

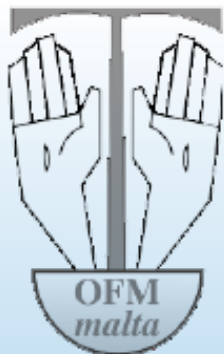
January - March 2019

Spirit + Life



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

127



Quarterly journal of
Franciscan culture published
since April 1986.

Layout:
John Abela ofm
Computer Setting:
Raymond Camilleri ofm

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

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EDITORIAL

DIALOGUE OR EVANGELISATION?

We have recently witnessed the prophetic visit of Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates. It has been a unique experience of inter-religious dialogue, focusing on the issues of peace, justice, integrity of our common home, religious freedom and the true sense of economic progress. Besides the obvious political aspects that such a visit entailed in underlining the need for disarmament in the volatile Middle East, in the face of the wars in Syria and Yemen, the Pope also spoke about the importance of recognising plurality and diversity when fostering the unity of the human family. The presence of foreign workers who are Christians in this Muslim environment, where their right to worship and religious expression is tolerated, has been indicated as a positive sign of true dialogue and peaceful co-existence by Pope Francis, and should serve as an example to other countries in the same region where such fundamental human rights are still non-existent.

The Pope also mentioned the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who exactly 800 years ago, in 1219, had a friendly encounter with the Sultan of Egypt, Al-Malik Al-Kamil, during the bitter experience of the Fifth Crusade. The reference to this event is important in order to build bridges for better Christian-Muslim dialogue, and is certainly well-received in circles where the notion of freedom of religious expression is welcomed and respected, at least in its formal structure relating to the right of worship.

What is maybe lacking, however, is the ability to integrate the need for dialogue on a human and cultural level, with the need for a healthy effort of evangelisation that does not force Christianity upon Islam or upon any other religion, and vice-versa, but that respects the true nature of religious dialogue. I noticed that, in the Pope's speech at the Founder's Memorial in Abu Dhabi and in the joint document "On Human Fraternity for world peace and living together", there is not one single mention of the person of Jesus. Indeed, to be honest, there is no mention of Muhammad either. Islam reveres both as prophets. This could have been a very conciliatory and correct strategy in order to promote a basis for dialogue which departs from faith in the same God and from the common experience of being human. However, it has left me with some unanswered questions.

Is there any relationship between dialogue and evangelisation? Is dialogue by itself enough to bring about the sacrosanct human values preached by Pope Francis and also by sincere Muslim religious leaders? To provide an answer, I refer again to the experience of Francis of Assisi in his encounter with the Sultan of Egypt. Indeed, Pope Francis mentioned once again this encounter in his homily during Mass at Zayed Sports City in Abu

Dhabi. There, obviously, he spoke about Jesus Christ to the Christian faithful gathered there, and also quoted the famous text of the *Earlier Rule*, chapter 16, where Francis tells his brothers who live among people professing Islam or other religions: “Let them [the Franciscan brothers] not get into arguments or disagreements, but be subject to every human creature out of love for God, and let them profess that they are Christians.”

This quote from Saint Francis goes to show that there is no true dialogue without evangelisation. Francis approached the Sultan with respect for his human dignity, with an attitude of openness and a sincere wish to speak about peace. But he did not stop there. He also spoke about Jesus.

When Saint Pope Paul VI visited Manila, and pronounced his homily at Quezon Circle on 29 November 1970, he said: “Convinced of Christ: yes, I feel the need to proclaim him, I cannot keep silent. ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!’ (1Cor 9: 16). I am sent by him, by Christ himself, to do this. I am an apostle, I am a witness. The more distant the goal, the more difficult my mission the more pressing is the love that urges me to it. I must bear witness to his name: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Proclaiming Jesus with an attitude of a humble proposal of true human dignity is a duty that every Christian assumes in force of baptism. It is not a question of imposing Jesus upon anybody. It is a question of being a sign of the only valid truth that has ever been said, namely, the truth of a Merciful God who is Incarnate. It is not possible to envisage mercy without human flesh and blood. With all due respect for the diversity of religions, for their dignity and holiness, the hurdle of the Incarnation remains the only convincing message that Christians can promote in any sincere inter-religious dialogue.

Indeed, we are facing two extremes in our contemporary world. On the one hand there is the danger of religious extremism and fundamentalism, which uses violence in the name of God. On the other hand, there is the equally powerful danger of religious indifference of a secularised and Godless society, which promotes the sacrosanct ideals of individualistic pretensions and pseudo-liberal rights as the hallmark of true humanity. Both extremes are diabolic in nature. It is only when dialogue is open to evangelization that we can speak of the possibility of true human dignity.

Francis of Assisi told this to the Sultan 800 years ago, and was received kindly not for who he was, but for the One for whom he stood.

Noel Muscat ofm

BERNARDO OF QUINTAVALLE, FIRST COMPANION OF SAINT FRANCIS

*Bernardo Commodi OFMConv
Miscellanea Franciscana 113 (2013) 390-421*

III Spiritual Profile

All the Sources speak with great admiration of Bernardo: when the Lord gave him Bernardo, Francis was filled with joy “over the arrival and conversion of such a man”.¹ In his following Francis, Bernardo was “a son of perfection.”² Already during his life he was called “the venerable man Bernardo”, and among the disciples of Francis, he was considered “the firstborn son of the blessed Father, both in priority of time and in the gift of holiness.”³ After his death, his name was mentioned with the addition “of blessed memory.”⁴ For Francis he was a preferred brother, since “he began first and most perfectly fulfilled the perfection of the holy Gospel, distributing all his goods to the poor,” as well as for “his many other prerogatives.”⁵ “Brother Bernardo was so holy that Saint Francis held him in great reverence.”⁶ Always upon the basis of the Sources, we can evidence some peculiar virtues that made up his spiritual profile, without forgetting that some anecdotes, conserved and transmitted by the oral and written tradition with the intention of illustrating these virtues, present an evident historical weakness and can be classified as idealistic episodes or imaginative and poetic decorations of the hagiographers.

Regarding the theological virtues, without forgetting the virtue of hope, which although not explicitly evidenced by certain episodes, lies at the basis of a radical choice such as that of Bernardo, we can state that the Sources place at the forefront especially Bernardo’s faith and his charity. According to the *Speculum perfectionis*, when Francis delineated the identikit of the authentic friar minor, seen as the living sum total of the best qualities of his brothers, he mentions Bernardo before all the

other brothers, and underlines as his characteristic traits his faith and poverty:

“The most blessed Father, having in a certain way transformed the brothers into saints by the ardour of his love and the fervent zeal which he had for their perfection, often used to ponder within himself about the qualities and virtues which should abound in a good friar minor. And, he used to say that a good friar minor is one who would possess the life and qualities of the following holy brothers: namely, the faith and love of poverty which Brother Bernard most perfectly had; the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo [...]”⁷

Regarding charity, the *Vita fratris Bernardi* presents a beautiful witness regarding the benevolent manner of judging on the part of Bernardo. One day, when Brother Leo was nearing death, he had a vision in which he saw a great multitude of brothers coming to meet him. They had already passed away from this life, and among them there was Brother Bernardo, whose eyes were of a most radiant and clear beauty. When he asked the reason for such a great splendour, he received the explanation that during his life Bernardo had always judged his neighbour with mercy and love:

“He always judged in a positive way the things he saw in others. If he met some mendicant poor persons who were dressed in rags, he would say: «These observe poverty better than you, brother Bernardo.» He used to judge them as if they were observing poverty voluntarily. And when he would see rich persons who were wearing precious and refined garments, he would say: «Maybe they carry a hair-shirt under their clothes, and in this way they mortify their bodies in secret, and thus they escape vain glory better than you, brother Bernard, who are wearing tattered clothes.» He would al-

ways judge in a positive way the behaviour of others, and all the good he would see in creatures was for him an occasion to praise the Creator.”⁸

Passing on to the other three evangelical virtues which constitute the vows of consecrated persons, regarding Bernardo’s chastity, we have this witness that I am quoting from the *Franceschina*: “Regarding most holy chastity [Bernardo] was a most zealous observer. He did not want to enter into any conversation, in any way and for any time, if it was not holy and good.”⁹ Regarding obedience, the witnesses are numerous: when Francis, in the very beginning, sent Bernardo to beg for alms, he who came from a noble and rich family, felt a certain resistance in himself, but since “he had perfectly embraced this virtue of obedience, he made no excuse and immediately went out on his way.”¹⁰ When Francis sent him to preach in Bologna, he would humanly have found some difficulty to present himself as a poor brother in the same city where he had acquired a doctorate in civil and canon law, but instead “equipping himself with the cross of Christ, and with the virtue of obedience as his companion, Brother Bernardo went to Bologna.”¹¹ During the journey which Bernardo and the other brothers were undertaking towards Santiago, when Francis asked him to suspend the journey in order to serve a sick man, although like all the others Bernardo had a great desire to reach his destination, “he immediately knelt down, and bowed his head, and most reverently received the obedience of the holy father.”¹² When Francis commanded Bernardo to place his foot on his mouth and throat, although Bernardo saw such a penance upon Francis as a very harsh thing to do, “out of obedience towards him, he carried out the command in as courteous a way as he possibly could.”¹³

There are numerous testimonies regarding Bernardo’s poverty. Already in the moment of his conversion, as we have seen, he showed a total sense of detachment from material goods, and put into practice to the letter the Gospel words he had just heard, by selling all his patrimony and distributing the money to the poor. His was such a radical emptying of self that it remained indelibly impressed on the mind of Francis, who recalled it willingly to the brothers during the last days of his life.¹⁴ When Bernardo went to Florence with Brother Giles, while they were in a church praying, they were approached by a certain man called Guido, who asked them to explain the meaning of

the poverty that they had freely chosen.¹⁵ When describing some of the peculiar virtues of Brother Bernardo, Bartolomeo da Pisa places poverty in the first place: “[...] this holy brother Bernard was the first to be drawn to love poverty in a special way; indeed he left everything behind and became poor voluntarily, and while he lived in the world he did not want to possess anything.”¹⁶

In order to complete the spiritual profile of Bernardo, we must indicate at least three other virtues he cherished, starting from that of humility and from two episodes which illustrate it. The first episode refers to his mission in the city of Bologna: after the great difficulties of the first days, he drew the sympathy of a doctor of law, who gave him as a gift a small house where a small community of brothers could live, and then he began to be honoured as a saint by persons who wanted to see him, touch him and listen to him. Since Bernardo was very humble and he feared that such honours would harm his spiritual life and take away his peace, one day he returned to Assisi to convince Francis to send other brothers to Bologna.¹⁷ The other episode is linked with the reciprocal obedience that Francis and Bernardo shared, as we have seen above, and which was a true competition of humility. This is the testimony of the *Actus/Fioretii*:

“Then Saint Francis said: «I order you under holy obedience to punish me for my boldness and audacity of heart. I will lie on the ground. You will then press the heel of one of your feet on my throat and the other on my mouth. With your feet thus placed on my throat and mouth, you will walk over me three times from one side to the other. And while you are walking over me, you will insult me, saying: ‘Lie down, you peasant son of Pietro di Bernardone.’ You will inflict me with many other greater insults, such as: ‘Where did you get such pride, you worthless creature?’» Brother Bernardo heard this, but found it hard to do. Nevertheless, because of obedience, he carried it out as courteously as he could. When he was finished, Saint Francis said to him: «Now, Brother Bernardo, command me to do what you wish because I promised obedience to you.» Brother Bernardo said: «I command you under holy obedience that, whenever we are together, you correct me and rebuke me sharply for my failings.» When Francis heard this, he was very surprised, because Brother Bernardo was so holy that Saint Francis held him in great reverence.”¹⁸

The biographers were struck with admiration at Bernardo's patience, to the point that when Bartolomeo da Pisa described Bernardo's virtues, after poverty he spoke about patience: "In second place he was tried many a time in his patience."¹⁹ Already during the mission to Florence this virtue appeared clearly in him and in his companion: when they were scorned, ill-treated, left naked, carried in the streets, hit with mud and made objects of so many offensive actions, the brothers sustained all this with unwavering patience, and "they prayed carefully and enthusiastically for their persecutors."²⁰ Even during his mission in Bologna, which at the time was the city of culture *par excellence*, the heavy insults and harassments were not lacking, but the patience of Bernardo never waned. When the children saw him with his rough and worn-out habit, they made fun of him and ridiculed him as if he were mad. "But Brother Bernardo, a real saint, endured these not just patiently, but quite happily. [...] While he was sitting there, many gathered around him, both children and adults. Some pulled his capuche back and forth, some threw dirt at him, and others threw stones; some climbed on him, rocking him violently back and forth. Through all these insults, Brother Bernardo remained patient and cheerful and at no time did he ever resist or complain."²¹ Such patience filled with admiration a doctor of law, who approached Bernardo, invited him to his house and donated him with a small house for the brothers, as we have already stated.

The last virtue of Bernardo, about which we have to say something, was his exceptional contemplative attitude. He was a man of intense prayer, he preferred the silence of the mountains and woods, and "he was often caught up in God,"²² a common phenomenon in the first century of Franciscan history.²³ I have already referred to the episode in the *Fioretti* in which Francis went to look for Bernardo to speak with him, but Bernardo was so lost in contemplation in the Lord that he could not listen to nothing and to nobody. This is how another chapter of the *Actus/Fioretti* describes this mystical experience:

"How much grace the Most High Father showed toward the evangelical poor who voluntarily left all things for Christ, is apparent in the same Brother Bernardo whose mind, after he took on the habit of the holy Father, was frequently rapt into God. It happened one time that he was present to hear Mass in a church, and his whole mind was suspended

in things divine. He was so absorbed in God that, when the Body of Christ was being elevated he noticed nothing, nor did he kneel when the others knelt, nor did he pull back his capuche. His eyes remained unblinking and he stayed in this condition completely senseless from morning until afternoon. Returning to himself after nones, he came out calling in a surprised voice: "Oh brothers! Oh brothers! Oh brothers! No one in this country is so great and so noble that if he were promised a palace full of gold, it wouldn't be easy for him to carry a sick filled with the most vile manure in order to merit so noble a treasure." Brother Bernardo was lifted up in mind to this heavenly treasure reserved for the lovers of God. For fifteen years he often went about with his mind and face turned toward heaven. [...] Brother Giles used to say that God did not give to everyone this gift, which had been given to Brother Bernardo of Quintavalle, that like a swallow he could feed himself while flying. Because of this outstanding gift given to him by the Lord, Saint Francis often and gladly conversed with him for whole days and nights. Sometimes both together were found rapt into the Lord for the whole night in the woods where they met to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever."²⁴

We can stop also on other virtues which exemplarily practiced by Bernardo (temperance, faithfulness, loyalty, clarity of soul...), but the ones we have already underlined already offer us a picture of the personage which is sufficiently clear and complete. They illustrate his spiritual journey, his rich and profound experience of God, his total attachment to the Gospel, and they confirm the positive judgment that the sources, as we have seen, make regarding him, the first companion, disciple, intimate counsellor and friend of Francis of Assisi, who became a perfect friar minor by following him.

IV. The blessing of Francis to Bernardo and Elias when he was dying

In presenting the figure of Bernardo, one cannot forget the controversial *benedictio* of Francis on his deathbed, where we also meet the figure of his first companion. I will make a quick list of the sources that have handed down this episode, and then I will briefly present the positions that

various scholars have taken on this theme during these last decades. Finally, I will express my modest view on the thesis which seems to me to be more convincing.

In the *Vita prima*, Thomas of Celano refers that Francis, when he was close to death and was still living in the palace of the bishop of Assisi, like a new Jacob or Moses, wanted to bless each of the brothers present, and in a particular way he gave a special blessing to Brother Elias, which was a clear sign not only of his respect for the vicar of the Order, but also of the great love he nurtured for him:

“When brother Elias sat down on his left side with the other brothers around him, the blessed father crossed his arms and *placed his right hand on Elias’ head* (Gen 48:14). He had lost the sight and use of his bodily eyes, so he asked: ‘Over whom am I holding my right hand?’ ‘Over brother Elias,’ they replied. ‘And this is what I wish to do,’ he said, ‘I bless you, my son, in all and through all, and just as the Most High has increased my brothers and sons in your hands, so too, upon you and in you, I bless them all. May the king of all bless you in heaven and on earth. I bless you as I can, and more than I can, and what I cannot do may the One who can do all things do in you. May God remember your work and labours, and may a place be reserved for you among the rewards of the just. May you receive every blessing you desire and may your every worthy request be fulfilled.’”²⁵

Other sources, instead, present a tradition which is very different and speak about a blessing which Francis gave to Bernardo, by placing upon his head his right hand after having mistakenly placed it upon that of Giles. The *Compilatio Assisiensis* adds the words that Francis dictated to one of the brothers:

“Brother Bernardo was the first brother the Lord gave me. He began first and most perfectly fulfilled the perfection of the holy Gospel, distributing all his goods to the poor. Because of this and his many other prerogatives, I am bound to love him more than any other brother in the whole religion. As much as I am able, it is my will and command that whoever becomes general minister should love and honour him as he would me. Let the other provincial ministers and the brothers of the whole religion hold him in my place.”²⁶

The episode is narrated in a yet different manner and in a definitely anti-Elias setting by the *Actus/Fioretti*, which are notoriously tendentious and

hostile to Elias. Francis called Bernardo to bless him, and Bernardo invited Elias to place himself on the right hand of the Saint to receive his blessing. Although he was blind, the Saint noticed this pious subterfuge and re-establishes order by crossing his arms, thus blessing Bernardo with his right hand, and giving him authority over all the brothers, as well as absolute freedom, and practically designating him as his true successor:

“Then Brother Bernard approached his right side. Saint Francis with his arms crossed placed his left hand on the head of Brother Elias and his right on the head of Brother Bernard. Then he said: ‘May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ bless you in heaven with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Just as you were chosen first in this Order to give the example of the Gospel and to imitate Christ in evangelical poverty, because not only did you freely give away your possessions and disperse them entirely for love of Christ, but you also gave yourself as a sacrifice to God in the odour of sweetness, therefore, may you be blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ and by me his poor little servant with everlasting blessings, whether you are coming or going, awake or sleeping, living or dying. May he who blesses you be filled with blessings, and whoever curses you will not be immune. Be the master of your brothers, and may all of them be subject to your authority. And whomever you wish to receive into this Order, let them be received, and whomever you wish to expel, let them be expelled. Let no brother have authority over you, and may you be freely able to go or to stay wherever you will.’”²⁷

In these last decades, famous scholars have faced in a critical manner the problem of the authenticity of the blessings given by Francis to Elias, Bernardo and other brothers.²⁸ In 1967 Raoul Manselli, examining and confronting the *Vita prima*, the *Memoriale*, the *Compilatio Assisiensis*, the *Speculum perfectionis*, the *Liber chronicarum* of Clareno and the *Actus beati Francisci*, affirmed that the *Actus*, although leaning tendentiously in a direction hostile to Elias, are more true both when they witness the presence of Elias and Bernardo, as well as when they present the particular blessing to Bernardo, which has a specific significance: Francis, after having grasped for a long time the incurable division present in the Order, at the end of his life wanted to place, besides the figure of the general vicar, who also exercised juridical powers, the figure of a holy brother who would act as the

spiritual guide of the Order. Thus “he would place side by side to the succession of leaders, a community of saints; to the severity of norms, the attractive force of an uninterrupted example.”²⁹

The argument was studied again in 1988 by Jacques Dalarun, who made a complete analysis of the sources. He developed the biblical reference of the blessing of Isaac to Jacob and that of Jacob to the sons of Joseph, and he also made recourse to the figures of Mary and Martha, and arrived substantially to the same conclusion as Manselli.³⁰ Dalarun then returned to the argument in 1996, using the method of stratigraphy. He distanced himself from the thesis upheld before regarding Elias as juridical leader and Bernardo as charismatic leader, and he arrived at the conclusion that things had to be quite simple: “Francis had probably blessed his brothers, as a founder would do before he dies; that is all. All the rest - Elias or Bernardo, the right side of the left, the crossed arms - according to me is simple an attractive literary tapestry.”³¹

Giulia Barone has for two times dealt with this issue in her studies dedicated to Brother Elias. In the first study, although admitting that Thomas of Celano could have decorated in a literary fashion the blessing of Francis to Elias, she does not feel that such a blessing could be excluded, since there is no reason to deny its existence.³² In the second study, she distances herself from the interpretation contained in the study by Manselli as well as in that by Dalarun, and she pronounces herself in favour of the blessing given to Elias since she finds it conforms to tradition: “The holy founder was bidding farewell to the community and, in the fact that there existed an appointed successor, the blessing was naturally addressed first of all to him. This is the situation described in the *Vita prima*, and which finds a confirmation, twenty years later, in the ambiguous phrase of the *Vita secunda*, in which Thomas, although insisting that the first brother who was blessed was the vicar (the name Elias is kept in silence), he adds that this blessing had been given to him since he was the vicar, and not on a personal title.”³³

More recently Filippo Sedda has published a study in which, after an *excursus* on two different ways of blessing practiced by Francis and transmitted by the Franciscan hagiographical sources (the blessing *ad personam*, namely addressed to Leo, Clare, Bernardo and Elias, and the general blessing-absolution), he stops on the blessings presented by Thomas of Celano, and affirms with

Lempp that “the words placed on the mouth of Francis in 1Cel 108 are ‘a rhetorical decoration’”, and confirms in a more systematic way the intuitions expressed by Dalarun in his second study, and concludes by saying that “there has certainly been a blessing and it cannot be dismissed as an invention of brother Elias, as Sabatier has written. Certainly, however, it was not a ‘special’ blessing, as Thomas underlined in the *Memoriale* (2Cel 216,10), but rather a general blessing-absolution, an action that Francis took from monastic usage.”³⁴

The last study to which I draw attention is that by Felice Accrocca, which I consider to be the most documented and convincing.³⁵ After having analysed in detail the sources and made an efficient synthesis of the historiographic discussion from Sabatier to our own times, the scholar proposes “an attempt at a solution” which appears to me to be more than just an attempt. Inserting himself in a consolidated and typical tradition of the founders, from abbots to bishops, Francis, in the last days of his life, has repeated many a time the rite of blessing both of a personal and of a collective nature. He blessed Clare and blessed all the brothers, present and absent. He gave a particular blessing to Elias who was his vicar, even though the words of the blessing placed on the mouth of Francis are probably those created by Thomas of Celano. He blessed Bernardo as his first brother and friend. Certainly, he did not consider the representatives of the two different parties of the Franciscan movement, one open-minded, the other one rigorous, as others have interpreted this later on. This vision is by now “superseded by the last studies which show instead Elias who was rather close to the Umbrian group, tenaciously attached to the memory of the beginnings.” Different hagiographic projects reinterpreted facts in such a way “that each one of the blessings was overloaded with a symbolic meaning which in reality it did not possess.” It was especially the *Actus* which reinterpreted the episode with a narration “that was forcibly thwarted and manifestly partisan.” Francis imparted his blessing on all those who wanted to observe the evangelical life that the Lord had revealed to him: “In his eyes, these persons were represented by Elias, Clare, Bernardo and all those who were gathered around him: they were different persons, but all of them were equally committed to translate in their life the Christian proposal of brother Francis.”³⁶

I personally find convincing the arguments of

Barone and totally trustworthy the reconstruction of facts done by Accrocca, which I support decisively. The blessing to Elias results a logical and natural action, if we consider that he was the vicar of the Order, that Francis held him in great esteem, as well as Clare, Gregory IX and other contemporaries in general.³⁷ In the *Vita prima*, Thomas of Celano has probably embellished it and amplified it in a rhetorical fashion, but he did not invent it: how could he, if at the moment when the work was composed all the friars who had assisted Francis during his last days were still alive? Normally it was affirmed that the powerful Elias had conditioned Celano, but Elias could not have been so powerful in the chapter of 1227, when the brothers had preferred Giovanni Parenti as minister general. The fact that in the *Memoriale*, written when Elias had been excommunicated, Celano mentions the blessing once again, if though he reduces it to essential details, seems to me to confirm its substantial authenticity.

Even the blessing given to Bernardo, which has as its source the companions of Francis who sent their memories to the minister general Crescenzo da Iesi, is probably a historical fact. We cannot certainly accept the version of the *Actus*, in which the ideological layout and the partisan manipulation are too evident.³⁸ It is difficult to adhere to the interpretation offered by the study of Manselli and by the first study of Dalarun, namely the fact that there were two leaders for the brothers, one juridical and the other one spiritual. As Barone justly observes, the hypothesis of the figure of Francis of Assisi who, on his deathbed, accepts the idea that his brothers could have diverse and opposed points of reference, “is too contrary to the wish of the saint of Assisi who wanted, first and foremost, unity and *fraternity*, in the strongest sense of the term, among his disciples.”³⁹ According to my way of seeing things, Francis, besides blessing Elias, blessed also Bernardo. He did so not to create a rival to his vicar, but because Bernardo asked him for a blessing and because he was very affectionate towards him, since he was the first brother that the Lord had given him, the first brother who had lived in a perfect way the Gospel, distributing to the poor all his belongings,⁴⁰ the first companion and faithful friend through whom he could understand that the evangelical *novitas* that he felt he had to incarnate in his life was precisely a project that was conceived and willed by the Spirit of God.

V. Exhumation of the sacred remains of Bernardo and other Companions

The *Chronica XXIV generalium*, when speaking about the *sancti fratres* buried in the churches of the Province of Saint Francis or in Umbria, records seventeen of them who were buried together with the Poverello in the basilica of Assisi:

“In the same Province rest in peace many holy friars, who were famous for their miracles. In the Sacro Convento of Assisi, together with our most holy Father Francis, are buried the following friars: Brother Bernardo of Quintavalle; Brother Peter Catanio; Brother Sylvester; Brother Eletto who had the gift of many tears, and who foretold the day of his death to the lord Peter, Cardinal of Albano; Brother Leo, the confessor of Saint Francis; Brother William of England; Brother Angelo Tancredi from Rieti; Brother Masseo from Marignano; Brother Rufino Scifi, a cousin of Saint Clare; Brother Barbaro; Brother Morico the short; Brother Philip Longo; Brother John of San Costanzo; Brother Bernardo Vigilante; Brother Morico, from the Order of Crosiers; Brother Guido from Siena, a lay brother, who foretold his death to Brother Leo when he appeared to him after he had already died; Brother Giles de Capociis [...].”⁴¹

Even Bartholomew of Pisa, in *De conformitate*, while going through the places of cult of the Provinces of the Order in which *sancti fratres* were buried, starts from the Province of Saint Francis and *in primis* from the basilica of Assisi. The first brother that the Pisano mentions and who was buried in the basilica is obviously the Seraphic Father; after him come eleven brothers, whose tombs surround the tomb of Saint Francis like a crown. Bartholomew offers some biographical notes on each one of them, which are more or less detailed according to the fame of the personages. These brothers are: Bernardo, Sylvester, Eletto, Leo, William, Angelo, Masseo, Rufino, Guido, Giles and Valentino da Narni.⁴² While the first ten brothers are present also in the longer list of the *Chronica XXIV generalium*, Valentino is a new name; regarding him the author states that he died on Le Carceri and was first buried in Santa Chiara and afterwards in San Francesco. The reason why Bartholomew of Pisa reduces, with respect to the *Chronica XXIV generalium*, the number of brothers buried in the basilica is maybe understood within the plan that lies at

the basis of his work: as the title states, he intended to evidence the conformity of the life of Francis with that of the Lord Jesus. Within this view, even the twelve brothers, including Francis himself, who are buried in the basilica refer to the college of the twelve apostles. This intention on his part results more clearly in the part where the Pisano, presenting the sixth tomb, makes an explanatory note regarding the English Brother William: just as in the apostolic college Matthias was inserted in the place of Judas, so among the companions of Francis, Brother William took the place of Brother John della Cappella, who went out of the Order and afterwards hanged himself.⁴³

Brother Ludovico da Pietralunga, who lived between 1568 and 1580 in the Sacro Convento where he carried out with admirable passion the duty of accompanying and explaining to educated and devout persons the visit to the double basilica, in his meticulous description of the basilica of Saint Francis, pinpoints also the precise ubication of the tombs of nine of these eleven companions of the Saint. In the left transept, during those times, were buried Brothers Leo, Masseo, Rufino and Angelo,⁴⁴ whose sacred remains were gathered in 1932 and placed in four copper urns in the new crypt of Saint Francis, realised according to the project of Ugo Tarchi and inaugurated on 3 October of the same year; the four urns were placed in four niches around the tomb of the Saint.⁴⁵

The same Brother Ludovico wrote that the other five brothers who were buried in the right transept of the lower basilica, under the Maestà of Cimabue, behind a large 14th century stone-slab protected by a robust iron grill, were not transferred. These were the remains of Bernardo, Sylvester, William, Eletto and Valentino da Narni. The identification of the five brothers is possible thanks to the words written on a tablet of the late 15th century, which was placed alongside the tomb stone-slab. The tablet was by then lost, but fortunately we know the inscription because Brother Ludovico saw it, read it and transcribed it in his description of the basilica.⁴⁶

In the inscription there was a reference to the *effigies* of the five brothers. Around 1320, a disciple of Lorenzetti painted an outstanding fresco that represents these brothers in half-figures, between the Maestà of Cimabue and their tomb. Successively this painting remained hidden for about two centuries, since during the 17th century a baroque altar was built in that spot, underneath the central

part of the Maestà of Cimabue, but hiding all the rest; the fresco “reappeared only after 1870, when G. B. Cavaselle removed the altar together with many other baroque decorations.”⁴⁷ During the time of Brother Ludovico, besides the five figures of the brothers, one could also read their names inscribed on the dark background of the fresco. Nowadays these names are practically illegible. As Scarpellini justly notes, Valentino da Narni cannot have been represented in the fresco, “for evident chronological reasons,”⁴⁸ since he died in 1378, many years after the fresco was painted. We still need to establish, although it is a difficult task, who in reality is the fifth brother represented by the disciple of Lorenzetti; it is logical to think that, like Bernardo, Sylvester, William and Eletto, he belonged to the group of companions of Francis.

Returning to the mortal remains of Bernardo and of the other four holy brothers, since a good number of years it was planned to make an exhumation of the same remains, as had been done twice with the body of Saint Francis (in 1818-1820 and in 1978) and one time with the remains of Rufino, Leo, Angelo and Masseo (in 1932).⁴⁹ The project became a reality in more recent times, between the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013. During the evening of 20 December 2012, behind closed doors and in a private function, in the presence of the bishop of Assisi, of the Custos of the Sacro Convento, of the Franciscan provincial ministers of Umbria, of many brothers and members of the Commission instituted *ad hoc*, the tomb excavated in the wall was opened. Three wooden caskets were taken out, two of them long and one shorter. The longer caskets were divided into two compartments, so that the relics were found in five different sections, each with a skull and a collection of bones. After the dutiful homage rendered to the relics by those present, the caskets were transported to a place in the Museo del Tesoro, where the Commission undertook a meticulous work of scientific study of the remains during the days 9, 12 and 30 January 2013. Doctors L. Capitanucci and C. Martellotti, in their report, after having catalogued all the bone elements present in the five compartments and after having described the state of conservation of the same, arrived at the following conclusions: “Taking note of all the limitations of the case, deriving from the fragmentation, incomplete composition and mixing of the skeleton remains, and on the sole argument of clinical-ana-

tomical objective analysis, in the absence of other instruments of research, we can arrive at the following conclusions: the skeleton remains which we have examined belong to five persons of the male sex, pertaining to the biological time-frame of between 30/35 and 50/55 years, who lived in good hygienic-sanitary conditions especially during their evolutive phase, who did not belong to social classes at high risk of injury (workers, soldiers, etc.), who have not carried out work activity that brought with it repetitive movements of the upper body limbs (farmers, iron-smiths, carpenters, generic handymen, etc.) and who finally have been under an interesting bio-mechanic stress, particularly in their vertebral column and in their lower limbs.”⁵⁰

On 31 January 2013, in the presence of the ministers general of the Franciscan families and of the capitular brothers of the 200th General OFM-Conv Chapter held at the Sacro Convento from 19 January to 17 February, the sacred remains of the five brothers, placed neatly in five plexiglass urns, were exposed for the veneration of the faithful in the lower Basilica in the chapel of Saint Nicholas, and remained there for fifteen days. On 14 February, after a solemn commemoration presided by Brother Marco Tasca, minister general OFMConv, the five urns were replaced in their original resting place. Unfortunately, it was not possible to place upon each one of them the name of the brother to whom the remains belonged, since from the data studied in the remains themselves, it has not yet been possible to pinpoint who is Bernardo, or Sylvester, or William, or Eletto or Valentino. One thing is sure, that one of them is Brother Bernardo di Quintavalle, *prima plantula Ordinis*, the first plant of the Order, to whom this study has rendered an affectionate and devout homage.

NOTES

- 1 1C 24 (FAED I, 204; *Fontes* 299): “de tanti viri adventu et conversione.” The L3C 27 states that Francis’ joy was motivated by the fact that he realised that “Lord Bernard was a man of great stature” (FAED II, 85; *Fontes* 1400): “dominus Bernardus erat homo aedificationis magnae.”
- 2 2C 15 (FAED II, 253; *Fontes* 456).
- 3 LMj III,3 (FAED II, 543; *Fontes* 796). Dante also calls him “venerabile Bernardo” (*Paradise* XI,79: FAED III, 884).
- 4 L3C, *Letter of Greccio* 1,5 (FAED II, 67; *Fontes* 1374); and 27 (FAED II, 85; *Fontes* 1400).
- 5 AC 12 (FAED II, 126-127; *Fontes* 1487): “primo incepit et complevit perfectissime perfectionem sancti Evangelii, distribuendo bona sua pauperibus” [...] “propter multas alias prerogativas.” Cf. 2MP 107 (FAED III, 355).
- 6 ABF 2 (FAED III, 440; *Fontes* 2090): “erat tante sanctitatis quod s. Franciscus habebat eum in magna reverentia.” The following are another two witnesses of the esteem with which the Saint held Bernardo: “Et Franciscus praedicabat eum omni reverentia dignum” (ABF 1: *Fontes* 2088); “Tante sanctitatis erat fr. Bernardus quod s. Franciscus, dum viveret, magno illum venerabatur affectu, frequenti commendabat eloquio et in sua absentia magnis preconiiis extollebat” (ABF 5: *Fontes* 1834).
- 7 2MP 85 (FAED III, 333; *Fontes* 1989-1990).
- 8 *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 45; *De conformitate*, 186-187; *Vita fratris Leonis*, in *Analecta Franciscana* III, Quaracchi 1897, 73-74.
- 9 ODDI, *La Franceschina*, 100.
- 10 *Ivi*, 98.
- 11 ABF 4 (FAED III, 444; *Fontes* 2094): “cruce Christi se muniens et obedientie sociatus virtute, Bononiam adiit”; cf. *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 36; *De conformitate*, 181.
- 12 *De conformitate*, 182; cf. also *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 38.
- 13 *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 41; *De conformitate*, 183.
- 14 Cf. AC 12 (FAED II, 126-128; *Fontes* 1487); 2MP 107 (FAED III, 355-356; *Fontes* 2025); ABF 5 (FAED III, 446-447; *Fontes* 2097); *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 42-43; *De conformitate*, 185. In ABF I,45 (FAED III, 438; *Fontes* 2088-2089) we also find these words of Francis regarding Bernardo and his poverty: “Saint Francis declared that he [Bernardo] was worthy of all reverence and used to say that he had founded the Order because, by distributing everything to the poor, he was the first to inaugurate evangelical poverty. He kept nothing at all for himself, but offered himself naked to the arms of the Crucified Who is the Lord blessed for ever.”
- 15 Cf. L3C 39 (FAED II, 91-92; *Fontes* 1411-1412); AP 21-22 (FAED II, 44; *Fontes* 1327); *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 37; *De conformitate*, 180-181.
- 16 *De conformitate*, 180.
- 17 Cf. ABF 4 (FAED III, 444-446; *Fontes* 2094-2096); *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 36-37; *De conformitate*, 181-182.
- 18 ABF 2 (FAED III, 440; *Fontes* 2090); see also *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 41 and *De conformitate*, 183. In order to avoid chiding Bernardo, whom he considered irreprehensible, from that moment onwards Francis avoided long meetings with him; however, when they met “erat videre mirabile, quomodo in Patre reverendo et eius primogenito fratre Bernardo certa pugna certabant, immo sibi obviabant obedientia et caritas, patientia et humilitas utriusque”: *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 42. In ABF I,8 (FAED III, 436; *Fontes* 2086) Bernardo is defined as “humillimus”, even when he understood and explained the Scriptures so profoundly.
- 19 *De conformitate*, 180.
- 20 L3C 40 (FAED II, 92; *Fontes* 1413); cf. AP 23 (FAED II, 44-45; *Fontes* 1328); *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 37; *De conformitate*, 180-181.
- 21 ABF 4 (FAED III, 444; *Fontes* 2094); cf. *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 36; *De conformitate*, 181. Even in the face of death, Bernardo showed himself to be most patient and serene, by entrusting himself completely to one of the brothers, who was a doctor: “I do not wish to be concerned about eating or drinking, [...] but I entrust myself to you. If you give me something, I’ll take it. If you don’t, I will not ask for it.” (2MP 107: FAED III, 356; *Fontes* 2026).
- 22 ABF I,44 (FAED III, 438; *Fontes* 2088): “saepe rapiebatur ad Deum.”
- 23 Ecstatic rapture was a frequent experience among the disciples of Francis, according to the *Vitae* gathered in

- the *Chronica XXIV generalium*. The most renowned among the “experts” of *raptus* was certainly Giles, on whom there are many witnesses even in the biographies of Francis, both the official and non-official ones. On this important friar minor of the first generation, the biography is abundant; here I limited myself to the following: E. KUMKA, *La “Vita prima” del B. Egidio, una storia meditativa*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 106-107 (2006-2007) 169-186; D. KOWALEWSKI, *L’insegnamento del beato Egidio di Assisi sulle virtù alla luce dei “Detti” e delle antiche biografie*, Roma 2011; B. COMMODI, *Il beato Egidio d’Assisi nel 750° della morte*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 111 (2011) 418-455; S. BRUFANI, *Frate Egidio d’Assisi tra storia e agiografia*, in *Franciscana* XIII (2011) 1-96; EGIDIO D’ASSISI, *Dicta*, ed. Critica a cura di S. BRUFANI, Spoleto 2013; *Frate Egidio d’Assisi. Incontro di studio in occasione del 750° anniversario della morte (1262-2012)*, Perugia (Monteripido) 30 giugno 2012, Spoleto 2013.
- 24 ABF 32 (FAED III, 503-504; *Fontes* 2157-2158). On the *raptus* during Mass, cf. *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 43; *De conformitate*, 182; on the joyful Giles who compared Bernardo to a swallow, cf. also *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 43-44; *De conformitate*, 182-183; on the common ecstatic experience of Francis and Bernardo, cf. also *De conformitate*, 183. Bernardo was so used to ecstatic experiences, that even while journeying along the road he would live them: “Quando enim ibat per viam cum socio, dixit socio: ‘Expecta me aliquantulum, frater’; et exiens aliquantulum a via, adhaerendo alicui arbori rapiebatur”: *De conformitate*, 182.
- 25 1C 108 (FAED I, 276; *Fontes* 387); cf. JULIAN OF SPEYER, *Vita Sancti Francisci*, 69 (FAED I, 415; *Fontes* 1087-1088) and *Legenda choralis umbra* 6 (FAED II, 475; *Analecta Franciscana* X, 546). The *Encyclical Letter* of Brother Elias on the death of Saint Francis refers that, at the Portiuncula, “like another Jacob, [Francis] blessed all his sons before he was taken from us and forgave them all the faults which any one of us might have committed, or even thought of committing, against him” (FAED II, 490; *Fontes* 254). In the *Memoriale*, Thomas of Celano speaks of a blessing given to each one of the brothers present with the imposition of the right hand over their heads, “beginning with his vicar” (who is not mentioned), and extending the blessing to the brothers spread out all over the world, present and future: cf. 2C 216 (FAED II, 386; *Fontes* 631). Even if some interpret this text as a correction of what the *Vita prima* stated, the two versions are not contradictory; they certainly reflect two different situations, since the *Memoriale* is less favourable towards Elias, but this can be understood if one reflects on the time in which Celano composed this work, when Elias was still under the weight of the excommunication inflicted upon him first by Gregory IX and then by Innocent IV, because of his closeness to Frederick II. Lastly, Bonaventure eliminated all particular blessings, and stated “as all the brothers sat around him, he stretched his hand over them, crossing his arms in the form of a cross, for he always loved this sign. And he blessed all the brothers, both present and absent, in the name and power of the Crucified”: LMj XIV,5 (FAED II, 643; *Fontes* 903).
- 26 AC 12 (FAED II, 126-127; *Fontes* 1486-1488). The same source then narrates how the dying Francis blessed all the brothers: “Beginning with one brother, he blessed them, placing his right hand on the head of each one, and he blessed all who were in the religion and all who were to come until the end of the world”: AC 22 (FAED II, 135; *Fontes* 1501). The episode of the blessing of Bernard, in the version of the *Assisi Compilation*, is also reproduced nearly *verbatim* in 2MP 107 (FAED III, 355-356; *Fontes* 2024-2025) and in *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 42. Angelo Clareno, in a different context, speaks about the blessing given to Bernardo and the words of love and recommendation uttered by Francis: cf. *Liber Chronicarum* 1,580-593. This *benedictio* was inserted by ESSER among the *Opuscula dictata* (*Gli scritti di S. Francesco*, 588-589) and by the editors of the *Fontes Franciscani*, 239.
- 27 ABF 5,8-16 (FAED III, 446-447; *Fontes* 2096-2097). This tradition was appropriated literally by the *Vita fratris Bernardi*, 42-43 (which overlaps the version of the *Compilatio Assisiensis* and that of the *Actus*), and by *De conformitate*, 185.
- 28 This controversial question was studied by various scholars even before this time. It had already attracted the attention of Paul Sabatier who, speaking about the blessing that Francis gave to Elias according to the version of the *Vita prima*, affirms categorically: “Evidently Celano was indignantly deceived by brother Elias” (P. SABATIER, *Speculum Perfectionis seu S. Francisci Assisiensis Legenda Antiquissima auctore frate Leone* [Collection de documents pour l’histoire religieuse et littéraire du Moyen Âge 1], Paris 1898, C, note 2). Later on, in the *Vie de Saint François d’Assise*, he mitigated his judgment by stating that he had some reservations regarding that blessing. Eduard Lempp, although judging as too strong the judgment of Sabatier, regarded the blessing in the *Vita prima* as not very truthful, while he was more inclined to believe the account of the blessing in the *Memoriale* (cf. E. LEMPP, *Frère Élie de Cortone. Étude Biographique* [Collection de documents pour l’histoire religieuse et littéraire du Moyen Âge 3], Paris 1901, 65-68).
- 29 R. MANSELLI, *L’ultima decisione di s. Francesco. Bernardo di Quintavalle e la benedizione di s. Francesco morente*, in *Bullettino dell’Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo e Archivio Muratoriano* [= *Bullettino*] 78 (1967) 148.
- 30 Cf. J. DALARUN, *Le dernière volonté de saint François*, in *Bullettino* 94 (1988) 266-329.
- 31 J. DALARUN, *La Malavventura di Francesco d’Assisi. Per un uso storico delle leggende francescane*, Milano 1996, 51.
- 32 Cf. G. BARONE, *Frate Elia*, in *Bullettino* 85 (1974-1975) 89-144.
- 33 G. BARONE, *Frate Elia: suggestioni di una rilettura*, in *I compagni di Francesco*, 78. This study and the one preceding it have been published in G. BARONE, *Da frate Elia agli Spirituali*, Milano 1999.
- 34 F. SEDDA, *Il gesto della benedizione-assoluzione di s. Francesco. Ancora sulla benedizione di frate Elia*, in *Biblioteca Franciscana Sarda* 10 (2002) 187.
- 35 Cf. F. ACCROCCA, *La benedizione di Francesco morente*, in *Frate Francesco* 69 (2003) 209-232.
- 36 *Ivi*, 230-232.
- 37 The highly positive judgment on brother Elias changed radically and became totally negative following upon the excommunication which consigned him to an unjust *damnatio memoriae*. Today, with a more attentive and less passionate examination of the sources, of his figure and of his action, some justice has been done in his favour: I recall the already-quoted studies by Giulia Barone and refer the study of F. SEDDA, *La “malavventura” di frate Elia, un percorso attraverso le fonti biografiche*, in *Il Santo* 41 (2001) 215-300, which freed his historical saga from many commonly-held beliefs and presented

- him as a close member of the first companions of Francis. This thesis was shared by Accrocca who wrote regarding Elias: in the eyes of Clareno “he appears as the principal cause of the decadence of the Order, but in reality he was closer to the Umbrian group than many others, he was stubbornly attached to the memory of Francis and to the first *fraternitas*”: *Liber chronicarum*, 34-35. On the relationship between Elias and the monastery of San Damiano, see also M.P. ALBERZONI, *Chiara e il papato*, Milano 1995. A more objectively positive image of Elias emerged in the study congress *Elia da Cortona tra realtà e mito*, held in Cortona on 12-13 July 2013. The acts were published in 2014.
- 38 The *Actus/Fioretti* are radically hostile to Brother Elias, and in the episode of the blessing, composed in a manifestly tendentious manner, they place Brother Bernardo, the firstborn son of Francis, against him, inventing for him a role of contrast which is totally inopportune and dangerous for the life of the Order; in reality the *Actus* place themselves at the service of a cause which is rather fundamentalist and which makes an absolute myth of the origins and does not consider the contingent historical facts, and proposes a radical faithfulness to the charism without noticing the necessity to be creatively faithful to the original *intentio* of Francis.
- 39 BARONE, *Frate Elia: suggestioni*, 79-80. Francis was not naïve, and he perfectly understood that two leaders would have most certainly brought about a division in the Order. We cannot forget that in his *Testamentum*, he himself had declared: “Et firmiter volo obedire ministro generali huius fraternitatis et alio guardiano quem sibi placuerit mihi dare. Et ita volo esse captus in manibus suis, ut non possim ire vel facere ultra obedientiam et voluntatem suam, quia dominus meus est”: *Test* 27-28 (*Fontes* 230).
- 40 Regarding this, see C. PAOLAZZI, *Francesco d'Assisi. Scritti*, Grottaferrata 2009, 412-414, who retains as substantially authentic the *benedictio* of Francis to Bernardo in the version handed down by the *Compilatio Assisiensis* and the *Speculum perfectionis*.
- 41 *Chronica XXIV generalium*, 252-253. English translation: ARNALD OF SARRANT, *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals of the Order of Friars Minor*, Translation by N. MUSCAT, TAU Franciscan Communications, Malta 2010, 343-344. On page 252 of the Latin edition, in notes 3, 11, 13, 14, it is clearly explained that Peter Cattani, Barbaro, Filippo Longo and Giovanni da San Costanzo were buried at the Portiuncula; in page 252, note 12 and in page 253, note 2, it is written that the two brothers having the name Morico are probably the same person; in page 153, note 1, it is stated that Bernardo di Vigilante is buried in Spain.
- 42 Cf. *De conformitate*, 178-203.
- 43 Cf. *ivi*, 193. Regarding the suicide of John della Cappel-la, cf. BERNARD OF BESSE, *Liber de Laudibus Sancti Francisci*, 1,10-11 (FAED III, 34; *Fontes* 1255); ABF 1,3 (FAED III, 435; *Fontes* 2085); *Chronica XXIV generalium*, 4.
- 44 Cf. LUDOVICO DA PIETRALUNGA, *La Basilica di San Francesco*. Introduzione, note e commentario di P. SCARPELLINI, Treviso 1982. There tomb was to be found underneath the Crucifixion and under the Madonna with Child between Saint Francis and Saint John, two frescoes by Pietro Lorenzetti. Above the tomb there were the *effigies* of the four brothers. These were lost, together with part of the Crucifixion of Lorenzetti, when an altar was built against the wall in 1604-1605. This altar was removed in 1870-1871: cf. *ivi*, 76, note 355.
- 45 Cf. M. MILLOZZI, *La tomba di S. Francesco*, Assisi 1982, 177-179. In that same happy occasion, the relics of “frate Jacopa”, who came to live in Assisi after the death of Saint Francis and died there in 1239 and was buried in the same basilica, were also closed in a copper urn and placed in the new crypt, precisely in the wall of the landing of the double stairway connecting the lower basilica to the crypt: cf. *ivi*, 179-180.
- 46 LUDOVICO DA PIETRALUNGA, *La Basilica*, 71-72. As we have already said, Brother Bernardo died between 1241 and 1246. Brother Sylvester, canon of the cathedral church of Assisi, expert of canon law and first priest to enter the minoritic Order, died around 1240 (cf. *ivi*, 71, note 331); the English Brother William, who after his death worked many miracles and who, according to the inscription, received from Brother Elias the unique order to refrain from working miracles because of respect towards Francis and the presence of his venerated relics, died in Assisi around 1230 (cf. *ivi*, 71, note 332); Brother Eletto died around 1253 and on 25 May 1253 prophesied to Cardinal Pietro di Collemadio that he would die precisely on that day (cf. *ivi*, 72, note 333); Brother Valentino da Narni, expert of physical sciences before entering the Order, died in 1378 on Le Carceri (cf. *ivi*, 72, note 334), and thus he certainly was not a companion of Saint Francis.
- 47 *Ivi*, 326.
- 48 *Ivi*, 72, note 334.
- 49 I have already spoken above regarding Rufino, Leo, Angelo and Masseo. Regarding the relics of Francis, in 1818, after an exhausting secret excavation which lasted for 52 nights, and which was authorised by Pius VII, on 12 December the body of Saint Francis was finally discovered. Immediately afterwards a report was sent to the Minister general of the Friars Minor Conventuals, who informed the Pontiff, and on 22 December all the Order was informed of the finding of the venerated relics; later on Pius VII nominated a pontifical Commission for the scientific study of the body of the Saint, at the end of which he published the Brief *Assisiensem Basilicam*, dated 5 September 1820, in which he declared “that the identity of the body of Saint Francis found underneath the main altar of the lower Basilica of Assisi is certain”: cf. MILLOZZI, *La tomba di S. Francesco*, 121-128. In the years 1820-1824 the relics of the Saint remained in a “secret sacristy” in order to project and excavate the crypt designed by the architect Pasquale Belli, in which on 4 October 1824 the relics were transported, and placed in the same ancient tomb where they had always rested (in 1932 the crypt was transformed by architect Ugo Tarchi). In 1978, with the permission of Paul VI, a second exhumation of the sacred remains of the Saint was carried out, in four sessions from 24 January to 3 March: cf. *ivi*, 201-204.
- 50 These notes regarding the exhumation and the conclusions of the Commission, formed by experts in the sectors of history, art and medicine, have been forwarded me by Fr. Egidio Canil, coordinator of the same Commission, who I thank heartily.

THE ORIGINS OF THE FRANCISCAN PRESENCE IN THE HOLY LAND [1]

Noel Muscat

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) is widely known as a man of peace and dialogue. In the turmoil of the mediaeval world, marked by the political games between the imperial and papal powers, and threatened by the spreading of unorthodox heretical movements and by the ever-present menace of Islam, Saint Francis founded a family of brothers who would shape much of the social and religious framework of Europe and beyond for centuries. Indeed, Francis of Assisi remains a reminder of a person who embodied the true nature of that *christianitas* that shaped Europe and gave it its true identity. Whether or not this affirmation finds approval in the minds and hearts of contemporary Europeans is a matter of minor importance than the *de facto* contribution of Christianity for the formation of a community of nations governed by the values of democracy and freedom.

Born in a wealthy family of merchants, imbued with the crusading spirit typical of his age, educated in the culture of chivalry and *amour courtois*, Francis also became aware of the evils of social divide between *maiores* and *minores*. He respected the nature of a hierarchic Church and society, the feudal bonds between nobles and serfs, but he responded with enthusiasm to alter all this through a movement in which the ones who govern were to be called *ministri* and *custodes*, in a spirit of freedom of expression, of sharing of goods and resources, of free movement unparalleled in the history of Christianity.

One of the most courageous acts of Francis of Assisi was that of changing the whole interpretation of the crusading spirit of the 13th century. The Crusades had been active ever since the summoning of the first Crusade by Pope Urban II during the Council of Clermont (November 1095).¹ In July 1099 the Crusader armies had crossed the

Bosphorus and the Anatolian Peninsula, turned south along the Lebanese and Palestinian coasts, and captured the holy city of Jerusalem. They were to establish the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, but for a brief period. In 1187 they lost Jerusalem and had to retreat to the fortified city of Acre on the coast and to other strongholds, where they remained until 18th May 1291, the date that marks the end of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Holy Land.

When the Crusades lost the Holy Land to Saladin during the battle of Qarne Hattin (4th July 1187) and then had to abandon Jerusalem (2nd October 1187), Francis of Assisi was still five years old.² He must have been impressed by the accounts of the tragedy that spread like wildfire in the narrow alleyways of Assisi. As a young man he grew up with the crusading spirit, and in 1204 had even tried to join the forces of Guatier de Brienne in Apulia and eventually to take the cross and gain knighthood.³ His plans failed miserably. Even when he had consecrated himself to God's service, he twice tried to go over to the "lands of the infidels", albeit with a holier intention, namely that of preaching Christ and gaining the palm of martyrdom. His inexperience led him to depart from Ancona in 1212, only to be stranded on the Dalmatian coast after a storm drove the ship he boarded to Zadar. Again in 1213 he tried to go to the Muslim dominions in Spain and Morocco, but an illness made him turn back.⁴ It was only in 1219, precisely 8 centuries ago, that Francis made it to Damietta, in Egypt, by joining the Fifth Crusade with intentions that were miles apart from the original ideals that he had cherished so much during his youthful years.

It is to this successful attempt to make a new kind of Crusade that we refer to in this paper, with

the aim of seeing the providential nature of Francis' presence in "the lands of the infidels" and the great contribution of his brothers, the *fratres Minores*, or friars Minor, in shaping a Christian presence and preserving the Christian identity of what we generally call the Holy Land.

The historical context of the Fifth Crusade

When Pope Innocent III was enthroned on 22nd February 1198, the Church was in a great need for reform. The Holy Land, as we have said, had been lost, and the Third Crusade of 1189-1192 had succeeded in regaining some Crusader strongholds along the Palestinian coast, like Acre, and the island of Cyprus, but had failed to recapture Jerusalem, although Richard I of England finalised a treaty with Saladin, allowing unarmed Christians to visit the holy city. In Europe the situation was further complicated by the birth of many lay heretical movements within the Church, among which the Cathars, Albigensians and Waldensians, and the moderate movement of the Humiliati, whose *propositum vitae* was approved by Innocent III in 1201, after they had been condemned by Lucius III in 1184 in the decree *Ad abolendam*.⁵

Innocent III set about to reform the Church, but he had to wait for many years until he finally decided to convene a Council at the Lateran. On 19th April 1213, Pope Innocent III issued his letter *Vineam Domini Sabaoth*, against the enemies of Christendom, the "beasts of many kinds that are attempting to destroy the vineyard of the Lord of Sabaoth," and announcing a General Council of the Latin Church. The Fourth Lateran Council, which convened in 1215, was unprecedented in its scope and impact, and it called for the formation of the Fifth Crusade, as what its participants hoped would be the final defence of Christendom.⁶

The efforts of Innocent III were a double-edged sword. On the one hand he launched the Albigensian Crusade in southern France in 1209, in order to eradicate the heretical doctrine of the Cathars.⁷ On the other hand, he had to concentrate his attention upon the threat of Islam and the need to regain the Holy Land to Christianity. He knew of no other way to do this than to organise yet another Crusade.

It was during the Fourth Lateran Council, convened in Rome in November 1215, that Innocent III announced that he intended all Christian European powers to observe a truce of God and organise a Crusade to retake the Holy Land from the Muslims.⁸ The last decree of the Council (14th December 1215), an addition to the 70 canons of the Council, which starts with the words *Ad liberandam Terram sanctam*, deals with a new Crusade to recover the Holy Land:

"It is our ardent desire to liberate the holy Land from infidel hands. We therefore declare, with the approval of this sacred council and on the advice of prudent men who are fully aware of the circumstances of time and place, that Crusaders are to make themselves ready so that all who have arranged to go by sea shall assemble in the kingdom of Sicily on 1 June after next (1217): some as necessary and fitting at Brindisi and others at Messina and places neighbouring it on either side, where we too have arranged to be in person at time, God willing, so that with our advice and help the Christian army may be in good order to set out with divine and apostolic blessing [...]."⁹

The call for a Crusade against Islam had already been made by the same Pope Innocent III in April 1213 in the encyclical *Quia maior*. This papal document was meant to stir up the crusading spirit of Christian Europe in the face of the Muslim occupation of the holy places. Its style and wording are strong, and convey a clear idea of the mentality of the age regarding the threat of Islam to Christianity:

"The Christian peoples, in fact, held almost all the Saracen provinces up to the time of Blessed Gregory; but since then a son of perdition has arisen, the false prophet Muhammad, who has seduced many men from the truth by worldly enticements and the pleasures of the flesh. Although his treachery has prevailed up to the present day, we nevertheless put out trust in the Lord who has already given us a sign that good is to come, that the end of this beast is approaching, whose number, according to the Revelation of St. John, will end in 666 years, of which already nearly 600 have passed. And in addition to the former great and grave injuries which the treacherous Saracens have inflicted on our Redeemer, on account of our offences, the same perfidious Saracens have recently built a fortified stronghold to confound the Christian name on Mount Thabor, where Christ revealed to his disciples a vision of his future glory; by means

of this fortress they think they will easily occupy the city of Acre, which is very near them, and then invade the rest of that land without any obstructive resistance, since it is almost entirely devoid of forces or supplies.”¹⁰

The Fifth Crusade took place during the reign of al-Malik al-Kamil (1218-1238), son of al-Malik al-Adil (1200-1218) from the Ayyubid Sultanate, and a brother of Saladin. His full name was al-Malik al-Kamil Nasser ad-Din Abu al-Ma’ali Muhammad. He was born around 1180.¹¹ After 1200 he became Viceroy of Egypt, during his father’s reign. After the death of al-Adil, the Ayyubid empire was divided between al-Kamil as Sultan of Egypt, his brother al-Mu’azzam Isa, ruler of Palestine and Transjordan, and a third brother, al-Ashraf Musa, ruling in Syria. The reign of al-Kamil was characterised especially by the events of the Fifth Crusade. Al-Kamil lost Damietta to the Crusades on 5th November 1219, but regained it after defeating the Crusader army advancing towards Cairo in September 1221. Another important note of his reign was the truce that he negotiated with Emperor Frederick II, King of Sicily. Since al-Mu’azzam, who had destroyed the walls of Jerusalem, died in 1227, al-Kamil regained control over Palestine, and returned Jerusalem, Bethlehem and other holy sites to the Crusader kingdom for a period of 10 years, beginning from 1229. The exception was made for the Temple area, with the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, while Muslims were to be allowed to stay freely in the holy city. Al-Kamil died in 1238, when the Khwarezmian Turks were planning invasions in Palestine, and the truce ended in 1239.

Al-Kamil was known to be a powerful but rather benign ruler. In his dealings with the Crusades, he often offered them concessions, which were refused particularly by the intransigent nature of the Papal Legate Pelagius Galvan. In this paper we shall concentrate upon the relations between al-Kamil and Francis of Assisi, particularly with reference to the famous meeting in Damietta between these two figures. Although contemporary historians tend to relegate such a meeting to a rather irrelevant episode of the Fifth Crusade,¹² it nevertheless constitutes a milestone in the relations between Christians and Muslims at a time when these were at war. We shall now consider the event of Francis’ arrival in Damietta and the encounter with al-Malik al-Kamil.

NOTES

- 1 S. RUNCIMAN, *A History of the Crusades*. Vol. 1: *The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 41-51.
- 2 A. FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi*. Translation of *Nova Vita di San Francesco* by H. MOAK, New York, 1981, 104-106.
- 3 P. SABATIER, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*. Translated by L. SEYMOUR HOUGHTON, London, 1919, 14-15.
- 4 The accounts of these two episodes are found in the first mediaeval source for the life of St. Francis (1229), namely that of THOMAS OF CELANO, *Vita beati Francisci*, 55-56 [= 1C, 55-56], in *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. I, *The Saint*, edited by R.J. ARMSTRONG, J.A. WAYNE HELLMANN, W.J. SHORT, New York - London - Manila, 2003⁴, 229-230 [= FAED I, 229-230]: “In the sixth year of his conversion, burning with the desire for holy martyrdom, he wished to take a ship to the region of Syria to preach the Christian faith and repentance to the Saracens and other unbelievers. But after he had boarded a ship to go there, contrary winds started blowing, and he found himself with his fellow travellers on the shores of Slavonia.” [...] “Not too long after this, he began to travel towards Morocco to preach the gospel of Christ to the Mirammolin and his retinue. He was so carried away with desire that he would sometimes leave behind his companion on the journey and hurry ahead, intoxicated in spirit, in order to carry out his purpose. But the good God, out of pure kindness, was pleased to be mindful of me and many others. After he reached Spain God withstood him to his face, striking him with illness, and called him back from the journey he had begun.” The Mirammolin was the king of Morocco, Mohammad al Nasir, known as “Amir al-Mu’minin”, or commander of the believers.
- 5 G.G. MERLO, *In the Name of Saint Francis. History of the Friars Minor and Franciscanism until the early sixteenth century*, St. Bonaventure, NY, 2009, 262.
- 6 *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291*, edited by J. BIRD, E. PETERS, J.M. POWELL, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2013, 106-129.
- 7 J. SUMPTION, *The Albigensian Crusade*, London, 1978; M. COSTEN, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade*, Manchester University Press, 1997; A. BURI, *God’s Heretics: The Albigensian Crusade*, Sutton, 2002; L.W. MARVIN, *The Occitan War. A Military and Political History of the Albigensian Crusade, 1209-1218*, Cambridge University Press, 2008; M.G. PEGG, *The Most Holy War. The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom*, Oxford University Press, 2008; *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade. A Sourcebook*, edited by C. LÉGLU, R. RIST, C. TAYLOR, Routledge, London and New York, 2014; Z. OLDENBOURG, *Massacre at Montségur. A History of the Albigensian Crusade*, Hachette UK, 2015.
- 8 *The Fifth Crusade in Context. The crusading movement in the early thirteenth century*, edited by E.J. MYLOD, G. PERRY, T.W. SMITH, J. VANDEBURIE, Routledge, London and New York, 2017; J. BIRD - D. SMITH, *The Fourth Lateran Council and the Crusade Movement: The Impact of the Council of 1215 on Latin Christendom and the East*, Brepols Publishers, Belgium, 2018.
- 9 *Conciliorum Oecumenorum Decreta. Edizione Bilingue*, a cura di G. ALBERIGO et alii, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2013, 267: “Ad liberandam Terram sanctam

de manibus impiorum ardenti desiderio adspirantes de prudentum virorum consilio qui plene noverant circumstantias temporum et locorum sacro approbante concilio diffinimus ut ita cruce signati se praeparent quod in calendas iunii sequentis post proximum omnes qui dispuerunt transire per mare convenient in regnum Siciliae. Alii sicut oportuerit et decuerit apud Brundisium et alii apud Messanam et partes utrobique vicinas ubi et nos personaliter Domino annuente disposuimus tunc adesse quatenus nostro consilio et auxilio exercitus christianus salubriter ordinetur cum benedictione divina et apostolica profecturus.” English translation in www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu (accessed 20/11/2018).

- 10 INNOCENTIUS III, *Bulla “Quia maior”* (April 1213), in *Patrologiae cursus completa, series Latina*, ed. J.P. MIGNE, vol. 216, col. 817-822: “Et quidem omnes pene Saracenorum provincias usque post tempora beati Gregorii Christiani populi possederunt; sed ex tunc quidam perditionis filius, Machometus pseudopropheta, surrexit, qui per saeculares illecebras et voluptates carnales multos a veritate seduxit; cujus perfidia etsi usque ad haec tempora invaluerit, confidimus tamen in Domino, qui jam fecit nobiscum signum in bonum, quod finis hujus bestiae appropinquat, cujus numerus secundum Apocalypsin Joannis intra sexcenta sexaginta sex clauditur, ex quibus jam pene sexcenti sunt anni completi. Certe

praeter priores injurias grandes et graves Redemptori nostro pro nostris offensis a perfidiis Saracenis illatas, nuper in monte Thabor, ubi discipulis suis futurae glorificationis speciem demonstravit, iidem perfidi Saraceni quamdam munitionis arcem in confutationem Christiani nominis erexerunt, per quam civitatem Accon sibi valde vicinam de facili cogitant occupare, ac deinde sine omni contradictionis obstaculo residuum terrae hujus invadere, cum sit viribus et opibus pene penitus destituta.” English translation in www.franciscanum.wordpress.com (accessed 20/11/2018). T.W. SMITH, *How to Craft a Crusade Call: Pope Innocent III and “Quia maior” (1213)*, in www.academia.edu (accessed 20/11/2018).

- 11 P. MOSES, *The Saint and the Sultan. The Crusades, Islam and Francis of Assisi’s Mission of Peace*, New York, 2009, 64-77.
- 12 *The Fifth Crusade in Context*, 29: “Perhaps the most explored topic in the historiography concerning the Fifth Crusade has been St Francis of Assisi’s presence at Damietta and his daring yet futile attempt at converting Sultan al-Kāmil in the enemy’s camp. The popularity of St Francis and the vast corpus of scholarship as well as the fascination for this direct religious confrontation has contributed to an impressive amount of writings dealing with this rather minor moment in the course of the campaign.”



Pisan Port in Acre, where St. Francis landed in 1219

FRANCIS AND BISHOP GUIDO I

*Summary presentation of the paper by
Felice Accrocca, Francesco e il Vescovo Guido I,
in Miscellanea Francescana 112 (2012) 465-484.*

One of the most elusive periods of the life of Francis is that of the decisive years of his conversion, namely from the time between his first interior turmoil, followed by his imprisonment in Perugia, to the formation of the first nucleus of brothers, when Bernardo, Pietro, Egidio and all the others joined Francis. This period covers the moments during which Francis was living alone, without any companions. One of the crucial issues of those years is undoubtedly the relationship that the young merchant - who was now uniquely desiring to understand what the divine will wanted from him - was keeping with the bishop of the town, Guido I. This is a delicate aspect, because it carries with it the complex theme of the relationship between Francis and the ecclesiastical institution.

The bishop of Assisi and the lack of interest of historians

It seems that the bishop of Assisi did not attract the interest of historians. Nevertheless, the few hints dedicated to him show his role as it appears among the ancient biographers, but even among the modern ones. If Paul Sabatier decisively denied any influence of Guido I upon Francis, on his part, Johannes Joergensen, who also imitated the methodology of Sabatier, expressed a very different opinion. In fact, he underlined that, after Francis returned from Rome, where he had gone as a pilgrim upon the tombs of the Apostles, the only person to whom Francis could go every now and then, in order to open his heart, was the bishop of Assisi, Guido, who probably would have been his confessor from the very beginning of his new way of life. These evaluations, which are diametrically opposed, ended up by showing also the different relationship that these two famous biographers

kept with the Catholic Church and with its institutions.

The most interesting results have been presented by Nicolangelo D'Acunto [*Il vescovo Guido oppure i vescovi Guido? Cronotassi episcopale assisana e fonti francescane*, in *Assisi nel Medio Evo. Studi di storia ecclesiastica e civile*, Assisi 2002, 103-155. Through the witness of biographical sources, the scholar underlines the fact that the diverse characteristics of the prelate emerges from the narrations relating to the beginning of the conversion and life of the first *fraternitas* and from the other narrations which refer to the succeeding years. Departing from diplomatic sources, he showed that in reality there were two bishops having the same name - Guido I and Guido II - with whom Francis entered in contact, and not one bishop, as many believed for a long time. D'Acunto holds that Guido I, who is expressly mentioned the first time in 1208, had an active part in all the events of the Franciscan origins: from the conversion of Francis up to the vocational choice of Clare. Unfortunately, the confusion that for a long time has dominated the episcopal chronotaxis of Assisi, has left its mark upon the readings of historians, who attributed to Guido I some character traits of Guido II, and thus ended up in not presenting a correct reading of the events that saw as protagonist the first one among the two bishops.

From hagiography to history: a difficult but not impossible passage

I would now like to return to the biographical sources, in order to consider some nodal passages, the first of which has not been examined by D'Acunto, in order to reflect upon the relationship between Francis and Guido I during a phase cir-

cumscribed by their existence, namely the period - as we have shown - during which the son of Pietro di Bernardone was living without any companions. Our approach to the biographical sources is also necessary to keep in mind the complex factors that influenced their editing, among which we find the tensions between the friars and the secular clergy and the bishops, which are of no minor importance. These conflicts were obviously premature, and we only find an evident hint in the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi. We should also keep in mind that Guido II, who nurtured clear projects regarding the canonisation of Francis, had to abandon them quickly, so much so that during the moment of the saint's death he was marginalised and the sources are silent about his role.

These are evident traces of the recurrent tension during the 13th century, which produced also a progressive elimination of the bishops of Assisi, Guido I and Guido II, from the Franciscan sources. If we take, for example, one of the episodes that have been written and rewritten by the hagiographers, namely the encounter with Innocent III, it is possible to become aware that the figure of Guido I underwent a decisive re-dimensioning in many of the sources, until it completely disappeared in the *Vita sancti Francisci* by Julian of Speyer and in the Bonaventurian *legendae*. I do not believe that it is by chance that all this happened precisely in the works of two authors who were writing against the background of evident tensions: Julian of Speyer, in fact, composed his *Vita* after the crisis of 1231, when Gregory IX was obliged to send two letters in defence of the brothers - the *Nimis iniqua* (21 August, with a renewed version on 28 August) and the *Nimis prava* (22 August) [*Bullarium Franciscanum*, ed. J.H. SBARALEA, I, Romae 1759, 74-75]. These documents were addressed against the opposition that some bishops were showing towards the brothers. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, instead, composed his biographies after some difficult years, during which analogous contrasts inflamed the tension in Paris, because of the polemic writings of William of Saint Amour against the Mendicant Orders.

The complex problem linked the Legenda trium sociorum

The most ancient sources, which are particularly precious for our research, are the *De inceptione*

vel fundamentum Ordinis and, especially, the *Legenda trium sociorum*, two texts which have often been seen as parallel texts, but which in reality are less homogenous than previously believed. The *De inceptione* is the work of brother Giovanni da Perugia, a disciple of brother Egidio (Giles), and was written before the death of Gregory IX, maybe during the generalate of brother Elias (before 1239). The date 1240-1241, accepted by the majority of modern historiographers, is based upon insecure data. Therefore, it is a document born within the group of companions of Francis. It is also found once again within that text which we today know by the name *Legenda trium sociorum*, whose paternity is today an object of discussion. In effect, if in the past the opinions differed between those who attributed it to the companions of Francis and those who saw it as a later work, in these last years, after the solution of the chronological question (the date 1246 is now universally accepted), another hypothesis has been born, namely, that its author was external to the minoritic environment.

The discussion was kept alive thanks to Jacques Dalarun and myself (Felice Accrocca). In 1996, Dalarun placed it within the Order and the circle of Companions, and he even went as far as speaking - although with some doubts - about a *Legenda duorum sociorum*, to be attributed to Angelo and Rufino. More recently he has continued in the same direction: as to the *Letter of Greccio* of the three companions of Francis, from the majority of codices it has been linked to the text of the *Legenda trium sociorum*. The French scholar aims first and foremost to establish a link between the date (11 August, feast of Saint Rufino, patron of Assisi) and one of the brothers who signed it, namely brother Rufino. Dalarun also tries to smooth the apparent contradictions between the indications given in the letter and the text of the *Legenda*, including the latter in the *dossier* sent to Crescenzo da Jesi together with the memoirs of Leo and other material. In a not too hidden form, he judges the work as coming from the pen of brother Rufino and also holds that chapters 17-18 were included within the original edition, which was later reworked in the editions that have arrived down to us (known as the *traditional Sarnano version*).

According to me (Accrocca), a whole set of data seems to point in another direction. The author reveals a good knowledge of the town institutions and of the civil laws of Assisi. He is not so well versed in the hagiographic style. He gives

an unusual attention to the role of the bishop, and has little historical interest for some crucial events in the history of the Order (to the point of uniting discordant versions, as in the case of Francis and the brothers with Innocent III). All these elements point to a personage who was not a Franciscan, but rather a citizen of Assisi whose principal objective was that of correcting the strongly negative image of the youthful years of Saint Francis, of his family and of the behaviour of the entire Umbrian town as it has been handed down to us in the text of the *Vita beati Francisci* by Thomas of Celano.

According to Jacques Dalarun, the *milites* (knights) were to play an important role in the edition of the work, and Rufino, who was the material author, came from a family of knights. Nothing prohibits - it is difficult to think the contrary - that it was precisely the nobles of Assisi who took the initiative to answer to the letter of Crescenzo da Jesi, who asked for the collaboration of all those who had known Francis in a direct way, and it was precisely them who could have conferred the mandate on someone - it is impossible to say more about his identity - to write in an orderly manner their memoirs and to re-write some phrases from the life of Francis. I am convinced that the *milites* could have had an important role in the origin of the text, in their quality as the ones who informed and gave the mandate to the person who wrote the *Legenda*: however, we cannot restrict the possibilities to Rufino by himself.

It is in fact difficult to think that a brother could have written the first sixteen chapters of the *Legenda*, even more if we think that he was one of the companions of Francis. The Companions witnessed as a group (many passages in the *Compilatio Assisiensis* reveal this clearly), and they showed themselves to be sensitive to the internal contrasts of their religious family, which were manifest during the last years of the life of Francis. Why would Rufino have been so little interested in the vicissitudes of the Order, to restrict his attention to the youthful years of Francis and to the first years of the group that gathered itself around him? Why would he have been so preoccupied to defend the reputation of the town and of its leading citizens, when his life, from a certain moment, took such a different turning? In order to mark the distance of the Companions, it is enough to see - as we have said - the way in which the author proceeds when narrating the event of the visit of the first group of brothers to Innocent III.

Moreover, the *Legenda trium sociorum* is different from other biographies which were born within the Order precisely because it aims at re-writing, in a circumscribed and coherent picture, the episodes of the youthful life and the first steps of Francis' conversion, repeating in many ways that Thomas of Celano had already stated, but also offering a different interpretation at the same time. We have to keep in mind that - contrary to what Paul Sabatier and historiography dependent upon him stated - for the entire 13th century the Franciscan biographical sources did not have an alternating relationship among themselves, but rather one of dependence and integration. In fact, they were often constructed in a complementary way among themselves, since their authors and compilers had as a point of reference sources which were already in existence, which their work tried to strengthen and integrate. In effect, if the *Vita beati Francisci* of Celano, the *Vita sancti Francisci* of Julian of Speyer and the *Legenda maior* and *minor* of Bonaventure of Bagnoregio present themselves as autonomous works complete in themselves, at other times it was the criterion of integration to move witnesses, compilers and authors to act. This criterion was kept in mind already in 1246 by the Companions who, when they responded to the appeal launched by Crescenzo da Jesi, referred nearly exclusively to episodes which were not mentioned in the *Vita beati Francisci* of Thomas of Celano, with the exception of some occasions in which they considered it opportune to integrate the narration and to correct the version of the facts (the same criterion was followed by the author of *De inceptione* in the few memories which he dedicated to Francis). This identical principle was followed by Celano when writing the *Memoriale*. He took many events referred by the citizens of Assisi, by the companions of the Saint and by many other witnesses, but he was always attentive not to repeat episodes already narrated in the *Vita beati Francisci*, to the point that in some cases he also left out new details in order not to return upon facts that were already known.

With the decision of the Chapter of Paris (1266), which decreed the destruction of all the other *vitae* of Francis, the work of Bonaventure became exclusive. However, it was soon noted that even the *Legenda maior* was incomplete. The Chapter of Padua (1276) decreed that the lingering memories be gathered, in order to complete the *Legenda maior* (not with a sense of opposition to the work

of the Seraphic Doctor). The initial rubric of the *Speculum minus*, contained in Ms. 1/73 of the convent of Saint Isidore in Rome, is exemplary from this standpoint, because it reveals to us that the compiler proposed to gather materials “which were not found in the common *Legenda*.” Even the material of the Companions that was then utilised for the *Compilatio Assisiensis*, was chosen on the basis of the need to integrate: in a first moment, in 1246, it was the Companions who worked this selection, with the aim of integrating the *Vita beati Francisci* by Thomas of Celano; in a second moment, probably after 1276, the selection was instead operated by the compiler who gathered the *Compilatio*, in order to integrate the *Legenda maior* of Bonaventure.

On the contrary, the author of the *Legenda trium sociorum* distances himself from this procedure, since he aims, first and foremost, to present a picture of the personality of the young Francis different from that presented in the *Vita beati Francisci*. For this reason he also textually repeats entire passages of the work of Celano and he re-writes many facts which had been referred to by the first biographer. At the same time, the *Legenda trium sociorum* reveals itself as a disproportionate work. If, as many critics think, the last two chapters (17-18) are the result of a later addition, then it is more logical to think that the Legend was originally planned not as a biography of Francis, but as a re-writing of part of it. This is well explained if we keep in mind the request formulated by Crescenzo da Jesi after the general chapter of 1244 and the aim that the Assisi citizens wanted to reach when they responded to this request, namely that of correcting the blurred picture that the official biographer had given regarding the young Francis.

On their part, chapters 17-18 were written in a later moment, and they give us an identikit of their author. They are undoubtedly the work of a brother who was proud of the prestigious standing acquired - thanks to papal benevolence - by the basilica of Assisi. With all probability, he was a member of the community which resided at the Sacro Convento. The force with which he underlines the primacy of the basilica, head and mother of the Order, and the precise knowledge of the formal characteristics of the letter *Is qui ecclesiam*, whose original is preserved to this very day in the Sacro Convento, are all proofs of this hypothesis. He also calls Francis, for the only time in the whole work, “our most holy father” (L3C 73,4).

Three different sections (*Letter of the Companions*, chapters 1-16, chapters 17-18) were joined together to form a text that assumed its definitive form in the period between the 13th and 14th centuries. In this way we can explain why the codices start from the 14th century; in fact, before that date, the first two parts (*Letter*, chapters 1-16) of the present *Legenda trium sociorum* were not destined to the public. However, it remains difficult to reconstruct in an orderly manner, in a sure and documented way, the various phases that led to the final edition in eighteen chapters. Once we establish the initial fusion of the *Letter* with chapters 1-16, we are still faced with the problem of the double edition of the work: the codices in fact transmit both the so-called Sarnano version [from the codex conserved in the communal library of Sarnano, edited by GIUSEPPE ABATE, *Legenda S. Francisci Assisiensis tribus ipsius Sociis hucusque adscripta. Redactio antiquior iuxta cod. Sarnanensem*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 39 (1939) 375-432], in sixteen chapters, as well as the so-called *traditional* edition, in eighteen chapters [published in the critical edition by THÉOPHILE DESBONNETS, *Legenda trium sociorum. Edition critique*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 67 (1974) 38-144], which was taken from the most important collections of sources. Abate and Clasen were convinced - even though with contrasting motives - that both editions had a strong relationship and a reciprocal dependence one upon the other. According to Abate, the Sarnano codex transmitted the most ancient edition of the text, from which the successive edition was derived, and which is nowadays improperly called *traditional*. According to Clasen, things stood directly on an opposite scale: he did not endorse the thesis of a composition in subsequent phases (from the beginning the text was born as it is presented, in eighteen chapters), and was convinced that the original edition was the *traditional* one. For Théophile Desbonnets, instead, both editions contain interventions, which different editors-copyists had made upon “a unique and anterior text”, which would be the archetype of the first sixteen chapters of the *Legenda trium sociorum*.

After examining the differences existing between the two versions, I am convinced of the correct position of Desbonnets. At the beginning, therefore, a first nucleus of the *Legenda* was formed, resulting in the union of the *Letter* with the first sixteen chapters, from which then two dif-

ferent versions were born: the editor-copyist who created the *Sarnano version* by copying and manipulating the text at his disposition; and the same thing in the case of the one who composed the *traditional version* - with all probability, a friar who lived in the basilica of Assisi - who then completed the work by adding chapters 17 and 18.

Guido I as a point of reference for Francis

The analysis we have just made, which is certainly tiresome, is nevertheless necessary to become aware of the particular nature of the text which we nowadays call *Legenda trium sociorum* and of the possibilities that it can offer us in our understanding of the relationship between Francis and bishop Guido I. The author of the first 16 chapters of the *Legenda*, in fact, shows himself to be less influenced than the other biographers by the tensions between seculars and mendicants, since he was outside the parties in conflict. This has helped him to assign to the bishop of Assisi a role which the others were wary of giving him: Guido I was the only person to whom Francis, during the early period of his discernment, could confide. It was he who suggested to Francis how to behave with regards to his father who had reported him. From that moment Guido I became Francis' guide (*dirigendo ipsum*). When he was not understood by the citizens of Assisi, the converted young man went frequently to look for the bishop and to ask him for counsel, and he was always received with benevolence. The same Francis, after the conflict with Pietro di Bernardone, comforted the priest of San Damiano with the same words that Guido I had addressed to him some time before.

The most significant affirmations, undoubtedly, are those in which the author speaks of the bishop of Assisi as the confidant and guide of Francis. The author affirms that Francis, in the beginning of his searching for inner meaning, went to Rome where he changed his rich clothes with the rags of a beggar and sat down on the steps of Saint Peter's basilica asking for alms. Then he changed again into his own clothes and returned to his hometown. He then began to pray to the Lord to indicate the way for him. "He did not share his secret with anyone; nor did he seek counsel from anyone, except from God alone, and, periodically, from the bishop of Assisi" (L3C 10: FAED II, 74). Certainly, during

the mid-1240s such an affirmation could appear embarrassing for the brothers, who had been for a long time in tension with the bishops; in fact, neither Thomas of Celano nor Bonaventure speak about this attitude, although they speak about Francis' pilgrimage to Rome. Neither is it by chance that these affirmations of the *Legenda trium sociorum* had, from time to time, aroused credit or suspicion: they were accepted by Mariano da Firenze, but rejected by Wadding. Sabatier has nothing to say about them, and - strangely enough - they seem to have been forgotten by Joergensen.

We have to state, first of all, that the *Legenda trium sociorum* presents itself as the best-informed source on the youthful years of Francis and on the first steps of his journey of conversion. Indeed, when Thomas of Celano was composing the first section of the *Memoriale*, he took all the new elements in it, which were unknown to him when he wrote the *Vita beati Francisci*, to the point of offering a picture of Francis, which was rather different from the one he had previously depicted [Cf. F. ACCROCCA, *Problemi di gioventù. La conversione di Francesco secondo il Memoriale di Tommaso da Celano*, in *Frate Francesco* 72 (2006) 393-420]. This also means that he had the knowledge of some authoritative and credible witnesses which were merged in the *Legenda trium sociorum*.

Indeed, such a fact demonstrates the necessity that such a detail would have already formed part of that text which was the archetype of the first 16 chapters of the *Legenda trium sociorum*, and which could have been part of the material sent to Crescenzo da Iesi. This renders it more credible. It is illogical to think that Francis, who was in search for the will of God, would have looked for guidance from someone who did not represent in his eyes an authoritative figure, to whom he could open his heart with full trust. It would be illogical to think the contrary, namely that he limited himself to an interior dialogue with the Lord, with all the risks of being auto-referential in his attitude. In the *Testament*, Francis affirmed that he had placed under the discerning judgment of the Pope the Rule which the Most High had revealed to him. How could he have acted differently just some years before? It is therefore more logical to insist that, during the beginning of his conversion when he was still searching for the will of God, Francis sought the advice of Guido I.

One can also keep in mind what *De inceptione*

affirms, namely that when the brothers were still few, they were persecuted by their parents and relatives: “Even their relatives and families would persecute them. Others from that city - great and small, men and women - would scorn and ridicule them as senseless and stupid, except for the city’s bishop to whom the blessed Francis frequently went to seek counsel” (AP 17: FAED II, 41). Such affirmations, which were also received by the *Legenda trium sociorum* (L3C 35: FAED II, 89), and they were certainly important since they came from a source that possessed good information on the vicissitudes of the first brothers: Giovanni da Perugia, in fact, received this information from Bernard and Giles, companions of Francis who had been direct protagonists of the events narrated. Therefore, it appears difficult to place them in doubt, also because the entire context of the narration tends to consider them authentic. The role of support and help of the group, as well as that of counsellor, that Guido I carried out, presents itself in full continuity with what the *Legenda* affirms, when it attributes to him this same function from the very beginning.

Guido I as Francis’ guide and counsellor

The *Legenda trium sociorum* states that, after the open conflict of Francis with his father in the presence of Guido I, “the bishop, focusing his attention on the man of God’s frame of mind and enthusiastically admiring his fervour and determination, gathered him into his arms, covering him with his mantle. For he clearly understood his deeds were prompted by divine counsel, and realised that what he had seen contained no small mystery. And so, from that moment, he became his helper, exhorting, encouraging, loving, and embracing him with the depths of his charity” (L3C 20: FAED II, 80). It is evident that, in this passage, the author makes use of a text from the *Vita* by Celano (1C 15: FAED I, 193-194). Thomas, however, did not hint at all at an action of direction by the bishop with regards to Francis. Even the Sarnano codex - together with the Barcellona codex, which forms part of its family - omits the expression “ac dirigendo.”

There are two possibilities, therefore. Either the expressio “ac dirigendo” was present in the archetype and was omitted by the editor of the *Sarnano*

version, or else it was not present at all, but was added by the editor of the *traditional version*. This last editor, besides, has been identified as having been a friar Minor who resided in the Sacro Convento of Assisi. It is totally illogical to think that, in a period successive to the first half of the 13th century, a brother who was proud of the importance given to the Assisi basilica by Gregory IX could have attributed to Guido I a function that no one among the sources - official and non-official - had ever dared to give him. On the other hand, such a role is in full continuity with the affirmations we have already quoted, which portray Guido I as the counsellor of Francis. For these reasons I think that the expression of the *traditional version* is more faithful to the dictates of the author, while it is logical to think that the editor-copyist of the *Sarnano version* could have considered it to be too dangerous to hint at a directive action of the bishop with regards to Francis, and therefore would have preferred to leave out such an expression.

Besides, as I have already affirmed, Guido I was totally involved in the occasion of the encounter of Francis and his brothers with Innocent III. The version of Thomas, who states that the bishop did not know about the journey, is not credible. If we consider his multiple relationships with the brothers, which are witnessed in an incontrovertible way by the sources, we cannot understand why, nor in what manner, Francis could hope to receive audience in the curia without the help of someone who was capable of introducing him in front of the right persons. On the contrary, it results more reasonable to follow the account of *De inceptione*, which makes of the bishop the true protagonist of that mission, at least in its initial phase. On the other hand, as Werner Maleczek has shown, in spite of the fact that the curial interests were concentrated “upon a political argument” as could have been the relationship with Otho IV, the “relative peace” which ecclesiastical politics enjoyed in 1208-1209, together with an experimented jurisprudence of the curia, permitted to Innocent III and his collaborators to be “more sensitive to the radical evangelical requests” [W. MALECZEK, *Innocenzo III e la curia romana nell’anno 1209*, in *Francesco a Roma dal signor Papa*, a cura di A. Cacciotti e M. Melli, Milano, 2008, 119, 121, 122 respectively]. The journey to Rome of Francis and his brothers could not have been a chance occurrence. Who else, but the bishop of Assisi, could

have helped them to discover the opportunity of the moment and encourage them not to lose time in going to the Pope?

A confirmation in the Compilatio Assisiensis

I think that it is important to give some attention to some affirmations contained in paragraph 58 of the *Compilatio Assisiensis*. Once again, we find ourselves facing a text which presents many problems, since it is transmitted by just one codex which originally - resulting from the inventory edited in 1381 by Giovanni di Iolo - was conserved in the *public library* of Assisi. This is a codex composed of different subjects, copied by various amanuenses, and compiled between 1310 and 1312 in the *scriptorium* of the Sacro Convento.

The third section of the work (CA 50-120) is built largely upon the testimonies of the companions of Francis. If we prescind from the so-called texts of Brother Leo (CA 102-105), this third section seems to be characterised by a stylistic continuity and by an identical narrative modality. At the origins of these paragraphs we undoubtedly find the companions of Francis, and in the first place, brother Leo.

Paragraph 58 merits a particular attention, since it refers to the teaching of Francis regarding the way in which the brothers should build and live in their houses:

“Once when he was in Siena for treatment of the disease of his eyes, he was staying in a cell, where after his death a chapel was built out of reverence for him. Lord Bonaventure, who had donated to the brothers the land where the brothers’ place had been built, said to him: ‘What do you think of this place?’ Blessed Francis answered: [...] ‘When the brothers go to any city where they do not have a place, and they find someone who wants to give them enough land to build a place, have a garden, and whatever is necessary for them, they must first consider how much land is enough for them, always considering the holy poverty we have promised.’ [...] The holy father said this because he did not want the brothers for any reason to go beyond the norm of poverty either in houses or churches, in gardens or in other things they used.

And he did not want them to possess the right of ownership to these places, but always to stay in them as pilgrims and strangers. [...] ‘Afterwards they should go to the bishop of that city and say to him: «Lord, for the love of the Lord God and the salvation of his soul, such and such a person wants to give us enough land so that we can build a place there. Therefore, we have recourse to you first, because you are the father and lord of the souls of the entire flock entrusted to you, as well as our souls and those of the other brothers who will stay in this place. Therefore, with the blessing of the Lord God and yours, we would like to build there.»’ The saint would say this because the good of souls the brothers want to produce among the people was better achieved by peace with prelates and clerics, winning them and the people, rather than by scandalising prelates and clerics, even though they might win the people. [...] ‘From the beginning of my conversion, when I separated myself from the world and father in the flesh, the Lord put His word in the mouth of the bishop of Assisi so he could counsel me well in the service of Christ and comfort me’” (CA 58: FAED II, 159-160).

Although the pen of the Companions of the Saint is evident in this description, we can attribute to Francis himself the essence of the words. Otherwise we cannot explain how the Companions could have been moved to insert here a reference to the bishop of Assisi, in such a way as to see in it an autobiographical reference. Such a reference, after all, stands in full continuity with the affirmations of the *Legenda trium sociorum*, which the Companions did not possess in the moment when they were writing their memories.

The words referring to the bishop of Assisi are therefore to be ascribed to Francis. At the beginning of his journey of conversion, the young Assisi citizen and future saint was therefore wisely counselled and comforted by Guido I.

What we can state with certainty is that, during those years in which he lived in solitude, Francis was not alone, because he had a secure point of reference in the person of bishop Guido I, to whom the Lord placed words on his mouth so that he could give wise counsel to Francis in his service of Christ. I believe that I can state without any hesitation that a future biography of Francis must necessarily take this aspect into account.

Saint Francis, armed only with humble faith

“

With a heart grateful to the Lord, in this eighth centenary of the meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al Kāmil, I have welcomed the opportunity to come here as a believer thirsting for peace, as a brother seeking peace with the brethren. We are here to desire peace, to promote peace, to be instruments of peace. The logo of this journey depicts a dove with an olive branch. It is an image that recalls the story – present in different religious traditions – of the primordial flood. According to the biblical account, in order to preserve humanity from destruction, God asked Noah to enter the ark along with his family. Today, we too in the name of God, in order to safeguard peace, need to enter together as one family into an ark which can sail the stormy seas of the world: the ark of fraternity. The point of departure is the recognition that God is at the origin of the one human family. He who is the Creator of all things and of all persons wants us to live as brothers and sisters, dwelling in the common home of creation which he has given us. Fraternity is established here at the roots of our common humanity, as “a vocation contained in God’s plan of creation.” [...] I like to quote Saint Francis, when he gave his brothers instructions about approaching the Saracens and non-Christians. He wrote: “Let them not get into arguments or disagreements, but be subject to every human creature out of love for God, and let them profess that they are Christians” (Regula Non Bullata, XVI). Neither arguments nor disagreements - and this also applies to priests - neither arguments nor disagreements: at that time, as many people were setting out, heavily armed, Saint Francis pointed out that Christians set out armed only with their humble faith and concrete love. Meekness is important: if we live in the world according to the ways of God, we will become channels of his presence; otherwise, we will not bear fruit.

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Pope Francis
Inter-religious Meeting
Founder’s Memorial, Abu Dhabi
Homily at Zayed Sports City, Abu Dhabi
4 - 5 February 2019

Abbreviations

Writings of St. Francis

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

Sources for the Life of St. Francis

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

Sources for the Life of St. Clare

BICl	Blessing of St. Clare.
1-4LAg	Letters to St. Agnes of Prague..
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.

Editor: Noel Muscat OFM

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



Cover picture:

Saint Francis goes with Brother Illuminato and the Fifth Crusade