of the primitive period of the Franciscan spring.

1. The Life of Brother Leo

Leo was born at the end of the 12th century probably in Assisi.¹ Even though many sources narrate episodes from the life of brother Leo, it still remains difficult for us to describe it, since the majority of the witnesses present the same episodes and in the entire hagiographical work of Celano and Bonaventure he is never mentioned by name.² Maybe it was Leo himself who requested the biographers to omit his name in the biographical sources. A clue regarding this petition of Leo can be found in the episode in which Thomas of Celano hints at the presence of four Francis who ministered to the sick Francis. Celano does not indicate their names, “out of regard for modesty”:

“These brothers were men of virtue, devoted to God, pleasing to the saints, and well-liked by people. The blessed Father Francis rested upon them as a house upon four pillars. I omit their names for the present, out of regard for modesty, which is a close friend of these spiritual men [...] This virtue graced those men and made them loveable and kind to people. This grace they all held in common, but a particular virtue also adorned each one. One had outstanding discernment [Angelo Tancredi?], another had extraordinary

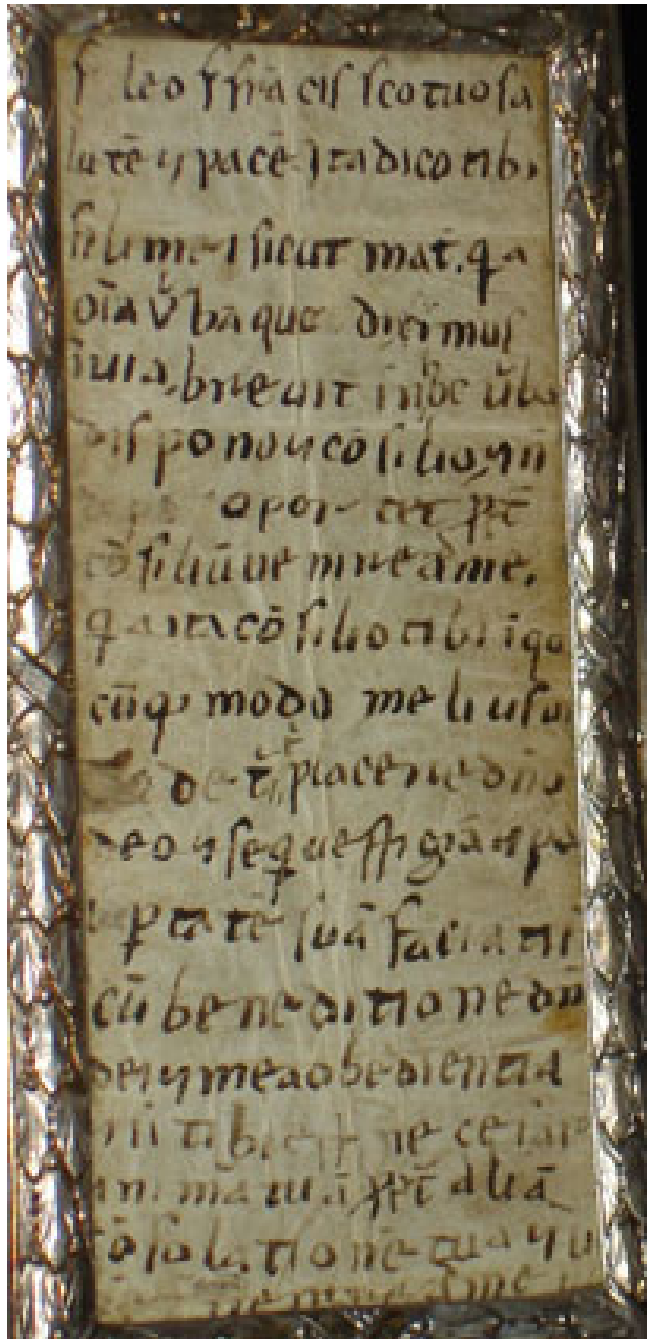
patience [Bernardo or Rufino?], one was famous for his simplicity [Leo?], and the last had great physical strength along with gentleness of spirit [Rufino or John de Laudibus?].”³

We know absolutely nothing regarding the life of Leo before his encounter with Francis. Maybe the two knew one another before the Saint’s conversion, as we can deduce from these words of Thomas of Celano:

“Now there was in the city of Assisi a man he loved more than all the rest. They were of the same age and the constant intimacy of their mutual love made him bold to share his secrets with him. He often brought him to remote places suitable for talking, asserting that he had found a great and valuable treasure. The man was overjoyed, and since he was so excited about what he heard, he gladly went with him whenever he was summoned.”⁴

According to Paul Sabatier, this anonymous young man was Leo.⁵ It is very probable that Leo joined Francis after the approval of the primitive form of life. Leo was already a priest by then, and he became the confessor of Francis and his inseparable “*secretarius*” – as Attilio Bartoli Langeli explains – in the original meaning of one of is custodian of secrets; not in the modern sense of ‘secretary’ which is misleading.⁶ It is, however, also true that Leo, having a good knowledge of Latin, could help Francis to write down his intuitions.

Leo must have possessed a rather tormented and restless spirit, but at the same time he was preoccupied to serve the Lord in the best way and in a more perfect manner. A witness to this is the letter of Francis to Leo: “In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprints and poverty.”⁷ Leo often journeyed close to his friend; the presence of Francis, his words and his way of life were for him a constant model of evangelical life. Leo, “little lamb of God”,⁸ as Francis would call him, grew



Francis' Letter to Leo

spiritually in every moment in the school of the Gospel, following the footsteps of the Saint of Assisi.

The Sources do not permit us to reconstruct the details of Leo's journeys. Probably Leo lived for long periods of time at the Portiuncula, in the period in which Peter Cattanio was vicar general (1220-1221). From the spring of 1223 Leo remained constantly by Francis, during the moment in which the Saint composed the *Later Rule*, as well as in 1224, when the Saint received the stigmata on La Verna. It was in this place that Francis gave Leo another writing, the *Chartula* or Parchment, containing the *Blessing* and the *Praises of the Most High*. This was a moment of pain for both Francis and Leo. Francis was seeing that his plan to live the Gospel had not been completely accepted. He was going through an interior drama which led him to search for solitude and isolation. In this choice he was

faithfully followed by his companion Leo. During the first months of 1225 "brother little lamb" accompanied Francis in his preaching tour of Umbria and Marche. Then he remained close to him during his stay in Rieti and Fonte Colombo for the treatment of his eyes, as well as during Francis' last journey in Siena, Cortona and Assisi in 1226, and finally during the moment of the Saint's death on 3rd October 1226.

We can only imagine the state of Leo after the death of Francis. Without his companion and friend, Leo just collapsed. His sad and afflicted spirit – according to Attilio Bartoli Langeli – found a sure point of reference and help in Clare, who offered a complete harmony "in the faithfulness to the memory and will of Francis and, furthermore, a kind of institutional attachment, which was helpful to a brother who was by now willingly living a solitary life."⁹ It therefore seems plausible that Leo had helped Clare to write the *Letters to Agnes of Prague*.¹⁰ It is not, however, evident that, before the death of Clare, Leo was chaplain of the community of San Damiano, since the only chaplain we know of during that period was brother Marco. Brother Leo remained close to Clare until the day of his death. The *Legend of Saint Clare* dedicates the last chapter of the first book to the episode of the death of Clare, who was surrounded by her sisters and by the first companions of Francis, Angelo and Leo:

"Those two blessed companions of the blessed Francis were standing there: Angelo was one of them who, while mourning himself, consoled those who were mourning; the other was Leo who kissed the bed of the dying woman."¹¹

This witness of the *Legenda* helps us to understand the profound and intimate relationship that united Leo and Angelo, as well as other brothers,¹² to Clare, who with courage and resourcefulness succeeded in defending the memory and the Christian proposal which Francis had indicated to her.¹³ In Assisi, on the day of the death and funeral of Clare, the Pope was present with his household. Leo, together with the other friars, certainly participated to the last rites celebrated at San Damiano, and then he took part in the solemn funeral in which it seems that Clare would have been proclaimed a saint without a regular process of canonisation:

"Like an unexpected piece of news, the word of the untimely passing of the virgin struck the entire population of the city. Men and women ran to the place; people flooded the place in such great number that the city seemed deserted. Everyone proclaimed her a saint; everyone proclaimed her dear to God. Among the words of praise not a few flowed with tears.

The Podestà with a squadron of soldiers and a crowd of armed men kept careful guard that night and day so that the loss of the precious treasure that lay within might be prevented [...]

The next day the entire Curia came. The Vicar

of Christ with the cardinals arrived at the place and the entire city directed its steps to San Damiano. It came time to celebrate the divine praises when, after the brothers had begun the Office of the Dead, the Lord Pope suddenly declared that the Office of the Virgins should be celebrated, not that of the Dead. It seemed as though he would canonize her before placing her body in the tomb.”¹⁴

The strong link between Leo and Clare is also shown in the fact that, after the death of the Saint, Leo was convoked by bishop Bartolomeo Accoramboni of Spoleto,¹⁵ together with brother Angelo, Leonard archdeacon of Spoleto, Giacomo archpriest of Trevi and brother Marco, chaplain of the monastery of San Damiano, to be part of the tribunal instituted by the same Bartolomeo for the process of canonization of Clare, ordered by Innocent IV with the apostolic letter dated 18th October 1253. The process took place in Assisi at the end of November of the same year.

After the death and canonization of Clare, Leo together with a group of brothers, continued to live along the footsteps of Saint Francis in his search for solitude. In fact, he retired to small friaries and hermitages, where he had lived before with Francis. There are references to his presence in Greccio in 1246, at La Verna in 1259, at Monteripido near Perugia, probably after the death of brother Giles, that is in 1262, and at the Portiuncula around 1268.¹⁶

It was probably in 1263, on the occasion of the transfer of the Clares from San Damiano to the new basilica where Clare was buried, that Leo and Angelo donated to sister Benedetta, the first abbess of the monastery after the death of Clare, the *Breviary of Saint Francis*, so that she would conserve it always “in memory and devotion of the holy father, who would often read it.” This breviary has a great importance, also because Leo wrote in it some notes which reflect his spirit.

On the life of brother Leo we have scant information – as Enrico Menestò states – and most are not one hundred per cent sure. We remember only the one found in the letter that Bonaventure sent from La Verna in October 1259 to the monastery of the Clares in Assisi, in which we can deduce that Leo was the chaplain of the nuns during that particular moment.¹⁷ Six years had passed from the death of Clare, and Bonaventure who had been master of theology in Paris, in 1257 had also become minister general. In this new commitment he also had to occupy himself with the disciples of Clare and it is for this reason that he wrote the letter. Bonaventure does not hide his scarce knowledge of Clare and her *sorores*, but says openly that, in order to have information, he had made recourse to brother Leo:

“To the beloved daughters in Christ Jesus, the Abbess of the Poor Ladies of Assisi of the Monastery of Saint Clare and all her sisters, brother Bonaventure,

minister general and servant of the Order of Friars Minor, sends his greetings of health with the desire to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, together with the most blessed virgins who are always ready to await him when he comes.

My dear daughters in the Lord, I have shortly known, through our most dear brother Leo, who was companion of the holy Father, that you try hard to serve Christ poor and crucified in all purity as brides of the eternal King, and for this I feel overjoyed in the Lord.”¹⁸

Clare, therefore, and her sisters who came after her, remained loyal and close to brother Leo, and he also established with them a spiritual relationship in order to serve together Jesus Christ, poor and crucified, as Bonaventure underlines in his letter.

Brother Leo died on 13th November 1271 after the death of the other companions of Francis, Rufino (†1249) and Angelo (†1257).

2. The spirituality of Brother Leo

We are not going to touch at this point the writings of brother Leo, which touch upon the Franciscan Question, which regards the manuscript tradition of Leo and of his companions. We shall instead pass immediately to the description of his spirituality, presented in the light of the works that were definitely produced by him. On the other hand, this task remains arduous since we do not possess texts with a uniquely spiritual style, and with all probability, these do not even exist. The spirituality of Leo has therefore to be gleaned from his writings, which were composed with a unique aim: to keep alive the memory of his holy father Francis. In the description of the spirituality of Leo, I think that we can distinguish two principal periods: the first one refers to the years lived with Francis and his first companions, the second to the long period following the death of the founder.

2.1. Leo as disciple of Francis

Leo initiated and matured his spirituality during the years spent close to Francis, when he did not only walk side by side with the founder, but above all could listen to the secret thoughts of his heart, and maybe sometimes – as a priest and confessor – offer his suggestions or comment for him some Biblical text. At the same time, it was certainly Leo to be guided by Francis, and we do possess some elements regarding this. One is found in the so-called *Liber exemplorum*¹⁹ that presents the memories of brother Leo handed down to us, this time, by a certain brother Pietro:

“Brother Pietro narrated this fact that brother Leo, companion of Saint Francis, confided with him: ‘When I was still a newly-ordained priest I was

accustomed to prolong the rite of the Mass. In fact I experienced divine consolations and therefore it was sweet for me to prolong the celebration. One day blessed Francis called me, and speaking to me with familiarity, told me: My son, brother Leo, do as I tell you: celebrate the Mass with all dignity, but do not stop too much during the celebrations, and conform yourself to the usage of the other priests. If the Lord gives you some special grace, when you finish the Mass, retire to your cell and there meditate and enjoy the divine consolations, if heaven will concede this to you. I think that this behaviour is better and more secure. In fact, because of the bystanders, it would easily be for you an occasion of self-glory or another inordinate sentiment, and the devil would immediately steal from you the merits of this special devotion. But in your cell nobody will see you, and you can abandon yourself with confidence to your devotion, and there the devil will be in difficulty to find the occasion to tempt you.”

The memory of Leo went back in time, to those unforgettable moments in which he celebrated the Eucharist for the first time. The celebration was for him a moment of grace and of profound prayer, and since he did not have experience, Leo prolonged it and forgot that there were other persons around him. Francis became aware of this danger and counselled Leo to conform himself to the other priests in the celebration of Mass. The memory of Leo helps us to enter into his soul and into the spirit which guided him during his youthful years. He was a priest full of ideals, his heart burned when he celebrated Mass. He experienced divine consolations and he was not aware that others did not experience the same sweetness in their hearts. Francis therefore teaches Leo the way to interiority, asking him to hide the graces he received and not succumb to the danger of self-glory. The teaching of Francis was very similar to that of Jesus, who in Mt 6:6 invites his disciples to pray behind closed doors to their heavenly Father who sees in secret. We marvel at the maturity shown by Francis, since he also was still a young man at the time and was also at the beginning of his spiritual journey. In spite of this he takes note of the danger that his brother was facing, and helps him with the words of Jesus to hide an exaggerated sense of piety, and without offending him, indicates to him true evangelical piety.

Another point of reference that permits us to make further progress in rediscovering the spirit of Leo is the autograph that Francis left his companion after a conversation he had with him while they were walking together.²⁰ It is difficult, indeed nearly impossible for us to date the letter. The majority of scholars think that it was written during the final years of the life of Saint Francis, maybe some time before he received the stigmata and certainly not after 1224, since during the last two years of Francis' life Leo was always close to him, and the two would not have needed to

communicate through letters.²¹ These are the words of the Letter:

“Brother Leo, health and peace from Brother Francis! I am speaking, my son, in this way – as a mother would – because I am putting everything we said on the road in this brief message and advice. If, afterwards, you need to come to me for counsel, I advise you thus: In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprint and poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience. And if you need and want to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation, Leo, come.”²²

Brother Leo was undoubtedly going through a crisis, since he felt that he desired to serve the Lord in a better way, even in a perfect way. It seems typical of his youthful spirit to feel such a crisis. Leo was becoming aware that with the passage of years, according to his way of seeing things, he should have served the Lord better. In spite of the conversation he had had before with Francis, the Saint decided to write a letter to him. Maybe Leo was asking his master to repeat what he had told him some time before, when they were walking together and he requested his personal counsel and consolation. Francis' answer was full of motherly affection. In this answer we find the echo of what the *Later Rule* states: “Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another let them show that they are members of the same family. Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit?”²³ The Poverello addresses Leo with the same spirit and speaks to him like a mother (*sicut mater*) to her son, giving him clear indications about how he should proceed, and at the end of the letter, inviting him to come to meet him.

J. Dalarun, speaking about the relationship mother-son, says: “The mother stands for the minister just as the father for the abbot. Maternity is the figure of a government of service.”²⁴

Certainly Francis and Leo did meet and conversed together, but we do not possess any clue as to the content of their conversation. The text of the Letter indicates in what direction Francis' counsel might have gone, since he writes: “In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprint and poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience.” This counsel uncovers the kind of formation that Francis transmitted to his brothers. To follow the footsteps and poverty of Jesus Christ is a dominant indicative, an excellent precept. The Friars Minor should live according to this proposal; it was the *forma vitae* of their newborn spirituality. This counsel of Francis has to be seen within the framework of the new way of life and practice of the evangelical “hierarchy”, described in the double



Francis' blessing to Leo

expression mother-minister. Whereas to the mother-minister of the Franciscan fraternity one applies the notion of *consilium*, to the relationship father-abbot of the monastic community, one has to apply the notion of *mandatum*. At the same time, Francis uses another verb in the expression, namely *disponere*. Francis writes to Leo: *dispono et consilio*. *Disponere* means first of all to organize, or to institute, to prescribe, to ordain. Leo comes to know that his mother-friend wanted to gather all the words that he had told him along the way (*omnia verba*) in one single word (*oc verbo*) – the word of his *consilium*, which becomes a decree and an order.

Concluding the first part of the letter we see how Leo and Francis had spoken along the way, and that this conversation was newly recorded by Leo in the request for the letter. Francis transformed all this in his letter of answer in a few words, or better still in a word of counsel-order, indicating to his friend that which was truly important, namely to live simply the precept of the Gospel by following the footprints and the poverty of Jesus Christ. This precept is none other than the heart of the evangelical vocation of the Saint

and his brothers.

The lesson does not end here. After having given him this fundamental indication, Francis leaves to his companion total freedom to live it out in his daily life, in whatever way it seemed better for him, according to true obedience. In fact, the Third Admonition reminds us: “Whatever he does and says which he knows is not contrary to his (the superior’s) will is true obedience, provided that what he does is good.”²⁵ The spirit of Leo and of the other brothers grew in this double climate of trust: trust towards the Lord, who is in grade of guiding those who, through divine inspiration, have begun to live this life, and also trust towards one’s own brothers, who are also responsible for one’s own vocation.

After having answered to the request of his friend, the Saint concludes his thoughts indicating to Leo not to come back to him: “if you need and want to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation, Leo, come.” The sense, however, should be: “you do not need to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation.” This prohibition, written by Francis himself, remains difficult to understand, but maybe it is not an expression of hard-heartedness,²⁶ but simply expresses a real difficulty: we are far away from one another – says Francis – and therefore I am sending you this letter

to contact you; I do not need to continue to talk to you, since by now I have already given you my advice. But immediately afterwards Francis seems to feel sorry for having said so, and adds the second part permitting Leo to return to him for the sake of the good of his soul.²⁷ The first part of the letter is essentially juridical, then in the later addition Francis’ style becomes more spiritual. Leo learns from the words written directly by the Saint that his mother-friend will always remain his spiritual father, his faithful and trustworthy brother, his point of reference and his spiritual councillor and help, who is always ready to see him every time Leo feels that he needs to return to him.

There is another Source where we find the elements that describe the spirit of brother Leo. This time the companion of Francis is presented in the state of anguish and of a spiritual crisis, which had been tormenting him for a long time. We are during the unforgettable Lent that Francis spent between 15th August and 29th September on Mount La Verna. The *Memoriale* gives us an account of what happened. The description is also taken up with small variations by the *Legenda Maior* XI,9 and the *Legenda minor* IV,6²⁸:

“While the saint was secluded in a cell on Mount La Verna, one of his companions was yearning with great desire to have something encouraging from the words of our Lord, commented on briefly by Saint Francis and written with his own hand. He believed that by this means he would be set free from, or at least could bear more easily, a serious temptation which oppressed him, not in the flesh but in the spirit. Though growing weary with this desire, he feared to express it to the most holy father. But what man did not tell him, the Spirit revealed. One day Saint Francis called this brother and said: ‘Bring me paper and ink, because I want to write down the words of the Lord and his praises upon which I have meditated in my heart.’ What he had asked for was quickly brought to him. He then wrote down with his own hand the *Praises of God* and the words he wanted and, at the end, a blessing for that brother, saying: ‘Take this paper for yourself and keep it carefully to your dying day.’ The whole temptation disappeared immediately. The letter was preserved; and later it worked wonders.”²⁹

Francis first wrote the *Praises*, using one side of the parchment; then in a second moment, he made use of the backside of the same parchment in order to write the *Blessing* to brother Leo, asking the Lord to bless him. In fact, more than a simple text, that parchment was intended – by the hagiographers Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure – as a powerful relic, written by Francis at the moment of the stigmata.

In the texts of Celano and Bonaventure we find the mention of a “serious temptation, not of the flesh but of the spirit,” which disturbed the heart of Leo. What kind of temptation was Francis’ friend suffering from? Neither Celano nor Bonaventure provide the answer. In their redaction of the facts Francis, after having written the *Praises* and the *Blessing*, returns to Leo saying: “Take this paper for yourself and keep it carefully to your dying day.”³⁰ Instead, in the Little manuscript³¹ we find another detail, which is very interesting, since it affirms that the serious temptation regarded the observance of the Rule: «*Accipe hanc chartam, et custodias regulam diligenter usque ad diem mortis tue.*» The omission of *regulam* in Celano and Bonaventure makes us think that the object of Leo’s cherishing the parchment was its value as a relic, whereas the proposal of ms. Little recalls in some way his faithfulness to the Rule.

The idea that brother Leo was being disturbed because of the failings of the Rule remain, therefore, only a hypothesis, according to which we can understand why he made recourse to Francis to have consolation and comfort and – maybe – also a counsel on how to follow in a better way the footsteps of the Lord.³²

To be continued...

NOTES

- 1 A different tradition states that Leo was born in Viterbo, cfr. E. MENESTÒ, *Leone e i compagni di Assisi*, in *I compagni di Francesco e la prima generazione minoritica*. Atti del XIX Convegno internazionale (Assisi, 17-19 ottobre 1991), Società internazionale di Studi Francescani, Spoleto 1992, 41.
- 2 The first modern author who presented a life of brother Leo was Paul Sabatier, in the occasion of the edition of the *Speculum perfectionis*. According to Sabatier Leo was author of the *Speculum*. Cfr. P. SABATIER, *Speculum Perfectionis, seu S. Francisci Assisiensis Legenda antiquissima, auctore fratre Leone*, Paris 1898.
- 3 1C 102 (FAED I, 272).
- 4 1C 6 (FAED I, 187).
- 5 Cfr. P. SABATIER, *Études inédites sur saint François d’Assise*, Paris 1932, 163. Other scholars indicate brother Elias, who is not mentioned among the first companions.
- 6 A. BARTOLI LANGELI, *Gli autografi di frate Francesco e di frate Leone* (Corpus Christianorum. Autographa Medii Aevi V), Turnhout 2000, 94 note 38.
- 7 ST. FRANCIS, *A Letter to Brother Leo* 3 (FAED I, 123).
- 8 The exhumation of Leo’s remains in 1755 revealed how Leo’s skull was particularly large. A testimony to this fact is given to us by an eye-witness, Fr. Ubaldo Tebaldi: “I myself have taken in my hands with great respect the skull of brother Leo, which was so large that it seemed to be that of a calf. I was astonished and understood immediately why Francis used to call Leo ‘little lamb of God’, but sometimes also ‘fra Pecorone’ (brother large lamb), not only for the greatness of his body, but especially for that of his head.” Cfr. MENESTÒ, *Leone e i compagni di Assisi*, 41-42.
- 9 BARTOLI LANGELI, *Gli autografi*, 94.
- 10 Cfr. T. JOHNSON, *Clare, Leo, and the authorship of the fourth letter to Agnes of Prague*, in *Franciscan Studies* 62 (2004) 91-100; A. MARINI, «Ancilla Christi, plantula sancti Francisci». Gli scritti di Santa Chiara e la Regola, in *Chiara di Assisi*. Atti del XX Convegno internazionale (Assisi, 15-17 ottobre 1992), Società internazionale di studi medievali e francescani, Spoleto 1993, 128 note 58.
- 11 LSC 45 (CAED 316).
- 12 We should here add that, before speaking of Angelo and Leo, the *Legenda* underlines the presence of other brothers and the express will of Clare that the spiritual friars would assist her by reciting the Passion of the Lord and his holy words. In the presence of the dying Clare there was present also brother Rinaldo, who “encouraged her to be patient in the long martyrdom of so many illnesses” and brother Juniper, who aroused an immense joy in the Saint (LSC 44-45: CAED 316-317).
- 13 M. GUIDA, *Chiara e il papato: resistenze e “normalizzazione” di una esperienza cristiana*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana salentina* 18-19 (2002-2003) 119.
- 14 LSC 47 (CAED 318).
- 15 Bartolomeo Accoramboni was bishop of Spoleto for 35 years, from 1236 to 1271. After the death of Frederick II in 1250, the bishop took upon himself the civil, as well as the religious power, of Spoleto. In 1253 Innocent IV entrusted him with the duty to institute the process of canonisation of Clare of Assisi. Since the preceding year he had conducted the process for Simone da Collazzone, he probably became for the Pope a guarantee for the good result of the process on the holiness of Clare. The bishop of Assisi at the time was the Franciscan

- Niccolò da Calvi. He was not asked to preside over the process, since in 1253 he was chaplain and confessor of the Pope and remained close to him until the Pope's death in Naples on 7th December 1254. This fact can explain the absence of the bishop of Assisi in the process of canonisation of Clare, and the reason why the process was entrusted in the hands of the bishop of Spoleto. Cfr. GUIDA, *Chiara e il papato*, 125 note 64.
- 16 Cfr. STANISLAO DA CAMPAGNOLA, *Gli spirituali umbri*, in *Chi erano gli spirituali*. Atti del III Convegno internazionale (Assisi, 16-18 ottobre 1975), Società internazionale di Studi Francescani, Assisi 1976, 85, 88-89.
- 17 Cfr. MENESTÒ, *Leone e i compagni di Assisi*, 44-51; Bartoli Langeli is convinced that Leo was never a chaplain to the Clares, cfr. BARTOLI LANGELI, *Gli autografi*, 95.
- 18 "Intelligens nuper, dilectae in Domino filiae, per carissimum nostrum fratrem Leonem, quondam socium sancti Patris, quomodo velut sponsae Regis aeterni servire Christo pauperi crucifixo in omni puritate studeatis [...]" S. BONAVENTURAE *Opusculum XIX. Epistolae officiales, Epistola VII (Opera omnia VIII)*, ex. typ. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi) 1898, 473-474.
- 19 L. OLIGER, *Liber exemplorum Fratrum minorum saeculi XIII*, in *Antonianum* 2 (1927) 239 note 70.
- 20 The *Letter to Brother Leo* was written on a parchment measuring 130x60mm on 19 lines. The parchment is conserved in the Chapel of the relics of the Cathedral church of Spoleto. See: D. LAPANSKI, *The Autographs on the «Chartula» of St. Francis of Assisi*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 67 (1974) 18-37; A. PRATESI, *L'autografo di san Francesco nel Duomo di Spoleto*, in *San Francesco e i francescani a Spoleto*, Spoleto 1984, 17-26; BARTOLI LANGELI, *Gli autografi*, 42-56; C. PAOLAZZI, *Per gli autografi di frate Francesco: dubbi, verifiche, riconferme*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 93 (2000) 3-28.
- 21 Sabatier dated the letter 1221. Accrocca believes that it was written before 1224. Cfr. BARTOLI LANGELI, *Gli autografi*, 44.
- 22 ST. FRANCIS, *A Letter to Brother Leo* (FAED I, 122-123). Latin text: *f leo f francisco tuo sa / lute et pacem. ita dico tibi / fili mei sicut mater quia / omnia verba que disimus / in via, breviter in oc verbo / dispono et consilio, et non / oportet propter / consilium venire a me. / quia ita consilio tibi in qo / cumque modo melius vi / detur tibi placere domino / deo et sequi vestigia et pau / pertatem suam faciatis / cum benedictione domini / dei et mea obedientia // et si tibi est necessarium / animam tuam propter aliam / consolationem tuam et vis / revenire a me veni*. For the transcription, cfr. J. DALARUN, «Sicut mater». Una rilettura del biglietto di Francesco d'Assisi a frate Leone, in *Frate Francesco* 75 (2009) 22.
- 23 ST. FRANCIS, *Later Rule* 6,7-8 (FAED I, 103).
- 24 Cfr. DALARUN, «Sicut mater», 23-24.
- 25 FAED I, 130.
- 26 F. Accrocca underlines the fact that one of the difficulties in the reading of the autograph comes from the presence or absence of the Latin «non». With this term the letter assumes a tone which is completely different – *there is no need for you to come to me* – and Francis thus appears very rigid regarding Leo and makes him understand that he is not ready to welcome him any longer; without the «non», Francis is always ready to welcome Leo and speak to him, but in this case we cannot understand the repetition of the same thought at the end of the letter: "if you need and want to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation, Leo, come." For this reason the translation that sees the letter in its part written in a rigid and negative tone, "there is no need for you to come to me" seems very convincing; whereas this expression is changed in the second section with a positive addition by Francis, when the Saint feels sorry for what he said and permits Leo to return to him. Cfr. F. ACCROCCA, *Le durezze di fratello Francesco. «L'Epistola ad fratrem Leonem» in Vita Minorum* 3 (1997) 243-259.
- 27 Attilio Bartoli Langeli and Jacques Dalarun are of the same opinion. Dalarun affirms: "According to my way of seeing things, it is in the study of the Letter to brother Leo that Attilio Bartoli Langeli has produced one of his most radical discoveries. On one part, in the sixth and seventh verses, the text of Francis is easily understood to imply *et non oportet* (it is not necessary) whereas before it used to be read as *et si oportet* (if it is necessary). It also reveals that the last four verses of the letter (*Et si tibi...*) are an addition of Francis of Assisi, a kind of change of attitude. The two discoveries are mutually enlightening. Francis begins telling to his faithful companion, brother Leo, that it was not necessary for him to come to see him. Then he seems to feel sorry for what he said, and adds: "but if you need to come to me, come!" DALARUN, «Sicut mater», 20.
- 28 The episode is also present in the *Considerations on the Stigmata* 2, where we finally find Leo mentioned by name: "Brother Leo was being assailed by the devil with a great temptation which was not carnal but spiritual, and he had a great desire to possess some words written by the hands of Saint Francis, since he thought that, if he acquired those words, he would be partly or totally freed from that temptation."
- 29 2C 49 (FAED II, 280). Leo conserved the *Chartula* to the day of his death (1271). It was mentioned for the first time in 1338 in an inventory of the sacristy of the Sacro Convento (ms. Assisi 344), cfr. L. ALESSANDRI – F. PENNACCHI, I più antichi inventari della sacristia del Sacro Convento di Assisi (1338-1474), in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 7 (1914) 66-107.
- 30 2C 49 (FAED II, 280). Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani* 490: «Accipe tibi chartulam istam, et usque ad diem mortis tuae custodias diligenter.» LM 11,9 (FAED II, 618). Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani* 876: «Accipe tibi chartulam istam et usque ad diem mortis tuae custodias diligenter.»
- 31 F. URIBE, *Introduzione alle fonti agiografiche di san Francesco e santa Chiara d'Assisi (sec. XIII-XIV)*, Assisi 2002, 22-23.
- 32 Thomas of Celano recalls another episode regarding brother Leo, which occurred in the summer of 1226, when Francis was sick and was in the palace of the bishop of Assisi: "When the saint lay sick in the palace at Assisi, that brother thought to himself: 'Now our father is close to death, and my soul would be comforted so much if I could have the tunic of my father after his death.' As if that desire of the heart had been spoken with his lips, Saint Francis called him shortly after and said: 'I am giving you this tunic. Take it. From now on it is yours. Even though I wear it while I am still alive, at my death it should be returned to you.' (2C 50: FAED II, 281).



THE LAST SUPPER OF SAINT FRANCIS AND THE IMAGE OF THE NEW ADAM (1)

Noel Muscat ofm

The Franciscan Sources of the 13th century present Francis as “a new person of another age.”¹ The idea of novelty in the life of Saint Francis is present in various attitudes that mark a break with the past but also continuity with the plans of God regarding Francis. Under the influence of other famous biographies of saints of antiquity, like for example Saint Anthony Abbot and Saint Martin of Tours, Francis’ biographers have, in a certain way, copied an hagiographical literary genre, in order to help us understand how Francis accomplished a process of radical conversion from a life of sin to the following of Christ in poverty and humility. This approach is seen very clearly in the trilogy of Thomas of Celano.

The novelty of Francis, however, consisted also in a new attitude towards God, towards human persons and towards creation. The Franciscan *novitas* has nothing to do with a personal or private conversion of a sinner who becomes a saint, but enters within the framework of the history of creation, of the tragedy of sin of humanity, and in the history of salvation of Christ and of his death on the cross.

Seen in this light Francis becomes a new man also in the Biblical sense. In him we can perceive the beauty of the innocence of the first man, Adam, created in the image and likeness of God, as well as the restoring of this image, which was deformed by original sin, in the person of Christ, the new Adam, who on the cross, in his paschal mystery, gives once more to every human person the dignity that had been lost because of sin.

If we see Francis in this light of the first human person, Adam, and in the light of the new Adam, Christ, prototype of creation, we can understand Francis’ attitude regarding God, regarding his fellow human beings and regarding creation. This vision can then be seen in a more clear way if we succeed in showing how Francis experimented in his own life the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ as a mystery of a new birth, of the restitution of the image of the new man created by God in his image and likeness, always in reference to Christ, the Incarnate

Word, and the masterpiece of God’s work of creation and salvation.

The object of our paper will, therefore, be that of seeing, first and foremost, the figure of the first man, Adam, and that of the new Adam, Christ, applied to Saint Francis, and then to understand how Francis lived the paschal mystery of Christ in the perspective of the new Adam, particularly in the revelation of Christ who offers himself to his disciples during the paschal meal.

The image of the first man, Adam, and of Christ, the new Adam, in the Writings of Saint Francis

The figure of Adam, the first man to be created, is presented by Francis in the *Admonitions*, in the light of the creation of the human race and of the fall of the first man.

The fifth *Admonition* speaks about the creation of man, of his dignity in the order of creation, of how man lost this dignity because of sin, and of how he can regain such a lost dignity by glorying in the cross of the Lord.²

“Consider, O human being, in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for He created and formed you *to the image* of His beloved Son according to the body and *to His likeness* according to the Spirit (Gen 1:26). And all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you. And even the demons did not crucify Him, but you, together with them, have crucified Him and are still crucifying Him by delighting in vices and sins. In what, then, can you boast?”³

We shall stop at this first part of the fifth *Admonition*. Francis starts with a reference to the creation of the first man (Adam) according to the account of Genesis.⁴ The two key words are *imago* and *similitudo*. In the biblical text man is created to the image and likeness of God. The two terms have

the aim of describing man in relationship to God the Creator. Man is created to the image and likeness of God, who in the Bible is sometimes presented in anthropomorphic terms.⁵ The physical and spiritual likeness of man with God is seen in a particular way in the power that God gives man to exercise over all the other creatures.

Francis interprets this image and similitude in an original way, which does not exactly correspond to the original biblical significance, but which has a high theological value. In fact Francis says that the first man (Adam) has been created to the *image* of the Son according to the flesh and to the *similitude* of the same Son according to the spirit. Francis understands very well the meaning of *imago* and *similitude* in the biblical text, but he applies it not to God the Father, but rather to Christ. In this way Francis wants us to understand the intimate relationship that exists between the first man (Adam) and Christ, as the model and prototype of the entire creation.

In a testimony of a sermon delivered to the friars by Eudes of Châteauroux (†1273), chancellor of the University of Paris (1238-1244) and cardinal bishop of Tusculum (1246), we find an interesting reflection on Francis that summarizes in the person of the Poverello the primeval state of innocence of Adam, created to the image and likeness of his Creator.

“As you very well know there are two kinds of creation, one which brings nature into being, the other whereby grace comes into being. The first creation gives existence to natural life, the second to the life of grace. About the first it is written: *The Lord created man out of earth* (Sir 17:1) and this that he might have being. Of the second we read: *When you send forth your Spirit, they are created* (Ps 104:30), that is, endowed with the life of grace, so that they may be virtuous. The first manner of being is to be understood of Adam, the second of Saint Francis and the other saints who were established in grace, and were called and glorified by God. There are two things to be said of Saint Francis: first, he was created in the image of the Godhead, and second, he was made in the likeness of Christ’s humanity.”⁶

This highly positive vision of the human person corresponds fully to the sensibility of Francis. As we have seen, he describes the harmony that reigned when the first man was still in paradise, when all creatures were under his power. This relation of harmony with the Creator was unfortunately broken by sin. Francis,



Chapel of Adam under Calvary

however, insists that creatures, in as far as they can according to their own state, serve, know and obey their Creator even better than man himself. The reason of this lies in the fact that it is only man who, with his free will, has chosen to break the original harmony of creation. For Francis, man who is created to the image and likeness of God, is so free and responsible, that the Saint arrives at placing squarely upon man’s shoulder the responsibility of the crucifixion of Christ rather than placing it upon those of the devil, since it is man who abuses his freedom by delighting in vices and sins!

According to the positive Franciscan vision, however, Christ’s cross is that occasion so that man can regain the dignity lost because of sin, and therefore can again appear in all his primordial beauty. This is possible since Christ could restore the image and likeness of God in man, which had been darkened by sin. This occurred when Christ became Incarnate and redeemed all human persons with his death on the cross. Christ therefore becomes the new Adam, who gives once again to the human person the dignity lost because of sin. Therefore man can find sense for his own life only by glorying in the cross of the Lord. Francis here uses the Pauline terminology of the First Letter to the Corinthians, in order to make us understand how, on the cross, Christ, the new Adam, became the wisdom and power of God, in order to give to the old Adam his lost dignity.

“Even if you were so skilful and wise that you possessed *all knowledge* (1Cor 13:2), knew how to interpret every *kind of language* (1Cor 12:28), and to scrutinize heavenly matters with skill: you could not boast in these things. For, even though someone may have received from the Lord a special knowledge of the highest wisdom, one demon knew about heavenly matters and now knows more about those of earth than

all human beings. In the same way, even if you were more handsome and richer than everyone else, and even if you worked miracles so that you put demons to flight: all these things are contrary to you; nothing belongs to you; you can boast in none of these things. But we can boast *in our weaknesses* (2Cor 12:5) and in carrying each day the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷⁷

This second part of the fifth *Admonition* contains again a reference to the first sin of humankind. Drawn by the devil, who is capable of knowing the celestial and terrestrial realities more than all human beings, man desired to possess science and wisdom, and forgot that the true wisdom and glory is found in being submissive to the mystery of the cross, as Christ himself did, he who was the wisdom and power of God. The sin of the first man, therefore, consisted essentially in his wanting to appropriate that wisdom and knowledge that belong to God alone, and in not wanting to recognize the majesty of God upon the entire creation. Francis insists strongly: “nothing belongs to you.”⁷⁸ It is only in the expropriation of his own self-will in a total act of obedience to the Father that Christ could redeem man from his primeval fall into sin. Man is saved by his total union with Christ, the new Adam,

who humbles himself unto death on the cross, as we sing in the Christological hymn of Phil 2:5-11.

The discourse regarding the first man Adam who sins by appropriating his own will, and thus disobeys to the voice of God, is developed in the second *Admonition*, entitled «The Evil of Self-Will». This text is the only one in which Adam is explicitly mentioned in the writings of Saint Francis:

“The Lord said to Adam: *Eat of every tree; you may not eat, however, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* (Gn 2:16.17). He was able to eat of every tree of paradise, because he did not sin as long as he did not go against obedience. For that person eats of the tree of the knowledge of good who makes his will his own and, in this way, exalts himself over the good things the Lord says and does in him. And so, through the suggestion of the devil and the transgression of the command, it became the apple of the knowledge of evil. Therefore it is fitting that he suffer the punishment.”⁷⁹

The first man, created to the image and likeness of God, according to the eternal prototype of creation who is Christ, who glorifies the Father, is endowed with free will in order to use it for his own good and that of the entire creation. God makes just one prohibition to the first man, that of not appropriating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The

first Adam, according to Francis, sinned when he went against this order of God, and thus wanted to appropriate his own free will. Therefore the sin of the first man was, always according to Francis, a sin of disobedience, which expressed itself also in an act which went against poverty, that is against the loving gratitude for all the good things that God had entrusted to man’s care. Man wanted thus to acquire the same knowledge of God. The appropriation of the will implies an abuse of the same free will, and this renders man a slave of the devil. The ancient serpent succeeded in making the first man eat the venom of the forbidden fruit, thus making Adam an enemy of God and a punishable creature. A remedy had to be found to this state of things, through the redeeming action of Christ, the new Adam, who did not go against obedience and who did not appropriate his own will, as Francis explains in the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*:

Francis naked before Bishop Guido



“Then he prayed to His Father, saying: *Father, if it can be done, let this cup pass from me. And his sweat became as drops of blood falling to the ground* (Lk 22:42.44). Nevertheless, He placed His will in the will of His Father, saying: *Father, let Your will be done; not as I will, but as You will* (Mt 26:42). His Father’s will was such that His blessed and glorious Son, Whom He gave to us and Who was born for us, should offer Himself through His own blood as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross: not for Himself through Whom all things were made, but for our sins, leaving us an example that we might follow His footsteps.”¹⁰

We see the change between the appropriation of the will on the part of the first Adam and the total handing over into the Father’s will on the part of Christ, the new Adam. Francis insists that Christ did not accomplish this for his own sake, since he is the model and prototype of creation, including man created in the image and likeness of God. Christ realised the mystery of redemption on the altar of the cross, in order to shed his own blood in expiation of the sin of Adam and of the entire human race. Living the grace of salvation implies walking on the footsteps of Christ, obedient servant of the Father.

Another text that speaks in a clear way about the fall of man in sin and about the redemption realised by Christ on the cross is found in chapter 22 of the *Earlier Rule*, which contains words of admonition to the brothers. Francis begins reminding his brothers the commandment of fraternal charity, on the example of Christ who offered himself spontaneously unto death on the cross.

“All my brothers: let us pay attention to what the Lord says: *Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you* (Mt 5:44) for our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose footprints we must follow, called His betrayer a friend and willingly offered Himself to His executioners.”¹¹

This text recalls once more the theme of the following of Christ along the way of the cross, according to the text of 1 Peter 2:21, and insists upon the spontaneous self-offering of the Lord on the cross. Those who crucified the Lord, according to what we have seen in *Admonition* 4,3 are men with their sins and vices, which are the fruit of the sin of the first man Adam. For this reason Francis continues to admonish his brothers against vices and sins, with references to the Gospel, particularly with reference to the state of man after his image is darkened by sin. The text which follows can be considered as a picture of Adam whose sin becomes contagious to the entire human race, which with him enters into a solidarity of sin that can be redeemed only by Christ, the new Adam.

“And let us hate our body with its vices and sins, because by living according to the flesh, the devil wishes to take away from us the love of Jesus

Christ and eternal life and to lose himself in hell with everyone else. Because, by our own fault, we are disgusting, miserable and opposed to good, yet prompt and inclined to evil, for, as the Lord says in the Gospel: *From the heart proceed and come evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, theft, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, false witness, blasphemy, foolishness. All these evils come from within, from a person’s heart, and these are what defile a person* (Mt 15:19; Mk 7:21-23).”¹²

The image of man which Francis presents seems rather dull and pessimist. However, it corresponds to the reality of man when he becomes slave to sin, to the misery of the old Adam, evicted from the earthly paradise. The image of the carnal man, who is putrid and fetid, is expressed very well in the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*, where Francis speaks of the fact that “through our own fault, we are all wretched and corrupt, disgusting and worms.”¹³ At the same time, the image of the worm, which indicates scorn, assumes a new meaning when Francis applies it to Christ, always in the same text, quoting Psalm 21:7. On the cross Christ becomes like a worm which is despised, but assuming the miserable condition of the sons of Adam, he, the new Adam, gives once more to humanity its lost dignity, in his sacrificial death on the cross.

The original sin of Adam consisted in letting himself be seduced by Satan to take away his gaze from the Lord God. Francis describes this state in which carnal man becomes, like Adam, the dwelling of Satan, and then he describes the state of the spiritual man in which God-Trinity dwells.

“And let us beware of the malice and craftiness of Satan, who does not want anyone to turn his mind and heart to God. And prowling around he wants to ensnare a person’s heart, [he wants] to blind it through worldly affairs and concerns and to live there [...] Let us always make a home and a dwelling place there for Him, Who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”¹⁴

The anthropological theology of Francis faithfully follows the biblical truth of man who distances himself from God and lets himself be drawn into sin by the action of Satan. In this way the new Adam loses his friendship with the Creator and becomes a miserable being, in need of redemption. In the person of the Incarnate Son, the new Adam, who on the cross turns the projects of Satan upside down and assumes upon himself the misery of man with a total obedience to the will of the Father, man regains the dignity which he had lost in the earthly paradise, and thus becomes a dwelling place for the divinity in his human nature redeemed by the blood of Christ.

There is a close relationship between the *mysterium iniquitatis* of the fall of the first Adam and the paschal mystery of our redemption that Christ,



Giotto: Francis and Lady Poverty

the new Adam, has accomplished by offering his will completely into the hands of the Father. It is in the paschal mystery that Christ gains complete victory on the devil, which had seduced the first Adam, created to the image and likeness of God.

In a text from the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, Saint Bonaventure shows in a concrete way how Christ won over the devil on the cross, in his act of supreme obedience to the will of the Father. The Seraphic Doctor says that Christ has confounded the devil at the exact moment of his death on the cross. Christ, the new Adam, has turned upside down the way of reasoning of the devil with a perfect syllogism, of which the major proposition was regarded his eternal divinity, the minor proposition regarded his death on the cross, arriving at the conclusion of the resurrection. Bonaventure states that while the leaders of the Jews were saying to Christ on the cross, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross," they were echoing the rebel cry of the devil who seduced the first man in order to make him appropriate his will and thus dominate upon creation against the will of God. On the other hand Christ remained obedient to the Father also on the cross, since he let himself be nailed to the cross and did not turn away from death. In this way, on the cross Christ has rejoined the two extremes of death and victory, as Paul says in 1Cor 15:54: *Death is swallowed up in victory*. Thus Christ confounded the devil, who could

not understand how the author of life could die. On the cross Christ won over the devil and gave back to man the dignity that the first Adam had lost because of his sin of disobedience.¹⁵

We can thus say that, even though the figure of Adam is not mentioned if not just once in the entire *corpus* of the writings of Saint Francis, we find various references to a theological tradition which was very popular in Christianity,¹⁶ namely that of the relationship between the first Adam, the first man who went against God's command and sinned, and the new Adam, Christ, who obeyed His Father's will and restored to humanity its image and likeness to God that had been obscured because of sin.

The image of the first man, Adam, and of Christ, the new Adam, in the Franciscan Sources

We shall now pass on to see the figure of Adam applied to Christ and Saint Francis in some sources of the 13th century. The first text we consider is taken from the Versified Legend of Saint Francis, written by Henri d'Avranches in 1239-1239 in the form of an epic poem. In the third book of the poem the author speaks about Francis who takes his clothes off in front

of bishop Guido of Assisi. He compares Francis, who stands naked and despising the world, to Adam who loses his state of innocence in the earthly paradise and has to expose his nudity in a shameful way.

"His clothes, he lays them down, including his trousers. / Without a stitch, stark naked he stands, for all the world like Adam. / But he differs from Adam in this: he suffers freely what Adam / Was forced to endure; he suffers by merit what Adam endured for sin; / And yet he is penalized as Adam was – though in a different way. / Exposed was the shamefulness of Adam, while no shame / Is discovered in him. Where is the shame in a naked body / When the vesture of its soul is honour? Wherein did this / Manliness lie? In scorning the world, in making himself disdained / By the world; in caring not a whit for his property or person."¹⁷

The theme of nudity applied to Francis is presented by Henri d'Avranches not only in contrast to the shameful nakedness of Adam, but also in relationship to the nakedness of Christ on the cross. In this way, Christ who is naked and crucified becomes the new Adam who Francis follows by denuding himself from all possessions. The following text from the Versified Life is a posterior addition:

"His clothes, he lays them down, including his trousers. / To be entirely stripped bare he declined not, out of love / Of Him who upon the cross was willing to hang naked. / And so, departing naked from the world, he left all things, / And being naked, followed the naked Christ crucified."¹⁸

The image of Adam in the story of creation is also illustrated in one of the most interesting Sources for our theme, namely the Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty, an allegory written probably within the context of the poverty controversy between the secular clergy and the mendicant orders in the University of Paris in 1254.¹⁹ The anonymous author of this allegory speaks about Francis who goes in search of Lady Poverty, who had been abandoned by the sons of Adam, who "hated it with a vengeance."²⁰

Lady Poverty welcomes Francis and his brothers who had easily climbed the lofty mountain where she dwelt, since they were lacking of material possessions. After the words of praise that the brothers address to Lady Poverty, she starts to speak about herself, beginning with the story of her betrothal with Adam in the earthly paradise:

"I was once in the paradise of God where man was naked (Rv 2:7). In fact I was in man and was walking with naked man (Gn 2:25; 3:8) through that entire splendid paradise, fearing nothing, doubting nothing, and suspecting nothing amiss. I thought I would be with him forever, because the Most High created him just, good and wise and placed in the most delightful and beautiful place. I was so happy playing before him all the while (Prv 8:30) because, possessing nothing, he belonged entirely to God."²¹

The figure of Adam which comes forth from this text is that of the first man who was totally naked and poor in front of his Creator. In nakedness and poverty, which Francis himself had embraced, Lady Poverty saw the exemplar of the first man Adam before he sinned, and also of Christ, who in the poverty and nakedness of the cross redeems man and leads him back to the original innocence of the earthly paradise. Unfortunately Adam sinned and deprived himself of the innocence of primeval nakedness, and in this way he had to hide himself from his Creator. Thus Lady Poverty remained deprived of her beloved, and she had to wait for the mercy of God who sent Christ, the new Adam, so that man could return to his Creator.²²

The link between the creation of Adam and the re-creation by the new Adam is found in the consideration of how Francis presents the paschal mystery of Christ, particularly in his writings when he speaks of the paschal meal as the prelude of the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord. We shall now try to look at the theme of the Holy Thursday celebration of Saint Francis, within the context of the Eucharistic meal, of the priesthood and of the commandment of love, in which Christ reveals himself as the new Adam who offers himself to his Father in order to restore the image spoiled by the first Adam.

To be continued...

NOTES

- 1 THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis* (1C 82), in *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. I [The Saint], edited by R.J. Armstrong, J.A. Hellmann, W.J. Short, New City Press, London – Manila - New York 1999, 251. (FAED I, 251). Latin text: *novus certe homo et alterius saeculi videbatur*. Parallel texts in *Legend of the Three Companions*, 54 (L3C 54) in *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. II [The Founder] 2000, 99; SAINT BONAVENTURE, *Major Life of Saint Francis* 4,5 (LMj 4,5) in FAED II, 553; THOMAS OF CELANO, *Treatise on the Miracles of St. Francis* (3C 2) in FAED II, 401.
- 2 F. URIBE, *La vera gloria dell'uomo. L'Ammonizione V di san Francesco*, in *Frate Francesco* 74/2 (Novembre 2008), 351-376.
- 3 *Adm* 5,1-4 (FAED I, 131).
- 4 The text of Gen 1:26-27 in the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* states: *faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram [...] et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam ad imaginem Dei creavit illum*. Latin edition: *Biblia Sacra iuxta latinam vulgatam versionem ad codicum fidem*, iussu Pii PP. XI, Pii PP. XII, Ioannis PP. XXIII, Pauli PP. VI, Ioannis Pauli II, cura et studio monachorum Abbatiae Pontificiae Sancti Hieronymi in Urbe Ordinis Sancti Benedicti edita. Textus et interpretatione Sancti Hieronymi. I. Liber Genesis, Libreria Vaticana 1926.

- 5 Ezekiel 1:26 describes God as “a form with the appearance of a human being” (Vulgate: *super similitudinem throni similitudo quasi aspectus hominis desuper*).
- 6 EUDES OF CHÂTEAUX, *Sermon to the friars of Paris on the feast of Saint Francis* (4th October 1262), in FAED II, 813.
- 7 *Adm* 5,5-8 (FAED I, 131).
- 8 C. PAOLAZZI, *Lettura degli “Scritti” di Francesco d’Assisi*, Edizioni Biblioteca Franciscana, Milano 2002, 121: “Comprendiamo la gravidanza teologica, concettuale e sentimentale di una definizione di Francesco: il peccato è l’“appropriarsi” di un bene che appartiene al Signore, come ha fatto Adamo mangiando dell’«albero della scienza del bene e del male», e come continuano a fare coloro che disubbidiscono a Dio, attribuendo a se stessi o usando a scopi egoistici ciò che deve servire all’amore di lui e dei fratelli.”
- 9 *Adm* 2 (FAED I, 129).
- 10 *EpFid* II,8-13 (FAED I, 46).
- 11 *RegNB* 22,1-2 (FAED I, 79).
- 12 *RegNB* 22,5-9 (FAED I, 79).
- 13 *EpFid* II, 45-47 (FAED II, 48): “We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh (cf. 1Cor 1:26), but, instead, we must be simple, humble and pure. And let us hold our bodies in scorn and contempt because, through our own fault, we are all wretched and corrupt, disgusting and worms, as the Lord says through the prophet: *I am a worm and not a man, the scorn of men and the outcast of the people* (Ps 22:7). We must never desire to be above others, but, instead, we must be servants and subjects to every human creature for God’s sake (1Pt 2:13).”
- 14 *RegNB* 22,19-20.27 (FAED I, 80).
- 15 ST. BONAVENTURE, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, I, 28, in *S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, Ad Claras Aquas, (Quaracchi) 1882-1902, Vol. V, 334: “Maior propositione fuit ab aeterno; sed assumptione in cruce; conclusione vero in resurrectione. Iudaei credebant Christum confudisse et improperebant ei: *Si Filius Dei es, descende de cruce*. Nam Christus non dicebat: sinite me vivere, sed dicebat: sinite me mortem assumere at alteri extremitati copulari, pati, mori; et tunc sequitur conclusio. Unde ipse illusit diabolo.”
- 16 B. BAGATTI, *Note sull’iconografia di «Adamo sotto il Calvario»*. *Studii Biblici Franciscani*, in *Liber Annuus*, Jerusalem XXVII (1977) 5-32, with illustrations 1-12. This study speaks about the so-called “Chapel of Adam”, which is found underneath Calvary in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. In this place, according to a very ancient Judaeo-Christian tradition, the skull of Adam who was buried under the rock of Calvary, was washed by the blood of Christ, which trickled down the open crack in the rock opened by the earthquake at the moment of Christ’s death. Thus Adam was redeemed by Christ’s blood and with him the entire human race was also redeemed. The famous Franciscan archaeologist notes the importance of some Apocryphal writings, such as *The Cave of Treasures*. This tradition was handed down by the Jerusalem Church, and from there it spread to Christendom, including in the Franciscan tradition of the *Tau cum capite* in the parchment of the blessing that Saint Francis gave to brother Leo on La Verna in 1224, and which is nowadays conserved as a relic in the inferior basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi.
- 17 HENRI D’AVRANCHES, *Versified Life of St. Francis*, Book 3, 145-154 (FAED I, 449-450). Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di E. MENESTÒ e S. BRUFANI, Edizioni Porziuncola, S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 1995, 1150: “Exutus vestes etiam femoralia ponit. / Stat sine veste palam nudoque simillimus Adae; / In causa tantum distat status huius et eius: / Suffert iste libens, quod sustulit ille coactus; / Suffert hic propter meritum, quod sustulit ille / Propter delictum; tamen hic punitur ut ille. / Sed secus: eius enim patuere pudenda, sed huius / Nulla pudenda patent. Quid enim caro nuda pudendum / Offerret, cuius animam vestivit honestas?”
- 18 HENRI D’AVRANCHES, *Versified Life of St. Francis. Additions*, Book 3, 165, in Vol. III [The Prophet], edited by R.J. Armstrong, J.A. Hellmann, W.J. Short, New City Press, London – Manila - New York 2001, 84. (FAED III, 84). Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1217: “Nudari totus non abnuat eius amore, / In cruce qui nudus pro nobis ultro pependit, / Sic mundum nudus egressus cuncta relinquit, / Et nudum nudus Christum sequitur crucifixum.”
- 19 Cfr. F. ACCROCCA, *Introduzione al Sacrum commercium sancti Francisci cum domina Papertate*, in *Fonti Franciscane. Nuova Edizione*, a cura di E. Caroli, Editrice Franciscane, Padova 2004, 1275-1282.
- 20 SC 5 (FAED I, 530): “(Francis) eagerly began to go about the streets and piazzas of the city, as a curious explorer diligently looking for her whom his soul loved. He asked those standing about, inquired of those who came near him: ‘Have you seen her whom my soul loves?’ (Sg 3:2-3) But that saying was hidden from them (Lk 18:24) as though it was barbaric. Not understanding him, they told him: ‘We do not know what you’re saying. Speak to us in our own language (2Kings 4:31) and we will answer you.’ At that time there was no voice and no sense among Adam’s children of being willing to converse with or to speak to anyone about poverty. They hated it with a vengeance, as they do even today, and could not speak peacefully to anyone asking about it. Therefore, they answered him as they would a stranger and declared that they did not know anything of what he was seeking.”
- 21 SC 25 (FAED I, 537).
- 22 SC 28 (FAED I, 538): “Immediately (God) called my companion. ‘Adam, where are you?’ But Adam said, ‘Lord, I heard your voice and was afraid because I was naked and hid.’ (Gn 3:9-10). He was truly naked because, as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, he fell among thieves who robbed him (Lk 10:30) first and foremost of his good nature, causing him to lose his likeness to the Creator. The most high King was, nonetheless, very kind, longed for his repentance, after giving him an opportunity to return to him.”



PAUL SABATIER

«LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI»

Translated into English by Louise Seymour Houghton, (Hodder and Stoughton), London 1908.

Chapter XVI

THE BROTHERS MINOR AND LEARNING

Autumn 1221 – December 1223

[271] After the chapter of 1221 the evolution of the Order hurried on with a rapidity which nothing was strong enough to check.

The creation of the ministers was an enormous step in this direction; by the very pressure of things the latter came to establish a residence; those who command must have their subordinates within reach, must know at all times where they are; the Brothers, therefore, could no longer continue to do without convents properly so-called. This change naturally brought about many others; up to this time they had had no churches. Without churches the friars were only itinerant preachers, and their purpose could not but be perfectly disinterested; they were, as Francis had wished, the friendly auxiliaries of the clergy. With churches it was inevitable that they should first fatally aspire to preach in them and attract the crowd to them, then in some sort erect them into counter parishes.

[272] The bull of March 22, 1222, shows us the papacy hastening these transformations with all its power. The pontiff accords to Brother Francis and the other friars the privilege of celebrating the sacred mysteries in their churches in times of interdict, on the natural condition of not ringing the bells, of closing the door, and previously expelling those who were excommunicated.

By an astonishing inadvertence the bull itself bears witness to its uselessness, at least for the time in which it was given: "We accord to you," it runs, "the permission to celebrate the sacraments in times of interdict in your churches, *if you come to have any.*" This is a new proof that in 1222 the Order as yet had none; but it is not difficult to see in this very document a pressing invitation to change their way of working, and not leave this privilege to be of no avail.

Another document of the same time shows a

like purpose, though manifested in another direction. By the bull *Ex parte* of March 29, 1222, Honorius III laid upon the Preachers and Minors of Lisbon conjointly a singularly delicate mission; he gave them full powers to proceed against the bishop and clergy of that city, who exacted from the faithful that they should leave to them [273] by will one-third of their property, and refused the Church's burial service to those who disobeyed.

The fact that the pope committed to the Brothers the care of choosing what measures they should take proves how anxious they were at Rome to forget the object for which they had been created, and to transform them into deputies of the Holy See. It is, therefore, needless to point out that the mention of Francis's name at the head of the former of these bulls has no significance. We do not picture the Poverello seeking a privilege for circumstances not yet existing! We perceive here the influence of Ugolini, who had found the Brother Minor after his own heart in the person of Elias.

What was Francis doing all this time? We have no knowledge, but the very absence of information, so abundant for the period that precedes as well as for that which follows, shows plainly enough that he has quitted Portiuncula, and gone to live in one of those Umbrian hermitages that had always had so strong an attachment for him. There is hardly a hill in Central Italy that has not preserved some memento of him. It would be hard to walk half a day between Florence and Rome without coming upon some hut on the hillside bearing his name or that of one of his disciples.

[274] There was a time when these huts were inhabited, when in these leafy booths Egidio, Masseo, Bernardo, Silvestro, Ginepro, and many others whose names history has forgotten, received visits from their spiritual father, coming to them for their consolation.

They gave him love for love and consolation for consolation. His poor heart had great need of both, for in his long, sleepless nights it had come to him at times to hear strange voices; weariness and regret were laying hold on him, and looking over the past he was almost driven to doubt of himself, his Lady Poverty,

and everything.

Between Chiusi and Radicofani – an hour's walk from the village of Sartiano – a few Brothers had made a shelter which served them by way of hermitage, with a little cabin for Francis in a retired spot. There he passed one of the most agonizing nights of his life. The thought that he had exaggerated the virtue of asceticism and not counted enough upon the mercy of God assailed him, and suddenly he came to regret the use he had made of his life. A picture of what he might have been, of the tranquil and happy home that might have been his, rose up before him in such living colors that he felt himself giving way. In vain he disciplined himself with his hempen girdle until the blood came; the vision would not depart.

It was midwinter; a heavy fall of snow covered the ground; he rushed out without his garment, and gathering up great heaps of snow began to make a row of images. "See," he said, "here is thy wife, and behind her are two sons and two daughters, with the servant and the maid carrying all the baggage."

[275] With this child-like representation of the tyranny of material cares which he had escaped, he finally put away the temptation.

There is nothing to show whether or not we should fix at the same epoch another incident which legend gives as taking place at Satriano. One day a brother of whom he asked, "Whence do you come?" replied, "From your cell." The simple answer was enough to make the vehement lover of Poverty refuse to occupy it again. "Foxes have holes," he loved to repeat, "and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay his head. When the Lord spent forty days and forty nights praying and fasting in the desert, he built himself neither cell nor house, but made the side of a rock his shelter."

It would be a mistake to think, as some have done, that as time went on Francis changed his point of view. Certain ecclesiastical writers have assumed that since he desired the multiplication of his Order, he for that very reason consented to its transformation. The suggestion is specious, but in this matter we are not left to conjecture; almost everything which was done in the Order after 1221 was done either without Francis's knowledge or against his will. If one were inclined to doubt this, it would need only to glance over that most solemn and almost most adequate manifesto of his thought – his Will. There he is shown freed from all the temptations which had at times made him hesitate in the expression of his ideas, bravely gathering himself up to summon back the primitive ideal, and set it up in opposition to all the concessions which had been wrung from his weakness.

The Will is not an appendix to the Rule of 1223, it is almost its revocation. But it would be a mistake to see in it the first attempt made to return to the early ideal. [276] The last five years of his life were only one

incessant effort at protest, both by his example and his words.

In 1222 he addressed to the brethren of Bologna a letter filled with sad forebodings. In that city, where the Dominicans, overwhelmed with attentions, were occupied with making themselves a stronghold in the system of instruction, the Brothers Minor were more than anywhere else tempted to forsake the way of simplicity and poverty. Francis's warnings had put on such dark and threatening colors that after the famous earthquake of December 23, 1222, which spread terror over all northern Italy, there was no hesitation in believing that he had predicted the catastrophe. He had indeed predicted a catastrophe which was none the less horrible for being wholly moral, and the vision of which forced from him the most bitter imprecations:

"Lord Jesus, thou didst choose thine apostles to the number of twelve, and if one of them did not betray thee, the others, remaining united to thee, preached thy holy gospel, filled with one and the same inspiration; and behold now, remembering the former days, thou hast raised up the Religion of the Brothers in order to uphold faith, and that by them the mystery of thy gospel may be accomplished. Who will take their place if, instead of fulfilling their mission and being shining examples for all, they are seen to give themselves up to works of darkness? Oh! may they be accursed by thee, Lord, and by all the court of heaven, and by me, thine unworthy servant, they who by their bad example overturn and destroy all that thou didst do in the beginning and cease not to do by thy holy Brothers of this Order."

This passage from Thomas of Celano, the most moderate of the biographers, shows to what a pitch of vehemence and indignation the gentle Francis could be worked up.

In spite of very natural efforts to throw a veil of re-[277]serve over the anguish of the founder with regard to the future of his spiritual family, we find traces of it at every step. "The time will come," he said one day, "when our Order will so have lost all good renown that its numbers will be ashamed to show themselves by daylight."

He saw in a dream a statue with the head of pure gold, the breast and arms of silver, the body of crystal, and the legs of iron. He thought it was an omen of the future in store for his institute.

He believed his sons to be attacked with two maladies, unfaithful at once to poverty and humility; but perhaps he dreaded for them the demon of learning more than the temptation of riches.

What were his views on the subject of learning? It is probable that he never examined the question as a whole, but he had no difficulty in seeing that there will always be students enough in the universities, and that if scientific effort is an homage offered to God, there is no risk of worshippers of this class being wanting; but

in vain he looked about him on all sides, he saw no one to fulfil the mission of love and humility reserved for his Order, if the friars came to be unfaithful to it.

Therefore there was something more in his anguish than the grief of seeing his hopes confounded. The rout of an army is nothing in comparison with

sufferings of humanity, but their overwhelming anguish was something far different from this, it was the birth-throes of the divine. They suffer, because in them the Word is made flesh, and at Gethsemane, as under the olive-trees of Greccio, they are in agony “because their own received them not.”



St. Francis receiving the Stigmata: Painting by Jusepe de Ribera

the overthrow of an idea; and in him an idea had been incarnated, the idea of peace and happiness restored to mankind, by the victory of love over the trammels of material things.

By an ineffable mystery he felt himself the Man of his age, him in whose body are borne all the efforts, the de-[278]sires, the aspirations of men; with him, in him, by him humanity yearns to be renewed, and to use the language of the gospel, born again.

In this lies his true beauty. By this, far more than by a vain conformity, an exterior imitation, he is a Christ.

He also bears the affliction of the world, and if we will look into the very depths of his soul we must give this word affliction the largest possible meaning for him as for Jesus. By their pity they bore the physical

Yet, St. Francis forever felt the travail of the transformation taking place in the womb of humanity, going forward to its divine destiny, and he offered himself, a living oblation, that in him might take place the mysterious palingenesis.

Do we now understand his pain? He was trembling for the mystery of the gospel. There is in him something which reminds us of the tremor of life when it stands face to face with death, something by so much the more painful as we have here to do with moral life.

This explains how the man who would run after ruffians that he might make disciples of them could be pitiless toward his fellow-laborers who by an indiscreet, however well-intentioned, zeal forgot their vocation and would transform their Order into a scientific institute.

Under pretext of putting learning at the service of God and of religion, the Church had fostered the worst of vices, pride. According to some it is her title to glory, but it will be her greatest shame.

[279] Must we renounce the use of this weapon against the enemies of the faith? she asks. But can you imagine Jesus joining the school of the rabbins under the pretext of learning how to reply to them, enfeebling his thought by their dialectic subtleties and fantastic exegesis? He might perhaps have been a great doctor, but would he have become the Saviour of the world? You feel that he would not.

When we hear preachers going into raptures over the marvellous spread of the gospel preached by twelve poor fishermen of Galilee, might we not point out to them that the miracle is at once more and less astounding than they say? More – for among the twelve several returned to the shores of their charming lake, and forgetful of the mystic net, thought of the Crucified One, if they thought of him at all, only to lament him, and not to raise him from the dead by continuing his

work in the four quarters of the world; less – for if even now, in these dying days of the nineteenth century, preachers would go forth beside themselves with love, sacrificing themselves for each and all as in the old days their Master did, the miracle would be repeated again.

But no; theology has killed religion. The clergy repeat to satiety that we must not confound the two; but what good does this do if in practice we do not distinguish them?

Never was learning more eagerly coveted than in the thirteenth century. The Empire and the Church were anxiously asking of it the arguments with which they might defend their opposing claims. Innocent III

sends the collection of his Decretals to the University of Bologna and heaps favors upon it. Frederick II founds that of Naples, and the Patarini themselves send their sons from Tuscany and Lombardy to study at Paris.

We remember the success of Francis's preaching at [280] Bologna, in August, 1220; at the same period he had strongly reprimanded Pietro Staccia, the provincial minister and a doctor of laws, not only for having installed the Brothers in a house which appeared to belong to them, but especially for having organized a sort of college there.

It appears that the minister paid no attention to these reproaches. When Francis became aware of his obstinacy he cursed him with frightful vehemence;



his indignation was so great that when, later on, Pietro Staccia was about to die and his numerous friends came to entreat Francis to revoke his malediction, all their efforts were in vain.

In the face of this attitude of the founder it is very difficult to believe in the authenticity of the note purporting to be addressed to Anthony of Padua:

“To my very dear Anthony, brother Francis, greetings in Christ. It pleases me that you interpret to the Brothers the sacred writings and theology, in such a way, however (conformably to our Rule), that the spirit of holy prayer be not extinguished either in you or in the others, which I desire earnestly. Greetings.”

Must we see in this a pious fraud to weaken the numberless clear declarations of Francis against learning?

It is difficult to picture to ourselves the rivalry which [281] existed at this time between the Dominicans and Franciscans in the attempt to draw the most illustrious masters into their respective Orders. Petty intrigues were organized, in which the devotees had each his part, to lead such or such a famous doctor to assume the habit. If the object of St. Francis had been scientific, the friars of Bologna, Paris, and Oxford could not have done more.

The current was so strong that the elder Orders were swept away in it whether they would or no; twenty years later the Cistercians also desired to become legists, theologians, decretalists, and the rest.

Perhaps Francis did not in the outset perceive the gravity of the danger, but illusion was no longer possible, and from this time he showed, as we have seen, an implacable firmness. If later on his thought was travestied, the guilty ones – the popes and most of the ministers general – were obliged to resort to feats of prestidigitation that are not to their credit. “Suppose,” he would say, “that you had subtlety and learning enough to know all things, that you were acquainted with all languages, the courses of the stars, and all the rest, what is there in that to be proud of? A single demon knows more on these subjects than all the men in this world put together. But there is one thing that the demon is in-[282]capable of, and which is the glory of man: to be faithful to God.”

Definite information with regard to the chapters of 1222 and 1223 is wanting. The proposed modifications of the project of 1221 were discussed by the ministers and afterward definitively settled by Cardinal Ugolini. The latter had long conferences on the subject with Francis, who has himself given us the account of them.

The result of them all was the Rule of 1223. Very soon a swarm of marvellous stories, which it would be tedious to examine in detail, came to be clustered around the origin of this document; all that we need to retain of them is the memory that they keep of the struggles of Francis against the ministers for the

preservation of his ideal.

Before going to Rome to ask for the final approbation he had meditated long in the solitude of Monte Colombo, near Rieti. This hill was soon represented as a new Sinai, and the disciples pictured their master on its heights receiving another Decalogue from the hands of Jesus himself.

Angelo Clareno, one of the most complacent narrators of these traditions, takes upon himself to point out their slight value; he shows us Honorius III modifying an essential passage in the plan at the last moment. I [283] have already so far described this Rule that there is no need to return to the subject here.

It was approved November 25, 1223. Many memories appear to have clustered about the journey of Francis to Rome. One day Cardinal Ugolini, whose hospitality he had accepted, was much surprised and his guests as well, to find him absent as they were about to sit down at table, but they soon saw him coming, carrying a quantity of pieces of dry bread, which he joyfully distributed to all the noble company. His host, somewhat abashed by the proceeding, having undertaken after the meal to reproach him a little, Francis explained that he had no right to forget, for a sumptuous feast, the bread of charity on which he was fed every day, and that he desired thus to show his brethren that the richest table is not worth so much to the poor in spirit as this table of the Lord.

We have seen that during the earlier years the Brothers Minor had been in the habit of earning their bread by going out as servants. Some of them, a very small number, had continued to do so. Little by little, in this matter also all had been changed. Under color of serving, the friars entered the families of the highest personages of the pontifical court, and became their confidential attendants; instead of submitting themselves to all, as the Rule of 1221 ordained, they were above everyone.

Entirely losing sight of the apostolic life, they became courtiers of a special type; their character, half ecclesiastic and half lay, rendered them capable of carrying out a number of delicate missions and of playing a part in [284] the varied intrigues for which the greater number of Roman prelates have always seemed to live. By way of protest Francis had only one weapon, his example.

One day, the *Speculum* relates, the Blessed Francis came to Rome to see the Bishop of Ostia (Ugolini), and after having remained some time at his house, he went also to visit Cardinal Leo, who had a great devotion for him.

It was winter; the cold, the wind and the rain made any journey impossible, so the cardinal begged him to pass a few days in his house and to take his food there, like the other poor folk who came there to eat ... “I will give you,” he added, “a good lodging, quite retired, where if you like you may pray and eat.”

Then Brother Angelo, one of the twelve first disciples, who lived with the cardinal, said to Francis: "There is close by here, a great tower standing by itself and very quiet; you will be there as in a hermitage." Francis went to see it and it pleased him. Then, returning to the cardinal, "Monsignor," he said, "it is possible that I may pass a few days with you." The latter was very joyful, and Brother Angelo went to prepare the tower for the Blessed Francis and his companion.

But that very first night, when he would have slept, the demons came and smote him. Calling then to his companion, "Brother," he said, "the demons have come and smitten me with violence; remain near me, I beg, for I am afraid here alone."

He was trembling in all his members, like one who has a fever. They passed the night both without sleeping. "The demons are commissioned with the chastisements of God," said Francis, "as a podestà sends his executioner to punish the criminal, so God sends demons, who in this are his ministers ... Why has he sent them to me? Perhaps this is the reason: The cardinal desired to be kind to me, and I have truly great need of repose, but the Brothers who are out in the world, suffering hunger and a thousand tribulations, and also those others who are in hermitages or in miserable houses, when they hear of my sojourn with a cardinal will be moved to repine. 'We endure all privations,' they will say, 'while he has all that he can desire;' but I ought to give them a good example – this is my true mission."

Early next morning, therefore, he quitted the tower, and having told the cardinal all, took leave of him and returned to the hermitage of Monte Colombo, near Rieti. "They think me a holy man," he said, "and see, it needed demons to cast me out of prison."

[285] This story, notwithstanding its strange coloring, shows plainly how strong was his instinct for independence. To compare the hospitality of a cardinal to an imprisonment! He spoke better than he knew, characterizing in one word the relation of the Church to his Order.

The lark was not dead; in spite of cold and the north wind it gayly took its flight to the vale of Rieti.

It was mid-December. An ardent desire to observe to the life the memories of Christmas had taken possession of Francis. He opened his heart to one of his friends, the knight Giovanni di Greccio, who undertook the necessary preparations.

The imitation of Jesus has in all times been the very centre of Christianity; but one must be singularly spiritual to be satisfied with the imitation of the heart. With most men there is need that this should be preceded and sustained by an external imitation. It is indeed the spirit that gives life, but it is only in the country of the angels that one can say that the flesh profiteth nothing.

In the Middle Ages a religious festival was before all things else a representation, more or less

faithful, of the event which it recalled; hence the *santons* of Provence, the processions of the *Palmesel*, the Holy Supper of Maundy Thursday, the Road to the Cross of Good Friday, the drama of the Resurrection of Easter, and the flaming tow of Whitsunday. Francis was too thoroughly Italian not to love these festivals where every visible thing speaks of God and of his love.

The population of Greccio and its environs was, therefore, convoked as well as the Brothers from the neighboring monasteries. On the evening of the vigil of Christmas one might have seen the faithful hastening to the hermitage by every path with torches in their hands, making the forests ring with their joyful hymns.

[286] Everyone was rejoicing – Francis most of all. The knight had prepared a stable with straw, and brought an ox and an ass, whose breath seemed to give warmth to the poor *bambino*, benumbed with the cold. At the sight the saint felt tears of pity bedew his face; he was no longer in Greccio, his heart was in Bethlehem.

Finally they began to chant matins; then the mass was begun, and Francis, as deacon, read the Gospel. Already hearts were touched by the simple recital of the sacred legend in a voice so gentle and so fervent, but when he preached, his emotion soon overcame the audience; his voice had so unutterable a tenderness that they also forgot everything, and were living over again the feeling of the shepherds of Judea who in those old days went to adore the God made man, born in a stable.

Toward the close of the thirteenth century, the author of the *Stabat Mater dolorosa*, Giacomone dei Todi, that Franciscan of genius who spent a part of his life in dungeons, inspired by the memory of Greccio, composed another Stabat, that of joy, *Stabat Mater speciosa*. This hymn of Mary beside the manger is not less noble than that of Mary at the foot of the cross. The sentiment is even more tender, and it is hard to explain its neglect except by an unjust caprice of fate.

"Stabat Mater speciosa / Juxtae foenum gaudiosa / Dum jacebat parvulus. / Quae gaudebat et ridebat / Exsultabat cum videbat / Nati partum inclyti. / Fac me vere congaudere / Jesulino cohaerere / Donec ego vixero."



The spirit of Assisi ... 25 years on

“It is with great pleasure that we write to you on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the historic day of prayer and fasting held in Assisi on October 27, 1986. For more than a year we have been preparing this special event. It is a reminder of the beautiful celebration held a quarter of a century ago; however, even more importantly, it is an opportunity to renew the fervour of our Franciscan vocation, which challenges us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in the manner of Francis and Clare. In his opening talk at the celebration of the Spirit of Assisi 25 years ago, John Paul II said: “I have chosen this town of Assisi as the place for our Day of Prayer for Peace because of the particular significance of the holy man venerated here – Saint Francis – known and revered by so many throughout the world as a symbol of peace, reconciliation and brotherhood.” During his Angelus talk on January 1, 2011, Benedict XVI announced: “...next October I shall go as a pilgrim to the town of Saint Francis, inviting my Christian brethren of various denominations, the exponents of the world’s religious traditions and, ideally, all men and women of good will, to join this Pilgrimage. It will aim to commemorate the historical action desired by my Predecessor and to solemnly renew the commitment of believers of every religion to live their own religious faith as a service to the cause of peace.” The theme of this year’s celebration in Assisi, to be held on October 27, is Pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace. In the footprints of Francis and Clare, we are all called to walk the path of peace as pilgrims, to pray and fast for justice in our world, and to dialogue with one another in an effort to discover creative ways to build peace in our own day.

*Message of the Franciscan Ministers Generals
on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of
the Spirit of Assisi (27th October 1987)*

”

Abbreviations

Writings of St. Francis

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

Sources for the Life of St. Francis

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

Sources for the Life of St. Clare

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

Editor: Noel Muscat OFM

All correspondence should be
addressed to
muscatnoel@yahoo.co.uk



Spirit + Life