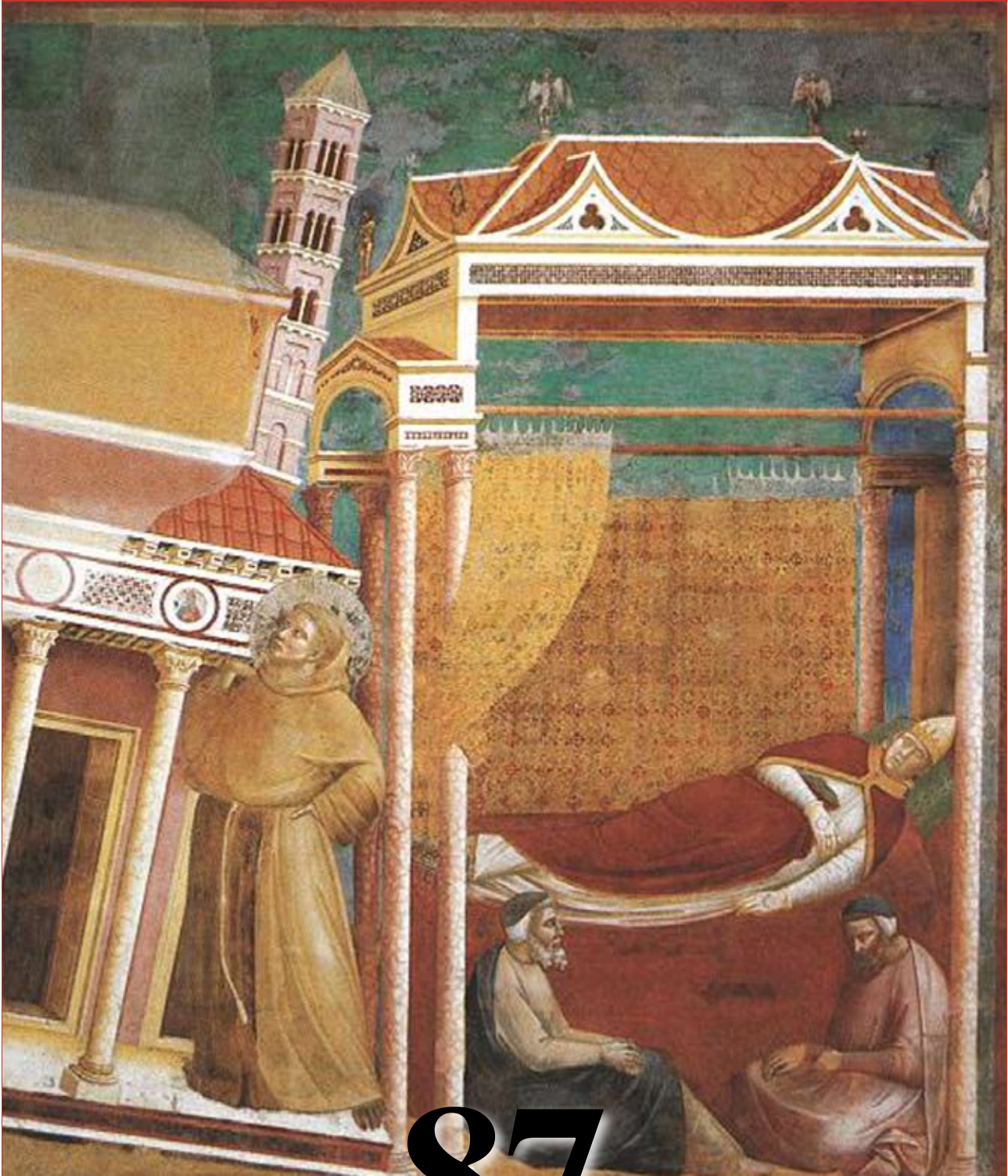


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A NEW WEB-SITE FOR FRANCISCAN STUDIES

As from January 2009, the Franciscan Studies section featuring papers and notes by Fr. Noel Muscat, as well as this present review “Spirtu u Hajja”, is now appearing on an independent web-site, entitled E-Tau, with the web address <http://franciscanstudies.e-tau.org/>

E-Tau is a new web-site being launched by a group of Franciscan Friars Minor from Malta. The idea is that of continuing to build upon the effort started by the same friars back in 1997, when the Franciscan Province of Malta was among the first in the Order of Friars Minor to have its own web-site, as a result of the expertise of Fr. John Abela OFM, who has been web-master at the General Curia of the Order of Friars Minor during these last 12 years.

The name E-Tau means “Electronic Tau”. The Tau is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and is mentioned in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel 9:4. For Christians it is a Biblical symbol, representing the cross of Jesus Christ. Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) used the Tau as his particular mark and signature.

In 1982, during the 800 anniversary of the birth of Saint Francis, the Maltese Franciscans launched “Edizzjoni Tau” (Tau Edition), in order to publish books and reviews dealing with Holy Scripture and the Holy Land Custody, as well as with Franciscan Studies. The founder of “Edizzjoni Tau” was Fr. Raymond Camilleri OFM.

Among the various publications the Franciscans have been publishing regularly two reviews. “L-Art Imqaddsa” (The Holy Land) is published by the Commissariat of the Holy Land, with the aim of providing articles on biblical themes linked with the Franciscan presence in the Holy Land. “Spirtu u Hajja” (Spirit and Life) is a review on Franciscan culture, published by Fr. Noel Muscat OFM. As from January 2008 “Spirtu u Hajja” has been published in English, and posted regularly on the website of the Maltese Franciscan Province.

This first step at providing the issue of the Franciscan review on line has encouraged us in our idea of eventually creating a web-site in which both “L-Art Imqaddsa” and “Spirtu u Hajja”, as well as other Franciscan publications, can be posted on line. Hence the name E-Tau, or Electronic Tau.

At this initial stage this web-site will feature the section on Franciscan Studies, which falls under the direct responsibility of Fr. Noel Muscat OFM.

Although we have built an independent site, we would like to create a link between E-Tau and the official website of the Maltese Franciscan Province (ofm.org.mt), as well as with other Franciscan websites.

Fr. Noel Muscat ofm

THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL IN THE EPISODE OF FRANCIS' DREAM IN SPOLETO

Noel Muscat OFM

The experience of conversion in Christian life finds its model in the unique experience of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. It was such an important turning point in the life of the Apostle of the Gentiles that the Acts of the Apostles dedicate a particular attention to this episode for three times (Acts 9:1-25; 22:1-21; 26:1-23).¹

All along the history of Christianity, Paul's conversion has been presented as a paradigm for all experiences of conversion. Maybe the only other experience worthy of such importance in Christian antiquity is that of the conversion of Saint Augustine, narrated in his *Confessions*.

The basic elements of Paul's conversion consist of the following: (1) a radiant vision of the glorious Christ, which blinds Saul and makes him fall to the ground; (2) the dialogue between Christ and Saul, in which Christ reveals his identity and Saul asks Christ what he wanted him to do; (3) Saul's repentance and acceptance of the faith and baptism; (4) Saul's courage in proclaiming Jesus Christ in the synagogues of Damascus. In Galatians 1:11-17 Paul says that the Good News he was preaching was revealed directly to him by Jesus Christ, and was not a human message. He later says that he spent a period in the Arabian desert, before starting his preaching in Damascus.

These are elements which also occur in the life of St. Francis, who writes in his *Testament* 14: "And after the Lord gave me some 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."² Francis also spent a rather long period of time of discernment in remote places around Assisi, particularly in an unknown cave (*crypta*) and in the church of San Damiano.³

Our aim in this paper is that of presenting one particular episode in the life of Saint Francis, which the biographers model upon the event of Paul's conversion in the Acts of the Apostles. The episode is that of Francis' dream at Spoleto, which

truly marks a turning point in the saint's process of conversion from dreams of chivalry to the following of the poor and crucified Christ.

The dream in Spoleto, a turning point in Francis' life

The episode of Francis' dream in Spoleto was truly a turning point in his process of conversion. Various sources for the life of Saint Francis speak about this experience, and we shall be examining them one by one. But let us first start with a historical analysis of the events leading up to this unique experience, which marks a physical return of Francis to Assisi and to the demanding voice of the crucifix of San Damiano to go and repair Christ's Church.

The famous Assisi historian, Arnaldo Fortini, dedicates a whole chapter to the experiences of conversion linked with the noble dreams of Saint Francis.⁴ After the war between Assisi and Perugia in 1202, in which Francis was captured and later liberated, the two cities signed a peace pact, or *carta pacis*, in November 1203. The tension between the two cities, however, lingered on until 1209. It was during this winter of 1203-1204 that Francis lay sick in the Bernardone house, and when through one of the most intense periods of emotional and moral suffering in his life. It was only in the spring of 1204 that he began to feel better and could start to go out and enjoy the glorious Umbrian countryside of Assisi.

One of the effects of the war was that of making people feel how futile it was to engage in quarrels and class hatred. Fortini states that, in his life-long research in the Assisi archives, "old Assisi records recall many who offered themselves and their goods to a church in the hope of finding everlasting peace. They are the *oblato mortui mundo*, the oblates dead to the world – lay men and women who, without consecration or vows, wear a religious habit, live in a church and follow a monastic regime."⁵ Such was to become Francis later on, when he offered his services to the poor priest at the church of San Damiano during an important moment of his conversion after receiving the message of the Crucifix.

It was some time later, during the first months of 1205, that Francis heard about the fame of the warrior Gautier de Brienne, count of Lecce. The *Legend of Three Companions* speaks about how Francis became enthusiastic to follow Gautier de Brienne in Apulia, who was fighting to defend the interests of Pope Innocent III:

"A few years later, a nobleman from the city of Assisi was preparing himself with knightly arms

to go to Apulia in order to increase his wealth and fame. When Francis learned of this, he yearned to go with him to that same place, and to be knighted by that count, Gentile by name.”⁶

Francis frantically began to make preparations for the expedition. His father Pietro di Bernardone was extravagant in letting him spend enormous sums of money on his military equipment, only to find out that Francis had given all his splendid attire to a poor knight, and therefore had to fork out money once again to equip his son for the expedition.

In the long sleepless nights during this frantic period of preparation, Francis once had a dream of an enchanted castle, full of military weapons all bearing the cross of the Crusader knights. During this dream he heard a voice telling him that all that splendid weaponry was destined for him and for his knights. This was to be the dream that would make Francis radiant with joy in his endeavour to become a famous knight during the Apulia expedition. But if the Assisi dream was one of glory, another dream, that of Spoleto, would fill Francis with so many doubts that he would simply give up all his plans, as we shall see.

Francis left together with the small band of warriors who left Assisi to join count Gautier de Brienne. Fortini describes the picturesque landscape that the young Francis saw in the one-day journey along the sides of the Subasio and the hills on the eastern section of the Umbrian valley, from Sant’Angelo di Panzo, on to the town of Spello, Trevi and finally Spoleto, a famous papal city. But Spoleto was to be as far as Francis would go in his hope of being knighted. Fortini describes in poetic terms what happened to Francis on that particular night:

“As he was making ready to resume his trip, fever overcame him again, that familiar shivering that returned every evening at the same hour and continued all night; so that he spent the nights in a semi-conscious state, half-asleep, half-awake, and in the morning was prostrate and worn out [...]

One night, being shaken more strongly than ever by the alternating waves of hope and of distress and discouragement, he heard a voice, perhaps the same one that had called him in his vision of the castle filled with arms [...]

Suddenly, in a great flash that illuminated his soul, Francis understood who it was that had spoken to him. And in an instant much of the old Francis burned away: the turmoil of his ambitious dreams, his greed for marvellous victories, his mania for military glory, his need to be first, his day-dreaming about unknown roads and unexpected encounters. Biographers say that the miracle of Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus had been repeated, that

a mortal soul had been caught up in an experience of the divine that sublimated worldly traits into an overwhelming desire to offer himself to God.

The emblem of Francis’s *contrada* was the sword that had severed the head of the Apostle Paul. Ever since adolescence, in festivals and in dances of the Tripudianti, in cavalcades and in battles and in prison, that symbol had been engraved in his heart. Now the blade of the sword had been turned on him, destroying and remaking him for Christ [...] Francis asked, like Paul: ‘O Lord, what do you wish me to do?’ And the reply was much like the one that Jesus had made to Paul: ‘Return to your own place and you will be told what to do’.

The vision of arms, the voice continued, must be understood in another sense than Francis had thought. The arms and the palace were destined for knights very much different than those he had in mind. In a much different way, too, would he himself win honour.

Francis did not sleep any more that night. When the first light filtered into the room, he got up. Dawn was rising on the summit of Monteluco. Now the significance of that extraordinary vision seemed very dear to him in Saint Paul’s own words: ‘Since we live by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s lead’ (Gal 5:25).”⁷

Francis’ dreams of knighthood were shattered. Gautier de Brienne died during the same campaign in Apulia. Francis, dejected and worn out by his continual search for worldly glory, went back to Assisi. The dream of Spoleto marked an important stage in what was to become his experience of conversion.

We now consider the same episode through an analysis of the Sources for the life of Saint Francis, and then we shall see whether there are any similarities between Francis’ experience at Spoleto and Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus.

The Spoleto experience in the Sources

The episode of the dream at Spoleto is present in some of the more important Sources for the life of Saint Francis. It is not found, however, in the oldest among them, namely the *Vita Sancti Francisci*, by Thomas of Celano, written in 1228-29. A group of Sources written in the period 1241-1247 give us the most faithful presentation of this episode. These are the Sources which depend upon the *florilegium* of Greccio (1246), but also upon a very important Source, namely the so-called *Anonymous of Perugia*, written in 1240-41. Bonaventure’s account in the *Legenda Maior*, written in 1260-63, depends upon these Sources, particularly upon Celano’s *Memoriale in Desiderio Animae*. All four of the Sources which

present the Spoleto episode quote Acts 9:6, referring the reader to the experience of Paul's vision and conversion on the road to Damascus.

In his *Vita Sancti Francisci*, Celano mentions the expedition to Apulia, as well as the dream of the palace filled with shining armour. But, strangely enough, he makes Francis renounce the expedition even before leaving Assisi. After saying that Francis, "considering his vision a predication of great success, felt sure that his upcoming journey to Apulia would be successful,"⁸ Celano skips the entire Spoleto episode and writes: "Changed in mind but not in body, he now refused to go to Apulia and was anxious to direct his will to God's."⁹ It seems that, in 1228, Celano did not have the information regarding Francis' journey to Spoleto, which he then narrates in his *Memoriale* in 1246-47.

The first time we find the Spoleto episode in the Sources is in 1240-41, in the work of John of Perugia, entitled *The Beginning or Founding of the Order and the Deeds of those Friars Minor who were the First Companions of Blessed Francis in Religion*, and normally known by the name *Anonymous of Perugia*. The text of this Source could very well be the oldest among the other parallel episodes we shall consider:

"After a while, a marvellous thing happened to this blessed man which in my estimation should not be passed over in silence. One night when he was asleep in his bed, someone appeared to him calling him by name. He led him into a palace of unspeakable beauty, filled with military arms, its walls covered everywhere with shining shields emblazoned with crosses. He inquired to whom these brightly shining arms and this beautiful palace belonged. 'All these things, including the palace,' said the guide, 'belong to you and your knights' [...]"

After giving the matter much thought, he decided to become a knight to obtain this princely power. After having as expensive a wardrobe as possible made for himself, he arranged to join up with a noble count in Apulia, to be knighted by him. Everyone marvelled that he was happier than usual, and when they asked him the reason why, he answered: 'I know that I am going to be a great prince.'

After obtaining a squire, he mounted his horse and rode toward Apulia. It was night when he arrived in Spoleto and, anxious about his trip, he retired for the night. Half asleep, he heard a voice asking him where he intended to go. He outlined to him his whole plan. The voice then asked him: 'Who can do more for you, the lord or the servant?' 'The Lord,' he answered. 'Then why are you abandoning the lord for the servant, and the patron for the client?' To which Francis responded: 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' (Acts 9:6; Acts 22:10).

'Go back,' it said, 'to your own land to do what the Lord will tell you' (Gen 32:9; Acts 22:10). It seemed to him that divine grace had suddenly made him a different man."¹⁰

The *Legend of Three Companions* depends upon the *Anonymous of Perugia*, but adds some interesting notes to the episode. The dream of the splendid palace full of armour is very similar to that in the preceding text, except for the fact that the L3C changes the adjective *gentile* in AP, referred to the knight whom Francis accompanied in Apulia, to a proper name, count Gentile, and says that Francis gave his splendid clothes to a poor knight. But the L3C then differs from AP by noticing that, in Spoleto, Francis "began to feel a little ill. No less anxious about the trip, as he was falling to sleep, half awake, he heard someone asking him where he wanted to go."¹¹ The text then continues on parallel lines with that in AP.

Whereas AP and L3C are content with the historical account of the Spoleto dream, the other two Sources we shall now consider give us a theological interpretation of the same episode. In his *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, Celano presents the episode and adds the following comment: "He turned back without delay becoming even now a model of obedience. Giving up his own will he changed from Saul to Paul. Paul was thrown to the ground and his stinging lashes bore fruit in soothing words; while Francis turned his fleshly weapons into spiritual ones, and instead of knightly glory, received a divine rank."¹²

Celano is the only one to mention in an explicit way the link between Paul's conversion and Francis' own conversion. In the *Legenda Maior*, Bonaventure gives importance to the fulfilment of God's will in the life of Saint Francis, by saying: "When morning came, then, he returned in haste to Assisi, free of care and filled with joy, and, already made an exemplar of obedience, he awaited the Lord's will."¹³

Paul and Francis: two models of conversion

This brief analysis of the Sources that speak about Francis' dream in Spoleto shows that the biographers deliberately wanted to create a link between Francis' experience of conversion and the experience of Paul on the road to Damascus. In both cases we are faced with a particular type of conversion, which in so many ways is different from the usual definition of conversion as a passing over from an immoral or sinful life to a life of holiness.

Neither Paul nor Francis lived a sinful life before their experience of conversion. Paul was a staunch Pharisee, who observed the Law of Moses in all its details. Presenting himself to the Jews of

Jerusalem, who wanted to stone him to death, Paul says: "I am a Jew, and was born at Tarsus in Cilicia. I was brought up here in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was taught the exact observance of the Law of our ancestors. In fact, I was as full of duty towards God as you are today" (Acts 22:3). His conversion consisted in being appointed an apostle of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. To the Galatians he writes: "The fact is, brothers, and I want you to realise this, the Good News that I preached is not a human message that I was given by men, it is something I learnt only through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You must have heard of my career as a practising Jew, how merciless I was in persecuting the Church of God, how much damage I did to it, how I stood out among other Jews of my generation, and how enthusiastic I was for the traditions of my ancestors. Then God, who had specially chosen me while I was still in my mother's womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son in me, so that I might preach the Good News about him to the pagans" (Gal 1:14-16).

Paul was convinced that his conversion had consisted in a radical shift from faithfulness to the Law of Moses to faithfulness to the Person of Jesus Christ, who appeared to him on the road to Damascus: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me" (Acts 9:6). In this way Paul became a convert from a blameless life of legal observance of the *Torah* to a radically new life of openness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whom he now preached to Jews and pagans alike.

If we take the life of Saint Francis, we notice a good number of similarities with Paul's own experience. In Spoleto, Francis also went through an experience of conversion. Paul had been blinded by a great light, which shone around him on the road to Damascus, and had heard a voice. The mystical experience in Acts 9:6 mentions a voice, not a physical appearance of Jesus Christ. In the same way, in Spoleto, Francis hears a voice provoking him with an uncomfortable question during his dreams. This makes Francis realise that he had been wrong all along in trying to find happiness in his dreams of chivalry and worldly glory. It is in the light of this experience of encounter of the real Jesus Christ, hidden in the mysterious voice that speaks to him, that Francis would later on write in his *Testament*: "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 Francis' experience was certainly not an easy one. He could write these words after twenty years of service to Christ, and realised that it was only after an intense inner struggle and the arrival

of the brothers that things became clear for him. But Paul's case was similar, since the Damascus experience was just the beginning of an arduous journey of study, prayer and faithful commitment in favour of the cause of the Gospel. "This man is my chosen instrument to bring my name before pagans and pagan kings and before the people of Israel. I myself will show him how much he himself must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16).

We have noted that Paul's conversion consisted in four specific moments, namely: (1) a radiant vision of the glorious Christ, which blinds Saul and makes him fall to the ground; (2) the dialogue between Christ and Saul, in which Christ reveals his identity and Saul asks Christ what he wanted him to do; (3) Saul's repentance and acceptance of the faith and baptism; (4) Saul's courage in proclaiming Jesus Christ in the synagogues of Damascus.

Francis also undergoes a similar pattern of experiences in his process of conversion. (1) At Spoleto Francis has a vision, which unfolds during a dream. Unlike Paul, Francis is not blinded by an extraordinary light at noon, but experiences the mystery of the darkness of the night. What is common between the two narratives of conversion is the fact that both Paul and Francis hear a voice, and both "fall down to the ground" by feeling humiliated in front of the greatness of this new revelation.

(2) The dialogue that unfolds between the "voice" and Francis is similar to that between the voice of Christ and Paul in Acts. One could say that Christ does not reveal himself directly to Francis as he did to Paul. To Paul's question: "Who are you, Lord?", Christ answers directly: "I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me." To Francis it is the voice that makes a direct question: "Who can do more for you, the lord or the servant?" "The Lord," he answered. "Then why are you abandoning the lord for the servant, and the patron for the client?" The answer in this case is also a revelation, since it is clear that the use of the term *Dominus*, Lord, refers to Christ, even though that would not have been clear to Francis at that very moment of his dream. Paul asks Jesus: "What am I to do Lord?" The answer is: "Stand up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told what you have been appointed to do" (Acts 22:10). The same pattern of dialogue is present in the case of Francis' dream at Spoleto: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:6; Acts 22:10). "Go back to your own land to do what the Lord will tell you" (Gen 32:9; Acts 22:10). Francis is invited to return home in order to clarify his position before Christ. It is as if he is entering a period of preparation or initiation, equivalent to what he is calling a conversion.

(3) The disciple Ananias goes to visit Paul

and baptises him in Acts 9:10-19. Paul becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, he is instructed on the Way in order to become a courageous herald of the Gospel. We do not know how long it took for Paul to become an expert apostle of the Gospel. He himself gives us a hint in Galatians 1:17, saying that he went to Arabia (the desert south of Damascus, inhabited by Nabataean Arabs), and thus indicates a period of intense preparation for his ministry. Francis' own experience in the "desert" is also emphasised by his biographers, particularly Celano, who speaks about Francis going out with an unnamed friend to a cave (*crypta*) outside Assisi and there praying earnestly to the Lord to reveal his will to him.¹⁵

(4) Paul courageously announced that Jesus is Christ in the synagogues of Damascus. His conversion led him immediately to become an apostle, first among his fellow Jews, and then among the pagans. Francis' conversion unfolded in a similar fashion. He first became a herald of evangelical penance in his native Assisi, during the time he spent as an oblate at San Damiano, and during the initial period of conversion, which he aptly describes in his *Testament*.

Indeed, the similarity between Paul and Francis in their search for Christ, finds its beginnings in this experience of initial conversion. This parallel experience is best expressed by two autobiographical texts, one from Paul and the other from Francis: "God, who had specially chosen me [...] called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son to me, so that I might preach the Good News about him to the pagans" (Gal 1:15-16). "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance [...] 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" (*Test* 14).

NOTES

¹ Acts 9:1-25 is the historical account of what happened on the road to Damascus. Acts 22:1-21 is Paul's own account of the episode of his conversion in front of the Jews in the Temple. Acts 26:1-23 is again Paul's account of his conversion in front of King Agrippa, when he was held in Caesarea, awaiting to leave to Rome, where he had appealed his case before Caesar.

² *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* (*Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di E. Menestò e S. Brufani, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 1995, 228). English text in *Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, I: The Saint (FAED I), edited by R.J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, W.J. Short, New City Press, New York

2003, 125.

³ Cfr. 1C 6 (FAED I,187); 1C 8-10 (FAED I,188-191).

⁴ ARNALDO FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi*, Translated by Helen Moak, Crossroad, New York 1980, 166-194. This is the English translation of the original work of Fortini, *Nuova Vita di San Francesco*, 5 Volumes, Tipografia Porziuncola, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 1959.

⁵ ARNALDO FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi*, 176.

⁶ L3C 5 (FAED II,70).

⁷ ARNALDO FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi*, 188-189.

⁸ 1C 5 (FAED I,186).

⁹ 1C 6 (FAED I,187).

¹⁰ AP 5-6 (FAED II,36-37). Latin text in *De Inceptione vel Fundamento Ordinis* [Anonymus Perusinus], 6, in *Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di Enrico Menestò e Stefano Brufani, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 1995, 1313-1314: "Et assumpto scutifero ascendens equum, versus Apuliam equitabat. Cum autem Spoletum pervenisset sollicitus sui itineris, et nocte facta se deposuisset ad dormiendum, audivit semidormiens vocem quandam ipsum quo vellet ire interrogantem. Cui per ordinem totum suum propositum revelavit. Cui vox iterum: - «Quis potest tibi melius facere, Dominus an servus?» Qui respondit: «Dominus». «Quare ergo relinquis pro servo Dominum et Principem pro cliente?» Cui Franciscus: «*Quid, Domine, vis faciam?*» (cfr. Act 9,6). «*Revertere, ait, in terram tuam* (cfr. Gen 32,9), *facturus quae tibi Dominus* (cfr. Act 22,10) revelabit». Qui subito divina gratia in virum, ut sibi videbatur, alterum est mutatus."

¹¹ L3C 6 (FAED II,71). Latin text in *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, 6, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 1378-1379: "Nam omnia indumenta sua quae de novo sibi fecerat curiosa et cara cuidam pauperi militi donaverat illa die. Cum ergo iter arripiens ivisset usque Spoletum ut in Apuliam pergeret coepit aliquantulum aegrotare. Sollicitus autem nihilominus de suo itinere, cum se sopori dedisset, audivit semidormiens quemdam interrogantem ipsum quo tendere cupiebat. Cui Franciscus cum totum suum propositum revelasset, adiecit ille: «Quis potest tibi melius facere? Dominus aut servus?» Cui cum respondisset: «Dominus», iterum dixit illi: «Cur ergo relinquis pro servo dominum et principem pro cliente?» Et Franciscus ait: «*Quid me vis facere, Domine?*» (cfr. Act 9,6). «*Revertere, inquit, in terram tuam* (cfr. Gen 32,9) *et tibi dicetur quid sis facturus* (cfr. Act 9,7). Nam visionem quam vidisti aliter intelligere te oportet."

¹² 2C 6 (FAED II,245-246). Latin text in THOMAS DE CELANO, *Vita Secunda Sancti Francisci*, 6, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 448: "Dormientem siquidem nocte quadam, quidam ipsum secundo per visionem alloquitur, et quo tendere velit, sollicite perscrutatur. Cui cum suum enarrasset propositum, et in Apuliam militaturum proficisci se diceret, interrogatus ab eodem sollicite: quis sibi melius facere queat, servus an dominus? Franciscus: «Dominus», inquit. Et ille: «Cum ergo servum pro domino quaeris?» Et Franciscus: «*Quid*

me vis facere, Domine?» (cfr. Act 9,6). Et Dominus ad eum: «*Revertere, ait, ad terram nativitatis tuae* (cfr. Gen 32,9), quia visionis tuae erit per me spiritualis impletio». Revertitur absque mora, iam *forma* obedientiae factus (cfr. 1Pet 5,3), et propriam abdicans voluntatem de Saulo Paulus efficitur. Prosternitur ille, et verbera dura verba dulcia gignunt; Franciscus vero arma carnalia in spiritualia vertit, et pro militari gloria divinum suscipit praesidatum. – Stupentibus itaque multis laetitiam eius insolitam, dicebat se magnum principem affuturum.”

¹³ LMj 1,3 (FAED II,533). Latin text in BONAVENTURA DE BALNEOREGIO, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, I,3, in *Fontes Franciscani*, 783-784: “Disposuit itaque, divinae adhuc dispositionis ignarus, in Apuliam ad quemdam liberalem comitem se conferre, in ipsius sperans obsequio decus adipisci militiae, ut ostensa sibi visio praetendebat. Cumque, paulo post iter aggressus, ivisset usque ad proximam civitatem, audivit in nocte Dominum familiari sibi allocutione dicentem: «Francisce, quis potest melius facere tibi, dominus aut servus, dives aut pauper?» Cui cum Franciscus respondisset, quod tam dominus quam dives facere melius potest, intulit statim: «Cur ergo relinquis pro servo Dominum et pro paupere homine divitem Deum?» Et Franciscus: «*Quid me vis, Domine, facere?» Et Dominus ad eum:* (cfr. Act 9,6) «*Revertere in terram tuam* (cfr. Gen 32,9), quia visio, quam vidisti, spirituales praefiguratur effectum, non humana sed divina in te dispositione complendum». *Mane itaque facto* (cfr. Ioa 21,4), cum festinatione revertitur versus Assisium securus et gaudens, et iam exemplar obedientiae factus, exspectabat Domini voluntatem.”

¹⁴ Test 14 (FAED I,125).

¹⁵ 1C 6 (FAED I,187).

SAINT CLARE AND THE FRANCISCAN ORDER (1)

English translation from the original Italian version by Felice ACCROCCA, «Chiara e l'Ordine Franciscano», *Atti del Convegno Internazionale «Clara claris praeclara»*, Assisi 20-22 novembre 2003 (Convivium Assisiense. Ricerche dell'Istituto Teologico e dell'Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose di Assisi), Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 2004, 339-379.

In 1228, immediately after the canonisation of Francis, or even before that date, Thomas of Celano began to write, “just as the illustrious Lord Pope Gregory commanded,” the life of the founder of the Order of friars Minor. In the compilation of his narrative, the hagiographer declared explicitly that he based himself upon those things he heard from Francis: “those things which I heard from his own mouth,” or those things he “learned from trustworthy and esteemed witnesses.”¹

Clare and the companions of Francis: Hagiographical reflexes

It has now been persuasively shown that in that occasion the companions of Francis did not give direct witness, probably because they were driven by a desire to be faithful to the memory and the teachings of their brother and father. It was only twenty years later that they would give witness, during the investigation promoted by Crescentius of Jesi. If we read the works of Celano departing from this viewpoint, it is evident that Clare herself did not give witness on the occasion of the canonisation and did not communicate her experience to Thomas, but she did so twenty years later. The references made by Celano to Clare and her Sisters in his *Vita beati Francisci* are, in fact, so generic that they hardly contribute anything to her memory. The objective of the hagiographer was rather that of describing the life of the monasteries founded by Cardinal Hugolino, more than the life in the monastery of San Damiano. This choice was in agreement with the project of Gregory IX to make of Clare and her community in Assisi the central ideal from which he could radiate the development of this new female religious Order, which he had organised while still a cardinal.² On the other hand, in the *Memoriale in desiderio animae* – written by Thomas with the

supervision of the companions of Francis, who in their own right, took upon themselves the sharing of responsibility for this work – we note that there is a specific attention given to Clare and her community.³

I have already advanced the hypothesis that the principal motive for which the companions of Francis decided to give witness was the promulgation of the letter *Ordinem vestrum*, published by Innocent IV, as a commentary on the Franciscan Rule, on 14th November 1245. In this letter the pope repeated some of the affirmations of the *Quo elongati* of Gregory IX, but he mitigated them considerably, particularly with regards to poverty and the right of the friars to administer property.⁴ The same *Memoriale in desiderio animae* constitutes an implicit answer to the *Ordinem vestrum*. Maybe it was at this moment, in 1245, that Clare decided that it was time to speak out.

It is true that we have only scarce elements to give a convincing answer to this question. This is more so since – with a difference from the companions who date their letter – we do not know when and how Clare and her own community gave their witness. However, I am prone to think that the answer in favour of this date is yes, taking into account the knowledge that Clare and her companions had of the Saint and of the Umbrian group of friars, who were tenaciously attached to the memories of the origins. No one of these friars, or even Clare herself, had given witness in 1228. We should also bear in mind that, in 1245, the Order was on the whole not enthusiastic about the papal declaration⁵. Independently of this, I still think however that we have to value in a different way the fact that, in the *Memoriale*, Thomas never mentions Clare by name. This element has often been indicated as a sign of the increased marginalisation of the *little plant* of Saint Francis. But we should also state that the *Memoriale* is silent regarding other illustrious names, including that of brother Leo. In fact, it is only thanks to the notes which Leo himself wrote on the *chartula* conserved in Assisi that it is possible to identify him in the *companion* who was with Saint Francis on La Verna in September 1224, and who “was yearning with great desire to have something encouraging from the words of the our Lord, commented on briefly by Saint Francis and written with his own hand.”⁶

We also underline the fact that Thomas had to obey to a criterion already followed by the companions, who had left anonymous many of the protagonists of the episodes that they had narrated. It is interesting to note how the companion who is most often quoted is Pietro Cattani, who was already dead since twenty-five years before the

companions wrote the letter of Greccio.⁷ In this way we understand why Clare is never mentioned in the *Memoriale*;⁸ rather, taking account of the teachings of Francis and of his reaction to the news that a legend dedicated to the first Franciscan martyrs had been written, it is possible that Clare herself was not very enthusiastic about the words of praise that Thomas had reserved for her in his *Vita beati Francisci*. In this sense, it is illuminating to see how the first companions had characteristically presented Clare in the only instance in which they mention her in their memories. In fact, they define Clare as “the first plant of the Order of Sisters, the abbess of the Poor Sisters of the monastery of San Damiano in Assisi, who emulated Saint Francis in observing always the poverty of the Son of God.”⁹ Clare is presented as the abbess of the “Poor Sisters”: there is therefore no hint, on the part of the companions, to the “recluse” life of the sisters, while they choose a title to define the form of life of the community of San Damiano, which is exactly the same one used by Clare for her Order¹⁰ (they do not mention at all the *Ordo Sancti Damiani*). Above all, the *little plant* is presented as an imitator of Francis in his observance of the poverty of Jesus. The story of Clare, therefore, is linked with that of the Order of minors, or better still, to the story of a section of that Order, namely the group of friars who had been closest to Francis as his companions.

We should also keep in mind another detail. In the testament written in Assisi, in the church of San Francesco, on 8th April 1258, in which Giovanna, daughter of the deceased Benvenuto Bonaventure, left legacies to relatives and other entities and religious persons. Among other things we read that she left “for a habit”, forty pennies each to brothers Leo, Bartolo, Pietro de Albe: these three friars appear distinct from the other members of the two communities of Saint Mary of the Porziuncola and San Francesco. If this brother Leo is the old companion of Francis and if – as Luigi Pellegrini affirms – the three friars mentioned above in the testament “were probably residing in the monastery of Saint Clare”,¹¹ we can conclude that the fact that Leo and Angelo were close to Clare on her deathbed in August 1253¹² was a consequence of the fact that they were part of the community of friars minor who assisted the monastery of San Damiano. This hypothesis is further strengthened by the fact that the two brothers were still present, on 24th November 1253, in the cloister of San Damiano, where, in front of Bartolomeo, archbishop of Spoleto, together with Leonardo, archdeacon of Spoleto, Giacomo, archpriest of Trevi, and the notary Martino, they listened to the deposition of the witness of the companions of Clare regarding the holy life of their

mother. If we confirm our affirmations, we can deduce that the relation of Clare with the companions of Francis was constant during her last years of life. This fact can throw new light also regards the possible collaboration of the companions in the final draft of the Rule of Saint Clare.

Clare and the companions of Saint Francis where, therefore, united in defending the memory of Francis. It is true that, during the moment of the death of the abbess of San Damiano, no famous personages in the government of the Order were to be found near her deathbed. But it is also true that the *Legenda* narrates how Clare, on the same day when Innocent IV visited her, received Holy Communion from the hands of the minister provincial.¹³ We cannot say anything regarding the absence of the minister general John of Parma. In fact, the chronicler Salimbene states that he used to journey often in order to visit the Provinces of the Order.¹⁴ It is therefore most possible that he received the news of the death of Clare some time after it actually happened.

In the case of Saint Bonaventure, the detachment from Clare appears very clearly. In 1259 he had been informed by brother Leo regarding the way in which the community of the sisters in Assisi endeavoured to serve the poor and crucified Christ, and how, upon the example of their own mother, they had no desire to possess anything under heaven.¹⁵ However, in the *Legenda maior*, Bonaventure leaves out the praises of Clare and the Damianites present in the *Vita beati Francisci*, as well as the witnesses given by Clare and her community as referred by Thomas in the *Memoriale in desiderio animae*. Except for some generic hints in the fourth and thirteenth chapters, the only time that Clare appears in the *Legenda maior* as a protagonist is during the moment in which, together with brother Sylvester, she is asked by Francis to pray for him, in order to be enlightened regarding whether he should dedicate himself over to contemplation or to preaching.¹⁶ This detachment on the part of Bonaventure was undoubtedly influenced by the polemic between the friars Minor and the nuns of the Order of San Damiano, which was very much alive in 1260-1263, during which the nuns pretended that the friars should take care to serve them by binding themselves to them as Francis had wished.¹⁷

I also regard as very indicative the famous witness of brother Stefano, transmitted to us by Tommaso da Pavia probably in the period when he was minister of Tuscany (1258-1270). Stefano, and Tommaso following his lead, insist in underlining the exceptional nature of Clare and the relationship that she and the community of her monastery maintained with Francis and the brothers, without however

implying that this meant that the friars had assumed the care of all the monasteries of the Order of San Damiano, called by then *Ordo Sanctae Clarae*. Brother Stefano says that Francis did not want any familiarity with women, and that it was only towards Clare that he maintained some kind of relationship. When he named her, he would never use her first name, but would refer to her as “cristiana”. He showed great interest in her and her monastery, and did not authorise any further foundations, although others (maybe brother Filippo Longo?) had in fact founded other monasteries while he was alive, and cardinal Hugolino himself had supported this new reality with great participation on his part.¹⁸

NOTES

¹ Preliminary Note: We shall be presenting only a small selection of the rich footnotes provided by the author. For a complete presentation of the scientific apparatus we refer the readers to the original Italian version.

1C Prologue (*Francis of Assisi. Early Documents*, Vol. I: The Saint, Edited by R.J. ARMSTRONG, J.A. WAYNE HELLMANN, W.J. SHORT, New City Press, New York – London – Manila 1999, 180) [FAED I, 180].

² MARIA PIA ALBERZONI, “San Damiano nel 1228. Contributo alla ‘questione clariana’, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 67 (1997) 475.

³ MARCO BARTOLI, “«Novitas clariana». Chiara, testimone di Francesco,” in *Chiara d’Assisi*. Atti del XX Convegno internazionale, Assisi, 15-17 ottobre 1992, Spoleto 1993, 157-185.

⁴ INNOCENT IV, Letter *Ordinem vestrum* (FAED II, 774-779).

⁵ THOMAS OF ECCLESTON, *Tractatus* fr. Thomae vulgo dicti de Eccleston *De adventu fratrum minorum in Angliam*, ed. A.G. Little, Paris 1909, 52, reminds us of the open opposition of William of Nottingham, John of Kethene, and Gregory da Bosellis. During the General chapter of Metz in 1254 (and not during that of Genova, as the chronicler states), these obtained the decree suspending the application of *Ordinem vestrum*. This decision was ratified by the Chapter of Narbonne in 1260: «Declaratio domini Innocentii maneat suspensa, sicut fuit in capitulo Metensi; et inhibemus districte, ne aliquis utatur ea in hiis, in quibus declarationi domini Gregorii contradicit» (F.M. DELORME, «*Diffinitiones*» *Capituli generalis O.F.M. Narbonensis [1260]*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 3 (1910) 503, n. 13).

⁶ 2C 49 (FAED II, 280).

⁷ The name of Pietro Cattani is found in 2C 11, 64, 80, 93 and in AC 1560, 1590, 1618.

⁸ Cfr. R. MANSELLI, *San Francesco d’Assisi. Editio maior*, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2002, 233 (ed. 1980:

157); J. DALARUN, *Donne e Donna, femminile e femminizzazione negli scritti e nelle leggende di Francesco d'Assisi*, in *Chiara di Assisi*, 251; ID., *Francesco: un passaggio. Donna e donne negli scritti e nelle leggende di Francesco d'Assisi*. Postfazione di G. MICCOLI, Roma 1994, 112; M. BARTOLI, *Chiara, testimone di Francesco. La figura di Chiara all'interno del movimento francescano dopo la morte di Francesco*, in *Forma Sororum* 33 (1996), 93; R. RUSCONI, *Chiara d'Assisi e la negazione del potere*, in E. MENESTÒ – R. RUSCONI, *Umbria. La strada delle sante medievali*, Torino 1991, 52. This author states that “maybe the root of this attitude is to be found in a certain perplexity in the environment of the Roman curia with regards to this nun, who obstinately refused, more than twenty years after the death of Francis, to be the most harsh and uncomfortable ‘witness’ of the original pauperistic vocation of the Saint.”

⁹ CA 13 (FAED II,128).

¹⁰ In the beginning of her Rule, Clare writes: «Forma vitae Ordinis Sororum Pauperum quam beatus Franciscus instituit haec est» (*RegCl* I,1 [*Fontes Franciscani*, a cura di E. Menestò e S. Brufani, Edizioni Porziuncola, Assisi 1995, 2292]). For the English translation of the writings and sources for the Life of Saint Clare, cfr. *Clare of Assisi. The Lady. Early Documents* [CAED], edited and translated by R.J. ARMSTRONG, New City Press, New York – London – Manila 2006.

¹¹ L. PELLEGRINI, *I frati Minori ad Assisi tra Due e Trecento*, in *Assisi anno 1300*, a cura di S. BRUFANI – E. MENESTÒ (“Medioevo Francescano. Saggi”, 6), Santa Maria degli Angeli-Assisi 2002, 127.

¹² Cf. *LegCl* 45,7 (*Fontes* 2440; CAED 316).

¹³ Cf. *LegCl* 42,3 (*Fontes* 2439; CAED 315).

¹⁴ SALIMBENE DE ADAM, *Cronica* I (“Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis”, 125) Turnholti 1998, 457 (ed. 1966, 434), rr. 15-21: “Hic fuit primus generalis minister qui cepit Ordinem circuire et provincias Ordinis visitare, quod consuetum prius non erat, excepto quod frater Aymo semel iuit in Angliam, unde fuerat oriundus.”

¹⁵ This is the way in which Bonaventure expresses himself in the letter written to the sisters of the monastery of Assisi in 1259, published in *Sancti Bonaventura Opera omnia* VIII, Quaracchi 1898, 473-474. Bonaventure explicitly quotes the Rule of Clare, chapter 8,6 (*Fontes* 2301). For an English translation of this letter, cfr. *St. Bonaventure's Writings Concerning the Franciscan Order*, Introduction and Translation by D. MONTI, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, NY 1994, 67-70.

¹⁶ LMj 4,6 (FAED II,553-554); 12,2 (FAED II,623-624).

¹⁷ When he became Pope, Alexander IV (who was called Rainaldo dei Conti di Segni, when still a cardinal), maintained his position as protector of the friars Minor and of the nuns of the Order of San Damiano. His successor, Urban IV, nominated as protector cardinal

Gian Gaetano Orsini, who then became Pope Nicholas III. He took upon his shoulders the task of protector of the friars, whereas that of protector of the nuns was entrusted to Stefano, cardinal bishop of Palestrina, in conformity to what the friars themselves had suggested. That was when the polemic started. The friars, who saw the spiritual care of the monasteries of nuns as a burden, which would hinder them in their pastoral ministry, tried to free themselves from it. On their part, the nuns continued to pretend that the friars were in duty bound to minister to them. For further studies regarding this issue, cfr. Z. LAZZERI, *Documenta controversiam inter Fratres Minores et Clarissas spectantia* (1262-1297), in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 3 (1910) 664-679; 4 (1911) 74-94; ID., *La “Forma vitae” di santa Chiara e le Regole sue e del suo Ordine*, in *Santa Chiara d'Assisi. Studi e cronaca del VII centenario, 1253-1953*, Assisi 1953, 116-118; B. BUGHETTI, *Acta officialia de regimine Clarissarum durante saec. XIV*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 13 (1920) 90-94; L. KNOX, *Audacious Nuns: Institutionalizing the Franciscan Order of Saint Clare*, in *Greyfriars Review* 16 (2002) 155-178, particularly 162-170.

¹⁸ This witness has been edited by L. OLIGER, *Descriptio codicis Sancti Antonii de urbe una cum appendice textuum de sancto Francisco*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 12 (1919) 382-384.

PAUL SABATIER

«LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI»

Translated into English by Louise Seymour Houghton, (Hodder and Stoughton), London 1908.

Chapter V - FIRST YEAR OF APOSTOLATE (Spring of 1209 – Summer of 1210)

[71] The very next morning Francis went up to Assisi and began to preach. His words were simple, but they came so straight from the heart that all who heard him were touched.

It is not easy to hear and apply to one's self the exhortations of preachers who, aloft in the pulpit, seem to be carrying out a mere formality; it is just as difficult to escape from the appeals of a layman who walks at our side. The amazing multitude of Protestant sects is due in a great degree to this superiority of lay preaching over clerical. The most brilliant orators of the Christian pulpit are bad converters; their eloquent appeals may captivate the imagination and lead a few men of the world to the foot of the altar, but these results are not more brilliant than ephemeral. But let a peasant or a workingman speak to those whom he meets a few simple words going directly to the conscience, and them an is always impressed, often won.

Thus the words of Francis seemed to his hearers like a flaming sword penetrating to the very depths of their conscience. His first attempts were the simplest possible; in general they were merely a few words addressed to men whom he knew well enough to recognize their weak points and strike at them with the holy boldness of love. [72] His person, his example, were themselves a sermon, and he spoke only of that which he had himself experienced, proclaiming repentance, the shortness of life, a future retribution, the necessity of arriving at gospel perfection (1Cel 23; 3Soc 25; Bon 27). It is not easy to realize how many waiting souls there are in this world. The greater number of men pass through life with souls asleep. They are like virgins of the sanctuary who sometimes feel a vague agitation; their hearts throb with an infinitely sweet and subtle thrill, but their eyelids droop; again they feel the damp cold of the cloister creeping over them; the delicious but baneful dream vanishes; and this is all they ever know of that love which is stronger than death.

It is thus with many men for all that belongs to the higher life. Sometimes, alone in the wide plain at the hour of twilight, they fix their eyes on the fading lights of the horizon, and on the evening breeze comes to them another breath, more distant, fainter, and almost heavenly, awaking in them a nostalgia for the world beyond and for holiness. But the darkness falls, they must go back to their homes; they shake off their reverie; and it often happens that to the very end of life this is their only glimpse of the Divine; a few sighs, a few thrills, a few inarticulate murmurs – this sums up all our efforts to attain to the sovereign good.

Yet the instinct for love and for the divine is only slumbering. At the sight of beauty love always awakes; at the appeal of holiness the divine witness within us at once responds; and so we see, streaming from all points of the horizon to gather round those who preach in the name of the inward voice, long processions of souls athirst for the ideal. The human heart so naturally yearns to offer itself up, that we have only to meet along [73] our pathway some one who, doubting neither himself nor us, demands it without reserve, and we yield it to him at once. Reason may understand a partial gift, a transient devotion; the heart knows only the entire sacrifice, and like the lover to his beloved, it says to its vanquisher, "Thine alone and forever."

That which has caused the miserable failure of all the efforts of natural religion is that its founders have not had the courage to lay hold upon the hearts of men, consenting to no partition. They have not understood the imperious desire for immolation which lies in the depths of every soul, and souls have taken their revenge in not heeding these too lukewarm lovers.

Francis had given himself up too completely not to claim from others an absolute self-renunciation. In the two years and more since he had quitted the world, the reality and depth of his conversion had shone out in the sight of all; to the scoffings of the early days had gradually succeeded in the minds of many a feeling closely akin to admiration.

This feeling inevitably provokes imitation. A man of Assisi, hardly mentioned by the biographers, had attached himself to Francis. He was one of those simple-hearted men who find life beautiful enough so long as they can be with him who has kindled the divine spark [74] in their hearts. His arrival at Portiuncula gave Francis a suggestion; from that time he dreamed of the possibility of bringing together a few companions with whom he could carry on his apostolic mission in the neighborhood.

At Assisi he had often enjoyed the hospitality of a rich and prominent man named Bernard of Quintavalle, who took him to sleep in his own

chamber; it is easy to see how such an intimacy would favor confidential outpourings. When in the silence of the early night an ardent and enthusiastic soul pours out to you its disappointments, wounds, dreams, hopes, faith, it is difficult indeed not to be carried along, especially when the apostle has a secret ally in your soul, and unconsciously meets your most secret aspirations.

One day Bernardo begged Francis to pass the following night with him, at the same time giving him to understand that he was about to make a grave resolution upon which he desired to consult him. The joy of Francis was great indeed as he divined his intentions. They passed the night without thinking of sleep; it was a long communion of souls. Bernardo had decided to distribute his goods to the poor and cast in his lot with Francis. The latter desired his friend to pass through a sort of initiation, pointing out to him that what he himself [75] practised, what he preached, was not his own invention, but that Jesus himself had expressly ordained it in his word.

At early dawn they bent their steps to the St. Nicholas Church, accompanied by another neophyte named Pietro, and there, after praying and hearing mass, Francis opened the Gospels that lay on the altar and read to his companions the portion which had decided his own vocation: the words of Jesus sending forth his disciples on their mission.

“Brethren,” he added, “this is our life, and our Rule, and that of all who may join us. Go then and do as you have heard.” (1Cel 24; 3Soc 27, 28, 29; 2Cel 1, 10; 3, 52; Bon 29).

The persistence with which the Three Companions relate that Francis consulted the book three times in honor of the Trinity, and that it opened of its own accord at the verses describing the apostolic life, leads to the belief that these passages became the Rule of the new association, if not that very day at least very soon afterward.

“If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell, that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.

Jesus having called to him the Twelve, gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them. And they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

[76] Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Matt., xix., 21; Luke, ix., 1-6; Matt., xvi., 24-26)

At first these verses were hardly more than the official Rule of the Order; the true Rule was Francis himself; but they had the great merit of being short, absolute, of promising perfection, and of being taken from the Gospel.

Bernardo immediately set to work to distribute his fortune among the poor. Full of joy, his friend was looking on at this act, which had drawn together a crowd, when a priest named Sylvester, who had formerly sold him some stones for the repairs of St. Damian, seeing so much money given away to everyone who applied for it, drew near and said:

“Brother, you did not pay me very well for the stones which you bought of me.”

Francis had too thoroughly killed every germ of avarice in himself not to be moved to indignation by hearing a priest speak thus. “Here,” he said, holding out to him a double handful of coins which he took from Bernardo’s robe, “here; are you sufficiently paid now?”

“Quite so,” replied Sylvester, somewhat abashed by the murmurs of the bystanders (3Soc 30).

This picture, in which the characters stand out so strongly, must have taken strong hold upon the memory of the bystanders: the Italians only thoroughly understand things which they make a picture of. It taught [77] them, better than all Francis’s preachings, what manner of men these new friars would be.

The distribution finished, they went at once to Portiuncula, where Bernardo and Pietro built for themselves cabins of boughs, and made themselves tunics like that of Francis. They did not differ much from the garment worn by the peasants, and were of that brown, with its infinite variety of shades, which the Italians call *beast color*. One finds similar garments to-day among the shepherds of the most remote parts of the Apennines.

A week later, Thursday, April 23, 1209, a new disciple of the name of Egidio presented himself before Francis. Of a gentle and submissive nature, he was of those who need to lean on someone, but who, the needed support having been found and tested, lift themselves sometimes even above it. The pure soul of brother Egidio, supported by that of Francis, came to enjoy the intoxicating delights of contemplation with an unheard-of ardor (1Cel., 25; 3Soc., 23; Bon. 29).

Here we must be on our guard against forcing the authorities, and asking of them more than they can give. Later, when the Order was definitely constituted and its convents organized, men fancied that the past had been like the present, and this error still weighs upon the picture of the origins of the Franciscan movement. The first brothers lived as did the poor people among whom they so willingly moved; Portiuncula was their favorite church, but it would be a mistake to suppose that they sojourned there for any long periods. It was their [78] place of meeting, nothing more. When they set forth they simply knew that they should meet again in the neighborhood of the modest chapel. Their life was that of the Umbrian beggars of the present day, going here and there as fancy dictated, sleeping in hay-lofts, in leper hospitals, or under the porch of some church. So little had they any fixed domicile that Egidio, having decided to join them, was at considerable trouble to learn where to find Francis, and accidentally meeting him in the neighborhood of Rivo-Torto he saw in the fact a providential leading.

They went up and down the country, joyfully sowing their seed. It was the beginning of summer, the time when everybody in Umbria is out of doors mowing or turning the grass. The customs of the country have changed but little. Walking in the end of May in the fields about Florence, Perugia, or Rieti, one still sees, at nightfall, the bagpipers entering the fields as the mowers seat themselves upon the hay-cocks for their evening meal; they play a few pieces, and when the train of hay-makers returns to the village, followed by the harvest-laden carts, it is they who lead the procession, rending the air with their sharpest strains.

The joyous Penitents who loved to call themselves *Joculatores Domini*, God's *jongleurs*, no doubt often did [79] the same (Spec 25a). They did even better, for not willing to be a charge to anyone, they passed a part of the day in aiding the peasants in their field work. The inhabitants of these districts are for the most part kindly and sedate; the friars soon gained their confidence by relating to them first their history and then their hopes. They worked and ate together; field-hands and friars often slept in the same barn, and when with the morrow's dawn the friars went on their way, the hearts of those they left behind had been touched. They were not yet converted, but they knew that not far away, over toward Assisi, were living men who had renounced all worldly goods, and who, consumed with zeal, were going up and down preaching penitence and peace.

Their reception was very different in the cities. If the peasant of Central Italy is mild and kindly the townsfolk are on a first acquaintance scoffing and ill

disposed. We shall shortly see the friars that went to Florence the butt of all sorts of persecutions.

Only a few weeks had passed since Francis began to preach, and already his words and acts were sounding an irresistible appeal in the depths of many a heart. We have arrived at the most unique and interesting period in the history of the Franciscans. These first months are for their institution what the first days of spring are for nature, days when the almond-tree blossoms, bearing witness to the mysterious labor going on in the womb of the earth, and heralding the flowers that will suddenly enamel the fields. At the sight of these men – barefooted, scantily clothed, without money, and yet so happy – men's minds were much divided. Some held them to be mad, others admired them, finding them widely [80] different from the vagrant monks, that plague of Christendom.

Sometimes, however, the friars found success not responding to their efforts, the conversion of souls not taking form with enough rapidity and vigor. To encourage them, Francis would then confide to them his visions and his hopes. "I saw a multitude of men coming toward us, asking that they might receive the habit our holy religion, and lo, the sound of their footsteps still echoes in my ears. I saw them coming from every direction, filling all the roads."

Whatever the biographies may say, Francis was far from foreseeing the sorrows that were to follow this rapid increase of his Order. The maiden leaning with trembling rapture on her lover's arm no more dreams of the pangs of motherhood than he thought of the dregs he must drain after quaffing joyfully the generous wine of the chalice.

Every prosperous movement provokes opposition by the very fact of its prosperity. The herbs of the field have their own language for cursing the longer-lived plants that smother them out; one can hardly live without arousing jealousy; in vain the new fraternity showed itself humble, it could not escape this law.

When the brethren went up to Assisi to beg from door to door, many refused to give to them, reproaching them with desiring to live on the goods of others after having squandered their own. Many a time they had barely enough not to starve to death. It would even seem that the clergy were not entirely without part in this opposition. The Bishop of Assisi said to Francis one day: "Your way of living without owning anything seems to me very harsh and difficult." "My lord," replied he, "if [81] we possessed property we should have need of arms for its defence, for it is the source of quarrels and lawsuits, and the love of God and of one's neighbor usually finds many obstacles therein; this is why we do not desire temporal goods." (3Soc 35)

The argument was unanswerable, but Guido began to rue the encouragement which he had formerly offered the son of Bernardone. He was very nearly in the situation and consequently in the state of mind of the Anglican bishops when they saw the organizing of the Salvation Army. It was not exactly hostility, but a distrust which as all the deeper for hardly daring to show itself. The only counsel which the bishop could give Francis was to come into the ranks of the clergy, or, if asceticism attracted him, to join some already existing monastic order.

If the bishop's perplexities were great, those of Francis were hardly less so. He was too acute not to foresee the conflict that threatened to break out between the friars and the clergy. He saw



that the enemies of the priests praised him and his companions beyond measure simply to set off their poverty against the avarice and wealth of the ecclesiastics, yet he himself urged on from within to continue his work, and could well have exclaimed with the apostle, "*Woe to me if I preach not the gospel!*" On the other hand, the families of the Penitents could not forgive them for having distributed their goods among the poor, and attacks came from this direction with all the bitter language and the deep hatred natural to disappointed heirs. From this point of view the brotherhood appeared as a menace to families, and many parents trembled lest their sons should join it. Whether the friars would or no, they were an unending subject of interest to the whole city. Evil rumors, plentifully spread abroad against them, simply defeated themselves; flying from mouth to mouth they speedily found contradictors who had no difficulty in showing their absurdity. All this indirectly served their cause and gained to their side those hearts, more numerous than is generally believed, who find the defence of the persecuted a necessity.

As to the clergy, they could not but feel a profound dis-[83]trust of these lay converters, who, though they aroused the hatred of some interested persons, awakened in more pious souls first astonishment and then admiration. Suddenly to see men without title or diploma succeed brilliantly in the mission which has been officially confided to ourselves, and in which we have made pitiful shipwreck, is cruel torture. Have we not seen generals who preferred to lose a battle rather than gain it with the aid of guerillas?

This covert opposition has left no characteristic traces in the biographies of St. Francis. It has not to be wondered at; Thomas of Celano, even if he had had information of this matter, would have been wanting in tact to make use of it. The clergy, for that matter, possess a thousand means of working upon public opinion without ceasing to show a religious interest in those whom they detest.

But the more St. Francis shall find himself in contradiction with the clergy of his time, the more he will believe himself the obedient son of the Church. Confounding the gospel with the teaching of the Church, he will for a good while border upon heresy, but without ever falling into it. Happy simplicity, thanks to which he had never to take the attitude of revolt!

It was five years since, a convalescent leaning upon his staff, he had felt himself taken possession of by a loathing of material pleasures. From that time every one of his days had been marked by a step in advance.

It was again the spring-time. Perfectly happy,

he felt himself more and more impelled to bring others to share his happiness and to proclaim in the four corners of the world how he had attained it. He resolved, therefore, to undertake a new mission. A few days were spent in preparing for it. The Three Companions have [84] preserved for us the directions which he gave to his disciples:

“Let us consider that God in his goodness has not called us merely for our own salvation, but also for that of many men, that we may go through all the world exhorting men, more by our example than by our works, to repent of their sins and bear the commandments in mind. Be not fearful on the ground that we appear little and ignorant, but simply and without disquietude preach repentance. Have faith in God, who has overcome the world, that his Spirit will speak in you and by you, exhorting men to be converted and keep his commandments.

You will find men full of faith, gentleness, and goodness, who will receive you and your words with joy; but you will find others, and in greater numbers, faithless, proud, blasphemers, who will speak evil of you, resisting you and your words. Be resolute, then, to endure everything with patience and humility.”

Hearing this, the brother began to be agitated. St. Francis said to them: “Have no fear, for very soon many nobles and learned men will come to you; they will be with you preaching to kings and princes and to a multitude of peoples. Many will be converted to the Lord, all over the world, who will multiply and increase his family.”

After he had thus spoken he blessed them, saying to each one the word which was in the future to be his supreme consolation:

“My brother, commit yourself to God with all your cares, and he will care for you.”

Then the men of God departed, faithfully observing his instructions, and when they found a church or a cross they bowed in adoration, saying with devotion: “We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee here and in all churches in the whole world, for by thy holy cross thou hast ransomed the world.” In fact they believed that they had found a holy place wherever they found a church or a cross.

Some listened willingly, others scoffed, the greater number overwhelmed them with questions: “Whence come you?” “Of what order are you?” And they, though sometimes it was wearisome to answer, said simply, “We are penitents, natives of the city of Assisi.” (3Soc., 36 and 37)

This freshness and poetry will not be found in the later missions. Here the river is still itself, and if it [85] knows toward what sea it is hastening, it knows nothing of the streams, more or less turbid,

which shall disturb its limpidity, nor the dykes and the straightenings to which it will have to submit.

A long account by the Three Companions gives us a picture from life of these first essays at preaching:

“Many men took the friars for knaves or madmen and refused to receive them into their houses for fear of being robbed. So in many places, after having undergone all sorts of bad usage, they could find no other refuge for the night than the porticos of churches or houses. There were at that time two brethren who went to Florence. They begged all through the city but could find no shelter. Coming to a house which had a portico and under the portico a bench, they said to one another, “We shall be very comfortable here for the night.” As the mistress of the house refused to let them enter, they humbly asked her permission to sleep on the bench.

She was about to grant them permission when her husband appeared. “Why have you permitted these lewd fellows to stay under our portico?” he asked. The woman replied that she had refused to receive them into the house, but had given them permission to sleep under the portico where there was nothing for them to steal but the bench.

The cold was very sharp; but taking them for thieves no one gave them any covering.

As for them, after having enjoyed on their bench no more sleep than was necessary, warmed only by divine warmth, and having for covering only their Lady Poverty, in the early dawn they went to the church to hear mass.

The lady went also on her part, and seeing the friars devoutly praying she said to herself: “If these men were rascals and thieves as my husband said, they would not remain thus in prayer.” And while she was making these reflections behold a man of the name of Guido was giving alms to the poor in the church. Coming to the friars he would have given a piece of money to them as to the others, but they refused his money and would not receive it. “Why,” he asked, “since you are poor, will you not accept like the others?” “It is true that we are poor,” replied Brother Bernardo, “but poverty does not weigh upon us as upon other poor people; for by the grace of God, whose will we are accomplishing, we have voluntarily become poor.”

Much amazed, he asked them if they had ever had anything, and learned that they had possessed much, but that for the love of God they had given everything away ... The lady, seeing that the friars [86] had refused the alms, drew near to them and said that she would gladly receive them into her house if they would be pleased to lodge there. “May the Lord recompense to you your good will,” replied the friars, humbly.

But Guido, learning that they had not been able to find a shelter, took them to his own house, saying: "Here is a refuge prepared for you by the Lord; remain in it as long as you desire."

As for them, they gave thanks to God and spent several days with him, preaching the fear of the Lord by word and example, so that in the end he made large distributions to the poor.

Well treated by him, they were despised by others. Many men, great and small, attacked and insulted them, sometimes going so far as to tear off their clothing; but though despoiled of their only tunic, they would not ask for its restitution. If, moved to pity, men gave back to them what they had taken away, they accepted it cheerfully.

There were those who threw mud upon them, others who put dice into their hands and invited them to play, and others clutching them by the cowl made them drag them along thus. But seeing that the friars were always full of joy in the midst of their tribulations, that they neither received nor carried money, and that by their love for one another they made themselves known as true disciples of the Lord, many of them felt themselves reproved in their hearts and came asking pardon for the offences which they had committed. They, pardoning them with all their heart, said, "The Lord forgive you," and gave them pious counsels for the salvation of their souls." (3Soc., 38-41)

A translation can but imperfectly give all the repressed emotion, the candid simplicity, the modest joy, the fervent love which breathe in the faulty Latin of the Three Companions. Yet these scattered friars sighed after the home-coming and the long conversations with their spiritual father in the tranquil forests of the suburbs of Assisi. Friendship among men, when it overpasses a certain limit, has something deep, high, ideal, infinitely sweet, to which no other friendship attains. There was no woman in the Upper Chamber when, on the last evening of his life, Jesus communed with his disciples and invited the world to the eternal marriage supper.

Francis, above all, was impatient to see his young [87] family once more. They all arrived at Portiuncula almost at the same time, having already, before reaching it, forgotten the torments they had endured, thinking only of the joy of the meeting.

THE ABBEY OF SAN BENEDETTO AL SUBASIO

ARNALDO FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi*, Translated by Helen Moak, Crossroad, New York 1980, 17-21. English translation of the original work of Fortini, *Nuova Vita di San Francesco*, 5 Volumes, Tipografia Porziuncola, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 1959.

The Benedictine Monks of Mount Subasio

[17] This monastery is first mentioned in a cathedral document of the year 1041, *Sancte Benedictum quod est monasterium*; but certainly it must go back to a more ancient era. Some eighteenth-century writers attributed its foundation to Saint Benedict himself. We need not pay any attention to such a fantastic assertion; but it is certain that in the 1041 document and in another of 1043, the monastery already seemed to be in possession of lands on Mount Subasio between Maddalena and the Carceri, which include Calcinaro and Fontemaggio. Therefore, we can believe that from this zone, located above the Perlici gate, its property extended along the side of the mountain all the way to the boundaries of the city of Spello. An opinion handed down by arbiters in 1298 confirms such a hypothesis, for it lists a part of the properties of the monastery on the mountain: Mortaro Vecchio, the valley of Panicasolo (which extends from the Mortaro meadows to the monastery), Sassopiano, the narrow stream of Rosceto, then across the plain to Topino where the abbots and the commune jointly owned mills and fulling mills.

In 1050 the abbot of Farfa, Berardo, acquired the monastery, but this subjugation was annulled between 1065 and 1084, when the [18] monks of Mount Subasio were able to recover their independence. Other documents of 1083 and 1088 demonstrate that they also owned land in Sant'Angelo di Caula, a little below the Galletta spring. A record of 1110 attributes to them other lands in the Panzo district.

The abbots were concerned with purchases and sales, sowing and harvesting, hay and flocks, the duties of serfs, and tithes. A document of January, 1160, from the San Paolo archives, for example, shows us one of them, the abbot Nicolò, intent on acquiring a mill on the Tescio at Ponte dei Galli.

Among the monks, commercial affairs did not impede prayer and meditation. We have an inventory of the ancient library of San Benedetto: great antiphonaries *de die et de nocte* bound in

white, red, and black leather, martyrologies with covers of handsomely decorated woods, Bibles, Gospels, missals, psalters, collections of sermons, the Dialogues of Saint Gregory, the Rule of Saint Benedict, the Office of the Dead, a treatise on the death of a sinner, a book of laws.

Likewise in the inventory many papal and imperial privileges are listed: a bull of Honorius III, two bulls of Innocent IV, one of Pope Martin, and still others, all with the papal leaden seals with red and yellow silk cords. Before Saint Francis was born, a violent quarrel between the monastery and the bishop over exemptions and tithes had begun; it continued through his life. A bull of Eugenius III, confirmed later by Alexander IV, exempted the abbots from every [19] jurisdiction, secular and ecclesiastical, and set forth long lists of dependent churches: Santo Stefano of Foligno, San Paolo of Spello, Santa Croce on the Timia, San Biagio of Cannara, Sant'Onofrio outside Perugia, Sant'Angelo of Gabbiano, San Giovanni of Beviglie, San Paolo of Satriano, San Pietro of Lucellano, San Giovanni of Grellano, Santa Maria of Porziuncola, and many others. "We wish these churches to remain in your possession, free for you and your successors, together with the land and the other properties, pastures, vineyards, woodlands on the mountain and on the plain, mills, roads, and everything cultivated by your hand or by the work of serfs."

The monastery, fortified and turreted like a castle, stood below the pasture land on top of the mountain, between thick woods and a steep precipice. It had a martial life, and monastic solitude alternated with the clash of arms. (In 1260 the monastery passed to the Cistercian monks). It was continually under siege in political battles or by mercenary troops (led by

Ceccolino Michelotti) until 1399, when, after a furious battle, it was torn down by order of the commune (led by Broglia di Trino). Several years ago, excavations in the small enclosed area in front of the church brought to light the dead of that last battle.

Enough remains of the church, closed in to the north by a crown of stone blocks, to allow us to make an exact reconstruction of it.

In front was a cloister, today gone, and a fountain fed by a fresh spring. The spring still flows into a drinking pool at the edge of a clearing. The church had a Romanesque façade built of squared white stones, which now appears to be lopped off at the third of its original height. It had a triple arched door, surviving today almost unchanged, as may be seen from the fresco by Giotto in the upper church of the Basilica di San Francesco. He depicted the monastery surmounted by a tall campanile with a spire. It dominated the mountain slope.

The nave is now unroofed all the way to the choir. The apse, facing east, rises from a heap of ruins covered with ivy. A narrow stairway leads down to the beautiful crypt, miraculously intact. The old campanile disappeared in the cold destruction – that campanile that until its last days announced the Ave Maria at dawn and at sunset to the shepherds bivouacked alongside the sheepfolds. They came in June and left in November, when the mists begin to smoke along the summit of the high meadows. The flocks would amble along, led by their guardians wrapped in goat skins. They would pause to quench [20] their thirst, then depart in a hurry, urged along by enormous dogs. From the heights would come the sweet faint sound of goat bells.

Afterwards, winter, with its interminable nights. The trees became bare. Snow fell and mantled the

St Benedict Subasio



towers, the bastions, the rocks, the deserted pastures. When the sky was clear, other peaks, shining white, could be seen far away.

A great clangour of bells would arouse the flocks. It came on the first day of spring, the special festival of the monastery, a day dedicated to Saint Benedict. The wave of sound found every gorge, every rock, every remote peak. The monks, two by two, carrying burning candles, formed a procession that coiled behind the high Byzantine cross, their white surplices shining against the background of solemn oaks. The ancient songs would rise up, to tell again in stately Gregorian chant of the eternal glory of the founder.

We can think that Saint Francis, who from the time of his infancy had especially intimate ties to these monks of Mount Subasio, often climbed all the way up here to enjoy the life of the solitary monastery on the mountain that was so dear to him. And we can wonder: under what pile of debris is buried the ruin of the room in which he discussed with the abbot (Teobaldo) the transfer of the chapel of Porziuncola to the Franciscans (in 1207)?

Recent excavations permit us to reconstruct the arrangement of the buildings that extended to the right of the church, in the area today occupied by a country house, its windows looking out over the valley, and by an open space thick with vines.

A passageway extended alongside the church, crowned at the presbytery end by an open gallery that faced the plain. On the near side of it there was the cloister, around which stood the various other buildings: the dormitory, the chapter house, the refectory, the kitchen, the larder, the warehouses, the animal pens, the workshops of the artisans.

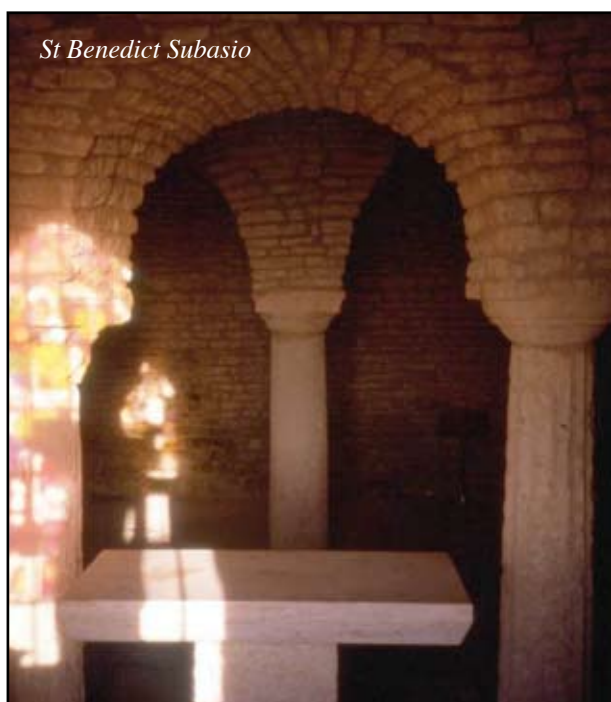
Given the nearness of pastures and the abundance of sheep, the *curtis* of the monastery was organized for the production and working of wool. The gallery must have been used for this purpose; one can see today arches where the washed wool was placed in the sun to dry. (We know that the industry was at its most flourishing in the *curtes* of Benedictine monasteries; the art of wool production had its place with work done on the land and stockbreeding. Even before Saint Benedict, Saint Jerome sent a *lanam fecit*, a Roman matron's directions for weaving wool, to a medieval nun. His letter to Demetriade, superior of a Roman monastery, is well known: "When you have finished the prayer of the choir, do not put the wool from your hands; [21] move your fingers continually on the thread of the distaff or on the little bridge of the loom. Gather the products of the diligence of the sisters in order to instruct the weavers, and examine the cloth with care; if it is bad, reject it, and dispose of it as ought to be done.")

A strong wall crowned by towers (some ruins of it remain) and a palisade built along the narrow ledge of space on the edge of the mountain defended the monastery from the plain.

From this falcons' nest, perched on the steepness of the "high mountain," the spirit is launched into a dizzy expanse of space lying between the sky, curving to a far-off horizon, and the lightly veiled great plain, on which there is now a tangle of innumerable white roads. But up on the heights of Mount Subasio, every anxiety is relieved, every fever diminished, every frenzy stilled in peace. *Ascesi* – mystical exaltations, spiritual ascensions – are the secret of this land.

A few steps lead to the crypt. It is dark, cold, cruciform, with sepulchral light falling from openings cut into the apse. In the walls, roughly cut stones alternate with the bare rock of the mountain. Eight Romanesque columns, short and stumpy, with leafy capitals, support heavy arcades. A stone bench runs along the walls just above the floor.

On the ground lies a great split slab tomb. On it is depicted an abbot of the monastery in the pontifical vestments he wore in the days when he went to the altar amid dazzling lights and songs that awakened echoes in the solitude of the mountain. Under the mitre is a solemn priestly face, rather like a stone sphinx. A gloved hand holds the pastoral staff of the abbot; the other, against his chest, gathers up the ample folds of the cope. The figure does not stand out in relief; its outlines are chiselled into the rock. The lines are somewhat evanescent; the figure if almost a shadow, a phantom. All the other monks are gone. He alone remains, custodian of the world that has dissolved into dust.



St Benedict Subasio

GENERAL SFO CHAPTER

*Information from CIOFS website:
www.ciofs.org*

The Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) celebrated its 12th General Chapter in Budapest, Hungary between 15th and 22nd November 2008, on the occasion of the conclusion of the celebrations of the 8th centenary of the birth of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, patron of the SFO. A total of 110 delegates attended the Chapter. The Maltese National SFO Fraternity was represented by Mr. Charles Grech, the International Councillor.

Addressing the Chapter, the outgoing Minister General, Encarnacion Del Pozo, spoke about the need that Secular Franciscans stand up as an Order. Secular Franciscans need to take charge of their identity as an Order, and act on the conviction they are equal partners in the Franciscan Family, not just passive members.

The Minister General said: "I would dare to affirm that, in this historic moment, the SFO feels more responsible than other members of the (Franciscan) family, and plays a unifying role because of our Rule."

Noting fruitful, ongoing relationships with other branches of the Franciscan family, which is currently celebrating the 8th centenary of the birth of the Franciscan charism, Encarnacion Del Pozo continued: "I beg of you – the SFO must not and cannot trail behind the other components of our family. The SFO has to reclaim its own place in these family events. The life experiences of our Order must be known and well present to the rest of the family. I do believe that the First Order, the Second Order and the Third Order Regular at all levels need the knowledge that we can offer as people fully immersed in the ordinary circumstances and problems related to work, family, politics, education and science, including situations of extreme poverty and all kinds of misery."

Del Pozo offered some challenges for the future. These include (1) the deepening of the formation process; (2) the intensification and revitalisation of the local Fraternity, where the life of the Order exists and vocations are developed; (3) the increase of the sense of mission in the world; (4) the consideration of different ways of living within the Secular Franciscan Order, such as family groups, young couples and groups arising from Franciscan Youth; (5) the fostering of the call to holiness, with fraternities becoming home to individuals who, taking their baptism seriously, want to become saints.



St Elizabeth of Hungary, Patron OFS

Del Pozo gave a demographic overview of the Order, while noting some difficulty in getting an accurate census for fraternities in all 110 countries where the Secular Franciscan Order is present. The number of professed active members remains constant at some 400,000. They belong to 65 established national fraternities, 42 emerging national fraternities, and three areas working toward canonical establishment of their first local fraternities. Franciscan Youth is present in 64 countries. The western world, particularly Europe, has seen a decline or stagnation in numbers, while the so-called Third World countries, including some in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Slavic nations as well, are seeing an astonishing growth in vocations.

The Minister General also urged (1) the continuation of the "China project", to spread the Franciscan charism and provide support for some 7000 Secular Franciscans and 120 fraternities discovered in China, despite decades of Communist repression; (2) a commitment to support and collaborate with Franciscans International, which brings a Franciscan voice to the United Nations.

The Chapter was also addressed by the ex-Minister General, Emanuela De Nunzio, who spoke on the theme: "Belonging to the SFO".

On 19th November 2008 the canonical elections for the new General government which is to lead

the SFO for the coming six years were held. Encarnacion Del Pozo, from Spain, was re-elected Minister General by an overwhelming majority of the 68 voting delegates. The other members of the Order's government, called the International SFO Council, include the vicar general and seven International Councillors of the Presidency, who are elected according to a combination of major language groups and geographical areas. Doug Clorey of Canada was elected Vicar General. The newly-elected International Councillors are: Consuelo Nuñez of Venezuela (Spanish-speaking group); Tibor Kauser of Hungary (English-speaking group in North America and Europe); Lucy Almiranez of the Philippines (English-speaking group in Africa, Oceania and Asia); Michele Altmeyer of France (French-speaking group); Maria Aparecida Crepaldi of Brazil (Portuguese-speaking group); Edwald Kreuzer of Austria (German-speaking group); Benedetto Lino of Italy (Italian-speaking group); and Ana Fruk of Croatia (representing the Franciscan Youth).

The canonical elections were presided by Fr. Marco Tasca, Minister General for the Friars Minor Conventual, representing the Conference of Franciscan Ministers General.

Finally, the Chapter decided to adopt five priority areas to focus on for the next six years. These include formation, communications, Franciscan Youth, presence in the world, and emerging National Fraternities.

JOHN DUNS SCOTUS COMMEMORATED

Noel Muscat OFM

The celebrations of the 700th anniversary of the death of Blessed John Duns Scotus (1308-2008) ended with a Conference organised at the Johannes Duns Scotus Akademie in Cologne, Germany, on 5th-8th November.

The celebrations included an academic ceremony at the University of Cologne on 7th November, and a remembrance service at the «Minoritenkirche» of Cologne, where John Duns Scotus is buried, on 8th November, together with an opening of a commemorative exhibition. The brains behind the organisation of this Congress were those of the Franciscan Friar Minor Herbert Schneider OFM. The Congress was also addressed by Fr. Johannes Baptist Freyer OFM, Rector Magnificus of the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome, as well as by Franciscan scholars, among whom Giovanni Lauriola OFM and Leonhard Lehmann OFM^{Cap}. Pope Benedict XVI sent a personal message to the participants in the Congress, read by Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Archbishop of Cologne.

The Minister General of the Friars Minor, Fr.



John Duns Scotus

José Rodríguez Carballo OFM, presided over the celebrations at the “Studium Biblicum Franciscanum” (SBF) of Jerusalem. On 8th November, the feast day of Blessed John Duns Scotus, the Minister General presided over the academic celebration organised by the SBF at the Immaculate Hall in Saint Saviour’s Monastery. Present for the celebration was also Fr. Massimo Fusarelli OFM, General Secretary for Formation and Studies in the Franciscan Order. The following day, Sunday 9th November, the Minister General presided over a concelebrated Mass at the Basilica of Gethsemani, together with the Custos of the Holy Land, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM and many friars of the Holy Land Custody.

John Duns Scotus’ sarcophagus in the «Minoritenkirche» of Cologne has the following inscription: “Scotia me genuit. Anglia me suscepit. Gallia me docuit. Cologne me tenet” (Scotland gave me birth. England welcomed me. France taught me. Cologne will keep me).

John Duns was born in 1265 in the village of Duns, in the Berwick district of Scotland. He is known as Scotus, or the Scot. From his early teens John was familiar with the Franciscans, especially his uncle Elias, who educated him at Oxford as a *puer oblat*. In 1278 John began to study philosophy at Oxford in the Franciscan school founded by Robert Grosseteste. At Oxford John joined the Franciscans in 1284. After completing his theological studies he was ordained priest at Lincoln on 17th March 1291 by bishop Oliver Sutton.

After his ordination John Duns Scotus continued to specialise in the Franciscan school of the University of Oxford, going



Celebration of Duns Scotus at Minoritenkirche



Minister General celebrates Mass in Jerusalem on Feastday of Scotus



Sarcophagus of John Duns Scotus

through all the grades and titles until he became Master in 1296, when he was 30 years old. After teaching theology at Oxford and Cambridge, in 1300 the superiors sent John Duns to the prestigious Franciscan school of the Paris University.

The period in Paris was, however, full of difficulties for Scotus. King Philip the Fair (1285-1314) entered into a bitter controversy with Pope Boniface VIII and was excommunicated. In return, the king ordered all professors at the Paris University to call for a general council to depose the Pope and to sign a petition calling for the convening of this council. John Duns Scotus was one of those who refused to sign the petition, and was therefore exiled from Paris.

During the Pentecost Chapter of 1304, however, the Minister General Gonsalvus of Spain recommended Scotus to the authorities of the University, and John was reinstated in his position of Master. It was at this period that Scotus became famous for his lectures, defending the privilege of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

John Duns Scotus left Paris in 1307 and transferred to the Franciscan school at Cologne. It was at Cologne that John Duns died on 8th November 1208, when he was still about 42 years old. He was buried in the «Minoritenkirche» (church of the Minors) near the famous Cologne cathedral. This church, until 1802, belonged to the Franciscan Minor Conventuals, who were again authorised to officiate it after 1945.

The cult given to John Duns Scotus since time immemorial at Cologne and Nola, in southern Italy, led the Franciscans to work hard for the official recognition of John's holy life. It was Pope Paul VI who addressed the Apostolic Letter *Alma Parens* on 14th July 1966, during the International Congress at Oxford and Edinburgh, commemorating the 700th anniversary of Scotus' birth. On 15th November 1980 Pope John Paul II visited the tomb of John Duns Scotus while on a pastoral visit to Cologne. On 6th July 1991 John Paul II declared the validity of the cult of John Duns Scotus from time immemorial. On 20th March 1993 the same Pope gave the official liturgical honours to Blessed John Duns Scotus at the Vatican Basilica. In Malta, the Franciscan friars organised a commemorative celebration of Vespers, and a discourse by the historian Fr. George Aquilina OFM, honouring John Duns Scotus, on 25th March 1993, at Saint Francis Church, in Hamrun.

The defence of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, initiated by John Duns Scotus, led the Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV to approve the liturgical office of this Marian feast in 1480. On 4th December 1854 Blessed Pope Pius IX officially declared a

dogma of faith the doctrine on the Immaculate Conception.

The Franciscans were instrumental in studying the works of the "Subtle and Marian Doctor," as Scotus is widely known. In 1938 the International Scotistic Commission was founded in the Order of Friars Minor, with its headquarters at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome. Fr. Carlo Balic OFM started the publication of the critical edition of Scotus' voluminous works, which is still underway to this very day.

One of the outstanding figures in the Franciscan Order during the 19th century, the venerable servant of God Gabriele Maria Allegra OFM (1907-1976), who was a missionary in China and a scholar of Holy Scripture, and who translated the entire Scripture in Chinese at the "Studium Biblicum Franciscanum" at Beijing (subsequently transferred to Hong Kong), was very devout of Blessed John Duns Scotus. In his memoirs Fr. Allegra wrote: "I see Scotus as the Doctor of the Immaculate Conception, of Christ as king of the universe, of the Church as the bride of Christ, as a defender of Christ's vicar on earth, as a theologian of the mystery of the Eucharist."

Pope Benedict XVI, in his message on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of 2008, wrote: "We desire, therefore, to call all learned men and women as well as all believers and non believers to the path trodden by Scotus, a path that underscores the harmony between faith and reason; a path that defines the nature of theology, which is oriented toward life and love, rather than mere speculation. When doing this work [of harmonizing faith and reason], he allowed himself to be guided both by the Magisterium of the Church and from a healthy critical sense in the knowledge of the truth. He was convinced that science has value insofar as it is realised in deeds."



**Exhibition of 46 panels
on the life of Saint Paul
by the Holy Land
Commissariat
on the occasion of the Pauline Year
from 9 February 2009.
Saint Mary of Jesus Franciscan Friary
Valletta
Entrance from Saint Ursola Street**

Saint Francis mentioned on Peace Day

Pope Benedict XVI
Homily during the Mass for Peace
at the Vatican Basilica
1st January 2009

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«We need to strive to establish a ‘virtuous cycle’ between ‘voluntary’ poverty and poverty which has to be ‘resisted’ [...] In concrete terms, we have to combat misery in an efficient way. We have to do what Saint Paul writes to the Corinthians, that is, we should try to ‘create equalities’ by reducing the different level between those who have abundance of goods and waste them, and those who lack even the basic necessities of life. This means that we have to make a choice in favour of justice and sobriety, choices which oblige us to administer in all wisdom the limited resources of our planet. When he affirms that Christ “has made us rich through his poverty”, Saint Paul offers an important indication not only on a theological level, but also on a sociological level. Poverty for him is not an end to itself, but it is the condition to bring about solidarity. When Francis of Assisi gave away all his belongings, he made a choice of radical witness inspired to him directly by God, but at the same time he showed to all the way of trust in God’s Providence [...] The message for us today is that of the poverty of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, which besides becoming an object of adoration for Christians, is also a school of life for all mankind. This choice teaches us how to combat material and spiritual misery, and that the way to follow is that of solidarity, which moved Jesus to share his condition with our human condition.»

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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

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



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