

2. Have we taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the post-conciliar liturgical reforms by concentrating on contemplative elements to be found in the celebration of the Eucharist and the divine office?
3. Does regular prayer of the affective kind occupy a place of honor in our daily spiritual program, or is it just an empty gesture? Are we making real efforts to introduce our candidates to this characteristic form of Franciscan prayer, and help others to be faithful to its daily practice?
4. How is silence in our surroundings and our speech observed in our friaries?
5. Are there efforts on the provincial level to establish houses of retreat, so often encouraged by the superiors of the order? Are friars with clear signs of a special call assured the freedom to live the contemplative life, even for an indefinite period of time?
6. Finally, what steps have been taken, on the regional or local level, to promote the apostolate of prayer among our Christian people?⁷¹

I will conclude with a quotation from the important and significant message addressed by Pope Paul VI to the special general chapter of 1974: "The contemplative spirit that shone forth in the life of St. Francis and his first followers is a precious treasure which his children must now promote and incorporate into their way of life. For the general renewal of your esteemed order must flow from a living and life-giving source, that is prayer, which is practiced in many ways. This is absolutely necessary for recovering the contemplative aspect of your lives and at the same time enabling your apostolate to exert a greater power and wider effectiveness."⁷²

⁷¹Cf. *Suggestiones et vota II Sessionis Consilii Plenarii Ordinis de Oratione* no. 20 in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 89 (1973) 124. "*Spiritus orationis et promotio orationis, praesertim interioris, in populo Dei, inde ab initio fuit charisma peculiare nostrae fraternitatis Capuccinae. Hoc historia teste, germen fuit semper genuinae renovationis.*"

⁷²*Litterae Pauli VI occasione Capituli generalis*, in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 90 (1974) 276-279, 277.

Bernardine of Asti: Principal Promoter of the Capuchin Reform

Constantius Cargnoni, O.F.M. Cap.

Bernardine of Asti (1485?-1557) played the principal role in explaining, defining and consolidating the structure and goals of the Capuchin way of life.¹ Gently but firmly he was able to reconcile the tensions and ease the growing pains of the first days of the reform. He harmonized different and even conflicting spiritual trends among the friars, bringing them into a synthesis evidently inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Matthew of Bascio was the spark, the reluctant prophet, who like the seed that must die, harbored within himself the vigor of the plant that was to be. Louis Tenaglia of Fossombrone fanned that spark to a leaping flame, and nourished it. Bernardine of Asti made the fire "beautiful, jovial, full of power and strength," (*Cantico di Frate Sole*) a mighty conflagration which was to "inflamm the brethren with the love of God."²

The first chroniclers of the order picture him as "the most prudent father of the congregation," "very humble by nature," "truly a mirror of meekness," "kind, friendly, full of love for all." When it came to fighting for the Capuchin reform, however, he became a "raging lion."³

¹In addition to the bibliography in *Lexicon Capuccinum*, 200 ff, see: Mariano d'Alatri, *Bernardino de Asti, padre della riforma Cappuccina*, in *Italia Francescana*, 32 (1957) 371-379; and in *Diz. degli Ist. di Perf.*, I, Rome 1974, 1390 ff; L. Penini, *Bernardino d'Asti*, in *Diz. Biogr. degli Italiani*, IX, Rome 1967, 197 ff.

²Cf. Matthias Bellintani of Salo, *Historia Capuccina*, in *Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VI, 25.

³*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, I, 16, 424; VI, 2; II, 182.

In any research into the charism of our reform to "clearly define and explain the characteristics of our Capuchin life," "focusing our attention on a study of our roots and examining its real nature, its objectives and the realization of its role in the Church," as Pope Paul VI said,⁴ we must try to recapture and immerse ourselves in the gentleness, humility, kindness and courage of Bernardine of Asti.

Without any pretense at writing a formal biography, I would like to discover the secret and the heart of the power which emanated from this great promoter of our reform.

Even before he joined the Capuchins he was recognized, with Stephen Molina and Francis Pipanti, as a promoter of reform within the Observant family. He obtained a bull from Clement VII (*In Suprema*) in 1532, which allowed the foundation of certain "houses of recollection" for friars eager to observe the Rule. He felt he was better able to realize his desire for renewal by transferring to the Capuchins in 1534.⁵

The Capuchins celebrated their first chapter in Rome at the convent of Santa Euphemia in November 1535. The following September 82 capitulars, representing eleven provinces, elected Bernardine as minister and vicar general, much to the displeasure of Louis of Tenaglia who considered him "too cold," a man more suited for contemplation than for action, "a bookworm rather than an administrator."⁶ Louis' judgment was false and prejudiced. While it was true that the new vicar general was "brilliant and deeply versed in theology" and that he could explain "the subtle distinction of Duns Scotus in a way that an old peasant woman could understand," he also had wide experience in government acquired during his life as an Observant. He was likewise outstanding for his living of the Franciscan way of life.

Bernardine deserves most of the credit for drawing up the

⁴Cf. Message of Pope Paul VI to the general chapter of 1974 and his speech to the extraordinary general (Sept. 30, 1974) in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 90 (1974) 279, 289.

⁵Melchior of Pobladora, *Historia generalis O.F.M. Cap.*, I, Rome, 1947, 36 ff.

⁶*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VII, 205, 207, 221 ff.

Constitutions of 1536, an authentic manual of Capuchin life as well as a sublime spiritual commentary on the Franciscan Rule. In its text the lawgivers were able to reconcile the best of the charismatic freedom found in the statutes of Albacina with the rich doctrinal and spiritual insights of the second generation of friars. They succeeded in harmonizing the early eremitic-contemplative elements with the apostolic ministry and "devout and holy studies, full of charity and humility." This has ever since been the policy of the Capuchin reform and constitutes, we might say, its "*forma religiosa*."⁷

His nine years in office (1535-1538 and 1546-1552) give us a look into the heart and soul of early Capuchin history and trace the path for realizing the Capuchin charism. Matthias da Salo in describing the work of this "first general," "elected to solidify and build up the reform" applies to him Ezechiel's vision of the dry bones. "Viewing the reform as a resurrection of scattered and unclean bones, he strove to imprint on them his own beautiful image by his wise words and holy life."⁸

The early chronicles of the Order give us a clear picture of his life style, so redolent of the authentic Franciscan spirit. "Asti was a devout and spiritual man who prayed frequently." "He prayed at great length." "He approached prayer with love."⁹ After a long and fatiguing journey the first thing he would do on arriving at a friary would be to "go to the church and spend considerable time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament."¹⁰

This gracious custom of greeting the real head of the household still prevails among us. I learned it from my novice master. Although the statutes of Albacina, reflecting the mind of St. Francis, prescribed one Mass which the whole communi-

⁷*Const.*, 1536, no. 122. Cf. E. d'Alençon, *Primigeniae legislationis O.F.M. Cap. textus originales seu Constitutiones anno 1536 ordinatae et anno 1552 recognitae*, Rome 1928, 76; *Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VI, 22.

⁸*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VI, 279, 17, 22, 35.

⁹*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VI, 116, 23; VII, 226.

¹⁰*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VI, 23.

ty was to attend, Bernardine was accustomed, out of devotion, to celebrate a private Mass every morning. His Mass became legendary among the friars for "its lengthy preparation and thanksgiving, lasting several hours."¹¹ When duty permitted, he would spend sixteen hours a day in prayer. As minister general he prayed at least six hours daily. He exhorted his friars "to spend as much time as possible in prayer."¹²

Prayer permeated his conversation. His admonitions and sayings were accepted without question by the friars. His word was the "*ipse dixit*" of the reform. To resolve any question it was enough to say: "Father Asti said thus and so."¹³

The brethren kept the words of Bernardine in their hearts as earlier friars had collected the writings of St. Francis and the sayings of Brother Giles. Quotations handed down to us by the chroniclers as those of "the four evangelists of the reform" are often a commentary on the words of St. Francis, which Bernardine had pondered in his heart for a long time and carried into practice. He calls prayer "the foundation of the religious life," "a secure vessel in a stormy sea," "the very purpose of the Franciscan Rule," "a pledge of final perseverance," and "an appeal to the divine majesty to pour out His favors."¹⁴

"If you should ask me why St. Francis gave us the Rule, my answer would be that he had no other end in mind than to free his friars from all impediments so as to lead them to holy prayer. The precepts of the rule remove all that could stand in the way of prayer, and provide us with the means of attaining the love of God which is the fulfillment of the entire law. If you should ask me which exercise our Father Francis wished us to practice in his order, I would point to what he says in the Rule: *Pray to God always with a pure heart.*"¹⁵

While in favor of introducing courses of study to prepare future preachers and missionaries, he issued a stern warning

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, 26.

¹³*Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, III, 187.

against "dangerous knowledge." The friars who abandon holy prayer for the sake of acquiring knowledge will end up in darkness. "Studies are good in themselves, but if the friars abandon prayer for the sake of learning they will become blind. All the more so if they neglect prayer for vain novelties; they will lose the grace of God."¹⁶

He drew up some wise rules for the spiritual life to introduce the friars to the way of God and to the practice of mysticism and contemplation. "Anyone who wishes to persevere in the service of God and in the Order must keep his conscience pure and his will free from all earthly attachments because our Lord speaks to a pure mind. The love God has for our souls is so tender that it will not tolerate any competition. The slightest distraction is enough to impede and diminish that perfect love He grants to our souls. Our holy Rule has no other object than to purge and prepare clean vessels for the Holy Spirit. Once we are instruments of the Spirit we fulfill a very special role in the Church as a particular family of Christ which He received from the Eternal Father for His people in these latter days. It was revealed to our father St. Francis that his friars minor were called to preserve the apostolic life in the world."¹⁷

Some of his sayings were quoted as proverbs. "Without prayer it is as impossible to persevere in the religious life as for a corpse to remain in the sea."

"If you want to be good, your prayer must be good; if you want to be better, your prayer must be better; if you want to be perfect, your prayer must be perfect."

"The more a friar humbles himself, the more God reaches down to him; the more a friar is puffed up, the more God remains aloof."

"Useless occupations are shares of the devil."

"Austerity makes good novices."

"A worldly friar is an enemy of St. Francis."

"The friar who devotes his time to contemplation and work sprouts two wings, the one of the contemplative life, the other of the active life, and they will bear him up to heaven."

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 189, note.

"A little disordered affection planted in your heart by the devil will easily grow into a mountain."

"There is no moment so brief that a servant of God cannot make use of it to love God. By such an act he can merit great glory in heaven which is worth more than a hundred thousand universes."¹⁸

Bernardine emerges as a consummate master of the spiritual life with an astonishing gift of recollection. His confessors stated that he never had to accuse himself of distractions. He constantly inculcated the practice of prayer, in poverty and humility, as the best way to arrive at perfect charity. "Prayer, poverty, fatigue, discomfort, contempt, commands, reproofs, punishments, exhortations, consolations all meant charity for him." This was the secret of the true friar minor.¹⁹

Bernardine gives us a compendium of his spiritual doctrine in a letter to the friars of the Province of Sant'Angelo in Sicily. In describing the qualities of a true Capuchin, he unwittingly sketches a picture of himself. "A Capuchin is continually devoted to prayer and zealous for holy poverty. He is charitable toward his spiritual brothers and all others. In this is found true charity."²⁰

For him external conduct was a manifestation of inward purity. He often exhorted the friars "to guard against allowing their eyes and hearts to wander; to avoid little faults so as not to fall into greater ones; to keep their hearts pure so that they might be an agreeable dwelling place for God." He wished the friars to be clothed in poor garments, because "relaxation in religious always begins with their attire."

He held to a strict and rigorous interpretation of the Rule in this matter, writing in a letter that is still preserved: "It is not permitted for true friars to wear three articles of clothing."²¹

¹⁸*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VI, 21, 25 f; VII, 226, 235.

¹⁹*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VII, 224, 243.

²⁰Cf. Circular letters of the superiors general O.F.M. Cap. (1548-1803) published by Melchior of Pobladora in *Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VIII, Rome 1960, 5.

In the same letter he speaks of clothing in a spiritual context: "Just as expensive clothing dresses up the body and makes it look more beautiful than it really is, so holy virtues are precious garments and ornaments of the soul and make it really more beautiful. They raise it to such a dignity that the soul which was an adulteress and a slave of the devil becomes the spouse of Jesus Christ, the King of all creation. She becomes the queen of His heavenly kingdom."²²

While the true Capuchin, faithful to the rule, may not wear three articles of clothing, he is nevertheless bound to wear three precious garments: "humble prayer, the highest poverty and loving charity."

"I exhort and plead with each one of you as well as I know how, to be very devoted to holy prayer. Beg the Lord to grant and preserve within you the holy virtues, especially charity and poverty. Together with prayer they are the indispensable and precious ornaments of the true friar minor. Without them no Capuchin can be pleasing to God or hope to be admitted to the eternal nuptials of the Divine Spouse."²³

Regretfully this eminent master of the Franciscan-Capuchin way of life, like the other early friars, did not leave us a spiritual diary or other writings, other than the few we have quoted. Matthias Bellintani notes that "he wrote some 'devout prayers' for the edification of the friars which contained some exercises which he himself used for mental prayer. These have been printed."²⁴ Paul Vitelleschi writes the same and promises to reproduce some of the prayers as an appendix to his book "since they were full of feeling, and used by such a venerated father."²⁵ However, as Melchior of Pobladora laments, the edition was defective and there is no further mention of these exercises which would have been of

²¹*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Cappucinorum*, VII, 235, 361-364; VI, 19, 32-34.

²²*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VIII, 5.

²³*Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁴*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VI, 22.

²⁵*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VII, 226.

the greatest importance for understanding the pristine spirituality of the Order.²⁶

The oldest writers, with whom recent authorities agree in part, claim that the "single volume of spiritual prayers" was printed in Milan in 1535 and reprinted in Genoa in 1557 by Antonio Belloni. If this is true, it would have been the first work to be published by a Capuchin. Hitherto this distinction has been accorded to the little ascetico-mystical treatise of John of Fano entitled *Arte de la Unione*, published in Brixen in 1536.²⁷ As late as 1978 no one was able to produce a copy of the "devout prayers." Even the exact title was unknown.

On the 450th anniversary of the publication of the bull *Religionis Zelus* we discovered a manuscript of the prayers. We could cry out with Bernardine of Asti: "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice! The Lord is nigh and always watches over us."²⁸ In the crises of post-conciliar renewal we are afforded a fresh opportunity to understand our charism through the discovery of the most important source of our early spirituality.

We refer to a manuscript 19x13.7 cm. in size written on parchment and in good condition, preserved in the historical library of the convent of the Friars Minor in the "*Chiesa nuova*" in Assisi — (Ms. 64).²⁹ The manuscript is a kind of spiritual anthology. It was written toward the end of the sixteenth century by a single copyist in fine and very clear lettering with numerous abbreviations. Other writings by various authors were added later. The work is almost certainly of

²⁶*Ibid.*, Note.

²⁷Dionysius of Genoa, *Bibl. Script. O. M. S. Franc. Cap.*, Genoa 1680, p. 86. who attributes to Bernardino "*volumen unicum Oratorium spiritualium, Mediolani apud Antonium Castilionem 1535, et Genuae apud Antonium Bellonum 1557*" Bernard of Bologna, *Bibl. Script.*, Venice 1747, 45 b. has about the same: "*Volumen unicum Oratorium spiritualium Mediolani 1535* (no publisher mentioned) *et Genuae apud Antonium Bellonum*." Wadding, *Scriptores Ord. Min.*, Rome 1906 41 a-b where we read: "*Scriptit librum spiritualium orationum, italice.*"

²⁸*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VIII, 4.

²⁹Cf. Marino Bigaroni, *Catalogo dei manoscritti della Biblioteca storico-francescana di Chiesa Nova di Assisi*, in *Atti dell' Accademia Proporziana del Subasio*, Serie VI — no. 1 (1978) 42 ff.

Capuchin origin but we cannot say for sure what convent or library it came from. There is reference in one of the texts "to those things decreed by the Council of Trent (!) especially with regard to the Capuchins." The volume is crammed with an incredible number of works written in an entirely different style. I filled ten pages with the titles alone. It is a veritable handbook of spirituality, a theological encyclopedia which includes a life of Jesus, ascetico-mystical tracts, prayers, the life of St. Francis — taken partially from the legend of the Three Companions — a detailed commentary on the Franciscan Rule as well as other material for the use of the friars. The book may have belonged to a Capuchin novice master. This is the codex that contains the long lost "*Oratione/devote/del Reverendo Padre Bernardino de Asti/del Ordine delli Frati Minori Cappuccini.*"

The title was probably taken from the original, since the copyist no doubt was working from the Milan or Genoa text. It confirms the statement of the chroniclers who speak of "*di alcune divote orationi*", whereas the bibliographers, not having the original text, changed the title to read "*orazioni spirituali.*"

There are in all seven prayers to the Blessed Trinity, tender and loving. The principal theme is the spirit and life of love. They are like a series of little hymns rising from the heart. Each begins with the word: "*Adoro.*" "I adore Thee most merciful Father...I adore Thee most sweet Jesus...I adore Your most holy divinity...I adore Thee most merciful Holy Spirit...."

We seem to find here a commentary on the prayer of St. Francis: "We adore You Most Holy Lord Jesus Christ, and we bless You...." It may also be looked upon as an interpretation of the gospel admonition to adore the Father in spirit and in truth. This, according to the statutes of Albacina and the Constitutions of 1536 is the real meaning of contemplative prayer: "Devout and fervent friars will not be content with one, or even two or three hours of prayer, but they will devote all their time to praying, meditating and contemplating. As true contemplatives they will adore the Father in spirit and truth. All the friars are exhorted to make this their study because it is the very reason why they became religious."³⁰

"The friars should remember that prayer is nothing else but speaking to God from the heart. Consequently he does not pray who speaks only with his lips. And each one should be intent on mental prayer and according to the teaching of Christ our best Master, to adore the Eternal Father in spirit and in truth and be solicitous to enlighten the mind and enflame the heart rather than to frame words."³¹

Essentially the same concept is written into the 1974 Constitutions: "The practice of mental prayer leads us to a spirit of true adoration."³² Bernardine's prayers might be called one continuous oration designed to kindle the flame of love in the heart and in our daily life. An analysis of the wording shows that the term "love" occurs most frequently (30 times), "to love" (9 times), the synonyms "charity" and "affection" twice each. "I adore" or "we adore" (15 times), "I bless" (15 times), "I implore you" (12 times), "I thank you" (6 times). Scattered throughout are verb forms describing the dispositions of the heart: "I confess" (4 times), "forgive me" (3 times), "reverence" (3 times), "to weep" (4 times), "to praise" (4 times), "to glorify" (twice), "to believe" (once), "to know you" (twice), "to please", "to desire", "to wish", (three times each), "to long for", "I long for", "I deliberate", "I propose" (once each), "to cleanse" (three times), "to illuminate" (twice), "to inflame" (twice), "to fear" (three times).

A few words about the individual prayers. The first is a prayer to the Most Holy Trinity, the Source of every good, for the wholehearted observance of the commandment of love as suggested in the Constitutions of 1536, no. 63.

In the next one Jesus Christ is adored "in His most holy divinity" and in "His most tender and beautiful, His most sure and resplendent humanity." The adoration of the humanity of

³⁰*Constitutioni delli Frati Minori della vita eremitica*, no. 8 in *Italia Francescana*, 53 (1978) 12.

³¹Const. 1536 no. 42 in E. d'Alencon, *Primigeniae legislationis O.F.M. Cap. textus originales*, Rome 1928, 43.

³²*Constitutio Fratrum Minorum Cappuccinorum*, Rome, Curia Generalis, 1975, no. 41, 1.

Christ brings to mind His Mother, who is our way to Jesus, just as Jesus is the way to the Father.

The third prayer adores God and thanks Him for all the benefits we have received: "for creation, redemption, the religious life, conversion." A touching general confession of faults follows, a fine example of the spirit of compunction and a commentary on the words of the 1536 Constitutions: "We entered religious life...to weep over our sins and to amend our life." (no. 97).

The fourth prayer has a choral character: "We adore you...." Its scope is universal. It reached out to all men on earth and to the souls in purgatory.

The fifth, too, is choral in nature. It is directed to the Eternal Father, and like the fourth, draws its inspiration from the prayer of St. Francis: "We adore you...and we bless you..."

The sixth is a prayer to the Son, and it too has a choral motif. In tranquil meditation the soul contemplates the mysteries of Christ as unfolded in the Eucharist. It is the outpouring of a soul wounded with the love of Christ.

The final prayer turns to the Holy Spirit. It is personal in nature. But though speaking in the first person, the one praying is almost compelled to resort to the choral form to express his solidarity with the universal church.

We could go on to a more detailed analysis, cite various numbers of the 1536 Constitutions, and compare them with the prayers and writings of other early Capuchins like John of Fano, Francis of Jesi, Bernardine of Balvano, Bernardine of Montolmo, Bernardine of Siena, and Sylvester of Sossano. But it is best to leave the reader free to personally savor this gem of our devotional literature without spoiling it with a plethora of learned commentaries. Therefore, I am appending the original text. I have omitted the abbreviations and added punctuation but have tried to preserve its primitive simplicity and fervor so that its warmth may be felt and something of its attractive mystical fragrance may be savored.³³

³³I have made some changes in spelling e.g. "Digno", for "Dingno"; "voglio" for "volgio" etc. I have written "Father", "Son", "Holy Spirit", "God", "Lord" with capitals.

The Devout Prayers of Father Bernardine of Asti of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin.

THE FIRST PRAYER:

To the Most Holy Trinity in which the first and greatest commandment is fulfilled, upon which depend all the others.

I adore You, Father Almighty, and Son most wise, and Holy Spirit most compassionate, O most Holy Trinity, my all holy God, most worthy, and greatest of all. I adore You and bless You, and as far as I can, I thank You with all your angels, and holy men, for Your infinite goodness. For You are supreme in every kind of goodness. You are most high, infinite, immense and most deserving of all love and ardent affection and all that is good. This is my delight, this I long for, and as far as I can, with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind and all my strength I ardently desire that You, my Lord and God be most perfect, as You are, more than I and all your creatures together can desire it. I would rather that I and all Your creatures should fall into nothingness or suffer all kinds of evil rather than that You my most holy God should lack any good or suffer any evil. I beg you most sweet God and Saviour to increase, strengthen and preserve in me this desire, and grant that I may love You most fervently above every other thing; that I may reverence, fear, adore and bless You. Enkindle Your love within me more and more, my most holy Lord. Pardon me for not having loved You, and not loving You now, as I ought. But I still love You most sweet Lord, most worthy and best. With all my vices and sins, with my lukewarmness and negligence, with my ingratitude and malice, I still love You, if it be possible to love You in this way. Pardon me, Lord, I beseech You, through Your infinite goodness, through the merits and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the glorious Virgin Mary, His Mother, and of all the saints. Permit me not to remain so tepid and cold, so full of negligence and sloth, immersed in so many vices and sins, and wrongful love. Rather inflame my heart with the powerful and inextinguishable fire of Your love, that most perfect love which is never idle but effects mighty things and destroys

every vestige of vice and wrongful love. Never let me be separated from Your love.

THE SECOND PRAYER:

To our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true Man
and to His sweet Mother, our advocate.

I adore You, most sweet Jesus. I adore Your most holy divinity for You are one God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. I adore your most sweet and pure and noble humanity and your most holy Mother for love of You and the goodness of Your humanity and that of Your sweet Mother. I desire, as far as I can without offending You, to suffer every manner of evil rather than wish that any good be lacking to Your most holy humanity and to Your most worthy Mother, or that any evil should befall You. I pray You, sweet Jesus, by the prayers, merits and love of Your most beloved Mother, draw me through ardent, chaste and pure and fervent love to Your sweet Mother and grant that through her I may come to You, and through You to Your most holy Father. Amen.

THE THIRD PRAYER:

The soul renders thanks to God for all his benefits,
repents of all her offenses and firmly resolves
not to offend Him again.

I adore You most holy Lord and my God, and I bless You, and as far as I can, with all your saints, I thank You for Your infinite goodness and for Your infinite love for me, a most wicked and ungrateful sinner, and for the benefits of creation, redemption, the religious life, for conversion and for all the graces You have bestowed on me, a most vile and thankless sinner, and which You deign to grant continually. I confess to You, Almighty God, all my wickedness, all my sins. I confess, too, most gentle Lord, all my pride, my gluttony and incontinence, my negligence and sloth, with all my murmuring and unkind talk, all vain ambition, all my evil and unclean thoughts, my great ingratitude.

I confess to You the countless, enormous and horrible sins which I have committed in my heart, with my tongue and my

actions, all the good I have neglected to do and the evil I have done, all the sins by which I have offended Your most sacred majesty, my own soul and my neighbor's, from the day of my baptism to the present moment. For all of which I say — through my fault, through my most grievous fault, my most wicked and ungrateful fault. I confess to You, most sweet and tender Lord, that I am not worthy to tread the earth or lift my eyes to heaven. I do not deserve Your pity or mercy. I am most unworthy of any good and deserving of every evil, present and future, in time and eternity. But I implore Your infinite goodness and mercy, through the prayers, merits and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, of His most sweet Mother and of all the saints and elect, angels and men, that You do not deal with me according to my wickedness but according to Your mercy.

Grant, most gentle Lord, that I may always love You most fervently, adore and bless You, reverence and fear You and ever be thankful for Your favors.

Grant that I may bitterly lament my sins. I wish my most sweet Lord, never to have offended Your most sweet majesty. I wish never to have committed any sin, mortal or venial. I beg You my Lord, to give water to my head and fountains of tears to my eyes. Fill my heart with deep sorrow and displeasure, an intense and continual contrition for all my vices and sins, and grant that daily, without ceasing, I may bitterly regret having exposed my miserable soul to damnation, so often having torn it away from You, its most sweet Lord and Spouse and given it over to the slavery of Satan. Forgive me the many times I have forfeited eternal happiness, the company of Your angels and saints. Forgive me for having separated my soul from You, its infinite treasure, and from Your grace and Your tender friendship, for the many times I have given scandal to my neighbor, and as far as in me lay, to have been the cause or occasion of the damnation of many souls redeemed with the precious blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Even more so, grant, O Lord, that every day I may lament the many times I have offended Your most sweet majesty. I beg you, Lord most merciful, by the merits and prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ, of his sweet Mother, and of all your saints to forgive me and deliver me from eternal punishment, from the power of Satan, from that place where Your most holy majesty is blasphemed. Send me,

O Lord, to purgatory for as long a time as may please Your mercy so that I may always remain in Your grace and know, love, adore, bless and praise and glorify You forever. Grant me the grace, my most worthy Lord, never more to offend You, and to make me ever-ready to suffer all the evils of this world, of purgatory and of the deepest pits of hell for Your love rather than commit a mortal sin. Yes, my Lord, I desire, propose and as far as I can, firmly resolve to suffer for Your love all these evils rather than offend Your sweet majesty by mortal sin.

This I resolve, my most kind Lord, not relying on my own strength, but on Your infinite mercy and Your all powerful assistance. Help me, Lord, to observe what You have led me to promise. Help me to avoid venial sins, to make good use of the time remaining to me, and to repent of my misspent past.

And to accomplish this for me and within me, I ask You to grant me all the holy virtues, love for You and Your grace, and remove from me all vices, sins and wickedness, all disordered self love, all attachment to the world and the flesh. Inflamm my heart with the most ardent flame of Your love and never permit me evermore to be deprived of Your virtues, or defiled by my vices. I beg You, my most sweet Lord, let me endure all the sufferings of this world, and of purgatory for Your love and with Your grace rather than allow me to offend You seriously again. Let me not fall into any doubts or errors concerning Your Catholic faith or commit any grave sin against Your most holy commandments, or against my vows. Let me not be separated from Your love, nor permit me to suffer eternal damnation. Amen.

THE FOURTH PRAYER:

**For all who are still in the present life
and for all the souls in purgatory.**

We adore You, most holy Lord God, and we bless You, and as far as we can, we thank You with all Your saints for Your infinite goodness, for Your infinite love, for the good things of Your creation, for redemption, for my vocation to this holy order, for all the other countless benefits you have conferred on all your creatures and especially on angels and men, and on

me a most vile and ungrateful sinner, and which You continually deign to grant. We pray by Your infinite goodness and mercy, and by the prayers and merits of all Your saints, for all the clergy, together with our sovereign pontiff and all the prelates of the Holy Roman Church. Grant that all religious, especially those of our Order, all Christians and all human beings presently sojourning in this valley of tears and sorrow, and all those who are to come, grant that all of them may come to know You, our Lord and God, and love You most fervently. Grant that we may always be thankful for Your benefits and with the help of your grace always keep Your commandments and our religious profession. Grant that we may always dread offending You more than any other evil. Grant that we may at length attain to that happy destiny for which You created us — to praise and bless You forever. We pray You, most sweet Lord, for the souls of all our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and benefactors, for all the souls presently in purgatory or who will go there that You deign to alleviate and shorten their sufferings. Release them soon and lead them to eternal glory to praise You with your saints and bless You forever. Amen.

THE FIFTH PRAYER:

To the Eternal Father.

We adore You Almighty Father, most sweet and best, and we bless You as far as we can and thank You with all Your saints and elect for Your infinite goodness, for Your infinite love, for Your infinite benefits and especially for Your only begotten Son whom You have given to us. By His merits we pray You, draw us with the golden chain of Your love to Him, and through Him lead us to You. Through His love give us all holy virtues, Your love and Your grace. Remove from us our vices and sins, all wicked love of the world and of the flesh, with all its delights and vanities. Do not permit us to be deprived of Your virtues or be defiled by our vices. Grant, O Father most holy, that we may always believe in You and in Your Son and the Holy Spirit, with firm faith, inflamed by charity and fortified by good works, so that we may not perish but have life eternal. Amen.

THE SIXTH PRAYER:

To the Son.

We adore You, all wise Son, most worthy and blest, and we bless You and as far as we can, we thank You with Your sweet Mother and with all Your saints and elect, for Your infinite goodness, for Your infinite condescension and love, for all Your benefits, but most especially for the admirable and most precious gift of Your holy incarnation, for Your exceeding great love, for Your profound humiliation, and for such a great exaltation of our human nature. We thank You for the nine months You spent within the womb of Your most pure virgin Mother, for Your holy nativity, for Your gentle and perfect conversation, for Your lowly submissiveness, for Your pain-filled life, for Your sacred passion, for Your precious blood, for all the evils endured for us, for all the good things You have granted us and still grant us. I pray You by Your infinite goodness, sweetness, tenderness, mercy and generosity, by Your great merits, and for all the merits, prayers and love of Your sweet Mother and of all Your saints and elect, that You would deign to cleanse me of all my vices, sins and wickedness, and adorn me with holy virtues. Take from me all evil self love, love of the world and of the flesh and of all its pleasures and vanities. Deign to inflame me completely with Your fervent love and grant, my sweet and worthy and best Lord, that today and always I may receive Your most excellent sacrament worthily. Grant that I may always keep You in the depths of my heart and of my soul and mind. May I revere You above all things, adore and bless You, praise and glorify You in eternity and always burn with Your love. May it burn more and more within me. I beg You, sweet Jesus and my most worthy God, draw to Yourself all my heart, my affections, my love, my soul and all my hopes and longings. Grant that all my good may rest in You, so that You may indeed be my infinite treasure, my delight and my glory. Grant, Jesus, my Lord and my God, that I may embrace Your sweet and perfect way of life and follow it carefully. Grant that I may be humbly subject, for love of You, first of all to You and then to the Roman Pontiff, Your vicar, to all prelates and every human creature in all that is pleasing to Your

sovereign majesty. Sweet Lord, grant that for love of You I may despise all the delights and vanities of the world and of the flesh as vile trash, so that I may gain You, my infinite treasure. May I possess You all the days of my life, in the momentous hour of death and in the eternal life to come. Grant, my most perfect Lord, that for love of You I may patiently and cheerfully endure all the injuries which may come to me and any evil which You, my sweet Lord, may permit me to suffer. Grant that I may willingly pardon all those who have injured me, or will injure me. Most kind Lord, freely pardon them and me, and make us live and die in Your grace. Amen.

THE SEVENTH PRAYER:

To the Holy Spirit.

I adore You, most merciful Holy Spirit, sweetest and best, and bless You and as far as I can, I thank You for Your infinite goodness and Your infinite love, and for all the benefits You have granted to us Your insignificant creatures, especially for the precious gift of the incarnation, passion, and death of our sweet Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and for all the saints You have purified, adorned, enlightened and inflamed. We implore You by the prayers, merits and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of His sweet Mother and of all the saints and elect. Come, Holy Spirit, come sweet Love! Come our most worthy and best Lord and God. Cleanse and embellish, illuminate and inflame our hearts with the fire of Your divine love. Grant that we may think, speak, and do what pleases You, Lord. Forgive us for all that we have thought, spoken or done that was displeasing to Your sweet majesty. Do not permit us to think, speak or do what is displeasing to You.

God the Father of heaven, have mercy on us. God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us. God the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us. Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us. Jesus, merciful and gentle, true God, have mercy on us and aid us against our enemies and in our every need, now and forever, and save our souls. Amen.

Saint Felix of Cantalice: One of the Fathers of the Capuchin Reform

Mariano d'Alatri, O.F.M. Cap.

After studying the careers of Matthew of Bascio and Louis of Fossombrone, Bernardine of Colpetrazzo came to the conclusion that the Capuchin reform was not the work of any one man. While each of them played an important though different role in its establishment, both of them left the group shortly after its inception, and died outside it. Bernardine of Asti finally solidified the new community pointing out that it had been founded on the firm foundation of the spirit of St. Francis.¹

Modern scholars are not quite sure why he made this remark which is based on James of Massa's alleged prophecy.² Mario of Mercato Saraceno had already stated that the Capuchin reform was not the work of Matthew or of Louis but of a select group of men. With Bernardine they gave religious stability to the little flock of frightened and scattered brothers. Bernardine of Colpetrazzo points out that Brother Felix of Cantalice was outstanding in holiness. So there was a

¹"The reform was made in the spirit of its Founder and from the beginning was different from other orders because God gave it a holy head, who was St. Francis, and will always give him to it." Bernardine of Colpetrazzo: *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum (1525-1593)*, I: *Praecipui nascentis Ordinis Eventus*. Published by Melchior of Pobladura (*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*. II) Assisi 1939, 69, 23.

²F. Ehrle; *Die 'historia septem tribulationum ordinis minorum des fr. Angelus de Clarino*, in *Literatur-und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters II* Berlin 1886, 281; *Chronica XXIV generalium Ordinis Minorum: Analecta Franciscana*, III, Quaracchi 1897, 285.