

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 Pobladora, 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 Pobladora, O.F.M. Cap., *Historia Generalis Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum*, I, Rome 1947; *Lexicon Capuccinum. Promptuarium historico-bibliographicum Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum*, Rome 1951.

Observants before and after the bull *Ite Vos* which attempted to unite reform groups of widely differing mentalities, and 2) official opposition to any kind of reform movement within the Order.

As a real foundation by which the history of the Capuchin reform can be explained, we propose the following.

### Matthew of Bascio and the Observants of Piceno

On Feb. 24, 1526 the magistrates of Cingoli were presented with an unusual petition. Help and protection was sought for a number of poor religious, priests and lay brothers who were leading an exemplary life in the hermitage of Sant'Angelo de Monte Acuto and were being severely harassed by the Observant friars. From a brief of Clement VII, issued March 8, it is clear that the friars concerned were Matthew of Bascio and the blood brothers Louis and Raphael of Fossombrone.<sup>2</sup> Hearings conducted on Feb. 24 reveal for the first time that at least since the month of February 1526 certain Observants of the province of Piceno had been agitating, not at all hesitantly, for secession and reform within the province of Piceno.

The steps taken by the three friars were inspired as an ideal by recent as well as remote events in the history of the Friars Minor in that area. It was there that the voice of Francis once resounded and there that the more serious reform movements within the Franciscan order met with an enthusiastic response. During the first years of the sixteenth century, however, even the Observants of Piceno fell victims to the spirit of excessive laxity in many of its members together with an overall decline in discipline and religious spirit. At the same time there were a number of fervent religious who longed for a more austere, hidden and devout life in conformity with the ideals of St. Francis. Like many of their confreres in other provinces they were grieved not only by frequent violations of the rule, but even more so by a life style which the superiors seemed bent on imposing on the en-

<sup>2</sup>For this deliberation and the brief of March 8, 1526 cf. E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 21-22.

tire membership. They were convinced that such a general spiritual decline was an obstacle to every legitimate aspiration to seraphic perfection and that their ideals were being stifled by superficial legalism. At the canonical visitation of June 1519 some of them asked the minister general to allow them to live in small hermitages. Father Francis Licheto granted their request as he had already done for friars in other provinces.<sup>3</sup> Later he retracted his permission. Even if he had not done so, the minister provincial John Pili of Fano would have opposed its implementation since he was firmly convinced that the *modus vivendi* of the Observant reform was in conformity with the Franciscan ideal. Supported by his conviction, he rejected any attempt at reform.

The man destined to resist any distortion of the Franciscan ideal was a humble friar from Montefeltro by name of Matthew of Bascio. Born toward the end of the fifteenth century he joined the Observants as a youth of fifteen and was ordained to the priesthood. With unflagging zeal he set about evangelizing the countryside and villages of the area. His powerful apocalyptic and penitential sermons resulted in numerous conversions. His own intense interior life led him to long for the way of life of the first friars. The frequent lapses from regular observance which he saw saddened him and he poured out fervent prayers to the Lord for light to know what path he should follow. Before taking the step that was to have such far reaching consequences he revealed his inner torment to his superiors. They gave him the stock answer, that he could follow the seraphic ideal as practiced in the Order with a safe conscience. Dissatisfied, he decided to turn to the Lord Himself to discover what route he was to follow.<sup>4</sup>

A strange encounter with a poor man he chanced to come upon in Montefalcone revealed to him the road he was to take. He would make himself a habit with a pointed hood, like the one a certain unknown person whom he had seen in a vision was wearing and which he judged to be the same as St. Francis wore. While continuing to preach the gospel, he would live in the strictest poverty. His decisive step of leaving the friary

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>4</sup>For biographical sources on Matthew: *Lexicon Capuccinum*, 1975-76.



without permission was supported by Franciscan literature and tradition. It was the mind of Francis himself that if ever the pure and integral observance of the rule should become impossible within the order, the friar might legitimately seek it elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Driven on by an irresistible impulse and convinced that he was led by the spirit of God, he went secretly to Rome to ask the Holy Father's permission to adopt the life style he felt compelled to lead. Clement VII granted him an audience and acceded to his petition on condition that he present himself to his minister provincial once a year as a sign of obedience. On his way home from Rome he preached the word of God all along the route. In April 1525 the Observants of Piceno celebrated their chapter in Jesi and John of Fano was reelected provincial. Matthew appeared before him to make his gesture of obedience as ordered by the Pope. To his great surprise, the provincial accused him of two violations: he had left his friary without permission, and he had put on a habit different from the one in use in the order. He had him imprisoned in the friary of Forano for his twofold crime.<sup>6</sup>

John Pili of Fano, the first provincial of the Observants elected after the promulgation of the bull *Ite Vos* was outstanding among the famous Observants of his day for regular observance, culture and priestly zeal. He was also well known for his austerity of life and the earnestness of his counseling. As a priest he dedicated himself principally to the ministry of preaching.<sup>7</sup> He could not have foreseen that he was destined to become an enemy of the reform movements stirring within his province. He honestly believed that it was his duty to crush, by whatever means available, such attempts in order to prevent scandal and divisiveness in the order.

Two years later, in his *Dialogo della Salute* John will explain the rationale and idealistic motives which prompted his repressive measures. He starts by saying that he saw no need for a new reform. Both the minister general Francis Quinones

<sup>5</sup>For another example, cf. Angelus Clarenus, O.M., *Expositio Regulae Fratrum Minorum*, Quaracchi 1912, 206-07.

<sup>6</sup>For Matthew's journey, cf. Marius of Mercato Saraceno, *op. cit.*, 165 ff.

<sup>7</sup>For biographical sources on John of Fano: *Lexicon Capuccinum* 833 ff.

and himself were completely satisfied that "the community life of the Observant family was good and secure," that there was nothing in it that "was contrary to the vows or other essential obligations of the rule." Sure of his position, he emphatically refutes the contentions of the reformers, quoting a little work called *Defensorium Observantiae*<sup>8</sup> written by himself. He not only explains the reasons why he was bearing down on innovators, but also reveals some serious discrepancies splitting up the friars of Piceno.

While Matthew of Bascio's gesture of "independence" planted the seed of a new reform of the Franciscan Order, he cannot be considered its founder in any juridical sense. It was left to others to petition and obtain from the Holy See the formal erection of the new institute. Matthew's role was to prepare the way for its establishment and his action was decisive. He was the first member of the Piceno province to rebel against a way of life which was rightly or wrongly held up as "the true observance of the rule." By his example he tried to replace dead formalism with a vital conformity with the life of the Seraphic Father.

#### Louis Tenaglia of Fossombrone

In punishing Father Matthew as an example for the capitulars, John of Fano probably felt sure that he had quashed the secessionist movement in his province. He soon had to admit that his strong-arm tactics did not work. A few months later, in November 1525, he had to inform the minister general who was visiting the Piceno province that two other friars had left, the Tenaglia brothers, Louis, a priest and Raphael, a laybrother. They were natives of Fossombrone, sons of Count Nicola, commander of the ducal army.

Louis was born in the last decade of the fifteenth century. He followed his father in the profession of arms for which there were many opportunities in that epoch. The Duchy of

<sup>8</sup>*Dialogo della Salute*: cf. *Il "Dialogo della salute" circa la Regola dei Frati Minori nelle due compilazioni*, a cura da Bernardino da Lapedona O.F.M. Cap., Isola del Liri 1939, 9. Cf. also *Defensorium Observantiae: Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, Salamanca 1511, ff 204 v - 219 v.

Urbino and the commune of Fossombrone were embroiled in continual warfare, a source of untold misery for the common people on both sides. We can well imagine that the continual strife with its accompanying bloodshed, looting and atrocities deeply affected Louis Tenaglia. He began to experience a deep longing to serve the Lord who can neither deceive nor be deceived. A man of dynamic temperament and by nature drawn to heroic enterprises he lost no time in carrying out his resolve to enter religious life.<sup>9</sup> He applied to the Observants and was clothed in the Franciscan habit at Massaccio (now Cupramontana) in October 1516. His brother Raphael followed him as a lay brother. The presence in the same community of Blessed John Reghi of Fabriano, a man illustrious for his life of austerity and ardent desire to return to the authentic spirit of St. Francis greatly influenced his ascetical formation and dedication to Franciscan life. Under the magnetism of the future *beatus*, Louis no doubt felt the urge to imitate him and fostered in himself the same ideal of leading the Franciscan life in all its completeness.<sup>10</sup>

His longing to imitate St. Francis led him to distinguish himself for a love of penance and solitude. The problem was: Could he find in a structured environment the opportunity to lead the kind of life he had in mind? During that critical period in the history of the Observants he was compelled to follow a life style far different from the one he had in mind. He fell prey to a sense of disillusionment. Always prone to externalize his convictions, he felt that it was his duty to live the Franciscan ideal without any relaxations or mitigations that human prudence might suggest. Anyone knowing him could have predicted that Father Tenaglia, impatient with delays, would not tarry in implementing his intentions. He asked permission of John of Fano to transfer to a smaller friary where he might live *modo reformato* with other confreres of like mind, or even follow the example of Matthew of Bascio. He sensed, quite correctly, that his superior would hardly be sym-

<sup>9</sup>For biographical sources on Louis: *Lexicon Cappuccinum*, 996 ff.

<sup>10</sup>On B. John Righi's residence in Cupramontana, cf. Ciro Ortolani of Pesaro O.F.M., *Vita e Culto del B. Giovanni Righi da Fabriano*, Rome 1904, 39 ff.

pathetic. Like Matthew, he felt compelled to take flight as the only recourse left him to realize his ideal. He left the friary with his brother Raphael.<sup>11</sup> His apparently rebellious act was rationalized by the "right" to observe the rule spiritually. Zealots like Matthew of Bascio were firmly convinced that their obligation to live the Franciscan ideal in all its integrity took precedence over any other commitment. When they found it impossible to do so within the framework of the community, they looked for opportunities elsewhere, as St. Francis had allowed. No doubt such an interpretation was personal and highly subjective and smacked of the Spiritualist mentality. Of their good intentions, however, there can be no shadow of doubt.

### Louis' Goals After Leaving the Observants

The two Tenaglia brothers departed in November 1525, for John of Fano writes in his *Dialogo della salute* that they were excommunicated by the minister general during his visitation in November 1525.<sup>12</sup> It would appear that they took flight from the friary at Fossombrone without any idea of traveling about without a fixed abode like Matthew. Louis had asked his superiors for permission to live in some isolated little place with other friars of like mind — either that or be assigned to a house of recollection. When he was refused he decided to take matters into his own hands and associate himself with Matthew whom he hoped to win over to his own plans. He certainly had no idea of following the leadership of Matthew, who, he was well aware, had no authorization to accept companions from the Observants. Notwithstanding Matthew agreed to receive the two brothers. The three planned to establish a fixed residence at the hermitage of St. Michael the Archangel at Cingoli, which was at one time used by some hermits but at the moment was unoccupied. They went to the Conventuals at Cingoli and asked to be placed under their protection. Our sources are not too clear about the kind of understanding reached by the fugitives and the Conventual

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Marius of Mercato Saraceno, *op. cit.*, 195 ff.

<sup>12</sup>John of Fano, *op. cit.*, 24.



friars. The most likely hypothesis is that they fled to the Conventuals so that, while remaining in the family of St. Francis, they could be placed under their jurisdiction, a step which would have the effect of legitimizing their irregular situation. The exact time of their arrival at the hermitage of Sant'Angelo is not certain, nor do we know the number of Observants who joined them there. We do know that on Feb. 24, 1526 the Conventuals took counsel about what they could do to assist and protect the fathers and brothers in the hermitage who by now were the victims of bitter persecution at the hands of the Observants.<sup>13</sup> From this fact it would appear that the refuge now harbored more than the original three. John of Fano, resolutely opposed to any schism in the order, did not remain a passive spectator. He employed every means at his disposal to bring them back to the fold, alternating threats with promises. When he saw that he could not budge them, he felt compelled to have recourse to stronger measures. He asked the Holy See to excommunicate any friars who persisted in living outside the community. An apostolic brief of March 8 hurled an excommunication against the three, authorizing the superiors to have recourse to the secular arm, if necessary.<sup>14</sup>

The friars in the hermitage, keenly aware of the storm gathering over their heads sought refuge in flight. Matthew returned to the territory of Fabriano where he hoped to enjoy relative safety. The Tenaglias took other means to avoid capture. Most likely the other Observants who were with them yielded to the threats of their superiors and returned to their communities even before recourse was had to the Holy See.

### Toward a New Reform

Louis and Raphael after leaving the hermitage of Sant'Angelo wandered about the nearby forest for a while like hunted criminals and then decided to go to the Camaldolese hermitage near Cupramontana to seek guidance and shelter with Father Paul Giustiniani. Father Paul had founded the Camaldolese reform there just a few years

<sup>13</sup>Cf. E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 21.

<sup>14</sup>Textus brevis: *ibid.*, 21-22.

earlier. On the eve of Palm Sunday, March 24, at the hour of compline the two brothers met Paul and informed him that they had, with permission of the Holy See, left the Observants for the purpose of observing the Franciscan rule more strictly, but that later on the concession had been revoked. Now that they were being persecuted by their own brethren, they asked him what was best to do for the peace of their souls. Paul replied that under the circumstances it would be wiser for them to leave the Order of the Observants and become members of his own community or of some other. But fearful of incurring the displeasure of the Observants in the nearby friary of Romita, he notified the guardian there of the presence of the two Tenaglias in his hermitage. The guardian replied that he would like the two friars to stay at the hermitage, in fact, he would be delighted if Father Paul would clothe them with the Camaldolese habit. In this way both the Camaldolese and the Observants would be spared considerable embarrassment! Meanwhile he hastened to apprise his provincial, John of Fano, of the situation. Armed with the authority of the papal brief, John invoked the secular arm to coerce the two rebels into returning to their friary. While Father Paul was conversing with the two friars in his cell after sundown on March 26, there suddenly appeared before the gates the local military commander, soldiers and a few Observant friars to escort the fugitives to the friary of Romita. Father Paul immediately protested against this violation of the ancient right of sanctuary. The local magistrate then put in an appearance; and after lengthy discussions, the two friars were placed in his custody. The following day at the urging of Father Giustiniani they were sent back to the hermitage. Then on Wednesday March 28 the minister provincial himself, "with a great crowd of friars," broke into the hermitage to seize the runaways. Once again Father Paul protested vehemently, and they had to retreat. But foreseeing that the Observants would try again, he advised the Tenaglias to leave. They in turn begged to be clothed in the Camaldolese habit, lest they fall into the hands of their tormentors; when they had received the habit, they asked Father Paul to receive them into his community. Paul agreed to present their request to the next chapter and in the meantime arranged for their

safe conduct to the hermitage of Pascelupo.<sup>15</sup> The Camaldolese held their chapter on May 23 and voted not to receive the two friars *pro bono respectu*. However, they left the final decision to the good judgment of their major superior.<sup>16</sup> We lack further information about their request to become Camaldolese. Perhaps at the time they were so depressed and frustrated that they despaired of ever realizing their spiritual goals.

Louis left the hermitage of Pascelupo and either personally or through an intermediary sent letters to the Sacred Penitentiary asking that the excommunication be lifted from himself and his two companions and that they be permitted to lead the eremitical life outside the friary while observing the Franciscan rule in its entirety. The Sacred Penitentiary in a brief dated May 18, 1526 granted all they asked and in addition allowed them to accept alms for their own use. They were placed under the jurisdiction of the local ordinary, more specifically, the bishop of Camerino.<sup>17</sup> Indults of this kind were quite easily obtained in those days. It was common for religious who for one reason or other were unwilling to remain in their own communities to ask for an indult to lead the eremitical life. But that May 18 was a red-letter day for the entire reform movement among the Franciscans. The first firm step had been taken toward the fulfillment of the longings burning in many hearts.

Louis, through an intermediary, informed the minister provincial of the brief and with his brother Raphael went to the Bishop of Camerino to make his submission and to ask permission to settle in some little hermitage within his extensive diocese. They chose a simple place near the church of San Cristoforo on the Arcofiato hill three miles outside the city. The chroniclers place the brothers in this dwelling in the

<sup>15</sup>Paul Giustiniani himself wrote about the stay of the two Tenaglia brothers in the Camaldolese hermitage of Cupramontana and the vexations they endured in a letter published by P. Lugano, *La Congregazione Camaldolese di Montecorono*, Frascati 1908, 205-207.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 208, note 1.

<sup>17</sup>Textus brevis: E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 27 ff.

period immediately following the bull *Religionis Zelus*.<sup>18</sup> They were there more than two years devoting their time to prayer and work, including some apostolic activity among the people of the neighborhood.

This secluded life, totally dedicated to the service of God, suited them perfectly. But a tragic turn of events in the Duchy of Camerino brought them into the limelight and called attention to their exemplary life and heroic charity. A deadly plague swept through the whole territory of the Marches, nor did it spare the Duchy of Camerino where within three days it claimed the lives of more than a hundred people, among them Duke John Maria. When the plague subsided, war broke out over his successor.<sup>19</sup>

During this crisis the two Tenaglias would leave the peace of their hermitage to betake themselves to the most infected areas to minister to the bodily and spiritual needs of the plague stricken. During the war of succession they came to the aid of many who were suffering from the harassments of the soldiery.<sup>20</sup>

With the cessation of hostilities, they returned to their hermitage to resume their interrupted way of life. By this time some concrete ideas for leading the reformed life began to take shape in Louis' mind. The early biographers assert that when Louis left the Observants he had no thought of becoming the founder of a new reformed institute. His only desire was to find a place where he could lead an integral Franciscan life. We do not know for certain what considerations led him to change his mind. The one witness capable of shedding some light on his gradual change of course is Bernardine of Colpetrazzo. According to him the suggestion came from the Camaldolese hermit, Jerome of Sessa, who advised Louis to found a completely new reform group independent of the Observants and to petition the Holy See for leave to observe

<sup>18</sup>The first to point to the hermitage of San Cristoforo in Camerino as the first refuge of the Tenaglias was Nicholas of Tolentino, O.F.M. Cap. in a letter to Matthias of Salo dated February 3, 1589 which was published in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 22 (1906) 139-142.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. C. Lili, *Historia de Camerino* II, Macerata, 1652, 280-337.

<sup>20</sup>Bernardine of Colpetrazzo, *op. cit.*, 222-224.



the rule of St. Francis under the name of "Hermits" rather than "Friars Minor," just as the Camaldolese had done who professed the rule of St. Benedict while calling themselves hermits rather than monks. But the decisive influence seems to have been exerted by a number of friars who still remained within the Observant fold but who were all in favor of Louis' ideas. They continually urged Louis to start a new reform institute which would make it possible for them to lead the life of which they dreamed.<sup>21</sup> The Duchess Catherine Cibo's role in bringing these plans to fruition seems to have been providential. We do not know for certain whether it was Louis himself or someone else who sought her help. Certainly no one under heaven had a greater capacity to bring about an undertaking of such magnitude than she did. Catherine, the daughter of Francis and Magdalen de Medici, the sister of Leo X, was the niece of Pope Clement VII. She married Duke John Maria of Camerino in 1520.<sup>22</sup> The Duchess was all too willing to intercede with her uncle Clement VII for Louis as a favor to the two brothers in gratitude for their devoted service at the time of the plague.

#### A New Franciscan Family

When Louis of Fossombrone decided to found a new reform institute he well knew that he would have to obtain the assent of the minister general of the Observants, or at least of the provincial of the Marches in accordance with the provisions of the bull *Ite Vos*. He was also aware that he would ask in vain. The response would certainly be negative. Consequently he chose to place himself under the jurisdiction of the Conventuals, who, he felt sure, would be more sympathetic to his plans. But a transfer from the Observants to the Conventuals would not be easy. The provincial chapter would have to give its approval. In time, a way was found out of the dilemma. The minister provincial alone, without the chapter, could sanction the transfer. John of Fano's successor, Paul of Santo

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 179, 228, 233.

<sup>22</sup>On C. Cibo: B. Feliciangeli, *Notizie e documenti sulla vita di Caterina Cybo-Varano, duchessa di Camerino*, Camerino 1891.

Severino, a man of gentler mold than John, heard Louis' petition,<sup>23</sup> though we do not know the exact date when permission was granted. Under the mantle of the Conventuals' jurisdiction, it was now time to take the final step, to ask the approbation of the Holy See. We do not know what arrangements he made with the Duchess. They probably agreed that the next time she would go to Rome, Father Louis would join her retinue. In the meantime he could draw up a letter to be presented to Clement VII outlining the basic elements of the new reform with primacy accorded to contemplation. They would live in out of the way places clothed in hermit's garb with a pointed hood. Both clerics and lay brothers would wear the beard. They would have a superior of their own who would enjoy the same authority as a minister provincial. Since they were not motivated by selfish interests, but wished to be of help to others of like mind, they asked leave to receive clerics and religious of other orders. Finally they pledged themselves to be subject to the visitation and correction of the minister provincial of the Conventuals.<sup>24</sup>

June 1528 was a propitious time to make a journey to Rome since the political situation there was in a state of relative calm. Catherine Cibo made plans to visit her uncle Pope Clement VII who meanwhile had gone with his curia to Viterbo to enjoy a little peace. Louis traveled in the suite of the Duchess. Both were disappointed when the curia turned down his petition because it lacked clearance from the cardinal protector of the Conventuals, Andrew del Valle. His Eminence was also highly displeased with Louis' request to accept members of other religious orders — even the Observants — into his new congregation. The resourceful Louis replaced the objectionable clause with a request to share in the privileges of the Camaldolese Hermits, which included the faculty of admitting the Observants! With the new wording, Louis obtained all he wanted. On July 3 Clement VII issued the

<sup>23</sup>The transition to the jurisdiction of the Conventuals is mentioned in the bull *Religionis Zelus*. De Paulo a San Severino-Marchi (Ciro Ortolani da Pesaro O.F.M.) *I ministri provinciali delle Marche*, *vid. Picenum Seraphicum*, 3 (1917) 75.

<sup>24</sup>For text, cf. E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 44-46.

apostolic brief: "Exponi nobis" in which he gave his blessing to Louis' petition. The latter took care to have the Pope's approval sealed in the form of a bull, *Religionis Zelus* which was published July 3, 1528.<sup>25</sup>

This document was the *Magna Carta* of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. It was a source of security for the new institute for centuries. Perhaps Louis was not aware of the magnitude of his victory. It is no surprise that Matthew of Bascio is not mentioned in the bull, since only the two Tenaglia brothers had in fact petitioned for the erection of the new community.

Normally a long passage of time elapses between the first stirrings of a reform movement and its papal approbation. For the Capuchin reform things moved along very rapidly. The reason was, of course, the influence of Catherine Cibo. On the back of the apostolic brief is written: "*Intercedente Ducessa Camerini.*" Her decisive role in obtaining approval for the new Franciscan reform will never be forgotten.

The Duchess of Camerino returned home on July 10 and had the bull *Religionis Zelus* proclaimed throughout her realms by the court heralds.<sup>26</sup> Thus the name of Catherine Cibo will remain indissolubly linked with the Capuchin Order for all time.

### First Members and First Foundations

An age old tradition holds that the first two to join the new institute were Matthew of Bascio and Paul of Chioggia, Observants living outside their friaries by virtue of a papal indult. When they heard of *Religionis Zelus* they applied for admission to the new Franciscan family. Peter Matthew Antonio, under the name of Joseph of Collamato, and Bernard of Fossombrone soon followed. In September another five Observants who had also obtained permission to live away from their communities joined them. They were: Matthew of San

<sup>25</sup>For text of the bull, cf. *Bullarium Capuccinorum* I, ed. Michael of Tugio, Rome 1740, 3 ff. For changes in canonical approbation cf. E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 40-49.

<sup>26</sup>B. Feliciangeli, *op. cit.*, 92.

Leone, Peter of Pagnano, Bernard of Offida, Anthony of Penabilli and Paul of Collamato. Another seven were added before the close of the year: Angelus Zuccari of Sant'Angelo in Vado, Archangelus of Matelica, Sylvester of Montegiorgio, Louis of Urbino, James of Gubbio, Rufin of Crema, and lay-brother Francis of Macerato.<sup>27</sup>

The first hermitages, in order of establishment, were: San Giovanni Battista in Camerino, Santa Lucia da Pollenza near Mancina, Santa Maria dell'Acquarella, near Albacina, one at Fossombrone. Foundations in Fano, Montevicchio, Matelica and Pietrarubbia followed in quick succession.<sup>28</sup>

### First Chapter and Constitutions of Albacina

A few months after the publication of the bull of approbation, the new Franciscan family counted among its members a considerable number of friars who had come over from the Observants. It had spread over a wide area. Now was the time for its leaders to arrange for the election of superiors as prescribed by chapter VIII of the rule, and to enact its own statutes. We are not certain of the exact date of this chapter, the first of a long series. We only know that it was celebrated "toward the end of 1528 or the beginning of 1529," in the hermitage of Santa Maria de Acquarella in Albacina. Father Louis summoned his brethren to this out of the way place, celebrated the Mass of the Holy Spirit in their presence and all devoted much time to prayer. Then they elected as definitors: Louis of Fossombrone, Matthew of Bascio, Angelo of Sant'Angelo and Paul of Chioggia. Matthew was chosen vicar general by acclamation. Two months later he resigned his office.<sup>29</sup> More than likely he submitted his resignation while the chapter was still in session. Louis of Fossombrone succeeded him. The latter signed himself "vicar general" in a document issued in August 1529.<sup>30</sup> There can be no doubt about the

<sup>27</sup>E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 56-59.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 59-61.

<sup>29</sup>Mario di Mercato Saraceno, *op. cit.*, 241-244; Bernardine of Colpetrazzo, *op. cit.*, 244-257.

<sup>30</sup>For text of document, cf. E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 76.



historicity of the chapter, even though one scholar recently attempted to disprove it. The arguments he adduces have no validity whatsoever.<sup>31</sup>

Once the elections were over, the capitulars tackled the task of drawing up statutes to provide safe norms for living their Franciscan ideal and protect it against arbitrary interpretations. According to a later account only the four definitors worked out the text. Matthew and Angelo were the source of inspiration while Louis and Paul were entrusted with clothing in elegant language the ideas which the other two "were not able to express very well."<sup>32</sup>

The early chroniclers are lavish in their praise of these first statutes. "More heavenly than human" wrote Bernardine of Calpetrazzo. "A seed bed" for all future constitutions of the order, proclaimed Matthias of Salo.<sup>33</sup>

There can be no question that the first constitutions breathe an authentic Franciscan spirit. A careful reading of them reveals a return to the first golden age of the Order of Friars Minor. Of their 58 articles, 18 allude to the example and admonitions of St. Francis; 8 are based on his testament; 19 enjoin a strict observance of the rule and the remaining 13 are concerned with the usual disciplinary regulations. Obviously they are not all brand new. Their dependence on antecedent Franciscan tradition is evident.

A number of the articles lack logical sequence. From a negative viewpoint they constitute a collection of regulations which attack abuses which deformed the authentic image of the Franciscan Order. More positively they represent a return to the evangelical purity and simplicity of the Rule and Testament and a call to imitate the life of the Seraphic Father. The

<sup>31</sup>The learned friar who made these assertions is Th. Graf (of St. Gall) O.F.M. Cap., *Zur Entstehung des Kapuzinerordens*, Freiburg im Br. 1940, 96-99. His thesis was refuted by Melchior of Poblatura in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 10 (1940) 418-427.

<sup>32</sup>Paul of Foligno O.F.M. Cap., *Origo et Progressus Ord. Fr. Min. Capuccinorum: Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, VII Rome 1955, 58.

<sup>33</sup>Bernardine of Calpetrazzo, *op. cit.*, 249; Matthias of Salo O.F.M. Cap., *Historia Capuccina I: Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, V, Rome 1946, 154.

basic themes can be reduced to four: Poverty and austerity, prayer, regular observance, solitude and silence.

The leaders of the Capuchin reform were not so much concerned with the elimination of certain shortcomings and lack of observance as with a total renewal of the seraphic life style. As they saw it, the safest way to reach this goal was a return to the Franciscanism of the first generation of friars as described in the earliest sources. They set as their specific goal a pure and simple observance of the Rule as interpreted by the Testament and the living example of Francis and his first companions. The bull *Religionis Zelus* clearly expresses the ideal of the reformers — "to observe the Rule of Blessed Francis as far as human frailty permits."<sup>34</sup> It was a commitment to total observance. While this is not stated in so many words, the statutes of Albacina implicitly contain it by their renunciation of any pontifical declarations which weaken the Rule. Their overall purpose was to bring about, in practice, a complete conformity with the Seraphic Father. This purpose constitutes the uniqueness of the Capuchin ideal, compared with other attempts to reform the Order. It is the essential character by which the spirituality of the new Franciscan family was distinguished from the very beginning. It included the primacy of contemplation, most high poverty joined with austerity and penance, the practice of humility and simplicity which are the ingredients of "minority," and the service of all people by their ministry of preaching and works of charity.<sup>35</sup>

### Early Spread and Confirmation of the Reform

Louis of Fossombrone deserves credit not only for founding a new reform of the Franciscan family but for extending it, in a very short time, over the entire Italian peninsula. The better to accomplish this he judged it wise to found a house in Rome, the center of Christianity. The Duchess of Camerino obtained from her brothers, Lawrence and John Baptist Cibo,

<sup>34</sup>As in the text of the bull: cf. *supra*, note 25, 3.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Luigi of Genoa O.F.M. Cap., *Dottrina spirituale della primitiva legislazione capuccina*, Genoa 1963; Optatus of Veghel O.F.M. Cap., *La réforme des Freres Mineurs Capucins dans l'Ordre franciscain et dans l'Eglise*, in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 35 (1965) 5-108.

directors of the hospital of San Giacomo for incurable diseases, the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli with an adjacent residence near the Flaminian gate. With heroic charity, the newly formed Capuchin community dedicated itself to the bodily and spiritual needs of the patients in the hospital. Clergy and laity alike came to know them well and esteem them.

Very likely it was at Santa Maria dei Miracoli that Louis met Bernardine of Reggio, a friar who had vigorously championed the reform of the Observants in Calabria. Since the Calabrian reform movement drew its inspiration from the same sources as the one in the Marches, Louis entered into an understanding with Bernardine. As vicar general of the Friars Minor of the Eremitical life, Louis would receive the hermitage of Sant'Angelo da Valletuccio together with 12 friars from the province of Calabria. The latter were to choose a vicar as soon as possible. Louis would be named commissary of Reggio. To ratify this pact, the approval of all the Recollect communities of Calabria was required. It was not obtained until May 28, 1532.

In the course of 1530 Louis accepted new foundations in Foligno, Genoa, Naples and Castelluccio (now Castelmauro). In 1532 Montepulciano, Rugge (now Lecce) and Potenza were added. These foundations eventually developed into provinces. The Calabrian friars introduced the order into Sicily in 1534. The order struck its first roots in the north early in 1535.<sup>36</sup>

The widespread defection of Observant friars to the Capuchins was a source of serious concern not only for the minister general, Paul Pisotti, a bitter enemy of any reform movement, but for all those who had the future of the order at heart. The Observant community already had its hands full dealing with opposition within its ranks. The superiors promised, rather unconvincingly, internal reform and a return to first fervor. At the same time they painted the austerity of the Capuchins in false and exaggerated colors. Father Pisotti

<sup>36</sup>For the early expansion of the new Franciscan family, cf. E. d'Alençon, *op. cit.*, 66 ff, 72-81, 90-92, 108 ff, 113; Melchior of Pobladora, *Historia generalis* I, 72-80.

acted in a very hostile manner toward reformers in general and the Capuchins in particular. In his first term of office (1529-1532) he left no stone unturned in his efforts to bring about their juridical suppression. His harsh and oppressive harassment of the Capuchins left a long and bitter impression. Decades later their chroniclers will still speak about it. His efforts were wasted; they neither slowed the flow of Observants to the Capuchins nor stemmed the spread of the order. Toward the end of 1529 he took a new tack. On December 14 he obtained a pontifical brief aimed at "certain reformed friars." The brief however, lacked teeth, since it failed to detail charges. Once aware of this oversight, Father Pisotti secured a new pontifical document which zeroed in on specific points. The new brief, dated May 27, revoked all concessions made to the Capuchins of the Marches and the reformed friars of Calabria. It enjoined the minister general to bring the friars back to the convents they had left. But even this new brief caused no great trouble for the Capuchins. Although it mentioned Louis and his brother Raphael and the friars of Calabria by name, it apparently revoked only the privileges that had been granted by the Sacred Penitentiary, leaving intact the bull *Religionis Zelus*, which constituted the Capuchin's juridical base. Two subsequent briefs, issued December 2, 1531 and July 3, 1532 left the Capuchin life intact.<sup>37</sup>

A few months later the superiors of the Observants who had remained in Rome while Father Pisotti was conducting the canonical visitation of the French houses, obtained from the Holy See the bull *In Suprema* which mandated a long overdue reform within the Franciscan Order. Not only did it forbid anyone to trouble the friars who wished to observe the rule purely and simply, but provided that in each province four or five houses should be assigned to them to be administered by a superior of their own choice.<sup>38</sup>

This bull threatened the very existence of the Capuchins. If its provisions were enforced, the new reform could only an-

<sup>37</sup>For Paul Pisotti's opposition to the Capuchins and the briefs he obtained, cf. E. d'Alençon, *op. cit.*, 82-87, 93-95, 99 ff.

<sup>38</sup>For the text of the bull *In Suprema*: *ibid.*, 110-113.



ticipate a slow and agonizing death. Actually the opposite took place. While certainly not its intention, the bull had the effect of accelerating the flow of the Observants to the ranks of the Capuchins. During the first part of 1533 the bull met with no organized opposition. The reform friars among the Observants were happy to think that their goals would be finally realized. But then Father Pisotti's successor decided to suspend the implementation of the bull, referring the whole matter to a future general chapter. This decision had enormous repercussions throughout Italy and aroused various reform groups. Toward the close of 1533 and early in the following year more Observants transferred to the Capuchins, among them John of Fano, Eusebius of Ancona, Bernardine of Asti, Bernardine of Siena (Ochino) and Francis of Jesi. The Observants now seemed to be flocking to the Capuchins in droves.<sup>39</sup>

The desertion of so many of their best men was a source of grave concern for the general superiors of the Observants. They decided that the only remedy was the suppression of the Capuchins. To achieve it they enlisted the help of the procurator of the order, Honorius Caiani. As the Pope's confessor he was in a position to press the need for suppressing the Capuchins on the grounds that their radical interpretation of the Rule was disturbing the peace of the order. Clement VII was now a very sick man and close to death. Against the advice of his counselor Jerome Ghinucci he yielded. The brief *Pastoralis Officii* of April 15, 1534 ordered all Observant friars who had joined the Capuchins to return to their convents within 15 days. It meant, purely and simply, the destruction of the new institute, albeit indirectly and "tactfully." Such a return of the Observants to their former friaries would empty the Capuchin hermitages. Events following the promulgation of the brief are confused. We do not know how Louis reacted, or to whom he had recourse to nullify its effects. At any rate, the brief was repealed within a few days and replaced by another, *Cum sicut accepimus*. The

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Meseguer Fernandez O.F.M., *Una Carta del P. Juan de Fano y los cronistas Bernardino de S. Maria Nova y Tomas de Montefortino*, in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 29 (1959) 96-100.

Capuchins were forbidden to accept any more Observants into their ranks or to establish any new foundations without the approval of the Holy See.<sup>40</sup> It posed another, very serious threat to the infant congregation.

### The Second Chapter Defines the Capuchin Program For Franciscan Living

The phenomenal spread of the new family throughout Italy and the continually increasing number of friars — there were over 500 by now — demanded the solution of some disciplinary and organizational problems which were becoming daily more serious. The statutes of Albacina were not adequate to meet the needs of such a large community and would have to be brought up to date. The good of the fraternity required the convocation of another general chapter, where, after free and fraternal discussion, new legislation could be enacted. Many of the Observants who had joined the reform after the suspension of the bull *In Suprema* were men of deep spirituality and well educated. They felt that primacy should be accorded to contemplation and they could not agree with Louis' insistence on manual labor and his narrow view of the apostolic ministry. Louis was well informed of their objections but was unconvinced of their validity. He tried to head off the chapter which he feared would pose a threat to the order. The reins of power would surely pass into the hands of men who had recently left the Observants and who might introduce the observances and life style of their former community. There is no evidence that Louis was motivated by personal ambition.<sup>41</sup>

Differences in the practical application of the ideal Franciscan way of life appeared, inevitably giving rise to conflicts which would leave a permanent stamp on the new reform. The rift widened to the extent that it gave rise to two mutually opposed trends. Even now, after four and a half centuries, it is difficult to say who or what made them irreconcilable.

The friars who were in favor of giving priority to the apostolate and studies over manual labor forced Louis to con-

<sup>40</sup>For the two documents, cf. E. d'Alencon, *op. cit.*, 116 ff, 119 ff.

<sup>41</sup>Bernardine of Colpetrazzo, *op. cit.*, 378 ff; also 373 ff.

voke the general chapter. It took a pontifical mandate, secured through the good offices of Victoria Colonna. General elections were held November 1535 at the convent of Santa Euphemia. Elected were: Bernardine of Asti as vicar general, Bernardine Ochino, John of Fano and Eusebius of Ancona as definitors. Louis was passed over completely. He felt that the capitulators had repudiated his accomplishments as vicar general and refused to recognize the chapter as valid. Leaving Santa Euphemia he betook himself with some of his close associates to the church of San Tommaso in Formia. Not content with leaving the chapter, he tried to make his own opinions prevail. With the help of John Cardinal Dominico de Cupis and perhaps others he succeeded in convincing Pope Paul III of the necessity of convoking another chapter for the purpose of restoring peace within the Capuchin community. The cardinal himself presided at the new chapter which was held in September 1536. The result of the votation was identical with that of the preceding chapter. With this second rebuff, Louis came to the conclusion that the way of life chosen by the majority of the friars, headed by Bernard Ochino was in effect a betrayal of the ideals he had fought for. Since they had not been achieved, he sensed that his further presence among the Capuchins was useless, and he left them.

Meanwhile the new vicar general and his definitors were tackling the more urgent problems faced by the fraternity. One of their first moves was to establish provinces. Their greatest achievement, however, was the new edition of the Constitutions, promulgated 1536-1537. In it the "manner of life" of the new institute received its definitive spiritual character. Apart from some minor changes and adaptations required by the needs of the times, it remained in force until Vatican Council II.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup>For sources and bibliography of the second general chapter, cf. Mario of Mercato Saraceno, *op. cit.*, 400-418; Bernardine of Colpetrazzo, *op. cit.*, 379-398; E. d'Alencon, *Tribulationes Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum primis annis pontificatus Pauli III (1534-1541)*. Rome 1914; *idem*. *De Capitulo generali Ordinis Fr. Min. Capuccinorum mense novembri A.D. 1535 celebrato et mense septembri anni subsequentis renovato*, in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 43 (1947) 282-288. It should be noted that accounts of the second general chapter presented even in the recent past are not generally ac-

The Observants, still torn with internal dissensions, again tried to suppress the reform or at least bring it under their control. They went so far as to enlist the aid of Emperor Charles V. With a history of so many failures, they tried something new. The minister general Vincent Lunel took a more conciliatory attitude and held out the olive branch hoping to win them over to the Observants. This attempt, too, was doomed to failure, thanks to the valiant efforts of Bernardine of Asti ably abetted by Victoria Colonna.<sup>43</sup>

And so, at long last, the future of the new reform was assured although in a short time its peace would be disturbed by troubles of another kind.

cepted today. There was not so much a question of a clash of personalities as a difference in interpreting and living the Franciscan ideal.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. E. d'Alencon, *Tribulationes* (as above); Melchior of Pobladora, *El emperador Carlos V contra los capuchinos. Texto y comentario de una carta inedita: Naples, Jan. 17, 1536*, in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 34 (1964) 373-390.