

*The Bull Religionis Zelus:
Introduction to the Amended Text*

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Through the good offices of Catherine Cibo, Duchess of Camerino, the Capuchin reform was approved by Pope Clement VII in a brief *Exponi nobis* given at Viterbo July 3, 1528 and on the same day officially "sealed," that is issued in the form of a bull beginning with the words: *Religionis Zelus*. While preserving the substance of the brief, the bull contains a number of changes. Along with the original document, which was given to Louis of Fossombrone, two authentic copies of the bull were made, one for Raphael, brother of Louis and the other for Catherine Cibo. None of these documents has survived.

It is said that the original was preserved in the town of Fossombrone. The chronicler Mario of Mercato Saracino arranged to have two true copies made at Ancona by Vincenzo Pavesio, notary apostolic, on July 10, 1579. From the copy kept in the general archives of the order (the other is preserved in the archives of the province of Ancona) Zachary Boverius (*Annales* I, 94-96) published the text of the bull, without, however, strictly adhering to the wording. Apart from some changes of little or no consequence, there are a number of omissions. Both Luke Wadding (*Annales* XVI, ad an. 1528 n XV) and the editor of the *Bullarium Capucinatorum* (I, 3 ff) follow Bovarius' text, with its omissions and introduce some variations of their own. The text found in the *Bullarium Romanum* (ed. Turin VI, 113-115) is certainly better. But it must be admitted that the Ancona version (even though the notary testified that it was "faithfully reproduced from the original and collated with it "word for word,") is not free from copiest's errors. Since scholars, especially Fran-

ciscan, who write about our history usually make use of the editions of Boverius or Wadding, or the *Bullarium Cappuccinorum*, we have published a corrected version of the authentic transcript which is purged of the more obvious errors. For the sake of clarity we have kept the paragraph numbering used by Boverius and our *Bullarium* and which needed to be adopted.

Religionis Zelus

Clement, Bishop
Servant of the Servants of God

To our beloved sons Louis and Raphael of Fossombrone, professed religious of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. Greetings, and our apostolic blessing.

Your zeal for religion, uprightness of life and conduct and other praiseworthy qualities of sincerity and virtue of which we have been reliably informed lead us favorably to accede, as far as God permits, to your petition, particularly in those matters which concern the salvation of souls and the propagation of religion.¹

1. Indeed, the petition you recently submitted recounts how, led by a fervent desire of serving the Most High², you entered the Order of Friars Minor Observant. Having made profession you remained in the order for some time and then, with permission of your superiors,³ and in conformity with the apostolic brief concerning unity and harmony between the aforementioned friars and those known as Conventuals, you transferred to the community of the latter, being graciously received by the provincial of the province of the Marches and were associated with the Conventual friars of the said province. And when, for the good of your souls and the glory of God, you wished to lead an eremitical life and as far as human frailty would permit⁴ to observe the rule of the blessed Francis, the aforesaid minister provincial granted you leave to ap-

¹*Vestris — nostris.* Trans.

²*Fervore serviendi — favore serviendo.* Trans.

³*Vestri — nostri.* Trans.

⁴*Quantum — quanta.* Trans.

proach the Roman Curia to ask and petition from us and the Apostolic See whatever would seem opportune for the salvation of your souls and the glory of God.

2. Our beloved son, Andrew, cardinal priest of the title of St. Prisca, protector of the above-mentioned order, also⁵ gave permission for you to make a like petition, on condition, however, that one of your group acting on behalf of the others, would present himself each year to the minister provincial or the provincial chapter of the forementioned friars Conventual in whose territory you live as a token of submission. The minister, if it seems good to him, may visit you once a year, but not more often, and if he should find that you are not observing the rule, admonish you to observe it more faithfully and take appropriate means to secure obedience. Apart from this he may not transfer you from place to place, nor impose any new burdens on you or make demands on you, but rather is obliged to protect and defend you that you may better⁶ serve the Most High in peace, as we understood to be contained in the letters patent from the same cardinal protector and minister provincial.

3. Wherefore we have been humbly petitioned on your behalf to grant you, out of our apostolic kindness permission to lead this eremitical life,⁷ and whatever else may seem appropriate.

4. We, therefore, ever concerned for the salvation of souls, absolve you from any excommunication, suspension, interdict, and other ecclesiastical censures and penalties,⁸ whether imposed by law or by individual, for whatever reason or occasion, if you should be bound by them in any way, insofar as they affect these presents. And we, by these presents, and by our apostolic authority, grant you permission to lead the eremitical life according to the rule, likewise.

5. To wear the habit with the pointed hood.

6. To receive all, diocesan clergy and priests as well as lay people, into your community.

⁵*Indulsit* — omitted. Trans.

⁶*Famulari — tumulari*. Trans.

⁷*Huiusmodi* — omitted. Bov., Wadd., and *Bull. Cap.*

⁸*Harum serie . . . consentes* — omitted. Bov., Wadd., and *Bull. Cap.*

7. To wear the beard.

8. To betake yourselves, with permission of the owners, to hermitages or other places to dwell there and lead an austere and eremitical life and to beg anywhere.

9. We further grant you full and free permission and faculties to enjoy each and every privilege, indult and concession made to the Order of Friars Minor and the Camaldolese hermits of Blessed Romuald, in general or in particular, which have been granted or will be granted⁹ and which they in any way use and enjoy, so that you may use them and licitly enjoy them as they do.

10. And we command all archbishops, bishops and others of ecclesiastical dignity, as well as the canons of metropolitan and other cathedral churches,¹⁰ by themselves or through others, to afford you efficacious protection¹¹ in all that concerns the above, and to see to it that you and your people peacefully possess and enjoy all the above and not allow you or any of your people to be disturbed, hindered or disquieted, contrary to the tenor of these presents. They are to restrain any who gainsay or reject them imposing as they may see fit, punishments and other legal measures,¹² invoking for this purpose, if need be, the secular arm.¹³

11. All this notwithstanding the decrees of our predecessor of happy memory, Boniface VIII, the one published by general council in two sessions, other constitutions and apostolic ordinances, as well as the statues of the above-mentioned order and its customs, even though confirmed by oath, apostolic letters issued by any of our predecessors in the apostolic see, or by ourselves, even those with the binding force of general law and of permanent application, by *motu proprio* and with knowledge and the fullness of apostolic authority, along with any clauses that have an annulling, voiding, revoking, confirming, restricting, restoring, corroborating, declarative,

⁹*Potiuntur* — omitted. Bov., Wadd., and *Bull. Cap.*

¹⁰*Discretioni vestrae* — omitted. Wadd.

¹¹*Efficacis . . . praemissis* — omitted. Wadd.

¹²*Juris — in eis*. Trans.

¹³*Etiam* — omitted. Bov., Wadd., and *Bull. Cap.*

derogating effect,¹⁴ 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 this¹⁵ 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.

¹⁴*Mentis — mensis. Bov. and Bull. Cap.*

¹⁵*Ei — ex. Trans.*

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.¹

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).²

Seen against a broader perspective, the Capuchin Order

¹Some 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.

²For 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.