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EDITORIAL

THE ISSUE OF CREATION

Pope Francis has published a message on the occasion of the 6th World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on 1 September 2020, introducing the particular season of special attention to the issue of integral ecology, culminating in the feast of St. Francis of Assisi on 4 October. The Pope bases his message upon the theme chosen by the ecumenical family for the celebration of the 2020 Season of Creation, which is “Jubilee for the Earth”, chosen precisely on this year which marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

The contents of the message are centred upon the themes of remembrance, return, rest, restoration and rejoicing. The Pope shows how creation is groaning with childbirth pangs in order to be given back its rightful dignity as a guarantee for a good quality of life, if mankind is more attentive to biodiversity and to the need for a truly sustainable development. As Franciscans we are called not only to speak about these themes, but also to give a concrete example by our simple life-style.

There is, however, a note in the message that has to be underlined in a special way. This regards the fact that care of creation goes hand in hand with social justice. Indeed, the exploitation of natural resources, the savage quest for development at all costs, create a situation whereby some people become immensely rich at the expense of the poor members of society.

In our local context such a message should be listened to very carefully. Many of us are aware of the grave consequences of over-development that does not keep in mind the need of respect for biodiversity and a sustainable development that guarantees respect for the sacredness of creation. We have been listening to endless statements by economists and developers, many a time supported by toothless politicians, who insist that sustainable development is on their agenda and that it goes hand in hand with ecological balance and care for natural resources like water, agricultural land, open spaces for community recreation, etc. We are all aware of the blatant lies of such a lobby. We know that greed for money has won over the hearts of many, that our landscapes, once dominated by domes and bell towers in the centre of sleepy villages, are now ravaged by concrete towers and cranes which dominate the skyline. We are aware of the clouds of toxic dust and fumes that we inhale everyday, of the growing cases of asthma and cancer, of the rising temperatures in what used to be windswept islands enjoying fresh sea breezes even in the midst of summer.

The most pressing issue, however, is the link between development and social justice. The number of persons who cannot afford to pay their monthly rents, with prices going up to exorbitant heights, is increasing. So is the number of homeless people, especially among the elderly. This state of affairs is

also the result of the policies of those who are equating their vision of sustainable development with a better quality of life. We are told that the building of new roads promotes better traffic flow and less pollution. At the same time we are felling hundreds of trees and promising to replace them with double their number, as we hopefully wait to see. We are destroying the few patches of fertile agricultural soil that remain, and filling the air with construction dust and our environment with construction waste that we are unable to handle any longer. Our developers are aiming high, not only skywise, but also seawise, since we are planning to reclaim land from the sea, with the result of having to dump construction waste and change the natural contours of our coastline.

What has all this got to do with Pope Francis' message and, indeed, with the Franciscan message this review intends to convey? Maybe one could state that it sounds more like a biased analysis with ulterior motives to discredit politicians and economists, and throw a bad light on so-called developers. Indeed, Christian ethics and social ethics can blend together, for the simple reason that the Christian moral code is based upon a genuine respect for the human person and its basic rights within the global framework of an integral ecology that also has rights that need to be respected. The Pope quotes his document *Querida Amazonia*, in which he spoke about the scandal of exploitation of natural resources by multinational companies in the South of the globe. This is a proof that political and economic policies regarding ecology are part and parcel of the Christian moral code, and that, as Christians, we have a right to speak out against exploitation and injustice.

Saint Francis of Assisi teaches us that creation is not our personal property. It is the property of its Creator, namely God. We did not create this planet. We found it ready-made for us. It is up to us whether we want to take care of it or destroy it. Destroying biodiversity and ecological balance will only spell disaster for our own well-being. We need to wake up and denounce those world leaders who are still mocking the dire truth about global warming and its effects, those economists who hide their insatiable greed for money with nice words about sustainable development, those pseudo-nature conservationists who are keen to convince us that shooting at creatures and planting trees go hand in hand. The list can go on. It is time to wake up. To wake up to the plight of an earth that needs a jubilee year of liberation from these hawks that are threatening its very existence. But we cannot do this without a price.

The price we Christians have to pay is not only that of praying for a better world. It also smacks of a sincere effort to change our life-styles, of doing away with waste and greed, of not adhering to a consumerist mentality of use and throw-away. It is an effort to open our eyes to the plight of the new poor members of our society, those who have no voice, those who are silenced into accepting their fate and having to change the way of life they have been living for years on end, to make way for those who want to develop their homes in a "sustainable" way to generate wealth for the privileged few. It is all about listening to the groans of sister earth and letting it breathe a new Spirit.

Noel Muscat ofm

THE FRANCISCAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION AND ITS RELEVANCE IN OUR CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Noel Muscat OFM

Is there such a thing as “Franciscan” theology? By this term we normally refer to the tradition of the Franciscan masters of the late Middle Ages, from the 12th to the 15th centuries, such as Anthony of Padua, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, John Duns Scotus, Bernardine of Siena, Francisco de Osuna, as well as to the mystics belonging to the “Spiritual” tendency in the Order, such as Peter John Olivi, Ubertino da Casale, Angela da Foligno. Many of the great masters of the Franciscan school were formed in the universities of Paris and Oxford. A typical characteristic of the Franciscan theological tradition is that many of these masters combined their role as lecturers in the academic centres with that of preachers. Indeed, the university chair and the pulpit are the two centres of Franciscan theological reflection, which is normally known as Franciscan theology. Such a term does not fit its true meaning if we take it to mean that Francis of Assisi is the founder of a theological system or line of thought in the same way that Thomas of Aquinas was in the Dominican tradition. Indeed, we never hear the term “Dominican” theology, but rather “Thomistic” theology. In the case of the Franciscan Order we could also speak about “Scotistic” theology, but that goes to show that it is only the theological analysis of Duns Scotus, and is not certainly emblematic to Franciscan thought in itself. Each and every one of the Franciscan masters is a school of thought in himself. Thus, it would be more correct to speak about the Franciscan theological tradition.

There is, however, one common factor among Franciscan mediaeval theologians, and it is the fact that they were able to respect the ancient hermeneutical tradition of the *sacra pagina*, going back to the Fathers and to the monastic tradition, while also making use of the method of Scholasticism, present in academic circles, particularly in Paris, where many of the same Franciscan masters were formed.

The Platonic-Augustinian tradition, embraced by the Franciscan masters, entered into contact with the new Aristotelic-Thomistic tradition, which had the advantage of presenting a systematic vision of revelation, based upon reason. In other words, the precedence of the *sacra pagina* as the basis for theological analysis through the *lectio divina*, which was the fruit of the monastic tradition, gave way to a system in which theology was presented as an autonomous *scientia*, which made use of human reasoning and philosophy in order to expound the truths of faith, without ignoring Holy Scripture, which, however, was limited to its role as an authoritative support to theological thought.

Such a change of perspective certainly brought with it a more systemic presentation of theological truths. However, it had the defect of basing itself uniquely upon human reasoning, which was sometimes driven to its extreme consequences, namely, to the denial of any possibility of divine “illumination” on the human intelligence. Aristotelism as it was preached in some academic circles, ended up by becoming a denial of faith, subordinating theological thought to human

reasoning, in such a way that this reasoning alone would be able to arrive at objective truth without the need of the *auctoritates* of Scripture and of the Tradition of the Church Fathers.

The Franciscan masters of theology fought against this deviation of the truth of faith, trying to show the validity of the autonomy of human sciences, including philosophy, but also their ultimate subordination to theological truth. In this way, while they admitted that theology is not the only science, they have shown that theology is the culmination of all sciences. Their vision was based on the notion of a God who enters into human history and reveals Himself to men as the light which enlightens reason. Thus, reason can arrive at God also with the help of human sciences, but it cannot do so without theology. It needs the help of the authority of the revealed Word, which enlightens the minds and renders them capable of delving into the truths of faith. These truths remain always superior to any human reasoning.

One can object that such an approach to theology was rather easy during mediaeval times, when the global vision of the academic world was based on the notion of a theology that included all sciences, although admitting their just autonomy. In that context it was normal for theologians to refer to the vision of the *Liber Sententiarum* of Peter Lombard, as the basic text for theological erudition, since it brought all sciences under the umbrella of Christian revelation, with its insistence upon God, One and Trinity, who is creator of all things, and especially of man as the culmination of His creative work. On his part, man was created as a free being, who unfortunately chose to distance himself from God, seduced by sin. In order to apply a remedy to this tragedy, which influenced not only humanity but also the entire creation, God willed that His Word would become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, as redeemer of the human race, in order to lead mankind back to God. This redemption is especially evident in the grace that is transmitted through the sacraments of the Church, and which can sanctify the human person in the journey towards God through an eschatological process of salvation of the entire cosmos and of the final victory over evil and over sin. In this perspective, each science finds its *raison d'être* in the innate ability of human nature to arrive at truth with the help of reason, and particularly of philosophical truth, to which are linked the sciences of logic, metaphysics, physics and ethics.

Although admitting all this, and having also commented the *Liber Sententiarum*, some

Franciscan masters, such as Alexander of Hales and Saint Bonaventure, have shown that one cannot arrive at the full truth on man and on creation without the divine help of the Word which illuminates. The precedence of the *sacra pagina* remains the basis of the theological method of these great masters, who also privileged the patristic method to approach the Word through the literal sense and through the three spiritual senses (allegory, tropology, anagogy), which are necessary in order to delve into the richness of the contents of faith as they are found in divine revelation.

A particular element which attracts the attention of the student of the Franciscan theologians is their ability to look at theology not only as a *scientia sacra*, but also as a *scientia prædicandi*, namely as a science that should lead the theologian to transmit the Word in a language which the simple can understand. In this perspective we speak of the Franciscan theologians who were great preachers before being masters who occupied university chairs. A case in point is Anthony of Padua who, although he lectured theology to the friars in Bologna and in other study centres of the Order, was first and foremost a great popular preacher. His method of doing theology did not consist in writing theological treatises in the scholastic meaning of the term, but in composing *sermones*, which are commentaries on the *sacra pagina*, keeping faithful to the patristic method and to the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture. These *sermones* constituted the basic text for the formation of preachers, who were considered to be true theologians. In truth, for these Franciscan masters, there was no distinction between the university chair and the pulpit. These were simply two complementary ways of transmitting the contents of faith. With the academic community such a contact was certainly more scientific in nature, but it always had the aim of providing expert theological material to use when one preached from the pulpit to the common people, who were thirsty for truth and meaning in a world of great social, economic and political changes.

One can therefore state that, already during mediaeval times, there existed a kind of dialogue between theology and culture, in an environment which was certainly Christian, but which also had the danger of deviating from an authentic Christian vision to a false view of Christianity, which regarded faith only as a corollary of the pre-eminent nature of philosophical reasoning. One could state that the *christianitas* that shaped Europe during the era of

monasticism was re-proposed in new terms by the scholastic theology of the masters of the 13th and 14th centuries, especially by those who did not see a break, but rather a development, from patristic theology to the new method of theological research in the university faculties. The Franciscans were experts in proposing such a continuity, and also in defending an authentic presentation of Christian faith in the face of the danger of a subtle de-christianisation which exalted human reasoning to the level of the unique criterion of objective truth, and consequently of ethics and practice.

If the challenges of Franciscan theologians of the time were great, they also remain such today. In other words, how can we propose a theology with the method of these mediaeval masters, in a de-christianised and Godless world? Is it possible to find links which can help us build bridges between theology and contemporary culture, on the same style of the contents transmitted by these masters, and following the Franciscan theological tradition? It is obvious that such an approach can become possible if we take for granted the fact that there exists a Franciscan Theology capable of conveying a message to contemporary men and women, as it was capable of doing during the first centuries of existence of the spiritual-mystical-theological Franciscan phenomenon. In this era, in which we speak so much about dialogue and communication between cultures, such an issue should be considered as important and necessary, in order not to fall into the temptation of making a fossil of our tradition, relegating it to a glorious era which is now passed and which can be considered irrelevant by our contemporary way of thinking.

The environment in which we are called to give witness to the Christ-event is certainly an environment which does not admit the influx of the sacred in the human sphere. This thought can be expressed with these wise words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI:

“A society without God — a society that does not know Him and treats Him as non-existent — is a society that loses its measure. In our day, the catchphrase of God’s death was coined. When God does die in a society, it becomes free, we were assured. In reality, the death of God in a society also means the end of freedom, because what dies is the purpose that provides orientation. And because the compass disappears that points us in the right direction by teaching us to distinguish good from evil. Western society is a society in which God is absent in the public sphere and has nothing left to offer it. And that is why it is a society in which

the measure of humanity is increasingly lost. At individual points it becomes suddenly apparent that what is evil and destroys man has become a matter of course” (BENEDICT XVI, *The Church and the scandal of sexual abuse* [unpublished essay], quoted from www.catholicnewsagency.com [retrieved 15/05/2020]).

In such a context, to propose a theology which departs from the assumption that God is at the centre of the cosmos and of history seems to be meaningless. Yet we know that every effort to project an idea of the Christian God that would be accepted by a Godless world, or better still, by a world which is against God, by trying to build bridges with a lay and secularised philosophy appealing only to purely human values, will not produce any result in affirming the essential character of faith in human life. Other ways have to be attempted. One way which could function is that of creating bridges of inter-religious dialogue, appealing to the “religious” sensibility inherent in every human person. But even this way, with its positive implications for the cause of peace and justice in the world, can mislead the aim of Christian theology. It does so when it becomes a method which leads to a kind of religious syncretism, in which salvation of the human race is reduced purely to the sphere of the good and conscientious intention of each and every human person, seen as being able to arrive at truth in the way he or she deem more opportune for one’s own religious beliefs. This method neglects the central theme of the necessity of the Christ-event as the completion of revelation and as a necessary condition to arrive at the full meaning of truth.

In this context, the Franciscan theological method risks being diluted in its Christian content. The praiseworthy efforts to reach out to the other by departing from common values of peace and human brotherhood are certainly necessary, but they cannot bear fruit if they become an occasion to “make use” of the Franciscan theological content simply as an attractive striving for common ideas and initiatives, even if these are aimed at sublime values such as the value of peace. This approach risks to belittle the “scandalous” element of the mystery of the cross, without which it is meaningless to try to understand the specific nature of Franciscan theology.

A look at the productions of the Franciscan theologians is sufficient in order to show how they did not admit a subsidence in the foundations of Christian faith, that is, in the revelation of a God who enters the history of humanity and in a

God who becomes incarnate in history in order to save humanity. These theologians were aware of the fact that we cannot speak of a “human” ethical system and oust Christian truth from the same ethical system. One cannot give to the sole human reason the pre-eminence of judgment on ideas and on ethical conduct which derives in a logical way from such convictions. The friendly and fraternal approach towards anyone who is “diverse” does not signify the annulment of the Christ-event and of the scandal of the cross. If we approach theological speculation in this manner, we will be guilty of having renounced the value of martyrdom as a sincere witness in favour of the truth of Christian revelation. There is no other way out. No dialogue with cultures and religions can prescind from this kind of witness, which does not imply an apologetic discourse of self-defence or an attack of the adversary, but rather a sincere, but strong, proposal of a truth that goes beyond and above all cultures and all religions. Such truth can only be found in the God of Jesus Christ.

For Franciscan theologians, like for example for Bonaventure, theological knowledge is not purely a science that can be explained by philosophical criteria. It is rather a *sapientia*. For Bonaventure, *speculatio* is, essentially, a mystical rather than a rational action. The Platonic-Augustinian nature always lies at the basis of Bonaventure’s theological reasoning, even if he did not prescind from Aristotelic rational philosophy, which provided him with the expressive language of the same theological truths. Following his master, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure based his entire theological system upon the significance and exposition of the *sacra pagina*. Holy Scripture is the book by which God has revealed Himself in a definitive way after man could no longer decipher the presence of the divine in the book of creation. Philosophy has an important role in presenting this initial phase of divine revelation, which is accessible to human reason, and which is capable of leading it towards a divine being. However, to say that such a being corresponds to the God of Jesus Christ implies a breakthrough which only Scripture can provide. In this way, doing theology and commenting the *sacra pagina* are equivalent to the same hermeneutical principle that aims not only at rational truth but especially at the content of faith. In this way the theologian becomes a mystic. One can say that such an approach is characteristic of Franciscan theology, which wants to present not only a divine being who is called God the Creator, but rather a relational being who is called God the

Saviour, who becomes incarnate in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The dialogue which Franciscan theology intends to establish with contemporary culture does not therefore consist of a discussion on the value of scientific knowledge as an expression of the innumerable autonomous sciences in which one admits a specific specialisation of professionalism in each specific field. It is not a question of denying this autonomous value of sciences. Rather, it is a question of presenting a holistic vision of the profound significance of human knowledge, addressing it towards the central point to which all sciences converge. Such an effort becomes the aim of a reasonable dialogue between religion and culture, but it cannot bear fruit except in the light of the Christ-event. As Bonaventure and the entire Franciscan tradition would say, it is a question of finding the centre of the *crux intelligibilis*, which becomes the hermeneutical principle in order to understand the meaning of creation and of the history of humanity.

The figure of Francis of Assisi as the inspirer of this kind of approach to dialogue between theology and culture is a central one. It is not central in the sense that we can see in Francis the creator of a movement of theological thought. We know very well that Francis was not a theologian and that he did not propose a new systematic theology. We cannot even state that Francis was directly the one who inspired the writings of the great Franciscan theologians and masters. Francis is absent in the *Sermones* of Anthony of Padua, and is only partially mentioned in the writings of Bonaventure. If we want to understand how the inspiration of Francis was translated in theological terms by such masters as Bonaventure, we can refer to the words of the theologian Gottlieb Söhnngen, master of Joseph Ratzinger: “Francis brought about the return to the Gospel form of life, Bonaventure the return to the scientific form of life of the Gospel” (Quoted from W. DETTLOFF, *Bonaventura da Bagnoregio*, in *Il Pensiero Medievale*, ed. H. FRIES, G. KRETSCHMAR. German title: *Klassiker der Theologie*, translation P. PAVANINI and P. MUSUMECI, Jaca Book, Milano 2005, 75).

This is the “scientific form of life of the Gospel” that the Franciscan masters and disciples of Francis of Assisi “invented”, and which can lead us to speak about a Franciscan Theology. It is not a question of having a compact and uniform theological synthesis, as one can state in the case of Thomistic Theology. Each and every Franciscan master created his own method of doing theology,

making use of different methodologies and styles, such as *sermones*, *quaestiones disputatae*, mystical treatises, biblical commentaries, etc. Therefore, Franciscan theology, more than just being a scientific-theological system, is a weaving of theological works of different kinds, which do not have erudition as their primary aim, but rather edification of their readers and audiences, even in those cases which concerned students in the faculties of theology where these masters lectured.

Such a distinction can be seen especially in the philosophical-theological system of John Duns Scotus. One could state that Scotus was the only Franciscan master who created a proper systematic theology of his own, in such a way that his methodology has been placed in confrontation with Thomistic Theology for many centuries. The specific note of Scotus, once again, distinguishes itself from a dependence upon any theological content considered to be “Franciscan” because it goes back to Francis of Assisi. However, the inspirational principles of Scotus’ theology were certainly enlightened by the ingenious intuition of Saint Francis.

Scotus was the defender of the absolute sovereignty and freedom of God in His being and in His actions. Such a principle constitutes the basis of the theology of the Subtle Doctor. God cannot be conditioned by no one and by nobody. His sovereign freedom is particularly seen in the way in which God loves. Creation is the fruit of this act of love which is supremely free and pure. Not only, but creation is possible because God always wanted to love someone else besides Himself, and this someone is His Incarnate Word. In the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, Scotus sees the sovereign freedom of God who creates out of pure love, and who forms man as the prince of creation. Scotus does not consider the mystery of the Incarnation as the fruit or the consequence of the choice of sin on the part of man. It is a well-known fact that man has sinned, simply because man is free in his choices enlightened by reason. When man missed his target and chose to abuse of his own freedom, he did so not only because he was seduced by Satan, but also because God wanted to respect to the utmost the freedom of this creature who He had created in His image and likeness. That is why God willed the Incarnation to be the most beautiful expression of this supreme freedom to create man and the entire universe simply in order to glorify Him as Creator. If the Incarnation, at a second stage, was also an occasion to redeem fallen humanity, this was a process that

is evident in divine revelation, but which leaves God completely free in His act of creation and in His will that His Word become incarnate, without being bound by any kind of conditioning factor.

The theory of individuation, which is so strongly present in the philosophy of Scotus, leads us logically to these considerations. The Word is the most perfect expression of the substance of the Father. The Father willed the Incarnation of His Word in such a way as to prepare for His Word a fitting abode in the virginal womb of Mary Immaculate. In this sense, the Marian doctrine of the Subtle Doctor can be understood in its true context. God willed Mary, He chose Mary, He predestined Mary to be the first fruit of redemption. In this way, Mary not only does not have any personal merit in the fact that she is Immaculate, but she is even indebted to the highest degree to the one and only perfect Mediator between God and mankind. The choice of God fell upon a particular woman, in a particular place and in a particular historical moment. It is she who God wanted to become the mother of His Son. Once again, the highest and sovereign freedom of God is at the first place.

In this vision it is the entire cosmos, all creation, that enters into the perspective of salvation. Scotus expresses in a marvellous way the Pauline theology of Christ as the centre of the cosmos and head of the Church. His theological vision is certainly the fruit of a Franciscan inspiration of creation, seen as a co-lover of God together with man, who does not stand above creation, but who participates in the life of the same creation. The theme of respect and reverence towards creatures finds in this Christian view its full significance. Scotus considers the individual nature of each and every creature as an expression of the sovereign freedom of God to love the work of His hands in a unique and unrepeatable manner. Thus one can hold that Scotus should truly be taken into account in the current theme of the Christian vision on the integrity of creation and of the care of our “common home”, which is evident especially in the encyclical *Laudato si’* of Pope Francis, even though the same document does not make any explicit reference to the Subtle Doctor.

The cosmic-salvific centrality of Christ is not only object of theological speculation for the Franciscan masters. It is also translated into the lived experience of intimate communion with Christ in the experience of the mystics. In this ambit, it is interesting to mention the female figures of Franciscan mysticism, as well as their relationship to the phenomenon of Franciscan spiritualism present in the Order during the second

half of the 13th century and first quarter of the 14th. We can state that the Franciscan mystical phenomenon was linked to a movement that might also have had some elements of suspect heterodoxy, but which cannot be considered as being outlawed as a mystical movement, since it was a sincere response to the sentiment of human affection in its relationship with Christ. Franciscan spiritualism, which was strongly apocalyptic in nature, was also fruit of the late mediaeval sensibility and constituted an answer to the need of affectivity in the spiritual realm. After all, Saint Francis himself was not a stranger to such sentiments, particularly in the mystical experience of the stigmatisation and in his tender affection towards the mystery of the Incarnation.

If a mystic of the same calibre as Angela da Foligno has been called *magistra theologorum*, this means that Franciscan theology was not written only in the university lecture halls of Paris, but also in the hermitages of the Apennine forests of Italy and in the towns where the common and illiterate people would live. Female Franciscan mystics were women who were semi-literate, some of whom did not even know how to write, and yet they have composed works of sublime and pure mystical value. Their penitential life in solitude, their closeness to the simple folk, and their relationship with outstanding figures of Franciscan spiritualism, such as Ubertino da Casale, Angelo Clareno, Peter John Olivi and others, remain an indelible sign of a theology that translates itself into life, which is expressed in the interchange between the heavenly summits of contemplation and the human day-to-day experience in the squares and market places of mediaeval Europe. Franciscan mysticism became a contemplative and prophetic gaze on the world, with the aim of reading the signs of the times in the light of revelation, also with the traits of an eschatologism that was considered heretical, but which, in reality, it was not.

The mystical works of the Spiritual Franciscans were considered to be treatises of true biblical interpretation that shed light on the future in a society in profound change, but which was also going through a crisis. The belief of these poor Franciscan visionaries was that the world was close to its end, that the eleventh hour had arrived in the history of humanity, and that the Christ of the Apocalypse was going to reveal Himself shortly. In order to defend such a belief they were not afraid to be regarded as witnesses who were even ready to face martyrdom. They saw in Francis the first martyr in an eschatological vision of a world

in decadence, in which the institutional Church was involved and compromised. The threat came certainly from outside, and it was perceived in very clear terms, including the persecution of Christians in the hands of Islam, seen as the instrument of the Antichrist. At the same time, however, they did not forget the internal threat to the Church, coming from the pseudo-Christians, who were menacing the evangelical purity of the rule and life of Francis of Assisi, as it was being lived by those brothers who were considered to be the true disciples of the *poverello*. Maybe we are not living so far away from such a cloudy and archaic world, which we improperly call the Middle Ages. Theology becomes mysticism when it knows how to read the signs of the times within the perspective of an authentic Christian martyrdom, which is not afraid to face the Antichrist within the same Church and outside it, working through the diabolical forces that operate in the world. Such a vision is seen to be a threat to the purity of the Gospel inspiration of a Church made up of “spirituals” and announced by the prophetic witness of Francis of Assisi and his rule of life.

In an era of Humanism which preceded the Renaissance, the awareness of the dignity and centrality of man in creation was expressed in literature, in art, in philosophy and in many other sciences. It was in this context that the Franciscans developed a new method of preaching, which distanced itself from the monastic and patristic style of approaching the Word through the *lectio divina* and the stereotype of the *sermones*. Indeed, it was not exactly a question of complete detachment, given that the Franciscan theologians of the 14th and 15th centuries continued to make use of scholastic theology and of the rules of the *ars prædicandi* of their predecessors. However, one notes a new element which emerges with force, namely their ability to translate their preaching in the language of the common people, the *volgare*, in such a way as to convey revelation and the contents of the Gospel to the masses. One can state that the great Franciscan popular preachers of this period, with their preaching in the open squares of the Italian towns, were opening up to a new style of penitential message, which had as its central motive the moral reform of society.

Franciscan popular preaching introduced a new method of doing theology, since it shifted the accent from the dogmatic content to the moral content of preaching. In itself it was not a novelty, since such an emphasis had already existed in the works of the great Franciscan masters, authors of *sermones*,

to whom we have referred to above. However, the method was certainly new, given that the preacher became an expert in the itinerant value of the Word, by travelling from one town to another, and planting the Christian message in the day-to-day lives of the people. No wonder that the great Franciscan preachers of the 15th century (Bernardine of Siena, John Capestrano, James of the March, Alberto da Sarteano, Matteo da Agrigento, Barnaba Manassei da Terni, Bernardino da Feltre) were also able reformers of the social, political and economic framework of their times in the Italian communes, as well as in many other regions of Europe. Their untiring mission was that of reforming morals, of recalling heretics to union with the Church, of denouncing vices and abuses in the management of political power, of money, and of sexual ethics. If we judge with our contemporary vision these preachers, we would be tempted to accuse them of inopportune interference in the political sphere, of antisemitism, of penitential austerity adapted only for the cloister and unacceptable in human relations in the field of politics, economy, or sexual ethics. However, these men had the courage to look with a critical eye on the world in which they lived, without necessarily condemning it to hell, but offering a remedy of humanity, which was distinct from humanism. It was the model of Jesus Christ and of the power of His Holy Name in giving to men and to institutions the dignity that they had lost as a result of vice and sin.

The method, the style, the contents of Franciscan theology in the centuries we have mentioned marks a glorious moment in Franciscan history, which seems to have weakened from the 16th century onwards. Maybe we could make an exception regarding the missionary preaching of the Friars Minor of the Observant family in the Americas, and in the birth of the first Friars Minor of the eremitical life, who would later on be known as the Capuchins. In any case, we cannot speak about a new flowering of theological or mystical works, with the exceptions of outstanding figures such as Francisco de Osuna in Spain, and Lorenzo da Brindisi in Italy. However, during the modern era, the theology of the Franciscan masters, particularly the Bonaventurian and Scotistic schools, came to the forefront in the study centres of the Franciscan Order, even as an alternative to Thomistic theology, which ended up establishing itself as the theology of the study texts in seminaries and in theological faculties.

With the onset of the post-conciliar period, such a distinction between the Franciscan and

Dominican schools dwindled to the point that, in various study centres of the Franciscan Order, the theology of the Franciscan masters was not part of the study curriculum. The crisis of the scholastic method, considered to be a mediaeval phenomenon which does not respond any longer to contemporary sensibilities, contributed to this impoverishment of knowledge of the Franciscan theological tradition. However, at the same time a growing interest in the study of the works of the great Franciscan masters was registered. The critical edition of the *Opera Omnia* of Saint Bonaventure by the Fathers Editors of Quaracchi between 1882 and 1902, as well as the critical edition of the works of John Duns Scotus on the part of the Scotistic Commission, since 1938, aroused the interest in the Franciscan method of studying theology. The ecclesial theological framework of the post-conciliar period has seen an increased interest in the themes which are dear to Franciscan theology, such as the centrality of Christ, glorifier of the Father and model of the creation that issues from God and returns to God, the importance of Christ's humanity in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, the role of creation in the salvific plan of God, which comprises not only man but also the cosmos, and the theology of history as a critical reading of the various moments of salvific history in view of the last times and of the return of Christ in glory.

At this point we should try to understand the specific role of Franciscan theology in its duty to transmit the contents of faith in a particular culture or history. If such a duty was carried out by the Franciscan theologians in the glorious periods of the history of the Order, particularly during the late Middle Ages, what does this same Franciscan theology have to say to our contemporary world?

We have already stated that we cannot speak of a uniform systematic thought in the furrow of Franciscan theological tradition. However, "we can affirm that, for Franciscan thought during the 13th century, one can legitimately speak of an intellectual tradition (a school of thought), which demonstrates coherence of themes and development. In all authors there emerges a concept of theology as *sapientia*, which also includes a determining reference to the *affectus* besides that to the *intellectus*, and which results as being oriented more towards the life and praxis (Scotus would call it *scientia practica*), than towards an intellectual understanding. We can note the coherence of this concept with the inspiration of Francis of Assisi, who qualified *sapientia* as the queen of

virtues, a choice that should enable to think twice all those who easily speak of a Franciscan anti-intellectualism (C. VAIANI, *Filosofia teologia mistica: esplorazione del nesso all'interno della scuola francescana*, in *Filosofia Teologia Mistica nella Scuola Franciscana*. Atti della Giornata di studio, Bologna, 18 marzo 2003, (Quaderni dello Studio Teologico "S. Antonio", 2), a cura di C. CAVICCHIOLI, 43: www.studiotologico.fratiminorier.it (accessed 17/05/2020).

In other words, the specific nature of Franciscan theology does not consist in its contents, but rather in its relational formulation. It is an affective theology, a *sapientia*, in the sense that it is directed at touching the heart, and not only the intellect. It is precisely this formulation that could render Franciscan theology more desirable in the dialogue with today's world and culture. Man is not only thirsting for truth, but also for affection. We live in a world where we lack love, simplicity, frankness and openness of human relations based not upon a virtual relation that isolates the person and keeps one locked in a closed self-centred world, but which open up the possibility to live to the full our humanity in relation with others.

Franciscan theology presents God as the most perfect relational being, who communicates His love for humanity in the person of the Incarnate Word. The Franciscan theologians wanted to show how there exists a living relationship between God the creator and the cosmos, how each and every

living being is a vestige and an open book that speaks of God. Franciscan theology does not speak of God who is seen in Himself as perfect auto-sufficiency, but rather of God who is incarnate, of God who walks among men and who speaks with them and to them.

In this age of sophisticated means of communication, which paradoxically are leaving so many persons in a frightening solitude, the theology of the Franciscan masters, translated in current terms which are comprehensible to contemporary mankind, can truly offer an effective means of linking up with a world which, although having denied God, is nonetheless loved by God; a world which is still in need of being redeemed and loved once again for all its intrinsic expression of the goodness of the Creator; a world which is still embraced by Christ's cross, which remains the centre giving meaning to the cosmos and to history.

It is up to us to continue to develop this ancient tradition of an affective wisdom that speaks of the God of Jesus Christ, and that presents Him before all as the unique Master in the art of communication, as the only way of salvation, the only spring of truth and the only life that can transform the culture of death of a decaying world in an opportunity for a new creation, ready to journey without fear towards the destination of its existence and of its history.

THE LETTER CUM SECUNDUM CONSILIUM OF POPE HONORIUS III (22 SEPTEMBER 1220)

Noel Muscat OFM

The image of the first Franciscan fraternity projected by the *De inceptione* (*Anonymous of Perugia*) is that of a fraternity of itinerant penitents. “Many people repeatedly questioned them, and it was extremely wearisome to answer so many questions because new situations often gave rise to new questions. Some asked them: ‘Where do you come from?’ While others asked: ‘To which Order do you belong?’ They answered simply: ‘We are penitents and were born in Assisi.’ At that time the religion of the brothers was not yet called an order.”¹

The fact that the incipient fraternity lacked a proper structure like the monastic Orders is seen in the simplicity and amateurish manner in which brothers were admitted. It is again the *Anonymous of Perugia* which portrays this state of affairs when speaking about the first mission of the brothers: “Some asked them to receive them into their society. And they accepted many of them, for, at this time, because of the small number of the brothers, each one had received from blessed Francis authority to admit whomever he wished.”²

As long as the fraternity was limited to a few brothers who would travel in twos on their missionary expeditions in Umbria and the Marches, the issue of making a discernment process when admitting new recruits was not a source for concern. But it was to become so later on, when the brotherhood grew in numbers, and when the brothers ventured far afield in their missionary journeys. The way of life of these *virii paenitentiales de civitate Assisii oriundi*³ was attracting many young men to their ranks, but there was no way of knowing what kind of religious men

these would be. It was all a question of admitting the brothers by trial and error.

When the bishop of Acre, Jacques de Vitry, who had been an eye-witness of the friars Minor in Umbria in 1216, wrote a letter from the crusader camp in Damietta in 1220, he again mentioned the brothers, lamenting that they were drawing to their ranks even his most trusted chaplains because of their exemplary way of life. At the same time, however, Jacques de Vitry criticised the friars Minor for their lack of discernment in admitting candidates to the Order: “This Order is multiplying rapidly throughout the world, because it expressly imitates the pattern of the primitive Church and the life of the apostles in everything. But to our way of thinking, this Order is quite risky, because it sends out two by two throughout the world, not only formed religious, but also immature young men who should first be tested and subjected to conventual discipline for a time.”⁴

One notes the expression *conventualis disciplina* used by Jacques de Vitry. What did he exactly mean by such an expression? Some scholars go as far as noticing its importance in the early years of the Order, heralding what would eventually become a process of making the Order assume a “conventual” structure, especially from the generalate of Brother Elias (1232-1239) and particularly under that of Saint Bonaventure (1257-1274).⁵ It is true that Jacques de Vitry might have had in mind the structure of monastic or canonical Orders, which were commonplace in that period. What is relevant is the fact that, during that same year, Pope Honorius III decided to send a Letter (*Bulla*) to the Order in which he obliges the brothers

to introduce the year of probation, or novitiate, for all the newcomers in the same brotherhood. This is the Letter *Cum secundum consilium*, published on 22 September 1220, before the Chapter of Saint Michael the Archangel, celebrated at the Portiuncula on 29 September.

In order to understand the importance of this document we shall proceed in three steps. We shall start with a brief look at the novitiate in the Rule of Saint Benedict. Then we shall look at the Letter of Pope Honorius III within the context of the history of the Franciscan Order at that precise moment. Lastly, we shall see its practical inclusion in the legislation of the Order, particularly in the *Regula non bullata* of 1221.

The novitiate in the monastic Benedictine tradition

The Rule of Saint Benedict dedicates chapter 58 to the theme *De disciplina suscipiendorum Fratrum* (On the manner of receiving Brothers). It is a long and detailed chapter which underlines the methodology of admitting recruits to the monastery. The part which speaks about the year of probation, or novitiate, states that the aspirant for the monastic life had to undergo a tough test before being admitted. In fact, he had to wait and insist on his request for five consecutive days before being admitted to the guest quarters for another few days. It was only after this test that he was admitted to the novitiate quarters under the direction of a senior monk. This monk had to test him especially in obedience and humility, as well as in his endeavour for the *Opus Dei* typical of the Benedictine way of life. After two months the Rule had to be read out to him, with the explicit affirmation that he was free to be bound to it, or else he was free to leave. He would then continue the novitiate in all austerity, and after six months the same process would be repeated. If he persevered he would be allowed to continue the novitiate for another four months. “If he shall then promise, after due deliberation, to observe all things and to do everything commanded him, let him be received into the Community, knowing that he is from that time forward under the law of the Rule, so that he can neither leave the Monastery nor shake off the yoke of the Rule, which, after so long a deliberation, he might have accepted or refused.”⁶

As is evident, the practice of monastic Orders in admitting candidates was very strict. In the case of the friars Minor, it was certainly strict in the sense that the candidate had to forfeit all his belongings before joining the brotherhood, and distribute everything to the poor. He would also undergo a test since part of his training would be that of serving lepers. But there was no hard and fast rule regarding a stable programme of formation or a discernment process in the form of a stable novitiate. The friars were itinerants and their cloister was the world. This would mean that they were exposed to all kinds of challenges from the very moment they joined the brotherhood. This state of affairs could not continue for long, and in due course the Church intervened with the Letter *Cum secundum consilium* of Pope Honorius III.

The Letter Cum secundum consilium of Honorius III

The text of the Letter *Cum secundum consilium*, published in Viterbo on 22 September 1220, is addressed to the “priors and custodians of the friars Minor.”⁷ It therefore recognises a well-organised structure in the Order, with proper superiors, even though the term “priors” does not belong to the Franciscan tradition and was never accepted by Francis himself.

The occasion in which the Letter was published was probably linked to the fact that Francis had requested a Cardinal Protector for the Order in the person of Ugo di Ostia.⁸ The Cardinal would certainly have made sure that the Order would be more organised in its internal structure, particularly at a delicate moment when it had just gone through a crisis during the absence of Francis who went to the East in 1219-1220. The time was ripe for such changes. The Order had already compiled various sections of what was to become the *Regula non bullata*, approved by the chapter of 1221, but including legislation that could be traced back to the early years and particularly to the period post-Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

The Letter *Cum secundum consilium* has all the necessary qualities for being a highly legalistic document issued by the Roman Curia.⁹ It insists upon the virtue of prudence and wisdom in making right decisions, and warns against rash enthusiasm. “For just as a prudent man becomes stale should he lack enthusiasm, so the enthusiastic man will be

covered with confusion if he is not prudent.” One cannot help noticing the expert hand of a well-trained jurist who drafted the document, and this person could well have been Cardinal Ugo himself, since we know how he intervened in all important occasions when the Order had to draft laws and regulations. The issue of the novitiate would have been an urgent one, given that the enthusiasm of the beginnings was now not sufficient for admitting good candidates to the Order.

The Pope reminds the brothers that every religious family existing in the Church had always demanded that new candidates undergo a year of probation, or novitiate, before being professed as religious. One notes the use of the expression *regulares observantias*, which indicates the existence of a Rule of life that has to be observed by those who are bound by it. One could state that the insistence of Jacques de Vitry on the fact that the brothers had to be trained in the *conventualis disciplina*, can be compared to the Pope’s invitation for the Order to test candidates before admitting them to the *regulares observantias*.¹⁰

The Letter then comes to its central point, namely the institution of the year of novitiate in the Order: “Therefore, by authority of these present letters, we forbid you to admit to profession to your Order anyone who has not first completed a year of probation. And once he has made profession, let no brother dare to leave your Order. It is also forbidden for anyone to receive [into another religious community] any brother who has left your Order. We further forbid anyone to wander about clad in the habit of your Order outside obedience, corrupting the purity of your poverty. If anyone should presume to do this, it is lawful for you to bring ecclesiastical censure upon such a brother until he has come to his senses.”

These provisions were to provide the basis for the Order’s legislation regarding the admitting of new candidates, and the organisation of the year of probation, or novitiate. This legislation is found especially in chapter 2 of both the *Regula non bullata* of 1221 and of the *Regula bullata* of 1223. As a final step we shall now consider the contents of chapter 2 of the Rule of 1221.

The novitiate in the Regula non bullata (1221)

Chapter 2 of the *Regula non bullata* does not

deal specifically with what nowadays we call the novitiate. Or rather, it does speak about the year of probation, but within the context of the acceptance of candidates in the brotherhood. The various steps that the brothers had to follow are explained in an orderly manner, and one immediately notes the explicit reference that is made to the Letter *Cum secundum consilium*:

“If anyone, wishing by divine inspiration to accept this life, comes to our brothers, let him be received by them with kindness. If he is determined to accept our life, let the brothers be very careful not to become involved in his temporal affairs but present him to their minister as quickly as possible. On his part, let the minister receive him with kindness, encourage him and diligently explain the tenor of our life to him.

When this has been done, let the above-mentioned person - if he wishes and is capable of doing so spiritually without any difficulty - sell all his belongings and be conscientious in giving everything to the poor. Let the brothers and the minister of the brothers be careful not to interfere in any way in his temporal affairs, not to accept money either by themselves or through an intermediary. Nevertheless, if the brothers are in need, they can accept, like other poor people, whatever is needed for the body excepting money.

When he has returned, the minister may give him the clothes of probation for a year, that is, two tunics without a hood, a cord, trousers, and a small cape reaching to the cord. When the year and term of probation has ended, he may be received into obedience. After this it will be unlawful for him to join another Order or to ‘wander outside obedience’ according to the decree of the Lord Pope and the Gospel, for *no one putting his hand to the plough and looking to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God* (Lk 9:62). [...] No one may be received contrary to the rite and practice of the Holy Church.”¹¹

The tone of the text in the *Earlier Rule* is not so juridical as the one in the Letter *Cum secundum consilium*. One notes the lack of rigidity that is present, for example, in the Rule of Saint Benedict, regarding the way in which aspirants are welcomed. In the case of the friars Minor the minister has to show kindness, together with all the brothers, to the candidates who present themselves for entry in the Order. The minister is to encourage the postulant, while at the same time being clear about the requirements of the way of life of the

Gospel. The real test for the candidate consists in renouncing to all his temporal possessions and giving them to the poor. In whatever manner he does this, it is totally up to him, and the brothers cannot interfere in any way in the right of the postulant to act according to his conscience. However, the Gospel command to renounce to all belongings is paramount in being accepted to enter the Order as a novice. It is only then that the candidate begins his year of probation. The Rule prescribes the clothes that he must wear, and which distinguish the candidates in probation from all the other brothers of the Order. Nothing is said about what is to be done in the year of probation. Maybe the novices would have taken part in the same missionary expeditions of the other brothers, and would have served lepers. There is nothing in the Franciscan Rule to suggest that the novitiate was to be done in a closed conventual setting. Neither does the Rule prescribe a director for the formation of the novices, as is explicitly said in the Benedictine Rule. One last thing is that, when the candidate concluded his year of probation, he would be received to obedience and had to abide by the norms of the Church, specifically those laid down in *Cum secundum consilium*.

By 1221 we can say that the Order had legalised and formalised a practice which the Church wanted to introduce in 1220 in order to satisfy an urgent need for a more organised growth of the same Order. *Cum secundum consilium* had served for such a purpose.

NOTES

- 1 AP 19 (FAED II, 43). Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di E. MENESTÒ, S. BRUFANI et alii, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 1995, 1325: A multis multipliciter interrogabantur, et valde laboriosum erat eis tot et tantis interrogationibus respondere, quia in novis rebus novae interrogationes saepius oriuntur. Quidam enim interrogabant eos: "Unde estis?" Alii vero dicebant: "De quo Ordine estis?" Illi autem simpliciter respondebant: "Paenitentes sumus, et in civitate Assisii nati fuimus." Adhuc enim Religio fratrum non nominabatur Ordo.
- 2 AP 24 (FAED II, 45). Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1330: Et quidam rogabant eos ut in suam eos societatem recipere dignarentur, et ex eis plurimos receperunt, quia tunc temporis propter paucitatem fratrum unusquisque habebat a beato Francisco potestatem recipere quos volebat.
- 3 L3C 37 (FAED II, 90): Those who saw them, however, were greatly amazed that they differed from all others by their habit and life and seemed almost like wild men [...] In fact, many judged them impostors or fools, and were unwilling to receive them into their homes lest, as thieves, they might slyly take their belongings. Therefore, in many places, after they had suffered a number of insults, they sought lodging in the porticos of churches and homes. Latin text in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1410: Quicumque autem eos videbant plurimum mirabantur eo quod habitu et vita dissimiles erant omnibus et quasi silvestres homines videbantur [...] Multi vero eos deceptores vel fatuos iudicabant et nolebant eos recipere in domum suam, ne tanquam fures res suas furtim auferrent. Propterea in multis locis, post illatas eis multas iniurias, hospitabantur in ecclesiarum porticibus vel domorum.
- 4 JACQUES DE VITRY, *Letter written in Damietta (1220)* (FAED I, 580-581).
- 5 This is the opinion of G. ODOARDI, *Conventuali*, in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, Vol. 3, 4, where he mentions the "conventualis disciplina" *auspicata per esso da Giacomo da Vitry nel 1220*, speaking about the name *Conventualis*.
- 6 *Regula S. Benedicti*, c. 58, in *Bibliotheca Benedictina Intratext osb.org*: Noviter veniens quis ad conversationem, non ei facilis tribuatur ingressus, sed sicut ait Apostolus: *Probate spiritus si ex Deo sunt*. Ergo si veniens perseveraverit pulsans et illatas sibi iniurias et difficultatem ingressus post quattuor aut quinque dies visus fuerit patienter portare et persistere petitioni suae, adnuatur ei ingressus et sit in cella hospitum paucis diebus. Postea autem in cella noviciorum ubi meditent et manduceat et dormiant. Et senior eis talis deputetur qui aptus sit ad lucrandas animas, qui super eos omnino curiose intendat. Et sollicitudo sit si revera Deum quaerit, si sollicitus est ad opus Dei, ad oboedientiam, ad opprobria. Praedicentur ei omnia dura et aspera per quae itur ad Deum. Si promiserit de stabilitate sua perseverantia, post duorum mensuum circulum legatur ei haec regula per ordinem et dicatur ei: Ecce lex sub qua militare vis; si potes observare, ingredere; si vero non potes, liber discede. Si adhuc steterit, tunc ducatur in supradictum cellam noviciorum et iterum probetur in omni patientia. Et post sex mensuum circuitum legatur ei regula, ut sciat ad quod ingreditur. Et si adhuc stat, post quattuor menses iterum relegatur ei eadem regula. Et si habita secum deliberatione promiserit se omnia custodire et cuncta sibi imperata servare, tunc suscipiatur in congregatione, sciens et lege regulae constitutum quod ei ex illa die non liceat egredi de monasterio, nec collum excutere de sub iugo regulae quem sub tam morosam deliberationem licuit aut excusare aut suscipere.
- 7 English text of the Letter in FAED I, 560-561. Latin text in *Bullarium Franciscanum Romanorum Pontificum, Constitutiones, Epistolas, ac Diplomata continens Tribus Ordinibus Minorum, Clarissarum, et Poenitentium a Seraphico Patriarcha Sancto Francisco institutis concessa*, studio et labore JOANNIS HYACHINTHI SBARALEÆ, Tomus I, Romæ 1759, 6: Honorius Episcopus, Servus Servorum Dei. Dilectis filiis Prioribus, seu Custodibus Minorum Fratrum salutem et Apostolicam Benedictionem. Cum secundum consilium Sapientia nihil fit sine consilio faciendum, ne post factum poenitudo sequatur; expedit cuilibet excelsioris viae propositum aggressuro, ut praecedant palpebrae gressus suos, vires videlicet proprias discretionis moderamine

metiundo; ne si, quod absit, altiora se quaerens in comotionem dederit pedem suum; retro respiciat in salis insatuati statum convertendus, pro eo quod sui Sacrificium, quod Domino fuerat oblaturus, sale Sapientiae non condidit; sicut enim sapiens desipit, si non fervet; sic fervens confunditur, si non sapit. Quare pene in omni Religione est ordine provide institutum, ut Regulares observantias suscepturi certo tempore ipsas probent; et probentur in eis; ne sit locus de cetero poenitudini, quam non potest levitatis excusare. Auctoritate itaque vobis praesentium inhihemus, ut aliquem ad professionem vestri Ordinis, nisi per annum in probatione fuerit, admittatis. Post factam vero Professionem nullus Fratrum Ordinem vestrum relinquere audeat, nec relinquentem alicui fit licitum retinere. Inhihemus etiam, ne sub habitu vitae vestrae liceat alicui extra obedientiam evagari, et paupertatis vestrae corrumpere puritatem; quod si qui forte praesumpserint, liceat vobis in Fratres ipsos, donec resipuerint, censuram Ecclesiasticam exercere. Nulli ergo omnino hominum liceat hanc paginam nostrae inhibitionis, et concessionis infringere, vel ei ausu temerario contraire. Si quis etc. Datum apud Viterbium, x Kalendas Octobris, Pontificatus Nostri Anno Quinto.

- 8 F. ACCROCCA, *Francesco, il Cardinale Ugo di Ostia e la conferma papale della Regola*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 86 (2016) 433-460.
- 9 S. DI MATTIA SPIRITO, *La bolla "Cum secundum consilium" di Onorio III. Spunti critici per un esame delle prime trasformazioni dell'Ordine Franciscano*, (Estratto da: *Annali della Libera Università della Tuscia*, fasc. III-IV 1973-74), Viterbo 1974.
- 10 It might not be pure coincidence that the two expressions that were to mark Franciscan history so strongly, namely *conventual discipline* and *regular observance*, and which gave name to the two main branches of the

Order during the 15th century, namely the Conventuals and the Observants, were coined not by Franciscans but by two ecclesiastics and jurists, namely Jacques de Vitry and Ugo of Ostia.

- 11 ER 2,1-10.12 (FAEDI, 64-65). Latin text: FRANCESCO D'ASSISI, *Scritti*. Edizione critica a cura di CARLO PAOLAZZI, Frati Editori di Quaracchi. Fondazione Collegio S. Bonaventura, Grottaferrata 2009, 244: Si quis divina inspiratione volens accipere hanc vitam venerit ad fratres nostros, benigne recipiatur ab eis. Quodsi fuerit firmus accipere vitam nostram, multum caveant sibi fratres ne de suis temporalibus negotiis se intromittant, sed as suum ministerium, quam citius possunt, eum representent. Minister vero benigne ipsum recipiat et confortet et vite nostrae tenorem sibi diligenter exponat. Quo facto, predictus, si vult et potest spiritualiter sine impedimento, vendat omnia sua et ea omnia pauperibus studeat erogare. Caveant autem sibi fratres et ministri fratrum quod de negotiis suis nullo modo se intromittant, nec accipiant aliquam pecuniam neque per se neque per interpositam personam. Si tamen indigent, alia necessaria corporis preter pecuniam recipere possunt fratres causa necessitatis, sicut alii pauperes. Et cum reversus fuerit, minister concedat ei pannos probationis usque ad annum, scilicet duas tunicas sine caputio et cingulum et braccas et caparonem usque ad cingulum. Finito vero anno et termino probationis recipiatur ad obedientiam. Postea non licebit ei ad aliam religionem accedere neque "extra obedientiam evagari" iuxta mandatum domini pape, nam secundum Evangelium *nemo mittens manum ad aratrum et aspiciens retro aptus est regno Dei* (Lc 9,62). Si autem aliquis venerit qui sua dare non potest sine impedimento et habet spirituales voluntatem, relinquat illa et sufficit ei. Nullus recipiatur contra formam et institutionem sancte Ecclesie.

LEO XIII AND THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

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The Pecci family had strong contacts with the Franciscan movement, especially in Carpineto Romano, where it had its origins. Gioacchino Pecci, after his ordination to the priesthood, was sent to Perugia in 1841, as a pontifical delegate. He was soon consecrated bishop, and in 1843 went to Bruxelles. In 1845 he returned to Rome and was appointed bishop of Perugia, the city he already knew. Ten years after his episcopal ordination, in 1853 he was made cardinal (E. MARTIRE, *Leone XIII*, in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, VII, coll. 1158-1163). As Pope Leo XIII, he often spoke about his devotion towards Saint Francis, which had its roots during his youthful years. These words written by him in the encyclical *Auspicato concessum* are a witness: “From our adolescence, We were accustomed to admire and honour Francis of Assisi with a particular devotion, and it is our glory to be enrolled in the Franciscan family” (LEO XIII, *Auspicato concessum*, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 15 (1882) 146).

Leo XIII and the Third Order of Saint Francis

“Gioacchino Pecci had his direct contact with the reality of the Third Franciscan Order in Perugia around 1871 during his meetings with a Capuchin friar, Antonio da Reschio, who presented the bishop with his courageous plan to revive the Third Order in Umbria, where it was dying out. Monsignor Pecci not only blessed the proposal, but made it his own. In May 1872 he became a member of the Third Order, receiving the habit in the Franciscan friary of Monteripido. He prepared

himself to this event through a spiritual retreat, and after his entry he wanted to spend some days on La Verna for a period of reflection. He periodically went to the Portiuncula to gain the indulgence and he visited the other sanctuaries of Assisi” (A.A. MORICHETTI, *Leone XIII e il Terzo Ordine francescano*, in L. TEMPERINI (ed.), *Terziari francescani in età moderna, antico e nuovo mondo. Atti del VI° Convegno di Studi Francescani. Forza viva nella Chiesa d'ieri e di oggi*, Roma 1952, 50; S. PÉANO, *Storia del Terz'Ordine francescano*, Modena 1969, 108).

During the period of his stay as bishop of Perugia he wrote two letters and gave a speech to the Third Order. The first letter, of 20 December 1871, defined the Third Order as a holy institution “which receives all those who live outside the cloister, with the aim of preserving them from a corrupt world, through the practice of pious exercises.” He also expressed his joy at the fact that the Third Order was being reborn and was changing the social fabric of the times. In its conclusion, the letter expressed the desire of the cardinal that the congregation would spread and grow numerically.

The speech of 26 November 1875, which followed upon the nomination of cardinal Pecci as protector of the Third Order on the part of Pius IX, was addressed to the Tertiaries of Assisi. In his speech the cardinal protector told them: “Having been appointed as your Patron, I would dearly like you all to know, my beloved ones, that on my part I will strive with all my efforts to favour in the best manner your holy Institute, so that it can always grow, and become stronger in virtue.”

In 1877 cardinal Pecci published a pastoral letter addressed to his diocese, in which he showed

the excellency and usefulness of the Secular Third Order and expressed his wish that it would spread to all parishes.

The social question, which was so dear to the heart of Pope Leo XIII, was a mission entrusted also to the Franciscan Third Order. In fact, Leo wanted the Tertiaries to enter in an active way in the positive construction of political, social and religious life at the end of the 19th century. The Pope saw the necessity to introduce the Franciscan ideals in order to solve the complex social and religious problems of the times, and for this reason he recommended the institution of fraternities in all the parishes, not only in those which were close to the communities and friaries of the First Order. His action was extended to cardinals, bishops, the curial environment and the people. We know of about 128 documents of Leo XIII regarding the Third Order, including also those published by the Roman Curia. Among these it is opportune to mention especially the encyclical letters *Auspicato concessum* (17 September 1882), *Humanum genus* (20 April 1884), *Quod auctoritate apostolica* (22 December 1885), the Apostolic Constitution *Misericors Dei Filius* (30 May 1883). We also recall the bulla of unification of the Family of the Franciscan Observants *Felicitate quadam* (4 October 1897).

Just four years after his election to the chair of Saint Peter, Pope Leo XIII published the encyclical *Auspicato concessum*, dated 17 September 1882, which commemorated the seventh centenary of the birth of Francis of Assisi, and promoted his virtues and his Christian way of perfection in the following of the Lord. The pontiff in the first part of the document recalls the religious story of the saint of Assisi, and expresses a desire:

“Such an enthusiasm is not sufficient by itself. In fact, one has to be persuaded that the honours that we give to Saint Francis are particularly acceptable to him, if they are also fruitful to the ones who follow his footprints. Now the most substantial and perennial profit consists in this, namely, that all persons see a semblance of the sublime virtues of him who they admire and procure to become even better by imitating him” (*ASS* 15 (1882) 146).

Later on in the same document, Leo XIII speaks about the Third Order and its illustrious members, among whom there are many nobles, popes, cardinals, bishops, some of whom are already venerated as saints and blessed in the Church. According to the Pope, it was thanks to the

Tertiaries “that many differences between parties were extinguished or resolved, that weapons were kept afar from the hands of those who wielded them because of quarrels and misunderstandings. The members of the Third Order procured comfort to the poor, they kept away lustfulness, which devours all riches and is an instrument of corruption. As a consequence, domestic peace and public tranquillity ensued, as well as integrity of customs and meekness, the right use and administration of property, which are the best elements of civilisation and well-being. All these were born within the roots of the Third Order: if these good things should not be lost, Europe should be grateful for the most part to Francis” (*ASS* 15 (1882) 150).

The Pope also made a strong appeal to Tertiaries in order to defend Christian social values against the ever-growing naturalism and the socialist ideology, which he regarded as threats to social life. He indicated the Christian spirit as a means to win over every evil which tries to destroy divine teaching, and proposed the figure of Saint Francis as an example to imitate, and the Third Order as a movement in which to realise this aim. At the end of the encyclical he wrote:

“Therefore try with all your means to know and to appreciate, as it merits, the Third Order; do so in such a way that the pastors of souls can illustrate its spirit in a clear manner, and particularly show its practical advantage, the many works for which it is rich, its convenience for individuals and for society. We should strive to reach this goal even more so, since the members of the First and Second Franciscan Orders are presently buffeted by an unworthy storm. May heaven will that all Christian people will hurry with good will to join the Third Order, in the same way that they did when they ran to the feet of the same Francis. We wish this to happen with our warmest desires and with the most justified right in the case of the Italian Tertiaries, since they, because of their common belonging to the same land of birth and because of the richness of the benefits they have received, should show to Francis a greater gratitude and devotion. Thus, after seven centuries the Italian people and the entire Christian world will see themselves drawn from confusion to serenity, from ruin to salvation, thanks to the son of Assisi” (*ASS* 15 (1882) 152-153).

Eight months later, on 30 May 1883, Leo XIII published the bulla *Misericors Dei Filius*, in order

to renew, after six centuries, the Rule of the Third Order Secular of Saint Francis. He published a new Rule, after a careful examination of the preceding Rule of Nicholas IV (18 August 1289), with the intention of simplifying it and rendering it more practical to the changing times, as well as reviewing the privileges and indulgences conceded to the Tertiaries. The Pope wanted to write the Rule personally, both in its Latin and Italian versions. In the initial section he presents a synthesis of the history of the juridical documents conceded to the Third Order along the centuries, in order then to pass on to explain the reason of the need for renewal (Cf. G. ANDREOZZI, *Storia delle Regole e delle Costituzioni dell'Ordine Franciscano Secolare. Manuale ad uso dei dirigenti e degli assistenti*, Perugia 1988, 230).

Chapter 1 deals with the acceptance of novices and their profession. The age for acceptance was lowered down to 14 years, thus opening up the Third Order even to young people. Chapter 2 speaks about discipline, about the norms on fasting and sacramental life, with a particular insistence upon monthly confession and frequent Eucharistic communion. The Rule also obliged the Tertiaries to the prayer of the canonical hours or the *Pater*, *Ave* and *Gloria*. Chapter 3 mentions the offices, the visitations, with the novelty introduced by the Rule that the canonical visitation was now a prerogative of the First Franciscan Order or of the Third Order Regular. After these chapters there are another 3 chapters dedicated to indulgences and privileges. Indulgencies occupy 2 entire chapters, one dedicated to plenary indulgences and another one to partial indulgences. The last chapter, that on privileges, was dedicated to priests who were members of the Third Order.

When Pope Leo XIII presented the new Rule during an audience given to the superiors general of the Franciscan Order on 7 July 1883, he had these words to say: “Some have thought that, as a result of the recent Constitution *Misericors Dei Filius*, the Third Order has been reduced to a simple confraternity. This has not been Our aim. As we have already stated, the nature and essence of this Institute has not been changed, since it will always remain to be a true Order and not a simple Congregation. You, Fathers of the Observance, Conventuals, Capuchins and Regular Tertiaries, have the duty to promote this *Order of penance* through priests and Visitators. Wherever your religious members are not present, you have to do

so through Delegates, so that you will attain to the aim that St. Francis and Ourselves will, for the good of society and for the enhancement of Christian piety” (*Ai Superiori Generali Francescani* (7 luglio 1883).

In the years 1883-1893 Leo XIII and the Roman Curia committed themselves to the spreading of the Third Order. A papal document worthy of note in this regard is the encyclical *Humanum genus* of 20 April 1884. In it Pope Leo XIII addresses the bishops with these words:

“Taking advantage of this present occasion, We want to recall the opportune initiative on which We spoke on other occasions, namely that of warmly promoting and protecting the Third Order of Saint Francis. Recently we have mitigated the Rule of this Order with prudent condescension. In fact, according to the spirit of its institution, this Order aims to invite all men to imitate Jesus Christ, to love the Church, to practice Christian virtues” (LEO XIII, *Humanum genus*, in *Enchiridion delle Encicliche*, 3, Leone XIII (1878-1903), ed. E. LORA, R. SIMIONATI, Bologna 1997, 317. Cfr. *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 16 (1883) 430-431).

The Pope also spoke about the Third Order of St. Francis in the encyclical *Quod Auctoritate* of 22 December 1885: “In order that these virtues of which we are speaking can be held in a constant manner, it would not be mistaken to entrust them in a stable manner to the custody and care of an institution. Venerable brothers, you can easily understand how important this is: namely, that each and every one you in your dioceses take care to promote the Third Franciscan Order, which is known as the *Secular* Order. Certainly, in order to conserve and increase the spirit of penance in the multitude of Christians, the examples and grace of the father Francis of Assisi are most valid. Indeed, in the heights of innocence of his life, he reached such a summit of zeal that he mortified himself, in such a way that he appeared to carry in himself the image of Jesus Christ crucified, not only in his life but also in his actions, as a result of the stigmata that were stamped on his body. The laws of his Order, which we are opportunely mitigating, are fairly easy to observe: but they have a great importance regarding Christian virtue” (Cfr. LEO XIII, *Quod Auctoritate*, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 18 (1885) 259).

In 1893 the first Congress of the Third Order was organised at Val-des-Bois in France, in the industrial establishment of Léon Harmel (1829-

1915). He was a Catholic industrialist, and realised and developed Catholic social ideals. He was profoundly religious, and was a Franciscan Tertiary since 1860. He strove to bring about reform among worker classes, by founding the “Catholic Association of industrials of the north.” He organised pilgrimages of French workers to Rome in 1887, 1889 and 1891. He also knew Leo XIII personally, and was received for a private audience and kept a continual correspondence with the same pontiff between 1894 and 1899 (Cfr. F. DUCHINI, *Harmel, Léon-Pierre-Louis*, in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, VI, coll. 1364-1365; J.L. COFFEY, *Léon Harmel Entrepreneur as Catholic Social Reformer*, Notre Dame, IN 2003, in <http://www.missa.org/lh.html> See also the entry about Léon Harmel in http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Léon_Harmel

These Congresses were an answer to the indications of Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Rerum novarum* (*Acta Sanctae Sedis* 23 (1890-91) 641-670). This document denounced the problems of the working class, to which it proposed various remedies, among which the action of the Church in which the Third Order of St. Francis would have assumed an important role, by its insertion in the organs of government and in the rebirth of professional corporations, in order to provide a common protection. The Congress was celebrated from 18 to 20 July 1893, under the presidency of Fr. Luca Turbiglio, delegate of the OFM Minister General for the Tertiaries.

The work of Harmel proceeded during the succeeding years. Five national Congresses were celebrated in France between 1893 and 1899. Even in Italy this initiative was introduced. In 1894 the first Inter-regional Congress of the Franciscan Third Order was celebrated in Novara from 24 to 27 September. Important decisions were taken regarding the social question. Some of them comprised the following:

“The Congress exhorts all Tertiaries not to isolate themselves from a public social life, but to work continually to introduce in society the Christian principles and the social influence of the Church [...] It recommends to Tertiaries the assiduous study on the practical level and according to the teachings of the Holy Father Leo XIII, of social problems which weigh over the minds and preoccupy the spirits of our times. [...] The Congress therefore recommends to Tertiaries and to Catholic societies to provide mutual help

among the sons of workers, in rural unions and common funds, in factories, in workers’ unions, in the secretariats of the people and lastly in all those works which serve to defend the people from the tyranny of modern capitalism and from that tyranny of the revolutionaries of the people who abuse the name of capitalism. [...] May it make the right decisions so that the Third Order will pay attention to the local Administrations, occupying itself in a more active role in the administrative elections (of communes and provinces), so that our Communes will be characterised by a Christian spirit in defence of religious, moral and material interests of all social classes.”

In 1895 the first General Congress in Italy was organised in 10-13 September 1895 at Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi, and was presided by the minister general of the Friars Minor Fr. Luigi da Parma. The Congress recommended to Tertiaries in particular to make an assiduous study on the practical level and according to the teachings of Leo XIII, of the social problems which were relevant during those times, by studying the true needs of the people, taking care of remedies, giving back to work its sanctifying and emancipating characteristics, promoting among all the notion of justice rendered perfect through charity, and that reciprocal respect and love that could build genuine fraternity among all social classes for the moral and material benefit of all.

Pope Leo XIII addressed a letter of congratulations to Luigi da Parma on 29 October 1895, in which he praised the Tertiaries for their religious revival. At the same time Leo XIII continued to send letters to the Third Order, in which he offered the secular Franciscans the same privileges and indulgences enjoyed by the Franciscan families of the First and Second Order. This recognition was sent by a pontifical *Breve* on 7 July 1896.

In 1900 the Third Order organised its first world Congress in Rome on 22-26 September. The Congress wanted to offer a concrete sign of gratitude to the Pope and a demonstration of the growth of the Order and of its living and operative presence in the Church and in society. According to the programme of the meeting, it touched upon social themes, particularly the questions of the life and work of Tertiaries with regards to charitable works, and to the solution of economic and social problems. The Pope wrote a special *Breve* to the Congress on 21 September 1900, in

which he reconfirmed his commitment to favour and promote the Order as a school of Franciscan holiness. On 27 September Pope Leo XIII received the Congress members in audience, and had these touching words to address to them: "I also am a Tertiary, and from my youth I have loved the Third Order. I am a Tertiary like you all."

It is certain that the year 1900 marked a significant moment in the recent history of the Order since, through an effort on the part of the Holy See and of the families of the First Order, it constituted a rich answer of the Franciscan laity to the wishes of the Pope. With the world Congress of Rome, the Third Order rediscovered its missionary projection within Christianity and gave a proof of its active presence in the modern Catholic movement.

M. Bigi summarises the papal action in favour of the Tertiaries in these words: "Leo XIII made of the Third Order a Third Order with a social proposal, based upon the Gospel, lived by lay people in the midst of social problems. He made of the Third Order a proposal to renew an Institute without changing its nature, by rendering it more adapted to bring about freedom, brotherhood and equality among all" (M. BIGI, *L'universale salute. Profilo storico dell'Ordine Francescano Secolare*, Roma 1990, 141).

The Order of Friars Minor - The action of Leo XIII in favour of the Unification of the Observant Families

Leo XIII not only showed great interest towards the Third Order, but he also decided to intervene in the question of the family of the Friars Minor. The situation of the numerous family of the Friars Minor of the Regular Observance, divided into four groups: Observants, Reformed, Alcantarines and Recollect, was a difficult one. Pope IX had already tried to bring a reform in the encyclical *Ubi primum* of 1847, but with scant results. "While there were numerous attempts to bring about a revision and an adaptation of the general constitutions to the circumstances of the times, the true reform had to wait until the last two decades of the 19th century in order to have a possibility of success. In those decades the idea of reunification of the four families began to emerge as a serious

proposal for a reform of the entire Order" (M. CARMODY, *I quattro principi dell'Unione Leonina 1897: sfondo e contesto*, in *Antonianum* 73 (1998) 80).

During this period the Observant Family faced great problems linked to its financial crisis, to the controversy on the Holy Land, to the problem of the Spanish provinces, the so-called Ultramontane provinces, and to the controversy regarding precedence, namely the hierarchic and juridical questions linked with a unique general government, which were raised for historical reasons ever since the *Bulla Ite vos* of Leo X of 1517 (M. CARMODY, *The Leonine Union of the Order of Friars Minor 1897*, New York 1994). This situation led the new general of the Observant Friars Minor, Luigi da Parma, to take up the issue of a reform of the Order and its unification. He began to act already in 1889. The same idea was embraced by the Roman Curia and by the Pope himself.

For this reason Pope Leo XIII convoked a general chapter of the Order on 16 May 1895 under the leadership of Cardinal Egidio Mauri OP, papal delegate. The cardinal succeeded in winning over a substantial majority in favour of unification, but not before having to face insurmountable difficulties because of the difference of opinion between the Friars Minor Observants and those of the Stricter Observance (Reformed, Alcantarines), and the opposition of the Ultramontane Spanish friars. On 11 June 1895 Luigi da Parma was convoked for an audience by Pope Leo XIII in order to brief him about the proposed unification. In spite of so many difficulties, Pope Leo was adamant that unification was the best solution. During an audience with Luigi da Parma and his Definitory, the Pope stated: "God wants this union, Saint Francis is waiting for it, and the Apostolic See ardently wishes it to come about."

The solemnity of St. Francis of Assisi in 1897 was the day in which Pope Leo XIII emanated the *Bulla Felicitate quadam*, which sanctioned the unification of the families of the Observants in a unique Order with the common name of Order of Friars Minor. This paper does not enter into the discussions and protests linked with such a name given to the families of the Observance, which were presented by the Conventuals and Capuchins (Cfr. L. DIFONZO, *L'Unione Leoniana O.F.M. nel suo primo centenario 1897-1997*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 97 (1997) 304-306). In the opening

paragraph Leo XIII recalled the fact that he pertained to the Third Order and that he worked hard in its favour. Immediately after, he goes on to speak specifically about the Order of Friars Minor: “It is the principal Franciscan Order, which is now asking for Our attention and zeal. [...] Indeed, it is without doubt a famous Order and is worthy of our care and of the benevolence of the Apostolic See, being a numerous and long-standing Order of sons of Saint Francis, known with the name of the family of Friars Minor.”

In spite of the centrality of the problems of the Observants, in the *Bulla* the Pope also mentioned the other two Franciscan families of the first Order, namely the Conventual Friars and the Capuchin Friars: “We shall not decree anything new regarding the Order of Conventuals and similarly regarding the Order of Capuchins: in the future both of them may remain in the juridical status in which they are in the present.”

The Pope continued to mention the difficulties faced by the Observant families. He specifically referred to the fact that the minister general of the Order did not have absolute power in all the families, which had their own peculiar statutes and privileges which exempted them from direct obedience. This caused discord and division within the same great Franciscan family: “Now We have understood how all the present circumstances want in an absolute manner that the Franciscan Order will have unity and return to its ancient common life. In this way all divisions and discords will be abolished, and the will of all remains united to the indications and direction of one leader alone, and in this way it will return to the constitutive form given to it by the founder Patriarch. [...] Having achieved this aim, with Our Apostolic authority, in virtue of these letters, the Order of Minors, which up till now has been divided into groups, will now by Our authority be recalled to unity and to common life in the strictest meaning of the word, in such a way as to form one unique body, and do away with all distinctions of families. Thus We hereby declare it to be.”

Fifty years after, the minister general of the Friars Minor, Fr. Pacifico Perantoni, wrote an encyclical letter in which he analyzed the events and the achievements of the Order during the half century following the Leonine Union. He presented the action of the pontiff, and also presented a list of the activities of the friars. He evidenced the positive factors, but also showed the flaws and the objective difficulties along the road of full collaboration. He nevertheless recognised the foresight of Leo XIII in his strong will to unify the divided families of the Observance.

Concluding this brief presentation of the link between Pope Leo XIII and the Franciscan movement, particularly represented by the Secular Third Order and by the Order of Friars Minor, we underline the Pope’s personal interest, which was born not only out of the universal pastoral ministry of the Church at the end of the 19th century, but above all from his profound and sincere affection towards St. Francis of Assisi and his proposal of a life which was perfectly evangelical and appealing to all generations. The attraction of Franciscan spirituality and the immediate manner in which it conquered, and still conquers to our day, the hearts of so many persons, did not leave the awareness of the pontiff indifferent to it. He wanted to revive in the Franciscans of each family the fervour of the following of the Founder, and thus reawaken in the society of those times the Christian sentiments that went into defending the profoundly human values in a time of great social and ideological upheavals. His modality to go against such ideas was not merely apologetic but prophetically modern, and it merits a profound theological and social analysis. On the part of Franciscan scholars a lot of research has especially been done regarding the events linked with the Leonine Union, but we still lack an analytical and exhaustive elaboration of those elements linking Leo XIII’s relationship with the secular Franciscans. We hope that such a lacuna will be filled as soon as possible in honour of the pontiff Leo XIII who worked so tirelessly in favour of the Franciscan Tertiaries.

THE ARCHIVES OF THE MALTESE OFM PROVINCE (1970 - 2020)

*English Translation of the section from the late
G. Aquilina, Il-Frangikani Maltin (Ta' Giezu),
Malta 2011, pp. 114-116.*

Provincial Archives are a collection of documents that regarding a Province, friaries or individual friars, and which are manuscripts that the same friars have written down or received from third parties, and which because of their nature it is wise to conserve. The principal aim of the Archive is that of administration. The historical aim follows it. Regarding this argument we have already written a study.¹ We must remember that the need to conserve documentary material was always considered to be important.² Unfortunately many documents were lost as time went by, the result of human carelessness and lack of attention, and also because of other causes like fire, water, theft, suppressions of convents and monasteries, and similar mishaps. There was also a time when our ancestors believed that paper concealed the germs of plague and other contagious diseases. Because of these reasons, and others as well, the ancient documents that have been handed down to us are incomplete. Regarding the history of our churches and friaries we can state that the scant documentary material that still exists is dispersed in the *Archivi di Stato* or *Biblioteche Comunali* in Sicily. The Superiors always insisted on the need that important documents should be well conserved. This is what was done, but no precise legislation existed regarding ancient archives, as one would have expected.

The General Chapter of the Order, held in Rome in 1651, ordered the establishment of two General Archives, one in Rome in the Friary of Aracoeli, and another one in Madrid in the Friary of San Francisco el Grande, according to the division of the Provinces of the Order: *Cismontane* and *Ultramontane*.³ The General Chapter of Toledo [1658] ordered for the first time the so-called 'Report to the Chapter', in which, to this very day,

a report on the state of each Province is provided. These documents were kept in a separate room, which would resemble a Cathedral hall. The Chapter also provided information as to how this Archive should be organised.⁴

The Provincial Archives and the Friary Archives legally existed before this date. The General Chapter of Rome in 1603 ordered: *praecipimus*, that the Provinces and Friaries should have their own Archives where the most important documents pertaining to the Province or to individual friars should be safely and comfortably, *commodius*, guarded and kept under lock and key.⁵

The Archives of the Maltese Province were juridically founded by the Father Provincial Liborio Caruana from Hal Qormi on 20 Januar 1706.⁶ Among other things, besides the orders he gave regarding who should guard the Archives and what kind of documents should be placed in the same Archives, the Provincial ordered that, within the space of eight days, the friars had to provide a specifically designed closet, which would be locked, and placed in a particular place in the Library. The document states that the documentary material present at the time was dispersed, torn, with pages missing and open to everybody. This important Decree was published expressly for the friaries in Malta during the Canonical Visitation. As a result of this Decree, we can say that from that day onwards we possess a good collection of documents in our Archives. In 1729 we have information regarding the books of administration and the registers for Masses.⁷ The state and custody of these books was controlled during the Canonical Visitation.⁸ This does not mean that the books were always well kept. It all depended upon the person who was responsible. We often have whole registers which are missing. From a Circular Letter

of the Provincial Fr. Giovanni Maria d'Augusta on 6 September 1723, we know that in that year there was: *lo stabilimento dell'Archivio della Provincia*. In Malta two friars, Giovanni Antonio [Mercieca] and Massimiliano [Valletta] were entrusted to control whether the Archives were in order. The Provincial ordered them to send a detailed report of the entire documentary material in the Archives to Sicily.⁹ The reason was that the Province needed information regarding the friaries. Besides we also know that, during the same time, the General Chapter of Milan issued an order¹⁰ in which it praised the work of Fr. Domenico De Gubernatis and his monumental work *Orbis Seraphicus*, which had been printed in 1682. The Chapter, however, stressed that: *non omnia Brevia institutionum Conventuum et Provinciarum referuntur*. It ordered the Provinces to send the documentation to Luke Wadding: *si in Archivis Provinciae, aut Conventuum asservantur, omnium transmittere exemplaria, sicuti si reperiuntur Diplomata Regia donationis, Concessionis situs, aut protectoris parique diligentia transmittere exemplaria, quibus fratribus, et Ecclesijs specialia privilegia, exemptions, et honores fuerunt impensa*. This order touched also the Maltese friars, and it was particularly sent to Fr. Giovanni Antonio Mercieca, the author of the *Chronica Duorum Conventuum*. This is how nowadays we possess the first editions of the works of De Gubernatis and Wadding. In 1741 the Minister General Gaetano di Laurino again stressed that the documents should be collected.¹¹ There were other commands regarding the fact that the friaries should possess an *Inventario* of all that which belonged to the church, the friary and the individual rooms of the friars.¹² Some of these Inventories still exist today.

As we have already stated, the custody of the Libraries and Archives depended upon those who were entrusted with their care by the Provincial Chapters, as well as upon the interest shown by the Provincials, especially during Visitations. What we can state regarding our own times is that in 1970 in our Province the state of the Library and Archives was very poor. The Provincial at the time Fr. Wistin Portelli was advised to create at least a Provincial Library in which the most important publications that are of interest to the friars could be gathered. The Archives of the Province, which were scattered in many parts, practically did not exist, and the conventual Archives were abandoned. Fr. Wistin agreed with the project to create a

Provincial Library and Provincial Archives. These were created anew in the Valletta friary in order to collect in them all the good documentary material that was present in the friaries of the Province. In this way were born the Provincial Library and Archives as we have them today.¹³

NOTES

- 1 G. AQUILINA, *L'Archivio nella Legislazione dei Frati Minori*, Roma 1967 [pro manuscripto].
- 2 CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES MALTA, *Misc.* 32A, f. 156. On 17 Sep 1487 is mentioned the nomination of: *Nardo e Rainerio Calava nell'ufficio di Maestro Notario ed Archiviario*. The Archive: *pro custodiendis Actis, et Registris Notariorum defunctorum*, the Notary Archives, were founded in Valletta on 10 July 1640, and on the following day the first Archivist was nominated. He was Salvatore Ciantar; ARCHIVES ORDER OF MALTA, 469, ff. 260-261.
- 3 *Codex Redactus*, Romae 1796, c. 371, n. 3.
- 4 *Constitutiones et Statuta Generalia*, Venetiis 1718, 200-203.
- 5 *Statuta Congregationis Generalis*, Romae 1603, mp.
- 6 ARCHIVES FRANCISCAN FRIARS, LC, 3, ff. 56rv: *Frater Liborius a Melita Ordinis Minorum Regularis Observantiae Sancti Patris Nostri Francisci Lector, Praedicator, Commissarius Terrae Sanctae, Excustos, et in hac Provincia Vallis Neti, et Melitae Minister Provincialis, et Servus. Quoniam in decursu Visitationis per Nos in hoc nostro Conventu Sanctae Mariae Jesu Vallettae, Duce Domino iam incohatae compertum fuit, omnes libros originales, scripturas, ac instrumenta continentia interesse, et statum ejusdem Conventus usque modo servari assuetum fuisse in Bibliotheca, sed ab omnibus indistincte contrectari; adeo ut aliqui ex dictis libris defecerint, alii autem in partem lacerati extiterint in grave damnum ac praeiudicium Conventus praedicti, qui ob id notitiis necessariis sui status penitus caret: Volentes proinde huic adeo praeiudicali absurdo congrue providere, ne hic Conventus maius detrimentum deinceps patiat; vigore praesentis nostri Decreti perpetuo valituri decernimus, et in virtute Sanctae Obedientiae stricte praecipiendo (quantum in Nobis est) mandamus, omnino confici infra octiduum proximum Armarium ligneum pro Archivio, tribus diversis seris, ac clavibus firmandum, illudque in Bibliotheca huius Venerandi Conventus retineri: et in eodem sic clauso conservari nedum omnes libros tam antiquos tum modernos, ex laudabili studio, labore ac solertia Venerandi Patris Fratris Sebastiani a Melita Ex-Difinitoris, et actualis Guardiani eiusdem Conventus noviter confestos, verum etiam omnes, et singula scripturas, acta, instrumenta, processus, aliaque quantumvis indirecte pertinentia ad statum, et interesse ipsius Conventus, eiusve religiosorum, ac aliter quomodocumque et qualitercumque: Et in primo folio cuiuscumque libri saltem ex modernis fieri notam omnium foliorum in eodem libro conetntorum illaque subscribantur per Venerandos Patres Guardianum, binosque primos Discretos et sigillo huius nostri Conventus muniatur.*

- Nec non fieri seorsim specificum Inventarium, et repertorium omnium ac singulorum dictorum librorum et scripturarum, illudque subscribi per praedictos Patres Guardianum, et Discretorum. Mandantes, unam ex dictis clavibus detineri per Venerandum Patrem Guardianum ad praesens existentem, et qui in alias per duos primos Patres Discretos: Et quoties aperiri contigerit dictum Archivium, omnes simul conveniant in loco nec ullus clavem absque canonico, et satis urgenti impedimento per Superiorem, et sex Patres antiquiores examinando alteri committat, sed omnes personaliter accedant, et proprijs manibus (...). Et Archivio aperto coram ipsis quicquid fieri contigerit, peragatur et denuo repositis in eodem Archivio libris, seu scripturis ab eo promptis, illudque dictis tribus clavibus obseretur, retenta semper per unumquemque ex ipsis Patribus paenes se propria clave. Quod si secus actum fuerit, aut praedicti Patres Guardianus et Discreti praemissis in aliquo contrafecerint, Pater Guardianus illusque sui Guardianatus munere privetur. Dicti vero Discreti voce activa, et passiva per quinquennium omnino careant. Si tamen dictum Archivium fuerit in futurum fractum seu ab eo avulsa aliqua tabula, et subtractae, seu alteratae scripturae culpa Bibliothecarii, ille voce activa et passiva (...) in perpetuum spoliatus irremissibiliter existat. Mandantes praesens nostrum Decretum in publico refectorio hora mensae cunctis religiosis capitulariter congregatis ad sonum campanellae ad stantibus, ac audientibus perlegi, et consimile eidem in pergamento conscribi, et palam affigi in dicto Archivio, ibique perpetuo detineri, ne per aliquem ignorantia allegari queat, et toties refici, quoties ratio seu necessitas id suadebit sub poena privationis vocis activae et passivae per annum sustinendae per Venerabiles Patres Guardianum, Discretos, et Bibliothecarium insolidum et non aliter etc. Datum in dicto Nostro Convento Sanctae Mariae Jesu Civitatis Vallettae Melitae hac die vigesima mensis Januarii XIV Indictionis 1706. Fr. Liborius a Melita, Minister Provincialis. De Mandato Paternitatis Fratris Admodum Reverendae, Fr. Maximilianus a Melita Provinciae Pro-Secretarius.*
- 7 ARCHIVES FRANCISCAN FRIARS, *LC*, 6, 214: Circular Letter of Fr. Costanzo di Malta 15 Dec 1729: *dopo che si leggeranno li conti al solito avanti tutta la Comunità, e si sottoscriveranno dalli Religiosi, conservandosi bene li detti quinternoli da mettersi d'anno in anno nell'archivio assieme con li libri delle Messe.*
- 8 ARCHIVES FRANCISCAN FRIARS, *LC*, 7, 27. vi. 1732, f. 135v: *li Padri Superiori locali ci facciano trovar*
- in buon'ordine gli inventarij delle Librerie, Archivij (...).*
- 9 ARCHIVES FRANCISCAN FRIARS, *Atti Originali*, XIII, doc. 54.
- 10 ARCHIVES FRANCISCAN FRIARS, *Atti Originali*, XVII, 37-38.
- 11 ARCHIVES FRANCISCAN FRIARS, *LC*, 9, f. 89v: *Essendo ormai insoffribile, che richiedendosi notizie dalle Provincie, queste non possano darle perche non l'hanno registrate, in ogni Provincia dove non fossero stabiliti, si stabiliscano gl'Archivij, comporre in ordine le scritture, antiche, e moderne, col registrar tutto ciò, che accade ne' Libri Maestri, e col farsi venire da Conventi le copie delle scritture, che si ritrovano negl'Archivij particolari autentiche, dovendosi per questo gran punto unirsi quanto prima di Deffinitori.*
- 12 The Visitor Fr. Giovanni Battista da Monte Gargano, in a Circular Letter of 1747, wrote: *Ordiniamo a PP. Guardiani perche dian principio a formare gl'Inventarij de Conventi ne quali vogliamo che si notino con fedeltà non solo le Sagre suppellettili, ma ben anche quelle spettino al semplice uso de Poveri Frati (...); ARCHIVES FRANCISCAN FRIARS, *LC*, 9, f. 145.*
- 13 Fr. Ġoġ Aquilina was personally involved in the realisation of this ambitious project, regarding which he does not elaborate. In 1970 the Provincial Library was transferred from its restricted environment to a more spacious hall just above the southern aisle of Ta' Ġiezu Church, overlooking Grand Harbour, together with the painting of the apotheosis of the Franciscan School. It shows the triumph of the Franciscan School, the Immaculate Conception and the Franciscan Doctors. This beautiful painting has been attributed to Francesco Zahra. In the painting we note the figure of the Librarian Fr. Constantino Vella, who enriched the library with many volumes in 1729, and is shown holding in his hand the inscription: *Imitari non pigeat quod celebrare delectat* (Do not hesitate to imitate those who you delight in praising). According to Rafel Bonnici Calì, the painting is probably a late work of the artist Ġannikol Buhagiar, aided by his disciple Francesco Zahra, who was still a young artist, and it shows a link with the Neapolitan art of Francesco Solimena. The Archives of the Province were organised in two rooms in the Provincial Curia in Valletta. As time passed, this space also proved to be insufficient for the quantity of documentary material collected by Fr. Ġoġ, who from 1970 to 2012 was Librarian and Archivist, and Chronicler of the Province until 1996. In the early 1990s the Archives were transferred to where they are today, in the premises of the old Theological Seminary in the same friary (note by fr. Noel Muscat ofm).

COMPLETE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF EARLY FRANCISCAN SOURCES NOW ONLINE

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On August 31, 2020, the *Commission on the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition* (CFIT) announced the full incorporation onto its website of the classic three-volume series on the life and mission of St. Francis, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, as well as a companion volume, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*.

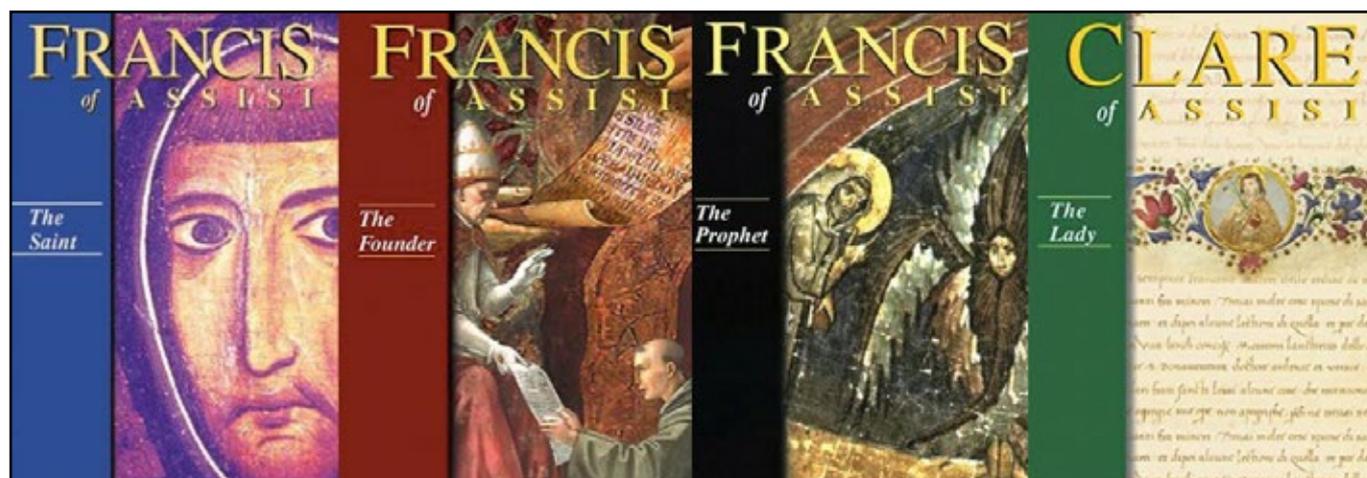
The original print compilation of the primary sources on the Franciscan movement, published between 1999 and 2001, was the work of Franciscan scholars Regis J. Armstrong, OFM, Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv., and William J. Short, OFM. A separate volume, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., was published in 2006. In addition to these translations, for the benefit of researchers and students this online version also incorporates the original Latin texts.

The multi-year task of bringing the several thousand pages of primary sources, translations, annotations, introductions and footnotes to the web was the painstaking work of Dr. Daniel T. Michaels, an expert in educational technology and digital humanities at the National Institute for Newman Studies in Pittsburgh (USA).

This new web version of the writings of Sts. Francis and Clare and the early Franciscan witnesses will make the original Latin documents and English-language translations instantly accessible to a new generation of scholars, students and lovers of *il Poverello* across the globe. This version is optimized for the users of mobile devices.

Fr. Dominic Monti, OFM, chair of CFIT and overseer of this six-year project made note of the significance of this web version: “Our goal was to bring our foundational Franciscan sources to the widest possible audience, especially to people in countries around the world who do not have ready access to the print volumes. CFIT is very grateful to the *Academy of American Franciscan History* for several grants which enabled us to bring this long project to fruition.”

Now containing the complete writings of Francis and Clare of Assisi and the early witnesses to their lives, ministry, and canonization, the website can be accessed by students, researchers, and lovers of things Franciscan by going to the CFIT website at: <https://www.franciscantradition.org>.



Jubilee for Creation



A Jubilee is a time to return to God our loving Creator. We cannot live in harmony with creation if we are not at peace with the Creator who is the source and origin of all things. As Pope Benedict observed, “the brutal consumption of creation begins where God is missing, where matter has become simply material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate measure, where everything is simply our property” (Meeting with Priests, Deacons, and Seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, 6 August 2008). The Jubilee season calls us to think once again of our fellow human beings, especially the poor and the most vulnerable. We are asked to re-appropriate God’s original and loving plan of creation as a common heritage, a banquet which all of our brothers and sisters share in a spirit of conviviality, not in competitive scramble but in joyful fellowship, supporting and protecting one another. A Jubilee is a time for setting free the oppressed and all those shackled in the fetters of various forms of modern slavery, including trafficking in persons and child labour. We also need once more to listen to the land itself, which Scripture calls ‘adamah’, the soil from which man, Adam, was made. Today we hear the voice of creation admonishing us to return to our rightful place in the natural created order – to remember that we are part of this interconnected web of life, not its masters. The disintegration of biodiversity, spiralling climate disasters, and unjust impact of the current pandemic on the poor and vulnerable: all these are a wakeup call in the face of our rampant greed and consumption. Particularly during this Season of Creation, may we be attentive to the rhythms of this created world. For the world was made to communicate the glory of God, to help us to discover in its beauty the Lord of all, and to return to him. The earth from which we were made is thus a place of prayer and meditation. “Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense” (Querida Amazonia, 56). The capacity to wonder and to contemplate is something that we can learn especially from our indigenous brothers and sisters, who live in harmony with the land and its multiple forms of life.



*Pope Francis
Message for the Celebration of World Day of
Creation
1 September 2020*

Abbreviations

Writings of St. Francis

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

Sources for the Life of St. Francis

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

Sources for the Life of St. Clare

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

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Cover picture:

Cover pic. Gentile da Fabriano, St. Francis receiving the Stigmata (1420)