

derogating effect,<sup>14</sup> or other clauses even though repeatedly granted, confirmed and renewed. Notwithstanding all the above, even though for their effective revocation a special, individual and literal mention must be made of them and their consequences as well as general expressions implying the same and even though it be expressly stated that they are by no means revocable. With full knowledge, we by these presents expressly revoke their effect as well as the forms to be observed in individual instances, for this particular at least, while all the rest remain in force. All other things to the contrary notwithstanding. Let no one, therefore, in any way tamper with this writing, concession, command and revocation, or temerarily dare to contradict it. If anyone should presume to attempt this<sup>15</sup> let him know that he shall incur the anger of Almighty God and of His blessed apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Viterbo, on the feast of Our Lord's Incarnation, on the third of July, in the fifth year of our pontificate.

## *The Historical Significance of Spiritual Reform in the XVI Century*

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While the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin took its beginning from reform movements within the Franciscan Order, we should remember that in its origins this drive for renewal was linked more or less closely with various other similar movements of the sixteenth century, all characterized by a spirit of revival.<sup>1</sup>

### Various Reform Groups

At first glance the Capuchins appear to be only one of those numerous attempts within the Order aimed at reviving the ideals of St. Francis. The Bull of Pope Leo X *Ite Vos in Vineam Meam* of May 29, 1517 was an attempt to unite these disparate groups. But the subsequent rise of new reform branches showed that legal measures could not bring together the manifold reform movements within the community. The ensuing decade witnessed the birth of the Paschasites (1517), the Amadeists (1518), Calabrian Recollects (1525), the Capuchins (1528), the Riformati (1532), the Alcantarines (1540) and the French Recollects (1592).<sup>2</sup>

Seen against a broader perspective, the Capuchin Order

<sup>1</sup>Some of the material presented in this article has been taken from a lecture given by the author in 1977. (*Ursprung und Eigenart des Kapuzinerordens*). Excerpts from this lecture were published in *St. Fidelis*, 64 (1977) 31-33 and 90-100. The present article has been enlarged and updated.

<sup>2</sup>For these data we are indebted to Heribert Holzapfel's *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, Friburg 1909, and Max Heimbucher's *Die Orden und Kongregationen der Katholischen Kirche*, Paderborn, 1933, 720-724.

<sup>14</sup>*Mentis — mensis*. Bov. and Bull. Cap.

<sup>15</sup>*Ei — ex*. Trans.

might be called one of those rivulets which flowed together to form the mighty stream of Catholic reformation in the Italian peninsula. The renewal of older institutes and the founding of new orders and lay associations which carried on the reform movements of the later middle ages laid the groundwork for the so-called Catholic reformation. This became an effective force, however, only when, under Pope Paul III, it was able to take root in Rome, and then, under the influence of the Council of Trent, spread over the entire Church. During these years, 1515 to 1540, new communities, and their subsequent approbation, proliferated. All of them emphasized the sanctification of their members, the apostolic ministry and the practice of works of charity as the basic elements of reform. In 1515 the Roman Oratory of Divine Love was founded; in 1524 the Theatines; in 1533 the Barnabites and in 1549 the Somaschans and Jesuits.<sup>3</sup>

This wave of reform in the Italian principalities received healthy stimulation from the Protestant reformation then in progress in northern Europe. The religious rebellion showed that an internal reform of the Church was absolutely necessary. The Protestant leaders were loudly reasserting demands which had been ignored in the so-called reform councils of the later middle ages. Given the unfortunate conditions of the times, the bewildering conflict of ideas and ideals, the actions of the reformers destroyed the unity of the Faith. At the same time they called attention to the gap between the lofty ideals of the Church and its actual condition and resurrected the concept of "a church ever in renewal." St. Francis himself had received a divine commission to renew, rebuild and reform the Church in the words addressed to him by the Crucifix in the chapel of San Damiano: "Francis, go, rebuild my Church which as you see has fallen into ruin."<sup>4</sup>

There is evidently a broad link between the foundation of the Capuchins and the humanist reformers who were working for a renewal of both religious and political institutions.

<sup>3</sup>*Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Hubert Jedin, IV, 452-476.

<sup>4</sup>*Vita Sancti Francisci Assisiensi. Cel.* II, 6, 10.

### Discontent With Contemporary Morality

Any reform movement starts with a feeling of discontent with the conditions of human society in general or of a particular community or institution. The current sad state of affairs is contrasted with an original condition always presumed to have been much better. Thus the Protestant reformers compared the state of the Church in the later middle ages, including its theology, with that of the primitive Church and the Gospel. The humanists despised the debased Latin of their times when they read the elegant language of Cicero. The political scientists looked upon the small Italian communes against the background of the splendor of ancient Rome. The renaissance architects contrasted "barbaric" Gothic Art with ancient classical styles. Similarly, the Capuchins saw the relaxation of contemporary religious life as a betrayal of the original severity of the Rule and Testament and the life of the Seraphic Father. As its name indicates the goal of the reform was a restoration of the original state of the Order.

### A Return to Beginnings

Reformation, considered as a restoration of an original condition, implies in the first place a return to external forms. Cola di Rienzo, a famous political expert, planned to restore the structures of the ancient Roman republic. The humanists assiduously cultivated the literary style of Cicero and Virgil. The renaissance builders copied the models of the famous Vitruvius who laid down the rules of art in the time of Caesar Augustus. Calvin built his reformed communities after the pattern of the early Church with its presbyters, deacons and bishops. So the Capuchins took the primitive habit of St. Francis with its pointed hood, wore the beard like their holy Founder, and lived in small huts modeled after the first Franciscan hermitages.

External forms, however, are symbols of a newly-found content. The original wine, recently discovered, is poured into old wine skins. This is precisely what occurred when the humanists mimicked classical styles, when the Protestant reformers patterned their lives on the Word of God and when

the Capuchins cultivated poverty, penance and solitude like the first Friars Minor.

### Reformation as Innovation

Reformation does not merely resurrect some original condition. It gives birth to something new. It does not take a connoisseur to recognize the fact that renaissance art for all its appeal to Greco-Roman antiquity, is quite distinct. Isolated groups of dedicated reformers were not able to superimpose an archetypal Christian community and maintain it in a milieu of embattled states and warring religious sects. The churches of the Lutherans and other reformers, limited to individual towns and districts, could in no way be compared with the communities of the primitive Church. It might be asked, then, whether the Capuchins, in their return to their roots, could come up with something new. For polemical reasons the early chroniclers of the Order portrayed their way of life in terms of the early Franciscans. Whatever was new would have to be learned from their data. One thing they certainly had in common with the first friars — a rapid evolution from a small group of hermits to an institute of wide-ranging popular missionaries.

At the same time they were innovative — for a number of reasons. For one thing reformers through selective evaluations and choice of materials often adulterate original data to a greater or lesser degree. Another reason is the fact that no reform can escape the thought patterns of its age. The humanists, for instance, were deeply influenced by the course of history around them, though in different ways. Some aligned themselves either wholeheartedly or with reservations to the Protestant revolution. Others lent their talents to promoting the Catholic counter-reformation. Still others took refuge in the cult of science. Luther's development was certainly conditioned by the political and social events of his time. The influence of the reform movements of the time on the Capuchins was made tragically evident in the person of Bernardine Ochino. The conditions of the world and the era can break the back of some reforms and give others greater impetus. A reform which is not blindly tied to the past but

takes into account the exigencies of the present can grow like a tree which draws nourishment from its roots but raises its top to the future. Accommodation to contemporary culture is the other side of reform. The Capuchins exercised such a powerful influence in their time mainly because, growing up from their Franciscan roots, they committed themselves to the pressing task of implementing the reforms of the Council of Trent.

### Reform From Below

Reforms can of course be mandated from above but even these can draw their strength from grass roots and lead to changes in social conditions either gradually or abruptly. The first half of the sixteenth century furnishes a number of instances of changes from below. A simple monk from Wittenberg started a chain of events that altered the course of European and World history. The ecclesial reforms taking place in the Italian provinces were initiated by individuals — laymen, priests and religious. A soldier convalescing from his injuries became the founder of the best known religious order of the time, the Society of Jesus. Simple religious, priests and laybrothers of the province of the Marches, founded the Capuchins. Indeed, in this also we can see some similarity and resemblance to the early Franciscans in general. It was a question of one man who was concerned with his own personal reform according to the example given by God being joined by others of like mind, with the Church eventually giving her blessing to their plans.

### The Importance of Vital Personal Experience

It is impossible to ignore the decisive role played by a vital personal experience in the initiators of reform movements. To cite a few examples: The poet Francis Petrarca climbed Mount Ventoux to discover the world and instead discovered himself while reading St. Augustine.<sup>5</sup> While studying St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans in the castle of Wittenberg, Luther gained new

<sup>5</sup>A Letter to Francis Dionigi from Borgo San Sepolcro. Paris, 26-4-1336.

insights into a God of mercy and of justification by faith. Ulrich Zwingli, terrified by the plague, had a stirring experience; Calvin experienced much the same in the same circumstances; his was a "sudden conversion to docility," as he put it. When his wounds prevented Ignatius of Loyola from performing heroic feats on the battlefield, he was inflamed with a vehement desire "to perform great feats in the service of God." Lying on his bed of pain and unable to get his favorite romantic literature he read the life of Christ by Ludolph of Saxony and the Golden Legend of Jacobus of Voragine. Elizabeth Spitzlin, who reformed the Capuchinesses of Switzerland, had a spiritual conference with Father Ludwig of Saxony while on a pilgrimage to Einsiedeln and came to realize the discrepancy between the kind of spiritual life she was practicing and the original Franciscan spirit.<sup>6</sup> Such instances can easily be multiplied. Against this background the conversion of Matthew of Bascio takes on credibility, though we suspect that the account has been touched up somewhat to play down the more important role played by Louis of Fossombrone in the early days of the Order.

Whatever may have been the influence of outstanding men or groups in the beginning, this much at least is obvious: the movement well deserved the name of "*La bella e santa riforma dei Frati Minori Cappuccini*."<sup>7</sup> After 450 years it continues to inspire high idealism and great works.

<sup>6</sup>*Helvetia Sacra* V/2: *Die Kapuziner und Kapuzinerinnen in der Schweiz*, Bern, 1974. pp. 946 and 1096.

<sup>7</sup>The title of a work by Father Melchior a Pobladura, Rome, 1943. (2 ed. 1963).

## *How the Order Sprung Up and Took Root\**

Callisto Urbanelli, O.F.M. Cap.

The Capuchin reform set as its avowed goal a return to the original Franciscan dream.<sup>1</sup> To understand it correctly and evaluate it justly one must keep in mind that enormous reform movement preceding and following it which reached its peak and ratification in the Council of Trent. Stirrings of reform were agitating the Franciscan Order in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The aspirations of Matthew of Bascio, Louis of Fossombrone and other founders of the reform were achieved not only because of their own personal dedication (as it is easy to suppose) but because what they said and did met with a sympathetic response in the souls of a great number of the Observants.

The immediate causes of the Capuchin reform are usually considered to be the following: 1) The critical situation of the

\* Bringing an account of the early history of the Capuchin reform within the narrow limits of an article necessitated a choice of material, selecting only those events which had a more decisive influence, even though less important data have their role in explaining this spiritual movement. In the judgment of the author, these restrictions do not detract from the structural unity of the study.

<sup>1</sup>The reader is referred to another work by the author entitled *Storia dei Cappuccini delle Marche* I/1 where a number of events and problems are treated at greater length. Reference is also made to the following: Marius of Mercato Saraceno O.F.M. Cap., *Relationes de origine Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum. Monumenta historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, I, Assisi 1837; Bernardine of Colpetrazzo O.F.M. Cap., *Historia Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum* I, *ibid.* II, Assisi 1939; Edouard d'Alencon O.F.M. Cap., *De primordiis Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum (1525-1534), Commentarium historicum*, Rome 1921; Melchior of Pobladura, O.F.M. Cap., *Historia Generalis Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum*, I, Rome 1947; *Lexicon Capuccinum. Promptuarium historico-bibliographicum Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum*, Rome 1951.