

**Ascetical and Mystical Spiritual Writings (1535-1628) in I Frati Cappuccini,,
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Introduction

In selecting the many spiritual authors who span the course of the Capuchin Reform during its first hundred years like a cluster of trees, we bore in mind their geographical dispersion, the popularity of specific authors, the importance of their literary products in the history of prayer methods, the almost miraculous survival of some of these rare or unique texts and the originality of others that were saved from oblivion and examined, studied or copied from manuscripts which had been lost and which are now publicized for the first time for modern readers.

I – GENERAL OVERVIEW

There are about twenty known authors and one anonymous author who come from just about every region of Italy including Piedmont, to Lombardy, Venice, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, the Marches, Umbria, Campagna and Basilicata as far as Puglia and Sicily. They produced their works over a period of time beginning from 1553, the year when the first work by a Capuchin was published, up to 1628, the year when Alessio Segala da Salò died, or up to 1631, the year of the death of the mystic Tommaso da Olera.

They begin with some “devout prayers”, which attest to a moment of initial grace that, as Bernardino Palli d’Asti described it, developed into dawn, and, a century later, turned into the classical, well-balanced and fruitful synthesis produced by the great master and spiritual author, Segala, and the inspirational, mystical experience of the saintly brother from Bergamo.

At the beginning it seems to be a fire that is spreading in a frenzied and violent manner which at times creates anxiety. In the end the fire, even though it is still burning, has been channelled and put to use in an orderly way to warm the house.

If it is true that the Capuchins did not see fit to set down the memory of their history until after 1570, when the long struggle for growth and institutional stability had passed and was forgotten and the objectives and essential aims of their apostolic, spiritual and social presence in the Church and in the world had been established, it is also true that they were concerned to compose, print and circulate texts concerning spirituality, which were based, for the most part, on their experience of the apostolic and the interior spiritual life.

1. *Methodological criteria and proposals*

Thus this ascetical and mystical literature is a parallel source to the documented sources of the Order and is indispensable to gaining an understanding of development of the methods of spiritual meditation as they were lived out and taught in the Capuchin Reform during the first century of its history. Together with the historical documents this spiritual literature forms an essential part of the historical record for as Giuseppe De Luca says: “historical truth is not the only thing to exist in

the search for truth; historical truth is not contained exclusively in notary documents.”¹

Certainly a simple review is not sufficient. Many good introductory works of this type are already available² We need to go back over the genesis and development of these writings and read them at depth once again looking at their content, the themes that they emphasise, the apparent contradictions and the whole outlook that is a central fact in the sixteenth century, namely the substantial complex meaning of the Council of Trent, which as M. Petrocchi says is the key “to the understanding of the Italian spirituality of the Sixteenth Century.” We need to do this not by considering it as a “product of the fear of Protestantism, but as a mature consideration of the new religious *elites* and thus as a vindication of a new rich and vital spirituality which was founded above all in the *devotio* of the Fourteenth Century.”³

Thus we see how the content of this literature faces up to events and initiatives that proceeded and followed the Council of Trent, including the foolishly ambitious aspirations of the spirituality of the followers of Valdo and the spirituality of the “beneficio di Cristo” which savoured of Calvinism, and with the evangelical and Pauline trends of the end of the Fourteenth Century and the beginning of the Fifteenth century and with the tendencies within the Franciscan reform which were revived during the Renaissance “as an experience brought to life by means of strong interior meditation,”⁴ which in the new historical and cultural environment had imbibed some of the approaches of the Franciscan Spirituals of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries. The content also absorbed a good deal of the spirituality of St Bonaventure while also remaining aware of contemporary trends in which were emerging in contemporary ascetical and mystical writings. On rare occasions the content tends incautiously and hesitatingly towards subtle pre-quietist positions which make one aware of a conflict, which might have been either conscious or unconscious, and which touches on the teachings of “the free spirit.” which had been condemned as heretical a century before this. The whole of this complex and multifaceted background needs to be examined and studied.

The modern method of studying the texts by mean of an historical critical approach ought not to be passed over. The criterion for this might be described as seeking to understand the original text through the assistance of the various aids offered by contemporary textual criticism, by philology, that is being aware of the words and their meaning at the time when the text was composed; critique of the style, morphological and redaction critique, and today, something which is very popular, linguistic and structural critique. Obviously another technique which is very helpful in promoting the understanding and cultural problems of a text is the consideration of the historical, social, ecological, cultural and political environment. Finally one needs to consider the situation within the Church, the part played by various socio and religious factors in the community. It would also be helpful to construct a table of the frequency with which terms are used in order to assess their significance in different spiritual and cultural contexts.

¹ Cf. Giuseppe De Luca, *Introduzione alla storia della pieta*, Roma, 1962, 55.

² Cf. Melchiodor a Pobladura, *Historia generalis O.F.M.Cap. I*, Roma 1947, 189-200; Optatus a Veghel, *Scriptores ascetici et mystici Ordinis Capuccinorum*, in *Laurent. I* (1960) 98-130, 213-244; Metodio da Nembro, *Quattrocento scriptori spirituali*, Roma 1972; C. Cargnoni, *Fonti tendenze e sviluppi della letteratura spirituale cappuccino primitive*, in *CF* 48 (1978) 311-398.

³ M. Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità italiana. II; Il Cinquecento e il Seicento*, Roma 1976, 17.

⁴ M. Petrocchi, *Storia della spiritualità italiana. II. Il Cinquecento e il seicento*, Roma 1978, 17.

However, such research should not become flight into an artificial paradise of literary techniques, but rather a help towards understand the written text which is not the final aim if we are trying to grasp the thought of the author. It is evident that a written text represents the thought of the author as it has been transmitted rather than the complete wisdom of the author. This will never be reached by what has been put into writing. We take the liberty of pointing this out to readers and to those who wish to go more deeply into the subject.

2. *General Features and Characteristics.*

The following twenty or twenty-one spiritual authors which bring together about fifty different works give a bird's eye view of certain emerging and interesting features of spiritual direction. They were composed entirely as the product of a fervent interior and apostolic life, and as a personal spiritual response to the needs that arose from practical religious experiences. In the first place these works are the product of the personal spiritual experiences of the various authors who have passed them on in works that were hurriedly written, with little attention given to literary style, scholarship or education.

The popular style of print in which they were produced is significant. All of them were set out in pocket editions in simple colloquial language, with no embellishment, but in sober expressions that were at times old-fashioned, but always forceful yet never pretentious. Thus they always exhibit quite clearly the difference between erudite literature and popular literature. Usually the former type of literature continued to use Latin, while the latter was deliberately beginning to use the vernacular. What is more, vernacular works showed a preference for pocket editions, which were convenient and short, whereas the scholarly works were larger and of more imposing appearance. In this respect the works that were edited by Capuchins were conveniently usable, for the most part small booklets "which could be passed from hand to hand."

They were works concerning things which should be put into practice or acted upon rather than about topics which were to be read about. They are manuals, *vademecum*, which should be consulted repeatedly in order to make certain that a way of life corresponded to what had been written down. They are works which are read so that what they contain can be used and they would only be used by those intending to put what they contained into practice.

Another important feature of these texts is that what they contained had been already preached to the people or to religious communities. Thus they came about through talks concerning life, real preaching and thus their aim was to communicate with the general public in the easiest and most direct manner.

The basic objective of all this literature is to transmit an experience of prayer, when attempting to access "secret mental prayer", an experience of meditation, contemplation, of spiritual exercises and of devotional practices. In essence we are confronted with "masters and teachers of piety", to use an expression coined by Giuseppe De Lucca,⁵ who emphasised the immense importance of "books on piety" when reconstructing the history of the past. "Books on piety deserve a separate history. Every age contributes something original, because in every era in addition to piety in the community there has also been vigorous private piety. With respect to

⁵ Cf. *Introduzione alla storia della pieta* cit., 30.

Christianity, there has been along with Liturgical piety, the piety of various Churches, various groups and various individuals.”⁶

3. *Titles, frontispieces and illustrations.*

The titles and frontispieces of these manuals are also fascinating in their own rite in that they demonstrate the evolution, assimilation and depth of spiritual and cultural preferences. It can be very enlightening to look at these.

Let us begin with *Orazioni devote* (Devout Prayers) to the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity (Bernardino d’Asti), or with the *Trattato di santé meditazioni divise in sette distinzioni per stabilire il cuor nostro in Dio* (A Tract Containing Holy Meditations Divided into Seven Sectors to Centre our Heart on God) (Francesco Tittlemans), or with a figure full of spirituality and complex mystical iconography such as the *Circolo del divino amore* (Circle of Divine Love) (Francesco da Jesi), in the only surviving edition which is contained in a reprinted small work by The Observant friar Bartolomeo Cordoni da Città di Castello entitled: *Dialogo della unione spirituale di Dio con l’anima* (Dialogue Concerning the Spiritual Union of God with the Soul) on the front piece of which there is a circle which contains the image of Christ crucified, which is an image that was also used on the front piece of *Alcune regule de la oratione, mentale* (Certain Rules for Mental Prayer) (Girolamo da Molfetta). All of this appears to have been brought together in *Operatta devotissima chiamata arte de la unione, la qual insegna unire l’anima con Dio* (A Very Devout Little Work Entitled The Art of Union, Which Teaches How to Unite the Soul with God) (Giovanni Pili da Fano) which contained a summary of the charism of “devotion” and mystical “union” that had been treated in the preceding volumes.

The theme of love and of meditation reappears in the *Dialogi sette* (Seven Dialogues) by Bernardino Ochino, which treats “the method of falling in love with God”, “becoming happy”, “self-control”, “the thief on the Cross”, “conversion”, “pilgrimage” and “belief in what is divine”. The frontispieces of the various editions of this work contain renaissance- style woodcuts⁷ that depict Christ taken down from the Cross and laid in the sepulchre, (See *Dialogo in che modo la persona debba regere bene se stessa*, (Talk on How a Person Ought to Adequately Control Himself), which was edited in Naples probably in 1536, the time at which the First Capuchin Constitutions were printed. Some have the image of a friar who is already well advanced in years and who is wearing a pointed beard and who has his hands joined and is gazing on a Crucifix which is glowing and is suspended in the sky in the Franciscan style that was probably inspired by popular, wide-spread illustration which depicted St Francis receiving the Stigmata. (This is also the only example, prior to Seventeenth Century, of a book which contains a portrait of its Capuchin author). It also has an illustration of a brother with a pointed hood on his head who is standing in a pulpit preaching with a crucifix in his hand while the people below are hanging on his words. In the background there are splendid woodcuts depicting the life of Christ, how He was scourged at the pillar, crowned with thorns and mocked, fell beneath the Cross, crucified and died on the Cross and then risen from sepulchre, or the young Christ among the doctors in the Temple and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Virgin Mary and the Apostles in the Cenacle.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷ For these woodcuts in the various editions of the *Dialogi sette* and concerning the iconography of Ochino cf. U. Rozzo, *I “Dialogi sette” e altri scritti del tempo delle fuga*, Torino 1985, 42, 59, 65, 81, 89, 79, 108.126, 128ss, 153-157.

The “dialogo” that had been used by Ochino became *Meditazione della Passione* (A Meditation on the Passion) (Bernardino da Montolomo) and *Invito spirituale alla pietosa meditazione della Passione di Cristo* (A Spiritual Invitation to Meditate Compassionately on Christ’s Passion) (Battista da Faenza). These were two texts, one handwritten and the other recopied from a later manuscript that had been interfered with, which were incorporated into *Discorsi e orazioni de l’anima spirituali* (Discussion and Prayers for a Spiritual Soul) (Francesco da Fognano). These contain the image of a Capuchin on his knees with his hood on his head and his hands elevated towards a large naked wooden cross with the instruments of the Passion, similar to what the Capuchins used for processions.

Thus a persistent focus began to build up in the titles that followed, such as the *Specchio di orazione* (Mirror of Prayer) (Bernardino da Balvano) accompanied by the reappearance of illustrations and vocabulary that had been used in the medieval literature of the *specula* (Mirrors), which were very popular booklets that contained images of Christ Crucified or scourged at the pillar or tempted in the desert. Other works returned to a method of teaching prayer and how to practice prayer, meditation and contemplation. A trailblazer among these was the famous *Pratica dell’orazione mentale* (The Practice of mental Prayer) (Mattia da Salò), which had no images but was full of spiritual insight. This was followed by the interesting but rare *Modo come la persona spitiyuale che ora si abbia a disporre nella orazione* (A Method for a Person who is now Ready to Enter into Prayer) (Silvestro da Rossano), which contains, at the beginning of the first part, a beautiful illustration of Pentecost, and at the beginning of the second part, a classical frontispiece of Christ Crucified with the trilogy of the Virgin Mary, St John and the kneeling Madeline at His feet. The image of Christ also appears in another work by the same author: *Breve modo di fare orazione intorno al spargimento di sangue di Gesù Cristo*, (A Short Method of Praying over the Shedding of the Blood of Jesus Christ). In a manuscript another one of his works is attached to this: *Devota meditazione sopra la salutatione angelica*, (A Devout Meditation on the Angel’s Greeting),

Other titles in this series are: *Corone spirituali per l’attenzione in contemplare la Passione del Salvatore* (Spiritual Rosaries to be Performed when Contemplating the Passion of the Saviour) (Mattia da Salò), and *Essercizi d’anima nei quail s’insegnano divotissimi modi di contemplazione* (Exercises for a Soul in which Very Devour Instructions for Contemplation are Taught) and *Compendio di cento meditazionisacre* (Compendium of a Hundred Sacred Meditations) both by Cristoforo da Verucchio.

The *Rosaries* are contained in very small booklets which contain a frontispiece which displays a small panel with Jesus as the teacher with an orb with a cross over it and at the beginning of the points for meditation for each day of the week there is a small scene of the Passion: Jesus in the Garden, scourged, crowned with thorns, fallen beneath the cross, wiped by Veronica, crucified and taken to the tomb and finally St Bernard’s representation of the name of Jesus. The images are very simple, archaic, popular and probably produced from the artist’s imagination, especially the scenes of the “holy mountains”.

Throughout the *Exercises* there are small illustrations which in various ways accompany the various meditations and depict moments in the life of Jesus, of his Passion and death or give glimpses of holy Bishops and anchorites, the mysteries and privileges of the Most Holy Virgin and are sometimes repeated with the obvious intent of being ornamental. However at other times they serve as direct

accompaniment of the content of the meditations, as in the case of the Mysteries of the Rosary where the small drawings illustrate the pages.

On the frontispiece of the *Compendio* there is a small drawing of the Stigmata of St Francis. However on the pages of the text splendid images of the whole life of Christ are scattered, some of which occupy the entire page, while others cover half a page. It is easy to see how these presentations of the Passion and other mysteries would have influenced the imagination of religious minded people.

Among the titles that come mainly from the seventeenth century but which were also influenced by earlier work we find: *Teatro del paradise overo meditazioni della celeste gloria per le quail vien proposto modo facile di contemplare con utilità dell'anime la vera beatitudine* (Mattia da Salò) (Theatre of Paradise or Meditations on the Heavenly Glory by means of which an Easy Way of Contemplating true Beatitude is Suggested for use by Souls), which is a very thick volume filled with images. Another volume is *Dardi del divin Amore... Opera spirituale e ripiena di devotissime contemplationi per infiammarsi nell'amore di Dio* (Cornelio da Urbino). (Darts of Divine Love ... A Spiritual Work Full of Very Devout Contemplation to Inflamm us With The Love of God). The front piece contains an illustration displaying a postage stamp size drawing of the Stigmata of St Francis. Inside there are some scenes of the life and Passion of Christ which are set out in typically baroque style in panels with heavy cornices with spirals and figures. There are some scenes of the life and Passion of Christ, particularly the Crucifixion. Also there is *Fascetto di mira nel quale si contengano 40 meditazioni sopra la Passione* (Michelangelo da Venezia), (Bundle of Myrrh which Contains 40 Meditations on the Passion), in which there are drawings of a Saint who is carrying all the instruments of the Passion on his shoulder which is a symbol of the devout soul who is meditating on Christ Crucified. There is *Paradiso interiore overo corona spirituale* (Paolo da Terni), (Interior Heaven or Spiritual Rosaries), or *Romitorio sacro di meditazioni et esercizi di contemplazioni e amoroze aspirazioni a Dio* (Valerio da Venezia) (Isolated Place for Meditation and Exercises of Contemplation and Loving Aspirations to God), or *Orologio spirituale intorno alla Passione* (Spiritual Timepiece About the Passion) and the mysteries pertaining to Mary. (Francesco da Corigliario).

Fuoco d'amore (Love's Fire) is the concise title of various spiritual works by Tommaso da Olera. These are based on the very personal contemplative and mystical experience of the author who places great emphasis on the doctrine of love. This subject is developed at length in another manuscript text which was widely distributed after it was first published when it was attributed to Gregory of Naples. In a certain way it may bear the title "Practica della listica unione con Dio" (The Practice of Mystical Union with God), in conjunction with "Pratica dell'oration mentale" (The Practice of Mental Prayer) by Bellintani, which must to be treated separately.

The Spiritual Works by Alessio Segala da Salò contain the spiritual terminology that we have seen already, but with mention of the new spirit that belongs to the Seventeenth century. These works include *Corona celeste*, (Heavenly Rosary), *Practica singolare* (Special Exercise), *Angelico essercizio*, (Angelic Exercise), *Via sicura del Paradiso*, (Secure Road to Heaven), *Arca santa della vita e passions di Cristo*, (Sacred Ark of the Life and Passion of Christ). Segala, who was a classical master of spirituality, imparted a healthy set of guidelines concerning the exercise of virtues and especially of mental prayer. In his titles one notes the optimism of the Seventeenth Century and confidence in the ascetical journey, in which situations of vice are dispensed with "in a short time" and true perfection is achieved easily. This is an encouraging stimulus to enter into "what pertains to the

divine” as the ultimate objective of the mystical life. All the Capuchin masters of the ascetical life aimed at this goal.⁸

4. *The Geography and Chronology of the Editions*

As we continue to list certain general characteristics of this kind of literature we need to be aware of an interesting fact. When they are split into clusters they illustrate all the levels of the robust Franciscan spiritual and social experience of the early Capuchins in their external activity of apostolate, preaching and spiritual direction as well as the internal personal, intimate and psychological elements of their communities and fraternities.

From another perspective the places where the editions were published bear witness to the nation-wide expansion of the Capuchin reform from Lombardy to Sicily. The honour of being the first place where a Capuchin work was printed goes to Milan. This was *Orazioni devote* (Devout Prayers) by Bernardino d’Asti. Brescia can boast of having produced the most prestigious books namely *Arte de la unione con Dio* (The Art of Union with God) by Giovanni da Fano, *Prattica dell’oration mentale* (The Practice of Mental Prayer) by Matia da Salò and the works by Alessio da Salò. Because it was the most important place for publishing, Venice produced the majority of the works of the early Capuchins. This was also because although they were printed elsewhere as first editions, they eventually finished up being republished in the capital city of Venice. For example, this was the case with the works by Father Segala which usually appeared in Brescia first and then were repeatedly reprinted in Venice. This was also the situation with many other works. Salò made a contribution by posthumously printing works by Mattia Bellintani and by his brother Giovanni. Other publications came out of Milan, Naples, Asti, Messina, Bologna, Fermo and Augsburg. This last place was the location of the works that were published by Tommasa da Olera, which were in circulation in manuscript form among the friars and lay people while the author was alive and following his death in 1631.

It is also interesting to note the times of publication to obtain an idea of the period of the greatest success of Capuchin publications during the first century of the Order. It is clear that growth is slow during the first decade. However following the Council of Trent the number of publication increase and they become numerous in the last decade of the Sixteenth Century and almost unbroken in the first decade of the Seventeenth Century. The reason for this is easy to discover as their appearance coincides with the numerical growth of the Order.

With regard to the identity of the authors it is useful to note the religious background from which they come. The greatest number of authors came from the Observant Franciscan family, especially those belonging to the first and second generation, one from the Conventual Franciscans others directly from the world. It should also be noted that many of these authors came to the Capuchins having already composed a certain amount of literary works. Some such as Giovanni da Fano, Bernardino da Montolmo and, especially, Francesco Tittlemans had composed philosophical and theological works.

It is a fact that these spiritual authors differ in importance, fame and influence, while some have become a necessary point of reference in history because they can help us understand the development of predispositions and of the spiritual presentation of the first century Capuchins.

⁸ Cf. Cuthbert of Brighton, *I cappuccino e la controriforma* cit., 478s, 491.

It is obvious that because of the difficulty in finding these texts, not all those who could have easily been included in the anthology have been chosen. For example, there is no mention of Girolamo Avogadro of Novara (+ 1582) who published *Meditazioni diuotissime sulla Passione di nostro Signore* (Most Devout Meditations on the Passion of Our Lord) in Brescia in 1579. There is no mention of Guido da Finale (+ 1589) who wrote *Compendio di molte diuozioni e orazioni in onore della SS. Vergine* (Compendium of Many Devotions and Prayers in Honour of the Most Holy Virgin). There is no mention of Bernardo Piccoli da Osimo (+ 1591) who in Venice in 1589 wrote and published a *Trattato della Passione del Signore* (Tract on the Lord's Passion) that contained various meditations for each day of the week, and which was also translated into French and published in Lyon in 1617 and in Todi in 1623. This last edition contains many other spiritual works. There is no mention of Giustino da Norcia (+ 1594) who anonymously published a tract *Dell' orazione mentale* (On Mental Prayer) in Venice in 1593. The same could be said about Matteo da Leonessa (+ 1593) who wrote "a most devout work arranged as meditations and conversations on the pain, torment and wounds of Jesus Christ." This was published posthumously and anonymously in Venice in 1586 and 1601. Eusebio Fardini d'Ancona (+ 1569) has not been included. He wrote *Divine meditazioni* (Divine Meditations) which cannot be found. Giovanni Fassati da Milano (+ 1565) who was once a Dominican is not included. He wrote *Trattato sull' orazione e meditazione* (A Treatise on Prayer and Meditation). There are also many others.

It is clear that a complete bibliographical study is lacking, especially a critical study. The ancient Capuchin bibliographers compiled lists that had imprecise titles or titles which had been translated into Latin. Turning to the field of unpublished or manuscript writings, which we have also made some use of in our collection of sources with interesting results, we find ourselves in a situation of making new discoveries and evaluations. A countless number of collections of devout writings fill the collected works of manuscripts in the libraries and archives of the Capuchin Order. Because of the suppression much of this material flowed into other libraries and archives. A search in local and regional libraries could be very successful and would probably unveil new texts and yield others which were believed to have been lost completely. This was the case with *Orazioni devote* (Devout Prayers) by Bernardino d'Asti, which was the first text written by a Capuchin, and which the present author discovered in a codex containing an assortment devotional text a few years ago.

5. *Literary style, audience and content.*

A final, general feature that it is useful to note is the consideration of the literary style, the circumstances and the historical context of the item and its content. Some texts appear to be lacking any evident intended connection to any literary style. Because they had been conceived and developed in an atmosphere of "practical" spiritual life they remained for a long time in the environment in which they originated and grew and in which they were received and respected as being something secret and intimate. It was only as an after-thought that they were committed to writing and dictated to others in response to a specific request which came from the brothers or the superiors or the general public. This was the case, or seems to be the case, with the above-mentioned *Orazioni devote* (Devout Prayers) by Bernardino d'Asti, *Circolo del divino amore* (The Circle of Divine Love) by Francesco da Jesi, *Paradiso interior* (The Inner Paradise) by Paolo da Terni, and of

some tracts of *Fuoco d'amore* (the Fire of Love) by Tommasso da Olera, and, finally, in part, for other reasons, *Istruzione mistica* (Mystical Instruction) by Gregorio da Napoli.

Possibly the literary style which the writing took on could have been developed at a later stage when the work was revised or edited. However this would not have been to an excessive degree. In such cases the text preserved its original spontaneity. This would be true especially of texts that might be classified as "mystical instructions" and which would thus require a special presentation that would be in line with the particular spiritual personality that had produced them.

Another literary form that was used was that of a letter, either real or fictional. This style was classical and traditional and is especially evident in the *Dialogi* by Bernardino Ochino, and, at times, in some of the meditations by Mattia da Salò.

However, in general the literary style of these booklets or devotional works and ascetical tracts betrays that they originated in words spoken to the people from the pulpit or in "lectures" or spiritual conferences within cloisters and monasteries or to groups of the laity who were gathered in devout confraternities.

Usually it is possible to identify the original circumstances of these works by beginning with the introduction or preface if mention is made of the "readers", or the "dedication" which might identify the various people who "sponsored" the publication or by noting certain of the author's spontaneous statements in the text.

For example, this is how we know that *Regole de la orazione mentale* (Rules for Mental Prayer) by Girolamo da Molfetta began as "sermons". Some of Ochino's *Dialogi* reflect conversations that he actually had with Caterina Cybo and in the circles of Italian "Spirituals" within the environment of the Evangelical Movement of the early Sixteenth Century. The small work *Specchio di orazione* (Mirror of Prayer) by Bernardino da Balvano contained to some extent topics on which he had preached in Messina in 1555. The *Essercizi d'anima* (Exercises for the Soul) by Verucchino were conferences and lectures which were delivered to the people during a Lenten preaching course and which were summarised for popular use in *Compendio di cento meditazioni* (Compendium of One Hundred Meditations) at the express wish of "some of his reverend Superiors".

The *Discorsi e orazioni* (Discourses and Prayers) by Francesco da Fognano were printed for the "Brothers and Sisters of the Compagnia del Santo Sacramento di Santa Maria Maddalena in stra' S. Donato" in Bologna. The *Paradiso interiore* (Interior Paradise) by Paolo da Terni would have been composed at the request of Father Giovanni da Narni and at the command of the Superiors. The *Corone spirituali* (Spiritual Rosaies) were a method of meditative recollection invented by Mattia da Salò that were used and loved by St Charles Borromeo. It was because of this that Bellintani never had them printed. The *Modo di orare* (Method of Prayer) by Silvestro da Rossano was written for the Benedictine Sisters of Santo Lorenzo in Venice and was connected to the devotion to Christ's Blood which Silvestro ardently propagated in his preaching. The *Prattica dell'orazione mentale* (The Practice of Mental Prayer) by Mattia da Salò was written in order to assist Christian persons and families who practiced meditation in the evening either at home or in a church. The meditations on the Passion by Michelangelo da Venezia were composed mainly for groups who undertook adoration at the time of the Forty Hours. Gregorio da Napoli's mystical tracts came about it would seem following correspondence regarding spiritual direction.

Only a few texts were composed out of spontaneous impulse or from personal choice without precise external concerns. One classical example of this might be

Opere spirituali (Spiritual Works) by Alessio Segala da Salò, who made spiritual direction his life's work.

It might even appear to be extraordinary to name the persons of mark who accepted that some of these works would be dedicated to them so that they became their patrons and followers. This might be the case with Cardinal G. A. Santori, who was the Protector of the Order to whom *Dardi del divin amore* (Darts of Divine Love) by Cornelio da Urbino was dedicated and the new 1573 edition of *Prattica dell'oration mentale* by Bellintani, which had been revised by the author, and dedicated to the Bishop of Brescia, Domenico Bollani. On the other hand Verucchino dedicated his *Compendio di cento meditazioni sacre* (Compendium of One Hundred Sacred Meditations) to Francesco Maria II of Rovere, Duke of Urbino, while dedicating his *Exxercisi d'anima* (Exercises for a Soul), through the intervention of Giambattista Rosa of Pieve, to Cradinal Lorenzo Prioli, Patriarch of Venice. Francesco da Carigliano dedicated his *Horologio spirituale intorno alla Passione* (Spiritual Clock Concerning the Passion) to Cardinal d'Este, while choosing Cardinal Domenico Ginnasio as the dedicatee of his work on the mysteries of the life of Mary. Michelangelo da Venezia offered his *Fascetto di mirra* (Bundle of Myrrh) containing forty meditations on the Passion to the Prince and Princess of Mantova. The patron of *Romitorio sacro* (Th Sacred Hermitage) by Valerio da Venezia was the noble Giovanni Guerigli from Venice who dedicated the book to his daughter Sr Zannetta Guerigli from the Monastery of S Eufemia in Mazorobo. *Paradiso interiore* (The Interior Paradise) by Paolo da Terni was dedicated to Fr Giovanbattista d'Esta, who had been Duck of Modena and who became a Capuchin, but who always remained very influential. The writings of Tommaso da Olera, which were published under the title *Fuoco d'amore* (Fire of Love) were placed under the patronage of the Emperor Leopold I. With respect to the Venice edition of 1637, the works of Segala received financial support from the Camaldolese Abbot Tommaso Valabio and from the noble lady Giulia Da Ca' da Pesaro for the 1643 edition. We could continue like this with respect to other works which we have not used. This would take us on a tour of names and famous people that would make us aware to some extent of the cultural and historical environment of the works of the early Capuchins.

With respect to content the topic that receives the greatest attention is the Passion of Jesus Christ alongside that of the Virgin Mary. These are always treated from the aspect of their ultimate objective which is the doctrine, and practice of a life of love and union with God, a theme that runs through all the spiritual and devotional works of the Order. Christs' Passion is presented in a hundred different ways, but always from the perspective of a life of love that produces union. The Trinitarian dimension is usually presented against a Christological background as associated with the Crucifixion and this inspired many Capuchin devotional practices. A practical and affective approach is the only approach that is proposed in these writings. There is no consideration of what is theoretical or speculative. A few pages appear to speculate about the doctrine of the spiritual life, but they immediately slip back into what is practical and concrete and to be followed as what is suggested or developed for various meditative or affective undertakings, allowing freedom of choice to the one who is at prayer, who may follow the suggestion, the proposed method, the prayer formula, the example of an aspiration and the timing or put it aside.

Some writings teach how to use vocal prayers for meditation or contemplation, especially the *Our Father*, at times making suggestions that may appear strange.

There are only a few real treatises about the spiritual life under its ascetical and mystical aspects. There are also only a few writings that are prevalently

“mystical” We would only mention *Arte de la unione* (The Art of Union) by Giovanni da Fano, *Circolo* (Circle) by Francesco da Jesi, *Istruzione mistica* (Mystical Instruction) by Gregorio da Napoli, *Fuoco d’amore* (Fire of Love) by Tommaso da Olera, and, to a certain extent, *Paradiso interiore* (The Interior Paradise) by Paolo Terni. The rest treat affective prayer meditation, “methods” of mental prayer, spiritual “exercises” and devotional practices. This may be important as a means of gaining an understanding of the spiritual choices made by the Capuchin Reform.