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# 146

## ***Editorial***

### **GRECCIO 1223-2023**

On 25 December 2023 we shall be celebrating the 800 years since Saint Francis of Assisi commemorated the Nativity of Jesus in the remote fortified village of Greccio, by re-enacting the Nativity scene in a cave. The celebration of the liturgy of Christmas, with the singing of Matins and the Mass of the Nativity, had as a backdrop a simple environment in which a manger with hay was placed under the altar and an ox and ass introduced close by. The whole scene can still be contemplated on the walls of the cave-church of Greccio, in the fresco of the Giotto school. On one side the Virgin Mary with Child, and Saint Joseph meditating quietly the mystery of the Virgin birth. On the other side, Saint Francis vested as deacon during the Mass and bending over the Infant Jesus in the manger.

This year the celebration of Christmas assumes this special characteristic of poverty and humility which is evident in the link between the Nativity Grotto of Bethlehem and the tiny cave-church of Greccio.

Our issue of *Spirit+Life* is dedicated to this great mystery of our salvation, which Francis lived in a tangible form during the Christmas celebration in Greccio, where the town of Bethlehem (the house of bread), was rendered visible in the Bread of Life, the Word made flesh, in the manger.

Francis contemplated the Nativity of Christ and lived the experience of poverty and humility of the Incarnation. Greccio became a new Bethlehem.

Noel Muscat OFM

# “QUASI NOVA BETHLEHEM DE GRAECIO FACTA EST” Greccio and the Nativity scene in the Franciscan Sources [Part 2]

Noel Muscat OFM

The commemoration of the 800 years since the Christmas celebration in Greccio in 1223 is a fitting occasion to make a detailed analysis of the first account of this event by the biographer Thomas of Celano. In the first part of our paper we have spoken about the fortified castle and hermitage in Greccio and about various events that are narrated by the Franciscan Sources and which occurred in this place where Francis of Assisi stopped more than once. Now we have to examine the moment in which Francis lived in Greccio when he was returning from Rome to Assisi, after having obtained the confirmation of the *Regula Bullata* of the friars Minor by Pope Honorius III on 29 November 1223.

The account by Celano marks the conclusion of the first part of his *Vita beati Francisci*, written in 1228-1229 upon the request of Pope Gregory IX. We shall first present the text in the English translation of the Sources, but also refer to the Latin text in the original version in order to study the episode in a more detailed manner.

## 1 Celano 84

His highest aim, foremost desire, and greatest intention was to pay heed to the holy gospel in all things and through all things, to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and to retrace His footsteps completely with all vigilance and all zeal, all the desire of his soul and all the fervour of his heart.

Francis used to recall with regular meditation the words of Christ and recollect His deeds with the most attentive perception. Indeed, so thoroughly did the humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion occupy his memory that he scarcely wanted to think of anything else.

We should note then, as matter worthy of memory and something to be recalled with reverence, what he did, three years prior to his death, at the town of Greccio, on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ. *There was a certain man in that area* named John, who *had a good reputation* (Jb 1:1; Phil 4:8), but an even better manner of life. Blessed Francis loved him with special affection, since, despite being a noble in the land and very honoured in human society, he had trampled the nobility of the flesh under his feet and pursued instead the nobility of the spirit. As usual, blessed Francis had John summoned to him some fifteen days prior to the birthday of the Lord. “If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio,” he said to him, “hurry before me and *carefully make ready* (Prv 24:27) the things I tell you. For I wish to enact the memory of that babe *who was born in Bethlehem* (Mt 2:12): to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he *lay in a manger* (Lk 2:7), and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay.” Once the good and faithful man had heard Francis’ words, *he ran quickly* (Jn 20:4) and prepared in that place

all the things that the holy man had requested.<sup>1</sup>

Note that Celano introduces the episode with a direct reference to the opening words of the *Regula non bullata*, chapter 1: *Domini nostri Iesu Christi doctrinam sequi et vestigia*.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that Celano is quoting the *Earlier Rule*, given that the Greccio episode happened barely one month after the confirmation of the *Later Rule*. However, the expression referring to the following of the footsteps and teachings of Christ is more detailed in the *RegNB*. It seems strange that Celano does not mention the confirmation of the *Regula bullata* by Pope Honorius III, and he only mentions the oral approval of the *forma vitae* by Innocent III in 1209.<sup>3</sup> Maybe his intention was that of showing that, already at the very beginning, the firm resolve of Francis to follow Jesus Christ according to the Gospel form of life was already a confirmation of what the Church recognised as a stable form of religious life in 1223. What is more important, however, is that the words and actions of Jesus, as Celano states, were at the basis of Francis' commitment and of his way of life. Thus Celano provides the background for the mystery of the

Incarnation that Francis wanted to celebrate in Greccio.

Celano states that Francis found himself in the castle of Greccio three years prior to his death. Francis died on 3 October 1226, and the Christmas celebration of Greccio occurred on 25 December 1223. As we have already stated, Francis was on his way back to Assisi from Rome where on 29 November 1223 Pope Honorius III had confirmed the *RegB*. Therefore, he stayed for a few weeks in the Rieti valley after coming up the Via Salaria to proceed to the Spoleto valley. He spent this time in Greccio.

At this point Celano describes the preparations that Francis ordered to be made for the Christmas celebration. The biographer mentions the nobleman Giovanni of Greccio, referring to him with the opening words of Job 1:1, therefore a just man, and also with the words of Paul in Philippians 4:8, where the Apostle encourages the Christians to cherish all that is admirable in virtue. Celano states that Giovanni was a great admirer of Francis and loved him intensely. Although he had noble birth, this man preferred the nobility of the spirit. It may well be that Giovanni was one of the penitents who followed the way of life of the friars, since we have

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<sup>1</sup> IC 84 (FAED I, 254-255). Latin text: THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Prima Sancti Francisci*, 84, in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 63.

84. Summa eius intentio, praecipuum desiderium, supremumque propositum eius erat sanctum Evangelium in omnibus et per omnia observare ac perfecte omni vigilantia, omni studio, toto desiderio mentis, toto cordis fervore, "Domini nostri Iesu Christi doctrinam sequi et vestigia" (*Regula* I, c. 1) imitari. Recordabatur assidua meditatione verborum eius et sagacissima consideratione ipsius opera relegebat. Praecipue incarnationis humilitas et charitas passionis ita eius memoriam occupabant, ut vix vellet aliud cogitare. Memorandum proinde ac reverenti memoria recolendum quod tertio anno ante gloriosi obitus sui diem apud castrum quod Graecium dicitur, fecit in die natalis Domini nostri Iesu Christi. *Erat in terra illa vir* (Iob 1,1) quidam nomine Ioannes, *bonae famae* (Phil 4,8) sed melioris vitae, quem beatus Franciscus amore praecipuo diligebat, quoniam cum in terra sua nobilis et honorabilis plurimum exstisset, carnis

nobilitate calcata, nobilitatem animi est secutus. Hunc vero beatus Franciscus, sicut saepe solebat, fere per quindecim dies ante nativitatem Domini fecit ad se vocari et dixit ei: "Si desideras, ut apud Graecium praesentem festivitatem Domini celebremus, festina praecedere, et quae tibi dico, *praepara diligenter* (Prov 24,27). Volo enim illius pueri memoriam agere, qui *in Bethlehem natus est* (Matth 2,1-2), et infantium necessitatum eius incommoda, quomodo *in praesepio reclinatus* (Luc 2,7) et quomodo, adstante bove atque asino, supra foenum positus exstitit, utcumque corporeis oculis pervidere." Quod audiens vir bonus atque fidelis *currit citius* (Ioh 20,4), et omnia in praedicto loco, quae sanctus dixerat, praeparavit.

<sup>2</sup> *RegNB* 1,1: *Regula et vita istorum fratrum hec est, scilicet vivere in obedientia, in castitate et sine proprio, et Domini nostri Iesu Christi doctrinam et vestigia sequi*. FRANCESCO D'ASSISI, *Scritti*. Edizione critica a cura di C. PAOLAZZI, Grottaferrata 2009, 242.

<sup>3</sup> IC 33 (FAED I, 212).

already seen that in Greccio many of the villagers had embarked upon this life of penance after listening to the preaching of Francis.

The preparation for the celebration of the Nativity began fifteen days before Christmas. Francis called his friend Giovanni and entrusted him with preparing with due diligence all that was needed for the fitting celebration. "If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio, hurry before me and carefully make ready the things I tell you. For I wish to enact the memory of that babe *who was born in Bethlehem* (Mt 2:1-2): to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he *lay in a manger* (Lk 2:7), and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay."

What exactly was Francis' intention? From Celano's description we can conclude that Francis wanted to re-enact the Christmas scene of Bethlehem in Greccio, in such a way that the people who would participate in the celebration would make a bodily contact with the mystery, literally see with their bodily eyes, the poverty and humility of the Son of God made man.

Celano quotes two Gospel passages from the infancy narratives that speak about Bethlehem (Mt 2:1-2) and about the manger (Lk 2:7). I think that it is important that we dwell for a few moments on these references, because they are not simply the result of Francis' assiduous meditation of the Gospel texts, but in some way refer to a concrete and tangible experience with Bethlehem and with the manger of the Lord (including also the reference to the ox and ass at the manger, which is a later tradition

taken by the Church Fathers from Isaiah 1:3).<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Francis insisted that he wanted a visual representation of the Nativity scene seems to suggest that he had a kind of intense experience of the same mystery in the life of Christ. It could very well have been a mystical experience, but the details that are conveyed in the description seem to suggest that Francis had seen the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem.

We know that in 1219 Francis had gone to Egypt during the Fifth Crusade and met the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil during the siege of Damietta. We also know, from the Crusader chronicles of the time, that the Sultan had given a *signaculum* to Francis, allowing him to travel unmolested in his dominions, which included Palestine and the Holy Places, and also to be exempt from paying the tax that Christian pilgrims were obliged to give to the Muslim overlords of the same Holy Places.

However, it is also true that none of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Sources speak about a visit of Francis to the Holy Places, by which we mean the Holy Sepulchre and Calvary in Jerusalem and the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The only reference that we have is that by Angelo Clareno in the *Chronicon seu Historia Septem Tribulationum Ordinis Minorum*, written in 1325, a century after Francis' death. Clareno states: "[The Sultan] ordered that he [Francis] and all his brothers could freely go to visit the Sepulchre without paying any fees."<sup>5</sup>

It is plausible to state that, during the first half of 1220, while he was still in the East, Francis could have visited the Holy Places, with the assurance he had received from the Sultan. Although Clareno only mentions

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Quaracchi editors of *Analecta Franciscana*, the image of the ox and ass, taken from Isaiah 1:3, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards was often used in the description of the Nativity of Christ by the Church Fathers. They quote St. Ambrose, *Expositio in Evangelium Lucae* II, n. 42 (PL 15, 1568) and St. Jerome, *Apologia adversus Rufini libros*, 1, n. 2 (PL 23, 17).

<sup>5</sup> ANGELUS CLARINUS, *Chronica seu Historia septem Tribulationum Ordinis Minorum*, in G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Franciscano*, Tomo I, Quaracchi 1906, 56: et ipsum et omnes fratres suos libere ad Sepulcrum et absque tributi solutione accedere posse mandavit.

the Sepulchre, it does not mean that Francis could not also have travelled to Bethlehem, which is just 8 kilometres away from Jerusalem. The Sepulchre is understood as a symbol of the Holy Places, and therefore access to the Sepulchre of the Lord would also have meant the possibility to visit other places like Bethlehem. After all, the church of the Nativity, built by emperor Justinian in the 6th century, has never been destroyed, and although it was officially closed after the ousting of the Crusades from Jerusalem in 1187, it nevertheless was still standing and could be visited.

What would Francis have experienced in Bethlehem? He would certainly have been allowed to enter the Nativity Grotto in order to contemplate the place of the birth of Jesus and the place of the manger in the side of the same Grotto. That is why we can presume that the tangible experience of the Nativity scene in Bethlehem could have prompted Francis to represent it in Greccio. Another very important aspect of the same argument, as we will see in the following paragraph, is that the Greccio Nativity scene takes place during the liturgical celebration of Matins and Mass on Christmas night. This is another proof that it is linked with the Holy Place of Bethlehem, where the Grotto is not just a place of worship of the birthplace and manger of Jesus, but rather a place of liturgical celebrations on the altars that stand exactly on the same spots of the birthplace and manger of the Lord.

Giovanni ran with haste to prepare what Francis had ordered. By quoting John 20:4 Celano makes Giovanni appear as another John, the beloved disciple, who hastens with Peter on Easter Sunday morning to the empty Tomb of Christ. As we shall see, there is an intimate link between the mystery of the birth of Jesus and the

Paschal Mystery of his crucifixion, death and resurrection. Not only is the Greccio episode placed within the context of liturgical celebration, but even the fresco on the cave wall behind the altar, coming from the school of Giotto, and which shows, on one side, the Nativity scene in Bethlehem, and on the other the Nativity scene in Greccio, depicts the infant Jesus standing up in swaddling clothes above a manger which seems to be like an empty Tomb.

## 1 Celano 85

Finally, *the day of joy* has drawn near, *the time of exultation has come* (Tb 13:10; Sg 2:12). From many different places the brethren have been called. As they could, the men and women of that land with exultant hearts prepare candles and torches to light up that night whose shining star has enlightened every day and year. Finally, the holy man of God comes and, finding all things prepared, *he saw them and was glad* (Jn 8:56). Indeed, the manger is prepared, the hay is carried in, and the ox and the ass are led to the spot. There simplicity is given a place of honour, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem.

*The night is lit up like day* (Ps 139:12), delighting both man and beast. The people arrive, ecstatic at this new mystery of new joy. The forest amplifies the cries and the boulders echo back the joyful crowd. The brothers sing, giving God due praise, and the whole night abounds with jubilation. *The holy man of God* (Mk 1:24) stands before the manger, filled with heartfelt sighs, contrite in his piety, and overcome with wondrous joy. Over the manger the solemnities of the Mass are celebrated and the priest enjoys a new consolation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 1C 85 (FAED I, 255-256). Latin text in THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Prima Sancti Francisci*, 84, in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 63-64:

85. Appropinquavit autem *dies laetitiae* (Tob 13,10), *tempus exultationis advenit* (Cant 2,12). E pluribus locis vocati sunt fratres: viri et mulieres

terrae illius, secundum posse suum, exultantibus animis cereos et facies praeparant ad illuminandam noctem, quae scintillanti sidere dies omnes illuminavit et annos. Venit denique sanctus Dei et inveniens omnia praeparata, *vidit et gavisus est* (Ioh 8,56). Et quidem praeparatur praesepium, apportatur

The preparations for the celebration of Christmas give way to an expression of immense joy on the part of those who participated in the event. Celano describes this joy by quoting a verse from the canticle of Tobit (Tob 13:10) and an expression from the Song of Songs (2:12). Then he gives us a vivid description of the procession of brothers coming from various *loca*, that is, hermitages. This is already an indication of the fact that the Rieti valley was dotted with small hermitages where the brothers would stay, like Poggio Bustone and Fonte Colombo. Maybe they also came from further afield, from the mountains of Terni and Narni. The long procession of people carrying candles and torches is an impressive description of this joy, and is a proof that during those two weeks of preparation Giovanni had worked hard at advertising the event. The light that illuminated the night made that night special, since Christmas was the night that enlightened all the other days of history. One of the biblical verses that Celano quotes when speaking about the light of Christmas night is that of Ps 138:12: “The night will shine like the day.” This verse is also popular in the liturgy, since it forms part of the Easter *præconium*, or *Exsultet*: *Hæc nox est, de qua scriptum est: Et nox sicut dies illuminabitur*. The use of this expression is another sign of the close link between the mystery of the Incarnation in Christmas and the Paschal mystery of the Easter Triduum. The celebration of the *Pascha Nativitatis* marks the starting point of the celebration of the *Pascha Resurrectionis*, which is sacramentally present in the celebration of the Eucharist.

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foenum, bos et asinus adducuntur. Honoratur ibi simplicitas, exaltatur paupertas, humilitas commendatur et quasi nova Bethlehem de Graecio facta est. *Illuminatur nox ut dies* (Ps 138,12), et hominibus atque animalibus deliciosa existit. Adveniunt populi et ad novum mysterium novis gaudiis adlaetantur. Personat silva voces et iubilantibus rupes respondent. Cantant fratres, Domino laudes debitas persolventes, et tota nox iubilatione resultat. Stat sanctus Dei coram

Greccio draws together these two important aspects of the same mystery.

At this point Celano introduces Francis in the setting of the Greccio Nativity scene. Francis is described with the words of John 8:56, referring to Abraham who saw the day of Christ in faith and rejoiced. We find here a link between the physical gaze of the Saint who beholds the place where the celebration was to take place, and the spiritual gaze of faith in the mystery, which made him overflow with joy.

Next is the description of the crib itself. The setting is simple. Celano mentions the manger, the hay that was placed in it, and the two animals that were also part of the scene. The mention of animals, in this case the ox and ass, is very important, since in this episode animals play an important role, as we shall see. Indeed, all creation was called to participate in the joy of the Nativity, since the setting included also the forests and mountains that would echo with the singing and praises of the brothers.

All this makes Celano note three important virtues that are evoked by this scene, namely simplicity, poverty and humility. It is as if we are listening to the same Francis who would praise the mystery of Christmas in the 15<sup>th</sup> psalm of the *Office of the Passion*: “For the Most Holy Child has been given to us and he has been born for us on the way and placed in a manger because he did not have a place in the inn.”<sup>7</sup>

These virtues which characterised the birth of Jesus lead Celano to the expression *quasi nova Bethlehem Graecio facta est*. Greccio became nearly a new Bethlehem. One cannot help wondering how Celano could have made such a description had he not been convinced that Francis would have

praesepio, suspiriis plenus, pietate contritus et mirabili gaudio superfus. Celebrantur missarum solemnna supra praesaepe et nova fruitur consolatione sacerdos.

<sup>7</sup> *Office of the Passion. Vespers of the Lord's Birth. Psalm XV,7 (FAED I, 156). Quia sanctissimus puer dilectus datus est nobis; et natus fuit pro nobis* (cfr. Is 9,6) in via et positus in praesepio, *quia non habebat locum in diversorio* (cfr. Lc 2,7). FRANCESCO D'ASSISI, *Scritti*, 106.

personally experienced the site of the Nativity and tried to re-enact what he saw with his own eyes. Certainly, there is a difference between the barren hills of Judaea and the lush forests of the mountains surrounding Greccio. However, both places convey the same message of simplicity, poverty and humility.

The joy of the event is described by Celano as a new joy in a new mystery. The element of *novitas* is typical of Celano, and he makes it all-inclusive. It is both human persons and animals who experience this new joy in the new mystery they behold. It is as if men and beasts were contemplating the same mystery with their physical eyes and with the eyes of faith. The same rocks on the mountains echoed the joy of the people, and it seemed that the same mountains were responding with their echoes to the praises that were being offered to God.

Celano states that the brothers were singing the praises of the Lord. The liturgy of the Christmas night contemplates the Nativity of the Lord first and foremost by the celebration of Matins, beginning with the Invitatory antiphon: *Christus natus est nobis, venite adoremus*. The Nocturns of the same Office are made up of messianic psalms (Psalms 2, 18 and 44 in the first Nocturn; Psalms 47, 71 and 84 in the second Nocturn; Psalms 88, 95 and 97 in the third Nocturn), and by the reading of the prophecies of Isaiah 9, 40 and 52 (in the first Nocturn), the Sermon of Pope St. Leo the Great for Christmas (in the second Nocturn), and the Homilies of St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine (in the third Nocturn). Celano speaks about the whole night being marked by jubilant singing. Indeed, the sung celebration of Matins would take roughly two hours.

In the meantime, Francis is described as staying close to the manger, sighing with piety and with marvellous joy. At the end of Matins the solemn Mass of the Nativity of the Lord was celebrated. Celano notes that the Mass was celebrated on the manger. Therefore, the manger served as an altar. This detail is interesting, as much as it is strange. Maybe such a kind of celebration had never occurred before. A proof of this is the fact that St. Bonaventure notes in the *Legenda Maior*: “It happened, three years prior to his death, that he decided to celebrate at the town of Greccio the memory of the birth of the Child Jesus with the greatest possible solemnity, in order to arouse devotion. So that this would not be considered a type of novelty, he petitioned for and obtained permission from the Supreme Pontiff.”<sup>8</sup>

Bonaventure notes this detail since he regarded it as a kind of “invention” on the part of Francis, which was not contemplated by liturgical norms. We have to remember that, until 3 December 1224, the friars were not allowed to have their own private oratories in order to celebrate the Eucharist. It was only on that date that Pope Honorius III published the Bulla *Quia populares tumultus*, in which he gave permission to the friars Minor: “we concede to you this privilege: that in your places and oratories you may celebrate solemn Masses with a portable altar, as well as the other divine offices, without prejudice to the rights of parochial churches.”<sup>9</sup>

Maybe this privilege was given after the Pope considered what Francis had requested in the case of the Nativity celebration in Greccio. In other words, the Christmas Mass of 1223 was celebrated on a portable altar that was placed upon or close to the manger where the hay and the two animals were introduced. Moreover it

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<sup>8</sup> LMj 10,7 (FAED II, 610). Latin text: S. BONAVENTURA, *Legenda Maior sancti Francisci* X,7 in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 604-605: Contigit autem anno tertio ante obitum suum, ut memoriam nativitatis pueri Iesu ad devotionem excitandam apud castrum Graecii disponeret agere, cum quanto

maiore solemnitate valeret. Ne vero hoc novitati posset adscribi, a Summo Pontifice petita et obtenta licentia...

<sup>9</sup> POPE HONORIUS III, *Quia populares tumultus* (FAED I, 562).



was celebrated in a mountain cave, which later on would become a cave-church, as Celano himself states.

What is of fundamental importance in this description is that the Nativity scene of Greccio was not meant to be a living crib in the choreographic sense of the term we apply nowadays to cribs. It was rather the setting for a liturgical celebration. Celano insists that the priest who celebrated the Mass felt a great consolation. In all the moments of the celebration we notice the sense of awe and adoration that engulfs the priest, the people, the animals and the entire forest and mountainside of Greccio, as if the entire creation was praising God for the mystery of the Nativity within the context of the Eucharistic mystery.

## 1 Celano 86

The holy man of God is dressed in the vestments of the Levites, since he was a Levite, and with full voice sings the holy gospel. Here is his voice a powerful voice, *a pleasant voice* (Sg 2:14), inviting all to the highest of gifts. Then he preaches to the people standing around him and pours forth sweet honey about the birth of the poor King and the poor city of Bethlehem. Moreover, burning with excessive love, he often calls Christ the “babe from Bethlehem” whenever he means to call Him Jesus. Saying the word “Bethlehem” in the manner of a bleating sheep, he fills his whole mouth with sound but even more with sweet affection. He seems to lick his

lips whenever he uses the expressions “Jesus” or “babe from Bethlehem,” tasting the word on his happy palate and savouring the sweetness of the word. The gifts of the Almighty are multiplied there and a virtuous man sees a wondrous vision. For the man saw a little child lying lifeless in the manger and he saw the holy man of God approach the child and waken him from a deep sleep. Nor is this vision unfitting, since in the hearts of many the child Jesus has been *given over to oblivion* (Ps 31:13). Now he is awakened and impressed on their loving memory by His own grace through His holy servant Francis. At length, the night’s solemnities draw to a close and everyone went home with joy.<sup>10</sup>

Celano presents Francis’ role in the liturgical celebration. He says that Francis was dressed with the liturgical vestments of a Levite, that is, a deacon. Francis would have worn a dalmatic and stole over the alb. According to this description Francis sang the Gospel of the Nativity Mass and even preached to the people. He was doing what was liturgically allowed for a deacon during solemn Mass. It is not very easy to prove that Francis was actually ordained as a deacon, since in his times the office of deacon and sub-deacon during solemn Mass were carried out also by other priests who would vest the dalmatic of the deacon or tunic of the sub-deacon. Some scholars have also suggested that Francis had the faculty to sing the Gospel and preach not because he was an ordained deacon, but

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<sup>10</sup> 1C 85 (FAED I, 255-256). Latin text in THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Prima Sancti Francisci*, 84, in *Analecta Franciscana X*, 64:

86. Induitur sanctus Dei leviticis ornamentis, quia levita erat, et voce sonora sanctum Evangelium cantat. Et quidem vox eius, vox vehemens, *vox dulcis* (Cant 2,14), vox clara, voxque sonora, cunctos invitans ad praemia summa. Praedicat deinde populo circumstanti et de nativitate pauperis Regis et Bethelhem parvula civitate melliflua eructat. Saepe quoque, cum vellet Christum “Iesum” nominare, amore flagrans nimio, eum “puerum de Bethlehem” nuncupabat, et more balantis ovis “Bethlehem” dicens, os suum voce sed magis dulci affectione totum implebat. Labia sua etiam, cum

“puerum de Bethlehem” vel “Iesum” nominaret, quasi lambebat lingua, felici palato degustans et deglutiens dulcedinem verbi huius. Multiplicantur ibi dona Omnipotentis et a quodam *viro virtutis* (cf. 1Mach 5,50) mirabilis visio cernitur. Videbat enim in praesepio puerulum unum iacentem exanimem, ad quem videbat accedere sanctum Dei et eundem puerum quasi a somni sopore suscitare. Nec inconueniens visio ista, cum puer Iesus in multorum cordibus *oblivioni fuerit datus* (Ps 30,13), in quibus, ipsius gratia faciente, per servum suum sanctum Franciscum resuscitatus est et impressus memoriae diligenti. Finiuntur denique solemnes excubiae et unusquisque cum gaudio ad propria remeavit.

only because of the privilege enjoyed by lay superiors in monastic Orders, who could take over the functions of deacons during solemn Masses. This could have been a possibility if Francis was not an ordained deacon. However, as we have stated, there is no clear-cut conclusion as to whether Francis was, in fact, an ordained deacon, or a simple layman. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the contemporary distinction between who were considered to be clerics and lay persons in the Church was not so clear.<sup>11</sup> Maybe Celano is more interested in the spiritual attitude of Francis in chanting the Gospel and preaching to the faithful. He sang the Gospel with a strong, sweet, clear and sonorous voice. The reference to the sweet voice is taken from Song of Songs 2:14: “for your voice is sweet,” and refers to the bridegroom who is praising his bride. Francis invited the listeners to meditate upon the birth of the poor King and upon the poor town of Bethlehem. Celano describes the style of preaching of Francis, insisting not so much upon the content of his sermon, but rather on the sweet sensation of referring to Jesus as the babe of Bethlehem, and pronouncing the name Bethlehem like a bleating sheep. Again, Celano is underlining the “pastoral” dimension of the Christmas scene, reminding us that Jesus was born and

placed on the hay in a manger, surrounded by the noises of animals. The physical sweetness felt by Francis, and communicated to the people, is expressed in Latin onomatopoeic terms by Celano: *felici palato degustans et deglutiens dulcedinem verbi*.

The description of the style of Francis’ preaching again suggests that the Saint might have been re-enacting a personal experience of the poverty of the Nativity Grotto in Bethlehem, which he wanted to communicate to the brothers and people gathered for the occasion. The result of his preaching was miraculous, since Celano narrates how a nobleman who was present for Mass (who, according to Bonaventure’s *Legenda Maior* was Giovanni himself)<sup>12</sup> had a kind of mystical experience in which he saw a lifeless child laying in the manger and Francis bending down over him in order to awaken him from his sleep.

This vision obviously had a spiritual significance. The celebration of the Nativity liturgy in Greccio led many people, who had forgotten the love of Jesus in their hearts, to awaken from their spiritual slumber and impress Christ in their loving memory. The expression *impressus memoriae diligentis* is significant, since the impression of the living memory of Christ occurred especially in the case of Francis

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<sup>11</sup> CONFERENCE MINISTERS GENERAL FIRST FRANCISCAN ORDER AND TOR, *The Identity of the Franciscan Order at the Moment of Its Foundation*, Rome 1999, footnote 13: The affirmation that Francis was ordained deacon (but when was he ordained?) does not contradict the fact that [...] with all probability, the same ‘diaconate’ of Francis has to be explained according to this order of ideas. We cannot exclude that it (presumed or proved as such) can be attributed to the faculty that the Benedictine *Rule* conceded to the abbot to sing the Gospel (with some words of commentary), dressed in liturgical vestments (chapter 11). This could be the meaning of the expression *leviticis ornamentis indutus* of which Celano speaks (IC 86), when Francis, making use of the faculty conceded by common law to a lay superior, sang the Gospel in Greccio during the Christmas night. One should not forget that, during Francis’ time, the permanent diaconate was no longer in use. All this, evidently, as nothing to do

with the affirmation that Benedict and Francis renounced to priesthood out of humility (they did not even begin their journey towards priesthood).

<sup>12</sup> LMj 10,7 (FAED II, 610): A certain virtuous and truthful knight, Sir John of Greccio, who had abandoned worldly military activity out of love of Christ and had become an intimate friend of the man of God, claimed that he saw a beautiful little child asleep in that manger, whom the blessed father Francis embraced in both of his arms and seemed to wake it from sleep. *Legenda Maior* X,7, in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 605: *Milites autem quidam virtuosus et verax, qui, propter Christi amorem saeculari relicta militia, viro Dei magna fuit familiaritate coniunctus, dominus Ioannes de Graecio, se vidisse asseruit puerulum quemdam valde formosum in illo praesepio dormientem, quem beatus pater Franciscus, ambobus complexans brachiis, excitare videbatur a somno.*

when he received the gift of the stigmata on La Verna. We again assist at a gradual transition from the mystery of the Incarnation celebrated in Greccio to the Paschal mystery that was to be celebrated in the living flesh of the *Poverello* on La Verna and during his *Transitus*, when for two years he appeared to be crucified with the marks of the Passion impressed in his own flesh.

The ending note of this section refers to the great joy of the people who returned to their homes after the celebration. It is a reminiscence of the scene of the shepherds who go to Bethlehem to see the Child Jesus and return joyfully as the first harbingers of the good news of salvation.

### 1 Celano 87

The hay placed in the manger there was preserved afterwards so that, through it, the Lord might restore to health the pack animals and the other *animals* there, as He *multiplied his holy mercy* (Ps 36:7-8). It came to pass in the surrounding area that many of the animals, suffering from various diseases, were freed from their illnesses when they ate some of this hay. What is more, women who had been suffering with long and hard labour had an easy delivery after they placed some of this hay upon themselves. Finally, an entire group of people of both sexes obtained much-desired relief from an assortment of afflictions.

At last, the site of the manger was consecrated as a temple to the Lord. In

honour of the most blessed father Francis, an altar was consecrated over the manger, and a church was dedicated.

This was done so that where animals *once ate the fodder of the hay* (Dn 5:21), there humans henceforth for healing of body and soul would eat the flesh of the immaculate and spotless lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, who *gave Himself for us* (Tt 2:14) with supreme and indescribable love, who lives and rules with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God, eternally glorious forever and ever. Amen. Alleluia. Alleluia.<sup>13</sup>

The last paragraph of the Christmas celebration in Greccio describes the aftermath of the same Christmas celebration in spiritual terms. Celano speaks about the hay that was placed in the manger during the celebration. He presents it as a kind of relic, since the hay was preserved and used as a kind of spiritual remedy for all kinds of ailments hitting pack animals and even women in labour. There is a kind of link between the hay of the manger of Greccio and the Eucharist. The sick animals were fed with this hay and they regained their bodily strength. Women who experienced a difficult labor were able to bear their children joyfully when they placed some of the hay upon themselves. In this way, the Nativity of the Lord became a sign of His saving power and of the beauty of a new-born life, which appeared in this miserable world of our humanity to give us hope and light.

<sup>13</sup> 1C 87 (FAED I, 256-257). 1C 85 (FAED I, 255-256). Latin text in THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Prima Sancti Francisci*, 84, in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 64-65:

87. Conservatur foenum in praesepio positum, ut per ipsum *umentia* et animalia *salva* faciat Dominus *quemadmodum multiplicavit misericordiam suam* (cf. Ps 35,6-8) sanctam. Et revera sic actum est, ut animalia multa, diversos morbos habentia, per circumadiacentem regionem, manducantia de hoc foeno, a suis sint aegritudinibus liberata. Immo et mulieres, partu gravi ac longo laborantes, de praedicto foeno sibi superimponentes, partu pariunt saluari: atque a diversis cladibus utriusque sexus concursus desideratam ibidem obtinent sanitatem.

Consecratus est denique locus praesepii *templum Domino* (3 Reg 8,63), et in honorem beatissimi patris Francisci supra praesepe altare construitur et ecclesia dedicatur, ut ubi animalia quandoque *foeni pabulum comederunt* (cf. Dan 5,21), ibi de caetero ad sanitatem animae ac corporis manducant homines *carnes agni immaculati et incontaminati* (1 Petr 1,19) *Iesu Christi Domini nostri* (1 Cor 1,10), *qui summa et ineffabili charitate dedit seipsum nobis* (Tit 2,14), cum Patre ac Spiritu sancto vivens et regnans Deus aeternaliter gloriosus per cuncta *saecula saeculorum. Amen. Alleluia. Alleluia* (cf. Apoc 1,18; 19,4).

When Celano was writing the *Vita Sancti Francisci* in 1229 he states that the cave where the Eucharistic celebration of Christmas took place in Greccio had, by that time become a temple of the Lord. The place was a hermitage and certainly not a grand church. However, the use of the term implies the holiness of the place, rendered sacred by the liturgical celebration, as well as by the presence of Francis himself. We have already said that, barely a year later, on 3 December 1224, the Pope gave the friars Minor the faculty to celebrate the divine liturgy on portable altars in the oratories of their hermitages. Maybe Greccio was one of the first places to have been favoured with this papal privilege, since it already was consecrated as a holy place by the Christmas celebration of 1223. Celano states that an altar was placed on the manger itself, just as it was in 1223. The present-day hermitage of Greccio still conserves this liturgical layout in the tiny cave-church and in the upper choir and church which the friars used for their divine offices.

The last reference to the event concerns the Eucharistic dimension of the Greccio celebration. Celano quotes Daniel 5:21 referring to king Nebuchadnezzar eating hay like an ox. This is a very strange image, but the aim is that of comparing the animals who eat hay with those who participate in the Eucharist to eat the body of the immaculate Lamb Jesus Christ. In other words, the celebration of the Eucharist in such a rustic setting as Greccio was externally seen as a re-enactment of the poverty and simplicity of the crib in which Christ was born among animals, but the fact that this setting served as the place for the celebration of the Eucharist rendered it a sacred place and gave a new meaning to the symbolic action that Francis made when he created the Nativity scene. The action of eating the body of the Lord was a guarantee for physical and spiritual well-being to all those who took part in that celebration.

We can conclude by saying that, what Francis did in Greccio was a kind of

prophetic action, reminiscent of the actions of the prophets of the people of Israel, such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The prophetic action has the aim of representing a spiritual reality through concrete signs, and thereby conveying a message which the bystanders can understand in the context in which they are living. This is precisely what occurred in Greccio. In the simple setting of a rustic cave in the middle of a forest among echoing rocks, in front of a crowd of poor peasants and brothers who flocked with torches and candles from all over the surrounding regions, Francis succeeded in conveying the simplicity and purity of the message of Christmas, in such a way as to render the liturgical celebration a living re-enactment of the mystery of the Incarnation. It was not a question of drama or a mystery play, which were also common in the Middle Ages. It was a celebration that was faithful to liturgical norms and respected the official prayer of the Church, but which took into consideration the need to make those present feel in their own flesh the intensity of God's love, present in the mystery of the Incarnation.

These aspects are present to the gaze of all those who visit the shrine of Greccio. Indeed, the fresco that adorns the walls of the cave-church, and which depicts two Christmas events, one in Bethlehem and the other one in Greccio, has the precise aim of conveying this message. It is a link between past and present, between the historical event of the Lord's Nativity in Bethlehem and the present celebration in Greccio, between the simple scene of a baby placed in a manger and surrounded by animals to the scene of an altar upon which the same baby becomes the bread of life for those who gaze at it with the eyes of faith.

Bethlehem, the house of bread, became the house of the bread of life in the birth of Jesus. In the same way, the hermitage of Greccio became a new house of bread in the union between the manger and the altar, between the hay and the Eucharist. That is why Greccio became a new Bethlehem.

# THE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION OF GRECCIO IN THE SOURCES

The episode of the Nativity celebration in Greccio is found in other Franciscan Sources, which are directly dependent upon 1C 84-87. Our aim here is simply that of presenting these paragraphs from the various Sources, and noting some particular details that continue to develop what Celano already treated in the *Vita Sancti Francisci*.

## **Thomas of Celano, *Vita Beati Patris Francisci (Vita Brevior)* [1232] 67-69**

67 And so it came to pass that on the solemnity of the Lord's nativity at Greccio, he did something rightly worthy of happy memory so as to represent the infancy of the new-born Saviour. During that night in which Christ was born on earth, he had a crib prepared, hay placed in the crib, and ox, and donkey gathered near the crib. People flock to take in the new mystery and, having obtained torches and candles, make the night bright. The brothers chant the requisite praises to the Lord and the ancient praises of Bethlehem are renewed with a new rite in Greccio. The saint stands before the crib, and he, with spirit directed toward heaven, is suffused with ineffable joy. The solemnities of the mass are celebrated above the crib and the priest enjoys new consolation.

68 The servant of God, dressed in levitical vestments, since he was a Levite, chants the holy Gospel with a sonorous voice. He blurts out sweet things about the nativity of the poor King and the little city of Bethlehem. For instance, wanting to name Jesus because of the great love that burned

within him, stammering, he called him the child of Bethlehem. There the gifts of the Omnipotent are multiplied, and a marvellous vision is seen by the man of virtue. He saw in that same crib a child lying lifeless, whom the saint of God approached and quickly awoke as if from the stupor of sleep. Fittingly, the young infant appeared to the one fostering anew the infancy of Christ and, through his servant, was restored to the memory of many in whose hearts he had been relegated to oblivion.

69 Finally, once the celebrations are finished and everyone has returned to their own place, the hay of the crib is kept through which animal diseases are cured, and through which even women and men, by the action of divine grace, regain their health from the illnesses. Later the place of the crib is consecrated as a temple to the Lord, and an altar with a church is dedicated above the crib in honour of the most Blessed father Francis.<sup>1</sup>

The description of the event is very similar to that of 1C, since the *Vita brevior* was intended to be an abridged form of the official *legenda*, and was dedicated to Brother Elias who was minister general of the Order. The expression that strikes our attention is that referring to the fact that "the ancient praises of Bethlehem are renewed with a new rite in Greccio." Celano intends to make a kind of parallel description of the praises of the angels in Bethlehem with the singing of Matins by the brothers in Greccio. Indeed, it seems that Celano insists upon Francis' personal

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<sup>1</sup> J. DALARUN *The Rediscovered Life of St. Francis of Assisi. Thomas of Celano*. Translated by T.J. Johnson, Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure, NY 2016, 25. Latin text: J. DALARUN,

*Thomas Celanensis Vita beati patris nostri Francisci (Vita brevior). Présentation et édition critique*, in *Analecta Bollandiana* 133/1 (2015) 23-86.

experience of the place of the Nativity in Bethlehem, since he states that the Saint preached about the “little city of Bethlehem.” Was it simply his imagination that made him speak about the poverty of the town of Bethlehem on the hills of the Judaeen desert, or was it his own personal experience in having actually been in the Nativity Grotto and prayed there?

### **Julian of Speyer, *Vita Beati Francisci*, 53-55**

53 Moreover, something marvellous happened three years before the blessed passing of Blessed Francis and, although many other things have been neglected, I think it is worthy of being recalled. The holy man assiduously meditated particularly on the things that were done in the time of Christ, and did not wish, if he could help it, to neglect even a jot or tittle of what was narrated in the books of the holy gospel. Quite the contrary, he considered everything written about Christ, but above all the vicissitudes of his life, and longed to experience the very sweet yoke and light burden of the Master himself.

Therefore, desiring to represent as faithfully as possible the lowly poverty of the infancy of the Saviour born at Bethlehem, when the Feast of the Nativity was at hand, the man of God sent word to a religious nobleman in the town of Greccio named John, who provided an ox and an ass, with the stable, in anticipation of the joys of the coming celebration.

54 Finally the holy night arrived. Blessed Francis was there with many of his brothers gathered around him.

The hay in the manger is prepared, the ox and the ass are arranged around the manger, and the vigil celebration begins with joy. A great multitude of people stream together from various places, the night is filled with an unaccustomed joy and made luminous by candles and torches. And so, with a new

ritual, the festival of a new Bethlehem is celebrated.

The brothers also paid their debt of praise to the Lord, and all present acclaimed him with new songs of praise. Blessed Francis, however, was standing before the manger full of sighs of joy and suffused by an indescribable sweetness. Finally, when Solemn Mass was celebrated above the manger, the holy Levite of God, dressed in festive vestments proclaimed the gospel with a sonorous voice and then with a voice flowing with honey he preached to the people about the poor King born in Bethlehem. Truly, he was so overcome by sweet devotion toward the infancy of that King, that whenever he had to speak the name of Jesus Christ, he would, as if stuttering, call him “the babe of Bethlehem,” out of an excess of loving tenderness.

55 Lest it be thought that these things happened without divine approval, a miraculous vision was shown to a certain virtuous man, who saw Blessed Francis go up to the manger and waken, as if from a deep sleep, a child who seemed to be lying there lifeless. It is therefore believed, and not without reason, that the Lord Jesus aptly revealed his infancy in this vision to the one who reflected upon it. He who was asleep or dead in the hearts of many, owing to forgetfulness, was awakened and recalled to memory by the teaching and example of Blessed Francis. The solemnities were completed with great exultation, and everyone happily returned to their homes.

Later, hay from the manger saved both men and women from various perils and also proved health-giving when applied to stricken brute beasts. Moreover, the place of the manger is consecrated as a temple of the Lord, and an altar, constructed above that same manger, is dedicated to the honour of the holy father Francis, in memory of the event.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> JULIAN OF SPEYER, *Life of Saint Francis*, 53-55 (FAED I, 405-407). Latin text: IULIANUS DE SPIRA,

*Vita Sancti Francisci*, 53-55, in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 360-361.

Julian of Speyer's account is also reminiscent of Celano's narration. It also provides a similar expression to the one we have just seen in the *Vita brevior*: "with a new ritual, the festival of a new Bethlehem is celebrated." The element of *novitas*, which is taken from Celano, is here applied to a new ritual. There was certainly no new ritual in Greccio, in the sense that the celebration itself was the normal Christmas celebration of the Nativity, with the singing of Matins and the Mass. However, the novelty of the celebration consisted rather in the material setting of the altar placed upon the manger in Greccio. It was a celebration marked by poverty and simplicity in the liturgical setting in which it was celebrated, without, however, degenerating into a choreographic representation of the Nativity scene without any theological basis present in the liturgical texts, psalms and readings that the Church proposes for Christmas night.

Julian of Speyer himself was a *magister cantus* at the Franciscan friary of the *domus studiorum* of Paris. He was certainly well versed in the liturgical norms and in the art of Gregorian chant. Indeed, he is also the author of many texts of the *Officium Rhythmicum Sancti Francisci*. The fact that he approves the celebration in Greccio is a sign that he fully understood its true implications and that the same celebration was highly respectful to the norms of the liturgy of the Nativity.

### **Henry of Avranches, *Legenda Versificata Sancti Francisci*, XI,90-118**

The mysteries of Christ are ever / enough for his meditation: the Word incarnate / and the heart-stirring passion of his nature assumed, / he never allows himself to forget; these sear the core / of his heart and make it catch fire with desire for heaven, / It gives him joy to present these mysteries in appropriate /

<sup>3</sup> HENRY OF AVRANCHES, *The Versified Life of Saint Francis*, XI,90-118 (FAED I, 506-507). Latin text: HENRICUS ABRICENSIS, *Legenda S. Francisci*

figures, and share out his pleasure to other people. / Again, one time wishing to celebrate the Birth of Christ, / he orders a manger made. An ox and an ass draw in hay / for their fodder; and things are provided whereby to / becomingly represent the mysteries of the virginal birth. /

The people that gather for the holy festivities fill / the church, bring candles and torches, while incense breathes / forth its scent. After matins, the Mass of the Feast / is celebrated. Francis it is who reads the Gospel / in sweet-toned melody; and then when the people are seated, /

He gives them a sermon, and softens hearts that were hardened / and out of hard rock causes rivers to flow. / There leaps forth a compunction mixed with gladness; clapping / of hands dries up the tears, a tear moistens the hands that clap. / All the night, till the new day dawns, passes in festive song /

And in praise of the Child that was born of the Virgin. / Accepting the mysteries celebrated in his honour, Christ, / for his part, gives rewards: eating the hay left over, / beasts swollen by ailments are eased and cured. / Through contact with the same, women with child and those long / in labour are enabled to give birth with ease, / as their weary wombs release the children waiting to be born. / The place of the crib is now, to the joy of the people, / a little chapel dedicated in honour of the blessed Francis.<sup>3</sup>

The epic poetic form of the *Versified Life* by Henry of Avranches was dedicated to Pope Gregory IX, and is dated during the generalate of Brother Elias (1232-1239), contemporary to the *Vita brevior* and Julian of Speyer. The description depends entirely upon Celano's account, but is characterised by its poetic nature and imaginative descriptions. For instance, Henry presents the Nativity episode in a church, imagining a congregation of worshippers with candles

*Versificata*, XI,90-118, in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 476-477.

and torches who could comfortably sit down to listen to Francis' sermon. The poem does not add anything new to the narration itself, and its value lies precisely in the poetic style in which it was composed.

**Saint Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, 10,7**

It happened, three years prior to his death, that [Francis] decided to celebrate at the town of Greccio the memory of the birth of the Child Jesus with the greatest possible solemnity, in order to arouse devotion. So that this would not be considered a type of novelty, he petitioned for and obtained permission from the Supreme Pontiff.

He had a manger prepared, hay carried in and an ox and an ass led to the spot. The brethren are summoned, the people arrive, the forest amplifies with their cries, and that venerable night is rendered brilliant and solemn by a multitude of bright lights and by resonant and harmonious hymns of praise. The man of God stands before the manger, filled with piety, bathed in tears, and overcome with joy. A solemn Mass is celebrated over the manger, with Francis, a Levite of Christ, chanting the holy Gospel. Then he preaches to the people standing around him about the birth of the poor King, whom, whenever he means to call him, he called in his tender love, the Babe from Bethlehem. A certain virtuous and truthful knight, Sir John of Greccio, who had abandoned worldly military activity out of love of Christ and had become an intimate friend of the man of God, claimed that he saw a beautiful little child asleep in that manger whom the blessed father Francis embraced in both of his arms and seemed to wake it from sleep. Not only does the holiness of the witness make credible the vision of the devout knight, but also the truth it expresses proves its validity

and the subsequent miracles confirm it. For Francis' example, when considered by the world, is capable of arousing the hearts of those who are sluggish in the faith of Christ. The hay from the crib was kept by the people and miraculously cured sick animals and drove away different kinds of pestilence. Thus God glorified his servant in every way and demonstrated the efficacy of his holy prayer by the evident signs of wonderful miracles.<sup>4</sup>

Bonaventure also depends upon 1C when narrating the Greccio episode. The first paragraph is, however, important, since Bonaventure places some personal comments in order to introduce the event. First of all, the Seraphic Doctor states that Francis wanted to celebrate Christmas in Greccio "in order to arouse devotion." Francis is presented in his evangelising ministry. The celebration itself, consisting of the praises of Matins and of the Mass celebrated on the altar upon the manger, is seen by Bonaventure as one sanctioned by the Church's authority. Bonaventure is wary not to present Francis as an inventor of novelties, and therefore he states that Francis obtained permission from the Supreme Pontiff himself in order to conduct the celebration in the cave with the manger, ox and ass, and an altar constructed in the same place. One cannot help seeing in this description the preoccupation of a minister general of the Order, who is trying to present Francis both as a prophet and an obedient son of the Roman Church.

The mentioning of Sir John (Giovanni) of Greccio as the one who had the vision of the sleeping child who Francis awoke from slumber is also Bonaventure's own. This shows that he had documented his sources also by interviewing persons who might have witnessed the event and could have remembered the experience that Giovanni of Greccio could have shared with them.

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<sup>4</sup> LMj 10,7 (FAED II, 610-611). Latin text: S. BONAVENTURA, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, X,7, in *Analecta Franciscana* X, 604-605.



## The spirituality of the Nativity scene

The publications regarding the Christmas celebration in Greccio, particularly those linked with the preparation for the 800 years since the event,<sup>5</sup> speak about the spirituality that is at the basis of this event in which Francis wished “to enact the memory of that babe *who was born in Bethlehem* (Mt 2:12): to see as much as is possible with [his] own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he *lay in a manger* (Lk 2:7), and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay.”<sup>6</sup> Francis wanted to make a tangible experience of the Nativity of Christ. The Sources insist upon this particular devotion of the Saint for the mystery of the Incarnation, which he meditated in the poverty and humility of Bethlehem. It seems that, for Francis, the most important among the feasts of the liturgical calendar was precisely the solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord. This is what the *Assisi Compilation* states regarding this devotion of the Saint:

“We, who were with blessed Francis, and who wrote these things about him, bear witness that we often heard him say: ‘If I ever speak to the emperor, I will beg him, for the love of God and by my entreaties, to enact a written law forbidding anyone to catch our sister larks or do them any harm. Likewise, all mayors of cities and lords of castles and villages should be bound to oblige people each year on the Nativity of the Lord to scatter wheat and other grain along the roads outside towns and villages, so that all the birds, but especially our sister larks, may have something to eat on such a solemn feast. Also, out of reverence for the Son of God, whom His Virgin Mother on that night laid in a manger between an ox and ass, everyone should have to give brother ox and brother ass a generous portion of fodder on that night. Likewise,

on the Nativity of the Lord, all the poor should be fed their fill by the rich.’

For blessed Francis held the Nativity of the Lord in greater reverence than any other of the Lord’s solemnities. For although the Lord may have accomplished our salvation in his other solemnities, nevertheless, once He was born to us, as blessed Francis would say, it was certain that we would be saved. On that day he wanted every Christian to rejoice in the Lord and, for love of Him who gave Himself to us, wished everyone to be cheerfully generous not only to the poor but also to the animals and birds.”<sup>7</sup>

In his *Memoriale in Desiderio Animæ*, Celano mentions the particular devotion that Francis would show for the mystery of the Nativity of Christ:

“[Francis] used to observe the Nativity of the Child Jesus with an immense eagerness above all other solemnities, affirming it was the Feast of Feasts, when God was made a little child and hung on human breasts. He would kiss the images of the baby’s limbs thinking of hunger, and the melting compassion of his heart toward the child also made him stammer sweet words as babies do. This name was to him like *honey and honeycomb* (Ps 19:11) in his mouth.

When there was a discussion about not eating meat, because it was on Friday, he replied to Brother Morico: ‘You sin, brother, when you call Friday the day when *unto us a Child is born* (Is 9:6). I want even the walls to eat meat on that day, and if they cannot, at least on the outside they be rubbed with grease.’

[...]

He could not recall without tears the great want surrounding the little, poor Virgin on that day. One day when he was sitting down to dinner a brother mentioned the poverty of the blessed Virgin, and reflected on the want of Christ and her Son. No sooner had he heard this than he got up from the table, groaning with sobs of pain, and bathed in

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<sup>5</sup> A. CACCIOTTI (a cura di), *Il Natale di Francesco a Greccio*. Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, Milano 2022 / Roma (Centro Culturale Aracoeli) 2022

(Biblioteca di Frate Francesco 25). See review by A. CHIRICHES, in *www.academia.edu*

<sup>6</sup> IC 84 (FAED I, 254-255).

<sup>7</sup> AC 14 (FAED II, 129-130).

tears ate the rest of his bread on the naked ground.”<sup>8</sup>

Note how this description continues to develop what Celano had already said in the *Vita prima* regarding the Christmas celebration in Greccio, namely that Francis was filled with sweet emotions when he pronounced the name of the Child of Bethlehem. The tenderness of the maternal care of the Virgin Mary who suckled the Divine Infant is shown in a clear way by Celano, and is seemingly the description that might have inspired the anonymous artist of the Giotto school who painted the fresco of the Nativity scene in Greccio.

### Conclusion

The celebration of the 800 years from the celebration of Christmas in Greccio is an occasion to deepen our understanding of the motives that led Francis to organise the liturgy of the Nativity in the way that the sources describe. We have seen that they all depend upon Celano’s account in the *Vita Prima*, although each one of them adds some minor details of interest that can shed further light on the way in which Francis wanted to celebrate Christmas in this remote fortified village overlooking the Rieti valley. What strikes us most is the poverty and simplicity of the celebration itself, including the liturgical setting.

Can we say that, by celebrating Christmas in this manner, Francis “invented” the Nativity scene in the crib? The Nativity scene in art is very ancient. It is found in sarcophagi dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It is particularly popular in Byzantine iconography. Indeed, the fresco on the walls of the Grotto in Greccio, which is attributed to the school of Giotto, has many features that make it resemble the Byzantine way of depicting the Nativity scene, except for the addition of the panel showing Saint Francis vested as a deacon during the Christmas Mass. The divine infant is represented standing up upon a

manger that looks like an empty tomb, and He is vested in the *epitaphios*, or burial shroud, but the fact that he is standing up, while suckling His Mother’s breasts, while being held by her maternal arms, is totally in line with the theology of Saint Luke’s Gospel, where the Child in swaddling clothes is already presented as the one who will be draped in a linen shroud and be buried, but at the same time rise from the dead and leave the empty Tomb.

Therefore, Francis could not have possibly invented the crib in the modern sense of the term, since the representations of the Nativity scene in art and drama were already common in his days. Francis, however, was a true inventor of a new way of celebrating the Nativity liturgy, since he succeeded in making the Nativity scene alive in a liturgical celebration, drawing inspiration from the Gospels, from Apocryphal writings, and from his possible personal experience as a result of his visit to the Nativity Grotto in Bethlehem.

Pope Francis himself speaks about this link between Bethlehem and Greccio in his Apostolic Letter *Admirabile Signum* on the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene (1 December 2019):

“Let us go back to the origins of the Christian crèche so familiar to us. We need to imagine ourselves in the little Italian town of Greccio, near Rieti. Francis stopped there, most likely on his way back from Rome where on 29 November 1223 he had received the confirmation of his Rule from Pope Honorius III. Francis had earlier visited the Holy Land, and the caves in Greccio reminded him of the countryside of Bethlehem. It may also be that the ‘Poor Man of Assisi’ had been struck by the mosaics in the Roman Basilica of Saint Mary Major depicting the birth of Jesus, close to the place where, according to an ancient tradition, the wooden panels of the manger are preserved.

The Franciscan Sources describe in detail what then took place in Greccio. Fifteen

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<sup>8</sup> 2C 119-200 (FAED II, 374-375).

days before Christmas, Francis asked a local man named John to help him realise his desire ‘to bring to life the memory of that babe born in Bethlehem, to see as much as possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he was laid upon a bed of hay.’ At this, his faithful friend went immediately to prepare all that the Saint had asked. On 25 December, friars came to Greccio from various parts, together with people from the farmsteads in the area, who brought flowers and torches to light up that holy night. When Francis arrived, he found a manger full of hay, an ox and a donkey. All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist. At Greccio there were no statues; the Nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present.

This is how our tradition began: with everyone gathered in joy around the cave, with no distance between the original event and those sharing in its mystery.

Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of Saint Francis, notes that this simple and moving scene was accompanied by the gift of a marvellous vision: one of those present saw the Baby Jesus himself lying in the manger. From the Nativity scene of that Christmas in 1223: ‘everyone went home with joy.’

With the simplicity of that sign, Saint Francis carried out a great work of evangelisation. His teaching touched the hearts of Christians and continues today to offer a simple yet authentic means of portraying the beauty of our faith. Indeed, the place where this first Nativity scene was

enacted expresses and evokes these sentiments. Greccio has become a refuge for the soul, a mountain fastness wrapped in silence.”<sup>9</sup>

I am aware that popular emotion and imagination play a significant role in the Greccio episode and that my insistence upon the link between Francis who supposedly visited the Nativity Grotto in Bethlehem and Francis who celebrated the Nativity Eucharist in Greccio might sound far-fetched and not sufficiently documented. I am still convinced, however, that the reference to Francis’ visit to the Holy Sepulchre by Angelo Clareno in his *Chronicon septem tribulationum* is not just an arbitrary invention, but can be historically verified when one examines closely the Writings of the Saint dealing with the mystery of the Incarnation, as well as the conclusions brought forward by the chronicles of the Fifth Crusade regarding Francis receiving permission from the Sultan to travel freely in his realms.

The evangelical intuition of Francis who adores the mystery of Christ who is born of a poor Virgin “along the wayside”<sup>10</sup> and whose poverty and humility are evident in the same mystery of the Eucharist, becomes tangible in the episode of the Nativity in Greccio. No wonder that Celano concludes the first part of his *Vita* with this episode, before proceeding to the section regarding the reception of the stigmata. Just as Bethlehem opens our gaze towards Calvary and the empty Tomb, so Greccio opens our gaze towards La Verna. The confirmation of the *Regula bullata* one month before the Christmas celebration was to be published not only by the papal Bulla *Solet annuere*, but also by the mystical encounter of the Child in the manger of Greccio and of the Crucified Seraph of La Verna.

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<sup>9</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum* (Greccio, 1 December 2019), 2-3, in [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

<sup>10</sup> *OffPass* 15,7 (FAED I, 156).

# 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY INFANT JESUS FROM BETHLEHEM IN TA' ĠIEŻU CHURCH, VALLETTA

Noel Muscat OFM



In the Franciscan church of Santa Maria di Gesù in Valletta, popularly known as *Ta' Ġiezu* by the Maltese, there is an ancient wax image of the Infant Jesus reclining with gold-embroidered swaddling clothes, which is venerated in the altar of Saint Francis of the same church. This statue is the work of a Maltese Franciscan lay brother who lived for many years in Bethlehem. His name was Brother Bonaventura Fava, and he worked this statue of the Child Jesus in 1725.

Bonaventura Fava was born in Valletta in 1668. He entered the Franciscan Order and began the novitiate on 2 June 1685. At that time the Observant Friars Minor in Malta in the two friaries of Santa Maria di Gesù in Rabat (1429) and Valletta (1571) were part of the Observant Sicilian Province of Val di Noto e Malta. Exactly one year later, on 2 June 1686, Fra Bonaventura made his solemn profession. He opted to remain a lay brother and also requested to be sent as

missionary to the Holy Land Custody, where he spent many years as Sacristan in the Nativity Basilica in Bethlehem.

At that time the Basilica of the Nativity was still officiated by the Franciscan friars living in the adjacent friary, in conjunction with the other Orthodox rites, particularly the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches. This was before the fateful events of Palm Sunday in 1757, when the Greek Orthodox forcefully took over large sections of the Basilica, together with the altar of the star marking the place of Christ's birth, in the Nativity Grotto. The Franciscans were left with the altar of the manger on the right-hand side of the Nativity Grotto.

Bonaventura Fava was an able artist. He worked this Infant Jesus as an exact replica of the one that was used in Bethlehem for the Christmas celebrations. The statue was *composta di cera vergine e polvere della Santa Grotta e di altri Santuari* (composed

of pure wax and of earth taken from the Holy Grotto and from other Sanctuaries). The date of composition was 1725. A year later, in 1726, this Infant Jesus was brought over to Malta and placed on the altar of the chapel of Saint Francis in *Ta' Ġiežu* church. During this period many Franciscan missionaries to the Holy Land would pass from the island of Malta on their way to the Orient. In fact, ever since 1636, the Valletta friary had an *Hospitium*, or hospice, for these missionaries, in the same house where the Commissariat of the Holy Land was founded. It was one of the first such institutions in the Order. Since Malta was in the hands of the Knights of Saint John, with their famous navy, who used to ply the Mediterranean in order to attack Turkish vessels, and who often docked in the ports of Palestine, many missionaries would come to stay in the Valletta friary to wait for the opportune moment to take one of the vessels and go to the Holy Land. They would also do likewise on their way back. Thus, in 1726, some Maltese friar who was missionary in the Holy Land brought with him this statue of the reclining Infant Jesus with swaddling clothes.

Fra Bonaventura lived in the Holy Land for the rest of his life. He was in Bethlehem for 30 years and died in Jerusalem on 12 March 1748 when he reached 80 years of age.

This statue of the Child Jesus was highly venerated in the past. When it was placed in the chapel of Saint Francis, the Grand Master of Malta, Fra' Antoine Manoel de Vilhena, paid for the gilding of the entire chapel, which is very rich in sculpture in the local soft limestone, a work commissioned by the Grand Masters Rafel Cotoner (1660-1663) and Nicolás Cotoner (1663-1680), who were brothers. In the same chapel there are four small oval paintings depicting

scenes of the Nativity on the four sides of the dome, the work of a local Maltese artist, Francesco Zahra (1710-1773).

The veneration that the statue of the Child Jesus enjoyed is attested by the fact that the Commander of the Order Fra' Federico Brauman left a legacy of 200 Masses to be celebrated on the altar of the Child Jesus.<sup>1</sup> There exists an inventory of the large quantity of *ex-voto* offerings in gold and silver that used to hang on the walls of the chapel: *Inventario delli doni che si trovano nella cassa del Santo Bambino*, dated 7 April 1739. Unfortunately, these gold and silver objects were all stolen by the French soldiers of Napoleon Bonaparte, when they were besieged in Valletta by the Maltese in 1798-1800, who rose against the French occupation and the looting of churches on the island.

The altar also had a silver frontal or *antependium*, the work of Pietro Paolo Troisi in 1735, and the walls of the chapel were decorated with red brocade damask with golden fringes brought over from Messina.

On 22 July 1766 Pope Clement XIII gave the altar the title of privileged altar, with the faculty of celebrating one Mass each week, and another Mass every 25 of each month, as well as during the Christmas novena and the Octave of Christmas.

The statue of the Child Jesus in the Franciscan church in Valletta is a sign of the link between the Maltese Franciscans and the Holy Land for many centuries, and also a sign of their love for the Sanctuaries and their service for the mysteries of the life of Christ, particularly in the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Ġ. AQUILINA, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin (Ta' Ġiežu) 1482c – 1965c*, Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta 2011, 352-353.

# LA VERNA: A GEOCRITICAL READING

Kevin Tortorelli OFM

Text and landscape together both know and remember reality. The text here is Celano's *First Life of Saint Francis* as well as his *Umbrian Legend* and *The Treatise on the Miracles*.<sup>1</sup> These texts recall for us the events surrounding the Stigmata of Saint Francis. The location is the mountain of La Verna. The motivation for this claim that text and landscape together both know and remember reality lies in a method of literary theory called *geocritical* reading. It offers an interpretation of a text in relation to place.<sup>2</sup> Geocritical reading shows how embodied experience of landscapes interacts with literary experience in one's interpretation. Geocritical reading allows places to speak to us in fresh ways and across distances of space and time. Geocritical reading throws emphasis on the breadth of the materiality of place by letting it speak in dialogue with a text. The result one hopes is a fresh way of seeing the text.<sup>3</sup> This article is a modest exercise in geocritical reading that hopes to allow La Verna to tell us what it remembers about a visit to its slopes in August and September 1224. A geocritical reading lets La Verna play its part in shaping the texts that describe what happened on that memorable occasion.

## Remote

The seeker is drawn to the remote. Perhaps unexpectedly, the concretely remote

location is a key to the massive geography of scale, of places distant and withdrawn though remoteness itself is not the same as distance. Remoteness can be 'closer'. Remoteness lets us see the interplay of intimacy and vastness that is not otherwise available to us. The imagination feeds on this interplay of intimacy and vastness, *tremendum et fascinans*. The remote is outside the familiar, beyond home though not necessarily far away. The remote mountain invites to a spirit of rest and to a rugged inner journey. Its sense of time is also remote in that a day may be experienced as a year at the service of the present. More typical concepts of past and future recede.<sup>4</sup>

These expressions of remoteness converge on La Verna. It stands 1283 metres (about 4209 feet) in the central Tuscan Apennines. Amid massive boulders born of ancient cataclysm there lies the formidable *sasso spicco*. The mountain is home to fast moving streams, flowing and cutting in deep gorges and ravines. La Verna wears a mantle of fir and beech forests. Saint Basil the Great<sup>5</sup> writes vividly of a similar mountain that God showed him, a mountain thickly forested and well-watered, more beautiful than Calypso island.<sup>6</sup> But the highest praise Basil can give the mountain is its gift of tranquillity (*hesuxian*) the mountain extends, the fruit of remoteness where one's wandering ceases.

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<sup>1</sup> M.W. BLASTIC, *Francis and his hagiographical tradition*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi*, M.J.P. ROBINSON ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, 69-74. 80-81.

<sup>2</sup> V. BURRUS, *Earthquakes and Gardens*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2023, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Geocritical is a literary theory first associated with Bertrand Westphal and Robert Talley. See BURRUS, p. 161, footnotes 1 and 2.

<sup>4</sup> BURRUS, *Geographies of the Remote*, 93-102.

<sup>5</sup> ST. BASIL THE GREAT, *The Letters*. R.J. DEFERRARI trans., Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1961, I, Letter XIV, 107-111.

<sup>6</sup> HOMER, *The Odyssey*. A.T. MURRAY trans., Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1966, I, 5, 55-57, p. 175. The whereabouts of Calypso's island is unknown despite some very imaginative efforts to locate it.

The landscape of remoteness helps the pursuit of ascetic virtue in part because remoteness brings to our attention the vastness of the earth and connects us to the scale of the earth. To experience remoteness is to experience ourselves as connected by the mountain to what is beyond the mountain. So Dante writes of La Verna:

“On that rugged peak between the Tiber  
And the Arno rivers [Francis] received  
from Christ

The last seal [*l'ultimo sigillo*] which his  
limbs bore for two years.”<sup>7</sup>

La Verna brings one to the edges of the Tiber and the Arno and beyond. Francis is absorbed into the remoteness of La Verna that brings together the intimate and the geographically immense, two dimensions of his experience of Christ. Only the mountain of La Verna has lived long enough to offer fitting witness to this encounter. Unequaled, La Verna holds for us the continuity of place. It marks the holy. It invites us to the places that hold us close and open us wide to the horizon. La Verna offers us a unique, authentic Francis and Francis reveals La Verna as an indispensable place for him and for us.

### **A Mountain without a garden**

In the remoteness of La Verna, no mention is made of a garden of any kind. Gardens, however rudimentary, are often found in other accounts of ancient Christian ascetical dwellings, as, for example, Antony of Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Gardens and orchards point to long term dwelling and habitation. Their lack on La Verna may indicate that Francis wanted to dwell there only for the 40 day fast of the ‘Lent of Saint Michael’, about August 15 to September 29, 1224. A garden implies human productivity and a welcome alliance with the good earth and its constant genesis of life. Its sense of time embraces schemes of destruction,

uprooting, cultivation and growth. With no garden, La Verna speaks for itself. In place of the garden’s productivity we listen to the mountain, to its own generativity and meaning. Its fir and beech trees rustle in the north wind (*aquilo*) or the west wind (*zephyr*). They blow where they will. You hear their sound but know not their source nor their destination (cf. Jn 3:8). La Verna echoes with the flight and sounds of birds. In place of a garden, La Verna hosts the chapel of the birds. Built in 1602, the chapel marks the location where, on his first visit, the mountain of La Verna warmly welcomed Francis in the excited greeting of a large and varied flock of birds.

### **An ecology of place**

How do words respond to places? How do places respond to words? They collaborate and interact. A place remembers a saint without any spoken or written words but its memory easily inspires words and texts. The life of a saint is a composition of places.<sup>9</sup> La Verna remembers Francis by holding him in its location. In its remembrance of Francis, the literal and figurative become fluid, no longer separate and unrelated categories. La Verna witnesses the intensity of the Stigmata as part of the mountain’s own connection to the bursting intensity of the world. La Verna is a text that has read Francis. It helped generate Celano’s text that we in turn read today.

Asleep in the precarious overhang of the *sasso spicco*, Francis entrusts himself to the maw of the mountain. He trusts its welcome, borne on chirping wings, that lets him rest and dream. As does La Verna itself. This mutual befriending opens up a notion of place as possibility.<sup>10</sup> Burrus draws on Plato’s *Timaeus*<sup>11</sup> where place (*chora*) is similar to a winnowing basket in which all kinds of potencies, movements and tensions are shaken together and

<sup>7</sup> DANTE, *Paradiso*. Canto 11. L. BIANCOLLI trans., Washington Square Press, New York 1966, III, 43.

<sup>8</sup> BURRUS, 119.

<sup>9</sup> BURRUS, 1.

<sup>10</sup> BURRUS, 154.

<sup>11</sup> PLATO, *Timaeus*, R.G. BURY, trans., Harvard University Press, Chicago MA 1942, VII, 52E, 53A, 125.

become generative of number, order and form. Place (*chora*) therefore is not empty but the movement of all these potencies in the direction of inclusion and coexistence. As she writes, “places are always shaping us but only because of the ways we and all the others are always shaping them at the same time.”<sup>12</sup> She concludes that place as such is sacred as creative potential.

## Conclusion

The geocritical perspectives touched on here are quite different from the language of place we find in geology and in the technical language of plate tectonics and the earth’s crust. We are some distance from the notion of space or place as considered by Geometry and Physics as the ordered totality of concrete extensions.<sup>13</sup> And we are very far indeed from a notion of space or place as merely empty and inert. Geocritical reading sets the sciences into a more comprehensive view of the living and dying of the earth, an earth that as place intensely feels and remembers, records, listens and teaches. At this level geocritical reading is broadly sympathetic to the viewpoint of Pope Francis’ *Laudato si’* with its trenchant analysis of how everything is interconnected, the loss of biodiversity to waste and greed, the wound represented by the burning of fossil fuels that plays a role in the shortage of fresh water, the adverse effects of climate change. In the spirit of a geocritical reading, the encyclical sees the indispensable connection between economic development and human development. Geocritical reading helps us to see that La Verna and its famous visitor belong here where a little portion of a mountain uniquely tells a story about God and a little man.

## Latin Abbreviations

### Writings of St. Francis

CantAudPov	Canticle Audite Poverelle
CantSol	Canticum fratris Solis
LaudDei	Laudes Dei Altissimi
BenLeo	Benedictio fratri Leoni data
EpAnt	Epistola ad S. Antonium
EpClerI	Epistola ad Clericos
EpCust	Epistola ad Custodes
EpFid	Epistola ad Fideles
EpLeo	Epistola ad fratrem Leonem
EpMin	Epistola ad Ministrum
EpOrd	Epistola toti Ordini missa
EpRect	Epistola ad rectores
ExhLD	Exhortatio ad Laudem Dei
ExpPat	Expositio in Pater noster
FormViv	Forma vivendi S. Claræ
Fragm	Fragmenta alterius Regulæ
LaudHor	Laudes ad omnes horas
OffPass	Officium Passionis Domini
OrCruc	Oratio ante Crucifixum
RegB	Regula bullata
RegNB	Regula non bullata
RegEr	Regula pro eremitoriis
SalBVM	Salutatio Beatæ Mariæ Virg
SalVirt	Salutatio Virtutum
Test	Testamentum
UltVol	Ultima voluntas S. Claræ

### Sources for the Life of St. Francis

FAED I	<i>Francis of Assisi. Early Documents. Saint</i>
FAED II	<i>Francis of Assisi. Early Documents. Founder</i>
FAED III	<i>Francis of Assisi. Early Documents. Prophet</i>
1C	Celano, <i>Vita beati Francisci</i>
LCh	Celano, <i>Legenda ad usum chori</i>
VB	Celano, <i>Vita brevior S. Francisci</i>
2C	Celano, <i>Memoriale in desiderio anime</i>
3C	Celano, <i>Tractatus miraculorum</i>
LJS	Julian of Speyer, <i>Vita S. Francisci</i>
OR	<i>Officium Rhythmicum</i>
AP	<i>Anonymus Perusinus (De Inceptione)</i>
L3C	<i>Legenda trium sociorum</i>
CA	<i>Compilatio Assisiensis</i>
LMj	S. Bonaventura, <i>Legenda Maior</i>
LMn	S. Bonaventura, <i>Legenda Minor</i>
SPMaj	<i>Speculum Perfectionis</i> (Sabatier)
SPMin	<i>Speculum Perfectionis</i> (Lemmens)
ABF	<i>Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius</i>
Fior	<i>Fioretti di San Francesco</i>



Cover page: Altar in Cave-Chapel of Greccio commemorating the Nativity scene of 1223  
Fresco by Giotto school dated end of 14<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>12</sup> BURRUS, 154.

<sup>13</sup> B. LONERGAN, *Insight*, Philosophical Library, New York 1957, 170.



