

## *The Capuchins and Ecclesiastical and Civil Authorities*

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Two factors have conditioned the Capuchin reform in its life and activities: 1. The personal and collective ideals of the founders, that is, their choice of a life of contemplative solitude, of individual and community prayer, of mendicant poverty according to the Rule and example of St. Francis, together with their willingness to take upon themselves the ministry of preaching and assisting the needy, especially in times of public calamities. 2. The juridical confirmation of their congregation by the Holy See, the protection provided by the civil authorities and their popularity with the masses of the people.

The dynamic thrust and interplay of these forces and their great significance led Father Edouard d'Alencon, the eminent critical researcher of their role, to entitle one of his important works: *Tribulationes Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum primis annis pontificatus Pauli III (1534-1541)*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This short list of sources, published and unpublished, referring to the history of the Order, devised and enlarged, was compiled by Fr. Edouard D'Alencon O.F.M. Cap., formerly in charge of the general archives Rome 1914: *Gian Pietro Carafa, Vescovo di Chieti (Paolo IV) e la riforma nell'Ordine dei Minori dell'Osservanza*, Foligno 1912. The author treating the origins of the Order wrote: *De primordiis Ordinis fratrum minorum capuccinorum, 1525-1534, commentarium historicum*, Rome 1921, which was followed by *Primigeniae legislationis fratrum minorum capuccinorum textus anno 1536 ordinatae et anno 1552 recognitae, cum introductione copiosisque adnotationibus*, Rome 1928: *Liber memorialis Ord. Fr. Min. Cap. quarto iam pleno saeculo ab Ordine condito (1528-1928)* with the collaboration of several authors. For a systematic study of the origins of the Order cf.: Melchior of Pobladura: *Historia generalis ordinis minorum Capuccinorum, pars prima 1525-1619*, Rome 1947. Also of value is Father

### 1. First Documents Approving Their Personal Charism

The charism of the reform became an integral part of Franciscan life as practiced by St. Francis and those companions who survived him during the early growth of the Order. Father Matthew of Bascio as an Observant friar was deeply imbued with this spirit.

"This good religious did not receive his inspiration in vain, but he immediately surrendered himself to the divine will. Remembering the words of our father Saint Francis who said prophetically that should the Order ever depart from true observance of the Rule, it would be right and proper for the good and zealous friars to withdraw from it, under obedience to the Pope, and go about the world doing penance, he dared to do just that."

"He made up his mind to go to Rome and obtain approval of the Holy Father to wear this form of habit and go about doing penance, preaching more by example than by words, instructing sinners as St. Francis and his first companions did. He had no intention of founding an Order or of winning over other friars to his way. His only concern was to reform his own life and make it conformable to the life and wishes of his blessed Father."<sup>2</sup>

This "thesis" sums up all the elements of personal inspiration. These elements are presented in the guise of visions and apparitions. His biographers saw an evangelical foundation in

Cuthbert's *The Capuchins, A contribution to the history of the counter-reformation*, 1928. Likewise Fr. Optatus of Veghel: *La reforme des freres mineurs capucins dans l'ordre franciscaine et dans l'Eglise (Collectanea Franciscana* 1965, 35. 5-108) For lack of space I must leave out much of contemporary bibliography. Cf. Melchior of Pobladura, *Cappuccini*, in *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, II, col. 203-232, ed. Paoline, Rome 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Paul of Foligno: *Origo et progressus ordinis fratrum minorum capucinatorum*, ed. Melchior of Pobladura, 13. Rome 1935. (*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capucinatorum*, VII). This chronicler completes the work of his predecessors whom he often quotes: Mario de Mercato Saraceno (*ibid.*, I); Bernardine of Colpetrazzo (*ibid.*, II-IV); Matthias of Salo (*ibid.*, V). E. d'Alencon transcribed the manuscripts. Very useful is an anthology which contains selections from the chronicles and the Constitutions of 1536 published by Melchior of Pobladura, *La bella e santa riforma dei frati minor capucini*, with an introduction by Giuseppe de Luca, Rome, 1963.

the events which confirmed Matthew in his resolve. When he clothed a poor man whom he found lying in the road with the garments of his own poverty, he clothed the eschatological Christ of the last judgment.<sup>3</sup> He relived young Francis' experience of kissing the leper.<sup>4</sup>

Historians record the horizontal, or human, dimension of the proposed reform in the assistance given by the first friars to the plague-stricken in Camerino in 1523. This social element confirmed the authenticity of their charism and won for them the protection of the civil authorities and the material support of the people.

"This work made him pleasing in the sight of God and of St. Francis and won the esteem of all the people. They looked upon him as a saint. It gained him access to the court of the Duke and Duchess of Camerino, Gianmaria Varani and Catherine Cibo, who was the niece of the reigning pontiff, Clement VII. Both of them felt a great debt to Father Matthew for his charitable labors on behalf of their subjects and were anxious to express their gratitude. The Duchess, especially was most thankful for the cure of two gentlemen of her court who had fallen seriously ill of the plague and whom Matthew, through the grace of God, had snatched from the jaws of death. She offered to be of any service to him or his group."<sup>5</sup>

This charismatic social "thesis" was in contrast to an "antithesis," namely, the monastic comfort to which the Observants had become accustomed. "Institutionalization" was looked upon by the first Capuchins as a hindrance to the Franciscan, apostolic way of life.

"Woe to you, Father Matthew, who are no true son of Francis, who should follow in his footsteps. No, you are a sham religious. Where is that most high poverty so beloved by St. Francis which you ought to observe? You live in a convent, not like a poor little brother, but like a nobleman in his luxurious palace. Like him you wear the best of clothes, eat your fill of choice food and sleep on a soft mattress. How many

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 15; *Mt* XXV, 36, 38, 43, 44.

<sup>4</sup>*II. Cel.* ch. V, no. 9; ed. *Fonti Francescane*, nos. 592, 1034, *prima ed.* Assisi 1978.

<sup>5</sup>Paul of Foligno. *op. cit.*, 9-10.

needy people who never vowed poverty, as you have, practice it nonetheless, going around half naked in their rags, never able to fill their bellies even with dry crusts, and forced to take their rest on a bundle of straw in some stinking barn? How will you dare, wretched man that you are, appear before the face of Christ your judge, when He confronts you with the hardships He had to endure from the cradle to the cross?"<sup>6</sup>

The situation took on a disciplinary problem on the one hand, and an institutional or juridical aspect on the other. That is, it ranged over the entire question of asceticism as practiced in the Order of Friars minor Observant. It involved the policy of the general and provincial authorities toward those who favored a pristine observance of the Rule and were trying to establish houses of recollection or hermitages where they could live in strict poverty and spend their time in prayer and contemplation, and toward groups like the Colletines in France, the Clareni, the Discalced Friars of Blessed John of Puebla and of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spain, the Martinians in Germany. In the bull *Ite Vos* issued May 29, 1517, Pope Leo X attempted to merge all these groups into one Order "of regular observance" with a minister general and provincials independent of the Friars Minor Conventual, leaving the Conventuals with their own general and provincial superiors.<sup>7</sup>

Father Matthew went to Rome early in 1525 to ask the pope for permission to live as St. Francis did. It was not until 1536 that his claim to have obtained such permission was accepted, and Vincent Lunel, minister general of the Observants

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>7</sup>E. d'Alençon treats of these movements which were known as Riformati in Italy, Recollects in France, Belgium and Holland and Germany, Paschalites and Alcantarines in Spain (cf. *François, Ordre de Saint*, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, fasc. 106, XVIII, col. 865 ff. Paris 1977; L. Di Fonzo-G. Odoardi-A. Pompei. *Ifrati minori conventuali. Storia e Vita 1209-1976*, 115-129, Rome 1978. Cf. *Dizionario degli istituti*, under *Collettani*; G. Odoardi, II, 1975, col. 1211-1217); *Clareni*, Cl. Schmitt (*ibid.*, col. 1114-1115); *Amadeitae*, B. Pandzic (I 1974, col. 502-503); *Capriolantes*, Cl. Schmitt (III, 1975, col. 254); *Ioannes de la Puebla*, G. Odoardi (IV, 1977, col. 1233-1234); *Joannes de Guadalupe*, *idem.* (*ibid.*, col. 1226-1230); *Joannes Pasqual idem* (*ibid.*, col. 1286-1289); *Alcantarini* (or *Franciscani Discalceati*), G. Odoardi — A. G. Matanic (I, 1974, col. 472-475) with notes on more recent bibliography.

and an unrelenting foe of Capuchin autonomy, gave him written permission, after his return to the Observant fold, to go about preaching in the manner Matthew claimed was granted him by the Holy Father.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this Matthew and his aspirations were under heavy fire from the superiors of the Order.

From this juridical base, granted by word of mouth, evolved all the ensuing changes in the shape of the habit, the penitential life, the apostolic ministry and the whole series of events recounted by the early chroniclers. "And so, the holy habit in the shape worn by St. Francis and all friars until later abandoned for a time, was restored in January of the year 1525 in the pontificate of Clement VII when Matthew was thirty years old, the age at which Christ began to preach, establish His church and institute the apostolic life."<sup>9</sup>

The minister provincial of Piceno, John of Fano, relegated Matthew to the little friary of Forano, citing the brief *Dudum Felicis Recordationis* of Clement VII, issued March 12, 1525,<sup>10</sup> which revived the norms laid down by Leo X for dealing with vagabond friars, even those armed with apostolic briefs! John was acting in good faith. He was a sincere promoter of reform within the Order but also a staunch defender of the discipline and unity so painfully achieved only eight years before. He was compelled to set Matthew free when the Duchess of Camerino threatened to intervene. Invoking her political authority she "would have ordered all the houses of the Order burnt to the ground and the friars thrown out into the street. She would have complained bitterly to the pope about the provincial's lack of zeal and obedience. After this outburst from the Duchess no one dared give Father Matthew any more trouble, especially since in view of his naivete and honesty there was no fear that he would set himself up as the leader of a new reform, and even if he did, that he could maintain it effectively."<sup>11</sup>

Matthew's example was contagious. He was spokesman for widely held views and embodied the hitherto unfulfilled

<sup>8</sup>Edouard d'Alençon: *De Primordiis*, 16-17.

<sup>9</sup>Paul of Foligno, *op. cit.*, 16.

<sup>10</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, XVI, 3 ed. Quaracchi 1933, 256.

<sup>11</sup>Paul of Foligno, *op. cit.*, 32.

hopes for reform. He was soon joined by Louis of Fossombrone, a priest, and his blood brother Raphael. Matthew let them know that the Pope's approval had been given only to him personally. Thereupon Louis and Raphael took refuge in one of the friaries of the Conventuals in Cingoli. John of Fano was very upset by the new turn of events and obtained a brief from Clement VII, *Cum Nuper*, issued March 8, 1526, which denounced the two brothers as apostates, fugitives, excommunicates, guilty of scandalizing the people of God and causing trouble between the Observants and the Conventuals.<sup>12</sup> They avoided capture by fleeing to the Camaldolese hermitage at Cupramontana and placing themselves under the protection of Blessed Peter Giustiniani, the founder of the reformed Camaldolese of Monte Corona. He in turn put them in touch with St. Cajetan of Thiene and John Peter Carafa, the Theatine bishop of Chieti, who later became Pope Paul IV. The latter were the founders of a community of clerics regular. He also informed the cardinal protector of the clerics regular, L. Pucci, Grand Penitentiary of the Roman Curia from whom Louis obtained the brief *Ex Parte vestra* on May 18, 1526 allowing him and his brother Raphael, as well as Matthew to lead an eremitical life, to support themselves by begging alms and to live outside the convents of the Observants without being harassed or pursued. Some conditions were appended: "You are to *ask, not necessarily obtain*, permission from the superiors either personally or through intermediaries" and they were to be subject to the local bishop, in this case John James Bongiovanni, Bishop of Camerino. This is the first constitutional "charter" granted to the Capuchin reform.<sup>13</sup>

The Apostolic Penitentiary usually granted such permissions by virtue of its ordinary faculties without having recourse to the Pope himself. John of Fano once more tried to retake the rebellious friars and strip them of their political protection. The two factions met in the upper story of the ducal palace which the three friars used for recreation.

<sup>12</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales*, 788-791, text based on E. d'Alencon: *De primordiis*, 21-22.

<sup>13</sup>*Bullarium Capuccinorum*, I, 1-2.

"Wretches," John exclaimed, "What are you doing outside the Order? Are you able to give praise to God and at the same time dwell in the houses of princes? Who ever prevented you from observing the Rule strictly? What has brought you to this palace? Come then, I am here as your father, concerned about your salvation. Return. I give you my word to treat you with kindness. I promise to take you back without any penalties." Father Louis then took a copy of the Rule from his sleeve and replied: "This is what made us leave." And reading a few passages, he added: "And how is this observed in your community?" He publicly lamented the fact that one who by virtue of his office was obliged to encourage the zealous friars, persecuted them instead. They were living in the palace with a clear conscience, something they were unable to do in the cloister.

The Duke confirmed the fact they lived a most exemplary religious life in his palace and hardly accepted water and fire from him, wishing to go begging for anything else.<sup>14</sup>

Catherine Cibo obtained some hermitages for them. She had asked for the retreats of Montalti and Monasterio for restoring the lapsed discipline of the Clarentians. Now she petitioned the Bishop of Camerino to allow the Clarentian places to be occupied by "real hermits" who follow the Rule of St. Francis in the greatest poverty.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. The Institutionalization of the Capuchin Charism

John of Fano wrote his *Dialogo* to check the exodus of the friars from the Observants and to refute the arguments of the reformers. The heroic dedication of the Capuchins became public knowledge during the plague that struck Camerino and during the sack of Rome in May 1527.<sup>16</sup> Through the influence of the Duchess, now a widow, Louis obtained the bull *Religionis Zelus* (July 3, 1528) from Cardinal Della Valle, protector of the Order of Friars Minor and Cardinal L. Pucci,

<sup>14</sup>Paul of Foligno, *op. cit.*, 163-164; E. d'Alencon, *De primordiis*, 59, note 2.

<sup>15</sup>*Idem. De primordiis*, 61.

<sup>16</sup>*Geschichte der Paepste*, IV, 2 Abt, 637, Freiburg in Br. 1907.

Grand Penitentiary and protector of the Camaldolese.<sup>17</sup> The connection of the Capuchins with the Franciscan family was safeguarded by an act of obedience to be made each year at the provincial chapter of the Conventuals. The Conventual superior had the right of visitation. The bull authorized them to receive only secular priests and clerics, and laymen, not however, as Louis had hoped, permission to build hermitages and to convert members of other religious orders to his evangelical way of life. However, he cleverly managed to have inserted into the bull a clause granting them all the privileges, concessions and favors enjoyed by the Friars Minor Conventual and the Camaldolese Hermits.<sup>18</sup> Through this legal stratagem Louis felt that he was entitled to open the door wide even to candidates coming from the Observants.

Now they had the protection of the civil authorities, the leaders of religious orders and the hierarchy of the Church to shield them from the attacks of their enemies. The authorities had approved and confirmed the authenticity of their charism and allowed the reform unfettered and widespread propagation. Father Matthew of Bascio and the Venetian Father Paul of Chioggia took advantage of their personal faculties to lead the eremitical life and joined them.

Some twenty friars attended the first chapter held in April 1529 in the solitude of Santa Maria dell'Acquarella above the castle of Albacina in the territory of Fabriano. Six of them were from secular life, five from the Observants — with special permission of the Sacred Penitentiary — and four of them Friars Minor, there by reason of the privilege of the Camaldolese. By the following year the community numbered about thirty. At Albacina were drawn up the first statutes of the Order: *Constituzioni delli frati Minori detti della vita eremitica*, which was dominated by spiritual concerns, without paying much attention to canonical regulations.

<sup>17</sup>Editores, *Bullarium diplomatum et privilegiorum Sanctorum Romanorum Pontificum*, Turin 1860, VI, 113, no. XXIV: "Approbatio congregationis fratrum Eremitarum, nunc Capuccinorum, Ordinis Minorum Conventualium Sancti Francisci, cum habitus predefinitione gratiarumque et privilegiorum concessione." Cf. Bonaventura da Gangi, *I motivi giuridici della riforma dei Capuccini*, in *Italia Francescana*, 1978, 53, 149-162.

<sup>18</sup>E. d'Alencon, *De Primordiis*, 58-59.

Social concern, or rather a sense of evangelical works of mercy, led them to speak of burying the dead: "We likewise ordain that they do not conduct obsequies except in the case of some poor person who may be brought to them spontaneously and whom no one else would bury because of lack of funds. When such a one is brought to our convents or hermitages, he is to be buried there *because it is a work of charity and mercy*. And they are not to receive any payment but let them in all charity and for the love of God pray for the repose of his soul."<sup>19</sup>

When the minister general Paul Pisotti obtained the brief *Cum Nuper* (Dec. 14, 1529)<sup>20</sup> aimed at religious who were making use of all kinds of legal tricks to get themselves documents from the Roman Curia allowing them to lead a reformed life outside the Observant family, a veritable deluge of briefs and bulls followed directed at particular groups and movements. The brief *Cum sicut accepimus* of May 27, 1530<sup>21</sup> condemned the brothers Louis and Raphael as well as the Calabrian community headed by Louis and Bernardine, both of Reggio. They had been sponsors of the Recollect reform within the Observants. In 1529 they associated themselves with Louis of Fossombrone. A community of the Roman province was also condemned. The little band of Capuchins in Rome responded by renewed efforts to provide religious, nursing and administrative services to the St. James Hospital for incurables. One of them, who had been trained among the Observants, won the hearts of the people by his simple and fervent preaching. The venerable servant of God, Laurenzia Longo, a widow and friend of Victoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, received the first Capuchins in the hospital of Santa Maria del Popolo in Naples (1530) at the suggestion of Catherine Cibo. In that same year the magistrates of Genoa put the Capuchins in charge of the public hospital for incurables in that city.

Paul Pisotti, head bloody but unbowed, now obtained the brief *Cum Nuper* (July 5, 1531) against friars who presump-

<sup>19</sup>Ed. *Italia Francescana*, 1978, 53, 19.

<sup>20</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales*, XVI, 322, no. XXXIII.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 336-337, no. XVI.

tuously and illegally had received from the Roman curia permission to withdraw themselves from religious obedience. Included among them were the promoters of the Capuchin reform.<sup>22</sup> When this backfired, Paul, like a man obsessed, wrung a more explicit condemnation through the brief *Alias postquam* (Dec. 2, 1531) which rescinded whatever concessions had been granted by the Grand Penitentiary, L. Pucci, on September 16, 1531 and renewed the directives of May 27, 1530 ordering the friars to return to the Observants. And it mentioned their abettors by name.<sup>23</sup>

The reformed friars of Calabria rallied round Louis of Fossombrone, and won the support of the Duke and Duchess of Nocera Inferiore, Ferdinand Carafa and Eleanor Concublet. The latter, with her ladies in waiting, had made the rough habits of the friars. In their chapter they elected as vicar provincial Father Louis of Reggio (May 28, 1532). Paul Pisotti thereupon managed to get the Roman Curia to reissue its former prohibitions and sanctions in a brief *Alias postquam* of July 3, 1532,<sup>24</sup> the fourth anniversary of the bull *Religionis Zelus*. The brief called upon the Vicar of Reggio Calabria and the Duke of Nocera Inferiore to make use of the secular arm. The Duke summoned the Observant commissary who carried the decree of excommunication to his palace, and the two principal "culprits," the Calabrians Louis and Bernardine. Controversy raged over the age-old tradition of reform in the Franciscan Order. The Capuchin renewal was nothing new in the history of authentic Franciscan dynamism. If the commissary insisted that Rome had spoken, the Duke would appeal to the highest authority in the Church to effect a reconciliation with this charismatic inspiration.

"Let us all await this decision, since the Capuchins seem to have a good case, and meanwhile let us keep calm and not change anything; above all, let us quietly sidetrack this excommunication. For my part I shall continue my support of the Order through one Roman congregation or another. And let there be no more harassment of the Capuchins..."

<sup>22</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales*, 791-792.

<sup>23</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales*, 347-349; E. d'Alencon, *De primordiis*, 93-99.

<sup>24</sup>E. d'Alencon, *ibid.*, 99-100.

"The Duke then summoned all the other Capuchins who had been earnestly imploring the help of the Holy Spirit. He told them that he was satisfied with the arguments presented on their behalf during the proceedings. He encouraged them to continue courageously in the course on which they had embarked. He advised them to make a report to the Holy See and withstand any new attempts that might be made against them, to build up the structures they had already begun and to expand freely."<sup>25</sup>

The curia made its own decision. Honorius Caiani, procurator general of the Observants, whom Clement VII appointed to be his confessor, attacked the bull *Religionis Zelus*, which had been given, he said, "to a certain disobedient friar distinguished neither for reputation, learning or holiness... He and his brother, also a member of our community, sought permission from our minister provincial of the Marches to transfer to the Conventuals. The minister, since he was dealing with stiff-necked, self-willed and incorrigible men allowed them to go...then they asked the minister general of the Conventuals for permission to lead an eremitical life, which he gave them in writing."<sup>26</sup>

This was the document which justified the Capuchins in their resistance to the machinations of the Observants with officials of the curia.

After consulting his advisors, Clement VII issued the bull *In Suprema* (Nov. 16, 1532) in which he gave his blessing to "the friars who are leading a stricter life" among the Observants in their own convents as poor hermits.<sup>27</sup> But the transfer of such eminent reforming friars like Bernardine of Asti, Francis of Jesi, Bernardine Ochino and Bernardine of Colpetrazzo proved that oppressive measures were counter-productive and portended a healthy growth for the persecuted Capuchins. The brief *Pastoralis Officii Cura* (April 15, 1534) was couched in sarcastic language and aimed at "the *fratres Capuciatos*" who left the convents of the Observants on the pretext that they wished to observe the Rule of St. Francis ex-

<sup>25</sup>Paul of Foligno, *op. cit.*, 321.

<sup>26</sup>E. d'Alencon, *De Primordiis*, 103.

<sup>27</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales*, 380-381.

actly, in its literal sense and without heeding the declarations of the Roman pontiffs...leading a life so rigid and austere as to be almost inhuman."<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Another Trial for the Capuchin Charism

The remark about Capuchin extremes in the matter of penance reflected the general impression of the people, who looked upon them with a mixture of awe and admiration. Far from conforming to the mentality of a renaissance society they practiced radical asceticism as a reaction to its cult of human talent and beauty. Following the gospel to the letter they rejected any truce with a humanistic philosophy which took as its slogan: "Follow nature."<sup>29</sup> Immersed in the delights of mystical contemplation they put to flight the hedonistic seductions of art and culture.

The ecclesiastical authorities were pleased with this conflict. It was a question of front line troops fighting for a moral renovation of society and for a witness to the vitality of the Church. The pontifical magistrate Jerome Ghinucci persuaded Clement VII to refer the condemnatory brief to the cardinal protector Andrew della Valle, for, as he said: "It hardly seems right and proper to compel a religious to follow a laxer way of life against his will. But if that indeed be the wish of your Holiness, I feel that the decision should not emanate from the Holy See itself. It should be delegated to someone else. It would be unbecoming for the Holy Father to issue it."<sup>30</sup>

The charge that the Capuchins renounced papal interpretations of the Rule was an oblique way of associating them with the Spirituels and Fraticelli of the fourteenth century who had rebelled against the authority of the Holy See.

The matter was addressed in the fifth number of the Constitutions of 1536: "And because it was the desire, not only of our Seraphic Father, but of Christ our Redeemer, that the Rule should be observed to the letter, with simplicity and without gloss, as it was observed by our first fathers, we re-

<sup>28</sup>E. d'Alencon, *De Primordiis*, 115-116.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. the texts of the Capuchin chroniclers in *La piu disperata vita*, Fr. Melchior of Pobladura, *La Bella*, 177-216.

<sup>30</sup>E. d'Alencon, *De Primordiis*, 115.

nounce all privileges and explanations that relax it, detract from its pure observance and wrest it from the pious, just and holy intentions of Christ our Lord, who spoke in St. Francis. We accept only as a living and authentic commentary thereon the declarations of the supreme pontiffs and the most holy life, doctrine and example of our Seraphic Father himself."<sup>31</sup>

The bull admits that the reforming friars within the body of the Observants "were inflamed with the Holy Spirit." The Capuchins who imitated them were punished by being banished from Rome. On the feast of St. Mark, April 25, after participating in the Rogation Day procession they marched out of the city chanting the Litany of the Saints until they arrived at the basilica of St. Lawrence Outside the Walls. Some of them sought hospitality with the canons of the Lateran; others were scattered among various provinces. This apparent dissolution of the congregation provoked a vigorous reaction among the civil authorities, the nobility and the common people. At any rate their exile was suspended with the brief *Sicut Accepimus* sent to Louis before the month was out. They were still forbidden, however, to accept candidates from the Observants, even when they detoured by way of the Conventuals. They were again accused of disturbing the friars' peace of mind with their pretensions to strict Franciscanism. The fact of the matter was, the witness of the Capuchins was a rebuke to the luxury and comforts that had crept into churches and religious houses as a result of renaissance opulence.

When Clement VII died, September 25, 1534, the situation of the Capuchins *vis-a-vis* the Order and the Church was thrown into doubt. As it turned out, their charism thrived under difficulties. The protection of the civil authorities grew stronger, as did the approval of the people. With the death of her uncle the Duchess of Camerino lost her political and family influence with the curia. She nevertheless continued to protect the Capuchins. The conversion of John of Fano was of tremendous importance. He who was once the persecuting Saul now became the Paul of the rapidly growing Order.

The Observants lost no time in getting the ear of the new Pope, Paul III. In the brief *Accepimus* (Dec. 18, 1534)<sup>32</sup> he

<sup>31</sup>*Idem.*, *Primigeniae legislationis*, 28.

once more forbade the Observants to flee to the houses and places of "the friars of the Order of St. Francis known as the Capuchins,"<sup>33</sup> pending the general chapter scheduled for Pentecost 1535 when the question of houses of recollection would be taken up. Nevertheless in the brief *Nuper Accepto* of January 12, 1535<sup>35</sup> only the reception of spiritual fugitives from the Observants was clearly forbidden, lest the internal reform of the Order be prejudiced. On the back of the document appeared a conciliatory note, a sign of better times to come... "to our beloved sons of the order of Friars Minor called Capuchins."<sup>35</sup>

The general chapter of the Observants, held in Nice May 15, 1535 elected Vincent Lunel as minister general. He immediately set about trying to stem the exodus of his friars to the Capuchins. The bull *Pastoralis Officii Cura* of August 14, 1535 stated that those who were serious about leading "a stricter life" were to be sent to houses of recollection which were to be built "in every province."<sup>36</sup>

Victoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, the new "mother" of the Capuchins, protested to the Pope that he was requiring written permission of the minister general or commissary for the Observants to join the Capuchins and quoted the brief of May 16, 1526 which stated that it was sufficient to "ask" permission not necessarily to "obtain" permission.<sup>37</sup>

At the urging of certain friends of the Capuchins within the ranks of the Observants, the brief *Dudum Postquam* was issued August 29, 1525.<sup>38</sup> It amounted to an *ultimatum* to the provincials to set up, within two months, reformed hermitages. Otherwise they would have to give their friars permission to "freely and lawfully" go to the convents of the Capuchins. And so the charism of the reform carried off the victory in the battle of the briefs.

<sup>32</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales*, 439; *Bullarium Capuccinorum*, I, 11.

<sup>33</sup>L. Wadding, *Annales*, 440; E. d'Alencon *Tribulationes*, 2-3.

<sup>34</sup>L. Wadding, *ibid.*, 458-459. E. d'Alencon *ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>35</sup>E. d'Alencon, *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>36</sup>L. Wadding, *ibid.*, 460. E. d'Alencon, *ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. *supra.*, 416.

<sup>38</sup>L. Wadding, *ibid.*, 461-462; E. d'Alencon, *ibid.*, 3-4.

Louis of Fossombrone's opposition to the convocation of a general chapter brought on a new internal crisis for the Order, which now numbered about 500 friars. To stay in office he crossed the Rubicon and standing on the opposite bank, so to say, he proposed restoring the reform to the obedience of the Observants to assist in the internal reform of that group. This, he felt was most desirable. Bernardine of Asti appealed to Victoria Colonna. With the support of the Duchess of Tagliacozzo, wife of Ascanio Colonna, she petitioned Pope Paul III to convoke a legal chapter. Paul replied that he would have the superior imprisoned in Rocca di Papa if he refused! This good lady became the patroness of the Capuchin cause in a really dangerous situation. As she admitted to Paul III's secretary: "Reverend Monsignor: When Fra Ludovico was doing well, little favor was shown him. Today when he is seeking to ruin this congregation he is favorably received with an impious piety and malicious charity...It is certainly strange that with all the good will His Holiness has for me, and the favor shown me by Father Palmieri and by yourself, my good friend, there should be such problems for more than 500 men so that you must imprison one of them and bring about so much strife and grief. Here in Rome I am stunned. In Naples I had no need to prove that I am neither wicked, nor stupid nor uncouth. Very sincerely yours, *The Marchioness of Pescara.*"<sup>39</sup>

The Constitutions drawn up in the chapter of 1535-1536 under the aegis of the new vicar general, Bernardine of Asti, express the need of combining the Capuchin charism with trust in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This need had been subjected to an unusual test by the recalcitrance of Father Louis. The original charism of the community was once again imperiled.

"As our Seraphic Father exhorts us in his Testament, let them endeavor to respect, love and honor all priests, bishops, cardinals and above all the holy and supreme pontiff, vicar of Christ on earth, the supreme head, father and shepherd of all Christians and of the entire church militant. Let them also love and honor all other ecclesiastics who live according to the manner of the Holy Roman Church, and be humbly subject to

<sup>39</sup>E. d'Alencon, *Tribulationes*, 12.

the head, father and Lord, the supreme pontiff. Let all the friars bear in mind the admonition left by our Seraphic Father in his Testament, that all theologians and those who minister to us the most holy and divine word we must honor and revere as those who minister to us spirit and life."<sup>40</sup>

John Dominic of Cupis, Cardinal of Trani, presided over the chapter. Paul III confirmed the election of Bernardine of Asti in the brief *Cum Sicut Nobis* (1536).<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Ecclesial and Social Charism of the Capuchins

Under the leadership of some distinguished friars from the Observants, the Capuchins entered a new phase of their existence marked by an increase of evangelical preaching, contemplative spirituality, popular asceticism, interior conversion and a leavening of a society steeped in the pagan humanism of the renaissance.<sup>42</sup> Victoria Colonna<sup>43</sup> herself a

<sup>40</sup>*Idem.*, *Primigeniae legislationis*, 74-75. The chronicler Marius de Mercato Saraceno refers to St. Francis: "Blessed is he who stands firm and does not depart from the teachings of Holy Church and devotion to its prelates and ministers. This is the foundation on which St. Francis, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, built his religious order. He wished his friars to be so obedient to the prelates of the Church and respectful to its ministers that if they should meet them on the road, they should not only kiss their sacred hands, but even kneel down and kiss the feet of their horses, as Brother Leo writes in the *Legend of the Three Companions*. There is no other shelter in which to find safety in the stormy seas of this world than in the shadow of the Supreme Pontiff adhering strictly to the teachings of the Church in the bark of Peter outside of which there is no hope of salvation." (Cf. Melchior of Pobladura, *La Bella*, 303, no. 652).

<sup>41</sup>E. d'Alencon: *Tribulationes*, 12-13. *Bullarium Capuccinorum.*, 16-17.

<sup>42</sup>Mario de Mercato Saraceno quotes the testimony of an official concerning the apostolic zeal of the Capuchins, which was in no way imperiled by the defection of Bernardine Ochino: "We know," said Cardinal Antonio Sanseverino to the college of cardinals, "that right now the Capuchins are highly esteemed by everyone. Through their poor, strict and holy life they seem to have brought back to the world the pure, simple and genuine apostolic life, walking in the way Christ showed to his apostles and to all who wish to follow Him carrying their cross on the road of perfection, teaching them to renounce and despoil themselves of all things. They wish to hold fast also to the traditions bequeathed them by the seraphic St. Francis." Cf. Melchior of Pobladura: *La bella*, 13, no. 18; also d'Alencon, *Tribulationes*, 55.

<sup>43</sup>Igino da Alatri, *La vita cristiana nel secolo di Vittoria Colonna*, in

typical product of sixteenth century culture, defended the Capuchins as a powerful religious force in a complex society badly in need of some radical non-conformists. In her *Information de la Verità* sent to a commission of cardinals appointed by Pope Paul III in 1536 to mediate the differences between the Observants and Capuchins, she discusses the religious, monastic and social problems of the time. The numerical growth of the Capuchins was proof of the vitality of the reform and showed how well they were being received:

"As our Divine Lord said: *The works that I do bear witness to me*. The most holy life of some 700 friars, true mendicants, highly praised in every city of Italy, can be questioned by no one. For the past five years and more the people say they would like to see this holy reform continue."<sup>44</sup>

The suspicion that the Capuchins were Lutherans in disguise because they proclaimed "liberty of the spirit," a phrase that smacked of both the new Lutheranism and the old Fraticelli, was, ironically, turned around into a charism of virtue and submission to the hierarchy.

"As to the first we can reply: If the friars are Lutherans, then St. Francis himself was a heretic. If to preach liberty of the spirit from vice and to be subject in all things to Holy Church is erroneous, by the same token it would be wrong to observe the gospel which repeatedly tells us: *it is the Spirit that gives life*. They publicly demonstrate that they do not preach the things they are accused of. Let their adversaries share something of their life, let them understand their humility, obedience, poverty, example, customs and charity, and they might become equally devout."<sup>45</sup>

Juridical bulls and briefs of approval bear ample witness

*Italia Francescana*, 1946, XXI, 13-24; *idem.*, *Fede e opere nella vita di Vittoria Colonna*, *ibid.*, 207; *idem.*, *I detrattori di Vittoria Colonna*, *ibid.*, 280-295; *idem.*, *L'amore di Vittoria Colonna per la Chiesa e per il Papa*, *ibid.*, 340-349; Benedetto da Alatri, *Vigorosa apologia. Lettera di Vittoria Colonna al card. Contarini*, in *Vittoria Colonna, marchesa di Pescara* (1574-1974) Rome 1947, 103-112; other writers: (*Italia Francescana*, 1947, XXII, 5-126); Melchior of Pobladura, *El emperador Carlos V contra los Capuchinos: Collectanea Franciscana*, 1964, 34, 372-390.

<sup>44</sup>E. d'Alencon, *Tribulationes*, 31.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

to their charism, which operated like the soul in the body.

"There are briefs which confirm the chapter and the election of the vicar, but the most marvelous documents they possess are their fervent works, which proclaim that each one of them individually and all of them together, have the seal of the wounds of Christ in their hearts, the brief of the stigmata of St. Francis in their minds, and confirmed by the infinite blessings daily bestowed on them by His Holiness, Our Lord. They accept all documents which bind them to a strict observance of the Rule. They have rejected and will continue to reject all those which relax it in any shape or form."<sup>46</sup>

The Capuchins practiced Franciscan submission to the hierarchy, including the local ordinaries, the diocesan bishops. They sought their collegiate approval, looking upon them as sharers in the supreme authority of the Holy See. A withdrawal from the authority of the Bishops would lead to anti-hierarchical rebellion and heresy.

"There cannot be a more humble or more Christian act than to subject oneself to the ordinaries. It is enough to say that anyone who criticizes their authority goes contrary to the mind of St. Francis who in his time respected them...They are to be subject in the first place to His Holiness, Our Lord, as to a head, and should willingly show obedience to the prelates as members of such a head. Those who love and submit themselves to the head and all its members show much more humility and devotion than those who act otherwise, considering the great scandal that results and the ruin of souls that follows such dissensions and quarrels which are of daily occurrence in the city and the diocese. And I regret to say, in the Lord, that these things have happened."<sup>47</sup>

The serious problem of reintegrating the Capuchin reform into the Observants was a frustrating experience because of constant delays. Things went from bad to worse, as our author complains:

"They tell us that we can see and prove and be well aware of the fact that the Observant community is in need of reform and that in three of their general chapters they voted to

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

reform. They have not done so. They are not capable of doing it. In their provincial chapters they have squelched any idea of reform. Pope Clement of happy memory issued a bull on the subject and there are two briefs from your Holiness which clearly demonstrate the need for reform. All attempts at reform have been suppressed. The only one that has succeeded is the one that has separated from them. It is essential that they remain separated. As your Holiness is well aware, those who hate reform in themselves, hate to see it in others. To them, black is white. And here lies the cause of so much persecution on their part."<sup>48</sup>

In a more conciliatory tone our redoubtable defender admits that there was a genuine reforming spirit among most of the Observants and holds out the possibility of reasonable pluralism and co-existence which would be in accord with fruitful Franciscanism.

"It would be a source of great edification and usefulness for the entire Franciscan Order and the two thirds of the Observant friars who disapprove of such persecution. They say: 'These are our brothers, children of the same father. They observe greater austerity. God inspires them and gives them the strength to maintain that strictness which prevailed in the beginning. We do not wish to impede something we ourselves would like to imitate. We too would like to cut down on the glosses added to the Rule. We would all then be able to enjoy peace and contentment, because in the one family of St. Francis there would be *'Bonus, Melior, Optimus.'*"<sup>49</sup>

With a keen insight into the spirit of the times, she locates Capuchin radicalism within the framework of that widespread drive for renewal which stirred within the Church from the beginning of the Lutheran crisis and which was productive of so many projects. Victoria Colonna has only the older orders in mind. Instead of forbidding anyone from joining the Capuchins, it would be better to spend one's efforts in helping all Christians, laity, clergy and religious to achieve personal reformation.

"As for receiving friars, which seems to be the *bone of*

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

*contention* it amounts to slamming a door that God wants to be kept open. There are other causes, too, which cause me grave concern and which displease God, recalling the words of the Saviour: *woe to you who shut the door of the kingdom of heaven*. We have a duty to assist, to stimulate, to spur men along the road to God and religious orders to be faithful to their commitment, urging them to conversion, friar by friar and layman by layman. I cannot understand why St. Francis is treated so badly by the curia. As Your Holiness knows the Benedictines have ten reforms, all of them independent. They wear white to distinguish themselves from those wearing black. All kinds of separation is necessary. St. Augustine's friars and other religious orders have had their reforms. Why should it come as a surprise that St. Francis wishes his followers to have two reforms, one mediocre and the other perfect?"<sup>50</sup>

These words should stimulate historians to undertake a study in depth to show how the Capuchins, in their efforts and openness had much in common with other religious and reform movements of the time, like the Hospitallers, various congregations of regulars, clerical and lay groups of both men and women.<sup>51</sup> Ludwig Pastor gives first place in this field to the Jesuits and the Capuchins.

In their chapter of September 1538 the Capuchins elected a new vicar general, Father Bernardine Ochino, a man much admired by Victoria Colonna. She wrote to Pope Paul III who at the time was staying with the Observants at Nice and was being pressured by their minister general to check the growth of the Capuchins:

"My joy has been mixed with so much grief that I no longer think of Rome, since I have been informed that your Holiness is planning new difficulties for the Capuchins, those poor little ones, most obedient servants of your Holiness. They don't defend themselves, or weave plots. It is now two years

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. M. Marrocchi, *La riforma cattolica, Documenti e testi*, 2 vol. ed. Morcelliana, Brescia 1967-1970. *Idem.*, *Per la storia della spiritualità in Italia tra il cinquecento e il seicento*, *La Scuola Cattolica*, no. 5. 1978, 414-445.

since I have written about them; and now the father general of the Observants has gone to Nice to talk to your Holiness and fill your ears with all kinds of evil reports based on the prudence of the flesh which is an enemy of God. If your Holiness really wishes to learn of the wonderful fruits produced by the Capuchins, their obedience and the honor they bring to your Holiness, you should send two honest investigators to every city in Italy and they will witness to their wonderful spirit, the esteem in which they are held by the people, the hatred the heretics have for them, their obedience to every wish of your Holiness, how much they are in demand, how one of them even predicted a calamity that would befall the city of Genoa...everybody knows these things. They are careful not to do anything that might displease your Holiness. Alas, Holy Father, is this the reform you want to destroy? Do you want to do away with the very best?"<sup>52</sup>

The minister general Vincent Lunel put off from one chapter to another any meaningful solution to the problem of internal reform. Nor did he slacken his efforts to prevent the Observants from crossing over to the Capuchins. On August 5, 1541 he obtained a pontifical brief *Cum Autem Sicut Accipimus*<sup>53</sup> which restricted the permission granted orally for transferal to the Capuchins, in order to forestall disturbances, conflicts and scandals!

Real scandal, as well as consternation and terror, were caused by the flight of the famous preacher Bernardine Ochino who had been re-elected vicar general of the Capuchins in 1541. The following year while in Geneva dialoguing with the Protestants he left the Catholic Church. Pope Paul III was so distraught that he planned to suppress

<sup>52</sup>E. d'Alencon: *Tribulationes*, 54.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. P. Melchior of Pobladura: *La bella*, 303, no. 659. *Ibid.*, 12: "As we have been informed...the friars known as Capuchins have, contrary to the wording and intent of our letters, presumed to receive professed religious of the Observants on the pretext of permission granted orally by Us thereby causing discord and strife and scandal to many, We...by virtue of these presents command and ordain that they do not receive or keep among them any of the above mentioned Observants even though they come in secular or religious garb and claim to have oral permission or under any other pretext." (*ibid.*, 59).

the Order completely. But the fidelity of the Capuchins to the Holy See, despite the defection of their leader, guaranteed their orthodoxy and the reality of their charism within the Church and society. On May 22, 1542 an ecumenical council was convoked.

The "battle of the bulls and briefs" between the Capuchins and the Observants ended up in a draw. Julius III in a brief *In Imminente Sedis Apostolicae* (Feb. 15, 1551)<sup>54</sup> forbade any criss-crossing between the two groups: the Observants were not allowed to join the Capuchins without written permission of their superiors; the Capuchins were not permitted to transfer to the Observants. The practice of some reform groups within the Observants of wearing the beard and a habit similar to the Capuchins probably eased tensions. Pius IV definitely established the independence of the Capuchin Order from the Observants with the bull *Pastoralis Officii Cura* of April 2, 1560.<sup>55</sup> He placed them under the protection of the Conventuals and forbade any other reform group to adopt their characteristic insignia.

This whole series of pontifical documents, covering a span of thirty-four years deserves more detailed study. This would show how the Capuchins used their charismata to practice the submission they always professed toward the Holy See, even when the Roman Curia was cool toward them or openly hostile, and how well they followed their liberty of spirit in realizing their Franciscan renewal.

Such research would shed further light on the synthesis drawn up by a chronicler of the Order, Bernardine of Colpetrazzo, a thumb-nail sketch of their loyalty to the papacy in good times and in bad.

"The popes have granted our congregation everything the friars requested for their survival and expansion. And this all the more graciously since many times our fathers did not know what to ask, and the Popes, guided by the Holy Spirit, provided for their needs so bountifully that one of good judg-

<sup>54</sup>*Bullarium Capuccinorum*, I, 24; also Melchior of Pobladora, *Historia generalis Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum, pars prima*, 1525-1619, 52, Rome 1947.

<sup>55</sup>*Bullarium Capuccinorum*, 25-28; Melchior of Pobladora *op. cit.*, 352.

ment could see that they were acting under divine guidance. Union with the prelates of the Church was so essential for its survival that the Order could not have existed without it. Anyone reading the terrible trials the Order had to undergo in the course of time will realize that it would have been wiped out if God had not rescued it through the prelates of the Church and the Holy Fathers in particular."<sup>56</sup>

##### 5. The Capuchin Charism as a Sign of the Times

In its *Decretum Pro Regularibus et Monialibus* of December 3, 1563, the Council of Trent approved, as a "privilege of poverty" the exemption of some Franciscans from possessing goods in common, which had been imposed on other regulars "with the exception of the convents of the Friars Minor Capuchin and the Observants."<sup>57</sup> The men who had recently undergone such great tribulations now sat in the first place. The Capuchins numbered some 3,000 and could finally cross the Alps to establish foundations in other countries.<sup>58</sup> A fascinating portrayal of their manifold activities can

<sup>56</sup>Melchior of Pobladora: *La bella*, 303, no. 659.

<sup>57</sup>"Third chapter. This sacred synod grants permission for all monasteries and religious houses (except those of the Friars Minor Capuchins and the Observants) to henceforth possess property even though it may be forbidden by some of their Constitutions or not granted by apostolic privilege." (*Council of Trent: IX. Actorum pars prima*, ed. S. Ehses, Societatis Goerresianae), 1080. Archbishop Bartholemew de los Martires regretted "that not all the brothers of St. Francis were excluded from permission to possess property," 1094.

<sup>58</sup>Bernardine of Asti took part in the first sessions of the council (Dec. 13, 1545-Sept. 13, 1547) as a theologian. He also gave witness to the new Capuchin life style: "...this council marked the beginning of great reforms in the Church of God in these last times as can be seen both in its profession of the gospel faith and the apostolic teachings of its decrees. And amidst the darkness of so many excesses appeared the practice of the apostolic life by the Capuchins...Father Bernardine was greatly respected for his modesty; a man of great learning and courage, and eminent father of a religious Order esteemed more than all others by the Christian people, he went around the kitchens barefoot and in worn garments with a little flask begging some bread and wine, and sometimes with a little pot for some soup. He did this and other things with a gentleness and a marvelous blend of seriousness and simplicity." (Paul of Foligno, *op. cit.*, 355). For an account of other Capuchins at the council especially their part in the discussions on the problems of Fran-

be found in a famous novel by Manzoni, an able interpreter of seventeenth and eighteenth century society. *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) pictures the Capuchins as a sign of contradiction from their very first appearance among groups, either intellectuals, liberals or democrats.

"The word 'friar' was uttered at this period with the greatest respect and with the most bitter contempt; of both of these sentiments, perhaps, the Capuchins were, more than any other order, the object. They possessed no property, wore a coarser habit than others and made a more open profession of humility. They therefore exposed themselves in a greater degree to the veneration or the scorn which might result from the various attitudes of the beholders."<sup>59</sup>

An impartial and intelligent interpreter, an observer and scourge of contemporary mores, he does not describe the reception given the Capuchins in terms of class ideologies but according to the emotional reactions of individuals. The Capuchin friar was beholden to no one class. He was all to all, enjoying total independence in his activities and services.

"...such was the condition of the Capuchins that nothing seemed to them too mean or too exalted. To serve the sick, and be served by the powerful, to enter palaces and huts with the same humility and assurance, to be at times in the same house the butt of jests and a man without whom no decisions were taken, to beg alms everywhere and give them to every beggar at the convent door — the Capuchin was used to everything."<sup>60</sup>

They were part of the Lazaretto in Milan from its inception, a fact confirmed by their continual presence there even in changed times. Manzoni gives the reason why the civil authorities put the Capuchins in charge of the hospital: "seeing that those who were running such an important ad-

ciscan poverty, cf. my article: *Frati cappuccini e il concilio di Trento*, in *Italia Francescana*, 1943, 18, 50-78.

<sup>59</sup>C. III. Is this meant to be an historical fact, or an ironical comment of the times of our author? Or is there question of an attitude taken in our post conciliar days with regard to Capuchin friars who persist in remaining "historical"?

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

ministration could not do anything else but relinquish it."<sup>61</sup>

This transfer of administration recalls the ministry of the Capuchins in the first days of the reform:

"And it was good that they accepted it, since there were no others willing to do so. They had no other aim but to serve, without any other ambition in this world than a death more enviable than envied."<sup>62</sup>

The illustrious writer voices the gratitude of the whole population for that ministry of charity, which according to St. Paul, is the greatest of all charisms. (I Cor. XII, 31; XIII, 13).

"The spirit and deeds of these friars deserve to be immortalized, with admiration and tenderness, with the gratitude that is their due for great services rendered by men for men, especially due to those who looked for no reward."<sup>63</sup>

Following Manzoni's example, Vincent Gioberti in presenting his religious and political concept of society points to the Capuchin as "a brother to the people."

"...as long as there are people like these in our villages, forced to sweat in working the soil and roughing it in the fields, a religious congregation dedicated especially to refining their minds and easing their labors, sharing their hardships, raising them up through the power of religion, will be of great moral and civic benefit."<sup>64</sup>

The patriarchs of the Capuchin reform reveal the sources of the friars' spiritual nobility and their influence among the people.

"The spiritual ancestry of the Capuchins is of the noblest, stemming from Christ himself, the universal source of all noble lineage. Like all institutions based on the gospel, the Order is distinguished for its religious intimacy and depth, traits that are lacking in the greatest pagan institutions. The Capuchin is the archetype of the poor man, a hard working man of the people, raised up, and purified through the gospel. Humility

<sup>61</sup>C. XXXI.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.* For a complete evaluation of the historical and literary relationship of Alexander Manzoni with the Capuchins cf. G. Santarelli's study: *I Cappuccini nel romanzo manzoniano.*, Milan, ed. Vita e Pensiero, 1970.

with dignity, simplicity and nobility blend in his personality, where extremes meet to create a harmonious Christian unity.'<sup>65</sup>

A new dimension was added to the charm which the austere and human personality of the Capuchin exercised on society — a typically Franciscan poetic and romantic trait, something unusual when we come to think about it, but nonetheless genuine and appealing when viewed against the background of asceticism.<sup>66</sup>

"The Capuchin is a poet, because his habit, his demeanor, his style reflect beautifully the ideals of the common people who are by nature poetic. The Capuchin Order is the democracy of religious life...I am convinced, too, that the Capuchin's beard and habit belong in paintings...they have something about them of the ancient and primitive, they hark back to Eastern beginnings and the times of the patriarchs... Perhaps this poetic character is due in part to their origins, from their founder, whose classical unadorned simplicity Matthew de Bascio found in his own reform...we find in the Capuchins relived and ever renewed that ancient style of Francis of Assisi, so beautiful, so poetic, so Italian..."<sup>67</sup>

With prophetic vision Gioberti anticipated the solution for our *post-councilar renewal*, so often restated but applied in such a variety of ways.

"Though I am a man of the nineteenth century, I must confess to my love for the Capuchins. Even though the changed conditions of the times prevent them from offering all the services to Christian society they once did I am convinced that by adapting to new situations without sacrificing their particular charism, they can still revive old time blessings. As I see it, the reason for the durability of the Capuchins in comparison with some other orders is precisely that characteristic which has endeared them to so many people, and, unless I am very much mistaken, constitutes the very essence of their life. The Capuchin is a brother to the people."<sup>68</sup> In 1841 Father

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 104-105.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

Henry Dominic Lacordaire ascended the pulpit of Notre Dame in Paris in his black and white Dominican habit to argue the rights of the Order of Preachers to live freely in France. It had been suppressed, together with other religious institutes during the French Revolution. Lacordaire also advocated the restoration of the Friars Minor Capuchin, who best represented "authentic and popular Franciscanism." The learned and eloquent preacher quoted the poet Dante who wrote that Divine Providence had raised up St. Francis and St. Dominic to renew the Church in the thirteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

"It is an incontrovertible fact that if civilization produces wealth, wealth is liable to be grossly abused. It can ruin the body and corrupt the soul. Science, another product of civilization is also subject to abuse. It can give birth to monstrous errors. The thirteenth century had need of two things: control of wealth and control of science. Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of great enterprises and of great men, men who are free and holy, after having established spiritual families in the rural areas, raised up in the medieval cities two men to combat the abuse of wealth and the abuse of science: Francis, the man of poverty, and Dominic, the man of learning."

"St. Francis was the knight of holy poverty. God did not summon his champion from the ranks of the poor. That would have been too easy. He called him from that class of selfish and avaricious men who set great store on wealth, who worship gold as their god. Divine Providence is always ingenious. Its ways are always amazing."<sup>70</sup>

Master of psychology that he was, Lacordaire showed how the culture and humanism of the nineteenth century demanded the return of medieval Franciscanism: "Gentlemen, we have come here today to ask you to bring back the order of the masses, the order with popular appeal, the order of pover-

<sup>69</sup>*Par.*, XI, 31-36.

<sup>70</sup>Henri-Dominique: *Sur la nécessité et l'origine des Ordres religieux*. Preached at Notre Dame Jan. 22, 1852 for the establishment of the Capuchins in Paris. (A collection was taken up for the completion of their chapel recently opened on the Boulevard Montparnasse), in *Sermons, instructions et allocutions (Notices, textes, fragments, analyses)*, II. *Sermons* (1850-1856), 234 Paris, 1885.

ty, three things that are always with us. The family of St. Dominic has been happily restored through the good offices of our archbishop. Today his pastoral solicitude pleads for that Order of poverty which in the thirteenth century stood side by side with the sons of St. Dominic, and in presenting their cause I have the support of the bishops of Nancy and Autun."<sup>71</sup>

His arguments, taken from the evils and complexities affecting French society of his time are still valid today and have even a wider application. Though expressed in different formulas, the fundamental social and historical reality of the problems remains pretty much the same. Proletarian Marxism has degenerated into a brutal dictatorship wielded by a privileged class. The antithesis of true democracy, it shuts man off from the road of liberty and deprives him of his personal and social rights.

"Gentlemen, you are in a state of decadence because you live in an age of business and pleasure. Yes, you are degenerate because you let yourselves be ruled by businessmen who are out to make money by fair means or foul, and by pleasure seekers who are out to spend it in any which way...I shall not go into details."

"You are living in a state of barbarism, because, as a consequence of the rule of business and pleasure, you have beneath you a whole body of the population who are ignorant, gross, despised and who envy you your money and your pleasures and who would like to strip you of them and enjoy them themselves. Here is barbarism, the offspring of decadence. The barbarians will eventually triumph because they are the natural and legitimate heirs of the degenerate...and I feel very sorry for the degenerate."

"You enjoy a civilized society because you still have among you many who are Christians, many men of genius, many who love literature, philosophy, liberty, religion — all those inseparable values which depend one upon the other."<sup>72</sup>

The choice of evangelical poverty on the part of the Friars

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

Minor Capuchin and their presence among the lower classes will act as a leaven for the renewal of society.

"All men of good will, all reasonable and dedicated men who cultivate religion, liberty, literature and philosophy must get involved in the struggle against decadence. I am convinced that the restoration of the religious orders, especially the Franciscans, will be a powerful help to civilization in its battle against decadence and barbarism. Devote your efforts to supporting religion, to refining the masses and leading them to the practice of morality. Have no fear of the presence of the monks among you. They will accomplish more good than you, for they will do it without your pride. They have no contempt for the masses. They know how to mix with the people, our inexhaustible national resource. You may recall the days of old when they were consuls, senators, emperors, and you may remember that there were men who turned their backs on imperial Rome in disgust and, full of hope, looked to the Thebaid of the anchorites."

"Rise up! Unite! Bring back to France the Order of the people, the popular Order. To this city, where there is so much destitution, restore the Order of poverty. In doing so you will render an immense service to the present generation and to those of the future, a great and precious boon to our twofold homeland, our earthly and our heavenly country."<sup>73</sup>

The fiery orator inveighed against all the wretchedness of the "City of Light." He also addressed the problem of the religious and secular education of the country people.

"The second free and normal service which the poor need is the free and normal service of truth. You, I trust, possess the truth in your books and your academies, in the minds of your learned and titled professors. But what about the lower classes? Who will bring the truth to them? Who will bring it to the common people, children of God like yourselves? Who will carry the truth to the poor in the rural areas, to the men whose minds, like their bodies, are bent toward the earth, and lift them up to face the true, the beautiful, the sacred, to all that can inspire a man and give him the courage to live? Who will seek out my brothers, the people, out of love, unselfishly,

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

solely for the satisfaction of speaking to them of God as they go about their daily toil? Who will bring them, not a dead book but something far more precious, a living faith, a vibrant word, God made present in a sentence, God and the apostle's soul telling them at the same time: Here I am, a man like you. I have studied. I have read books. I have meditated for you who were not able to. I bring you knowledge. You need not search far for my credentials. *You can see them in my life.* It is love that speaks the words of truth!"<sup>74</sup>

It is urgent that we meet the unspoken aspirations of the people and interpret them in the light of their spiritual and cultural needs. Untold questions must find an answer.

"Who can, who would dare to speak to the people in this way if not the apostle of the people, the Capuchin? In its richness the Church has raised up great orators for the poor as well as for kings. She instructs her missionaries in the eloquence of the hut as well as in the eloquence of the court. Yet the voice of the Church has not reached our poor. In the rural areas there are thousands of French citizens who have not heard the thunders of truth for over forty years. 'Oh, they have their parish priest', you say. I agree. They have him, a rampart and representative of religion, a devoted shepherd, a pleasing image of simple, everyday virtue. And this is much. But the power of the word cannot be equated with the authority of the pastor. The passage of time can deaden it and rob it of the charm of freshness. If you city dwellers need fresh points of view, so do the country folk. Like you, the poor have need of the intoxication of words. They too have motions to be stirred up, they too have recesses of the heart where truth slumbers and where eloquence must arouse it. Let them listen to a Demosthenes; and the Demosthenes of the people is the Capuchin."<sup>75</sup>

Simultaneously Louis Veuillot, editor of *L'Univers*, was fighting to have Capuchins allowed to stay in the south cemetery of Paris, to wear their habit and perform their religious services to the people. He used an "*argumentum ad hominem*" in his reply to M. Guerault, editor of the an-

<sup>74</sup>*Conferences de Notre Dame*, II. (*Oeuvres*, III) 196 Paris, 1857.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 196-197.

tical publication *La Republique* who ridiculed the external appearance of the Capuchins:

"The question comes down to this, whether the Capuchins, who are French citizens just as much as the editor of *La Republique*, are allowed to preach the Christian faith as freely as he preaches socialism; whether they can accept alms for their ministrations as willingly as the editor receives his wages for the articles he writes; whether they can wear their habit as the editor wears a suit, and now wears a dress coat; whether they can go barefoot while the editor rides in his coach; whether they can chant the hymns of the Church as the editor sings the songs of Beranger."<sup>76</sup>

Apart from any particular ideological or partisan views, the fact is that the friars enjoyed the favor and good will of the people.

"Two Capuchins preached the Lenten course last year (1850) in a large parish situated in the heart of Paris. For two months, in their habits and sandals, they walked all over the city. Several times we asked them how the people reacted. We can assure you that in no part of the city, and from none of its residents, were they subjected to the coarse insults hurled at them by the editor of *La Republique*..."<sup>77</sup>

The Capuchins of the rationalistic, liberal, anticlerical nineteenth century were closer to the heart of the people than their cultural and political adversaries. They represented a genuine democracy which drew its inspiration from the religious and social teachings of the gospel. The Capuchins witnessed them with prophetic insistence, in the context of the daily life of the masses, supported by the evangelical beatitudes and Franciscan minority. As animators of human progress they were a leaven in religious and cultural life.

"We emphatically reject the notion that a Capuchin who spends his days preaching, hearing confessions and studying barefoot in a heatless cell, who spends part of the night in

<sup>76</sup>*Mélanges (mis en ordre et notés par François Veuillot)*, IV, 365, Paris. ed. Lethielleux 1934. This was the verse:

"*Bénit soit la Vierge et les Saints  
On rétablit les Capucins.*"

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 365.

prayer and the rest on a straw pallet is leading a soft and idle existence. We reject the notion that the Capuchin, continually occupied in preaching, meditation, studying and the works of the sacred ministry, that this priest who carries the message of peace, sentiments of charity and thoughts of eternal life everywhere, that this religious who has withdrawn from all the pleasures and all the ambitions of the world and has even given up his name, we reject the notion that this man, with his habit, beard and bare feet is any less an honor to the human race than a ballet dancer, a vaudeville performer, a poet, or any writer or politician.<sup>78</sup>

### 6. Charism and Prophetic Sign?

This study of the historical experience of the Capuchins provides us with some points for reflection about the role and image of the friars in this second age of the order ushered in after the second Vatican Council with new styles of religious observance and different types of ministry.

A few points we might ponder:

1. Can the renewal of religious orders envisaged by Vatican Council II be carried out in our Capuchin family through a reawakening of the spiritual experiences which achieved such great results in its first century of existence and which have never been rejected?<sup>79</sup>

2. Will such a renewal result from decrees from *above*, from a hierarchical summit, or grow from *below*, like the early Franciscan and Capuchin movements?

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 370. Modeste de Corpataux: *Louis Veuillot, avocat des Capuchins (1838-1938) in Sankt Fidelis*, 1938, XXV, 118-122.

<sup>79</sup>The topic of new life styles and apostolic ministries was treated in the interprovincial congress held in Rome November 1948. Cf. *Acta congressus interprovincialis fratrum minorum Capuccinorum de Hodiernis apostolatus necessitatibus*, Rome, Nov. 21-27, 1948. Rome 1951. XVI - 307 p. (Supplem. *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 67) 1951. The study of R. Carli, F. Crespi, G. Pavan, *Analisi dell'Ordine dei frati minori cappuccini, a cura della Commissione di studio per il rinnovamento dell'Ordine*, Milano, Etas Compass Libri, 1974 is a critical and deep examination of methods of research and statistical analysis. Much could be said about it! Cf. also AA.VV., *Attualità dell'esperienza francescana (Il cappuccino oggi, 1)* Milan. Studio teologico S. Francesco, 1972.

3. Will the opinions of religious and civil authorities, and especially of the people, have a definite input, so that the saying "*Vox populi, vox Dei*" will be true also for modern Capuchin renewal?