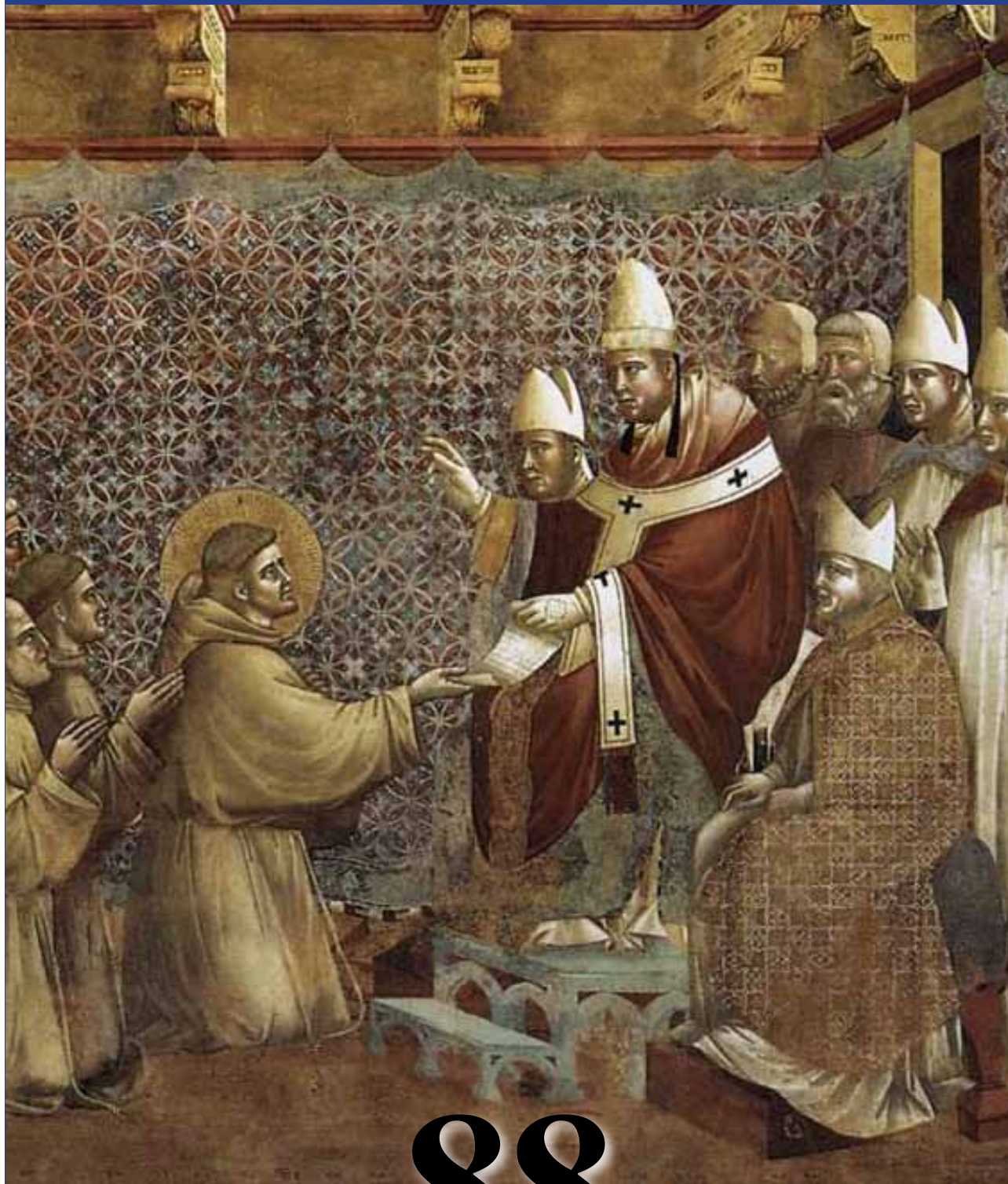


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«GO OUT OF THE TENT»

We are in the aftermath of the celebration of the Chapter of Mats of the Franciscan Family in Assisi during the Easter octave week. This has been an impressive gathering of members of the Franciscan Family worldwide, together with the respective Ministers General. The Chapter commemorated 800 years of Franciscan presence and history in the Church, ever since the approval of the first Form of Life written by Saint Francis and presented to Pope Innocent III in the spring of 1209.

This issue of our Franciscan Review is dedicated in a special way to this event. It is important for all Franciscans, especially younger Franciscans in formation, to appreciate our roots and our history, in order to love our Family that has been one of the greatest achievements of the Catholic Church.

I was talking to some of our young friars from the Holy Land Custody of the Friars Minor who took part in this Chapter of Mats. Like many others of their age they returned enthusiastic and enriched by their experience. They told me that they appreciated the talks given by prominent Franciscan leaders and scholars, as well as the special audience given to them by Pope Benedict XVI at Castel Gandolfo.

One thing struck them most, though. They told me that, among all the ones who conveyed messages to them, they can never forget what our ex-Minister General Giacomo Bini ofm had to say to them. In the enormous tent in which all the Franciscans gathered for the meetings during the Chapter, Giacomo Bini reminded all those present that we have now been celebrating our past, but that it is high time that we stop celebrating history and move on. He encouraged all the Franciscans to be able to go out of the tent into the world, where there is an enormous cloister waiting for the evangelising ministry of the Franciscans. Francis did just that when he left the Lateran Palace of Pope Innocent III.

I think that the words of brother Giacomo are truly prophetic. We are bemoaning our dwindling numbers, the lack of vocations, the lack of enthusiasm and hope for the future. Yet we still want to impress the world that we are thousands and that we know how to celebrate and commemorate our glorious history and tradition. What about forgetting about our past for a few years and going really to the beginnings of our vocation to be reborn as Franciscans? That is, understanding prophetic voices that are so rare in our times? Like the voice of brother Giacomo who tells us to remember what Francis stands for: namely to start living for the sake of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ who never looked back to the past, but always moved on to spread the Good News? It is a pity that voices like these are so rare nowadays, and that we often see more of the same in our Franciscan choices.

Fr. Noel Muscat ofm

SAINT FRANCIS IN FRONT OF POPE INNOCENT III (1209)

Noel Muscat ofm

The celebrations commemorating the 800th anniversary of the approval of the *Forma Vitae*, presented by Saint Francis to Pope Innocent III in 1209, invite us to reflect on the historical and charismatic aspects of such an event in the early life of the Franciscan Order. At the same time, the same commemoration raises a number of questions, which we should try to answer. Can we regard 1209 as the year of foundation of the *Ordo fratrum Minorum*? How can we interpret Francis' initiative in taking his first companions to Rome to see the Pope? Did Francis make use of an erroneous legal process when he bypassed the authority of bishop Guido of Assisi, who alone had the power to send him to the Pope? What did Francis exactly have in mind when he was approached by Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo, and defended his evangelical choice of life by discarding all other options then available to him? What was the true significance of Innocent III's oral approval of the primitive Form of Life? Last but not least, what kind of religious order, if one can correctly call it so, was Innocent III instituting when he sent Francis and the brothers to preach penance?

The answers to these questions help us to focus upon the true historical significance of this episode, not only at the very moment in which it occurred, but also with reference to subsequent influences upon the way in which the history of the Franciscan Order unfolded during the 13th century. They also throw light upon the foundational inspiration of Saint Francis and the true identity of the religious family instituted by him. Finally they show how it is not possible to present Francis' intuition without reference to the Church of Rome, which alone possessed the right and power to accept his way of life and approve it as truly catholic and apostolic.

We must necessarily depart from the presentation of the primitive Franciscan fraternity of brothers who went to Rome with Francis in 1209. Identifying these brothers will help us understand what kind of fraternity Francis intended to present to Pope Innocent III. Then we shall analyse the various Sources that speak about the visit of Francis to Innocent III, taking into account both those coming directly from the pen of Francis' own

companions and those that come from witnesses who were outsiders to the Franciscan family. The latter are normally regarded as being unbiased in their faithfulness to historical truth. Yet they still present us with a number of problems regarding the intentions of their authors and their ability to get the facts historically right. At the end of our presentation we shall try to answer the set of questions we presented above, with the hope of understanding the full meaning of why we Franciscans are celebrating the 800th anniversary of the foundational inspiration of the Gospel life as codified by Francis of Assisi and ratified by the supreme authority of the Church.

What Francis succeeded in accomplishing 800 years ago was a totally new way of religious life in the Church, but its inspiration was not that of Francis alone. At best, Francis was among the most successful among a number of religious reformers, who were, in their majority, lay persons, and who yearned for a return to the original freshness of the Gospel values. A good number of these reformers either ended up being condemned by the Church's hierarchy, or their movements died a natural death. Understanding the reasons behind Francis' successful endeavour is important to see the link between tradition and innovation, intuition and institution, the charismatic and the hierarchical elements which interact in the ecclesial community. Francis and his spiritual family can thus avoid the danger of being an object of historical study, a memory of the past, without a prophetic openness to their role in present day history and in the future.

The first brothers

The Sources for the Life of Saint Francis of Assisi¹ give us divergent presentations of the first Franciscan fraternity. Thomas of Celano, author of the *Vita Sancti Francisci* (1228-29), states that, the first one among the companions of Saint Francis was a certain devout man of Assisi.² We do not know the identity of this mysterious companion. Various possibilities have been presented, among which the name of Elias, who was supposedly the friend Francis took with him whenever he went to a grotto outside Assisi to look for a hidden treasure.³ Since he is not mentioned anymore in the Sources, he is not considered as being in the list of the first companions.

The second one in the line of companions is considered to be the first known companion of Saint Francis, namely Bernardo da Quintavalle.⁴ Celano then mentions a citizen of Assisi who lived a praiseworthy life, as the third companion, and who died shortly afterwards after living in holiness.

Other Sources mention the name of this second companion, namely Pietro.⁵ Some have suggested Pietro di Catanio a lawyer and canon of San Rufino, who accompanied Francis to Egypt in 1219 and was subsequently created Vicar general of the Order by Francis himself (29th September 1220) but died at the Porziuncola on 10th March 1221.

On 23rd April 1208, feast day of Saint George, Egidio (Giles) joined Francis' company. Celano describes Egidio as a simple man, an example of manual work and intense contemplation.⁶ Celano then mentions another unknown companion, and finally Filippo (Longo), making the total number of seven brothers (Francis, anonymous first companion (Elias?), Bernardo da Quintavalle, third companion (Pietro), Egidio, anonymous fifth companion, Filippo). Celano then mentions another anonymous companion,⁷ in order to bring the total number of brothers to eight, including Francis himself. It is probable that he does this on purpose, in order to present the first mission of the brothers, who go out with Francis two by two in all the four directions of the compass. Bernardo and Egidio proceeded to Compostela, whereas Francis and an unknown companion went to the Rieti valley.

After the brothers returned from this first mission, Celano presents another four companions who join Francis, thus bringing the total number

of brothers to twelve, including Francis himself.⁸ Celano does not present the names of these new companions. It is supposed that they were Giovanni di San Costanzo, Barbaro, Bernardo di Vigilante e Angelo Tancredi. At this stage Francis decides to take his companions to Pope Innocent III, in order to request the approval of his *Form of Life* composed mainly of Gospel texts referring to the calling of the apostles and disciples of Jesus.

John of Perugia, author of *De Inceptione vel Fundamento Ordinis*, in English *The Beginning or Founding of the Order*, known also as *The Anonymous of Perugia* (1241), presents Bernardo da Quintavalle and a certain Pietro as the first two companions of Saint Francis, who followed him on 16th April 1208.⁹ The third companion was a priest of Assisi, called Silvestro.¹⁰ These first brothers went to live with Francis at the Porziuncola chapel, where Egidio joined them after eight days, that is on 23rd April 1208.¹¹ Francis takes Egidio with him on a mission to the Marca di Ancona. Upon returning to the Porziuncola, three other companions from Assisi joined Francis, namely Sabbatino, Giovanni (della Cappella) and Morico il Piccolo.¹² Francis then goes out with his six companions for the first mission of the new fraternity.

AP 31 then states that Francis decided to go to Rome with all his companions, who had by now



increased to twelve, including Francis himself. It gives no hint as to who were the new companions who increased the fraternity of six to twelve brothers.

The *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, or *Legend of Three Companions* also states that the first companion of Saint Francis was Bernardo da Quintavalle, who goes with Francis to the church of San Nicolò together with Pietro, the second companion, where they consult the word of the Gospels in the Missal.¹³ The priest Silvestro was next on the line of the first brothers to follow Francis.¹⁴ The first brothers went to live near the Porziuncola, where Egidio joined them.¹⁵ The four brothers then left for their first missionary journey. Francis and Egidio left for the Marca di Ancona. Upon returning to the Porziuncola they were joined by Sabbatino, Morico, and Giovanni della Capella.¹⁶

L3C 41 states that Francis had given permission to the six brothers to accept newcomers into the fraternity, and lead them to Santa Maria della Porziuncola. In this way the *Three Companions* prepare the reader for the episode of the journey to Rome, during which the brothers, including Francis, were twelve.¹⁷

If we try to attempt an incomplete list of the first companions, taking into account what we have seen in the main Sources we have analysed, we would get the following result: (1) Saint Francis; (2) Bernardo da Quintavalle; (3) Pietro (Pietro di Catanio?); (4) Silvestro; (5) Egidio (Giles); (6) Sabbatino; (7) Morico il Piccolo; (8) Giovanni della Cappella; (9) Filippo Longo; (10) Giovanni di San Costanzo; (11) Barbaro; (12) Bernardo di Vigilante; (13) Angelo Tancredi. This would mean that the first companions were not twelve, as many Sources indicate, but thirteen. This, at least, is the list that Arnaldo Fortini compiled in his biography of Saint Francis.¹⁸ However, it is the same Fortini who states that it is unlikely that Silvestro joined the group in the very beginning. The inner conversion he experienced, as is narrated by the Sources, does not mean that he would have joined Francis at that very moment. In any case, the affirmation of the *Three Companions*, who say that, when the brothers went to Rome, Francis was the “twelfth”, does not agree with what other Sources state, when they portray Francis being accompanied by twelve brothers.¹⁹ In this case Silvestro would have been one of them at this early stage of the history of the primitive fraternity.

Francis and the first brothers go to Innocent III

In his *Testament*, Francis describes how, after the Lord gave him the brothers, he decided to go to the

Pope in order to ask for approval of the *Forma vitae* or Rule of life which he had written, basing himself on the Gospel texts he had discovered at San Nicolò and at the Portiuncula.²⁰ This fact is proved by the testimony of the biographers who present us with the texts we now examine in order to follow the events that happened in the Lateran palace in 1209, when Innocent III found himself face to face with yet another evangelical group of laymen who claimed to have rediscovered the calling of living according to the way of life of Christ and the apostles.

Thomas of Celano is the first among the biographers who present the episode of the approval of the *Propositum* or *Forma vitae* by Innocent III.²¹ He gives us the first witness of the fact that this document, which is irretrievably lost, was essentially a simple commentary on the Gospel texts consulted by Francis and the first companions (Mk 10:21 [Mt 19:21?]; Mt 16:24; Lk 9:3) and on the Gospel of the mission of the apostles, heard by Francis in the Portiuncula on 24th February 1208 (Mt 10:9-10). A plausible explanation of this possibility is the fact that these texts are found in the *Earlier Rule* of 1221, in chapters 1 and 14, and therefore the original document, which is officially “lost” could very well have been incorporated into the *Regula non bullata*.

The initiative to go to Rome was a courageous decision, but maybe an imprudent one as well. In fact, Celano says that when Francis and the brothers arrived in Rome, they met Bishop Guido II of Assisi, who was surprised to see them, and who was afraid that they might abandon his diocese, where he held them in high regard. These words could very well hide a sense of frustration on the Guido’s part. As a diocesan bishop who was well aware of his rights and duties, Guido might have been rather angry that Francis had taken such a bold initiative to go directly to the Pope without first asking his permission.²² After all, Guido had recently approved the small fraternity and its form of life for his own diocese. Indeed, Francis’ preaching tours outside the confines of the Assisi *contado* might also be regarded as canonically inaccurate missions, since Francis and the brothers would have no protection outside the territory which fell under Guido’s Episcopal jurisdiction. Guido, however, seemingly tried to help Francis who might have naïvely thought that he could see the Pope without any intermediary help. So he addressed him to the bishop of Sabina, Cardinal Giovanni Colonna di San Paolo²³ who, according to Celano, “among the other princes and great men at the Roman Curia, seemed to look down on the things of the earth and love the things of heaven.” The Cardinal first put Francis to the test, suggesting easier ways of

perfection, namely other Rules of life for religious that the Church had already approved. Francis remained steadfast in his fundamental option for the *apostolica vivendi forma*, and the Cardinal presented him and the brothers to Pope Innocent III, who orally approved their *Forma vita*. The relative ease with which Francis acquired this oral approval is shown in the dream in which he bends a great tree to the ground, symbolizing Innocent III's meekness in approving the way of life of the poor brothers. We shall see that, in subsequent Sources, things did not turn out to be so plainsailing for Francis.

Julian of Speyer's account differs very little from that of Celano, except for the fact that Julian mentions the proposals that Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo made to Francis, namely to accept the way of life of hermits or monks, an offer which Francis turned down in favour of his apostolic option.²⁴

The account given by John of Perugia in *De Inceptione Ordinis*²⁵ shows many similarities with 1C, but at the same time it contains various new elements. The number of the brothers is indicated. They were twelve, plus Francis. Upon leaving Francis proposed to choose one of them as Guardian of the itinerant fraternity, and they chose Bernardo da Quintavalle. Upon arriving in Rome they found Bishop Guido, who welcomed them kindly and addressed them to Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo. AP does not say that Guido was surprised to see Francis and the brothers in Rome, nor that he feared that they would leave his diocese. The Cardinal expressed his wish to become "protector" of the primitive brotherhood and introduced Francis to Innocent III with the word: "I have found a most perfect man who wishes to live according to the form of the holy Gospel and to observe evangelical perfection." The Pope asked Giovanni di San Paolo to bring Francis in his presence. The Pope was impressed by Francis' way of life, but he still wanted to place him to the test and asked Francis to go and pray the Lord to give him a sure sign that his calling to evangelical perfection was truly a divine initiative. At this point the AP introduces the dream of the beautiful and poor woman in the desert, who sends her sons to live in the palace of the king, who was their father, and who welcomed them with joy, seeing his own resemblance in them. This vision was a sure sign for Francis and he returned to the Pope and recounted this parable to him. The Pope was then convinced that this was a divine sign of Francis' genuine intentions and approved his *Forma vitae*. Francis then promised obedience to the Pope, and the brothers did likewise to Francis. The Pope then gave them permission to preach everywhere, and thus the primitive fraternity was now free to go out of the Assisi confines to preach penance. The

Cardinal gave Francis and the brothers a tonsure,²⁶ as a sign of their approval as preachers of penance, or maybe to declare that they were religious brothers, and ordered Francis and the brothers to meet twice a year in a chapter, on Pentecost and on Michaelmas (29th September).

The *Legenda Trium Sociorum* depends upon 1C and AP, but is maybe the most detailed among the Sources in narrating this event.²⁷ Although it combines together both Sources just analysed, it does have some interesting new elements. The episode narrates, in fact, three dreams. The first and last dreams are experiences of Francis, whereas Pope Innocent III has the second dream. The first dream regards the poor woman in the desert and her sons who go to the king. The last dream is the one regarding Francis who bends the high tree to the ground. Thus L3C combine the two dreams, one narrated by AP and the other one by 1C. The Pope's dream is the well-known vision of Francis who supports the Lateran basilica.²⁸ For Innocent III this prophetic dream has a clear meaning: "This is indeed that holy and religious man through whom the Church of God will be sustained and supported." L3C 51 says that "afterwards (Innocent III) approved (the *Forma vitae*) in a consistory." The Latin term *concistorio* could refer to a council of Cardinals, and some scholars have suggested that it could be a reference to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Thus, the oral approval of 1209 would have been followed by a more solemn approval of the *Forma vitae* in 1215, when the fraternity had flourished and spread far and wide. L3C 52 states that "blessed Francis and the other eleven brothers were given the tonsure (*tonsura*), as the lord cardinal had arranged, wanting all twelve of them to be clerics." This detail seems to be in stark contrast to what we have already stated in the case of AP 36, where the term *clerica* (also translated "tonsure" in English) refers to the monastic tonsure, which was a sign of consecration in religious life. It is not clear whether L3C give to the term the same meaning, since the *tonsura* was rather a sign of the clerical state. Even though here the mention of clerics is explicit, we still have to take into consideration that, in the Middle Ages, the latin term *clericus* had a much wider significance than it has today in canon law.

In the *Memoriale in Desiderio Animae*, Thomas of Celano concentrates the whole story of Francis' journey to Rome in one single meeting of Francis with the Pope.²⁹ Celano does not repeat what he had already said in the *Vita Sancti Francisci*, he does not mention bishop Guido or Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo, but mentions the parable of the poor woman in the desert and the Pope's dream regarding Saint Francis supporting the Lateran basilica. The aim of

Celano in this first part of the *Memoriale* is simply that of providing the basis for the second section regarding Francis' virtues, and the historical details are normally kept to the barest essentials. However, we do find a new element in the interpretation of the parable of the poor woman. Celano writes:

"Francis himself was this woman, not because he was soft in his deeds, but because he was fruitful and bore many children. The desert was the world, which was then wild and sterile, with no teaching of virtue. The many beautiful children were the large number of brothers, clothed with every virtue. The king was the Son of God, whom they resemble by their holy poverty. They were fed from the king's table refusing to be ashamed of their lowliness, when, in imitation of Christ, they were content to live on alms and realized that because of the world's contempt they would be blessed."

The last one among the main Sources is Saint Bonaventure, in his *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*.³⁰ The account is borrowed from the sources we have already mentioned, but there are many interesting details and a section, which is original. Bonaventure's idea was that of composing a *legenda* from all the other sources that had been written in the period 1228-1260.³¹

Bonaventure gives us the account of all the

visions and dreams linked with this narrative. He mentions first Francis' dream of the great and high tree that he bent down easily, to symbolize the benevolence of Innocent III regarding his plan of Gospel life. This dream occurs in 1C 33, LJS 21, and L3C 53. The origin of this dream seems to be biblical, since a similar dream is found in the Book of Daniel 4:7-14, where the king Nabuchadnessar is described as a great tree, which is then cut down, in order to symbolize the humiliation of this glorious king who ruled over all the earth. Innocent III is, in a certain way, humiliated in front of the greatness of the plan of Gospel life envisaged by the little, poor and despicable Francis, who knelt down before him and asked him to approve his *Forma Vitae*.

The scene of Francis who presented himself in front of the Pope is presented more realistically in the *Legenda Maior*. In fact, Bonaventure states that the Pope "hesitated to do what Christ's little poor man asked because it seemed to some of the cardinals to be something novel and difficult beyond human powers." This objection on the part of the cardinals might have been highly probable, since the experience of the Curia with many evangelical movements in the 13th century had not always been positive. At this stage Bonaventure introduces the figure of Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo,

Lateran Basilica - Rome



who intercedes for Francis in a very intelligent way, warning his fellow cardinals that, refusing to give permission to Francis to live according to the perfection of the Gospel, meant that “there is something novel or irrational or impossible [...] to live according to the perfection of the Gospel.” That would amount to “blasphemy against Christ, the author of the Gospel.”

Bonaventure’s *legenda* then presents a paragraph, which is totally new and original. In fact, this paragraph did not come from the pen of Bonaventure himself, but was added by Jerome of Ascoli Piceno, Minister General of the Order (1274-1279) and later on Pope Nicholas IV. Arnald of Sarrant, in his *Chronicle of the 24 Ministers General*, tells us that Jerome had heard the story from Cardinal Annibaldi, a nephew of Innocent III.³² This story throws light on an important aspect of Francis’ visit to Pope Innocent III in 1209. The other sources have shown that it was relatively easy for Francis to go in front of the Pope and present his *Forma Vitae*, at least after he had been introduced by Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo. Here, on the contrary, it seems that Francis tried to approach Innocent III on an initial occasion, even before he had been formally introduced to him. How he could have managed to introduce himself in the papal Curia without being blocked beforehand is hard to comprehend, but it seems that Francis did manage to approach the Pope who was deep in thought and who became irritated when he saw the poor man who had intruded his privacy. The relevance of the story lies in the fact that it proves how unprepared Francis was when he decided to go the papal Curia with his first brothers.

The same paragraph describes how Innocent III had a dream of a palm tree, which grew to great heights, and which symbolized the poor little man whom he had sent away the day before. This dream is also centred upon the vision of a tree, and is unique in the sources we have taken into consideration. Whereas the great tree that Francis saw in his dreams bowed down to his humility, in this case the great person of the Pope is humbled and has to look up at the sprout growing and becoming a gigantic palm tree. The dream provides the background for the Pope’s rethinking of the whole issue. Innocent III sent to call Francis from Saint Anthony’s hospice on the Celio, and took note of his request.

Bonaventure then moves on to recount the dream of the poor woman in the desert, which is frequently cited in the sources we have analysed, namely, in AP 35, L3C 50, and 2C 16-17.

Finally, Bonaventure speaks about how Pope Innocent was convinced that Francis’ Gospel project was authentic in the dream of the little poor

man who supported the Lateran basilica, which is also found in L3C 51 and 2C 16. Bonaventure also speaks about the small tonsures (*coronas parvulas*) that Francis and the brothers receive. He does not use the terms *clerica* or *tonsura* used in AP or L3C, and whereas in these earlier sources it was Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo who gave these distinctive signs of religious consecration to Francis and the first brothers, in Bonaventure it is the Pope himself who orders this in order to enable the brothers to preach freely.

One last source regarding Francis’ visit to Innocent III in 1209 is that of Roger of Wendover (†1236), a Benedictine monk of the English abbey of Saint Albans. Being a source coming from the pen of a non-Franciscan it has a particular importance also due to the fact that it presents a curious narrative, which is not found in the other sources we have quoted.³³

The title *Ordo fratrum Minorum*

We have no proof that 1209 is the year, which marks the foundation of the Order of friars Minor (*Ordo fratrum Minorum*).³⁴ On this occasion we can only speak about the official recognition of the *Forma Vitae* of the Gospel lived by Francis and the first brothers on the part of the Church of Rome. In other words, we could state that in 1209, the Church of Rome accepted the Franciscan way of life as catholic. We have absolutely no proof that this automatically implied that the Church was instituting the Franciscan Order as a religious family within its ranks.

It is very difficult to establish the exact moment in which the Church officially recognized Francis and the brothers as an *Ordo fratrum Minorum*. We know that the first brothers would prefer to call themselves “penitents originally from the city of Assisi” (*virī poenitēntiales de civitate Assisi oriundi*).³⁵ According to Thomas of Celano, it seems that the name *fratres minores* came to Francis’ mind quite by chance, when he heard the words of 1 Peter 2:13 at the time when the *Regula non bullata* was in the process of formation.³⁶ That would probably place the fact narrated by Celano some time after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).³⁷

The sources do, in fact, present a development from the primitive description of the fraternity as “penitents originally from the city of Assisi” to “friars Minor”. The chronicler Burchard of Ursperg, Premonstratensian canon of the abbey of Ursperg, in the diocese of Augsburg (1177-1231) says that, in the very beginning the friars were known as *pauperes minores*, and only later did they change their name to *fratres minores*, in order to

avoid vainglory from attributing to themselves the prerogative of being poor.³⁸

By 1216, according to the witness of Jacques of Vitry, the brothers were definitely known as *fratres minores*, even though he does not seem to get his terminology right in the case of the *Poor Ladies*, whom he calls *sorores minores*.³⁹

Both the *Compilatio Assisiensis* and the *Speculum Perfectionis* explain that the name *fratres minores* came to Francis' mind when he heard the reading of the Gospel of Luke 12:32.⁴⁰ Francis regarded his spiritual family as the small remnant of God's flock. For him, it was not simply a question of choosing an official name for his spiritual family, but rather that of being sure that the specific vocation of the friars would correspond to the name by which they were to be known. These sources insist that Francis received a direct revelation from Christ, who reserved to the first brothers this honorific name of *minores* after having prayed for them to the Father. The direct divine intervention is evidently manifest in these sources, particularly the SP, which insist that the Rule itself has been 'dictated' to Francis by Christ, and is thus, in so many ways, a 'revealed' document to be read and observed on parallel lines with the Gospel.

What are we commemorating in this 800th centenary?

In the beginning of our analysis we have presented some questions, which we now try to answer briefly. First of all, can we regard 1209 as the year of foundation of the *Ordo fratrum Minorum*? The answer is no. In 1209 Francis and the first brothers presented their *Forma vitae* to Pope Innocent III as a penitential brotherhood, without any pretention of wanting to become a religious Order. The original *propositum vitae*, according to the sources, was made up of the Gospel texts consulted by Francis and some other practical norms for life in fraternity. The fact that Francis expressly refuses to identify his brotherhood with one or the other of the religious Orders present in the Church during the 13th century is not necessarily an indication that he wanted to found a new religious family, but rather that he did not consider his family as a religious Order in the canonical sense of the term. It was Pope Innocent III, or the papal Curia, through the initiative of Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo, who seemingly identified the first brotherhood with a religious family. The fact that the cardinal gave monastic tonsures to Francis and the brothers could indicate that he regarded them, in a certain way, as religious, but it could also indicate that they were simply a fraternity of itinerant preachers approved

by the Church of Rome. We have seen that we cannot truly speak about the foundation of an *Ordo fratrum Minorum* in 1209. This could have been possible in 1215, with the advent of the Fourth Lateran Council, which established clear criteria for founding new religious Orders in canon 13. The year 1209 can therefore be regarded as the year of the official recognition of the evangelical *Forma vitae* of Francis and his first brothers on the part of the Church of Rome. Thus the primitive fraternity ceased to be a small brotherhood restricted to the environment of Assisi, and opened itself up to a universal calling.

How can we interpret Francis' initiative in taking his first companions to Rome to see the Pope? Did Francis make use of an erroneous legal process when he bypassed the authority of bishop Guido of Assisi, who alone had the power to send him to the Pope? We have seen, from an examination of the sources, that the idea to take the brothers to Rome came to Francis' mind after the initial experiences of evangelisation. Francis was not juridically prepared to know the canonical requirements of having his fraternity approved by the Pope. He certainly did know, however, that as long as he and the brothers would remain confined to Assisi under the jurisdiction of Bishop Guido, their sphere of activity would be rather limited, since they were risking their own reputation whenever they ventured out of the confines of the Assisi diocese. For this reason, maybe, Francis decided to go directly to see the Pope. He might have known that he was bypassing the authority of the local bishop, but he might also have been aware that other lay penitential groups had done just that, and had their *propositum* approved by the Pope. In Rome, however, Francis had to face the authority of Bishop Guido, and although we could say that the bishop might have been irritated when he saw Francis and the brothers in Rome, he eventually gave them his full support, by addressing them to the proper channels of command, with the help of Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo.

What did Francis exactly have in mind when he was approached by Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo, and defended his evangelical choice of life by discarding all other options then available to him? This question is rather hard to answer, given that we do not know, first of all, whether Francis was truly intentioned to found a religious family at this stage. It was rather the Cardinal who suggested the easier way to Francis, by indicating the centuries-old religious institutions of the Church, namely the heremitical or monastic forms of religious life. He might not have indicated the Rule of life of the regular canons, given that these were priests, and the first brothers were nearly all laymen. What

Francis did know was that Christ had called him to live according to the *apostolica vivendi forma*, but this way of life was still not a canonically approved form of religious life in the Church at that moment. It only became so after the confirmation of the *Regula bullata* of the friars Minor in 1223. Francis insisted that he had received an intuition, and he wanted it approved by the institution. That was his only aim in going to Rome. He was aware that the official approval of the Church meant that he and the brothers could live that way of life with a clean conscience and present themselves as wholly catholic. He had no other plans for himself or the brothers.

What was the true significance of Innocent III's oral approval of the primitive *Forma vitae*? The Pope's approval was simply an oral yes to Francis' plan of Gospel living, without any other commitment on the part of the Roman Curia. The Pope did not promise anything to Francis, except that he would re-examine the juridical status of the brotherhood after having given it time to develop and grow, and see how things would work out. Neither was this oral approval easy to get. Although it is difficult to reconstruct the sequence of events when Francis went to Rome in 1209, it is obvious that things were more complicated than they would appear in the oldest version, that of Celano's *Vita Sancti Francisci*. Francis arrived in Rome only to find out that he could not approach the Pope so easily as he might have thought. Roger of Wendover's account seems oddly strange, but it could very well have a grain of truth in it, if we compare it with the addition of Jerome of Ascoli in the *Legenda Maior*. In both instances, we have a clear refusal of the Pope to see and welcome Francis. Indeed, the Pope is irritated at the inopportune intrusion and sends Francis away from his presence. It is only when Francis met Bishop Guido and maybe cleared their mutual misunderstanding as to the intention of his visit that things started moving for him. Guido sent him to Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo, who first put Francis and the brothers to the test by welcoming them to stay on and seeing their way of life. It was not just a question of examining a written document to present to the Pope. The cardinal wanted proof of the authenticity of this way of life by having the brothers to stay with him for some time. Then he started discussing the issue of the initiative with Francis, again presenting him with innumerable difficulties and doubts. Only when he was sufficiently convinced of the sincerity of Francis' intentions did the cardinal promise to present his cause in front of Innocent III and the consistory of cardinals. Once Francis had come to the Pope and presented his petition, he was told

to retire and wait for an answer. At that moment a discussion ensued between the cardinals and the Pope, which would have had a negative outcome if it were not for Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo who felt confident enough to defend Francis and the brothers as genuinely living the Gospel way of life and reproposing it to the whole Church as a concrete possibility and not an ideological utopia as the cardinals were saying. The Pope called back in Francis and sent him with the command to reflect and pray, and wait for a concrete sign from Christ, and then come back to him. The Pope was buying time. He realized that the consequences of his decision were important, since this way of life was a true novelty in the Church, not so much for its contents, but rather for the way Francis had presented it, namely a truly catholic *Forma vitae*, that would have the blessing of the universal Church. The answer came to Innocent III under the form of Francis' parable of the poor woman in the desert. Innocent III, on his part, also had received a sign in the dream of the poor small man supporting the Lateran basilica. At this point the Pope decided to approve this *Forma vitae* orally and *ad experimentum*, and recognized Francis and the brothers as an itinerant fraternity of apostolic men, giving them the permission to preach penance everywhere, and possibly giving them the monastic tonsure as a sign that he regarded Francis and the brothers as true religious. At no point did the Pope ever state that he was founding an Order. This would answer our last question: What kind of religious order, if one can correctly call it so, was Innocent III instituting when he sent Francis and the brothers to preach penance?

These reflections do not have the aim of providing a solution to the way events developed in 1209. What we can add at this point is that it is rather out of place on our part to try to understand whether Innocent III did approve a *Forma vitae* of a clerical, lay, or mixed brotherhood. These canonical expressions we use today to discover the true identity of our being Friars Minor may not have been that relevant in 1209. They would certainly have become relevant shortly afterwards, and particularly during the tumultuous period of Elias generalate and its aftermath with Alberto da Pisa and Haymo of Faversham. But that is another story.

NOTES

¹ The texts of the Sources in English will be quoted from: *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*. Vol. I: *The Saint*; Vol. II: *The Founder*; Vol. III: *The Prophet*, Edited by R.J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, W.J. Short, New City Press, New York – London – Manila 1999-2001 [FAED I-III, plus page number].

- ² 1C 24 (FAED I, 203).
- ³ 1C 6 (FAED I, 187). Cfr. Paul SABATIER, *Life of Saint Francis of Assisi*, Trnslated by Louise Seymour Houghton, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1908, 20-22.
- ⁴ 1C 24 (FAED I, 203-204).
- ⁵ 1C 25 (FAED I, 204).
- ⁶ 1C 25 (FAED I, 204).
- ⁷ 1C 29 (FAED I, 207).
- ⁸ 1C 30-31 (FAED I, 208-209).
- ⁹ AP 10 (FAED II, 37-38).
- ¹⁰ AP 12 (FAED II, 38-39).
- ¹¹ AP 14 (FAED II, 39-40).
- ¹² AP 17 (FAED II, 41).
- ¹³ L3C 27-29 (FAED II, 85-86).
- ¹⁴ L3C 30-31 (FAED II, 86-87).
- ¹⁵ L3C 32 (FAED II, 87).
- ¹⁶ L3C 35 (FAED II, 88).
- ¹⁷ L3C 41 (FAED II, 93); L3C 46 (FAED II, 95).
- ¹⁸ Arnaldo FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi*, English translation of the original edition (*Nova Vita di San Francesco*, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 1959), by Helen Moak, Crossroad, New York 1980, 266-291.
- ¹⁹ JULIAN OF SPEYER, *Vita Sancti Francisci*, 21 (FAED I, 383), agrees with the L3C, whereas the AP 31 (FAED II, 48) says that Francis went with twelve companions.
- ²⁰ S. FRANCISCUS, *Testamentum* 14-15, in *Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di E. Menestò e S. Brufani, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 1995, 228: “Et postquam Dominus dedit mihi de fratribus, nemo ostendebat mihi, quid deberem facere, sed ipse Altissimus revelavit mihi, quod deberem vivere secundum formam sancti Evangelii. Et ego paucis verbis et simpliciter feci scribi et dominus Papa confirmavit mihi.” English text in: FAED I, 125.
- ²¹ THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Prima Sancti Francisci*, 32-33, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 305-307. English translation: 1C 32-33 (FAED I, 210-213): [32] “When blessed Francis saw that the Lord God was daily increasing their numbers, he wrote for himself and his brothers present and future, simply and in few words, a form of life and a rule. He used primarily words of the holy gospel, longing only for its perfection. He inserted a few other things necessary for the practice of a holy way of life. Then he went to Rome with all his brothers, since he greatly desired that the Lord Pope Innocent the Third confirm for him what he had written. There was in Rome at this time the venerable bishop of Assisi, Guido by name, who honoured Saint Francis and all the brothers in everything and revered them with special love. When he saw Saint Francis and his brothers, he reacted strongly at their arrival, as he did not know the reason for it. He feared they wanted to leave their homeland, where the Lord had begun to perform great things through his servants. He greatly rejoiced to have such men in his diocese, for he relied most of all on their life and character. But when he heard the cause and understood their plan, he rejoiced greatly in the Lord and promised to give them advice and to offer his support. Saint Francis

also approached the reverend lord bishop of Sabina, named John of Saint Paul who, among the other princes and great men at the Roman Curia, seemed to look down on the things of earth and love the things of heaven. The bishop received him kindly and charitably and praised highly his wish and plan.

[33] The bishop of Sabina, a far-sighted and discerning man, questioned him about many things, urging him to turn to the monastic or eremitical life. But Saint Francis, as much as he could, humbly refused his urging. He did not despise what was urged on him, but he was intently seeking other things, moved by a loftier desire. The lord marveled at his enthusiasm and, fearful that the holy man might fall in such a lofty proposal, he pointed out smoother paths. Finally, won over by his perseverance, the bishop agreed to his pleas and from then on strove to promote his interests before the lord pope.

Presiding over God's Church at that time was the lord Pope Innocent the Third, a glorious man, prolific in learning, brilliant in speech, burning with zeal for justice in matters which the cause of the Christian faith demanded. When he recognized the wish of the men of God, he first considered the matter and then gave his assent to their request, something he completed by a subsequent action. Exhorting and then warning them about many things, he blessed Saint Francis and his brothers and said to them: ‘Go with the Lord, brothers, and as the Lord will see fit to inspire you, preach penance to all. When the almighty Lord increases you in numbers and grace, come back to me with joy, and I will grant you more things than these and, with greater confidence, I will entrust you with greater things.’

The Lord was truly with Saint Francis wherever he went, gladdening him with revelations and encouraging him with gifts. For when he had gone to sleep one night, he seemed to be walking down a road, and alongside it stood a tree of great height. That tree was lovely and strong, thick and exceedingly high. It came about that when he approached the tree and stood under it and marveled at its beauty and height, the holy man himself rose to so great a height that he touched the top of the tree. Taking it into his hand, he easily bent it to the ground. It really happened this way, when the lord Innocent, a very high and lofty tree in the world, bent himself so kindly to his wish and request.”

²² M. ROBINSON, “Assisi, Bishop Guido II and Saint Francis” in *Greyfriars Review* 12 (1998) 255-287.

²³ John of Saint Paul was a Benedictine monk of the monastery of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome. He became bishop of Sabina in 1204 and died in 1215.

²⁴ IULIANUS DE SPIRA, *Vita Sancti Francisci*, 21, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1042-1043. English translation: LJS 21 (FAED I, 383-384): “[21] Seeing that the number of brothers was gradually increasing, Blessed Francis explained more fully to them his heart's purpose, not to mention the hidden design of divine revelation. He wrote a rule in simple language, including words from the holy gospel, for the perfection of which he strove as much as he could. He wanted what he had written to be confirmed by the supreme pontiff, so he took the eleven brothers

that he had with him, himself being the twelfth, and made his way with them to Rome. When he arrived, he went to one of the cardinal bishops, an esteemed and discreet man, and explained fully and in an orderly manner the cause of his coming to Rome. The cardinal carefully heard the business of the poor man of Christ and, even though he justly commended the plan as praiseworthy, he nonetheless first suggested to Francis that he enter the eremitical or monastic life. But the servant of Christ stuck firmly to what he had begun and, as modestly as he could, refused to agree to suggestions of this sort. But, with the Lord's cooperation he persisted until, thanks to the arrangements of the same bishop, the matter came to the hearing of the supreme pontiff. Divine Providence was with the blessed man in everything he was doing, and its clear revelations and visions made him confident. At that time he saw a vision that promised the Lord Pope's assent to his plan: a mighty tree, wondrously tall, whose top he easily bent down to the earth with his hands. Later on, when the most excellent and magnanimous Lord Pope Innocent III, who was then ruling the church, deigned to give his assent to the poor man, the meaning of this vision became evident. The supreme pontiff gave the twelve brothers his kind consent concerning the confirmation of their rule and also gave them his mandate concerning the preaching of penance. With joy, he blessed and dismissed them, but he promised that later, when their number had increased, he would give them even more."

²⁵ *De Inceptione vel Fundamento Ordinis* 31-36, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1335-1339. English translation: AP 31-36 (FAED II, 48-51): "[31] As he realized that the Saviour's grace was increasing his brothers in number and merit, blessed Francis told them: 'Brothers, I see that the Lord intends to make us a large congregation. Therefore, let us go to our mother, the Roman Church, and inform the Supreme Pontiff about what the Lord is doing through us so we may continue doing what we have begun by his will and command.' Since what Francis said pleased the rest of the brothers, he took the twelve with him, and they went to Rome. While they were on the way, he told them: 'Let us make one of us the leader and consider him the vicar of Jesus Christ for us. Wherever he wants to go, we will go; when he wants to rest, we will rest.' They chose Brother Bernard, who was the first to be received by the blessed Francis, and they did as he said. They made their way rejoicing and spoke about the words of the Lord. No one dared to say anything unless it pertained to the Lord's praise and glory or to the benefit of their souls, and the spent time in prayer. The Lord, on the other hand, prepared lodging and food for them as the need arose.

[32] When they arrived in Rome, they met the bishop of the city of Assisi who was then staying in the City. When he saw them, he welcomed them with immense joy. Now, the bishop was acquainted with one of the cardinals, the Lord John of Saint Paul, a good and religious man, who loved servants of the Lord very much. The bishop of Assisi familiarized him with the proposal and life of blessed Francis and his brothers. After he heard these things, he had a strong desire to meet blessed Francis and some of the brothers. When he heard that they were in

the City, he sent for them and had them come to him. Seeing them, he welcomed them with eagerness and love. [33] Even though they stayed with him for only a few days, he came to love them from the depths of his heart, because he saw shining forth in their actions all he had heard about them. He told blessed Francis: 'I commend myself to your prayers and, from now on, I want you to consider me as one of your brothers. Therefore, tell me, why did you come?' Then blessed Francis made known to him his whole proposal: how he wanted to speak to the Apostolic Lord and, with his approval and mandate, to continue what he was doing. To which the cardinal responded: 'I want to be your procurator at the Curia of the Lord Pope.' Thus it was that he went to the Curia and told the Lord Pope Innocent the Third: 'I found a most perfect man who wishes to live according to the form of the holy Gospel and to observe evangelical perfection. Through him, I believe the Lord intends to renew His church in the entire world.' When he heard this, the Lord Pope was amazed and told him: 'Bring him to me.'

[34] On the following day, therefore, he brought him to the pope. Blessed Francis laid his whole proposal before the Lord Pope, just as he had previously done to the cardinal. The Lord Pope answered him: 'Your life is too hard and severe, if you wish to found a congregation possessing nothing in this world. For where will you obtain the necessities of life?' Blessed Francis responded: 'My Lord, I trust in my Lord Jesus Christ. Since He has promised to give us life and glory in heaven, He will not deprive us of our bodily necessities when we need them on earth.' 'What you say is true, son,' the pope replied, 'but human nature is weak and never remains in the same state. But, go and pray to the Lord with all your heart, so that He may show you what is better and more beneficial for your souls. Come back and tell me and I will then grant it.'

[35] Francis withdrew to pray. With a pure heart, he prayed to the Lord that in His ineffable piety He would reveal this to him. While he was engaged in prayer, with his whole heart focused on the Lord, the words of the Lord came into his heart and spoke to figuratively. 'There lived in the realm of a great king a very poor but beautiful woman, who caught the king's eye and by whom he fathered many sons. One day that woman began to think to herself: «What am I to do, a poor woman with so many sons? I have no possessions to provide them with a livelihood!» While she was pondering all these things in her heart, her face became sad. When the king arrived, he said to her, «What is the matter? I see that you are lost in thought and sad.» With her whole heart she told him all her thoughts. The king told her: «Do not be afraid of your dire poverty, nor of the sons you have, and the many you will have. If the many hired hands in my house have their fill of food, I certainly do not want my own sons to die of hunger. No, I want them to have even more than the others.»' The man of God, Francis, immediately understood that the poor woman symbolized him. As a result, the man of God strengthened his resolve to observe most holy poverty in the future.

[36] Getting up at that very hour, he went to the Apostolic

Lord, and told him all that the Lord had revealed to him. On hearing this, the Lord Pope was greatly amazed that the Lord had revealed His will to so simple a man. And he realized that he was not proceeding according to human wisdom, but in the display and power of the Spirit. Then blessed Francis bowed down and humbly and devoutly promised obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope. And the other brothers, because they had not yet promised obedience, likewise promised obedience and reverence to blessed Francis according to the precept of the Lord Pope. The Lord Pope approved the rule for him and his brothers, both present and future. He also gave him authority to preach everywhere as the grace of the Holy Spirit was given him and that the other brothers were also to preach, provided that blessed Francis gave them the office of preaching. From then on, blessed Francis began preaching to the people in the cities and villages, as the Spirit of the Lord revealed to him. The Lord placed in his mouth uncompromising, honey-flowing, and very sweet words, so that hardly anyone ever tired of listening to him. Because of his great love for the Brother, that cardinal had all twelve of them given the tonsure. Afterwards, Blessed Francis ordered that a chapter be held twice a year, on Pentecost and on the feast of Saint Michael in the month of September.”

²⁶ AP 36 speaks about “twelve brothers” including Francis, whereas AP 31 states that Francis took with him “twelve brothers” to Rome. The *clerica*, or tonsure, was not necessarily a sign that the brothers were considered to be clerics. In the Middle Ages it could simply mean that they were religious, and that they had permission to preach.

²⁷ *Legenda Trium Sociorum* 46-53, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1419-1425. English translation: L3C 46-53 (FAED II, 95-99): “[46] Seeing that the Lord would increase his brothers in number and merit, since there were already twelve most perfect men expressing the same belief, blessed Francis said to the eleven, he being the twelfth, their leader and father: ‘Brothers, I see that the Lord mercifully wants to increase our congregation. Then, going to our mother, the holy Roman Church, let us inform the Supreme Pontiff what the Lord has begun to do through us, with his will and command, that we may continue doing what we have undertaken.’ And since the proposal of their father pleased the other brothers, and they had embarked together with him on the journey to the Curia, he said to them: ‘Let us make one of us our leader and consider that man a kind of vicar of Jesus Christ, so that wherever he wants to go, we will go, and whenever he wants to rest, we will rest.’ And they chose Brother Bernard, the first after blessed Francis, and, as the father said, they served him. They, then, made their way rejoicing and spoke about the words of the Lord, not daring to say anything except for the praise and glory of God and the benefit of the soul and they frequently spent time in prayer. The Lord, on the other hand, prepared lodging for them, doing what was necessary to minister to them.

[47] When they arrived in Rome and found the bishop of the city of Assisi there, they were received with immense

joy, for he honoured blessed Francis and all the brothers with special affection. Not knowing the reason for their arrival, he began to be apprehensive, fearing that they might want to leave their native land, where the Lord had begun to do marvelous things through them. For he rejoiced to have in his diocese such men whose life and conduct he greatly appreciated. After he learned their purpose and understood their plan, however, he was overjoyed and promised them his counsel and help. The bishop was known to the cardinal bishop of Sabina, named Lord John of Saint Paul, a man truly full of God’s grace, who loved, in particular, servants of God. The bishop of Assisi made the life of blessed Francis and his brothers clear to him. On this account, he was eager to meet the man of God and some of his brothers. Hearing that they were in the City, he sent for those men and welcomed them with great reverence and love.

[48] During the few days they were staying with that man, they so edified him with their holy words and example, that, seeing what he had heard about them to shine in deed, he commended himself humbly and devoutly to their prayers. He even asked them, as a special grace, to be considered one of their brothers. Then asking blessed Francis the reason why he came and hearing from him their entire proposal and intention, he offered to be their procurator at the Curia. That cardinal then went to the Curia and told the Lord Pope Innocent III: ‘I found a most perfect man, who wishes to live according to the form of the holy Gospel, and to observe evangelical perfection in all things. I believe that the Lord wills, through him, to reform the faith of the holy Church throughout the world.’ Hearing this, the lord pope was greatly amazed and had the cardinal bring blessed Francis to him.

[49] On the following day, therefore, the man of God was presented by that cardinal to the pope, to whom he revealed his entire holy proposal. The pope, a man of extraordinary discernment, in due fashion assented to Francis’s request, and encouraged him and his brothers in many ways. He blessed them saying: ‘Go with the Lord, brothers, and as He will see fit to inspire you, preach penance to everyone. When almighty God increases you in number and grace, come back to us. We will grant you more, and entrust you with a greater charge.’ Before the saint left his presence, the Lord Pope wanted to know whether what had been, and what would be conceded, was according to the Lord’s will. And so, he said to him and his companions: ‘My dear young sons, your life seems to Us exceptionally hard and severe. While We believe there can be no question about your living it because of your great zeal, We must take into consideration those who will come after you lest this way of life seem to burdensome.’ The pope saw that their constancy of faith and the anchor of their hope was so firmly grounded in Christ, that they did not want to be shaken from their enthusiasm. So he said to blessed Francis: ‘My son, go and pray that God will reveal to you whether what you ask proceeds from His will. In this way, knowing the Lord’s will, We may accede to our desires.’

[50] Once God’s saint had prayed, as the Lord Pope suggested, the Lord spoke figuratively to him in spirit:

‘There was a little, poor and beautiful woman in a desert, whose beauty fascinated a great king. He wanted to take her as his wife, because he thought that, from her, he would have handsome sons. After the marriage was celebrated and consummated, there were many sons born and raised. Their mother spoke to them in this way: ‘My sons, do not be ashamed, for you are sons of the king. Therefore, go to his court and he will provide for all your needs.’» When they went to see the king, he was struck by their good looks, and noticing a resemblance to himself in them, he asked them: ‘Whose sons are you?’» When they answered that they were the sons of the little poor woman living in the desert, the king embraced them with great joy. ‘Do not be afraid,’ he said, ‘for you are my sons. If strangers are fed at my table, how much more will you, who are my lawful sons.’» He then ordered the woman to send to his court all of the children she had borne to be fed.’ When these things had been shown to blessed Francis while he was praying, the man of God understood that the poor woman signified him.

[51] After he completed his prayer, he presented himself to the Supreme Pontiff and narrated point-by-point the story that the Lord had revealed to him. ‘My lord,’ he said, ‘I am that little poor woman whom the loving Lord, in His mercy, has adorned, and through whom He has been pleased to give birth to legitimate sons. The King of kings had told me that He will nourish all the sons born to me, because, if He feeds strangers, He must provide for His own. For if God gives temporal goods to sinful men out of love for providing for His children, how much more will He give to Gospel men who deserve these things out of merit.’ On hearing this, the pope was greatly amazed, especially since, before blessed Francis’s arrival, he had seen in a vision the church of Saint John Lateran threatening to collapse, and a religious, small and of shabby appearance, supporting it on his own shoulders. When he awoke, stunned and shaken, as a discerning and wise man, he pondered what this vision meant to tell him. A few days later, blessed Francis came to him, made known his proposal, as we have said, and asked him to confirm the rule he had written in simple words, using the words of the holy Gospel, for whose perfection he fully longed. As he was reflecting on how enthusiastic blessed Francis was in God’s service, and comparing his vision with that shown to the man of God, he began to say to himself: ‘This is indeed that holy and religious man through whom the church of God will be sustained and supported.’ So he embraced him and approved the rule he had written. He also gave him and his brothers permission to preach penance everywhere, with the stipulation that the brothers who preach obtain permission from blessed Francis. Afterwards he approved this in a consistory.

[52] Therefore, after obtaining these favours, blessed Francis thanked God and on bended knees, promised obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope humbly and devoutly. The other brothers, in accordance with the precept of the Lord Pope, promised obedience and reverence to blessed Francis in a similar way. After receiving a blessing from the Supreme Pontiff and visiting the tombs of the Apostles, blessed Francis and

the other eleven brothers were given the tonsure, as the lord cardinal had arranged, wanting all twelve of them to be clerics.

[53] As he was leaving the City, the man of God, with his brothers, set out into the world, greatly surprised at how easily his desire had been granted. He was growing each day in the hope and trust of the Saviour, who had earlier shown him by holy revelation what was to happen. For before he had obtained these things, one night when he had gone to sleep, it seemed to him that he was making his way down a road beside which there was a lovely, strong and thick tree that was exceedingly high. As he approached and stood under it, marveling at its height and beauty, the holy man suddenly rose to so great a height, that he touched the top of the tree and very easily bent it even to the ground. It really happened this way, when the Lord Innocent, a very high, lovely, and strong tree in the world, bent himself so kindly to his wish and request.”

²⁸ Regarding the same dream of Innocent III in the Sources for the life of St. Dominic, cfr. FAED II, 97, footnote a. The dream is narrated by Constantius Medici in his *Life of Saint Dominic* (1244-1245).

²⁹ THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Secunda Sancti Francisci*, 16-17, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 457-460. English translation: 2C 16-17 (FAED II, 254-256): “[16] When he presented himself and his followers before Pope Innocent to request a rule for his life, it seemed to the pope that their proposal for a way of life was beyond their strength. A man of great discernment, he said to Francis: ‘My son, pray to Christ that through you he may show us his will, so that, once we know it, we may confidently approve your holy desire.’ The saint accepted the command of the supreme shepherd and hurried to Christ. He prayed intently, and devoutly exhorted his companions to appeal to God. What next? In praying, the answer came to him and he told his sons of the news of salvation. Thus, Christ’s familiar speaking in parables is recognizable. ‘Francis,’ He said, ‘say this to the pope: Once upon a time there was a poor but lovely woman who lived in a desert. A king fell in love with her because of her great beauty; he gladly betrothed her and with her had lovely children. When they had grown up, having been nobly raised, their mother said: ‘Dear children, do not be ashamed because you are poor, for you are all children of a great king. Go joyfully to his court, and ask him for what you need.’» Hearing this they were amazed and overjoyed. At the thought of being royalty, their spirits were lifted. Knowing they would be the king’s heirs, they reckoned all their poverty riches. They presented themselves boldly to the king: they were not afraid to look at him since they bore his very image. When the king saw his likeness in them, he was surprised, and asked whose sons they might be. When they said they were the children of the poor woman who lived in the desert, the king embraced them. ‘You are my heirs,’ he said, ‘and my sons; have no fear! If strangers are fed at my table, it is only right that I feed you; for by law my whole inheritance belongs to you.’» The king then sent orders to the woman to send all his sons to be fed at his court.’ This parable made the saint happy, and

he promptly reported this holy message to the pope.

[17] Francis himself was this woman, not because he was soft in his deeds, but because he was fruitful and bore many children. The desert was the world, which was then wild and sterile, with no teaching of virtue. The many beautiful children were the large number of brothers, clothed with every virtue. The king was the Son of God, whom they resemble by their holy poverty. They were fed from the king's table, refusing to be ashamed of their lowliness, when, in imitation of Christ, they were content to live on alms and realized that because of the world's contempt they would be blessed. The lord pope was amazed at the parable presented to him, and recognized without a doubt that Christ had spoken in this man. He remembered a vision he had seen only a few days earlier, and instructed by the Holy Spirit, he now believed it would come true in this man. He saw in a dream the Lateran basilica almost ready to fall down. A religious man, small and scorned, was propping it up with his own bent back so it would not fall. 'I'm sure,' he said, 'he is the one who will hold up Christ's Church by what he does and what he teaches! Because of this the lord pope easily bowed to his request; from then on, filled with devotion to God, he always loved Christ's servant with a special love. He quickly granted what was asked and promised even more.'

³⁰ BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci* III,8-10, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 800-803. English translation: LM III,8-10 (FAED II, 547-549): "[8] Seeing that the number of brothers was gradually increasing, Christ's servant wrote for himself and his brothers a form of life in simple words in which, after he had placed the observance of the holy Gospel as its unshakable foundation, he inserted a few other things that seemed necessary for a uniform way of life. As he desired to have what he had written approved by the Supreme Pontiff, he decided to go with his band of simple men before the presence of the Apostolic See, placing his trust solely in God's guidance. As God was looking from on high upon their desire, He strengthened the companions' frame of mind, terrified at the thought of their simplicity, by showing the man of God a vision of this sort. It seemed to him that he was walking along a road beside which stood a tree of great height. When he approached and stood under it, he marveled at its height. Suddenly he was lifted so high by divine power that he touched the top of the tree and easily bent it down to the ground. The man, filled with God, understanding the portent of this vision to refer to the condescension of the Apostolic See, was overjoyed and, after he had comforted his brothers, set out with them on the journey.

[9] When he arrived at the Roman Curia and was brought into the presence of the Supreme Pontiff, he explained his proposal, humbly and urgently imploring him to approve that rule of life. The Vicar of Christ, the Lord Innocent III, a man thoroughly brilliant with wisdom, admiring in the man of God remarkable purity and simplicity of heart, firmness of purpose, and fiery ardor of will, gave his assent to the pious request. Yet he hesitated to do what Christ's little poor man asked because it seemed to

some of the cardinals to be something novel and difficult beyond human powers. Among the cardinals there was a most venerable man, the lord John of Saint Paul, Bishop of Sabina, a lover of holiness, and helper of Christ's poor. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he said to the Supreme Pontiff and his brother cardinals: 'If we refuse the request of this poor man as novel or too difficult, when all he asks is to be allowed to lead the Gospel life, we must be on our guard lest we commit an offense against Christ's Gospel. For if anyone says that there is something novel or irrational or impossible to observe in this man's desire to live according to the perfection of the Gospel, he would be guilty of blasphemy against Christ, the author of the Gospel.' At this observation, the successor of the Apostle Peter turned to the poor man of Christ and said: 'My son, pray to Christ that through you He may show us His will, so that once we know it with more certainty, we may confidently approve your holy desire.'

[9a *Additio posterior*] When he arrived at the Roman Curia and was led into the presence of the Supreme Pontiff, he explained his proposal asking with humility and persistence that the rule of life be approved. The Vicar of Christ was in the Lateran Palace, walking in a place called the Hall of Mirror, occupied in deep meditation. Knowing nothing of Christ's servant, he sent him away indignantly. Francis left humbly, and the next night God showed the Supreme Pontiff the following vision. He saw a palm tree sprout between his feet and grow gradually until it became a beautiful tree. As he wondered what this vision might mean, the divine light impressed upon the mind of the Vicar of Christ that this palm tree symbolized the poor man whom he had sent away the previous day. The next morning he commanded his servants to search the city for the poor man. When they found him near the Lateran at Saint Anthony's hospice, he ordered him brought to his presence without delay.

[10] The servant of Almighty God, giving himself totally to prayer, obtained through his devout prayers both what he should say outwardly and what the pope should hear inwardly. For when he told a parable, as he had accepted it from God, about a rich king who gladly betrothed a poor but lovely woman who bore him children with the king's likeness, and, for this reason were fed at his table, he added his own interpretation. 'The sons and heirs of the eternal King should not fear that they will die of hunger. They have been born of a poor mother by the power of the Holy Spirit in the image of Christ the King, and they will be begotten by the spirit of poverty in our poor little religion. For if the King of heaven promises his followers an eternal kingdom, he will certainly supply them with those things that he gives to the good and the bad alike.' While the Vicar of Christ listened attentively to this parable and its interpretation, he was quite amazed and recognized without a doubt that Christ had spoken in this man. But he also confirmed a vision he had recently received from heaven, that, as the Divine Spirit indicated, would be fulfilled in this man. He saw in a dream, as he recounted, the Lateran basilica almost ready to fall down. A little poor man, small and scorned, was propping it up

with his own back bent so that it would not fall. 'I'm sure,' he said, 'he is the one who will hold up Christ's Church by what he does and what he teaches.' Because of this, filled with exceptional devotion, he bowed to the request in everything and always loved Christ's servant with special love. Then he granted what was asked and promised even more. He approved the rule, gave them a mandate to preach penance, and had small tonsures given to all the lay brothers, who were accompanying the servant of God, so that they could freely preach the word of God.

³¹ The order of the chapter of Narbonne in 1260, or more probably, of the chapter of Rome in 1257 was the following: *Iterum ordinetur de legenda beati Francisci, ut de omnibus una bona compiletur* ("Ceremoniale ordinis minorum vetusissimum sub Ioanne de Parma ministro generali emanatae anno 1254", a cura di G. GOLUBOVICH, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 3 (1910) 76).

³² ARNALD DE SARRANT, *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*, in *Analecta Franciscana* III, 365: "His Generalis addidit Legendae beati Francisci per dominum fratrem Bonaventuram compilatae illam visionem domini Papae Innocentii tertii, quando beatum Franciscum tamquam ignotum repulit indignanter ab illo loco: «Cum igitur esset Christi vicarius in loco, qui dicitur Speculum» etc.; quam sibi dominus Richardus, tituli sancti Angeli diaconus Cardinalis, nepos eiusdem domini Papae, prout ab eodem, avunculo suo, receperat, devote revelavit."

³³ ROGER OF WENDOVER, *Chronicle* 5-6 (FAED I, 598-599): "In order to carry out his salutary purpose this man of God, Francis, had the above-mentioned norms set down in writing, together with some others which are most faithfully observed by the brothers of this Order up to the present time, and presented this document to Pope Innocent, who was sitting in consistory at Rome, requesting that his petition be confirmed by the Apostolic See. The Pope attentively considered the brother standing before him; his strange habit, his ignoble countenance, his long beard, his unkempt hair, and his dirty and overhanging brow, and once he had Francis' petition read, which was so difficult, indeed impossible in common estimation to carry out, he despised him and said: 'Go, brother and look for some pigs, to whom you are more fit to be compared rather than to human beings, and roll round with them in a slough; give them this Rule you prepared and fulfill there your office of preaching.' When Francis heard these words, he bowed his head and left immediately. He finally found some pigs and rolled with them in the mud until he had covered his body and habit with filth from head to toe. He then returned to the consistory and presented himself to the gaze of the Pope. 'My Lord,' he said, 'I have done as you ordered; I beg you, now hear my petition.' When the astonished Pope saw what Francis had done, he deeply regretted having treated him with contempt. When he composed himself, he ordered Francis to wash himself and then return to him. Francis swiftly cleansed himself from the filth and returned immediately. Overcome with emotion because

of this, the Pope granted his petition; after confirming his Order and, through a privilege of the Roman Church, the office of preaching which he had requested, he dismissed him with a blessing." Original text in L. LEMMENS, *Testimonia minora saeculi XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi*, Collegio San Bonaventura, Quaracchi 1926, 31.

³⁴ Historically the Latin name *Ordo fratrum Minorum* would indicate the Order from the moment of the approval of the *Forma vitae* in 1209 (even though at that stage the sources do not speak about an *Ordo* in the canonical sense of the term) up till the moment when the Order split into two distinct families, namely the *Ordo Fratrum Minorum de Regularis Observantia*, and the *Ordo Fratrum Minorum Conventualium*, in 1517. Some historians would speak about the *O.Min.* or *Ordo (fratrum) Minorum*. The name *Ordo Fratrum Minorum* refers to the families of the First Franciscan Order as we know them today, and as they developed from 1517 onwards. Nowadays there are three families with this name, namely: *Ordo Fratrum Minorum* (Order of Friars Minor), *Ordo Fratrum Minorum Conventualium* (Order of Friars Minor Conventuals), and *Ordo Fratrum Minorum Cappuccinorum* (Order of Friars Minor Capuchins). The official name *Ordo Fratrum Minorum* without any other adjectives was given by Leo XIII in 1897 to four autonomous families of the First Order, which coexisted under the obedience of one Minister General, and which the Pope united into one family, namely the *Fratres Minores de Regularis Observantia*, the *Fratres Minores Riformati*, the *Fratres Minores Discalceati* or *Alcantarini*, and the *Fratres Minores Recollecti*. The Friars Minor Capuchins are a reform, which started in 1525 and was officially recognized as an autonomous Order in 1610.

³⁵ L3C 37 (FAED II,90); AP 19 (FAED II, 43).

³⁶ THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Sancti Francisci*, 38, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 312-313: "Ordinem Fratrum Minorum primitus ipse plantavit, et ea scilicet occasione hoc ei nomen imposuit. Cum nempe sic in Regula scriberetur: 'Et sint minores', ad huius sermonis prolationem, ea quidem hora: 'Volo', inquit, 'ut Ordo Fratrum Minorum fraternitas haec vocetur'. – Et vere minores, qui, omnibus subditi exsistentes, semper quaerebant locum vilitatis, et officium exercere, et in quo quaedam fore iniuria videretur, ut sic in solido verae humilitatis fundari mererentur, ut felici dispositione in eis consurgeret omnium virtutum fabrica spiritalis." English translation 1C 38 (FAED I, 217). The reference to 1Pt 2:13 is found in *RegNB* 7,2.

³⁷ L. LEHMANN, "Sed sint minores. La minorità nella *Regula non bullata*: proposte e reazioni", in *Minores et subditi omnibus. Trattati caratterizzanti dell'identità francescana*. Atti del Convegno (Istituto Franciscano di Spiritualità, Pontificio Ateneo Antonianum, Roma, 26-27 novembre 2002), Edizioni Collegio S. Lorenzo da Brindisi – Laurentianum, Roma 2003, 129-147. In page 146 the author concludes: "Quindi, è ben probabile che il nome sia stato stabilito poco dopo l'approvazione orale del *propositum vitae* nel 1209/10 o, al più tardi, per la *forma vitae* elaborata intorno al IV Concilio Lateranense nel 1215, per il quale i frati dovevano presentare

indubbiamente una loro regola per sottrarsi al decreto 13 del Concilio che proibiva la fondazione di nuovi Ordini. Con sicurezza possiamo quindi concludere che, dopo una certa fluttuazione (prima “Penitenti di Assisi”, poi “Poveri Minori”), tra il 1210 e il 1216 il nome di *Fratres Minores* viene a stabilirsi in modo che nel 1216 è già ufficiale.”

³⁸ BURCHARD OF URSBERG (FAED I, 594): “The Pope approved certain others then on the rise who called themselves ‘Poor Minors’ [...] However, later on these men realized that their name could possibly lead to self-glorification under the cover of great humility and that, as many bear the title ‘poor’ to no purpose, they could boast in vain before God; therefore, obedient to the Apostolic See in all things, they preferred to be called Lesser Brothers (*Friars Minor*) instead of Poor Minors.”

³⁹ JACQUES DE VITRY, *Letter written from Genoa (1216)* (FAED I, 578-580).

⁴⁰ *Compilatio Assisiensis* 101, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1636-1637. English translation: AC 101 (FAED II, 204-205): “This is why blessed Francis would say: ‘Therefore, the Lord has willed that they be called Lesser Brothers (*Friars Minor*), because they are the people whom the Son of God asked of the Father. They are the ones of whom the Son of God speaks in the Gospel: *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom* (Lk 12:32); and again: *What you did for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did it for me* (Mt 25:40). For, although the Lord may be understood to be speaking of all the spiritually poor, he was nevertheless predicting the religion of the Lesser Brothers (*Friars Minor*) that was to come in His Church. Therefore, as it was revealed to blessed Francis that it was to be called the Religion of the Lesser Brothers (*Friars Minor*), he had it so written in the first Rule, when he brought it before the Lord Pope Innocent III, and he approved and granted it, and later announced it to all in the Council.” Parallel text: *Speculum Perfectionis* 26, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1890-1891. English translation: 2MP 26 (FAED III, 276).

SAINT CLARE AND THE FRANCISCAN ORDER (2)

Felice Accrocca

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The contested memory: friars, nuns, and the Holy See during the second half of the 13th century

It is difficult to know the degree of awareness that the friars in the Italian peninsula had regarding the experience of Clare: probably they would have known that limited information about her and her community given by Celano in his works. We can, however, intuit more fruitful bonds, during the sixties of the 13th century, among the survivors of the original experience, namely among those who had known personally Clare and Francis, and particularly brother Leo and the sisters of the community of Assisi. We have already said that Leo was probably serving the community of San Damiano. In this way we can better understand how it was he who, in 1259, gave witness about the Poor Ladies to Bonaventure, and the reason why he left the famous scrolls and the breviary of Francis to the monastery of Saint Clare. Now, precisely this bond with the old companion of Francis could have strengthened the old companions and the new disciples of Clare in their resistance to the attempts at introducing the observance of the new Rule of Urban IV in the Assisi monastery. After its publication, the cardinal protector Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, who had written the Rule, worked hard to ensure that all the monasteries would embrace the new Rule.¹ Regarding this fact, it is important to underline that, from public documentation published a century ago by Lazzeri, we know that on 11th December 1263 the cardinal had written to the nuns in Tuscany admonishing them to accept «reverenter» the Rule of Urban IV;² two days later, he also wrote to their visitor, inviting him to act «prudenter ac diligenter» in order to reach the same objective; he then had to communicate to the cardinal who were

the nuns who had refused «*pertinaciter*» to accept the new Rule and what were the motives that had made them justify their refusal. In particular, it is very interesting and revealing to note that the fragment of a document of the Clares in Bruges, that Lazzeri published in a note, and which is dated 1265, affirms that the nuns professed the Rule of Urban IV voluntarily and not because of any coercive action on the part of the friars.

Another illuminating document is the letter *Ut Ordo beatae Clarae* that Clement IV addressed, on 11th December 1265, to the visitator of the Umbrian Province. He says that many monasteries that professed the Constitutions of Hugolino, observing the Benedictine Rule, were now refusing to accept the Rule of Urban IV.³ The pope warned these communities that if they would persist in their refusal, he would deny them the help and the favours of the cardinal protector and of the friars who were subject to him; as a consequence, the nuns would remain without a pastor, and would have to submit to the authority of the diocesan bishops, or else provide themselves for their pastoral care. They would cease to pertain to the Order of Saint Clare and would not enjoy the favours given to that Order, since they would be deprived of the title of being an Order.⁴ The visitator was also obligated to remind the nuns who resisted the pope's orders, that if they held as dear to them the blessing of the pope and his benevolence and that of the Holy See towards them, besides «*incommoda evitare*», they were advised to accept and profess the Rule of Urban IV.⁵

In spite of this clear command, on 31st May 1266 the Pope wrote to Cardinal Orsini telling him that some nuns from the Order of Saint Clare, coming from diverse places, had gone to the Papal Curia in Viterbo. They were unanimously resolute in their refusal, declaring that they preferred to remain in their preceding situation, or else, to embrace the Rule given to Isabelle of France.⁶ It is difficult to imagine how these nuns, who came to the Curia declaring that they were representing many other nuns in various places, could have acted on their own initiative, since they were bound by strict laws of enclosure. It is more probable that the initiative was that of friars who sent them to the Papal Curia.

Their resistance was a lengthy one. In fact, more than thirty years later, Matteo Rosso Orsini, returned on the same argument. In the letter *Inter cetera*, addressed to the minister general and ministers provincial of the Order of friars Minor, on 8th April 1297, he exhorted them to put all their efforts to convince those communities of nuns who had not yet accepted the Rule of Urban IV.⁷ The attitude of Boniface VIII in this regard was emblematic. In 1297 he deposed Giovanna, daughter of Giovanni

Colonna, from her role as abbess, and in 1298 he tried to introduce the Rule of Urban IV in the monastery of San Silvestro *in Capite*, of the community founded by Margherita Colonna. In this monastery the nuns followed the Rule of Blessed Isabella, given in 1285 by Honorius IV. In the same monastery there were also six friars Minor, at the service of the nuns. The nuns resisted and on 23rd December 1303 they obtained the confirmation of the permission to observe the Rule of Isabella from Benedict XII.

The reading of the *Bullarium Franciscanum* invites us to take into consideration another testimony by Ubertino da Casale, which unfortunately is often discarded, because of its excessive impartiality. Ubertino says that, when Giovanni Gaetano Orsini was still Cardinal Protector, he composed for the Order of Saint Clare a new Rule, and thus made the same Order descend from the ideals of most high poverty and placing it in a very low state in relation to the high esteem it used to enjoy before, as everyone could plainly see if he would read the text of the first Rule, that Francis had composed under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. After fifty years had elapsed, Ubertino seems to have lost knowledge of the initial and troubled history of the Order of Saint Clare. He considered the community of San Damiano as the origin of all the others and the Rule of Saint Clare as being followed in all the other monasteries, before the advent of the Rule of Urban IV. More interesting still, however, is what he refers later on in the same testimony: “[Cardinal Orsini], since he had been protector of our Order, refused the perfection of another Rule, and ordered that those harsh precepts, that had been approved by Pope Urban, were now to be divulged in all the world, so that no friar could pretend to deter those nuns from accepting the modifications that he had made. That fragile sex has suffered many persecutions and threats in those monasteries that resisted, and for many years did not want to accept these modifications. If all this came from the Holy Spirit, at least in that it was permitted as a punishment for sins, can be proved only by the way events unfolded later on.”⁸

The resistance of the Assisi monastery

In the light of this context, it is undoubtedly significant that the nuns in Assisi had asked and obtained from the Pope, on 31st December 1266, the Letter *Solet annuere*,⁹ confirming the Rule of Saint Clare approved by Innocent IV. It is logical to suppose that, in this action of “resistance” on the part of the nuns, who wanted to honour the memory of Clare, one can also see the hand of brother Leo,

who was the most persistent among the brothers for his defence of the faithfulness of the Franciscan model of the origins, and who was still living in Assisi at the time.¹⁰

According to the dispositions of the Letter *Ut Ordo beatae Clarae*, this re-confirmation placed the community of Assisi outside the Order of Saint Clare. The fact that this was the juridical situation in which the monastery found itself, is seen by the other fact, namely that, while in the preceding letters the community was qualified as pertaining to the Order, from 31st December 1266 this qualification does not appear any longer in the papal documents addressed to the monastery, not even in the Letter *Devotionis vestrae* of Nicholas IV, that Oliver considered as the document that declares the passage of the community of the monastery of Saint Clare of Assisi to the Rule of Urban IV.¹¹

I consider it interesting to look at a decision taken by the minister general Bonaventure, during the General Chapter of Lyon in 1272, in which he commanded the friars “not to dissuade the nuns of Saint Clare from accepting the Rule, but rather to convince them to the contrary, and the minister general wants to recommend them (the nuns) to the reverence of God and of the venerable father and lord Cardinal.”¹² Bonaventure speaks about the nuns of Saint Clare, not about the nuns of the *Ordo Sanctae Clarae*, and makes a reference to a precise minister and not indistinctly to all the ministers who had monasteries of Clares in their Provinces. These are clear elements that make us think that the Minister General was referring to the monastery of Assisi, in which the community, feeling itself as the custodian of the legacy of Clare, and sustained in this attitude by at least some of the friars Minor, continued to resist the pressures coming from outside its walls, compelling it to adopt the Rule of Urban IV. From a letter written by Nicholas IV to Matteo Rosso Orsini we know that, in 1288, the nuns of Saint Clare still professed the Rule of their mother. In this letter the Pope expressly mentions some texts from the Rule of Saint Clare that was observed in the monastery.¹³ The new juridical situation imposed upon the community of Santa Chiara the need to request from the Apostolic See the exemption from the bishop of Assisi and from all other prelates. Clement IV conceded such a privilege of exemption some days after the re-confirmation of the Rule of Saint Clare, on 13th January 1267.¹⁴

It is from this knowledge that, according to my way of seeing things, we should interpret the famous painting of the Maestro di Santa Chiara. Out of eight episodes of the life of Clare that are reproduced in the painting, five regard the first days of her *conversio* and witness to the important role that Francis had

at the beginning of that story. Even the sixth panel, depicting the miracle of the multiplication of the one loaf of bread, reminds one of the strict union of the community of San Damiano with the Order of Minors (the pieces of bread for the sisters are cut from a loaf which is divided in half; the other half is reserved for the friars). In the last panel, during Clare’s funeral, the friars Minor appear in the forefront and in a more important position than the other members of the papal Curia. Could it not be, therefore, that these episodes were represented with another aim, namely that of insisting, in 1283, upon the solemn affirmations present in the opening words of the Rule of Saint Clare, that the form of life of the Order of Poor Ladies had been instituted by Saint Francis?

Elvio Lunghi is of the opinion that the bishop of Assisi, Simone, was the one who commissioned the painting; Kuster is of the same opinion, but states that the friars were probably also collaborating with the bishop.¹⁵ I also agree with these opinions, keeping in mind that the same Simone had been a friar minor and custos of the Sacro Convento in Assisi (during the second half of the 13th century all the bishops of Assisi had been friars Minor).¹⁶

Kuster develops other observations of Servus Gieben,¹⁷ who notes that, while the central image of Saint Clare is painted with a white veil covering her head, upon which there is a black veil that disappears immediately underneath the mantle, in the *historiae* the white veil is absent and the only veil on the head of Clare forms one whole with her mantle. Gieben notes that the first time that a double veil (white and black) is mentioned occurs in the Rule of Urban IV. According to Kuster, the central figure would present Clare as observing the Rule of Urban, and would thus indicate the change that occurred from the community of San Damiano, observing the Rule of Saint Clare, to the community of the Protomonastero, observing the Rule of Urban IV. However, I am not convinced regarding this last interpretation. The way in which Clare is dressed in the central panel does not conform to the prescriptions of the Rule of Urban. In fact, Clare is not wearing the scapular, and her face is not covered, whereas the Rule of Urban states that the sisters “should cover their forehead, cheeks, neck and throat, as befits their honesty and religious life,” and that they should not “appear in any other way in front of outsiders.”¹⁸ The painting therefore demonstrates, in a very correct manner, changes that can be verified with the passage of time. Whoever had commissioned it (an agreement between bishop, friars and nuns?) had, as his primary intention – and this is evident as results from the exact representation of the habit that Clare is wearing –

that the community of Assisi was part of an *Ordo* and observed a Rule that was different from the one that was being observed in the other monasteries of the *Ordo Sanctae Clarae*.

The Liturgy, a strong instrument of diffusion of the cult of Saint Clare

In 1255, most probably on 15th August,¹⁹ Pope Alexander IV canonised Clare in Anagni. I do not think that the Order started to give importance to the cult of the new saint in 1260, as the documentation that has arrived to us shows. In fact, according to the *Chronica XXIV generalium*, the general Chapter held in Rome in 1257 – the first one after her canonisation – at which Pope Alexander IV was present, established that the feast of the Saint should be celebrated according to a double liturgical rank.²⁰ Unfortunately much of the pre-Narbonne legislation of the Order is lost,²¹ and therefore it is not possible to declare with absolute certainty what actually happened. However, it is possible that the dispositions of Narbonne,²² or at least part of them – namely the order to celebrate the office according to a double rank – are a logical development on previous legislation. In the rubric regarding the office, it is said “according to the order of the Pope.” This affirmation confirms what had already been stated in the *Chronica XXIV generalium*, namely that Alexander IV was personally present in the Chapter of 1257. If to this we add the fact that it was the same Pope who promoted and personally took care not only of the canonisation ceremony, but also of the transmission of the memory of Clare, since he commissioned her *Legenda* (and hence wanted to promote her cult), then the information given by the chronicler is not only possible, but highly probable.

Between 1256 and 1260 the cult of Saint Clare appears to be documented in many churches of friars Minor in central and northern Italy. In June-July 1256, in fact, the name of Saint Clare appears side by side with that of Saints Francis and Anthony in a series of papal letters, all addressed to the friars Minor. Alexander IV conceded an indulgence of one hundred days to those who visited the churches of the Minors on the feast days of these saints, and during their octaves.

During the general Chapter of Narbonne, the double office was confirmed and the name of Saint Clare was included in the litanies of the saints that used to be found “at the end of the psalter, after the penitential psalms.”²³ However, this disposition remains unclear (was it an office of greater or lesser double rank?). The Chapter of Pisa of 1263 established that the feast of the Saint, just like that of the Trinity and of the Dedication of a church,

should be celebrated according to a major double rank. In this way the feast of Saint Clare resulted as one of the most solemn in the Order, even though it did not have an octave.²⁴ The Chapter of Lyon in 1272 prescribed the insertion of the name of Clare in the litanies of Holy Saturday and in the other litanies, and asked the friaries to procure for themselves a copy of the *Legenda sanctae Clarae Virginis*.²⁵ Van Dijk says that the reference is precisely to the official *Legenda*, and not to the *Legenda coral*is for liturgical use. Twenty years later (1292) the general Chapter of Paris established that the Office (*historia*) of the Saint be examined, in order to be declared compulsory for the entire Order, except if it was found to be defective; in this case the minister general had to entrust somebody with the task of composing a new office.²⁶ This was to become the Office known as *Iam sanctae Clarae claritatis*, which is also found in the Assisi Codex 338. According to Aureliano van Dijk this office was composed and sang in Assisi some years before the Chapter of Paris and the author made use of the *Legenda sanctae Clarae* as his point of reference. In the following century, the general Chapter of Assisi of 1340 established that the feast of Saint Clare was to be commemorated in the entire Order, just as was the practice already in the case of the feasts of Saint Francis and Saint Anthony.²⁷ The general Chapter of Barcelona in 1357 decreed that the feast of the Translation of Saint Clare, on 2nd October, should be celebrated in the entire Order.²⁸

NOTES

¹ L. KNOX, *Audacious Nuns: Institutionalizing the Franciscan Order of Saint Clare*, in *Greyfriars Review* 16 (2002) 172-177.

² “Monemus igitur vos et rogamus, ac vestre devotioni qua possumus affectione suggerimus, quatenus reverenter suscipientes Regulam prelibatam, quam vobis sub nostri sigilli testimonio mittimus” (Z. LAZZERI, *Documenta controversiam*, 79).

³ “Cum igitur, sicut accepimus, quorundam monasteriorum, que infra fines visitationis tuae sunt sita, abbatissae et sorores dictam regulam adhuc recipere non curvaverunt” (*Bullarium Franciscanum* III, 64B, n. 61).

⁴ “Illud etiam debent abbatissa et sorores praedictae prae oculis suae considerationis habere, quod si quae ipsarum despectis sanitatis consilii propriae prudentiae innitentes regulam non receperint antedictam, ad quam tot et tantis utilitatibus et necessitatibus invitantur, dilecti filii nostri J. Sancti Nicolai in carcere Tulliano diaconi cardinalis eiusdem ad praesens Ordinis protectorem, qui Ordinem ipsum tam ferventi caritate zelatur, et ad profectus ipsius inspirante Domino tam ardentem aspirat, forsitan destituentur auxilio et favore. Profecto si eadem

abbatissaw ac sorores praefati cardinalis destituantur auxilio, per consequens Fratrum Minorum, qui eiusdem subsunt regimini, forsitan tam oportunis obsequiis et tam necessariis auxiliis et consiliis privabuntur. Et ne sine Pastoris cura remaneant, oportebit quod vel dioecesanis episcopis, vel aliis regimen committatur ipsarum, qui curam gerentes earum per alium modum, quam per illum quem hactenus habuerunt, et per alias personas earum procurent commoda et salutem: sicque Ordine ipsarum, quae dictam regulam non tenebunt, ab eodem Ordine Sanctae Clarae diviso, ipsae tamquam omnino discretas ac effectas, ab eodem Ordine alienas, non denominabuntur ab Ordine antedicto; et ipsius immunitatibus, et concessis privilegiis, ac indulgentiis non gaudebunt” (*Bullarium Franciscanum* III, 63C-64A).

⁵ “Volumus ut eas omnes, auctoritate nostra, efficaciter moneas et inducas ut, sicut nostram et apostolicas Sedis gratiam caram habent, et divinam ac nostram benedictionem desiderant, dictaque commoda consequi ac incommoda evitare, infra octo dies post monitionem tuam praefatam praedicti praedecessoris Urbani regulam suscipere ac profiteri procurent” (*Bullarium Franciscanum* III, 64B-A).

⁶ “Verum sorores Ordinis Sanctae Clarae venerunt Viterbium pro multarum terrarum sororibus, quarum mora in Curia nec olim tibi placuit, nec hodie placet. Sunt omnes in hoc proposito, quod tuam regulam non recipiant, sed vel statum observent pristinum, vel, si ille videtur dubius, vivendi formam quam habet dilecta in Christo filia soror regis Franciae acceptabunt” (*Bullarium Franciscanum* III, 82C-A).

⁷ *Bullarium Franciscanum* IV, 433A-B. Cf. L. OLIGER, *De origine regularum ordinis S. Clarae*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 5 (1912) 443.

⁸ UBERTINUS DE CASALI, *Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu*, with an introduction and bibliography by Ch. T. Davis, V, 6, Torino 1961, 448a: “Tantum vero scivit facere serpens antiquus persuasione illorum qui a sua paupertate defecerant et procuracione illius qui illius ordinis erat inter cardinales protector dominus Ioannes de Ursinis, qui fuit postea Nicholaus papa tertius qui sibi novam regulam composuit et ab altissima paupertate deiecit et in gradu vilissimo, respectu prioris altissimi, collocavit. Quod manifeste claret si prime regule, quam per Spiritum Sanctum Franciscus composuit, et huius regule, quam hic dedit, legatur textura. Nam tantum differunt quantum altum et imum, crudum et insipidum, seraphicum et perfectum. Et quia ipse etiam protector nostri Ordinis erat, fecit dura precepta mandari per mundum quod nullus frater presumeret dissuadere illis sororibus, quod non reciperent suam confectionem, quam fecerat per Urbanum papam bullari, perfectione alterius regule refutata. Sed persecutiones et comminationes multe facte sunt fragili illi sexui, aliquibus monasteriis ex eis per multos annos resistentibus, ne sua confectio commodaretur ab eis. Certe utrum hoc a Spiritu Sancto

fuerit, nisi sicut a permittente et puniente peccata, rerum exitus docet.”

⁹ Cf. *Bullarium Franciscanum* III, 107, n. 116.

¹⁰ In 1267 Francesco Venimbeni da Fabriano met Leo in Assisi, as we see in a fragment transcribed around the year 1620 by Giovanni Antonio Cadori, regarding the Portiuncula Indulgence: “Et hoc testificatus est frater Leo, unus de sociis beati Francisci, vir probatae vitae, quem ego frater Franciscus vidi in anno quo veni ad fratres, quando fui ad dictam indulgentiam. Dixit enim frater Leo se audivisse ab ore beati Francisci de dicta indulgentiam ab eo, ut predicatur, impetrata.”

¹¹ Cf. F. CASOLINI, *Il Protomonastero di Santa Chiara in Assisi. Storia e cronaca (1253-1950)*, Milano 1950, 32 and note 82; G.G. MERLO, *Nel nome di san Francesco. Storia dei frati Minori e del francescanesimo sino agli inizi del XVI secolo*, Padova 2003, 200. For a different view of the whole matter, cf. I. OMAECHEVARRIA, *L'Ordine di S. Chiara sotto diverse Regole*, in *Forma Sororum* 15 (1978) 145-146.

¹² SANCTI BONAVENTURAE *Opera Omnia* VIII, 467: “ut non dissuadeant sororibus sanctae Clarae de receptione regulae, immo contrariam suadeant, et vult quod minister habeat eas recommendatas ob reverentiam Dei et venerabilis patris domini cardinalis.” Cf. A.G. LITTLE, *Definitiones Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Fratrum Minorum 1260-1282*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 7 (1914) 680.

¹³ Letter *Licet in Regula* (11th September 1288), in *Bullarium Franciscanum* IV, 39-40, n. 55: “Licet in Regula abbatissae et sororum monasterii sanctae Clarae de Assisio contineatur expresse, ut illum cardinalem Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae in gubernatorem, protectorem et correctorem teneantur habere, qui gubernator, protector atque corrector Ordinis Fratrum Minorum a Sede apostolica fuerit deputatus...”

¹⁴ Privilege *Etsi universae*, in *Bullarium Franciscanum* III, 108-109, n. 118.

¹⁵ Cf. E. LUNGHI, *La decorazione pittorica della chiesa*, in M. BIGARONI – H.E. MEIER-E. LUNGHI, *La basilica di Santa Chiara in Assisi*, Assisi 1994, 182-184; N. KUSTER, *Klaras Tafelbild in Assisi. Zur Komposition der ersten bildhaften Lebensgeschichte der heiligen Schwester*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 73 (2003) 17-46.

¹⁶ Cf. N. D'ACUNTO, *Assisi nel Medio Evo. Studi di storia ecclesiastica e civile* (Quaderni dell'Accademia Proterziana del Subasio, 8), Assisi 2002, 42-44, 207-235.

¹⁷ Cf. S. GIEBEN, *L'iconografia di Chiara d'Assisi*, in *Chiara d'Assisi*, 192.

¹⁸ “Habeant et scapularia sine caputio, de vili et religioso panno vel staminea, amplitudinis et longitudinis condecens, sicut unius cuiusque qualitas exigit, vel mensura [...] Vittis aut velis de panno communi communo albis, non tamen pretiosis aut curiosis, capita sua cooperiant uniformiter et honeste, ita quod frons, genae

et collum et gula sint (ut earum honestati et religioni convenit) cooperta; nec aliter coram extraneis personis audeant apparere” (*Rule of Urban IV*, chapter 4, in *Bullarium Franciscanum* II, 511).

¹⁹ Cf. G. BOCCALI, *Santa Chiara di Assisi. I primi documenti ufficiali: Lettera di annunzio della sua morte, Processo e Bolla di canonizzazione*, introduzione, testo, note, traduzione italiana dei testi latini e indici a cura di G. Boccali (Pubblicazioni della Biblioteca Franciscana Chiesa Nuova – Assisi, 10), Santa Maria degli Angeli – Assisi 2002, 234-237.

²⁰ The Chapter was “in festo Purificationis beatae Mariae celebrato, domino Alexandro papa IV presente. In quo capitulo fuit ordinatum, quod de beata Clara fuerit de cetero festum duplex” (*Analecta Franciscana* III, Quaracchi 1897, 324). According to A. VAN DIJK, *Il culto di Santa Chiara nel medioevo*, in *Santa Chiara d’Assisi. Studi e cronaca del VII centenario. 1253-1953*, 159, this information was taken from NICHOLAS GLASSBERGER, *Chronica*, in *Analecta Franciscana* II, Quaracchi 1887, 74, whereas the *Speculum Minorum* of 1509 adds that the order was given under the command of Alexander IV, who was personally present for the Chapter.

²¹ Cf. C. CENCI, *De Fratrum Minorum Constitutionibus Praenarbonensibus*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 83 (1990) 50-95.

²² F.M. DELORME, «*Diffinitiones*», 504, n. 18: “De sancta Clara fiat officium duplex, sicut papa mandavit; et nomen eius ponatur in letania.”

²³ A. VAN DIJK, *Il culto di Santa Chiara nel medioevo*, 160.

²⁴ “Inter duplicia maiora festum Trinitatis, Dedicatio ecclesie et festum sancte Clare de cetero comptentur. Octava tamen de eisdem non fiat” (S.J.P. VAN DIJK, *The statutes of the general Chapter of Pisa [1263]*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 45 (1952) 31, n. 34). Cf. A. VAN DIJK, *Il culto di Santa Chiara nel medioevo*, 159-160.

²⁵ “Et nomen sanctae Clarae in sabbato sancto et in aliis letaniis ponatur et eius legenda, publicata in generali capitulo, a locis singulis habeatur” (A.G. LITTLE, *Definitiones Capitulorum Generalium*, 681).

²⁶ “Item ordinat et vult Generale Capitulum, quod ystoria beatae Clarae examinari debeat, et recipiatur et cantetur per totum Ordinem, vel fiat alia per aliquem, cui Minister Generalis commiserit, si dicta ystoria inventa fuerit defectiva” (G. ABATE, *Memoriali, Statuti ed Atti di Capitoli Generali dei frati Minori dei Sec. XIII e XIV*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 33 (1933) 27).

²⁷ Cf. F.M. DELORME, *Acta et Constitutiones Capituli Generalis Assisiensis [1340]*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 6 (1913) 255, n. 9.

²⁸ “Festum translationis sanctae Clarae a fratribus et sororibus secunda die octobris celebrentur.”

PAUL SABATIER

«LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI»

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

Chapter VI

ST. FRANCIS AND INNOCENT III

[88] Seeing the number of his friars daily increasing, Francis decided to write the Rule of the Order and go to Rome to procure its approval by the Pope.

This resolution was not lightly taken. It would be a mistake in fact to take Francis for one of those inspired ones who rush into action upon the strength of unexpected revelations, and, thanks to their faith [89] in their own infallibility, overawe the multitude. On the contrary, he was filled with a real humility, and if he believed that God reveals himself in prayer, he never for that absolved himself from the duty of reflection nor even from reconsidering his decisions. St. Bonaventura does him great wrong in picturing the greater number of his important resolutions as taken in consequence of dreams; this is to rob his life of its profound originality, his sanctity of its choicest blossom. He was of those who struggle, and, to use one of the noblest expressions of the Bible, of those who *by their perseverance conquer their souls*. Thus we shall see him continually retouching the Rule of his institute, unceasingly revising it down to the last moment, according as the growth of the Order and experience of the human heart suggested to him modifications of it.

The first Rule which he submitted to Rome has not come down to us; we only know that it was extremely simple, and composed especially of passages from the Gospels. It was doubtless only the repetition of those verses which Francis had read to his first companions, with a few precepts about manual labor and the occupations of the new brethren.

[90] It will be well to pause here and consider the brethren who are about to set out for Rome. The biographies are in agreement as to their number; they were twelve, including Francis; but the moment they undertake to give a name to each one of them difficulties begin to arise, and it is only by some exegetical sleight of hand that they can claim to have reconciled the various documents. The question

took on some importance when in the fourteenth century men undertook to show an exact conformity between the life of St. Francis and that of Jesus. It is without interest to us. The profiles of two or three of these brethren stand out very clearly in the picture of the origins of the Order; others remind one of the pictures of primitive Umbrian masters, where the figures of the background have a modest and tender grace, but no shadow of personality. The first Franciscans had all the virtues, including the one which is nearly always wanting, willingness to remain unknown.

In the Lower Church of Assisi there is an ancient fresco representing five of the companions of St. Francis. Above them is a Madonna by Cimabue, upon which they are gazing with all their soul. It would be more true if St. Francis were there in the place of the Madonna; one is always changed into the image of what one admires, and they resemble their master and one another. To attempt to give them a name is to make a sort of psychological error and become guilty of infidelity to their memory; the only name they would have desired is that of their father. His love changed their hearts and shed over their whole persons a radiance of light and joy. These are the true personages of the *Fioretti*, the men who brought peace to cities, awakened consciences, changed hearts, conversed with birds, tamed wolves. Of them one may truly say: "Having nothing, yet possessing all things" (*Nihil habentes, omnia possidentes*).

They quitted Portiuncula full of joy and confidence. Francis was too much absorbed in thought not to desire to place in other hands the direction of the little company.

"Let us choose," he said, "one from among ourselves to guide us, and let him be to us as the vicar of Jesus Christ. Wherever it may please him to go we will go, and when he may wish to stop anywhere to sleep there we will stop." They chose Brother Bernardo and did as Francis had said. They went on full of joy, and all their conversations had for their object only the glory of God and the salvation of their souls.

[92] Their journey was happily accomplished. Everywhere they found kindly souls who sheltered them, and they felt beyond a doubt that God was taking care of them.

Francis's thoughts were all fixed upon the purpose of their journey; he thought of it day and night, and naturally interpreted his dreams with reference to it. One time, in his dream, he saw himself walking along a road beside which was a gigantic and wonderfully beautiful tree. And, behold, while he looked upon it, filled with wonder, he felt himself become so tall that he could touch

the boughs, and at the same time the tree bent down its branches to him. He awoke full of joy, sure of a gracious reception by the sovereign pontiff.

His hopes were to be somewhat blighted. Innocent III had now for twelve years occupied the throne of St. Peter. Still young, energetic, resolute, he enjoyed that superfluity of authority given by success. Coming after the feeble Celestine III, he had been able in a few years to reconquer the temporal domain of the Church, and so to improve the papal influence as almost to realize the theocratic dreams of Gregory VII. He had seen King Pedro of Aragon declaring himself his vassal and laying his crown upon the tomb of the apostles, that he might take it back at his hands. At the other end of Europe, John Lackland had been obliged to receive his crown from a legate after having sworn homage, fealty, and an annual tribute to the Holy See. Preaching union to the cities and republics of Italy, causing the cry ITALIA! ITALIA! to resound like the shout of a trumpet, he was the natural representative of the national awakening, and appeared to be in some sort the suzerain of the emperor, as he was already that of other kings. Finally, by his efforts to purify the Church, by his indomitable firmness in defending morality and law in the affair of Ingelburge and in many others, he was gaining a moral strength which in times so disquieted was all the more powerful for being so rare.

But this incomparable power had its hidden dangers. Occupied with defending the prerogatives of the Holy See, Innocent came to forget that the Church does not exist for herself, that her supremacy is only a transitory means; and one part of his pontificate may be likened to wars, legitimate in the beginning, in which the conqueror keeps on with depredations and massacres for no reason, except that he is intoxicated with blood and success.

And so Rome, which canonized the petty Celestine V, refused this supreme consecration to the glorious Innocent III. With exquisite tact she perceived that he was rather king than priest, rather pope than saint.

When he surpassed ecclesiastical disorders it was less for love of good than for hatred of evil; it was the judge who condemns or threatens, himself always supported by the law, not the father who weeps his son's offence. This priest did not comprehend the great movement of his age – the awakening of love, of poetry, of liberty. I have already said that at the opening of the thirteenth century the Middle Age was twenty years old. Innocent III undertook to treat it as if it were only fifteen. Possessed by his civil and religious dogmas as others are by their educational doctrines, he never suspected the unsatisfied longings, the dreams,

unreasoning perhaps, but beneficent and divine, that were dumbly striving in the depths of men's hearts. He was a believer, although certain sayings of the historians open the door to some [94] doubts on this point, but he drew his religion rather from the Old Testament than from the New, and if he often thought of Moses, the leader of his people, nothing reminded him of Jesus, the shepherd of souls. One cannot be everything; a choice intelligence, an iron will are a sufficient portion even for a *priest-god*; he lacked love. The death of this pontiff, great among the great ones, was destined to be saluted with songs of joy.

His reception of Francis furnished to Giotto, the friend of Dante, one of his most striking frescos; the pope, seated on his throne, turns abruptly toward Francis. He frowns, for he does not understand, and yet he feels a strange power in this mean and despised man, *vilis et despectus*; he makes a real but futile effort to comprehend, and now I see in this pope, who lived upon lemons, something that recalls another choice mind, theocratic like his own, sacrificed like him to his work: Calvin. One might think that the painter had touched his lips to the Calabrian Seer's cup, and that in the attitude of these two men he sought to symbolize a meeting of representatives of the two ages of humanity, that of Law and that of Love.

A surprise awaited the pilgrims on their arrival in [95] Rome: they met the Bishop of Assisi, quite as much to his astonishment as to their own. This detail is precious because it proves that Francis had not confided his plans to Guido. Notwithstanding this the bishop, it is said, offered to make interest for them with the princes of the Church. We may suspect that his commendations were not very warm. At all events they did not avail to save Francis and his company either from a searching inquiry or from the extended fatherly counsels of Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo upon the difficulties of the Rule, counsels which strongly resemble those of Guido himself.

What Francis asked for was simple enough; he claimed no privilege of any sort, but only that the pope would approve of his undertaking to lead a life of absolute conformity to the precepts of the gospel. There is a delicate point here which it is quite worth while to see clearly. The pope was not called upon to approve the Rule, since that came from Jesus himself; at the very worst all that he could do would be to lay an ecclesiastical [96] censure upon Francis and his companions for having acted without authority, and to enjoin them to leave to the secular and regular clergy the task of reforming the Church.

Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo, to whom the Bishop of Assisi presented them, had informed himself of the whole history of the Penitents. He

lavished upon them the most affectionate tokens of interest, even going so far as to beg for a mention in their prayers. But such assurances, which appear to have been always the small change of the court of Rome, did not prevent his examining them for several successive days, and putting to them an infinite number of questions, of which the conclusion was always the advice to enter some Order already existing.

To this the unlucky Francis would reply as best he could, often not without embarrassment, for he had no wish to appear to think lightly of the cardinal's counsels, and yet he felt in his heart the imperious desire to obey his vocation. The prelate would then return to the charge, insinuating that they would find it very hard to persevere, that the enthusiasm of the early days would pass away, and again pointing out a more easy course. He was obliged in the end to own himself vanquished. The persistence of Francis who had never weakened for an instant nor doubted his mission, begat in him a sort of awe, while the perfect humility of the Penitents and their simple and striking fidelity to the Roman Church reassured him in the matter of heresy.

He announced to them, therefore, that he would speak of them to the pope, and would act as their advocate with him. According to the Three Companions he said to the pope: "I have found a man of the highest perfection, who desires to live in conformity with the Holy Gospel [97] and observe evangelical perfection in all things. I believe that by him the Lord intends to reform the faith of the Holy Church throughout the whole world."

On the morrow he presented Francis and his companions to Innocent III. Naturally, the pope was not sparing of expressions of sympathy, but he also repeated to them the remarks and counsels which they had already heard so often. "My dear children," he said, "your life appears to me too severe; I see indeed that your fervor is too great for any doubt of you to be possible, but I ought to consider those who shall come after you, lest your mode of life should be beyond their strength."

Adding a few kind words, he dismissed them without coming to any definite conclusion, promising to consult the cardinals, and advising Francis in particular to address himself to God, to the end that he might manifest his will.

Pope Benedict XVI on the 8th centenary of the Rule

Castel Gandolfo, 15th April 2009

Chapter of Mats of the Franciscan Family

“

«Cari fratelli e sorelle, sono passati otto secoli, e oggi avete voluto rinnovare il gesto del vostro Fondatore. Tutti voi siete figli ed eredi di quelle origini. Di quel “buon seme” che è stato Francesco, conformato a sua volta al “chicco di grano” che è il Signore Gesù, morto e risorto per portare molto frutto (cfr Gv 12,24). I Santi ripropongono la fecondità di Cristo. Come Francesco e Chiara d’Assisi, anche voi impegnatevi a seguire sempre questa stessa logica: perdere la propria vita a causa di Gesù e del Vangelo, per salvarla e renderla feconda di frutti abbondanti. Mentre lodate e ringraziate il Signore, che vi ha chiamati a far parte di una così grande e bella “famiglia”, rimanete in ascolto di ciò che lo Spirito dice oggi ad essa, in ciascuna delle sue componenti, per continuare ad annunciare con passione il Regno di Dio, sulle orme del serafico Padre. Ogni fratello e ogni sorella custodisca sempre un animo contemplativo, semplice e lieto: ripartite sempre da Cristo, come Francesco partì dallo sguardo del Crocifisso di san Damiano e dall’incontro con il lebbroso, per vedere il volto di Cristo nei fratelli che soffrono e portare a tutti la sua pace. Siate testimoni della “bellezza” di Dio, che Francesco seppe cantare contemplando le meraviglie del creato, e che gli fece esclamare rivolto all’Altissimo: “Tu sei bellezza!” (Lodi di Dio altissimo, 4.6: FF, 261)»

”

Abbreviations

Writings of St. Francis

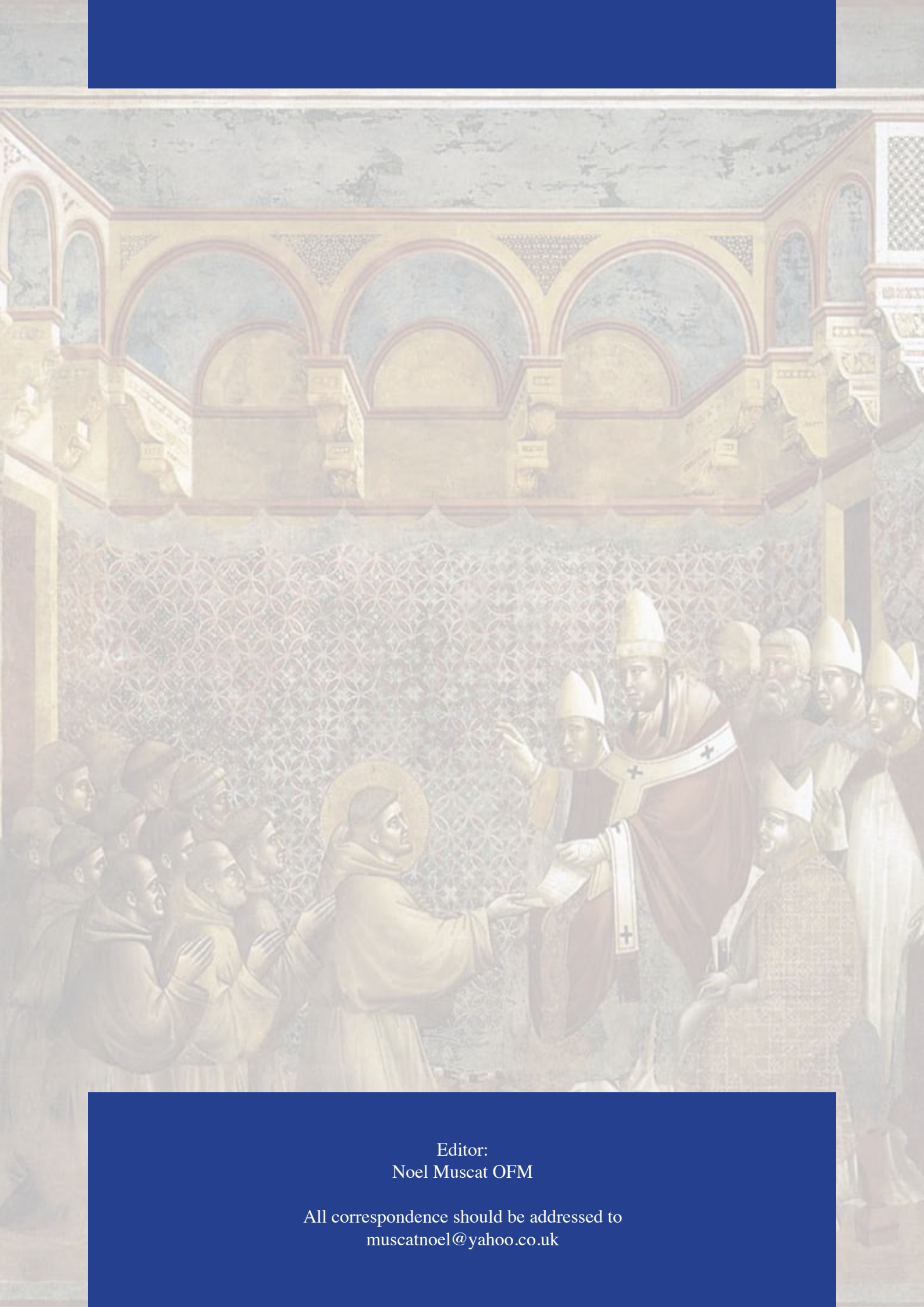
Adm	Admonitiones.
CantAudPov	Cantico Audite Poverelle.
CantSol	Canticum fratris Solis.
LaudDei	Laudes Dei Altissimi.
BenLeo	Benedictio fratri Leoni data.
EpAnt	Epistola ad sanctum Antonium.
EpCler I	Epistola ad Clericos (Redactio prior).
EpCler II	Epistola ad Clericos (Red. posterior).
EpCust I	Epistola ad Custodes I.
EpCust II	Epistola ad Custodes II.
EpFid I	Epistola ad Fideles I.
EpFid II	Epistola ad Fideles II.
EpLeo	Epostola 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

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



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