

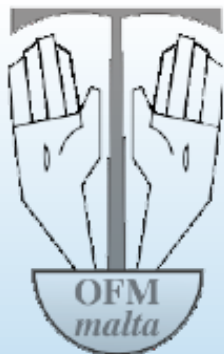
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EDITORIAL

THE HUMAN NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

We live in a world where communication and information are fundamental to any organised society in all spheres of life, political, economic, social, educational, religious, etc. No organisation can function properly without effective means of information and communication through social media, publications, and all means that allow persons to interact and to be informed.

The Franciscan Order has been at the forefront in its commitment to communicate and inform through these social media. The Order's website dates to the very early days of internet technology, in the mid-1990's when internet became mainstream. This was possible also thanks to the expertise of a Franciscan friar from our province of Malta, Br. John Abela OFM (died 19 December 2010), who dedicated many years to the creation and updating of the websites of the Franciscan Order, the Custody of the Holy Land, and his home province.

Times have changed, and social media are coming up with newer and more efficient means of communication and information. On the technical level, one can state that the brothers are well informed about what is going on in the Franciscan world. Communication levels between entities, individual brothers and the Order have improved, and we can say that we are well connected on the technological level.

The problem, however, regards the human level of communication and information. Whereas we are capable of being linked in front of the screen or through our smartphones, we know full well that the level of human communication among us is decreasing at an alarming rate. The problem is so exasperated that we tend to live more in a virtual world than in the real world of genuine human contacts.

The well-known British-American author and speaker, Simon Sinek, has often spoken clearly about the dangers of addiction to the means of social media among "millennials", namely those born roughly between 1981 and 1996. These generations have been the ones to have an immediate contact with social media during their early adolescence. Those born during the 1980s are less prone to be addicted to social media, but only slightly so. Sinek states that, whereas our society protects minors from the abuse of alcohol, drugs, gambling, etc., there are absolutely no controls over their use of social media, which produce the same brain chemicals leading to addiction. This generation is nowadays between 30 and 40 years of age. In our Order they make up a small, but significant percentage of brothers, since they are the future of our Order's existence.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing a situation, even within our religious houses, where no brother is able to attend a meeting,

go to a lecture, participate in a retreat, even go to prayer or to dinner, without placing his smartphone on the table, face-up or, worse still and not very politely, face-down. The same happens in the rec room, during journeys, and in all situations where brothers are supposed to live together and interact as human persons.

On the other hand, we are bombarded by information and communication. This is a good thing, even though we have to ask ourselves, with all sincerity, whether this form of communication is actually helping us to grow in mutual relations. With the excuse of being informed and receiving all kinds of communication, we are becoming conditioned by what we see on our screens. Even within our Order and entities, we are given information that is either too vague, and which does not communicate anything substantial, or which is too “bookish” for the younger generations. I bet that the majority of “millennial” brothers who read this short commentary of mine will not arrive at the very end of it, and I doubt whether they have even arrived at this point. This is the dilemma we are facing.

We have lost the human touch of Franciscan life. To quote Sinek once again: if I am being approached by a person (a brother) who asks me a favour, and I quickly tell him: “Ok, I’ll get to you later”, because I am texting on my smartphone, I am not respecting my brother as a person. Same thing happens when smartphones beep during meals, during recreation, during prayer, and (God forbid) even during the celebration of Mass or in the confessional... We are saying that the person we have in front of us, the human person with whom you and I are physically communicating with, is not important to us. Before any meeting we look like idiots if we do not take out our smartphones to “pretend” we are checking text messages or emails or Facebook or anything else that might make us look “normal” robots. True relationships are built when we are capable of looking at one another in the eye, of talking to the person who is with us here and now.

Saint Francis reminds us of the need to build true, genuine, human relationships, and not a virtual world of information and communication of gossip and fake news (to use this popular jargon) that tear us apart. To Brother Leo he writes: “And if you need and want to come to me for the sake of your soul or for some consolation, Leo, come” (*Letter to Brother Leo*). To a minister provincial who wants to avoid the brothers who bother him, Francis give this advice: “I wish to know in this way if you love the Lord and me, His servant and yours: that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned - however much he could have sinned - who, after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy” (*Letter to a Minister*).

These words speak volumes. True love is based on true communication. A couple in love switch off their phones when they are making love, if they truly love one another. Are we able to lay aside our gadgets to respond to the true love that we are called to give as Franciscans? Can we do with less news, less texts, less phone calls, less video chats, in order to enjoy the pure joy of human communication, which reflects the human touch of God in Jesus Christ?

Noel Muscat ofm

FR. ALFONS MARIJA CAMILLERI OFM (1910 - 1994)

Noel Muscat ofm



Fr. Alfons Marija Camilleri OFM

as Patri Fons by many people who knew him and appreciated his human and Franciscan qualities, he merits the respect due to a true Franciscan friar who loved his Order and his Province.

The early years

Fr. Alfons was born in the tiny village of Għasri on the island of Gozo on Friday 15 April 1910, in the farmhouse bearing the numbers 16 and 17 in *Strada Chiesa*, nowadays known as *Sqaq il-Knisja*,¹ close to the church of the *Madonna tal-Patroċinju*² in the picturesque Għasri valley (*Wied il-Għasri*). His father's name was Lwigi, who had married twice. Patri Fons' mother, Ursola (Sika) was the second wife of Lwigi. Fr. Alfons had three sisters, Marija, Ġużepa and Rita. Marija emigrated to Melbourne, Australia, but her son Louis remained in Malta and lived in Hal Luqa. Ġużepa became a Dominican Sister and took the name Sr. Filomena. She lived all her life in the Dominican convent Ta' Pompei, in Victoria, Gozo. Rita was married in Malta to Ċensinu Muscat, and lived in Rabat.³

On 16 August 2019 we commemorate the 25 years since the passing away of Fr. Alfons Marija Camilleri OFM, one of the most prominent Maltese Franciscans since the establishment of the Maltese OFM Province in 1914. Affectionately remembered

Besides these siblings, Fr. Alfons also had two other sisters and one brother, born from the first marriage of Lwigi. The step-brother

emigrated to Australia and lost all contact with his family. Fr. Alfons tried to trace him all his life, but never succeeded. The two sisters, who he called “aunts”, since they were older than him, were called Karmena and Lonza (Annunzjata). Karmena lived in Kerċem, while Lonza remained single and was like a second mother to Fr. Alfons. It was she who encouraged him to become a Franciscan friar.

Fr. Alfons was baptised in the parish church of Żebbuġ on 16 April 1910 by the parish priest Dun Bartilmew Busuttil. In baptism he was given the names Ġużeppi, Nazzarenu and Ġann Marija. His family carried him as a baby along the steep lane known as *Triq tal-Kanun*, leading from *Wied il-Għasri* to Żebbuġ. As we have seen, Għasri was still a vice parish at that time.⁴

When he was still a baby he received the sacrament of Confirmation on 27 April 1910, since his parents took him in haste to Bishop Giovanni Maria Camilleri’s residence thinking that the child would soon die. He did not recall the date of his First Communion, since by that time Pope St. Pius X had encouraged children to be admitted for Communion, and the priest in charge of the village church misinterpreted this concession as an invitation to admit all children to the Communion rail, even before the age of reason.

As a young boy, Fr. Alfons was sent to school, a very rare privilege in those days. He studied at the primary school of Żebbuġ, trudging uphill barefoot every day from his farmhouse to the hilltop village. As an adolescent he studied at the Lyceum of Victoria, which was the only secondary school in Gozo. During weekends he would have to help his mother and sisters in their farmwork, by taking the sheep and goats for grazing on the *Għolja tal-Ġurdan*, with the famous lighthouse as its landmark. He was the only male member of the family, since his father Lwiġi emigrated to Australia in search of work, and only returned to Gozo when Fr. Alfons was already a Franciscan friar. Fr. Alfons stated that he only saw him once before he was sent to study philosophy in Italy. Lwiġi died of pneumonia on 15 March 1927. In those times it was impossible for Fr. Alfons to come to Gozo for the funeral of his father. He stated that the sad news was broken to him some days later, and he had to live in the anguish of knowing that his mother and sisters were now alone and had to fend for themselves.⁵

The Franciscan vocation

In 1925 Ġużeppi was introduced by a friend to the Franciscan Friars Minor in the friary of Saint Anthony in Għajnsielem, Gozo. On 2 May he was admitted to the Novitiate in the friary of *Santa Marija ta’ Ġesù (Ta’ Ġiezu)* in Rabat. Although being the only male member of his family, through the encouragement of his step-sister Lonza, he boldly left his farmhouse to become a Franciscan, trusting in God’s providence to take care of his dear mother and sisters. He never looked back at his decision. He was given the religious name Alfons Marija, and spent his Novitiate year in a very strict environment, and on 3 May 1926 made his first Profession.

His superiors decided to send him, together with another Gozitan friar, Fr. Tarċisju Xerri († 16 November 1979 in Hamrun), to study Literature and Philosophy in the friary of San Vivaldo in Tuscany. Fr. Alfons describes the years he spent in this remote friary as the most enjoyable of his life and was sad to return to the same place years later and find that the excellent Franciscan fraternity that he had lived in was now on the brink of extinction. From there he was sent to study Theology in Siena. On 13 June 1931 he made his Solemn Profession in the *Convento dell’Osservanza* in Siena, where he also received the Minor Orders and the Subdiaconate. After the second year of Theology he was brought back to Malta and concluded his studies in the Rabat fraternity. He was ordained Deacon in Malta.

After concluding his theological studies Fr. Alfons was ordained priest in the Mdina Cathedral by Bishop Dom Mauro Caruana OSB on 15 August 1933. On 27 August he celebrated his first solemn Mass in the parish church of Għasri.

Being a promising student with excellent qualities for study, Fr. Alfons was sent to higher studies at the *Antoniano* in Rome in September 1934, after having completed his last year of Theology in Rabat after his priestly ordination, as was the practice in those times. At this Franciscan study centre, nowadays the Pontifical University *Antoniano*, he acquired the Licentiate degree in Sacred Theology in 1935, and in 1936 continued to specialise in the study of Holy Scripture at the *Pontifical Biblical Institute* of Rome, where he acquired a Licentiate degree in Scripture in 1938. As a present for his successful conclusion

of studies, he was given permission to go on a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Back in Rome, in 1938, the superiors of the Order asked him to form part of the newly-born Scotistic Commission, chaired by Fr. Carlo Balić OFM, and entrusted with the onerous work of publishing a critical edition of the *reportationes* of the famous Franciscan scholar Blessed John Duns Scotus (1265-1308), known as *Doctor Subtilis*, and defender of the privilege of the Immaculate Conception. Fr. Alfons humbly obeyed, but the year he spent in the Commission was a difficult one. For one thing, Fascism in Italy under Benito Mussolini was heading for war against the Allies, and Fr. Alfons knew that, as a British citizen, he would find difficulties to stay in Italy. Secondly, he was feeling claustrophobic in the library and study rooms of the *Antonianum*, and longed for some pastoral activity. Thus, just before the outbreak of World War II, in 1939, he begged his superiors to relieve him of his post in the Scotistic Commission, and returned to Malta. While in Rome he had participated in the funeral of Pope Pius XI and the coronation of Pope Pius XII.

Back in Malta during the War

Upon returning to his home province, Fr. Alfons was sent to the friary of Rabat to teach Holy Scripture, Greek and Hebrew to the Franciscan students. He became an examiner in the Curia of the Gozo diocese, and was also Secretary to the Visitor General Fr. Giuseppe Balestrieri. During the provincial chapter, Fr. Berardu Tabone OFM was confirmed as Minister Provincial (1936-1942) and Fr. Alfons was appointed Provincial Secretary.

During the years of the Second World War Fr. Alfons remained in the Rabat friary. It was during those years that he began to dedicate most of his time to the ministry of the confessional, for which he would remain well-known and appreciated for the entire span of his life. He would spend hours in the confessional, and exercised this ministry with enthusiasm and holiness to the very end, particularly in the friaries of Rabat, Valletta and Hamrun.

On 16 January 1941, during the attack on HMS *Illustrious* in Grand Harbour, Fr. Alfons was in Valletta working as Provincial Secretary. From the *belvedere* of the friary, just above Victoria

Gate, he witnessed the attack. In his *memoirs* he recounts how he was an eye-witness of many episodes during the War, including the direct hit on the *Ta' Ġiezu* church in Rabat, when the choir ceiling collapsed, and the other direct hit on the Sacro Cuor parish church in Sliema on 1 April 1942, when a number of people died, including Fr. Diegu Galdes OFM and Fr. Ġorġ Xerri OFM.

On 8 January 1943 Fr. Berardu Tabone OFM ended his term as Minister Provincial. Since it was not possible to convene a provincial chapter because of the War, the Minister General appointed Fr. Anton Marija Bajada OFM as Minister Provincial. However, just one and a half years later, in 1944, he presented his resignation from the office. Since Fr. Alfons had been chosen as Vicar Provincial, he automatically had to fill the vacancy of Minister Provincial until the provincial chapter of 1946.

Minister Provincial for the first time (1944-1946)

As soon as the War ended, Fr. Alfons tried to go to Rome to keep contact with the general government of the Order. He himself states that this first mandate of his office as Minister Provincial was a difficult one. For one thing, he was a relatively young friar of 34 years. The Province was just recovering from the years of War, and he had to oversee the repairing of the damaged churches and friaries, but also to reform the Franciscan life in the Province. He embarked on this ministry with forcefulness and foresight, and also had to act swiftly to deal with the problems that the Province was facing. As often happens, his enthusiasm and clear sense of direction was not always welcomed with a spirit of cooperation on the part of his confreres.

In spite of all these difficulties, Fr. Alfons set out to plan a better future for the Franciscan Province. He immediately grabbed the opportunity of establishing a new church and friary in the new neighbourhood of Fgura. Unfortunately, this opportunity was lost because of the insistence on the part of the Carmelite Friars that they had been promised a church and friary in this new town by Bishop Emmanuel Galea (1891-1974), who was Vicar General to Archbishop Michael Gonzi. Although Fr. Alfons lost the battle and Fgura was given to the Carmelites, he succeeded in founding a new Franciscan presence in Hamrun,

in a small friary in Lord Byron Street, where in 1947 the Franciscans established a chapel, and then acquired a plot of land in Villambrosa Street, where they were to build the church and friary of Saint Francis in 1952.

Fr. Alfons was also chosen for prestigious posts in the local Church and in civil society. During those years he became examiner of Scripture, Greek and Hebrew in the Faculty of Theology of the Royal University of Malta, where he continued to offer his academic services for 20 years. He was also appointed Prosynodal examiner and Theological Censor at the Archbishop's Curia. In 1945-1946 Fr. Alfons was a member of the National Assembly, which had the mandate to formulate a new Constitution for Malta.

During the provincial chapter of 1946 Fr. Alfons was not re-elected as Minister Provincial. He himself writes that he was offered the opportunity by a number of brothers, but that since they wanted strings attached to their votes, he declined to be conditioned by human interests and preferred to defend his integrity as a religious. The new Provincial was Fr. Angelicus Azzopardi (1946-1955). During those 9 years Fr. Alfons covered the role of Provincial Custos (Vicar Provincial) and Provincial Definitor (Councillor). Since he had transferred to the *Ta' Ġiezu* friary in Valletta when he was Provincial, Fr. Alfons remained in the same friary and dedicated his energies to the administration of the sacrament of penance in the same church. During those years the Franciscan church of *Ta' Ġiezu* in Valletta was one of the most popular churches on the island, due to its closeness to the Harbour, where all commercial activity was concentrated, and on account of the devotion to the Miraculous Crucifix venerated in the same church. It was also during those years that Fr. Alfons offered his services as Master of students in Rabat and in Valletta.

During the Jubilee Year 1950 Fr. Alfons went to Assisi, at the Portiuncula, as confessor and guide for pilgrims. He spent the entire summer months offering his service. It was during this period that he went to Rome to participate in the canonisation of Saint Mary Goretti (24 June 1950). Before returning to Malta he visited the Franciscan sanctuaries of La Verna and Valle Reatina, as well as the friary of San Vivaldo in Tuscany, where he had spent his years as a young friar studying Literature and Philosophy.

Minister Provincial for the second time (1955-1961)

On 28 July 1955 Fr. Alfons was elected Minister Provincial for the second time, for a six-year mandate (1955-1961).

The first problem that he had to face as Provincial was the question of the College that the Franciscan friars directed at their friary in Ġhajnsielem, where they had borders who attended lessons in the friary and who were lodged in a large house near the friary known as *Ta' Gliex*. This College had been founded some years earlier by Fr. Akkursju Xerri OFM († 14 December 1968), who was a Gozitan friar from Victoria, and who later was to become Minister Provincial, succeeding Fr. Alfons (1961-1967). For some time the College was a success, but it eventually entered into a period of crisis and lack of leadership until, in December 1955, Fr. Alfons had to decide to close it down, since the Province did not have the necessary personnel and funds to keep this institution, although a number of friars had dedicated their energies towards its organisation. Fr. Alfons speaks about the sad situation he found, which led him to take the difficult decision to close down the College.

On 6 November 1955 Fr. Alfons blessed the first rooms on the ground floor of the new friary in Hamrun, where the Province had by now built a large church dedicated to Saint Francis Stigmatised (1952-1955). The friary continued to grow and Fr. Alfons would eventually retire for the rest of his life in this church to dedicate his time in the ministry of confession.

On 17 January 1956 Fr. Alfons was asked to encourage the Province to embark upon a new initiative, namely that of the pastoral care of Maltese migrants in London. The proposal was that of opening a "Malta Catholic Centre". The proposal came from three prominent members of the Catholic Action, among whom Monsignor Philip Calleja. Fr. Alfons understood that the proposal did not include any other commitment on the part of the Maltese Archdiocese, and that the Province would have to shoulder the responsibility of founding such an institution.

On the first occasion he found, Fr. Alfons went to the United Kingdom, in order to visit the parish of St. Cuthbert in Cardiff, Wales, where the Maltese friars were already established to assist Maltese migrants. He also went to London and

was received by Cardinal Bernard William Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster (1946-1956). He was accompanied by Fr. Dominic Coppola OFM († 18 August 1998), who was already working in England. To his surprise, Cardinal Griffin not only accepted his request, but even went as far as offering to buy a house for the Maltese Province in London, in Poplar, East London, where many Maltese migrant workers had settled near the docks. In order to realise the project Fr. Alfons first had to win over the opposition of the Minister Provincial of the English OFM Province, and acquire the necessary permits from the General OFM Curia in Rome.

On his return journey Fr. Alfons stopped in Paris and went to visit the town of Lisieux, the birthplace of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, to whom he had great devotion. He then proceeded to Rome to meet the Minister General Fr. Augustine Sepinski OFM (1952-1965). While he was in the General OFM Curia he also discussed the proposal that the Maltese Franciscan Province take over the responsibility of sending some friars to the Libya Franciscan mission, on condition that the Province be given the care of the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in the *Mina*, or harbour, of Tripoli.⁶ These efforts, however, remained difficult to implement, as we shall see later on.

Maybe the thorniest problem that Fr. Alfons had to face as Minister Provincial was the question of the Coronation of the ancient Statue of Saint Joseph, known as *San Ġużepp ix-Xiħ*, venerated in the Oratory of the Archconfraternity of Saint Joseph, annexed to the Church of *Santa Marija ta' Ġesù* (*Ta' Ġiezu*) in Rabat of Mdina. The Rector of the Archconfraternity, the Noble Alexander Dei Marchesi Apap Bologna, asked Fr. Alfons, who was going to Rome on 3 May 1956, to take a personal interest in the Coronation issue, since previous attempts had been futile. During his visit to Rome Fr. Alfons approached Fr. Ferdinando Antonelli OFM (later on a Cardinal),⁷ Consultor at the Sacred Congregation of Rites, who resided at the *Antonianum*. Antonelli asked Fr. Alfons to formulate an official petition, which was duly signed by the Minister Provincial and the officials of the Archconfraternity, and confirmed with the seal of Archbishop Michael Gonzi. The petition had a positive outcome. Thanks to Antonelli's personal initiative, on 27 July 1956 Pope Pius XII addressed the Apostolic *Breve* from Castel Galdolfo. After the approval of the Sacred Congregation of Rites,

the *Breve* was published, and addressed personally Fr. Alfons. On 7 October 1956 Fr. Alfons read the official *Breve* in the Franciscan church in Rabat. Unfortunately a misunderstanding ensued between the Archconfraternity and Fr. Alfons, as Minister Provincial representing the Franciscan friars who have ecclesiastical jurisdiction over their conventual church. The ensuing events were very complicated, since the same Archbishop Michael Gonzi entered into the fray, sometimes siding with the friars and at other times with the Archconfraternity. Fr. Alfons had to make recourse to the Procurator General of the Franciscan Order in Rome, as well as to the Congregation of Rites and the Congregation of Regulars, since he was convinced that, according to canon law, the friars had jurisdiction over their conventual church, including the Oratory of Saint Joseph, which forms part and parcel of the same ecclesiastical edifice of *Ta' Ġiezu* church. The whole question led the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome to suspend the Coronation ceremony, which was planned for 1 May 1957, until a definite solution was found, requesting the Archconfraternity to comply by the decisions of the Holy See, and respect the Provincial's right to hold on to the Apostolic *Breve* and to be a co-signer of the *rogitus* of the Coronation ceremony. The complicated story was only solved after Fr. Alfons had concluded his mandate as Minister Provincial, when a compromise was reached between the Franciscan friars, led by the new Minister Provincial Akkursju Xerri OFM and the Archconfraternity, in which the Provincial accepted to cede the Apostolic *Breve* to the Archconfraternity. On 1 May 1963 the Statue of Saint Joseph was solemnly crowned by Archbishop Michael Gonzi. Except for this event of a misunderstanding of a juridical nature, relations of mutual collaboration between the Franciscans and the Archconfraternity have been cordial.

Between 25 November and 2 December 1957 Fr. Alfons visited the Tripoli mission, discussing the possibility that the Maltese Franciscan Province take over the Apostolic Vicariate of Misurata and the church of *Santa Maria degli Angeli* in Tripoli. As soon as he set foot in Libya, Fr. Alfons became aware that the Italian Franciscan missionaries were opposing their home Province in Milan, which wanted to cede part of the mission to the Maltese Franciscans. Fr. Alfons realised that he could not pursue the initiative and returned to Malta without

concluding anything.

In 1957 Fr. Alfons took part in the General Chapter at Santa Maria degli Angeli, in Assisi. On his way to Assisi he stopped in Naples, and also visited Foggia and San Giovanni Rotondo, where he had the occasion of meeting personally with Fr. Pio of Pietrelcina, nowadays, Saint Pio, the Capuchin friar known for his ministry as confessor and for bearing the wounds of Christ's passion. During the chapter Fr. Augustine Sepinski OFM was re-elected as Minister General.

It was during this chapter that Fr. Alfons met the English-speaking Definitor, Fr. Antonine De Guglielmo OFM, who made the proposal that the Maltese Franciscans could join their confreres of the Immaculate Conception Province in the USA, who had founded a mission in Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador). Back in Malta Fr. Alfons encouraged some young friars to embark on this mission, and thus the first Maltese Franciscans arrived in Central America, where they have been working with great success to this very day.

On 15 August 1958 Fr. Alfons celebrated the 25th anniversary of priesthood in the Franciscan church of Valletta.

One of the outstanding achievements of Fr. Alfons was the founding of the Portiuncula Retreat House in Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq. On 20 May 1959 Fr. Alfons laid the foundation stone of this House, after going through difficulties and opposition on the part of the members of his Definitorium during the entire course of 1958. This was the first Retreat House to be founded in Malta. Fr. Alfons had come out with the idea after having heard of a similar experience in the Franciscan Province of California. He entrusted the realisation of the onerous project to the Procurator of the Province, Fr. Benjamin Galea OFM († 18 April 2013). The Retreat House was completed in 1964. In order to convince the Definitors on the need for this House, Fr. Alfons accepted their demands that, during the same time that the Retreat House was being built, the Province had to take care to upgrade the Valletta friary. Portiuncula Retreat House was built on land that was adjacent to the tiny chapel of Saint John *ante portam Latinam*, where the Province possessed a small house where the students used to go for summer holidays at Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq. Even in this endeavour, Fr. Alfons had to try hard to convince Archbishop Gonzi of the need for this Retreat House, before acquiring his

blessing to proceed with its foundation.

In 1958 Archbishop Gonzi asked Fr. Alfons to accompany a group of Maltese migrants on their sea journey from Malta to Australia. Fr. Alfons accepted the offer, since he wanted to visit the Maltese Franciscans who were working in the parish of Christ the King in Lockleys, Adelaide. He left Malta on 18 December 1958 together with 272 Maltese migrants and many others from other countries who joined later on, including Greeks and Croatians. The journey took him first to Athens, then to Port Said, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, on to Colombo. On 2 January 1959 the ship left Colombo for the longest leg of the journey to Freemantle. During the journey the ship encountered a typhoon and was in danger of sinking. Fortunately it finally made port in Perth. From Perth Fr. Alfons made the last leg of the journey by crossing the Great Australian Bight to Melbourne. In Melbourne he had the occasion to visit his sister and her family, and then proceeded to visit the friars in Adelaide. In Sydney he met the Minister of the Australian Franciscan Province, and finally returned to Malta on 19 March 1959.

In September, while conducting the canonical visitation of the Maltese Province, Fr. Alfons went to England to visit the friars in London and in Cardiff. He found various problems that he had to face. The parish of St. Cuthbert in Cardiff was in crisis and eventually he had to close the Franciscan presence there. The last parish priest was Fr. Bernard Hersey OFM, who never returned to Malta, but died in Wales on 27 February 1986.

During the celebrations of the 1900 anniversary since the arrival of Saint Paul in Malta, in 1960, Fr. Alfons took care to invite three Franciscan bishops to take part in the special celebrations organised by the Collegiate Parish Church of Saint Paul in Valletta. One of these bishops was Monsignor Pacifico Perantoni OFM, who had been Minister General of the Order.

In September 1960 Fr. Alfons went to visit the Maltese Franciscans and the Maltese migrants in Canada and in the United States. He visited the parish of Saint Paul in Toronto, and was also invited to go to San Francisco, to visit the Maltese community there. He also stopped in New York and had a meeting with Cardinal Francis Spellman, trying to propose the opening of a Malta Catholic Centre in the USA on the model of the one in London.

During the first months of 1961 Fr. Alfons

embarked on the preparations for the Provincial Chapter during which he was to conclude his six-year mandate as Minister Provincial. During that chapter Fr. Akkursju Xerri OFM was elected Provincial, and Fr. Alfons became Provincial Custos. As an ex-Minister Provincial he had the opportunity to choose a friary where he wanted to retire. Fr. Alfons chose to go to the Hamrun friary, where he was to remain until some months before he died, that is, from 1961 to October 1993, a total of 32 years, which he dedicated wholly to the administration of the sacrament of penance in the church of Saint Francis. It was in this place that Fr. Alfons became well-known as a humble Franciscan friar, always ready to hear confessions. He was instrumental in the propagation of the devotion towards the icon of the Virgin Mary of Perpetual Help venerated in the same church, as well as being a good example of prayer and community life.

Visitor General for three times

During the early years he spent in Hamrun, Fr. Alfons was offered the honour and responsibility of being Visitor General for three consecutive times. He was Visitor General to the Franciscan Province of Ireland (1963), to the Custody of the Holy Land (1965), and to the Pontificio Ateneo Antonianum, the College of St. Bonaventure in Quaracchi, and the College of Grottaferrata, all houses dependent upon the General OFM Curia (1967). No other Maltese Franciscan has ever been Visitor General so many times.⁸

On 4 January 1963 Fr. Alfons received the appointment as Visitor General to the Irish OFM Province by the Minister General Fr. Augustine Sepinski OFM. As Secretary for the Visitation Fr. Alfons chose his close collaborator, Fr. Ivo Tonna OFM, who had been Provincial Secretary. Fr. Ivo was to become Minister Provincial in 1973-1979, and was subsequently President of the Collegio S. Bonaventura of Quaracchi, and professor of Latin and Philosophy at the *Antonianum*. He died on 6 October 2012. The canonical visitation was conducted between June and July 1963, and included the College of St. Isidore in Rome, which was the academic house for the Irish Franciscan students in Rome. Fr. Alfons also visited the Franciscan professors and students at the University of Louvain in Belgium, and all the

friaries of the Irish OFM Province, including the friary of “Adam and Eve” in Dublin. At that time the Irish Province was one of the most glorious and numerous Provinces of the Order, with missions in Africa and a great number of friaries, colleges and other academic institutions. On 10 July 1963 Fr. Alfons presided over the Provincial Chapter, which was celebrated in St. Anthony’s College, Galway. On his way back to the Province Fr. Alfons stopped at the “Malta Catholic Centre” in London.

On 20 January 1965 Fr. Alfons was again appointed as Visitor General to the Custody of the Holy Land. He again chose Fr. Ivo Tonna OFM as Secretary to the Visitation. This was a very demanding visitation, since the Holy Land Custody was, and still is, one of the largest and most widespread entities of the Order. In those days it encompassed many countries, including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece (Rhodes), with other friaries in Constantinople, Palermo, Naples, Rome, Milan, Madrid, Washington and Buenos Aires. Fr. Alfons began his canonical visitation on 6 March 1969 in the Commissariat of Palermo, and he concluded the same visitation on 20 June. He visited the Commissariats of Palermo and Naples, the Delegation of the Holy Land in Rome. He then left for Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Cyprus, Israel and Jordan. On 3 May 1965 he made his solemn entry into the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. At that time the Old City of Jerusalem formed part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (before the Six Day War of 1967). Pope St. Paul VI had visited the Holy Land in January 1964. The Custodial Chapter was celebrated in June 1965, after Fr. Alfons had proposed the list of Discreets (Counsellors) of the Custody. After reporting his Visitation to the authorities of the Franciscan Order in Rome, Fr. Alfons returned to Malta.

On 6 February 1967 Fr. Alfons was appointed Visitor General for the *Antonianum*, Quaracchi and Grottaferrata. All these are international centres of study of the Franciscan Order, depending directly upon the general government of the Order of Friars Minor. Fr. Alfons started the visitation in the Pedagogical College of Grottaferrata, in the Colli Romani, close to Albano, from 13 to 18 March 1967. He continued with the canonical visitation of the College of San Bonaventura *ad Claras Aquas* in Quaracchi, outside Florence, between 19 and 25

March 1967. This centre for the critical editions of the works of the Franciscan Masters had been heavily damaged when the River Arno overflowed its banks on 4 November 1966. Its famous library was eventually transferred to Grottaferrata and is now at St. Isidore's Irish College in Rome. Fr. Alfons concluded his canonical visitation at the Pontificio Ateneo Antonianum on 3 to 15 April 1967. He left a detailed account of these visitations, which he conducted during a very difficult period, when the post-conciliar spirit of reform and the beginning of student unrest in Europe, which was to lead to the student revolts of 1968, was being also felt in ecclesiastical circles. Fr. Alfons was not a man to give up in front of difficulties and tensions, and he wrote a tough but faithful report of what he experienced during the visitation.

The last years of ministry

Back in the Hamrun friary, Fr. Alfons retired as a full-time confessor. He was still 57 years old, and could have looked forward to other achievements. Instead, he preferred to live a humble life as an ordinary friar. The years he spent in Hamrun were not marked by any special commitments, except for the fact that he was elected Provincial Definitor and continued to exercise his role as an experienced spiritual director and confessor, helping the Province with his long experience. For the sake of justice to more recent developments and persons in the Franciscan Province who are still living, it would not be prudent to make any comments on the final 32 years of the life of Fr. Alfons in the Hamrun friary. The only occasions worthy of note are the celebration of Fr. Alfons' 50th anniversary of priesthood in 1983 and that of his 60th anniversary in 1993. On both occasions Fr. Alfons celebrated a solemn thanksgiving Mass in the Hamrun Franciscan church, as well as another Mass at his home parish in Ghasri. However, by 1993 Fr. Alfons was 83 years old and not feeling well. Some weeks after the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the priesthood, he was diagnosed with cancer. Through the kind and fraternal care of the brothers, and especially of the Guardian Fr. Anthony Chircop OFM, Fr. Alfons eventually decided to transfer to the Priests' Home *Christus Sacerdos* in Birkirkara. In 1991 Fr. Alfons had the joy of returning, for the last time, to visit London, and also to go to Lourdes. It was to be the last

journey of his life.

While he was in the Priests' Home, through the encouragement of the Guardian Fr. Anthony Chircop, Fr. Alfons dedicated his time to writing his *memoirs*, entitled *Tifkiriet ta' Hajti*, which are conserved in the Provincial OFM Archives of Valletta.

Fr. Alfons died in the Priests' Home in Birkirkara on Tuesday 16 August 1994. He had the joy of living the last day of his life on the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, 15 August, the day on which he commemorated his priestly ordination. Fr. Alfons was 84 years old, of which he lived 69 years as a Franciscan religious and 61 years as a Franciscan priest. His funeral Mass was packed with so many persons who had known Fr. Alfons and were his penitents. Fr. Alfons was buried in the chapel of the Franciscan friars in the Addolorata Cemetery.

NOTES

- 1 T. CALLEJA, *Patri Alfons M. Camilleri ofm*, in *Il-Korpus* 3 (1995) 38-61; P. ALFONS M. CAMILLERI OFM (1910-1994), *L-Ghasri ta' Tfuliti. Tifkiriet dwar l-Ghasri ta' mitt sena ilu*, ed. T. Calleja, in *Il-Korpus* 34, Ghasri 2010.
- 2 The church of the *Madonna tal-Patroċinju* was the only church of the village of Ghasri when Patri Fons was born. The parish church of *Corpus Christi* (*Kristu Ewkaristiku Salvatur*) was still being built. The *Patroċinju* church was built in 1739 by Dun Tumas Saliba, who enlarged and rebuilt it in 1754 on the spot of an older 16th century church dedicated to the Assumption and known as *Ta' Ċini*. On 3 September 1768 Dun Tumas succeeded in acquiring a decree from Pope Clement XIII elevating the church to the rank of Minor Basilica affiliated to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. From 1878 to 16 December 1921 this church served as a vice parish church to the village of Ghasri, which depended upon the parish of Żebbuġ. The church has a beautiful painting of the Virgin Mary, by Francesco Zahra, dated 1739, and an alabaster altar consecrated by Bishop Labini in 1789. The church also has a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, a gift of the Xuereb family from Valletta, donated through the initiative of Patri Alfons. Cfr. Ġ. ZAMMIT, *Kronaka tal-Knisja tal-Patroċinju ta' Wied il-Ghasri u tal-bini tal-Knisja Parrokkjali tal-Ghasri*, Pro Ms., copy in the Provincial OFM Archives, Valletta, 46.
- 3 Ċensinu Muscat is still alive and is 97 years old. His daughter Pauline Darmanin kindly gave me the information on the family. She is a member of the Secular Franciscan Order and lives in the Sacro Cuor parish in Sliema.
- 4 The parish church of Ghasri was designed by Dun Ġużepp Diacono, who also designed other churches in Gozo, such as the parish churches of Qala and Fon-

- tana, and the Franciscan church of Saint Anthony in Ghajnsielem. The foundation stone was laid on 9 January 1916. On 16 December 1921 it was declared parish church of Ghasri by the Bishop of Gozo Giovanni Maria Camilleri, who was an Augustinian friar.
- 5 I was personally privileged to have listened to Fr. Alfons narrating these facts to me when I was Master of students in the Hamrun friary in 1990-1993, some time before he died. Many of the facts are also recorded in an autobiographical manuscript by Fr. Alfons, *Tifkiriet minn Hajti*, conserved in the Provincial OFM Archives in Valletta.
 - 6 The church of *Santa Maria degli Angeli* was built in 1870 by the Maltese migrant community residing in Tripoli, Libya, in the ancient quarter of the city close to the harbour. Before it, there already was a church built in 1650 by the Franciscans. It was enlarged in 1870 by the architect Fra Fortunato da Rosina, and modified in 1891 by Fra Silvestro di Lastebasse. Before the arrival of the Franciscans of the Province of Lombardy in Tripoli in 1908, the church of *Santa Maria degli Angeli* was the cathedral church of the city. It is built entirely of Maltese stone imported from Malta. After the Revolution of 1970 the church was abandoned and fell into a sad state, until the diplomatic efforts of the Apostolic Vicar Monsignor Giovanni Martinelli OFM resulted in the church being restored and entrusted to the Anglican Community of Tripoli. Cfr. R. CINI, *La Nostra Storia*, Internet, www.maltamigration.com (accessed 1 June 2019).
 - 7 Ferdinando Giuseppe Antonelli was born in Subbiano, Italy, on 14 July 1896. In 1909 he joined the Order of

Friars Minor in Florence, and in 1914 made his solemn profession. On 25 July 1922 he was ordained priest. In 1965 he was appointed Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Fr. Antonelli resided at the Pontificio Ateneo *Antonianum* of Rome between 1928 and 1965. He was *Rector Magnificus* of the same academic centre in 1937-1943 and 1953-1959. Between 1939 and 1945 he was General Definitore of the Franciscan Order. Antonelli was also an expert during the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965. On 19 February Antonelli was appointed Titular Archbishop of Idicra and was consecrated on 9 March 1966. On 7 May 1969 he became Secretary of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and on 5 March 1973 was elevated to the office of Cardinal Deacon of San Sebastiano al Palatino. On 2 February 1983 he became Cardinal Priest. Ferdinando Antonelli died in Rome in 1993, when he was 97 years old. He was buried in the Pietà chapel besides the conventual church of the Franciscan sanctuary of La Verna. Cardinal Antonelli was a good friend of Fr. Alfons, and he also took part in the solemn celebrations of the 750th anniversary of the stigmatisation of St. Francis, which were held in the Franciscan churches of Malta in 1977.

- 8 The autobiographical accounts of the three Visitations are also conserved in a second volume of the manuscript *Tifkiriet minn Hajti*, in the Provincial OFM Archives in Valletta.

THE ORIGINS OF THE FRANCISCAN PRESENCE IN THE HOLY LAND [3]

Noel Muscat ofm

The Franciscan Sources on the episode of Francis' encounter with al-Malik al-Kamil

Among the Franciscan sources of the 13th century that speak about Francis' encounter with the Sultan, the most complete is that by Saint Bonaventure, in the *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*. The Seraphic Doctor presented this biography in 1263 to the chapter of Pisa, and in 1266, during the chapter of Paris, he declared it to be the official biography of the founder, to the point of ordering all other previous *legendae* to be deleted (*deleantur*).¹

We shall not enter here into the merits or demerits of such a decision, but will concentrate solely on the account of Francis' encounter with the Sultan, which Bonaventure records with precise details, having heard the account directly from Brother Illuminato of Rieti, who accompanied Francis in his evangelising venture among the Saracens:

"Taking a companion with him, a brother named Illuminato, a virtuous and enlightened man, after he had begun his journey, he came upon two lambs. Overjoyed to see them, the holy man said to his companion: '*Trust in the Lord, brother, for the Gospel text is being fulfilled in us: Behold, I am sending you forth like sheep in the midst of wolves*' (Mt 10:16). When they proceeded farther, the Saracen sentries fell upon them like wolves swiftly overtaking sheep, savagely seizing the servants of God, and cruelly and contemptuously dragging them away, treating them with insults, beating them with whips, and putting them in chains. Finally, after they had been maltreated in many ways and were exhausted, by divine providence they were led to the Sultan, just as the man of God wished. [...] He preached to the Sultan the Triune God and the one Saviour of all,

Jesus Christ. [...] For the Sultan, perceiving in the man of God a fervour of spirit and a courage that had to be admired, willingly listened to him and invited him to stay longer with him. [...] He offered him many precious gifts, which the man of God, greedy not for worldly possessions but for the salvation of souls, spurned as if they were dirt. Seeing that the holy man so completely despised worldly possessions, the Sultan was overflowing with admiration, and developed an even greater respect for him. Although he refused, or perhaps did not dare, to come over to the Christian faith, he nevertheless devoutly asked Christ's servant to accept the gifts and give them to the Christian poor or to churches for his salvation. But, because he was accustomed to flee the burden of money and did not see a root of true piety in the Sultan's soul, Francis would in no way accept them. When he saw that he was making no progress in converting these people and that he could not achieve his purpose, namely martyrdom, he went back to the lands of the faithful."²

Bonaventure's account, however, contains the first inkling of what we can call the legendary elements which soon entered into the narration of Francis' encounter with the Sultan. In the same episode, Bonaventure states that Francis challenged the "priests" of al-Malik al-Kamil to an ordeal by fire, in order to see which religion was the most pleasing to God. The Sultan refused to accept the challenge, because an elderly member of the Muslim religious had already slipped away secretly from the scene, and neither would he let Francis take the challenge alone. This detail is probably an attempt to defend the aggressive nature of evangelisation linked with the Crusade. Such a practice, besides having been prohibited by the Fourth Lateran Council, was certainly contrary to the spirit of meekness of Francis in confronting the Saracens, although the desire for martyrdom that prompted

him to preach before the Sultan might have been sincere.³

A curious source regarding the meeting between Francis and al-Kamil comes from the pen of Brother Illuminato, who accompanied the Saint in his venture. It speaks about an episode in which the Sultan supposedly asked Francis to tread over a carpet full of crosses, to see whether he would show this sign of disrespect, and Francis simply stated that the crosses referred to those of the two criminals who were crucified with Jesus and not to that of Jesus himself. A second episode narrates the polemic answer of Francis to the protest of al-Kamil, stating that Christians were not to invade the lands of the Saracens. Again, we are facing the issue of the legendary element that crept into the story of the encounter between Francis and the Sultan.⁴

The sources coming from the 14th century further enhance the legendary element in the historical event of Francis' encounter with the Sultan. Such an approach is evident particularly in the *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius*, written by brother Ugolino Boniscambi da Montegiorgio (1328-1337), in chapter 27, entitled "How the Sultan of Babylon was converted to the faith and baptised by brothers sent by Saint Francis."⁵ There is also a version of the account in the dialect of Tuscany, in the anonymous and famous *Fioretti* or *Little Flowers*.⁶ The account narrates two episodes, which are purely legendary, but which show

how the friars had cherished in their memories the event of Francis' encounter with al-Kamil.

One of the interesting notes about this interpretation of the events is that the author of the *Actus* states that "the Sultan liberally allowed Saint Francis and his companions to preach freely anywhere they wished. He then gave them a *signaculum* (particular sign): seeing it, no one would harm them."⁷ This particular sign has sometimes been interpreted as a special permission enabling Francis and his brothers to travel freely within the Sultan's realms, including therefore the Holy Land and Jerusalem. We shall deal with this issue in the next section.

The two events that are narrated in the *Actus-Fioretti* accounts concern the conversion of the prostitute who invited Francis to bed and was converted when Francis showed her a large fire burning into which he entered, and invited her to enter with him if she wanted to sin, as well as the conversion of al-Malik al-Kamil himself at the end of his life, when Francis miraculously appeared to two friars and sent them to baptise him as he had promised.⁸ It is obvious that the two accounts are legendary interpretations coming from the oral tradition of the 14th century Franciscans, particularly from the family of the "Spirituals", who wanted to idealise in an eschatological light Francis' radical poverty and the original freshness of the Order which had, by then, entered into a crisis of identity and division between the well-structured *Commu-*



nititas Ordinis and the *Spiritual* break-away reform family.

The *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, compiled by brother Arnald of Sarrant (1369-1374) mentions Francis' visit to Egypt, depending heavily upon the preceding sources, particularly Saint Bonaventure:

"In that expedition of the brothers, the blessed Francis, full of fervour for martyrdom, went to the regions of Syria together with twelve brothers. Taking with him Brother Illuminato he crossed over to meet the Sultan. The Saracens caught them, they bound them in chains and cruelly beat them, but finally they led them to the Sultan. The Cardinal Jacques de Vitry in his history of Jerusalem says: 'We have seen the founder and master of this Order of friars Minor, brother Francis, a simple, uneducated man beloved by God and men, whom all the others obey as their highest superior.' [...] In another document we read that the Sultan converted to the Christian faith by the help of two brothers after the death of Saint Francis, who had foretold that he would send him the brothers so that he would receive baptism at the end of his life."⁹

The voluminous work by Bartholomew of Pisa, *De Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Iesu*, presented on 2nd August 1399 to the general chapter of Assisi, mentions the visit of Francis to the Sultan and various other events of the early Franciscan presence in the East.¹⁰ Golubovich presents a reference from this work to Francis' encounter with al-Kamil and the fact that he received a *signaculum* allowing him to travel freely in Saracen lands.¹¹

One last note regards a Muslim source that supposedly is a proof that Francis met Sultan al-Kamil. It is the witness of the Egyptian Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Fârisî, one of the spiritual counsellors of al-Malik, who died in 1224 and was buried in Cairo. On his tombstone there is an inscription which reads: "He has a virtue that is recognised by all. His story with Malik al-Kamil and the episode which occurred because of the monk (*rahib*) is very famous." Some Islamologists and scholars of Franciscan history have stated that this *rahib* could very well refer to Francis, who appeared to be a man of God, a kind of *sufi*, in the Muslim mentality. Such a thesis is obviously open to discussion, and is not accepted by all as referring explicitly to Francis of Assisi.¹²

The Franciscan sources up till the end of the 14th century present the episode of Francis' partici-

pation in the Fifth Crusade at Damietta as a unique event of sincere dialogue between a Christian and a Muslim. We have seen that a critical analysis of these sources is obligatory, since from a historically documented account by the chroniclers of the Fifth Crusade the sources gradually degenerated into legendary hagiographic and apologetic narrations which betray the typical Crusader mentality and the desire to enhance the miraculous and extraordinary aspects of Francis' holiness. One thing is certain, namely that the Franciscan presence in the East, and particularly in the Holy Land, finds its humble beginnings in the sending of Brother Elias and the other brothers in 1217 to the town of Acre and to the visit of Francis, Illuminato and the other brothers to the Province of *Outremer* and to Egypt in 1219.

Saint Francis and his brothers in the Holy Land

The general chapter of 1217 had instituted provinces within the Order. The term does not necessarily imply a juridical and geographical entity as we understand it today. The aim was that of sending the brothers on mission in the lands "beyond the Alps" and "beyond the sea". One of these ventures was to prove to be the most courageous, namely that of establishing a Franciscan presence in *Outremer*. Although the geographical extension of such a missionary experience was spread far and wide along the entire region of the Middle East, the only practical and safe places where the friars could effectively settle were the city of Acre and the island of Cyprus.

One of the principal chroniclers of the Order, Jordan of Giano, describes this first mission of the brothers in the East, as a direct result of the decisions taken during the general chapter of Pentecost of 14th May 1217. The brothers who were chosen had as their leader a prominent figure, namely Brother Elias of Cortona.¹³ Jordan writes: "Brother Elias was appointed minister provincial by Blessed Francis for the territory beyond the sea. At his preaching there, a certain cleric by the name of Caesar was received into the Order."¹⁴

Brother Elias remained in Acre for about 3 years, until 1220, when he returned to Italy together with Saint Francis and the brothers who had accompanied him in Egypt. In Acre Elias must have found the ideal environment in which he could es-

establish a friary, since Acre, as we have said, was a cosmopolitan city, and merchants and Crusaders from all over Europe used to visit it. The particular interest of the friars Minor to settle in the towns was a sign of their particular vocation, even though in the early years of the history of the Order the Minorite settlements were rather solitary *loca*, or hermitages, which however were to be found within easy walking distance from the towns and cities where the friars would spend the day preaching and begging for alms. In the case of Acre, it is difficult to envisage a Franciscan establishment outside the walls of the city itself, since the territory outside Acre was hostile territory in the hands of the Saracens. The Franciscan friars who arrived in Acre in 1217 established themselves in a new quarter of the town, which was, however, within the outer ring of fortifications. This was the quarter of Montmusard.¹⁵

The Franciscan presence in Acre must have been linked with a conventual structure within the walls of a thriving city such as Acre. There were other mendicant Orders in Acre, having each a proper *conventus* within the urban setting.¹⁶ The fact that the friars could scarcely do any evangelising activity safely out of the city walls necessitated a rhythm of life that was typical for Acre, namely study and preaching within the social framework of this cosmopolitan port. Besides being the headquarters of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, of the ecclesiastical authority of the Latin Patriarch and the Bishop, Acre was a conglomeration of quarters belonging to the Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitallers, the Venetians, Genoese and Pisans, as well as to other groups, like the Teutonic Knights, who had moved to the castle of Montfort but might have still held property in Acre. The presence of so many different groups meant that Acre was a hub of commercial and military interests, and the Franciscans might have found ideal ground for their evangelising ministry. The fact that tensions were normally high between the different groups meant that the message of peace could be announced, first and foremost, to Christians. There was also a presence of different monasteries of nuns. During the late 13th century there was certainly a monastery of the Poor Clares.¹⁷

When Elias and the first brothers settled in the Montmusard quarter of Acre, the city had just welcomed its new bishop the year before, in 1218, in the person of Jacques de Vitry-sur-Seine. This preacher of the Crusade went to Damietta soon af-

ter arriving in Acre, and he describes the strategy of the Fifth Crusade that was taking place at the time, stating that the plan of King Jean de Brienne and of the Cardinal Legate Pelagius was that of attacking Damietta in Egypt, and then recovering Jerusalem. We know that this plan never materialised, because the Crusaders only succeeded in capturing Damietta on 5th November 1219, but could not hold it for long, since they lost it again on 29th August 1221. Because of internal disagreements and political urgency, King Jean de Brienne returned by sea to Acre on 29th March 1220.¹⁸

These historical details are important to understand the unfolding of events in Acre during those years. The presence of bishop Jacques de Vitry was linked to the Crusade, and the city was, for a period, a centre for the arrival and departure of the Crusading armies. Saint Francis himself, together with Brothers Illuminato, Pietro Catanio, Barbaro, Sabbatino, and Leonardo of Assisi,¹⁹ arrived in Acre, at the Pisan port, probably in mid-July, and was welcomed by brother Elias himself. It could also be that he must have returned to Acre on his way back to Italy, after meeting Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil and experiencing the fall of Damietta and the brute violence of war that disgusted his sensitive spirit.

Acre was therefore an ideal place for a Franciscan settlement, even as early as 1219, when the brothers did not yet have permanent residences or even oratories in the towns and cities.²⁰ One could state that the case of Acre was nearly an exception, given the particular nature of this establishment *in partibus infidelium*, that is, in lands that were not under Christian domination. In Acre, Elias and the brothers could very well have been able to live in a stable environment,²¹ although they certainly felt it their duty to be evangelisers and penitential preachers, given that many of them, even Elias himself, were not priests but lay brothers.

The issue of preaching the Gospel among Christians was obvious enough, but one should remember that the reason for sending the brothers “among the Saracens and other non-believers” was explicitly that of announcing Christ also to them, first through the witness of life and then, God willing, through the proclamation of the Word:

“As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject *to every human creature for God’s sake* (1Pt 2:13) and to acknowledge that

they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Saviour, and be baptised and become Christians because *no one can enter the kingdom of God without being reborn of water and the Holy Spirit* (Jn 3:5).²²

This must certainly have been the main reason for sending Brother Elias and the other brothers to establish the Province of *Outremer* in 1217, with its headquarters in Acre. We do not know whether Elias and the brothers did, in fact, indulge in penitential preaching to the Saracens, who were also present in the city as merchants, together with Christians of other Oriental rites. What we do know, however, is that the friars Minor in these regions did try to preach the Gospel to the Saracens. It is Jacques de Vitry himself who gives this detail in his *Historia Occidentalis*:

“In fact, the Saracens willingly listen to all these friars Minor when they preach about faith in Christ and the Gospel teaching, but only as long as in their preaching they do not speak against Mohammed as a liar and an evil man. When they did speak in such a manner, the Saracens irreverently put them to the lash and savagely expelled them from their city; they would have killed them, if God had not miraculously protected them.”²³

We have no evidence that such a thing happened in Acre during the time when Elias was *minister* of the *Provincia ultramarina*, or the Province of Syria. It is, however, possible that Elias might have taken the initiative to spread the evangelising ministry of the brothers beyond the confines of Acre. What is evident in the accounts by Jacques de Vitry is that the Franciscan way of life was attracting many young clerics to its fold, so much so that the prelate protests that he was being deprived of the best elements of his clergy, who opted to become friars Minor. In the *Letter written in Damiatta* in 1220 he states:

“Colin, the Englishman, our clerk, also joined this Order, as well as two more of our company, namely, Master Michael and Lord Matthew, to whom I had committed the care of the Church of the Holy Cross. I am having a difficult time holding on to the cantor and Henry and several others.”²⁴

It seems that, through the initiative of brother Elias and his companions, the friars Minor of Acre anticipated the sense of antagonism that was to de-

velop later on between the brothers and the secular clergy, regarding the foundation of *studia* in the University towns and the pastoral ministry in the conventual churches. Although Jacques de Vitry speaks highly of the friars, he also remarks that their way of life was rather dangerous for those who were spiritually weak, and that they needed a more regular discipline.

The presence of the friars Minor in Acre was, in many ways, a foreshadowing of what was going to happen in the Order after the death of Saint Francis. Given that the Order grew and spread far and wide, the Popes gave it privileges in its mission that Francis might have not liked to accept, such as when Gregory IX gave the friars who had established themselves in Jerusalem the right to have clerical rights and to handle money, given that they were living in a hostile environment.²⁵ Be that as it may, it would have been difficult for Francis of Assisi not to notice this trend in the Franciscan presence in Acre, where he certainly stopped for some time, especially on his way back to Italy, after supposedly visiting the Holy Places.

“The third time, however, by Christ’s design, he was let to the Sultan of Babylon after suffering many insults, chains, beatings, and hardships. Standing in the presence of the Sultan, he was entirely aglow with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He preached to him Christ Jesus and the faith of the Gospel with such force, such lively and moving words, that the Sultan and the bystanders were amazed. By the power of the words which Christ spoke through him the Sultan, moved to gentleness, willingly listened to his words against the decree of his own wicked law, and insistently invited him to arrange to stay in his land. He ordered that Francis and all his brothers were to be able to have access to the Sepulchre freely, without paying tribute [...] After visiting the Lord’s Sepulchre, he hastened back to the land of the Christians.”²⁶

The possibility of Francis visiting and praying in the Holy Sepulchre has been dismissed by some prominent historians as an invention that was born a century after the facts themselves. Angelo Clarino wrote his *Chronicon seu historia de septem tribulationum* in 1325. There was even a papal prohibition under pain of excommunication for those pilgrims who ventured to Jerusalem and paid the toll to the Muslim overlords to enter the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.²⁷ The question, however, is open to discussion, given that the sources state that the Sultan gave a *signaculum* to Francis, al-



lowing him and the brothers to travel in his realms under his protection. If Francis was allowed to pray in the Sepulchre without paying any tribute, he would automatically be exempt from the papal prohibition.

Golubovich is of the opinion that Francis remained in the East until spring of 1221.²⁸ This would mean that Francis remained for nearly two years in *Outremer*. He insists on this thesis, even though other scholars, like Sabatier, state that Francis returned to Italy in the summer of 1220, and Wadding that he returned in the beginning of 1220. Other more recent historians are convinced that Francis did not stop in the East beyond autumn of 1219, and that he had already returned to Italy before the fall of Damietta on 5th November 1219.²⁹

This remains a thorny problem, given that from it depends the historical unfolding of the Order after the re-entry of Francis in Italy, which saw the Saint renounce to the leadership of the Order in favour of Pietro Catanio († 10 March 1221) and then in favour of Brother Elias. Maybe we can object to Golubovich's thesis, lengthening Francis' stay in the East until spring of 1221. At the same time, it seems improbable that Francis would have left Egypt immediately after his encounter with the Sultan and went back to Italy in the company of numerous Crusaders who returned in September 1219. Maybe the more logical conclusion is that of

following Luke Wadding, who states that Francis remained in the East until the spring or summer of 1220.³⁰ That would mean that he was in time to return to Italy for the celebration of the general chapter on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel (29th September), when Pietro Catanio was installed as vicar of the Saint in the leadership of the Order.

NOTES

- 1 G. ABATE, *Le "Definitiones" del Capitolo generale di Parigi del 1266*, in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 32 (1931), 5 § 11: "Item praecipit Generale Capitulum per obedientiam, quod omnes Legendae de Beato Francisco olim factae *deleantur*, et ubi inveniri poterunt extra Ordinem, ipsas Fratres studeant amovere."
- 2 S. BONAVENTURA, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, 9,8-9 (FAED II, 602-604). Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani*, 859-861: "Assumpto igitur socio fratre, Illuminato nomine, viro utique luminis et virtutis, cum iter coepisset, obvias habuit oviculas duas; quibus visis exhilaratus, vir sanctus dixit ad socium: «Confide, frater, in Domino, nam in nobis evangelicum illud impletur: *Ecce ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum* (Mt 10,16)». Cum autem processissent ulterius, occurrerunt eis satellites Saraceni, qui, tamquam lupi celerius accurrentes ad oves, servos Dei ferialiter comprehensos, crudeliter et contemptibiliter pertractarunt, afficientes conviciis, affligentes verberibus et vinculis alligantes. Tandem afflictos multipliciter et attritos ad Soldanum, divina disponente providentia, iuxta viri Dei desiderium, perduxerunt. Cum igitur principes ille perquireret, a quibus et ad quid et qualiter missi essent et quomodo

advenissent, intrepido corde respondit Christi servus Franciscus, non ab homine, sed a Deo altissimo se fuisse transmissum, ut ei et populo suo viam salutis ostenderet et annuntiaret Evangelium veritatis. Tanta vero mentis constantia, tanta virtute animi tantoque fervore spiritus praedicto Soldano praedicavit Deum trinum et unum et Salvatorem omnium Iesum Christum, ut evangelicum illud in ipso claresceret veraciter esse completum: *Ego dabo vobis os et sapientiam, cui non poterunt resistere et contradicere omnes adversarii vestri* (Lc 21,15). Nam et Soldanus admirandum in viro Dei fervorem spiritus conspiciens et virtutem, libenter ipsum audiebat et moram contrahendam cum eo instantius invitabat. [...] Obtulit tamen ei multa munera pretiosa, quae vir Dei, non mundanarum rerum, sed salutis animarum avidus, sprexit omnia quam lutum. Soldanus, videns virum sanctum tam perfectum rerum mundalium contemptorem, admiratione permotus, maiorem erga ipsum devotionem concepit. Et quamvis ad fidem christianam transire nollet, vel forsitan non auderet, rogavit tamen devote famulum Christi, ut praedicta susciperet pro salute ipsius Christianis pauperibus vel ecclesiis eroganda. Ipse vero, quia pondus fugiebat pecuniae et in animo Soldani verae pietatis non videbat radicem, nullatenus acquievit. Videns etiam, se non proficere in conversione gentis illius nec assequi posse propositum, ad partes fidelium divina revelatione praemonitus remeavit.”

- 3 C. FRUGONI, *Francesco e la prova del fuoco*, in *San Francesco e il Sultano*, 525-536. For the Saint's desire to die as a martyr, see M. MELONE, *Il desiderio di martirio di Francesco d'Assisi nella «Legenda Maior» di Bonaventura da Bagnoregio*, in *San Francesco e il Sultano*, 509-524.
- 4 *Verba fratris Illuminati socii b. Francisci ad partes Orientis et in conspectu Soldani Aegypti*, in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 36-37. P. SELLA, *Francesco e il Sultano. L'Incontro*, in *San Francesco e il Sultano*, 502-506 shows that the narration attributed to Brother Illuminato is a false, simply a literary aid to the style of preaching of the Crusades, which was common during the 13th century.
- 5 FAED III, 490-492. Latin text in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 60-64.
- 6 FAED III, 605-607. The episode is entitled “How Saint Francis converted to the faith the Sultan of Babylon and the prostitute who invited him to sin.”
- 7 FAED III, 490. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 63: “Et insuper liberaliter sibi et sociis suis concessit quod quocumque vellent libere possent ire, et ubique per totum imperium suum libere praedicare. Et dedit illis quoddam *signaculum*, quo viso, a nemine laedebantur.”
- 8 *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius*, c. 27, in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 64: “Post aliquot autem annos, praedictus Soldanus infirmatus est: et expectans promissum sancti qui iam ad vitam beatam migraverat, posuit exploratores in portarum exitibus, ut si quando duo fratres in habitu sancti Francisci apparerent, ipsos ad eum festinanter traducerent. In illo autem tempore apparuit beatus Franciscus duobus fratribus suis et praecepit illis, ut sine mora pergerent ad Soldanum, et eius salutem sicut eidem promiserat procurarent. Qui perfecertunt devote mandatum; et mare transeuntes ad Soldanum per exploratores praedictos adducti sunt.

Quos ut vidit [Soldanus] gavisus est gaudio magno valde dicens: «Nunc scio vere quia misit Dominus servos suos, sicut sanctus Franciscus promisit, Domino revelante, ita mihi servavit pro salute mea sollicitate transmittendo». Recipiensque ad ipsis fratribus fidei documenta et sanctum baptismum, in ipsa infirmitate regeneratus, in Domino migravit ad gaudia sempiterna, et salva facta est anima eius meritis sanctissimi patris Francisci, ad laudem Iesu Christi. Amen.”

- 9 *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, in *Analecta Franciscana ad Historiam Fratrum Minorum spectantia*, edita a Patribus Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), prope Florentiam, Tomus III, 1897, 22-23, quoted in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 68. English translation: ARNALD OF SARRANT, *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals of the Order of Friars Minor*, Vol. I, Translation by N. MUSCAT, TAU Franciscan Communications, Malta, 2010, 34.
- 10 BARTHOLOMAEUS DE PISA, *De Conformitate Vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu*, in *Analecta Franciscana*, Voll. IV-V, Quaracchi 1906. A partial translation of this voluminous work is entitled *La Famiglia Feconda di Francesco d'Assisi nel 'De Conformitate Vitae' di Bartolomeo da Pisa*, Liber I, Fructus VIII, in *Analecta Franciscana*, Tomus IV, 1906, 165-364, Traduzione di N. MUSCAT, TAU Franciscan Communications, Malta, 2015.
- 11 GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 75: “Sed cum guerra inter Saracenos et christianos tunc esset implacabilis etc.: ex tunc eum Soldanus libentissime audiebat et beatum Franciscum rogavit quod ad ipsum frequenter accederet. Insuper sibi et sociis suis concessit quod, quocumque vellent, libere irent, et ubique per totum imperium suum libere praedicarent. Et dedit eis quoddam *signaculum*, quo viso a nemine lederentur. Habita igitur hac liberali licentia, Sanctus Franciscus socios suos binos hinc inde transmisit in diversis partibus paganorum.”
- 12 L. LEHMANN, *Francesco incontra il Sultano*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 112 (2012), 531-534, with further biographical indications.
- 13 The bibliography on brother Elias is abundant. I. AFFÒ, *Vita di frate Elia ministro generale de' francescani*, Parma, 1783; E. LEMP, *Frère Elie de Cortona*, Paris, 1901 (Collection d'études et de documents, III); A. POMPEI, *Fratre Elia d'Assisi nel giudizio dei contemporanei e dei posteri*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 54 (1954), 539-635; R. B. BROOKE, *Early Franciscan Government. Elias to Bonaventure*, Cambridge, 1959, 83-122, 137-177; L. DI FONZO, *Elie d'Assise*, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire e de géographiques ecclésiastiques*, XV, Paris, 1963, 167-183; G. ODORARDI, *Elia di Assisi*, in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, III (1976), 1094-1110; C. SCHMITT, *I vicari dell'Ordine francescano da Pietro Cattani a frate Elia*, in *Francesco d'Assisi e francescanesimo dal 1216 al 1226*. Atti del IV Convegno della Società internazionale di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 15-17 ottobre 1976), Assisi, 1977, 235-263; G. BARONE, *Fratre Elia: suggestioni da una rilettura*, in *I compagni di Francesco e la prima generazione minoritica*. Atti del XIX Convegno della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani e del Centro interuniversitario di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 17-19 ottobre 1991), Spoleto, 1992, 61-80; S. VECCHIO, *Elia d'Assisi (Elia da Cortona nel secolo Buonbarone)*,

- in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XLII, Roma, 1993, 450-458; G. BARONE, *Brother Elias Revisited*, in *Greyfriars Review* 13 (1999), 1-18; G. BARONE, *Da Frate Elia agli Spirituali*, Milano, 1999 (Fonti e ricerche, 12), 29-72; F. SEDDA, *La "malavventura" di frate Elia. Un percorso attraverso le fonti biografiche*, in *Il Santo*, XLI (2001), 215-300; J.A. GIERMEK, *Letter of the Minister General OFMConv on the 750th Anniversary of the Death of Brother Elias "of Cortona"*, General Curia OFMConv, Rome, 2003; G. BARONE, *Elia di Assisi (da Cortona)*, in *Enciclopedia federiciana*, I, Roma, 2005; P. MESSA, *Frate Elia da Assisi a Cortona. Storia di un passaggio*, Cortona, 2005 (Accademia etrusca – Cortona. Cortona francescana, II); G. G. MERLO, *In the Name of Saint Francis. History of the Friars Minor and Franciscanism until the early sixteenth century*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, NY 2009, 167-181; A. VAUCHEZ, *François d'Assise. Entre histoire et mémoire*, Paris, 2009, 139, 157, 194-195, 218, 221, 232-239, 260-261, 324-328; *Elia di Cortona tra realtà e mito*. Atti dell'Incontro di studio (Cortona, 12-13 luglio 2013), Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 2014; G. BARONE, *Elia nella storiografia da Sabatier a Manselli*, 1-16; J. DALARUN, *Élie vicaire. Le complexe de Marthe*, 17-60; F. ACCROCCA, *Frate Elia ministro generale*, 61-90; M. P. ALBERZONI, *Frate Elia tra Chiara d'Assisi, Gregorio IX e Federico II*, 91-122; F. SEDDA, *La deriva storiografica di frate Elia nelle fonti francescane trecentesche*, 123-144; S. NOBILI, *Elia come antimodello nella Cronica di Salimbene de Adam*, 145-160; P. CAPITANUCCI, *Francescani e alchimia fra mito e realtà: la leggenda di Elia alchimista*, 161-180; M. PELLEGRINI, *La Chiesa che perdonò Elia. Clero secolare, società, monaci e frati a Cortona nella prima metà del XIII secolo*, 181-212; F. CERVINI, *Elia e l'arte del costruire. Paradigma di un architetto mai esistito, ma non privo di gusto*, 213-232.
- 14 JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, 9, in *XIIIth Century Chronicles. Jordan of Giano. Thomas of Eccleston. Salimbene degli Adami*, Translated from the Latin by P. HERMANN, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1961, 24-25. Latin text in *Analecta Franciscana* I, 1-19: "Frater autem Helias minister provincialis est institutus ultre mare a beato Francisco. Ad cuius praedicationem quidem clericus, nomine *Caesarius*, ad Ordinem est receptus." Brother Caesar of Speyer was later to lead the mission of the friars to Germany in 1221.
 - 15 J. FOLDA, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land. From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre 1187-1291*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 125: "Montmusard was a new part of Acre located adjacent to the northern twelfth-century wall. Its new wall ran from a point just east of the *castellum* at the gate of St. Anthony to a point on the coast about 800 metres north of the wall, forming a triangular suburb [...] As for the date that the new walls of Montmusard were built, it is clear that the walls of Acre would have had to be repaired after the great earthquake of 1202 when the fortifications at Acre suffered serious damage."
 - 16 FOLDA, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 400: "Because of the presence of the numerous religious houses in Acre, there were Christian schools in Acre. Theology was taught here since 1218. Besides the likelihood of a school connected with the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, the Franciscans and the Dominicans must have had *studia* in Acre. William of Rubruck had been assigned to the Franciscan convent (established c. 1219) as *lector* in 1255, and the Dominicans with their emphasis on study, preaching, and missionary work surely had a similar *studium* in their establishment (founded c. 1229). Certainly both the Franciscans and the Dominicans were actively involved in the study of oriental languages, including Arabic and Armenian, for their missionary activities. These three places would have been centres of study in Acre, each with some kind of library. Other major orders were present in the city as well, such as the Carmelites, the Benedictines, and the Cistercians, but we know very little about their intellectual activities there."
 - 17 FOLDA, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 183. Besides the Poor Clares, there were Augustinian nuns, Cistercian nuns of the Magdalene, nuns of the Knights of St. John of the Hospital of Acre and Jerusalem, nuns of Lazare, nuns of St. Anne, nuns of St. Brigitte, and those of Notre Dame of Tyre. The Poor Clares were all massacred when Acre was taken by al-Ashraf on 18th May 1291. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca* I, 350-353.
 - 18 FOLDA, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land*, 115-117.
 - 19 L. WADDING, *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum a S. Francisco Institutorum*, Tomus I, ad an. 1219, LV: "Dum haec ita paterentur Viri sancti, Franciscus non feriebatur, nec otio, aut sui corporis commoditatibus indulsit, sed ut praedixit Martyribus, iter aggressus est Syriam cersus, commisso in Occidente Ordinis regimina fratri Eliae Tuscie Ministro. Duodecim sibi assumpsit comites, e quibus hi fignantur ex nomine frater Petrus Cataneus, frater Barbarus, frater Sabbatinus concives, et ex discipulis primis, frater Leonardus de Assisio, et frater Illuminatus Reatinus." A detailed account of Francis' visit to Acre and Damietta is given by A. FORTINI, *Nova Vita di S. Francesco*, Vol I, Parte II, 43-109.
 - 20 It was only on 3 December 1224 that the Order was allowed to have its own Oratories for the celebration of Mass and the Divine Office. HONORIUS III, *Quia populares tumultus*, in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, ed. J.H. SBARALEA, Romae, 1759, Tomus I, 20: "Confiderantes vobis negandum non esse, unde nemini derogatur; dum vera exposit religio, ut quae sunt etiam de gratia speciali, vobis concedere debeamus; Devotioni vestrae, cum professi paupertatem sitis, pariter et amplexi, non temporale commodum, sed spirituale quaerentes; auctoritate praesentium vestris inclinati precibus indulgemus, ut in locis, et Oratoriis vestris cum Viatico Altari possitis Missarum solemnias, et alia divina Officia celebrare, omni Parochiali jur Parochialibus Ecclesiis reservato."
 - 21 G. LIGATO, *Acri al tempo di frate Elia da Cortona*, pro ms. 15: "In ogni caso il pragmatico Elia avrebbe a nostro avviso ridimensionato l'atteggiamento anti-stabilità del francescanesimo originario, primo fattore di contesa con il monachesimo che infatti criticò presto la penetrazione francescana che influiva sia sulla vita cenobitica strettamente intesa sia sulle attività pastorali; Elia probabilmente contribuì a ciò introducendo nella Provincia ultramarina i primi *oratoria*, una

- sperimentazione inevitabile in un ambiente urbano e dinamico ma anche ardita se si considera l'originaria diffidenza francescana verso qualsiasi *stabilitas*, diffidenza che negli anni successivi la Curia romana avrebbe superato anche a costo di ignorare le ultime volontà di Francesco.”
- 22 ST. FRANCIS, *Regula non bullata (Earlier Rule)*, 16,5-7 (FAED I, 74). Latin text in FRANCESCO D'ASSISI, *Scritti*, Edizione critica a cura di C. PAOLAZZI, Frati Editori di Quaracchi, Collegio S. Bonaventura, Grottaferrata, 2009, 266: “Fratres vero qui vadunt [inter saracenos et alios infideles], doubus modis inter eos possint spiritualiter conversari. Unus modus est quod non faciant lites neque contentiones, sed sint subditi *omni humanae creature propter Deum* (1 Petr 2,13) et confiteantur se esse christianos. Alius modus est quod, cum viderint placere Deo, annuntient verbum Dei, ut credant in Deum omnipotentem, Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum, creatorem omnium, redemptorem et salvatorem Filium, et ut baptizantur et efficiantur christiani, quia *nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu Sancto, non potest intrare in regnum Dei* (cfr. Joa 3,5).”
- 23 JACQUES DE VITRY, *De Ordine et praedicatione Fratrum Minorum (ex Historia Occidentalis)*, cap. 32), in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 10: “Saraceni autem omnes praedictos fratres Minores tam diu de Christi fide et evangelica doctrina praedicantes libenter audiunt, quousque Mahometo, tanquam mendaci et perfido praedicatione sua manifeste contradicunt. Ex tunc autem eos impie verberantes, et, nisi Deus mirabiliter protegeret, pene trucidantes, de civitatibus suis expellunt.” English text in FAED I, 584-585.
- 24 FAED I, 581.
- 25 GREGORY IX, *Si Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* (1 February 1230), in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, ed. SBARALEA, I, 58-59; GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 160: “Volumus tamen quod non percipiant decimas, primitias et oblationes, nec habeant ecclesiasticam sepulturam, nisi pro Fratribus Ordinis praedicti.”
- 26 ANGELO CLARENO, *The Book of Chronicles or of The Tribulations of the Order of Friars Minor*, Prologue, 395 (FAED III, 398, 400). Latin text in GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca*, 55-56: “Tercio post multa obprobria, vincula, verbera et labores ad Soldanum Babilonie Xto, ordinante, perductus est. Stansque in conspectu eius, igne Spiritus Sancti totus ardens, in tanta virtute, et viva et efficaci predicatione Xtum Yhesum et eius sanctam fidem evangelii predicavit eidem ut amiretur Soldanus, et omnes pariter qui astabant. Nam ad virtutem verborum que Xtus loquebatur in eo, Soldanus in mansuetudinem conversus, auditum verbis eius contra sue nephande legis decretum libenter prebebat, et ad moram contrahendam in terra sua instanter invitavit, **et ipsum et omnes fratres suos libere ad Sepulcrum et absque tributis solutione accedere posse mandavit.**”
- 27 G. BASETTI-SANI, *San Francesco è incorso nella scomunica? Una bolla di Onorio III e il supposto pellegrinaggio del Santo a Gerusalemme*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 65 (1972), 16-17.
- 28 GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca I*, 2: “Laddove noi vedremo passo passo, con più precisione, che Francesco, dopo aver visitato il Soldano, cui e alla cui corte predicò *per dies aliquot* (Vitry *Histor.*); e dopo aver fatto lo stesso negli accampamenti saraceni *multis diebus* (id. *Epist.*), vedremo che egli si fermò in Egitto, non solo fino alla caduta di Damietta (5 nov. 1219), ma fino all'ingresso solenne che vi fecero i Crociati nel 2 febbraio 1220. Da lì lo rivedremo ritornare *in Siria*, e ivi fermarsi per *un pezzo di tempo* (Éracles), prima di far vela per l'Italia col famoso fr. Elia e con altri compagni; lo vedremo quindi in Oriente certo fino quasi alla fine del 1220, e con tutta probabilità indicheremo il suo ritorno in Italia entro il marzo o entro l'aprile del 1221.”
- 29 They base their conclusions on the affirmations by JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, in *XIIIth Century Chronicles*, 26, 29: “Blessed Francis, when he had set out to cross the sea with Blessed Peter of Catania, a doctor of laws, left behind two vicars, Brother Matthew of Narni and Brother Gregory of Naples. Matthew he put at St. Mary of the Portiuncula, so that remaining there he could receive those who were to be received into the Order; but Gregory he appointed to travel about Italy to strengthen the brothers [...] Brother Francis, taking with him Brother Elias, Brother Peter of Catania, and Brother Caesar, whom, as was said above, Brother Elias while minister of Syria had received into the Order, and some other brothers, returned to Italy.” A lay brother came over in haste from Italy to report to Francis that his two vicars had introduced many practices contrary to the Rule, and urged him to return as soon as possible.
- 30 The reason for this time-frame is that Golubovich insists that Francis must have had enough time to visit the Holy Land and pray in the Holy Sepulchre. L. WADDING, *Annales Minorum*, I, ad an. 1220, n. 2, 332, prefers the year 1220: “Misso Fratre Stephano, sancti Viri olim Socio, in Syriam curarunt ut omnia ei exponerentur, et revocaretur in Italiam.”

QUANDO OGNI ALTRA VIA È ESCLUSA: IL MARTIRIO COME ULTIMA POSSIBILITÀ DI DIALOGO

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L'ultima indagine per un dialogo

Mi sono di recente trovato in forte disaccordo con alcune non indifferenti affermazioni rivolte ai Minori di san Francesco ed ai Predicatori di san Domenico, in particolare al loro modo di porsi nei confronti dei saraceni quando, o per iniziativa personale o per imposizione della Chiesa, i frati di questi due Ordini Mendicanti iniziarono a confluire in Terra Santa¹. L'autore in questione afferma infatti che “guardando indietro nel tempo, si può pensare che, se l'approccio domenicano non ha incontrato alcuno spettacolare successo, quello francescano portò ad un evidente e profondo fallimento, come ogni martirio fa.”² Il testo continua elencando tutti i presunti errori metodologici commessi dai poverelli d'Assisi come perfetti esempi di un dialogo inter-religioso condotto nel peggiore dei modi.

Non è mia intenzione entrare qui in polemica con chi abbia sollevato suddette critiche in quanto, per lo meno, apprezzo l'onestà dell'autore quando, nello stesso passo sopra riportato, egli riconosce che “è sempre imprudente e forse ingiusto, per una persona che vive in tutta comodità in un'altra epoca, esprimere un giudizio su un'impresa del genere, che ha portato centinaia o migliaia di uomini a dare la loro vita”; al contrario, desidero cercare di contestualizzare e motivare (che non

obbligatoriamente significa ‘giustificare’) alcuni aspetti che riguardano l'Ordine dei Minori e che possono – o potrebbero – aver influito negativamente sul dialogo inter-religioso con i musulmani, portando così i Francescani a percorrere le vie apologetiche che l'autore in questione non ha mancato di sottolineare.

Occorre dire che il periodo storico in questione risulta infinitamente complesso, un momento delicatissimo in cui hanno giocato diverse forze che si sono incrociate tra di loro in grovigli per nulla facili da districare. Si potrebbero elencare a riguardo diversi spunti di lavoro e di riflessione – come, ad esempio, definire la mentalità della Chiesa Cattolica durante il Medioevo ed il suo modo di porsi verso tutto ciò che non era cristiano; come stesse evolvendo l'Ordine dei Minori al proprio interno; quali fossero i legami che vincolavano inscindibilmente i poverelli d'Assisi con l'istituzione ecclesiastica, ecc. – tuttavia, considerata la portata vastissima del tema ed il poco spazio a nostra disposizione, ho scelto di focalizzare la mia attenzione su un aspetto nello specifico: perchè i frati di Assisi, che si recavano in Terra Santa per convertire i musulmani (e ciò, nella logica della Chiesa di allora, era l'unica forma di dialogo inter-religioso ammissibile) seguirono e conseguirono invece la via del martirio? Si tratta di una contraddizione interna tra il motivo iniziale ed il risultato reale

oppure, al contrario, esiste un sottile collegamento tra il dialogo inter-religioso che si prefiggevano ed il martirio che invece ottennero? L'autore delle critiche al metodo francescano riporta le dinamiche che fecero "fallire" i Minori, ma pare non sforzarsi neppure di entrare nella logica delle loro motivazioni. E questa, a mio avviso, da parte di chi intende esprimere giudizi, è una mancanza grave. Colmare tale lacuna e mettere la ricerca del martirio dei poverelli d'Assisi in relazione con il dialogo inter-religioso sarà quindi l'obiettivo di questo breve elaborato.

Sappiamo oggi che, tra gli scritti attribuibili direttamente al Serafico Padre Francesco, non vi è alcuna allusione ai saraceni, se non in due capitoli delle Regole (Rnb 16,1-21³ e Rb 12⁴) stese dal santo d'Assisi. Ed in nessuna di esse si fa riferimento ad un 'martirio ricercato'. Ma ciò che è noto nella nostra epoca non obbligatoriamente lo era anche allora. Ci furono infatti diversi autori francescani, di poco o di molto posteriori al loro iniziatore, che gli attribuirono frasi che parevano legittimare l'effusione volontaria del sangue o lo spasimo del santo a sottoporsi alla scimitarra saracena. Benchè tali fonti siano estremamente interessanti e allo stesso tempo utili ai fini di una completa comprensione dell'argomento qui trattato, esse riguardano troppo nello specifico il martirio e troppo poco il dialogo inter-religioso; perciò è stata mia premura raccogliere in un apposito appendice, mettendole a disposizione di coloro che, volendo scendere più in profondità nel tema, desiderano cogliere tutti i risvolti di questa argomentazione affascinante, complessa e allo stesso tempo dibattuta.

Premetto infine che tutto quanto qui argomentato non è altro che una mia umile e personale interpretazione dei fatti, una lettura delle dinamiche e degli accadimenti storici che cerca di scendere in profondità nelle motivazioni che possono aver mosso questi santi uomini di Dio a "lavare le loro vesti, rendendole candide, con il sangue dell'Agnello" (Ap 7,14).

L'ultima frontiera per un dialogo

Delle varie fonti francescane a nostra disposizione, la testimonianza delle fiamme di San Bonaventura, la così detta 'prova del fuoco'⁵, è in assoluto, ai fini di questa trattazione, la più

importante di tutte. Di particolare rilevanza è il discorso pronunciato dal santo:

"Dà ordine di accendere un fuoco il più grande possibile: io, con i tuoi sacerdoti, entrerò nel fuoco e così, almeno, potrai conoscere quale fede, a ragion veduta, si deve ritenere più certa e più santa. {...} Se mi vuoi promettere, a nome tuo e a nome del tuo popolo, che passerete alla religione di Cristo, qualora io esca illeso dal fuoco, entrerò nel fuoco da solo. Se verrò bruciato, ciò venga imputato ai miei peccati; se, invece, la potenza divina mi farà uscire sano e salvo, riconoscerete Cristo, potenza di Dio e sapienza di Dio, come il vero Dio e signore, salvatore di tutti."⁶

La 'prova del fuoco', assieme agli altri scritti del Ministro Generale, dominò incontrastata per moltissimo tempo ed è fondamentale per trarre le nostre conclusioni, ragion per la quale la riprenderò in considerazione tra un attimo.

La via che Francesco aveva tracciato nella Rnb non trovò in apparenza molta risonanza nell'Ordine dei Minori. I frati continuarono infatti a confluire in Terra Santa, fino a diventarne presenza fissa, tuttavia non si comportarono verso l'Islam troppo diversamente da tanti altri religiosi dell'epoca⁷ e l'approccio del Serafico Padre passò apparentemente inosservato. Ma è proprio vero che i Francescani accantonarono il loro iniziatore? Tanti fautori del dialogo inter-religioso lo confermerebbero senza pensarci neppure un attimo; eppure, rileggendo il capitolo 16 della Rnb, troviamo interessanti ambiguità che, prima di rispondere affermativamente, potrebbero invitarci a riflettere un pò più a lungo. Nel suddetto capitolo si afferma infatti che "quando vedranno che piace al Signore, annunzino la parola di Dio."⁸

Ma cosa vuol dire esattamente questa frase? Quando e come l'annuncio della Parola piace al Signore? Quando non ci sono persecuzioni o pericoli? Oppure quando sono i musulmani stessi a mostrarsi interessati? Era dunque riservato all'intelligenza, e soprattutto, alla preghiera personale dei Minori, il difficile discernimento di capire quali tempi e modi fossero effettivamente i migliori per la predicazione attiva della Parola. E le risposte possono variare da persona a persona. Emblematico a riguardo – e questo, ritengo, sia il punto focale – è il mirabile discorso di Paolo VI, tenuto a San Pietro il 21 giugno 1970, in occasione della canonizzazione di Nicola Taveliç e di altri tre compagni, soprattutto quando il papa afferma che "vi possono essere situazioni in cui, o per impulso

dello Spirito Santo, o per altre speciali circostanze, l'araldo del Vangelo non ha altro modo per scuotere l'infedeltà che quello di fare del proprio sangue la voce d'una estrema testimonianza."⁹

Era ciò che Francesco voleva? Impossibile dirlo con certezza. La mente di mistici e santi tanto lungimiranti è sempre difficilissima da comprendere. Alcuni studiosi affermano che, al tempo dell'assisano ed anche dopo, la mentalità interna all'Ordine era troppo lontana da quella del suo iniziatore e che i tempi "non erano ancora maturi per comprendere ed accogliere gli ideali di Francesco, che rivoluzionavano tutte le categorie tradizionali."¹⁰ Altri ritengono invece preponderante e negativa l'influenza della Chiesa, tanto da delineare "la graduale cattura del movimento creato da Francesco entro le rigide e mortificanti strutture ecclesiastiche."¹¹ Personalmente, più che optare per un *aut...* *aut*, come direbbe Søren Kierkegaard, sono più propenso ad un *et... et*. Bisogna infatti dire che Francesco, facendo sin dagli inizi confermare ad Onorio III la propria Regola, "sa di dover vivere in maniera evangelica, ma di doverlo fare in perfetta comunione con la Chiesa. Perciò egli visse e conquistò con aspro travaglio l'armonia tra le due obbedienze, ovvero alla rivelazione dell'Altissimo e alla Chiesa Romana, accettando che la fraternità fosse parzialmente assimilata agli Ordini già esistenti e collaborando con il cardinale Ugolino – futuro Gregorio IX – per la stesura della Regola."¹²

Queste parole ci aiutano a capire che, in verità, Francesco ha avuto la fortuna e, al contempo, la sfortuna di essere un personaggio di una rilevanza a dir poco immensa, sul quale si sono versati – e se ne versano tutt'ora – oceani di inchiostro; la sua portata era tale che nè i frati nè la Chiesa del suo tempo sono riusciti ad abbracciarla tutta. Anche io, nello scrivere questo breve trattato, provo un immenso imbarazzo all'idea di dover interpretare le parole dell'assisano in una o in un'altra direzione. Perché il problema è esattamente questo: l'interpretazione. I frati di poco posteriori al Serafico Padre e tutti gli autori dell'Ordine del XIV secolo rivisitarono Francesco come gli evangelisti fecero con le parole di Gesù in base a chi fosse il destinatario del loro Vangelo ed a quale messaggio volessero infondergli.

La 'prova del fuoco' lasciataci da Bonaventura è perciò simbolica ed emblematica di questa rivisitazione. Nella seconda versione a nostra disposizione, che non è stata compresa nella

LegM, Francesco afferma infatti che "la nostra fede è superiore alla ragione e la ragione riesce persuasiva solo per chi crede. Inoltre non potrei prendere argomenti dalla Scrittura, perché loro alla Scrittura non credono. Si faccia piuttosto un fuoco con legna di bosco: io entrerò nel fuoco insieme con i vostri savi; e quelli che saranno bruciati serviranno a dimostrare che la loro fede è falsa."¹³

Questa frase tratteggia chiaramente il pensiero bonaventuriano, nel quale non vi è alcuno spazio per il dialogo inter-religioso basato su confronti e confutazioni e, di conseguenza, in qualche modo giustifica gli attributi non troppo cortesi che egli affibbia ai 'barbari' saraceni.¹⁴ La 'prova del fuoco' descritta dal Ministro Generale diventa quindi l'unica via tangibile per attestare in quale fede risiedesse davvero la verità, se nell'Islam o nel Cristianesimo.

E Francesco? Anche lui la pensava come Bonaventura? Un'analisi della Rnb 16, e di come l'assisano tratteggia la prima opzione di comportamento tra gli infedeli, farebbe pensare che, ordinariamente, non fosse possibile convertire i saraceni (sottolineo 'ordinariamente' perché certi autori postumi, trattandosi del santo, non si fanno scrupoli storici di nessun tipo nel descrivere la conversione del sultano¹⁵), ma ciò non significava che egli escludesse la possibilità di risiedere tra i musulmani. Il santo invita non solo – come prima opzione – a vivere soggetti ad ogni creatura umana, ma anche a confessare apertamente di essere cristiani. Il che, di conseguenza, poteva condurre alla esposizione di "nemici sia visibili che invisibili."

Come seconda strada, quando vedranno che "piace al Signore", i frati sono tenuti ad annunciare la Parola. Quest'indicazione, però, come già rilevato, poteva essere intesa in tanti differenti modi e creare ambiguità; e, di fatto, probabilmente le creò. Unendo infatti questo passo del capitolo 16 della Rnb con la frase di Bonaventura riportata poco sopra (che scoraggiava ogni possibile discussione teologica), i frati, persuasi anche dalle fonti postume che esaltavano il martirio, si sentirono forse legittimati ad usare un modo apologetico che, talvolta, è passato anche per denunce alla fede islamica espresse con insulti e pesanti parole. Dal momento che ogni possibile forma di agone verbale era stata tratteggiata come inutile o non fruttifera, la via apologetica più diretta ed aggressiva restava l'unica e forse l'ultima via di dialogo in grado scuotere la coscienza dei saraceni.

In un momento di espansione islamica tanto forte, vedere seguaci di Cristo che non avevano paura di ‘sfidare il leone nella sua tana’, a costo della loro stessa vita, forse poteva interrogare il cuore di questi musulmani più di quanto sembrasse.¹⁶

L'ultima speranza per un dialogo

I Francescani hanno dunque fallito? Secondo le categorie odierne del dialogo inte-religioso, senza dubbio! Ma come possiamo valutare correttamente una situazione del genere con i criteri di giudizio odierni, senza calarci nella situazione e nella mentalità di allora, quando persino la Chiesa del tempo non ragionava come oggi?

Secondo le categorie di Francesco, forse fallirono. Il fatto che l'assisano non sia ricorso a metodi verbali aggressivi con il sultano farebbe pensare che egli, personalmente, non li consigliasse o che fosse preferibile non cercarsi un martirio volontario. Ma se ci si pensa bene, questi frati non si comportarono poi molto diversamente dal loro iniziatore. Si è criticato la scelta dei Minori di predicare apertamente in piazze, mercati e moschee, pretendendo la conversione istantanea dei saraceni al Cristianesimo¹⁷... ma questo non è forse la stessa cosa che fece Francesco, quando si recò in Egitto? Rivolgendosi al sultano, il Serafico Padre andò diretto a quello che era il ‘cuore dell'Islam’ (un pò come san Paolo cercò di fare quando si appellò all'imperatore di Roma, centro del mondo di allora); i Francescani dopo di lui ne hanno semplicemente seguito l'esempio. Le uniche differenze si collocano nel metodo (non nella mentalità), del quale abbiamo già messo in evidenza le ragioni.

Secondo le categorie dell'istituzione ecclesiastica di allora, che non ammetteva alcun dialogo se non per convertire gli infedeli, probabilmente non fallirono affatto. Questi frati, agli occhi della Chiesa, erano infatti degli eroi che, pur di annunciare la Parola ed adempiere così il mandato di Cristo (Mt 28,19-20), erano disposti ad esalare l'anima anche nei modi più brutali che si possano immaginare. Il loro approccio, ci tengo a sottolinearlo, attaccava pubblicamente gli errori e le falsità contenute nella fede di Maometto, non le persone. E se ciò accadeva, il fine era quello di richiamare e di scuotere i saraceni dal torpore di peccato nel quale erano sprofondati nel servire

l'Islam e nell'esservi asserviti. Meraviglioso, a riguardo, è questo passo di Paolo VI, tratto dal discorso di canonizzazione già citato:

“A ben leggere nella loro storia e soprattutto nei loro animi, noi vediamo che non è uno spirito d'inimicizia che li spinse al martirio, ma piuttosto di amore, di ingenuo amore, se volete, e di folle speranza; un calcolo sbagliato, ma sbagliato per desiderio di giovare e di condurre a salvamento spirituale quelli stessi che provocarono a infliggere loro la terribile repressione del martirio.”¹⁸

Dio solo sa con certezza che frutti produca il sangue del martirio; noi, che non possiamo leggere nel cuore dei musulmani di allora – e che quindi non sappiamo nulla di cosa questa estrema di testimonianza di fede smuovesse in loro – dobbiamo astenerci da ogni giudizio. Per cui, se anche il metodo di porsi non era il più conforme al dialogo inter-religioso così come lo intendiamo oggi, affermare che l'approccio francescano “portò ad un evidente e profondo fallimento, come ogni martirio fa”, mi pare un giudizio a dir poco eccessivo e, alla fine dei conti, persino falso. Questi uomini coraggiosi si sottoposero infatti alle scimitarre saracene perché le circostanze storiche, il mandato della Chiesa, l'immagine che si era creata di Francesco e la situazione interna all'Ordine avevano forse fatto intendere loro che non ci fosse altro modo per lanciare un messaggio che restasse impresso nella mente degli infedeli. Il martirio era l'ultima frontiera di una flebile speranza di dialogo inter-religioso utile ad interrogare i cuori e le coscienze dei musulmani.

Ma il martirio può essere considerato una forma di dialogo inter-religioso? Certamente sì. Se consideriamo dialogo tutto ciò che, scontrandosi con le nostre concezioni religiose, è in grado di interrogarci sul perché di altri comportamenti, migliorarci nella nostra fede o farci vagliare nuove opzioni, l'effusione del sangue è da collocarsi indubbiamente ai massimi vertici. E i musulmani, che come i cristiani condividono il concetto di martirio – seppur in differenti modi – non potevano certo restare indifferenti davanti a centinaia di uomini pronti a morire senza esitazione alcuna per il loro Dio.

Ammetto che questa conclusione potrebbe lasciare spazio a migliaia di perplessità o obiezioni. Era giusto o sbagliato conseguire il martirio in tal modo? Si poteva dialogare diversamente? Occorreva risiedere tra gli infedeli ed aspettare tempi migliori? Forse. Ma è inutile, a mio avviso,

recriminare il passato con ipotesi o congetture che non sono avvenute. Anche perché: “del senno di poi, sono piene le fosse.” (Alessandro Manzoni)

NOTES

- 1 Quando, in questo periodo, parliamo di Terra Santa, alludiamo ad un territorio che comprendeva l'impero costantinopolitano di allora, isole greche comprese; vi era poi parte dell'Asia Minore, la Siria, la Palestina (il che significa anche tutto ciò che oggi è Israele), l'Egitto ed il resto del Levante. Cfr. G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Franciscano*, I, Quaracchi, 1906, p. 108.
- 2 J. M. GAUDEUL, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*, I, in *Studi arabi-islamici del PISAI*, 15 (2000) p. 177. La critica dell'autore si concentra soprattutto sul fatto che furono centinaia e centinaia i Minori che parvero sottoporsi ad un martirio volontario, seguendo una via che, invece di dialogare inter-religiosamente con i musulmani, sembrava finalizzata a provocarli apertamente ed a sfidarli nei luoghi dove era più pericoloso esporsi.
- 3 FF 42-45.
- 4 FF 107-109.
- 5 Cfr. LegM IX,8-9; FF 1174-1175.
- 6 LegM IX,8; FF 1174.
- 7 Vi erano, ovviamente, anche delle eccezioni. Molto singolare, ad esempio, è la storia di un giovane frate che, appena giunto a Gerusalemme, entrò in una moschea ed insultò apertamente i saraceni lì raccolti in preghiera, nel tentativo di ottenere il martirio. I musulmani però, invece di ucciderlo e di prendersela indiscriminatamente con tutti i Francescani del luogo, riconobbero che lui solo era colpevole e si affrettarono a riconsegnarlo al suo superiore, che riconobbe l'enorme pazzia commessa da quel frate incosciente. Cfr. G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Franciscano*, II, Quaracchi, 1913, p. 149.
- 8 Rnb 16,8; FF. 43.
- 9 Cfr. *Canonizzazione dei martiri Nicola Tavelic, Deodato da Rodez, Stefano da Cuneo e Pietro da Narbonne. Omelia del Santo Padre Paolo VI. Domenica, 21 giugno 1970*, Internet (16.01.2019): <http://www.vatican.va>.
- 10 K. ESSER, *Origini e inizi del movimento e dell'Ordine francescano*, Milano, 1975, p. 192.
- 11 P. ZERBI, *San Francesco d'Assisi e la Chiesa Romana*, in *Francesco d'Assisi nell'ottavo centenario della nascita*, Milano, 1982, p. 90.
- 12 C. PAOLAZZI, *Lettura degli "scritti" di Francesco d'Assisi*, 2^a ed., Milano, 2002, p. 302.
- 13 *Miscellanea bonaventuriana*; FF 2701.
- 14 Il pensiero di Bonaventura ci aiuta anche a capire, di conseguenza, come egli reputasse completamente inutile l'immenso impegno profuso dai Domenicani nello scrivere opere e saggi che tentassero di dimostrare l'instabilità delle posizioni religiose islamiche.
- 15 Cfr. Fioretti XXIV; FF 1855-1856.
- 16 Molti di questi frati uccisi dai musulmani, durante il martirio, operarono segni e miracoli che resero la loro fine straordinaria anche agli occhi dei saraceni. Cfr. *Gerino da Pistoia alla Verna. Un ciclo cinquecentesco di affreschi restituito alla luce*, a cura di A. Giorgi, Villa Verucchio, 2007. Questi martiri, le cui morti straordinarie sono collocate tra leggenda e realtà, furono per decenni e decenni il modello da seguire per tanti Francescani; le crude e brutali immagini dei loro supplizi hanno decorato luoghi di culto e clausure per decenni.
- 17 Cfr. GAUDEUL, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*, 178.
- 18 *Canonizzazione dei martiri Nicola Tavelic, Deodato da Rodez, Stefano da Cuneo e Pietro da Narbonne. Omelia del Santo Padre Paolo VI.*

Saint Francis, touched by the poverty of the people

“

“I am glad to welcome you, who have come to Rome on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Missionszentrale der Franziskaner. It is good that you as a community of religious brothers and committed lay faithful address all people of good will to motivate them to help the needy and marginalized throughout the world to obtain a better future. In this way, the word of Jesus is newly realized in a concrete way: ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’ (Mt 25: 40). Your initiative is the result of the parish activities in Bonn-Bad Godesberg. Special thanks go above all to the first director who served for many years, Fr. Andreas Müller, who thanks to God is present among us today. Saint Francis of Assisi has always been an example to you: he wished to live poor and to let himself be touched by the poverty of the people. In this way he found Christ’s peace and became himself one who lived from the gifts of Providence. In this spirit, your missionary centre, with its modest origins, has been able to weave a worldwide network of charity, solidarity and fraternity. The Saint of Assisi heard Jesus’ request: ‘Francis, go and repair my house that, as you see, is all in ruins.’ Despite all the experiences of the limits of the Church at the time, he set out on his journey to live out the Gospel in an authentic way. Today too we sometimes suffer as a result of the limits of the Church. The words of the Crucified are a call to us all. Renewal will occur only if we listen to the Lord, letting ourselves be transformed by Him, and continuing to do good with Him. Indeed, faced with current challenges, we must make greater efforts for a good future for all. And with this aim your missionary Centre may continue to give its valuable contribution, first and foremost with the witness of your life and your faith!”

”

Pope Francis
Address to Members of
“Missionszentrale der Franziskaner”
Foundation, Germany
Vatican
6 April 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.

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Cover picture:

St. Francis in front of Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil.