



*Enlighten the Darkness
of My Heart*

Ite vos:
An inhabited memory
for walking together
towards the future



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Assisi 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The *Franciscan Friars in Assisi Coordination Group* came into being with Pope Francis' visit to Assisi on October 4, 2013. At the end of his visit to the Tomb, the Pope turned to the Ministers General and other friars present and said: "Good, you should stay united." The Pope's invitation connected with our already strong desire to "walk together and grow in common vocation and mission."

Franciscan Friars in Chapter was jointly created to prepare for and re-experience the centuries-old events that led to the Pardon of Assisi (celebrating its 800th Anniversary in 2016) and the Papal Bull "*Ite vos*" (celebrating its 500th Anniversary in 2017), with the goal of planning an even more significant future together.

This initiative was accepted and disseminated by the four Ministers General of the Order. It is being proposed simply as a possible pilot experience for friars who might want to organize similar courses around the world.

At our meeting on June 30, 2015, we updated the Ministers Provincial and those who work closest with them, on encouraging Provincial fraternity as we travel the path toward the 2017 "Generalissimo Chapter". We also shared ideas and intentions, in view of a Plenary Assembly of all the Franciscan fraternities in the region of Umbria, Italy.

We are now at point where we hope everyone is convinced that an authentic and profound reconciliation between the Franciscan families will let us more powerfully and clearly give witness to the charism of Francis and Clare.

Continued meetings, dialogue and prayer between all of the Friars Minor will yield the fruit of peace and evangelization. By taking this path, we hope create space for prophetic prospects and initiatives that can specifically be developed into one (or more) "missionary" realities which can be lived in communion.

The material that we provide for this meeting consists of:

a) The text *A Path for Walking Together and Growing in Common Vocation and Franciscan Mission (2015/2018)*. These are the guidelines for 2015-2018, set forth by the *Franciscan Friars in Assisi Coordination Group*. Its ultimate goal is increased creative fidelity to the charism together with a more powerful and affirming way of giving witness.

b) The text of *Ite vos*. Since it is not believed to have ever been translated into Italian, we think we have done a commendable cultural service. Our warmest

thanks go to Friars Bruno Pennacchini and Umberto Occhialini from the St. Mary of the Angels community, for undertaking the not so enjoyable task of translating the text from Latin.

c) A historical study entitled *Retracing the Events of ITE VOS. Hopes Dashed by the BULLA UNIONIS*, written by Friar Luigi Pellegrini, OFM Cap. We asked Friar Luigi to give us a summary of the events which played a role in the Order's situation in 1517 and their consequences; whether they are recognized as factors of success or failure.

d) A theological study entitled *The Essential Elements of the Theology of Vita Consecrata Today for a Re-reading of History*, written by Friar Alceo Grazioli, TOR. This is the summary of a joint effort started by a group of theologians: the Most Reverend Paolo Martinelli, Auxiliary Bishop of Milan; Sr. Simona Paolini, FMGB; Friar Domenico Paoletti, OFM Conv.; and Friar Giancarlo Rosati, OFM. We asked this committee to show us the essential elements of the theology of *Vita Consecrata* today, beginning with the vision of Vatican II, of which we are all children. It is through these qualifiers that we want to look and interpret the facts of the past.

e) These two studies are followed by a *guide sheet* for group discussion. It indicates the areas of discussion we will confine ourselves to in order to keep debate focused on the two historical and theological essays.

f) Another essay included in the folder is an article by Fr. Luciano Bertazzo, OFM Conv., called: *For the Vocation and Mission of the Franciscan Friars in the Church and in the Contemporary World: An Inhabited Memory*. Friar Luciano prepared the article as a summary of a joint effort started by a group of historians: Friar Luigi Pellegrini, OFM Cap., Friar Giuseppe Buffon, OFM, and Fr. Mario Sensi. It offers a useful avenue for interpreting the facts of the past from a theological perspective, for understanding their meaning in our lives, their role in the development of our charism and the possible paths we might take. In fact, as we have indicated in the subtitle of our assembly: *An inhabited memory for walking together towards the future*.

g) Based on that essay, we ultimately decided to offer *Guidelines for a Common Path*. We want to initiate a process of reconciliation between us. With suitable preparation, we will testify to our fraternal love on July 11, 2016, five-hundred years after the publication of the papal brief *Romanum Pontificem* (July 11, 1517). We have selected three moments that local Franciscan communities from the same ministerial territory can share together over one or more days: *The Three Stages of the Memory*.

We thank all the Franciscan friars of Umbria for the attention you will be giving to this itinerary. Special thanks to the members of the two committees who have been working on this for quite some time.

United in prayer and in our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi, we send you our affectionate fraternal regards, reminding you that our next meeting will be on July 11, 2016, for the day of reconciliation between us and the testimony of our fraternal love.

Friar Antonio M. Tofanelli, OFM Cap.
on behalf of the *Franciscan Friars in Assisi Coordination Group*

FRANCISCAN FAMILIES OF ASSISI
FRANCISCAN FRIARS IN CHAPTER

**A Path for Walking Together and
Growing in Common Vocation and Franciscan Mission
(2015/2018)**

*I ask you, therefore, Lord Jesus Christ,
Father of mercies,
not to consider our ingratitude,
but always be mindful
of the abundant mercies
which you have shown to it [this city]
that it always be a dwelling place
for those who truly acknowledge you
and glorify your name blessed
and most glorious forever and ever. Amen.*

(The Mirror of Perfection, 124: FF 1824)

1. Peace and All Good to each and every one of you!

With this Franciscan greeting, Pope Francis began his homily during his pastoral visit to Assisi on October 4, 2013. He received the gift of a “blue crucifix” and a faithful copy of the Rule offered by the entire Franciscan family represented by the Ministers General and the guardians of the Portiuncula and the Sacro Convento. Responding to the greeting and gifts we gave him, the *Lord Pope* said to us: “Good, you should stay united.” Those words are often echoed among us friars of the Franciscan Families.

2. From Vatican II onward, our four Orders have taken important steps to find a common line together, especially thanks to the driving force of Friar Ernesto Caroli, OFM, who in 1972 founded *Franciscan Movement* (Mo.Fra.). This movement aims at fostering unity and collaboration among all the religious and lay people dedicated to the ideal of the Poverello of Assisi. Over the years, *Franciscan Movement* has managed to increase knowledge and mutual respect among the different Franciscan families by arranging meetings to exchange views and opportunities to have dialogue (this culminated in the Chapter of Mats, April 15-18, 2009 which nearly coincided with the death of Friar Ernesto). Its efforts were advanced by the

publication of *Franciscan Sources* on the 750th anniversary of the death of St. Francis, and, subsequently, by publishing different dictionaries and volumes (e.g. the book series *Franciscan Mystics*).

3. In Assisi, then, the inspiration to collaborate continues, through incentives from the “City,” as well as local and regional institutions and also thanks to the pastoral plan developed by Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino to coincide with the St. Francis-related centennial (cf. “A Church in Mission with Francis of Assisi”, Assisi 2009).

The approach of two significant anniversaries in our history, the eighth centenary of the “Pardon of Assisi” (2016) and the fifth centenary of the Bull “*Ite vos*” of Pope Leo X (2017), also add to our inspiration to *walk together and grow in common vocation and mission*.

4. So here, the idea of a “*synod*” of the *Franciscan Families*, i.e. sharing a common path, gets its start from historical memory, passes through reconciliation, dialogue and fraternal discernment and leads us to make choices together and work in unison to carry out projects of evangelization. We think in the coming years, 2015 to 2018, these experiences of fraternal communion will continue to help us enjoy the enriching plurality of the various families of the First Order and Third Order Regular. From this, we can lay the groundwork to keep encouraging this process. We hope it will be further developed in the future as it has been in the recent past.

5. The ultimate goal is *growth in creative fidelity to the charism through more incisive and constructive joint witness*. For this we have proposed a four-year program. (The first year is a year of preparation which, happily, coincides with the Year of Consecrated Life):

2015: “Enlighten the darkness of my heart” (*PCr: FF 276*): This is a year of preparation for “remembering” and “understanding.” It will be about developing deeper insights into the historical-critical events of the Order and its multiform development, interpreted in the light of the theological vision of consecrated life and through various topics of common interest to the friars today (fraternity, authority, freedom, etc.). One key event will be the convocation of a fraternal assembly to officially start off on this multi-year path. As Franciscan Families, we should come to share a document/documentary that will form the basis for highlighting the meaning of certain events and conflicts. We should also collect the reactions of the friars through a questionnaire.

2016: “What we do not completely forgive, make us, Lord, forgive completely” (*Pater 8: FF 273*): 2016 is the centenary year of the Pardon of Assisi, during

which, in addition to celebrating the occasion, we will invite the friars and the fraternities to once again embrace the visit of the Risen Lord and His salvation. We will propose that the communities implement penitential ways of raising awareness, of asking for forgiveness and joyfully accepting the mercy that will be expressed in mutual gestures of goodwill, the result of a renewed Pentecost. Thus, on **July 11**, the 500th anniversary of the publication of the brief *Romanum Pontificem* (July 11, 1517)¹, we can arrive at a demonstration of reconciliation among ourselves and bear witness to our fraternal love. During this event, we will celebrate pardon and announce our most significant appointment in 2017: the “Great General Chapter”.

2017: “And love them in this and do not wish that they be better Christians” (*Lmin 7: FF 234*): The centenary year of *Ite vos*, also known as the *Bulla unionis*, which actually produced the separation, will be dedicated to fraternity. There will be an in-depth exploration of relational aspects from the point of view of minority, with particular attention given to various dimensions: inter-subjective, witness, institutional relations and asymmetric dimensions in general. We would like to explore the style of fraternal life as our theme and have an event from **May 29** (the 500th anniversary of the publication of *Ite vos*) through **June 2**, *ad instar Capituli*, to discuss, discern and listen to the Spirit. The year will reach its culmination when we, as pilgrims, go before Pope Francis on **November 29** (the anniversary of the publication of the Rule), to be reconfirmed in the charism we received from God eight hundred years ago and receive once more from the Church, as the Fraternity of the First Order, the Rule which will be returned to the Ministers General.

2018: “I want to send you all to Paradise!” (*The Diploma of Theobald: FF 2706/10-11*): The final year will be dedicated to evangelization, with the intent of opening our horizons to the future, joyfully announcing salvation. The mission, driven by compassion, by a rediscovered and recharged passion for the salvation of one’s brothers—of every man, will translate concretely into the realization of projects discussed and selected in “Chapter”, projects which express the beauty of the entire Franciscan family united by the same original

¹ With this letter, Pope Leo X summoned the “Great General Chapter” for Pentecost of 1517, with the goal of putting an end to all of the in-fighting among the Franciscans of the First Order, after he received appeals from rulers and civil authorities asking that these quarrels be definitively resolved.

inspiration and single purpose. The drafting of a kind of post-synodal document, that is, subsequent to the path of faith we have taken together, will lead to reflection and a synthesis of the experience, and yield possible developments for “future generations”.

6. 2015 is a *year of preparation*. During this year we would like to *develop deeper insights into the history of the Order and its multiform development*. We make no claim to be exhaustive in this, but we hope to start a process that can be developed and make further study of our historical-critical character in the years to come. This is a two-fold proposal being put forward.

7. First we need the work of historians who, starting from existing documentary material and lectures offered by various historiographical sources, can provide a picture of the places, dates, people and fraternities, with a description of the actions and activities that were undertaken and their consequences, whether or not they were recognized as factors of success or failure or had affected the progress or decline of the Franciscan movement (Order).

8. Secondly, it is necessary to re-propose the current theological vision of consecrated life with its special vantage point for reviewing past events. Some issues of common interest among the friars of our own day could be interpretive of the past. In this way, the material, which inevitably contains conflicts that have characterized Franciscan history, will form the basis for a *dialectical exchange aimed at reaching a comprehensive point of view*.

9. This historical-critical phase should, by the summer of 2015, lead to the first edition of a document/documentary by proposing that the friars collect their impressions and reactions, even through a questionnaire. We can assume their reactions will be different from those of our “fathers”. To give this path its official start, during the year, a fraternal assembly could be called of the Ministers and Vicars Provincial with the Minister General and/or the Assistant General of the area where the event takes place.

10. The next step, which could be developed in the years to come, will be *processing the information*: trying to reach common ground through dialogue, or arriving at a single set of interconnected common areas (the “histories” of individual Franciscan families), to understand the many points of view present in the different families by studying their character, their relation or opposition to one another in contrasting family histories and in their different interpretations.

11. Of course, in this process, viewpoints of the past or present will emerge that result in *conflicts*. These viewpoints emerge from the works of scholars,

but also from the traditions transmitted within the Franciscan families or by clichés often unwittingly embraced by individuals and communities. Talking about them and deepening their meaning should take one “beyond the fact, to the reasons for conflict.” The comparison of these viewpoints “will bring to light just where differences are irreducible, where they are complementary and could be brought together within a larger whole, where finally they can be regarded as successive stages in a single process of development” (Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 129).

12 In this way, through constructive criticism that highlights incongruent positions, one can challenge faulty reasons behind conflicts, and *clichés* that generate suspicion, resentment and hostility. Similarly, irreducible differences can be examined with the aim of maintaining that “series” and eliminating superficial ones. Thus, *even conflict, through reconciliation, can become an opportunity for growth* for the entire Franciscan family of the *Friars Minor*.

13. 2016 is the *centenary year of the Pardon of Assisi*, the first year on our three-year path. In the wider context of the 2016 Jubilee of the Pardon of Assisi, which celebrates the eighth centenary of the Indulgence granted to Friar Francis by Pope Honorius III, we pause to contemplate the centrality of the theme of reconciliation, so vital in the process for fraternal communion. Without mutual Pardon, in fact, nothing appears genuine or effective. Everything gets lost in mere historical consideration, without regard for the current reality or the spirit of conversion.

14. *Friar Francis’ insistence concerning the theme of reconciliation* is well-known, especially his decisive nature regarding fraternity in the Order. This is exemplified in his words addressed to a superior: “And love those who do those things to you and do not wish anything different from them, unless it is something the Lord God shall have given you. And love them in this and do not wish that they be better Christians. And let this be more than a hermitage for you. And if you have done this, I wish to know in this way if you love the Lord and me, His servant and yours: that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned—however much he could have sinned—who, after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord; and always be merciful with brothers such as these” (*Lmin.* 5-10: *FF* 234-235). On our path, which focuses on the formation of fraternal communion, we cannot overlook reconciliation.

15. *One of the celebratory dimensions of the Jubilee of the Pardon of Assisi, largely developed at the Shrine of the Portiuncula, will play out through more systematic events such as an International Studies Conference, a critical edition of an ancient hagiographic text of indulgence, or some study volumes, or art exhibitions and educational activities to help understand the value of forgiveness in the life of the Church and the meaning of the Portiuncula Indulgence in history.*

16. *In particular, however, some ways will be proposed for the purification of the memory”, in order to help the friars and fraternities embrace a new visit by the Risen Lord and his salvation. Finally we would like to experience the Pardon event together, through a celebration open to the Franciscans in general but aimed especially at our four Orders, which share the same beginnings and perspective. On July 11, 2016, a grand celebration will be held in which our religious Orders, in addition to experiencing a time of fraternal reconciliation, will ask the Lord of all mercy to Pardon us for all these centuries, as St. John Paul II realized during his Jubilee, when he asked forgiveness for all that Catholics had done to tarnish themselves².*

17. *2017, the centenary year of “Ite vos”, also known as the “Bulla unionis”, is the second year of our three-year course. After a year of purification of the memory, accompanied by gestures of goodwill, we would like to delve into the theme of fraternity from the point of view of minority as the specific style of Franciscan fraternal life.*

18. *Friar Francis’ insistence concerning minority is also well-known. The words of the Earlier Rule are clear and decisive regarding fraternal relations in the Order and its various dimensions: inter-subjective, witness, institutional relations and asymmetric dimensions in general—“Let no one be called ‘prior’, but let*

² “The *purification of the memory*—asserted at the time by the International Theological Commission, in *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*—is a process which aims at liberating personal and communal conscience from all forms of resentment and violence that are the legacy of past faults, through a renewed historical and theological evaluation of such events. If done correctly, this should lead to a corresponding recognition of guilt and contribute to the path of reconciliation. Such a process can have a significant effect on the present, precisely because the consequences of past faults still make themselves felt and can persist as tensions in the present. As such, the purification of the memory requires “an act of courage and humility in recognizing the wrongs done by those who have borne or bear the name of Christian”. It is based on the belief that “because of the bond which unites us to one another in the Mystical Body, all of us, though not personally responsible and without encroaching on the judgment of God who alone knows every heart, bear the burden of the errors and faults of those who have gone before us” (John Paul II, *Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*, 10).

everyone in general be called a lesser brother. Let one wash the feet of the other” (*Earlier Rule* VI, 3-4: *FF* 23).

19. In a climate of cultural diversity and pluralism, it seems important, in this year dedicated to the style of fraternal life, to propose some clarification of terms and content, to re-establish a *vocabulary of understanding*. We have considered, in fact, that some of today’s recurring terms such as freedom, unity, fraternity, poverty, penance, conversion, etc., have many shades of meaning, making them forerunners of misunderstanding: for example the term freedom in a culture very much linked to the French Revolution (*liberté*) is seen as “freedom from” (freedom from totalitarian regimes, from religious dictates, traditions, etc.), while in the Judeo-Christian tradition, as in the Franciscan tradition, it is “freedom to” (freedom to serve, to obey, to believe, etc.). The exodus from such misunderstandings, which most people aren’t even aware of, will allow us to “get out of Babylon and live a new Pentecost”. If we come together humbly, through cultural, spiritual, community and inter-obediential meetings, if we listen to the Spirit, we will learn to understand each other, to communicate, to speak “one single language” that translates the values of the Christian and Franciscan *traditio* into terms for the present day: freedom, unity, fraternity, poverty, minority, service, hospitality, authority, authorship, etc.

20. During this year, from May 29 to June 2, we will be having an *ad instar Capituli* event, to discuss and discern with a view toward making decisions together on various approaches to develop new activity in evangelization. On that occasion, it would be nice to try to define, besides a shared orientation, issues that deal with charism, even legal forms that could allow for an inter-obediential experience and/or joint management of various activities: educational, missionary, pastoral, charitable, at the local, Provincial or Conference level, similar to what happens in the Conferences of the OFS Assistants. In this way, it would become even easier to choose joint initiatives for evangelization.

21. The year will reach its culmination when we, as pilgrims, go before Pope Francis on November 29 (the anniversary of the publication of the Rule), to be reconfirmed in the charism we received from God eight hundred years ago and receive once more from the Church, as the Fraternity of the First Order, the Rule, which will be returned to the Ministers General.

22. *2018 is the closing year of this four-year path.* After a year of purification of the memory and having redefined the vocabulary of Franciscan fraternity in the style of minority, we believe that Grace itself will move us to open our horizons to the future, joyfully announcing salvation.

23. “I want to send you all to Paradise!” Thus, in 1216, Friar Francis made his joyful announcement from the square of the Portiuncula. This speaks of the

passion our founder had for the salvation of every man and needs to be the purpose that motivates our choices when identifying areas for growth and action, in collaboration among the various Minorite obediences.

24. In this year, therefore, we want to stake everything on mission driven by compassion, by a rediscovered and recharged passion for the salvation of one's brothers—of every man. Let's think concretely about the realization of projects discussed and selected in "Chapter", projects which express the beauty of the entire Franciscan family (the three Franciscan families of the First Order and the TOR, but with implications for the Second Order and for the Secular Franciscan Order) united by the same original inspiration and single purpose. If possible, we would work for a "*new*" *fraternal reality with a "mission" of witness*, which better expresses, without having to explain, the beauty of fraternal life itself—filled with mutual charity and fellowship. These become the primary source and first form of evangelization, according to the heart of Friar Francis. It was he who discovered, recognized and really pointed out that the beauty of being together in the name of Jesus was the first and most effective form of apostolate. (An inter-obediential form: a local fraternity inserted into a diocesan program? an *ad gentes* missionary fraternity? a fraternity engaged in a specific charity, however, in social work? Another form?) We hope that further ideas and proposals emerge from the Chapter.

25. *The drafting of some kind of post-synodal document*, that is, subsequent to the path of faith we will have taken together, will lead to reflection and a synthesis of the experience, yielding possible developments for "future generations".

26. We members of the organizing committee are convinced that as friars of Franciscan families we are communicating something when we gather together in our common vocation of holiness, love, fraternal life, simplicity, and Franciscan joy, all of us following the same lifestyle of minority. We are convinced that this can have a profound effect in the heart of our neighbor, in this time rampant with self-centeredness and individualism. Far be it from us to think of ourselves as experts, but our common intention is to do the best we can to joyfully spread the best news in the world: "*Christ is risen!*" We will give our all to accept, with love, whatever God wants.

PART I

THE TEXT OF “*ITE VOS*”

BISHOP LEO
Servant of the Servants of God

Go into my vineyard, says that Master of the House, who had planted a vineyard, the Savior of the world and our Redeemer Jesus Christ: even though he took care of everyone and managed everything that he did, nevertheless, among his other plantations, which, through his Father he planted in the ground of the Church militant, there was one that he looked after with such ardent love, that everywhere he would call it his own. He cared for this vineyard so carefully, with diligent, industrious and faithful farmers, which he sent out to you incessantly, some early in the morning, others in the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth and even the tenth and the eleventh hours. This is the sacred religion of the Friars Minor, which, while they were still in the green leaves of holiness, by means of apostolic men, extended themselves like branches, from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the world. They irrigated the mountains and filled the earth with the wine of wisdom and knowledge. This is the holy and immaculate religion, in which we contemplate the presence of the Redeemer, as through a spotless mirror. Through it, one can admire this model life of Christ and the apostles. It sets before the eyes of the Christian people the standards of the first foundations of the Church; and finally, it evokes what is Divine, Angelic, Most Perfect, and in full conformity to Christ, so much so that it can justly be called his own.

To cultivate this vineyard, the Master of the House sent, early in the morning, at sunrise, *an Angel ascending from the East, with the sign of the living God*³, the blessed Francis, who along with admirable men of sanctity, laid the first foundations of this vineyard. In the third hour, they were succeeded by religious men, led by blessed Bonaventure. With the power and help of the Holy Trinity, they repaired the walls of this vineyard which were nearly in ruins. After them, as in the sixth hour, some friars went forth who were fervent in spirit, who, comforted by the Holy Council of Vienna, as though sent by God, brought back to their beginnings the rigors of discipline, then almost completely worn out. Then, at the ninth hour, the time of death of the Lord, when scandalous farmers appeared in the vineyard who grew

³ cf. Luca WADDING, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XVI, pp. 49-55. – Italian translation by editor.

worse every day, the Lord stirred up the spirit of a teenager, or rather a few friars, who under the guidance and authority of the blessed Bernardine, the herald of the Name of Jesus, and trusting in the support of the Council of Constance, revived the whole Order, which had languished, indeed, was almost dead.

Lately then, in these last days, almost to the last hour, other men have appeared, zealots for the House of Israel. They cut down the sacred groves, demolished the temples: *and where sin abounded*, with the Lord's help, they made sure that *his Grace abounded all the more*, introducing a model of reform. But, as among the workers of the vineyard in the Gospel parable, when the ones who came later were treated as being equivalent to the ones who arrived first, a great clamor arose, as Kings, Princes, communities and peoples are attesting. News of serious fights has reached us; quarrels and clashes occurring among the Friars of this religion, over superiority and higher degrees of perfection, incidents which have been increasing day by day around the world.

Therefore we, who since childhood have been ardently devoted to the Friars of this Order and the Order as a whole, are now ardently impelled to silence these kinds of farmer's quarrels, and to quell the grumbling, in imitation of that steward in the Gospel, especially considering the abundant fruits that we know come from their exemplary life and sublime doctrine.

We are forced into this out of the ordinary concern of office and pastoral government, notwithstanding our assertion that the conflict has no merit, and also in view of the continuous and ceaseless supplications and prayers that come from the Christian Princes, especially from our beloved sons in Christ, the elect Emperor Maximilian, the most Christian Francis of France, the Catholic Charles of Spain, Henry the VIII of England, Emanuel of Portugal and the Algarve, Louis of Hungary and Bohemia, Sigismund of Poland and the Illustrious King, Cristierno of Dacia, as well as some other Princes, Dukes, Counts, Peoples and Communities; prayers and supplications that urge us to put an end to these divisions in the Order of Saint Francis.

Therefore, after designating a secret Consistory, we have charged and enjoined some of our Venerable Brothers, Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, to diligently investigate the causes and origins of these quarrels and divisions, and to thoroughly explore appropriate remedies in order to settle such disputes. After long examination and mature debate, they made a very faithful and diligent report to us. After our further consideration, having weighed the issues they explored and examined, in order to achieve harmony, and after having deliberated over them within our Consistory, we, together with them and the other Cardinals, and with their unanimous opinion, have judged the said Order as follows:

First, we found that conflict among the Prelates, the irremovability of some, and the unreformed life of other friars are the main causes of such quarrels and divisions. Therefore we want and we order, according to what is contained in the Rule of blessed Francis, that there should be one Minister General for the entire Order with full powers over all individual Friars of the same Order, to whom all the aforesaid individual Friars are bound strictly to obey in all those matters that do not go against God, their souls or the Rule. This Minister General shall exercise the Office of Generalship for a maximum of six years. During this time, if it should appear to all of the Ministers Provincial and Custodians that the aforesaid Minister General is unable to perform his service for the common good, these aforesaid Friars, who are responsible for the election of the Minister General, are required to elect another, in the name of the Lord. The election of his successor is to be done exclusively by Reformed Ministers Provincial and Custodes, whether they are Ultramontane or Cismontane, during the General Chapter of the same Order, on the feast of Pentecost, in the place chosen by the Minister General during the General Chapter immediately preceding. All the Ministers and Custodes or Delegates, both Cismontane and Ultramontane, are bound to attend the Chapter. And so that the head does not appear different from the limbs, we want and also order, that no friar shall be elected Minister General if he is not leading a reformed life, and is not considered such by the Reformed Community. In the election of the Minister General, no one shall have voice unless he is reformed and is considered reformed by the Reformed Congregation. If something to the contrary is attempted in the future, it shall be deemed wholly invalid and void. The election of the future Minister General should be celebrated at the next feast of Pentecost in the Friary of Aracoeli in Rome, according to our orders expressed in the letters sent in the form of a papal Brief: we order that all the Reformed Ministers and Custodes, as well as the Vicars and Discreets of the Friars of the Observance, or of the *Family* should celebrate the aforementioned election. And so that the election of the Minister General be carried out according to the above rule by the Ministers Provincial and the Custodes, that it should be celebrated freely, according to the intention of the same rule, and without any unrest, we ordain and establish that they are true Ministers, and they are thus as a result of being elected; also we declare that their Discreets are Custodes. With regard to other Reformed Friars, we want, in Provinces where the Ministers for now are not reformed, or are not considered to be such, under whom there are some Reformed Friaries, that two Friars be elected by the aforesaid Reformed Friaries, according to the standard of our other letters, written in the form of a Brief, to then replace the voices of

those unreformed Ministers of the aforementioned Provinces: we grant at this time to the friars of the Congregation of Friar Amedeo, of the Clareni, and of the Holy Gospel or of the Capuche, in each Province in which they have friaries, that in addition to the voices of their Vicars, they shall have, just this once, two voices. We define and even declare the election of the Minister General, which shall be carried out by the aforesaid friars, to be canonical according to the Rule of the Friars Minor and the form transmitted by Blessed Francis in the Rule. And so that in this same Order, in order to conserve the peace with God, and to foster charity between the Cismontane and Ultramontane friars as much as possible, we command that if the Minister General, as has been said, were to be elected from among the Cismontane friars for a six-year term, that in the six years that follow he should be elected from among the Ultramontane friars. We want this alternating election to be preserved by the Friars in perpetuity.

Nevertheless, since we see that this Order has expanded so marvelously throughout Christendom and that because of its magnitude, the benefit of pastoral care may never be lacking, we judge that when the Minister General is elected from among the Cismontane Friars, he shall institute a Commissioner General in the Ultramontane zones, to be elected by the Ultramontane Friars themselves. The Minister General shall give him the task of presiding over the Ultramontane Friars, in accordance with what the General Chapter deems most appropriate: but in such a way that the said Commissioner is still subject to the Minister General, as are the Prelates of the Order, obliged to obey in everything according to the Rule. If, however, the Minister General were to be elected from among the Ultramontane Friars, then he must institute a Cismontane Commissioner General, in the same way as stated and set out above for the Ultramontane Commissioner. The said Commissioner General will exercise his office for three years only, after which, the Minister General must institute a new Commissioner, to be elected as above, according to what seems fitting to the Ultramontane and Cismontane friars.

The Minister General may be absent from the headquarters he has chosen for his six years [of service], and move to another area of his choosing. But during the time of his absence, he shall leave a Commissioner in his place, with the advice and consent of the Definitors of the General Chapter. And should there be no Commissioner General placed in that area, over the said six years, the Minister General shall be required, in the first three years of those six years, to celebrate a General Chapter, gathering the Delegates in that area, the area that he is from; and similarly he must celebrate another General Chapter in the area that he is not from, either in person or through his Commissioner, to which all the delegates of that area shall

attend; or else, regarding this matter, do whatever the Minister General and the General Chapter shall appropriately decide.

Also, as for the Ministers Provincial in the Provinces whose Ministers are not yet reformed, or are not considered to be such, we declare, decide and order that the Vicars of the Friars of the Observance, or the Family, of the same Provinces, are now, and in perpetuity, the undoubted Ministers of those same Provinces. They are also to be called by the name of Minister. We make every single friar fully subject to them, as well as their abovementioned houses and places where they dwell in their respective Provinces. And to the Minister General and Ministers Provincial, called *of the Family*, we grant the same authority and power that once was previously enjoyed by them, and we decide that this shall be considered thus in perpetuity. Therefore we command the aforesaid Friars, even those who observe the Rule of St. Francis purely and simply, to be obedient in all, according to the Rule, to the said Ministers, as true Ministers, declared and established by us.

Finally, to ensure that the collapse of the Order does not happen again, due to the irremovability of the Ministers Provincial, we want and we order that the aforesaid Ministers Provincial cannot continue in their office beyond a three-year period, after which all Friars shall consider them released from office. However, during that three-year period, they may be relieved of their office by their respective Chapters, which shall be celebrated according to the Rule and custom, in case they were found to be less than suitable; the same is true for the Custodians, on this matter.

No one can be elected Provincial or Custos or have voice in their elections, if he does not lead a reformed life, and is considered such by the Reformed community of that Province, of which he would be put in charge. Whatever is then attempted contrary to this shall, *ipso facto*, be considered null and void.

Also, since frequent mention will be made of the Reformed who observe the Rule of blessed Francis purely and simply, we want and we declare that every single Friar described below shall be included under that name: those of the Observants, including those of the Family who reformed under the Ministers as well as those of Friar Amedeo, of the Colletans, of the Clareni, of the Holy Gospel or of the Capuche, those called Discalced, or others similarly named, and who want to observe the Rule of Saint Francis in a pure and simple way. They shall be united in perpetuity, making themselves into one body. So that in the future, with all the diversity of the aforementioned names omitted, they shall be called the *Friars Minor of St. Francis of the Regular Observance*, together or separately, and these can and should call themselves such. All of the groups together, as already men-

tioned, should be subject in all respects, according to the Rule, to the aforesaid Minister General, the Ministers Provincial and the Custodes, in whose Provinces they are residing. The Conventuals then, who live according to privileges, should be subject to the same Ministers General and Provincial, in the ways that will be established when our forthcoming letters are next published.

So that every occasion of dissent, scandal and partiality, is completely removed from the Order we firmly order and command, under penalty of *latae sententiae* excommunication, which will be incurred *ipso facto*, and from which no one can be absolved, except in *articulo mortis*, if not by us or by the Apostolic See, that no friar of the Order of St. Francis may, with malice, ridicule or insult, call another friar of the Order: *Privileged, Collettan, Bullist, of Claren, of the Gospel or of the Capuche, 'Pharisaic'*, or any other name, even one that is newly coined. Nor should anyone who, in the future, using the previous divisions of the Order or using our union and institution created by the grace of the Holy Spirit, jeer, insult, or offend him in any way or be perceived doing so. No Friar then, cleric or layman, should mockingly or maliciously call those Friars and their supporters by such names; but all the Friars of the Order must be called, between themselves and others, the *Friars Minor*, as has already been said, or of *St. Francis*.

We furthermore decree that no Reformed Friar can be sent by any Prelate of the Order, not even the Minister General, to live in a non-reformed friary, or one not considered reformed. If, however, a Provincial Chapter should deem it a lesser evil to send some friar to a non-reformed friary rather than keep him with the Reformed; in that case, the Prelates may send one or more friars to an unreformed friary.

We command, under pain of *latae sententiae* excommunication, to each and every Conventual living according to the privileges, Prelates and Friars, that they shall not dare to receive the aforementioned Reformed except as indicated; similarly (we ordain), under the same penalty, that the Reformed Friars shall not depart in any way from the obedience of their Ministers.

And so that no new institutions [*sectae*] are introduced in that Order, with the risk of causing new fights, we firmly impose and command that for the future, no new institution [*secta*] or reform shall be introduced in the said Order; or carried out without the express consent of the Minister General, or the Reformed Provincials in their respective Provinces: so that such reforms should still be subject in everything to the Minister General and the Reformed Provincials, according to the rule, as we expressed above regarding the Reformed.

Therefore we submit, and we incorporate in perpetuity, in their respective Provinces, all of the houses, places and hermitages, maintained and owned by

the friars of the Observance, or the Family, or those otherwise called Reformed, subject to Ministers instituted and declared by us. We want these same places held, possessed and governed in perpetuity by these same Ministers and their reformed successors. We take this upon our self and extinguish any dispute on these matters, brought before any ordinary or delegated judge, or even before the S.R.C. cardinals, or the Cardinal Protector, or the auditors of our Sacred Palace, or the Commissaries Apostolic, both in the Roman Curia and outside of it, both among the Prelates and among the subjects, in any state or instance, both possessory and petitionary or even in *dispossession*, under any pretense, even if previously they were subjected to the obedience of the Chapters of the Conventual friars of the said Order; and we impose perpetual silence upon the parties.

We also overturn and cancel judgments and processes on that matter, promoted by any judge, whatever the result, even if such disputes were to involve the places of the Friars, and goods received from any area, or for any other reason. Nevertheless, we command, order, and impose on these Conventual Friars, or any judge and anyone else who does not presume to make an attempt, to procure, judge or say, both in court and out, anything against this our declaration, what we have instituted, innovated, united and incorporated, under penalty of *latae sententiae* excommunication, and the deprivation of the benefits obtained, and also the inability to obtain others in the future, even if there could, or should, be a demand on our part in the future, even if those arguments were related to the places of the Friars and assets being received, or any other subject.

In order to ensure, according to the needs of places and people, that all things are wisely regulated in view of maintaining reform, which, thanks to God, has already been introduced in the Order for all of Christianity, we want, order, and establish, in view of the “Generalissimo Chapter” to be celebrated in the near future, that you deputize some friars from among those most reliable, scholars and experts from different regions, and that they gather together all that they consider appropriate for the maintenance of the reform, the observance of the Rule, and the due execution of this our Constitution, to be approved by the entire Chapter or its majority, and finally by us, armed with the backing of Apostolic confirmation.

To the current Auditor of the Apostolic Camera, to all Archbishops, Bishops and Prelates and to any person registered in Apostolic dignity, we command through Apostolic writings, through solemn publication of these our letters, and everything contained therein, that wherever and whenever they deem appropriate, and whenever the Minister General and the Reformed Ministers Provincial or any among them so requests; that they be assisted with the garrison of an effective

defense, and ensure that everyone can peacefully make use of it and enjoy it, not allowing them to be unduly harassed by anyone, or by any authority they might possess. Those who are disobedient shall be suppressed by means of ecclesiastical censures and other means of redress including, if necessary, appealing to the secular arm.

This is notwithstanding any Apostolic letter and pardons, as well as those of the Sacred Council of Constance, we specifically waive, notwithstanding any opposition to the above formalities and unusual clauses that are granted, or are eventually granted, in the future to the Friars, families, Congregations, Denominations, or to some of them, both authors and founders, Reformed or Conventual, or those otherwise called such, belonging to this religion, even if they should have to make special, specific, detailed, and literal mention of it.

Finally, since it would be difficult to convey these letters of ours to all the places that one should, we want and we decree with Apostolic authority, that the copies, sealed by notary public and bearing the seal of an ecclesiastical Prelate, are deemed worthy of faith, as if the originals were being displayed.

Therefore, it is unlawful for anyone to devalue or rashly dare to oppose, this page of our institution, definition, submission, declaration, union, statute, subjection, incorporation, convocation, imposition, revocation, termination, taxation, precept, command, derogation, will and decree. Should anyone then presume to attempt it, know that he shall incur the wrath of Almighty God and the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at St. Peter's in Rome,
May 28,
the year of Our Lord's Incarnation 1517;
the fifth year of our pontificate.

Bembo Tommaso de Binis

PART II

DEEPENING HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

CHAPTER I

Retracing the events of *ITE VOS* Hopes dashed by the *BULLA UNIONIS*

In the context of the “Big History”

To appreciate the actual historical significance of *Ite vos*, it is necessary to put it into the context of the papacy and European events taking place between the last decades of the fifteenth century and early sixteenth century. This was a troubled and complex period of social history, a time torn apart by wars for territorial supremacy, fought by the great European powers. The papacy was totally involved in this. Many were urging the profound reform of the whole Church *in capite et membris*, a task that should have been undertaken by the Council convened at the Lateran in 1512. In 1517, the Council was concluded without any substantial results. From that year on, the structure of the Church and civil society was rocked by the storm of Protestantism. At the same time, geographical and historical developments expanded dramatically as political powers and religious activists all became embroiled in the “race to the new world”. Among those players, the Observants stood out in particular, with their commitment to expand the frontiers of Christendom, in some cases through questionable sponsorship and methods.

There were far-reaching and traumatic events in this context that took on relative importance even though they did not involve the main sovereigns of Europe. The so-called “Wars of Italy” (1494-1521) tore through the Italian countryside for over two decades. The dramatic continuation of these wars echoed the so-called “Sack of Rome”, in that it upset the then widely disputed capital of the Western Church and the Papacy, which once again had become involved in the struggle for supremacy among the great powers. In May of 1526, Pope Clement VII promoted the anti-Habsburg League. Emperor Charles V reacted in 1527 by throwing his Landsknecht mercenaries at Rome itself. This threatened the life of the pope who was saved by taking refuge in Castel Sant’Angelo.

Meanwhile, the deadly challenge of the Ottoman Empire loomed threateningly in the East. After occupying a good number of countries in South Eastern Europe, it was taking aim at the very heart of Christendom. In this context, prophecies began to multiply about the end of the Roman Church and the Empire, or rather, Europe's secular history.

***The Papacy in the early decades of the sixteenth century
and the expectations of Christianity***

Julius II (the Friar Minor Giuliano della Rovere and the nephew of another Franciscan, Sixtus IV) ascended the papal throne in 1503. His contemporaries described him as having an “energetic and terrible nature.” He lavished all his efforts on strengthening the political power of the Papal States. When faced with the general problems of a Christianity in need of fundamental reform, he demonstrated a certain lack of involvement. The Fifth Lateran Council was convened by him and opened on May 3, 1512. However, he was not as focused on meeting the demand for the reform of the Church as he was for opposing the “conciliar” initiative of the French King Louis XII. Louis, at war with the Papacy, had promoted an Assembly of Bishops in Pisa, in 1511, which, despite its low turnout (six Cardinals, twenty-four bishops, some Abbots, jurists and theologians, mostly French) was intended to be an Ecumenical Council.

During della Rovere's pontificate, there was increasing expectation for an “Angelic Pope” who would restore the eminently pastoral character of Christianity's Summit. The expression of such reincarnational expectations was seen in a text sent by Paolo Giustiniani and Pietro Querini to the new pope in the summer of 1513, shortly after his election (March 1513): *Libellus ad Leonem X*⁴. The authors saw him as the possible initiator of the moral and institutional reform of the Roman Church. With the ascension of Giovanni de' Medici to the papal throne, many actually hoped the promise of the Church's religious revival would be achievable with the end of papal involvement in the tragic era of wars in Italy. In fact, the pope did appear to have peaceful intentions in his efforts to bring the European sovereigns together. However, Leo X was forced

⁴ *Pauli Iustiniani et Petri Querini eremitarum camaldolensium Libellus ad Leonem X Pontificem maximum*, in *Annales Camaldulenses ordinis Sancti Benedicti, IX* (Venetiis 1773), pp. 612-719; *Scritti del beato Paolo Giustiniani. Il Libellus ad Leonem X e altri opuscoli*, edited by the Camaldolese Hermits of Montecorona, preface by Bishop Sergio Pagano, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan) p. 212.

to acknowledge the ineffectiveness of his hopes for peace among the great powers, which, immediately after his election, recommenced their military activities for predominance on the Italian peninsula. Then began a cautious policy of safeguarding the arbitration role of the Papacy, except when the pope himself became involved in the dispute. In the hope of realizing the aspirations of his nephew, Lorenzo de' Medici, for the Duchy of Urbino, the pope triggered the so-called "War of Urbino" which ended after eight months of armed clashes, in October of 1517. That was the exact year that the Bull, which is the subject of our meeting, was issued. But there were a good many other events and serious issues that shook the Western Church that year, too.

1517: A pivotal year in the Western Church

The fifth Lateran Council ended on March 16, 1517. The Council should have given an authoritative answer to the age-old problem of Church reform *in capite et in membris*. However the matter remained largely unresolved, because it was inadequately dealt with. In light of the proposals made by several parties, the Conciliar decrees – some of which seemed to be going in the right direction-appeared modest and mostly ineffective in terms of addressing the need for moral reform and doctrinal renewal.

A specialist in the history of the Councils of the early modern age offered some rather harsh judgement in this respect: "The Fifth Lateran decrees were stifled by the indifference of the Pope...and the ill will of a Curia unwilling to change its ways...the most durable accomplishment of this Council was having the last word on conciliarist theories about recognizing the superiority of the Pope."

"The Pope's indifference" and the "Curia's ill-will" are two factors that then, and not only then, could be brought up to explain the historical reason for the ineffectiveness of the Conciliar decrees.

One could also point to another, more vigorous agent, a figure who served as a catalyst for rebellion across much of Western Christianity: "The entry of Luther onto the scene, seven and a half months after it (the Council) closed, and the tremendous acceleration of the reform processes that he launched, made any measures the Council was considering laughable, if they had only ever been applied"⁵. In fact, 1517 was the exact year that Luther's theses came out. In developments to come, this would lead to the final split within the Western Church. On October

⁵ M. Venard, *Il Concilio Lateranense V e il Tridentino*, in *Storia dei Concili Ecumenici*, edited by G. Alberigo, Brescia 1990, p. 328.

31, 1517, the Augustinian friar published and discussed his famous ninety-five theses. It started a chain reaction, indeed, a revolt against the Church of Rome which found fertile ground among some German princes and had traumatic consequences for the Church itself and for the whole of Western Christianity. Unfortunately, Leo X underestimated this phenomenon, at least initially, calling it a “friars’ squabble”.

Ite vos and its background

Ite vos would appear to be a “small episode” within the complex context of a series of events that loom over it. Its “history”, including its antecedents and its consequences, does not match anything in the historiographical record of the time—the period between the end of the fifteenth century and the early decades of the sixteenth century. Even specific monographs spanning this period and the main actors involved, including Leo X, make no reference to this matter. It would seem to be entirely internal to the Minorite Order. To find writings on it, one must turn to the studies in the Franciscan historiography.

Although these events were ignored in the “Big History” they did involve the actors from that history and they took place at the highest levels of international politics. The Bull records the pressures being applied by the different rulers and governments of the time, from the Kings of Spain and France, to the Republic of Venice, which hoped for a solution to the conflicts within the Minorite Order.

Far more contingent reasons drove the pontiff to try to restore union, hence his issuing orders that favored the more vigorous and active group, the Observants. Leo X was pressed by the need to settle the financial situation of the Roman Curia. It had been afflicted by significant economic waste in support of political and military initiatives. Also looming were the huge expenses required for the construction of St. Peter’s. In the wake of a centuries-old tradition to provide financial support for the construction of places of worship, came the granting of indulgences as a means to solicit and reward. Since this was the main church of Western Christendom, it provided a good opportunity to raise money by attracting investors through the offer of extraordinary remissions. Preaching in this regard was entrusted to the Dominican Johann Tetzel, who promoted it so unscrupulously he seemed, and not without reason, as if he was offering a “special sale”. Even the Observants, some of whom, unfortunately, were inexperienced and ignorant, began to engage in such preaching. However, the amount of money they collected was vastly superior to that of the “town criers” of other religious Orders and could not fail to attract the “benevolent acceptance” of their requests by the pontiff.

The complexity of the Order's internal situation

In order to understand the how and why of the Order's troubled state of affairs, which we summarized at the beginning, and in order to not reduce Leo X's decision to a matter of handing out prizes to the Observants, it is necessary to retrace the centuries-old story of the tensions in the structure of the Order of Minors. It is enlightening to consider the relationship between the different families within the Order itself and the initiatives put forward by its supreme leaders. The picture that emerges is much more varied than that commonly presented which, in layman's terms, compares Conventuals and Observants as if there were only two uniform and opposed sides. *Ite vos* itself lists a long series of reformed groups, each of which tended to its own autonomy.

But first things first: the papal letter lists the different, more or less autonomous groups or families (the Conventuals, the Cismontane Observants, the Ultramontane Observants, the Reformed *sub-ministris* Colletans, the Amadeans, the Clarenis, and the Guadalupians or Congregation of the Holy Gospel). It then indicates that it will quell the source, not only of division, but of discord and conflict. Notice how the situation is qualified: *graves lites, iurgia et dissentiones*. In an Order in which all are called "Friars Minor" one is struck by the reasons for such "serious fights, quarrels and clashes": *occasione superioratum et perfectionis graduum*. Those who should behave and consider themselves "minor" were now fighting over "superiority" and each one was claiming a greater "degree of perfection", obviously believing the others to be "imperfect", or less perfect!

In order to overcome these deep divisions, in the years immediately preceding, starting with the election of the Minister General Egidio Delfini in 1500, proposals had been put forward to restore unity in the Order. The new Superior, elected in the Conventual Chapter, was engaged in several initiatives for the reunification of the various groups. However, his efforts only caused mistrust. The Observant friars viewed his plans as a threat to their independence. The Conventuals, on the other hand, did not share his support for the rigidly reformist ideas of his close associate, the Colletan Friar Boniface of Ceva.

From the beginning of his term, the Minister General had worked on new Constitutions for a general reform of the Order, the so-called *Alexandrian Statutes*, as ratified by Alexander VI on March 13, 1501. Delfini traveled throughout Europe for reunification, proposing meetings between the different families and trying to involve the Observants, the strongest group, which was supported by the most powerful rulers of the time: one may recall the Archbishop of Toledo, Francisco Ximénez de Cisneros, who fought in support of the Observance, and intended to achieve a very different objective than that of the Minister General. Even Spain's

rulers Ferdinand and Isabella, from whom Delfini had sought support against Ximénez, took sides with the Observants.

In his efforts to realize his plan, the Minister General had the support of Friar Boniface of Ceva, a collaborator who had intentions of strict “reform”. He was one of the prominent personalities of Colletan reformism and had worked out a plan for the extensive reform of the Provinces of Aquitaine, Burgundy and France by means of gradually conquering the friaries through the efforts of the friars of his family living under the obedience of Conventual Superiors. The Observants should have been attracted to this plan, whereby they could have achieved a reconstitution of all the Franciscans into a single large family, characterized by the strictest observance of the Franciscan Rule, something which Ceva considered inviolable. To reach his goal Ceva joined forces with Delfini’s reunification commitment. Delfini upheld Ceva’s campaign to reform southern France. At the Chapter of the Province of Burgundy, held August 18, 1503, he imposed the unification of all Franciscan families and congregations in the region. In fact, he put both the Conventuals and the Observants under the direction of the Colletans. In the Conventual General Chapter, convened in Troyes, May 26, 1504, Friar Boniface was made director of the Reform as a Minister for the Province of France and as a General Commissioner for the other Provinces of Burgundy and Aquitaine.

After several attempts to convene the representatives of all the parties concerned, an agreement was reached in 1506, in which the different families of the Order were represented. During the “Generalissimo Chapter”, Egidio Delfini was replaced by Conventual Rainaldo Graziani as leader of the Order. A few days later Delfini, who was by then elderly and exhausted from his efforts to reunify the Order, died, almost paradoxically, in the Observant friary of Santa Maria Nova in Naples.

The Chapter appointed a Commission, headed by Boniface of Ceva, which drew up new statutes between 1506 and 1508. These were called the *Julian Statutes* because they were approved by Julius II. The Pope, however, soon withdrew his approval and maintained a disposition that oscillated between favoring the Conventuals and favoring the Observants. The Pontiff ended up questioning everything about the foundations of Boniface’s reform. On February 18, 1510, yielding to pressure from the Observants, he annulled the previously ratified statutes, justifying himself with the declaration that such Constitutions were *magis extortae quam impetratae* [extorted more than obtained] from Graziani and Boniface. Moreover, it stated that the smaller congregations, including *coletani etiam sub Bonifacio provinciae Franciae... ministro* [even the Colletans under Boniface, the Minister of the Province of France] were to be incorporated by the friars of

the Observance. Ceva did not give up. Rather, his fighting spirit was provoked all the more. Being a religious had not changed the combative nature of his previous military profession. He appealed to the Parliament of Paris, in front of which, in January of 1511, he engaged in a lively debate with the Ultramontane Commissioner of the Observants, John Silvestris. The proceedings of the debate were published in Paris in the *Articuli in supremo parlamento Senatu Parisiensi ad... Ludovici XII iussum...convocatis partibus duarum Observantiarum eiusdem Ordinis...exibiti*. His opponents turned to the Theological Faculty of the Sorbonne. In 1514, the Faculty decided the dispute in favor of the Observants, while the proceedings at the Parliament of Paris still remained open. Meanwhile Boniface of Ceva published his most important work, *Firmamentum trium ordinum beatissimi patris nostri Francisci* (Paris, 1512) which was fortuitous, in that he collected a series of texts on St. Francis, including several written by him or attributed to him. His aim was to propose early sources that could constitute a solid foundation (*fir-mamentum*) for a possible return to the proposals and example of Brother Francis.

Next, Boniface arranged to bring the parties together for a conference. It was convened in Ghent, in 1516, by Charles V, who, at only sixteen years of age had just been made King of Aragon and Duke of Burgundy. Charles V decided to intervene in the conflicts of the Franciscans in that part of the Province of France which fell under his jurisdiction. Ceva attended the conference as a delegate of the Provincial of Cologne. At the end of the discussions, Charles V, with a decision typical of his reformist orientations intended for Council consideration, proposed that the matter be referred to the Lateran Council, which was then under way. Boniface had accepted the proposal, but a few months later, in Paris, he published *Defensorium elucidativum Observantiae regularis fratrum minorum*, a violent attack on his Observant opponents which put an end to any hope for an accord.

The Council appointed a commission of cardinals, flanked by four Friars Minor, charged with the task of drawing up a text for the solution of the conflict. Thus, the draft of *Ite vos* was prepared. Its first version began with an exact quote from the Latin Vulgate bible on the parable of the vineyard: *Ite et vos*. Note the names of the signatories of the draft: in addition to the four cardinals, there are represented only the Reformed and three members of the Observants. Friar Boniface, who had just reformed, was appointed spokesman of the Conventual Friars. This was one of his last battles: on March 18, 1517, the French king, Francis I, prohibited any work written in the press. A few days later, on April 12, the friar died. Within a month *Ite vos* was published (note the cancellation of the *et* with respect to the draft).

We have dwelt a good while on the background which led to the Pope's issuing *Ite vos*. We have highlighted the various workings on one side or another to show how the litigation might have been experienced in the field, especially between the two largest groups in the Order: the Conventuals and the Observants. Some other groups remained in shadows, except for those who carried more weight because they were represented by various outstanding or combative personalities. This was precisely the case with the Colletans who, thanks to Friar Boniface of Ceva, were able to play a major role and seemed to have won the match, although for a short time, in a substantial area within one of the three Provinces of France. The final victory, if one can call it that, was won, in part, by the Observants. They had the backing of powerful supporters across various regions, such as Francisco Cardinal Ximenez de Cisneros and the rulers in Spain. In France, Louis XII seemed to want to rise above the factions, but his successor, Francis I, bent to the demands of the opponents of Friar Boniface and decreed an end to his polemical writings.

The papal letter of 1507 was intended to put an end to the litigation and to bring unity within the Order. In fact, it sanctioned the "victory" of the Observants, or at least their absolute institutional prevalence. However, the history of the Friars Minor shows, that in the decades immediately after *Ite vos* was issued, the letter's specific intent, as expressly indicated, produced no results with regard to reunification. In fact, the 1517 decisions may well be called "the history of a failure, or an illusion", despite the expectations of those involved, including the key player, Leo X.

The contents of Ite vos May 29, 1517

A cursory examination of the Bull highlights the terms of the dispute and the proposed solutions to the benefit of the Observance. The introductory exhortation of the letter is presented as a commentary on the parable of those called in at later hours to work in the vineyard: a paraphrasing obviously retailored to fit the situation of the Minorite Order. The vineyard is the *Religio Minorum Fratrum*, the workers arriving over several hours are the various "generations" of the Franciscans; those at the last hour (this, according to a literary formula used for centuries) are the Reformed. The intentions of the Pope in favor of the reform are already clearly marked by the significant cancellation of the *et* from the draft's introductory exhortation. In an attempt to bring together the different components of the varied world of the Minors, orders are given for a Generalissimo Chapter, at which different groups of individually listed reformers will be represented: the *Reformed sub-ministris*, the Amadeans, the Clareni, the Guadalupians or of the

Holy Gospel. But the election of the Minister General is reserved for those with “voice”, that is, the representatives of the friars who joined the reform. And it is precisely in the choice of the Supreme Head of the Order where the reversal of hierarchical relationships takes place: this function will no longer be covered by a Conventual, but will be alternated between a Cismontane and an Ultramontane Observant. The two families continue to be differentiated, which is evident from a supplementary order: the family from which the Minister General is not chosen will be represented at its apex by a General Commissioner. The hierarchical reversal is also imposed with regard to the triennial Ministers Provincial; this position will switch from the current Ministers Provincial (the Conventual ones) to the Vicars of the Observance. The absolute prevalence of Observant groupings in the papal letter seems incontrovertible from the precise directive that requires the various reformed groups to merge into a single body of *Fratres Minores sancti Francisci regularis observantiae*. As a result, a ban is triggered against introducing any new reforms. It also decides to gather together all the different, previously-enacted Constitutions into one single text *pro manutenentia reformationis et regulae observantiae* [for maintaining the reform and observance of the Rule].

The failure of the orders of Leo X

The practical ineffectiveness of the orders in the papal letter was confirmed by the repeated clarifying or correcting documents that came after *Ite vos*. The Conventuals, subject to the Ministers General and Provincial of the Observants, were released by the Bull *Omnipotens Deus* of June 12, 1517, in which those responsible for the Conventual family were awarded the title of “Master” (General and Provincial) and any interference from Observant Superiors was prohibited. Thus it sanctioned the definitive division of the Order into two large families.

Even the reunification of the various reformed groups turned out to be a practical failure, because each of them maintained an effective hierarchical autonomy, while the Colletans continued to remain under the obedience of Conventuals, but with their own friaries and Superiors.

The ban against establishing new reforms was soon thwarted: a decade later, Clement VII with his letter *Religionis zelus* of July 3, 1528, granted the first approval to a handful of friars who had broken away from the Observants and were soon to become the Capuchin family. However, for the moment, they were made subject to the Conventuals and would only achieve full legal independence in 1618. Those Capuchins were not, however, the only reformed group to appear after the letter of Leo X. Others sprang up out of competition and dissent with the

Observants, against whom they would claim autonomy by choosing, in many cases, to submit to the Superior General of the Conventuals. The “reform” movement proved to be unstoppable, even within the Observance, as the search continued for a more rigorous implementation of the proposals of the rule of the Friars Minor.

In conclusion

The failure of *Ite vos* was obvious from the start: it was made clear by the contrasting positions that characterized the meetings and discussions of previous years. Moreover, much of the Minorite story, from the first century of its history, has been marked by a certain “doggedness” about the problems of poverty, with reference, above all, to two prohibitions in the *Rule*: total dispossession that is not only personal, but also communal, and the prohibition against the direct or indirect use of money, at the cost of introducing a series of legal fictions to justify it. But another essential element in Brother Francis’ proposal was minority, seen as a choice and seen as sharing the conditions of the least in society and in the Church. It seems that this ingredient might not have been the first concern of the various reform movements, especially the “Regular Observance”. In addition, the “return to the origins”, an idea more or less explicitly avowed by all reform movements and groups, could only be a fantasy when one considers how, in its first fifteen years, the group that gathered around Francis of Assisi’s literal-Gospel proposal actually lived. Their style of living was later veiled, indeed hidden, by a mass of communitarian-conventual tradition, which outweighed the memory of the eremitic choice of the early reforms. Poverty itself was the banner of the reformist movements. But after the first decades, faced with changing situations, that poverty was subjected to adaptations and compromises which threatened to drain it of its ideal value and the choices being made for its daily practice. This explains the need for a continuous “renewal,” which was carried out through a multifaceted, and in many respects, irreconcilable proposal to “reform the reform.”

The events that unfolded before and after *Ite vos* certainly did not escape these “logics of history”. Franciscan origins were, and remain, an irreproducible event. There was and continues to be however, that fundamental and urgent way of living *secundum sancti evangelii* [according to the form of the Holy Gospel], which is the basis of the same rules set out by Brother Francis and which he strongly proposed again in his *Testamentum*.

One should not forget this significant passage from the chapter of the *Earlier Rule* dedicated to *fratres predicatore* [friar preachers]: *Omnes fratres operibus predicent* [Let all the brothers preach by their deeds]. The Friars Minor soon be-

came an Order of preachers, which included members of the Observants, at least starting with Bernardine of Siena. In the *Earlier Rule*, the norm “preach by their deeds” meant, and let me say “means”, active commitment to put the core values of the Gospel message into daily practice, living out what has characterized Brother Francis’ “proposal” regarding not only poverty, but also minority, and which, in different times and beyond the distinctions in various families, must connote today, our “being Franciscans.”

Friar Luigi Pellegrini, OFM Cap.

CHAPTER II

The essential elements of the theology of *Vita Consecrata* today for a re-reading of history

*1. Theological and spiritual reflection on the consecrated life went through a very productive period during the Second Vatican Council, especially with the Conciliar text *Perfectae Caritatis*. It presented the elements which Vatican II proposed for the renewal of the consecrated life.*

There are five main elements that Vatican II proposed in *Perfectae Caritatis*: the return to the sources, that is, the return to the Christ of the Gospel, a return to the spirit of the founders, communion in the life of the Church, knowledge of the modern world and inner renewal. The then Cardinal Bergoglio reminded us at the Synod on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World, 16th General Congregation, October 16, 1994, that these elements for the renewal of the consecrated life, are in “mutual tension” and thus present a real vision of the renewal the Church desires. Four of these emergent tensions are, in my opinion, still very present in the Church today. The first tension is between the religious family and the faithful people of God, a tension that must be addressed with an ecclesial understanding of communion and participation. The second tension threatens to block out the contribution that religious life can make to the Church. It is the tension between one particular Church and the universal Church. In a religious family this is reflected in a special way by the universality of the Institute. Thus, there have appeared religious communities that Cardinal Bergoglio called “loose”, i.e. without having any concrete insertion in the Church. They “claim to be so universal that they become non-particular.” The Argentine prelate also emphasized the opposite risk that this tension was bringing out: “the particular being misrepresented as internationalism”. The third tension to have emerged from the essential elements of the post-Conciliar renewal of the consecrated life is the tension existing between one’s charism and the needs of the world, a tension the Church is facing as it tries to create a new document after *Mutue Relationes*. In his synthesis, the Argentine prelate urged those present at the Synod with words that still give us much pause for reflection on balance within the wider Catholic spectrum: “the world’s needs must not carelessly de-emphasize the distinctiveness of different charisms, but neither should charisms be reduced to one particularist style that keeps one from seeing and taking charge of the needs”. The fourth dimension is between the current economic, historical, real life of the world and the eschato-

logical dimension. It is a tension that has developed in several ways, such as the long-standing tension of liberation theology in Latin America. The fourth tension is created, in fact, between concrete apostolic service and the eschatological message: “it’s about putting the transcendent into the very core of our daily lives and the activities in our charge.” These tensions are a reminder that the Church is a body, a living body, whose struggles and growing pains cannot be easily dismissed as dangerous and harmful perfectionism. This is why tensions existing between two polarities cannot be resolved by assimilating one of the poles, or by synthesis, i.e., cancelling out the two polarities. Ecclesial tension can only be resolved on a higher plane than synthesis, where the solution includes understanding, in some way, the polarities that have produced the tensions. For this we need to reflect and discuss, keeping our eyes fixed on Christ and invoking the Holy Spirit, who enlightens “the darkness of our hearts”.

2. The theological and ecclesiastical characteristics of the consecrated life in John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of 1996.

Theological reflection on the nature of the consecrated life has deepened in recent years. New perspectives have emerged from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. In light of this, it is acknowledged that the profession of the evangelical counsels *indisputably* belongs to the *life* and *holiness* of the Church (cf. *LG* 44). John Paul II went further when he said in the famous and debated number 29 of *Vita Consecrata*: “The idea of a Church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore conform to the intentions of her divine Founder, as revealed to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament.” This text implicitly affirms that the consecrated life has always been a part of the Church and is needed by the Church and that it is in keeping with what Jesus Christ himself intended. It follows that the consecrated life will always be part of the Church and one of her indispensable and characteristic elements since it expresses her very nature. However, this immediately raises another question: what does the expression: “the intentions of her divine Founder” mean? Thus the problem arises of identifying the life according to the evangelical counsels within its specific character. One truth is clear: the identity and the ecclesial nature of the consecrated life are in fact a single theme. Number 29 of *Vita Consecrata* has provoked much debate, especially from the ecclesiological point of view. One should recall that number 29 was based on *LG* 44 which launched a long period of heated discussion between ecclesiologists and theologians of the consecrated life: “Thus, the state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though

it does not concern (*not spectet*) the hierarchical structure of the Church, it nevertheless, undeniably belongs (*pertinent*) to its life and holiness.” One can see that the whole debate on the essentiality of the consecrated life plays upon the terms *hierarchical structure* and *nature*. This debate, which has not yet subsided, highlights what was important to Saint John Paul II, namely that the consecrated life is a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and it is out of this love which the Church has for us, that we should re-establish a serious profession of the evangelical counsels and perhaps regain a new consciousness about the preciousness of our vocation. Finally I would like to clarify that our *focus* as religious is not to defend our “right” to be recognized within a diocese or the whole Church, but to understand that we are essentially religious messengers working in communion with the whole Church and therefore in favor of the reality of the Church itself and not of ourselves.

3. Having the opportunity to talk about “the common essentials” or more appropriately, “the diversity of approaches” in the present state of theological reflection on the consecrated life.

On this there are not many doubts: today it is more appropriate to talk about the diversity of approaches. I do not believe it is time yet for a satisfactory synthesis that could take account of all the riches to emerge after the Council related to the consecrated life. This diversity of approaches has also been accentuated by what Benedict XVI defined as the two hermeneutics of *discontinuity* and *continuity or rupture and reform*. In his famous speech to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2005, the Bavarian pope wondered: “Why has the implementation of the Council, in large parts of the Church, thus far been so difficult?” To paraphrase, we could say: “Why has it been so difficult to create a single theology of consecrated life?” “Well,” the Pope said, “it all depends on the correct interpretation of the Council or - as we would say today - on its proper hermeneutics, the correct key to its interpretation and application. The problems in its implementation arose from the fact that two contrary hermeneutics came face to face and quarreled with each other. One caused confusion, the other, silently but more and more visibly, bore and is bearing fruit.” Benedict XVI also highlighted that this hermeneutic of rupture asserted that the texts of the Council as such would not yet express the true spirit of the Council; rather, they would be the results of compromises. The spirit of the Council would be revealed in the impulses toward the new that were contained in the Conciliar texts. I would like to emphasize the danger of this being allowed to more less implicitly discredit the texts of the Second Vatican Council. I would also point out that a serious question emerges from the hermeneutics of discon-

tinuity: who can explain the deeper truths of the “spirit of the Council”? Whose hermeneutics should be presented? Could they come from individual and diverse theologians, with the risk of falling into a dangerous subjectivism, disrespectful of magisterial dictates? We could use the positive expression-synthesis used by Benedict XVI: it would affirm the *absolutism of relativism* in the theology of the consecrated life itself. Perhaps not coincidentally, John Paul II, in those years, approved the instruction *Donum Veritatis* on the ecclesial vocation of the theologian, where, at no. 11, it mentioned that: “never forgetting that he is also a member of the People of God, the theologian must foster respect for them and be committed to offering them teaching which in no way does harm to the doctrine of the faith. The freedom proper to theological research is exercised within the Church’s faith. Thus while the theologian might often feel the urge to be daring in his work, this will not bear fruit or ‘edify’ unless it is accompanied by that patience which permits maturation to occur. New proposals advanced for understanding the faith ‘are but an offering made to the whole Church. Many corrections and broadening of perspectives within the context of fraternal dialogue may be needed before the moment comes when the whole Church can accept them.’” Within the hermeneutic of discontinuity or rupture, some perspectives grew that emphasized the lay component. They excessively pointed out the common priesthood of the faithful at the risk of de-emphasizing the distinctiveness of the three states of life—which I don’t think was truly enriching for the entire Church.

4. Social and cultural situations inviting reflection on the consecrated life today

Some contemporary social scientists help us read our cultural and social context. Therefore, I would first suggest you analyze the reflections of sociologist Salvatore Abruzzese. He has worked extensively on the sociology of religion that deals with the *modern desire for God*. Assisi would be one of its *hypermodern* capitals. He examines the polysemantic aspects of the term “modern” that indicate contemporaneity, topicality and, philosophically speaking, the memory of modernity which, among others things, is based on a principle: change for its own sake, the new will be better than the old, etc. Emphasizing this perspective is likely to tear at the healthy and authentic Tradition of the Church. One risks even tearing at the basic truth of Revelation, and for us consecrated persons, tearing at the fundamental truths that our founders left us as a testament to realize our history in the present. This *modern desire for God*, which leads to “change for its own sake” and opens up the very ideological assumption that “the after” is always better

than “the before” I believe is still very much affecting religious life. I think that in this direction as well, one would lack the fresh perspective needed to skillfully balance the old with the new, as Jesus tells us when he asks us to imitate the good man who knows how to bring forth good from his treasury. The American sociologist Christopher Lasch makes another important contribution. He denounces the development of the *minimal self*. Having let go of the great ideologies, the great visions of the right and left, what remains? A ‘minimal self’, who, on one hand appreciates nothing and hopes for nothing and on the other hand, narcissistically closes in on himself. This too, is affecting religious life. The other term that I would put forward for reflection is that we are in an era of *sad passions* as pointed out by authors Miguel Benasayag and Gh rard Schmit. They state that we are in an age where people no longer hope for anything good in the future, because what is being predicted for the future is frightening: an economic crisis, a third world war, or a catastrophic weather event. Finally, I would like to cite another author who can help us reflect on the theology of the consecrated life, Zygmunt Bauman. We are in a time of *liquid* identity, *liquid* love, *liquid* relationships and therefore *liquid* consecrated alliances. This view is a challenge for us. What produced this worldview? According to Bishop Paolo Martinelli it is the liquefaction of vocation. That is, we have moved from an exclusive use of vocation (for friars, sisters and priests) to an inclusive use: we are all called to holiness. This “inclusion” may hide a danger which is rarely mentioned: it creates confusion regarding roles and states. To be called to the priesthood, to consecration or to be a faithful layperson, basically...it is all the same thing. As a consequence if I have a crisis in the consecrated life, I can become a priest or I can get married...we are all called to holiness! Vocation, then, has become highly fragmented (some say they have the vocation to the lectorate, I have a vocation to be in the oratory, etc.) this fragmentation has caused a loss of meaning and therefore a loss of perseverance as well. Finally, today, we are witnessing a secular usage of the term vocation. In this sense, an architect may assert he is called to his profession or the doctor his, etc. This has led to confusion in some respects and an advantage, since we can talk about it. It offers us consecrated men and women a task: to clarify our ecclesial identity. I would stress that we need to rethink obedience, chastity and poverty in this context, not by closing ourselves off to the challenges that history is presenting to us. For example, it is impossible not to consider economic crisis without being forced to rethink the vow of poverty; one cannot write about the vow of chastity without thinking of gender ideology, as one cannot think of the vow of obedience without seriously considering instances of subjectivism, of the *absolutism of relativism*, of

the crisis of fatherhood and authority. This is a great stimulus for rethinking the three vows and the foundations of the theology of the consecrated life.

5. It has been our intention to start out on a common journey together, passing through a purification of the memory of difficult moments in Franciscan history. Starting from what has been said so far on the theology of the consecrated life today, what are the paths that can help this process?

I would like to suggest a set of guidelines that could work as paths of hope.

- THE FIRST PATH is ***fragility***. Often demonized, I believe, instead, that fragility is a major path to follow, because it represents an important aspect of the way of *minority* for us Franciscans, the way of humility, the way of weakness: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10). For this reason I have focused a lot of study on ‘fragile perseverance’. I did not want to present a problem, but in proposing the impossible path of being fragile and persevering, I wanted to mention that perseverance has always been fragile and always will be. This is because in that fragility is the opportunity to experience faith in God and to experience His mercy and power.

- THE SECOND PATH I would like to propose is ***perseverance***. It is an ingenious way of keeping our identity. Persevering not only preserves our covenant with God, with the brothers and with the Order, but it also preserves our very identity. For our reflection, let me propose a text which deals with these issues called *Resistere o andarsene* [Resist or Leave] by Carla Corbella. More importantly, there is a famous article by Klaus Demmer called: *The Irrevocable Decision: Thoughts on the Theology of Vocation*. It suggests perseverance as knowing how to preserve and defend being fully ourselves throughout history. This perspective is proposed as a way of holiness in the fullness of our originality.

- THE THIRD PATH is ***reconciliation***—reconciliation *ad intra and ad extra* [from within and without]. Reconciliation *ad extra* occurs with those who have departed. This is because I have seen that those who remain tend to forget about those who have departed, while those who have departed always provide us with an opportune way to verify the authenticity of our vocation. I strongly believe that being able to reconcile with those who have departed lets us grow stronger in our own vocation. Most of all, I believe that reconciliation *ad intra* is needed with some of those who have remained, with those whom we might define as the “non-persevering persevering”, in order to

understand these persons who perhaps have not had the courage to leave, who have “nested” in the friary (cf. the studies of G.M. Rulla, F. Imoda, and A. Cencini). Reconciliation must occur with them as well, because they have caused, or are causing, a lot of anger and tension within the community.

- THE FOURTH PATH comes from *the initial Yes* to one’s calling, that is, reflecting theologically on the importance of the memory of that Yes. Often this is stolen from our history by change for its own sake, by forgetting, by seeking the new and then forgetting what René Voillaume referred to as *The Second Calling*. This is a very challenging path that, in my opinion, we should follow.

- THE FIFTH PATH is the *preciousness of consecration*. The hidden theme here is excellence. Is this something we should put in the archives or is there still a chance to talk about excellence in the consecrated life? I propose we get on the path founded by Von Balthasar and widened by our Bishop Paolo Martinelli, to talk about “reciprocal excellence” in every state of life, as proposed in *Christifideles Laici*, no. 55: “In Church Communion, the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves.” Here is what I mean by reciprocal excellence: the laity offering excellence to the priesthood and the consecrated life; the consecrated life offering excellence to the laity and the priesthood and the priesthood offering excellence to the consecrated life and laity. This is a page of theology yet to be written.

- THE SIXTH PATH is given to us by a Claretian author, José Cristo Rey García Paredes. He has studied the current situation regarding liminality. The consecrated life today is in a state of liminality both inside and outside of the Church. Today, amid movements becoming fashionable, we seem to have been archived. In different ways, in the Church, we are told that we are no longer so effective. It is then that some might get mad or shut down or we might take on a role of paternity. I would like to propose traveling the path “*from liminality to paternity*”, just as the Benedictines did for us. When Francis of Assisi arose in the world, the Benedictines paved the way for us, they donated friaries to us and they blessed us. We were paternally revealed. Now it is up to us. Why not take the path of paternity and blessing while, at the same time, being attentive to the preservation of our identity?

- THE SEVENTH PATH is a careful study, carried out on several occasions by Bishop Paolo Martinelli, on the way of *authentic freedom*. Today, freedom is too often confused with liberalism. We should go back to that great concept of Christian freedom proposed by Benedict XVI. There is a freedom on which to stake it all, a freedom on the move, as Von Balthasar would say from his perspective of “dramatic theology”. Even we consecrated forget too soon and too often, that freedom, at some point, runs out—because at a certain point in life we grow old, we

get sick and...die. Today, however, we live in a concept of freedom that could be called “conservative”, i.e. a freedom in which I keep obsessively believing there will always be time for play. That day may never come. This applies to both one’s initial discernment and discerning the steps of a second calling, when we have to risk something to preserve the beauty and the meaning of our consecration.

- THE EIGHTH PATH is the way of love, *the truth of love*. I would like to quote the French philosopher A. Finkielkraut who had the courage, in a contemporary, French, secular, and hypermodern context, to write in 2011, *Love is forever—or not (Et si l’amour durait)*. In an interview he stated: “We have entered the era of temporariness: our commitments are no longer binding, durability has been replaced by intensity. The criterion has become intensity and not love, or at least what happens is that all that remains of love is loving intensity. But within us, darkly, we know that giving up on durability is equivalent to giving up on love. To say “I love you” is equivalent to saying “I will love you”; it is to speak about the present and the future at the same time, to take oneself outside the flow of time. Any declaration of love is a statement of eternity. We have almost, but not quite, forgotten that love is a persistent affair. Therefore, I am wary of a morality that would make love its only criterion, especially because today we do not seem to want to retain anything from love but intensity. But then I do not want blame my age too much, because lasting nostalgia and desire remain very strong and deep. It seems to me that we no longer have the courage to say, with fortitude and frankness, what Finkielkraut asserted so forcefully. Rather, we think of the path of consecrated life in terms of time, as Carla Corbella says. I think we should find the courage to say that love is either forever or not.

- THE NINTH PATH is the path of the *white martyrdom*. I propose re-reading the transition of martyrdom in the fourth century from red to white. Today, perseverance is in a fragile state; if you depart your consecrated fraternity, if you change your Order or state of life, nobody stops you, indeed, they throw you a party. Today, perseverance should be rethought of as white martyrdom, not as self-gratification, but as an intelligent appreciation of this hidden way, of these secret waters, like Hezekiah’s Tunnel under Jerusalem, which still gives substance to the Church.

-THE TENTH PATH comes from the very heart of perseverance: *hope*. I would take Benedict XVI’s *Spe Salvi* in hand again to see how perseverance in the consecrated life is a way of hope. I would like to conclude with a passage I really love from Timothy Radcliffe. He wrote it on the occasion of the International Congress of Consecrated Life: *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity*. It reads: “How

may we men and women religious be signs of hope in this fragile world? One way is by daring to embrace our uncertain future with joy. Our vows are a public commitment to remain open to the God of surprises who subverts all our plans for the future and asks us to do things that we never imagined”—for example, being in communion with all the different families on a day like the one we are celebrating now.

Friar Alceo Grazioli, TOR

Guide Sheet for Working in Groups

1. Objective

The main objective of our work in groups is to share some spontaneous thoughts about the two historical and theological essays.

2. Specific Areas

For orderly progress during the group work, it will be important to confine our discussions to the following areas:

- Predominant reactions to the presented historical data and reasons for those reactions
- Predominant reactions to the presented theological data and reasons for those reactions
- Any proposals that emerged from the presentations.

3. Moderator and Secretary

Each group shall have a moderator and a secretary. The latter shall adhere to the three designated areas when making his report in the assembly room.

4. Groups

The number of groups will be based on the number of participants. Every effort will be made to:

- give everyone an opportunity to make a contribution
- not have too many secretaries making final reports
- stay within the somewhat limited time frame we have available.

PART III
FOR THE VOCATION AND MISSION
OF FRANCISCAN FRIARS
IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE MODERN WORLD
An inhabited memory

“You have not only a glorious history
to remember and to recount,
but also *a great history still to be accomplished!*
Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you
in order to do even greater things”
(St. John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, 110).

The year 2017 will mark the 500th anniversary of the Bull *Ite vos*. This Bull produced the final, painful division of the Franciscan Order into its two main components, the Observance and the Conventuals. The same date also corresponds with the start of the Protestant Reformation, symbolically launched by Martin Luther when he nailed his proposed theses to the church door in Wittenberg.

How do we re-read these historical events, especially the first one, as Franciscans today? We have some indications of this from the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis for the Year of Consecrated Life (November 28, 2014):

“The first of these aims [of this year] is to *look to the past with gratitude*. All our Institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins, we see the hand of God who, in his Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church. This initial experience then matured and developed, engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts, and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiatives and expressions of apostolic charity. Like the seed which becomes a tree, each Institute grew and stretched out its branches. During this Year, it would be appropriate for each charismat-

ic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts, which embellish her and equip her for every good work (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 12). Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way, we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts” (I, 1).

We can interpret our past in the light of Israel whose faith was based in rereading its own path, and commemorating what was experienced when it had wisely discerned the presence of YHWH. When Moses asked God to show him his glory, God replied that he would allow only his back to be seen, once he had passed by (Ex. 33:23).

What memory of our own past, what future, mindful of the *kairos* [opportune time] of the present, can the Franciscan movement have?

We are invited to this commemoration, in particular, by the Franciscan communities of Assisi. It all started from Assisi, by its resident, Francis. Starting again from Assisi, and from Francis with his proposal of Gospel radicalism and “universal man”, how can we talk to the people of today?

Inhabiting the memory

Retracing our history, we cannot fail to see how it was affected by various forms of conflict, which stemmed from the discord between ideals and reality, between the memory of the father and the historical issues lived out by his sons. In this conflict, we cannot help but recognize that we were wrong, one way or another, that we sinned regarding mutual charity and gave into suspicion, prejudice, judgements, disputes, separations, uproar and scandal.

An ideality existed that constantly tried to reconnect with the figure of Brother Francis. It swung between the proposal of the *Rule* and the inspiration of the *Testament*. The *Later Rule* resulted from the evolution of the identity of the *fraternitas* into an *Ordo*. The *Testament* was the precious word he bequeathed to his friars, “because this is a remembrance, admonition, exhortation, and my testament, which I, little Brother Francis, make for you, my blessed brothers” (*Test.* 34: *FF* 127).

Maybe it all started from there. There is a “myth of origins”, as they say today, which, for better or worse, is a part of Franciscan history. Perhaps it started with Francis’ unequivocal mandate: “And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: ‘They should be understood in this way.’ But as the Lord has given me to speak and write the Rule and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity until the end” (*Test.* 38-39: *FF* 130).

As our history continues, how do we live the mandate of these words, words that ask questions requiring convincing answers, which put forward compelling proposals?

In this conflict, the cross and delight of Brother Francis’ legacy seems, to us, to be caught between the uniqueness of his personal experience (“The Lord gave me, Brother Francis”) and the lived-out complexity of the history.

We know that the question was posed from the beginning. Repeated requests were made to the Apostolic See in an attempt to find a compromise between the *Rule* and the *Testament*. The answers came from the atmosphere and culture of the times and from the *Rule*. From its proposed lifestyle (“The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel”), a strict code developed, broken down into a dry schematic of more or less serious obligations. The *Testament* remained the reference point of the memory. Despite having no legal status (cf. Bull *Quo elongati*, 1230), it still carried the force of declared norms to be observed.

Friar Bonaventure of Bagnoregio is someone who belongs to our history. He searched unremittingly for a solution that could give a sense of life-purpose to an Order that had expanded rapidly and abnormally. The Order was becoming ever more clericalized and engaging itself on the frontline of the pastoral ministry of its day. It was finding theological motivations to support its new way of mendicancy and it was promoting the figure of Saint Francis, the *Seraphic Father*, as the horizon on the way of holiness and as a mirror for his heirs.

Bonaventure’s proposal was challenging and concrete, in that he tried to offer a correct dosage between charisma and institution, creating a balance main-

tained through their constant push and pull, the vibrations of which have been felt throughout our history.

Finding a *way* between the demands made by history and the memory of Saint Francis—this is a job that belongs to us: to find the particular path first followed by the early *Communitas Ordinis*, and secondly by the group of *Zelatores Regulae*. We search for a way to recall that plurality of diversity, which was unable to maintain a harmonious unity, which trail blazed, often in conflict, even splitting off into autonomous directions, while remembering that we belong to one founding father.

It had been a turbulent history in which the unique style of interpreting poverty, based upon “living the Holy Gospel” – a style of charismatic faithfulness to their own identity - became a dramatic sticking point even with the See of Peter, challenging the ecclesiological setting itself (cf. John XXII - Michael of Cesena).

The *Chronicle of the 24 Generals* was written in the second half of the 1300s. It came out amid the aftermath of the devastating Black Death which had so deeply affected the quality of life in the religious Orders. Intending reconciliation, the *Chronicle* proposed recovering our shared memory of the history of the many holy brothers who followed in the footsteps of the seraphic Father and the many witnesses who, following the Lamb, had given their lives through the crown of martyrdom. It did not deny that there had been difficulties, but why could it not have focused more on what united us as opposed to what divided us? We can truly say, along with Qohelet, “Nothing [or little] is new under the sun,” (Ecc. 1:9) and “God makes his sun rise on the bad and the good!” (Mt. 5:48).

The sanctity of Bernardine of Siena belongs to the Church and to all of us. The same is true of the other three pillars of the Observance: John Capistrano, James of the Marches and Albert of Sarteano. They were able to respond to new demands emerging in a world that was not only calling for *reform*, but also for profound *renewal*, right down to the anthropological and evangelical roots. The novelty of their proposal was in knowing how to reunite the hermitage with the city, to inhabit quiet places, in keeping with the experience of Saint Anthony of Padua and the origins, in order to be able to speak effectively to the people in the town squares.

Their memory is a gift that reminds us that preaching and proclaiming the word of God was an integral part of the apostolic Minorite identity from the beginning. We are reminded of this in chapter 17 of the *Earlier Rule* and chapter 9 of the *Later Rule*. We brought our preaching back to the cities where it flourished vigorously, prompting internal conversion and leading people to follow in the footsteps of Christ and Francis. This “return to the city” even included economic dynam-

ics—like fostering the creation of the *Mounds of Piety* [pawnshops] to give dignity back to the laboring multitudes. Is the cry of the poor rising from the periphery of our history any different today, in a situation where Mammon and finances seem to have the legal upper hand to perpetuate policies that do violence to Mother Earth?

The holiness of Bernardine, however, was unable to prevent the paths from branching out. As the early Minorite movement found favor in the cities, instituting the roots of Franciscan enlightenment, so the renewed Observant proposal looked for and found even stronger urban favor and support from European monarchies, Italian lordships and local powers than in the previous *respublica christiana*.

This was the winning route that led to the Bull *Ite vos* of May 29, 1517. It was the culmination of a troubled history whose context has already been extensively studied. It was the point of no return for finding any further compromises to attain a unity which was, by then, impossible.

It was the emergence of an “other” Franciscanism, as opposed to the medieval *Communitas*, which stood in need of a reform that was yet to come.

The Observance had a way of compelling unity within the symphony of reformist paths arising at that time with different emphasis and in various geographical locations of *christianitas*. It was a kind of Franciscanism that proposed the ideal of highest poverty as its charismatic identity, but it ran the risk of not adequately living out the *minoritas* that was dreamt of by St. Francis.

We have interpreted the reform over the course of history as a “game” of contradictions and conflicting separations. This also includes reforms like the “beautiful and holy Capuchin reform”, which came after the Observance was legally recognized. Evidently, having the “legality” of the primacy and the right to the seal of the Order were not enough to curb the search for Franciscan utopia.

Was Francis’ ideal a dream or a utopia? That push to start over is a remembrance that belongs to us. It was possible the dream was a *eu-topos*, an approach of self-giving in our history, and not an *ouk-topos*, an impossible pipe dream. Pope Francis writes about it in his aforementioned Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life:

“So I trust that, rather than living in some utopia, you will find ways to create ‘alternate spaces’, where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive. Monasteries, communities, centers of spirituality, schools, hospitals, family shelters – all these are places which the charity and creativity born of your charisms have brought into being, and with constant creativity must continue to bring into be-

ing. They should increasingly be the leaven for a society inspired by the Gospel, a ‘city on a hill’, which testifies to the truth and the power of Jesus’ words” (II, 2).

Why not consider the plurality of “ways” traveled in our Franciscan history as a wealth of diversity? Why not get beyond the Franciscan ideology of who was, or who is, more faithful to Francis’ proposal and instead, harvest the symphony of ideals that have cropped up to enliven the Christian proposal of recovering the original sources?

“Ecclesia semper reformanda” [the Church is always to be reformed]; “Ordo semper reformandus” [the Order is always to be reformed]. Therefore, the symphony of diversity is to be understood through diverse viewpoints, to be interpreted according to conflicting historical accounts, while accepting the appeal made by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (229-230).

If we have been divided by the issue of poverty, why not retrieve minority as the unifying sign in the common heritage to be revived today? “They [all the brothers] must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside” (*Earlier Rule IX, 2: FF 30*).

The historical period following the Tridentine reform belongs to us as well. Historiography seems to interpret it as a period of progressive stagnation caused by reassured and reassuring systems that may have produced excess stabilization.

On one hand, the more scholarly Minorite historiography records the sharpening of ideological conflicts in the Franciscan Family over claims of legitimate ancestry to a founder whose historical roots were becoming ever more distant. On the other hand, it was a period of history that, for us, was the flowering of holiness of many friars, especially between the 1600s and 1700s. These include St. Francis Solano (†1610) St. Lawrence of Brindisi (†1619), St. Joseph of Cupertino (†1663), St. Charles of Sezze (†1670), St. Ignatius of Laconi (†1701), St. Francis Anthony Fasani (†1742) and St. Leonard of Port Maurice (†1751), just to name a few from the vast field of witnesses of the Gospel. If holiness is an indicator of passion, we note that, even in a history that seemed to be reduced to fixed and opposing mindsets, we were not deprived of the gift of impassioned brothers.

There is the remembrance of the lived-out passion that overcame the storm of the French Revolution with its profound changes in the social, cultural and ecclesial fabric. It was a period of radical upheaval, but also one of benefits, which enabled the rediscovery of our roots during the purification wrought by the reconstruction of the nineteenth century, thanks to the intuition and the strength of the

ideals of men like Bernardino da Portogruaro (1822-1895), Bonaventura Soldatić (1827-1895) and Bernardo Christen da Andermatt (1837-1909).

The story of our missionary commitment belongs to us. This commitment has energized the development of the various Franciscan Orders. It is something that the entire Franciscan family has experienced on a global level in its history. Francis, Clare, and Anthony intensely desired it in their lives. They would go on to become “different” missionaries within the settings to which God’s plan had called them. It was a story that, from the beginning, led the friars to distant lands to proclaim the good news of the Gospel, often giving their lives. It was a story that could incorporate the richness of local cultures, weaving them into the newness of the Gospel. Today in particular, it is a story that spurs us on, especially in traditionally Christian countries where the question of God seems to have been snuffed out or suffocated amid a galaxy of other proposals that are distant from the roots of Christianity. What legacy does St. Francis leave us in memory of his passionate testimony of the Gospel?

Fratres, dum tempus habemus, operemus bonum
[Friars, while we have time, let us do good]

We are aware that we have used the expression “belongs to us”, without assuming to have the exclusive right. Rather, as is says in scripture, “To the Lord our God belongs justice; to us shamefacedness” (Bar. 1:15). We cannot claim anything; as the Seraphic Father exhorts us, we hold nothing for ourselves, but we return everything to God, the giver of all good. That which is beautiful and good was, and very much is, from God: “Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him, ‘from Whom all good comes, for everything’” *Earlier Rule XVII, 17: FF 49*).

The remembrance of the journey that we have presented is just a whisper compared to our much more complex and rich history: It is a memory inhabited by sin but also by characters, testimonials of a passion for Jesus Christ and for the Kingdom of God, already but not yet totally present in our midst, through Brother Francis.

The chronological date of 2017, five hundred years after *Ite vos*, is a *kairos* to overcome the fragmentation of identity in which we all find ourselves. It is no longer time for “Franciscan ideologies”, but a time to awaken passions, so that in memory of St. Francis, Jesus might be loved even more passionately. We should not say, “The days are evil” (Eph. 5:16): this is the time that is given us to make a mark in our history. In this passing *chronos* [time] we are given a chance to seize the *kairos*.

The experience of the disciples at Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35) is not foreign to us, or rather, as believers, it belongs to us. The disciples were returning with sad hearts to a place of bitter disappointment until they were met and accompanied by the Pilgrim Jesus who left them only with his signs of the word and the bread. Meager signs, but able to warm their hearts and return them, filled with joy, to Jerusalem.

Brother Francis wanted to go to the “Lord Pope Innocent” to receive the seal of the Mother Church of Rome. In our projected itinerary for 2017, we plan to return that year to the “Lord Pope Francis” to be sent forth again, reconfirmed that the dream of the man from Assisi, Francesco di Bernardone, friar, and Saint Francis, is again a dream that generates human kindness and says that being disciples in love with Jesus is something beautiful and worth living one’s life for.

The Seraphic Father leaves us in the freedom of God’s children, “Lying like this on the ground stripped of his sackcloth garment, he lifted up his face to heaven in his accustomed way, and wholly intent upon that glory, he covered with his left hand the wound in his right side, so that no one would see it. And he said to his brothers: “I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you yours” (*Leg. Maj.* 14, 3: *FF* 1239).

“Therefore, all my brothers, let us be very much on our guard that, under the guise of some reward or assistance, we do not lose or take our mind away from God. But, in the holy love which is God, I beg all my brothers, both the ministers and the others, after overcoming every impediment and putting aside every care and anxiety, to serve, love, honor and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind in whatever way they are best able to do so, for that is what He wants above all else” (*Earlier Rule XXII*, 25-26: *FF* 60).

Friar Luciano Bertazzo, OFM Conv.

PART IV

GUIDELINES FOR A COMMON PATH

THE THREE STAGES OF THE “MEMORY”

Introduction

1. In the Prayer before the Crucifix (cf. *PCr: FF 276*), attributed to St. Francis, the Poverello turns to the Crucifix, recognizing in “the cursed man who hangs from a tree” (Dt. 21:23; Gal. 3:13) the Savior of the world. He opens his heart to Him, his heart which feels immersed in darkness. The “*enlightenment*” or rather, the mystical experience described by Francis, is reminiscent of the disciples at Emmaus (cf. Lk. 24:13-35), who are going away from Jerusalem with heavy and sorrowful hearts. It also follows that the requests made by the son of Bernardone seem to be an updating of the account in Luke. Francesco Bernardone asks for the gift of solid *faith*. This is an indispensable condition for recognizing the Risen One who walks with us and helps us to interpret and comprehend the events of our history, even the more obscure and difficult aspects of it, such as salvation history. He also asks for the gift of *hope* and *love*, which strengthen faith and make it fruitful.

2. In the same prayer, the discernment that the Seraphic Father is earnestly pleading for is to accept what the apostle Paul refers to as the wisdom of the cross (1Cor. 1:18) as the fundamental criterion for his existence. Based on Francis’ word, which is actually the teaching of the Gospel, we can conclude that, notwithstanding the specificities of any one group, the historical journey of the Friars Minor overall consists in the constant search to consciously *accept the logic of the cross* as a reference point for action and thinking, as witnessed for us by the Franciscan saints.

3. Biographers repeatedly report a characteristic element in the early Franciscan fraternity: the experience of “*telling each other about the things of God*” as a means of learning from each other. Celano presented this commitment as a prototype for what we now call community discernment, showing us how fraternity can create an environment where the presence of God may be revealed in everyday storylines, storylines which become, for individuals and for the whole community, a history of salvation. Celano says:

As they were going, they discussed among themselves the many gifts of different kinds the merciful God granted them. They had been graciously received by Christ’s vicar, the lord and father of the whole Christian nation. How could they carry out his advice

and commands? How could they sincerely keep the rule they had accepted and steadfastly safeguard it? How could they walk before the Most High in all holiness and religion? Finally, how could their life and conduct, by growth in the holy virtues, be an example to their neighbors? (*1 Cel. 34: FF 377*).

It is interesting to see how, even in this text, there is a persistent reference to what the biographer perceived and presented as the friars being of one heart and one soul. This element of the journey has strong symbolic meaning and evokes the Franciscan fraternity's experience of constant and common growth (cf. Acts 4:32). It is evident that the early Franciscan fraternity adopted this way of *being* as the foundation and basis of its *activity*.

4. The itinerary we are presenting tries to point out common elements. It leaves plenty of room to adapt the content, methodology and means of expression based on what the local fraternities propose to do together. *Our common goal is to prepare for realizing reconciliation between ourselves and to give witness to our fraternal love on July 11, 2017, 500 years after the publication of the Papal Brief Romanum Pontificem (July 11, 1517).*

5. It seems a common modality for us would be to use the experience of “*telling each other about the things of God*” as a means of mutual edification. Therefore, it would be important for Franciscan communities who live and work in the same pastoral setting to come together three times during the year.

6. Among the many possible penitential paths for raising awareness, for asking for forgiveness and for accepting the joyful mercy that can be translated into gestures of mutual benevolence, the fruit of a renewed Pentecost, we are pleased to present a three-stage path, which we shall call “*the three stages of the memory*”.

7. The thematic guidelines we present throughout the three stages start with the material mentioned above and follow the indications offered by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life (November 28, 2014):

- a) Looking to the past with gratitude
- b) Seeing error as an occasion for mercy
- c) Having personal encounters in the light of faith.

8. Also these worksheets obviously only offer guidelines for a common path and should therefore be filled out *taking different situations into account*. Let us once again, dear brothers, welcome the visit of the Risen Lord and his salvation.

Friar Alfredo M. Avallone, OFM Conv.
on behalf of the *Franciscan Friars in Assisi Coordination Group*

STAGE I

LOOKING TO THE PAST WITH GRATITUDE

1. Cleopas, one of the two disciples of Emmaus, responded to the Stranger in a joking manner tinged with lamentation and irony, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” (Lk. 24:18). The Stranger seemed to even notice that pain, that irony, and asked in a tone that loosened their lips and brought out their hidden pain: “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see” (Lk. 24:19-24). The words rushed from the mouth of Cleopas like a flooding river. His companion (Who was he? Me? You?) remained silent, totally involved, as if the other had been able to fully express the tumult of his heart. The Stranger had a unique reaction. He bluntly rebuked them: “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Lk. 24:25-26). Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them what referred to him in all the scriptures. Being pious sons of Israel, these two were accustomed to recalling the extraordinary love story between the one God and His chosen people. They were always reliving it, intensely participating in it at every stage. However, never before had their hearts become so impassioned while listening to someone speaking. Between their amazement and fear arose a question: Why had the words of the Stranger so captivated their souls? Did his voice not have something in common with the voice of the Prophet of Galilee in whom they believed? Was it possible that it might be him? Yet, he had unquestionably died. Whoever this man was, it was good to hear him and his words were heartwarming. It was as though he was illuminating the darkness, as though night was giving way to the light of dawn.

2. “The first of these aims is to look to the past with gratitude. All our Institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins we see the hand of God who,

in his Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church. This initial experience then matured and developed, engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts, and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiatives and expressions of apostolic charity. Like the seed which becomes a tree, each Institute grew and stretched out its branches. During this Year, it would be appropriate for each charismatic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12). Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts” (Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life*, November 28, 2014, I, 1).

Application

3. “Making remembrance” for us is not only remembering, but also *looking for the meaning of the events* which give rise to choices made in the Spirit, worthy choices that can evolve our history in an evangelical direction, especially regarding the multiplicity of cultures and societies which the charism of Francis must confront and take root in.

4. “Making remembrance” for us is *celebrating the Spirit of the Lord and His holy works*. It is renewing our lives as Franciscans according to the charism and inspirations of our beginnings. For this, the Church has given us some parameters: we must return to the Sources and pay prudent and careful attention to the signs of the times.

5. “Making remembrance” for us is accepting our Seraphic Father Saint Francis *as the yardstick of Franciscan holiness*. In his *Testament*, with its sentiments of praise, thanksgiving and adoration toward the Triune God, Francis “made re-

membrance” out of his search for meaning in life, out of his conversion to Christ and the Gospel, out of the beginnings of the “fraternitas” of the Penitents of Assisi. He wanted them to be identified as “friars minor”, among themselves and in their dealings with all creatures. He wanted all creatures to be recognized as brothers and sisters and to be understood and welcomed as gifts from the Father.

STAGE II

SEEING ERROR AS AN OCCASION FOR MERCY

1. On that day, a day not specified by the chronicles, two disciples of the Nazarene were on their way to Emmaus, a village about eleven kilometers from Jerusalem. They were conversing about all the things that had occurred and while they were conversing and debating, the Stranger drew near and began to walk beside them. However, their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He was the one to break the ice. “What are you discussing as you walk along?” he asked. They stopped, their faces betraying the deep sadness of their hearts. They had loved and believed in him. They had bet their lives on the decision to follow him. And now it was all over, in what was certainly the most painful and scandalous way. The Rabbi who had charmed them, their Teacher, was dead, hanging from the post of shame. The facts seemed to contradict who he was. His cry from the Cross had pierced the deafening silence of the Father whom he had mentioned so often: “Eli, Eli, Lama sabachthani?”; “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Love could not pardon death: this was why the hearts of the disciples were sad, because death seemed to have swallowed their Lord, and with him, all their hope forever.

2. The Risen Jesus was not ashamed to take the road to Emmaus, a road the disciples had chosen as the main route of their new lives, even though their perspective was off course. In fact, it was precisely the presence of the Lord that made that road a path of salvation for the two disciples. Therefore there is no road, however off course it may be, that remains alien to the mercy and goodness of God. Thus, like the two disciples, we are able to stop and to tell the Lord our sorrows, giving him the opportunity to be our traveling companion and to warm our hearts. The ability to accept and integrate one’s own limits and sins, in a perspective of faith and openness to the action of grace, is a primary and fundamental objective of the journey of each friar throughout his life.

3. Francis of Assisi himself traveled in faith along a road that he did not humanly will, as he says in his *Testament*: “It seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them” (*Test.* 1-2: *FF* 110). Thus, the biographers also show us various experiences where what seemed to be an obstacle for Francis actually proved to be God’s intervention for the benefit of his salvation. The same can be seen in the reflection of the early friars about willful sin: “Let all the brothers, both the ministers and servants as well as the others, be careful not to be disturbed or angered at another’s sin or evil because the devil wishes to destroy many because of another’s fault. But let them spiritually help the one who has sinned as best they can, because those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Likewise, let all the brothers not have power or control in this instance, especially among themselves; for, as the Lord says in the Gospel: ‘The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and the great ones make their authority over them felt.’ It shall not be so among the brothers. Let whoever wishes to be the greater among them be their minister and servant. Let whoever is the greater among them become the least. Let no brother do or say anything evil to another; on the contrary, through the charity of the Spirit, let them serve and obey one another voluntarily. This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Earlier Rule* V, 7-15: *FF* 18-20).

Application

4. There are *two serious risks* that are deeply connected with each other even though they appear diametrically opposed. They derive from the incorrect assessment of sin and its consequences: the underestimation of sin and the weakening of the redemption.

5. The first risk is setting out on a path of underestimating – in practice, certainly not intent – the devastating effect that sin has on human life. In other words, this risk can be represented as an apparent *excess of optimism regarding human potential*, since it holds up a model of perfection for the friar that does not sufficiently take into account the negative influences of sin on human life. Such influences, while not determinative, are a real limitation to the integrity of the person and his will to do good. Indeed, everyone experiences the fact that the reality of sin exists and that this reality has a tremendous effect on the life of man seeking God. Thus the initial, unrealistic proposal of achieving such lofty objectives is terribly frustrated when it clashes with the harsh reality of daily life. There, an attempt is made to compromise such objectives with results that do not meet expectations.

6. The second risk, which is deeply tied to the first, is *ignoring* – again, in practice, not in theory – *the effects of the redemption wrought by Christ*. His saving sacrifice is what bridged the humanly unbridgeable, namely the abyss created by the disobedience (cf. Gen. 3) that tragically separated man from God. The two risks are connected in that, if we do not have a proper awareness of the devastating effects of sin, we inevitably end up ignoring the admirable effects of redemption. Simply put, our human journey remains confined to what is earth-bound. We cannot make that necessary leap skyward as the momentous event of the Resurrection calls us to do. Man’s vocation coincides with his redemption and, as such, is placed in the resurrectional context of the salvation brought by Christ. This is why St. Francis and his early companions used to repeat the prayer: “We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches throughout the whole world and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world” (*Test. 5: FF 111*).

STAGE III

HAVING PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE LIGHT OF FAITH

1. As they approached Emmaus, the village to which the two disciples were going, Jesus gave the impression that he was going on farther. To lose him just then seemed unacceptable to them. This was why they insisted: “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” (Lk. 24:29). By a curious paradox those words, while suggesting exterior nightfall and the setting sun on the Judean heights, evoked the interior darkness that had come upon them: the absence of a future following the dying gasp of the Prophet abandoned on the cross. Perhaps, that was why He yielded submissively to their request, almost out of compassionate tenderness, and went in to stay with them. The inn was simple, one of many willing to accommodate travelers on Israel’s dusty roads, refreshing them with food and rest at the end of the day. Once at table, the Stranger took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. It was the gesture of a head of household during the Passover meal. It was the gesture that he had made to them on the evening of the last supper. And now it was being performed by one they thought was just a stranger. Then, their eyes were opened and they recognized him: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures

to us?” (Lk. 24:32). But he vanished from their sight. Didn’t he tell the woman who went to the tomb on the morning following the Sabbath: “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father (Jn. 20:17)? Didn’t he promise his disciples that he would precede them to Galilee? When Elijah was on the mount, didn’t the Lord briefly pass by as a “light, silent sound”? They were stunned with emotion. They began retelling each other what they had experienced with him along the way: the story and the questions overlapped. How could they not understand? Those words, that voice, his light upon the Scriptures...why didn’t they recognize him at once? Sometimes sadness comes off as bad joke and often produces mutual fear and distrust. But here the light was so great, that even though it was night and travel after dark was inadvisable, they decided to return without delay to Jerusalem. From that time on, their lives would be changed forever—and along with their lives, the life of the world. This encounter at Emmaus is not reported in the chronicles, but in the testimony of faith of the Evangelist Luke at the end of his Gospel. He tells us about it with such singular freshness that the heart of a believer can imagine itself being there, identifying itself with the nameless companion of Cleopas, perceiving that sunset, experienced on a single day two thousand years ago at an inn in the Judean hills, as the dawn of the new beginning for everything and everyone.

2. The experience of the disciples at Emmaus could easily be put under the heading of an encounter: an encounter that changed as the awareness of the disciples transformed, gradually being enlightened by faith. Indeed, at the beginning, they were convinced they were talking to an anonymous wanderer. Only after they allowed Jesus to warm their hearts and revive their faith, did they recognize him as the Lord of life (cf. Lk. 24:34).

3. Habitual reading about Christ and familiarizing oneself with Him is nourished by a deeper examination of Scripture, just as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus. In this regard, there is again the exemplary life of our father St. Francis. When his early companion, Bernard of Quintavalle, expressed his desire to follow the Lord in the way Francis had set forth, Brother Francis replied: “If you want to prove your words with deeds, let us go into the church tomorrow at dawn, take up the Gospel Book and seek the council of Christ” (2 *Cel* 15: *FF* 601). Francis, therefore, did not look for answers in human wisdom and subtle reasoning. He confidently relied on the word of life contained in the Holy Gospel, the word of life mediated by the Church, in the person of the poor priest who read the Holy Scriptures to him.

Application

4. The encounter with Christ is the fundamental experience for every Christian, mediated by faith which is an indispensable ingredient. We cannot take this encounter for granted just because we happen to be friars! Our option for Christ must be based on *the concrete experience of meeting with him*, and from there it is nourished and sustained. Such a fundamental meeting cannot be substituted in any way: each of us is called to meet the Lord in the streets of his own life, to recognize the wanderer and let him become our travel companion. Only after an authentic encounter with Christ Jesus can our mission become credible and authentic, since we cannot proclaim what we ourselves have not accepted and received.

5. The meeting of the disciples with the Risen Christ at Emmaus has a markedly human, everyday character. For St. Francis, the core definition of being a follower is “to be engaged in the things of God.” Being a follower paints a certain picture of persistence and continuity on the road. However, it also reveals a profound sense of the everyday, an ordinariness which applies (or should apply) to this role. There is a kind of “*mystique of the everyday*” that it is essential to learn and practice for the growth and consolidation of our vocation.

6. The path of the Friar Minor, then, is founded on and sustained by this fundamental encounter with Christ. We recognize and welcome him as the Lord of our life through faith in the ‘today’ of our history. It is a history comprised of everyday life in which God is always present. There is a risk we must defend against with all our strength, immersed as we are in the human logic of activism: that is, sacrificing what is important for what is urgent. In our society, which is paradoxically both overactive and lacking in profound content, there is a tendency to emphasize what is urgent at the expense of what is important. We are called to pinpoint the things that are really important and foundational to everything else and to capitalize on them, putting them at the center of our actions. It’s not the *how much* that matters; it’s the *how* and the *why*.

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