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EDITORIAL

FRATERNITY AND THE CHRISTIAN DIMENSION

On 3 October Pope Francis went to visit the Tomb of Saint Francis in Assisi. After celebrating Mass on the altar in the crypt beneath the sarcophagus where the remains of Saint Francis are venerated, Pope Francis signed and promulgated a new Encyclical Letter entitled *Fratelli tutti. On fraternity and social friendship*. The Encyclical is inspired by the witness of Francis of Assisi, the builder of fraternity and a champion for dialogue with all men, a universal symbol of peace and harmony with God and creation.

It has been common during these last years to speak about Francis of Assisi as an innovator in favour of human fraternity, particularly with reference to his visit to the East during the Fifth Crusade in 1219-1220, during which he met the Muslim Sultan of Egypt al-Malik al-Kamil, a sworn enemy of the Christian armies who went to regain the Holy Land from the hands of the Saracens. Dialogue and fraternal encounters with the Muslim world have been at the forefront of Pope Francis' mission, especially during his visit to Abu Dhabi where he signed the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, or the Abu Dhabi Declaration, a joint statement between the Catholic Church and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayyeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

In a certain way, both this Document and the Encyclical are inter-related. In fact, in *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis writes: "Issues of human fraternity and social friendship have always been a concern of mine. In recent years, I have spoken of them repeatedly and in different settings. In this Encyclical, I have sought to bring together many of those statements and to situate them in a broader context of reflection. In the preparation of *Laudato si'* I had a source of inspiration in my brother Bartholomew, the Orthodox Patriarch, who has spoken forcefully of our need to care for creation. In this case, I have felt particularly encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, with whom I met in Abu Dhabi, where we declared that 'God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters.' This was no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment. The present Encyclical takes up and develops some of the great themes raised in the Document that we both signed."

The positive note about such initiatives is that Christians are seen to be apostles of peace and fraternity. They have been able to admit past mistakes and atrocities that were committed in the name of Christianity. The ones who were the first to take such initiatives were the men at the top, namely the Popes themselves, beginning from John XXIII with *Pacem in terris*, Paul VI who opened the papacy to journey in the modern world, John Paul II, the champion of dialogue with Jews and Muslims alike, Benedict

XVI who prudently sought to give a doctrinal basis for inter-religious dialogue, and Francis who has proposed other methods of approaching others, including that of mutual friendship based upon human values. In all these efforts, the figure of Saint Francis stands out as one of the most obvious in order to build bridges.

Unfortunately, there is one problem in all these efforts, namely that what any Pope would mean for Christians the world over (maybe also including many non-Catholics) does not ring the same bell for religions like Islam, since they do not have a strong central figure who is the focal point of reference. In this way, the Christian notion of dialogue encounters a seemingly unsurmountable barrier, namely the difficulty to dialogue with different figures whose authority is limited to specific groups. Maybe this calls for a more careful approach in the effort to build human fraternity and friendship. It is not just a question of signing joint-declarations, or of shaking hands and embracing (actions which sadly seem to become unfashionable among human beings). To quote a highly respectable Muslim religious authority as an inspiration for an Encyclical that speaks about fraternity as envisaged by the *vir catholicus et totus apostolicus* who was Saint Francis is, to be polite, a subtle unintentional lack of respect to the true significance of fraternity as Francis envisaged it. If it is highly laudible as a genuine and sincere effort at building peace, it stops short of indicating the origin of true peace.

Benedict XVI's speech in Regensburg in 2006 was an occasion of deep anger in sections of the Muslim world. Yet he said nothing offensive. Benedict XVI just spoke the truth about the danger of intolerance, wherever it comes from. His words of apology to those who felt offended were clear: "I am deeply sorry for the reactions in some countries to a few passages of my address at the University of Regensburg, which were considered offensive to the sensibility of Muslims. These in fact were a quotation from a medieval text, which do not in any way express my personal thought. I hope this serves to appease hearts and to clarify the true meaning of my address, which in its totality was and is an invitation to frank and sincere dialogue, with mutual respect."

Frank and sincere dialogue with mutual respect calls for two equal partners. It calls for a sincere recognition of truth. Francis of Assisi never entered into dialogue without being truthfully faithful to his identity as a Christian. He never accepted a dialogue in which God is mentioned in a way that pleases both parties, and avoids to mention the God of Jesus Christ. Fraternity and friendship are certainly human values that bind us together irrespective of our beliefs. But they cannot be considered as the foundation of true dialogue when it comes to religious beliefs. We Christians are not called to advocate an irenic dialogue to appease any person who would accept it only as long as we do not mention Jesus Christ, the Son of God. With all due respect and reverence to the sincere efforts towards peace and reconciliation, which are to be fostered at all times, fraternity has a Christian dimension. It was that dimension that Saint Francis preached, even to the Muslims.

Noel Muscat ofm

THE MAKING OF THE REGULA NON BULLATA (1221)

Noel Muscat OFM

The year 1221 is generally considered as the year in which the general chapter of the friars Minor, held at the Portiuncula, approved the *Regula non bullata*, or *Earlier Rule*, so called because it never received papal confirmation, which was to come two years later on 29 November 1223 with the *Regula bullata*, or *Later Rule*, confirmed by Pope Honorius III with the Bulla *Solet annuere*. Many historians of the Order have spoken of the chapter of 1221 as having been the famous “chapter of mats” presided by Cardinal Hugo of Ostia, in which about five thousand brothers took part.¹

The chain of events that led to this chapter have to be reconstructed in order to provide us with the historical circumstances that prompted the brothers to approve the Rule. There is a possibility that the chapter of mats could have been celebrated on 2 June 1219, some weeks before Francis set sail for the East. On that occasion cardinal Hugo could have been present for the capitular meeting. In 1221 Pentecost fell on 30 May, and this was the day when the *Regula non bullata* was approved. In between we find Francis away from Italy. He journeyed to Acre and hence to Damietta in Egypt during the summer of 1219, when he met the sultan of Egypt during the Fifth Crusade. Francis could have returned to Italy sometime during the early autumn of 1219, but it is more probable that he stayed in the East for a longer period of time, and only returned after Pentecost Sunday, 17 May 1220, since on that year the chapter was celebrated not on that date, but on 29 September, when Francis decided to renounce the leadership of the Order in favour of Peter Cattani, and after he had requested Pope Honorius III to appoint Cardinal Hugo of Ostia as cardinal protector of the Order.² The date of 1222 for the chapter of mats has also been suggested, corresponding to Pentecost, 22 May 1222.³

One of the salient elements in the *Regula non bullata* is chapter 16, which is entitled: *De euntibus inter saracenos et alios infideles*. The

theme of the brothers going among Saracens and other non-believers could have been discussed in view of the missionary expeditions of the friars Minor from 1217 onwards. It is one of the signs pointing to a long process of formation of the Rule of 1221, which began way back in 1209, when Francis went to Pope Innocent III to obtain oral approval of his *propositum vitae*.⁴ The general chapter of Pentecost, 21 May 1217, was the pivotal moment for the sending forth of the brothers to the lands beyond the Alps and beyond the sea. The unfortunate experiences of the first missionaries in Germany and Hungary might have contributed to the formulation of a nucleus of legislation for a better organisation of missionary expeditions.⁵ Indeed, the general chapter of 1219 was instrumental in the sending forth of new and better equipped missionaries to France, Spain, Germany. Francis, as we know, took the opportunity of that chapter to set sail for the East, where the brothers had already been present ever since 1217 in the Crusader stronghold of Acre. Thus, we can conjecture that chapter 16 of the *Regula non bullata* could have well been written before Francis’ departure and not after his return, that is, in 1219 and not in 1221.⁶

Another point that must be made regards the fact that, according to the sources that speak about the chapter of mats, the impression given by the same sources is that Francis acted with an energetic sense of authority in the face of the insistent request on the part of the learned brothers to adopt one of the established religious rules, in line with the explicit command of the Fourth Lateran Council in canon 13 of its legislation.⁷ The fact that Francis strongly opposed the idea indicates that he still exerted considerable influence among the brothers, in other words, that he was still the leader. Now this could only have been possible in 1219, since in 1221 Francis had already renounced the juridical leadership of the brothers, even

though he certainly retained his role as spiritual leader of the brotherhood.

Maybe a good clue as to the formation of the *Regula non bullata* as we know it can be found in the description that Jacques de Vitry presents in a Letter written from Genoa in 1216, on the occasion of his consecration as bishop of Acre just before his departure to this Crusader stronghold. In the Letter he explicitly calls the brothers with their official name, *fratres minores*. Coming from an extra-Franciscan source, this could very well be the first time that the name is officially used. The brothers who in 1209 considered themselves as *virii poenitentiales de civitate Assisii oriundi*,⁸ since they had no official name at the time, would have developed a self-awareness of their identity by the time of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. The fact that Francis himself chose the name *fratres minores* for the brotherhood⁹ is a proof that this choice was made before 1216, when an outsider to the Order in the person of Jacques de Vitry explicitly refers to the brothers with this name.¹⁰ In his Letter, Jacques de Vitry writes: “The brothers of this Order assemble once a year in a designated place to rejoice in the Lord and eat together; with the advice of good men they draw up and promulgate holy laws and have them confirmed by the Lord Pope.”¹¹

This description of the annual gatherings of the brothers could very well be the earliest reference to the general chapter of Pentecost, which after 1216 is more documented, even though it probably existed even before, since the Rule of 1221 states that the ministers were obliged to celebrate the annual chapter with their brothers on the feast of Saint Michael, whereas the ministers coming from beyond the mountains and beyond the sea were to gather for the general chapter once every three years, and those hailing from the Italian peninsula once a year, on the occasion of Pentecost.¹²

These chapters would have provided the best occasions for the brothers in order to review their *forma vitae* both regarding its inspirational charism as well as regarding the practical consequences that ensued, as a result of a growing fraternity and of new experiences of evangelisation. Much has already been written regarding the formation of the *Regula non bullata*, and I do not pretend to add anything new to what has already been stated by eminent scholars. It would, however, be helpful to delve into the technicalities of the general chapters in order to understand how such a process would have occurred. This could help us to understand

some of the “holy laws” which the brothers drew up during the chapters, “with the advice of good men” and which were subsequently “conformed by the Lord Pope.” Following Jacques de Vitry’s assertion, we will consider these three elements, namely: (1) *consilio bonorum virorum*; (2) *faciunt et promulgant institutiones sanctas*; (3) *a domino papa confirmatas*.

The advice of good men

Francis and his first brothers were certainly not up to standard in the knowledge of ecclesiastical laws. They were, for the most part, laymen. If we refer to the events of their first calling we notice the utter simplicity and naïveté with which they consulted the Missal in the church of San Nicolò *ad pedem plateam* in Assisi.¹³ From the very beginning Francis was aware of his limitations, even though in the *Testament* he insists: “And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.”¹⁴ The seemingly presumptuous affirmation of the *Testament* is not to be taken in the sense that Francis deemed himself to be an expert in the technicalities of religious life, but rather that he was convinced that the original inspiration to live according to the *forma sancti Evangelii* was revealed to him by Christ himself. The problem was not the inspiration in itself, but the concrete way of making it known and lived by the brothers, and especially of having the Church approve such a way of life that seemed to be a kind of misfit in ecclesiastical canon law. The fact that the Church was facing a serious crisis because of lay movements that were getting out of hand in their insistence upon being the true interpreters of Gospel perfection, did not help Francis at all in his endeavour to go to the Lord Pope and present his *propositum vitae* for approval in 1209. At the same time, we cannot help noticing that Francis was aware of his inability to make any tangible progress without the support of the Church’s hierarchy, and without the expert help of ecclesiastics who could find a canonical form for the way of life he was proposing.

Who could have been these “good men” who would have helped Francis with their advice? We have various examples in the Sources. One of them was certainly bishop Guido I of Assisi.¹⁵ His role in the early stages of Francis’ conversion was very important, and he was the one who counselled

Francis before his decision to renounce to his father's possessions in front of the same bishop. The *Legend of Three Companions* is very clear about this important role of counsellor exercised by bishop Guido.¹⁶ It was the same Guido who offered his help to Francis when the latter presented himself at the papal curia of the Lateran in order to request approval of his *propositum* from Innocent III. Celano offers us an intelligent picture of the event, in which we come to know the prudence of Guido I, and at the same time the fact that he might have felt irritated that Francis would have come to Rome without even consulting him.¹⁷ One has to remember that, at that time, the fraternity was confined to the town of Assisi, and it was only bishop Guido who would have had jurisdiction over the brothers. Francis was seemingly unaware of such technicalities. This is another sign of his ingenuous attitude to canon law, which called for more trust in "good men" like Guido who could direct Francis' efforts. In Rome Francis also could make use of the good and kind services of cardinal John of Saint Paul, bishop of Sabina, who introduced him to the pope.¹⁸

At this point in time the fraternity was still at its very beginnings and no chapters were celebrated. However, given that the question of a form of life was at stake, the nucleus of what was later to develop as a fully-fledged rule for a religious order was certainly a matter of concern for the Church and Francis was also aware of the need to consult expert ecclesiastics in order to have it approved.

Was Francis aware of the problem that would ensue later on when his charismatic ideal would be channelled into the official canonical structure of the Church? I do not personally think that such a matter would have posed a problem for Francis at this stage, at least not in the sense that Paul Sabatier intends to portray it when he states: "When the priest sees himself vanquished by the prophet he suddenly changes his method. He takes him under his protection, he introduces his harangues into the sacred canon, he throws over his shoulders the priestly chasuble. The days pass on, the years roll by, and the moment comes when the heedless crowd no longer distinguishes between them, and it ends by believing the prophet to be an emanation of the clergy. This is one of the bitterest ironies of history."¹⁹

Sabatier's thesis is certainly open to debate, and there might be much truth in it as well. However, one cannot help feeling that it is rather biased and a fruit of historical events that might not have concerned Francis at all. If Francis was so naïve

as to permit ecclesiastics to tamper with his inspiration, then we cannot understand why he vehemently opposed the same ecclesiastics (including learned friars) who wanted to channel his inspiration into the mainstream of tradition of the ancient monastic and canonical orders. Neither would we understand why he was so forceful in insisting about his cherished values after renouncing the government of the Order and while dictating his *Testament*. Francis was no such man. He was strong-willed in his endeavour to make the *apostolica vivendi forma* understood and approved by the Church, and that is precisely why he was intelligent enough to make recourse to the same Church as an institution in order to realise his project. That is where his role during the general chapters that formulated the *Regula non bullata* comes in.

The episode of Francis in front of cardinal Hugo and the learned brothers during the chapter is a case in point to prove how Francis was willing to listen to the advice of "good men", but only insofar as they did not block his freedom to propose the way of life of the Gospel to the brotherhood without any need to remain chained to the monastic or canonical tradition. Going back to the text from the *Verba Sancti Francisci*, we can discover both Francis' willingness to listen to the advice of "good men" as well as his stubborn resistance to their conservative approach to his *forma vitae*. It was no easy task. Present for the chapter was cardinal Hugo, who would become Pope Gregory IX, the pope of the *Decretals* promulgated in 1234. He was a professional canonist and was certainly in agreement with the ministers and learned brothers who would have preferred Francis to follow the orders of the Fourth Lateran Council and choose one of the monastic or canonical rules that had formed the backbone of religious life in the Latin church ever since the 5th century. Besides the Rule of Saint Benedict, which was more adapted for a monastic setting, there was the so-called Rule of Saint Augustine, which was followed by regular canons, and especially was the rule that was adopted by Saint Dominic when he founded the Order of Preachers. Maybe, this would have been the rule that the learned brothers would have preferred to adopt for the Order of Minors. Another possibility would have been a return to the monastic Benedictine tradition, but on the Cistercian model. This seems to have been a remote possibility for the friars Minor, but given that the chapter of 1221 was presided by cardinal Raniero Capocci, who was a Cistercian monk, there might have been some influence exerted on the learned brothers. We can-

not know for sure what the learned brothers were thinking in precise terms, but they were certainly contrary to the contents of the *Regula non bullata* as it had developed during the period 1209-1221, at a moment when it seemed that it would be chosen as the binding rule for the Order.

Cardinal Hugo remained silent in the face of Francis' defence of his Gospel ideal. Maybe he did not want to interfere directly, even though we know that he did assume an important part in the writing of the *Regula bullata* in 1223, which would end up being the only Rule that the Church agreed to confirm for Saint Francis. As a canonist, Hugo might have considered the text of the *Regula non bullata* not very legalistic, and maybe too spiritual with its abundant citations of Scripture. In the end he might have also convinced Francis of the need to make this Rule more canonically accepted by the Roman Curia, and again Francis listened to the cardinal's advice and let him and brother Bonizo of Bologna, another canonist, have an important role in the drafting of the *Regula bullata* of 1223, in which, however, he retains his own stamp at the very beginning and end of the same Rule, namely, that the rule and life of the friars Minor was that of observing the Holy Gospel.²⁰

Draw up and promulgate holy laws

The second element underlined by Jacques de Vitry concerns the fact that the general chapters of the Order were the occasion for the brothers to draw up and promulgate "holy laws." The methodology used by Francis and the brothers could hardly have been reminiscent of the way in which general or provincial chapters in the Order are celebrated nowadays. In other words, they would not have had, as their prime purpose, the enacting of laws, statutes or constitutions. At the same time the brothers did decide upon a plan of action, and therefore, in a certain way, their decisions had the effect of being "holy laws" binding upon all the fraternity, and resulting from various experiences that called for a clear indication to follow on the part of all. In other words, the formation of such "holy laws", which ultimately resulted in the drafting of the *Regula non bullata*, was a gradual process of growth by trial and error, which tried to give a canonical structure to an inspiration that seemed so cut off from the prudence of lawmakers and canonists.

We have a clear example of the simplicity and practicality of the early chapters in the description given by Jordan of Giano of the chapter of 1221 when an organised group of brothers were sent to Germany, among them the same Jordan.²¹ The attitude of Francis is one of attentive listening to the brothers during the chapter, and especially of a sense of respect towards the vicar of the saint, namely brother Elias, who was entrusted with the juridical government of the Order during that same chapter, after the premature death of Pietro Cattani on 10 March 1221. One notices that Francis took the initiative of reminding Elias about the need to send brothers to missionary expeditions to Germany. The fact that the brothers had not yet set foot in Germany is not correct, since we know that the first brothers went on a suicide mission in 1217, after which they had to return because they had gone ill-prepared and ill-equipped, unable as they were to communicate with the local population. Francis was physically weak, and this is another sign that we are dealing with an event that occurred after his return from the East in 1220. But he still exerted considerable influence when it came to encourage the brothers to be faithful to their Gospel calling.

Many scholars of Franciscan history have studied the development of the *Regula non bullata*, particularly during its early stages of formation, from 1209 to 1215, and the effects of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and of the later developments of missionary expeditions in 1217 and 1219, as well as the effects of the papal interventions in favour of the friars Minor, and the institution of the novitiate year through the Bulla *Cum secundum consilium* of 22 September 1220. It was obvious that this rapid change brought about with it a pressing need for legislation, as did the increasing number of brothers and their presence in so many regions outside the primitive nucleus of the Umbrian valley.

We do not exactly know the role that Francis played in the promulgation of these laws that were governing the Order according to the canons of the Church. Maybe Francis was more practical in his approach to legislation, and would leave legal technicalities to experts like cardinal Hugo and the learned brothers and ministers. We do have an example of his practicality when it came to propose a praxis to follow in the chapter, in the *Letter to a Minister*, where he speaks about the brothers who sin mortally. He proposes a practice that condensed part of the *Regula non bullata*, chapters 6 and 20, and would enter nearly *verbatim* in chapter 7 of the *Regula bullata*. Francis proposes this method-

ology for discussion in the chapter of Pentecost.²²

The relevance of the general chapters in the formation of a legislation for the Order, and hence in the formation of the *Regula non bullata*, and subsequently of the *Regula bullata*, is fundamental in order to comprehend how the brothers succeeded in organising a *corpus* of “holy laws” during the crucial years of the fledgling fraternity. Kajetan Esser remains a point of reference to this fact when he writes: “At all events, in the early days of the Order, Chapter had a far greater significance for the Friars Minor than for the cloistered orders. It was accordingly not so much an organ of administration, but more a service to the common life. The days of the Chapter each year were days of renewal and strengthening for the life of the fraternity. To use a modern expression, they were a kind of annual ‘retreat’. Each Chapter made the friars freshly aware of their solidarity, thus promoting the outward experience of sharing a common life and a growing sense of togetherness. However, as the friars settled down and began to reside in fixed dwellings in which the element of monasticism became ever stronger, the Chapters were bound to lose their original meaning. In their adaptation to the Chapters of the other orders, they became more and more instruments of government that served the ministers in the management of the Order.”²³

Confirmed by the lord Pope

Francis presented himself to two popes during his lifetime, namely to Innocent III in 1209 and maybe also in 1215 on the occasion of the Fourth Lateran Council, and to Honorius III in other occasions, which could include 1220, upon Francis’ return from the East in order to request a cardinal protector for the Order, and certainly before 1223, when Honorius III confirmed the *Regula bullata* on 29 November. In the meantime, Francis had more frequent contacts with other ecclesiastics, whom we have already mentioned, namely bishop Guido I of Assisi (and later on, bishop Guido II towards the end of Francis’ life), Cardinal John of Saint Paul, Cardinal Raniero Capocci of Viterbo, and especially Cardinal Hugo of Ostia, who became cardinal protector in 1220, and who would later on become Pope Gregory IX and canonise Saint Francis just two years after the saint’s death. It is true that Hugo would exercise a decisive role after the death of Saint Francis,²⁴ since he would insist that no one better than him could interpret the *intentio beati Francisci*.²⁵ Yet, even when

Francis was alive, Hugo had a great influence upon him, and was certainly the power behind the papal throne that would help Francis and his Order to become a bulwark of catholicism and to be fully inserted within the legal framework of religious Orders as a new form of consecrated life in the Church, namely the apostolic or *apostolica vivendi forma*, placed alongside the heremital, monastic and regular canonical forms already in existence.

The confirmation of the *Regula bullata* was certainly the result of the initiative of Cardinal Hugo during the period from Pentecost 1221 to November 1223.²⁶ It was also an effect of the crisis within the Order during this delicate period of time. Francis was no longer the leader of the Order in the legal sense, even though his spiritual authority was still felt strongly, and would continue till the end of his life, when he dictated his *Testament* with no qualms about using such expressions as *precipio firmiter per obedientiam*, *firmiter volo*, *firmiter teneantur*, etc. The text of the *Regula non bullata* was not up to standard for Hugo’s canonistic expertise, and no attempt to produce any corrections or development in the same document was effective.²⁷

The fact that the pope would “confirm” the decisions taken by the general chapters of the friars Minor does not necessarily mean that it was the pontiff himself who personally examined these deliberations and approved them. What is more probable is that the friars made recourse to ecclesiastics who were experts in canon law in order to feel secure about the validity of their decisions. This practice was certainly made easier when Hugo became cardinal protector.

One of the thorniest problems that the friars would face was that of legitimising their presence and role in the Church vis-à-vis the local bishops. It was not enough to think that the Order was approved by the pope and had a cardinal protector. At grassroots level the friars met with many difficulties.²⁸ One of the issues at stake was preaching, since the brothers were itinerant and after 1217 they were preaching well beyond the confines of the Umbrian valley. The fact that they needed the pope’s protection in the case of *Cum dilecti* and *Pro dilectis* is a case in point.²⁹

It is certainly more correct to speak about papal “confirmation” in the case of the *Regula bullata* of 1223. Before that moment all we can indicate are papal responses to concrete needs of the Franciscan fraternity, often communicated through the services of the cardinal protector. Francis did not seem very enthusiastic about requesting papal approval for the ever-growing need to have “privileges”, and

yet we know that, even when he was still alive, the friars did acquire permission, for example, to have their own oratories in order to conduct their prayer services. In 1224 Pope Honorius III sent to the friars the letter *Quia populares tumultus*,³⁰ conceding them precisely such a privilege. It is fairly plausible that permits of this kind were given as a result of a deliberation by the friars during the general chapter, based upon a concrete and practical need, and which needed papal “confirmation” transmitted to the fraternity through a document of the papal curia, which was certainly also commissioned by the cardinal protector of the Order.

In other words, the expression of Jacques de Vitry, *a domino papa confirmatas*, refers to a period in the Order’s history which, in a way, paves the way for the decisive approval and confirmation of the Rule of 1223, passing through the Rule of 1221, and going back to many decisions taken by the general chapters, which were eventually presented to the papal curia for approval as time passed, and ended up being included in the Order’s legislation. A thorough study of the various themes that might have been discussed, approved and presented for approval, goes beyond the scope of this limited paper.

Concluding remarks

By 1221, the year in which the *Regula non bullata* was presented to the general chapter of Pentecost and approved, Francis had retreated from the direct government of the Order. Many things had changed ever since the humble beginnings. The Order could not function simply as a spontaneous brotherhood of itinerant men. The sheer number of brothers called for a specific organisation and for clear legislation in order that it could fit within the ecclesiastical framework in which it had grown through missionary expeditions in Europe and beyond. As Grado Giovanni Merlo aptly sums it up: “The charisma of brother Francis [...] was no longer sufficient to regulate the life of an Order which had experienced vast growth and was very different from the little group of the beginnings.”³¹

Although many have attempted at reconstructing the various moments of formation of the *Regula non bullata* and have certainly provided some useful insights regarding specific topics that were the result of decisions taken during the general chapters of Pentecost in order to respond to practical needs in the Order, it is very difficult to have an exact sequence of the events as they

unfolded from 1209 to 1221, passing especially through the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and the general chapters of 1217, 1219 and 1221. Jacques de Vitry’s testimony of the primitive Franciscan fraternity in 1216 is certainly helpful, as is Hugh of Digne’s *Expositio Regulae*, which mentions a *Regula ante bullam*, which could refer to the *Regula non bullata*, but in an earlier stage of development.³²

Celebrating the 800 years of the presentation of the *Regula non bullata* in 1221 will be an opportunity to study in greater depth the making of this same Rule and to appreciate its richness not simply for its spiritual and biblical content, as we have normally done in the past, but also for its juridical implications for the life of an Order in making in the period 1209-1221. In this way we will avoid thinking that it was only in 1221 that the Order could boast of having a Rule that could respond to the canonical requirements as laid down by the Roman Curia, and discover the various attempts that predate this point of arrival, and also this point of departure, if we are to study further the true reasons as to why the Rule of 1221 was never confirmed by the pope, and the re-writing of the definitive text of the *Regula bullata*, which incidentally was only professed *en masse* by the brothers in 1239!³³

NOTES

- 1 *The Words of Saint Francis*, 4 (FAED III, 124-125): “When blessed Francis was at the general chapter called the ‘Chapter of Mats’, held at Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, there were five thousand brothers present. Many wise and learned brothers told the Lord Cardinal, who later became Pope Gregory, who was present at the chapter, that he should persuade blessed Francis to follow the advice of those same wise brothers and allow himself to be guided by them for the time being. They cited the *Rule* of blessed Benedict, blessed Augustine, and blessed Bernard, which teach how to live in such order in such a way. Then blessed Francis, on hearing the cardinal’s advice about this, took him by the hand and led him to the brothers assembled in chapter, and spoke to the brothers in this way: ‘My brothers! My brothers! God has called me by the way of simplicity, and showed me the way of simplicity. I do not want you to mention to me any rule, whether of Saint Augustine, or of Saint Bernard, or of Saint Benedict. And the Lord told me what He wanted: He wanted me to be a new fool in the world. God did not wish to lead us by any way other than this knowledge, but God will confound you by your knowledge and wisdom. But I trust in the Lord’s police that through them He will punish you, and you will return to your state, to your blame, like it or not.’

- The cardinal was shocked, and said nothing, and all the brothers were afraid.” The same episode is narrated in greater detail in the *Actus Beati Francisci et sociorum eius* 20 (FAED III, 475-478) and in *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* 18 (FAED III, 595-598). In this case, however, no mention is made of the tension between Francis and the learned brothers regarding the Rule they were proposing, but rather attention is drawn to the presence of Cardinal Hugo and that of Saint Dominic, as well as to the miracle of the generosity of the population of the Spoleto Valley in providing the brothers with their daily needs during the chapter. Regarding the date 1221 not all historians agree. Some propose dates as early as 1217-1218, others 1220 and yet others 1221-1222. R.B. BROOKE, *Early Franciscan Government. Elias to Bonaventure*, Cambridge University Press 1959, 286-291, proposes 1222. That year Easter fell on 10 April, hence Pentecost fell on 29 May. Another important detail concerns the fact that in 1221 Cardinal Hugo was not present in Assisi since he was Papal Legate in Tuscany, but rather the Cistercian Cardinal Raniero Capocci of Viterbo. The chapter is also mentioned by the chroniclers Jordan of Giano and Thomas of Eccleston.
- 2 F. ACCROCCA, *Francesco, il Cardinale Ugo di Ostia e la conferma Papale della Regola*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 86 (2016), 433-460.
 - 3 P. MARANESI, *Alla ricerca della “intentio Francisci”*. *Approccio storico-critico della Regola bollata*, in *Un testo identitario. Metodo e temi di lettura della Regola di Francesco di Assisi*, a cura di A. CZORTEK (*Itinera franciscana*, 5), Ed. Cittadella, Assisi 2013, 34-35: “Forse, un episodio indicativo del clima di contrasto tra Francesco e i settori dirigenziali nei confronti della *Regola* è presente nel racconto del capitolo delle Stuoie, evento offerto dalla sola *Compilazione di Assisi* e da essa posta immediatamente dopo il racconto, da noi già utilizzato, dell’opposizione dei frati alla scrittura del testo. In quel grande incontro generale, in cui nel maggio del 1222 si ritrovano insieme alla Porziuncola quasi cinquemila frati, i ministri e i frati dotti, rivolgendosi all’aiuto del cardinale Ugolino, avrebbero voluto convincere Francesco a dar loro una ‘Regola’ che permettesse di vivere in modo più ordinato la loro esistenza, cioè a diventare più un ‘ordine’ e smettere di essere ‘fraternità’.”
 - 4 D. FLOOD, T. MATURA, *The Birth of a Movement. A Study on the First Rule of Saint Francis*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1975; T. DESBONNETS, *From Intuition to Institution. The Franciscans*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1988.
 - 5 JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, 3-7, in *XIIIth Century Chronicles*, Translated by P. HERMANN, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1961, 21-24.
 - 6 I am aware that many would not agree with this assertion, given that the material presented in chapter 16 could more logically have been composed after Francis’ experience in the East and not before. J.F. GODET-CALOGERAS, *De la Forma vitae à la Regula bullata et le Testament de Frère François*, in *La Regola dei Frati Minori*. Atti del XXXVII Convegno internazionale della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 8-10 ottobre 2009), Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 2010, 37: “Quant au chapitre XVI sur le comportement en milieu musulman, il est clair qu’il doit être postérieur aux premières missions des frères en terre musulmane et au séjour de François au Moyen Orient (1219-1220).” Having said this, however, I still believe that chapter 16 of the *Regula non bullata* could have served as a preparation for the missionary expeditions *inter Saracenos et alios infideles*, which incidentally had already begun in 1217 and, taken as private enterprises, as far back as 1215, when brother Giles went to the Holy Land. Cfr. *Vita beati Aegidii Assisiatis*, in L. LEMMENS, *Documenta antiqua franciscana*, I: *Scripta fratris Leonis socii S.P. Francisci*, Quaracchi, 1901, 42: “Ivit etiam ultra mare et visitavit terram sanctam.” Cf. *Storia della vita del beato Egidio (Vita Perugina)*, 4, Traduzione di S. BRUFANI, in *Fonti Agiografiche dell’Ordine Francescano*, a cura di M.T. DOLSO, Padova, 2014, 1198.
 - 7 Fourth Lateran Council, Decree *De novis religionibus prohibitis* (can. 13), in *Conciliorum Oecumenorum Decreta*, curantibus J. ALBERIGO et alii, Istituto per le Scienze religiose, Bologna 1973, 242: “Ne nimia religionum diversitas gravem in ecclesia Dei confusionem inducat, firmiter prohibemus, ne quis de caetero novam religionem inveniat, se quicumque voluerit ad religionem converti, unam de approbatis assumat. Similiter qui voluerit religiosam domum fundare de novo, regulam et institutionem accipiat de religionibus approbatis.”
 - 8 *De Inceptione vel Fundamento Ordinis* 31-36, in *Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di E. MENESTÒ e S. BRUFANI, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 1995, 1335-1339.
 - 9 THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*, 38 (FAED I, 217): “He himself originally planted the Order of friars Minor and on the occasion of its founding gave it this name. For when it was written in the Rule, ‘Let them be minors...’, at the uttering of that statement, at that same moment he said, ‘I want this fraternity to be called the Order of friars Minor.’” Although the editors state that the name *Ordo fratrum Minorum* is translated as Order of Lesser Brothers, they also state that “friars Minor” is the commonly accepted title of the First Order of Saint Francis. This is why I always translate *Ordo fratrum Minorum* as *Order of friars Minor*.
 - 10 Although Jacques de Vitry is correct in calling the brothers by the name *fratres minores*, he seems to be less informed regarding the monasteries of the Damianites, whom he calls *sorores minores*. Clare and the Sisters of San Damiano were not known by this name at the time, even though other monasteries of Poor Ladies in *Tuscia* and *Valle Spoletana* might have later on adopted the name *sorores minores*. Such a name was certainly adopted by Isabelle of France, sister of King St. Louis IX of France, when she founded the monastery of Longchamp (1259). Cfr. S.L. FIELD, *The Rules of Isabelle of France. An English Translation with Introductory Study* (Studies in Early Franciscan Sources, Vol. 4), Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure, NY 2013.
 - 11 JACQUES DE VITRY, *Letter written from Genoa (1216)* (FAED I, 580). Latin text in R.B.C. HUYGENS, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, Leiden 1960, 76: “Homines autem illius religionis semel in anno cum multiplici lucro ad locum determinatum conveniunt, ut simul in domino gaudeant et epulentur, et consilio bonorum

- virorum suas faciunt et promulgant institutiones sanctas et a domino papa confirmatas.”
- 12 *RegNB* 18, in FRANCESCO D’ASSISI, *Scritti*. Edizione critica a cura di C. PAOLAZZI, Frati Editori di Quaracchi. Fondazione Collegio S. Bonaventura Grottaferrata 2009, 270, 272: “Quolibet anno unusquisque minister cum fratribus suis possit convenire, ubicumque placuerit eis, in festo sancti Michaelis archangeli, de his que ad Deum pertinent tractaturus. Omnes autem ministri qui sunt in ultramarinis et ultramontanis partibus, semel in tribus annis, et alii ministri semel in anno veniant ad capitulum in Pentecoste, apud ecclesiam sancte Marie de Portiuncula, nisi a ministro et servo totius fraternitatis aliter fuerit ordinatum.”
- 13 AP 10-11 (FAED II, 37-38). The fact that Francis, Bernardo and Pietro were not capable of handling the Missal is evident because they asked a priest to open the Missal for them. Latin text of *De Inceptione vel Fundamento Ordinis* 31-36, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1317: “Et cum aperuisset sacerdos librum, quia ipsi adhuc bene gere nesciebant, invenerunt statim locum ubi scriptum erat: *Si vis perfectus esse, vade et vende omnia quae habes et da pauperibus...*”
- 14 FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *Testament*, 14 (FAED I, 125). *Testamentum*, 14, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 228: “Et postquam Dominus dedit mihi de fratribus, nemo ostendebat mihi, quid deberem facere, sed ipse Altissimus revelavit mihi, quod deberem vivere secundum formam sancti Evangelii.”
- 15 F. ACCROCCA, *Francesco e il Vescovo Guido I*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 112 (2012) 465-484.
- 16 *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, 19, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1392: “Videns ergo pater quod coram consulibus nihil proficeret, eandem querimoniam proposuit coram episcopo civitatis. Episcopus vero, discretus et sapiens, vocavit eum debito modo, ut compareret super patris querimoniam responsurus. Qui respondit, nuntio dicens: ‘Ad dominum episcopum veniam quia est pater et dominus animarum.’” English text in FAED II, 79.
- 17 THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita beati Francisci*, 32, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 305-306: “Venit proinde Romam cum omnibus dictis fratribus, desiderans nimium sibi a domino Papa Innocentio tertio quae scripserat confirmari. Erat tunc temporis Romae venerabilis Assisiatus episcopus, nomine Guido, qui sanctum Franciscum et omnes fratres in omnibus honorabat, et speciali venerabatur dilectione. Cumque vidisset sanctum Franciscum et fratres eius, causam nesciens, ipsorum adventum graviter tulit; timebat enim ne patriam propriam vellent deserere, in qua Dominus per servos suos iam coeperat maxima operari. Gaudebat plurimum tantos viros in suo episcopatu habere, de quorum vita et moribus maxime praesumebat. Sed audita causa et eorum intellectu proposito, gavisus est in Domino valde spondens eis ad hoc dare consilium et subsidium ferre.” English text in FAED I, 210.
- 18 THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita beati Francisci*, 32, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 306: “Accessit praeterea sanctus Franciscus ad reverendum dominum episcopum Sabinensem, nomine Iohannem de Sancto Paulo, inter quos alios Romanae curiae principes et maiores videbatur terrena despiciere et amare caelestia. Qui eum benigne atque charitative suscipiens, ipsius voluntatem et propositum plurimum commendavit.” English text in FAED, I, 210.
- 19 P. SABATIER, *Life of Saint Francis of Assisi*, Translated by L. SEYMOUR HOUGHTON, London 1908, xv.
- 20 *RegB* I,2 and XII,4, in FRANCESCO D’ASSISI, *Scritti*. Edizione critica a cura di C. PAOLAZZI, 322 and 338: “Regula et vita Minorum Fratrum hec est, scilicet Domini nostri Jesu Christi sanctum Evangelium observare...”; “ut semper subditi et subiecti pedibus eiusdem sancte Ecclesie, stabiles in fide catholica, paupertatem et humilitatem et sanctum Evangelium Domini nostri Jesu Christi, quod firmiter promisimus, observemus.”
- 21 JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, 17, in *XIIIth Century Chronicles*, 33-34: “At the conclusion of the chapter, that is, when the chapter was about to be terminated, it came to the mind of Blessed Francis that the establishment of the Order had not yet come to Germany. And because Blessed Francis was quite weak, whatever was to be said to the chapter on his behalf was spoken by Brother Elias. Blessed Francis, seated at the feet of Brother Elias, tugged at his tunic to attract his attention. Elias bent down to him to inquire what he wished, and they straightened himself and said: ‘Brothers, thus says *The Brother* (meaning Blessed Francis, who was called by the other brothers *The Brother*, as it were par excellence), there is a certain region called Germany, where there are devout Christian people, who, as you know, often pass through our country, perspiring under the heat of the sun, bearing large staves and wearing large boots, singing praises to God and the Saints, and visit the shrines of the Saints. And because once the brothers who were sent to them were treated badly and returned, *The Brother* does not compel anyone to go to them; but to those who, inspired by zeal for God and for souls, may wish to go, he desires to give the same obedience that he gives to those who go beyond the sea, and even a broader one. If there are any who wish to go, let them rise and gather in a group aside.’ And there arose about ninety brothers inflamed with such a desire, offering themselves to death; and, gathering in a group aside, as they were commanded, they awaited the answer who, how many, in what manner, and when they were to go.”
- 22 *EpMin* 13-15, in FRANCESCO D’ASSISI, *Scritti*. Edizione critica a cura di C. PAOLAZZI, 164 and 166: “De omnibus autem capitulis que sunt in Regula, que loquuntur de mortalibus peccatis, Domino adjuvante in capitulo Pentecostes cum consilio fratrum faciemus istud tale capitulum: ‘Si quis fratrum instigante inimico mortaliter peccaverit, per obedientiam teneatur recurrere ad guardianum suum. Et omnes fratres qui scirent eum peccasse, non faciam ei verecundiam neque detractionem, sed magnam misericordiam habeant circa ipsum et teneant multum privatum peccatum fratris sui, quia non est opus sanis medicus, sed male habentibus (Mt 9,12).’”
- 23 K. ESSER, *Origins of the Franciscan Order*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1970, 80-81.
- 24 F. ACCROCCA, «Sancta plantatio Fratrum Minorum Ordinis». Gregorio IX e i Frati Minori dopo Francesco, in *Gregorio IX e gli Ordini Mendicanti*. Atti del XXXVIII Convegno internazionale della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 7-9 ottobre

- 2010), Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 2011, 195-257.
- 25 GREGORY IX, *Bulla «Quo elongati»* (28 September 1230), in FAED I, 570: "For as a result of the long-standing friendship between the holy confessor and ourselves, we know his mind more fully."
- 26 F. ACCROCCA, *Francesco, il Cardinale Ugo di Ostia e la conferma Papale della Regola*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 86 (2016), 433-460.
- 27 Here we refer to the *Fragments alterius Regulae non bullatae*, which are excerpts of the same Rule but differing slightly from it, found in the Codex of Worcester Cathedral, in Hugh of Digne's *Commentary on the Regula bullata*, and in the *Memoriale in desiderio animae* of Thomas of Celano. According to Carlo Paolazzi, they could very well indicate a failed attempt to get the *Regula non bullata* confirmed by Pope Honorius III. FRANCESCO D'ASSISI, *Scritti*. Edizione critica a cura di C. PAOLAZZI, 292: "Quanto alle cause della revisione redazionale, come si è scritto in altra sede. «forse non è del tutto azzardato ipotizzare che il testo del 1221 sia stato leggermente ritoccato (in uno dei capitoli generali del biennio seguente?) ai fini di una approvazione pontificia ufficiale, visto e constatato che Francesco, nel congedare il testo della Regola del 1221, sembra assai lontano dal pensiero di doverne redigere in tempi brevi una nuova [...] Sulle ragioni storiche, giuridiche, comunitarie ed ecclesiali per le quali la Regola del 1221 è stata messa da parte, e poco più di due anni dopo i Frati Minori hanno davvero avuto 'un'altra Regola', molte cose, forse troppe, sono state scritte, ma in realtà sappiamo ancora molto poco.»" The citation is taken from PAOLAZZI, *Nascita degli "Scritti" e costituzione del canone*, in *Verba Domini mei. Gli Opuscula di Francesco d'Assisi a 25 anni dalla edizione di Kajetan Esser ofm*. Atti del Convegno internazionale (Roma, 10-12 aprile 2002), a cura di A. CACCIOTTI, Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, Edizioni Antonianum, Romae 2003, 40-41.
- 28 F. ACCROCCA, «Sancta plantatio Fratrum Minorum Ordinis». Gregorio IX e i Frati Minori dopo Francesco, in *Gregorio IX e gli Ordini Mendicanti*. Atti del XXXVIII Convegno internazionale della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 7-9 ottobre 2010), Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 2011, 207: "Non sempre la storiografia ha posto nel dovuto rilievo il fatto che sin dall'inizio del terzo decennio del Duecento - quindi vivente ancora Francesco - anche l'Ordine dei Minori conobbe crescenti contrasti con l'episcopato e il clero secolare. [...] nel capitolo XVII della *Regula non bullata* si prescriveva che nessun frate osasse predicare contro «la forma e l'istituzione della santa Chiesa» - il che equivaleva a richiamare la costituzione X del Lateranense IV, che faceva del vescovo l'ultimo responsabile e il supremo garante della predicazione nel territorio della propria diocesi."
- 29 N. MUSCAT, *The Letter Pro dilectis of Pope Honorius III (29 May 1220)*, in *Spirit+Life* 131 (January-March 2020), 22-25. J.M. POWELL, *The Papacy and the Early Franciscans*, in *Franciscan Studies* 36 (1976) 248-262.
- 30 HONORIUS III, *Quia populares tumultus*, in *Bullarium Franciscanum*, studio et labore J.H. SBARALEA, Tom. I, Romae 1759, n. 17, p. 20. English text in FAED I, 561-563.
- 31 G.G. MERLO, *In the Name of Saint Francis. History of the Friars Minor and Franciscanism until the early Sixteenth Century*, Translated from the original Italian, *Nel Nome di San Francesco*, by R. BONANNO, Franciscan Institute Publications, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, NY 2009, 57.
- 32 B. VOLLOT, *La Règle des Frères Mineurs de 1216*, in *Franciscana. Bollettino della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani*, 2 (2000), Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 2000, 137-138: "Nous ne savons rien de bien précis sur la toute première règle, ébauchée en 1209, sinon qu'elle était très sommaire. En revanche, on s'est demandé s'il n'avait pas existé un autre texte entre 1209 et 1221. C'est plus que probable maintenant. Vers 1242, un méridional, Hugues de Digne avait déjà écrit une exposition de la *Regula bullata*. Pour appuyer ses dires, il utilise ce qu'il appelle la «règle ante bullam», la «règle originale», la «première règle» etc. Mais il est clair maintenant qu'il ne s'agit pas de la règle de 1221. C'est un texte plus court, plus simple, plus dépouillé, dépourvu totalement de précisions juridiques, exactement ce que nous attendions du pauvre François, sans culture, au style plat et répétitif, comme les gens du peuple. Il s'agit très certainement de la règle de 1216, approuvée oralement par Innocent III. Le concile de Latran IV exigeait pour toute expérience religieuse l'adoption d'une règle préexistante. François refusait absolument cet alignement sur les règles antérieures. Innocent III tourne la difficulté en se limitant à une approbation orale, dans les mois qui précèdent sa mort (17 juillet 1216). Notons au passage que, dans l'hypothèse où celle de 1221 n'aurait pas été adoptée par les frères et les ministres, cette version antérieure aurait été observée de 1216 à 1223." Cfr. R. RUSCONI, *La Formulazione delle Regole minoritiche nel primo quarto del secolo XIII*, in www.academia.edu (retrieved 07/11/2020).
- 33 THOMAS OF ECCLESTON, *De Adventu fratrum Minorum in Angliam*, c. 13, in *XIIIth Century Chronicles*, 154-156: "And because Brother Elias, it was said, had never made profession of the *Regula Bullata*, and for which reason his conscience permitted him to receive money, it was immediately arranged that he should make profession of this Rule and then under the same formula the whole chapter, and the whole Order."

THE USE OF BELLS IN THE FIRST CENTURY OF HISTORY OF THE FRIARS MINOR

Pietro Messa ofm

Translation from the original

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Ed. Monastero Esarchico di Santa, Grottaferrata 2010, 277-287

Brother Francis lived in a context in which bells had a precise role. Thus we should not be surprised that he refers to «whenever bells are rung» in his writings, and attributes to bells their role to bring to mind the duty to praise and thank the Almighty Lord, as he affirms in the *First Letter to the Custodians*: “In every sermon you give, remind people about penance and that no one can be saved unless he receives the most holy Body and Blood of the Lord. When it is sacrificed on the altar by a priest and carried anywhere, let all peoples praise, glorify and honour on bended knee the Lord God living and true. May you announce and preach His praise to all nations in such a way that praise and thanks may always be given to the all-powerful God by all people throughout the world at every hour and whenever bells are rung.”¹

The poor man of Assisi is aware that God is the giver of all good and therefore that all men are obliged to praise him. In the *Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples* - although he makes no mention of bells - Francis reminds those in authority not only to remember the Lord personally, but also to announce through «a messenger or some other sign» to all people to give praise and thank to the Lord: “Therefore I strongly advise you, my Lords, to put aside all care and preoccupation and receive the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus

Christ with fervour in holy remembrance of Him. May you foster such honour to the Lord among the people entrusted to you that every evening an announcement may be made by a messenger or some other sign that praise and thanksgiving may be given by all people to the all-powerful Lord God. If you do not do this, know that, on the day of judgement, you must render an account before the Lord your God, Jesus Christ.”²

In this case we find no mention of bells, but given that the aim is the same as that recalled in the *First Letter to the Custodians*, namely that of praising and thanking the Lord, it is certainly not a forcing of meaning to see in the expression «some other sign» the function of bells.

This exhortation to the rulers of people reminding them of their duty to call citizens to praise the Lord is so important for Francis that, in the *Second Letter to the Custodians*, he writes: “Brother Francis, the least of the servants of God, sends greetings and holy peace in the Lord to all the custodians of the Friars Minor whom this letter reaches. Know that there are certain very lofty and sublime things in the sight of God that people sometimes think of as worthless and contemptible; there are others that are esteemed and remarkable to people that God considers extremely worthless and contemptible. In the sight of our Lord God, I

beg you, as much as I can, to give to bishops and other members of the clergy those letters treating of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord; and to keep in mind what we have recommended to you about these things. Make many copies of the other letter I am sending you, in which it is written that the praises of God be proclaimed among the peoples and in the piazzas, to give to mayors, consuls and rulers, and distribute them with great zeal to those to whom they should be given.”⁷³

Therefore, brother Francis exhorts the brothers to make many copies of the *Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples* «in which it is written that the praises of God be proclaimed among the peoples and in the piazzas», in order to distribute them diligently to the ones they address. Carlo Paolazzi writes that, in this *Second Letter to the Custodians*, we find “a significant clue of the pastoral interests, which in that moment (1220, after the return from the East) were very alive in Francis, and which are translated in the lucid and unitary project to promote public praise of God through a series of ‘circular’ letters. The very structures of the Order are activated for the aim of their diffusion, and in particular the preachers of the Word and the custodians of the friars Minor.”⁷⁴ Consequently, without forcing the meaning, we can define the writing addressed to the rulers as a true circular letter, in which Francis maintains that their duty is to send a messenger or give another sign every evening - and therefore also by means of the ringing of bells - inviting all to praise the Lord.

For Francis, therefore, bells should be rung in order to remind all to praise Him who is worthy of all praise, glory and honour. However, Francis himself, especially after his canonisation by Pope Gregory IX in 1228, became an object of admiration and veneration. Thus we should not be surprised that Thomas of Celano, in *The Life of Saint Francis* written on the occasion of the canonisation by order of the same pontiff,⁵ tells us that the people used to ring bells whenever the Saint was going to arrive in their towns and villages: “When he entered a city, clergy rejoiced, bells rang, men exulted, women rejoiced, and children clapped. Often taking branches from trees and singing psalms, they went out to meet him.”⁷⁶

In this image as it is transmitted by Thomas of Celano it is not difficult to notice a reminiscence of “Palm Sunday” in which the liturgy commemorates the entry of Jesus in Jerusalem, acclaimed by the crowds holding palm branches. This episode by

Celano shows how bells were not rung only to invite people to praise the Lord, according to the indications given by brother Francis, but also to acclaim the new Saint.

If Francis was aware of the possibility that man can forget to praise the Lord, and for this reason he exhorted the rulers to exercise their function of reminding their citizens of this duty, Thomas of Celano, once again, in the *Memoriale in desiderio animae*, narrates that the same Saint needed someone who would wake him up from his laziness and call him to the divine praises. Such a function, which is proper to bells, was also exercised by a falcon who «would ring the bell of its voice with a light touch» at the moment in which Francis was living in a hermitage: “When blessed Francis, fleeing, as was his custom, from the sight of human company, came to stay in a certain hermitage place, a falcon nesting there bound itself to him in a great covenant of friendship. At nighttime with its calling and noise, it anticipated the hour when the saint would usually rise for the divine praises. The holy one of God was very grateful for this because the falcon’s great concern for him shook him out of any sleeping-in. But when the saint was burdened more than usual by some illness, the falcon would spare him, and would not announce such early vigils. As if instructed by God, it would ring the bell of its voice with a light touch about dawn.”⁷⁷

At the time in which Thomas of Celano wrote the *Memoriale* (1246-47), the bells would ring especially in order to exalt the greatness of Saint Francis, which was manifest in a particular way in the wonders worked thanks to the unique miracle of the stigmata:

“Those sacred stigmata of the invincible soldier of Christ should not be considered lacking in great power, besides being a sign of special grace and a privilege of supreme love which the whole world does not cease to admire.

How those signs are also powerful weapons of God can be understood through a novelty and evident miracle that happened in Spain, namely in the Kingdom of Castille. There were two men who for a long time had been quarelling with each other with deep hostility. There was no rest for their bitterness; there could be no enduring relief for their violent enmity, nor for even a moment any cure for the animosity they harboured, unless one were to die the cruelest death at the hand of the other. So each of them, fully armed, with

many comrades, set up frequent ambushes for his adversary, because the crime could not be committed in public.

One evening, in the deepening dusk, a man of honest life and praiseworthy reputation happened to pass by on the road where there was concealed an ambush of one for the death of the other. This man was hurrying on his way to pray, as he usually did, after the hour of compline at the church of the brothers, for he had given himself with deep devotion to Saint Francis. The sons of darkness rose up against the son of light, and they believed him to be that rival of theirs whom they had long sought to kill. Stabbing him with deadly blows from every side, they left him half-dead. But at the last moment the cruelest enemy thrust a sword deeply into the man's throat, and, unable to move it, left it in the wound.

People rushed from everywhere, and with cries to heaven the whole neighbourhood wailed at the death of the innocent. Because the living spirit was still in the man, the advice of doctors prevailed that the sword not be removed from his throat. (Perhaps they did this for the sake of confession, so that he might be able to confess at least by some sign.) The doctors worked the whole night until the hour of matins to wipe away the blood and close the wounds, but because of the multiple deep stab wounds, they could do nothing and ceased treatment. Some friars Minor stood by the bed with the doctors, filled with grief, awaiting the departure of their friend.

Then the brothers' bell rang for matins. The man's wife heard the bell and, groaning, ran to the bed and cried: 'My Lord, rise quickly, go to matins, your bell is calling you!' Immediately, the one believed to be dying, with a groaning rumble of the chest, struggled to stammer some wheezing words. And raising his hand toward the sword stuck in his throat, he seemed to be motioning for someone to remove it. A miracle! The sword immediately sprang from its place, and in the sight of them all flew over to the door of the house as if launched by the hand of a very strong man. The man got up, unharmed and in perfect health, as if rising from sleep, and recounted the wonderful deeds of the Lord.⁷⁸

Now the bell was that of the church of the friars Minor where also lay persons would go to take part in the liturgy celebrated *secundum regulam fratrum minorum* and certainly one of the greatest solemnities would have been that of Saint Francis.⁹

In the narration of his life we notice an emphasis placed on the signs of holiness and his funeral is described as a true and proper canonisation ceremony, accompanied by the ringing of bells:

"A great crowd of people, especially the devout inhabitants of the city, expected the saint's birth through death very shortly. But he seemed to be strengthened by the arrival of the devout Roman lady [Jacoba dei Settesoli], and there was a glimmer of hope that he would recover. So the lady gave orders that the rest of her escort should leave: she alone with the children and a few attendants would remain. But the saint said to her, 'No, don't! I will depart on Saturday, and on Sunday you and all the others will return.' And so it happened. At the predicted time, he who had fought valiantly in the Church militant entered the Church triumphant. I omit here the crowds of people, the shouts of rejoicing, the ringing of bells, the streams of tears. Likewise I leave out the mourning of his sons, the sobbing of those dear to him, the lament of his companions. I want to recount only how this pilgrim, deprived of the solace of her father, was consoled."¹⁰

The cult of Saint Francis, thanks also to the work of the friars Minor, spread in many other countries where churches were built in his honour, and where benefactors commissioned paintings in order to encourage devotion, and also cast bells for the churches of the brothers, as Thomas of Celano narrates:

"Corneto is a powerful and not an unimportant town in the diocese of Viterbo. There a bell of no small size was to be cast and the brothers' place, and many of the brothers' friends had gathered to contribute their help in the project. When the casting was completed, with great rejoicing a grand banquet began."¹¹

The hagiographer underlines that the bell what was being cast was «of no small size», and it was appropriate for «a powerful and not unimportant town»; «many of the brothers' friends» came to share in the joy of the festivities at the end of the work that they carried out to cast the bell. The first persons to be joyful were certainly the friars themselves, in spite of the fact that the so-called *Pre-Narbonne Constitutions* of 1239 ordered that the bells that went beyond a certain size should be broken or else substituted.¹²

In the *Assisi Compilation* we find the episode of Saint Francis who was consoled in his illness by heavenly music, coming down miraculously from

God. In order to prove the supernatural origin of this melody, the author concludes by writing:

“The brothers were amazed and considered this a great miracle. As they knew that it was truly a work of God for the consolation of blessed Francis, especially since, by a decree of the podestà, no one dared to go about the city, either at midnight or even after the third ringing of the bells. And because, as blessed Francis said, it came and went in silence, without a word or a noise from its mouth, for more than an hour to console his spirit.”¹³

The bell mentioned here is the city bell, if one considers that “besides the proper liturgical use, the bell - beginning in the 12th century - assumed also a civil role and it was rang also to announce the political activities of the free Italian communes and of the mercantile towns of central Europe [...]. In central-northern Italy the seats of civil power procured to have a bell-tower during the 13th century and during the first decades of the following century. This tower was often standing in contraposition to the buildings where the episcopal authority resided.”¹⁴

As we shall see, also if in the other sources the bells are not mentioned, as is the case, for example, in the *Minor legend* of Bonaventure, in the *De inceptione* - known also as *The Anonymous of Perugia* -, in the *Legend of Three Companions*, in the *Little Flowers*, in the *Tree of Life* of Ubertino da Casale, and in the *Chronicle on the Seven Tribulations* of Angelo Clareno, the few instances where bells are included are enough to show how bells represented a significant fragment of Franciscan history and its various passages.

In fact, from the bell mentioned by brother Francis in *The Letter to the Rulers of the People*, with which the citizens are invited to praise God, the sources pass to mention bells which were cast in honour of Saint Francis himself. Soon the acquisition of friaries and chapels gradually became a matter of fact in the history of the Minors, as became the internal organisation of the *fraternitas* with its various competences and specialisations, all organised according to the rhythm of the bells.¹⁵ A proof of this, for example, is found in Salimbene de Adam when he speaks about brother Giovanni da Parma, minister general from 1247 to 1257:

“When brother Giovanni Parenti was minister general, as soon as he would hear the bell calling the brothers to clean the vegetables, he would also run to work with the other brothers, as I have seen with my own eyes [...]. Also, he would take

part in the divine office during the day or during the night, especially during vespers, matins and Mass; and he would do anything that the cantor would ask of him, like beginning the antiphons, singing responsories and readings, and celebrating conventual Mass.”¹⁶

It was not only the bell of the house of the friars that would call them for the various activities, but the bells were above all a reminder for the people to participate in the liturgy and in the preaching in the churches of the Minors. This resulted in an ulterior reason for friction between mendicants and the secular clergy. That is why, for example, in 1225, in Beauvais, the friars Minor, requested by the apostolic legate and by the bishop, obtained from the cathedral chapter and from the priest - or rather the *parrochialis sacerdos*, the parish priest - of the church of Saint Thomas the use of the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, which was dependent upon the main church. The brothers promised, among other things, not to receive faithful *ad divina* (for divine offices) in the great solemnities, not to have bells with which the might summon the faithful, not to have a proper space in the cemetery, to observe the interdicts of the bishop and not to receive persons who were excommunicated by him, as was established for the titulars of all the other chapels of the city. The lack of respect for these norms would produce, according to the agreement stipulated, the annulment of the concession and the expulsion of the friars, except in the case when, after having resolved the matter, they would correct their ways.

In the 1220s, even for the Minors the control of churches in the cities, although accompanied by the prejudiced renunciation of the exercise of the care of parishes and of the enjoyment of the income resulting from it, meant that, as for all, the need to come to agreement with the local Church regarding the details of their presence, including the question of bells.¹⁷

Also in the story of Saint Clare bells are present, according to the conventual use of calling the sisters to prayers, as “sister Benvenuta da Perugia” affirms in the *Process of canonisation* of the Saint:

“The witness also said mother Saint Clare was very persevering, day and night, in prayer. At about midnight she woke the sisters with certain signs in silence to praise God. She lit the lamps in the church and frequently rang the bell for Matins. Those sisters who did not rise at the sound of the bell, she called with her signs.”¹⁸

By that time the bells did exist and they could be rung, thanks also to the innumerable benefits and dispensations that the brothers obtained from the pontiffs. Therefore bell-towers became necessary.¹⁹ But whereas in the beginning it was enough to have a simple arched bell-structure, as we can still see in the church of San Damiano in Assisi, in the large friaries of the cities (*domus conventualia*) including that of San Francesco in Terni, the friars built large and strong bell-towers, as a sign of the role that the friars had by now assumed in the city. All this was seen to be an abuse if in the Constitutions of Narbonne of 1260, while Bonaventure of Bagnoregio was minister general - referring to the norms of the preceding constitutions - he ordered the friars not to construct bell-towers.²⁰ The fact that such a norm was repeated in all the successive constitutions²¹ means that, in fact, the friars Minor continued to build bell-towers in their friaries.

In this respect Franciscan history was not different from that of some monastic reforms, like those of the Cistercians and Camaldolese who, at least initially, had voluntarily renounced to have bell-towers, so much so that the general Chapter of the Order of Citeaux in 1257 imposed the norm: «turre lapida ad campanas non fiant».²²

Some of these buildings of bell-towers were not accepted by all, and some brothers wanted to live a literal observance of the Rule of Saint Francis. With brother Paoluccio Trinci they could realise their wish, especially when some friaries - among which La Romita di Cesi - obtained permission to live in a different style from that of the friars of the large convents in the cities. In this way the Franciscan Observance was born, and it saw various attempts to reform the entire Order of friars Minor, particularly during a general chapter celebrated in Terni on 3 October 1500. By now, the distance between the friars of the community, who were represented by bell-towers similar to that of San Francesco of Terni, and the friars of the Observance, who preferred simpler bell structures "in the form of a sail" ("a vela") - which are still visible today for example in the church of Santa Maria dell'Orto in Terni, at La Romita in Cesi and at the Speco di Narni di Sant'Urbano in Narni - was so evident that the division of 1517 through the Bulla *Ite vos* of Pope Leo X was inevitable.²³

If blessed Giles of Assisi, who was known for his gift of prophecy - and who soon became one of the brothers to whom the Observance referred

in a special way - during the last years of his life had retreated to the hermitage of Monteripido near Perugia, surrounded at that point by a fame of holiness, sent a message to the citizens of Perugia telling them that the bells would not ring neither for him, nor for his canonisation, or even for his great miracles,²⁴ the same did not occur in the case of the so-called "First Franciscan Martyrs", namely Berardo, Ottone, Pietro, Accursio and Adiuto, who hailed from the region of Terni and who were martyred in Morocco. For them the bells of the tower of the church of Saint Francis in Terni rang joyfully in 1481 when the Franciscan cardinal Francesco della Rovere, who had become pope Sixtus IV, canonised them in 1481,²⁵ precisely as the brother from Assisi who was among the first ones of the *fraternitas* of Minors had wished:

"Brother Giles held that the great prelates of the Order of friars Minor did not do a good thing not to strive with all their efforts in front of the Pope in favour of the canonisation of the friars minor who were martyrs in Morocco because of their glorious profession of faith. He used to say that the brothers should procure such a canonisation not in view of their own glory, but solely for the honour of God and the edification of the brethren."²⁶

With this saying brother Giles knew how to unite the different uses of bells on the part of the friars Minor, namely to celebrate the greatness of their own history by exalting the holiness of the brothers, beginning with the Holy Founder, in order to praise «the Most High, Almighty and Good Lord» as brother Francis of Assisi had wanted.

NOTES

- 1 FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *EpCust* I,6-8 (FAED I, 57).
- 2 FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *EpRect* 6-8 (FAED I, 58-59).
- 3 FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *EpCust* II (FAED I, 60).
- 4 C. PAOLAZZI, *Nascita degli «Scritti» e costituzione del canone*, in «Verba Domini mei». *Gli Opuscula di Francesco d'Assisi a 25 anni dalla edizione di Kajetan Esser* (Roma, 10-12 aprile 2002), a cura di A. CACCIOTTI (Medioevo 6), Romae 2003, 65-66.
- 5 Cfr. M. GUIDA, «Iubente Domino et glorioso papa Gregorio». Gregorio IX e la «Vita beati Francisci» di Tommaso da Celano, in *Convivium Assisiense* 6/2 (2004) 39-160.
- 6 THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 62 (FAED I, 238).
- 7 THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 168 (FAED II, 355-356).
- 8 THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Treatise of the Miracles of Saint Francis*, 11-12 (FAED II, 406-407).

- 9 Regarding the liturgy during the first decades of the history of the Order, cfr. P. MESSA, *Un testimone dell'evoluzione liturgica della fraternitas franciscana primitiva: il Breviarium sancti Francisci, in Revirescunt Chartae, codices, documenta, textus: miscellanea in honorem fr. Caesaris Cenci OFM*, ed. A. CACCIOTTI - P. STELLA, I (Medioevo 5), Romae 2002, 5-141; F. DOLCIANI, *Francesco d'Assisi tra devozione, culto e liturgia*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 71 (2001) 5-45.
- 10 THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Treatise of the Miracles of Saint Francis*, 38 (FAED II, 418).
- 11 THOMAS OF CELANO, *The Treatise of the Miracles of Saint Francis*, 54 (FAED II, 427).
- 12 *Fragmenta Priscarum Constitutionum Praenarbonensium*, 38, in *Constitutiones generales ordinis fratrum minorum*, I (saeculum XIII), a cura di C. CENCI - R.G. MAILLEUX, Grottaferrata 2007, 10: "Item, campane, que numerum librarum in constitutione preceptum excedunt a centum libris et supra, aut frangantur aut commutentur."
- 13 *Assisi Compilation*, 66 (FAED II, 169).
- 14 P.F. PISTILLI, *Campana*, in *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, IV, Roma 1993, 87. Regarding the significance, the use and the production of bells in the Middle Ages cfr. *Del fondere campane. Dall'archeologia alla produzione. Quadri regionali per l'Italia settentrionale*. Atti del Convegno (Milano, 23-25 febbraio 2006), a cura di S. LUSUARDI SIENA - E. NERI, Firenze 2017.
- 15 *Constitutiones generales Narbonenses*, IV, 12-13, in *Constitutiones generales ordinis fratrum minorum*, I, 77-78: "Quolibet autem die post secundam mensam immediate pulsetur campana refectorii, et ex tunc sileatur usque nonam. In diebus ieiuniorum simili modo pulsata campanella sileatur usquequo fiat signum ad surgendum, secundum spatium a guardiano provide ordinatum." The same norm was repeated in the constitutions promulgated by subsequent chapters; cfr. *Constitutiones generales ordinis fratrum minorum*, I, 119; 171-172; 232; 301.
- 16 SALIMBENE DE ADAM, *Chronicle*, 44.
- 17 Cfr. P. MESSA, *Introduzione*, in BONAVENTURA DA BAGNOREGIO, *Vita di san Francesco. Legenda maior* (Lecture cristiane del secondo millennio 42), Milano 2009, 88-119, which refers to M. PELLEGRINI, *Itinerari dell'inserimento. Riflessioni su minoritismo e Chiese locali nella prima stagione francescana, in Il francescanesimo delle origini alla metà del secolo XVI. Esplorazioni e questioni aperte*. Atti del Convegno della Fondazione Michele Pellegrino, Università di Torino, 11 novembre 2004, a cura di F. BOGLIANI - G.G. MERLO (Studi, fonti, documenti di storia e letteratura religiosa, Bologna 2005, 71-111).
- 18 *Process of Canonisation of Saint Clare*, II,9, in *Clare of Assisi. The Lady. Early Documents*, edited and translated by R.J. ARMSTRONG, New City Press, New York - London - Manila 2005, 152.
- 19 Cfr. D. GILLERMAN, *Campanile*, in *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, IV, Roma 1993, 101-109.
- 20 *Constitutiones generales Narbonenses*, III,17, in *Constitutiones generales ordinis fratrum minorum*, I, 75: "Campanile ecclesiae ad modum turris de cetero nusquam fiat." However, this prohibition was already present in the preceding constitutions, written in a period between 1239 and 1257: *Constitutiones generales prearbonenses*, in *Constitutiones generales ordinis fratrum minorum*, I, 55.
- 21 *Constitutiones generales ordinis fratrum minorum*, I, 116; 167; 296.
- 22 P.F. PISTILLI, *Campana*, 86.
- 23 P. SELLA, *Leone X e la definitiva divisione dell'Ordine dei Minori (Omin). La bolla Ite Vos (29 Maggio 1517)* (Analecta Franciscana 14 - Documenta et Studia 2), Grottaferrata 2001.
- 24 S. BRUFANI, *Egidio d'Assisi. Una santità feriale, in I Compagni di Francesco e la prima generazione Minoritica*. Atti del XIX Convegno internazionale della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 17-19 ottobre 1991), Spoleto 1987, 287-311.
- 25 I. HEULLANT-DONAT, *La perception des premiers martyrs franciscains à l'intérieur de l'Ordre au XIII^e siècle*, in *Religion et mentalités au Moyen Âge. Mélanges en l'honneur d'Hervé Martindir*, Rennes 2003, 211-220; Ead., *Missions impossibles. Essai sur le franciscains et leur martyrs (XIII^e-XIV^e siècle)*, in *Études Franciscaines, n.s. 1* (2008) 165-173; E. URBANI, *Protomartiri Francescani* (Biografie I), Gorle 2009.
- 26 Citation in Italian in the original text of the paper: EGI-DIO DI ASSISI, *I detti*, traduzione di N. VIAN, in *Scritti dei mistici francescani: Secolo XIII*, I, Assisi 1995, 135.

FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY OF EARLY 16TH CENTURY ARTEFACTS IN THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIJA TA' GESÙ IN RABAT

Noel Muscat ofm

During these last years there has been a renewed interest in the restoration of two important early 16th century artefacts in the church of Santa Marija ta' Ġesù, popularly known as *Ta' Ġiežu*, in the ancient part of Rabat originally forming the suburb of Mdina before it took its present shape and size during Byzantine and Arab domination, and thus known in Maltese as *Ir-Rabat tal-Imdina*. The church, built in 1500 in Gothic style, and rebuilt in 1752-1757 after the damages sustained during the earthquake of 1693, houses two important artefacts that have aroused interest in their artistic and historic value during these last years, namely the marble statue of the Madonna and Child by Antonello Gagini of Messina (1478-1536),¹ which is currently under restoration, and which includes her pedestal still on display since 1911 at the Museum of Fine Arts, depicting a basrelief of the stigmatisation of Saint Francis and others of Saint Francis and of Saint Paul, as well as the remaining two main panels of the main altarpiece of the original church, now hanging on the sides of the arches alongside the presbytery, depicting an enthroned Madonna and Child and a Deposition, the work of Antonello de Saliba or Resaliba from Messina (c.1466 - c.1535).² Both artefacts date from the early 16th century.³

The commissioning of these artefacts, plus their historical and artistic value, have been amply documented and studied, and they are still an object of interest, particularly now that the Gagini statue is being restored and that some missing sections of

the original altarpiece of the Renaissance church are being documented.⁴ The aim of this paper is not that of adding anything special to what has already been stated regarding these works of art, but rather that of delving into the specific Franciscan characteristics of the spirituality they convey, having been commissioned for a Franciscan church of the Regular Observance, with obvious links to the mainstream Observant family in nearby Sicily, where devotion to *Santa Maria di Giesu* was a dominant factor during the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

The description of the artefacts in the Cronica duorum conventuum

In 1731 fr. Giovanni Antonio Mercieca (ca. 1660 - 1753)⁵ wrote an 87 page Chronicle on the two existing friaries of the Friars Minor of the Regular Observance in Malta, namely the friary of *Santa Marija ta' Ġesù* in Rabat-Mdina, and the friary with the same title of *Santa Marija ta' Ġesù* in Valletta. In this *Cronica* we find a clear description of the Gagini Madonna and Child and of Antonello de Saliba's altarpiece. His description is that of the original church as it was still standing, albeit with seemingly heavy damages, after the 1693 earthquake, before it was rebuilt in the present Baroque style in the mid-1770s.



The Gagini Madonna and Child

Regarding the large icon on the main altar of the church, this Franciscan friar writes: “The choir of this aforementioned family of Religious is quite spacious. Against its back wall is venerated a very ancient Icon, in Gothic style and divided into three orders, in which, the first one, which is at the top, represents in its centre the dead Body of the Lord Christ in his deposition from the Cross, placed as he is in the bosom of his afflicted Virgin Mother. On its right hand side there is Saint Paul, and after him Saint Anthony of Padova. On the left hand side there is Our Father Saint Francis, and after him Saint Louis Bishop. In the centre of the second order there is the Most Blessed Virgin sitting on a Throne, with her divine Son on her right knee, and on both sides Angels who are adoring these holy Persons. On the right of the Mother of God stand the Holy Virgins Agatha and Catherine, whereas on the left stand Lucy and Barbara. On the third and lowest level, which is roughly one palm in height, at the centre we find the Saviour of the world, and on his right and left sides are shown an equal number

of his Apostles associated with him. Each one of the figures have above them a perforated *epistilium* (architrave), which is gilded and adorned. This work was done in Messina in 1517.”⁶

An interesting detail in Mercieca’s description regards the two lateral altars, one on each side of the main altar, dedicated one to Saint Francis of Assisi and the other one to Saint Anthony of Padua. This was a common occurrence in many churches of the Franciscan Observant friars in Sicily during the 15th century, whose churches were normally dedicated to the Virgin Mary: *Santa Maria di Gesu e San Francesco*, to distinguish them from the large conventual churches of the Conventual Franciscan family, which were dedicated to *San Francesco* in all the large towns. Another important detail to know is that the title *Santa Maria di Gesu* regarded the title of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary, since this feast was instituted through the preaching of the Franciscans.⁷

Regarding these lateral altars the author of the *Cronica* writes the following description: “In the main pillars, which stand underneath the major arch over the main Altar, there are two minor and lateral Altars. The one on the right is dedicated to the Most Holy Patriarch Francis, and that on the left to Saint Anthony of Padua. These are two of seven Altars.”⁸

Although not part of our theme in this paper, it is also important to mention the presence of the cult of Saint Joseph in the same church of the Franciscan Observants in Rabat. This cult has been the object of research because of the presence of the Archconfraternity of Saint Joseph and its Oratory annexed to the Franciscan church.⁹ Here we will limit ourselves simply the description of the side-chapel of Saint Joseph within the same church, as presented by the *Cronica*, for the simple reason that the cult towards Saint Joseph is intimately linked with that towards the Virgin Mary and the mystery of the Incarnation, and is also the direct result of the preaching of the Franciscan Observant family during the same period.¹⁰

The *Cronica* states that the Altar of Saint Joseph is found in the chapel corresponding to the right transept of the crossvault, which was (and still is) slightly larger than the other chapels on its side. The altarpiece hanging at that time was a painting by Mattia Preti, depicting Saint Joseph working as a carpenter with the child Jesus holding a saw in his hand, together with the Virgin Mary. The *Cronica* also mentions the relic of the staff of Saint Joseph, which is still venerated to this very day with the fame of being miraculous, as well as the door leading to the Oratory of the Confraternity of the Saint.¹¹

The chapels following that of Saint Joseph included the Altar dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene, and after the northern side-door of the church, the chapel where the marble statue of the Madonna and Child by Gagini was venerated. "After the lateral door looking towards the north and leading to the public street is venerated on her Altar the Most Blessed Virgin with her Only-begotten Son of God, whom she holds as a child on her left arm. This image was sculptured in marble in Messina in the year 1504. It is of natural height and is sculptured most beautifully, and is enclosed in a crystal glass panel. The whole frame has been recently gilded thanks to a noble benefactor."¹²

The Gagini statue, separated from its pedestal in 1911, has been standing for many decades in the niche at the back of the main altar under the titular painting of the Visitation. As from 15 September 2020 it has been moved for restoration, in the hope of being reunited with the marble pedestal and placed back in the original chapel where it already stood for over two centuries when our author was writing his *Cronaca*.

The Franciscan spirituality of the artefacts

The study of these precious works of art has also to take into consideration their specific characteristics as objects of devotion in a Franciscan church of the Regular Observance. This name indicates a reform within the Franciscan Order of friars Minor that officially began in 1368 through the initiative of fra Pauluccio Trinci da Foligno, but had its roots as far back as 1334 and links with the family of the Spirituels and Fraticelli in the same Franciscan Order, in which the memories of Saint Francis and his first companions were kept alive. Although the history of the Spirituels and Fraticelli is very turbulent, they also produced eminent mystics, like Angela da Foligno and Ubertino da Casale, to mention just two. The Observant reform grew very strongly during the 15th century through the preaching of Saints like Bernardine of Siena, Giovanni da Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca, until it finally succeeded in gathering into its fold the majority of the friars of the Order.¹³ In 1517, roughly some years after the artefacts arrived at the Rabat *Ta' Ġiezu* church, Pope Leo X divided the Franciscan family into two distinct Orders, namely the Friars Minor of the Regular Observance and the Friars Minor Conventuals, corresponding

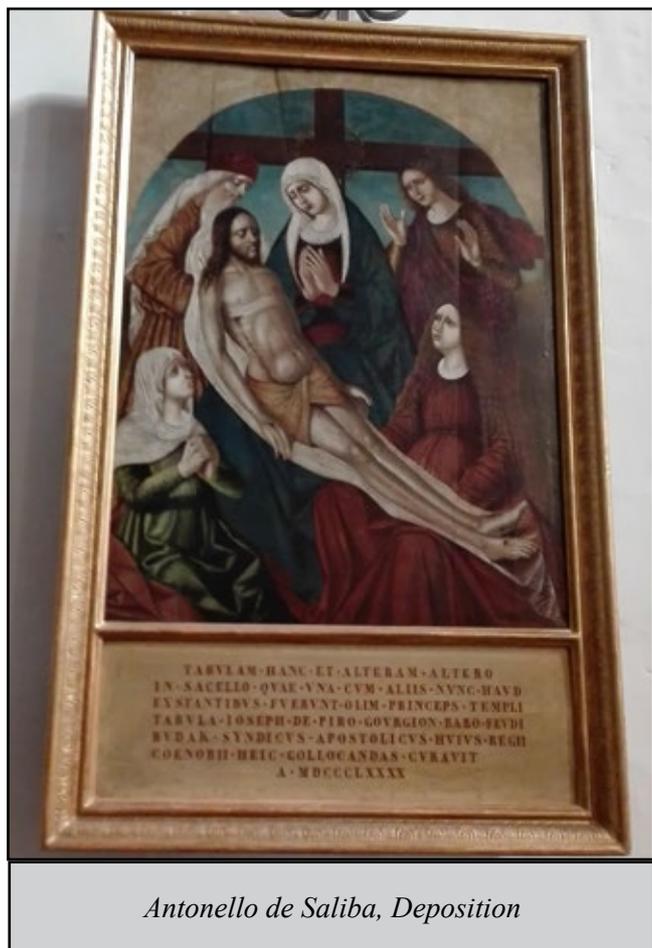


Antonello de Saliba, Madonna and Child

respectively to the reformed and non-reformed groups within the same Order.

The differences between the two families of the Order were not only ideological, namely centred upon the interpretation of poverty and the precepts of the Rule as Francis of Assisi had intended them. They were also evident in the architectural and artistic expressions of the churches and friaries. Whereas the Conventual family, as its name implies, established itself in the structure of the *conventus*, with a semi-monastic style of life, normally in the towns and cities, and with large conventual churches that acquired the same privileges of the canonical churches (choir-stalls, pulpit for preaching, bell-tower, right of burial), the churches of the Observant family were more modest. Indeed, in the very beginning the friars of the Regular Observance preferred to live in hermitages with no public places of worship. As time went on and their numbers increased, especially because of the fame of their great preachers and reformers mentioned above, the Franciscan Observants also settled in the towns and cities and built their own conventual churches, avoiding however the grandeur of the refined Gothic style of their Conventual confreres.

In Sicily the reform of the Observance took root and spread like wildfire through the preaching of Blessed Matteo da Agrigento, a faithful disciple of

Antonello de Saliba, *Deposition*

Bernardine of Siena.¹⁴ He divulged in Sicily and the surrounding islands the devotion towards the Holy Name of Jesus, which was the characteristic theme of preaching of the Franciscan Observants. This theme was part and parcel of Franciscan spirituality, centred as it is on the mystery of the Incarnation and on the humanity of Christ and his Virgin Mother. That is why the churches of the Franciscan Observants were often dedicated to the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus. This, obviously, was not just a Franciscan phenomenon, but was a common element in many other mendicant Orders during the 15th century, when we find churches dedicated, for example, to the mystery of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary.

The Rabat altarpiece at the *Ta' Ġiezu* church aptly expresses this kind of spirituality. The central panel is the titular painting, depicting the Virgin Mary enthroned with the Child Jesus. Above it we find the panel of the Deposition, in which Christ's dead body is seen in on reclined on the lap of his afflicted Mother. The presence of John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Clopas and Joseph of Arimathea in the painting is reminiscent of the Gospel scene of John 19:25ff. The figure of Mary Magdalene is particularly interesting. She is the long-haired woman holding the feet of Jesus.

Devotion to Mary Magdalene in the Franciscan family has always been strong. In the same church in Rabat a side altar, as we have seen, was dedicated to Mary Magdalene, where a marble statue of the Saint is still venerated, and her feastday was celebrated with due solemnity on 22 July. Mary Magdalene is the typical example of a penitent, and many Franciscan mystics were inspired by her to regard their lives as an act of penance, as did Francis himself and the first brothers, who described themselves as *virī poenitentiales de civitate Assisi oriundi*. The two panels are an expression of the typical Franciscan attention to the events surrounding the Incarnation and Redemption. One of the best examples of this particular devotion is to be found in the cycles of frescoes in the lower basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi. The right-hand transept looking towards the main altar is dedicated to the mystery of the Incarnation, whereas the left-hand transept is dedicated to the mystery of the Passion. In a certain way, the collocation of these two panels under the arches of the side pillars of the main altar in *Ta' Ġiezu* church is a very intelligent way of presenting them according to a Franciscan spiritual perspective.

According to the description of the *Cronica* that we have presented, there were a number of Saints alongside the main panels. On the top level there were represented Saint Paul and Saint Anthony of Padua on the right-hand side of the Deposition and Saint Francis and Saint Louis Bishop of Toulouse on the left-hand side. The choice of Saints Francis and Anthony is self-explanatory. Being a Franciscan church these two Saints always have the place of pride. Indeed, as we have seen, in the ancient Gothic church there were two lateral altars alongside the main altar under the pilasters, dedicated to these two Saints. The choice of Saint Paul is also self-explanatory, since the altarpiece was commissioned for Malta, and with Mdina and Rabat being also a centre for the local cult of the Apostle. But why Saint Louis of Toulouse (1274-1297), the holy Bishop known for his purity, who died at a young age? The reason could be the following. Louis of Toulouse was the second son of Charles I of Anjou, King of Sicily, who lost control of the island and its dependencies as a result of the Sicilian Vespers revolt of 1282. Louis was taken hostage by the Aragonese King Peter III of Aragon. After his liberation he renounced the right to the throne of Naples and preferred to become a friar Minor, and eventually Bishop of Toulouse. He was canonised by John XXII in 1317. His figure was intimately connected with the history of Sicily under the house

of Anjou, of which the Maltese islands had formed part.

The saints in the middle section, flanking the Madonna and Child, were Agatha and Catherine on the right side and Lucy and Barbara on the left. These virgins and martyrs were popular in the Latin Church. Agatha and Lucy were Sicilian Saints, and Catherine was particularly venerated in the Byzantine church of which Malta formed part before the Arab conquest. The case of Saint Barbara could refer to the fact that Barbara is invoked as a protection against lightning strikes, and in any case was a popular saint in Sicily. What is even more interesting is the fact that, after the Franciscan Observants built their second church of *Ta' Ġiežu* in Valletta, in 1600 they commissioned the Sicilian painter Antonio Catalano to paint the large baroque titular piece above the main altar, again depicting an original way of interpreting the event of the Visitation, in which the painter inserted the same four virgins and martyrs.¹⁵

The lower panel is of an inferior height than the other two. The central panel depicted Christ the Saviour with a chalice against his side-wound from which blood flows, flanked by Saint Paul and Saint John the Evangelist. The other panels, according to the *Cronica*, represented the other apostles. The figure of Christ placed at the centre is certainly a reminder of the Eucharist, but at the time before the Council of Trent it was improbable that the tabernacle would have been placed at the centre of the main altar in close proximity to this icon.

The marble statue of the Virgin with Child, the work of Antonello Gagini, was one of other similar statues in other churches of the Franciscan Observants in Sicily. It conveys the typical form of the Virgin holding the Child sitting on her left arm and gently touching him with her right hand. According to the *Cronica* it used to stand above an altar in the third side chapel from the main altar close to the northern side-door of *Ta' Ġiežu* church. The shallow pedestal depicts the stigmatisation of Saint Francis at the centre, flanked by another figure of Saint Francis and Saint Paul. In a certain way the Gagini Madonna expresses in sculpture what Antonello de Saliba expressed in painting on the main altarpiece.

Both the central panel of the altarpiece (Madonna with Child) and the Gagini Madonna with Child remain as proof of the characteristic note of the Franciscan Observant churches in the Kingdom of Sicily, dedicated to *Santa Maria di Gesu*, namely to the Holy Name of Jesus and of his Virgin Mother, and to this very day are witness to the devotional

aspect of 15th century Franciscan preaching by the family of the Regular Observance, centred as it was on the humanity of Jesus the Saviour of mankind (*Jesus Hominum Salvator*) and the tender maternal love of his Blessed Mother.

NOTES

- 1 M. BUHAGIAR, *Sculpture in Malta in the 15th and 16th centuries*, in *The Malta Independent* (Wednesday 5 September 2007). Retrieved 06.11.2020: www.independent.com.mt See also, of the same author, *The Qormi Pala d'Altare and Artistic Patronage in Malta during the 15th and early 16th Centuries*, in *Proceedings of History Week 1984*, The Malta Historical Society 1986, 21-32.
- 2 C. VELLA, *Three recently restored Renaissance paintings by Antonio de Saliba on Malta*, in C. VELLA (ed.), *At Home in Art: Essays in Honour of Mario Buhagiar*, Midsea Books, Malta 2016, 47-66; 171-186. These two panels were restored in 2014.
- 3 Ġ. AQUILINA, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin (Ta' Ġiežu) 1482c-1965c*, Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta 2011, 280-281.
- 4 C. VELLA, *Long-lost paintings rediscovered from a 1515 altarpiece in Rabat*, in *Times of Malta* (Wednesday, November 4, 2020), 14-15.
- 5 Giovanni Antonio Mercieca was born ca. 1660. We know for certain that he received the Subdiaconate in Siracusa on 19 September 1682 [*Archives Province Franciscans* = APF, *Atti Originali* = AO, VII, doc. 38]. He was an expert Latinist *Lector*, as well as *Lector* of Philosophy and Theology. He lectured Physics, Philosophy and Theology for three years in the *Studium Generale* of the Order, in the friary of Sant'Angelo in Milan. He was also an able preacher and preached in various towns of Lombardy, including Milan, Lodi and Cremona [APF, AO, VII, doc. 39; XIII, ff. docs. 13,14]. On 31 January 1695 the Minister General Fr. Bonaventura Poerio sent him to teach Theology in the *Studium Generale* of Modica in Sicily. After 13 years of teaching, on 29 August 1705 he was appointed *Lector Jubilatus De numero* [APF, AO, VII, doc. 40; XIII, 19; *Notarial Archives Valletta* = ANV, Atti Tommaso Vella, R478/21, 9. v. 1719, f. 590^v.] He was Guardian in the Maltese friaries, Definitor, Provincial Commissary for the friaries of Malta [APF, AO, IV, doc. 16; XVII, doc. 43]; Synodal Examiner, and in 1714 co-visitor during the Pastoral Visit of Bishop Giacomo Cannavez [*Archives Archdiocese Malta* = AAM, *Visite Pastorali*, XXX, Cannavez 1714-1717, mp.] He was Theologian of the Jerosolymitan Order [APF, AO, VII, docs. 44-46]. For many years he taught Gregorian Chant to the Franciscan students and friars, and also to the diocesan clergy [P. Pelagio 1776, 181]. He was Custos, a famous scholar of Literature. The diarist I.S. Mifsud writes that he was: *religioso di summa esemplarità e stima singolare appresso tutti i letterati* [*National Library Malta* = BNM, *Libr. Ms IX,1*]. He left a whole list of manuscripts, among which the most important is the *Cronaca duorum conventuum*, written in 1731, which is of great importance for the history of the two friaries of

- Rabat and Valletta. He also composed many inscriptions for public monuments. Died in Valletta, 2 January 1753; age 93; religious 75 [APF, *Necrologio Antico*, N23 (G. Scerri) in *Anglu tal-Paċi*, 2 (1917) 307-309]. Source of information: Ġ. AQUILINA, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin (Ta' Ġiežu) 1482c - 1965c*, Klabb Kotba Maltin 2011, Żjieda Ċ, 592-593.
- 6 G.A. MERCIECA, *Cronica duorum conventuum* (1731), f.15, Ms. in *Archives of the Franciscan Province* = APF, Valletta: "Chorus iste supradicte Religiosorum familie satis capax est, in cuius ultimo pariete Icon veneratur antiquissima, et Gothico more in tres ordines divisa, in quodam primo, e superiori representant in medio Corporis Christi Domini extincti depositionem de Cruce in sinum afflictis Virgine Matris, á latere dextero Divum Paulum, et post illum Divum Antonium Patavinum, á sinistro Sanctum Patrem Nostrum Franciscum, et post hunc Sanctum Episcopum Ludovicum. In medio secundi ordinis, Beatissimam Virginem in Cathedra sedentem, cum divina Prole super eius dexterum genu stante, et Angelos utrinque sacras adorantes Personas: á dextris Deiparentis Sancte Virgines stant Agatha, et Catharina, á sinistris vero Lucia, et Barbara: tertius, et infimus ordo unicus circiter palmi altitudinis adest, quo Salvator mundi in medio existens, et equali numero Apostolorum suorum ad dexteram, sinistramve associates ostenditur, quam omnium figurarum quelibet supra se epistilio perforato, ac deaurato adornatur opus Messane elaboratum anno 1517."
 - 7 The friars Minor already celebrated the feast of the Visitation in 1263. Pope Urban IV decreed its institution. In 1389 Pope Urban VI extended the celebration to the entire Latin Church. On 10 July 1441, during the Synod of Basle, with the authority of Pope Eugene IV, the feast of the Visitation was confirmed as a feast for the entire Latin Church. Eugene IV was a staunch defender of the reformed branch of the Franciscan Order, namely the friars Minor of the Regular Observance. Ġ. AQUILINA, *Kwadri tal-Madonna fil-Knisja "Ta' Ġiežu" tal-Belt Valletta*, in *Spiritu u Hajja. Rivista ta' Kultura Frangiskana*, 41 (Lulju 1996) 97-100. On page 97-98: "It-titlu ta' Santa Marija ta' Ġesù jiġbor fil storja shiħa. Ir-riforma b'riżq ir-ritorn tal-Ordni Frangiskan għall-idejal tal-bidu ta' meta waqqfu S. Frangisk fil-harsien u l-ghajxien tal-faqar imqaddes, imhegga minn S. Bernardin ta' Siena u shabu, fosthom il-Beatu Matthew ta' Agrigento, fi Sqallija, saret bil-ghajta tal-Isem ta' Ġesù u tal-Madonna, li ġew miġburin f'titlu wieħed ta' Santa Marija ta' Ġesù, meqjum fil-misteru tal-Vizitazzjoni, jew iż-Żjara ta' Marija lil S. Elizabetta. Ta' min iżid hawn li fl-1525, nhar id-9 ta' Ġunju, il-Vigarju Ġenerali tad-djoċesi, Sede Vacante, flimkien mal-Kunsill tal-Ġurati tal-Imdina, ordnaw li l-festa tal-Vizitazzjoni għandha tiġi iċċelebrata b'mod solenni. Jum ta' festa minn dejjem kien nhar it-2 ta' Lulju, u dan sar-riforma tal-Kalendarju, meta bdiet issir fil-31 ta' Mejju."
 - 8 *Cronica duorum conventuum*, f.15: "In maioribus parastatis, maiorem arcum super Altare maius substantantibus, bina sunt minor Altaria collateralia maiori. Quod est á dextris S[anctis]S[imo]. Patriarche Francisco extat dicatum, et quod á sinistris, D[ivo] Antonio Patavino, utramque ex septem Altaribus."
 - 9 J. DEBONO, *The Arch Confraternity of St. Joseph at Rabat 1800 - 1970s. A Social and Religious Perspective*. B.A. (Hons.) History Dissertation, University of Malta 2013, 11-23, in www.academia.edu (retrieved 07/11/2020).
 - 10 N. MUSCAT, *Saint Joseph in Franciscan Theology*, in *Spiritu u Hajja. Rivista ta' Kultura Frangiskana*, 46 (Ottubru 1997) 157-161. G. SPIRITO - M. CESCHIA, *Giuseppe di Nazaret. Una prospettiva francescana tra XIII e XV secolo*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 111 (2011) 163-185. English translation by N. MUSCAT, *Joseph of Nazareth. A Franciscan Perspective between the 13th and 15th Centuries*, in *Spirit+Life. Journal of Franciscan Culture*, 128 (April-June 2019) 4-15. N. MUSCAT, *San Ġużep fit-Teoloġija u Spiritwalità Frangiskana*, Malta 2019 (still awaiting publication, as part of a voluminous study by various authors on the cult of Saint Joseph in the universal Church and in the Maltese islands).
 - 11 *Cronica duorum conventuum*, ff. 15-16: "In brachio dextero Crucis, seu Thau Ecclesie sacellum adest reliquis, sui lateris aliquantum amplius cum Altari S[anctis]S[im]o Patriarche Ioseph dicato, cuius effigiem interidentis ligna, parvulo Iesu serra deferente, et purissima eius Matre assuente cinteola á latere positus depinxit peritissimus Eques Mattias (qui tota Ecclesie maioribus Conventualis Ierosolymitane Religionis formicem depictis Sancti Ioannis Baptiste facinoribus eleganter ornavit) veneratur in hoc Altari reliquia de baculo ipsius S[anctis]S[ime] Patriarche. In huius sacelli muro sinistro patet aditus ad Oratorium Confratrum S[ancti] ancti Ioseph satis amplum, et multorum sodalium optime capax."
 - 12 *Cronica duorum conventuum*, f. 16: "Sequitur ostium laterale boreale ad via publica post quod veneratur in suo Altari B[eatissi]ma Virgo cum suo Unigenito, Deique Filio infante super sinistrum brachium, expressa in statuam pariter marmoream, Messane anno 1504 ad naturalem proceritatem speciosissime sculpta, christallis pregrandibus inclusam, cuius totus prospectus novissime per nobilem benefactorem deauratus fuit."
 - 13 The bibliography on the Spirituals and Observants in the Franciscan Order is unending. Here we simply give some fundamental indications. The following annual conferences of the Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani in Assisi have been dedicated to this theme: *Chi erano gli Spirituali?* (Assisi, 16-18 ottobre 1975); *Il rinnovamento del francescanesimo: l'Osservanza* (Assisi, 20-22 ottobre 1983); *I Francescani nel Trecento* (Assisi, 16-18 ottobre 1986); *Santi e santità nel secolo XIV* (Assisi, 15-17 ottobre 1987); *Eremitismo nel francescanesimo medievale* (Assisi, 12-14 ottobre 1989); *Angelo Clareno francescano* (Assisi, 5-7 ottobre 2006); *I frati osservanti e la società in Italia nel secolo XV* (Assisi, 11-13 ottobre 2012); *Ubertino da Casale* (Assisi, 18-20 ottobre 2013); *Pietro di Giovanni Olivi frate minore* (16-18 ottobre 2015). The titles of the various papers presented can be consulted on www.sisf-assisi.it
 - 14 A. MURSIA, *A proposito del Movimento dell'Osservanza Francescana in Sicilia. Dal rientro nell'isola di frate Matteo di Agrigento al pontificato di Sisto IV*, in *Miscellanea Francescana* 115 (2015) 318-330.
 - 15 Ġ. AQUILINA, *Kwadri tal-Madonna fil-Knisja "Ta' Ġiežu" tal-Belt Valletta*, in *Spiritu u Hajja. Rivista ta' Kultura Frangiskana*, 41 (Lulju 1996) 98.

FRATER FRANCISCUS STORIA E ATTUALITÀ

The 48th International Congress of Study of the International Society of Franciscan Studies was dedicated to the theme *Frater Franciscus. Storia e Attualità*. The Congress was held in Palazzo Bernabei in Assisi on 15-17 October 2020. This year, because of the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Congress was open for a limited number of participants, but was transmitted live on the official website of the Society: www.sisf-assisi.it

The following scholars presented their papers, which will then be published in the annual Acts of the Congresses of the International Society: Grado Giovanni Merlo (Università di Milano), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storiografia (1993-2020)*; Enrico Menestò (Università di Perugia), *Tradizione manoscritta e questioni ecotiche degli Scritti di Francesco*; Maria Pia Alberzoni (Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore - Milano), *Francesco e la Chiesa romana tra storiografia e ideologia*; Stefano Brufani (Università di Perugia), *Frate Francesco e l'Ordine. La minoritas in questione*; Maria Teresa Dolso (Università di Padova), *Minorità e minoritismi*; Roberto Lambertini (Università di Macerata), *Verso una nuova antropologia? Francesco e l'umano*; Marina Benedetti (Università di Milano), *Frate Francesco e madonna Chiara*; Francesco Morales (Università di Milano), *Immaginazione, aneddotica e storiografia: le biografie contemporanee*; Haude Morvan (Università di Bordeaux-Montaigne), *I "volti" di san Francesco d'Assisi*; Enrico Cardini (Università di San Marino), *Francesco e l'Islam*; Giacomo Todeschini (Università di Siena), *Francesco e l'economia*; Raimondo Michetti (Università Rome Tre), *Francesco e l'essenza del cristianesimo*; Giuseppe Buffon (Pontificia Università Antonianum), *Francesco e il creato*; Andrea Riccardi (Università La Sapienza), *Frate Francesco - san Francesco - papa Francesco*.

The first Congress dedicated to the figure of

Francis of Assisi was that of 1993. The aim of this year's Congress was to verify the progress accomplished in Franciscan studies, particularly after the critical edition of the *Opuscula* of Saint Francis by the late Kajetan Esser in 1976 and the subsequent critical edition of Carlo Paolazzi. It also takes into consideration the effort of contemporary historiographers who study and present new editions of the sources for the life of Saint Francis. Above all, the various papers tried to delve into the understanding of the intuition of the evangelical-pauperistic experience of Francis and of the first fraternity of minors, and the process of its institutionalisation and the emergence of various typologies of minoritic presence, object of an incessant interpretation by the 'politics' of the apotolic See and Roman curia. The figure of Saint Francis in liturgy, preaching and art, has also contributed to a more complex historiographic presentation of this unique man and prophet.

The theme chosen for this year's Congress had the aim of presenting an overall picture of the recent historiography of Francis of Assisi. The emphasis was on the various authors who tried to portray an image of Saint Francis in an original and meaningful historiographic interpretation. Historiography regards the way in which history is written, and is a specific science that draws particular interest on the part of scholars of history. Indeed, no historical account is complete without a specific interpretation of the same facts and personages that have made history. Just as the study of the medieval Franciscan biographies calls for a thorough understanding of the historical context in which they were written and of the ideologies that underlie their documentation, so contemporary biographies of Saint Francis need to be studied within the context in which they are meant to portray an image of him to contemporary readers.

Few historical figures have had the fortune of

Francis of Assisi in being the object of endless volumes of history, hagiography, literature. This has invariably drawn many to form their own interpretation regarding the figure of Francis. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges to a historian is that of avoiding the trap of projecting his or her interpretation in the past and reading historical documents in the light of contemporary ideologies and judgments. Alas, this has often been the case in Franciscan historiography. Ever since the start of modern studies on Saint Francis by Paul Sabatier at the end of the 19th century, it has been very difficult to distinguish the historical element from the actual interpretation of the same event. Francis has been presented as a Church-reformer, an idealist, a man of dialogue, a champion of ecology, a peace-activist. In the same way, a century after his death, he was presented by Spiritual Franciscans as a defender of an ideology of poverty in contrast to a powerful and rich ecclesiastical institution. One could almost speak about an abusive interpretation of what Francis really stood for. Such interpretations are evident in the many biographies of the saint and monographs of Franciscan history, that have taken the place of the old manuals that were also biased according to which party they were coming from in the same Franciscan family.

A very thorny problem in contemporary historiography regarding Francis and his spiritual legacy regards the *intentio Francisci*, namely the deep-seated psychological and spiritual forces that drove Francis to accomplish his dream in a way that he never imagined, namely by being the founder of a great religious family. The crises that he went through in the face of an ever-changing structure

that he himself could not control are evident in the sources we have at our disposal. Francis might have felt misunderstood and misinterpreted even when he was still alive, let alone after his death. How is it possible to discover his original intentions without making violence upon him and abusing his intuition? The answer for historians today offers no easy solution.

The Congress tried to address this issue in such a way that we would be aware of the distance of time and space that lies between our world and the medieval world in which Francis of Assisi lived. At the same time it wanted to be a tribute to so many intelligent minds who have taken the task of studying Francis and his message in a way that would be as faithful as possible to his intentions and, at the same time, that would build bridges with the contemporary world and culture in which we live.

The theme of one of the papers say it all. How come that brother Francis would become Saint Francis and would be chosen as a namesake by a contemporary pope? What is the relationship between these three visions, namely the human, hagiographic and prophetic-charismatic-institutional representation of the figure of Francis of Assisi? Is the contemporary Francis who embraces Patriarch Bartholomew and Grand Imam Sheik Ahmed el-Tayyeb a faithful representation of the historical Francis who crossed into enemy lines to meet the adversaries of Christianity, indeed of the *Romanitas* of that Catholic Christianity that he embraced? Is this the criterion wherein we are to cherish his holiness? If it is so, then are we not also experiencing a re-incarnation of Francis today? History will have to give us an answer.

Francis has inspired these pages



“«Fratelli tutti». With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. Of the counsels Francis offered, I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother ‘as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him.’ In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives. There is an episode in the life of Saint Francis that shows his openness of heart, which knew no bounds and transcended differences of origin, nationality, colour or religion. It was his visit to Sultan Malik-el-Kamil, in Egypt, which entailed considerable hardship, given Francis’ poverty, his scarce resources, the great distances to be traveled and their differences of language, culture and religion. That journey, undertaken at the time of the Crusades, further demonstrated the breadth and grandeur of his love, which sought to embrace everyone. Francis’ fidelity to his Lord was commensurate with his love for his brothers and sisters. Unconcerned for the hardships and dangers involved, Francis went to meet the Sultan with the same attitude that he instilled in his disciples: if they found themselves ‘among the Saracens and other nonbelievers’, without renouncing their own identity they were not to ‘engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake’. In the context of the times, this was an extraordinary recommendation. We are impressed that some eight hundred years ago Saint Francis urged that all forms of hostility or conflict be avoided and that a humble and fraternal ‘subjection’ be shown to those who did not share his faith. Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God. He understood that ‘God is love and those who abide in love abide in God’ (1 Jn 4:16). In this way, he became a father to all and inspired the vision of a fraternal society.



Pope Francis

Encyclical Letter «Fratelli tutti»
on fraternity and social friendship

Tomb of St. Francis, Assisi, 3 October 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:

*Immaculate Conception with St. Francis and John Duns Scotus.
Painting by Fortunato Venuti (1906), St. Anthony Church, Ghajnsielem, Gozo*