

THE CAPUCHIN REFORM A FRANCISCAN RENAISSANCE

A portrait of sixteenth century Capuchin life

An English translation of *La bella e santa riforma* by Melchiorre da Poblatura OFM Cap by Paul Hanbridge OFM Cap and edited by Dr. G. Lomas. Second edition, Rome, 2007.

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INTRODUCTION

GIUSEPPE DE LUCA

For many, this book will appear novel - and it is, in fact, a new work. As with anything new, it will surprise and challenge some common opinions, popular persuasions, and set ideas, and thus will not succeed in pleasing everyone straightaway. Nevertheless, it embodies that sense of discovery, adventure and excitement that each and every new thing worthy of the name has to offer.

First of all, let us see what kind of book it is, and then we can judge its worth.

You can see, on first opening it, that it looks like a *florilegium*, or more accurately, a *chrestomathy*. A *florilegium*, or anthology, if you prefer to call it that, gives the idea of flowers chosen and gathered from a beautiful field. From this selection and garnering, no-one would claim to be able to infer or deduce the nature of the field and all its produce.

A *chrestomathy*, on the other hand, appears to be not only more learned, but also more serious, more comprehensive. It's a collection of particular themes, useful for the understanding of the whole argument. It is a learned exposition precisely because it presupposes an exact and complete understanding of the whole, of which therefore the choice, the *chrestomathy*, is a comprehensive and faithful representation, giving an overall *précis* of the main themes.

Clearly, such matters are superficial. Our feeble perceptions are so complex and unfathomable that to define the ultimate reason of things in words is hardly a simple matter. The task imposes on our minds a wide range of ideas, which the intelligence can only gradually narrow down to a single point and then grasp it.

The book which the Capuchin friars offer to the Italian reader is a *chrestomathy*, which nevertheless here and there may give way to the tone and recitative nature of a *florilegium*, or anthology. It gathers all that is useful, indeed necessary, for an understanding of the history of the first century of the Order. It does not collect this history from later historians or from contemporary documents, but from the historians of the first Capuchin times, from the chroniclers of the new religious family. Just who these chroniclers are, who it is that the reader will discover in these pages and in the pages of the *chrestomathy*, will be pointed out by the editor in the foreword.

The author of this *chrestomathy* is not a new-comer to the scene. Generally, authors of anthologies are mere compilers, but in order to put together a *chrestomathy*, some skill is required. In the case of this book, the one who has

put it together is the same scholar who recently offered a critical edition of the witness of the chroniclers from whom he now selects. A better prepared or more informed man could not have been desired. Having spent a good part of his life on these texts, he knows them marvellously well, every page and every nuance. We could say that he has a critical eye for those pages: he knows which ones are good, which ones less than good, and those that are unsuitable for his purpose. He doesn't choose randomly, on the basis of first impressions. He chooses even the smallest parts thoughtfully, after due consideration, for many and weighty reasons - the reasons of one who carefully balances things, not after a single reading, but after much scrutiny.

The scope of this work will be clear to anyone who reads it with at least more attention than is given to ordinary recreational reading, even though the reader might lack the same meticulousness that the author employed in putting it together. From the large and ponderous tomes that he has critically edited, he has chosen those passages, lengthy and short, which can offer us an exact, complete vision of primitive Capuchin life. His intention was not to write a history. The history of the Capuchins of those years can be found in the systematically compiled introductions to his edited works, which adequately indicate his sources to us. Nor has he intended to collect texts for polemical use or historical argument, as may be needed when one wants to demonstrate something to someone who either agrees or disagrees, or when texts are needed to be put into a scholar's hands upon which he can build a history lesson. Neither of these purposes is intended by Father Melchior of Pobladora. He is an historian, although a special kind of historian - one who doesn't want to come up with an historical narrative but, rather, to dedicate himself wholly to the study and publishing of sources.

His principle and single aim has been this: to assemble texts that speak about neither the data nor the external trappings, but about the soul, the spirit, and the spiritual consequences of the first Capuchin life. The present *chrestomathy* proposes, above all, to narrate with the same words of the early chroniclers of the Order the way in which the fire of the new life came to be lit, how it took hold, and how it grew into a blaze.

The texts are not presented randomly, ordered only by the criteria of their artistic or spiritual beauty. Rather, they are moulded into an organic unity by connected chapters bound together into a cohesive whole, with each chapter in turn having its own structure. Anyone who cares to read this book will discover what the first Capuchins were like, what they sought, and what they achieved. Indeed, in the history of Italy and of the world, in the history of the Church and of western civilization, one cannot help but acknowledge the part they played.

We must not eulogize them here, nor do we want to. Besides, we wouldn't know how to, nor would we be able to. What that mighty religious family was and is, everyone knows already. If they don't know, it doesn't take much to find

out: popular preachers and missionaries, men of prayer and action, men of simplicity and of study. They quickly grew in numbers throughout the rural districts, cities and countries of Europe and of the world, so that today wherever the Church is, there they are, too, having become one of the major forces of the Christian army. They pray, they preach, and they suffer with the people. They put before our minds a vivid and practical example of a group of humans stripped of every pleasure, ready for every duty.

In past centuries they have been called and written of as a laughing stock, because of the simplicity some of them had. But which saint, Saint Francis included, has not been ridiculed? Which religious family has not been laughed at or derided? There have always been blithe wits who found in spiritual persons their best and greatest pretext for jibes. However, even within the limits of human judgement, did they ever have reason to do so? Moreover, when have the derisive ever been right about the spiritual? When have they ever brought spiritual people to silence or reduced them to nothing? It is a fact in the present case that the Capuchins, if they have had adversaries here and there who sought to deride them with ridicule, have always been appreciated and loved very much by intelligent people, from Vittoria Colonna to Alessandro Manzoni. Except for the period of Voltairean vituperation, they have always enjoyed the sympathy of the intelligent - another indication of their being authentic Franciscans.

II

I think it would not go amiss to expound, at the start of this book, two or three considerations that will benefit its reading and comprehension, considerations born from reading the book itself, and which just need to be clarified and formulated in anticipation of what is to follow.

The first consideration is this:

- The canonical approval of the Order was given by Clement VII in 1528.
- The departure of Matteo da Bascio, which indicates the fact of the split from the Observance, was in January 1525.
- In 1526 the first Capuchins met with Blessed Paul Giustiniani, the Venetian nobleman who had been a Camaldolese, and who also had detached a new family from the official observance - the Camaldolese of Montecorona.

Let us now look at the facts.

We are in the full swing of the Protestant Reformation. While at the time of the departure of Matteo da Bascio we find no small number of similar happenings and like-minded individuals, let it be noted that we nevertheless should not conclude that we can talk about a Protestant reform being followed afterwards

by a Catholic counter reform, almost as if the second came from the first by reaction and contraposition. German and English historiography assume that the Protestant reform was central at that time, and in such an historiography a certain position and final resolution of the problem appears, if not excusable, certainly most natural. However, this historiography comes from Protestant theology, and Protestant theology comes from the Protestant Reformation. It is understandable, although it may not be pardonable, that everything is made to come from the Protestant Reformation by those who in fact originated in that reform themselves. An analogous, far less sectarian phenomenon (indeed, a completely non-sectarian one) has occurred concerning the beginnings of Catholic religious Orders, which, by reason of their very life, have naturally continued down through the history of the Church, and have come to glory especially each in its origins.

However, Protestant historiography has gone overboard, to the point of falsifying practically the whole perspective. For this historiography, the Renaissance is nothing but a preparation for the Protestant Reformation, and, in order to show this, only those facts and writings, men and authors, that support such a concept have been put forward. A typical case is Savonarola. Usually only the anti-papal side of him is seen. Yet he was a man of intense spiritual life, and his polemic against Alexander VI was hardly a disgraceful episode, although it would have been the most clamorous and ultimately cost him his life. However, Saint Philip Neri loved him, not because of their political consensus, but because he regarded him as a saintly man, which is the essence of his character.

To want to make Humanism and the Renaissance serve the Protestant Reformation is for us arbitrary, and if the Germans and English do this, then we need patience! That even Italians set out along this line of thought (and some have done so for a century, being sons spiritually of European Protestantism and of German and English cultures) is beyond understanding. A century which goes from Catherine of Siena to Savonarola is not a century rebellious to Christian, indeed Catholic, civilization. Between the birth of printing and 1530 the number of books of Catholic piety far surpassed the number of all other books printed.

The same thing has happened for that period which, after the example of the Protestants, we have baptized as the Counter Reformation. Everything attributed to the Counter Reformation has to be considered as born from the desire, in fact from the necessity, to contrast and contradict the Protestant Reformation, to diminish it, humiliate it, to bring it to nothing if possible! It must be admitted, in truth, that a lot did come from this motive. On the other hand, to say that the holiness which makes the fifteen hundreds so great emerged from a reaction, is something I totally deny. Rather, there was a Protestant Reformation which did everything to disturb and de-rail the Catholic Reformation that was already under way. The Protestant Reformation was

opposed by the movement of the Catholic Counter Reformation, but this reform movement had already been begun before that. The Catholic Reformation must at least be acknowledged if anything is to be made of the period 1450-1550.

The movement that has its beginning with the first Capuchins is spiritually prior to the Protestant Reformation and quite independent of it. It would occur to no-one to suggest that Matteo began the movement in order to counteract Luther. His departure matured in his heart for personal reasons. If there were external reasons, these were all of another kind: reasons from within religious life, particularly Franciscanism, especially in the Franciscan family of the Observants. Just as the Observants were born from the bosom of the Conventuals, so the Capuchins were born from the bosom of the Observants - as a movement to regain the primitive spirit of Francis.

Between the end of the fourteen hundreds and the beginning of the fifteen hundreds there was a prodigious, diversified attempt and effort at reform. While in our country this effort aimed towards holiness, in Germany it aimed towards something else, which we don't want to define here. The outcome of one and the same movement was different among us here and among those abroad. The so called Counter Reformation was not a contra-reformation. It was born as a Catholic reform, simultaneous with the Protestant one. The polemic against Catholicism inaugurated by Protestantism brought about the polemic against Protestantism accepted by Catholicism. However, such a polemic is not the true essence of an era which knew the Spanish mystics, the Baroque, the missions, the art of a Torquato Tasso, schools for everyone, assistance for the sick, etc, etc.

The birth of a family like the Capuchins is therefore one of the many signs of Catholic vitality in the early fifteen hundreds, and the very greatness of this family attests to that vitality. The Protestant episode of Ochino, singled out by the profane, demonstrates the point that the meeting with the Protestant Reformation did not injure (however, nor did it benefit) the growth of the Order.

In 1536 there were 500 Capuchins. In 1571 in the Italian provinces alone they were 3300. In 1758 they reached the highest numbers of their expansion: 32,821 in 63 provinces and 1,715 friaries and hospices.

III

The second consideration is this: in regard to facts such as the origins of the Capuchin, it is customary to give many reasons, but to leave out the only one that is true and substantial - holiness. We do not want to study or elucidate the concept and nature of holiness here: let it suffice for our present purposes to call it the love of Christ - a love which brings one to imitate him, that is, to live

announcing the same word which he announced, and to sacrifice oneself for humankind as he did.

There are many facets and forms of this holiness. Unfortunately, the thinking of the last two centuries - the seventeen and eighteen hundreds - may have put holiness among the lesser facts, because it is neither simple intelligence nor simple action. The Saints do not count if they haven't written memorable pages or if they haven't had an influence on civil history. When they have been holy, but without literary or civil repercussions, it seems they are not worthy of consideration. Yet many of the greatest movements of history have been born from holiness - even the most solitary and withdrawn kinds - rather than from politics, economy or the arts.

Putting ourselves face-to-face with the first group of Capuchins, we have the obligation of penetrating their spirit, of studying their life. It seems incredible that at the beginning of that century - sumptuous and wealthy in every way - a ragged little group of poor friars should begin something like the Capuchins. It seems incredible, but it is true. Those rugged friars had the greatest and most heroically strong spirits. We see what the dominant character of their life was from the pages of the first historians - and from those pages alone.

Meanwhile, they had their own unmistakable character. No-one would have mistaken a Capuchin for another friar or religious. No-one was unaware of their spiritual distinctiveness. If at first they remained unknown to the world at large, they quickly aroused its close interest, and surprised and attracted it.

We begin by uniting two characteristics which seem to be opposites, but which are two poles of a Christian spirit when it is sincere and profound - solitude and preaching.

A predilection, almost a temptation, to eremitism is undeniable among the first Capuchins. They were hermits living a very austere life. In that very complex society they brought to light again the harshness of the first monasticism of Egypt and of the Celtic countries. Jesus began in the desert; Paul began in the desert; it is as if all holiness begins there - and we must admit that the Capuchins began in the same way. If the almost absolute and too rigid eremitical phase was quickly passed through, nevertheless there endured in the spirit and make-up of the Order the imprint of that first experience. It would not be difficult for me to pick out examples and sayings from these pages in proof of what I affirm; but the reader will read them for himself without needing me to cite them for him. It is enough that he remember this observation in reading the book. It will furnish the proof.

But we should be less concerned about an eremitical vocation in the early fifteen hundreds than about the actual historiography which that century presents to us. In secular historiography it is quite customary to insist upon the corruption of oratory in those years. What is usually looked at is eloquence of a scholastic

nature, or of the processional feast, or even of the court. But there was then, as there always has been, a popular eloquence among men - that simple, naked and poor preaching which is the vehicle of Christian tradition and the school of Christian generations.

Which brings us to the other characteristic of the first Capuchins - popular preaching.

Rather than being a reaction to heretical preaching, the Capuchins began preaching like this on account of their intense personal convictions. Let the reader see in this book what their spirits were like and what the results of their preaching were. The Order of Capuchins, which has the whole future in which to mount its challenges, began as Francis had begun, among the mountains and the hills, the country areas and parishes of Italy. Just as there is a lovely Umbria and a harsh Umbria according to altitude (Assisi is not Norcia), so also there are the gentle Marches and the heavy Marches - and Catria is not the pleasant hill of Recanati. The Capuchins, born in the Marches, felt the hard tradition of the Marches. Just as in their eremitical life, so also in their preaching, they appeared somewhat strong and impetuous rather than flaccid and dreamy.

In our opinion also, their vocation cannot be passed over when considering those decades in which Catholic oratory has been seen as something quite corrupt and vain. If in the countries which became Protestant the theme of preaching was detachment from Catholicism, why isn't it recognized that popular preaching also remained strong in Catholicism, and that it was never destroyed? The fourteenth century was a great century for popular preaching. The fifteen hundreds were no less great.

It seems to us that the Capuchins are living proof that the Church did not suffer any break in spirit during those years in which they emerged, and in which common opinion locates the greatest diminution of Catholicism. We do not exaggerate if we say that the early fifteen hundreds strangely resemble the first fifty years after the millennium - two periods greatly disparaged, yet two periods that were truly great. A religious family like that of the Capuchins is not born at a time of desolation.

IV

The book put together by Father Melchior of Pobladora, as we have said, will not only be of benefit in making known the beginnings the Order, but also will be an advantage in giving us a better idea of the fifteen hundreds, and of religious Italy at the time. We have been quite calumniated, denigrated and offended, we Italians, by many strangers (and even by Italians) who deny our having any religious feeling. It has been stated that we did not have a reform because we did not have a Christian heart! What a thing to say! The Italians, it was suggested, were all sceptics then. It is true that nothing else can be said

when only Aretino, Ariosto and Machiavelli are read; when Alexander VI, Julius II, Leo X and Clement VII are looked upon as lords of the most splendid court of the time. Yet not all Italians lived as courtesans and... how can I say it?...as personages of the Aretine. After all, the first ever Capuchins were all Italians.

Nor can it be said that the Italians were irreligious sceptics. A flourishing Order and religious movement was born from them.

The third observation we wanted to state in advance is this: here in these pages we are present at the birth of a religious family which is one of the strongest in the Church today. With a mastery which was his alone, the learned editor knew how to choose and assemble all those texts that can tell us about the secret and clear, profound and powerful spirit of the emerging marvellous brotherhood of barefoot, solitary preachers that were the Capuchins. In reality, the Editor knew how to bring to light the solid, candid and robust roots of the Capuchin tree. Using the original words of the first chroniclers, he has shown us their prayer, austerity, daily life, houses, travels, anxieties, joys, what they wore, what they ate, how they spoke, and above all, how they kept silent. No part of their life goes without mention. We even come to know about their defects, their restlessness, their problems, and how much they had to suffer unjustly and justly in order to reach the heights which they achieved. (Those who fancy them to have been completely holy in the beginning show signs more of a naive wish than of mature intelligence.) As in the Franciscan origins, so in Capuchin origins, the shadows make the light more precious. And there were shadows.

However, let us not always be addressing those who are outside the Church, and are against the Church (the more we do, the less they listen to us), but let us speak now among ourselves, about our own business.

What a marvellous book this is for the Catholic heart! Our dearest devotions, our most pondered (if not practised) virtues, our most nourished hopes, our less consolable sorrows and our most incommunicable joys; all that humbles us, all that reveals our sin and our grace, all that is our misery and our mercy; how much we must flee and how much we must follow, how much we must break down in ourselves, and how much we must build up; everything we are and everything we should be as Christians, our time and our eternity: all are reflected in these pages with clear order, and found here with immense consolation.

Even if written by writers with crude styles, these pages often compare with writings by true and proper authors, even poets. We leave it to others to make of them a literary appreciation. It is enough for us to write what we have, not as a panegyric, nor in bad faith, but in good faith and in full awareness. The time will come, when the sorely worn-out rhetorical garb of dull humanism will have fallen apart, and a large number of these pages will appear in the anthologies of

Italian prose, as examples not only of Christian living but of sincere and robust writing.

Rome, Easter 1943
Don Giuseppe De Luca

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

The present collection has been compiled in order to meet the desire expressed by many to have a *florilegium*, both spiritual and literary (naturally enough), gathered from the more representative texts of the first Capuchin historians.

In this edition, the intention has been to illustrate the spiritual life, and more particularly the Franciscan life, lived by the Capuchin Friars in the first seventy years of the Order's existence. The testimony of the first two historiographers of the Order has been compared with the official legislation, demonstrating that a perfect harmony can be seen to have existed between the law and their way of life, the theory and the practice.

From these pages, those features of the Order which were established and handed on by the more genuine historical sources will be seen clearly and exactly. Each will highlight the beauty, the power and the holiness of that movement of Franciscan reform which in the fifteen hundreds prompted in the Church and in society an efficacious reawakening of spirituality and evangelization. The authors from whom we have drawn describe this magnificent flowering of spiritual life with liveliness, vigor, and fresh and spontaneous charm.

All the fundamental aspects of Capuchin life and action are found personified in a massive throng of generous souls who knew how to realize the ideal of perfection and holiness. Persons, places and episodes are situated and strike root in a nurturing setting of authentic Franciscanism. In fact, this complex and varied story is dominated by a single directing spirit, feeling and intent - to live integrally the evangelical life in the school of Saint Francis of Assisi.

The sources from which we have drawn are specifically the following:

1. the *Constitutions* of the Order promulgated in the General Chapter of 1536, which remained substantially identical in the various redactions of the fifteen hundreds;
2. the *Relationes* of Father Ludovico da Fossombrone of Mercato Saraceno, written between 1565 and 1580;

3. the *Chronicles* of Father Bernardino da Colpetrazzo in his triple composition of 1580, 1585 and 1593.

We have followed a simple and clear editing method. The literary forms of the original texts are kept, but have been reproduced using our modern orthography to facilitate reading. The many passages chosen have been arranged according to logical development, and follow a scheme that divides them into nineteen chapters and then breaks up these chapters into paragraphs, using subheadings.

Obviously, not all the texts transcribed have the same value, and some will appear to be repetitive. Frequently a text is a protracted exposition in which the significant sentence or thought could have been expressed more succinctly. However, such long citations have a double advantage: they give all the nuances of a teaching, and also demonstrate the literary genre of the writers of that era. Therefore, we believe that each text has its own spiritual or literary worth. Furthermore, the book will also appeal to lovers of good writing.

Let us now give a brief overview of the history of the Capuchin Order during the period to which these chosen and arranged texts refer.

Matteo da Bascio, one of a number of aspiring reformers of the great Franciscan family of the Observants, initiated in January 1525 the movement in which the actual Order of Friars Minor Capuchin had its origins. His first companion, Father Ludovico da Fossombrone, gave a certain organization to the incipient reform, which was canonically approved by Clement VII on the 3 July 1528. Its form of life was codified perfectly in the Constitutions promulgated by the General Chapter of 1536 under the direction of the new Vicar General, Father Bernardino d'Asti.

With the initial difficulties overcome, the young institution spread so rapidly that in the same year, 1536, it counted about 500 religious distributed in 12 monastic Provinces from the Alps to Sicily. Only twenty five years after its origins - in 1550 - its members numbered 2500. Forty years later, in 1571, they amounted to 3300 in the Italian Provinces alone. In 1574 the Capuchin Minors crossed the Alps and established themselves in France, and successively in Spain (1578), Switzerland (1581), Belgium (1585), the Tyrol (1593), Bohemia (1603) and the Rhineland and Westphalia (1611-1612).

In the final years of the fifteen hundreds the Order counted 7268 religious, 30 Provinces and 664 friaries. Through their wide range of activities the Capuchins by now were known and appreciated throughout the nations of Europe.

This rapid development had as its deep and inexhaustible font of strength the holiness of life of the first friars, of whom a great number reached the heights of perfection - friars such as Blessed Matteo da Bascio, Saint Felice da Cantalice, Venerable Raniero of Sansepolcro, Saint Giuseppe da Leonessa, Saint Seraphim of Montegranaro.

The friars prepared themselves for their apostolic tasks through studies completed in provincial and general schools under the direction of teachers learned in the ecclesiastical sciences. There was also a large number of writers among them, who, in their aesthetical works, reminded men of the duties involved in living a Christian life. Particularly numerous were the preachers, who worked tirelessly in cities and country areas for the reform and instruction of the people - accompanying their apostolic activities with the establishment of various beneficent institutions that endure to this day.

The Order made a valuable contribution to the Council of Trent, through the participation of nine of its more illustrious members.

Meanwhile, within the confines of Italy and beyond the Alps, the friars defended the unity of the Church and bravely and effectively opposed the spread of heresies. Nor did they neglect the propagation of the Christian religion among the infidels: Giovanni Spagnuolo was murdered in Cairo; Saint Giuseppe da Leonessa pressed on with a willing team to Constantinople; others reached the African and Levantine coasts and the islands of the Mediterranean.

All these and other activities continued to multiply in number and to grow in strength throughout the sixteen hundreds. Let it suffice for the period which is illustrated in the pages of this book to take note of those just mentioned.

I finish with the words of Ludovico da Fossombrone of Mercato Saraceno:

‘Now there is nothing more left to tell about their very holy way of life except - and this says it all - that they lived in such a manner that it seemed as if the very first companions of our Seraphic Father Francis had come to life again. Yet I write about only a few of them, since it would be impossible to chronicle the number and diversity of the fervent deeds of our first holy friars.

‘And people know that I am neither a liar nor a dealer in flattery, and that what I write is true. Everyone can be confident that, in making these things public, I have not been biased with too much affection for the Congregation, even though I am myself a member - albeit an unworthy one. I am prompted only by the truth, and can say that I have spoken up and stated all this in order to demonstrate to my brothers the life that our fathers led. Also I have done this so that we may - how can I say it? - be spurred on to walk, or rather to run, with a greater swiftness along the same path.’ [I, 268]

Father Melchior of Pobladura OFM Cap

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

I have nothing to add to what I wrote in the preface of this *florilegium* twenty or so years ago.

The reader can see for himself that the volume has greatly increased in size. This is nothing to marvel at. Growth is the law of life and of progress.

The increased number of pages is due neither to the need for corrections nor to the caprice of novelty. The 1943 text remains unchanged. The systematic order is also identical. Even the titles of individual chapters are identical. The addition of margin numbers has the single purpose of facilitating reading and citation.

The newly inserted passages are fully justifiable. In the interim the historical collection of the sources of the primitive Capuchin life has been enriched by three new volumes, and it was necessary to take the new testimonies into account. That is what has been done in gleaning material from the chronicles of Matteo of Salò and Paul of Foligno, for by order of the Major Superiors they had collected the memories of the confreres of the fifteen hundreds. Nevertheless their testimonies have not in the slightest modified the profile of Capuchin life previously outlined. However the image is greatly embellished by some previously unpublished brush strokes, and illuminated with new gleams of light.

The 262 passages added to the 670 of the first edition will do nothing - we hope - other than finally justify the flattering judgments with which the present anthology was then accepted. Some greeted it as a literary jewel. Others saw it as a spiritual treasure. Permit us to cite evaluations which reflect these two points of view.

The volume, wrote Ludovico Hunter, "is something truly 'singular' and absolutely 'new'. It tells the story of the Capuchins' origins, and narrates them with the authentic words of the very first chroniclers of the Order in passages which have not only historical value but also spiritual and literary worth."

"For us," added Gabriel of Saint Mary Magdalene, "the value of the book lies in its spiritual content. Because of this, we do not hesitate to call it wonderful! The spiritual world that it reveals in the tempestuous fifteen hundreds is a feast for the soul; a glittering and luminous evocation of a simple and sublime way of life. Under the frequent guise of rough ingenuity, heroic souls appeared, and still more, the fecund wisdom of a flourishing religious life thrived. The various chapters of the book, not meant to be doctrinal, are like jewelry boxes which collect, so to speak, the sparkling fragments of living souls. But what pure wisdom of spiritual life they teach! Glowing actions and words of gold are found on every page, without any ostentation. Yet persuasive, penetrating,

encouraging and always full of serenity. A spiritually precious book, able therefore to do great good for souls of every taste and background who are capable of reading it seriously and taking it to heart."

These and other authoritative judgments have been amply confirmed by the pressing request to prepare the edition which we now present to the public.

We give heartfelt thanks to all those have been generous with their help and advice. A moving and grateful remembrance also goes to the dear and unforgettable Don Joseph De Luca, deserving of our affection and admiration after given authority this edition, through the part which he played in being pleased with the gathered fruits and by wishing a large circulation to "*La Bella e Santa Riforma*".

M.P.

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

Unfortunately, historical texts from the first years of the Capuchin Franciscan movement are not generally available in English. I felt urged to translate this work believing that in these pages we can glimpse the life of the first Capuchins and meet some of them in the vivid recollections of their contemporaries. The Capuchin Reform had affected the entire Franciscan Family and took place against the background of the Renaissance and Reformation. Therefore I chose the English title: *The Capuchin Reform - A Franciscan Renaissance*, adapting it from the heading of Pobladora's first chapter in this book.

Melchior of Pobladora, a Capuchin Friar, published his critical editions of the chronicles of the Capuchin Reform between 1937 and 1950 in the series *Monumenta Historia Ordinis Min. Capuccinorum*. In 1947 and 1948 the three volumes of his *Historia Generalis Ordinis FF. Min. Capuccinorum* also came to light. *La Bella e Santa Riforma dei Frati Minori Cappuccini* is a fruit of this scholarship. First published in 1943, it was revised and enlarged in 1963. Pobladora presents a portrait of Capuchin life during its first decades, choosing carefully from the primary sources he had published.

The chroniclers were motivated by their zeal to describe, defend, and lovingly promote and celebrate the gift of the Capuchin life they had received from God. Accuracy about the names of persons and places, as well as dates, was secondary. They perceived their history with the eyes of faith and the conviction that the faithful Providence of God is present in the unfolding of all kinds of events - in both persecution and prosperity. As a testimony to their life, *The Capuchin Reform - A Franciscan Renaissance* offers us a window onto that primitive Capuchin life and spirit.

There is something here also for the secular historian. The chroniclers Pobladora quotes wrote towards the end of the sixteenth century, so that this collection also allows us a view into religious and social life within Italy in that period.

My first draft translation was finished in 1988. I revised this draft ten years later. This present translation attempts to maintain fidelity to the original text, but avoids literalness. I have tried to present the “mind-set” of the Chroniclers, even if this may prompt some dissonance with us today. These early Friars felt differently to us in many ways. Their insights into the Gospel life may challenge us and ought not be dismissed as archaic, naïve or quaint. That they think and act differently to us is one of the strongest values of these often provocative testimonies.

Should the translation of a work such as this be technical, and include explanatory notes, comments and references? In this case, I believe not. It is my desire that *The Capuchin Reform - A Franciscan Renaissance* with its wealth and depth of spirituality should be accessible to anyone who cares to read it. As an introduction this volume is intended more for reflection than study.

Some terms have different meanings today, even in Italian. For example, one commonly comes across *religione* and *luogo*. Today the word *religion* may refer to a distinct system of beliefs. For our Chroniclers it had a different meaning. In this text *religione* is synonymous with “Religious Order.” Therefore I have translated *religione* as “Order” where that was the meaning intended. For the word *luogo* I have used “place,” “house” or “friary” where I believe appropriate. In the original, the titles of the Friars were either “Brother” (*Fra*) or “Father” (*Padre*) (used for non-cleric Friars also). Often a friar was addressed with both. To simplify matters, whenever “Padre” was used on its own or with *Fra*, I have used “Father” only. Otherwise I have used “Brother,” even for clerics.

Other words have been difficult to express in English, e.g. *singularità* and *particolarità*. Something or someone is “singular” if unique, outstanding or special. On the other hand, *particolarità* has a negative connotation. In this context I believe it describes that attitude by which a person tries to be as obviously different, unique or *sui generis* as possible in relation to the community. Today this kind of assertiveness could be called *individualism*. *Honestà* is another example of how a word changes meaning from one language to another, one time to another. In the chronicles of the Capuchin Reform it has a broad range of meanings, namely fittingness, decency, modesty, chastity, charity and purity. Rarely does it mean honesty or trustworthiness. In most instances I would translate *onestà* as *probity*. There are many other such problems of terminology, which would be noted in a more critical translation. Italian or Latin terms left in the text (in italics) are in the index, with a brief explanation.

May I thank all those whose patience has borne the brunt of my importunate requests for help day or night. Outstanding among them are Bro Hugo of Maria

OFM Cap and Mrs Pierina Murer, who by now has probably forgotten all about her help. I would also like to thank my other Capuchin Brothers who helped, especially Athanase Gonelli (who kindly contributed a critical edition of the 1535 constitutions), and Gary Devery - Thanks also to the different people who have read this draft and made helpful corrections and suggestions. They'd prefer to remain anonymous here, especially Jonesy.

A tribute of thanks goes to Dr Gabe Lomas, who has edited this final version of the translation. Thanks to his encouragement, talent and patience in accomplishing such a painstaking task, *The Capuchin Reform - a Franciscan Renaissance* has finally emerged in readable English. Finally, my gratitude also goes to Br John Cooper, OFM Cap, whose enthusiasm for the Capuchin life has overflowed into keen, practical support for this project.

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SOURCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

- C *Capuchin Constitutions* of the General Chapter of 1536, edited by Eduardo D'Alencon in *Liber Memorialis* OFM S. Francisci Capuccinorum, Rome, 1928, pp 356 - 419
- I Marius a Mercato Saraceno, *Relationes de Origine Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, Monumenta Historica OFM Cap Vol I, edited by Melchior of Pobladura, Collegio S. Lorenzo da Brindisi, Assisi, 1937
- II Bernardinus a Colpetrazzo, *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum 1525 – 1593. Liber Primus: Praecipui nascentis Ordinis eventus*, Monumenta Historica OFM Cap Vol II, edited by Melchior of Pobladura, Collegio S.Lorenzo da Brindisi, Assisi, 1939
- III Bernardinus a Colpetrazzo, *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum 1525 – 1593. Liber Secundus: Biographiae Selectae*. Monumenta Historica OFM Cap Vol III, edited by Melchior of Pobladura, Collegio S.Lorenzo da Brindisi, Assisi, 1940
- IV Bernardinus a Colpetrazzo, *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum 1525 – 1593. Liber Tertius: Ratio viviendi fratrum, ministri et vicarii generales, cardinales protectores*. Monumenta Historica OFM Cap Vol IV, edited by Melchior of Pobladura, Capuchin Historical Institute, Rome, 1941
- V Matthias a Salò, *Historia Cappuccina. Pars Prima*. Monumenta Historica OFM Cap. Vol V, edited by Melchior of Pobladura, Capuchin Historical Institute, Rome, 1950
- VI Matthias a Salò, *Historia Capuccina Pars Secunda*. Monumenta Historica OFM Cap. Vol VI, edited by Melchior of Pobladura, Capuchin Historical Institute, Rome, 1950
- VII Paulus a Foligno, *Origo et progressus ordinis fratrum minorum capuccinorum*, Monumenta Historica OFM Cap. Vol VII, edited by Melchior of Pobladura, Capuchin Historical Institute, Rome, 1955

In the references at the end of paragraphs, the use of C or the Roman numerals I-VII corresponds to these volumes, and are followed by the page number in the volume as indicated by Pobladura.

FRANCISCAN RENAISSANCE

The Franciscan Order throughout the centuries has known days of varying fortune, a universal phenomenon reflected in all human institutions. On the steep slopes of life, it is easy for humans to slip, since they are more inclined to give in than to struggle. If our interior energies are not restored and renewed constantly in the strenuous ascents of the spirit, all progress becomes impossible. In fact, stability itself and vital equilibrium are compromised.

However, in its seven centuries of history the Order of St. Francis has tested its own vigour, always maintaining and reinvigorating the life passed down to it from its founder. In the early fifteen hundreds from its ancient trunk there sprouted a vigorous shoot that quickly expanded into other branches, making itself admired everywhere for the copious fruits of its apostolate, virtues and holiness. Reviving according to the impulses and needs of the era, Franciscanism proved its perennial fecundity.

The Capuchin family thus came to be grafted onto the age-old tree of the Catholic Church, a vigorous sprout of Franciscan restoration, a force of individual sanctification and a leaven of social renewal.

In the bosom of the Franciscan Order the most fervent friars aspired to a more complete and exact observance of the Rule they had vowed. While the reform was not accepted without debate, nevertheless the ground was prepared and the proposal of the first Capuchins, in overcoming conflicts, triumphed rapidly. The life and the example of the Seraphic Father was the light which guided their steps: uncompromising imitation of St. Francis was the distinguishing mark of the Friar Minor.

The instigators of the new reform, truly called to glorious achievements, laid the sure foundations of this magnificent edifice in establishing the fundamental principles that had to direct the activity and regulate the common life of the multitude of friars. The first Capuchin generations did not know of mediocrity, and detested tepidity and negligence in the service of the ideal they embraced. When "those truly heroic soldiers, indeed captains, who had fought under the insignia of the cross of Christ and under the standard of the Seraphic Father St. Francis" (I, 234) gathered in the name of the good Jesus, they were strengthened to rise ever higher towards the summit of perfection through purity of heart and the practice of genuine and fervent love. Thus that crowd of chosen souls, unsatisfied by the kind of life previously professed, enlisted themselves willingly and with fervent enthusiasm under the newly hoisted standard of St. Francis, and saw the longing of their hearts fulfilled. Now they were happy! In that oasis found in the desert of life, they breathed deeply the Franciscan spirit for which they searched. They had discovered the refreshing springs that extinguished the thirst that tormented them.

Natural movement and Violent movement

1. All religious orders are established to help their members tend towards perfection. In their beginnings, these orders are so rigorous and hold to such lofty ideals that it is only with enormous effort that frail humans can attain their goals. Then, little by little, these religious orders begin to decline, and eventually they fall away to such a extent that it becomes hard to see any difference between the way religious people live and the way secular people live. This has occasioned a huge number of reforms, for if religious orders did not thoroughly reform themselves, they would cease to exist. Since the Lord God does not want there to be a shortage of holy religious orders, he has raised up from time to time, as it has pleased His Majesty, some of his servants to lead these orders back to their heights.

The reason for all this is that human life has been radically damaged by our father Adam, and it is now more difficult for us to do good than to do evil. That is, our nature is more inclined to sink down than to rise up above itself and rest with mind and heart in the supreme joys of eternal life, according to the Prophet. He says it is necessary to rise above oneself, teaching us that to tend towards the things of eternal life and to live a contemplative life is not a natural movement, but a supernatural one.

Consider Aristotle. Speaking about natural movement and violent movement, he says that natural movement is weak at the beginning and strong at the end. He gives as an example a rock dropped from a high tower, which at first would be easy to catch. As it falls, however, it gathers such momentum that if a plank of wood or something similar were placed in its path, the rock would smash it to pieces. And the longer the drop, the more momentum the rock gathers, so that a tiny little stone would suffice to kill a man.

Violent movement, on the other hand, is powerful at the beginning and weak at the end. Aristotle demonstrates it in this way: a rock thrown by a strong man could kill someone as it leaves his hand, but when it has finished its flight, it is so weak that it would hardly hurt a fly.

Therefore, to go into decline is a natural movement, while doing good and living the religious life in the state of perfection is a violent movement.

We can see that violent movement has always existed in the Church of God. In the beginning, with a spirit-filled movement violent to our nature, the primitive Church attained great heights. Then, slipping into natural movement again, the Church and all Christianity came to such a low pass that, if they had not been drawn back to the heights at various times by holy men through violent movements, things would have become so utterly lax that there would no longer be even the semblance of Christianity in the world today.

So it is not without cause that our Lord wants his Gospel preached continuously in his Church, and that he orders bishops and superiors to be like farmers,

always cleaning the burrs from their sheep, for the greatest and most important duty in pastoral care is constantly to foster reform. And indeed, from the beginning, the Church has been accustomed, through Sacred Councils, to withdraw to the heights, to the true teachings of Christ, and to cleanse itself of the false teachings of heretics. Had it not been for this means of purification, the faith of Peter would have been lost completely - if such a thing were possible, since, within Christ's governance, that faith is all-powerful.

Hence, violent movement was the foundation of all holy religious orders. Their holy founders, filled with the Holy Spirit, began with such austerity, strictness and poverty in regard to those things necessary for the sustenance of their bodies that they appeared more like angels than men.

In them, evangelical life was portrayed and the apostolic life was made manifest to the world. They showed how our Lord wanted all his followers to live. They demonstrated clearly to the unschooled how the Lord wanted his sufferings and death to be witnessed to the world - so much so that, through their example, countless others followed them with great fervour, and in a very short time holy men were to be found everywhere. They lit up the whole world with their example, teachings and miracles.

Heaven and earth were enriched by them, and they benefited the Church of Christ so mightily that even today it is seen to be propped up by them, its pillars of holiness. Through them, Christ has defended his Church by purifying its teachings from the heretical doctrines sown by Lucifer through many earthly and wayward men.

Thus it is that holy religious orders have been maintained on high by violent movements, and they have always produced very pleasing fruits, worthy of His Majesty.

However, when holy religious orders have taken up natural movement again by leaving the rigour of penitence and high contemplation, and have become self-centred, falling back into self-love, they have gradually sunk down, even to the extent that neither their good fruits nor their merits can be seen in them any longer. They entangle themselves so much in natural movement that what our Lord observed through the Apostle Paul can be declared here too: "Everyone seeks his own interests, and not those of Jesus Christ." (Phil 2:21)

This is the reason for so many reforms. If holy religious orders did not withdraw to the heights through violent movements and bring about shining reforms, in a little time they would disappear completely. Yet, since our Lord wants them to continue for the good of the Church, it has pleased him from time to time to raise up holy men, who, through wonderful reforms, have led the orders back to that perfection of observance which was initiated by their founders. For to reform a thing means nothing other than to restore it to its proper, original shape.

It was a violent movement, an inspiration guided by the Holy Spirit, that was the start given by our Seraphic Father Saint *Francis* to his holy religious Order. Our Father and all his Companions, and those first Fathers, founded the Order with such sublime, lived ideals, that although many reforms emerged afterwards, none has been able to achieve the spirit, fervour and perfect observance of the holy Gospel of Christ seen in the first Fathers of the Order. [II, 37-40]

2. Though many reforms have arisen, they have quickly subsided, falling back into natural movement, right up until the time of the last reform - ours, which we Capuchins believe to have been brought about in the spirit of the founder, and through the will of God. [II, 43]

They wanted to begin a reform

3. Therefore you should know that until Clement VII, the Order lived in great peace and was widely accepted among secular people. Some of the friars were holy men, and all enjoyed peace and tranquillity wherever they were, and even sensual comforts.

Because of the support of these secular people, and the opportunity at that time - with everything so cheap - for the friars to have a great abundance of temporal goods, it happened that they were well off as far as physical needs were concerned, and had a surfeit of material things. I know this from having seen it, and I am happy to give an example of one particular place in the Province of Saint Francis where, on Holy Saturdays, a hundred goats were often brought to the door! (I am making an allegation about the surfeit that the Fathers of that time enjoyed, but which I can't adequately detail here.)

But it pleased our Lord to reawaken the Order, so that it began to consider its affairs.

Many holy men, inspired and illumined by God, withdrew themselves into remote and obscure places and there exercised themselves greatly in holy contemplation and the observance of the Rule. Many learned and holy men discussed the Rule and the regular life daily, expounding and demonstrating how much the Order had become alienated from the true observance of the Rule. Others spoke so highly of the things of God that many were inspired to take the decision to withdraw into solitude. I knew a number of these friars, who, enlightened in this God-given way, realized what dangers they were in, and how far they had strayed from the true observance of the Rule.

Consequently, all that they had been saying concerning reform came about. They saw that it was clearly impossible to persuade the majority of the friars to accept a stricter life, adhering to the will of our Father Saint Francis. But, nevertheless, the reform movement was so significant that the friars aligning themselves with it began to challenge the whole Order. It was something truly

ordained by God, so that in all the provinces where it became an issue, in both general and provincial chapters, many friars sought, with great tenacity, to initiate reform.

Although self-interest and lethargy held sway among the lax friars, who didn't want anything to do with reform, nevertheless this spirit of reform prevailed. So, many Fathers, with singleness of purpose and great fortitude, went off to see his Holiness Clement VII, and convinced him that the Order stood convicted of being too lax and outside the observance of the Rule.

With the Pope now on their side, they thought that the reform was as good as accomplished. However, trying to get it regularized in the chapters, so that lists could be made of those who wanted to join the reform group, proved to be a different matter. So great was the tumult in every province that it was only by considerable good fortune that the zealous friars were able to escape from the hands of the others.

This battle lasted around three years, so that the reform could never come to a head. [II, 23-26]

Brother Matteo's departure

4. It pleased the Lord God that in the third year of the papacy of Clement VII, through a revelation from God, Brother Matteo da Bascio, a simple man of great spirit, departed, wearing his long pointed cowl. With the blessing of God and the Supreme Pontiff, he started to preach, and such was his fervour, going about barefoot and dressed as he was in that simple habit, he truly seemed like someone just returned from purgatory and not of this world - like an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Now, when something new and of importance comes along, it produces fear in the opposing party and, at the same time, great consolation among those to whom it appears to favour. Thus the departure of Brother Matteo brought about great fear among the lax brethren, and great joy among those zealous for reform.

When the lax superiors realized that the hare had escaped and could not be caught, they tried, thinking of those who had not yet escaped, to shut the gate by applauding the zealous friars and allowing them to join the reform. Nevertheless, their hand had been forced, and it was evident that they had reluctantly and unwillingly allowed the zealous friars to join the reform. When friars joined the reformed group, their lax superiors took them out again, under the pretext of wanting to make use of them in other important roles. Thus the reform movement stuttered on. [II, 26]

5. Therefore this was the reason our Congregation grew. Brother Matteo and Brother Ludovico first got the Brief and then the Bull. The majority of zealous Fathers believed that the Reform by the Zoccolanti Fathers would not progress

since it was so persecuted. Therefore they decided to come to our Congregation. [II, 28]

6. In conformity with prophecy, the reform of the Capuchins was most opportune regarding the period in which it occurred, and the needs of the Order. Because of this we can say that it was brought about by God and not by humans. There are, indeed, many signs of this. In many ways we are certain that all the power of the world could not have accomplished it amid so many difficulties if the hand of God had not been there [II, 29]. Hence this small, new vine, renewed and restored in our very own Italy, is the work of him from whom issues and descends every good. [I, 94]

7. This holy beginning was as wonderful as it was weak in the sight of people. For we cannot truly say who brought it about, or who was the beginning and direct cause. However we are forced to say that it is from God and not from human beings, miraculous not human. The reform was weak in appearance, and yet so robust that it resisted adversities just as robust. Amidst many thorns, this rose has been restored ever fresh and fragrant through the power and grace of God.

Consider also that Brother Matteo da Bascio, a man without letters and lacking any standing, gave the reform movement a feeble and weak beginning - and not directly, because he never had the intention of reforming anything other than himself. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit made use of him. [II, 96]

It was not brought about by men

8. Who was our founder, the first member of the Order? Our Father Saint Francis, and no other. The Seraphic Father is our saint, as indeed are all the other saints of the Order, which compels us to assert - as it should everyone else - that this reform movement is truly a reform of the Order of Saint Francis, founded on him and on his blessed spirit. Therefore this comes from Christ and not from mortal men. It began in Saint Francis and in no-one else, and continues to be his. [I, 194]

9. The Servant of God, Matteo da Bascio, never tired of saying that the Congregation came from God and not from men. He said:

“Even if none of you is aware of this truth, I am. When I was in the friary of Montefalcone I was not planning to start a reform, nor even to reform myself. However, the Holy Spirit visited me many times, and I discovered that it was not only me, but the whole Order, that needed reforming. He let me know then how far we were from the true observance of the Rule.” [II, 250]

10. The Congregation was not fashioned by men. Jesus Christ formed it with the Spirit, and in the spirit of Saint Francis. He will take very great care of it, as will also our Seraphic Father, upon whom it was founded. [I, 232]

11. 11 Know that the congregation of the Capuchins came into being miraculously. This way of living according to the true observance of the Rule has been re-established not by men but by the Holy Spirit. [III, 185]

It was planted by God

12. In the house at Motta Filocastro, long before his last illness took a firm hold or gave any indication of death, Ludovico da Reggio openly said that he would not recover from his sickness. He comforted the friars, and with fiery words exhorted them to the perfect observance of the Rule and to perseverance in the holy reform fashioned by God. A friar said to him, "Father, Father George has left us and you are leaving us too. How will our Congregation last, since it is so criticised and persecuted? The two of you have sustained and defended us against our opponents. Without you we will be helpless. We can do nothing but wait for the destruction of our reform." The holy old man answered, "Sons, do not worry. The movement will continue to grow. It has been planted by God, and God is the one who will defend it." [V, 198]

Contentions

13. 13 While there might have been controversies and contentions among the Scribes and Pharisees about whether or not Christ was the true Messiah, fulfilling the prophecies of holy men, that was nothing compared to what went on in the Order concerning whether or not the Capuchin reform was truly the one that had been foretold. Most friars - in fact, nearly all of them - thought not, and believed that it would soon disappear. This occasioned a massive confrontation between the lax friars and the zealous friars eager for observance of the Rule.

Some lax friars carried on like the Scribes and Pharisees, who said, when our Lord worked miracles on the Sabbath: 'This man is not from God because he disregards the Sabbath.' Likewise, these lax friars said: "This reform is not a good thing, because it is not carried out under obedience to the Order. We all know who their leader is: Brother Ludovico. Although he's a good man, he's not spiritual enough to be carrying out reforms."

In opposition to this, the other friars said: "Don't be deceived. The prophecy says reform will be brought about by simple, uneducated persons lacking in favour and of no standing. Next to nothing will come to light about who actually instigates it, because God has reserved that honour for himself.

"It began in '25, but only grew after the reformers were scattered in '27. After this dispersal, Brother Matteo and Brother Ludovico emerged with a band of barefoot friars. They caused an uproar throughout the world. The whole Order was in turmoil. This was because our Lord God never fails anyone who faithfully entrusts himself to him.

"The zealous friars had desired reform for a long time. They could never achieve this goal while it was being so savagely attacked by the lax friars. It now seems to me like a miracle from God that we became so divided in spirit among ourselves that we no longer agreed on anything. However, reform has taken place in our hearts, even though we are separated physically.

"Don't you now see that it's not possible to keep quiet about this reform? It was brought about when God inspired the hearts of his chosen ones to join the reform movement in which the friars wear pointed cowls. I, too, am one of them, and there are many others in every province. We are determined to continue unwaveringly.

"Thus, you see, reform has come about. There is nothing deceptive in it, because it has been accomplished in order for us to do what we promised God to do. Nor would God permit us to be deceived, and allow such a large multitude, moved by zeal for observance of the Rule, to go astray. May it please God that if I have not been the first, at least I won't be the last."

At that time, it was impossible not to talk about the reform movement. It was the only thing the friars discussed. The zealous ones became so worked up that they said publicly, "Will that day never come when I can leave this present misleading way of life and do penance for my sins?"

And this would lead to arguments among them, for the lax friars would say: "You're mad! But never mind, go and join them. You won't last long! They live like shepherds, out in the open fields. How is it possible to organise an order while living so frugally? It won't be three days before you're back again! You've never tried to sleep in stables, in shelters, in the lairs of wild beasts or under trees, as these madmen do - barefoot, with little clothing and nowhere even to meet together."

But, wonderful God! Those servants of his would immediately begin to weep copious tears and cry out, saying, "It's the true reform, founded on the sufferings and cross of Christ! The desire to join it sets us on fire more than anything else! What does being reformed mean, except to return to the proper form given to our holy Order in the beginning?

"Can't you understand? Nothing makes it clearer to us that this is the true reform than seeing it conformed in everything to our Father Saint Francis and all those first Fathers who dwelt so poorly in shacks, lairs, and the poorest little places?

"Don't you see that, of the many reforms that have occurred, the Order has never returned so closely to its first state as these little poor ones have done now? There's no arguing against it: this must be the true reform." [II, 227-228]

In precariousness

14. Like God's own sheep, when many zealous friars saw Brother Matteo in his distinctive habit, they knew it was the kind of habit that the Seraphic Francis wore. They were inflamed with incredible zeal. Like men inebriated with God they decided with great fervour to observe the Rule to the highest degree of perfection.

This witness of Brother Matteo was so significant that in a brief time a number of barefoot friars lined up behind him, like stray sheep who, on hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, run with great ardour through the mountains, valleys and alpine places to gather and to be united under his governance and guidance. They do not worry about the thorns, rocks and other obstacles of persecution that strew the way. They embrace the cross of their Shepherd willingly, desiring every day to suffer more and more for his love and to follow in the footsteps of His Majesty.

The journey was very harsh for them physically, for they were without the kind of leader usually given to such groups of God's servants. Yet inwardly they were full of hope that God would not abandon them. This hope was not in vain, because our Lord God provided them with certain necessary supporters. While their existence was always precarious, he kept them invincible. [II, 97]

All to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity

15. How wonderfully Divine Providence watches over the Order of Saint Francis! At that time it was divided into two groups: the congregation of the Conventual Fathers and that of the Zoccolanti Fathers. God, having to make from these two a third, namely the Capuchins, wanted each of the first two to play a part in this. Thus it was that the Zoccolanti brought forth the Capuchins, and the Conventuals maintained them.

Since the Zoccolanti trace their origins back to the Conventuals while the Capuchins came directly from the Zoccolanti, when there was a movement from the Capuchins back to the Conventuals again, a perfect triangle was formed. Three lines and three angles that completely encompass the whole Order of Saint Francis, as if by destiny!

The Order was founded by him in the extraordinary circumstances of his being called three times by the Crucified; his restoration of three churches; his thrice opening the missal to learn the will of God and his vocation; and his having impressed in his heart and expressed in his habit and life the sacred sign of the Tau cross, which has three points. All this redounds to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity! [V, 118]

The true Reform loved by God

16. Brother Paolo da Chioggia often said he desired to die for Christ. And indeed, he was most steadfast throughout the grave and bitter persecutions of those times, cheerfully exhorting the friars to endure them, too. He said:

“We can have no greater sign, brothers, that this is the true reform, loved by God, than to see it impugned so wickedly. Therefore be at peace. Just as the primitive Church bore wonderful fruit and flourished during tribulations, so fruit and growth must come to our Congregation in this way. Moreover the tribulations will not be so many that we cannot endure them, for God does not loosen even slightly the halter he’s put on the devil, who always wants to do as much evil as he can. With the reins of his providence and mercy God allows the devil, in some measure, as much power as he sees necessary to benefit the elect, and as much as our weakness can endure. God also wants us to be strong enough to persevere, and treats us just as he did his Beloved. He allowed his Son no respite in undergoing extreme sufferings, and would similarly nourish us with the solid food of unrelieved trials. However, he pastures us and sustains our weakness with the milk of consolations, just as if we were little children, for though we are persecuted by friars, secular people welcome us, embrace us, revere us and sustain us. [V, 106]

Appearance of the life of Saint Francis

17. Truly, the Capuchin reform mirrored the state of the Order when it first began. It represented the life of the holy Apostles, and of Saint Francis with all his companions. [II, 17] Anyone who looked at it carefully would have seen an image of the life Saint Francis led with those first Fathers. [II, 70]

18. Cardinal Antonio Sanseverino told the College of Cardinals:

“We know that the Congregation of the Capuchin Friars now has what could be called the greatest credibility in the world. Because of the poor, strict and holy life the friars lead, it seems that the simple, pure and truly apostolic way of life has come about again on earth. They walk along the way Christ our Saviour first showed to his disciples and to anyone who wants to follow him: the way of perfection, with the cross on his shoulder. He taught them to renounce and strip themselves of everything. They want to hold on to the essentials that their Seraphic Saint Francis also held, and taught to them.” [I, 465]

19. At that time I was in the poor Congregation. Thinking back critically, I would say that the most glorious period ever for our Congregation was from ’28 until ’33. It was the period most conformed to the origins of the Order and to

the time of our Father Saint Francis. I do not deny however that the second period, until '43, was the most glorious vis-à-vis the world. Nor do I deny that in the second period we find the largest number of friars and the most learned and greatest of our preachers. However, since the Order of our Seraphic Francis was founded on humility, poverty and self contempt, and in holy and perfect contemplation, it was never more conformed to all these things they call perfection as it was in that first period. During that time, the original state of the Order was truly renewed with every degree of perfection. The habit, life, humility, true contemplation and contempt for the world in which our Father Saint Francis and his companions led was once again manifest to the world. [II, 259]

20. Ludovico da Fossombrone used to teach his friars:

“Concerning ourselves, I don’t want us who started this holy reform to finish up leading a life according to our own ideas. I want us, in and through everything that happens, to draw nearer to the example and teaching of the early Fathers - particularly of our Seraphic Father Saint Francis.” [II, 219]

21. “Be sure my brother that this will be a reform of greater importance than the many others because it takes up again the true foundation. It conforms to our Father Saint Francis and to the beginning of those first Fathers in and through everything.”

Father Ludovico said this because while he was bringing about this reform his only intention was to conform himself totally to what Saint Bonaventure and the Three Companions say about how our life was lived in the beginning. [II, 154]

From these they obtained their form of life

22. For their teaching they took up the experience and the admonitions of our Seraphic Father, recorded for the use of all in the books of our Order, namely, the *Conformities*, the *Chronicles of the Order*, the *Legend of St. Bonaventure* and what was written about our Seraphic father Saint Francis by the three most splendid companions: Brothers Leo, Angelo, and Rufino. This was why the first Capuchins held these books in high regard.

After the reading from the Sacred Scriptures at table, a little extra was read about our Father Saint Francis and of the Order. Here the friars learnt about the form and manner of their life and how our Father Saint Francis wanted habits, houses and other things to be - things which his friars would use only because of necessity. Those venerable first Fathers wrote in the first Constitutions that all these things should be read and carefully considered by the friars, with all diligence and attention. [IV, 4]

Fruits of a harsh and devout Cross

23. Their sufferings were a balm for their consciences. Being pilgrims and strangers on earth, without even a cup of water, they relished their sufferings with delight. They found in them the occasion for acts of penitence for the love of God, and for the observance of holy poverty and the Rule they had promised to follow.

Their intimacy with the beloved Jesus was neither impeded nor cooled by any desire of the flesh nor by distracting or idle occupations. They kept him in mind always. Amid so many afflictions upon their poor nature imposed by their needs, they had no rest other than to long for him. Not knowing when their adversities would end, they enjoyed the fruits of a harsh and devout Cross.

They fostered the Capuchin reform ardently with sweat, tears, penitence and holy deeds. They were so abundantly meritorious before God and had such high standing in the world (something that should be impressed in the heart of each Capuchin), that their later followers would receive from heaven and earth freedom to observe the holy Rule and to imitate these first friars in their simplicity, if not in their rigour.

The tumult surrounding this important foundation served as a clear argument to show that this work was of God and not of some man. [VII, 42]

In the footsteps of the Father

24. It would clearly be a real injustice to the present huge number of friars belonging to the reform group if they were left in ignorance of the astonishing zeal and fervour of our first Fathers, who wanted to imitate our Father Saint Francis and the first saints of the Order. [II, 13]

25. I won't go into all the details, because I'm sure you know most of them. Let's take the prophecy which says: 'In the last days the reform will be accomplished in the spirit of the Founder' - which means in the spirit of Saint Francis. Consider carefully the fact that neither the Zoccolanti nor any other reform group was ever as thoroughly conformed to true observance of the Rule as the Capuchins. They have even taken up again the proper habit of our Father Saint Francis, imitating its colour, ordinariness, coarseness and shape down to the last detail.

The houses of the Capuchins were modelled on the friaries built at the time of our Father St. Francis. Never, in any reform, has high poverty been so strictly and completely observed as it is now - by the grace of God - among the Capuchins. Thus it can be seen that this movement was begun in the spirit of the Founder. [II, 17]

26. The rest of you have judged this way of life to be foolhardy, yet our sole purpose in adopting it is to conform ourselves to our Father Saint Francis and follow in his footsteps. [II, 32]

In this consists all the toil of the Religious

27. There was Brother Francesco da Cartoceto, a man of great holiness, very zealous in the observance of the Rule. Enlightened through experience of the Holy Spirit, he was accustomed to say:

“It’s not possible for a friar to achieve perfect victory over himself if he does not imitate our Father Saint Francis in these three virtues: fasting, prayer and silence. It’s supremely important that he should control his tongue, the source of all vices, and detach himself through poverty of spirit from all earthly things. These virtues are necessary for combating one’s passions and conquering one’s self, which is what a religious person strives for. When that person’s mind is purified, God can communicate himself to him. Then, when Christ is sculptured in his heart through continuous contemplation, his effort ceases.” [V, 63]

This is the way of Christ and of his saints

28. Matteo da Bascio said to his followers:

“My sons, how happy you are! You have received from God the gift of seeing this holy reform, something which many holy friars desired to do and weren’t allowed to. Those who continue in its initial fervour will all be saints, but they will suffer many persecutions. However, be strong, my sons, and embrace the cross, because this is the way of Christ and of his saints. I give thanks to God for this great favour: he has not allowed me to see death before being pleased to make me worthy of the blessed habit of my glorious Father Saint Francis! Now may God dismiss his servant in peace, that in peace I may gladly sleep and take my rest.” [V, 83]

The ultimate effort

29. That’s how the holy reform back to true religious life began. These were the first fruits which the poor Capuchins gave to the Lord God. They consecrated themselves so completely to God that their final achievement was the uttermost that frail humans could hope to obtain. Indeed, since those times it has never been possible for our poor Congregation, either generally or in individual instances, to match those first true servants of God. They strove in everything to conform themselves to our Father Saint Francis and his companions.

Nor do I believe that the houses which our Father Saint Francis had were poorer than those the Capuchin Friars had at the beginning. Nor did our Father Saint

Francis and his companions dress as poorly or use such wretched cloth as did those poor Capuchins.

We read that our Father Saint Francis and his companions initially stayed in the friary at Rivotorto, in the Carcere at Assisi, in Farneto, in Speco di Sant Urbano, in Romita di Cesi and other ancient dwellings. There they set aside the concerns and activities that usually keep us busy, and occupied themselves solely with holy contemplation. Well, when the first Capuchins read in the *Legend of the Three Companions* this account of the way our Father Saint Francis lived, they strove to imitate it, giving themselves up totally to contemplation, which is the goal and perfection of religious life. [II, 258]

By means of these poor barefoot men

30. The world was in the greatest darkness. Christianity was full of abuses, both among its leaders and among its members. Princes were at war with each other. Peoples were extremely afflicted not only by wars but by the famines of the times and by strange epidemics of diseases, and a thousand other misfortunes. Everywhere there were signs that Christ was angry with Christians. Therefore, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin Mother and these poor barefoot men, this holy reform was begun in order to appease his anger. It was sown of beans and simplicity, and has been part of the nourishment and sustenance of the poor children of Holy Church. [VII, 34]

For the defense of Holy Church

31. Francesco da Iesi used to say that in these very dangerous times God had commissioned the Congregation of Capuchins with the defense of Holy Church, so that through example, teaching and prayer they would sustain the catholic faith and manifest the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, desirous that they work strictly according to God's intentions, Francesco da Iesi inspired them so strongly in the love of God and of the spiritual life that, since those times, there has never been anyone in the reform movement who preached to the friars with such power of spirit and loftiness of ideals. This was attested to in Rome by Brothers Bernardino d'Asti, Giovanni d'Fano, Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo, and many others from among the ten or twelve founding Fathers. All of these men were most learned and holy, and fervent in their own preaching, but they always went to wherever it was that Francesco da Iesi was preaching. They used to say, "Never before have such lofty concepts been expounded. If this man had an orator's tongue, he would astound the world." Many Roman personages and learned men used to go to listen to him, and were amazed by what they heard. [VI, 129].

We are known as friars minor

32. We are sons of our Seraphic Father in so far as we imitate his life and teaching. Our Saviour said to the Hebrews: 'If you are the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham', and, in the same way, if we are the sons of Saint Francis, we should do the works of Saint Francis. Indeed, each one of us is ordered to strive to imitate our Father (in fact, our Lord Jesus Christ in him), given to us as our rule, norm and example - not only in the Rule and Testament, but in all of Saint Francis' glowing words and loving deeds. [C, 6]

33. We are known as Friars Minor by our lowliness, our coarse clothes, our poor dwelling places, and the poor fare we eat. So, if we dress in lavish clothes, live in fine mansions, and eat expensive foods, we cannot be called sons of Saint Francis, but, rather, sons of Sir Francis. And if we wear gloves and go about on horseback, with a servant walking ahead of us, then we deserve to be called friars of Lord Francis, not Saint Francis. [III, 378]

Solid foundations

34. Our Lord God gave tremendous fervour to those servants of his who first started the Congregation of Capuchins. Because of this they took as their core principle and point of focus the perfect observance of the Rule and Testament of our Seraphic Father, and above all the precept of holy poverty. [IV, 149]

35. Those venerable Fathers had another fundamental principle that they incorporated into the constitutions right from the start: subjection, reverence, devotion and obedience to the prelates of the holy Roman Church. [IV, 6]

36. A third wonderful tenet was that the Friars should exercise themselves continuously in holy prayer, both mental and vocal, with all humility and purity of heart. [IV, 6]

37. The Rule of Saint Francis is nothing other than a way of living, well suited to holy contemplation. However, it does not depart from the cross, participating still in both the active life and the contemplative life. It shows the mixed life to be more perfect than a wholly contemplative one, for it is more conformed to the holy Gospel and apostolic life, observing through poverty the two precepts of love of God and love of neighbour, putting into action the love of God through holy prayer, and the love of neighbour through preaching. Our Rule purges us from every earthly attachment through poverty, and makes us ready for prayer. It is through prayer that our relationship with God is fostered, and through preaching and good example that our relationship with our neighbour is regulated. [III, 80]

38. Thus, on these impregnable, sound and perfect foundations our venerable and holy Fathers, like astute architects, founded the beautiful and holy reform of the Capuchin Friars. Anyone who carefully scrutinizes these basic tenets will conclude that they come from the Holy Spirit and not from men. They adorn

and fortify our Congregation in such a clear-cut way that they keep in perfect order the little boat whose sails are trimmed by our Seraphic Father himself. However, it is the infinitely good Jesus, our Saviour, who takes care of the tiller, so there's no doubt that he'll guide to the port of salvation those friars who abide by their charter. [IV, 7]

39. Those first Fathers gave such a wonderful start to the reform that its sons still feel their influence. Seculars who knew them can't forget the divine light those servants of God brought to people, a light which even today nourishes us as we relish their holy instructions. The good fragrance that they left and their holy deeds thrill us all. [II, 205]

We exhort all the friars

40. Given that God is the final end to which each of us should tend, for whom we should thirst and in whom we should seek to be transformed, we exhort all the friars to direct all their strivings to this purpose. Let us focus all our thoughts and aspirations on him, and with every ounce of will - all our heart, mind, spirit, strength and energy - let us unite ourselves with our supreme Father in genuine, constant, undivided and pure love. [C, 63]

Intermediaries between God and sinners

41. The venerable Father Francis da Iesi, while in the friary at Foligno, gave this very moving sermon to the friars:-

"Know, dearest brothers, that the first and last children are the dearest to their father.... Today we, like the last-born of the eternal Father, have obtained from Holy Church all the favours we have sought. I say 'last-born' because in all the world there are few to be found who have not turned their backs to Jesus Christ. Our Lord pampers us, the lowliest men on earth, on account of the modicum of goodwill he sees in us. He favours us so much that there was never a Congregation so spoilt by the Church and by its prelates.

"But what shall we say about the world? Has there ever been seen an Order more pampered than ours? On the one hand we should rejoice about it, but on the other hand fear that if we are not grateful to God he may need to create another hell, more horrendous and more painful than the one he has already made, so that he can put us there.

"There is no sin in the world more displeasing to God than ingratitude. However if, with so many opportunities to serve God, we aren't all saints, we ought to be the unhappiest creatures on earth. While God may show compassion to some of the other Orders, and many will be excused because they lacked

opportunities, what excuse could we have? We would deserve that our venial sins be counted as mortal!

"We are an Order more detached from the world than many others, since we don't hear confessions or have any other involvement with seculars. We live on alms, unlike those who live by their own income and need to take care of possessions, bring in crops at harvest time, and engage in all those labours that are necessary before the fruits of the earth can be enjoyed. We, on the other hand, enjoy baked bread, clear wine and ripe fruit without any of this toil. It wasn't possible for the Holy Spirit to give us an easier way to obtain the necessities of nature than to have us live as mendicants. And this is so that we would have more time to attend to divine worship, and in particular to mental prayer.

"Our Lord does not lack followers who work for gain, yet in the world there are very few of these who praise him and are inflamed by his love through holy contemplation. Therefore our Father Saint Francis said that Jesus Christ spoke to him, saying, 'Know, Francis, that I have begged from my Father a people content with me alone. So I have elected you and all those who will want to follow you as my special servants, and I will provide for all your necessities.'

"See then, my sons and brothers, the promises of our Lord! How he cares for us and how he provides for us! Who would ever have hoped to receive these favours from the Supreme Pontiff? It is only by the will of our Lord, who inspires the Holy Pontiff and all the prelates of Holy Church - and, indeed, and the whole world - always to do good to us.

"We are intermediaries between God and sinners: although they continually offend him, we continually praise him and placate the anger of His Majesty. All the world cries: 'Pray! Pray for us!' Therefore what are we to do, if not completely strip away all thought of self and give our hearts to God? This is what he wants from us. Therefore who will be so villainous as to want to do anything other than praise His Majesty - who has placed us in such a noble state that we already do on earth what the blessed spirits do in heaven?" [II, 401]

Mediators before God

42. People generally agreed that God had sent them into the world to console the poor people, so greatly afflicted, and to enlighten those trying to find their way in a world filled with ignorance, abuses and hideous atrocities. Thus God had sent the poor Capuchins to comfort those in torment, to guide sinners, to succour the needy, to advise prelates, to exemplify a Christian way of life, and to be mediators before him. [VII, 78]

The austerity of the friars seemed utterly wretched

43. This kind of life was a great benefit to Christians. The world was in darkness, and in those tormented times people were afflicted by wars that battered the whole of Italy, and by the pestilence that followed them. Yet, on seeing the Friars living so austere and in such a seemingly wretched state, people were astounded, and said, "Men of this kind have never been seen before! Either it is the end of the world or great things are going to happen".

Once the terrible devastation had passed, people had comfort, example and instruction from a widespread and general reform. This was the beginning, the means and a sign of the reform in the universal Church, which was to come by way of a General Council. The state and quality of the Capuchin reform always corresponded well to that advocated by the Sacred Council of Trent - that most powerful instrument, by means of which God has brought about the reform of the Church. [VI, 273]

God doesn't brook rivals

44. Bernardino d'Asti taught thus:

"Know this, son, that if the devil manages to sow even one seed of panic in your mind so that you consent to him, it will spread like wildfire and poison your whole soul. Therefore it is imperative that anyone who wants to persevere in the service of God in our holy Order should keep a strict conscience and a will detached from every earthly affection, because our Lord God communicates himself to those of pure mind. Indeed, so all-embracing is the tender love with which God loves our soul that he will not brook a rival, and the least straw that enters in between is sufficient to retard and to diminish that perfect love, so that it isn't given so fully to our soul.

"If you consider the matter carefully, you'll see that our Rule does nothing other than purify us and prepare us to be unstained vessels in which the Holy Spirit can dwell. Being made instruments of the Holy Spirit, we can keep the principal place in the Church of God, as the particular family of Christ that he has begged for from the Eternal Father to help his people and his children in these last days. For it was revealed to our Father Saint Francis that the Friars Minor were called by God to maintain the apostolic life in the world.

"Let me tell you this: God has made purgatory for us. However he has given us such opportunities that if we do not respond by leading a good life - so good that at death we speed away to heaven on the wings of these great opportunities - then, such great negligence will be imputed to us by God that we will go to purgatory for many years. Worldly people and other Religious, because of many

pressing responsibilities, will have some excuse for not doing all they should. While our Lord has prepared purgatory for them and for us, we for our part will have no excuse."

Many times with my own ears I heard him in his sermons say these words:

"Capuchins, do not be negligent or foster false hopes, saying 'I will go to purgatory', for I say to you that if you do not strive to be perfect observers of our Rule you will go not to purgatory but to hell. Purgatory was made for those wrongs committed through frailty, and for mortal sins already confessed but not perfectly purged by penitence in this world. But for malice aforethought and mortal sin the penalty is not purgatory but hell." [III, 189]

Therefore this is true reform

45. Brother Bernardo d'Offida was so full of love for the Congregation that during those troubled times he was one of its chief stalwarts. He used to make a joke of any suggestion that it would come to nothing, and used to put heart into the friars with rousing talks like this:

"Let us be firm, brothers! Away with your doubts! The foundation of this holy edifice is so sturdy that it cannot be brought down either by diabolical or by human powers. Ours is the perfect observance of the Rule, probably equal to the best in any period in history.

"The foundation stone of the Rule is poverty - and look! - we have no secure dwelling place! We barely keep hunger at bay with a few morsels of bread, vegetables or fruit! We scarcely keep flesh and bone together with the scraps we eat!

"The final touchstone of the apostolic life is that famed happiness of being persecuted for following the Gospel - and look! - for that very reason we daren't even let ourselves be seen, lest we be thrown into prison!

"You can be sure that this is the true reform! Only the Holy Spirit could have brought about the renewal of such a harsh way of life! For we live conformed to the Rule, the mind and the lifestyle of our Seraphic Father, and even dress in the habit worn by him and by our first fathers. How have we, simple, weak and unlettered as we are, been able to reinstate this way of life and this habit? And especially in these days, when we have such poor knowledge of those early times, and when the original habit had been forgotten in the Order! Is it not the work of God?

"So then, let us rejoice and give thanks! Although we are such wretched little men in the eyes of the world, God has deigned through his goodness to make use of us in founding this, his beloved Congregation. Let us keep to our lowly state and leave the glory to him. He has chosen us, simple, foolish and wayward as we

were, precisely so that this can happen. For if we had been of noble blood and had great learning or high dignity, we would have ascribed everything to our own industry and effort.

“Finally, let us be constant against the attacks of the devil, who’s certain to lose, anyway. In the end, God will gather to himself abundant fruit from the palm that we are planting.” [VII, 498]

To aim towards perfection

46. I said to Brother Antonio Corso, “If God decreed that we should go to purgatory, we could be certain that the pain there would come to an end. For myself, I want to go there.” The holy man answered thus:

“Not me! I want to do as much as I can not to go there! For what is the desire to go to purgatory but negligence, a lack of concern about perfection? The bad habits we fall into make us care little about venial sins, and bring us dangerously close to the edge of ruin, mortal sin. It is necessary to guard ourselves from venial sins, to take them very seriously, and to put every effort into freeing ourselves from them, for they impel us towards purgatory. Yet to guard ourselves from them in order not to go to purgatory takes very little. The fact of the matter is, however, that we don’t want throw off our negligence, and this does us a lot of harm. This keeps us forever lukewarm and holds us back from perfection, for our disposition is such that we never put ourselves in God’s hands to let him make of us what he pleases.

“The mortifications of our Father Saint Francis enriched heaven and earth. Through them came so much light that it was as if another sun were shining, giving light to the whole world. The Lord would never have brought Francis’ exemplary life and that of his Order to such heights of perfection had he not striven so mightily to mortify himself. Therefore, if we are unwilling to mortify ourselves a little, we inflict great damage on ourselves and on those who seek enlightenment.

“On the other hand you do not know what the pains of purgatory mean. We are obliged to strive for perfection, the perfection which liberates us also from those pains. Mind you, we should do good for the love of God, not just to escape purgatory’s pains.” [III, 253]

47. The purpose of religious life is nothing other than the continuous exercise of the love of God. [III, 57]

Let us enjoy this beautiful gift

48. Now let us be joyful and make use of this opportunity which we have received from God to observe the Rule perfectly, as we have promised to him.

Let us be sure not to abuse this blessing, because the Lord our God would then deprive us of it. Rather, let us establish ourselves well in humility, that most stable foundation of all the virtues, and enjoy this beautiful gift which God has prepared for us. [II, 400]

When he saw himself clothed in the habit

49. When Brother Bernardo was received by Brother Ludovico and saw himself clothed in the habit, he prostrated himself on the ground and, full of joy and with great fervour, he started to give thanks to God. With his face bathed in tears and raised to heaven he said, "Let death come now at its appointed time, Lord, since you have thus deigned to wait for me so that I, a vile little man, should find myself among your true servants and observers of the holy Rule, which I have promised to you and again promise to observe perfectly by the help of your grace." [V, 136]

A turning back

50. They were very certain that in such a journey anyone who does not strive to go forward go backwards. Just as the devout Saint Bernard and Saint Augustine say - we are like a boat that goes against the current. If the boat is not skilfully made to surge forward, at the point where it stops the current of the river quickly makes it go backwards, with detrimental consequences. [I, 248]

He was caught up so much by love

51. Brother Bernardo d'Offida joined the reform at its beginning. He was caught up so much by love that he could never thank God enough. He said that this must be the true reform and that it could not exist if the Holy Spirit himself had not led them to live such a harsh life, conformed to the seraphic Rule. He added that he had found the true habit of the Seraphic Patriarch, Francis. He exhorted the friars to endure persecutions and regard them as signs that this reform was the work of God, who, in those calamitous times, had thus founded anew a way of life through simple, unlettered and disorganized men. What great fruit God would draw from it!

Consider well that neither the Zoccolanti nor anyone else who set out to reform the Order so faithfully practised true observance of the Rule as the Capuchins did. They even, quite wonderfully, took up again the proper habit

No doubt they would be victorious against the devil, who was attacking this reform with great ferocity.

He said: "Now I understand the truth of the saying: the Rule is only understood by those who observe it." He rejoiced at the grace of seeing the reform, and said: "How many holy friars, whom I am not worthy to name, have asked for the reform from God with very long prayers and many tears, and have died

without having seen it! And I, through divine mercy, have been made worthy of it!" [V, 39].

To live the authentic way of life

52. "Oh how blind I was," exclaimed Bernardino da Reggio, "wasting time in such vain and useless learning, and how little I observed what I had promised to God! What a greater gift we have received from God! In this holy Congregation he has given us light and the opportunity to observe what we have promised! In order to defend the authentic way of life, we are obliged to live it." [III, 220]

Nor would I know how to be anything other than a Capuchin

53. Old Matteo da Schio said:

"I am so at home in this holy Congregation that it seems as if I was born here. What a God-given gift! Nor would I know how to be anything other than a Capuchin.

"I am sorry this holy reform didn't come about sooner so that I could serve God in it when I was young, and give him the flower of my youth. How many years I have wasted, living like a madman, never considering my obligations! May it please God that these last days of my old age be acceptable to him. If I had more, I would give him more, and if I was able to do more I would.

"Apart from holy baptism, I can't think of any great gift that I've received from God. I am so grateful to His Majesty, for it seems to me he's let me live just to see this holy reform come about. How often I wanted to see how our Father Saint Francis lived! Now I know! Now I can see how our Seraphic Father and his companions observed the Rule." [III, 380]

He would weep for joy

54. From childhood, Matteo da Leonessa always did well. He was successful in his studies and became a doctor. While still a secular he led a religious life, and was generally reputed to be a holy and chaste man. Inflamed later by a greater desire to serve God, he chose to become religious (a Conventual). However after eight months as a Conventual, he saw that that life was not as fruitful as he had hoped. Hearing about the fame of the Capuchins, he left the Conventuals and went to Rome, where he was received by Brother Bernardino d'Asti, the Provincial of that Province at the time. Whenever he imagined himself clothed in the habit, and later when he saw himself dressed in it, he would weep for joy. He began to do penance and to keep vigil at prayer with such fervour that Brother Bernardino d'Asti said that Matteo truly did more than his constitution could bear. Once professed he continued to progress in these practices. [VI, 222]

Oh truly we are blessed

55. Finally, we can all tell of being taken from the labyrinth of this unhappy world and from the darkness of this Egypt, with its heavy yoke and misery. We can tell of being led with a sure hand through the desert of this present life. And truly this present life should be so called, since everything we see with our mortal eyes is desert, especially if we consider the beauty of the garden of blessed souls (in so far as this is possible). Our God has led us, I say, into this desert in order to bring us later to the promised land of blessedness. He will do this out of mercy, for he has promised it in his clemency and he is faithful to his promises.

He has led us to our high state and put us on this royal road, so that we may never lack his succour and abundant help in our every need, and may do valiantly what must be done. He reveals himself to us continuously in the cloud of clear faith and in the column of ardent charity.

In this his most sacred temple, he keeps his divine ark, our true refreshment, where all our hope and all our good are placed. He continues to care for us well with waters of the sweetest refreshment, coming from the rock of his side; and with the manna of his most holy sacraments for fine food. He has given us another guide, truly a new Moses, our lawgiver, Saint Francis. That's right, our Seraphic Father, who with the law of his most holy rule starts us walking on the true road to our homeland.

I therefore repeat that we are truly blessed under this guide - not four, not six, not ten but a hundred and a thousand times blessed, with so many favours and so many helps given us by our Saviour Jesus Christ on this journey. We are blessed, let me tell you, if we always give ourselves into his hands with all our trust, putting ourselves into the care of our Redeemer, Consoler and Father. We are fortunate if we let ourselves be guided by him and give him true, firm and continuous obedience, being constant in our praise of him, and observing every promise with all the strength of our hearts. We can say that having brought us out from the captivity of Babylon, he has consoled us with his graces. He consoles us with the hope of becoming citizens of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, and of rejoicing in the heights of his most holy Mount Zion, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns for ever and ever. [I, 474]

It shines like a sun

56. Our Congregation is of no small importance in the Church of God. It shines like a sun in a time of deep darkness. It has awakened the whole world and shown to all Religious what the life of our first Fathers was like, and in particular what the habit and life of our Father Saint Francis and those first saints of the Order were like. Woe to those therefore, who through their bad example, hide this light of the life of Christ and his Apostles from the world!

God forbid that they should thus deserve to be cursed by Christ and our Father Saint Francis. [III, 434]

It will shine like a sun

57. Therefore those servants of God used to say: Our Congregation will stand on its feet as long as the Friars keep themselves in simplicity, because it is not made up of a large throng, but of a few true servants of God who want to observe the Rule as our Father Saint Francis and his companions did.

Those who want to lead a lax life do great wrong in coming into our Congregation. There is no shortage of lax Orders for them to join. They should go to these and leave ours in its simplicity, a place of God and a Congregation of true servants and knights of Christ, where those who want to aim towards perfection are able to withdraw and give themselves more strictly to holy contemplation.

Thus it will shine like a sun in the Church of God and his holy Apostles and, by example of deeds and words, demonstrate to everyone poverty, obedience, humility, abstinence, contempt of the world and love and charity towards God and neighbour. It will show forth the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of his Apostles, of our Father Saint Francis and his companions and true servants of God, who in the Order have illuminated the world with catholic and holy doctrine, good example and holy virtues.

Therefore these great servants of God used to say: Woe to those Friars who slacken the discipline of this holy Congregation and deprive the Church of God of a light so necessary in these times, because they will receive a curse from God and from our Father Saint Francis. [IV, 167]

It is like a sun in the Church

58. There is no shortage of lax Orders. It is expected of us - said Giustino da Panicale - to maintain this state granted us by the Lord through the prayers of many holy friars, who strove hard in these matters to obtain this favour and to bring about the reform. It is like a sun in the Church of God, which has made known what the life of Christ and of Saint Francis and his companions was like. Therefore, woe to those who would slacken the discipline of this Congregation and take this light from Holy Church, because they will be cursed by Saint Francis. [VI, 194]

This was the work of the reform

59. Let God's infinite goodness give us grace to remain in the reform, which was a return to that primitive form and way of life which our Seraphic Father lived with his first companions. So, then, we deform ourselves if we distance ourselves from that first form of life. It was the task of the Capuchin reform to

take up again the form of life led by our Father Saint Francis, who founded his Order in most high poverty, contempt for the world, and on continuous prayer and devotion. Amen. [II, 485]

Many crowns prepared

60. Antonio Corso therefore prepared himself for death by receiving the holy sacraments. The friars said to him, "Father, are you afraid of death?" "Indeed I am!" answered the old man. Then they said, "If you're afraid, you that have done so much good, what will we do?" "How do I know," he answered, "if my works were acceptable to God?" A little later, keeping his eyes raised to heaven, he began to cry out, "Blessed friars! I say the Capuchins are blessed friars! I see many crowns prepared for them!." [VI, 174]

The necessary foundation and adornment

61. Father Bernardino d'Asti took charity as the third, single governing companion to prayer and poverty. He grew more and more inflamed with the love of God, the Church, the Order and each particular person, and in a holy dislike of his own self. He directed all he did and suffered to the glory of God, for the benefit of these others and for the holy integration of his own self.

Therefore his prayer, poverty, efforts, discomforts, orders, reprimands, punishments, exhortations and consolations were all borne in love. He taught that these three virtues - love, poverty and prayer - were the necessary foundation and adornment of the Congregation in general and each Capuchin friar in particular. He declared that any of these virtues without the others was not authentic.

Here in this letter (the only one of his which remains) addressed to the Province of Sant' Angelo are his own words:

Venerable fathers and brothers and sons, health.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. The Lord is near to us and cares for us continuously. Just as precious clothes are an adornment of the body and make it more beautiful than it is, so the holy virtues are the precious clothes and adornment of the soul, and truly make it more beautiful. They give it such dignity and loftiness that the adulterous, sinful soul, a slave of the devil, becomes a bride of the most high emperor God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and a queen and empress of the heavenly kingdom and empire.

Of these virtues, the most worthy and principal one is charity, or love. It is a most sweet and delightful virtue. However, carnal, secular and animal men pretend to be dressed in charity. We must guard ourselves and flee from them, as our very good Master admonishes us. He says that we will know them by their fruits, that is, their deeds. However I want to give you two examples and signs by which to know if true charity is in you or in others.

When you see a Capuchin friar continuously solicitous about prayer and quite zealous for most holy poverty, and is charitable towards his spiritual brothers and other people, you can believe that true charity is in him. But if you see some one negligent about prayer and who likes the lax life and an abundance of pleasurable things, and who preaches and praises charity, flee from him and hold him in suspicion. Do not believe his charity to be the true charity. Rather it is carnality or carnal and sensual love. For charity cannot be in us without the other necessary virtues, especially without the two aforesaid ones, namely prayer and poverty. Therefore continuous solicitude, especially concerning most holy poverty, is the surest sign of true and authentic charity and the other true virtues. Not only are prayer, poverty and charity signs of virtue, but they are signs of one another.

If you see a Capuchin friar who is not faithful and zealous in the integral observance of most holy poverty, hold his prayer in suspicion, and hold suspect his zeal for poverty. For we have seen some friars in whom it there seemed to be some zeal for poverty, and who later changed their minds and returned to the lax life. It does not belong to us to judge them. However, I believe that the principal cause of their ruin was their lack of humble prayer.

Therefore anyone who wants to be sure, about what is fitting for the present state, may have either sign. Be certain that just as the house can never stand without foundations, nor can we if we lack the integral observance of most holy poverty. God would let our Congregation fall into ruin. Woe to those Capuchin friars who seek to make our life lax. In truth they are not Friars Minor of Saint Francis, but rather of Friar Elias. As the Apostle says, they are enemies of the cross of Christ our God, and destroyers of our Congregation.

Therefore I exhort and beg each of you, as much I can, to be very solicitous about humble and devout prayer, praying to the Lord with your heart, so that he give us the holy virtues and give us growth and perseverance, especially in most holy charity and poverty, which - with prayer - are very necessary and the most precious adornments of the true Friar Minor. Without these no Capuchin friar can be acceptable to the divine and heavenly bridegroom. May he bless you all and keep you always in his grace and in holy peace.

From the house of Castrogiovanni, 6 June 1548.

Yours entirely,

General of the Capuchins

Brother Bernardino d'Asti. [VII,242]

THE VINE AND THE HEDGE

In the field of the Catholic Church Saint Francis planted the vine of his Order. To defend it from being ransacked by those who oppose goodness, and to ensure that it bore abundant fruit, he fenced it in with the Rule. Our Seraphic Father loved this Rule,

seeing it as the express will of God, and leaving it to his friars as a pledge of life - the marrow of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Just before his departure, before receiving the kiss of Sister Bodily Death, he also dictated his last Will, giving his sons the authentic, authoritative interpretation of the Rule. This Testament was received with sentiments of respect and love. Indeed, the Rule and Testament comprise a sacred inheritance passed down through the ages, two shining beacons of evangelical life, inexhaustible springs of the purest Franciscan spirituality.

Under the protection of our Seraphic Patriarch, the little seedbed of the beautiful and holy reform of the Capuchin Friars promised a copious harvest. Providentially, the friars hedged it about with holy Constitutions, thus guarding against deviations and deformities of the Franciscan spirit and insuring that the renewed Order of Saint Francis would have the vigour and beauty of an eternal spring.

The Capuchins recalled the frequent and ardent exhortations of our Seraphic Father, and from the very beginning applied themselves with attention and diligence to the study of the Franciscan Rule. They regarded it with love and observed it with fidelity. Instead of erudite theoretical knowledge of the Rule, they preferred a lived, practical understanding. Indeed, they studied the Rule so that its spirit would inform the way they lived. They spoke of it often and fervently, as something very dear to their hearts; to discuss it was, for many of them, a kind of relaxing, spiritual recreation. They had the same affection and veneration for it as for sacred things, and regarded it as inviolable in matters great and small, in its precepts as well as in its counsels. Should any Friar Minor dare to violate the Rule, they considered him guilty of sacrilege, since it was the manifest will of God and of our Father Saint Francis. A friar had to keep his word, given solemnly in religious profession, with utter fidelity and without changing it or faltering.

The Capuchin Friars Minor accepted unquestioningly the Testament of Saint Francis as being the most authoritative and fatherly clarification of this Rule. However, they did not want to assign to it the prescriptive force of a law or commandment, which is what some - such as the Spirituels - wanted to do. To preserve the Congregation "in the spiritual observance of the evangelical and seraphic Rule" they published some simple and devout statutes in 1536 which gave the Congregation its proper and unmistakable character.

Ignorance is dangerous

62. Because the Rule of Saint Francis is like a mirror that reflects the light of evangelical perfection, it is to be read out clearly, with due reverence and devotion, in each house every Friday. Thus, with it impressed on our minds, we will be able to observe it more faithfully. [C, 2]

63. The friars diligently sought to acquire whatever knowledge they needed to carry out their obligations faithfully. They were certain that culpable ignorance was dangerous and could lead to damnation, especially in a person who didn't

trouble to find things out and acted as if ignorance were something desirable - to be preferred, and even sought after. While the scholastics call this kind of ignorance supine, it is shunned by the good, denounced by the intelligent and condemned by God. In such a state a man takes no account of his obligations, nor does he want to know anything about them. He moves about in a profound and thoughtless stupor, as if buried in the darkness of his own ignorance. Thus he lives, slackening the reins on self-indulgence and heading ever further down the path of sin, while eternal ruin closes in on him.

Therefore, to keep away from this danger, those holy Fathers were most diligent in searching out what is important for observance of the Rule. They read about it, asked questions about it, and discussed it among themselves. When they met together, they devoted what little time they had to discussing the Rule or some other such virtuous topic. There was no-one, be he ever so simple, who was not well grounded in what he professed, or unable to converse about it. Moreover, their mutual good will nurtured their fervour and enkindled their spirits, and they rapidly grew in perfection. They knew full well that no-one can arrive at a perfect observance of the Rule if he does not understand the obligations it imposes on him, so they talked about these matters a lot. Those who could sought out what needed to be known, and then everyone put this into effect with great enthusiasm and care, so that all advanced on the journey they had undertaken together. [I, 247]

64. "If Father Vicar allows," said Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo, "I want to go to around the houses preaching the Rule. While, by the grace of God, all our friars have good will, those who do not know the Rule sin through ignorance." [III, 66]

65. When he was Superior, Eusebio d'Ancona constantly exhorted the friars to the true observance of the Rule, preaching on it in all his sermons. When he was made General, his plan was to explain everything about the Rule in every Province during the six years he was in office. His sermons were very effective. [III, 122]

66. When the holy man Francesco da Iesi arrived at a house, he would first rest up for a couple of days. Then he would preach to the friars on the state of perfection that we have promised to the Lord our God through the Rule, and on how we should apply ourselves to this holy work. Almost all his talks were on the Rule, and he seemed like a Seraph, fired up with the love of God. He showed how perfect the Rule is and how, albeit with difficulty, the friars must preserve its perfection. Indeed, whoever observes the Rule of Saint Francis perfectly can be called a saint. [III, 79]

67. Brother Giacomo da Molfetta was Guardian at the house of Molfetta at the time when the kingdom was full of the French. At that time Brother Ludovico sent two friars into Puglia, in the land of Otranto, to establish houses. Passing through Molfetta, they were courteously received by the Guardian there. While

they were dining by candlelight that evening, he came into the refectory to welcome them, and when he saw the shadow of the two Capuchins on the wall, he couldn't help smiling.

After considering the harshness of their life he said to himself: "If they live like this out of devotion, that's fine, but if they do it because they think they're obliged to, then they're ignorant. And if they do it out of hypocrisy, then they're martyrs for the devil."

With these thoughts in mind he said to them, "Fathers, why are you living this kind of life?" They answered that it was in order to observe the Rule. When he said in a number of ways that they were not obliged by the Rule to do all they were doing, they disagreed with him, and argued so eloquently and profoundly about the obligations of the Rule that he became confused. Even with his great learning it seemed he did not know how to explain the Rule he had vowed to God to observe.

Straightway he resolved to study it well. He applied himself diligently to this task and had the explanations read at table, so that others might follow suit. [VI, 246]

No one can understand the Rule if he does not observe it

68. "I confess frankly", asserted Bernardino d'Asti, "that I knew little about the Rule when I was with the members of the Zoccolanti reform. When it was discussed, I learned most from the spiritual lay friars. I never properly understood the true meaning of the Rule until I joined the Capuchins and saw how those simple friars observed it. They had a great desire to keep to the Rule, and so God revealed to them how to live it, for they were unlettered men, taught not by the learned but by the Holy Spirit." [III, 185]

69. "I now understand the Rule," said Matteo da Schio, "because I follow it. Frankly, no one can understand the Rule if he does not observe it, because the Rule does not consist in following formulae. Rather, anyone who is in love with God and enlightened by the Holy Spirit can observe the Rule of holy Francis, because it consists in true contempt for one's self and true love of God. The Rule is spiritual, and it is necessary that it be observed by the spirit and through the spirit. Therefore we give thanks to the Lord our God who has given us grace to see Saint Francis resurrected - not him but his life." [III, 380]

The purpose of the Rule

70. They said that until the Capuchin reform took place they had never understood that the Rule's purpose is true mortification of self indulgence, true poverty of spirit and true union of our spirit with God. [II, 98]

71. If you asked me what the intention of our Father Saint Francis was in giving the Rule, I would answer that he had no intention other than to arrange for his

friars to be free from all impediments to holy prayer. With the precepts of the Rule he removed from us those things that keep us back us from holy prayer, and gave us the means to acquire true love of God, in which consists the observance of every good law. If you asked me what exercise our Father Saint Francis wants us to practise in the Order, I would use what he says in the Rule for an answer: "Pray always to God with a pure heart." Clearly, this was why he gave us the Rule. By observing it we are liberated from every earthly care and able to attend to prayer. [III, 187]

He became fired up

72. In the Capuchins, Francesco da Macerata constantly grew in zeal. He continued like this not only during those first years, when it was not possible to persevere without great fervour, but throughout the whole twenty years he lived in the Congregation. The example he gave was powerful, since he lived the life as fully as his years would permit him.

He became fired up especially when listening to the reading of the Rule, a copy of which he used to carry about with him in his sleeve. He would produce it at opportune times, and ask others to give him detailed explanations of it. Since he was illiterate, he used to get a cleric to read this or that chapter to him, while he knelt down with hands joined and face raised to heaven, listening with such devotion that he would weep. And while he revered the written Rule by behaving in this way, he responded to its spiritual message with equal intensity. [VII, 468]

I made him flee

73. Around that time in the Province of Saint Francis there was a young cleric who, having served God with much humility and zeal for the observance of the Rule, lay on his death bed. The devil, as is his wont, appeared to him in order to tempt him. However, the friar took out the Rule, which he carried in his sleeve, and struck the demon with it as hard as he would an enemy about to stab at him with a sword. To escape the blows, the devil drew back, and ran away. The sick friar continued to lash out, saying: "I made him flee!" Resisting in this way, he demonstrated that while he lived he had overcome the infernal enemy by observing the Rule, since now, as he lay dying, he had driven him off with a copy of the same Rule. Victorious, he went with joy to his Creator. [VI, 300]

He carried the Rule in his sleeve

74. Bernardo da Fossombrone always carried the Rule in his sleeve. He wouldn't give time to any other reading. He spoke about it with such fervour when he discussed it with the friars that he looked as if he were already in Paradise. [III, 30]

He would start reciting the Rule

75. Brother Francesco lived to a ripe old age. When he didn't feel able to engage in contemplative prayer he would start reciting the Rule. Because he was already quite deaf, he once recited it so loudly that another friar asked him to speak more softly. When the Provincial heard about this he said to that friar: "Let him pray out loud. His prayer is better than yours." [VI, 215]

Using words of the Rule for prayer

76. There were friars who found much spiritual gain in using the words of the Rule for prayer. Others drew great spiritual delight from these words by listening to them and reading them with devout attention.

God was highly pleased with the guileless intention and commitment that the friars brought to that heavenly pact, solemn profession, by which they dedicated themselves to him and united themselves with him. [VI, 363]

We reject all glosses

77. It was the will not only of our Father Saint Francis, but also of Christ our Redeemer, that the Rule be observed simply, to the letter and without gloss - just as our first seraphic fathers observed it. Our Rule is very clear, and can be observed quite precisely, in a holy and spiritual way. Hence we reject all glosses and all indulgent, useless, harmful and lax commentaries that draw the Rule away from the pious, just and holy mind of Christ Our Lord, who spoke in Saint Francis. The only commentaries on the Rule that we accept are the declarations of the Supreme Pontiffs, along with the most holy life, teachings and example of our Father Saint Francis. [C, 5]

It starts with little things

78. When they had Visitation, their only concern over provisions was to make sure that there were a few extra vegetables, or some fruit - little things like that. But when it came to the Rule, if there was anything amiss - if they the Capuchins, of all people, had acted in any way contrary to the Rule - the commotion would reverberate to the heavens. [IV, 9]

79. Zeal for the observance of the Rule was so great among our first Fathers that they corrected even the smallest faults. These good Fathers knew what it was that had previously caused laxity in the Order, saying, "It starts with little things. Therefore it is necessary to be firm, lest the hedge around the vine should fall into disrepair. Once this happens, the Order quickly goes to ruin. So long as those who transgress in small matters correct themselves, the Rule will not be breached. However if these little faults go unrectified, it will later become necessary to correct and punish serious infringements that are against the Rule and mortally sinful." [III, 183]

The rudder of every observance

80. Our first Fathers resolved to observe the Rule perfectly. They didn't give more weight to precepts than to counsels. Rather, they observed all of them together - the precepts as precepts, and the counsels as counsels. Everyone observed them out of love. It seemed to them that the rudder of their whole way of life and of every observance of the Rule was to do everything for love. Since in their acute suffering they were wonderfully on fire with the love of God, it was enough for them that Saint Francis had put it in the Rule or that it was according to the way of the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This gave rise to such freedom of spirit that they overcame everything through the true observance of the Rule. They didn't need explanations of the Rule, didn't want to query things or seek privileges. For, just as the wording of the Rule was simple, so did they observe it, simply as it was written. [IV, 7]

The strictest observance

81. There were other friars - some in Albacina and in other lonely places, some living in huts, others going to preach here and there. Intent only on the strictest observance of the Rule, they all let themselves be guided by God, living a most exemplary life that both edified and startled the world. [V, 155]

This is the essence of Christian hope

82. Brother Bernardino da Colpetrazzo attested that he had never seen a Capuchin so zealous about not neglecting the smallest thing in the observance of the Rule as that good friar, Bernardo d'Offida. When he exhorted the others also to perfect observance, even in external minutiae, he said:

"So many of us have been in the Order for a good number of years, and yet never understood what observance of the Rule really is! I sincerely confess not to have understood it except in these few days that I have practised it among the Capuchins. A lot of men have said, and I've frequently heard this, that the Rule can only be understood by those who observe it. I know this saying to be true. Those who are immersed in self-indulgence cannot understand the Rule, even if they are learned. For the Rule is totally spiritual, and cannot be understood except by those who observe it and have its spirit.

"The life of our Father Saint Francis and his companions seemed to me to centre on matters that were trivial and of little value when I first heard them read. How blind I was! Now I know their importance! Divine wisdom would not have put frivolous things in the Rule!

"To go by foot, without shoes, in patched clothing, without having anything else except the rosary and the Rule - these may seem to be

things of very little importance, yet underneath them is hidden the spirit of the Lord. They are a measure of the awareness and understanding one has of God, refining our contempt for the world and detaching us from material things.

"This is the essence of Christian hope. For the more a friar is obedient, poor, humble and detached from the world, the more he has of the Spirit. The more he exercises himself in these things for the love of God, the more he acquires light and the Spirit of God. And, just as in the sacraments divine grace is present and operates under the lowly appearance of matter, so is the true Spirit of God present in these observances and detailed externals. Therefore they should not be despised.

"I believe that a Friar Minor can never possess or maintain full communion with the Spirit if he does not value these little things. I have myself experienced that anyone who is not concerned about little faults very soon succumbs to big ones. At one time I wanted to live in houses where the air was fresh and the linen clean, where there were good meals, pleasant cells and other things pleasing to the senses. It seemed to me that I was serving God. However I was serving the flesh, and perhaps the devil. I give thanks to God, who has deigned to send this inspiration of the habit and life of our Father Saint Francis into the world during my lifetime." [VII,497]

These look like trivial things to me

83. Francesco da Iesi was very much into the rigour of observing the Rule to the letter. He himself said to me: "When I made profession, I had in mind to observe the Rule to the letter." He told me that this intention had caused him immense trouble in the Order, which seemed unable to meet this obligation. Therefore, when he received novices for profession he always advised them to have the intention of observing the Rule except that, as declared by the Supreme Pontiffs, the precepts should be observed as precepts and the counsels as counsels. His scruple was this: it seemed to him that, according to the intention he had had, he was bound by precept to all the counsels.

"For example," he said, "I am bound in this way if I carry a mantle with me on my travels when the weather is fine and I don't need to wear it." When I was taking a mantle for a journey, he said I was not allowed to take a mantle with me because the weather was fine.

So I asked him, "How should I carry my mantle?"

He said to me, "Wear it on your back. Although this may be a trivial matter, it is nonetheless against the purity of the Rule, which only allows the use of necessary things."

Nor did he ever change his mind about carrying a staff for travelling. However, when he was very old he used to carry a cane.

I said to him, "What difference do you see between the cane and the staff?"

He answered me, "The Gospel forbids me to carry a staff. Since I need a little support I supply my need with a cane, and the staff which the holy Gospel prohibits me I leave alone."

I said to him, "These look like trivial things to me."

He answered, "It is true that anyone who disregards these things doesn't sin mortally. Yet insofar as they are against the purity of the Rule they impede us on the way to perfection. They make us slothful in spirit and destine us for the pains of purgatory.

"Our Father Saint Francis wrote the Rule twice. The first time he made it too long, so he was instructed by God to shorten it in such a way that it would lead to greater perfection. Our Lord did not want our Father Saint Francis to write the Rule according to his own judgement about what was good, but rather according to what His Majesty revealed to him. Hence the genesis of the perfection of our Rule, which comes from him who cannot err. Therefore we have to say there's nothing superfluous in it, and anyone who wants to observe it perfectly must not overlook any of the things written in that Rule. It is of no small importance to obey God simply in what he asks of us, and to obey him perfectly." [III, 80-81]

In these observances lies the true spirit

84. Brother Bernardo d'Offida exhorted the friars to the perfect observance of poverty and of external minutiae, which seem to be of little value. He said it was just like the sacraments. Beneath those lowly appearances, divine grace is present and at work. So beneath these observances and external duties lies the true spirit of God. Therefore they should not be despised. [V, 139]

We should prefer to lose our lives

85. When Bernardo da Fossombrone was speaking about things concerning the Rule, he said with much fervour:

"We Friars Minor should prefer to lose our lives rather than offend against our vows, knowing how much our Lord God solicitously cares for us, never failing in the promises he made to our Seraphic Father.

"When Saint Francis was at Fonte Colombo, God told him he wanted the Rule observed to the letter, adding: 'I know how great human frailty can be, and also how much I want to provide for the friars in their need.' His goodness never failed to keep that promise.

“Although ours is such a large Order, and the Friars are everywhere freely moving about, His Majesty always takes care of them. He provides for them in all their needs either by means of support from seculars or truly miraculously through holy angels. The whole Order is full of examples of this.

“Now if God does not fail in his promises to us, it would be great foolishness on our part and a sign of great infidelity if we did not observe what we have promised him.” [III, 29]

They will find heaven open

86. Therefore blessed will be those who persevere in the perfect observance of the Rule until the end of their lives, for just as our Seraphic Father says, they will find heaven open. [II, 96]

Let us put all negligence aside

87. Because our Seraphic Father, finding himself at the point of death, left the abundant blessing of the Most Holy Trinity to the zealous and true observers of the Rule, and added his paternal blessing, too, let us carefully understand and with affection and love observe the perfection shown and taught us in the Rule and in our Order. Let us put all negligence aside. [C, 147]

We need the favour of God

88. Giovanni da Fano pointedly observed:

“My sons, good intention and good will are not enough to persevere in the observance of the Rule. We need the favour of God, because the Rule is a state of great perfection in which we cannot remain without a special gift from God, human frailty being what it is. Because of this, we need to exercise ourselves assiduously in holy prayer, which is the mother of all the graces received from God. And our Lord God has given us the Rule for this very reason, since we cannot pray with proper devotion if our minds are not kept purified from all earthly affection.” [III, 100]

The Testament is the clearest and most beautiful gloss

89. Most of all, they followed the Testament of our Seraphic Father as a sound foundation for the perfect observance of the Rule. We are not obliged to do this through profession or a particular vow, but rather we embrace and observe it as the paternal admonition of our Seraphic Father, and as something that demonstrates to us more fully his intention about the observance of the Rule. Hence those venerable Fathers concluded that anyone who wanted to observe the Rule must necessarily also observe the Testament. Consequently, this was written into the first Constitutions.

The venerable Father Francesco Tittelmans, a most learned and holy man, upheld this opinion of those first Fathers when he joined our Congregation many years later. He affirmed that it was impossible to observe the Rule perfectly without embracing the Testament of our Seraphic Father as guide and norm. He maintained that if there is a difficulty in the Rule, wherein it is not quite understood in some passages, the Testament, given by the Holy Spirit, serves as a gloss on it. Made in the same spirit as the Rule, it is the clearest and most beautiful gloss to be found. Just as our Father says: "Let the friars not say this is another Rule. The Lord inspired me to write these words, just as he inspired me to write the Rule." He wanted to demonstrate that he had written the Rule and Testament through the revelation of God and in the same spirit. [IV, 3]

Let it be better and more universally observed

90. As true and legitimate children of Christ, our Father and Lord, born to him in another age in Saint Francis, we are sharers of his inheritance. Let it be ordained that the Testament of our Father Saint Francis be observed by all. It was set down by him when he was close to death and marked with the sacred stigmata. Filled with fervour and the Holy Spirit he yearned earnestly for our salvation. We accept his Testament as a spiritual gloss and exposition of the Rule, just as it was written by him for this purpose, so that the promised Rule can be better and more universally observed. [C, 6]

A hedge around the Rule

91. In order that our Congregation, which can be likened to a vine of the most high Son of God, should be maintained in the spiritual observance of our evangelical and seraphic Rule, the General Chapter celebrated in the mother City of Rome in our house of Saint Euphemia in the year of the Lord 1536, decided to set up some statutes to act as a hedge around the Rule. Then it will be like the impregnable tower of David, with bulwarks to help us defend ourselves against all the enemies of the living spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, and against all those laxities contrary to the most fervent and seraphic zeal of our Father Saint Francis. [C, *Introduction*]

Devout Constitutions

92. In the Chapter at Albacina they composed some very devout constitutions, which seemed to come from angels rather than human beings. The friars who first took them to the house at Foligno called out, "Look, here are the Constitutions!" and all the others came running to see. As Brother Francesco da Cesena, a cleric, began to read them, everyone began to weep with devotion. To all of them, the Constitutions seemed like a light showing us how to govern ourselves. It was a marvellous thing that such apt Constitutions - brief and yet so substantial - should be composed in so short a time by such simple friars. The

Constitutions that the Congregation now has, although composed later in Rome, are substantially an amplified version of those. [II, 288, 249]

The Constitutions are the hedge of the Rule

93. These are the Constitutions which, like many other oracles, must be recognised as coming from God - so much so that Brother Evangelista da Cannobio, our General, and other great fathers asserted that the Holy Spirit was seen present in the shape of a dove while they were being written. Pope Pius V, since he was involved with reform, asked for the constitutions of different orders. After reading those of the Capuchins, he exclaimed: "Truly, these are dictated by the Holy Spirit, and whoever observes them can be canonized!" It is not incredible that he should say this, since Saint Vincent, the Dominican, had said the same thing previously about the observers of the minorite Rule. Charles of Persignano, canon of Gerona, famous in Spain for his holiness, says that Christ had told him that he himself had composed the Constitutions of the Capuchins. [VII, 56]

94. Matteo da Bascio said: "We now have our Constitutions. Observe them, not through fear of punishment, but for love of God. They will be like a hedge which you will never break through to ruin the vine of the promised Rule. As long as you surround yourselves with this hedge you will always be innocent, never having offended against the Rule." [II, 252]

Observe them and live joyfully

95. Similarly, Brother Matteo recommended the Constitutions, speaking of the confidence with which a Capuchin could appear before the tribunal of God and Saint Francis, dressed in innocence through holy observance of the Rule, faithful to it for love of God and not for fear of punishment. Observing the Constitutions, such a friar will live joyfully, guarded within the hedge of the Rule. Many, many friars, some quite holy ones, had sought such a help from God over a good number of years, but only now has the opportunity come. [VII, 81]

Now we are within what the Rule allows us

96. In 1552 it seemed that in some instances the Constitutions were too strict. So they added to them and changed certain things. That good Father Bernardino d'Asti said, "Alright, now we have gone as far as we can. Any slight breach that occurs from now on could well be against the Rule itself. Until now we have had a great hedge around the Rule, so that it has never been touched. Previously we did more than the Rule commanded, but now we are within what the Rule allows."

No eloquence can do justice to how important that great hedge was. It kept the vine of our Rule so protected and fortified on all sides that not even a leaf was touched. [IV, 9]

Cut down the hedge

97. Those venerable Fathers said, “In so far as the Congregation observed the Constitutions, it always observed the Rule perfectly. However, cut down the hedge of the Constitutions and the vine will be devoured easily by the infernal serpent.” [IV, 172]

May they learn from our saintly fathers

98. The friars were careful not to transgress or change the Constitutions, for they were mindful that light and the spirit of God decrease as laxity increases. In former times things had arrived at such a state of laxity that even learned friars defended blatant transgressions of the Rule, while the enthusiasm of the zealous evaporated. They read the prescripts of the Rule, the declarations of the Pontiffs, the writings of those learned in the Rule, and the practice of our Father Saint Francis, yet within the Order there existed a state of affairs that the learned falsely called excellent - a point of view rigorously endorsed by their Superiors.

May the blessed God guard us from getting into a situation like that! But if ever those who follow us should come to such a pass, may they learn from the teaching and example of our first saintly fathers, who clearly had God’s approval. [VII, 527]

Let us turn to our Redeemer

99. As we go about fulfilling our obligations, let us turn to our Redeemer to learn his will. Because of his love for us, we should strive to please him by observing the present Constitutions, for to neglect and condemn them would be a grave sin. Keeping them will help us to observe in its entirety not only the Rule we have promised to follow, but also the divine law and the evangelical counsels. In our efforts, our consolation will abound through Jesus Christ, and through him the grace of God will free us from dangers. We will be able to do everything in the one who comforts us, that is, the omnipotent Christ, and in all things he will give understanding. He is our Saviour, the power and wisdom of God, who gives to each of us in abundance and without reproach. He, the power and the word who sustains all things, will also strengthen us. [C, 149]

They please me greatly

100. The Lord revealed this to Giovanni Spagnuolo:

“Know that I like the Constitutions very much, and I like their observance even more, since all that the holy evangelical counsels

lay down must be observed in the Rule. I lament very much that some Superiors, with little excuse - from laxity rather than the desire for perfection - break these prescriptions and go against them. It displeases me even more when they then turn about and apply them strictly, without having regard for love of neighbour. These Constitutions must be observed with an eye towards my love, the love of neighbour and in the right spirit. Without that spirit and my love, nothing pleases me." [II ,467]

Our Congregation proceeds at a good pace

101. Having such a good hedge, or rather a very strong surrounding wall, of well made prescriptions, our Congregation proceeds at a good pace in all those things which define it - especially the words and life of our most holy Father and his Companions and, more recently, those of our Fathers who have truly been its norm, guide and mirror. Happy are we if we continue in the enterprise we have undertaken, and in the sure way that has been shown to us through their words and deeds. [I, 246]

A VISIT TO A FRIARY

Let us pay a visit to the first, secluded Capuchin houses and friaries, to savour the prayerful atmosphere and experience the beautiful harmony of spirit that lives and breathes so charmingly in the records. It is useless looking for architectural excellence here, or ornate artistic objects or monuments that attract the curious gaze of tourists. That would be to miss the point. Rather, what we can expect to find are rustic dwellings where nature's stark beauty is able to speak more intimately to the soul. Such a visit will allow us to experience more immediately the environment in which the lives of those marvellous men were lived out.

The first dwellings of the Capuchins are best called temporary shelters or emergency refuges. The tribulations of those epic times discouraged or made impossible the establishing of stable and settled foundations, or even the renovation of existing buildings. Later, plans for construction were very simple: the materials used were those to hand locally, while the architects, engineers and workmen were the brothers themselves, both subjects and Superiors. Their ability to do this work on their own certainly cut down expenses, but their primary motive was to observe the most noble ideal of poverty in a practical way.

By preference, they chose solitary places, three or four miles from populated areas. Inevitably, before finally becoming established, they experienced the discomfort of living in unfinished dwellings, and this discomfort certainly did not disappear entirely when their modest buildings were finished.

The dimensions of the church - the best constructed part of the little friary - were very modest. The lines were very simple indeed, while the sacred furnishings were barely adequate, and of no beauty or value.

The cells were like little oratories. Poverty and austerity shone everywhere. The walls, made of sticks plastered with mud, had a simple wooden cross as their only ornament. Light came in through a small window. There were no desks or wardrobes, which would have been superfluous. Nor were keys required to guard the treasures of their poverty.

After the chapel, their other gathering place was the refectory - a small and unadorned room with a rough table without provisions or crockery.

Evidently the friars had taken as their model the humble houses of the poor rather than the palaces of the rich.

In the forests and caves

102. The poverty so loved by our Seraphic Father was practised so perfectly in the beginning that I would venture to say no other reform ever achieved such strict poverty as that of the Capuchins. When the Reform of the Observance began, they got most of their friaries from the Order itself - sometimes even entire Provinces, including friars. They reformed these as best as they could, according to the objectives of their movement. The poor reform of the Capuchins, on the other hand, did not receive so much as one room from the Order. The rough little houses that they started were all built from scratch, and mostly with their own hands. They were so poor that it was not possible to make them any poorer.

I was there, and know what I'm talking about. However, lest it appear that I want to praise the Congregation too much by speaking about what it suffered in the beginning, I won't say all that could be said.

You would scarcely believe just how much our poor Congregation suffered, with the friars having to build all their houses from the foundations up. This was especially the case at the height of the persecutions. The poor Capuchins were just like the great Maccabee and his followers, who held a sword in one hand and built the Sacred Temple with the other. Before the friars could build a house anywhere, they had to live in shacks and caves, or wherever they could find shelter. Furthermore, each day they were visited by some new evil, since their opponents were out to destroy them. [II, 69]

103. In the beginning, and for some years, our first Fathers were tested by and passed through every kind of suffering. They slept in caves, under trees, or wherever they could. [II, 213]

104. The poor Capuchins, who had just appeared on the scene, went about like wanderers and fugitives. Some went into the wilderness, some into caves and others into scarcely accessible mountains, living on herbs, wild fruit and water, for as yet they didn't have any houses. They were quite often compelled to dwell in woods and caves, like wild animals. [I, 206]

105. They were more than happy to stay in caves, hospices, abandoned churches, or other rough places in keeping with their poverty. Like pilgrims on this earth, they had nothing but the rags they stood up in. [II, 212]

106. During the day, they strove to preach and to assist the poor. At night, they preferred to retire whenever they could to some abandoned church, hospice or fraternity, and spend most of the night there praying the Office, or taking the discipline, or in other devotions. [II, 189]

Let them ask permission

107. It is ordained that when the friars want to start a new house, according to the teaching of the humble Francis, they should first go to the Bishop or his Vicar and ask permission to start a house in his diocese. When they have his permission, let them go with his blessing to the *commune*, or landlord, and ask for the loan of a little place. [C, 71]

Our houses should not be established too far away

108. So that seculars can make use of us in spiritual things and we of them in temporal things, it is ordained that our houses should not be established too far away from towns, castles and villas. Nor should they be too close, so that we do not suffer disturbance because of frequent visitors. It is sufficient that our houses usually be about a mile and a half from these locations, preferably closer to solitary, deserted places rather than the pleasures of the city. [C, 77]

Large houses require a good number of friars

109. That saintly man, Battista da Norcia said:

“So, woe to those friars who leave the poor places and woods to be nearer cities, or to make the friaries prestigious! They will receive punishment from God! From what I have seen, nothing has ruined the Order more than excessive buildings and houses close to cities. Large houses require a good number of friars, and from this comes familiarity with seculars. In this way the spirit is lost. When too many friars want to live in one place, holy poverty cannot be observed. For, when they can’t support themselves by begging, they start to accept funerals, legacies and wills. People start to donate money, and the Rule gets set aside. A big house is built at great expense and maintained only with difficulty. A humble little house is cheap to build and easily maintained.” [VI, 134]

Do not be surprised about this

110. Francesco da Iesi saw great danger in building, saying that Saint Francis condemned nothing so much as superfluous buildings. Nor has anything else

done so much harm to the Order. When our houses are more beautiful and more ornate than the houses of the poor, they are not following poverty but are opposing it. For poverty consists in three things: clothing, food and dwellings. If our habits should be of the same cloth as the poor wear, and our food the same kind of food that they eat, then without doubt our houses should also be similar to their lowly dwellings. It is not permissible to wear soft fabrics or to eat expensive and delicate foods, and our buildings are governed by the same norms that set our standards for food and clothing.

Once, when Francesco da Iesi was at the friary in Venice, it seemed to him necessary to do a small amount of building there. A lay friar told him it was superfluous. The good father answered: "Don't be surprised about this brother, because when a friar starts to build the devil enters him. When the devil has taken away his brain, he makes him act against poverty." [VI, 126]

They were zealous not to offend against poverty when building

111. In the beginning their dwellings were meagre huts or deserted houses, all very uncomfortable. They did not have cells to which they could withdraw alone, as is normal for religious. When by the grace of God they were finally able to build a little house, they made it as basic as possible. Instead of using mortar, they used mud as far as they could.

The small cells and rooms were narrow and low, made of sticks and mud. It seemed to the friars that to have a tiny cell to withdraw to was a most outstanding favour from God - which it was. Moreover, if a cell was built without the extreme lowliness and poverty that they all desired, they would very quickly demolish it. For they were eager not to offend against the poverty and intentions of Saint Francis when they were building. Indeed, the poorer they were and the more wretched and uncomfortable their circumstances, the more they rejoiced. It was ordered that cells should be no more than nine hand-spans square and ten in height, so that a poor sort of cell would be consistently built, able to be lived in by anyone.

They kept a sharp eye on expenditure. They helped manually, toiling faithfully with great consolation of spirit. In the beginning, they used to go each year to the owner of the place - that is, the *commune* or a particular person - taking some small gifts from the garden, such as a salad or fruit. They would ask the owners if they wanted to accommodate them in the same way in the coming year. This practice was later abandoned because it bothered the landowners; maybe the expenses incurred by different landowners could have been the occasion of discord or caused some other such problem. It was enough for them that the friars should declare that they had no jurisdiction over these places and that they were quite ready to depart from them whenever they were dismissed. [V, 279]

The people would run to see them

112. This continued for many years afterwards. When they began a humble new house in a city where they hadn't been before, the people would run to see them and to listen to them, as if they were apostles. They thought the friars all performed miracles, and that God revealed to them everything they wanted to know. [II, 284]

Everyone thought them saints

113. At that time the friars dwelt in a wretched house in a village near Foligno, called Colle. They lived very poorly. They wanted nothing except a little bread, and occasionally some fruit. They laboured during the day and kept vigil in prayer by night. The good example they gave to the whole area was so great that everyone thought them saints, and many miracles were worked through them. Because the city people became keenly devoted to the Capuchin Congregation (and have continued faithful to them), in time, the friars left that place to be closer to the city.

In around the year 1531, the first friary at Saint Valentine was established, with miserable cells so dark and damp that the friars withdrew to the forest, where they had made some huts for themselves. There they passed their time in prayer and tears, and in taking the discipline. [V, 138]

They helped manually

114. In order to avoid anything that might offend against poverty, it is ordained that the friars must not get involved in any way with the construction of buildings. However, they may indicate the simple lines of the basic design to those to whom such an undertaking is committed, be solicitous for their needs, and give them manual help. The friars should try to build as far as possible with sticks and mud, as a sign of poverty and humility. Let them take for their model the humble houses of the poor and not modern buildings. [C, 75]

115. When they were building houses, they helped with the manual work. They did what they could themselves, and didn't interfere in the other parts of the construction. They built simple, squat houses, with the inside rooms made of sticks and mud. Often they built the outer walls with earth and stones, then plastered them with mortar in such a way that the bare rocks were visible on the outside. [IV, 152].

116. Benedetto da Subiaco was in the Congregation from the beginning, when it was founded. For a long time it was necessary for him to be in houses where building was taking place. With great joy he helped in everything he could. He used to say: "We'll be able to stay in these little houses with a good conscience because we've made them with our own hands, and they conform to holy

poverty.” He rejoiced about this so much that when he spoke about it, it seemed he would be completely overcome with joy. [III, 134]

117. Since the friars had no houses at that time, they started many small friaries, building their humble abodes with their own hands. The servant of God, Brother Raniero da Borgo San Sepolcro, never failed to give his all, working most diligently. Because God had blessed him with hands that did all things with precision and perfection, he was sent to nearly all the places being built in our Province. During the day he worked until he was weary, then he spent the greater part of the night in holy prayer. He was often visited by our Lord God. [III, 490]

Everything in them was a harmony of spirit and devotion

118. The houses built for them were so small that a tall man could almost touch the roof with his hand. They were built like this to conform with the houses of our Father Saint Francis, which can be seen even to this day. These Capuchin friaries were all single storey buildings, with little cells made of sticks and mud, roughly roofed. The friars gloried in the poverty of their houses, since it seemed to them that everything about them was in harmony with their spirit and aspirations. [IV, 175]

119. The little houses were built with great simplicity, their small rooms made from interwoven twigs and other rough materials. Initially, almost all of them had only one storey. However, the friars soon realised that building like this caused a lot of sickness, because of dampness and other bad qualities the buildings had. Not infrequently a friar would contract an infirmity that was serious and painful, or would be gravely beset by an incurable sickness. Therefore even the first, enthusiastic friars were of the opinion that buildings should be taller and exposed to the sun, with cells made of properly laid baked bricks, sealed with plaster or another lasting material. A model was established by the General Chapter indicating the size of cells, and where the windows and doors in them and in the other rooms of the friary should be. [I, 255]

He finished it in twenty five days

120. Among the first Capuchins who came to the Reform from the Congregation of the Zoccolanti Fathers was Brother Ludovico da Foligno, a priest. He was given more to prayer than to study and had little learning, even though he was preacher. He was received by Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone and sent by him to the Province of the Marches, where he built the tiny little house of Saint Elia outside Fano. He made it from sticks and mud, and it was so small and poor that he finished it completely in twenty five days. He took up residence there and said the Mass of the Holy Spirit. He worked and laboured with wondrous humility, which made the leaders of Fano marvel greatly. When

they went to the friary, they found Brother Ludovico completely covered in dirt, because at the time he was plastering the twig lattice with mud. [VI, 196]

They felt as though their hearts would burst

121. After the Chapter of Albacina the Guardians were all sent with their small fraternities to the said houses. When they arrived they sang the Divine Office, said their Masses and ate together with great joy. The joy of those poor little ones was so great that it seemed to them as if they were reborn when they rang their small bells at the Divine Office and at the Masses. This lasted for many days, and they felt as though their hearts would burst. [II, 248]

They slept in huts

122. Before the friars built the rough house that went up, they slept in huts or in caves, or anywhere they were able to withdraw and find shelter. Alas, each day they were visited by some new evil, because their adversaries wanted to destroy them. [II, 69]

123. In the house at Foligno where the friars began to build anew, the poor fellows were in a hut, and when it rained they spent the night standing because they were in a puddle of water. In that hut they said Mass and the Office and had their prayers. Wine wasn't drunk nor did they cook anything, usually eating just raw vegetables. Sometimes they baked a loaf of bread. [III, 245]

124. At the time, before their houses were settled in, they suffered a lot because it was generally necessary for them all to sleep in huts. [IV, 152]

Little cells of sticks and mortar

125. In regard to dwellings, Bernardino d'Asti always preferred the poorest friaries and smallest cells. After his first Generalate, he withdrew into the old house at Nemi. Even though he was convalescing, he rejoiced to stay in that devotional, small and isolated friary in order to give himself more time for union with God through contemplation, after his intense activity while in office.

He stayed at Saint Bonaventure's in Rome, where you can still see those tiny cells of twigs and mortar, each scarcely big enough for a man to stretch out in. He was General, Procurator and Guardian there. His successors also lodged at that friary, until the time came when the growth of the Congregation and its many undertakings made it necessary to increase the size and number of rooms for bearers of high office.

Bernardino was very zealous in safeguarding holy poverty in the community. He was unbending in this, so that no fault could be found in the way buildings were constructed under his direction during his time in office. He severely reprimanded a Guardian in Rome for bricking-in a cloister, even though it cost

nothing, because it seemed a superfluous work, contrary to holy austerity and simplicity. [VII, 241]

Small, poor, decent churches

126. Let our churches be small, poor and decent. We do not want them to be large for preaching in, because as Saint Francis said, better example is given by preaching in the churches of others than in our own, especially if large churches offend against holy poverty. [C, 74]

Because of the presence of the most pure Christ, everything in our churches should be completely clean. [C, 39]

127. The churches were tiny, and built mostly according to the dimensions of the Holy House of Our Lady of Loreto. [IV, 23]

128. We order that in our churches there be only one small bell of one hundred and fifty *libra* or thereabouts. Let there be no sacristy in our houses other than a press or chest with a good key held by a professed friar. In that press or chest the friars should keep the things necessary for divine worship. They may have two small chalices, one of pewter and the other with only the cup made of silver. There may be no more than three vestments, without gold, silver, velvet or silk or anything else precious or unusual. They should be spotlessly clean. Let the altar cloths be of inexpensive material and the candle sticks of wood, and let our missals, breviaries and all our books be simply bound, without ornate figuring. In this way, all the things meant for our poor use will shine with most high poverty, and inspire us towards those precious heavenly riches in which all our treasure, delight and glory reside. [C, 140]

129. While on the subject of our friars in those early times: in their sacristies were those things that pertain to divine worship. These were few and simple but spotlessly clean, pleasing and most delicate. For many years in our churches gold, velvet and silk were never used in our vestments or altars cloths. They are still not used up to the present, since the friars live in great simplicity. [I, 261]

A drape as an altar panel

130. I do not want to omit what Cardinal Gabriele **Paleotto**, Archbishop of Bologna, had to say to the friars. He was edified by the zeal for poverty of Brother Onorio da Montegranaro, and at one celebration he said: "I understand, fathers, that you want to make a precious altar piece for the altar, and to have it very beautifully decorated. I advise you not to forget nor remove yourselves from your holy poverty. I tell you that in one of your houses I saw a drape used as an altar panel with a crucifix above it. The pallium was made of woven reeds with a cross. My devotion was encouraged by this more than it would have been had these things had been made of brocade." [VII, 465]

Of simple cloth without gold and silver

131. For a long time they used chalices of pewter. However, urged by a great reverence for the Most Holy Sacrament, they stopped using them since they stained the corporals. They wrote into the Constitutions that there could be two chalices per house with only the cup made of silver. In regard to things pertaining to the church, their practices were based on the declarations of Nicholas III, who said that it is not permissible for Friars Minor to have precious vessels or unusual and expensive statues. Everything to do with the church should be clean and simple and of little value. For the vestments they did not want chasubles and other sacred cloths made of brocade or silk and other costly materials, but ones made of simple cloth, without gold or silver. For many years, in our house in Rome the altar hanging was a mat.

The seculars were wonderfully edified by these things. Consequently, when they saw that the Capuchins had begun to build beautiful churches and to receive statues of great worth (although this was done by the friars with the good intention of fighting heresies), those who knew about our initial simplicity were greatly surprised by what was going on. [IV, 24]

They preferred priests as pure as gold

132. At a time when little thought was being given to the things of God, he decided to reawaken the world through the stark sign of the friars' extreme poverty.

Their churches were small, and the vestments, ornaments and vessels of the altar were poor. The friars were also very strict about the sacred furnishings. They preferred priests as pure as gold to chalices made of gold. They remembered that, according to the *Clementina*, God is pleased by our being poor even in the things of divine worship, and they were very focussed on this, almost fanatical. In effect, they strove to have outward appearances fittingly represent inner realities, but without the pomp and gravity of external formalities. Holy Church was well enough adorned with such ornaments in other Orders.

Because of this they contented themselves with a simple little box of white panels for the tabernacle of the most Holy Eucharist. The repository was a small ivory box lined with a corporal. The chalices and patens were of pewter. The altar cloths were of coarse linen. The palls were small mats, with a cross or simple image on top. The plain cross was of lightly polished wood. The candlesticks were pieces of wood attached to little boards with a nail driven through and pointing upwards. The thurible was a heavy bowl with some strings attached to it. The boat was a box of wood or pasteboard. The vestments were made from rough wool or linen cloth. Many of these had

another simple chasuble as a lining, so it could be reversed to provide a chasuble of another colour. Everything was very neat and tidy. [VII, 76]

133. Since in those times the things of heaven had been forgotten, Divine Providence decided to shake up the world with a new sign: the stark, extreme poverty of the friars.

Their churches were small and very poor with a few poor vestments, ornaments and vessels to celebrate and keep the Most Holy Sacrament. A simple little chest of white panels served for the tabernacle of the Most Holy Sacrament. The repository was a small box lined by a corporal. The palls were small mats. The vestments were of cloth or coarse linen. The thurible was a heavy bowl with simple pieces of string attached, or just hand-held by the priest. The boat was a box of wood or pasteboard. The candlesticks were made by the friars themselves from wood or a little piece of board pierced by a nail pointing upwards. The altar piece was simple in appearance, made of roughly pressed paper and a cross of lightly polished wood. [V, 157]

Nothing rare or precious was to be found there

134. The churches were also very small and poor, decorated with humble furnishings. They were made in such a way that there were no more than three vestments and two chalices with silver cups. Nor was any kind of gold or silk used, so that nothing rare or precious was to be found there. [V, 280]

We have a small number cells

135. The cells should be no more than nine hand-spans in length and ten in height. The doors should be seven spans high and two-and-a-half wide, the windows two-and-a-half high, one-and-a-half wide. The passageway of the dormitory should be six spans wide. In the same way, let the other rooms be small, humble, abject and lowly, so they may preach humility, poverty and contempt of the world in everything. [C, 74]

136. Voluntary poverty owns nothing, yet it is rich in everything, including happiness. It neither fears nor desires anything, nor can it lose anything. It has put its treasure in a sure place. However, really and truly to uproot the occasions of all ownership, it is ordered that no friar may have a cell key, or a trunk, a stool or anything else. Office bearers are exceptions to this, since they need to store those things they have to dispense to the community in a just and reasonable way. [C, 86]

137. When we began to have cells, it was like rising from death to life for us. With great joy we said, "May our Lord God be thanked. We have a small number of cells, which we have made with our own hands, in accordance with the intentions of our Father Saint Francis." When a cell was built which seemed

to the friars to be out of the ordinary, they would completely demolish it, driven as they were by their great zeal. [IV, 152]

They slept on bare boards

138. We order that no friar, unless he is infirm or weak, may sleep on anything but bare boards, mats, twigs of broom, ferns or a little straw or hay. Nor may he sleep on blankets. This is so that our beds may be somewhat similar to the one on which he died who said, "The foxes have caves and the birds of heaven nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Math 8:20). It is also so that we might be more vigilant and solicitous for prayer and conformed to our Father Saint Francis, for whom the bare earth was often a bed. In this he was especially like Christ, the Holy One of God, in the desert. [C, 25]

139. As a rule, they all slept on bare boards. In the winter however, some of the weak or older friars put down a little straw with a mat of reeds on top. Sheets were not used until Brother Eusebio d'Ancona was made General, and then mainly in the Province of Saint Francis. Even so, the practice of the Congregation was to sleep on mats and not between sheets. Most of the friars slept on boards, many of them using logs or bundles of fennel or other herbs as pillows.

When secular people came along to look at these little cells and saw the austerity of the friars' sleeping arrangements, they were greatly edified. [IV, 23].

Flasks, pots and bowls

140. They didn't want anything superfluous in their houses. In regard to table napkins, there were two per friar, the second for use when the first was being washed. During visitation, the Vicars had them give away anything extra for the love of God. They did this with everything, even flasks, copper and iron utensils, vestments from the sacristy and the like. At every visitation they were diligent about making them give away unnecessary things. [IV,24]

141. The Vicar General even visited the cellars. If he found more table napkins there than were needed for one change at laundry time, he gave all the spare ones away for love of God. He did the same with the kitchen utensils. When there was a surplus of these, or if they were in some way precious, he gave them away for love of God. [IV, 175]

142. 2 Those servants of God were clearly free from every earthly affection. At a time when they were beset with many persecutions, enduring great suffering and in really extreme poverty, they desperately needed some serviceable utensils. But they would only accept those that were misshapen or chipped. If they saw there were more flasks, pots and bowls than absolutely necessary, they promptly gave them to the poor. They believed that the use of unnecessary

things, no matter how trivial, was not licit for them. They wanted to keep to the pure observance of the Rule.

With my own eyes once I saw them gathered to eat, sitting on the ground, all sharing a single plate of salad and a little baked bread. No sooner did they start to eat than they began to weep for joy. They said, "Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ, for today we find ourselves observing what we have professed. We imagine that our Father Guardian is Jesus Christ and we are his disciples." [II, 136]

143. They were so zealous about not using things except out of necessity that often they ate salad and then drank soup from one and the same bowl because they didn't have enough crockery. [IV, 175]

Oratories in the forest

144. Not only did they set up isolated friaries where they dwelt in the greatest poverty, but there were many who, with the permission of their Superiors, made themselves little cells around the friary itself, where they stayed in order to have even greater solitude. They fasted continuously on bread and water to give themselves more perfectly to holy contemplation. Some of them did not eat bread but only fruit or vegetables. [IV, 42]

145. Those servants of God laid their whole foundation on giving themselves to holy prayer and contemplation, and on being reserved and detached among themselves and with secular people. This was why many of them had well concealed oratories in the forest. Some of these were covered with twigs of broom and other simple things, so if it happened to rain they could stay there and keep dry, sheltering from the wet. The friars delighted greatly in the solitude of these oratories, and could usually be found there during the day if they were needed. Father Guardian knew where they were when he wanted to have them do something. This silence and isolation gave them ideal circumstances in which to keep their minds always on God. [?]

Forest for a little spiritual walking

146. It is ordered that if there are vines or other superfluous trees in the grounds of established houses, they may not be cut down. However, with the permission of the owners, let the fruit be given to the poor, and the vines dug up and taken elsewhere to be planted or given to the poor. [C, 80]

147. When he was a novice of Brother Battista da Norcia, Brother Jerome was in the forest to get some dry branches. He cut up a bush which was half green and half dry. That good Brother Baptist bowed low before him and, for the instruction of everyone, said:

"Don't you know that it's not permissible for us to cut wood in the forest? It's not ours, but belongs to the *Comune* of Perugia, which

allows us to take dry wood for our needs, but not to cut green wood? The Pope allows us to have the forest so that we could do a little spiritual walking in it and pray there, not so that we could cut wood. Just as it would be against the Rule to have vines and fields to harvest their produce, so it is also against the Rule to have forests for wood."

For as long as he lived he always got wood, for the love of God, from outside the forest. He always treated the forest in such a way that not even one bush was cut down. Nor did he ever want fruit trees planted in the garden. He said:

"The garden has been given to us for fresh greens and nothing else. It has been decided by Holy Church that it would be too much of a distraction for the Order if every time we wanted some greens we had to go and beg for them. Therefore we are allowed to have gardens, especially since we use greens more than anything else because of the many fasts we undertake." [III, 275]

148. They wouldn't cut down any tree or wood in the forest or on any land allotted to them, without the permission of the owners. They believed that Friars Minor are not allowed to have forests in order to cut wood for themselves, but only to preserve the fervour of the Order. Indeed, they wanted their forests to be part of the enclosure, because that was where they went for a little respite and prayer, and it wasn't fitting that women and secular persons should be allowed there, too. Another reason they didn't want the timber cut was that, just as it is not permitted for us to have vines and fields to harvest the produce, so it is not permitted for us to have forests as a source of wood. When it was necessary to prune the trees, they would do so and then accept the wood for love of God from the proper owners, just as if they had procured it from outside the forest.

They didn't make many gardens for themselves. They gave greens to anyone who came, but they did not want any garden produce taken into town. That was always carefully avoided. [IV, 22]

All the places had owners

149. It has been decided that in each house an inventory must be kept in writing of all things of special value lent by their owners for our necessary and simple use. Within the octave of our Seraphic Father, let each Guardian duly go to the owner of the place and thank him for the property lent to the friars in the past year. Let the Guardian then implore him to deign to lend it to the friars again for another year. If and when he consents, they can dwell there with a safe conscience.

However, if he doesn't consent, let the friars accept this not with sullen resentment, but rather with joyous hearts, embracing divine poverty and recognising that they are under obligation for the time it was lent to them. Since

the property belongs to the owner, and he is not obliged to lend it, let them not be offended if he does not offer to them it again.

Let them do the same with all the other things of special value. When it is opportune, let them take articles such as chalices and their like to their owners. When these things are no longer needed, let them be returned, just as they are, to where they belong. Or permission may be sought to give them to the poor. [C, 70]

150. Thus our first Fathers took over small properties and built them according to the legislated model, two or three miles away from the towns, preferring places that were under someone's ownership. Once a year they would return these properties to their owners and thank them for the time they had lent them to us, bringing them some fruit and a salad as rent. These formalities were observed by the whole Congregation for many years.

When some expense occurred in the houses because of the need to maintain the roofs or to add rooms, they always had recourse to the proper owners. They did the same in regard to the iron and copper utensils provided by their patrons and used in those houses. When they were no longer needed, they returned them to their owners. Thus the friars always remained free of ever having to be involved with money. [IV, 22,23]

Half a scudo

151. There wasn't much in those little houses that would be worth more than half a *scudo*, apart from the heavy and excessively patched habits they wore. This was the established norm, followed faithfully by the whole Congregation. [II, 248]

152. They ordered that only those things the friars couldn't go without should be found in their friaries, and that these should evidence lowliness, roughness and simplicity - that is, poverty. [I, 249]

Sumptuous houses

153. Because of his zeal for poverty, Battista da Norcia would not allow friars to leave houses in order to build other, more comfortable, ones. He said:

"Let no-one ever be enamoured of a building, lest in the end he should be punished by God. Nothing has ruined the Order more than having sumptuous houses. You see, many friars seek out beautiful locations, which attract secular people to us. They befriend us, and time gets taken up in fostering that friendship, so that holy prayer and devotion are pushed aside. It also becomes necessary to increase the number of friars to fill up those houses, so that unsuitable candidates are received into the Order without being properly scrutinised. Consequently, we become overrun with

useless friars, who ruin the Order with their bad example and scandalise the seculars. Where there are many friars living together, a little is not enough, and poverty goes by the board. The seculars become affronted by the friars' excessive importuning, and lose their respect for us. And as they withdraw their support, we begin to lay up stores and provisions unlawfully." [III, 272]

It is dangerous for the Order to build

154. Francesco da Iesi was always strongly opposed to sumptuous buildings. He said that it is dangerous for the Order to build anything, and almost impossible not to offend holy poverty in the process. When he was at Venice, he had a small building put up - I don't know which one it was. A distressed lay-brother said to him, "Father, it seems to me that you may have been a little excessive with this building." The holy man answered, "Do not be surprised over this, my son, for as soon as a friar begins building anything, the devil promptly comes along and distracts his attention and makes him violate poverty." He went on:

"Our Seraphic Father would reprimand us for our buildings that flout poverty more than for anything else. If he came across friaries that offended against the ideal of poverty, he either removed the friars or had them demolish the house. Our Father Saint Francis didn't want the friary of Our Lady of the Angels to be built with stones and mortar. Rather, in his lifetime, the humble little cells of the friars were made of sticks and mud, covered with straw.

"Know that nothing has done more harm to the Order and given more hurt to the friars than fine buildings. Whenever our houses are more splendid and more costly than the houses of the poor, they always exceed the bounds of poverty - which consists of conforming to the poor in the way they live. Just as we have the poor as an example of how to dress, so that we should clothe ourselves in the rough materials that the poor of the region use, in like manner the poor are our model as regards dwelling places. If we really want to be logical in this, then neither the use of costly materials nor the consumption of expensive food is permissible for us. Rather, we should content ourselves with the same things that satisfy the needs of the poor." [III, 77]

155. Giustino da Panicale sometimes found himself in places where the friars had started to build, and would say to them:

"The words our Father Saint Francis writes in the *Testament* about himself and his companions are not without purpose: that they willingly stayed in abandoned churches. I say that we should do the same ourselves. There are many devotional, abandoned churches which no-one uses. Let us take over one of them and observe our

Rule there, and build only as much as we need for accommodation, so that we won't incur any more expenses. That was the intention of our Father Saint Francis.

"Truly, I tell you: new men will come and will not be content with our simplicity. Rather, they will leave aside the little houses that we are building with so much effort, and build for themselves new, large, sumptuous friaries in the vicinity of towns.

"Let us, to whom God has given this spirit and who have understood through his grace the true observance of poverty and of the Rule, make our little houses as poor we can and as inexpensive as possible, so that when we leave them not a lot is lost". [III, 433]

That first strictness was more perfect

156. Given the example of Brother Sylvester, and other things that happened in the Order, some might say: 'So! The Capuchin Congregation is completely ruined, along with the many holy men who've agreed to build houses or even simply restructure them!'

I would reply that two factors are involved in producing this misfortune. One is the internal disposition of those friars involved, hidden from us but known to God, for which they might well deserve punishment, meted out by him in his unseen judgements. The other is this: God wanted, through our radically austere way of living, to awaken the sleeping world and make it aware of the life and holiness of Saint Francis, and he is displeased by those who have obscured his designs.

However, the growing Congregation needed to build and to increase the number of its friaries. And, according to the perceived will of Christ, the spread of the Order would be of benefit to everyone. I would say that growth can't involve a transgression of the Rule, since there's no prohibition against it. Indeed, quite a lot of building took place even under the governance of Saint Francis and Saint Bonaventure.

Although the initial stringency of the friars was more perfect and more in conformity with the way the Apostles lived, it was nevertheless incompatible with the organisation of a normal religious order. So, introducing and founding an Order that observes a unique kind of poverty - evangelical poverty - in a way suitable for a large number of true and poor Friars Minor has made it necessary for us to alter our friaries to resemble the houses of other religious orders. This was done in accordance with the standards set for the basic necessities of regular observance. [VI, 194]

Blessed are you, servants of God

157. When some seculars went to see those friaries, they were so edified and moved, that sighing and weeping they said, "Blessed are you, servants of God,

for you are detached here from the fallacies of this world, and in these poor and isolated places you serve him with great austerity of life." [IV, 175]

They went away speechless

158. One day, the Priors of Fano went to visit the old friary at Fano while it was being built. When they entered and saw the simplicity of the friars and the poor house they were building, they all began to weep, and said to one another, "We have seen beautiful dormitories and refectories, and gracious lodges. But here these imitators of the Seraphic Francis have trampled the world underfoot with singular zeal!" They were so astounded that they went away speechless, tears running down their cheeks. [III, 288]

The aroma of simplicity

159. So great was the austerity, that it seemed the aroma of simplicity and sanctity emanated from the walls. [IV, 166]

As though their Father Saint Francis himself lived with them

160. Once they were settled in at Saint Euphemia's, living their usual harsh routine in great poverty, the Capuchins became known for the example of their way of life and the efficacy of their preaching. Good candidates came each day to join the Congregation.

With the Capuchin reform planted right under their noses in the city of Rome itself, the Zoccolanti grew more embittered, and spread it about that the Capuchins were useless failures in the Church, and an embarrassment to ecclesiastical propriety. They did all they could to get rid of them.

However the good friars were defended by God because of their fervent and continuous prayers to him. They begged that the Church be not deprived of the beauty of strict observance of the holy Gospel, nor that they themselves be deprived of the opportunity to pursue this observance. In their turn, they did not waste that opportunity.

On the rare occasions that a few of them were seen in the city, they were either questing for bread (and usually nothing else) or visiting shrines. Dressed in patched garments, they went about silently like tramps, with their heads well inside their hoods. Their infrequent words were about mourning over our sins, the love of heaven, faithfulness to Christ, and the study of virtue - mindful of the strict account we must render at death.

Their cells, made of plastered woven cane, were scarcely big enough to lie down and sleep in. Their only furniture was a cross, a table or a mat to sleep on, a bundle of fennel for a pillow, and a worn-out blanket. There were but three pumpkins in the cellar. There were only two habits for the community to use for changes. In the entire household, the rest of the goods amounted to no more

than ten *scudi*. And, having an excess of pious simplicity in sacred things too, they made their Holy Week sepulchre out of mats.

Silence was all-pervasive. As for the garden, the weaker friars held rosaries, while the stronger ones held spades and did the work.

In these harsh conditions, the friars were poor, happy and enthusiastic. Rather than return to the former lax way of life, they would have fled into the wilderness.

In choir they seemed like angels, singing the psalms slowly in their simple chant. At the altar they seemed like saints, celebrating with gravity and piety.

While their austerity was frightening, their poverty and simplicity were endearing, and their devotion moved people.

With this quiet witness, they proclaimed to the hearts of the judicious prelates of the court and important personages among the people that the movement to uproot this family of friars was an impious one. It was a family where poverty and the Rule could be observed to the highest possible degree, as though their Father Saint Francis himself lived with them and guided them. It would be a great failure in charity to impede anyone who sought to turn from a lax way of life to a very strict one in order to observe the vows he had professed. [VII, 179]

Fitting quickly into the divine plan

161. However God wanted the Congregation to be useful to Holy Church with its preaching and its sober balance of a lifestyle that mixed solitude and conversation. So he permitted it quickly to come into line with his divine plan.

It may be that the thoughts of Brother Ludovico were prudent and holy. They had the approval of some serious fathers, who maintained that just as in earlier times God had made other Orders flourish, so he would not have allowed our Congregation to lack learned men had we continued in our former simplicity and strictness and not erected houses of study. But in fact we can see that God, who planted the Order and can be trusted to take care of it, has wanted it to move in the direction of being less solitary, less austere and more educated. Experience has shown that having a large number of friars, which benefits so many, is incompatible with remote and austere little friaries, because of the infirm, or because of travelling and other needs.

It cannot be denied that the fervour of the Congregation suffered very much in its observance when it moved away from its early austerity, solitude and insistence on small communities. Hence, as far as possible, that strictness of observance should be ardently sought after and maintained, not only in the older friaries but also in the newer ones, even if they are close to populated places and have a large number of friars in them. The friars should strive with holy discretion and zeal to maintain the early practices of the Order as much as they can. [VII, 199]

IN THE SCHOOL OF FRANCISCAN PERFECTION

It is not enough simply to come up with a good idea or to put together a well thought-out program of religious life. Though the propositions advanced may be convincing, they will not of themselves be sufficient to ensure the continued existence of an Institution.

No matter how readily any plan of action may be endorsed, it is still necessary to test and try those who have to continue its realization. Consequently, specialists are appointed to take care of the plan's development and to ensure its future, since the Institution must be on guard against the lurking danger of becoming complacent over what has already been achieved.

During the period of the traditional novitiate, Religious Orders require from their approved candidates proof of their suitability. At the same time, the candidates face up to and examine more closely the reality of the ideal that is being pursued, and measure their own strengths and resources against the long journey ahead. It is the task of spiritual teachers to orientate and lead these recruits towards new and loftier goals.

The little band of disorganized friars hiding in the forests, having overcome their first hesitations and laid to rest all legal doubts, quickly grew into a numerous, well disciplined army, for many men, attracted by the ideal of authentic Franciscanism, sought the honour of putting on the poor but revered uniform of these new soldiers of Christ. The spectacular increase in the size of the Congregation concealed a potential danger, the threat of which did not escape the directors of the renewal movement. The harsh experience of daily living taught them that integral and total realization of the evangelical life they had re-established could not be attained by everyone, so that it was necessary to screen aspirants very carefully. This idea echoed like a refrain through the conversations of the first Fathers, so it is no wonder that the Superiors told candidates clearly and frankly, before allowing them into the novitiate, just what the obligations were that they had to meet. Thus there were no surprises hidden from them, and they could not plead ignorance later on. During their novitiate year they had to understand and experience in depth the regimen of life they wanted to embrace.

The tender shoot of the Capuchin reform quickly became, like the gospel's grain of mustard seed, a robust and leafy tree that put forth branches laden with fruit throughout Italy (and, later, the whole world), and this extraordinary expansion can be attributed in great part to the strict and judicious selection of novices. Nor must we forget the discerning work of those to whom was entrusted the difficult task of educating these youths. They were generally the ones who did the selecting and, most importantly of all, inspired the aspirants to live an authentically Franciscan life, laying down a solid basic foundation for the spiritual edifice. Leafing through the biographies of the first Capuchin Friars, we come across perfect models of educators, true fathers and teachers.

God has opened Paradise

162. Most friars within the Order changed their minds. Although at first they grumbled about the reform, they later came to speak well of it. I myself heard some of them, whom you wouldn't have called lacking in spirit, say among themselves: "What should we do? Such-and-such, and so-and-so (and they mentioned a good number of friars) have joined the Capuchin reform. What's holding us back? We know that the movement comes from God, and is much favoured by His Majesty, for it has persisted despite all the opposition to it. God has given us this opportunity to observe the Rule to the letter, and we will be greatly to blame if we stay here just to hold on to physical comforts. God has opened Paradise. Blessed are those who enter!" [II, 276]

The poor Congregation raised up its head

163. It pleased the Lord God that in the thirties the wars, pestilences and famines ceased. In this period a great number of friars came to the holy reform from the main body of the whole Order, not only simple and ignorant ones, but also a great multitude of the foremost learned and holy men. And then the poor Congregation was able to lift up its head and face the world, because these great men and their preaching made it famous everywhere, and brought it to the notice of the prelates of Holy Church. [II, 257]

164. God, who began the reform, not only kept it going but also brought it to fulfillment. He caused many Fathers who were as illustrious and renowned in letters as in holiness of life to join it from all over Italy - precious stones chosen by him for this special building. [I, 282]

Few are chosen

165. We desire that our Congregation grow more in virtue, perfection and spirit that in numbers. The Infallible Truth said: "Many are called, but few are chosen." And our Seraphic Father said, when near death: "Nothing is so harmful to the pure observance of the Rule as a multitude of useless and worldly friars." So, we order that the Vicars diligently examine the backgrounds and qualities of candidates, and only receive them if they can demonstrate the highest intentions and most fervent wills. [C, 12]

166. Those servants of God used to say:

"This Congregation is not for the many but for the few true servants of God who want to observe the Rule as our Father Saint Francis and his companions did. Consequently, anyone who wants to lead a lax life does great wrong in coming to our Congregation. There is no shortage of lax Orders he can join. He should chose one of those and leave this one in its simplicity, as a place of God and a Congregation of true servants and knights of Christ.

“Our Order is one to which those can turn who want to aim for perfection and give themselves more strictly to holy contemplation. It must shine in the Church of God like a sun, and demonstrate to the world the life that our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy apostles lived. In deeds and words it must proclaim poverty, obedience, humility, abstinence, contempt of the world and love and charity towards God and our neighbour in our Lord Jesus Christ. It must witness to the love of his holy Apostles and our Father Saint Francis and his companions - true servants of God, who in the Order, with catholic and holy doctrine, with good example and holy virtues, have shone so brightly upon the world.” [IV, 167]

167. Francesco da Iesi said that nothing is more ruinous for the Congregation than the reception of friars who have special needs that must be taken care of, and yet are still admitted to profession. Good will is not a sufficient factor in considering young people, who may be very delicate, too young, weak, infirm or the like. They should not be received if it means they are going to be obliged to do that which they cannot. They will be required to go without shoes, be poorly dressed, fast often, and endure the efforts that the Order makes to remain poor. If they can't fast and do the other things that are required, then it would soon become necessary to make extraordinary provision for them, and burden secular people by asking for special food on their behalf.

For people such as this, who cannot live so strictly, the Lord has willed that there should be other Orders with other Rules in his Church. There they can properly exercise themselves in the holy virtues, live religiously and save themselves. Even so, if this is harmful for them they should not be received into these Orders, either.

There is another disadvantage attached to having a lot of friars, in that it is necessary to build large houses for them, and these houses have to be placed near cities for their convenience. From this follows familiarity with seculars and difficulties in observing poverty - the cornerstone of our Rule. Silence is lost and holy prayer, the goal of the Rule, becomes neglected.

Francesco da Iesi said that the Rule of Saint Francis is nothing other than a way of life well suited to holy contemplation, although it can't be separated from the cross. It combines both the active life and the contemplative life, a mix that is more perfect than the simple contemplative life alone since it is more in conformity with the holy Gospel and the way the Apostles lived. The Rule cleanses us from all earthly affection through poverty, and makes us ready for prayer. Indeed, through poverty it observes the two precepts of love of God and love of neighbour, realizing love of God in holy prayer and love of neighbour in preaching: it turns us towards God through prayer, and towards our neighbour through preaching and giving good example.

Because these services require some expertise, only candidates who are suitable should be accepted by us to undertake them. To do otherwise would be to violate the Rule. However, this is not to say that those who lack both the gift of contemplation and of preaching cannot be received to perform other necessary services. Being occupied in this way, they, too, are entitled to sustain themselves by sharing in the alms given to the Order. But it is contrary to the Rule for us to accept candidates who are not suited for contemplation, preaching, or some other service. [III, 79]

168. According to Bernardino d'Asti, austerity of life makes good novices. There is no doubt that all kinds of people come to the Order, just as all sorts come to the Christian religion for faith and baptism. Our Lord referred to this when he spoke of the net that catches many fish, some good and some bad. On the seashore, Jesus Christ, the best of fishermen, puts the good fish into a pot and leaves the bad ones on the sand to be devoured by birds - demonstrating to us that he constantly purifies his Church. This purification is also necessary in the Order, because many coming into the Order are called not by God but by malign spirits, to plague the good ones and to discredit the Order in the eyes of the world. However, austerity of life sees off most of those who do not submit to their novice master. Hence, so long as life in the Congregation is lived austere and poorly, not many bad people will find a lodging here. [III, 186]

169. This Congregation is like the sea, which harbours neither dead bodies nor unclean things. [I, 456]

170. The lay brother, Giustino da Panicale, said:

"Why do we need so many friaries? Let's receive only a few friars and maintain the four small friaries that we have. So long as there are only a few of us we will be able to observe the Rule, but when the Congregation multiplies it's likely that it could fall into ruin, because true servants of God have always been few in number.

"Let's not be responsible for starting another lax Order. Let whoever wants to live laxly and sleep in fine buildings go to the other Orders and leave this one for poor men who want to live according to the simple observance of the Rule. What are we on about, wanting to multiply so rapidly? It's better for those who want to live laxly to go and join the Zoccolanti, who already have friaries built, so we won't have to build any. This will spare those living in the world the expense of paying for further buildings, and also remove the scandal of sects multiplying all over the place.

"Know that this Congregation of Capuchins has been created by God in response to the many prayers of those holy men who for a long time have desired the observance of the Rule. They have offered many tears to God in order to see this reform, but many of them that I have known haven't been able to see it. And now our

Lord through his mercy has granted to us poor ones the opportunity to observe the Rule according to the pure intention of our Father Saint Francis. Let us therefore preserve our present state, granted to us by God after so many difficulties, and acknowledge that its foundations rest in holy poverty, austerity of life, and our being few in number." [III, 434]

171. The venerable Father Eusebio d'Ancona said, "There's never been a breath of scandal about friars who travel about alone, and this tells us how much God cares for us." When I asked him, "Why is this, Father?" he answered thus:

"It comes from their great spirit and zeal, and also from their austerity of life. Only good men who want to suffer should come to our Congregation. Indeed, the best way of keeping the Congregation pure is to hold on firmly to the austerity of our way of life, so that it becomes known among secular people how much we undergo. Then those who come to join us will only do so if they desire suffering, and this good desire will sanctify them and dispose them to suffer even more than we already do. However if the Order is soft, many men will come not to suffer but to flee the hardships of the world, or simply to study and gain renown. That would be our ruination." [IV, 188]

172. I'll pass on to you the advice of the Cardinal of Trani to our Superiors: "Superiors, root out the weeds if you want your Order to last! Don't be too ready to receive large numbers of candidates. The chosen of God are few, able to persevere in this way of life because they are greatly favoured by His Majesty. Be sure that confusion will result if your numbers grow too large." [II, 397]

With God's help I am quite willing

173. Pietro Matteo - in religion Giuseppe da Collamato - was the second person to join the Capuchins straight from the world.

Afire with great fervour, he made a decision to abandon the world, and soon after left his home in Collamato. He knew that the Capuchins were living as fugitives in the mountains of Fabriano near Cerreto, so he went and found them, and made known to those servants of God his good intentions.

The first friar that Pietro Matteo spoke to was the holy man Brother Paolo da Chioggia, who questioned him thoroughly and then said, "Son, go back home and take time to think this over carefully, commending yourself ardently to the Lord God. If your good intentions persist, come back here and we will receive you. But be very clear about this: if you become a friar you will have to observe the Rule, which is very strict and very demanding."

Brother Paul briefly outlined the obligations contained in the Rule, and said that the young man would have to give away all his property for the love of God. "However," he said, "if, after thinking it all through carefully, you are willing to observe all these things, return to us and you will be received."

The devout youth answered, "With God's help I am quite willing to do all you say, although I have no property since my father is still alive".

Then he returned home, and lost no time in giving himself to his devotions more fervently than ever. He continued like this for several months, pondering very carefully the action he planned to take. Then, one day, full of joy, he went to the large house where his mother and father were gathered with all the family. Kneeling down before them all, he turned to his father and mother and asked their parental permission to go off and take up the service of God.

"I am certain," said their devout son, "that I have not been the good and obedient son I ought to have been, and so I ask you to pardon me." After that he turned to the rest of the family and asked their forgiveness in the same way, listing his faults with many tears.

Then he turned again to his father and said to him, "My father, give me your holy blessing. I am resolved to take myself back to join the Capuchins, in order to do penance for my sins".

But the rest of the family thought this parting was too difficult to bear, and said, "Although Pietro Matteo is young, his example brightens up the whole house and he's a great comfort to us all. Now he wants to abandon us!" And, turning to his father, they said, "Don't let him go! Don't give him your blessing!"

His father, reluctant to see him leave, said, "Son, who are you under obligation to that you can't live freely in our house? We don't want you to go." Pietro Matteo answered, "Father, you can't oblige me to stay, because I am under obligation to God rather than to you. This is especially true since there are enough of you here to do the work without me. I'll be of much more use to you in the service of God than I will be staying at home."

His father and the rest of the household saw that he was resolute, and although it grieved them very much they gave him their blessing, albeit with much weeping. He quickly left them, filled with joy, whereupon they groaned aloud, the sort of groan that's heard when the most loved member of a family dies. Indeed, such was the lament made by all the family that the neighbours thought there'd been a death in the house, and almost the whole citadel came flocking to the sound. His family would have been the largest in those parts, an ancient one with many relatives, so that all together they numbered about sixty.

Pietro Matteo, dry eyed, not worried about father or mother, unencumbered, full of exuberance, left the world and all its vanity, saying no more to anyone, not even one little word. When he reached the Capuchins he was received with

great joy, and invested by the venerable Father Paulo da Chioggia. Thus the poor Congregation came to number seven friars.

Because they didn't have a place for Pietro Matteo, he did almost the whole of his novitiate in the mountains of Fabriano. There the friars rarely had enough bread to eat, and slept as best they could in farm houses, or in some hut or cave. They were almost continuously in great fear and dread of being captured. Hence Pietro Matteo's period of probation was very harsh, filled with every kind of suffering. [II, 33]

The Vicar told him he was too young

174. Brother Giovanni Battista was from the Umbrian city of Terni, in the Church's dominion and in the Province of Saint Francis. He was born of honest parents, citizens of Terni. From an early age he attended school, but when he was about twelve years old, the devout boy, inspired by God, decided to leave the world and enter the Franciscan Order.

Seeing some boys like himself in the friary of Saint Francis, he was greatly attracted to the Order, and when he visited those young friars for a few days, he told them of his happy aspirations. Those young friars made him known to a venerable Father and teacher, very appropriately called Master Nunziangelo. Having learnt of the matter, he called the devout boy to him and said: "Son, if you want to be a friar, I will cloth you at my expense, and if you want to apply yourself to learning, I will take it upon myself to make a man of you."

The devout boy understood these words, and was overjoyed. Within a few days he was invested, and bore himself so well that the teacher conceived a great love for him and guarded him more carefully than he did any of the others. He gave him a separate room, and always had him sleep alone.

It was a marvellous thing that on his own initiative, guided by God, he fasted all Lent, according to the prescript of the Rule. He was a model for all those venerable Fathers. His teacher said to him, "Friar Giovanni Battista, you do too much in wanting to fast all Lent. You'll soon become infirm." The devout child answered him, "It is better that the body become infirm than the soul die through mortal sin. I am obliged to fast." Amazed by these words, his teacher grew even more devoted to him, and gave him every assistance so that he could fast.

The friars told him that Saint Francis had worn a hair shirt, fashioned out of horse hair. Brother Giovanni Battista quickly and secretly procured one through his mother, and wore it. No-one knew about it.

It happened that the venerable Father Francesco da Iesi, a Capuchin, gave the Lenten sermons in the friary church, and was well received there. Brother Giovanni Battista was greatly inspired on hearing him preach, and because that Father had his room in the friary, formed a friendship with him. One day he

asked him, "What group of friars do you belong to?" When the friar replied that he belong to the friars of Saint Francis, Giovanni Battista said, "Well, why don't you go dressed like a friar of Saint Francis?" The friar answered, "Son, you're mistaken. Saint Francis never wore your kind of habit, but always went dressed like us. In relaxing the Order, the friars put aside the habit of Saint Francis and took up the one that you're wearing. Your group doesn't even observe the Rule. As for the truth of what I say, read the Rule for yourself." And with that he pulled a copy of the Rule out of his sleeve and handed it to the boy.

Thus it was that the devout boy retired in his room and, full of joy, read the Rule over and over again during that Lent.

The Father Preacher left at Easter, and without saying anything to anyone Giovanni Battista set off after him. He sought out the Father Vicar of the Province in the friary at Narni, introducing himself to him and asking on bended knee to be received into the Order. The Vicar told him he was too young, so Brother Giovanni Battista answered him, "Father, I am sixteen years old and I do not want to go back to the other friary again."

The Vicar said, "You won't be able to fast." Brother Giovanni Battista replied, "I began to fast when I was twelve years old, and have always fasted throughout Lent in the friary, as the Rule demands. I'm sixteen now: why won't I be able to fast?"

The Father Vicar saw that these answers were those of an experienced man, not a young boy. He realized that the youth had been endowed with good understanding by God, and therefore accepted him and sent him to the novitiate in the friary of the Carcerelle of Assisi.

The boy was so delicate and good looking that the Master was embarrassed to let him be seen by seculars. The Father Vicar wanted him to stay two years in the novitiate. His behaviour was so saintly that he amazed everyone. He always fasted with more austerity than the others did. He was so mortified and reserved with the friars that if he was not at Office, or had been called by the Master, he never looked the others in the face, and never volunteered an explanation. Because he was so delicate and young, his Master thought that when it was cold the sharp air might make him sick, so he always had him wear a piece of woollen cloth on his head. By the grace of God he bore up very well and at the end of the year made his profession. He always carried himself like an angel. [III, 389]

Like a gallant man he took the Capuchin habit

175. Battista da Faenza was born of honest parents. In his youth he embraced the military arts, winning much honour and acclaim. He was colonel of the Duke of Urbino and was known as 'Captain Battiston of Faenza'. He was a

brave and very distinguished man, performing great feats of war. He is said on one occasion to have held a city gate (I don't know which city) against an entire army all on his own. He was a big man, strong enough to catch a man by the belt and hold him up high in the air with just one hand. He had penetrating eyes, and frightened the life out of people when he stared at them.

Although he was valiant while serving at arms, he was even more valiant in the service of God. For, touched by the Holy Spirit, he decided to leave the vanities of the world and become a Religious. So he said to himself, "Baptist, you've committed many sins, served the devil very faithfully, and sought worldly vainglory. If you want to save yourself now, you'll have to do penance in real earnest during the short time that remains for you to be of service to God."

So, like the gallant man he was, he made a resolution, and took the habit in the Congregation of the Capuchins. A very strict Master was given him, who nevertheless used to quake whenever Baptist fixed him with that stare. When this was brought to Brother Baptist's notice, he said to the Master, with tears of contrition, "My Father, I have a rough nature and am very used to doing things my way. However, remember that I have come here in order to do penance for my sins. Therefore, don't be intimidated by me. Whether right or wrong, I have the chance to gain merit from these occasions, so please don't show me any leniency. Don't treat me like these boys, who don't know what sin is, but chastise me as the very great sinner that I am, one who has offended God a great deal."

Subsequently, whenever the Master gave him a penance, he performed it so joyfully that everybody marvelled and praised God, and he soon became as gentle as a lamb. He was sometimes a little impatient, because of his rough disposition, but as soon as he was made aware of it, he would throw himself on his knees and say, "Forgive me, Father, I am not able to control my temper. I am the worst man in the world. Do not fail to correct me and help me conquer myself."

It was truly awe-inspiring to see such a huge giant of a man tearfully kiss the ground and do all sorts of penances. He wept so much when he made profession that the other friars couldn't hold back their tears, either. [III, 504]

See how much Christ has suffered for us

176. In Cantalice there lived a happy couple who had four sons, the third of whom was baptized Felice. This name proved to be providential, for he was called Felice in the world and on the feast of Saint Felice he was admitted to our holy Order, and later on the feast of Saint Felice he made profession. Happily, he led a Godly life while he lived, and we speak piously in saying that we hope he is now happy with the blessed in heaven, for it was on the name day of Saint Felice that he died.

He followed in his father's footsteps until he reached the age of thirty-six, leading the life of a farmer. Then, while staying one day in a certain alpine area to pasture some animals, he heard a voice thundering from the sky, which called out, "Felice!" With simple spontaneity he answered back, "Yes? What do you want?"

The voice responded: "I am an angel of God, and he wants you to enter his service." Felice replied, "Where does he want me to go?" And the angel answered, "Into the Order of Minors." So Felice asked, "Where will I find them?" to which the angel replied, "Go to Leonessa. You will find them there."

The servant of God wasn't tardy, and reacted like John the Evangelist did, the Beloved of the Lord. When the Saviour of the world called John and his brother, he left his father Zebedee, the boat and the nets and followed him unquestioningly. So it was that Felice he left his animals immediately and went off to Leonessa, to the house of the Capuchin Fathers. Having asked for the Father Guardian, he told him in all simplicity what he wanted, although he didn't tell him about the revelation from God. The Guardian, because he didn't know him well, told him to go and find the Father Vicar, but omitted to tell him where the Vicar was.

Now Felice was a simple man, and not accustomed to hearing angels, so he returned to the care of his animals and waited, fostering the desire to live a Christian life. He withdrew as much as he could from social dealings with others and from the danger of sin. He was steadfast in preserving the fragrant flower of his virginity, and Divine grace habitually guarded him from other sins, too.

So it is not surprising that the desire for Christian perfection burned so brightly in his eager heart. Once he heard the lives of the holy Fathers read. He thought about their penance and how they sustained their lives with just fruit and vegetables and no bread. He decided that he also wanted to abstain from bread and wine and to imitate those saints in their abstinence. In order to do this he deliberated seriously about becoming a Capuchin just as God had revealed to him. He thought that in the Capuchin habit he could do all these things, but, while he didn't lack the will to join, in his simplicity he just didn't know how to go about it.

So once again the Lord God sent his angel to him. The angel said, "Felice, I am the angel of the Lord. He has sent me again to tell you that you are to go into his service." Felice answered, "I went there and they didn't want to admit me." The Angel replied, "Go to Rieti, and there you will be told what to do."

So Felice went to Rieti straightaway and spoke to the Father Guardian of the Capuchins. The Guardian led him into the church and, showing him a crucifix with the figure all bloodied and bruised, said, "Young man, see how much

Christ has suffered for us!" These poignant words from the Guardian, and the pitiful appearance of Christ crucified, went straight to Felice's heart, and he was filled with love and compunction. He gave a great sigh, and tears began to stream down his cheeks - evidence of his holy disposition and of a heart unencumbered by sin or worldly affections. This was the prelude to his holiness, especially the holy affection that caused him to weep over the Passion of our Lord, something that was not unusual for him.

After they had stayed for a good while praying in the church, the Guardian took him back into the house. He saw that the young man was devout and a suitable candidate for the Order, and sent him to Rome with a letter for the Father Provincial, who received Felice kindly and invested him. He was sent to the novitiate house at Anticoli, where the Novice Master was Brother Bonifacio da Anticoli, a man of very holy life.

This period in the novitiate proved of great benefit to the young man in his service of God. Not that this was surprising, for the good Master found Felice well disposed, and instilled in him - as Felice wanted him to - the best forms of religious behaviour, instructing him in the perfect observance of the Rule. The Master impressed upon him that, since he wanted to reach perfection in religious life, it was necessary for him to ground himself in the solid fundamentals of holy humility, the perfect foundation of every spiritual edifice.

Felice, the servant of God, really absorbed the good instructions he was given, so that he did excellently throughout his novitiate. He was so prompt and willing in holy obedience that a hint sufficed as a command for him. He was so completely in control of himself that his Master said he'd never had a novice who acquired virtue as easily as he did. He gave himself to prayer to the point that no matter what household duties he went about, he never disengaged himself from the contemplation of God. Since he was disposed to live like this, all that had to be done was to show him the way. And he persevered walking in this way, always growing in perfection, until he died. [III, 463]

He never seemed able to thank God enough

177. It was said that God had revealed to Brother Bernardo d'Offida that he should join the Capuchins. When that good servant put on the Capuchin habit, he prostrated himself on the ground, and raising his tear-drenched face to heaven he said, "Lord may death now come at its appointed time, since you yourself have deigned to wait until I, a lowly little man, should find myself among your true servants, observers of the holy Rule that I, through your grace, have promised to follow. I now renew my promise to observe the Rule perfectly, with the help of your grace, according to the intentions of my Father Saint Francis. I'm not worried about living or dying, only about serving you faithfully."

He never seemed able to thank God enough. Rejoicing that so much favour had been shown him, he said, weeping, "I've known so many holy friars, whom I

am not worthy to call by name, that have prayed long and shed copious tears asking God for the grace to see the reform of the Order. Yet they have died without seeing it, while I, a lowly worm and poor lay-brother, have been made worthy to do so through divine mercy." [VII, 496, 498]

Weeping for joy

178. Pietro da Todi took the holy habit of Saint Francis with such great fervour that for many days he was not able to stop himself from weeping for joy. [III, 244]

179. And Francesco da Bisignano couldn't refrain from weeping for joy at seeing himself clothed with the habit of our Seraphic Father Saint Francis. He continued this way for a good number of months. [III, 352]

180. When Matteo da Leonessa saw himself clothed with the holy habit that our Father Saint Francis wore, he was not able to stop himself from weeping out of affection and joy. He was like this for many months.

During his novitiate, this servant of God was like a wise architect who lays deep and solid foundations for the palace he builds. He was learned, and also well instructed in the spiritual life, and seemed to know exactly what he was doing as he set about basing all he did on the solid foundation of holy humility. In the course of his novitiate he behaved in such a mortified and humble way that it became plain to everyone that his leaving the world had not been fickle or vainglorious, but inspired by the Holy Spirit. So great were the gains that he made in meekness and mortification during his novitiate year, that he behaved for the rest of his life as if he were still a novice. [III, 148]

181. In 1560, the end of the first three years of the Generalate of Brother Tomaso da Castello, there was a cleric novice in Asti called Brother Cipriano da Genova. He used to pray with great fervour, so much so that he was always weeping. He frequently told a young lay-brother that the devil didn't come near him when he was at prayer because Christ, the blessed Virgin and our Father Saint Francis were always there with him.

However, when discussing things with others, or when answering questions, he seemed rather more eager to voice his opinion than is fitting for a novice. As a result, he didn't get enough votes to make profession. So, prior to being dismissed, he was sent to get his secular clothes from where they were in another house. When it dawned on him what was happening, he became greatly disturbed, and straightaway turned to the Lord and told him he would rather die than ever put off the habit and return to the world, where he might offend his Divine Majesty.

Amazingly, he was instantly struck down with a terrible fever, which ended in his death some ten days later. He received all the sacraments, and was visited by God in such a manner that three days before his death he didn't speak to

anyone. The friars would come into his cell and find him on his knees with his hands joined, whereupon they would put him back into bed and cover him up. But when they next visited him they would find him down on his knees again. After three days he began to speak to the friars, saying things like, "Let those ladies in! Make room and let the virgins enter!" Then, chanting praises that the friars couldn't understand, he died. This left the friars feeling very edified about him, even to the point where some suggested that his outspokenness might have been a ruse on his part to get himself despised and humiliated. [VI, 544]

182. Matteo da Leonessa went away to Rome to become a Capuchin. For some months after first seeing himself clothed in the holy habit that he knew was identical to the one worn by Saint Francis, he wept abundant and copious tears of joy and affection. This was a testimony to the depth and strength of his conversion.

He had a sensitive disposition and was a distinguished person and throughout the testing time of the novitiate his behaviour was highly satisfactory and exemplary. He had great constancy, enhanced by special help from God, so that he conscientiously embraced the penances, the *culpa* and the trials and the mortifications of the novitiate year - to say nothing of the austerity and the discomforts of life in common. In those days, discipline was applied with great rigor!

In two matters he was outstanding. One was that, although he was an educated person who had previously enjoyed great personal freedom, he made profession in a spirit of blind holy obedience, humility and simplicity, rooted in such openness of heart, that you could never detect in him any hint of self-assurance, or of his being opinionated. Nor was there any evidence of unhealthy self-esteem, cynicism towards his spiritual exercises, or any inclination to censure others. Usually, people like him are infected by these things to some extent.

The other outstanding thing about him was that he embraced the practices of the novitiate so firmly that he kept to them for the rest of his life. Hence, even though he was a Guardian, distinctions between him and the other friars were unknown. In community, he seemed like a novice that could well have just put on the *capparone*, such was his modesty, his self-composure and his demeanor. He kept his voice subdued and his eyes lowered, like one always ready to obey. His charity was constant, and he never shirked hard work or menial tasks. He observed silence and solitude, kept to his devotions, and was serene and joyous in suffering and in upholding the good customs of the Order. [VII, 535]

Masters who are more mature friars

183. Christ said to the scribes and Pharisees: "Woe to you who cross land and sea to make a single proselyte, and then make him a worse son of hell than

yourselves!" (Cf. Matt 23:15). Lest such words be said of us, let it be determined that in each Province the novices be housed in one or two friaries suitable in spirit, assigned for this purpose by the Chapter. Let the novices be given Masters who are more mature friars, sober minded and enlightened in the ways of God. They shall take care to teach the novices not only the formalities of religious life, but also those things of the spirit necessary to imitate perfectly Christ, our way, our truth and our life. Let them show the novices by word and example how to live as Christians and as Friars Minor. [C, 17]

Master of the experienced

184. God had adorned Pietro da Todi with religious qualities that made him very pleasing in his eyes, and which Peter cultivated faithfully. While with the Zoccolanti he became master of novices, and with the Capuchins he became master of the more advanced friars. He remained zealous over poverty and penitence, and was strict about what he wore and what he ate.

But, harsh as he was towards himself, he was charitable to the young friars, and especially to the novices, the tempted and the sick. His own austerity was a daunting example to others, and he didn't fail to test the novices with the stern practices then prevalent - much stricter than those of today. He also made sure that the professed kept rigorously to the discipline of the house. At the same time, he appeared to the friars to be in every way another Saint Francis, seasoning penances with discretion and imposing them at times and in measures that accommodated the needs and strengths of each friar. He nurtured them and sustained their spirits with inspiring discourses and by his own example. Consequently, the novices and professed that came to the Order in simplicity, desiring to serve God in this penitential way of life, tasted the delights of paradise in the midst of the many bitter difficulties, and would give up all vices rather than leave.

He was solicitous in helping those tempted to resist their temptations, and sought comfort and consolation for them day and night through prayer. He was always affable towards them, giving them good counsel and every kind of assistance. And when it came to the infirm, he was like a mother in his warmth towards them, helping them, consoling them, providing for them and serving them tirelessly. Indeed, he was gentle and sympathetic with everyone, so much so that when he saw anyone in anguish or difficulties, he couldn't hold back tears of compassion.

This gentleness of heart embraced everyone, living and dead, including seculars, and because of this he was widely revered. If he heard that discord had arisen, he would immediately intervene with fatherly concern, integrity, gentleness and gravity, and would calm and reconcile those in contention, no matter how many had taken to arms. [VII, 507]

185. Giovanni Battista da Terni was for many years Guardian and Master of novices. He governed the novices with great simplicity and prudence, and with so much benevolence that they loved him even more than if had he been their own father. He said that above all the novice Master should conduct himself in such a way that the novices know with certainty, by the outward signs he gives, that he carries them all in his heart. Then they will find great security in him, for if they do not feel secure they will be lost. [III, 391]

186. When Pietro da Mazara was a youth, he dedicated himself to the military arts. He was a courageous young man and held in high honour. But he acquired a lot of enemies, lost favour at court, and couldn't see how to escape the consequences. So he fled into the countryside and became a leader of outlaws. He did many evil things in different localities, and he and his brigands were greatly feared by everyone.

It pleased the Holy Spirit to put it into his heart to abandon that wicked way of life and to take up religious life. It didn't take long for him to be elected Vicar Provincial of the whole of Sicily, an office that he exercised with great prudence and in a most exemplary manner. He was extremely kind and considerate towards his brothers, with a well known reputation for being the servant of all, as our Father Saint Francis would have it. He never excused himself from regular penances, even though the exercise of his office caused him great fatigue.

He was also novice Master, although everyone said that he was no good at it. This was because he was so kind that frequently when a novice merited being disciplined, he would punish himself instead, out of compassion for the youth. He would say to the novice, "My son, you deserve to be disciplined, but I will take your punishment upon myself." When the friars told him that this was no good, since the novices were not mortifying themselves, he would answer, "These youths are like angels, and don't know what sin is. But I am the worst man in the world, and it is fitting for me to be punished in their stead." [III,393].

187. Brother Jerome hailed from the city of Novara in Lombardy, his parents being of the most noble stock of the Avvocadri family. From his earliest years he devoted himself to reading learned works, and became very well instructed in logic and rhetoric. He was tall of stature, very elegant in physique - as delicate as a young woman - and endowed with such good breeding that everyone could see he was of noble blood.

When he was about sixteen years old, the grace of the Holy Spirit brought him to a realization of the fallacies of this world, and he decided to leave it and serve God in a religious order. He joined the Capuchins in Milan, putting on the habit with much devotion and desiring to observe the Rule he promised to God. When our Fathers observed his irreproachable and holy life, they gave him the care of the novices, and he remained novice Master for rest of his life in the Congregation.

Not surprisingly, this servant of God was most fervent and zealous for the perfect observance of the Rule, so obedient that his Superiors never had to tell him anything twice. He was so humble in his conversation that, although the novices strove to imitate him, they achieved only a little of their Master's degree of mortification. This was because he was endowed by God with an innate mildness, and it was hardly possible for him to get angry. [III, 370]

It doesn't matter, keep going

188. Brother Giuseppe da Ferno was Master of novices, although throughout the Province the name that everyone, including Superiors and Provincials, called him was 'Father Master'. Anyone using that title was immediately understood to be referring to him. When he taught the novices how to cut the tonsure, he had them cut his hair the first time they did it. Sometimes it happened that one of them would cut away skin and flesh, too, but he would sit firm as a rock and give no sign of having felt it. The novice would say to him, "Father Master, I have cut you!" And he would reply, "It doesn't matter, keep going." [VI, 389]

He was called the Holy Master

189. Francesco da Novara was more angelic than mortal in the way he lived. He was almost continuously Master of novices in the Milan Province, and governed his charges with such prudence and good example that he was called the 'Holy Master of Bergamo' by all the friars, and by seculars, too.

He always gave his novices good directions and sound teaching concerning what they must do to acquire perfection, the goal of religious life.

This servant of God said:

"The end cannot be reached without the means. The end of religious life is to become inflamed with the love of God, and the means to reach this end are the holy virtues. Because God communicates with pure minds, whoever wants to have Jesus Christ in his heart and love him perfectly above all else, must purify his heart. This is done in the novitiate, for just as a man takes off his secular clothes and is dressed in the holy habit that our Seraphic Father Saint Francis wore, so must he divest himself of all errant secular ways and dress himself in the garb of religious customs. For example, to speak too loudly is not religious behaviour, but secular waywardness. Indeed, the religious man should take care to speak but little, and then in a low voice and only when necessary. The rules of all Orders, except that of our Father Saint Francis, enjoin silence, although we read that our Father held silence in high regard as the custodian of every acquired virtue and the bridle of every vice. And we can see in the constitutions of the Order that right

from the beginning silence was given a prominent place. It is the main thing to be remembered by anyone wanting to practise holy contemplation. And it wasn't without reason that our holy Father Francis gave us that telling reminder: 'The tongue is like a fly which lands now on honey, now on dung. That's how the tongue of a bad Religious operates, now praising God, now murmuring about his neighbour and speaking evil.' A young novice who keeps his eyes lowered and speaks little and in a subdued voice, is like an angel of God, while one who lacks composure and self-discipline is like a worldly person, vane and full of vices.

"Therefore cultivate most carefully the beautiful habit of speaking little, and value holy silence highly, for no-one lacking this lofty virtue can be called a religious. As the Apostle James says: 'Vane is the religion of the one who does not restrain his tongue' (James 1:26). Indeed, we find that our Lord spoke only a few times, as did the Mother of God. The early saints put great store by holy silence, and it was not without cause that it was highly praised by the abbot Saint Basil and observed by the abbot Saint Benedict, those very holy Fathers who imposed it in their Rule. Many sins are committed with the tongue and many evils issue from unnecessary conversations.

"Therefore, just as a stamp leaves its impression on an elegant seal, so the novitiate imprints on the novices the beautiful form they must keep and diligently observe in the Order as long as they live. They in turn pass on to those who follow them into our holy Order the example of the gracious practice of silence."

This servant of God counselled his disciples with these and similar teachings.
[III, 365]

HOLY AND DEVOUT STUDIES

Studies have always been problematic in Franciscan life. The dichotomy of science versus sanctity - study versus piety - has not always been understood with clarity or kept in balance by all.

The Capuchin Friars found themselves with the same difficulties that distressed their Seraphic Father Saint Francis and his first disciples. It was certainly too much of an indulgence for them to pursue knowledge for its own sake, but on the other hand doctrine and culture are powerful and efficient weapons in the undertakings of the apostolate, and it would have been foolhardy to embark on those undertakings unarmed.

There was some hesitation about this matter when the Order was first beginning, but little by little an adequate solution to the problem emerged.

What was feared most wasn't study itself, but consequences detrimental to the interior life that could result from it. Behind the love of study some friars saw a subtle and dangerous temptation, a snare against which it was necessary to forearm themselves. Moreover, it was through an inordinate love of books - they said - that Bernardino Ochino set himself on the path that led to his leaving both the Order and the Church, and this sorrowful experience was a serious warning that could not be ignored.

While it is true that almost all of the first friars came to the Order already intellectually formed, the extraordinary development of the apostolate required a more ordered and systematic solution to the problem of academic studies. Hence, studies became compulsory, and with each passing day the organizing of regular courses became better structured. This was despite a number of highly sceptical friars, who seemed to mourn the golden days of fervent and enlightened simplicity. Whatever the case, although armed to defend against dangers to the purity of the Franciscan ideal, the young friars still had to be instructed in sound virtue.

Cases of Conscience

190. Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo was very learned and well instructed in all the sciences, especially in the teachings of Scotus. Indeed, it came about that he was made lector in the first universities of Italy because of his keen intelligence and excellent teaching. Everyone called him by his nickname, *The Soul of Dun Scotus*. [III, 59].

191. The first piece of advice he gave me was this: "Don't ever try to strike up a conversation with me unless you want to talk about the things of God. Or about cases of conscience. I'll always be ready to converse on these matters. I want all young friars who have any intelligence to study cases of conscience. Nothing can be studied that is more useful for benefiting one's neighbour." When I asked him if I'd be suitable for studies, he answered me thus:

"You have compunction. Take up a *sermonale* and study that. Preach, but don't try to do anything else. Be aware that when you see the Congregation set up a program of studies, it will begin to slough off its spirit. If Father General should command me to study cases of conscience, I would do so. But should he command me to study logic, I wouldn't. And that's not because the sciences aren't good, but because they're not compatible with our way of life, since we have promised God to be lowly. Anyone who promises to observe the Rule of Saint Francis promises humility, which is founded on simplicity. The sciences, good though they may be, are nearly always a cause of pride for us, inclined to sin as we are.

"Understand, Brother Bernardino, that the learned ones whom God wants in the Order are called to weep for their sins and to acquire

the Order's spirit. Those with learning who acquire this spirit bear great fruit in their preaching. However, by wanting to acquire letters in the Order, the spirit cannot be simultaneously acquired. Learned friars who lack this spirit are the cause of great evil in the Order, and the cause of many heresies in the world, because the Scriptures cannot be understood without the spirit that informs them." [III, 64].

192. Battista da Norcia said to me, "I'm not worried about your studying. It's just that I'm afraid when you've finished you'll become a confessor." I answered him, "That will never be." Baptist answered, "You well know that if the Congregation agrees to hear confessions it will bring ruin upon itself." [III, 275].

Profane and vain sciences

193. Because the flames of divine love are born from the light of things divine, let it be ordered that a portion of the Sacred Scriptures be read, expounded by holy and devout teachers. All friars are forbidden to dare to read or to study profane and vain sciences. They may study only the Sacred Scriptures - in fine, the most holy Christ, in whom are all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. [C, 4].

It would have been better to have spent his time in prayer

194. Someone said that [Brother Ochino] left out of shame because he was wasn't made a Cardinal. However, I believe that tales about his desire for honours were fables. He had more honours than he could have wanted. If he desired favours, he had all of Italy in his grasp. I believe there was no other cause for his departure than that suggested by the venerable Father Bernardino d'Asti: he took little care over holy prayer and was rarely, almost never, seen at it. Furthermore, he gave His Holiness to understand that he wanted to write a book against the Lutherans, and the Pope gave him permission to study prohibited books. My understanding is that this took a long time, and that he always had a cell full of these books, boasting that he had seen all the books of the world except the Koran of Mohammed, which he still wanted to see. I believe all this did him no good, and it would have been better for him to have spent his time in prayer. Moreover I understand it's true that the devil appeared to him and he offered the devil his trust, asking him for the explanation of some difficult passages in Saint Paul. And I believe that that devil tricked him into embracing error, although some say - incorrectly - that the devil actually forced him into it. [II, 438].

Tempted in a more subtle way

195. We know how the unfortunate Congregation of Capuchins has been persecuted in many ways by the tyranny of human nature, from all of which the Lord Jesus Christ has freed us. May it please His Majesty that we're not now tempted more than ever in another, more subtle way. By this I mean that, under the guise of doing good, we put aside the unsullied rigor of silence, fasts, and continuous disciplined prayer in order to devote ourselves utterly and completely to the study of letters. We'll think we're profiting hugely, but in fact will have abandoned doing good simply in order to learn the art of oratory. We'll think that we've benefited our neighbour and enlightened everyone around us, and will pay no heed to the words of our Seraphic Father Saint Francis. He tells us that friars who leave the spirit of holy prayer and devotion in order to give themselves to vane studies, thinking they'll enlighten their neighbour, will themselves experience interior darkness. Blinded by their senses, by vain glory and external show, they will lead their neighbour into darkness through their bad example. [II, 485]

Their book was the Cross

196. Individuals didn't have books for study, because their book was the Cross. The few books the friars had were held in common, and only preachers were allowed to use them and study them. It was a singular privilege for anyone to have even a Testament for personal use. Lamps continued to be withheld from individuals, except for use on the night before a friar was due to engage in preaching. This was in order to conserve lamp oil, but also to make sure that friars attended more to prayer than to study. Anyone who had to do some other studying, or read the psalms or something, had to go and make use of the light from the sanctuary lamp. [VII 76]

Study towards the performance of good works

197. Books teach us to perform good works, and to practise what these books teach is the fulfillment of the lessons they give. We get to heaven not by reading books and getting knowledge from them, but by doing what the books teach us to do. [II, 281]

198. Bonaventura da Montereale said:

"Know that all doctrine, all science and all study is ordered by God towards the performance of good works. Everything we occupy ourselves with should be directed towards learning how to do good and how to teach our neighbour to do good. Indeed, anyone who has learning without good works is like a man who has a vine but cannot produce good wine from it.

"As our Father Saint Francis said, 'We do as much good as we know how to do, and no more.' Anyone who knows how to do good but

doesn't do it will be doubly punished in hell, suffering far more than ignorant people who lack this knowledge.

"Be aware that good works bring us to know God more surely than learning does. When there was little learning around and many good deeds, the Church of God was full of saints. Now that there's a lot of learning and a paucity of good deeds, saints can't be found anywhere. Similarly, in the beginning the members of our Order were simple and everyone was a saint, as we can see from the lives of our Father Saint Francis and his companions." [III, 320]

Some devout and holy courses of study

199. Anyone who wishes to be a worthy and true preacher must not only live an exemplary religious life, but also have a knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures. Clearly, gaining this knowledge involves study. Consequently, we order that there should be some devout and holy courses of study in our Congregation, so that the noble and fruitful exercise of preaching may not wane, for this would be of great detriment to the poor souls of secular people.

These studies, embracing rhetoric and logic as well as sacred letters, must be conducted in charity and humility, and are to be undertaken by those friars judged by the Vicar Provincial and Definitors to be of fervent charity, praiseworthy manner, and humble and holy conversation. Also, these friars must be capable of undertaking studies, so that when they have finished them their learning, as well as the example of their lives, will be useful and bear fruit in the house of the Lord. [C, 122]

The learned called to weep for their sins

200. Although Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo was very learned, he was never happy about the Congregation setting up courses of study. He said that the introduction of studies into the Order would ruin it, just it had always done in the past. According to him, learned men called to join our Congregation are here to weep for their sins. He maintained that the Sacred Scriptures need to be understood in the same spirit in which they were composed, so that it is above all necessary for us to read them prayerfully. Learning without spirit has been the cause of great evil in the Order and has brought heresies into the world. In the beginning, the Church of God was governed through prayer, and from this came understanding and the true interpretation of Scripture. Thus it was that those holy men used to have recourse to prayer for enlightenment. Indeed, if prayer is lacking, then the light of God is lacking, and without that we can govern neither ourselves nor others. That was why our Father Saint Francis always valued prayer. [VI, 227]

He took up a favourable attitude towards them

201. When Girolamo da Montefiore became a Capuchin, he was at first opposed to studies, saying that if the Capuchins attended to their vocation of humility and prayer, God would send them some learned men. For this reason he refused, albeit humbly, to do any studying. However, when he became a Superior, he learnt by experience that studies are necessary, and adopted a favourable attitude towards them. Whenever he got the chance he'd take up a book, although he was at pains to stress that both the studies and the students should always be spiritual and unpretentious. [VI,350]

Sacred Theology

202. Francesco da Iesi was invested in the habit of the Order when he was about the age of twenty-three. He set his heart on one thing: to engage only in activities that would increase his knowledge of God, so that he might come to love him perfectly.

He was always studying Sacred theology. He told me he reasoned that all the sciences are designed to lead us to a knowledge of God, and sacred theology surpasses all of them in this regard. He argued that the love of God was the end of all things, and we can't love what we don't know. So we have to study if we want to follow the Rule concerning things that bring us to a better knowledge of God.

The Fathers, seeing that he was very studious and well acquainted with letters, acceded to his wishes and promoted him to the study of sacred theology. So, he devoted himself to this work for many years, sometimes under the tutelage of a master, sometimes on his own, and became the most profound theologian in the Franciscan Order, well instructed in the theories of Scotus. [III, 73]

203. He continued steadily in these lofty studies until he died. As a result, his sermons and preaching were filled with theology supported by Sacred Scripture. And having become a preacher, as it pleased God, he was seized with a great desire to use his knowledge in the service of God, and for the benefit those souls redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. [III, 74]

Without knowledge he cannot be loved

204. So it was, then, that Francesco da Iesi set his heart on doing only what would lead him to love God above all things, which is the end of the divine law and of the Rule. Therefore, when he was promoted by his Superiors to further his studies, he did so with singleness of purpose. Reasoning that you can't love God unless you have some knowledge of him, Francesco devoted himself to mastering theology, the science that above all others imparts a knowledge of God. He studied partly under a master and partly by himself, matching earnestness in studies with holiness of life, and became a most learned

theologian, highly expert in the theories of Scotus. Inevitably, he talked of nothing but theology, supporting what he said with quotations from Sacred Scripture. He was reckoned the best theologian in the Franciscan Order, and it was said that he arrived at the heights of wisdom not so much by his own endeavours as by a singular grace from God. This seemed quite credible when you saw that his teaching plus his disciplined life were, for him, a bridge to divine contemplation, in which he was continuously caught up. He noted that this special state was properly to be seen as the *raison d'être* for the religious virtues, and the goal of the Rule. [VII, 376]

The teachers

205. Bernardino d'Asti couldn't hold office in the Order anymore because of old age. So, in order not to miss out on doing good for his neighbour, he gathered together the youngest friars in Rome and taught them holy theology. I myself heard him say, "I've taught about eleven courses in Scotus." He taught with such ease that it seemed that he knew everything by heart. I heard him say, "Anyone who understands Scotus well, will surely have learnt something." [III, 185]

206. When our Fathers saw the good zeal and holy life of Bartolomeo da Lucignano, they made him teacher in the Province of Milan. There he taught with such clarity and good example that he was an excellent director for all the students. [III, 169]

207. Cherubino da Spoleto had a pleasant manner, and a discerning and bright mind, and it pleased the Lord God that he should make profession. The venerable father Brother Francesco da Iesi singled him out, and took such a keen interest in him that in a short time he instructed him thoroughly in the sciences and in sacred theology. This venerable father had a truly profound grasp of sacred theology, such that there were few like him in the whole Order. He taught the young friar with great clarity, and helped him to grow in knowledge and at the same time use that knowledge to advance in holy prayer. Cherubim became so inflamed with the love of God that his mind was always occupied with the Lord. [III, 401]

Libraries

208. It was always the intention of our gentle Father that any books necessary for the friars should be held in common, not by individuals. Hence, we order that there should be a small room in each of our friaries in which the Sacred Scriptures and the works of the holy doctors can be kept. This will assist the friars to observe poverty more faithfully, and remove from their hearts the desire to have individual possessions.

At the same time, the useless books of the ungodly, which quickly make men more pagan than Christian, may not be kept in our houses. If such a book

should turn up, let it be given to the poor according to the arrangements made by the General or Provincial Vicars. [C, 121]

Study is the cause of laxity

209. Setting up study faculties attracted many noble men to the Order, and was largely responsible for making it illustrious throughout the world. May the Lord grant that it be even more illustrious in the eyes of His Majesty! Although study can't be done away with, because we have to preach, it has nonetheless always been a cause of great laxity in the Order. Before we had study faculties, the Lord God gave us many learned men, enough for our needs. With the whole Congregation living in simplicity and perfect observance of the Rule, these men occupied themselves much more in holy prayer than is the case nowadays, and were a better example to secular people. Because of this, it's undoubtedly true that those few preachers bore more abundant fruit than the many we have now who engage in studies. Generally, they lose their spirit and their simple piety. [II, 480]

Familiar with and well accustomed to suffering

210. Angelo da Santo Angelo in Vado was very strict with the young friars and kept them under tight discipline. He said,

"The entire underpinning of the Order consists in the young friars being familiar with and well accustomed to suffering, right from the start. If they don't begin by making mortification and suffering their foundation, they easily revert to what they were like when they were seculars. But if they keep to this for a few years, and learn good habits, then, when they are sent on to study or are made Superiors, they will have no difficulty in maintaining good self-discipline. So it should never be necessary to put on a cheerful face for the sake of the young: it's better to keep them subdued. Remember that John Climacus says it is no less a sin to make use of an opportunity to mislead the young and weak than it is to snatch bread from the hand of a starving pauper. Teachers will have to give an account to God for what they could have done, but failed to do, to help their disciples gain merit." [III, 56]

211. For these reasons it was customary among them that young friars never spoke with seculars during their first ten years, and in the friaries they never conversed with other friars, except their Master and Superior. This proved to be a successful stratagem, since they became so accustomed to mortification that, later on, the good habits they had acquired prevented them from becoming lax, even though they had ample opportunity. [IV, 189]

212. When young friars asked advice from Matteo da Schio, the servant of God answered them, "Sons, we must think about our end, lest the flesh deceive us.

What we battle over is not a small matter, since if we surrender ourselves to the flesh we will gain hell, but if we walk according to the spirit, we will conquer and gain heaven. The one who loses heaven doesn't lose something inconsequential: our Father Saint Francis said, 'So great is the good I expect that each present pain delights me.' Therefore, think about the end, and suffering for the love of God will not be difficult for you. A merchant underwent many dangers by sea and by land in order to gain four farthings. What, then, must we do to acquire something so good that, once acquired, it will make us happy and blessed not for one year, or for ten, but for eternity?" [III, 381]

When he saw such fair youthfulness

213. The good Father Tomaso da Città di Castello was most zealous about regular observance, and of all the Generals until now he was the one best loved by the Congregation. When he saw such fair youthfulness emerging in the Congregation he said, "If I only I could see this youthfulness when it flowers. How dear this would be to me!" He desired very much that the youth should benefit from study, saying that he himself had discovered how important doctrine was. That was because he'd studied only the humanities before joining the Order, and was now an experienced priest but had not been able to spend time in studies. [VI, 296]

Acquired knowledge gives a mortal wound

214. Let the students not go after knowledge that puffs them up, but let them seek rather to know the enlightening and inspiring love of Christ, which builds up the soul. Nor should they ever become so committed to the study of letters that they have to neglect the sacred study of prayer. This would clearly be against the express intentions of our Seraphic Father, who did not want holy prayer ever to be left aside for the mere study of letters. Therefore let teachers and students alike strive to put more effort into studying spiritual matters than into gaining human knowledge, so that they might better acquire the spirit of Christ. In this way they will derive greater profit from their studies, striving more to know the spirit than the letter. Without the spirit the true sense is not acquired, only the bald letter, which blinds and kills. [C, 123]

215. Let the friars strive together in holy poverty and humility never to forsake the royal road that leads to heaven. Recall frequently the words of Jacopone: "Acquired knowledge gives a mortal wound if it does not repose in a humble heart." The friars will have further reason to humble themselves, if they realise they have incurred new obligations to God by being promoted to studies and accounted worthy to be introduced to the true and pleasant understanding of sacred letters. God is hidden within their meaning, and his spirit is sweeter than honey to the one who tastes it. [C, 124]

A DAY OF PRAYER AND WORK

To the superficial observer it might seem that days, months and even years followed each other with ordered monotony in the friaries. But this is an illusion. The reality is that each day was different.

First of all, the spiritual and personal work of the friars, who were aiming for perfection, took place in a situation that was being constantly changed and modified by their actions, experiences, struggles and conquests. Different activities made up the daily routine of the religious: prayer, study, preaching and manual work. Idleness, the enemy of the soul, was banished entirely. The friary became a silent and busy beehive in which there was no place for any "Brother Drones". Each friar fulfilled his proper duties with fidelity, and all strove to sanctify their souls by loving God, collaborating with their confreres, and serving their neighbour.

The friars treasured the precious gift of time. Like shrewd merchants they diligently traded with the talents they had received to increase their virtue and merit, and to make themselves useful to their confreres, to the Order, and to society. Theirs was a day of intensive work and activity. The church, the cell and the forest were their points of reference. Prayer, study and manual work were their principal occupations. The lay friars were no less diligent than the priests in their use of time, and indolent and idle friars were severely punished. In the silence of the night everyone ceased material work and concentrated more on the work of the spirit.

The more learned or more enlightened often held spiritual colloquies with their confreres. The chronicler calls these fraternal gatherings "academia", and in truth they resembled edifying and intimate sessions of ascetic and mystical studies. All the friars shared the same pains and joys, and also the same means of sustenance: the same food, the same habit. Individualism was avoided like the plague, and was unheard of among them. Perfect and regular observance day by day, or the fulfillment of the will of God in the present moment according to the Rule and Constitutions of the Order, was the holiness within the reach of all. This was the sure way that would lead many friars to union with God, to a higher perfection.

Every minute given us by God

216. The devout Saint Bernard says that nothing is more precious than time. But nowadays nothing is considered less important, even though every minute given us by God will be carefully examined to see how we have spent it. Therefore we exhort all our brothers never to be idle nor to waste their time in vain or empty talk, or in doing things of little or no use. Let them, instead, spend all their time in praiseworthy, fitting and useful spiritual and physical employment, to the honour and glory of the Divine Majesty, and for the edification and good example of their neighbours and brothers, religious and seculars. [C, 68]

217. Wasting time does great harm to a man, bringing his spirit to a state of tepidity. [I, 166]

218. Bernardino d'Asti said:

"If we have to give an account of every idle word on the day of judgment, we'll even more surely have to render an account to God of time badly spent. There's no interval of time so short that a servant of God can't make some act of love towards him, thus meriting a degree of glory in heaven worth more than a thousand worlds." [III, 185]

219. When Francesco Tittelmans saw friars wasting their time he would upbraid them vigorously. He said that it was almost impossible, especially for young friars, to be chaste without engaging in continual exercises, spiritual or manual. He held that it was wrong for young and healthy friars not engaged in studies or, like the lay-brothers, in various good works, to live comfortably from alms-giving, unless they did manual work. [III, 174]

220. It seemed to the friars to be a great sin to spend time on something worthless. I have many times seen and experienced instances of the bright and clear consciences of those servants of God. For example, if it happened that one of them stopped, even for a short while, to chatter to one of his brothers, as soon as he realised what he was doing he would kneel down and accuse himself of his fault. He would say, "Forgive me, my brother, for I have made you waste your time." And, filled with remorse, he would straightaway go off to confess. [II, 456]

221. It seemed as though their friaries were empty, for each friar was individually occupied in some necessary task or in holy contemplation. [II, 257]

They never wasted a minute

222. They took themselves away from the world, withdrawing from normal human intercourse to live in remote, mostly deserted, places. They did not focus on manual work, nor did they have books to study. They were not over-concerned about questing for alms. They didn't give themselves to long discussions - quite the contrary. Whenever they had to do manual work together, a spiritual book was read out loud, and everyone listened. (This custom continues even today.) Yet they never wasted a minute. So, what did they do the rest of the time? Well, quite simply, they devoted themselves to prayer. Prayer was their work, their pastime, and their sustenance. [V, 284]

A regular life

223. The poor friars, now assigned to their fraternities, began to breathe more easily. They were able to settle into their skimpy rooms, to come together in

choir to praise God and celebrate and attend Holy Mass, all in an orderly way. They prayed the usual prayers together, and in general led a regular life.

For many days their hearts raced with excitement, especially when the bell rang for Divine Office. To them, that bell was like a trumpet call summoning them to paradise.

They sang the Divine Office slowly and devoutly, using a simple chant. They said, rather than sang, their Mass, slowly and devoutly, and seemed like angels come down from heaven. The laity got so much spiritual consolation from these Masses that they came from five or six miles away to hear them. [VII, 73]

In this manner the two would recite the psalms together

224. You can see from the evidence how devout, enlightened and absorbed the holy friar Vito da Ragusa was at prayer. As a result of this, he was most profound when talking about the things of God, as if he were a great theologian. Yet what he said was always put simply. When he was not disposed to prayer and devotion of the spirit in this way, he would avoid wasting time by withdrawing either to his cell or into the woods with Brother Francesco da Sciacca, a simple priest and a man of incredible asceticism. The priest would begin with two or three words of the *Miserere*, and Brother Vito would repeat them after him, and in this manner the two would recite the psalms together. In this and in other ways, Vito made good use of his time, not letting a moment of it pass by in idleness, let alone in chatter or trivial activities. [VI, 493]

Don't go to bed if you've still got work to do!

225. Umile d'Offida was simple and straightforward, and thus capable of contemplation on a very high plain. In his younger years, after being invested in the holy habit, he was almost continuously caught up in holy contemplation, saving when he had to attend to the necessities of nature.

He planned his day carefully. After Matins he would rarely return to bed, but would continue in prayer either in his cell or in the church until the hour of Prime. When he had heard the first Mass, he would usually do half-an-hour's manual work in order to wake himself up and keep fit physically. Then he would go to his cell, and either study or pray until Terce. After Vespers, he would study or pray until Compline.

He was so earnest about the proper use of time that, had he not been constrained by obedience, he would never have spoken with the other friars. On the tip of his tongue was a sort of proverb:

"Don't go to bed if you've still got work to do!"

"A man who diligently serves a noble master strives to be vigilant in order to please his patron. Isn't it, then, even more incumbent on a man to keep awake and be constantly vigilant when he is in the

service of the Lord God, who continuously bestows a variety of gifts on his servants - though many of these gifts are lost because we're not awake enough to accept them." [III, 142]

You've making me waste time

226. I was closely acquainted with Onorio da Montegranaro over a number of years, and know that he was especially zealous about praising God by spending time well. Even though tired out after a journey, he would rise at night after about four hours' sleep and say Matins, then continue in prayer until dawn. After that he would say Mass, which he seldom missed. When he was staying in the friary, of course, he never failed to get up with the others at Matins, no matter how tired he was. This servant of God ordered his life in such a way that, after taking care of the needs of the body, he spent the rest of his time in praise of God. He would pray, recite the Office of Our Lady and the Office of the Dead, say the seven penitential psalms, perform other devotions, or simply go to his cell and write sermons or study. He conversed little with anyone and spoke hardly at all.

Once we were together in Rome at the General Chapter, and, since he was my close acquaintance, I took him one day to the Colosseum and to the Baths of Diocletian. Many others were there with us, taking the air, visiting hallowed places, and touring around the antiquities of Rome. However, in the middle of this outing he said to me, "You're making me waste time!" and became so upset that he refused to go any further, and returned to the friary. [III, 114]

To make baskets, small crosses or similar trivial things

227. Bernardino d'Asti reprimanded those friars who retired to their cells to make baskets, small crosses or similar trivial things when they grew tired at prayer. He wanted them to get into the everyday work of the house instead - like gardening, serving in the kitchen, or helping the sick. He wasn't very pleased with those friars who, under the pretext of attending to their devotions, excused themselves from domestic chores. And he was even less pleased with those who became so preoccupied with domestic chores that they lost their taste for prayer. He wanted to teach the friars to do both things, but in a balanced way so that one kind of activity didn't impinge on the other. He said that the friar who spends his time like this acquires two wings to carry him to heaven - one from the contemplative life, the other from the active life. He praised discretion, saying it was the seasoning of all the virtues. And he reproved those friars who gave themselves indiscriminately to prayer, saying that the devil employs the same tricks that a doctor uses with the sick, concealing poisonous temptations under the taste of spiritual honey. [VI, 26]

What have you done this morning, my son?

228. Peter of Cività Ducale was a most zealous observer of the Rule. He fervently practised all the virtues, especially holy prayer, to which he gave all his time - save from attending to the necessities of nature, and the short time he spent in studying and in writing sermons. He very seldom went back to bed after Matins, but would continue in prayer until dawn. Then, after saying Mass - which he did every morning with great devotion - he would retire to his cell. He was always either there or in church. He had a soft voice, but seldom spoke to anyone, except when necessary and then only briefly. [III, 196]

229. Matteo da Schio was very zealous about time, and rarely conversed with anyone. He was constantly occupied with pious activities, and didn't take much sleep. Thus, he seldom returned to bed after Matins, remaining at prayer until morning. He took a good hour to say Mass, then he would withdraw from the community.

230. Once he saw that I had been idle, and corrected me fraternally. He said to me, "What have you done this morning, my son?" I answered, "Very little, my father!" The man of God responded, "I am aware of that. But I'll tell you, to give you good example, that such hasn't been the case with me. I haven't been idle. I have prayed, said Mass, attended Office in choir, and composed a sermon, all to the praise of God. My son, the saints were very diligent in acquiring holy virtues. As for me, I'm very conscious of wasting time: you can never get it back." [III, 379]

Every little moment of time

231. Antonio Corso reckoned that health and long life stand out among God's gifts, because every little moment of time gives us the chance to acquire merit. We must increase our merit as much as possible. If the saints could mourn they might well feel anguish about all the good they could have done and didn't do, since the more merit you gain on earth the more fully you are able to see, enjoy and love God in heaven. [VI, 172]

The first way of living according to the Rule

232. Holy Francesco Tittelmans wanted the friars to do manual work, and earn their livelihood this way, saying this was the first and most certain way of living according to the Rule. He cited the example of Saint Paul who, though preoccupied with preaching, writing and praying, wanted to support himself through his own labours. He instanced Saint Basil, Saint Benedict and Saint Bernard, who all wanted their monks to work, and also cited Brother Giles, companion of Saint Francis, who always earned his own food. However, grown old in the friary at Perugia, he became unable to work any more, and felt

conscientious scruples about it. When our General, Saint Bonaventure, visited that house, he got some food for him. All the early fathers were like that.

For instance, Francesco Tittelmans said that when the friars aren't busy in spiritual activities, such as the Office, Masses, prayers, studies and sermons, they should work to earn at least some of the food they eat. He himself, in order to give an example of this, ordered that the friars, especially the lay-brothers, should learn to weave cloth, to make baskets, and other such things. He said that the spirit of the Order is acquired much more in observing the Rule and obeying God than in devoting oneself to times of silence under the pretext of already having that spirit. As for the friars, especially the young ones, it is impossible for them to keep themselves chaste if they do not flee idleness. [VI, 181]

The office of the lay-brothers

233. Bernardino d'Asti strongly reproved lay friars who gave themselves up to idleness and did not want to take on the work of the kitchen and other such duties. He said those friars who did not serve the Order in its necessary ministries were not worthy to live off alms, nor could they be absolved if they did not amend themselves. [III, 188]

234. For many years Gratiano da Norcia was Master of novices, and instructed his charges with admirable charity. He never wanted to learn how to lecture, or to become learned. He said, "The work of lay-brothers is not that of lecturing or becoming men of letters, but of serving the Order."

He was zealous in the observance of poverty, and full of charity, and enthusiastically took to working in the kitchen. To save time during the winter, he did his kitchen work after Matins, when the other friars went back to bed. He returned to church for the beginning of Prime, and stayed there until all the Masses were finished. He said each Hour of the Office in the church. He very rarely went back to bed after Matins, although he usually took a little nap after a meal. He tenaciously persevered at prayer, for a long time dressing in sackcloth. However as he grew old and still continued busily working away at various tasks, he put the sackcloth aside, saying that it added nothing to the afflictions he was already suffering due to bodily infirmities. He avoided all familiarity with secular people, being happy to keep to the church or to the woods. [III, 307]

I have put in some charity

235. Francesco da Iesi always had a very humble bearing. He never displayed his astuteness, except when zeal in the governance of others compelled him to. He dressed poorly and, although he loved solitude very much, didn't avoid common and lowly chores when he was called upon to do them. Once he stayed back alone in the friary when all the others went out to cut firewood.

While they were gone he got something ready for them to eat. When they came back and were at table, Father Baptist said to him, "This soup is very good. What have you put in it?" He answered, "I have put in some charity." [VI, 124]

Fathers, persevere!

236. Vincenzo da Foiano celebrated Mass almost every day and frequently went to Confession. The rest of his time was devoted to holy contemplation. He would usually sleep for three hours before Matins, and rise to join the others in prayer. He very seldom went back to bed after Matins, although he did return to his cell, since it was quieter there. He was often heard doing battle with the devil, who engaged him in intense struggles. [III, 338]

237. Domenico da Bologna subdued his delicate members through penance, sleeping on a plank, with a lump of wood for a pillow. He often slept three hours before Matins, then knelt on the plank to pray. He would weep copious tears, calling to mind the sufferings of our Lord, and at the same time experiencing bodily afflictions because of all the penance he did. That plank was more of a kneeler than a bed for him. [III, 346]

238. Bernardo d'Assisi gave himself over to the fervour, peace and great love that he felt in prayer. If the friars had not made sure he got to bed, he would have been on his knees day and night, forever beating his breast and weeping. Because of this he reached great serenity of mind and purity of heart, and was hardly ever aware of anyone but God. He maintained himself in such a state of contemplation that he was always focussed on God, whether eating, sleeping or attending to the other necessities of nature. [III, 281]

239. Most of the friars remained in the church at prayer, and didn't go back to sleep after Matins. Once, two religious came to the friary of Saint Valentine in Foligno to visit the friars there, and were given rooms for the night. After Matins, everyone retired, and the visitors assumed they'd gone back to bed. To verify this, they lit a candle and went round the cells, but they couldn't find anyone. Since there was no-one in the church either, the visitors were puzzled as to where the friars might be. So they went outside, and there came upon a number of individual oratories made by the friars out of bushes. They heard the friars inside them, whipping themselves, while some were at prayer, shedding copious tears. In order to be certain of this, the visitors stayed until morning to see what would happen. They realised that none of the friars had gone to bed after Matins, but each one had continued at prayer and in disciplining himself. Before departing in the morning, the visitors said, "Fathers, persevere! This is the true reform, one of deeds, not empty words." [IV, 24]

Let them do appropriate manual work

240. It is a difficult for men to be always caught up in God. Therefore, to avoid idleness (the root of every evil), to give good example to our neighbour and to be less of a burden to others, let the friars do appropriate manual work when not engaged in spiritual exercises. This follows the example of the saints, especially the Apostle Paul, who did manual work while preaching. It is also a response to the admonition to do manual work, given by our Father Saint Francis in the Rule, and conforms with his express will on this matter in the *Testament*. While thus occupied, however, the friars should at the same time engage their minds in spiritual reflection. For this purpose, it is ordained that when the friars are at work they should converse about God, or have a devout book read to them. [C, 65]

241. Let the friars be on their guard not to make work an end in itself or to become so preoccupied with it that they hinder, diminish or extinguish the spirit, which is the very thing that all our endeavours should foster. Manual work is a gift given by God to help us maintain the spirit of devotion, and was recognized and accepted as such by the saints. Therefore, let the friars always keep God before them, travelling the loftiest and quickest route to him, making sure that manual work is not a time of distraction from him, devoid of devotion. [C, 66]

242. Although we may live off the alms that are given to us, or equally off alms that we have begged, and all this is according to the Rule, nevertheless the most perfect way of conforming to the Rule would be to live off our labours. This notion can be found in the early Fathers, who all said in their Rules that manual work should be undertaken. And we know also that our Seraphic Father Saint Francis wrote in his *Testament*, "I worked with my hands and I want to continue working. And I want my Friars to engage in honest work" ... and so on.

Because of this, many Capuchins who were familiar with crafts such as weaving and sewing cloth, cobbling, fashioning baskets and hampers, and similar things, took up these occupations. In many friaries they set up looms, such as in the friary of Saint Nicholas in Rome, where I myself saw four or five of them, and where the friars earned almost enough to buy the food they needed. It was the same in Genova, where they wove cloth of great value, and even distilled herbs. It became such that in most houses the friars could almost make a living from their labours. [IV, 194]

243. It seemed that our Lord God concurred in all this with his grace, for each friar was recollected while at work, striving to keep his mind on God. This edified the secular people. [III, 175]

A Congregation of shopkeepers?

244. However, among the friars the movement to earn their living through work petered out. The venerable Fathers Bernardino d'Asti and Francesco da Iesi, Father Giovanni da Fano, and many other most illustrious fathers and very holy men didn't want it to go ahead. They said:

"It would be better if the whole Congregation were to live by begging. If some want to live by their labours, let them go ahead, and turn us into a Congregation of shopkeepers, not holy religious who attend to Masses, the Divine Office, the study of the Scriptures and preaching.

"This Congregation of shopkeepers would have strong links with secular organizations, and wouldn't be able to keep its ideals in sight, becoming so engrossed in work that its spirit would be totally extinguished."

God has arranged it so that everything about our way of life serves the spirit of the Order, just as our Father says in the Rule. Because of this, our Fathers put in the Constitutions that the friars should not make work their goal, but should work only insofar as it is necessary to avoid idleness, the enemy of the soul. This was the reason that our venerable Father Francesco da Iesi evaluated all the activities of the friars. Nonetheless, those early Fathers affirmed that nursing in hospitals and other such work enkindled this spirit.

I myself watched Brother Gregorio da Viterbo, a man of great perfection, seated at table. The tears that fell from his cheeks onto the tabletop outnumbered the mouthfuls of food he ate. He was full of emotion at realising that, through his labours, he had earned the bread he was eating, and that this was perfect observance of the Rule. [IV, 196, 197]

245. Whenever Benedetto da Subiaco ate food that he and other friars in the community had earned through their labours, he would frequently join his hands and raise his eyes to heaven during the meal. He was often seen to give tearful thanks, saying: "Thanks be to God! I've always wanted to live off my labours, and this wish has been fulfilled." [III, 134]

246. As the Congregation grew, friars joined it who were not very well acquainted with its spirit. The venerable Fathers, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, saw that to hold such men to the observance of the horarium while they were nursing the infirm would cause them to falter. They realised that not everyone was up to it, and therefore waived part of the horarium. Their reasoning was that these friars would not waste their time, but would intensify their efforts at holy prayer and in holy studies, and eschew and condemn every form of idleness. So those venerable Fathers said, "Whoever engages earnestly in holy prayer, the Office, studies and preaching, makes good use of his time. In

a similar way, our lay brothers use their time to advantage when they follow the horarium and carry out their duties in the Order.” [IV, 198]

Readings

247. Let some very devout reading be read to the friars, exhorting them to follow Christ crucified. [C, 2]

248. Because the flames of divine love are fed by knowledge of things divine, we order that a text from Sacred Scripture be read, explained by holy and devout doctors. [C, 4]

249. To achieve uniformity of practice, both in the choir and in our other community undertakings, let the teaching of Saint Bonaventure and the instructions of our early Fathers be read aloud. In addition, the *Little Flowers*, the *Conformities*, and other books about Saint Francis should be read, so that we can come to a better understanding of his mind. [C, 142]

250. Thus it was the Capuchins began to study with great care the declarations of the Supreme Pontiffs, the *Chronicles of the Order*, the *Legend of the Three Companions*, and the *Conformities*. In these books they discovered the way of life lived in the Order at the beginning. Indeed, for many years little else was read at table other than things about our Father Saint Francis. [IV, 171]

A judicious and learned academy

251. While the good God, along with our supporters, never failed to defend and succour us wherever there was need, the poor friars were themselves brave combatants, full of zeal for the honour of God and for their own salvation. They did whatever was appropriate and fitting to help their cause, commending themselves to God with frequent prayers and Communions, and with continuous sacrifices, and uniting themselves to him in other holy undertakings as well. They prayed continuously to the Divine Majesty to save them with his powerful arm.

They tried in many useful and nourishing ways to build themselves up, and they discovered through experience that one thing in particular was especially helpful and edifying. This was for one of them to deliver an uplifting sermon to the others when the whole community was gathered in the refectory, eating in silence. In Rome, where this practice was very much favoured in the early days, the sermon was given from a small, purpose-built pulpit. In other friaries - and there were only a few at that time - the Superior would often give a sermon in the refectory, although he was the only one that did this, and he remained seated at table. These sermons were not confined to things that needed to be done around the house, but were usually holy and fervent exhortations about the things that needed to be done for salvation. In Rome, as I said, they would be given by any friar, according to the Superior's choice. However, while the

Guardian or Vicar General would deliver his sermon still seated at table, the other friars would use the pulpit.

Not only priests but also lay brothers who had the spirit of the Order and were suited for such things performed this office. Among all the lay brothers - of whom there were many in the Congregation well known for their judgment and spirit - the most fearless and fervent speakers were Brothers Egidio d'Orvieto and Bernardino da Fossombrone. Anyway, whoever was asked to go up into the pulpit did his duty fearlessly and fervently. And these sermons were not delivered just at meal times, but even, on occasion, during the day, especially on feast days after the friars had fulfilled their duties in church. It is little wonder that this office was carried out with due gravity, fervour, sound doctrine and skill, since many had joined that poor Company already adorned with holiness of life, and some with deep learning in every discipline and branch of knowledge.

In giving sermons, they took different subjects according to their special interests. One spoke of humility, another of holy poverty, another of faith and hope in God, another of charity and another of obedience. Others preached on the imitation of Jesus, exhorting the friars to mirror their Father, who was always a true imitator of Christ, right up to his death. Others spoke about strength of soul, and others of whatever they were best at, so that anyone witnessing those proceedings and hearing the content of their talks would have said that here was not only a company of poor little brothers but also a judicious and learned academy of lettered men, who, along with their doctrine, practices and daily exercises did a great deal that was useful not only to themselves and their profession, but also to the advantage of the secular world. This was how this community of poor men appeared to others.

Those who were keen, zestful and perceptive would adopt a military style of address - such as a general might use in rallying his troops during their daily skirmishes, or when about to assault the walls of a fortress. The result was that those present heard some marvellous oratory, robust and inspiring, but adapted to the matter in hand. The speakers advanced the strongest reasons and arguments, persuading their brothers to be vigilant, armed and ready. They showed why they needed vigilance, and how they must be armed not only for defense against assault but also in order to carry through to victory and then consolidate it. To the victors go the spoils, the enemy's flags and booty - in other words, salvation for the victors and for many others, plus the paradise we formerly lost to our arch enemies, the demons of hell.

The preachers described the vileness and cowardice of those enemies, cowering in misery, their strength brought low. Oftentimes have these demons been vanquished - indeed they triumph only when joining battle with those who actually want to be conquered and overcome by them. On the other hand, it was demonstrated that the forces of the poor friars were invincible, and the

battleground on which the contest was taking place - the Church - was exactly fitted for this purpose. Their sponsor, indeed their captain general, was not only the strongest possible leader, but was also unconquerable. He was the king of heaven, lord of the earth, ruler of the abyss, just punisher of kings, bountiful and merciful rewarder of good and brave soldiers. Therefore, assured of all this, they were utterly certain that they would triumph, and share with him in a glorious victory. Indeed, their cause gained its legitimacy and holiness from being mainly for the honour of the captain, so they threw themselves into battle with great enthusiasm.

To lend weight and authority to what they said, they quoted texts from the Sacred Scriptures and cited former saints who had already fought heroically and won glorious victories. Their quotations were so apt and to the point that it seemed as though they had originally been produced just to fit in with what the friars were saying.

They presented their material with great strength of spirit, earnest conviction, and - sometimes - tears, their pious words bringing tears, also, to the eyes of those listening. Their diction and style of narration were quite pleasant and easy to listen to, so that anyone hearing them would have thought them masters of the rhetorical arts, though in fact they were not consciously using any artifice. They were as skilful as any teacher of oratory, their eloquence being equal to that of the most learned and most astute person who ever practiced that skill. And all the sermons and serious discussions they engaged in were marked by this kind of rhetoric.

But it is no wonder they were so eloquent! Each one of them was not only learned, but also had within him the spirit of the one who is the teacher of every science and all beautiful art - that is the Teacher of teachers, Christ Jesus, who has power to raise up children for Abraham from stones (Matteo 3.9). If Christ spoke in these friars, is it surprising that from their tongues and voices there should issue words that were ornate, glowing and persuasive?

Their sermons were of such benefit that everyone increased in fervour, and desired nothing but to suffer for Christ. At the height of their afflictions they gave joyful praise to God, who had called them to serve him and had made them worthy to suffer abuse and scorn for the sake of his love. [I, 392]

Sermons that penetrated heaven

252. Paolo da Chioggia was of no small value to the poor Congregation, and was trusted by everyone. Whenever anything of importance came up, they would all turn to him for help. Should anyone speak of spiritual things to him, he would break down in tears and say, "I have been a traitor to my Lord, but such is his goodness he hasn't held my monstrous ingratitude against me, but has treated me like a wounded lamb and led me back to the flock, the haven of salvation." He used to say, "I desire to die for Christ."

When the persecution of the friars was at its height, he remained steadfast, and with joyful countenance comforted everyone, saying:

“My beloved brothers, we can have no greater sign that this Congregation is the true reform, loved by God, than to see it attacked so viciously. Therefore, do not doubt that just as the primitive Church increased and bore fruit in tribulations, so our Congregation will bear fruit in these persecutions.

“The Lord God never lets the devil have his head entirely, nor does he let him tempt the servants of God as much as he might. The Lord always restrains him with the reins of his mercy, so that he cannot tempt anyone beyond his strength.

“Can’t you see that just by showing people this holy habit, God has stirred the whole world to penitence? On the one hand we are persecuted by religious, on the other we are embraced by seculars. May it be God’s will, my little ones, that we become so perfect that we merit to be persecuted by everyone!

“God is compassionate towards us, and knows that we are weak and vulnerable, like infants at the breast. Nevertheless, if we exercise ourselves in penitence and the perfect observance of the Rule, our heavenly Father will treat us like mature men, and give us the solid food of ceaseless tribulations. This is the nourishment he gave to his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he left upon the cross to suffer as much as he could endure, without respite, and bereft of all human consolation. And look at our Father Saint Francis, persecuted even by his own father and brothers!”

Since this servant of God was very well schooled in sacred theology, he often gave sermons to the others, his poor, simple and ignorant companions, sermons that penetrated heaven and inflamed everyone with the love of God. During the short time that he lived, he was an especially stable pillar for the poor Congregation. [III, 25]

With inflamed words

253. Brother Giovanni da Fano offered the priceless treasure of the word of God not only to seculars but also to the friars, in whom his fiery words rekindled the desire to serve God and to observe the Rule strictly and perfectly. When they were staying in the friary of Abbadia outside Brescia, the Divine Goodness chose to manifest the value and the virtue of his words one evening when they were at table. Giovanni started to preach to them with such spirit and effect that the friars stopped eating their bodily fare in order not to miss the spiritual nourishment that came from his lips. One of them saw our Father Saint Francis in splendour above them, bestowing his blessing. [V, 220]

So beautifully did he preach

254. The venerable Father Bernardino d'Asti on seeing that Brother Francesco Tittelmans was unusually gifted, gave him the task of preaching some sermons to the friars to motivate them all to the true observance of the Rule. From then on he frequently gave sermons to the friars about the Rule, his manner being most persuasive. So beautifully did he preach that all the venerable Fathers - some of whom were very learned - declared they had never before come across such high ideals or such profound concepts. (This made him blush.) He preached mainly in Latin, since he had difficulty with the vernacular. He was conscious of the lay-brothers who were present, and lamented that he couldn't offer them the nourishment of these beautiful thoughts on the Rule. [III, 174]

A shining, star-like object

255. God caused the appearance of a shining, star-like object above the friary at Montemalbe, outside Perugia, in the evenings after Compline, as a sign of divine approval of the sermons that Francesco da Iesi was preaching to the friars. Its appearance was such that a peasant living nearby said to one of the friars, "What's happening, Father? Each evening after the *Hail Mary* we see a most beautiful star moving up and down for quite a while over your house." From this the friars realized that the light appeared at the very time this holy man was fervently preaching to them.

Francesco explained in a most inspiring way how loving God for his own sake and despising all else - including ourselves - means that we should love everything because of God. Everything that exists belongs to him, and nothing at all belongs to us, so we should desire and seek only his glory. Since we, too, belong to him, and not to ourselves, we must want, and ask from him constantly, whatever pleases him and is for his honour, not things that are pleasurable, satisfying or useful to us.

With words like this, Francesco enkindled the enthusiasm of the friars for austerity of life, by which our every appetite is mortified, saying that the spirit of God lies hidden within an austere lifestyle. He claimed that God had made a pact with us Friars Minor to the effect that he will fill us with spiritual pleasures insofar as we deprive ourselves of bodily comforts, culinary delights, and attachment to things of this world, because of our zeal for the strict observance of the Rule. Those friars were quite deluding themselves who believed they could make life in the Order easier: all they were doing was making it more difficult. The more we give way to self indulgence, the more onerous and hellish the Order appears to be, since we lose the spirit that makes it pleasant and agreeable. Only this spirit can make life in the Order satisfying and joyful. Therefore this is the most important thing to foster, namely the spirit of the Lord, since without it to live in the Order is intolerable. [IV, 129]

He instructed them in the ways of the spiritual life

256. Brother Francesco da Iesi kept apart from the other friars as much as he could, neither speaking nor conversing with them. He restricted himself to giving them a spiritual talk each day, in which he stirred up in them the love of God and holy virtues. He instructed them in the ways of the spiritual life and contemplation, giving them excellent guidelines for this. That's why so many of them turned out enlightened and ardent in striving for perfection and the pure observance of the holy Rule. [VII, 380]

Franciscan joy

257. Brother Matteo da Bascio used to say that he was very pleased when the friars were joyful and visited each other frequently for brief spiritual conversations. He said that sadness and melancholy were major impediments to the spirit in the servants of God. So he wanted them to be joyful and to pray often, yet not to weary themselves by remaining at prayer too long. They should alternate contemplation with vocal prayer and occupy themselves in reading spiritual books and conversing about God, since too much attention to contemplation is very difficult for those who are not good at it, and becomes very tedious for them. As a result, they give it up altogether, wearied by the tedium. Therefore it seemed to him that joyfulness and practicing the holy virtues joyfully are a great help towards persevering in these virtues and staying healthy. [II, 253]

258. On the evening of *carnevale*, Bernardino d'Asti, the ex-General, was invited to share our common meal. He said, "I won't eat anything, but I want to lend you my support. So I'll sit with you at table and give you a few spiritual thoughts so that while the body is being refreshed I can create a *carnevale* for the spirit, too." When he joined us at table he spoke so profoundly about the glory of paradise that we were all surprised. When he had finished he said to us, "I also want you to enjoy a little recreation and tell some jokes." He told us the story of a German Bishop and the mayor of a country town. The Bishop said to the mayor, 'Volo comedere modicum', and the mayor, not understanding Latin well, got confused. He killed and roasted his small donkey for the Bishop to eat. The donkey's name was *Modico*.

We laughed a little at this joke, and Bernardino, with great modesty, returned to his cell. [III, 184]

Common life

259. Nothing special should be given to any individual at table, except to the sick, itinerants, or the old and very weak, according to the dictates of charity. [C, 53]

260. The Fathers expressed strong disapproval of any variation in the shape or cut of the habit. This was because some friars made the hood so short that it was reduced to a small point. [IV, 172]

261. Once, on seeing Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo quite exhausted, I said to the cook, "Make something special for this poor Father." The cook replied, "He won't eat it. He is so careful and zealous about the example he gives that he has never wanted anything special." So I said, "Trick him. Put a little meat in his soup bowl so he won't notice it. He's a exceptional and holy man, and our Congregation will lose a great deal when he dies."

The good, simple cook did as I told him. But Bernardino found the meat in the bowl and, being Vicar of the house in the absence of the Guardian, he called for the cook, who came and knelt before him in the refectory. Then he said to the him, "Son, do you really want me to become a hypocrite? I'd rather you'd put a viper into my bowl than this meat! Make sure it doesn't happen again!" And with great warmth, he seized the occasion to give a very beautiful half-hour sermon about how important it is not to show favour to individuals. He said:

"This is how divisions arise in the Order! Friars become divided and turned against each other, animosity grows, and they begin to form opposing cliques! The Order has to maintain unity in all things, and must not descend into promoting individualism. No matter how many imperfections it might have, those who want to serve God and be good friars within the Order should still be able to do that.

"It's intolerable, seeing some poor friars passed over and their needs neglected, while others who are favoured get their wants attended to. Neither this nor the murmuring it causes should be allowed to go on any longer!"

And turning to us young friars he said over and over again, "Sons, avoid individualism as you avoid damnation!" [III, 61].

262. Bernardino d'Asti was teaching a cook that he should never show partiality to anyone, and said to him, "If there are twelve friars in the family, try to choose twelve loaves that look alike and are equal, and give the best of them to the Guardian, out of respect." [VI, 24]

263. Matteo da Schio had the habit of always going back to eat with the friars during his annual preaching engagements. He said that it didn't seem like a proper meal when he ate outside the refectory. He said, "I never feel like a religious when I'm away from our houses. But when I eat the same fare that the other brothers eat, it all becomes milk and meat for me. But when I eat things that they don't eat, it's like poison." [III, 380]

Nothing special in the way of food

264. Although very old, Brother Rufino da Gallarate never wanted anything special in the way of food. Even towards the end of his life, when he was afflicted with serious health problems, he kept to this strict resolve. When he was confined to eating in his cell, he would ask what the other friars were having to eat, protesting that he didn't want anything more than them. If he found out they had given him even one snail extra, he would leave it on his plate.

He persevered in this austere holiness of life even when he was decrepit with age, always getting up for Matins and keeping prayer vigils. One friar said to him, "Old Father, surely you don't need to rise for Matins any longer?" But Rufino was concerned about how the example of the old is a significant benefit to the young, so he answered: "Son, if I get up for Matins, no-one notices me. But If I don't get up, everyone will be aware of it." [VI, 486]

The best kind of abstinence

265. Bonaventura da Montereale finally became a Capuchin, and led a very holy life, practising abstinence by not eating in the evenings. He said the best kind abstinence to practise in the Order involved eating in the morning with the others, and having the same fare as them, since eating food different from the others could upset the cooks' routine. It's better to take a meat broth soup than to concoct some Lenten soup different from the community's. He reckoned that this kind of abstinence is very helpful, since it avoids contentions and goes unnoticed. [VI, 241]

Regular Observance

266. Bonaventura da Cremona worked some miracles, but I'm not going to write about them since I haven't got any reliable information. Suffice to say that for about fifty-five years, filled with every virtue, he served the Lord in our holy Order. [III, 242]

267. Although Jerome of Florence is not known to have worked any miracles, nevertheless we can say it is a great miracle that for the twenty or so years that he lived in the Order he persevered in the austerity of our life, and nothing but good was ever seen in him. [III, 333]

268. I haven't got any verifiable information about Giacomo da Cetona's miracles, so I'm not going to write them down. It's enough that he lived for about forty five years in our holy Order, full of holiness and beyond reproach. He unwaveringly persevered like this, giving the very best example all his life, right up until his death. He went to heaven full of merit, and we can now piously believe that this blessed soul prays for us unceasingly. [III, 363]

269. Angelo da Savona wasn't markedly austere, being a man of noble countenance but very weak physically. His only miracle was his true and perfect observance of the Rule. But such was the elegance of his manner that, by public acclaim, he earned the reputation of being a holy man. [III, 131, 132]

270. Brother Felice da Cantalice was well known to everyone because he was the porter, yet - astonishingly enough - the Holy Spirit guided him in such a way that his holiness was never seen. He was reputed by all to be an ordinary man, though a good one. His holiness went unnoticed not only by the secular people but also by the friars, so well did he conceal it! Indeed, it seems that this servant of God excelled in being indistinguishable from the others, even though he was utterly spiritual and full of perfection. [III, 467]

271. By the grace of God the Order has always been holy. It keeps to a holy way of life lived in common, guided and ruled by regular observance. It follows a horarium, day and night, of the usual prayers, Masses and Divine Offices, said with devotion in calm, loud and clear voices, with attention to enunciation. It is solicitous in frequenting the holy sacraments of Confession and Communion. Any friar who, for no good reason, fails to observe all - or even some - of these things, or who shows by what he says and does that he is wayward, should be immediately corrected. [I, 268]

272. Servants of God who are pleasing to His Majesty are recognizable by the miracles they perform, and I consider the greatest miracle that a servant of God can accomplish is to persevere over a number of years in docility, deprived of his own will and subject to holy obedience. Perseverance is the crown worn by God's elect. It is not enough to begin to serve God: we must persevere until death to merit that crown. And that merit is much greater if we persevere without ever breaking the pact we have made with Jesus Christ, to observe the Rule all the days of our life. To act contrary to that pact even once is to sully our life, although perseverance to the end is still worthy of great praise. [III, 458]

273. Those who found themselves embroiled in those tribulations were so far advanced in holy contemplation and the holy virtues, that I, who knew them, would say that everyone who died in our holy Order should be canonized, even though they haven't worked any miracles. [II, 456]

This is Brother Bernardino, the great theologian!

274. The principal pursuit of the holy man, Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo, was self-mortification, by which he flourished and made great gains. Once, at the friary in Camerino, he stayed in the woods after Vespers, occupied in contemplation and his usual devotions, and didn't come to choir for Compline until the second bell rang. A lay brother met up with him after he'd left the woods and was entering the friary, and decided to test his patience. So he turned and glared at him and said bluntly, "This is Brother Bernardino, the great theologian, so negligent in God's service that he waits for the second bell

before going to praise him!" The good Father, full of true spirit, immediately got down on his knees, and with hands raised to heaven said in a clear voice, "Let Jesus Christ be praised who has made known to you my negligence! And thank you, Brother, for pointing this out to me." Then he got up quickly and went off to choir for Compline. [VI, 230]

SILENCE

Human beings naturally feel the need to communicate their ideas to others, that is, to speak. To speak with God and of God, to praise him and to bless him is the noblest function and the worthiest use of human speech. But how many unpleasant words and how many useless ones flow each day from our hearts and lips? The more we pour ourselves out, the more we lose our inner vitality.

If we were to speak a little less and a little better, we would make an effective contribution towards the betterment of society. Certainly, human interests would not be lost to us, while those of God and souls would profit. Ordinarily, those who speak more are not those who have more things to say. Nor are they the ones who say the best things.

It seemed as if no-one was there

275. I don't think I should keep quiet about that most noble virtue, holy silence, which was observed with great zeal by our first Fathers [IV, 185]. They wrote in the Constitutions that evangelical silence should be observed continuously, and that the friars should shun every idle word, speaking only to honour God. When observed well, silence is the cause of great good, but when it goes unobserved it is the cause of great evil. [IV, 35]

276. Silence is the guardian of the spirit we have received, and Saint James says that the religion of a person who does not restrain his tongue is just show. Accordingly, aware that the infallible Truth, Jesus Christ, says that we will render an account for every idle word, let us observe evangelical silence at all times, insofar as our frailty permits. Since the number of things that could be said about God is so vast, it is no minor fault for a friar, dedicated to divine worship, to speak, through his consecrated mouth, about the things of the world. [C, 44]

In regard to regular silence, let it be observed in the church, cloister and dormitory at all times, and in the refectory from the first signal at table until thanks are given. Let it always be observed in our friaries from after Compline until Prime is rung, and from Sext until after None during the period between Easter and the Exaltation of the Cross. [C.45]

277. Silence was observed at all times in the friaries, so that even though there were plenty of friars around [I, 265], it seemed as if no-one was there, except when Masses and the Office were being said. [II, 194; IV, 35]

278. They maintained silence constantly, talking only when necessary, and then in subdued voices. Each one kept to himself, some in cells, some out of doors or praying in the chapel, some elsewhere, employed in useful work. Hence it seemed that there was no-one in the house. [VII, 74]

The decorum of holy silence

279. I often heard the friars say, "Silence is the guardian of the spirit received. More is lost in one gossip session than is gained in a month of prayer. When I have been keeping the silence and then go to Confession, I find that I've nothing to confess." The Holy Spirit uttered a powerful word when he said through the mouth of Saint James: The religion of anyone who cannot restrain his tongue is a sham. Truly, one who does not possess the habit of holy silence cannot be called religious.

When they gave sermons on silence, they used to say, "Outsiders do not watch us taking the discipline, or fasting, or see our hair shirts and other such things. It is when they observe us to be poised, restrained in our words and judicious in what we say, that they think of us as good religious. But when they see us dissolute in talk, laughing frivolously and fooling around, they know that we are not much better than they are." [IV 35, 36]

280. From silence comes tranquillity of mind, and from this comes holy contemplation. But from gossip sessions come murmuring and idle words, which in turn spawn discord among the brothers, ill will, disputes and great turmoil of mind. [IV, 35].

281. Francesco da Torri received from God the special grace of constant silence, so that he rarely let a word pass his lips. He achieved such great tranquillity of mind that his thoughts were always concentrated on God. He used to say, "When I go to Confession, I rarely confess anything except idle words and murmurings. However, when I've been keeping interior silence and not talking about the behaviour of my neighbour, I have difficulty in finding anything to confess at all. We endure many hardships in the Order, but gain little from this because we don't do violence to our evil inclinations. This keeps us entangled in a myriad of imperfections, and causes the soul to grow cold in the love of God and the love our neighbour. All our striving is in vain if we don't know how to tame that venomous serpent, the tongue!" [III, 441]

282. Antonio da Monteciccardo often said, "There's nothing like vain and protracted talking for cooling one's ardour and diminishing one's spirit. Truly, he who tames his tongue is an accomplished servant of God. For to the extent that we do not master our tongue, we expose ourselves over and over again to

the danger of losing through a single word those merits we have acquired through our great efforts over many years." [III, 235]

283. Battista da Norcia would immediately stop his companion if he started talking negatively. He would say: "Let's not go into this any further. Let's talk about the love of God, and do ourselves some good, since nothing can inflame us more with the love of God than frequently talking about it. At the same time, there's nothing that diminishes the spirit more than talking about things of the world." [III, 273]

284. The brief and soft speech of the Capuchins, coupled with their quiet modesty, presented such a wonderful example to secular people that it was enough of itself make the friars admired. [IV, 36]

285. When secular people entered those friaries they did so in silence, for it seemed to them that to make a noise there would be like committing a grave sin. Had anyone spoken out loud, it would have offended the ears of those servants of God. [IV, 35]

Whenever there was discourse on God

286. Vincenzo da Foiano gained such control over his bodily senses that he ceased to take any pleasure in things of the earth. This freed his mind to wander through the heavens, and he us told of the inexplicable delights he experienced, and which became a regular part of life. Thus it was that his heart caught fire whenever there was any discourse on God, and so great was his spiritual rapture that he couldn't help being caught up into ecstasy while the talk lasted. At other times he would make soft mewling noises and utter disjointed words, and then take himself off to his cell to continue these holy manifestations. Sometimes, if a Major Superior was giving a homily or some other important person delivering a talk, he would feel constrained to remain there, out of respect, and would restrain himself for the length of two *Misereres*. After that he was forced by joy to burst into groans and cries, and to dance about. Then he would dash away. [VII, 438]

Holy conversation

287. They held to the custom of rarely talking among themselves. When they gathered together, they conversed first and foremost about the things of God or about the observance of the Rule. [IV, 39]

They either kept silence or spoke about Jesus, or about the Rule, or about Saint Francis or other saints, in order to become more inspired to imitate them. At other times some devout book was read. [I, 265]

288. It seemed to them that the first one to strike up a spiritual discussion was truly happy. There was spontaneous discussion about the customs and life of our Father Saint Francis and of the holy men of the Order, or about the truly

holy virtues. Months would go by without a useless or idle word passing the lips of those servants of God. [IV, 162]

289. Nor was there ever talk among them about things of the world. If a friar should unthinkingly introduce a worldly topic into the conversation, one of the others would immediately get on his knees and offer fraternal correction, saying, "These are idle words." At this the offender would also fall to his knees, and confess his fault.

Talk was always of the things of God and about the observance of the Rule, and when they needed to speak of these things they did so briefly, and in subdued voices. If secular persons came along, they were amazed at not hearing anyone around the friary. This was because the friars seldom came together, except for the Office and other routine exercises of the Order. When these were over, each friar returned to his own solitude. [IV, 185]

Three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys

290. They were silent at all times, conversing only about necessary things. Sometimes they came together to talk about God, encouraging one another in the observance of the Rule, especially regarding poverty, suffering, indigence and persecutions. They always spoke with lowered voices, and used self-effacing words. If an idle word was spoken by anyone, one of the others would immediately kneel down, accuse himself of being at fault, then offer fraternal correction to his errant brother. They would then say together three *Our Fathers* and three *Hail Marys* in reparation for the fault. [V, 156]

May the good Jesus be praised!

291. Antonio da Monteciccardo was in the habit of saying "May the good Jesus be praised! May the good Jesus be praised!" after every three or four words whenever he was talking with anyone. I once asked him why he did this, and he answered:

"The tongue of the Religious is consecrated to God. Because of this it is not permissible to digress too much in discussion from the praises of God, just as it is not permissible to be a long time with the mind alienated from God."

"When Saint Bonaventure exhumed the remains of Saint Antonio da Padova to re-inter them, he found the tongue ruddy and fresh, as if he were alive. This was because Anthony had always praised God with his tongue, and also given others occasion to praise him."

"From all this we can see that our Lord has given us a tongue and all our members so that with them we may praise him. There is no organ in man more precious than the heart, and it is the tongue that broadcasts the heart's thoughts and secrets. What we have in the heart we manifest by the tongue. Consequently, a person's tongue

cannot keep silent in praising Jesus, if that person carries Jesus in his heart. There is nothing more shameful than a servant of God, all his members consecrated to Christ through the holy sacraments, profaning these members through profane deeds. By way of our mouths we receive the Most Holy Sacrament; with the tongue we offer praises to God, proclaiming the Scriptures and other sacred things. This blessed member is continuously busy. It would be a grave sin if, after it has praised its creator, the tongue should start to speak of profane things. Our holy Father said that he saw in a vision that the monk who speaks now of God, now of worldly things, is like a fly that lands now on honey and now on dung. We know that our Lord has put us on notice that we shall render account to His Majesty for every idle word. [III, 235]"

You would never hear him utter an idle word

292. Regarding Angelo da Sant'Angelo in Vado, there's nothing but edifying instances to report. He was so controlled in his speech that you would never hear him utter an idle word. He conversed but little, and then about the things of God, or of the Rule. [III, 56]

293. Antonio da Sicily was graced with all the holy virtues. In particular he had this grace from God: he never let an idle word issue from his mouth. He kept away from the friars' colloquiums, and when some manual task was imposed upon him by obedience he always carried it out on his own, in order not to have to speak to anyone. [III, 145]

294. God gifted Gratiano da Norcia with the particular grace of silence. He was so moderate in speech that he never uttered an idle word, and would speak about the Rule or about spiritual matters if it was ever necessary for him to say anything at all. [III, 307]

Excessive and useless chatter

295. Antonio da Monteciccardo said: "In so far as we do not master our tongues, we are constantly exposed to a multitude of dangers that could lead us to lose, through a single word, all the merits we have acquired over many years of hard striving. I tell you, there's nothing like excessive and useless chatter for cooling ardour and diminishing the spirit. Anyone who tames his tongue merits to be called a well equipped servant of God." [VII, 515]

He was most deprecative of idle words

296. Bonaventura da Villanero, a holy old man, was assigned to the friary at Casale Monferrato. He led such an exemplary a life there that he was universally esteemed to be saintly by friars and secular people alike. He had built a hut for himself outside the friary buildings but within the vicinity. He

withdrew to it during the day in order to flee conversation and dedicate himself utterly to contemplation. He was most depreciative of idle words, and if someone went to him he used to give him some spiritual book to read, and immediately began talking spiritually and in a unique way about passages in the Rule. [VI, 218]

He spoke very little

297. Francesco da Macerata used to speak rarely and very little, and never idly. He withdrew himself, always busying himself as much as possible at prayer. When he travelled, he did little else but pray. [V, 146]

His discourse would be of spiritual matters

298. Battista da Norcia kept well away from conversing and speaking unnecessarily. When he went outdoors, he went around reciting psalms, and if it was ever necessary for him to speak, his discourse would be of spiritual matters. He used to say that nothing could inflame us more with the love of God than speaking about him frequently, while talking about things of the world diminishes the spirit. [VI, 135]

The piety of his words

299. Girolamo da Montepulciano was large of stature and fair of face. He used to wear his cowl pulled down over his eyes, and appeared to be embarrassed whenever he spoke to anyone. He was very reserved, and escaped having to talk to people by disappearing into his cell or into the church. However when he couldn't avoid having to speak, the piety of his words and the serenity of his face showed that he was deeply engaged in devout meditation. And this was, indeed, the case, for he dwelt continuously on holy thoughts, especially on the thought of death. [VI, 200]

Limiting himself to speaking about fasts

300. Pietro da Portogallo led a solitary life, even in the friary, never getting into conversations, and speaking very little. However, he sometimes joined in the friars' discussions, limiting himself to speaking about the fasts and penances of the saints. He would say, "This body is the greatest enemy I have. If I can conquer it, that will be no small accomplishment." [VI, 187]

Speech more angelic than human

301. Domenico da Bologna was notable for his patience and mildness, and was never seen perturbed. He spoke little, and always of God, and then with such a devout countenance and angelic demeanour that everyone said such speech, more angelic than human, could be found nowhere else. [VI, 212]

He leapt for joy

302. Vincenzo da Foiano never let an idle word escape his lips, and if it was necessary for him to speak, he would only say a few brief words about God. Whenever he felt the need to talk, he would start to jump up and down for joy, then, letting out a cry, he'd dash off somewhere. This was because his heart was overflowing with spiritual joy, and he couldn't control himself. Thus it was that on one occasion, when Brother Giovanni da Fano was visiting Monte Casale and talking about divine matters, Brother Vincent was so overcome with joy that he jumped up and sped away, leaping and crying out as he went. [VI, 206]

With subdued and gentle voices

303. Let the friars always strive to speak about God, with subdued and gentle voices, with modesty and charity. [C, 45]

304. They used to speak with soft and gentle voices, and this enkindled the greatest devotion [IV, 185]. There was never any talking, except in subdued voices. [II, 257]

He was hardly heard

305. And then there was Brother Alberto da Napoli, a lay brother who had been a soldier when he was in the world. When he joined the Capuchins, he was austere in both the way he lived and the way he dressed, and he added to this the observance of strict silence, which he kept rigorously. As a result, if he was ever obliged to say anything he would speak so softly that people could hardly hear what he said. Because of his exemplary life his Superiors were happy to place him in the same house as the novices. He was most charitable to the infirm. [VI, 137]

He was never seen to laugh unbecomingly

306. Bonaventura da Cremona was so careful about what he said that he hardly ever let a superfluous word fall from his lips. He never spoke at length, except about the things of God or to be of benefit to his neighbour. He was so unassuming in the way he spoke, with eyes cast down, that this servant of God outdid any bride in mild and humble comportment. His modest demeanour and his way of talking clearly showed that he had engraved Jesus Christ in his heart. Nor was he ever seen to laugh unbecomingly, although sometimes his mouth would twitch into a quiet, angelic smile. [III, 239]

He always seemed on the point of laughing

307. Giovanni Spagnuolo had a boyish face; with a sparse black beard, not very long, and black eyes. He looked so devout and happy that everyone who saw him felt uplifted. He was very austere towards himself, but so loving and kind

to everyone else that many people said he was like our Father Saint Francis. He wore a bright and cheerful look on his small angelic face, and although he seldom actually laughed, he always seemed to be on the point of doing so. He was so restrained in speech that no-one ever heard him utter an idle syllable, for he would usually reply to questions in gestures rather than words. However, if people sought his counsel, or if the topic was the spiritual life, then he would answer very quietly and humbly, and edify all concerned.

This servant of God was so immersed in holy contemplation that he rarely talked to anyone. However when it was necessary to speak for the benefit of his neighbour, he focussed his thoughts and became so caught up in what he was saying about God that he seemed like an angel on earth. So appropriate and judicious was his counsel that all agreed his words came from a good mind powerfully illuminated by God. The reason was his abiding closeness, in holy contemplation, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who deigned to reveal his goodness to his servant. [III, 294, 296]

He had a very genial countenance

308. Giacomo da Cetona conversed little with anyone, and when he did it was with such kindness and gentleness that he seemed like an angel on earth. He had a very genial countenance, and almost always spoke about the things of God. When he felt a little inspired, he would make a bow and then, with a smile on his lips, hasten off to the church or to the forest. [III, 356]

His words were tender

309. Francesco da Novara had an abundance of virtues, especially that of controlling the tongue. He was very well practised in holy silence, even to the point that his disciples didn't have to vocalise questions such as, "What are you doing?" So infrequent and subdued was his speech that he showed he truly carried Jesus Christ engraved in his heart. His words were tender, inspiring and kindly, and greatly pleased everyone, so that people had a great desire to hear him speaking about the things of God. Francesco's fame spread widely, and anyone who found himself troubled went to hear what he had to say, and would leave comforted. [III, 367]

It seem that a flame come from his mouth

310. Giovanni Spagnuolo was measured and benign in conversation, and so devout in appearance that people said he closely resembled Saint Francis. When people needed to learn from him what the will of God was in their particular situations, he took time to pray to God about it for some days, and then would answer them - but if it was necessary he would give an answer straight away. When he spoke, it seemed that a flame of fire came from his mouth, which gave everyone great consolation. [VI, 142]

He'd make a little bow

311. Domenico da Bologna spoke little and very seldom, and when talking about the things of God he spoke softly, in a low, excited voice and few words. Then, without drawing attention to himself, he'd make a little bow and get up to go. It was as if others of greater importance were waiting for him, and he had other more pressing matters to attend to. For him this was always to be at holy contemplation in front of the Blessed Sacrament, or in his cell or in the forest. [III, 346]

His amiable conversation

312. Bonaventura da Montereale spoke little, and that little was about God. A happy and delighted face, creased with a little smile, was the extent of his laughter. He seemed quite angelic, with his amiable conversation and pleasant appearance. [VI, 238]

They took these matters very seriously

313. If anyone breaks the silence, let him say five *Our Fathers* and five *Hail Marys* in the refectory with his arms extended. [C, 45]

314. They always confessed their fault in the refectory if they walked hurriedly, slammed doors, or made other loud noises while in the dormitory. They took these matters very seriously. [IV, 36]

315. If a friar chanced to say something funny, his companion would immediately kneel down and say, "My brother, you have said an idle word." On hearing this, the friar himself would also kneel down, kiss the ground, and admit his fault. Together they would say three *Our Fathers* and three *Hail Marys*, so that God would pardon them and give them grace not to fall again. This was a great help in removing the bad habit of idle speech. [IV, 162]

316. These matters might appear frivolous, yet their importance can't be adequately expressed. Through these rules they freed themselves from all murmuring, useless chatter and idle words. How much these things can sully the conscience each one can see for himself. In the same way, everyone knows that unnecessary recreation and vain talk cause great harm. Like icy water, they extinguish what there is of the fire of charity. When devotion and fervour of spirit are lost, the hapless Religious will find himself in great danger of falling into every sort of vice, from which the support of the spirit would constantly keep him safe. [IV, 40, 185]

Up, servants of God

317. Bartolomeo da Spello was a man of great silence, especially at the appointed times. While he was Guardian of the house in Foligno, Brother

Ludovico da Fossombrone sent Brother Agostino da Bassano as his Commissary General on visitation. Because the poor fellows didn't have a bell to wake the friars for Matins, Bartholomew cried out in a loud voice "Up, servants of God! Get up to praise the Lord!" In the morning, when the Commissary was presiding at the chapter of faults, he had Bartholomew take the discipline. He rebuked him severely for having broken the silence. The servant of God took it so joyfully. It was as if he was at a wedding feast. [III, 260]

KNIGHTS OF LADY POVERTY

Franciscan poverty is not simply the lack or insufficiency of useful or necessary things. Nor is it solely the renunciation of the good things of this earth and the desire to have them.

Poverty consists primarily in the stripping away of self - the total denial of oneself and all that is or might be an obstacle to the soul's union with God in contemplation. Such a renunciation and stripping away is not brought about simply by the desire to be freed from material concerns and from slavery to earthly riches. Rather, it is based on a love of Christ that wants to follow and imitate the thing that is most significant in his life: the cross, which he embraced while he lived, and to which he was nailed when he died.

Poverty thus understood can be considered in some ways as a synthesis of Franciscanism, just as the cross is a synthesis of Christianity. It has universal value. Under this aspect, it comprehends and embraces all the moral virtues, in particular humility and obedience.

Saint Francis' love of poverty, and the primary importance that he gave to it in his spirituality and his work of reform, will seem an exaggeration only to those who don't understand its profound meaning. The Capuchin Friars, heirs to the spirit of our Seraphic Father, swore unconditional fidelity to Lady Poverty. They served her chivalrously, enthusiastically, and with love.

These knights of Lady Poverty did not follow her thoughtlessly, with their eyes closed. They knew exactly what this austere expression implied, and their fervour and fidelity derived precisely from their complete understanding of it. If someone should call the kind of life lived by the first generation of Capuchins extreme or exaggerated - in truth, it reached heroic proportions - he would show himself ignorant of the fact that the touchstone of love is love given unstintingly. Such a person may, by reading and meditating on the following texts, come to understand to some degree the generosity with which those friars served Lady Poverty, and understand also the enthusiastic praises they lavished upon her, the universally acknowledged keystone of the Franciscan edifice.

The Capuchin Friars, as authentic sons of the Poverello, detested everything contrary to poverty, but, above all, money - the "sacrament of evil", as one noted biographer of Saint Francis aptly called it. The habit, the tunic and cloak, the cord and drawers, the Rule and a breviary, the discipline and a handkerchief, the rosary and, for the old, a cane for the journey: these were all the portable riches of the true Friar Minor Capuchin. To guard himself more surely against the danger of being unfaithful to his Lady Poverty, he shared in common with the other friars even the few things necessary for life, and would not dare use them without first obtaining permission.

In order to have a complete vision of the ideal of poverty chivalrously embraced by the Capuchin Friars, the reader should recall the description of the poor dwellings in which they lived, and consider carefully their paucity of food and all their other privations. Then perhaps he will be able to work out the rationale for what others have called a "desperate way of life"

The advantages and benefits of Lady Poverty

318.318 Above all they were awake and alert to the observance of that most holy poverty they had promised to God. They endeavoured always to witness to the bright splendour of poverty, wanting to be poor in all things, for they knew that poverty was the constant companion of Jesus Christ on earth, and that he never abandoned it.

His birth demonstrates this, the way he lived clearly shows it, and the way he died manifests it utterly and completely. In his desire to reveal this poverty, he indicated clearly in his utterances what it was like, speaking of the birds of heaven having nests and the animals of the earth dens and caves, while the Son of Man - who was at the same time truly the Son of God - had nowhere even to rest his head. He was born in a crib, which was the dwelling place of another. His palace was a little house allotted to Joseph and his blessed Mother (which is now in Loreto, called the Holy House). Having made disciples, he went about preaching, himself and his blessed apostolic band living on the alms they received. His deathbed was a cross, and his burial place was someone else's tomb. Thus, from the day that he was born until the hour that he gave himself up to death - in order to vanquish death, hell and sin - he was always extremely poor.

You can see from what I've said, that poverty was always the companion of our most beloved Saviour. And he left it as a heritage to our Seraphic Father, to be, as it were, his joyous bride. So Francis gladly took her to himself and was always her most ardent lover, begetting through her many sons for Christ. These, his legitimate offspring, have all the affection and reverence for her that good sons should bear towards their dear mother.

Therefore, if anyone wishes to show himself a true son of Lady Poverty and Saint Francis, let him admire her, long for her, love her, embrace her and always remain in her presence. And this, not only because she is his mother, but also

because of the fruits she brings forth in his life, fruits that she offers to all who esteem her. These fruits are so abundant that the human tongue could never describe them all.

For Lady Poverty is carefree, fearing nothing under the heavens. She scorns fortune - if indeed 'fortune' is the right word for it. Unconquerable, she spurns all the demons of hell, and makes a mockery of the world and its vanities, holding in contempt its riches and its pomp. She laughs at crazy people who want their fill of these things, which in the end are nothing but mist and shadow. She chortles over their antics, for they are like people who think that if they get a large enough net they can capture even the wind for themselves.

Lady Poverty is always at peace, for she doesn't have to worry about guarding her possessions against thieves or courts of law. She possesses nothing, and yet is richer than Midas, Crassus or Cressus ever were. She lives in security, because her treasure is in heaven. She dwells here on earth without fear or threat, because her palace is in heaven, her company is with the angels, and she rejoices to stand always before God.

These, then, are the advantages and benefits of Lady Poverty, which she shares with those sons of hers that are content to abide with her. [I, 367]

The apple of their eye

319. They were most fervent and utterly contented in the observance of the Rule as they had promised. They especially esteemed their most beloved mother, Poverty, to whom they were completely faithful, and who was ever the apple of their eye. [I, 374]

Most high poverty

320. Matteo da Bascio used to say:

"It was the intention of our Father Saint Francis that his friars should be completely detached from the world, living in perfect poverty. And he called this poverty 'most high' - believing it to be different from all other kinds of poverty in the world. Therefore, my sons, you can truly be called legitimate sons of our Father Saint Francis, for you live in great poverty in these little friaries, with no attachment to the things of this world. Such attachments are heavy weights that keep the soul earthbound and unable to fly to its creator. Clearly, our Father Saint Francis was enlightened by God to realise that it is not possible to apply oneself totally to the exercise of perfect contemplation without a true foundation in poverty. Do you not see, beloved sons, that although our Lord Jesus Christ had every one of the virtues *par excellence*, nevertheless humility and poverty were more evident in His Majesty than any of the others?" [II, 251]

Evangelical poverty consists in being detached

321. On the other hand, let each friar realise that evangelical poverty consists in being detached from everything on this earth, and in using all things sparingly, as if forced to do so out of necessity and for the sake of God's glory (for we must recognise that he is the source of all things). [C, 67]

The venerable Father, Brother Francesco of Iesi, said:

"True poverty consists in being attached to nothing on this earth, loving only the Divine Majesty, and doing his will perfectly. Hence our venerable Fathers said that poverty resides much more in the will than in the way we use things. They claimed that it would be futile in God's eyes to be poor in the use of earthly goods but affluent in the use of one's own will. They said, by way of example, that should a friar die and three cents be found after his death stitched into his habit, they would judge that friar to have died owning assets, and would treat him like the damned, depriving him of ecclesiastical burial. Now, if things are such that a friar who dies owning three cents could be sent to hell - guilty of a very minor breach of material poverty (which prohibits the possession of earthly goods) - how much more surely can it be said that the friar will die damned who, without contrition or Confession, departs this life still holding on to his own will - the richest asset in the world!"

"It's like a prisoner or slave, who gives anything and everything - what's his and what isn't his - to obtain freedom. We've voluntarily obliged ourselves, under vow, to be poor in the use of our own wills. By profession we have deprived ourselves totally of the power to make decisions, to say 'yea' or 'nay'. We have stripped ourselves of this for the love of God, and committed ourselves to do what someone else commands us to do. This is the precious gem that we have given to the Lord God, and to him it is incomparably more pleasing than all the riches of the world. It is no small thing, the offering of one's own will to the Lord. Indeed, it is an offering that is whole and complete, and nothing else is pleasing to him if this is lacking.

"This is that true poverty of spirit that so inspired our first Fathers, freeing them from all earthly love, from ambition, from the desire to be reputed holy and from all bodily comforts. All these things severely hinder the spirit, and often extinguish it completely." [IV, 12]

322. Exterior poverty, to which the Rule and our profession bind us, concerns three things: buildings, clothing and food. Nothing in the Order is more difficult to follow than this precept, which allows only the necessary use of simple things for the sustenance of life. Yet, if exterior poverty is so important

that anyone who doesn't observe it can't retain the spirit, how much more important must spiritual poverty be, since it requires absolute detachment from all these things of the earth! I tell you, a man can abstain from food as much as he wants, give himself to prayer, go regularly to the Sacraments, and go off into the desert: yet, if he has as little as one cent's worth of self-love or attachment to earthly things, he will never receive the true spirit.

True spiritual poverty consists in loving nothing but God. Our Seraphic Father called this 'high knowledge'. To spell it out: anyone who has an affection for his parents or friends, for homeland, Provinces or friaries, for the little things he uses - such as books and other things - cannot love God perfectly. [III, 77].

323. I haven't got the eloquence to describe the great zeal that I saw in those saints of God concerning this spiritual poverty. They said it was the foundation of perfection. [IV, 183].

324. Thus it is that no-one should be astonished at those true servants of God or consider them to be extremists, since their desire to do penance was so great that they did all they could to avoid whatever appeased the senses. They were content to cater only for the most essential needs of nature, experiencing such an abundance of spiritual delights that they cared little about things that delight the body. Their fear of losing the wonderful gift of contemplation was so great that they fled every bodily comfort opposed to it. [IV, 184].

The true foundation

325. It is universal experience that as soon as a friar sloughs off poverty he falls into every other enormous vice. Therefore, let the friars strive, after the example of the Saviour of the world and his beloved Mother, to be poor in the things of this world, so that they might be rich in divine grace, the holy virtues, and heavenly treasures. [C, 59]

Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, our venerable Fathers knew that the true foundation of the Order is nothing other than the observance of holy poverty, as seen in the life of our Father Saint Francis. It was so rooted in Saint Francis' heart that in the Rule he takes away from us all power of ownership, and even forbids us to make use of anything superfluous or unbecoming to our state. He said this again and again in the Rule, and it can be found recorded in the discourses he had with his friars, in which he spoke with such warmth that it seemed the thing he was most zealous about was most high poverty [IV, 14]. His concern was that poverty - our most high Queen, Mother and beloved Bride - must be the Order's abiding and immovable foundation if we are to be pleasing to God. [I, 170]

326. The other basic was that, first and foremost, the friars should ground themselves in holy poverty, recognising it as the principle and most reliable

foundation of all regular observance. When it is removed, every spiritual edifice collapses. [IV, 6]

327. This Congregation of Capuchins will last, so long as it stands on that very beautiful foundation - most holy poverty. [III, 226]

328. Francesco Tittelmans often preached to the friars by means of discussion, and so wonderfully did he explain the Rule that all the venerable Fathers, even the most learned, affirmed that they had never heard sentiments or concepts loftier than his. He especially honoured the precept of poverty, using the phrase *altissima paupertas* and calling it the foundation of the Order and of every virtue. It was, he said, a surgeon's knife, excising from the servants of God every impediment that might hinder or retard them from reaching the goal of religious life, which is holy contemplation. This poverty was brought into the world not by man but by Jesus Christ, Son of God, and left as an inheritance to his bride, the Church. [III, 173]

No provisions of any kind should be laid up

329. Christians should know that, according to the Gospel, their heavenly Father is especially concerned for them, and is anxious to guide them and look after them - and is well able to do this. The poor friars of Saint Francis should be even more aware of this, for they have undertaken to follow Christ, the great Emperor and unblemished mirror of perfection, in the way of most high poverty.

So, we shouldn't be like non-believers, who are over-anxious about getting themselves a sufficiency of worldly goods. They have no trust in divine providence, which, with a generous open hand, supplies the needs of even the brute animals. We, however, as children of the Eternal Father, must not worry about the things of the body, but depend on his divine generosity and abandon ourselves to his infinite goodness. Therefore let it be commanded that in our friaries no provisions of any kind may be laid up for more than for two or three days at a time, or at most for one week - if times and places make this necessary. This applies especially to basic food supplies, and in particular to food that can be begged each day. Fruit may not be stored, except for a short time according to the judgement of the Provincial. [C, 81]

330. In order to obviate superfluous provisions, let it be ordered that in our friaries there be neither casks nor barrels, but only some poor gourds and flasks. Firewood may be stored for two or three months, especially for the winter. [C, 82]

There is nothing more contrary to our Rule

331. Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo used to exhort the friars, with great fervour and to considerable effect, to commit themselves completely to God. He

said that nothing honours God as much as this, and that it was in order to show the world his providence that he sent our Father Saint Francis and his poor Order. For Saint Francis was eager to make sure his friars were not concerned about or entangled with the things of this world, and did not store up provisions, but rather committed themselves to God's governance in all things, just as Christ taught his Apostles. Thus it is that nothing is more contrary to our Rule than harbouring provisions, since this weakens our trust in God and results in our being abandoned by the very one that has made himself provider for the Friars Minor. Truly, anyone who lays up provisions for himself shows that he does not trust God, and thus deserves to be abandoned by him. [VI, 231]

You have great faith

332. Some months before the great famine of 1570 was being felt everywhere, the guardian of the Napoli friary went to visit the Cremonese Papal Nuncio. The Nuncio told him that he was preparing for a massive famine and that it would have been good had the friars provided grain for themselves. When the guardian said that they never laid up grain and begged only for bread, the Nuncio suggested they should make biscuits. To this the guardian replied that they had never done this, and that he wasn't fearful of the future. On the contrary, he was quite sure that the friars would want for nothing, even though others might be short of food. The Nuncio said, "You have great faith!" To which the guardian replied, "We are confident because Christ and Saint Francis promised this to us."

Thus it was that during that cruel famine - so terrible that people were dying of starvation in the very streets of Napoli - the Capuchins lacked nothing. Bread and other necessary food was always there for them, even though there were a good fifty friars in the community. [V, 328]

They were extreme rather than moderate

333. Getting back to our first Fathers: they put all their hope in the Lord God, in his providence and in the competence of Holy Church, and with a firm resolve to observe everything they had promised to God. Above all, they established themselves in most high poverty, and were zealous about even its smallest details - to the point of being extreme rather than moderate in their observance of it. [II, 290]

They didn't want to store anything

334. They were extremely careful about the things they used from day to day, and didn't want to store more than a week's supply of food at any one time. When the Vicars made their visitations, they made the friars give away all surplus stores of apples, vegetables, onions, nuts and other fruit, and would reprimand the Guardians harshly. So strict was the friars' way of life in true

observance of evangelical poverty that at visitations there was little to correct other than their having more than enough of things such as these. The friars thought that to have a surplus of supplies constituted a major transgression of poverty, and used to say, "We are blessed if our Congregation continues in its strong resolve not to offend against the Rule in the little things. For if these things are overlooked, even the precepts of the Rule will be overturned." In their judgement, to have more than a quarter of a bushel of nuts or fruit in a friary would be to transgress the constraints of poverty. [IV, 181]

335. It was wonderful that they should all be united in the same powerful God-given desire for the perfect observance of poverty. They had it imprinted on their hearts that they should use things only out of necessity, to the point where they would give away the pots. They didn't want to store anything at all. [II, 248]

336. Eusebio d'Ancona was most zealous over the observance of the Rule, and very enthusiastic about holy poverty. Consequently, when he went on visitation he would not tolerate any surplus goods in the friaries, even the most trivial things that the friars used. Nor did he want any kind of fruit from the garden to be kept in storage, unless it was needed for its seeds. He wanted the onions and garlic left in the ground when they matured so that they could sprout again. He said that storing anything for any length of time was against the purity of the Rule. [III, 123]

A mouthful of bread and a glass of wine

337. When Eusebio d'Ancona was Vicar of the Province of the Marches, he once had to journey by boat, and tucked himself away in a corner under the stern. Some of the passengers started to criticise religious orders. When they had complained about all of them, one said, "Now lets complain about this new Order that has just started." At this, someone else said, "How can you have anything against them? The poor fellows go back to their friaries in the evenings to find neither bread nor wine there, and they are patient."

And, wouldn't you know, when the Provincial, Brother Eusebius, arrived at his destination that same evening, he found that the friars really hadn't got even a mouthful of bread or a glass of wine between them, and they couldn't now go out to beg for anything because it was already dark. Knowing their situation, he said secretly to himself, "Be patient, Brother Eusebius. Exercise the patience they spoke about on the boat." By good fortune the friars found a handful of flour in the house, with which they made two or three scones. And there was a small cup of Mass wine, enough for one. This was the fare on which they dined that evening.

Eusebius used to tell this story with a wry smile, reflecting how the Divine Will had been clearly revealed to him on the boat by what the people had said, and how he consequently had been well prepared to exercise patience. [VI, 220]

The friars are not allowed to have anything superfluous

338. Battista da Norcia was tall, of striking physique and angelic countenance, and although everybody admired his good looks, he was an unassuming person. He held the position of Master of novices almost continuously in the devout friary at Montemalbe, near the city of Perugia. While he was Guardian, he opposed having two things where one would suffice, no matter how trivial the things in question might be. Once when I was there he created a tremendous fuss over the acquisition of some small plates. You see, the friars had nothing but bowls to eat from, which they used for both their soup and their fresh salad during the fasting seasons. The holy man made a great to-do about having plates as well, saying, "If the bowls are enough for our needs, then these plates are superfluous. And we friars are not allowed to have anything superfluous." [III, 268, 271]

339. Not only did this small, newly formed Congregation as a whole take care not to have a surplus of anything, but each individual friar was on the watch, too. Consequently they laid it down that in their friaries they would have only things that couldn't be done without, and that those things would, by their ordinariness, roughness and simplicity, clearly witness to poverty. [I, 249]

340. Those Fathers told me that when the little Chapter gathered in the hut at Albacina, they had nothing for their meals but some fruit, a little bread and some wine in an old chipped jug. They found a glass in the hut with its stem broken off, and took turns in drinking from it, placing it upside down when they'd finished. These were the lavish banquets and grand facilities that the community used to provide at Chapter time! Those servants of God rejoiced so much in their poverty that they went away with their spirits far more nourished than their bodies would have been had they had sumptuous meals. [II, 290]

What does this barrel mean?

341. Brother Bernardo d'Offida had a keen intellect, coupled with great prudence, and consequently was present at almost every General Chapter, and made a notable contribution to Definitory meetings, too. He was much esteemed by the Fathers for his ingenuousness, and was most zealous about holy poverty. Father Eusebio d'Ancona told me that once, during the General Chapter in Rome, the Father Guardian of the friary at Camerino got in a small cask of wine to make provision for the many friars who were passing through. When Brother Bernardo saw this extraordinary commodity, he went off sighing and weeping to the Blessed Sacrament, muttering, "Lord, help us! Nothing will do but we must provide ourselves with barrels of wine now!"

Then he decided to make a fraternal correction of the Father Guardian. He knelt down in front of him and said, "Oh Father Guardian, what does this barrel

mean? It seems to me that we've gone back to where we were before. I'd like to stay in this friary, but if this is the way things are going I'll quit the Province."

The Guardian answered him, "I have done it for the Fathers who are passing through. It won't happen again. Forgive me, Brother Bernardo. And thank you for your fraternal correction."

When Brother Bernardo heard this very humble reply, he understood completely and confessed his own fault to the Father Guardian. [III, 50]

342. Matteo da Cascia was so ardent about poverty that I don't think anyone among the Capuchins in the Province of Saint Francis excelled him. So great was his zeal that he couldn't tolerate anything being stored away, and when the friars accumulated garlic, onions, apples, nuts and the like, he wouldn't rest until the Father Vicar had them disposed of. He always wanted to live in the poorest friaries. [III, 155]

Alms - the blood of Christ

343. Brother Rufino da Gallarate said to the friars:

"Brothers, we have to render an account to the Lord God even for the smallest things we have, because they are all alms - the blood of Christ. Haven't you heard what happened at Saint Mary of the Angels in the Province of Saint Francis? The sacristan there always used to carry lots of tapers up his sleeve. At night he'd take one out and light it, and if he came across other friars he'd strike up a conversation with them. When the first taper went out, he'd light another, and so on and so on, and in this way he'd work his way through a great number of them. He carried on like this over a period of years. Finally when he was approaching death, the devil brought him all the tapers he'd used up - so many that they filled up almost half the cell, which was quite a large one. The devil stood over him and said, 'You're damned! You've acted against holy poverty!' The friar was so shaken by this that, on coming to himself, he believed he was utterly lost.

"However, it pleased the Lord God that the sacristan should regain his health and recover from his illness. He went to Confession, shedding copious tears, and changed his life from then on. He said to the others, 'Brothers, take warning from what's happened to me! I thought that using up a taper was something of no consequence, but I didn't realize that over the years the number I'd use up would reach such huge proportions!'

"That's how it is with us," said Rufino, the servant of God. "Today we do one little thing wrong, tomorrow another. Today we take a little bit extra at table, tomorrow we do the same again. Soon all these little bits add up to a large amount. It is not licit for us as poor

ones to take more than we need to sustain our bodies. Oh, how many extra portions of food we gulp down our throats, portions that we take from lowly, poor people, food that would be enough to nourish many of them! Our Father Saint Francis was so careful even over water, saying: 'I do not have to render to God an account for the water that flows down the river but, but I do for the water that I drink.' There can be no poverty where there is abundance, and we're committed to observe poverty." [III, 458]

The work of poor people - the blood of Christ

344. Bonaventura da Montereale was most zealous about poverty, and once, when he found off-cuts of wool and linen about the friary, he gathered them up. He said that they were the work of poor people - the blood of Christ - and he would have to account for them, since they could be put to some use. He said that no offence by a Friar Minor against holy poverty was so small that God would overlook it. Consequently, even little things, minor faults, must not be underestimated. Indeed, my own mother taught me the same when I was little, for one Sunday she caught me making a little walking stick, and rebuked me, saying that people go to purgatory for the little things like that. Taking my hand, she put a small burning coal on the palm and made me grasp it. "There," she said, "now see if you can bear the fire of purgatory!" In this way she taught me not to make light of such matters, however tiny and trivial they may seem. Thus it is that we must shun every defect, even the smallest. [VI, 242]

Let them not carry flasks for the journey

345. Because true friars with living faith must depend on their kind and most beneficent heavenly Father, let it be ordered that they may not carry flasks, or meat, or eggs, or fine and precious foods for the journey, leaving all care of themselves to God, who feeds not only the animals but even people who habitually offend him. [C, 48]

He set off along the road, disgruntled

346. In his journeys, Francesco da Iesi neither carried nor wanted his companion to carry anything to eat, except for bread if they had to go where there they couldn't get any. The following incident shows his feelings towards poverty. His companion cooked three thrushes for him, having compassion on his old age, and his having to walk. When the time came to eat, the good old man sat on the ground, and, expecting bread and water, said, "Now we'll eat like Friars Minor!" However, when his companion showed him the thrushes, Francesco was extremely upset - for he'd been cheated out of his desire, deprived of the treasure of holy poverty! Quite vexed, he ate only two

mouthfuls of bread and wouldn't touch the thrushes. He got up and set off along the road, disgruntled. [VI, 126]

What will Brother Bernardo eat?

347. Bernardo d'Assisi didn't want to carry anything with him when he travelled, because he was enthusiastic to observe the Rule to the letter- his main goal in life. Once when he was in the friary at Montemalbe he had to go to an ordination with other clerics. Since it was a time of fasting and they were leaving quite early in the morning, each of them took some bread to eat for their meal on the journey. Turning to Brother Bernardo they said to him, "Bring some, too. We won't give you any of ours."

Brother Bernardo replied, "The Gospel says not to. In fact, our Lord says to his Apostles, 'Take nothing for the journey' (Luke 9.3), and this is what we've promised to do."

Laughing at his response, his companions said to him, "We'll see what happens at meal times! The Lord tells us that we should not tempt him. If we can provide for ourselves humanly we must not expect miracles. If you won't take anything, that's your problem."

Brother Bernardo answered, "Would the Lord let me go in want for bread? I'd like to see that happen!" And when he left he didn't take anything with him.

Now, while they were on the journey they felt hungry, and stopped for a meal. They said to one another, "What will Brother Bernardo eat?" He said, "You'll find out what Brother Bernardo will eat." Looking around he saw a small roadside cottage, seemingly uninhabited. He went and knocked on the door, and a man came out and gave him four loaves. Bernardo rejoined his companions, and quickly sat down to eat some of the bread the Lord God had so mercifully provided for him. They all agreed that no better bread was to be found in the whole of Perugia, and reckoned that what had happened was a miracle.

The Lord did not break the trust of his servant who served him with such simplicity. [III, 282]

I'm feeling faint!

348. Brother Bernardino d'Asti was very zealous about the observance of holy poverty. Trusting in divine providence, he never wanted his companion, Brother Angelo, to take anything on their journeys. However on long journeys he would let him take a little bread when they went through areas where there weren't any houses.

Brother Angelo told me that when they were near Monferrato in Lombardy one Friday, the time came to eat, and the holy old man could not go further.

Turning to his companion, Angelo, he said, "I'm feeling faint! I need a meal. But how can we eat, since we have no wine?" Angelo replied, "It's all due to you! You wouldn't let me bring any along!" When the holy old man realised that Angelo was worried out of concern for him, he said, "Don't worry. My Lord is powerful in providing for us." He walked on with great effort, Brother Angelo encouraging him to keep going.

They were approaching a hill when Brother Angelo saw a handsome young man walking down towards them, carrying a flask in his hand and four white loaves wrapped in a tablecloth in his arms. The young man came up and said to him, "Take this, Father. The Lord sends it to you." Brother Angelo took the bread and unwrapped the tablecloth to give it back, and the young man promptly vanished before his eyes. Astonished at this, the holy man realised that, without a doubt, it wasn't a temporal lord but the Lord who governs all things who'd sent them this food by means of an angel. As they gladly ate the bread and drank the wine they became aware through another sign that it was the Lord who had provided it. For the meal gave them great physical satisfaction, while at the same time they became aglow with the love of God and inflamed with the desire for holy poverty. They were inspired to entrust themselves to Divine Providence, by which God so carefully provides for the needs of his servants.

From that time on, Brother Bernardino was even more determined that his companion should carry nothing. He put this into the Constitutions, and strongly reprimanded friars who filled their pockets when they went on journeys. He said it is not the way for Friars Minor to behave, for they had sworn a solemn vow to put their trust in Divine Providence.

When the two later arrived at some dwellings, they gave the flask and the tablecloth to the poor for the love of God. [III, 189]

Let's see who's got the most!

349. When Brother Girolamo da Montefiore was travelling around, if his companion got some bread for him he would give it away should they meet poor people along the road, even though he and his companion might then have to go short themselves. When he was General he forbade his companions to carry with them anything other than bread and wine, fruit, onions and the like. With great reluctance he permitted them to take a little cheese, too. This is why he would often go through their pockets and bags to see if they had any fancy foods there, saying to them, "We have to be an example to others."

If it was necessary for him to suffer because of poverty, he was very happy to do so. For instance, once, in the state of Urbino, he and his companion needed food, and went begging round an impoverished hamlet. They got nothing but a few small rolls of bread. When they stopped to eat, he said to his companion with great joy, "Now we are doing what our Father Saint Francis did! Let's see

who's got the most!" And the two of them took out the rolls they'd been given and ate them happily. His companion later said that he'd never seen Brother Jerome as joyful and as light-hearted as he was on that occasion. [VI, 350]

Our procurator and advocate

350. Our Father Saint Francis realised that, according to apostolic teaching, the desire for money is the root of all evil, and he wanted to eradicate this completely from the hearts of his sons. In the Rule he commanded the friars not to receive coin or money for any reason whatsoever, either directly or through an intermediary. We want to carry out entirely and fully this godly intention of our Father, inspired in him by the Holy Spirit. So, we order the friars not to have an kind of 'spiritual friend' (*sindaco*), procurator or any person on earth, no matter what he is called, who may keep or receive coin or money for the friars themselves. Nor must the friars have someone to whom, because of his respect for them and their good name, they can make application, request or petition for money. Rather, let our procurator and advocate be Jesus Christ, our God, and let his most fair Mother be our supporter and patroness, and let all the angels and saints be our spiritual friends. [C, 57]

Esteem coins and money no more than dust

351. Our Seraphic Father used to say that his true friars should esteem coins and money no more than dust, and should hold them in fear as venomous snakes. Our holy and zealous Father foresaw in spirit that many friars, abandoning this Gospel pearl, would lapse into receiving bequests, testimonies and surplus alms. He mourned their treachery, saying that any friar who esteemed money more than mud was near to damnation. [C, 58]

The friar took a long pole

352. The friars did not want to have recourse to spiritual friends to buy necessary things, even for the sick, when they could get these things by begging. Their zeal against using money was so great that they would clam up at the first mention of it.

For example, there was a certain zealous friar, a member of the fraternity living in the house at the Carcerelle in Assisi, who used to foster his devotion by going to pray in a particular oratory in the forest there. A very devout tertiary called John-Mary also frequented this oratory. Well, one day (no-one knows the precise details) the servant of God came across a coin there, and took to his heels at the sight of it. When he got back to the friary he came upon John-Mary, who asked him where he'd just come from. Almost out of control, he replied: "From your oratory! Of all the things to do! You left some money there! Why did you have to count money in our place? Taking money there to count it has spoilt the place completely! I used to go to that oratory because it did me good,

but I won't go there any more now! What you've done is sinful!" When John-Mary pleaded to be shown the money, the friar took a long pole and used it to point it out, as if it were a dangerous snake. From then on he lost all interest in that oratory.

And again, if devout secular folk were to throw a few coins onto the altar, the friars would sweep them up like dirt, along with the rest of the rubbish, and not give them a second thought. This was because the Superiors often gave sermons about our Seraphic Father's strong insistence that the friars should not get involved with money. Also, experience showed that nothing had damaged the Order so much as the desire of the lax friars for money. Because of this, they hated even to hear it mentioned. [IV, 182]

As far as Heaven is above the Abyss

353. As regards daily living, the Congregation was as constant in the beginning as it is now. The poor friars accepted only simple alms, and didn't rely either directly or indirectly on coin or money for their daily needs. They used money only as permitted by the Rule - that is, for clothing and for the care of infirm friars, and for other similar necessities that couldn't be met through begging. As regards their use of money, the friars of today are, by the grace of God, and without exception, just as zealous as those first friars were. And no hint of Poor boxes, collection chests, begging bowls or anything else that might act as a repository for coins or monetary alms has ever been found in our churches or houses, right up to the present. So I think it can be said - to the praise and glory of God - that at the time of our first Fathers the Order observed the Rule as the friars had at the time of Saint Francis. And in the use of money, it still continues to follow the Rule with a strict and most vigilant spirit. Indeed, it mightn't be too far from the truth to say that it shows greater zeal now than could be found even in the days of our good Father. Hence all the present friars are as far from the love of money as Heaven is above the Abyss. [I, 256]

They held all things in common

354. They held everything in common, except their breviaries. They shared drawers, habits and other things. And should anyone need a book, a pair of drawers, or even some cotton for sewing, he would always ask permission for it. [IV, 37]

355. Thus it was that in those early, propitious days they held all things in common - books, habits and whatever was allowed by the Rule. They wanted only what the Rule permitted, and even then just for their simple use, regarding them as being on loan from their Superior, whose permission they sought before passing things around among themselves. They knew that, according to Saint Bernard and others, exchanging things and passing them around without permission amounted to acts of ownership. They were careful not to avail

themselves of what had been given to others to use, or to move things from one place to another. They regarded it as obvious theft to take even a pin, a pen, or a small piece of paper without the knowledge of the one who'd been given it to use, and without the permission of the Superior. [I, 250]

356. They said that keeping anything for one's exclusive use meant that one was in the highly dangerous state of harbouring disordered affections. There were many examples of this, especially among the lay friars, who kept the *Little Office of Our Lady*, or a small book or some other such thing, and became so upset when their Superiors took them away that they left the Congregation altogether. Also forbidden were those curious *Angus Dei*, rosaries, small crosses and the like, which are superfluous and play no small part in hindering the spirit. Many simple friars keep things like these today, unknown to their Superiors, and so run the risk of ownership. Lots of cases come to light at Chapter times, when friars turn up with bulging pockets or even have so much that they have to get secular people to carry things for them. An unencumbered friar, who possesses nothing, is more able to maintain his composure, and is always more assenting to holy obedience. He is the total opposite of the friar who delights in pious trivia, especially in things that he keeps because they're curious rather than useful or necessary.

In those days, you wouldn't see anyone carrying a satchel, even at Chapter times when they changed friaries, or when they went on journeys. The only exceptions would be a few preachers who carried books about with them. This was very edifying for secular people, and also meant that the friars were unencumbered and moved with greater freedom. In addition, they didn't carry knives, so that when they needed to stop and have some bread (which they carried up their sleeves), they had to borrow a knife from some secular person. And because our Lord told the Apostles not to carry staffs, many of the friars would not do so, although some of the older friars needed to use walking canes. [IV, 38]

Everything in its place

357. Rufino da Gallarate used to keep the house neat and tidy, with everything in its place, and he would get very distressed when he saw things messed up. He used to say to the friars, "Brothers, we have to give an account to the Lord God about even the smallest things, because they are all alms and represent the blood of Christ." [III, 548] If Francesco da Novara saw something spoilt, he would get very upset about it. [III, 367]

Rich in their poverty

358. Most high poverty is the queen and mother of all the virtues, the bride of Christ our Lord - and of our Seraphic Father - and our own most beloved mother. We exhort all the friars to reach her heights by desiring no attachments

on this earth. Let them rather set their hearts on heaven, using the meagre things they have sparingly and as if by constraint, reckoning themselves rich in their poverty. Let them be content with a little spiritual book, perhaps a crucifix, a couple of handkerchiefs, and two pairs of drawers. Let them remember, that according to our Seraphic Father, a Friar Minor must be nothing if not a mirror of every virtue, especially of poverty. [C, 27]

The greatest riches

359. If any friar (with his superior's permission) had a little book or some other small thing, and became aware that he had grown attached to it, he would give it to the Guardian. The humble friar would say, "Father, I don't want this book any more because I know I've become attached to it. When I want to use it I'll get it, and afterwards I'll put it back in its place." [IV, 183]

360. At the time of death, they always returned the breviary, Rule, discipline chain and handkerchief to the Father Guardian. These were the greatest riches those servants of God had, so that they passed expeditiously to their Creator, having nothing to hold them back. [IV, 38]

361. Antonio da Monteciccardo said:

"It seems to me grossly foolish to want to be wiser than Christ and our Father Saint Francis. In the Rule, Francis does not grant us the particular use of anything except the habit, drawers, cord, breviary, and tunic or mantle. All the other things are held in common, and the Church grants us the actual use of them. This means we can't have the use of surplus things, only of things necessary to sustain our bodies and to carry out the works of the Order. It's these necessary things over which the Church, according to the declarations of the Supreme Pontiffs, claims ownership: to use superfluous things is to offend against our vows. Know that when the friars are caught up with many things, it is difficult for them to have the right spirit, because they are tied to the senses."

Therefore this holy man didn't want to have anything. Now, he had a rosary given him by the Duchess of Urbino, and this illustrious lady visited him when he was on his death bed. As she came to leave the holy old man, he said to her, "Madam, I know I am near to death. To whom shall I leave your rosary when I die?" Her Ladyship, considering the simplicity of the holy old man, motioned to another lady who was with her and said, "Leave it to this lady so that I make a present of it to her after your death." With much devotion she accepted it like a precious relic, because it was from that holy man. [III, 232]

362. Vincenzo da Foiano was so zealous about poverty that he wanted only a breviary plus a notebook in which he had written things about the Order and some of his devotions. But then, when he grew old, he gave up his notebook - and it seemed to him as if a mountain had been lifted off his shoulders. [VI, 204]

I consign these things to you

363. When Bonaventura da Montereale became gravely ill with pleurisy in the friary at Montemalbe, the friars thought he would never leave his bed again. However, when the friars were at table, the holy old man got up and dragged himself along as best he could to the refectory, without anyone being aware of it. There threw himself on his knees, and with many tears asked pardon of all the friars, saying to them, "Fathers and Brothers, I must depart from you, for I hear the Lord calling me. Because I have always been an ungrateful and bad religious, and for the bad example that I have given you, and the many inconveniences you have suffered through me during my sickness, I ask pardon of you all, and I beg you to forgive me and to deign to pray to God for my soul, although I do not deserve it."

Then he took off the discipline, the rosary, the Rule and the handkerchief that he had in his sleeve, and gave them to the Father Guardian, saying, "I return to you these things that you lent me to use while I had need of them. Because I won't need them any more, I'm leaving them with you."

All the friars wept on seeing how the holy old man stripped himself of these things with such zeal and meekly gave them back to his Superior, preparing himself for the approach of death. Getting up from the table, they took him by the arm and led him back to bed. [III, 318]

The cheapest cloth

364. We order that the friars, who have chosen to be menials in the house of God, be dressed in the cheapest, coarsest, most abject and least sought after kind of cloth available in the Provinces where they live. Let them remember that the sacks Saint Francis wanted them to use for patches, and the cords he wanted them to use for cinctures, do not conform to the riches of the world. [C, 21]

365. Concerning clothing, almost the whole Congregation dressed in a kind of coarse woollen cloth called *arbascio* which is the roughest that can be found. When *arbascio* couldn't be obtained, they used the kind of cloth that peasants wear. However, in the Provinces of the Marches, Saint Francis and Tuscany, the wool is very fine, so no-one wanted to use the cloth there because it made them appear too elegant. When no other cloth was available, the friars used to cover their habits with patches of sacking. [IV, 155]

366. By way of contrast, the habits of the friars in Calabria, Puglia and Sicily were more like very rough sackcloth than smooth wool. This was partly due to the somewhat less than soft quality of the wool there, which is naturally coarse and rough, unlike that found in other places. But it was also due to the friars' being true lovers of rigour and strict observance, and wanting to use this inferior, scruffy and undesirable material, even though they could have used cloth that was not as coarse or uncomfortable to wear. They were ardent about

this because of their desire for penitence, and they reasoned that the Lord God had provided them with this sort of woollen cloth, and presumably wanted them to use it for their habits, as I have described. They put these laudable ideas into practice by going out and begging for this sort of wool, and then carefully making scruffy, prickly cloth out of it. They spun and carded the wool themselves, without using oil to dress it, leaving it coarse. This is the way they say country folk and the poor of that region do things. They also weave the cloth their own way, so that it ends up naturally dark. Garments made from this sort of cloth look ugly, and feel like *estamine*, or even rougher (if there is anything rougher than that!), just like the sacks merchants use to bail wool. Such were the habits that these friars wore. [I, 366]

Aberration is always incongruous

367. The friars said that keeping the habit simple was of considerable importance. So the early Fathers would get very upset when they saw some variation to its shape or simplicity, such as someone making the cowl so short that it was nothing but a small point. They maintained that the cowl should be pointed, cover the face completely when pulled down, and be full enough to hang straight when worn on the head. [IV, 172]

368. Know that aberration is always incongruous and unseemly. A poor friar, uncouthly dressed, is out of place in a sumptuous dwelling, and in any other such situation. But a poor friar dressed austere and roughly, barefoot and pale from hunger, in a small, rustic friary in a forest, seems nothing short of a saint of God. [III, 26]

He was faithful to the principle of common life

369. Bernardino d'Asti was most frugal at table, and always ate at the designated times. He was faithful to the principle of common life, which during his Generalate he clarified through regulations that were prudent and appropriate for an organised Congregation whose members had varying needs and lived in a variety of situations. Yet, although faithful to life in common, he himself managed to remain singularly austere. No matter what he was doing or what his own needs were, he never sought special food or extra helpings. He made a practice of eating nothing at all if the friar in charge failed to accommodate him in this matter, to teach him to offer less in future.

Thus it was that once, when he was General, he was very tired and hungry, and the cook put in front of him a huge dish of food. He didn't touch it, and said to a friar who was his confidant, "This cook has done me wrong: I am very hungry, and now and I can't eat anything because he's given me too much." [VI, 19]

Their clothes were so shabby

370. Learned and prudent friars have expressed the opinion that the clothes of the first Fathers were so shabby that neither at the time of our Father Saint Francis nor at the beginning of any other reform was such strict poverty observed as regards clothing. [IV, 15]

371. Poverty was much loved by the Son of God, was given to us by our Seraphic Father to be our mother, and should radiate from everything we use. Accordingly, we order that mantles should not extend beyond the tips of the fingers, and should be worn without cowls, except when walking, and should only be worn if necessary. Habits should reach no lower than the ankles, and be eleven palms in width - twelve for those who are corpulent. The sleeves should be no bigger than is necessary for the arms to be put in and pulled out, and should reach about half-way along the hands. As regards tunics, they should be most contemptible and coarse, and eight or nine palms long - or at least half-a-palm shorter than the habit. Let the cowl be square, as those of Saint Francis are seen to have been, so that our habit forms a cross and we appear to be crucified to the world and the world to us. Let the cincture of the friars be a rough, coarse and common rope, the knots simple, unexceptional and plain. Dressed like this, we shall be despised by the world, and thus have all the more chance to mortify ourselves. And the friars should not wear caps or hats, or have two of anything, or anything at all that is superfluous. [C, 23]

372. You'd never have found anyone in the Congregation (except, perhaps, the sick) wearing three layers of clothing, no matter how old and feeble he might be, although the friars would use patches as necessary. The idea of donning three layers of clothes was repugnant to them, and it was reputed - and publicly voiced - that they were all of the firm conviction that to wear three layers was against the precept of the Rule. Many sermons were preached to this effect by the Fathers, citing commentators such as Supreme Pontiffs and doctors of the Order, who all said it was against the Rule. [IV, 16]

373. They didn't want any old habits lying around, except perhaps a couple for friars to change into when they got wet. They cut up the other old habits and used them for patches. [IV, 175]

374. A small room shall be set aside in every friary, where the clothes of the community are to be kept by a friar assigned to this task. He should clean and patch the clothes as needs be for the use of the community. When the friars have no further need of these clothes, they should clean them and return them with gratitude. [C, 24]

They maintained them with patches

375. It was remarkable that, although the friars' clothes were of poor quality and not intended to last more than one year, they kept them in such good repair

by the use of patches that they usually made them last for four years. It was even more remarkable that many of them, through zeal for holy poverty, made them last for fourteen and even sixteen years. [IV, 15]

376. I once saw Battista da Norcia washing his tunic, and wondered why he didn't wash all of it, only the top half. So I said to him, "My Father, why don't you wash the whole tunic?" He replied, "It seems you don't know what happens to woollen clothes when you wash them in strong lye, as the friars do. I do know, because I was in the trade. Nothing wears them out more quickly than washing them too often. I've had this tunic for fourteen years now, but had I washed it like the friars do it wouldn't have last four." [III, 269]

If the poor had this patch

377. Bonaventura da Montereale wore a habit completely covered in patches. If he came across a discarded piece of material, he would get quite upset and say to the friars, "If poor people had this cloth they wouldn't disdain to use it, as we do. They'd patch their clothes with it. And, unlike us, they haven't taken a vow of poverty!" [III, 318]

Sandals made from bits of leather

378. We also decree that the young friars and those who can should go barefoot, after the example of Christ, as a sign of humility and as a witness to poverty and to mortification of the senses, to give good example to others. Those who cannot do this may, with the permission of their superiors, in accordance with the teaching of the gospel and in imitation of our first Fathers, wear sandals that are simple, cheap and unadorned. [C, 26]

379. In the winter they wore sandals, usually made from bits of leather they had found along the road or begged from shops and then sewn together. [IV, 155]

They were coarsely dressed

380. There was nothing attractive about the attire of these humble friars: they were coarsely dressed, from head to toe. They cared nothing if the world laughed at them because of their rough, crude clothes, or abused them and called them idiots. Indeed, the more they had to endure, the more their faces shone with inner contentment. [I, 255]

These were the reasons

381. In fasting and in all the other things we practise, we have followed our first Fathers, not in pretence or mindlessness, but because this is what we are obliged to do by our profession of the Rule of the Seraphic Francis - a Rule founded on most high poverty. [II, 32]

382. This is what engaged our Father, Francis, and what he was inspired to hold on to above all else. We have declared that his inspiration came from God, and we now go further and claim that Christ gave Poverty to him as his bride; since their wedding and spiritual relationship was voluntary, in the same way that temporal, human ones are.

Initially, an ardent desire to imitate Jesus Christ inspired him. It prompted him to keep clear of the snares and deceptions that are associated with wealth. It also led him to avoid superfluity, something which worldly people very often indulge in. He was further spurred on by a burning desire to embrace a higher state, to become more than he was by enriching himself with virtue and holy merit. He was inspired to give himself more freely to the service of God, and not to allow anything to impede or encumber him, so that he could preach more vigorously against worldly futilities, and walk more robustly - indeed, run - in the way shown him by his Saviour. Thus he could renounce the world with greater abandon, and be completely humble and held in utter disregard.

These were the reasons that inspired our Father to hold most holy poverty very dear, and the very same reasons inspired our first Capuchins. These reasons also inspire those living today to have the highest regard for Poverty, who is truly their mother. [I, 269]

AN EXTREMELY HARSH LIFE

The way of the cross is the path of life. It is impossible to attain the vision of God in heaven without subduing the powers of evil and sin on earth. Bodily mortification reproduces and renews in us the life of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10).

Detachment, self-abnegation, renunciation, and suffering are simply the negative elements of Christian mortification. Exertion, struggle and perseverance are necessary in order to reconstruct or rebuild whatever has been destroyed.

The positive elements of mortification consist in subduing disordered tendencies and in keeping them firmly in rein by the exercise of our reason, thus directing them towards God. Only in this way can one understand how mortification can repair a person and make the divine shine out. Indeed, to love mortification, to seek it out and practise it for its own sake, is a deviation, an error, because the proper order would then be inverted and the end would be confused with the means.

In the light of these fundamental principles, austerity and penance can be better appreciated.

The extreme rigour of the first Capuchins compelled their contemporaries to define their life as "extremely harsh." They heroically trod the world underfoot, despising its pomp and comforts in a Renaissance milieu that exalted these things as achievements. They

embraced the naked cross of Christ, realising the Gospel code of penance in all its fullness.

These imitators of Jesus crucified reckoned themselves to be his true disciples only in so far as they carried his cross. Since Saint Francis wanted the friars to be penitents by profession, they had to embrace their sufferings or else be shown up as hypocrites. Moreover, God's champion does not rest except in knowing him and in being in loving union with him, and experience taught the friars that only through pain and sacrifice can the intelligence be enlightened and the heart purified.

They had much clearer ideas than people credit them with concerning the spiritual life, its aesthetical foundations and its mystical development. First of all, it was the loving image of the suffering Christ that urged and guided their steps along the uncompromising way of Calvary. Secondly, being ranked among the penitential men of Assisi, under the command and guidance of Francis, the standard bearer of Christ, they could not and would not abandon the Cross, especially in their aspiring to union with God in contemplation, the most desirable goal of souls consecrated to him.

Now, it is certain that only the will can sin. However the senses are its allies and very dangerous accomplices, constantly inciting it to go past the limits of what is permissible. Moreover, it would be to lull oneself into the greatest of illusions to think one can successfully eradicate the root of evil with internal discipline alone, and omit the practice of external mortification. The body is a powerful enemy that needs to be brought into servitude, otherwise it will prepare some dangerous ambushes for us. Therefore the Capuchins, as true athletes of penance and austerity, nourished themselves with the most frugal meals, wore the most humble habits, slept little (and on bare boards), and punished their bodies with harsh sackcloth and bloody disciplines. We believe that a scene like the famous 'Chapter of Mats' could have been seen repeated on any day of the year in the Capuchin communities.

Who knows how many chains, how many iron bands on their arms, how much sackcloth and how many disciplines, etc, the friars would have presented at the command of their Superior?

Perhaps anyone who visits this gymnasium of unheard of austerities and penances might shake his head and smile derisively, saying it's all a game, an exaggeration, an external display - in short, a pretence. But, no: they didn't reduce their bodies to servitude in such a ruthless way for the sake of aesthetic snobbery. Their external penance was nothing else but a departure point to attack a stronger, battle-hardened enemy: self-love, which is conquered with internal mortification - the annihilation of self-will to conform it to the will of God.

The strictest observance with a most austere life

383. They let God guide them, intent on the strictest observance of the Rule, with a most austere life that not only edified but also frightened the world. They delighted in poverty, prayer and suffering. The desire to observe poverty

perfectly, which they all shared, meant that for some years they went without eating anything cooked. At first they ate bread and water with herbs or fruit. Then they took to passing a flask around the table in consideration of those who were weak or old. However, it either went untouched or, at best, they put a drop of wine into the water. But, even if they did that, it was so watered down that it seemed like the jug's rinse water. Thus it served to chastise their taste, which would have preferred pure water rather than water that smelt of wine. Their tumblers were vegetable gourds.

Nevertheless, they began to accept food when the occasion arose. While their reverence for the Gospel and the Rule meant that they did not want to prohibit any particular sort of food, they renounced delicacies and fine food because of austerity and poverty. As a consequence, they didn't have meat for four or five months, and this made people to think that the friars didn't eat meat. Often, if certain foods were brought, the friars would return them, because no-one wanted to eat them. Sometimes people who brought food would piously insist that the friars take it, and would leave it hanging up at the door, but the friars would distribute it to the poor and to hospitals. Generally, after great insistence, the most that the friars accepted was a little fatty meat, but no other kind. They took this kind of meat so rarely and in such a small quantities, and cooked it so poorly, that it was quite obvious that, like the poor, they ate such food rather than to refuse it. As a result, devout people became convinced that they should provide them with more substantial food, but such as did not offend their preferences or the life choices they had made.

They didn't have a spit or grate, or any frying pans or other such utensils for cooking food simply and plainly, just a few pots. They didn't use salt. However, to trick their senses they put ashes on the table in its place. They did not have stools to sit on or tables at which to eat, so they ate on the floor. Sometimes, as an act of amiable fraternity, they all ate from a single plate.

Generally they had only one meal during the day. When they wanted something to eat in the evening, they took a little refreshment from a hamper of old bread morsels.

They had nothing in their huts or in their cells to lie on. Their rest was either on the bare ground or on a board with a rock or piece of wood or bundle of twigs or fennel for a pillow.

They had made an uncompromising resolve that they should not want to use anything if necessity did not require it. They did not want stores of vegetables, fruit or any other sort of thing. Nor did they keep anything superfluous. Even if there was just one pot too many, it was returned or given to a poor person. They wore the poorest habits, made from the lowliest cloth they could find. These were straight, cut off half way down the leg, worn and patched with sackcloth. They always went barefoot through ice and snow, and this astonished everyone they met. [VII, 74]

The ultimate effort of human nature

384. Added to these everyday hardships were more extraordinary ones. Some were undertaken voluntarily, with permission from their Superiors, such as wearing hair shirts, making extraordinary fasts, and taking extra disciplines. Then there were those imposed by the Superiors as penances for everyday faults, or to foster the practice of virtue and the maintenance of discipline - work in the fields, difficult journeys, and other similar things. Because of this, one historian wrote that the rigour of the first Capuchins was the ultimate effort of human nature. Human nature can hardly be subject to greater strictness in religious life than that experienced by the first Capuchins. In general, that degree of strictness is not present in our way of life today, nor was it there at the time of our Father Saint Francis and his blessed companions. This is evident when comparing what the Three Companions of the blessed Patriarch wrote and what the chronicler Bernardino da Colpetrazzo refers to concerning the events of his time. He examined the similarities between the dwellings and practices of the Three Companions and those of the Capuchins.

Truly, as regards strictness, the Capuchin Reform was stricter in its observance than the Order had been in the first days of our Father Saint Francis. Those first beginnings did not have contradictions and pressures that called the friars to turn their backs on Christ, as was the experience of the Capuchin Reform. Nor did those first friars have the facility and ease to do this by returning to the Zoccolanti Fathers, where they would have been welcomed joyfully to pursue the delights of the flesh. So, it is clear that something more than ardent vigour has kept the Capuchins faithful to the Reform. This, surely, is nothing less than a vehement love of Christ. [VII, 77]

Fugitives in deserted places

385. The friars lived a life of extreme harshness, either by choice or through necessity, beset as they were with uncertainties and with having no secure haven in which to take refuge. As befits fugitives, they had to retreat to deserted places and take shelter in abandoned huts or houses. And, since they left everything to Divine Providence, not many were willing to join them in the beginning. Only a few could live so desperately, as it were. [V, 111]

He needs to accompany Jesus with the cross

386. The holy man, Brother Vincenzo da Foiano, was asked why he used to punish himself with such harsh penances. He answered:

“I have been well informed by a pious, learned and wise man, that anyone who wants to please God needs to accompany Jesus with the cross by suffering for his love as much as he can. If, strive as one might, this goal is not achieved, at least one can maintain the desire to suffer more for his love. Some do good so long as God

encourages them with sweet visits in prayer. Without such visits their efforts cease. This is a sign that they do not love God, but themselves. But the true lover suffers willingly for the love of God, and the more he seems spurned and abandoned, the more lovingly he persists, knowing that this is a clear sign of being greatly loved by God. Let him know that God gives spiritual delights to weak minds, lest they grow bored and drift away completely from the path of doing good. On the other hand, in this world he gives woes and tribulations in abundance to those faithful friends, who love him with a strong and disinterested love. Indeed, he can give them no greater gift, for through bearing tribulation virtuously they are made like Christ, who chose the cross as the most evident sign of his love towards the Father, a love that equals the Father's the love for him." [VII, 435]

387. They delighted in poverty and suffering. Their habits were very poor. The coarse cloth - the roughest they could find - came down to their knees, and was patched with sackcloth. They went barefoot in every season, even in snow and ice, so that they frightened the people. Lean, scrawny and mournful, they went with heads and faces covered by their cowls, their eyes lowered,. They maintained silence, unless asked either to preach or teach the way of God. This they did with words that were simple and full of zeal. They served others with their hands, too, when they found anyone in need. In their hut-retreats, or in the woods or other houses, they had no physical comforts. They had no beds to lie on. Their rest was either on the bare earth or on some board, with a stone or a piece of wood for a pillow. [V, 155]

High knowledge

388. Francesco da Iesi used to say:

"If exterior poverty, by which we abandon physical comforts, is so important, then how much more important is spiritual poverty, which consists in a perfect and heartfelt abandonment of every earthly thing and of every creature? I tell you that an abstemious man can do what he will - give himself up to prayer, join a strict Religious Order, or even go off to the desert - but while one small dram of love of self and the things of this world remains in him, he will never have the true spirit. Therefore, anyone who has affection for parents, homeland, Provinces, houses, friends and for the little things he uses, like books and other such things, cannot have the true spirit and love God perfectly. For spiritual poverty is to have affection for God alone. Our Seraphic Father called this high knowledge." [VI, 131]

Father Guardian, you're going too far

389. When the house at Foligno was established, our first in the Province of our Father Saint Francis, Brother Bernardo d'Offida was made Guardian. Called Saint Valentine's, this was the third house in the Order. There Brother Bernardo and his little community led a life that was more angelic than human. They edified the whole town and countryside by their good example, and also performed miracles, so that the people regarded them as saints. A person considered himself blessed if he could see them and be blessed by them.

While the friary was being built, they lived nearby in a house in the Villa di Colle. They were never seen to leave there except to go to say Mass, to work on the building and to go questing. The astonished seculars said, "What do these poor men live on? During the day they are busy at their building work, and spend the night at the divine praises and in prayer. They ask no more of us than bread or at most some onions or garlic."

So they said to Brother Bernardo, "Father Guardian, you're doing too much. You won't be able keep it up. Only the angels can live without eating or sleeping." To this the holy man replied, "The least I can do is this, which I'm obliged to do. It's nothing to what Christ suffered for us. However, may God be thanked who has given me this opportunity to suffer something for his love, and to do penance for my sins. It makes up for when I had all the comforts of the body and thought I was serving God, while all the time I was serving myself. You people also urge me on by thinking we suffer too much. In order not to be a hypocrite, I must do penance." [VII, 499]

Never be without some affliction

390. Pietro da Todi wore a hair shirt next to his skin almost continuously. He used to say, "A servant of God should never be without some affliction, in memory of the Passion of the Lord." [III, 246]

Don't do things that make you ill

391. Time and again the friars said to Pietro da Norcia, "Don't do things that make you ill!" He would answer, "Jesus Christ didn't just become ill for me: he died for me! I'll never finish purging myself of my many sins!" [III, 136]

I must do penance

392. During Brother Bernardo d'Offida's time as Guardian at Saint Valentine's, the seculars saw the friars enduring great hardship and said to him, "Father Guardian, you don't need to have so much discomfort and suffering in your life." He answered, "This is nothing to what the Lord has suffered for us. However, may the Lord be thanked, who has given me this opportunity to suffer something for his love! It makes up for when, while having all the

comforts of the body and serving myself, I convinced myself I was serving God. Now you want to hold me back from suffering, thinking that we suffer more than we do. So I must do penance to avoid being a hypocrite." [V, 140; VII, 499]

He gives them nothing but woes

393. Once, Vincenzo da Foiano was asked why he afflicted himself with such harsh penances. He answered, "I'll tell you. I've been given some clear advice by a wise and learned man to the effect that anyone who wants to please God needs to accompany Jesus Christ with the cross and to suffer for his love as much as he can. Where our efforts do not succeed, we can at least desire to suffer more and more for his love. Some do well as long as the Lord visits them with many consolations in prayer, without which they go backwards. This is a sign that it's not God they love but themselves. True love consists in suffering willingly for the love of God. The more a person seems afflicted and abandoned, the better it is for him, since this is a clear sign that he is loved greatly by God. I tell you, God only gives spiritual sweetness to weak persons, so they will not stray completely from the way of doing good. He gives nothing but woe and tribulation to those who are his true servants and earnestly love his most high Majesty, for he can give them no greater gift than this. [III, 340; VII, 435]

Was Saint Francis wrong in this?

394. Matteo da Schio was so austere that it seemed to the friars he would go to extremes rather than take the middle way. Once he was told, "Father, you will have to give an account to God for acting so strictly in making us observe more than the Rule requires and making us take so many disciplines. Doesn't your conscience reproach you?" The holy man laughed and answered, "May God pardon you my sons. Our Father Saint Francis, who founded the Rule on most high poverty, was very strict both towards himself and towards the others. Was he wrong in this? As our Lord said, it is necessary that all who want to go to heaven should follow the narrow road. And because few go that way, few are saved (Matteo 7:14). I will not have to give an account to God if I have made you walk along the way that leads you to heaven. However, I will indeed have to give an account to God for the times I have been too easy and granted you those things that are according to the flesh, because then I will have let you go along the wide road that leads to hell. Our Rule is of such sublimity that it is impossible to do more than it commands. And, on the other hand, we are so inclined to obey our senses and become lax that I am fortunate if I have obliged you to behave in such a way that the Province has not become lax. Woe to you when you have as Vicar one who is so agreeable that he gives you everything you want, because such a person could not be called a shepherd but a one who scatters the sheep." [III, 380]

One cannot enter Paradise without effort

395. Bernardo d'Assisi returned to the city, where the people eagerly awaited him, and honoured him as if he were a famous dignitary, putting on splendid celebrations. People considered themselves blessed if they just caught sight of him. One of them said to him "Brother Bernardo, you are a young man. You must take care not to do too so much penance that you can't hold up." He answered, "But how much penance has our Lord Jesus Christ done and our Father Saint Francis? I have made a vow to follow them. One cannot enter Paradise without effort. When I became a friar, I promised God to observe the Rule as much as I could, according to my best efforts, helped by his grace. The Lord Jesus Christ has given me grace until now. He will still give it to me, to observe until death all I have promised him. Who was weaker and more infirm than Saint Francis? Nonetheless he did such great things that he enlightened all the world, and not just with physical striving. Rather it was the Lord, for whom nothing is impossible, who worked in him. When I became a friar, if someone had said to me: 'I'll give you a hundred *scudi* if you go barefoot just as Saint Francis did,' I wouldn't have managed even two steps. It seemed utterly impossible to me! And yet, now I want to do this continuously both on mountains and plains. God's power is great. He does what he pleases and has always worked marvellously in all his creatures." [III, 282]

The ball warms the hand

396. As the venerable Father Brother Francesco da Iesi used to say, neither doctors nor medicine are able to produce the effect in the human body that abstinence does, cleansing it of all immoral dispositions. In the Order, austerity of life does the very same thing, because strictness of poverty and enduring all things cleanses the body of the Order, and consequently perverse men and persons who are not called by God do not come here. If they do come, they're unable to last, because suffering quickly sends them away. Truly, the Holy Spirit works like a good gardener, continuously clearing the garden of weeds. Thus the Holy Spirit keeps the garden of God - the holy Order - free of weeds, so as long as it maintains austerity of life. He doesn't let men who injure it by bad example and a lax living stay for long. Even without the elixirs of novitiates and chapels, and without the medicine of wooden stumps and cells, they go away.

He said, "Know that the chief foundation of our Congregation is suffering for love of Jesus Christ, and this suffering cleanses the soul. Once cleansed, our Lord God fills it with spirit and many gifts and graces, and from such a soul comes all manner of good things. But from impassioned souls that are not mortified abundant evil issues forth. And this was the reason the Congregation didn't grow very much in the beginning, because it suffered extremely and no-one joined except men who desired only to suffer. When they saw that their

initial desire was not frustrated, and found themselves suffering much more than people had said they would, they were filled with joy. They rejoiced so much in their suffering that had they been threatened with death they would not have forsaken the habit. What happened to them is what happens to someone who holds a hot ball in his hand. The ball warms the hand and the hand keeps the ball hot. Thus, suffering inflamed them in the love of God and that love warmed and comforted them in their suffering. [III, 39]

God has made this pact

397. Eating roasted and tasty food may seem to be something of little consequence, yet the friar who carefully avoids such things and remains strong in the observance of the Rule will find that the spirit of God is with him. Know that God has made this pact with us Friars Minor: the Lord fills us with spiritual delights according to the measure that we deprive ourselves of bodily comforts, the pleasures of food, and all earthly affection out of zeal for the observance of the Rule. We delude ourselves if we strive to make life easy by ensuring that we don't have to endure any physical discomforts. In fact, this makes life more difficult, since the more we concentrate on the things of the flesh, the more the Order becomes a hell for us as we lose its spirit. On the other hand, we feel comfortable in the Order when we are full of its spirit in observing the Rule. There is no burden that doesn't appear light when we have the spirit. So, clearly, our first aim should be to have this spirit, because to live in the Order without it is quite intolerable. [III, 78]

But was always full of joy

398. Brother Stephen of Milan suffered a lot because of his infirmities, but was always full of joy. He used to say, "If God accepts favourably the gifts and sacrifices offered to him joyfully in prosperity, how much more pleased he must be with offerings given to him joyfully in adversity." [VI, 303]

The discipline

399. Many of the friars afflicted themselves by taking the discipline in preparation for holy prayer. They used to say, "If the Passion of Jesus Christ is not felt in some way, it's impossible to pray." [II, 283]

The subjugation of the flesh

400. Apart from taking the discipline three times a week, the friars often encouraged one another, both in word and deed, to do penance together. Many of them were remarkable in the measures they took to subjugate their bodies, wearing rough hair shirts, going about clad in flimsy habits, and sleeping little and in discomfort. They afflicted their bodies in other, similar ways, such as those the Holy Spirit had taught to the saints. [V, 156]

They scorned all the pleasures of the flesh

401. For the love of God, they vigorously spurned things that delighted the flesh, and so the Holy Spirit filled their hearts with spiritual consolations. For their self-control was such that they were always ready to pray, and God's goodness did not fail to enlighten their unclouded minds. So it was that they scorned all the pleasures of the flesh. [IV, 19]

Abstinence is a primary virtue

402. Antonio da Monteciccardo said: "A great desire to suffer for Christ and to practise abstinence was kindled in my heart when God confirmed me in my fasting, and I have fasted almost continuously ever since. Know, my son, that abstinence is a primary virtue, one that begets others. The servant of God who does not embrace it cannot have the spirit, nor can he be chaste for very long." [V, 143]

A moderate abstinence is necessary

403. Many friars told Pietro da Mazara he was too strict, and was probably deceiving himself. When he was passing through our house at the Carcerelle, the servant of God asked me what I thought of the matter. I answered him, "If you know that what you're doing isn't harming you physically, carry on. If there's any self-deception, frequent abstinence practised purely for the love of God will reveal it. Abstinence mortifies the body and marvellously illumines the intellect. Moderate abstinence is necessary for anyone who wants to give himself to contemplation." When he heard this, the servant of God was very happy. [III, 395]

My greatest enemy is my body

404. Pietro da Portogallo was endowed by the Lord God with the greatest simplicity. He rarely spoke of anything other than fasting and penance. He never slept more than three or four hours a night, spending the rest of the time either in disciplining himself or in prayer. He often said, "The ancient saints have done great things!" As he grew older, he summed up everything in this one saying: "My greatest enemy is my body. If I can win the battle and subdue it, that'll be no mean feat!" [III, 302]

They renounced delicate and expensive food

405. The friars had no utensils to prepare meals, nor did they have stools or tables to eat from, but took their food on the floor. It's true that when their modest friaries were built they made use of the vessels and utensils necessary for making their salads and weakly seasoned soups, but they were very restrained and detached about it. Out of reverence for the Gospel and the Rule

they did not want to proscribe any kinds of food at meal times, although they did renounce delicate and expensive food as an act of austerity and poverty. The most they would accept, when confronted by an insistent donor, was a little fatty meat - never any other sort. Even meat such as this was accepted only rarely, and then in very small portions. They would cook it badly, and go through the motions of eating it rather than throw it out, for it would be tasteless and would certainly not afford them any pleasure.

The wine was watered down to such an extent that there was more pleasure to be had from the taste of the pure water than from the flavour of the wine. Their drinking cups were made out of gourds. They didn't use salt, but had ashes on the table instead, to fool their sense of taste. They usually had only one meal a day, and if a friar wanted something to eat in the evening, he would help himself from a basket that held pieces of stale bread. Those that needed to could refresh their tired bodies a little in this way. [V, 155]

The gullet is the source of all evil

406. Liberalino da Colle di Val d'Elsa said, "The gullet is the source of all evil, while abstinence is the source of all good. When religious practised abstinence and holy contemplation, the Orders were always full of holy men performing miracles. When they ceased practising austerity of life, they forfeited both miracles and holiness, and turned to the miracles of Lucifer, causing countless scandals." [III, 330]

Anyone who loves his throat is an enemy of God

407. Bernardo da Fossombrone persevered in very great holiness for many years in the Congregation. He was most austere, and loved poverty - so much so that he always talked about it when he was required to speak. He fasted nearly all the time. He never desired to eat meat or other such food, saying that this was not suitable for servants of God. He condemned the vice of the stomach, saying that anyone who loves his stomach is an enemy of God. For Capuchins that are detached, an onion or a salad is enough. [V, 125]

Farm-style soup

408. They subdued their flesh with fasts and the discipline, and when they fasted they made do with bread and water. Often one, two or even three days would go by during the week without anyone eating anything. Food was restricted to soft vegetables, herbs and a few simple fruits, all eaten without bread. This is how they observed the times of Lent. At other times the community of friars ate rough and simple things when at table, such as herbs and cooked vegetables, and various kinds of country style soup. When they seasoned their food, they always kept an eye on poverty. Just a little oil was

enough for them, so that a rather small vessel of oil would last them several months. [I, 263]

Penitential friars always fast

409. Abstinence, austerity and strictness are greatly praised among the saints, and since we have chosen a harsh life, after the examples of our Lord Christ and Saint Francis, we exhort the friars to follow the holy Lenten observances that Saint Francis did. Penitential friars will always observe the fast, but they may not take excessively large meals, or eat extra food at table. Meat may not be eaten on Wednesdays. [C, 50]

Unbelievable abstinence

410. The friars should not seek expensive or exotic food when they go begging. To ensure that these words do, in fact, reflect reality, friars may not quest for meat, eggs, cheese, fish or other expensive foods that are inappropriate for people in our state of poverty. This applies even during *carnevale*. The sole exception is when friars are begging for the infirm. However, if people give us such things without being asked, they may be accepted, so long as poverty is not compromised. [C, 83]

411. None of the friars had any colour in his cheeks, due to all the fasting on bread and water that went on. [II, 389]. Their constant abstinence was unbelievable, some of them fasting continuously. They drank water and ate bread only once a day, while some of them sustained their wretched lives by eating five ounces of beans or fruit with their daily drink of water.

Nevertheless, apart from those who observed austerity in food in this way, it was generally true that each one was content with bread, vegetables and herbs. They went for four or five months when they not only didn't eat meat, they didn't even see it [II, 257] - unless one of them saw some in a dream, or chanced to catch sight of some in the course of his travels. [I, 370]

412. Consequently, there were cutting boards in only a few friaries. When a small amount of meat was given to them, the cook would cut some slices of bread and place a small portion of meat on each slice for the humble friars. The whole operation was done in such a way that they would end up eating as much cutting board as they did meat. [IV, 166]

413. They satisfied their needs with herbs, vegetables and fruit. Their preference to eat herbs was so great that they cared little about other, expensive, foods. The majority of them ate nothing cooked, only raw herbs and fruit. The best soup found on the table in those times was made from boiled bread, a little cabbage and a few beans. [IV, 19]

414. Sometimes the soup lasted three or four days, because most of the friars fasted on bread and water [IV, 154]. Since they didn't have enough crockery, they often used the same bowl, first for salad, then for soup. [IV, 175]

415. For a good number of years, meat and wine were taken only rarely - almost never - in the houses of the humble Capuchins. This was because the majority of them followed all the Lenten observances our Father Saint Francis used to follow. Most fasted continuously, eating once a day. If someone fancied something particular to eat, he'd change his mind when he saw that his brothers weren't eating it. If a little meat was given to them, they would put it aside. And in this way the Capuchins got a reputation almost everywhere for being vegetarians. As a consequence, people seldom offered them meat. And even when it was offered, the friars wouldn't take it unless it was fatty. They absolutely refused to accept chickens, birds and the like, and wouldn't eat them when they were put before them.

When some meat came into the house, given them for the love of God, they recoiled from it as if it were a snake. I've often heard the following in Narni friary: 'I like this house very much because it's devout and solitary. But I don't like staying here because they accept meat.' The problem was Messer Teodoro, who devotedly gave two small portions of meat each week to the lowly Capuchins. He'd often been told that he shouldn't do this, but he persisted, especially during the Summer. And it was impossible to refuse it, because he used to leave it there and go away.

Once he left some tuna. None of the friars would to eat it, so - and I saw this - Brother Raniero da Borgo gave it to the cat.

In the house at Norcia Benedict Finocchiuolo brought us a little meat. The others admonished him not to do it again..

If I were to expand these examples, there would be too much to say, because, apart from Easter and *carnevale*, meat was eaten rarely - indeed, hardly ever. [IV, 19]

416. A jug of oil lasted eight friars fifteen days. It was used mainly in fresh salads. [IV, 154]

417. The friars didn't want frying pans in their friaries. They said frying was not something the poor do, because it uses up a lot of stuff. Furthermore, it's only purpose is to sharpen the appetite and satisfy the flesh - something that must be avoided by servants of God.

Nor did the friars have roasts, or use sauces and the like. They were very abstemious. They were satisfied only with hunger. Moreover, when they drank soup that was tasty and gratifying, many of them would dilute it with water to take away the pleasure.

It was a wonderful, too, that the Lord God concurred so much with them. When they ate those plain meals, he imparted so much flavour to their food that they found a salad had more taste to it than any expensive food a gentleman might give them. [IV, 20]

418. They never put cheese on their food, except over the Easter solemnities and on other principal feasts during the year. They never touched fine foods. Nor did they ever allow them into their houses, except when they accepted something for the infirm. They regarded the acceptance of aromatic and spicy things as sacrilege. They often remembered what our good Father says in the Rule: that we must not judge those who dress in soft cloths and who use fine foods and drinks. While taking the point of these words - that our Seraphic Father did not want us to judge others in such matters - it is not permissible for us to use these luxuries. [I, 263]

419. Although the friars rarely satisfied their hunger with the plain food they ate, it turned out that they never wanted anything except bread and similar basic things to meet their needs, just like the hungry poor themselves care for little other than bread. However those servants of God used to say, "We must never eat our fill of plain food if we are to obviate the desire for fine food. If plain food begins to bore us because we have so much of it, like careless men we'll begin to look for meat and other appetising food."

In the beginning the friars didn't have gardens because there were only a few friaries. When they wanted vegetables to eat, they begged for them or went looking for wild herbs in the fields. When they returned home, all the friars would gather round with great joy and, putting the vegetables on a large plate or dish, they'd eat them together.

Many of them wept all the time, their hearts deeply touched at being able to take what they needed while surrounded by so much charity and kindness, and at the simplicity of their brothers, who were just like poor men. [IV, 20]

They sat around a basket

420. Usually only a few of them had an evening meal. Those who wanted a small meal gathered around a basket full of bread scraps. They took a little, each looking for the hardest and least appetising piece. [V, 282]

Oh dear! What have I done?

421. Once Brother Battista da Norcia went on a journey with Brother Tomaso da Città di Castello, who later became General. However, at that time he was a disciple of that holy friar. The good old man fainted through weakness and fell to the ground. Brother Tomaso hurriedly left the road and found to some farm cottages, where he obtained an egg. He brought it back to Brother Baptist, and had him eat it. When the old man had recovered and started on the way again,

he burst into a mournful lament, saying, “Oh dear! What have I done? Oh dear! What have I done?” Brother Tomaso begged him to tell him what the matter was, and learned from him that it was because he’d eaten an egg. Brother Tomaso tried to console him, and said “Wouldn’t you want any of us to eat similar food if we need to?”

Brother Baptist used to say, “The Friar Minor should never completely satisfy his hunger with vegetables or plain food, because the more he is satisfied by these things, the more he desires fine food. However, if he abstains even from simple food, he’ll feel less appetite for the other kind. Like a poor farmer who only ever needs bread, he’ll not want anything else.” [VI, 133]

Meat is not the food of Capuchins

422. Brother Ludovico da Foligno fasted almost all the time, and spent all the vigils of the Lord and of Our Lady on bread and water. He rarely ate meat, only herbs and vegetables, or just bread and fruit. He said meat is not the food of Capuchins. He didn’t want to live anywhere except in poor houses, and wished to die at the foot of an oak tree. [VI, 196]

The natural taste should have been enough

423. The zeal of Francesco da Iesi to check his stomach was so great that when he saw a young one use some salt at table, he reprimanded him firmly and said, “Son, the natural taste should have been enough for you. The sin of the stomach consists in enjoying food too much. The more you enjoy the food, the greater the sin.” [III, 76]

Christ was denied water

424. Our most holy Saviour teaches us to keep our hearts sincere and our senses mortified. Therefore only wine that has been well diluted should be put on our tables, lest our hearts become dragged down by drunkenness and excess. Our body always craves pleasure, so we should do what the seraphic Saint Bonaventure said Saint Francis used to do. Saint Francis restrained from drinking even enough cold water to quench his burning thirst, saying that it’s difficult not to give in to the flesh when satisfying one’s needs. It would be good for the friars to remember that Christ was denied water when he was on the cross, and given wine and myrrh, or vinegar and gall, instead. [C, 52]

425. To forestall the possibility of our having superfluous provisions, we should not keep bottles or barrels in our friaries, just simple gourds and flasks. [C, 82]

426. The friars were very abstemious as regards taking wine. They used to dilute it so much that it was more like water flavoured with wine than wine that had been watered down. And although it was so thoroughly diluted, they

would still put a jug of pure water next to it, so that those who wished to water it down more - or simply take water - could do so. [I, 263]

Water that tasted like milk

427. Most of the time the friars fasted on bread and water, and drank so little wine it was hardly mentioned. A flask would have lasted five or six friars for a whole week.

The family in the house at Borgo consisted of nine friars, and they had a large glass flagon that held two whole flasks. They took it with them when they went questing on Saturdays, and it would last them all through the following week. That's because they filled it with water at the well, and then topped it up with a little wine, much as a person puts a splash of oil on a salad. They used to say: "God works a miracle and makes the well water taste like milk to all the friars who drink it." And I know this was true, because I myself was there a whole year and used to drink it, and it always seemed as though I was drinking milk. [IV, 33]

The stopper was covered in mould

428. Once, in the little hut of Saint Valentine, near Foligno, one of the friars felt ill and wanted some wine to drink. The others looked all over the hut for their little terra cotta *truffo*, shaped like a small barrel and able to hold about a flagon of wine. They used to take it with them when they went questing and collect wine in it. Well, they searched high and low, and eventually found it under some wood, where it had been left a few days previously. When they went to open it they found the stopper had become covered in mould, and the wine was almost ruined. Nevertheless, they gave some of it to their sick brother, and everyone else got half a bowl to drink, too. [III, 245]

Wine does not suit me

429. Bernardo da Fossombrone seldom drank wine. When someone asked him, "What don't you drink a little?", he replied, "My complexion is ruddy, and wine only makes it worse." Thus the servant of God hid his abstemiousness under the guise of simply taking precautions.[III, 30]

It seemed he didn't have a body

430. After the first General Chapter, at which Asti was elected, Vincenzo da Foiano was sent to the Province of Rome. He had wanted to live among herbs, bushes and chestnut trees, and had asked the General for permission to do this. But the General said, "I'll give you every chance to have solitude and to do all the penance you want, but under obedience," and sent him to Monte Casale.

In Monte Casale, Vincent's lifestyle was such that it seemed almost as though he had no body, and got his sustenance from contemplation. He never strayed from his simple cell, where his bed was a table and his bed cover a rough blanket, and which was his abode for ten years. For a period of seven continuous years he lived on nothing but bread and water. Even after that period, his chief change was to augment his bread rations with a little fruit and herbs, taking soup only on solemn feasts. He would forgo wine on some vigils, drinking herbal water - such as rosemary or sage - instead. He liked to eat kneeling on the ground when he was on bread and water. Even the bitter cold in the middle of winter didn't induce him to wear more than a short, patched habit that came half-way down his legs. He went about in that habit for sixteen years, and never used a mantle or wore sandals. [VI, 204]

Living beyond human efforts

431. Who can fail to be amazed and filled with wonder at the life of Antonio Corso, who was extremely frugal when it came to food? He fasted continuously on bread and water, but wanted to try himself beyond that and ration out his bread to see just how much was really necessary to keep him alive. He did this for the love of Christ, and to mortify the 'old man' in him. So he set about measuring out for himself a daily ration of five ounces of bread and five of figs or grapes, or whatever fruit was available. After eating, he would drink one cup of water.

He spent a whole year living in this extremely frugal way, and would have continued on except that when fruit became unavailable he had to switch back to his former diet of bread and water. Once again, he measured everything out very carefully.

He persevered in this acute fast for many years, and as he grew older he became ever more abstemious, inflamed as he was with divine love. He didn't worry about his physical strength failing, for the weaker he grew in body the stronger he grew in spirit. So it was that the good old man decided to cut down his eating to three days a week, taking bread and water every Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, but nothing on any other day. He kept this up until his death, and at the end of his life was much more robust in spirit and eager to do penance than ever before.

This man's life was beyond what is normally possible for people, and the friars who witnessed it confirm everything I've said about him here. [I, 285]

The best kind of mortification

432. Francesco da Iesi seldom ate more than once a day. He claimed that this was how a religious ought to live, and was the best way to practice mortification. He said it was especially useful in that he gained two hours every evening by not sitting down at table. Anyone who does this has more time to

do good, especially if he forgoes the evening meal during the summer. "The issue that concerns me is the use of time, not whether or not to eat," he used to say.

He didn't think much of those who would limit themselves to bread and water one day, and then eat insatiably the next. He maintained that true mortification consisted in eating moderately and in harmonizing one's life with others. So we should join others at table once a day and partake of the food that's put before us. This is the best kind of kind of mortification, and is far healthier than undertaking drastic fasts, which few can persevere with. Frugality in food is of no use unless it is undertaken as an aid to contemplation. [III, 76]

He praised moderate abstinence very much

433. Liberalino da Col di Val d'Elsa was very devout and fervent at prayer, most austere in dress and frugal in what he ate. However, he condemned excessive fasting by others, saying that fasting should serve prayer, and too little food is as big a hindrance to praying as too much food. He hardly ever ate meat, and said the ancient monks who banned it had good reason to do so. It was his habit to eat one meal a day, and he praised moderate abstinence at table highly, saying that when an Order practised this it became filled with holy men and performed miracles of God. However, when its members abandoned this practice they performed the scandalous miracles of Lucifer. [VI, 213]

434. Giacomo da Cetona was very small in stature and of very gentle disposition. It was quite evident that the strength to suffer came to him from God, not from physical toughness. He ate frugally, usually one meal a day. He was of the opinion that leading a life of frugality was more conducive to contemplation than fasting on bread and water, and did not weaken the body too much. Mind you, he fasted on bread and water on the vigils of Our Lady and on the Fridays of Lent. [III, 356]

He only had to promote moderation

435. Bernardino d'Asti carefully planted and cultivated holy poverty, so that it struck roots. He had very little trouble in this regard, and only had to promote moderation, so that the practice of poverty could continue through the health and holiness of the friars. To this end he ordered that soup be seasoned a little with something or other: every imprudent cook was seized of the idea that soup should be made without any seasoning, even salt. No zealous friar - not even the Guardians - had dared to fix this, since all assumed it would be outrageous to complain about such a minor hardship.

At the same time, Bernardino ordered wine be diluted somewhat, but in such a way that it still remained true wine, not - as was the practice - water flavoured with wine, like the rinse from a wine flask. [VII, 46]

Bernardo d'Assisi

436. Bernardo d'Assisi's Novice Master was a holy man, and showed him the way to heaven by word and example. This was exactly what Bernardo wanted, for his sole desire was to undergo harsh penances for love of Christ and in imitation of our Father Saint Francis. Indeed, he did little else right up to his death except pray and shed tears, so inflamed was he with the love of God.

When he first began to fast, his Master allowed him to do so on bread and water most of the time, and Bernardo ever afterwards continued faithful to this, the first undertaking he'd been given. But after he'd been professed for a few years his Superiors realised that, youthful and frail as he was, he'd soon become ill if they let him do penance in the way his zeal prompted him. So Brother Francesco da Iesi brought him up from Borgo and put him under the care of Brother Battista da Norcia, a holy man.

Baptist watched over him like a good shepherd, and noticed that he was always at prayer in his cell, weeping all the time and sleeping very little. On top of this, Bernardo's Director had ordered him to eat properly, but Bernardo only pretended to eat, not to be stopped. He took very little, nothing but the plainest food that was served up, along with a little wine. So Brother Baptist forbade him to fast, let alone take just bread and water, without his permission.

Even so, Bernardo - deeply inspired during his novitiate - would have liked to cut back his meals to bread and water once a day, to leave himself more time for prayer, had his Superior allowed him. He was commanded to eat whatever he needed to, but was so used to fasting that, despite his zeal for obedience, he couldn't change. He would eat whenever he was commanded to, but lapse into his old routine if the command wasn't renewed. He keenly desired to do penance, and on one occasion when told to eat some fresh beans, he worked out a way of being obedient and penitential at the same time: he ate them whole - pods, shells, everything.

So in this way when he was young he'd allowed the devil to deceive him into thinking that certain things were good, and so he disobeyed his Superiors to do these things. As a result of this, our Lord visited him with a little penance when he came to die. [III, 280]

That they would not do just anything

437. Because of things like this, Superiors often strove to encourage and guide the friars in the ways of God, especially the young ones, so that they would not do anything just according to their own discernment but allow themselves to be guided by their Superiors. There was a lot to do in this regard because many of them became ill through trying to do more than they could. Some had to leave the Order and enter ones that were less strict, because our Order was in general very austere and there were no facilities for looking after the sick. [II, 253]

Men who'd trampled the world underfoot

438. It was wonderful in those days to meet Religious who were not out to become dominant in the world, but who'd utterly trampled it underfoot. They were dressed in thin, simple habits, patched with sackcloth, and more wretched and rougher than the cloth of the poor anywhere in the world. Indeed, they were more akin to hair shirts than to the habits of Religious. [II, 194]

It looked as if the friars were tied up in sacks

439. Their clothing could not have been rougher, coarser, or more abject than it was. God gave the ancient form of the habit to the Order as a gift, and at the same time gave them the splendour of poverty, by which he made it glorious in the beginning.

The material they used for habits was the crudest, roughest and most unrefined cloth to be found, like that in which poor farmers dressed. They always used *arbaschio* cloth whenever they could - the same material that was used for galley slaves. As there were only a few friars at that time, they could get that wretched, coarse material, but they also sewed patches of sackcloth on their habits - according to the intention of Saint Francis - to make them more contemptible still.

Regarding the cut of their clothing, their habits had a square hood with a long pointed corner to protect the back of their heads. They lacked fullness, and were quite short, leaving part of the leg bare. The sleeves were short and narrow, so it looked as if the friars were tied up in sacks. [V, 277]

Habits that were more like hair shirts

440. Almost everyone in the congregation was dressed in a coarse kind of cloth called slave wool or *arbaschio*, the crudest material you could get. [IV, 155] Rough and unfinished, it was more like a hair shirt than a garment to keep out the cold. [IV, 5]

441. The friars dressed so austere that their clothes were more like hair shirts than habits. This gave a great example to secular people, who used to cross themselves when they saw them. [IV, 174]

442. When Brother Giovanni da Fano entered the city of Verona, he presented such a novel sight that the children surrounded him and mocked him with shouts and hoots and jibes. They even threw stones at him, and the good brother couldn't keep his hood up on his head. But he and his companion passed through without any show of resentment - indeed, it was as if Giovanni wanted this to happen, for he slowed down to give the children more time to jeer at him.

When he eventually arrived the cathedral, he placed himself before God and thanked him for the favour of being ridiculed for the sake of his love, and asked him to prosper their journey and mission.

While they were at prayer, Monsignor Tullio spotted them, and came up and asked them if they planned to stay in Verona. Brother Giovanni said yes, unless they were told to leave, since he saw this a wonderful opportunity to serve God. The Crispoldo said: "Told to leave? By whom? The Bishop will gladly give you hospitality in his own house. Wait here until I come back."

He went straight to the Bishop and told him that two Capuchins were in the cathedral. Now the fame of Capuchins had reached the Bishop, and he sent for them straightaway, since he wanted to meet them. When he saw them he was utterly amazed at their rough habits and lowly bearing, and asked if all Capuchins went about like that or were these two exceptionally humble and self-effacing. Brother Giovanni answered that because the Capuchins professed perfect humility and poverty, they competed among themselves to see who could go about looking the most abject and despicable. [V, 216]

The seculars were amazed

443. All our first fathers went about barefoot, summer and winter alike. They were never forced to do so - it was always voluntary. If they were weak or old and couldn't go barefoot, they were allowed to wear sandals. These sandals were crudely made out of old boots the friars found along the road and gathered up. They used string to turn them into sandals, and secular people were amazed when they saw how austere the friars were. They were astonished to see them go unshod through the snow in times of bitter cold. [IV, 17]

Their feet got stuck to the ice

444. They went about barefoot, even with snow and ice on the ground. On one occasion they halted for some reason and their feet got stuck to the ice. When they went to move on they could only lift their feet with considerable effort. Indeed, some left the skin off their soles stuck to the icy ground. Yet, so great did the desire to suffer glow in their hearts, they continued on as if they were walking on rose petals. It's astonishing that they were not only not killed by the cold, but they actually lived through it happy and healthy. They felt in themselves a sense of awe that the particular grace of this suffering should be given to their bodies and to the congregation of the reform. [V, 278]

Let them go barefoot

445. Those young friars who can are ordered to go barefoot, after the example of Christ and as a sign of humility, poverty and mortification of the senses, and to give good example to others. If they can't go barefoot, they can imitate our

early Fathers and wear cheap, simple, plain sandals, in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel. [C, 26]

They regarded such things as agreeable

446. In those days, Brother Amadeo da Antegnate always went barefoot, even during the terrible winters in Lombardy, which were especially severe for a period of many years. Many a time he would stop to talk with others about the things of God, and his feet would stuck to the ice. When he made to walk on, he found he could free himself with difficulty. Sometimes the soles of his feet stuck fast to the ice, and the skin peeled off as he walked away.

Those first Fathers were so antagonistic towards their bodies and loved suffering so much that they would regard such things as agreeable.

However, as Amadeus grew older he adapted himself to a more normal way of life [VI, 317]

447. Girolamo da Montepulciano always went around barefoot. His feet would crack open because of the cold, and he'd use either a needle or an awl to sew the cracks closed. [VI, 201]

They slept on bare boards

448. The friars' sleeping arrangements were very skimpy. In the summer they slept on bare boards, and in the winter some of them put a little straw on these boards and placed on mat on top of it. For many years mattresses were not used in the Congregation, except by the sick and very old, infirm friars. The rest slept on boards. [IV, 174]

449. Christ said: "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matteo 8.20), and he, the Holy of Holies, slept on the ground in the desert. Our Father Saint Francis often made the bare ground his bed. So that our beds may be somewhat similar to theirs, and that we may, like Francis, be more vigilant and solicitous of prayer, we order that only the infirm and very weak may sleep on anything other than bare boards, mats, brush wood, bracken or a little straw or hay. Nor may they use bedclothes. [C, 25]

They slept in a manger

450. Brother Amadeo da Antegnate needed to find lodging in the house of a friend, where he was given a good bed that night. However, he thought the bed was inappropriate for a poor Capuchin, so he and his companion took themselves to a stable and slept there. There was nowhere to sleep, except in a manger. In the morning his companion grumbled about having been cold and uncomfortable, but Brother Amadeus said, "Last night I prayed more fervently than ever before in my life, since I experienced and reflected upon how Our Lord Jesus Christ lay as a baby in the discomfort of a manger." [VI, 318]

The customary discipline may not be omitted

451. We order that the customary discipline on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays must not be omitted, even on great solemnities. This is so that body may not rebel against the spirit, and also so that we may remember the extreme pain and Passion - especially the scourging - our dear Saviour suffered. The discipline should be taken after Matins, or if it's too cold, in the evening. It must be taken every night in Holy Week. When the friars take the discipline, let them sympathise with Christ, the Son of God, tied to a pillar, and let them try to experience a little of the terrible pain he endured. After the *Salve Regina*, they should recite five devout prayers. [C, 56]

They frequently wore hair shirts

452. The friars frequently wore hair shirts, and punished their bodies severely. Pietro da Portogallo wore an extremely coarse hair shirt next to his skin, while Battista da Faenza beat himself mercilessly with the discipline, as if he were a lump of wood. Francesco da Macerata wore such a fierce hair shirt that it seemed to him he was continuously feeling the pains of purgatory. [III, 405]

Three types of clothes

453. Antonio Corso wore a rough and very prickly hair shirt next to his skin. Since it was difficult to wear a hair shirt all the time and still keep it clean and in good repair, he had three made so that he could always have one on under his habit. This was to punish his senses and to console his spirit.

One of his shirts was made from horsehair, fashioned in such a way that the points of the hair created continuous torment. The second was made of hemp rope, woven tightly together with coarse and chafing knots that gave even more torment than the horse hair. Then, when he'd grown quite old, God put an even greater flame of love in his heart, along with the fervour and resolve to increase his suffering even more. The result was a third, even rougher, shirt, made from pigskin and fashioned to be extra abrasive. To feel this abrasion even more, he snipped the skin with scissors to make it extra sharp. Thus it was that his poor body suffered hourly martyrdom, since one of these shirts - pigskin, hemp or horsehair, was always on his back. [I, 284]

It doesn't matter

454. Onorio of Montegrano was ugly in face and in form, but beautiful in the brightness of his conscience. His soul was most precious in the eyes of the Lord, whom he served with great virtue and faithfulness in the perfect observance of the Rule. He was very austere, and for many years wore a hair shirt. Then, to avoid the friars getting to know about it, he changed to wearing a girdle, four fingers wide, full of nails, reversed so that the points went into his skin. He

wore this right up to his death, desiring never to be without some sort of suffering to remind him of what Our Lord suffered for us. He spent as much time keeping vigil as he did sleeping, it was a wonder that no-one noticed this all those years.

One day he went to the friary at Ferrara on visitation, and set out from there for Bologna. On the way he fell ill, and when he reached the friary at Bologna his illness got considerably worse. This was due as much to his advanced age (he was nearly seventy) as to the many fatigues he'd undergone. Yet he showed remarkable patience during his sickness.

He was nursed by Brother Ludovico da Bologna, who saw the girdle already mentioned when the time came to treat the sickness by putting ointment and other medications on the affected part. So Brother Ludovico held him and said, "My Father, the girdle has to come off. Your body is so racked by the sickness that this is probably too much for it to bear." The servant of God answered, "It doesn't matter. Let it stay there." But Brother Ludovico replied, "It might not be pleasing to God, my Father, that you should have the girdle on now." And he took Brother Onorio by the hand, and removed the girdle from him. [III, 113 - 114]

Six thousand, six hundred and seventy-six lashes

455. Antonio Corso often took the discipline, and he told me himself that he used to lash himself six thousand, six hundred and seventy-six times. He used to retire to a secret place, take off all his clothes, and lash himself from head to toe with the discipline chain, reciting psalms all the while. He would continue whipping himself for five hours, at the end of which he knew how many strokes he'd given himself because the first time he did this he'd counted them, and timed it all with an hour glass.

He taught this practice to many devout friars, although few could go the full distance because of the many assaults the devil launched on them while they were at it. He told me that he himself could never set about it without the devil appearing and trying to stop him in some way.

"I want you to know," he said, "that taking this particular discipline is very pleasing to Our Lord, and anyone who completes it receives great graces from God. I've taught it to many others, including Brother Raniero da Borgo, who kept it up all night in the church at Foligno. He couldn't complete it though, because the devil thwarted him. And let me tell you, I've seen the devil - sometimes coming out of the church at Foligno. I saw him above the cistern, with two containers in his hands, looking as if he would like to draw some water. I confronted him and said 'Hey, Malatesta! You're thirsty are you?' When he heard me, he instantly vanished. Like smoke!" [III, 251]

It wasn't necessary to prompt the friars

456. In those days it wasn't necessary to prompt the friars to fast, pray, wear hair shirts, observe silence - or follow the many good practices undertaken by the good and fervent friars in our Order. Maybe the friars practised these things too much, but whatever the case, Superiors found it necessary to keep an eye open lest they should grow excessive in what they did and make themselves ill through their efforts.

There was a strong, universal desire among those first servants of God to do nothing except suffer for the love of Christ. They thought of nothing else. [II, 253]

Do you know who these friars are?

457. You never saw a friar with any colour in his cheeks. You'd often hear it said, "Everyone knows that you can tell they practise harsh penances by the way they're all pale and wan." At other times people said:

"Do you know who these friars are? All of them were notorious men in the world - soldiers, captains, assassins, murderers. They've now been brought to this way of life to do penance. May God grant them perseverance! There's never been a harsher way of life in the whole world than this one. They're all run down by their labours. They eat little, and will take hardly a little bread and water. They're predestined for eternal life, and God has converted them because he wants them to be saved." [IV, 157]

They're rogues and petty thieves

458. Patience was one of their virtues, and had three obstacles to overcome before it could become truly great. The first of these was extreme suffering. They all endured this willingly, a good part of it coming about because of the times in which they lived and their being still unknown. This ignorance about them was the reason they never got food or lodging when they travelled anywhere, so that they had to spend the night under trees, in caves, in stables, in hospices, in hay lofts, and in other similar uncomfortable places. Many people thought they were scoundrels and charlatans, and this brought them a lot of suffering.

Among the many examples of this, we can take the experience of Brother Ludovico da Capranica. This holy friar once journeyed with another holy man, Brother Pietro da Pontremoli, from the Marches to Rome. Near the castle of Col Fiorito, a man from the mountains of Foligno approached them from behind with an unsheathed sword and starting whacking them with the flat of the blade. He kept behind them for three miles, whacking first one then the other. A woman said, "Why are you beating these poor defenceless men?" and he

replied, “You won’t ask that when they steal from your house and roast your chickens. They’re rogues and thieves, and are up to no good. You leave it to me: I’ll make them pay properly for it!” This was so gratifying to the friars that they couldn’t hide their feelings, and when they reached Foligno they related the tale to the others, bursting out laughing, and thanking God for giving them the grace to suffer for his love. Whenever they thought or spoke about it afterwards, they couldn’t stop laughing.

This same Brother Ludovico travelled to Narni from Rome with Brother Benedict, a lay friar from Brescia. They went past a boy as they were leaving Vallestretta, and he began to howl and cry. A good number of people heard the commotion and came running up. One man started hitting the friars with a club, shouting, “Thieves! They’re trying to rob this boy!” As has happened previously, the friars felt great joy over this, and showed it. They told the friars at Narni about it with considerable satisfaction. [V, 289]

Neither hypocrisy nor desperation

459. In all our fasting, and in everything we do, we have drawn upon our first Fathers. This is neither hypocrisy nor what might be called desperation, but simply obligation. We have professed to observe the Rule of the Seraphic Francis, which is founded on most high poverty. A way of life followed by so many glorious saints and approved by Holy Church cannot be considered imprudent. [II, 32]

There is nothing that can’t be achieved

460. These things are truly marvellous. But when you think of the help of God’s grace, which makes even the most difficult task easy, and of a soul resolved to reach its goals with all its rational strength, then there’s nothing that can’t be attempted and achieved by steadfast application. [I, 286]

God's chief concern is the heart

461. It’s of little consequence if we’ve reformed externally but haven’t reformed ourselves interiorly, since God’s chief concern is the heart. When he finds that purified and detached from worldly things he fills it with his Holy spirit, who brings every virtue with him when he comes. [II, 251]

462. The holy man Francesco Tittelmanns said our Lord cares little about the exterior when it doesn’t reflect the interior. And Saint Francis didn’t care much about formalities, but more about goodness and uprightness of heart. [III, 176]

Each one has his measure assigned to him

463. When the Capuchins first emerged, Antonio Corso joined them immediately. He was received by Brother Ludovico and sent to the Province of

Saint Francis, where he stayed in the first friary at Foligno, called Saint Valentine's. The austerity and holiness of his life was so great that he was called 'the holy friar' in the city and throughout the region. And if his inner holiness had been equal to that of his outer state, especially in the severity of his sufferings, he would have been another Saint Francis. However, each one has his measure assigned to him by the providence of God. [VI, 171]

They may glitter like gold

464. I believe and firmly maintain that no-one ever entered the Congregation of Capuchin Friars and proved to be his own body's biggest enemy more than this holy man, Antonio Corso. If he had stopped at external things and not progressed further, what would he have achieved and what sort of praise would have been given him? Well, his achievement would have been to become an enemy of his body, but with no advantage to his soul.

If we stand back and examine someone's eternal works, these may be bright enough, on the surface, to create a favourable impression. But all the time the person's inner self may lack this light and be enveloped in darkness. Seen from a distance these works may glitter like gold, but close up and in the long run it is the glitter not of gold but of useless tinsel that they display. And this is exactly how it is with hypocrites. They perform dazzling deeds for all to see, but don't pay attention to the spirit, which is much more important. Indeed, because of their imperfections - even vices - they do great harm. For if we want fasting and suffering to be acceptable to God and meritorious, we need to accompany them with virtues, which make the soul most beautiful in the eyes of its Creator.

What's the use of keeping vigils, being always on your knees, taking the discipline, fasting all the time, going about, as it were, half clad, and inflicting other kinds of penance on your body, if all the time your heart is cruel, conceited, proud and full of self-love, bereft of piety, humility, mortification, compassion and charity? What's the use of practising external penances if you go about plotting to harm this one or that, always looking for an opportunity to hurt others? Is fasting performed by someone in such a frame of mind praiseworthy? If you abstain from meat and dairy foods, but tear others apart by murmuring against them, cut them to pieces with curses, and destroy their reputation and honour, is that praiseworthy?

How many there are in the world today who are just like the Pharisees! Be sure that God is, at best, only a little pleased with their fasting and penances. You can be certain that such abstemiousness is as profitable as the boasts of the upright man who stood in the Temple and said, "I am not like other men: I fast twice a week, I give a tenth of everything I possess." (Luke 18.11)

Frugality must be companioned by humility, patience and gentleness. It must be accompanied with piety, modesty and prompt obedience. It must seem to be

surrounded by mercy, fraternal charity, and the holy desire genuinely to please and help all others according to the Divine will. Penitence never permits itself to continue without complete faith, firm Christian hope and ardent charity. Abstinence always stretches out the wings of the soul to make it soar towards heaven along the path of prayer, meditation and the contemplation of heavenly things. A person with such qualities is truly a pilgrim on the earth, and can be said - like the apostle Paul - to dwell with Christ in heaven (Philippians 3.20).

That most fervent soul about whom I write, Antonio Corso, did all these things, and other illustrious and wonderful deeds with surpassing excellence. [I, 286]

465. Brother Thaddeus of Montepetriolo asked Antonio Corso how long he had been living the way he was. The servant of God answered:

"I have been cultivating this austere way of life for twenty-five years. But what of it? The efforts I've made are good only in so far as they are pleasing to God, and they please him only when they are done for love of him. I've exhausted myself trying to get rid of self-love, which diminishes all I do! Who can free me from vainglory in doing good? If our Lord God did not direct our hearts, all we do would be done by ourselves, not by him. And if our efforts are our own and lack concurrence with divine grace, they are abysmal in the eyes of God. All our endeavours should be directed towards being purged of the poison of our own passions, and then everything we do, no matter how trivial, will be acceptable to His Majesty.

"At the same time, we must be prepared exteriorly. Everything we keep for our particular use without any real necessity stands in our way and disqualifies us from being called true observers of the Rule. Such things slow us down in spirit, and condemn us to the pains of Purgatory." [III, 253]

Self-will

466. Pietro da Portogallo said, "There's no greater demon in our lives than self-will." [III, 302]

467. So it was that the servant of God, Felice, laid a good foundation, based on mortification of the flesh and true humility. But above all it rested on the complete subjugation of self-will. He knew how to keep his fervour of spirit tranquil amid so many concerns, and resigned himself to the will of God as shown in the demands of holy obedience. It was by this means that he was given the office of quester. During all the time he held that office he never sought, neither directly nor indirectly, to be relieved of it. He just carried it out in the undoubting faith that it was God's will, and serenely bore all the bodily and spiritual discomforts that came his way. He placed his hope in God, trusting that he would sustain him amid so many labours and distractions - like a man in a forest protected from the other creatures there. Thus it was that he

became great and was protected from every evil: subjugation of self-will is the foundation of perfection. On the other hand, it is impossible to attain true perfection if one retains even a drop of self-will - although one can be in the grace of God. [III, 470]

What use is it to a Friar Minor?

468. Francesco da Torri thought, "Since I must leave the world, I want to enter the strictest and poorest order there is to do penance for my sins." His lifestyle was more angelic than human, aimed at complete self-abnegation. His great desire was to be jailed for months and put on bread and water. He said, "In the Order I've always desired to suffer for the love of Jesus Christ, for I know that if my suffering does not in some way give honour to God and benefit others, then it's worthless. What use is it to a Friar Minor if he scourges his body and does other penances yet does not love God above all things and his neighbour as himself?" Truly, his desire to mortify himself and to benefit others was always rooted in the heart of this servant of God. [III, 440]

469. "Brother Bernardino," said Giovanni Spagnuolo, "I advise you to strip yourself completely of self-love - indeed, of your own self. Wherever you are, whether subject or Superior, set yourself to do everything well. But beware! If you retain just one dram of self-love it will contaminate all the good you do and render it less acceptable to God than it might otherwise be. You're still young, so take counsel from the old. Anyone who tends to perfection fulfils and understands the purpose of religious life, which is to deny self-will and conform totally to the will of God." [III, 296]

They have been reduced to a state of compromise

470. An extreme and anxious zeal about poverty served initially to make the friars break away from widespread laxity, but later it was something of an impediment to the reasonable and necessary progress of the Reform. It had an additional effect in that it has been necessary to find accommodation close to farms and towns for friars who live in isolated friaries. This is mainly because of the large number of sick friars to be found in such an enormous group of men.

Consequently, their life, houses and habits and everything else have been reduced to a state of compromise and to a religious program. Those who do not have such a fervent spirit as the first founders can still live within the substantial observance of the Rule. And those who strive with an ardent spirit for the perfection of the virtues and the Gospel life have all the opportunity they desire. Hidden away within the usual daily routine of the friary, they go further than those who are content to do what is necessary to be saved and do not aspire to do more. They can securely follow their blessed desire to achieve true

holiness, watched by the heavenly Giver who sees what happens in secret. [VI, 281]

As their suffering increased, so did their delight in it

471. They prayed with purity of mind, mastery over their senses, and perseverance, and this inflamed them with the love of God. Ecstasies, visions and the spirit of prophecy increased their ardour. As a result, they longed to be conformed to Christ crucified, in imitation of our Seraphic Father. They grieved when they thought of the offences committed by sinners, and unspeakable misery of their suffering souls. With great insight and zeal they reflected on occasions of suffering - external and internal - for the love of God. Their sufferings were immense, but seemed small to them, just as fire sprinkled with water doesn't die down but grows stronger.

They accompanied their very suffering with a lively inner life, according to the light of the graces they received. To them this inner life far surpassed their suffering, enabling them to do penance for past sins with great joy. They could experience a small part of the pain Christ suffered for them and be made members of Christ and more clearly like him. They were filled with joy at the thought of the glory given to God and the delight given to Christ, who was offering their sufferings to the Father as his first fruit. They considered the happiness our Father Saint Francis felt as he savoured the smoke of the sacrifice they were making of themselves to God through the observance of his beloved poverty and his holy Rule. They rejoiced at the consolation a friar faithful to the Order meets at the moment of death. They were glad as they contemplated the light that, like a candelabra, they sent ahead to alleviate the darkness of Purgatory and its punishments for relatives, benefactors and other dead persons. They were happy at the thought of the fruit they hoped for, beseeching some desired favour for themselves or others. They rejoiced over the honour they gave to the Blessed Virgin and their other beloved saints, and the dignity and benefit given to Holy Church. They encountered other delights, known only to the ones who experienced them.

The result of all this was that as their sufferings increased so did their delight in suffering. Indeed, their desire to suffer led them into action, and their search for opportunities to suffer never ceased, nor was an occasion ever passed up. So it happened that their sorrow was reduced to the single lament that they couldn't suffer as much as they wanted to. [VII, 81]

IN THE CENACLE OF LOVE

The Capuchin fraternity passed its days heroically in a life of harsh penance, acute sufferings and endless privations. The friars were troubled from within and without. Comforts were not known and were not welcome.

From their pale, thin faces they nevertheless radiated an immovable calm, a cheerful serenity and charming smiles. They lived in imperturbable and perfect joy.

And the secret? A treasure was hidden within the stark Capuchin huts: love. It was more than fraternal love, more like the family love that parents and children share, making them all members of one and the same family. It was a bond that kept them united and ameliorated their extreme sufferings. They lived for each other, and were attentively concerned about and tenderly sensitive towards one another. Their greatest sorrow was separation, and their greatest satisfaction was to serve. They shared all their sorrows in common, and the glory of one was the joy of all.

Fraternal charity was the new commandment given by Christ to his disciples. Completely seraphic in ardour, it is the hallmark of the sons of the Father.

In the Capuchin communities, peace and intimate union reigned supreme. The friars relished the affection and cheerfulness of living together to the praise and glory of God. They held in abhorrence thoughts which were not entirely benevolent, as well as rash or severe judgments. They always proposed kind and favourable interpretations about the actions of others. Harsh words, insolent irony, scornful sarcasm and the derisive smile were all outlawed. Nothing other than kind and pleasant talk was to be heard. They supported one another, and with the balm of charitable words they alleviated the moral sufferings of their confreres. But since to be content with words alone would be a deception, and never a sincere love, they sought a higher charity: that of works - above all towards the sick, the neediest members of the mystical body of Christ and of the community. For these there were the delicate foods, airier cells, and care and attention. Everyone sought to render charitable service towards the sick brothers, for it was considered an honour. They desired it as if it were a prize.

If distance or separation sometimes cool love down, not so among the Capuchin Friars, because these things inflamed it even more. Their meeting in friaries or on journeys were occasions for explosions of joy. Foreign brothers were welcomed with embraces, kisses and hugs. Their departure left an emptiness in the community and a pang in the hearts of its members.

Gathered together in the holy name of Jesus

472. We ordain that in our friaries there should be no fewer than six friars and no more than twelve. Gathered together in the holy name of Jesus, let them always strive towards greater perfection with all their hearts and souls. So that they may be true disciples of Christ himself, let them love one another cordially, bearing with each other's short-comings, always exercising themselves in divine love and fraternal charity, and striving to give the best example to one another and to everyone else at all times. [C, 139]

473. This was how they tried to live at all times. They were close to one another, sociable and most loving, remembering the counsel of their Father, who said that wherever the friars are, they ought to be familiar and friendly

towards one another. I experienced this for myself, and can say that when I came to put on this blessed habit, I saw so much charity and such joyfulness and fraternity that I thought I was among the angels in Paradise. I was so happy that I very often cried with joy over it.

And this behaviour was not only toward the sick, but also between the healthy friars. The tone was such that a friar might even take food from his own plate and give it to his brother, with great charity and holy insistence, saying that the other had greater need of it than he did. In a word: there was a wonderful charity among them. [I, 265]

474. So great was the love among them, that even though they found themselves swamped by tribulations because of the grave persecutions they suffered, and because of their strict life, nonetheless the charity and love among them made every deprivation seem slight. [IV, 186] It was a marvellous thing that amid such keen sufferings, their loving conversation took the edge off all the harshness, so that it seemed all these things were bearable. [IV, 39]

475. So great was the joy they found in that simplicity and charity towards one another, that even though their situation brought extreme suffering, nonetheless they loved one another so genuinely that they would usually have preferred death rather than be deprived of their holy fraternising. [IV, 154]

476. The love that reigned among them was so great that nothing gave them greater sorrow than the fear that the Congregation might be totally dismantled and that they would have to separate from one another. [II, 452]

477. They were isolated from all worldly cares in their solitary, small friaries, with the result that they lived like the angels of God, in perfect harmony and peace. Rarely did they leave their houses. When it was necessary to go out and get alms, it seemed to them like a thousand years before they returned again. They enjoyed such familiarity with one another that while they were away from their friaries they felt great distress. [II, 457]

Some dissension and unpleasantness occurred

478. The same Brother Antonio da Piagnano told how he belonged to the family in the friary at Iesi, where the Guardian was a lay friar - a man highly esteemed in that Province for his prudence and good government. Some dissension and unpleasantness occurred between the Guardian and another friar, and the Guardian spoke about it with Brother Anthony at least twice.

Then the Guardian died, and the same evening that he died he was brought to the church, and Brother Anthony was assigned to watch over his corpse. After some time, however, Anthony grew sleepy and retired to his cell, where he fell asleep sitting on the litter. While he was sleeping, the dead Guardian appeared to him, and pointed out that Anthony had left him dead in the church. Brother Anthony asked the Guardian how he was, and he replied, "Not good."

"Why?", said Brother Anthony. "Because of that other friar," the Guardian said, naming him. In fact, Brother Anthony believed they had not attempted to reconcile their differences, or had been insincere when they did.

This is a real danger among religious. Since so many kinds of people live and interact so closely together, they can easily hide discords among themselves. Gradually they become no longer vigilant in mortifying and ruling these passions properly. This is all the more so since such dissonance often comes in disguise, or under the appearance of holy zeal. Thus it happens not infrequently that both parties believe themselves to be right. When neither one recognises his fault or error, they cannot become perfectly reconciled. Furthermore, as their passions increase and their minds darken, there is a great danger that in being unaware of it, their malevolence comes to such a point that the true substance of fraternal love is driven irrevocably from their hearts. Hence a thousand bad effects follow from this, the situation worsening so that they don't come to confession or Communion or join in other good exercises. Rather, they nourish the basilisk in the depth of their souls, and, spending their life unfruitfully in the service of God, they come to a wretched end.

They cannot be excused because of their ignorance, or for not obeying the first promptings of remorse of conscience that came to them. For they have willingly obeyed their passions - which typically blind the mind. Besides, they have committed a great sin of ingratitude, for they've been called by God into such a noble state, yet have not given every attention to perfection. Instead they've given rein to concupiscence.

Hence God justly allows them to fall into an interior darkness that leads them wretchedly to exterior darkness in the end. [VI, 565]

United as one in heart and one soul

479. Fraternal charity was the other virtue that marked the blessed Reform. It was like a condiment, used to sweeten the many bitter things that came from the friars' involvement in so many travails. They exulted with joy, seeing themselves favoured by God in being given such a wonderful calling, and the grace to be united together to observe the Rule perfectly. There was nothing they would not have done and suffered for each other if need be.

They talked together in great peace and tranquillity, being comforted together in loving the observance of the Rule and in loving suffering. They had nothing to share together except suffering, and so there was no discord of any kind among them. They were all far from being ambitious, seeking nothing but the discomfort of their cells, their habits and their food. They never indulged in idle talk, but only in spiritual discussions, especially about the Rule and holy poverty. This latter topic particularly occupied them, for it had been buried for so many years and resurrected by our blessed Father Saint Francis in his day. Thus it was that they had no reason to feel offended by one another.

Their spirit of devotion, their zeal about the Rule and the example of our Father Saint Francis ignited fraternal love marvellously in their breasts. They endeavoured with all their might to be united as one in heart and soul. [V, 292]

I have never judged except for the good

480. "I am leaving you a record in memory of my love," said a friar of the Province of Genova to a confrere. "I have always tried not to worry about events in the Order, but to live with simplicity and purity of heart. I have never judged the actions of anyone else except to see them in a good light, reckoning all the other friars better than me, and more faithful and dearer to God. Therefore, do the very same if you desire to live with a tranquil soul and acquire that peace which by admirable grace unites our souls to the Divine Essence." After he'd said that, they both recited the litanies, and when they had finished what they had to do, the good friar happily breathed forth his spirit. [VI, 555]

Never think evil of anyone

481. The purity of mind of the venerable Father Bernardino d'Asti was so great, he could never think evil of anyone. When some fault was reported to him he always said, "Do you know what his intention was? I do not believe this is a failing, because he has done it for some good purpose which we don't know about. But if there is some defect, I'll let you know later." He always took the part of the accused and interpreted everything in the best light. [III, 188]

482. Vincenzo da Foiano had achieved such simplicity he could not think anyone would sin. When a novice accused himself of some transgression, small though it might be, the holy man would respond, "Oh poor fellow, must I punish you for having committed a fault?" When the novice answered, "Father, I did it," he would say, "Oh poor fellow. You must have been well intended. I'm sure you haven't done any wrong."

Once he was told about a lord who laid great burdens on his vassals. Brother Vincent said, "I don't believe he does things like that, because God would take his position from him." And, claiming that he himself had done the same and worse, Brother Vincent said, "The poor fellow must have some serious reason. The secrets of princes cannot be known. I've heard said that he is a holy man and of good will. I do not believe the Lord would let him remain in such grave sin." In this way he always maintained a good opinion about others. [III, 340]

483. Giovanni Battista da Terni was quite enlightened by God in holy prayer and I believe he achieved great purity and great simplicity of heart. His purity of mind was so great he couldn't really think evil of anyone. [III, 391]

To take the burden from the shoulders of others

484. Brother Antonio da Fossano, a priest, was a holy friar. He was very devout, full of charity, and very eager to suffer. When bad spells of weather-rain, snow and the like - came, he offered himself to the Guardians to go questing and to do other similar services to take the burden of that labour from the shoulders of others. He considered it a grace to be able to go.

He became afflicted with a serious and debilitating catarrh problem, which troubled him a lot. So he stopped going to choir and joining in the Office, because he didn't want to visit his difficulty on others and irritate and distract them. However, in order not to lose the merit attached to being present for the divine praises, and to offer them to God, in so far as he could, he took up a position nearby, outside the choir, and listened devoutly while the friars chanted. [VI, 555]

Loving words

485. The words of Francesco da Novara were so loving, warm and humane that they greatly refreshed everyone, [III, 367]

486. Brother Angelo da Sant'Angelo in Vado was very kind towards his needy brothers. If he saw friars troubled or sick, he would minister to them with such kindness that he seemed more like an angel than a man. [III, 56]

487. When Francesco da Macerata heard of a friar in distress, he couldn't rest until he'd comforted him. If he was unable to do this with words, he would go away to a solitary place and harshly discipline himself, praying to the Lord for a long time for his troubled brother. Later he would return to him to see if the temptation had departed. If he found him consoled, he would embrace him with great tenderness and say, "Son, I have great compassion for you. I know very well how serious it is to be tempted by the enemy." When he heard about the tribulations of the poor seculars, he wept for them and said to the friars, "Oh my brothers, I don't know if you're aware of the tribulations our beloved benefactor suffers. Do not forget him. Pray to God for him that he may be given grace, lest the poor soul be lost."

This servant of God was so practiced in patience and had such a kind nature that it was almost impossible for him to get angry, except with himself. If he was asked for advice about some quandary or other, he would answer with his head lowered, saying "My brother, I know nothing nor can I tell you anything. But if it would do you some good, I would shed my blood for you." [III, 407]

488. When Battista da Faenza saw a brother troubled, he would seek him out and embrace him, saying, "Oh my Father, I've committed so many sins that no-one deserves to suffer greater afflictions than I do. But should that be a cause for despair, or a cause for rejoicing and trusting in the mercy of God? No-one can know how wicked my life has been, wicked enough to deserve hell a thousand

times over. And yet so much mercy has been shown me! Surely, no-one should despair! If God has forgiven a great sinner like me, he'll certainly forgive anyone who trusts in his mercy." With these and other loving words, the servant of God would comfort his brother. [III, 507]

Loving to all

489. In his conversation, Bernardino d'Asti was kind, affable and mild. He showed himself loving to all, with the seriousness and maturity of a holy and very wise man. [VI, 22]

He seemed more an angel than a man

490. Brother Pietro da Civita Ducale was very zealous about the Divine Office, so that even though he was sick he liked to attend choir. If he couldn't stand, he knelt. Throughout his life he observed the practice of remaining secluded, and so was never seen conversing or walking with the friars. Outside choral Office and the common prayer, he gave himself to contemplation, either in the woods or alone in his cell. Such was his conversation that he seemed more an angel than a man, and he was considered holy by all the friars. Superiors willingly entrusted him with the care of the novices. [VI, 245]

Let's talk about something else

491. To attend to similar spiritual exercises, Father Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo avoided not only idle talk but also conversations about legitimate matters. He usually made it known that others should not speak to him except about things of God or about cases of conscience. Otherwise, with some protest, he would not listen. For if he wasted a moment of time, he felt grave remorse of conscience. In fact, if he realised that the discussion was taking him in an ominous direction, at the first opportunity he would say, "Let's talk about something else!" He would walk away, with head bowed. [VII, 395]

Neither murmuring nor detraction

492. We exhort all our friars to guard themselves against all detraction and murmuring, especially about ecclesiastical prelates, the clergy and religious persons, especially those of our Order. [C, 134]

493. Angry words, which would have shown their souls to be disturbed either by murmuring and detraction or by things of the world, were never heard to come from their lips [I, 264]

494. Francesco da Torri said, "It is no small victory in the Order to conquer the vice of murmuring. No matter how much we exert ourselves at prayer and other good works, we never gain as much as we lose by murmuring." [III, 441]

495. When Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo heard talk about others, he either fled or raised his voice saying, "Let's talk about something else!" [III, 64] If Girolamo da Montepulciano heard evil said about anyone, he would immediately make an excuse and flee. [III, 323]

496. A Guardian wanted to test a holy man, though insincerely, by telling to him he had a very dissolute Friar in the house. However when the holy man heard the complaint, he immediately threw himself to his knees and said to him, "Father Guardian, forgive me, I have not fed our little donkey." (Since he was a very old man he led a donkey about, and sometimes rode it.) Leaving the Guardian, he went to the little stable and threw himself to his knees. With many tears he thanked God who had given him the grace to flee the murmuring. The Guardian later observed him levitating. [III, 231]

He always spoke with charity

497. Brother Onorio da Montegranaro was frightening in appearance, and always rigorous in punishing vices. But he was most benevolent towards good people, and always spoke about others with charity, concealing their faults. [VI, 313]

Do not say it, do not say it

498. Antonio da Sicily was so kind towards others that if one of his brothers asked him anything, he could never rest until he had satisfied him. He was so exemplary in his conversation that everyone in Rome regarded him as holy, especially the Pope, who esteemed him so much that he often wanted to speak with him himself. For it delighted the Pope very much to hear Anthony speak so simply. He was so controlled in his speech that no one ever heard him say an idle word. He suffered greatly on hearing evil spoken of other people, and should he hear something bad said about someone else, he would pull himself up short, turn round and say to the speaker, "Oh my brother, don't say it! Don't say it! Don't you know that the one you are talking about is your brother, and he's holier than I am?" Then he would rush away. [III, 454]

Fraternal correction

499. Superiority was unknown among them. As brothers, they all desired fraternal correction, not only from their Superior, but from each one of their brothers. [II, 244]

500. If it chanced that some critical, idle or useless talk arose, one of the brothers would immediately point it out. Humbly kneeling down, without becoming disturbed by it, the one who had initiated it confessed his fault and promised to make amends for it. If it happened that some injurious words were spoken by other people to one of the friars which happened frequently so that the heavenly Father might help the friars to profit - that friar didn't immediately

become agitated. Rather, he took the injury joyfully and cherished it like a precious gem. He gave heartfelt thanks to God, and to the one who had injured him by his words and actions. [I, 264]

501. When, as a test, someone told the servant of God, Brother Giacomo da Cetona, his defects, he seemed to come to life. With a smile on his face, he answered, "Do you wonder that I have committed this fault? You don't know the other worse ones that I know about! If God took his hand from me, I could leave the Order and do all manner of evil and damn myself like many others have done." [III, 360]

Kneel down and tell him his fault

502. If a friar thought he'd hurt one of his brothers with just half a word or action, no matter how slight, he'd hurry to put things right with him. He would kneel down with his cord around his neck and confess his fault to him, especially if he was about to receive Holy Communion. This would be reciprocated with genuine tenderness and serenity, which often touched their hearts. With both reduced to tears, their hearts were cleansed, and they were affirmed by a more realistic experience of the Passion of our Saviour, which they were about to recall in that most Sacred Mystery, which they were now about to approach with greater insight and fervour. [VII, 82]

The works of mercy

503. This is a saying of Bernardo d'Offida:

"On judgement day, the Lord will require from us a stricter account of the works of mercy than anything else. When I think over what our Lord Jesus Christ says - that the whole Law is fulfilled in the love of God and our neighbour (Matteo 22:40) - I am never happier than when I am at prayer or in some kind of service to others. When I am not at either of these tasks, it seems to me I'm not only unreligious, but also unchristian." [III, 47]

He was exemplary in discourse

504. The holy man Ludovico da Reggio was, among all his virtues, most notable for austerity of life and fervour at prayer. He seldom ate more than once a day, and observed all the Lenten practices followed by our Father Saint Francis. He did these fasts with great devotion, and an exacting strictness about food. His custom was to never eat meat. Against his bare skin he wore a coat of mail as a hairshirt. He habitually exerted himself to the limits, especially in works of charity. Thus, regarding seculars, he preached with great fervour and spoke so effectively that throughout Calabria there were very few places where he had not sown the Word of God, with wonderful results. He also preached energetically to the friars. The more uncompromising and austere he was

towards himself, the more loving and kindly he was towards the friars, being understanding about their spiritual and bodily needs. With great charity he helped them as much as possible.

He was so pleasant, humble, modest and exemplary in discourse that he seemed like an angel of God. Hence all the friars regarded him as a holy man. He was most constant in austerity and most zealous in regard to poverty. [V, 194]

This good Father has all the faith in the world

505. Giuseppe da Collamato was illiterate, but always involved himself in charitable works. When he stayed in friaries he acted as altar server to the friars, and did all the other lowly services. Quite often he was Guardian and novice master, and he governed very well indeed. The friars all said, "This good Father has all the faith in the world." He showed great love, and was understanding towards his brothers if they were dissatisfied. Although he was very austere towards himself, nonetheless he was very kind towards others. [III, 36]

He did everything with great charity

506. Gratiano da Norcia never wanted to wear anything other than a patched habit. He fasted almost continuously and rarely took soup. His office was to cook for the friars and to serve the infirm, all of which he did with great charity. He was able to cook at night so that he didn't have to talk. Therefore, in the morning he could remain at his devotions in church, while in manual work he kept his mind on God. Finally, towards the end of his life, he was so conformed to this pattern that he left behind him the consensus of opinion that he was a holy man. [VI, 301]

He was everywhere

507. When a menial task had to be done, Brother Antonio da Sicily was always at hand. Often when the clerics went to sweep the house or the refectory, they found that Brother Anthony had done it ahead of time. He invariably washed all the kitchen utensils. If there was an old friar who couldn't do much for himself, the holy man would visit him many times each day, offering himself to him with so much charity that he seemed like an angel. And I who write these things, have seen almost all of them with my own eyes. [III, 455]

This crust is enough for me

508. Often, when there was only a little bread, they offered it to one another and said, "This is your main meal. You need more food. This crust is enough for me, but it is not enough for you." The reply would be, "I am young. I can

bear it more easily.” In this holy contention, the crusts often remained because no-one would take them. Each wanted his brother to have them. [IV, 154]

509. Such was the great love they bore one another. Quite often they ate sitting on the ground around the food, placed there in the middle by the Guardian, who represented Jesus Christ for them. Many times, when the new fruit came, the Father Guardian called them all together and with great charity gave these refreshments to his sons. [IV, 21]

Every possible charity should be shown to the sick

510. Let it be ordered that the friars neither ask for nor receive fancy foods unbecoming to our state of poverty. Nor may spices be used, except when necessary for sick friars. We should show every possible charity to the sick, as the Rule and every just law requires - after the example of our Seraphic Father, who was not ashamed to quest meat publicly for the infirm. [C, 54]

511. The friars may not quest for expensive or delicate food, except when it is for the sick. Consequently, to ensure that questing is not a sham, we order that meat, eggs, cheese, fish or other fancy foods unfitting to our state of poverty may not be sought - even during *carnevale*. [C, 83]

The infirm were treated with incredible charity

512. In those days, and ever since, the infirm have always been treated with incredible charity, solicitude and care. No mother has ever surpassed the charity of the friars towards the infirm, just as spiritual love actually surpasses natural love of the flesh. The precept of the Rule can be more charitable in well disposed hearts than natural instinct in worldly persons.

The Rule says:

“If anyone of them falls sick, the other friars ought to serve him as they would want to be served themselves”; and:

“If a mother loves and nourishes her physical child, with what greater diligence ought each friar to love and nourish his spiritual brother”.

The friars led a very harsh life observing the Rule, engaged in work that had a thousand other demands, yet the sick were not left wanting for anything. The friars helped, consoled and served the sick and provided for them in all their needs. And, while they didn’t have friends and benefactors for their own needs, they were neither ashamed nor timid about asking them humbly for any necessary help. They would set aside scruples about poverty in this matter, since the Rule and the example of Saint Francis encouraged them to make all necessary provision for the sick and infirm.

This charity has always given and continues to give great comfort to the friars, and inspires them to do penance. They know that in their old age and in their

infirmities they will be served and provided for with the utmost diligence in both temporal and spiritual needs. By divine providence, in the Congregation there is no friary that lacks good and proficient doctors, who have treated the friars with great charity. Similarly there is no lack in the provision of medicines and foods and of everything else needed for the infirm. We can see divine providence in this through the merits of Saint Francis and through the promise made to him by God: that his divine Majesty would himself provide for the observers of the Rule. Nor would he ever abandon them. Therefore we have seen many miracles performed for the infirm, when by human and ordinary means they could not be provided for. [V, 293]

So tender a mother was never seen

513. So that this may be fulfilled for the infirm, according to what reason says and the Rule commands and fraternal charity requires, it is ordered that when any friar becomes infirm, the Father Guardian should immediately appoint a suitable friar to serve him in all his needs. If it is necessary for him to move to another friary, let this be done immediately. Let each friar think about what he would want to happen to himself in the same situation. There is no good, natural mother bound so much to her child as is each friar is to his brothers, just as the pious Father of our Order states. [C, 88]

514. I now want to mention the General Chapter's order concerning the large size of cells or rooms. It hasn't eventuated that large cells have been built, except in the case of rooms for the sick. These have been built while giving consideration to the needs of the sick, and to charity and discretion, care being taken not to offend against poverty. [I, 256]

515. I'm not going to dwell on the charity shown towards the infirm, because I couldn't match a thousandth of it. I'll say this only: our Father made a comparison between friars and a tender mother who loves and nourishes her physical child, and his words were carved into the hearts of those good friars. Towards the sick they were more than a physical mother, since they were spiritual brothers in Christ. Whatever they themselves would have wanted to meet their needs, they did for others in their infirmities and wants, with generosity and a truly ardent spirit. [I, 266]

516. If any of them became infirm, the Guardian would serve him first, and afterwards the friars, with great tenderness and charity. There never was seen a mother so tender and loving towards her child, as those true servants of God were towards their infirm brothers. [IV, 153]

They made them well with the utmost care

517. There was tremendous charity among them. If anyone fell ill, everything possible was done for him. When it was obvious that they did not have a doctor or other things needed by the sick friar in the house, if they were a long way

from the cities they would take him to another fraternity or to a more suitable place. There they nursed him with the utmost care. However, our adversaries took advantage of this to calumniate us, since they said, "They have no charity. When one of them is sick, they take him to hospital." They didn't realise that this was done so that greater charity could be shown to the sick. [IV, 186]

518. Bartolomeo da Spello was wonderfully pleasant to the others, and compassionate to the infirm and the troubled. [III, 260]

He won over the hardness of a butcher

519. As a youth, Brother Antonio da Sicily became a Capuchin and Brother Matteo da Napoli was his teacher in the infirmary. He was well instructed by his teacher, he succeeded him as infirmarian. He showed outstanding virtue, and never got flustered despite all the many problems and hassles that the office carries. Rather, he carried out his duties with marvellous patience and charity.

It was this patience and charity that won over the hardness of a butcher. You see, Brother Anthony often went to the butcher's to beg meat for the infirm friars. There was one butcher who not only did not give him alms but always insulted him. However, Anthony did not stop asking him for alms, but continued to beg from him like this for sixteen years. All he got was insults. But in the end the butcher said, "This brother has worn me down me with his patience." So he gave Anthony a good piece of meat, and said, "Father, always come here, so that I can give you alms."

Anthony was as charitable to the sick and as pleasant to everyone, as he was strict with himself. [VI, 302]

The example of Saint Francis

520. When the friars saw the good disposition, patience and humility of Bernardo d'Offida, they put him to work in the infirmary. He served the sick there with great solicitude and patience, and seemed, amid those heavy labours, to rejoice continuously, night and day. No one ever saw this servant of God too tired to serve. He said:

"It was not without reason that our Father Saint Francis imposed on us in the Rule that we should serve the infirm as we would want to be served ourselves. He gives us the example of a tender mother towards her child. He did this to us show us that we can never do too much, but are always bound to keep on doing more for our infirm brothers. If Our Lord wants us to help one another in all our needs, more so in sickness, which among the corporal needs, is the greatest of all."

He often delighted in talking about what our Father Saint Francis did after his conversion: how he immediately dedicated himself to the hospitals to serve the

infirm and the lepers. He considered this the greatest of the corporal works of mercy, while among the spiritual works of mercy the greatest is to draw another away from sin and help him to be saved. That's why we find our Father well practised in these two works, rather than the other works of mercy. [III, 46]

I would have to quit the Capuchin way of life

521. Bernardino d'Asti also taught them that charity and poverty should go together in serving and providing for the brothers. With the healthy friars one should focus on poverty, and with the sick, on charity. If a friar took sick and didn't want to be treated by doctors or take medicine, he said Guardians should not insist on them doing so. Many holy men, placing their confidence in Jesus Christ, have forgone medical attention. Since we live in the state of perfection, we must imitate holy men and not scorn others who want to imitate them. He said, "I have many ailments. If I were to attend doctors, I would have to quit the Capuchin way of life." [VI, 24]

It pleases the Lord God

522. Brother Francesco da Torri served the sick with incredible love. He said, "I am not sure if everything I do in the Order pleases God. However, when I have worn myself out helping others in their needs, I'm quite certain that this is pleasing to the Lord God. Our Father Saint Francis laid the foundation for this work of charity. He served the lepers with immense solicitude, even though many times they were great sinners. The Lord often showed him that this service pleased him, especially that time he appeared to him as a thoroughly ulcerated leper. Now if it pleases God so much that we serve lepers and other infirm people, even though they are sinners, how much more greatly must it please him when we serve our infirm brothers, who are religious and his own servants?" [III, 441]

It seemed he would dissolve completely in love

523. Antonio da Reggio never wasted a minute in idleness. He was charitable towards everyone, but especially, with great kindness and diligence, towards the sick. He was bursting with love, and never tired of serving. Hence the Lord God often showed that holy man how acceptable his charity was to him. He would go with faith to anyone that was sick with fever, or had a headache or other similar infirmity, and when he made the sign of the Cross over them, the sick person would recover instantly. There was one particular occasion when he healed the small son of a gentleman from Messina. The child was near death, but when Anthony visited him and made the holy sign over him, the boy began to improve immediately. Indeed, he quickly recovered. [V, 204]

Most ardent in charity

524. Brother Serafino da Savona was a man of great holiness. He was many times Guardian at the house at Genova and Vicar of the Province. He was a virgin and most austere in his charity. He never grew tired of serving the infirm personally, taking care of them in body and soul. His discourse was so eloquent and devout, and his conversation so exemplary, that seculars who heard him knew him to be a holy man. [VI, 337]

Infirmarians

525. The servant of God, Giacomo da Reggio, was also admirable in his charity towards others. He'd get greatly upset if a friar became infirm and the Guardian did not allow him to take care of him. When he nursed the sick, he did so with as much diligence as if the person were Jesus Christ. He would sleep only a little, so as not to leave his infirm brother unattended. [III, 450]

526. Antonio da Sicily was infirmarian of the house at Rome. He served there with such charity, kindness and patience, that despite the many problems and labours he had, no-one ever saw him troubled or showing the least sign of impatience. [III, 453]

527. Francesco da Macerata served the sick with so much simplicity and charity that he would have gone most nights without sleep. He would skip meals in order to be available to serve the infirm. [III, 405]

528. Battista da Faenza was a big hearted man, and his love for the friars was so great that when he saw them in need, he would take it to heart. He served the sick with such diligence that he only ever slept a little, and hardly ever took a break. He would look at them with a serene countenance and a smile on his lips. Then he would embrace them and say, "Don't worry, my Father. Be glad you have nothing bad." [III, 507]

Towards the friars he was most fond

529. Brother Justin's austerity was tempered by charity, in which he was helped by God to advance more and more with gentleness as well as rigour. In the infirmary among the Zoccolanti Fathers he had had many experiences. Hence, when the plague afflicted Italy in those days, he went with a priest to serve the stricken. His companion administered the sacraments to them and he comforted them. He lanced the abscesses of their boils for them and put medicine on them. If they died, he buried them.

When needed, he also visited the other infirm and gave them important advice about remedies, not only spiritual but also corporal. Hence many said if they could have Brother Justin in their illness, they would not bother too much about doctors. He was very fond of the friars and attentive to them beyond measure. [VII, 528]

Two thrushes

530. The servant of God, Alberto da Napoli, had great compassion for the sick. Once when he was serving an infirm friar, he had nothing to give him. He went away into the forest and there laid two snares. When he went back to them he found he had caught two thrushes. It was an amazing thing, because it wasn't the time of the year for thrushes, and no-one had ever seen a thrush in that district before. When he brought them home, he showed them to the friars with great joy. Laughing a little and saying nothing, he prepared them for the sick friar. Hence forward this was considered to be a miracle of God because of the great charity that his servant Brother Albert had. [III, 310]

Hospitality

531. We order that foreign brothers be received with all fraternal charity. As true sons of the Eternal Father let them first visit his church. Once they have performed some reverence and prayer, they may be presented to the Superior. [C, 128]

532. Some of the ancient patriarchs merited to receive angels because of their hospitality. So we order that in each house a friar be appointed especially to make sure that foreigners are received with all possible charity. All the friars should join in this act of charity, washing the feet of visitors after the example of the humble Son of God. During the washing, let them recite some devout hymn or psalm, while regarding themselves as useless servants, even when they have done everything possible. [C, 55]

Receiving foreigners with joy

533. When they came from other houses, they sometimes called out as they approached a friary, and the friars there would come out to greet them. They would embrace with great tenderness, unable to hold back tears of joy. The hosts would then do for the travellers whatever little acts of charity they could, washing their feet and drying them, and refreshing them with the best they could find in the house. The attitude of receiving foreigners with joy has always been present in the Congregation. [V, 292]

A most gracious welcome

534. From this it came about that when they heard foreign friars coming, they went out to them and welcomed them with the greatest joy, with embraces and kisses of holy peace, and with such charity that they indeed appeared to be true brothers. They would give them a most gracious welcome and minister to each one's needs, as necessary. When the visitors left, the whole community went with them for a short distance. When they took their leave, those who remained often had tears on their cheeks. [I, 265]

535. When friars came to a house and saw other friars, they would cry out three times, "Jesus!" in a loud voice. The friars of the house answered in the same way, "Jesus!" Often they went to meet them and embraced them with great tenderness. Because of their tears, they often stood embracing one another for a good while without saying a word. [IV, 186]

536. Whenever they arrived at some little friary on their travels, the friars of the house would see them coming from a distance and all come out together to greet them. The travellers would respond and hasten forward with great excitement. They would all weep for joy, embracing and kissing one another. The arrival of their brothers generated so much delight in the hearts of those servants of God that for three days they could not show them enough kindness. They talked about nothing but the Congregation and how God made it prosper. All of them were burning with an incredible fervour to observe the Rule perfectly and to suffer every evil willingly for the love of Christ. [IV, 153]

The sorrow of departure

537. The great love they bore for one another was such that to be separated brought the most intense sorrow they could experience in this world. [II, 209]

538. They loved each other so tenderly that they never wanted to be separated from one another. [IV, 39]

539. When the friars departed from the friary, their brothers accompanied them for a short distance. It was as if they were losing part of their hearts. [IV, 153, 186]

Weeping for the prodigal sons

540. It happened that a friar left the Congregation through the temptation of the enemy, and they were all filled with sadness. For many days they prayed for him. That prayer did not cease until he returned. He later admitted frankly that every time he remembered the grateful welcome and loving conversations he'd experienced with his brothers, he could not stop himself from crying. That love finally forced him to return. [IV, 39, 153]

541. He said, "Every time I thought about your love, and recalled that I had departed from such loving brothers, I dissolved completely into tears. Although I was physically comfortable, nonetheless nothing pleased me when I recalled having left you." [IV, 186]

542. Others say when they leave - and they are believed by the world, which lives wrapped up in the senses - that they leave this life because it is too harsh and is harmful. This is quite false. Those who remain are also men. They are clothed with the very same flesh, too. They are beset with weaknesses, also. Nonetheless they live here with joy. The excuse given by those who leave is therefore worth nothing at all, since it is quite false.

Let every one be certain that the Order is founded on the greatest charity. The constitutions have been drawn up with much mature judgment. Our entire Order has in itself all the guidelines that are needed. Therefore the healthy and the sick, the young and the old, noble and common, robust and weak can stay with us quite easily, and each one can do what he is most able to do. No-one is forced to do what he can't, because no-one is obliged to the impossible.

Therefore let no-one give up or leave us, whatever his reasons may be. What he does is not right; he has no excuse. He is greatly deceived by the approval he gets, and ends up feeling sorry for himself and leaving. He will have to give a full account to God and Saint Francis, because he is leaving a place where not only can he avoid evil and flee from dangerous temptations, he can also do great good. [I, 260]

HOLY HUMILITY

"May God keep you, O lady holy poverty, with your sister, holy humility." Thus sang our Father Saint Francis in his inspired salutation of the virtues. In fact poverty and humility are twin virtues. Humility is not only the root of poverty. It is also its fruit. For good reason humility could be defined as perfect poverty.

The virtue of humility has a somewhat disconcerting content. Fallen nature's pride does not want to understand it. It finds it hard to accept it. But the one poor in spirit understands it straight away. He knows how to have nothing and be capable of nothing. He desires to live a hidden life. He loves contempt. He sees and admires in his neighbour the magnificence of God. He lives spontaneously in the reality of being without pretence or affectation.

O truly humble souls, hidden flowers disclosed by their perfume! Austere and inelegant friars who radiate smiles, peace and happiness with unsung simplicity and sweetness! Your interior building rests solid on the living rock. It has a majestic profile and rests secure on the horizon of grace. It challenges the hurricanes of the passions and of pride.

We know truth is the foundation of Christian humility. Reason and faith teach us that we have nothing from ourselves. We receive everything from God. Therefore the honour and the glory of our being as well as of our doing is due to him. He is the principle of all good acts. He must be the end of every good intention. The proud person is a thief of the divine glory, just as the humble person is its defender. In fact, the humble of heart refers everything to God. The divine light brightly enlightens his nothingness. He does not misunderstand the talents with which God has endowed his soul or adorned his body. Rather, he recognises that every perfect gift is from above. Hence humility is an affirmation, without undue appropriation, of one's qualities and personal gifts. It does not endure pusillanimity or timidity. It knows how to defend its own rights and it also knows how to require the respect of others when necessary.

“Like wise and quite expert architects,” the Capuchin friars raised the spiritual edifice of their sanctification upon the solid foundation of true and authentic humility. They immediately held in suspicion any virtue which did not rest on this base. Humanly speaking also, the way of true greatness is that of true humility.

Glorious humility

543. From what has been said it is clear how glorious humility appeared in these friars, who didn’t want ‘Minors’ to be an empty name. In observing the Rule perfectly they were sedulous about being conformed to their Father, who was very humble. They humbled themselves as much as they could before everyone.

By their poverty, lowliness, abject dressing, going about despised, being subject to all, letting themselves be maltreated by every kind of person, and even glorifying in their suffering, their persecutions and scorn, they clearly witnessed to their humility.

Once, in the early days when the feast of the Porziuncola came around, they were still unknown and were so few in number that they couldn’t form a procession of their own. To gain the indulgence, two of them entered with a multitude of seculars. As usual, the crowd was huge, all pushing each other, and one of the friars was pushed into a man. The innocent friar hadn’t been pushing but was shoved by others and couldn’t help colliding with him. The man became angry, lifted his hand, and gave him a hard slap, along with some insulting words. However, the friar was not moved interiorly by the insult, nor did he show any outward sign of resentment. On the contrary, he knelt down immediately with his head uncovered and humbly offered him the other cheek. At this, his striker became confused, and didn’t know what to do or say. Rebuked by other people, who were marvellously edified by the humble act of the patient friar, he departed in silence. [V, 294]

Perfect humility

544. Giovanni Battista da Norcia strongly reprimanded brash people who trusted too much in themselves. He said:

“Every evil comes from this kind of behaviour. All the good we attribute to ourselves we steal from God. Everything we want for our comfort against the will of God comes from pride. I maintain that humility is nothing other than the perfect resignation of oneself to the will of God. We need to understand clearly that just as we depend on God for our being, so we also depend on him for our doing. Perfect humility, therefore, is to know that God does all the good in us and to attribute this to him.” [III, 274]

These are grave sins

545. The holy man Francesco da Iesi said;

“Uncork your ears and take in to what I’m saying to you. You must not love yourself. Instead, hate yourself and love God alone. Be aware that your existence is not from yourself, but from God. Therefore you need to resign yourself to him so that he may make of you what gives him greater glory. You must resign yourself to the will of God without any regard for yourself. If it would be for his greater glory that you go to hell rather than heaven, you must content yourself and pray to him continuously in your heart so that he might glorify himself in you. You must desire nothing except for God to be glorified in you.

“It is good nevertheless to be aware that there is nothing more dangerous than to desire the reputation of holiness. Then, you do good in order to be considered good; you praise and serve others in order to receive favours from them; you give gifts or write letters in order to have some friends to benefit you, to hold you in esteem and give you preference ahead of others for offices and other such futile things.

“I’ll tell you more. If you do good mainly to gain merit from it, to flee hell and go to heaven - and not for the love of God - all that good is lost. We conclude therefore that true poverty consists in not having, wanting or desiring anything other than Jesus Christ, and to want and desire all those things which make us love Jesus Christ.”
[III, 78]

546. Nor is there anything more dangerous than to desire a reputation for holiness; doing good in order to be considered good; praising and serving others to receive favours from them, giving gifts and writing letters in order to have some friends who esteem us and profit us by preferring us over others for offices and other similar vanities. These are grave sins, which are great impediments to the spirit. [VI, 131]

We have no greater demons

547. Pietro da Portogallo desired to have superiors who would mortify him and insult him. He said, “We have no greater demons than self-will and pride.” [VI, 187]

Thorns are not roses

548. By its nature sin is not a good thing. Thorns are not roses, even though roses grow among thorns. Although the most powerful hand of God can bring good from evil, the good does not come about through the evil. God alone produces the good, because it is from him alone that all graces and good things

originate. This is a characteristic of God. Since he is the highest, infinite, good, he does not know how to do anything but good, nor can he but do so. If some good often comes from humans, the glory must be given to God, who is its very first cause. [I, 97]

Very lowly and worthless instruments

549. When we do good works, it is only just that the glory be given to God, who is their first cause. All good things come from him and descend upon us - good thoughts, inspirations, graces, the knowledge and strength to carry out all those works that have the likeness of goodness and are done by humankind. By ourselves, without his favour and help, we can do nothing. Without him, our human minds cannot think anything good, nor can our hands do anything good. On our own we are lowly instruments, too worthless to do anything of value. Therefore in all our actions the superior help of God is needed. [I, 420]

God comes down to the extent that the friar humbles himself

550. When a friar delights in fasting and in wearing our wretched habit, he will not give way to his cravings or to gluttony. As soon as he stoops to sensuality in the smallest thing, the way to countless other desires will open up to him. He will become ambitious and proud and supremely displeasing to God. Then he will have fallen from that high mountain into the abyss of every evil. God comes down to a friar to the extent that the friar humbles himself, and distances himself from a friar to the extent that the friar exalts himself. [VI, 25]

If God took his support away from us

551. The servant of God, Brother Giacomo da Cetona, was so humble that to anyone who hadn't known him previously, he would have appeared at first sight to be an ordinary religious. He was never outstanding in any way, concealing his good works and avoiding being conspicuous in public. He made himself conform to the others in everything. However, he worked away secretly, always busy with the things of God. Thus he avoided any hint of superiority, and always considered himself subject to every other person. This made him evade all offices in the Order, so that he could escape being in authority. In his own heart he regarded himself as the vilest creature in the world. He never tired of serving others, especially the old and infirm. He served them with great patience, and no-one ever saw him get tired or annoyed.

This was the virtue that exalted and magnified his soul in divine grace. He never believed anything good could come from his mouth that would deserve praise. Rather, he behaved as if he were the most useless religious in the world. He always avoided being noticed. For this reason he transferred from the Province of Saint Francis, because the friars there began to honour him. When the servant of God became aware of this, his humility was such that he could

not bear their praises. Just as you cannot displease a proud person more than by dishonouring him, so it is when one meets a humble person: you cannot displease him more than by praising and honouring him. Since the humble person has no greater opponent than himself, when he finds others helping him to ridicule himself he's truly pleased. Our Holy Father Francis did the same when he habitually asked to be rebuked by his companion, who would say to him: "Wretched son of Peter Bernardino!"

Once, someone tested this servant of God, Brother James, by telling him his defects, and he seemed to liven up. With a smile on his face he answered:

"Are you surprised to find these defects in me? You're not aware of the other, worse, ones that I know about! If God took his guidance away from me, I would leave the Order and commit every kind of evil, and damn myself like many others have. My dear brother, realise that if God took his support away from us, there's not one of us who wouldn't fall into some enormous vice or other. Don't be surprised when one of your brothers commits a fault. Rather, appreciate it when you see him walking uprightly and continuing in the state of perfection. While it belongs to corrupt nature to sin, doing good is a gift of the Holy Spirit. So, when we sin, we sin as humans, but when we do good, we do it as God's servants - purified, renewed and established by God himself in the way of doing good. This is one of the greatest miracles God performs - that a man who is all sin becomes, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, like an angel of God and lives in a human body in this world as if he didn't inhabit it, clothed in every virtue. This is a change which can be brought about only by the Holy Spirit.

"When I was in the world, I remember seeing someone so wicked - so habitually evil - that when he stopped committing sins it was only because he was too tired to go on. Then, suddenly, he was converted and became a holy man. Who do you think converted him? You might think it was some preacher or some good instructions that turned him from evil to good. You'd be mistaken. I'm not saying these things aren't good, but if God doesn't touch the heart, all other efforts are vain.

"Well, that great sinner is me. I know how the Lord spoke to my heart, and as if by force has dragged me into this Order. I don't know if there is any more effective virtue in the world for making ourselves a true gift to God than holy humility. It leads us to the highest knowledge of God to be had in this world. When you see a young man who behaves like an angel in the novitiate and then becomes lax, blame nothing other than a lack of humility. Little by little he begins to consider the dignities of the Order. In this way he becomes ensnared. To have these dignities he puts holy prayer

aside, and with the desire of being humble growing weaker, gives himself to study. Gradually, blinded by the enemy, he loses sight of humility altogether. He progresses to serving not God, but himself, because everything he does is done in order to achieve personal greatness. In this way he becomes a reprobate, with no merit before God.

“This was the insight God gave me at the beginning of my novitiate: if I wanted to avoid every evil, I should embrace holy humility perfectly, and never abandon it. In this way I would be set free. May it please Jesus Christ, who inspired me, to give me the grace to persevere in and die with that humility.” [III, 360]

One does not have to keep silence always

552. From then, the adversaries of the Order no longer had the boldness to speak about this, but took another tack. They never stopped defaming us everywhere with their pestiferous tongues.

Our General, the venerable Brother Bernardino d’Asti, was very humble by nature, but could no longer endure in silence the many injuries the unfortunate Congregation was suffering from the likes of these. Therefore this good Father took into his confidence the venerable Brothers Francesco Tittelmans and Francesco da Iesi. He discussed with them the idea of inviting their adversaries to a debate, to expose their pretensions once and for all. This greatly pleased those two Reverend Fathers, and they offered to go with the Father General and lend the strength of their support to this enterprise, with the help of God.

So off they went together to find Cardinal Campeggi. They said to him, “Monsignor, we know you are an admirer and protector of those Fathers who oppose us, and that you love them very much. We have come to explain our thinking to you and to beg you to grant us this favour: that because of the love and esteem you have for those Fathers, you would make known to them and show them what we are firmly resolved to do. Until now we have been silent, like little lambs. However, we see that our humility is worthless in silencing our adversaries, and our explanations have likewise failed. Even the ruling they have received is ineffective in silencing their tongues. They still continue to talk and behind our backs and wound us, and want to stop us living as we do. Therefore, for the love of Jesus Christ and the defence of our Congregation, we are resolved to become lions. With this in mind, we have come to Your Most Illustrious Lordship to beg that you would let these Fathers know that we invite them to debate with us before the Supreme Pontiff and in the presence of the entire sacred consistory. We want to prove and confirm that everything we have done and are doing in our Reform has been done well by us and in a holy manner. We could not have done otherwise for the salvation of our consciences and the observance of the Rule we have promised. You can see that we are both ready and quite able to do what we have said concerning these matters. When

these issues come out into the open, we will demonstrate in this debate such defects in our opponents that it would have been better for them never to have opened their mouths against us."

The Cardinal responded, "What could you ever say against those Fathers?" Father General answered, "Does Your Lordship command me to reveal to him what would be said, and said in the presence of all the world?" The Cardinal said he could speak, and the other two Fathers could too if they wanted. He said they should say whatever they wished and leave out nothing.

The Fathers said, "We are sure that Your Lordship loves those Fathers," and the Cardinal, turning to Father General, answered, "And I am certain that you love them, too, and that you are like most loving fathers towards them, having been among them so many years yourselves." Brother Bernardino replied, "Therefore, I speak with confidence so that Your Most Illustrious Lordship may provide both for them and for us."

Then the Father General began to say more about the practices of the others. He said so much that the Cardinal was quite convinced that those other Fathers were wrong.

After having been so well informed, the Cardinal no longer favoured those Fathers over the Congregation of Capuchins. Rather, whenever it was necessary for him to speak about the Congregation with Cardinals and with others, he always spoke in our favour.

Due to no fault of the good Fathers, the falsehoods of a few imprudent friars who were badly uninformed about our holy Order came out clearly into the open. A stop was put to their behaviour, so that they no longer spoke about these matters without restraint. And when those lax friars spoke passionately about these things in the Court, they were no longer believed.

So the venerable Father Asti said that one does not have to keep silence always, because the distinction must be made between personal injuries and those that result in the dishonour of a religious Order. [II, 422]

The foundation of all the virtues

553. As regards cultivating the other virtues, each one strove to adorn his soul with them to the best of his ability. He knew that the more his soul was enriched with these precious gems, the more beautiful it appeared and the more pleasing it was to God. He also knew that the external trappings of his life were worth little or nothing, however harsh or strict the life was, if they were not accompanied by a living faith and adorned by the necessary virtues. Therefore each friar renewed his profession and scrutinized his life continuously, like a clever merchant who shrewdly checks his dealings, to gain true humility. This virtue is truly the solid foundation of all the others. The friars considered that if

this virtue was properly acquired, it was easy to become rich in all the others. [I, 266]

554. Girolamo da Montepulciano had a remarkable life. Like the first Fathers, he established himself firmly in holy humility, the surest foundation for building one's spiritual edifice. In the Order he performed all the lowly tasks. Such was his control over his feelings that the friars said, "This man is like a living corpse." [III, 323]

555. Raniero da Borgo San Sepolcro went through his novitiate with great fervour. He was so tempted by the infernal enemy that if God had not helped him miraculously he would have gone completely mad. I witnessed this with my own eyes when we were both part of the family in the holy friary at Narni in the winter before the spring when he made his profession. The poor fellow was so drained he didn't know how to talk, walk, or do anything, and wept most of the time. This was all part of God's providence. It's a bit like a wise architect who plans to put up a lofty palace: the higher he wants to go, the deeper the foundations he has to lay. So it was that the Lord God wanted to elevate his servant Raniero to great heights, which meant he needed to be solidly established in profound humility and well grounded in holy virtues, lest he be duped by the ancient serpent and become proud. Pride is the notorious enemy of Our Lord God. [III, 349]

The friars' little donkey

556. The servant of God, Felice da Cantalice, laid an excellent foundation by grounding himself in mortification of the flesh, true humility and - what is most important - in the perfect subjugation of his own will.

I can't say enough about his humility. He himself would say: "I'm with the friars, but I'm not a friar. Rather, I'm their little donkey." His humility showed clearly in his words and in all his actions. Had it been otherwise - had he not founded everything upon holy humility - the spiritual edifice he built up over so many years would have come crashing down, and the Lord God would not have shown so many signs and wonders through his holy merits. [III, 470]

All our works are alchemy

557. The servant of God, Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo, exercised himself marvellously in the mortification of self-will. Being zealous, I often asked him about different virtues. One day he answered me thus:

"My Brother Bernardino, without humility all our works are alchemy. Someone who has not established himself in self-mortification and has not acquired a high degree of holy humility should never think he has the spirit. As long as one dram of self-love is kept, he can go to whatever strict Reform he wants; he can do

all the fasting he likes, but he's wasting his time if he doesn't mortify himself and abandon himself totally to the God's governance. God guides all things to their due end, according to his providence, and is never more honoured than when someone truly surrenders himself to his good pleasure. Our Seraphic Father Saint Francis founded his whole Order on this. He wanted his friars to trust completely in God's providence for the necessities of life and not to store things up for the future, which is how those who don't entrust themselves to his goodness behave. We live in the belief of one day coming to enjoy things that we can't now see, so we must live in faith, and hope that God's goodness will govern us and take care of us just as he himself does, and that he will direct us along the way to heaven. Those in the Order who let themselves be governed by God and not by men come to have great peace, which is so necessary for contemplation. Thus it is that few contemplative friars are to be found, because few of them work to mortify themselves.

"What else makes us travel from place to place, from Province to Province, to go about all day, if not our own predilections?

"I can tell you that for a long time in the Order I've been doing battle with four enemies. Two of these, gluttony and lust, I have almost conquered, through the grace of God. As to pride, I have mortified it to a large extent: I don't feel as happy about being vilified as I do about being praised, though I can rationalize things and rejoice more over vilification than over approval. I often find myself caught up in the labyrinth of my own opinions, which is something I don't want but frequently can't avoid because of ill-formed habits. This is a fact, and it is an interior reform that needs to take place. The reform of the habit we wear and of the external way of living in the Order is there to be seen. But in general we haven't yet arrived at interior reform, which is more important.

"And as regards spiritual matters, we often think we're praying and loving God very much, but because we lack mortification, what we're doing is loving ourselves and following our own preferences. It may seem to us that we are contemplating splendidly, but all we're doing is having beautiful ideas. You know how someone who can't speak French can't say anything in that language, well, someone who hasn't got the love of God can't love him. And anyone who loves himself is even less able to love God, because these two things are opposed to one another, like fire and water. The more love of God a person has, the less he has of love of self. On the other hand, the more love of self a person has, the less he has of love of God. If we want all the things we do in the Order to be meritorious, they need to be ordered to the love of God, otherwise they lack purpose. The majority of our poor friars are greatly

deceived, for they're content just to say Mass and the Office and to recite the usual prayers, and then spend rest of their time doing things of little merit. I carry a canker in my heart, and am fearful of damning myself, for it seems to me that I never do all that I can."
[III, 62]

Father, be careful!

558. When Bernardino Ochino returned to the house, his companion, Brother Francesco da Calabria, a preacher and a very good friar, said to him, "Father, be careful, you are in great danger! Gracious! What enormous favours they've given you!" The Sienese answered, "These holy prelates do it out of courtesy, entirely of their own accord."

This was nothing but a warning that God was giving him through that good Father. Since he was at the height of popularity and shown great favour, he needed deep humility, which he was later seen to be lacking. Because of his pride, God would allow him to fall, just as happened in the *Legend of the Three Companions of our Father Saint Francis*. There was a great preacher in the Order in Francis' time, who was called the apostle of Christ because of the gift he had of preaching. Shortly afterwards he infelicitously left the Order. Our Father Saint Francis was asked how this man's ruin had come about, since he seemed so virtuous and so well endowed with every good grace that he was considered by everyone to be holy. Yet, he had fallen so ignominiously! Our Seraphic Father said, "Sons, poverty, obedience and chastity are good. All the virtues are good. If, however, they are not founded on humility they are worth little or nothing."

It seemed this is what happened in the case of the miserable wretch Brother Bernardino Ochino. He had so many graces, yet his life was not founded on holy humility. [II, 432]

559. There was a great lesson about not putting trust in the flattery of the world but remaining always in the fear of God; and establishing ourselves in true humility. One considers how Bernardino da Siena fell so ignominiously who, even though he was a very learned man, had spent many years in the Franciscan Order, and was held in very high regard by everyone. [II, 445]

Exaggerating his failings

560. Exposing defects didn't entail any persuading, since a friar would accuse himself of his faults in front of his superior. The friar would confess his failings and exaggerate them, eagerly awaiting his penance and expecting to be helped by prayer and counsel to repair the damage caused by his faults. If he was not aware of committing a fault, he would still readily accept every correction given him (even unwarranted ones), whether given by a superior or an inferior. He earnestly desired to make up for offences committed in private and to redress

bad example given in public. He welcomed eagerly whatever was said to him in paternal kindness and fraternal care, even though it might be harsh, and accepted gladly whatever penances were imposed on him, through which he could embrace the beloved cross. [VII, 82]

They strove to know themselves

561. They were always careful to mortify themselves, and strove to know themselves and their abjectness honestly, wanting the others know all this, too. They had considerable self-knowledge, and consequently thought little of themselves, and rejoiced when others also knew them well and thought little of them. As a result, they were not disturbed even by the greatest humiliations, and accepted everything as coming from the most just and holy hands of God. [I, 266]

He called himself a good for nothing

562. Brother Paolo da Chioggia always went barefoot, content with only one thick, coarse habit that had patches all over it. He seldom ate more than once a day, and most of the time took only bread and water. He was very humble, regarding himself as nothing. He called himself a good for nothing. When he talked about God he dissolved completely into tears. He said, "I have betrayed my Lord, but his mercy has looked upon my terrible ingratitude, and he has led me back to his flock like a stray sheep." [V, 106]

Useless for everything

563. Girolamo da Montepulciano was very humble. He thought very little of himself, so that in Rome, where he was known, he was not ashamed to go around from house to house questing for wood and carrying it publicly on his shoulders. Because of his humility, even though he was lettered and had been appointed a preacher by his superiors, he always refrained from preaching. So far as possible he made himself out to be useless at everything, so that his superiors would not think highly of him. [VI, 200]

He devoted himself to the pursuit of humility

564. Bartolomeo da Spello devoted himself so much to the pursuit of humility that he wanted to do all the menial tasks around the house: washing the bowls; washing the clothes; sweeping the house; weeding the garden; washing the feet of the friars; and other similar acts of humility. He never wanted these tasks to fall to others. [III, 260]

He considered himself quite useless and insignificant

565. Francesco da Macerata had considerable humility. Indeed, he was outstanding. He considered himself to be quite useless and insignificant. The conversation, gestures, words, voice and the whole appearance of this holy man preached humility. He could not see in his own mind that everyone, both seculars and friars, were no better than him, and he openly said so in plain words. [V, 146]

But I am a sinner

566. Antonio da Monteciccardo was staying in the friary at Narni when the Marquise of Pescara was passing through. She was a devotee of the Capuchins and especially of Father Anthony, about whom she had heard great things. She went to visit him and asked him if it was true that he had raised up a dead man. Answering with holy caution, he said, "Madam, Our Lord Jesus Christ raises the dead and he has raised up many of them because of the holiness and merits of his faithful servants. But I, who am a sinner, would be more likely to kill the living than raise the dead because of my faults." She was taken off guard by his humility, and left it at that, not daring to ask him anything else. [V, 145]

Such a living example of humility

567. I had heard certain very beautiful spiritual things from Brother Francesco da Iesi, and it was an incredible experience for me to teach these to Brother Angelo da San Angelo in Vado, after he'd earnestly beg me to. Even though he was a young man, I was embarrassed to have such a holy Father request such a thing of me - I who was not worthy to speak with him, even kneeling down. I was very edified by the humility of that servant of God, and don't think I've ever seen such an example of living humility as I saw in that venerable Father. [III, 56]

Therefore, humble me

568. "If I had wanted to study," said Domenico da Bologna, "I had the opportunity to do so in my own city. However, I have come to do penance and subdue my own will. Therefore, humble me and do not give me an office that might foster pride in me."

He never wanted any office in the Order, so that he could remain lowly and be better able to attend to contemplation. When he had completed forty years of holy living in the Order, he passed on to the Lord. [VI, 212]

The good foundations of humility and obedience

569. Brother Giuseppe da Corleone, a lay friar, was a man of holy life. He was totally dedicated to pursuing the things of God, and most enlightened in those

matters. To ascend higher in his pursuit of them, he solidly laid in his soul the good foundations of humility and obedience. He abased himself in the eyes of God interiorly and exteriorly, performing acts of profound humility. He showed this especially in his prompt obedience not only to his superiors but to everyone. He didn't separate humility from obedience, since perseverance in obedience is only authentic if it springs from humility. If someone obeys in order to appear good and to be acceptable to others, he is like a tree whose fruit rots very quickly because its roots are infected and contaminated. Thus, Joseph was truly obedient because he was truly humble.

It is also true that courteous speech flows from humility, and he always spoke very courteously with everyone, although he spoke only if he was compelled to by necessity or by the love of God. Because of this, he was opposed to anyone complaining, be they superiors or anyone else.

He was remarkable in combining charity towards others with great harshness towards himself. His idea was that these two things would serve each other, for he spared no effort in practising charity. When his tasks were very menial - and occasionally repugnant, especially when serving the infirm - he performed them all the more eagerly. Whenever he could, he contrived to have these tasks fall to him. In addition, he was very abject in his clothing, and would never use a mantle, as if it were too grand to wear. [VI, 500]

He declared himself useless

570. Brother Francesco da Macerata had a humble mind, too, and his conversation reflected this in every way. The gestures, words and voice, and the whole demeanour of this good religious showed humility. He said that in his mind he could not accept that everyone else, both seculars and friars, we are not better than him. He declared himself useless, as nothing but a burden on the Order, and his simplicity guaranteed that he spoke from the heart. His voice always trembled a little, as if he was on the verge of tears. [VII, 476]

Although I have conquered it

571. Although he was very learned, Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo, because of his humility, never said a word in Latin. Once he was listening to skilful man debate with a doctor when he was tempted to join in the argument, too. I saw him tentatively draw nearer, and then he bowed his head and fled. He went to Brother Rufino dal Borgo and said, "Although by the grace of God I have already overcome him, Brother Ass wanted to show himself as learned." [III, 64]

Be obedient

572. Even though he was a superior, Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo never lessened his concern about humility and mortification. Here is an example of this. When he was Provincial he told his companion, whom he appointed as his

secretary, to do the worse thing he could think of to him. When his companion demurred, saying it would not be fitting for him either to do this or want to do it, he replied, "Be obedient! Do as I tell you." [VII, 394]

573. Girolamo da Montefiore's outstanding virtue was humility, by which he mortified himself so much that everyone marvelled at him. When the holy old Brother Francesco da Cannobio saw him pass through the Province of Milan some years after his conversion, he used a coarse word in the Lombard dialect to speak about Jerome's humble behaviour.

Jerome's speech, his gestures, his deportment and everything about him preached humility. No word of self praise was ever heard to come from his lips. He always countered praise with self humiliation. He gave himself willingly to lowly tasks: sweeping up, washing bowls or working in the garden. He even did this when he was General, as happened once in the Province of Milan, when he was held up by rain for three days in the house at Monza. The friars were planting cabbages, and he joined them in their task. Thus he carried out his Generalate in a most exemplary way. [VI, 348]

It is all harmful and ruinous

574. This was written to show there is danger in every human state. It shows how it is better for everyone to behave humbly. This is especially required of those who profess to seek outstanding holiness. If there is no foundation of humility there, what is built is harmful and completely ruinous. [VI, 427]

This was what exalted all the saints

575. Rufino da Gallarate received from God the gift and virtue of holy humility. It shone in him both inwardly and outwardly. He considered himself to be the greatest sinner in the world. It is humility that exalted and magnified all the glorious saints before God. The Mother of Christ declared his taking human form in her was attributable to this virtue. When Saint Elizabeth said to her "Blessed are you because you have believed," she answered, "God has looked upon the humility of his servant" (Luke 1:48). Because she was the humblest maiden in all the world, the Son of God left aside all the others and took this most holy, humble Virgin as his Mother. This virtue was the one over which our Father Saint Francis exalted so much. When his companion, blessed Brother Pacificus, saw in paradise one chair higher and more beautiful than all the others, he was told, "This chair is reserved for the humble Francis."

Humility greatly exalted this servant of God, Rufino, who persevered in it during his fifty three years in the holy Order. He always performed the more humble and lowlier tasks and duties: the kitchen, begging, the garden, sweeping the house, and countless others. He never withdrew his neck from under the yoke of holy obedience. [III, 459]

No less than if other scandals were disclosed

576. The old friars related many amazing visions and miracles that happened concerning Bernardino d'Asti. However, because they kept them secret, they have not come to light. Those first fathers disliked the miracles performed in the Congregation becoming known, and regarded it as unfitting as the publication of scandals. [VI, 27]

We are great sinners

577. These and many other calumnies had been brought out into the open. Therefore the poor Capuchins had a lot to do to give an account of themselves. Faced with these things, many simple friars did not know how to answer, and humbly accepted the calumnies as fraternal corrections. Lowering their heads, they begged those who told them these things to pray to God for them so that he might enlighten them, because they were truly great sinners. At the same time, many who did not have that degree of patience began to dispute with those who said these things. However, there's no doubt that the first group of friars gave the better example: their silence was superior to the reply of those who wanted to rebut the detractors. Indeed, the detractors were greatly edified by their humility, and while at first they doubted the life of the friars, they now became completely convinced that they were servants of God. [II, 30]

Where there is humility

578. Be humble. Where humility is present, God is present, too. Where God is present, there is every good. [II, 397]

MINISTERS AND SERVANTS

Saint Francis delineated the image of the Superiors with vigorous and precise lines that have the psychological and spiritual value of a self portrait. He defined them as "ministers and servants of all the friars", that is, the least and humblest among the subjects. The virtues must shine in Superiors more than external honours, and such honours are not to be sought by them. Superiors are at the disposal of all the friars and are to get angry with no one. They are enemies of error and healers of those who err. They are patient and fatherly in correcting and the first to work, the last to rest. They seek themselves in nothing, but always and in everything they seek the glory of God and the good of their subjects.

Those who were elected from the Capuchin fraternity to direct their confreres were schooled in that fraternity in the principles and rules of government. In biographical and legislative texts the teaching transmitted to the Order from the life and doctrine of our Seraphic Father can easily be identified.

All of the friars desired to occupy the last place with Christ, who came to obey and to serve, and not to be served or to command. Some even considered it to be more perfect to renounce office and to give themselves more freely to contemplation, rather than to apply themselves to "the daily cares which do not last," as the Superiors were constrained to do. These were chosen among the better ones, as having no other aim than the glory of God and the salvation of souls, rather than knowledge, or facility in the settlement of matters or any other exterior human qualities that might humanly recommend them. Above all, they had to be distinguished for a great love of prayer, outstanding simplicity of life and an ardent zeal for perfect regular observance. "The most expert in the service of God and most enlightened" were preferred, so that with goodness, amiability and good example they would draw their subjects along in the following of Christ and of Francis.

More than Superiors, those who governed could be called, and loved to be called, fathers of their subjects. They were first in the observance of the Rule and first when it came to work. Although they occupied the chief place because of their office, they desired to be called the least in the community. Their conduct was their most eloquent preaching. They did not disdain the humbler works of the friary. They were the first to serve the sick and lend a hand to the builders. They conscientiously fulfilled their duties to sanctify, encourage and visit their brothers. The visitation especially was a cause of joy and satisfaction for everyone. The father was consoled when he saw the growing fervour of his beloved sons. They, in turn, received much spiritual profit in contemplating his bright example and in receiving the clear teachings left by their loved father and shepherd.

Each avoided office

579. All the friars should always desire to be subjects and to obey the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and of our Seraphic Father, rather than to be Superiors and have command over others. However those on whom prelacies are imposed through obedience, should not be stubborn in refusing them. Rather let them fulfil the ministry committed to them with all humility and solicitude. [C, 133]

580. They rejoiced about being subjects, to the extent that the greatest disappointment they could experience was to be given the office of being Superior over others. It was seen as a great impediment to the joys of contemplation. [IV, 13]

581. Because of this each avoided the offices of the Order as far as possible. Anyone who had nothing to do other than obey his Superior was counted fortunate. This was the reason they had to state in the Constitutions that when the friars are elected to office they should not just stubbornly refuse to accept. [IV, 183]

Each one desired more to obey than to rule

582. Among themselves the friars communed humbly. Ambition, often the poison and ruin of an Order, was far from them. Brother Ludovico governed the Congregation by himself for ten years, and none of the others ever complained about it. Each one desired more to obey than to rule and command, so they kept silence, even though by then there would have been among them men of considerable learning with ability to govern. Right up to the present, both General and Provincial Chapters have always been conducted with great integrity. Neither in public nor in secret do the friars ever discuss who should be elected. On the contrary, if anyone inadvertently says something that raises the slightest suspicion in this regard, he is immediately deprived of any right to vote, as a minor penance. As long as the souls of the friars are pure and humble, the Order will remain sound, but as soon as ambition corrupts them everything will be contaminated. [V, 295]

It is not permissible to refuse it stubbornly

583. I once asked Giovanni Spagnuolo if it would be all right to refuse an office imposed in the Order, so that one might give oneself up more easily to holy prayer. He answered me:

“I’d say that where the Rule is observed and the office of Superior can be carried out within the observance of the Rule and giving service to others, it is not permissible to refuse it stubbornly, even though it is permissible effectively to excuse oneself from the care of souls. We have the example of many saints who fled from this. However, if a friar wants to avoid mortal sin, he cannot rebel stubbornly against holy obedience.”

When I said that I was young and knew through experience how much hindrance I suffered in spiritual matters, and to how many dangers I was exposed by accepting to be a Superior, the servant of God answered:

“No good work done in obedience can thwart the spirit. Rather, the impediment you say it imposes on you comes about because you don’t carry out your office diligently and simply for of the love of God. In exercising such an office it is necessary to guard oneself from self-seeking, from delighting in being a Superior. Truly, it’s necessary to act only for the honour of God and the well-being of others. Indeed, those who desire office, or perform their duties mainly for their own benefit - for if there was no benefit in it they would not have accepted it - are in a bad state, and are often abandoned by God. Therefore I give you this advice: When some office is imposed upon you, accept it and carry it out, observing the Rule and without showing partiality to any person. And guard yourself against the fear and shame of being deposed. For the one

who fears such shame seeks to stay in office, and to this end tolerates some defects that should not be tolerated. Ambition can be seen when someone tries all he can, and with offence against God, to get and keep friends - especially those persons he knows can help to retain him in that elevated position - often with gifts and flattery. These things are often the cause of ruin for an Order.

"May God never allow these things to come among us! By the grace of God our Congregation is so well ordered and of such good disposition, that even though we are Superiors, we have a lot of scope for doing good and practising holy contemplation and every kind of virtue, so long as the observance of the Rule is maintained in its simplicity." [III, 295]

If he had not remedied it beautifully

584. In the year 1558, under Paul IV, Brother Eusebius convened our General Chapter at Napoli, in which Brother Alphonsus of Sessa became first definator. In the world, Alphonsus had been a ruler in his city. When he became a Capuchin he was a man of holy life. For two or three triennia he was the Provincial of the Province of Napoli. There he was the confessor of the Capuchin nuns for eighteen years. While he lived he was the mainstay of that Province and of that monastery. He taught the cooks not to put fruit or other titbits on the table on Fridays, but to serve only what the Constitutions allowed, such as salad and soup. Friday was the day of the Passion, observed with great devotion by our Father Saint Francis, and so it was fitting that some special sign of penance be shown.

He was a man of great judgement, and very prudent and zealous in governing. There is no doubt that he would have been a good General, and the friars would have elected him if he had not cleverly forestalled it. Ordinarily he spoke simply and plainly, but still with great spirit. However, when he had to speak as first definator, he used the singular strategy of making himself judged as being too simple. With this he avoided the office of General. [VI, 282]

Good guides

585. As we see in all governments, both spiritual and temporal, they prosper in so far as they are led by good guides. [II, 404]

In the last place with Christ

586. Let every election be carried out purely, simply, canonically and in a holy way. The friars should strive to act according to the teaching of Christ, our kindly Lord. So then, invited to his wedding feast, let them be in the last place with him, not in the first with Lucifer, aware that the first shall be the last and the last shall be the first. With Christ, let them flee from dignities and not accept

them unless, like Aaron, they are called by God through holy obedience. [C, 102]

To elect the best

587. The Cardinal of Trani gave them a sermon, talking about the charity and holy union they had to have with one another, and about the grace God had given them in calling them from the world to serve His Divine Majesty in a Congregation like this. He spoke about the risk there had been in the past, and which was present still. So they had to remain in the fear of God and always and in every way walk in the truth, with simplicity and purity of heart - particularly in the matter of elections. These should be carried out with utter integrity, untainted by any corruption and completely devoid of ambition. Truly, ambition is just like a poisonous snake: when it enters and strikes, it poisons everything and is life-threatening to the one who is struck and bitten. Therefore they should come to elections with that fear of God anyone who loves and fears him should have. By electing the one they know and firmly believe to be the best and most suited for office, their election process will be not only canonical, but even holy. [I, 412]

Their gifts

588. Let our mature and discreet friars, those with knowledge, understanding and experience, be elected as our Superiors. [C, 99]

589. When Bernadine of Asti was General he was very successful, during visitations, in exhorting the Superiors to consult others. He added that a friar who does not willingly accept advice is not worthy to be elected Superior. He put himself forward as an example: when he had no one to advise him, he sought the advice of his lay companion, and it turned out well for him. [III, 188]

He presented them to God

590. When Brother Girolamo da Montefiore had important matters, he put them before God in prayer, commending them with all his heart to his Divine Providence. He went to his cell to do this, and wrote down everything he understood in prayer to be the will of God in these matters. Because of this, he resolved with great prudence and charity many problems they thought to be insoluble. He never let himself be carried away by his own preferences. Therefore, at his death he had no regrets, except that perhaps he had let himself be carried away somewhat by zeal for the observance of the Rule when he had punished offenders. This was the reason that, after his Generalate, he wrote to some of those he had punished, asking their forgiveness. When the Cardinal Protector heard about this, he forbade him to do it again. [VI, 351]

Simple priests

591. At that time in our Congregation simple priests were elected because they did not want Superiors to be learned, just spiritual and zealous about the observance of the Rule. If there was someone lettered, but had a lax reputation, they would not elect him. In this way, learning was not taken into consideration, but zeal for the observance of the Rule and dedication to holy prayer. Those Fathers thought it was gravely inappropriate in an election if someone was considered who was not zealous about the observance of the Rule.

For this reason, the majority were simple priests or lay friars. God concurred so much with their simplicity that the friars who were subjects were much happier to be under the government of those simple friars than under the government of lax and pompous ones. [IV, 9]

Although he was a lay friar

592. The goodness, life and prudence of Bernardo d'Offida meant that, although he was a lay friar, he was nevertheless always Guardian. He was elected *custos* at the time of General Chapters so that he could go to them. Therefore he attended nearly all the Chapters held at that time. [V, 137]

593. Francesco da Iesi said, "True observance of the Rule was never so excellent nor carried out with such simplicity as when the Order was governed by simple people."

He said the more government lacked in human ability, the more it showed the governance of God. For when God elects a man to spiritual government, he supplies for the short-comings found in human nature. For example, for a normal understanding of all the deceits by which the infernal enemy, the devil, tempts a Superior's subjects, the Superior needs to be learned, reflective and of fine natural intellect. When Superiors are lacking these, our Lord God supplies for them with good inspirations. Because of this, each Superior should know clearly that by his own efforts he cannot rule and govern his subjects according to God's will. Knowing he is incapable, let him humble himself before God and have recourse to him assiduously in holy prayer, so that His Majesty may deign to govern him, and take up the governance himself. He should firmly believe that on his own he can only govern badly, to the detriment of God's sheep. Hence, this holy man, Francesco da Iesi, said:

"If we think about it well, we can see that the Order has never been more badly governed, nor more lax, nor given more scandal to the world than when it was full of learned men. While the Order was governed by the simplicity of our Father Saint Francis and that of all the simple friars during his time, it always maintained perfect observance of the Rule. However, when the learned Brother Elias and his many learned followers began to rule the Order with the

teaching and prudence of the flesh, it immediately filled with ambition. The beloved Order began to sink under their government. This happened because the learned usually trust in themselves and rule according to their own prudence. This has no place in the Order because it is founded on God and on his providence and in simplicity. Take this from the Order and the foundation on which God built it is taken away. There is nothing more repugnant to simplicity than transient human prudence, which always seeks to accommodate physical requirements."

"Therefore, a Superior cannot rule and govern well if he doesn't realise that he stands in the place of God and all his governing is truly directed towards God, and that he has been put there not by himself but by God for the benefit of his sheep. This is especially so when a Superior manipulates the governing of the Order for his own glory and doesn't seek the honour of God. Our Lord cautioned not only the Order, but the whole Church, when he said, "Without me you can do nothing. I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). Therefore this governance comes from God and not just from humans. However, when learning and holiness are there together, all things being equal, that's the best situation." [II, 320]

He can't govern well without the spirit

594. Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo said:

"A Superior can't govern well without the spirit. Nor can he have the spirit unless he practises prayer. Learned Superiors generally think they can keep the friars observing the Rule through a web of numerous regulations. However, if they think about it carefully they'll see that this is nothing but a noose to trap their poor subjects. It seems our Father Saint Francis relied on nothing but prayer. Read what it says in the *Legend of the Three Companions*. A friar asked him who he thought worthy to be General. He answered, 'I don't know anyone in the Order who is suitable, but I will describe for you what such a one should be like. The General ought to be a perfect observer of the Rule, and preach more by example than words. He should spend the whole morning, the noblest part of the day, in prayer, saying or hearing Mass, until meal time. Then he should rest a little. When Vespers have been said, he should recreate with the friars. He should be very zealous about all the virtues, but especially about poverty, contenting himself with a small amount of paper and an inkwell. He should avoid taking bags with him on a journey. He must be so kind that if an offender comes before him seven times in one day - indeed, even times beyond counting in one

day - he would never show anger. And if the sheep does not look for mercy, he should offer it to him'." [III, 67]

This is the role of the Superior

595. Battista da Norcia expressed regret to a friar after sending two others out to get something that was needed. When the friar asked him why he was upset, the good old man answered:

"Because walking through the streets won't do them much good. As Guardian I am enjoined to guide the friars along the way of God, and must render him an account for every time I give them occasion for distraction. It's the role of the Superior to guide the friars according to the will of God and to give them as much opportunity as possible to love God, and to remove from them those things which may be an impediment to this. A Superior has no authority over his subjects except as a minister of God in things that belong to God himself. Hence the one who is not united to God and enlightened by him is unsuited for this office. Nor is there any office in the world for which stricter account must be given than that of governing souls. It is difficult to know if we are ordering subjects on behalf of God or on our own behalf, according to our own passions or according to the Rule. You know, the Rule says that the friars are obliged to obey their ministers in all the things they have promised to God. Therefore I am bound to command and lead them in these things to the love of God, in which the observance of the Rule consists." [VI, 136]

He sought advice even in the unimportant things

596. Bernardino d'Asti preached almost all the time, inspiring the friars to perfection, expounding the Rule, and instructing them about the way to maintain the life of a true Friar Minor and Capuchin. Although he had reached a high degree of wisdom through learning, experience and contemplation, as well as through his natural intelligence and holy life, nevertheless he sought advice about things even if they were of no great importance. When he did not have a more expert person to consult, he discussed the situation with his companion, even if he was a lay friar. Similarly he exhorted the other friars, especially the Superiors, to consult others. He said, "The one who trusts in his own judgement and has little appreciation of consultation, declares himself unwise and unworthy of being a Superior." [VII, 247]

They should be fathers

597. Those who rule should never stop being fathers to those who are their subjects, and consider them, love them and embrace them as sons. [I, 377]

He was nearly always Guardian

598. The good Father Bartolomeo da Spello was very zealous about holy poverty. He was a lover of austerity, and thus was always content with only one habit, even in old age. This he wore completely patched, putting a mantle on top when compelled to by the winter cold. He rarely satisfied his hunger, and then only with bread, greens or vegetables. If he ever thought the soup was tasty, he would fill a drinking cup with water and then let the water fall into the soup as if by accident, so that the others wouldn't notice. He fasted on bread and water for the more significant vigils. He was also a great lover of silence, and so kept mainly to himself. When he was the Guardian, he liked to do the lowliest tasks around the house himself: sweep up, wash the bowls, wash the clothes, and also wash the feet of visiting friars.

In the evening he went to bed early so that he could get up earlier in the night to pray. He was always up and praying on his feet one or two hours before Matins. During the winter he was a little less rigorous, for although he was highly dedicated to holy meditation he was also old. He said he felt he lacked natural vigour.

He was most exemplary, and a great favourite with seculars. He was pleasant and loving to everyone, and outstandingly compassionate and attentive towards the infirm.

Because of all these virtues he had, he was nearly always made Guardian. [V, 151]

I would ruin this Order

599. The kindness of Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo was so great that although he was often Vicar of the Province of the Marches and Napoli, no one could ever claim they'd seen him angry, despite the many occasions for that go with holding the office of Superior. He said, "If I were General, I would ruin this Order, because I am so useless I don't know how to reprimand." Yet he was loved by everyone, and bore more fruit through kindness than those do who are feared because of their harshness. This good shepherd gave so much hope to offenders that the enemy could hardly, if ever, steal anyone from his hands. In the case of cruel shepherds, the sheep find no refuge. If they commit a transgression, the poor things bound away and give themselves up as prey to Lucifer rather than go before the cruel shepherd. [III, 66]

600. Although Ludovico da Reggio was very severe on himself, he was very kind towards others. He provided for their every need with great tenderness and in such a way that he fulfilled what Father Saint Francis says: a mother does not behave as tenderly towards her son as each friar should towards his brother. Ludovico was so disposed and given to charity towards others, whenever he

saw any of his sons suffering, he couldn't rest until he'd alleviated them. [III, 204]

A most loving father

601. Antonio da Monteciccardo governed the Province of the Marches for many years with great peace. When he arrived in the house it seemed as though Saint Francis himself had come. He was so loving and pleasant towards his subjects that he didn't seem like a Superior, but like a most loving father who had begotten them all. When anyone who was troubled by a temptation of the enemy saw his face and received his hand upon his head, he was so consoled it seemed the Holy Spirit had come down on him. No one could ever recollect seeing him any other way. He always had a joyful face that encouraged everyone, no matter how desperate, to trust him as a most loving father. [III, 234]

Not like the foreign princes

602. According to the teaching of Christ, our humble Lord, Christian Superiors must not be like foreign princes who accumulate power and honours for themselves. Rather, for Christian leaders, the heavier the weight they carry, the more they should humble themselves. They should remember that while the other friars have to obey their Superiors, they in turn have to obey all the friars - as imposed on them by the Chapter that elects them. After the example of Christ who came to serve and minister to us and to give up his own life for us, they should serve and minister to the friars in every need, especially their spiritual needs. Therefore all the Superiors are exhorted to be ministers and servants of all their friars. They will do this if, according to the teaching of the Seraphic Father, they minister spirit and life to their subjects through example and teaching. [C, 101]

I am not suitable for the office of Superior

603. The good Father Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo was very, very gentle and kind. He was like that even towards Superiors or other persons of standing, embracing them and smiling at them when they met, and then withdrawing.

He was affable as Superior, so that he was made Provincial in several Provinces. He did not know how to make anyone sad. He said, "I'm not suitable for the office of Superior because I don't know how to punish. If I was General, I would ruin the Order with too much kindness." [VI, 231]

Too rigorous in correcting

604. Brother Amadeo da Antegnate's illness got worse, and he seemed to be approaching death. He became depressed and very melancholic, so a young

preacher went to console him and to read him something spiritual. When he talked with Amadeus he noticed that he was almost wavering, so he tried to boost his confidence in the mercy of God. Amadeus said to him, "I'm not in doubt about the mercy of God, but in fear over my wrong-doing. Before my eyes I keep open the book of my conscience. I am afraid I have been too rigorous in correcting the friars. So speak to them for me, and ask them all to forgive me." [VI, 320]

The most humble

605. Matteo da Leonessa was often Guardian, yet he was inconspicuous except that he was the most humble of friars, reckoned as nothing by the others. [III, 148]

They all wanted to stay with him

606. The humility of Raniero da Borgo San Sepolcro was so great and his conversation so holy and devout that everyone liked him. He was often Guardian. He was exemplary in this office his subjects benefited from being in a peaceful community. Although he was a simple lay friar, he governed so prudently that, without exception, all the friars wanted to be in the friary where he was. [III, 490]

Most skilful in checking the dissolute

607. In the year 1573 Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone convoked the fourteenth Chapter in Ancona. At it Brother Vincent was elected the eighth General. He was a native of Monte dell'Olmo in the Marches, but a member and Vicar of the Province of Saint Francis. In governing he was a man of great prudence, and was most skilful in curbing the dissolute. He was more intent on impeding vices than punishing them, and so gave little freedom to those he knew to be incorrigible and insolent. Rather, with great endeavour he kept them under control and away from occasions of sin. He gave clear signs of this in the many acts of government that he carried out. [VI, 329]

Is he the Guardian?

608. Ludovico da Foligno was the one who built the house at Fano. One day while it was being built, the Priors of Fano went to visit the place. When they asked who the Guardian was, the friars promptly called out to Brother Ludovico, saying that the *Signori* wanted to see him. He came up to them, his habit all besmirched with clay, and even more of it in his beard. They were wattling the cells, smearing the clay on, and he'd got covered in it.

When the Priors saw this holy man, ragged and exhausted, they were amazed. They looked around and said, "Goodness! Is this the Guardian?" With a cheerful grin he replied, "Yes. I am that great sinner!"

When they talked about it among themselves, several of the Priors said, "You can see these poor wretches are not sluggards! If the Father Guardian wears himself out like that, imagine what the others must be like. They're truly servants of God!" [III, 288]

The preaching of good example

609. The Vicar Provincial, Giacomo da Montepulciano did not preach many sermons, but strove to preach to the friars by example. He always used the excuse that he didn't have the grace of speaking. And the friars said they were happier for him to preach to them by example rather than in long sermons. The venerable Father, clearly well advanced in holiness, urged them on in the observance of the Rule and other spiritual matters. But this required so much from them that no one could follow him perfectly.

Once, when a friar didn't rise for Matins, the holy man said only this at the *culpa*: "Son, I arrived yesterday evening very tired. By the grace of God I got up last night and prayed and took the discipline with the others. That's all I'll say to you." Often when he said such words, the friars were moved to tears. They thanked God that he had given them such a holy man as shepherd and guide. [III, 325]

He was faithfulness itself

610. Although he was Guardian, Bernardo da Fossombrone willingly busied himself over lowly tasks such as sweeping up, washing dishes, sewing and working in the garden. He never wasted time. Charitable and willing to satisfy everyone, he never stopped to talk with the friars except if necessity or for the sake of charity. He always displayed an angelic joyfulness on his simple and sincere face. It was said of him that he was faithfulness itself. His life was exemplary in everything. So he was often made Guardian and was very frequently made novice master. [V, 130]

I would rather ask death from you

611. Lord God, since you've had me elected to this office, I beg you never to cease the task of governing through me because of my sins. You know hearts, and with your strong hand you can repel and resist the fierce blows against your sheep that I see being prepared by the infernal enemy. I would rather ask death from you than be the cause of the loss of one of the least little sheep because of my rough ways and failures in governing. [II, 247]

612. Our Father does not want lots of regulations. He wants the friars, with true and living faith, to practise holy prayer, through which they acquire all the virtues. With great kindness and due care let Superiors seek to remove the friars from occupations that are the source of imperfections, for through such occupations they come to distance themselves from prayer. Superiors must take every step to keep the friars calm and devout in the true observance of the Rule. Regulations such as these are authentic.

A friar who has the spirit walks willingly in the way of holy virtue, but one who lacks the spirit does nothing that's of any value, and whatever he does presents him with difficulties. This is because he relies on his own efforts whenever he attempts something good. As it is often said, things done relying on one's own strength are not worth a piece of bark. Therefore it is the spirit that obstructs vice in the friars and opens them up to holy virtue. What else does the Apostle teach us but to walk by the spirit in the ways of God? All our rebelliousness is born of the flesh. All good is born of the spirit. Therefore, if you want the friars to obey willingly, have them dedicate themselves to prayer. [III, 67]

This is the role of the Superior

613. In the days when Battista da Norcia was Guardian of Montemalbe, I was present when it was necessary for him to send out two friars on an errand. He turned to me and said, "You won't believe how unwilling I am to send friars outside the friary. And it pains me even more to have sent those poor unfortunate friars." I said to him, "Why are you so upset about it?" and he replied:

"Well, not much good can come out of walking through the streets. Being Guardian, I'm obliged to guide my subjects along the way of perfection. I will be obliged to render an account for each time I give them occasion to snatch their minds from some good thought and from meditation on the things of God. This is the role of the Superior: to guide his subjects according to the will of God; to give them, as far as possible, the opportunity to love God; and to remove from them all those things that impede the love of God. As Superior, I have no authority over my subjects except as agent and minister of God in matters involved in his service. Therefore it happens that no one can perform this office well except one who is united with God and is enlightened by him. Nor is there any office in the world that will have to give a stricter account to God than that of the care of souls. Nevertheless, it's difficult to know how to discern whether we command our subjects on behalf of God or on our own behalf; according to our desires or according to the observance of the Rule and the commandments of God; for the greater advantage of their souls or to fulfil certain urges of our own. You well know that the

Rule says, 'The friars are obliged to obey their Ministers in all those things they have promised the Lord to observe.' Therefore, this is my role and that of every Superior: to use the utmost diligence to ensure the friars observe the Rule and in particular the precept on which all laws always depend, namely, 'Let them love God, practising the means necessary to come to that love.' I would have given those poor brothers greater opportunity to love God if I had left them quiet in the house rather than sent them on a journey. So, this is what sorrows me about sending out those poor friars." [III, 273]

In his administrations he ruled in a holy way

614. Brother Sebastiano da Grattieri, a priest, was Provincial. Throughout his term of office he ruled piously, like the saintly man he was. By holiness of life, he urged the friars to be virtuous. He was very severe towards himself, but towards others he was very charitable and easy going. On Fridays he usually ate nothing, and during Lent he went without food three days a week, while in Holy Week he ate only on Maunday Thursday, and then only bread and raw salad. He often went barefoot. He slept on a narrow litter, not lying down, but wrapped in a mantle and leaning against the wall.

But his austerity didn't make him brusque in his conversation with others. On the contrary, he was gentle, compassionate and full of kindness. You see, any austerity that makes a man uncivil towards others is truly suspect, for the fruits of the Holy Spirit cause people to rejoice in being different; and don't make them mutually antipathetic. Certainly, austerity that isn't accompanied by the true spirit of prayer is usually nourished by pride. This holy man was most devout and fervent in prayer. He acquired and grew into the kind of temperament that the fruits and the flowers of all the virtues adorn. [VI, 503]

They impose a penance

615. Let the Superiors remember what our Father Saint Francis was accustomed to say: "If we want to lift someone up again who has fallen, it is necessary for us to bend down to him in kindness". Jesus Christ, our most kind Saviour did this when the adulteress was presented to him. Do not be inflexible with rigid justice and coercion. Christ, the Son of God, came down from heaven to save us on the cross, and showed all possible kindness to us fallen sinners. Let Superiors also remember that if God judges us with rigid justice, few or none would be saved. When imposing a penance, let them have an eye towards saving and not losing the soul and reputation of the unfortunate friar involved. None of the other friars should be scandalised by that unhappy friar's sin, nor be ashamed of him, avoid him or be revolted by him. Rather, let them be compassionate towards him, and even more, let them love him as much as he needs. Remember

what our Father Saint Francis said: "Each of us would be much worse if God didn't preserve us with his grace". Even when Christ left Saint Peter in the world as universal shepherd in his place, he said he wanted him to forgive the sinner even if he should sin seventy times seven. Thus Saint Francis said in a letter that, if a friar committed the greatest sin possible, and then humbly sought mercy and he went to see his Superior, he should not depart without forgiveness. If the friar did not seek mercy, Saint Francis wanted the Superior himself to offer it to him. Even he came before the Superior a thousand times Saint Francis wanted the Superior to remember his own sins and never show the friar any disdain. Instead, to draw him to Christ our most kind Lord, he should love him with the heart - knowing in truth that repentance of heart with a firm purpose to sin no more and to exercise himself in virtuous deeds is sufficient before God. Therefore, when he gave penance, Christ was accustomed to say: "Go in peace and do not want to sin any more." [C, 95]

616. On the other hand, let Superiors be mindful that not to punish those who sin invites corrupt friars to commit similar faults, and opens up to them the possibility of indulging in all kinds of vice. Hence, let Superiors impose on them a fitting penance, with mercy, according to the Rule. Therefore, so that this estate of the Lord, our Order, be preserved by a strong hedge, we order that in governance, but especially in the correction and punishment of the friars, there should be no or stretching of the law or making lengthy judgements. [C, 96]

617. Let Superiors correct offenders with all humility and charity, always mixing the wine of severe justice with the oil of sweet mercy. [C, 126]

As a penance they had him wash the dishes

618. In his governing, Brother Tomaso da Città di Castello showed the greatest zeal over poverty. He feared, or rather saw, that the great numbers coming to the Order would compromise the rigorous observance practised until then. He made all the provisions he could so that reception would be done with great caution. When he saw that, despite this, continuing growth was beginning to give birth to tepidity in some friars, and other problems were emerging from it, he used more rigour than before in punishing offenders.

When he finished his first triennium in 1561, during the reign of Pius IV, he convoked the tenth General Chapter in Rome. There his predecessor, Brother Eusebius, was elected first definator, and strongly reproached him for his regime of vigorous correction and punishment. He said, that because of it, he, Tomaso, deserved to be punished in the same way he had punished others. As a penance they had him wash the dishes, I don't know how many times. Good Brother Tomaso accepted the reprimand and the penance not only with patience but also with great joy, especially since he hoped to be unburdened of the weight of governing. However God, who wanted to reassure him that his

regime wasn't displeasing, moved the hearts of the friars to re-elect him. [VI, 293]

Fragility deserves mercy

619. Bernardino d'Asti always took the side of the accused and interpreted things in a lenient way. However, when he found malice in someone's defect he chastised him firmly. He said fragility deserves mercy, but malice must be stripped completely away, leaving nothing remaining but soul and body, which are creatures of God. These can be glorified if amends are made, but malice is completely of the devil and cannot be allowed to remain. Therefore chastisement must be such that causes the friar to reject malice. If the punishment does not correct him, he will be cast out like Lucifer. [III, 188]

Active and contemplative

620. Those venerable Fathers who were adorned with the spirit and with learning said:

"If anyone wants to know how to govern by the spirit, let him look to the primitive Fathers. He will find the first holy Fathers who began the monastic life always distinguished in governing between active subjects and contemplative ones. They gave the manual workers useful undertakings and mortified them with the tasks that the life of the Order entails. As for those suited to contemplation, they granted them solitude and every facility."

The Superiors very clearly founded their governance on the example of those early Fathers. They gently directed the friars to which ever bent they were inclined. They said, "Those who have tasted the spirit and holy contemplation can be turned to external tasks only with difficulty. Manual workers who are inclined to such tasks can only be turned towards contemplation with difficulty. Therefore it is very important that whoever rules should know the friars' characters and what God has called them to, because they don't all have the same gifts." In regard to government, when the Superior is in accord with God in guiding his subjects using the means that God gives him, he will always govern with great facility.

This was the intention of Father Saint Francis:- that the Superiors encourage those who come to the Order to give themselves completely to God. However, when God wants one thing and the Superior commands another, discord is the result. Francis is speaking about the spiritual friars and not the proud ones who want to live in their own way, and who deserve to be mortified. A proud friar should not be left to do whatever he likes. If proud friars did not amend themselves and heed the correction of the Superiors, our Father Saint Francis wanted them cast out from the Order so that they would not disturb those who wanted to do good. [IV, 10]

He was diligent in chastising defects

621. Onorio da Montegranaro was severe in appearance and zealous in spirit, and made a diligent effort to see that offenders were chastised. While he was Vicar Provincial he was conscientious in chastising defects, maintaining good customs and eradicating detrimental innovations, so that corruption would not be introduced into the Congregation and its purity of observance would be maintained. He was very cautious and reserved in receiving young men into the Order, concerned lest he admit a bad apple that could contaminate the others.

However, he was civil in conversation and had well cultivated manners. While he was very friendly towards the good friars, he spoke to everyone in a most charitable way, and would not dwell on the defects of anyone who wasn't there. He was outstandingly frugal. Thus, once when a cloth off-cut was being sewn up to make a cover for the Little Rule, a lay friar said to him, "Father, can't we find a better Little Rule for you without mending this tattered one?" The zealous Father replied, "Son, having it like this is enough for me. If anyone wants something more beautiful, he can take it upon his conscience."

When he wasn't a Superior, he didn't look for precedence, but always took the lowest place, both in choir and elsewhere. [VII, 457]

They must visit their brothers

622. We order that during his three years in office the Father Vicar General must strive to visit personally all the friaries and all the friars of our Congregation, and that the Vicars Provincial must visit their brothers. The same holds for Guardians. Let them not cease charitably to exhort their subjects to the perfect observance of the divine and evangelical precepts and counsels, of the Rule they promised, of these current directives, and especially of most high poverty which is the firmest foundation of all regular observance. [C, 126]

He embraced his sons

623. The great servant of God Matteo da Bascio began with immense fervour to visit them in their little friaries. When they saw from a distance that their General was coming, all the friars would come outside together with their Guardian. With one loud voice they all called out together three times, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" Then the Father General would respond in the same way. When they met up, that good shepherd would embrace his sons most tenderly, giving them the kiss of peace. Together they would go back to the friary.

The visits of this servant of God were joyful. For him it was not a painful duty. Rather, it was a great joy to see his sons living so simply and eager to suffer. [II, 250, 254]

When he visited he preached on the Rule

624. This General, Brother Giovanni Maria da Tusa, was a man of holy life. He nearly always dined simply on bread, with wine or water, even when greatly fatigued during visitations. He was gentle by nature, and didn't go so far as punishing anyone unless compelled to do so by clear evidence of excess. When he visited the friars he preached on the Rule by expounding it. Many friars wrote his expositions down, and they were held in high regard. [VI, 364]

Very useful visits

625. Giacomo da Montepulciano was very saintly and governed for many years. When he was on visitation, this servant of God never failed to participate in choir and prayers with the other friars. Sometimes he missed Terce and Sext when he was interviewing the friars. Otherwise he always went. [III, 325]

626. When Superiors went on visitation as the Rule commands them, they found men in the friaries who led truly blameless lives. So they had no need put pen to paper and record what reprimands or corrections needed to be given. On the contrary, when they found everything going well with observance of the Rule and holy example, they had reason to praise to God. They stayed with joy and quiet in the friaries when they went around, and departed with joy in their hearts, not because they were leaving but because they left behind blessed peace and many good and delightful things. [I, 267]

627. Their visits were most useful because they stayed at least four or five days in each friary. Every day they preached, and they corrected the slightest thing, especially in regard to holy poverty. [III, 76]

He set out to make a visitation of the whole Congregation

628. Bernardino d'Asti was elected and confirmed as General. Together with the Fathers he drew up Constitutions to govern the Congregation in a properly consistent way, and then settled things in Rome. After that, he set out in the holy name of God to make a visitation of the whole Congregation. He took a little donkey, which carried him when he was fatigued by the length of the journey. This form of visitation has been observed by the Generals for many years now.

The first thing that happened when he entered the friaries was that he went to the chapel and spent some time at prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He begged God to enlighten and direct him in his task of visiting the friars. He wanted the friars to pray to God to help him rule and govern them.

He then entered the ordinary rooms where they did for him the charitable acts done for friars who arrive on their travels.

When he stayed in the friary, he came for the prayers and Offices in choir and he prayed at length. He did not see anyone in the morning until he had said Mass, with a long preparation and lengthy thanksgiving. He could easily do this when there were few friars. With his kindness he was able to encourage even the least significant friars to have confidence to speak their minds to him and make known their needs or whatever seemed beneficial to say in regard to the Order. He was kind in consoling, prompt in providing, gentle in correcting, always more inclined to kindness than to rigour. He said, "If I have been too rigorous in punishing, may God reprimand me in his judgement. I will have no excuse. But if I many have been excessive in forgiving, when he reprimands me I will say that I have learned from his mercy, which has no end or measure."

He did not readily believe everything he heard about people. He even excused the accused as much as he could by referring to good intentions the friar might have had. However, if in fact he found malice, he chastised firmly while saying that fragility attracts compassion and mercy, but malice repels them. The aim of punishment should be to remove malice. If malice remains, the friar is lost, for if the punishment does not remove it, the man is like a demon. [VI, 23]

Giovanni da Fano

629. Giovanni was elected Vicar of his Province, the Marches, so he was called away from one labour and led on to another. When he arrived and assumed office, he carried it out with great solicitude and warmth of heart, as he knew was his duty. He also knew that keeping the friars in observance of their professed Rule was something most acceptable to God and to our Father Saint Francis.

In this necessary and holy Office he was able to offer the friars boundless service. This was truly the case for, on visitation, he showed them the royal and true path by which to ascend to heaven.

When this saintly Father was visiting the houses of the friars, and his sons heard first of his coming and then of his arrival, it brought the greatest joy to their hearts. It was just how a most loving father affects his own sons when he returns home after spending a long time away. As soon as he arrived all the friars would gather around him with jubilation and joy. One would embrace him. Another would kiss his hands or proffer some other form of welcome. He would reciprocate. This happened in such a way that from every side, in word and in spirit, there was only happiness and joy. There is nothing marvellous about this because he truly was a father and more than a father - if that is possible.

He would rest a little and then he begin his visitation with great paternal friendliness. He wouldn't stay just one or two days, but live with them for a good while, in order to bring them as much benefit as possible. While he was there, not a moment passed but the flowers and fruits of shining example and

holy works blossomed in him. He constantly preached or read aloud some enlightening or holy text, or expounded the Rule, not only at table but at other times and in other places. His sermons and readings were such that he inflamed the hearts of the friars, who were indeed already disposed to be ignited by his great enthusiasm.

Hence through his behaviour and manner that good servant of God made the house he where stayed seem like paradise. Nothing was on their lips except God, salvation and the holy virtues. Each one was encouraged not to lag behind in the good race, not to run but to fly if possible, like a runner who wants to keep ahead of the others and win the prize. In encouraging their swiftness, the impassioned words of that good shepherd and father were very sharp, though gracious spurs. But Saint Gregory says example speaks louder than words, and certainly Giovanni strove to put into practice himself everything he preached to others. Clearly, whatever position you're in - but especially if you're a Superior - preaching but not practising what you preach drags people down rather than builds them up. It scandalises the listener rather than produces good fruit in him.

There are two ways by which Superiors ought to exhort their subjects to continue the journey they've begun: the use of efficacious and warm words, and the good example of holy deeds. Of these two, the example of doing something is a more vigorous invitation and a stronger persuasion than is the timbre of talking about it. The soldier takes more heart and feels braver if he sees his captain advance into battle with a resolute heart, rather than if he just listens to the captain make speeches decorated with a thousand flowers of eloquence exhorting him not to be timid but ardent in battle. When a servant of God sees that his Superior is the first and most fervent in doing what he teaches, he is more moved and inspired to serve the Lord than he is by one who gives sermons and little talks and is then seen to be a lover of sensuality and ease.

The good Father I am talking about never failed to carry out in himself what he encouraged in others. In his sermons he showed that humility is necessary: and he was always as humble as a lamb. He encouraged gentleness: he was very gentle. He inspired souls to kindness and charity towards others: he was outstandingly charitable and kind to everyone. He declared to the friars that mortification was their adornment and duty, that they should be resigned to the will of God in and through everything. He was always united with Christ and constant in sparing no effort to mortify himself.

It was evident to the Capuchin Friars that he'd begun to do this from the time he took the habit, not from when he was Vicar, and he continued to journey with alacrity along this good path until his death. The worse his health became with advancing years and the labours of office imposed on him, the more robust he showed himself to be. Neither old age nor anything it entails ever weakened or retarded his fervour for long.

Who was the first to prayer and the Divine Office and most frequented the church? Brother Giovanni da Fano. Who was best prepared to do the usual Lenten observances our Seraphic Father did? Brother Giovanni da Fano. Who was most faithful in observing the strictest fasts and other bodily penances? Brother Giovanni da Fano. Who took the greatest pains always to conform his will to the divine will by imitating Christ's virtuous and lofty deeds to acquire the Spirit of the Lord and his holy operation, as is counselled by the Rule? Brother Giovanni da Fano. Who was the greatest devotee of most high poverty, and most in love with her? Brother Giovanni da Fano. His simple and frugal life was a clear testimony to all of this. His habit was the roughest cloth to be found. Worn out and always patched it lent the greatest credence to his poverty. What more can be said? In everything he showed not only how much zeal he had for poverty, but that he was poverty itself. Therefore I long to say this, and I say it because I am certain I am speaking the truth. While he was Vicar, he was not only a solicitous, skilful and provident shepherd over his flock, but always - at every hour, at all times and in every place- he showed himself to be a vessel, a shrine and a temple of the precious and most pleasing fragrance of total goodness.

There was another very beautiful side to this man. People were quite charmed and delighted at first sight when they met him. His comely countenance was always gracious, serene and jovial, which gave him a majestic and noble appearance. He looked like one of those saintly Patriarchs of the Old Law, venerable and extraordinary. He was utterly charming in his speech, kind in his conversation, and outstanding and skilful in all he did. [I, 300-303]

Bernardino d'Asti

630. The most high and just God wanted to make use of Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone while there was need to defend the poor friars in the beginning. They were like a humble flock, filled with fear at finding themselves in the midst of continuous, critical attacks that were launched on them. But the Divine Majesty dealt with the Congregation and with Brother Ludovico as he had previously dealt with the Israelites and with Saul.

He allowed Saul to fall because of the wrong he did, and in his place gave the humble David to his people as their defender, head and king. David made himself quite illustrious with many noble deeds, and ruled the people bravely and well, defending them from the assaults of their enemies. In the end he lost his kingdom and his name, and ended up in utter disgrace.

Well, as I was saying, he let Brother Ludovico fall and leave us because of his wrong doing. He gave another Vicar to the Congregation, Bernardino d'Asti, who was truly humble, like David. He had to pasture his flock with fitting diligence and defend it from anything that could hurt it. The good Father always did these things. By the way, I have already said that he was very well

educated and led a holy life, and he governed with very great prudence - not with worldly prudence, but prudence that was completely informed by the spirit. In his governance this good Father - who's never praised enough - conducted himself honourably and with such holiness that everything went well. There was nothing but fervour, devotion and peace in the Order.

This man was exemplary in all he did, and his gracious presence was sought by everyone everywhere. He was loved and feared by everyone. But not loved and feared with cringing and servile love and fear. No, it was completely filial, light and joyful. For he had a way of doing things that true Superiors have to have, as Saint Augustine shows in the Rule he gave to his friars. He says Superiors should contrive more to be loved rather than feared. Thus this Father, though always revered, was loved a lot more than he was feared. It was not that he did not love, or that he did not observe justice when rare occasions required it. While he was strict in carrying out justice, he went about it with so much kindness and love that although he was a judge, he never stopped being a father. He was offended by faults, but never showed that the sinner, his neighbour, may have been displeasing to him, or that he did not love him from the heart. He remembered what our Father Saint Francis says in the Rule: that when a sinner goes to the Superior, he, Saint Francis, does not want the Superior to get angry, lest charity be impeded or controlled by anger. Rather, Francis wants penance to be imposed with mercy, not oppression. Once the penance is given he doesn't want the Superior to avoid the friar or disain him or be antipathetic towards him. Moreover, he says the Superior ought to show that he takes no account of the matter, so that the subject doesn't lose trust. Once trust is lost, other unfitting things come about. He never regretted giving paternal correction, nor who it was that went from him corrected.

Bernardino used to say that a judge who is not a father is a bit of sadist. In regard to defects, a father who is soft and careless is similar to Eli the high priest. Since he doesn't use his judgement, he leads his children to ruin. Therefore mercy and justice need to be there together in such a way that one is not seen without the other. If it is necessary to bend to one side, it is better to bend towards that of the merciful father than towards that of the strict judge. And here we're not talking about obstinate and incorrigible friars, who deserve all the chastisement they get. Though their punishment may be severe, it's insignificant when measured against their wrongs.

I heard Bernardino say such things with my own ears - specifically, in the friary at Sant'Angelo in Vado. It was in the year of our Lord 1547, when he was General, and came on visitation. He stayed there some time because he was ill, and during that period three Vicar Provincials came to see him, along with some other Fathers. This holy man often spoke in the presence of all the friars, and, among other things, he sometimes brought up this particular topic. I thought what he said came from a living, divine oracle, and committed his talks to memory, then took up the task of writing down a full record of them.

He said these things and much more, discussing the qualities friars should have, especially Superiors. One of his points was that clemency should always go with justice, and these two should never be separated, even for the briefest moment. He added that he would rather be reprimanded for clemency than for harshness. He said that when he had to go before the tribunal of God to explain himself and his governance, he would rather be reprimanded for mercy than for strictness. He alleged that if he was rebuked about rigour, he would have neither reason nor excuse to present in his defence. However, if he was rebuked for mercy he would immediately have something to put his hand to in order to defend himself. He said mercy, kindness and clemency have been well taught at the school of Jesus Christ himself who, moved by pity, became human on this earth. Urged by mercy he worked many merciful signs, which as a mortal man he let the world see. He would always reveal himself as most clement to all the different kinds of people who went to him, even to sinners. He taught all these things to his disciples and to Christianity in a thousand ways. Bernardino said he therefore wanted to keep to this way, since he saw Our Lord God keep to it just as his friends did.

He concluded that all the friars should not only be obedient subjects to their Superiors, but also loving sons who always regard Superiors as their dear fathers. On the other hand, Superiors should always show themselves to be loving fathers towards their subjects and live with them as one of their own, dressing in their cloth and being measured with their measure. They should act toward their subjects, as they would want these subjects to act towards them were they to become Superiors. When Superiors go on visitation they should not fail to punish what deserved being punished, yet they should behave in such a way that when they left, the subjects felt saddened at their departure, and longed for them to return. A Superior should behave in such a way that when he resided in a friary he would not be seen with a jaundiced eye, nor would his subjects conceive in their hearts a desire never to see him again. He said it was a bad sign- and other good Fathers have confirmed it - when the Superior is not loved, but rather avoided by most friars. He added that Jesus Christ does not stay with a Superior who finds faults while visiting a friary but leaves it still entangled in its imperfections and transgressions. Similarly, it is a bad sign if a Superior visits a friary and, after punishing faults, leaves behind a lethargy of soul, interior resentment, and discord among the brothers. They are left without peace or tranquillity of heart, an effect proper to the king of darkness and usually persisting after his appearances. However, Jesus Christ is with the Superior who gives all required admonitions and corrections to his sons, along with opportune and due remedies, then leaves them strong, with holy peace and tranquil and quiet souls, and more willing than ever to do good and stride forward along the path of perfection they have begun. Now that is how the good Father Asti governed.

No one ever saw him melancholic or upset, or reprimand in anger. He never uttered an idle word, or let something small blow up out of proportion - even if avoiding this put some suspicion of frivolity on him. He was always serious, but at the same time he accompanied this with the greatest gentleness. He was never worldly, yet all the seculars who came to him left contented. He never gave occasion for anyone to have reason to complain about what he did, nor did anyone complain do so. He fulfilled what he promised, but never promised anything that was either unjust or impossible. He said it was an offensive and reprehensible thing to promise what one could not or should not do. Failure to do something you've promised deserves more than mere censure, since it is a clear sign of instability in faith, or little of it. For him there could be no valid excuse for this. Hence the saying: "I wasn't thinking; I didn't believe it" is a clear indication of lack of due prudence.

Therefore, this enlightened Father walked continuously with an open mind on judgement.

Furthermore, he was very zealous about all the virtues. In particular he was a supreme lover of the most holy poverty promised to God. He was assiduous in holy prayer. He never abandoned his beloved humility and gentleness. He abased himself before everyone as if he was himself the very least of all the friars. His presence alone was a great comfort to all, and no one went away from him without being greatly consoled, and being convinced and satisfied even about something he could not get. To sum it up: from his tongue he distilled the sweetness of heavenly and divine honey.

The Congregation could be reckoned as blessed during the time of his governance, and we can assert that that was when it began to take on the shape it had later, making it clearly recognisable as an Order. For until those days it was a company of strays, fugitives and frightened, insignificant friars. In the days of Father Asti it took up the proper shape that well organised Orders have. At that time they were divided into Provinces. When the Chapter finished, some good, prudent and learned Fathers stayed with the Father General and the Father Definitors and made our Constitutions, which still stand and, with God's help, will continue to stand.

Since our Congregation has received from Jesus Christ the favour and sustenance of having this blessed Father as its head, its affairs will go on forever, from good to better. For he was most vigilant in addressing all the needs it had. He kept the Congregation fervently, or rather most ardently, in the service of God and the observance of the Rule. With deeds and words he showed himself to be a solicitous shepherd of his flock. It can be said he never failed to give them fervent sermons at all times. Once when he was giving a sermon in the second Chapter, a good friar and zealous servant of the Lord saw Saint Francis sitting at the side of this Father General while he was speaking. When the sermon was over, our blessed Father disappeared. [I, 414-418]

IN FILIAL SUBJECTION

Along with humility and poverty, obedience forms an inseparable triptych in the thought and life of St. Francis of Assisi. To renounce self-will is an excellent act of poverty, just as it is also an act of profound and true humility. No one is better than the one truly poor in spirit and humble of heart to the degree of being subject to men out of homage to the sovereign majesty of God.

If the Capuchin Superiors in their governance were regulated by the maxims and the examples of their Seraphic Father, the subjects on their part were animated in obedience by the teachings and the spirit of the very same Holy Patriarch.

The Superiors were servants of the friars, and their subjects were their most beloved sons.

They all loved, obeyed and revered the Prelates of the Holy Roman Church.

The surest state

631. They prescribed holy obedience to mortify something that's hugely important: namely, self-will. They elected as their shepherds and Superiors those friars who were the most practised in the service of God and the most enlightened, and everyone submitted to their wills. This was judged to be the first state, or at least the surest state, in the service of God. In this state they knew that God assisted them greatly with his favour, and that it was impossible for anyone truly obedient to be damned. This is because all our desires are held in reign by obedience.

They were greatly strengthened in the service of God and established in holy obedience when they learnt of its excellence and nobility and how necessary it was. As a result, they received from God a great deal more humility, spirit and mortification through holy obedience, than they had done in all their sufferings through fasting and the other afflictions they went through during the many persecutions they endured. [II, 213]

632. They frankly confessed that although they had truly suffered a lot in the wilderness, still their deeds didn't seem to be of much merit since they weren't seasoned with holy obedience. [II, 250]

633. No tongue can tell what those first Capuchins suffered. However, the fruit of obedience was reckoned more important in the Order, as I often heard them say when discussing things among themselves. One or other of those servants of God would say:

“Certainly, we were sustained in the woods by the mercy of God, staying there for months and even years without seeing one another. I reckon that for someone to stay in solitude without foundering is a greater miracle than raising the dead. As for me, I can't think of a

safer life than staying in the holy Order and letting oneself be governed by one's Superior. Speaking for myself, I wouldn't want that flight alone into the woods and that unconstrained way of living to come back. It's impossible to list all the grave temptations suffered by servants of God who remain solitaires. However I am not saying they're not greatly helped, for were this not so it would be impossible for them to last there even one day, especially since His Majesty allows us to be persecuted unjustly. So it's necessary to trust in his goodness. However when we can remain under obedience in the observance of the Rule, it is not necessary to search for better grain bread. In the beginning, the suffering was a great labour. But now the charity of the Order has made everything easier for us. May God keep us in the peace we now have and may he take from us - and make us overcome - every temptation that entices us to leave the Order, thinking we can give ourselves completely with more facility to holy contemplation. Experience tells us that it's false to think that we can become better outside the Order. All those who leave the Order are in danger, for in each case God allows them to become engulfed in all kinds of sin. They become worse than seculars, and infamous throughout the world."

Thus the resolution of those first Capuchins to remain under obedience was a good one. [II, 214]

Obedience frees us from all care

634. They enjoyed their subjection because it gave them great liberty. It freed them from every worry and from every concern they had about providing for themselves and taking care of their needs.

Chatting among themselves they often came out with things such as: "You'll never guess what the demon has put before me in prayer! He said to me in my mind: 'Where would you like to live?' I answered him, 'I'll gladly stay wherever I've been put by my Superior'."

They'd add: "Holy obedience frees us from all care. When the demon says, 'What'll you eat?' we can answer, 'Whatever the cook gives me.' 'What'll you wear?' 'The habit the Guardian gives me.' And so on for everything."

They affirmed that God can be served much better and more expeditiously under obedience than in solitude. Just to have to think about basic things, about the provision of what's necessary for staying alive, takes up so much time that little remains for one to give oneself to holy prayer. All that time is gained through holy obedience and one is freed from the worry and solicitude that greatly interfere with poverty of spirit. Therefore one should know how to make use of obedience to benefit the spirit. [IV, 13]

In these friars obedience had perfect dominion

635. Obedience, which is the driving force, the practice, the support and the splendour of every perfection in Orders, held sway over the friars. Superiors had no need to compel their subjects to obey through fear, because they did not fear penances, being like those who undertake great hardships. There was no need for any compulsion since love made them prompt to the merest suggestion.

It often happened that when a friar received an unexpected obedience to go to another house, he set out on the journey immediately, without even returning to his cell, since he was already clothed in all his earthly goods. It was easy changing not only friaries, but also Provinces, for they had overcome their preferences about staying in one house or another, or of wanting this or that. Obedience was no longer a difficulty.

Remembering what Saint Francis used to say how he would willingly have obeyed a novice of one day as much as an older friar, they desired nothing from their Superiors than authority and a friary of God and Saint Francis. By the grace of God, up to the present, this virtue is found in every friar. If it should dwindle, Superiors will have to govern rigorously and issue commands to ensure obedience. Strict observance will begin to disappear, since virtue and grace go hand in hand. [V, 297]

Nothing is good without obedience

636. It pleased the Lord God to put into the heart of Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone to assemble all his sons and advise them about the temptations of the enemy to make them leave the Order. He said to them, "Beloved brothers and sons, I don't condemn your desire for solitude. But I tell to you openly that nothing is good and religious, if it isn't done under holy obedience." [II, 218]

Solitude is very dangerous

637. Ludovico da Foligno desired very much to die in solitude, but also in holy obedience. It happened one day that he went to seek counsel from an eminent doctor called Master Leonard. Ludovico said to him, "Would it be lawful for a servant of God to leave the Order and withdraw into solitude, and remain there even though he'd be obliged to hear Mass on a feast day?" The doctor answered him:

"Without a doubt it would be lawful for him, because he could arrive at greater perfection. If God gave you the grace to be able to contemplate continuously and you'd been caught up into God, you wouldn't be obliged to anything else, because everything that religious persons do has the love of God as its aim. When one achieves the end, the means are no longer necessary. However, my

advice is that no one should ever undertake such a thing, unless it has been first endorsed by God that this is his will. For it's a very difficult thing for a religious to do better outside obedience than when living under obedience, unless it's a particular call from God. Obedience is the bond that ties all the friars with God himself, with the Church and with the Order. That's because it's proper for them to regulate all their actions so that they're acceptable to God. It must always be remembered that in the Order there are enlightened men of letters and of spirit, who can enlighten the simple friars so that they won't be easily deceived. But solitude is a very dangerous thing, unless God gives you some special gift. The friar who does as much good as he can in the Order achieves a lot. When the Order is well regulated, he lives according to the decrees of whoever is in charge. That's why we have what we call the Rule. Following the precepts of that Rule will unfailingly lead you to its objective, otherwise it couldn't be called a Rule. You didn't have this in the wilderness, when you walked according to the rule of your own will, which errs easily if it isn't regulated by God."

This reply greatly calmed that servant of God Brother Ludovico, who from the beginning had always had a niggling desire to retreat into solitude in order not to be troubled by anyone and give himself totally to holy prayer. [III, 290]

Let them humbly kneel

638. Let the friars who are subjects obey their Superiors with all humility and without hesitation in everything in which they know there is no offence to God. Let them give due reverence to their Superiors, as they would to Saint Francis, and to the Vicars as they would to Christ our God. When they are reprimanded and corrected by them let the friars humbly kneel and patiently endure every reprimand and correction, according to the praiseworthy custom of our early and humble Fathers and Brothers. Let them not answer proudly or in any way dare to answer the Superior, especially in the chapter, or in the refectory, if they have not asked and obtained permission first. [C, 127]

Nothing will seem difficult

639. Concerning obedience, the friars carried out everything they were commanded, and indeed even the least hint given them, with great ardour of spirit, cheerfulness, attention and humility. No matter how exacting the task, nothing seemed difficult or burdensome for them. Rather, because of that one phrase proclaimed when profession is made, that is 'living in obedience', they always had their will prepared and ever ready to obey whenever the Superior should command or order something, and never felt even the slightest reluctance. Thus they were accustomed to be constantly ready to fulfil their vow

of holy obedience, and showed themselves to be joyful and very happy whenever called upon to do so. [I, 248]

Such obedience is more glorious

640. The friars are exhorted always to obey, with all possible reverence, the Supreme Pontiff - the pre-eminent Father of all Christians - and all Prelates, and even every creature that might show to us the way to God. We know that the more inferior the person is who is obeyed for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the more glorious and more acceptable to God is the obedience we give. [C, 9]

Willingly he would have obeyed a novice in the order one day

641. The friars they governed were simple, so they often called to mind the example of our Father Saint Francis when strengthening them. He would have obeyed a novice invested in the Order just one day as willingly as he would have obeyed the oldest, most senior and most learned Father. That's because the Order is governed by God, since the canonically elected Superior who is assigned to each of us, is assigned by God, not men. The Superior represents for you the person of Jesus Christ. If you truly believe that in the Order you are governed by God, and obey simply because of love of him, God, who governs you through your Superior, will not allow him to command you anything against God's will or your soul. Should it happen that he commands you to do something that is not pleasing to God, and you, unaware that it is wrong, simply obey, thinking you are doing something good, that wrong will be imputed to him and not to you. So great is the power of holy obedience, that if you do something that in itself is sinful, but you are unaware of this because of your simplicity, what you do will be meritorious for you unto eternal life.

Those Fathers said that every time you offer yourself to God in the Order it is very important to believe firmly that you are governed by God and not by men. Obedience is denigrated greatly and merit is diminished when, in your mind, you begin to weigh up the qualities of your Superior. When you obey him more willingly if he is noble, old or well educated, it is a clear sign that you obey men and not God.

It is true that God works more certainly in a simple friar than in a learned man. You can be sure you are governed by God through the former, while you will be governed most of the time by human prudence through the latter. God gives more to simple friars, who are like weak instruments, and his governance is more immediately evident in them when you entrust yourself to them, than it is in human prudence. [IV, 11]

Readily

642. The friars' subjection to and reverence for their Superiors was so great, that it was enough for those Superiors simply to make their intentions known for the

friars to carry it out immediately. Like perfect men, they strove not only to obey the precepts of their Superiors, but even their simple intentions. In this way they did all the things required for the perfect observance of the rule. [II, 457]

643. Hence they went readily wherever holy obedience sent them. Even though there might seem to be some difficulties, especially when they took up new Provinces, nonetheless they rejoiced that their Superiors were confident in them. It was the same around the house. One never heard of any friar excusing himself or resisting holy obedience in any way. When their Superior spoke, they would kneel down with great meekness and obey him. It continued like this for some time, few friars staying long in the same Province or in the same house. [IV, 188]

644. Antonio da Monteciccardo told a story about the visit of a saintly man of the Franciscan Order, who, because of the many miracles he'd performed, had been called to Rome by the Pontiff to speak with him about the things of God. When that holy man stopped off at the friary where he was, and all the friars were at table, with the *Mirror of the Cross* being read, he saw him levitate from the floor. The holy friar stayed in the air at some height, enraptured, while the friars continued eating. When they'd finished they went to the church to give thanks, and returned to the refectory to find him still there in rapture.

Anthony then told another story about him. The Guardian of the said friary wanted to experiment to see if the man was as holy as everyone thought. After Mass one morning he called him aside and said to him, "Father, I would like you to help me work a little in the garden." The holy man answered, "I can only do a little, but the little I can do I do willingly." On seeing the readiness of his obedience, the Guardian was sure he was a saintly man. [III, 230]

The Guardian did everything

645. Those first Fathers obeyed and revered their Superiors with great simplicity, as if they were their Father Saint Francis himself. If anyone demurred they considered it a great scandal. They would say: "Good heavens! He's had the impudence to rebel against obedience!" They'd say, "Whenever I'm sure the Superior wants a certain thing done or doesn't want it done, I am bound by conscience to obey." Obedience was so strict among those venerable Fathers it could be said without a lie that it was the Guardian who did everything in the house. The same sort of thing held for the other Superiors. [IV, 12]

To seek the will of God

646. Brother Ludovico da Stroncone wanted to be conformed to our Father Saint Francis, and he heard that the Capuchins had undertaken to administer the hospital of Saint Giacomo degl'Incurabilis. So, with great insistence he begged and pleaded with Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone to appoint him to

the service of the poor lepers. There he intended to perform the lowliest tasks for the love of God. But when he thought it over afterwards, he began to doubt and to say to himself: "How do I know if God is calling me to this service? I have made a mistake in asking for such a thing. In undertakings like these, the will of God must be sought." Because of this he wrote again to Brother Ludovico again saying, "Venerable Father, my intention was to exercise myself in mortification when I wrote to you about the hospital. Now I withdraw my request and with all subjection I entrust myself to your will." However, when it pleased the Lord God that he be posted there by his Superiors, he raised his hands to heaven, thanking God. He said, "Now I see how the Lord wants me to exercise myself in the virtue of charity to others." [III, 264]

647. If anyone of them was at any time posted to another house of the Order, he was unsettled until he left for that house. Staying where he was seemed to him to be claiming ownership of his own will. [IV, 183]

A most perfect obedience

648. Now Brother Giacomo da Novara had two outstanding virtues, which embraced all the others. One of the two was purity of mind. With an extremely God-fearing conscience he guarded himself most carefully from every little defect. Because of this, he was commonly regarded as scrupulous. Given the evidence, however, it seems he was a long way from being scrupulous, which is to be unsettled by small details without ever improving. It is not scrupulous to weigh what actions are more important, especially concerning obeying and believing Superiors; spending time usefully; restraining the flesh and repressing and regulating the passions; attending to the exercise of virtue; and being busy with the holy movements of the spirit in the love of God. Ordinarily, things like this are far from the minds of the scrupulous, who are occupied only with minutiae, things that make a man neither good nor bad but which they are always scrupulous about. These trivia worry the scrupulous because they have qualms of conscience about them yet do not abstain from doing them. They magnify them and make splinters look like beams. They commit faults that are either not faults at all or are very slight ones, and regard them as very grave. This really damages their consciences terribly, which conjure up visions of either hell fire or the fire of purgatory.

This holy man, however, was quite the opposite of this, and put all his efforts into cultivating virtue and the love of God. He guarded himself most diligently from anything about which his conscience gave him remorse. He considered each little thing in order to guard his conscience and be pure and purged as much as possible before God. From this a most perfect obedience grew in him, which admitted of no interpretive gloss. He wished to obey in all simplicity, and do exactly what he was told. [VI, 377]

Most enthusiastic about holy obedience

649. Matteo da Cascia was most enthusiastic about holy obedience. When chapters were held, he always wanted to know if there was any new law he had to obey. He observed the constitutions inviolably, and also those things that were promulgated by chapters. Nothing in the world would have made him go against the constitutions. [III, 155]

Learn not to recommend the wicked

650. Brother Amadeus of Antignate was most zealous about holy poverty, about which he talked freely and with great gusto. He was zealous in the extreme about obedience, so much so that he did not dare to do anything without the merit of explicit obedience.

Once when he was coming to Rome through Lombardy, he thought he would visit the Holy House of Loreto. He came to Ancona accompanied by a secular who came on the journey to speak about the things of God. However, when they arrived in Ancona someone heard the secular blaspheme, and he was arrested put in jail. In his distress he begged and pleaded with Brother Amadeus to intercede for him with the governor. The good Father did so with simplicity and charity. However, the governor turned to him with a fiery and menacing glare, so to speak, and immediately commanded that Brother Amadeus be bound and led away by his cord. When he found himself bound and saw that they were about to drag him away, he said to the governor, "My lord, if you don't want to respect me - and I don't deserve respect, because I am a sinner - I beg of you at least to have respect for our Order." "Go," said the governor, "I pardon you. However, learn in the future not to commend the wicked and don't try to impede justice." He then freed him.

Later, Amadeus believed and always said that this happened to him because of disobedience, for he had had the audacity to visit to Our Lady of Loreto without having special permission to do so. [VI, 317]

He was never seen to object

651. The servant of God, Brother Felice da Cantalice, practised obedience very willingly. He was never seen to object to anything that was imposed on him, no matter how difficult, hard and laborious it might have been. Rather, with great humility he embraced and fulfilled all that was commanded him by his Superiors, without ever complaining or grumbling. He wanted everything he did to be seasoned with holy obedience. Nor would he have made visits nor given alms while questing without the permission of the Father Guardian. He was so good and faithful, that all the friars were very confident in him. He was equally obedient to anyone who asked a favour of him. [III, 470]

The Church hierarchy

652. The venerable Fathers laid another foundation. It was subjection and reverence, devotion and obedience to the Prelates of the holy Roman Church. [IV, 6]

653. As our Seraphic Father exhorts us in his Testament, let the friars strive to revere, love and honour venerable Priests, reverend Bishops, reverend Cardinals, and above all the Holy and Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Christ on earth, General Head, Father and Shepherd of all Christians and of all the Church militant. And let the friars act the same towards all others in the ecclesiastical state who live according to the order of the holy Roman Church and are humbly subject to our aforesaid Head, Father and Lord - that is, to the Supreme Pontiff. [C, 119]

654. We also exhort all our friars to guard themselves from all detraction and murmuring, especially about ecclesiastical Prelates, about the clergy and about religious persons, especially in our Order. Rather, let us bear reverence to each one according to his degree, regarding them all as Fathers and Superiors in Christ Jesus, our Saviour. [C, 134]

655. Therefore the foundation laid by our Seraphic Father was not in vain. In everything he recommended and submitted his Order in obedience to Holy Church. This is the foundation on which the Order would have to remain holy, united and incorporated into the spouse of Jesus Christ, always being subject in everything to, and corrected and regulated by the Prelates of Holy Church. The Congregation of Capuchins has never received anything except favour and infinite benefits from the Supreme Pontiff as from all the Prelates of Holy Church. Like a good mother, they correct those friars who have erred and maintain the good ones with infinite favours.

It is exactly as the venerable Father Francesco da Iesi said. It is evident that the Prelates of the Church are guided by the Holy Spirit in the governance of our Congregation. It cannot be said that we believe this - although by faith we do - but rather that we know it from concrete experience. It is quite obvious that they have done nothing regarding the Congregation except what rightly had to be done. Just as Paul III of happy memory said, "I had decided to ruin the Congregation of Capuchins entirely, but I realised that God did not want this." The Holy Pontiff implied that in this matter he did not act like a man who, with reason, was angry towards the Congregation, but that, guided by the Holy Spirit, he preserved it. [II, 478]

656. All the Supreme Pontiffs have kindly and readily granted the Congregation everything they have requested for the maintenance and growth of the Reform. Many times certain particular needs have arisen, and while our Fathers did not know whether or not to ask, the Supreme Pontiffs, guided by the Holy Spirit, have provided for the Congregation. Their provision has been

so divinely inspired that it was obvious to all those of sound and judicious mind that they were guided by God. The necessity of that union with the Prelates of Church for the conservation of the Order has been obvious. Without it, it would have been impossible for the Order to survive. Anyone who considers well the troubles that the Order has had at different times knows that they were so difficult that it would have been completely annihilated if God had not liberated us by means of the Prelates of Holy Church, and in particular the Supreme Pontiff. [II, 290]

657. Blessed is the friar who is careful not to depart from the teachings of Holy Church or from devotion to her Prelates and Ministers. Here, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, our Seraphic Francis founded his Order. He wanted very much the Prelates of the Holy Church to be obeyed, and her Ministers honoured, so when the friars met any of them on a journey they would not only kiss their sacred hands, but kneeling down would kiss the feet of their horses, too, as Brother Leo says in the *Legend of the Three Companions*. The only refuge in the tempestuous sea of this world where one is not endangered is the shadow of the Supreme Pontiff and the surety of never departing from the doctrines of Holy Church. In these things our Lord Jesus Christ promises us salvation, likening the Church to the barque of Peter. Outside of this there is no hope of salvation. [III, 84]

658. Our Father Francis, as we see at the beginning and end of his Rule, wants special reverence to be shown towards the Supreme Pontiff, who is the Vicar of Christ our God, and also to all Prelates and Priests. Therefore we order that, besides the common prayers, each friar in his private prayers should petition the Divine Goodness for the happy estate of the church militant. They should also pray for His Holiness, that God might give him the grace of knowing clearly, willing efficaciously, and working powerfully all those things that are to the honour and glory of His Divine Majesty, the salvation of the Christian people and the conversion of the non-believers. Similarly, they should pray for all reverend Cardinals, Bishops and Prelates subject to the Supreme Pontiff. [C, 43]

THE SPLENDOUR OF PURITY

A luminous halo adorns the foreheads of virgins: it is the emblem of victory, a reward for valour. Purity is a virtue that is guarded or reconquered at the price of a struggle without truce. However, a well devised and wisely conducted strategic plan is necessary to organise the defence or to re-establish the order that has been disturbed.

The order and composure of the exterior senses is a very good bulwark against the assaults of the impure enemy. Above all, if the windows of the eyes have been closed to

any sight that disturbs inner equilibrium, death will enter the soul only with difficulty. As regards mortification, all the saints and spiritual masters recognise the need for energetic preventative action. Penitential practices tame the untimely ardour of the body and are like thorns defending the freshness of the delicate flower of chastity.

In guarding this beautiful virtue we often come across a dangerous snare. The Holy Spirit admonishes us not to stare at women, lest this become an occasion of scandal. Indeed, uncompromising reserve with the weaker sex is well established as an judicious principle in Franciscan traditions. However, in Saint Francis this sprang also from chivalry: he considered it brazen to stare at the face of one who is a bride of Christ.

Undeified purity of heart predisposes one for contemplation, since chaste souls breathe in a supernatural atmosphere and have a taste for spiritual things. It is a truth proclaimed by Infallible Wisdom that the clean of heart see God.

The dignity and beauty of this Reform

659. Chastity then, a blossoming flower nourished by the acquisition of the other virtues, has been the dignity and beauty of this reform. A lot of suffering, prayer, solitude, and humble and holy conversation removed both internal and external occasions of all evil. The growth of the Congregation could have given some external occasion for scandal, since in travelling around it was necessary for the friars to shelter in all sorts of lodgings. Yet, by a miracle and an outstanding privilege granted by God, he has preserved this array of men through their human diligence from the gross scandals that often dim the bright rays emanating from well established Orders.

The Congregation used the remedy it had at its disposal. In the Constitutions it is forbidden for any friar to speak with women in a place where he cannot be seen by a companion. Other remedies are also in place that enforce this. Nevertheless, human frailty is all pervasive in this matter, since the enmity between the devil and the servants of God is immeasurable. Consequently, divine fervour must be invoked through the singular privilege granted to this reform through God's mercy and through the merits of Saint Francis. [V, 295]

Like angels

660. In regard to chastity, there's little to say, since I can affirm that they lived it like angels clothed in mortal flesh. They kept their senses mortified constantly in such a way that no trace of death had strength or skill to breach their defences. There was never a moment in which their minds did not strive to remain clothed in the clarity and beauty of modesty, like pure white ermine. [I, 249]

It did not seem that they had a body

661. It seemed that because of the great austerity of their life, the vices of the flesh had been totally eradicated and uprooted. God so cooperated with his grace that it truly seemed they didn't have bodies. [IV, 33]

Every gesture said it all

662. They were so absorbed in the things of God, that their closeness to the Lord regulated their senses. You could tell this just by observing one of them: the calmness in his eyes, his speech, his bearing and his every gesture said it all. [IV, 185]

I do not know you by sight

663. When Bernardino d'Asti read or was in choir he set up a bench in front of himself, to prevent him from looking at his young disciples. As he grew older, he was able to kneel there always during Office. Once he gave a wonderful exhortation to everyone about keeping ones eyes lowered. Turning to one of us, the youngest, he said, "I'll tell you this, my son: I don't know you by sight, even though you've been around me for three years. Well, you're a young man. What do you think you'll have to do?" [III, 186]

I swear to you that I have never seen your face

664. The friars who had long conversations and close familiarity with Bernardino d'Asti, declared it certain that he maintained spotless virginity until his death. Because of his faithful guardianship over it, he was skilful in avoiding not only conversation with women and young men but also even looking at them. This was so much the case that he never looked at the faces of young friars who entered the Order and lived in it.

Once it happened that a young man looked around at the other friars. Bernardino called him and questioned him, saying, "How long have you been my disciple?" The young friar replied that it was three years. The holy old man responded, "Well, I swear to you I've never seen your face in those three years, and you've been so bold as cast you eyes on others. Learn to tame your eyes, because I can tell you they are the windows of the heart, through which the devil can wound you." [VI, 20]

Their eyes were not seen

665. Bernardo d'Assisi was so self-disciplined that he rarely if ever showed any reaction to what he saw or heard. However, when he heard God spoken about, he became so fervent it seemed he wanted to leave this world. He had a good looking face, but was so well controlled that no one, neither secular nor friar, could claim ever to have seen his eyes. Or, for that matter, to have got him to

say one word in jest. On the contrary, he spoke rarely and briefly, about God or about doing penance. [III, 281]

666. In their reckoning, Giacomo da Montepulciano also was very self-disciplined. He was well proportioned, tall, slender and good looking. He enhanced his good looks with modesty and mortification of his body, especially of his eyes. Even when he was old he continued to keep his eyes lowered to such an extent that people hardly ever caught sight of them. He did everything possible to avoid speaking with anyone, especially with women. [III, 323]

Vice was banished and abhorred

667. They truly detested talking about vice, and would cut it out of their conversations. They wouldn't eat anything that might dispose them to vice, namely, spices, artichokes and spicy herbs. Had anyone eaten any of these things, the others would have been shocked. They drank so little wine that it was almost unnoticeable.

When the friars found themselves in the house of seculars, they avoided sleeping on feather mattresses and soft beds, preferring to sleep on boxes or tables. When they were travelling around, they would ask to sleep on straw.

They avoided reading books that could contain unwholesome matter. Because of this, they put in the Constitutions that such books should not be kept in our houses. [IV, 33]

They drank little wine

668. Most of the young friars went about barefoot and wore hairshirts, the better to mortify their flesh. They drank a little wine, but fasted most of the time. These young friars were so severe on themselves that seculars would be quickly moved to tears of devotion on seeing their austerity. [IV, 189]

The straw and the fire

669. If we are pure of heart we see God with the eye of sincere faith, and are made more open to the things of heaven. Therefore the friars must not have any suspicious dealings, trifling conversations or long and unnecessary talks with women. When friars are compelled by necessity to speak with them, they should always be in open places so that they may be seen by their companion and give an example to the world. In this way they will carry the fragrant perfume of Jesus Christ everywhere, conversing with simplicity, discretion and chastity. They should recall that memorable story, written in our *Chronicles*, of a holy friar who burned a piece straw and said, "What a straw gains from fire, a religious servant of God gains from women." [C, 137]

They did not speak with women

670. Therefore our first Fathers thought it extremely important to avoid and sort of familiarity with persons who were suspect. They avoided every action and friendship that could jeopardise their reputations, and were so reserved that they hardly ever spoke with women.

You would never see any friar speak with women except in a public place with his companion present, both friars with their eyes lowered and looking angelic.

671. There were many friars who asserted that they did not know any woman by sight. They would have considered it greatly inappropriate for a friar, when speaking with a woman, to look her in the face. The Capuchin friars gained a widespread reputation for being men who did not speak with women.

They wouldn't even give them trinkets such as an *Agnus Dei*, little crosses, statues and the like, striving to be wholly distant from women. [IV, 33]

672. Liberale da Col Val d'Elsa was very zealous about holy chastity and a foremost opponent of friars having dealings with women. He said, "We have no greater enemies in this world than our dealings with women." [III, 380]

673. Giustino da Panicale said, "Sons, avoid conversations with women. You can learn only by experience just how much power the enemy has to ruin poor souls by means of women." He added, "I have never seen any friar who was delighted to be with women and who did not fall from grace - often to perish completely." [III, 433]

Nor any suspicion

674. It was a marvellous thing!. Our Congregation was small at that time and the friars lived so austere that many who came could not persevere. There were always some men on the way in, and some on the way out. By the grace of God, for many years there was not even the slightest whisper heard or any suspicion raised about the holy chastity of those who went their own way and left our Congregation. [IV, 32]

He seemed like an Angel

675. Girolamo da Novara was very chaste, and everyone held he was a virgin. He was so self-disciplined in his behaviour, his speech, his conversation and the way he used his eyes, that he looked angelic. More important than this, the Lord God gave him the gift of high contemplation because of his great purity. [III, 371]

Very zealous about holy probity

676. Francesco da Novara was very zealous about holy probity and was considered a virgin by everyone, secular people and friars alike. With an innate

purity and simplicity, he always gave the wonderful impression of one inwardly united with God. So it came about that apart from the necessities of nature he was always occupied in mental and vocal prayer. [III, 367]

Although his skin had been rough

677. Everyone deemed Brother Felice da Cantalice to be a virgin, and it appears this might have been demonstrated at his death. When he was alive, his skin was quite damaged, swarthy and rough. After his death it became soft, supple and gentle, like the skin of a little child, and his limbs became flexible, as if he were still alive. There's no reason to doubt that he was a virgin just because he'd been mixing with the people for such a long time. No one has ever heard the slightest whisper of suspicion about him. [III, 471]

PRAYING SOULS

To be raised up to God in prayer, to enjoy God in contemplation: this is the purpose of religious life. All the other acts of regular observance are ways of achieving that.

To outline with brief brushstrokes so vast a theme is nearly impossible. Prayer was not confined to varying time slots during the day. It was the centre of gravity of the Capuchin life. Neither did the friars stop at the first stages of prayer, but flew up to the regions of contemplation. A great army of heroic souls was formed and nourished by meditation and contemplation. The rigour of their penances, their faithful regular observance, their fruitful apostolate of the word and of action, and the overwhelming enthusiasm of the crowds find no satisfactory explanation except in the habit of prayer with which the Capuchins were imbued. This is the keystone of the Capuchin edifice, the crucible where those souls were tempered for all their heroic deeds. It was the forge of their apostolic conquest over the multitudes.

From their wretched hermitages lost in solitary woods, these men filled with God descended with the zeal of the apostles and the impetus of the crusaders, to recall a society that had distanced itself from God, and to reconquer souls that had denied Christ. As rough and wild as they were in dress and appearance, they showed themselves to be mild and refined in their spirit, which had passed through the light and fire of contemplation.

"Those wise and quite expert architects" who founded "the fair and holy Reform of the Capuchin Friars" put prayer at the base of the renewed Franciscan life, as its "invincible and perfect foundation." The value and advantages of prayer are many and noteworthy. It would not be easy to summarise them all. It is the teacher of the spiritual life; the mother and nurse of the virtues; the illuminator of the intelligence; the supporter in difficulties; the possessor of heavenly treasures. The friars often spoke about it in their spiritual colloquies, and as true spiritual masters they sought to

identify the obstacles that needed to be removed to reach the contemplative life, and identified the weapons to be used to emerge victorious in this most high conquest.

The legislation in this particular point required the minimum. However the majority of friars were content only with the maximum of prayer. There were many truly spiritual friars who prayed all the time. It is quite difficult to select some representative types, when true contemplatives are there by the dozen.

The other wonderful consequence

678. The other, wonderful consequence, was that the friars in all humility and purity of heart exercised themselves continuously in holy prayer, both mental and vocal. [IV, 172]

Prayer is the nerve of the spiritual life

679. Some friars have been tricked by the devil at prayer, for that's when he most likes to harass people. But many of them have experienced great gains. They were very zealous, and received many graces from God when they were being attacked. Strengthened by prayer, they defended the reform.

Truly, prayer has been and is a solid pillar supporting this edifice of ours, and the spirit of devotion still persists in our community of friars. If some are negligent in this regard, their negligence can be seen also in their behaviour, which doesn't properly match the habit they wear.

Prayer is the central nerve of the spiritual life. They say that you don't cease to pray if you're busy doing good, but it's also true that anyone who does cease to pray, ceases to do good, too. For anyone who puts prayer aside under the pretext of doing other good things, in the end puts those good things aside as well. [V, 287]

Given the gracious spirit of prayer

680. Prayer, persistent and unchanging, has always been there, and maintains the Capuchin congregation. Because the Rule of Saint Francis is so perfect, it bridles the flesh, the senses and the human appetites. But it is not possible to put this into effect just by behaving normally: interior spirit and devotion are also necessary. They give the soul the vigour it needs to overcome the sensual part of our nature, which always seeks its own ends if not restrained and corrected. Therefore, the friar that gives up prayer falls miserably into traducing his profession, while the one that continues to pray observes the Rule, enlightened and strengthened by God.

God wants perfect observance throughout our reform, and has given it the gracious spirit of prayer, which is a manifest sign that this reform is an undertaking that comes from him. [V, 288]

The purpose of religious life

681. They were at pains not to bring into the Congregation those customs of the Order regarding non-spiritual matters. These are not customs, but abuses. The friars for their own part distanced themselves as far as possible from lavish ceremonies, unnecessary conversations with seculars, and other things unbecoming good religious. They came together as often as they could, disengaged from all non-essential matters, making time to give themselves completely to holy contemplation. They said, “We see that the entire Order is established for the purpose of holy contemplation, which alone suffices for the perfect observance of the Rule. Good as all the other things may be, without contemplation they lack perfection, for they are but the means that help us towards our goal.” [IV, 172]

682. Francesco da Iesi pursued contemplation as his first priority. Before he became a Capuchin he had already done this with great profit. He now enjoyed great facility in praying, and dedicated himself to prayer with admirable attention. Through long practice he was able to keep his mind continually united to God, and achieved such a state of detachment that he was unable to come down to earth and apply himself properly to the routine cares and governance of the friars. This is why he rejected the Reform and left it when he’d finished the three years of his Generalate. He was preoccupied with and wrapped up in God, and went about so abstracted from creatures that he seemed like someone from another world. He claimed that this is the purpose of the Rule, and everything else is directed to it. Fittingly, he later said he entered the Order to focus on nothing but knowing God in order to love him. He applied himself with great care and diligence to removing everything else entirely from his affections. To this end he restrained himself severely over anything could give him any pleasure, regarding all natural delight as poisonous to the love of God. [VI, 124]

683. Even though all the things which the holy Religion uses may be good, nevertheless all of them together are not worth as much as contemplation is, since this is the end to which all the other things are ordered, just as our Father says: “Let the unlettered friars not be anxious to learn, but let them desire to have the spirit of the Lord above all else, the spirit that all the other things must serve.” [II, 158]

684. Everything our Father established in our holy Order is of great importance, and, if properly heeded, can prepare us wonderfully for holy contemplation. But Brother Bernardino d’Asti said that the truly central thing in his opinion was holy contemplation itself, and all the other things were there to serve it. Therefore the venerable Brother Bernardino said, “God will always protect the Congregation, so long as the friars observe the Rule. But they can’t observe the Rule if they don’t give themselves to prayer, because the purpose of everything in the Rule is simply to promote holy contemplation.” [II, 400]

684a. Matteo da Bascio said, "It only remains for me to remind you to pray frequently. This is extremely important, for without prayer all the other virtues are imperfect. In prayer the love of God increases, which renders our efforts perfect. For God does not take into account how long you have been doing good, but with how much love you have." [II, 252]

685. "You know," said Giacomo da Cetona, "our Rule is only concerned about ordering us to practise holy prayer. And that's the whole purpose of religious life." [III, 357]

The life which has sustained and sustains it

686. They had the Rule to spur them on. It commanded the friars above all to desire the spirit of the Lord and his holy operation; to pray always with a pure heart; to have humility and patience in persecution and infirmity; and to pray to God for those who persecuted them. They desired nothing more than to observe the Rule, and since the height of that observance is to pray to God constantly with a pure heart, they paid remarkable attention to prayer. They gave themselves to it as much as they could, with all their care and zeal.

In the Rule they saw prayer and patience in persecutions joined together. They needed both at the same time to observe the Rule. It was as if Saint Francis saw their situation when he wrote the Rule. Therefore wanting to observe the Rule perfectly, they took on themselves the holy resolve always to be engaged in and steadfast at prayer.

To set up good, enduring legislation, they did not oblige the community by virtue of the constitutions to more than two hours of mental prayer in the course of twenty-four hours. But the friars engaged as much as they could, spontaneously and enthusiastically. Because of this, many were holy men enlightened by God, receiving many graces from our Lord when they prayed. And this has been the Congregation's source of strength, and the life that has sustained it, and sustains it still. There is no doubt at all that while the Order keeps the spirit of prayer alive and fervent, it will be maintained in the pure and true observance of the Rule. It's noticeable that those friars who are more given to prayer are also more perfect in the other virtues and in the observance of the Rule. [V, 285]

Father, pray for us

687. Angelo da Sant'Angelo in Vado was very zealous about holy prayer. He was usually in the church one or two hours before Matins, and after Matins he would sleep only a little or not at all. Always recollected, he had the gift of tears. There were only a few occasions that he didn't weep copiously over the Passion of our Lord when at prayer. He said, "Our aim is nothing less than prayer. Therefore all the friars should arrange everything they do to help them at prayer." When seculars give alms they don't say: 'Father, come and chat with

us, or do some other thing.’ Rather, they say, ‘Father, pray for us.’ Generally he stayed at the house of Sant’Angelo and rarely ever went outside, habitually keeping aloof. When his secular acquaintances came, he didn’t speak with them unless it was something important. He said, “Listening to the stories and woes of seculars is very harmful to one’s prayer life.” [III, 55]

Prayer is the aim of the Rule

688. Bernardino d’Asti was very strict and austere towards his body regarding food and clothing, but was very liberal to his soul regarding prayer. He was intently focussed on this holy virtue, spending as much time as he could at it, praying with great fervour. When he could, he harangued the friars with efficacious words and said that prayer is the aim of the Rule of Saint Francis. Our Seraphic Father has given us a Rule detached from all worldly worry so that we can all give ourselves to prayer. Without prayer it is impossible to persevere in the Order, just as a dead body cannot stay in the sea. A friar deprived of the life of prayer is like a dead man. Ordinarily all those outside of the Order who fall do so because they do not exercise themselves in prayer.

He used to say to the friars, “If you want to be good, pray well; if you want to be better, pray better; if you want to be perfect, pray perfectly. You will be good and dear to God in so far as your prayer is good and dear to the Lord. Prayer can make an angelic man out of a diabolical one; a heavenly man out of an earthly one. On the other hand, if a friar is angelic and leaves prayer aside, he becomes demoniacal.”

Once there was friar who was gravely tempted. He spoke with Bernardino, who asked him if he prayed. When he said “No”, Bernardino said to him, “It’s a miracle that you’ve persevered in the Order until now. Pray and you will conquer the devil, because this is the weapon by which the enemy is conquered.”

Bernardino said to the friars, “Devout prayer is like a stimulus that induces the divine Majesty to grant his graces. When Demosthenes was asked what the first and most important thing is in an orator, he answered: practice. Asked what the second is, he replied: practice. And the third? He again answered: practice. The same is true of prayer in the spiritual life and observance of the Rule. Prayer is what makes a friar perfect and holy.” [VI, 21]

If you ask me...

689. Bernardino d’Asti was very zealous about holy prayer. Therefore, once when he was giving a most beautiful sermon about prayer, he said these words:

“In the *Rhetorica*, Tullius says, ‘If you ask me what oratory is made of, I would tell you that it consists in pronunciation. If you were to ask me the same question three times over, I would say the very same thing.’ So I say to you, if you ask me what religious life is

made up of, I would answer that it consists in prayer. And if you ask me again and again, I would say that it consists in holy prayer.

"All good is born in the servant of God through mortification and holy prayer. But all bad is born from little mortification and little prayer. There is no friar so lax who, if he frequently falls to prayer, does not very quickly become angelic. Nor is there anyone so holy that he doesn't very quickly become like a demon if he puts prayer aside. In the most holy sacraments the Lord God makes us certain of his grace when we receive them in the right way, so in holy prayer he renders us certain of receiving from His Majesty that grace we ask of him, or another, better, one.

"Prayer magnified all those first Fathers before God. So, if you want to be good, pray. All those who imagine themselves to pass the tempestuous sea of this world without this little boat, will remain deceived, and will drown.

"If you were to ask me what the intention of our Father Saint Francis was in giving the Rule, I would answer that his sole intention was to organise his friars to be free from every impediment to holy prayer. He wanted to give us the means that make us acquire true love of God, in which consists the observance of every good law. If you were to ask me what it is our Father Saint Francis wants us to do in the Order, I would answer with what he says in the Rule: to pray to God constantly with a pure heart. This, then, was the reason he gave us the Rule, and by observing it we can be free from every earthly care, and attend to holy prayer.

"And it was a marvellous thing our Father Saint Francis said: that the friars who leave holy prayer aside in order to acquire knowledge, will become dull. If those who leave holy prayer aside to study the sciences, which are good become dull, how much more will those lose divine grace who leave holy prayer aside for other, vain things?"

When he went on visitation, if he found a Friar who was tempted, he would say to him, "Tell me, son, do you pray?" If the friar answered 'No', he would say, "Oh poor fellow, no wonder you're tempted. It's a miracle from God that you haven't been ruined. It's not possible to persevere in the observance of the Rule without prayer. Prayer is the weapon of the servants of God that conquers the deceits of the enemy. Therefore, take up this extremely strong weapon, with which all the valiant soldiers of Christ have conquered." [III, 186]

This is the barque

690. Matteo da Schio said, "This is the barque that brings us into harbour through the tempestuous sea of the world. Without prayer, it is very difficult to remain holy." [III, 263]

Ludovico da Stroncone replied, "Without the practice of frequent holy prayer it isn't possible to observe the Rule perfectly and so make it into the true port of salvation, nor is it possible to acquire true perfection." [III, 263]

They rarely persevere

691. "Nor can you persevere in this state," agreed Matteo da Bascio, "in such high poverty, if you don't exercise yourself in holy prayer. For all good comes from God, and he usually gives his graces and gifts only to those who ask him for them." [II, 252]

692. "Those who take no account of holy prayer," declared Battista da Norcia, "and are not zealous about coming together in choir, rarely persevere in the Order. On the other hand, God never abandons those who are zealous about these things, no matter how imperfect they are. It is almost impossible for them not to become good religious if they frequent holy prayer, for divine worship has great power to sanctify the one who participates in it." [III, 272]

The soul grows stronger

693. "You know," said Giacomo da Cetona, "just as our body is nourished by food, and without food will die, so our soul is nourished, grows strong and lives by holy prayer. When a friar abandons regular holy prayer, his soul quickly gets sick, grows weak and lukewarm, and becomes very disposed to sin. It soon dies if it doesn't return to the solid food of holy prayer." [III, 357]

From prayer comes intelligence

694. Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo concluded thus:

"There's nothing as ruinous as having only a little time for God. This comes about because we get too involved in useless things. So it's necessary to rid ourselves of frivolous occupations and give ourselves to holy prayer, with which the Church of God has always been governed from the beginning. From prayer comes insight and the ability to interpret the Scriptures. Therefore, those who are not contemplatives, learned though they may be, cannot expound the Scriptures well. Saintly men turn to holy prayer in their needs to gain enlightenment. Thus, we cannot govern ourselves well, unless we exercise ourselves in holy prayer. If we don't do this, good governance over ourselves and of others will cease." [III, 66]

695. As a great servant of God said, "I think the only reason Bernardino Ochino fell was that he completely abandoned holy prayer. He was far too sure of himself and trusted in himself too much." [II, 455]

Impediment in holy prayer

696. “We must scrutinise ourselves in everything we do, not only in regard to what we eat,” enjoined Francesco da Iesi. We must order everything to serve holy contemplation, the perfection of religious life. We sin whenever we do something that renders us useless at prayer, because we have truly been called to this and prayer is the aim of religious life. Other things that we occupy ourselves with are means, and the means must always be ordered unto the end. Therefore too much eating, talking, conversing, and the like, are all impediments to holy prayer. There’s no graver sin than one that obstructs us in holy prayer.” I often heard Francesco say, “When I took up the habit I straightaway resolved to seek nothing else in the Order but knowledge of God, for we can’t love him if we don’t know him. Because of this I’ve always schooled myself in knowing God and making him known to others. Clearly, those who seek anything else in the Order are deluded.” [III, 76]

Self-love and love of God

697. Antonio da Monteciccardo said:

“Listen, anyone in the Order who wants to obtain the grace of prayer must be detached from his passions and from evil inclinations. Self-love and the love of God cannot exist together without great imperfections. The friar who has an affection for and holds on to anything, however small, is held back from the true love of God. For this reason our Father Saint Francis never permitted personal use of anything except as granted in the Rule. Necessity and permission are prerequisites for us to use anything beyond what the Rule allows.” [III, 231]

A beautiful thought

698. Bernardino da Monte dell’Olmo claimed:

“In spiritual matters, too, we lack self-discipline. We often think we’re praying and loving God a lot, but instead we’re loving ourselves by following our own impulses. We think we’re wrapt in deep contemplation, but all we’re doing is dreaming beautiful thoughts. Someone who doesn’t know how to speak French can’t express himself in that language, and in the same way someone who has no love for God can’t love him. Nor can anyone who loves himself love God, because these two things are opposed to one another, like fire and water. The more love a person has for God, the less love he has for himself. And the reverse is true: the more love a person has for himself, the less love he has for God. If we want everything we do in the Order to be meritorious, we must

direct them towards the love of God. Otherwise they lack purpose.”
[III, 63]

The greatest labour

699. Angelo da Sant’Angelo in Vado went to confession nearly every day. He was asked why he confessed so often. The servant of God answered, “I give myself to contemplation, an exercise that requires first and foremost a clear conscience. Venial sins, although they do not remove us from God’s grace, nonetheless weaken our soul and render it difficult to rise above itself. For in contemplation we do nothing of our own except prepare ourselves and dispose ourselves to hear what the Lord God says in us. When the soul is well disposed through confession and contrition, God shows it what has to be contemplated and inflames it with his love. This is because God communicates himself to pure minds. However, when the soul keeps in itself ideas, fantasies and imaginings of anything other than God, these things make it indisposed to contemplation. Therefore, the most important task we have is that of keeping our minds free from incongruous entanglements. All our goodness depends on this, since the aim of religious life is nothing other than the continuous exercise of the love of God.” [III, 56]

Spiritual teacher

700. Prayer is the spiritual teacher of the friars, so the spirit of devotion must not be allowed to become lukewarm in them but must inspire them more and more as it burns continuously on the altar of their hearts. That is exactly how our Seraphic Father wanted it to be. The true spiritual Friar Minor always prays, and so we order that two special hours be designated for the sake of those who are lukewarm. [C, 41]

To speak to God with the heart

701. The friars should remember that to pray is nothing other than to speak to God with the heart. A friar who speaks to God only with his lips does not pray. Therefore, let each friar strive to make mental prayer, and, according to the doctrine of Christ, the supreme Teacher, adore the eternal Father in spirit and truth. Let each friar take care diligently to enlighten his mind and then inflame his affections rather than just utter words. [C, 42]

Like a magnet

702. The servants of God experienced great delight in holy prayer, and this drew them to it like a magnet. [II, 456]

A continuous watch

703. They gave themselves over to constant prayer. Their dedication was such that, what with this one or that one always at prayer, or all of them at prayer together, it seemed that they were keeping a continuous watch. There was good reason for this: the poor fellows were beset with innumerable problems, struggling men, with themselves and with demons.

In winter time they prayed in the churches and their own cells, offering themselves to God in sacrifice. In summer they made great use of the forests. Withdrawn there, they poured out tears in abundance and sent deep sighs to the throne of the Divine Majesty. [I, 264]

704. The usual prayers were said all together in the church. However, these were only the start. After Mass had been said, nearly all the friars who were not occupied in the tasks of the Order, continued in prayer right up until Terce, and again after Vespers until Compline. Then, according to the weather, they went into the church, or their cells or the woods [IV, 23]

Always with the mind absorbed

705. The Lord God did not fail to give them his Spirit. They became so perfectly detached from all earthly affections that they were continuously immersed in God and remained with their minds absorbed in contemplation on the things of God. Every misfortune they suffered helped them in this, and they rejoiced then when they saw themselves abandoned by everyone. [II, 212]

Tears were most familiar to him

706. Brother Bernardino da Fossombrone was very much a lover of solitude. Therefore, when he could, and with the permission of his Guardians, he used to make a little cell in the forest. Secluded there from the others he led an angelic life. He was well used to tears, since meditation on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ was his continuous practice. He had dedicated himself completely to prayer, and when he was on a journey he always kept a short distance from his companion so as not be distracted from it. When he heard the Lord or our Father Saint Francis named, he would burst into floods of tears. [V, 125]

Their whole foundation

707. Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone had to do a lot to calm many of them. Also a lot had to be done to bring them to submit to the formalities of the Order since they had been so delighted by the experience of contemplation. Because they had been accustomed to the austerity of solitude, they found talking to one another hard. Their minds had become so set upon prayers and divine ideas that every other occupation seemed unpleasant. Their whole foundation was prayer. They said: The aim of the Rule and of religious life is nothing other than

contemplation. This is achieved when, with the appropriate means of fasting, poverty and silence, the passions and disordered affections are conquered and the body subjected to the spirit. Observance of the Rule in external matters, which are set up by the Holy Spirit to vanquish the flesh, would be in vain, if doing all these things does not achieve the purpose for which we have done them. This purpose is to give ourselves to perfect contemplation and, as far as human frailty allows, to remain united with God, who has done all these things because he wants to be loved.

So here we are, miraculously placed in this state by our Lord God amidst persecutions. It does not seem fitting to us, who have come through so much opposition to get here, that we should give it all up and return again to ceremonies, conversations, manual tasks and other superfluous occupations. Although these things may be done through obedience and may be meritorious, nevertheless they are unfitting for those who can do more. Consider: a capable merchant who can make a profit of a thousand *scudi* is not content with a profit of only two *baiocchi*. We have the example of our Seraphic Father Saint Francis, who submitted to many tasks in the beginning to mortify his body. The Lord also made him pass through many tribulations, and when he was purified he assiduously fled all other occupations and gave himself completely to holy contemplation. There he made the greatest profit. Through high contemplation he was enlightened by God who enlightens all the world, and he showed with his life and with the Rule the true way of serving God. [II, 215]

I hunger for nothing except time

708. The mind of Giovanni Spagnuolo was so absorbed in God that he was hardly ever seen by the other friars except when he celebrated Mass, which he did with great devotion. He remained enraptured for a good part of the time, totally transformed. Because of this his Mass usually took a good hour. When it was finished, he immediately withdrew either into the forest or his cell, and persevered in prayer until meal time. I heard him say many times, "I hunger for nothing except time. I care about little else except contemplating my Lord." His Superiors had exempted him from choir for the Hours during the day, and he joined the others in choir only for Matins. These induced the servant of God into contemplation, and after they were said, he would continue until dawn. At dawn he said Mass, and then continued fasting until meal time. At the meal he ate only bread, and drank half a bowl of water. Then he took some rest. After vespers were said, he returned to prayer until the middle hour of the night. He always followed this routine. [III, 294]

My mind is so voracious

709. I was told by a friar worthy of belief, that Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo said, "Helped by learning, my mind will cover more in one hour than anyone

else would in thirty years. My mind is so voracious that it always keeps me occupied." [III, 64]

He was completely dedicated to prayer

710. Brother Giuseppe da Corleone made use of the virtues as a ladder to climb to God, and as wings to fly and converse in heaven through prayer, to which he was completely dedicated. He never wasted time, but when he had finished his tasks and done what obedience and charity required, he would withdraw straightaway to the church. There he heard as many Masses he could. As soon as he was released from his chores after dinner, he would go to the church as if it were his place of rest. He used to go there to pray two or three hours before Matins, and then spend the rest of the night there. Similarly, he prayed as much as he could in the morning. He was so loving and kind that the sacristan did not have to worry whether or not it was time to ring the bell for the Office, day or night. Brother Joseph usually reminded him. [VI, 501]

His mind was rapt in God

711. The life of venerable Brother Ludovico da Reggio was full of holiness. He exercised himself greatly in holy prayer throughout his whole life. He used to pray for a total of fourteen hours each day and night. His mind was so absorbed in God that he remained as silent as a statue. Neither did he make any bodily noises such as a friar would usually do, such spitting or shuffling his hands or feet. His heart and mind were so pure that as soon as he began to pray he became rapt in God. This came about because he had practised for many years, and he was helped very much by teaching. Often wonderful effects of this were seen. If he was not asked to do something for charity or the salvation of souls, he was never seen except at the practice of prayer. When he could not contemplate because of tiredness, he said the psalms or other devout prayers. [III, 202, 203]

With his hands and face lifted towards heaven

712. Brother Ludovico da Reggio prayed with great tranquillity and extreme stillness, keeping his mind close to God. His body went rigid, and he looked like a statue. Many times his acquaintance, Brother Antonio da Reggio, a lay friar and a holy religious, saw him levitate a good distance above the ground while he prayed the Office. Once he went with a noble lady to visit one of her sick relatives, and no sooner had he entered the house than he withdrew into a room. She waited a while, thinking that he had gone there because of some need he had. When he did not return, and because she wanted him to visit her sick relative, she lifted the curtain across the door of the room into which he had gone. There she saw him with his hands elevated, his face lifted up towards heaven, and his whole body raised a good distance into the air. [V, 195]

How is it possible to pray for so long?

713. Antonio Corso slept only a little during night, three hours at most. The rest of the night he spent in holy prayer. After Matins he typically continued until morning, when he prepared himself at length for Holy Mass. After Mass was celebrated, in winter he would immediately withdraw to his cell. In summer he went into the forest, where, because of the fast he kept, he continued in prayer until he ate.

Once a friar said to him, "How is it possible to pray for so long, especially at night? How do you manage to stay awake?" The servant of God answered, "Our Lord Jesus sees the heart of his servants. He takes more delight in good desires that he does in good works, which come more from His Majesty rather than from us. It is enough for me to stay with the desire of honouring His Majesty, and to be prepared on my part to receive any gift or grace it might please him to give me. If he gives me something, it is because of his mercy. If he doesn't, I haven't wasted time by keeping court with His Majesty in church and being prepared should it please him to make use of this most unworthy instrument. You know, the servants of God lose many graces because they don't do what they can on their part. The Lord doesn't speak unequivocally about wanting to give to us. Rather, in the Gospel he persists in persuading and teaching us that if we want his good Spirit he will give it to us, but we must first ask him. He says, "Knock and the door will be opened to you. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find" (Matteo 7:7). We do all these things in holy prayer, and this is nothing more on our part than preparing to receive. Because of this, I a sinner, knowing myself bereft of all good, have recourse to the one who can give to me." [III, 252]

Like gusts of divine wind

714. Brother Onofrio of Pistoia hauled a small basket on a carrying pole around all day while making the inside wall of the garden at the house called Montughi, in Florence. To reward himself he spent almost the entire night in prayer.

When he worked he endeavoured with all his strength to continue the most holy practice of praying all the time, keeping his mind lifted up to God and focussed on holy thoughts. Sometimes, when the manual work should have had his full attention, he did not do it properly because his mind was absorbed in other, more important things. But it could be said that when he worked in the garden, he turned over more dirt than was usually required. He was ponderous because of the disengagement of his mind. The spirit sometimes even pressed him to interrupt his external work and withdraw for a little while to give expression to the fervour generated by meditating continuously. This fervour came to his heart like gusts of divine wind. They filled the sails of the vessel that was his soul, which was already being borne along quietly by the

calm wind of his ceaseless prayers, and put a stop to his hands and his entire body, so that for a brief while everything was employed in spiritual action. When he became aware of it, he withdrew a short distance to be totally and freely moved by the Holy Spirit.

His behaviour during the day and the way in which he did physical work showed that he disengaged his soul and gave up his entire body at night or whenever it was he prayed. He continued like this as far as obedience and charity allowed him.

In the evening it was his custom to stay in the church until the fourth hour. Sometimes the Spirit, which breathes where and when it pleases, kept him longer. He readily made himself flexible and obliging. There, alone before the most Blessed Sacrament, he would deliver himself up to God unconditionally. Similarly, he kept vigil after Matins. However, he would withdraw to his cell when Office and the usual night prayers were finished, to hide all this from the friars and perhaps sometimes to give a little rest to his tired body. There he would wait until the others had left the church, after which he would return to express freely the heavenly movements of his spirit.

Thus, this simple minded friar profited greatly. Without any book learning, he received wonderful insights from heaven about divine secrets and the blessed mysteries of our Faith. Hence his words were fiery and ardent with the love of God. He occasionally spoke freely about the most holy Passion of our Lord, with lively feeling and efficacious words, but sometimes his interior ecstasy choked back his words so that he could not articulate them properly. He seemed to cut them off or swallow them. Sometimes he even uttered them so softly that he could be heard only with great effort. Again, he could be so overcome by inner light that he could not find any words to use.

He was very much in favour of keeping one's mind continuously raised in heavenly reflections, during which, he said, the sufferings of Christ should be always kept in mind. His whole bearing witnessed to an inner self caught up in the divine. [VI, 571]

I commend to you this city!

715. This was, therefore, the mine from which the servant of God Felice da Cantalice mined the fine gold of the perfect love of God, for he laid a good foundation during his novitiate and always burned with great fervour, persevering in the most noble practice of prayer.

His way was one that is obvious, and known to all the friars. Because he could get very tired through all the efforts involved in questing and fasting, he always went away to bed early in the evening. When prayer was over - in most houses after Compline, but after Matins in winter - the friars retired to rest. At about the second hour of the night, Felice woke up and went to the Church, staying

until Matins so that the Lord would not be there alone. He rang the first bell for Matins, and when the friars began to the Office, he retired to take what little sleep was required for the sustenance of nature. After Matins, when prayers were finished and the friars had retired to rest, he went to the chapel and stayed praying until dawn. He rang the dawn bell. Then he served the first Mass, which is usually said at dawn, and he went to Communion. Having completed his prayers, he took up his task of questing, or whatever task was imposed upon him under obedience.

Not much is known about his manner of praying, because he entered the chapel with a lighted candle and explored the whole place to see if anyone was there, in order to be freer to speak with our Lord, sometimes out loud. Nonetheless he could not shield himself completely. Some friars who wanted to know how he prayed lay down flat in a part of the chapel where he could not see them. Something about his way of praying is known from them.

Once they saw him go away into the cemetery, which is beneath the church. There, speaking with the dead, he burst forth in these words, "Beloved brothers, you have done your part. Now it falls to me." He said this, recalling the great fervour of the servants of God buried there previously and known by him. Then with great fervour he began to discipline himself, saying the *Miserere*. After he said two or three verses, he burst into tears. He was heard to weep so copiously by the one who observed it, it was as if with his bodily eyes he saw Christ scourged by the torturers. When this had continued for a good length of time, he began the next verse of the psalm, disciplining himself at the same time and putting his mind to the contemplation of God and the Passion of his Son. He usually began his prayer by afflicting his flesh, disciplining himself vigorously. Then he sat in the middle of the church. Most times he was heard to say, "I commend to you this city," and he mentioned particular needs.

It would take too long to recount all the incidents that different ones saw during the time of this servant of God was at prayer. However, anyone who carefully considers his good and regulated exterior life can easily see that it all proceeded from the acceptable practice of holy prayer, in which he occupied himself most of the time. Prayer is more pleasing to His Majesty than any other exercise, and through it every good becomes manifest in the good Religious. For prayer is the goal of all the other things we do. [III, 468]

You look like a young man

716. Once I was in the woods of Montemalbe, and wanted to see what Antonio Corso did there. On one occasion, I saw him walking along, saying, "My Jesus! My Jesus!" very softly. His face was always so radiant that he seemed to have two bright red roses in his cheeks. He was like this because his mind was rapt in God continuously, through the great fervour of spirit he had. Once I said to him, "Father Anthony, you look like a young man. Your face is so rosy." The

servant of God answered, “Many others have said that to me. I don’t know where the colour comes from. It can’t come from eating too much. Maybe I blush with embarrassment because of the love of the seculars, but of what importance is that to me?” [III, 263]

Oh Father, Oh Father!

717. When Giacomo da Montefiore was Provincial and on a journey, he was asleep one night with his companion. He got quietly up at the usual time for prayer, and when his companion awoke he saw a bright light around James as he prayed. Unable to contain himself he cried out, “Oh Father, Father!” Without replying, James went back and lay down as if he was going to sleep. When he thought his companion had gone back to sleep, he got up again to pray. But his companion was not asleep, and again he saw the bright light. He did not cry out this time, but remained quiet, watching the good Father at prayer. The good Father then commanded him to tell no one what he had seen while he was still alive. [VI, 341]

Not batting an eyelid

718. When he was Guardian in the house at Narni, Ludovico da Foligno stayed in the woods almost all the time during the summer. Once I came upon him in there so elevated in spirit and taken out of himself with rapture that he didn’t hear a thing or move an inch as I passed close by him. I saw him there with his face turned towards heaven not batting an eyelid, standing motionless as if he were a statue. [III, 289]

Found enraptured in spirit

719. There was also a Brother Francesco, a lay friar of the Province of Rome. Nicknamed *il Cantarone*, he usually looked after the door in the Aracoeli friary in Rome. Being a bit of a comic, he was known to nearly everyone in Rome, especially Prelates, Bishops and Cardinals. Yet with all this he was very spiritual and zealous about regular observance.

Even though he was very comical, he reached great holiness and a high degree of contemplation. Brother Bernardo da Stroncone, a lay friar and a man of great spirit and holiness, told how he found him once enraptured in spirit with his body raised head high above the ground. Brother Bernardo was able to go beneath him and devoutly touch him. When he later asked Francesco where his soul had been while he was at prayer, he showed disdain at such a question and kept silent. [VI, 215]

He had the grace of contemplation

720. Antonio da Reggio was much given to prayer, during which he could not suppress the sighs and tears with which he sent his prayer to God. He had the grace of contemplation, and occupied himself in this in whatever time he had to spare outside necessary tasks and acts of charity. He spent most of the night at prayer, sleeping very little. [V, 204]

He was so quiet while he prayed

721. Antonio da Monteciccardo wore a rough hairshirt next to his skin, and always went about barefoot. He never wanted to wear anything other than a habit of coarse *arbaschio*, patched with sack, right up until he was old and quite frail. He was always occupied with and intent at prayer and contemplation. He spent the period after the meal - which he called 'useless' because it was no good for contemplation - in saying psalms. He said Mass very devoutly and remained giving thanks with great devotion all morning until the hour of the Office before dinner, weeping very frequently. He spent the whole night except for the first period of sleep in prayer, and was so quiet while he prayed you'd think there was no one there. He was the same at Office, standing with body and eyes unmoving. He didn't look here or there. He stood upright with hands joined, never stooping, even when he was old. [V, 142]

The grace of tears

722. Umile d'Offida had the grace of tears, and the friars often heard him weep copiously over the Passion of the Lord. It was believed that the Lord God revealed many things to him. When he came out from prayer he was so inflamed with the love of God that it looked as though he had two roses on his cheeks. When the friars said anything to him, he answered with signs more than with words. He withdrew from them as quickly as he could in order not to lose the interior spirit. [III, 142]

723. Angelo da Sant' Angelo in Vado had the grace of tears. There would have been only a few times when he prayed that did he not weep copiously over the Passion of our Lord. [III, 55]

Lifted up in ecstasy

724. Friars worthy of belief saw Giacomo da Novara lifted up in ecstasy many times during holy prayer. He exercised himself so perseveringly in prayer, that apart from the necessities of nature, he spent all the time at it. [III, 371]

THE FLOWERING OF PIETY

Pious practices can be considered as means for the communication of grace. They predispose the soul to receive it, or they confer it, or they increase it. They are not all equally important, nor do they all develop in the same way. However, to practise them with fidelity and discretion is a secure guarantee of progress in the way of perfection.

It is difficult to follow souls in the flight of contemplation and penetrate the intimacy of their colloquy with God; it is much easier to identify their external practices, their spiritual exercises, which are like flowers from their life of prayer. Many of these flowers will be found strewn across the pages of this book. The reader who would like to collect them and classify them could assemble a bouquet that would define in some way the contribution of Capuchin spirituality to the piety of the Catholics of that period.

The Eucharistic Sacrifice is the centre of piety. Those souls who draw light, warmth and strength from the Eucharist know this and experience it. From the first days of the Capuchin reform the Sacrifice of the Mass was surrounded by love and veneration. The priests were permitted long and careful preparation. They celebrated with angelic composure and lingered in fervent thanksgiving. Their Eucharistic piety found a confirmation in the particular care with which they adorned the tabernacles. It was perhaps the only instance in which they sacrificed to some extent the rights of lady Poverty and showed no regret.

Furthermore, the official prayer of the bride of Christ, the Divine Office, occupied a good part of the friary day. Among vocal prayer it holds the first place. The friars came together day and night to sing the praises of the Lord with faith and love. Their careful punctuality and the way they gathered together clearly manifested their internal devotion.

Nothing was more natural than that the Capuchin Friars, crucified to the world, should be enamoured by the Passion of Christ. In this they recognised the supreme proof of the love of God towards his creation. There they found comfort and the encouragement to persevere in their life of sufferings and privations.

Above all, the piety of the Capuchins was imbued with devotion to the Holy Virgin. All contended in honouring her. They prepared to celebrate her feasts with fasts of bread and water, a very common practice also on all Saturdays of the year. They profited with joy from the liturgical privilege of celebrating Mass in her honour. They established confraternities and pious associations. They sang her glories when preaching, etc. To her they attributed fervour and perseverance in the religious life. They couldn't imagine a true Friar Minor who didn't have a sincere filial devotion to the great Mother of God, Queen of the Franciscan Order.

They didn't want to burden the friars with vocal prayers

725. The fathers did not want to burden down the friars with vocal prayer, so that they could give themselves more to mental prayer. Therefore, apart from

the Office, which the Rule imposes, they added nothing more than the litanies of the Saints. This was always to be said before prayers, at night during the winter and at midday during the summer. They added the discipline, which is taken by all the friars three times a week for about quarter of an hour while singing in common the *Miserere*, the *De Profundis*, the antiphon of the Passion or of Our Lady, and some other prayers as well. By common statute, nothing is added to the prayer after Compline, except three times a week when some psalms and the prayer for living and deceased benefactors are said.

The Office has always been said out loud and in a monotone, with pauses but no harmonies. All the Hours are sung in a monotone, night and day, on ferial days as well as feasts. This has been very carefully planned so that the recitation does not get faster and faster, but proceeds slowly, and can be easily understood by anyone who hears it, and properly relished by those who pray it. [V, 287]

Holy Mass

726. The friars who are priests are exhorted that when they celebrate Mass they do not think about human favour or glory or any temporal thing. Rather, let them celebrate purely for love, with simple, pure and clean hearts. Let them celebrate Mass with all humble reverence, faith and devotion, having regard only for the honour of God. Let them prepare themselves as much as their frailty allows, since anyone who does the works of God carelessly is cursed. Since the Mass is a divine action that is above all others, it is supremely displeasing when it is done irreverently. [C, 32]

727. The friars should not seek any earthly reward for celebrating Mass. They should follow the example of Christ, the High Priest, who without looking to gain any reward for himself, offered himself on the cross for us. The friars must know that because of this they are under obligation to God.

The other friars are exhorted to be present at the divine mysteries with the celebrant priests, so that they too may participate with the uttermost reverence and angelic minds in the presence of God. Let them celebrate and communicate spiritually, and offer to God that most pleasing sacrifice. [C, 33]

728. It was a great joy also for the seculars, who came to their Masses from as much as five or six miles away. They delighted very much to hear the Masses of those holy men, who celebrated slowly, with profound humility, and so devoutly that the seculars thought they were in heaven. [II, 248]

729. Bernardino d'Asti celebrated every morning with great devotion. He always prayed for an hour before and after the Mass. I often heard him say, "I never miss Mass without confessing it." [III, 185]

730. He celebrated Mass with great fervour. His custom was to take an hour for mental prayer before and after. During his time in the Generalate, he at least liked to hear a Mass before his and another after it. [VI, 21]

731. Antonio da Monteciccardo said Mass almost every day, in which he commemorated many saints, for whom he had particular devotion. He held Saint Jerome in devotion above all others. Once while he was saying Mass, someone counted thirty collects. The friars weren't very pleased about this, since it appeared to go beyond the practice of Holy Church. However, his devotion was so great that he could not rest unless he was satisfied in his mind that he was doing all he could to help the souls in purgatory and the many people that recommended themselves to him. [III, 229]

732. It pleased the Lord God that Bernardino da Assisi was ordained priest. If the providence of God shone in him first among all his actions, this was never more so than when he began to say Mass. He celebrated with such great devotion that he looked more like an angel than a man at the altar. As soon as he finished Mass, he withdrew to the usual contemplation. He immersed himself so much in his consideration of kindness of our Lord who so kindly gave himself to his creatures, that streams of tears came from his eyes. [III, 283]

733. Matteo da Leonessa lived a life of great purity. This was because he never got involved in the things of the world, so that his mind was greatly enlightened and lifted up to God in contemplation. Once while saying Mass in the cathedral at Narni, he was caught up in ecstasy for about half an hour at the *Memento*. [VI, 223]

734. Bonaventura da Montereale would hardly ever say Mass in the morning without first taking the discipline. When he could not do this in church because the friars were there, the holy old man would go outside into the woods and discipline himself there, severely. Then he said his Mass, persevering in holy prayer both vocal and mental. [III, 316]

735. The mind of Giovanni Spagnuolo was so caught up in God that he was hardly ever seen by the other friars. He celebrated the Mass with much devotion, being in rapture a good part of the time, completely absorbed in God. Because of this his Mass usually went for a good hour.

Since he knew he spent a long time at Mass, he worried about irritating the people, and always celebrated early or in some chapel to avoid people and not bore them. But the reverse was true. He was so devout in the way he performed the rituals that the seculars were enriched by the experience. He had great zeal about praying for the souls in purgatory, and hardly ever said Mass without including a collect for the dead. [III, 294]

Brightness like a sun

736. Brother Bartholomew of Florence, a lay friar, did not know how to read, but spoke very well about the things of God. He had been the companion of Bernardino d'Asti. He told how he had often seen Bernardino lifted well off the ground, rapt in prayer. Many people witnessed many times that when he turned towards the people while saying Mass, a light as bright as the sun emanated from his breast and lit up the whole church. [VI, 29]

He celebrated most tastefully

737. Brother Vincenzo da Foiano prayed with great recollection, and as he prayed he was forced to send vehement sighs from his burning breast. He remained kneeling with his hands joined throughout the Divine Office, praying the psalms with exemplary attentiveness. He was exceedingly diligent in celebrating Holy Mass, which he did each day. Before Mass he always liked to be reconciled and to make a long preparation, sometimes going on so long that his Superiors made him cut it short. It was the same when he was at the altar: they told him not to be a nuisance to any worthy person waiting for him. On Christmas night, because of his super abundance of tenderness and tears he could hardly bear to say Mass. He celebrated the Mass of the Blessed Virgin whenever he could, for he had had a great devotion to her since boyhood. Apart from his Office, he also recited his rosary every day. After Mass and after vespers he withdrew into the woods, where he attended to his devotions and took the discipline. He was seen levitating in ecstasy many times. [VII, 437]

Most reverent, most attentive, most devout

738. It's difficult to talk about the devotion surrounding Masses celebrated by Brother Giacomo da Novara: he was as diligent as he could be, yet he kept his divine graces well hidden. He never made known what had happened interiorly. However, exteriorly he was all good, most reverent, most attentive, most devout, much, much more than can be explained with words. There was a devout woman at Cremona, who went to the friars for Confession, and for a long time had him as her confessor. Once she saw a marvellous light above his head during Mass when he elevated the Blessed Sacrament. The young friar who helped him to say the Office felt a great sense of devotion in serving Mass for him.

When Brother James heard Mass celebrated by others, he used to make the most profound acts of interior humility at the *Agnus Dei*. Exteriorly he did as much as he could without showing noticeable singularity. He always communicated spiritually along with the priest. He prepared himself devoutly, and in that action received the Bread of Life in spirit with inestimable affection. [VI, 382]

Confession and Communion

739. We order that the friars confess at least twice a week and receive Communion every fifteen days, or more often if they wish and their Superior judges it expedient for them. In Advent and Lent however, let them communicate every Sunday. According to the apostolic admonition, let them first of all attend to examining themselves carefully, their nothingness and their unworthiness. Let them consider, too, the gift of God given with so much charity, so that they may receive it not in judgment on their souls, but for the increase of light, grace and virtue.

May the most high and divine Sacrament, in which our most wonderful Saviour deigns so graciously to dwell with us all the time, be kept in all our churches in a very clean place, and held by all in the highest reverence. Let them stay and give honour in front of it, as if they were in their heavenly homeland with all the holy angels. [C, 91]

740. Let it be obvious among ourselves how often we frequent the sacrament of penance. We do so in such a way that the friars confess two or three times a week. Some do so every day. I speak in similar vein about most Holy Communion of the Body of the Lord. It is administered not only to the friars, but even to many seculars, men and women, who come to receive it in our churches. [I, 360]

To honour that most holy altar

741. We want to show ourselves to be what we truly are - true and zealous sons of the Holy Roman Church. We want to be obedient to the sacred canons and ordinances and to give the most holy altar all the honour we poor human beings can. Accordingly, let the tabernacles of the Blessed Sacrament be suitably painted, with gold used to decorate in and around them. Coverings and precious canopies of silk should be used for them, and similar coverings should be used for the chalices. We should do these things with great willingness, knowing that honour is fitting for such a place, although it is never possible to give it the honour it deserves, for it represents Christ to us.

We should be even more willing to do these things when we recall that the treacherous Lutherans are opposed to these most holy honours and divine worship. Hence we are sure that if our zealous Father Saint Francis returned to the earth in these calamitous times - calamitous because of these cursed heresies - there would be no one, however devout and holy, who would honour that most Blessed Sacrament and that sacred and holy altar more than he. He would put all his heart into venerating the images of the saints, and the saints themselves. He would see the other side of the matter - how much dishonour is accruing to these enemies of God and the saints. These are truly the diabolical ones of Germany, the heretical Huguenots.

I fear for anyone who questions this honour under the pretext of some strange zeal, whoever he may be. Therefore, let anyone act wisely who believes and says he is a Catholic and zealous about divine worship, lest he himself become the sinister manifestation of some error. [I, 261]

Mindful of Saint Francis

742. The Most Blessed Sacrament was kept unadorned, but in the greatest cleanliness. Similarly they kept the things belonging to the Most Holy Sacrifice very neat. When they began then to make tabernacles for the Blessed Sacrament in the Church, they were mindful of what Saint Francis said in his Testament. He wanted it kept in refined places. So the Capuchins started to make beautiful tabernacles, though not very big ones, with a silk coverings suitable to their churches. Since the new rubrics say that chalice veils should be silk, they have allowed silk veils in order to observe those rubrics. But apart from these things and some things to do with the tabernacle, they continued to avoid both gold and silk, and still continue to do so. [V, 280]

Burning lamp

743. Once during the winter, when the nights are long, a devout sacristan in the friary at Rome found that the lamp that burned before the Blessed Sacrament had gone out. He was very upset by this, and thereafter usually got up two or three hours before Matins, and went into the church in order to see if the lamp was still burning. [II, 286]

His regal and majestic presence

744. Francesco da Macerata saw our Saviour in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist with the eyes of faith. He felt his regal and majestic presence so keenly that when he went to or from the church, he passed in front of it or to the side of it, whether the Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the altar or reposed in the tabernacle. When he was leaving by the choir exit or through the main door, he went round by the side of the altar. Rather than turn his back towards it, he would have walked backwards. [VII, 476]

The angelic Office

745. We order that clerics and priests who are not legitimately impeded should go as quickly as possible to the choir once they have heard the first sound of the bell for Divine Office. There they are to prepare their hearts for the Lord. With devotion, composure, self-discipline, quiet and silence, let them remember that they are before God, where they must discharge the angelic Office of singing the divine praises. [C, 35]

Without codas or harmonies

746. We also order that the friars sing the Office with all due devotion, attention, dignity, uniformity of voice and unity of spirit, without codas or harmonies, with their voices not too high nor too low, but in between. May the friars strive to sing psalms to God more with the heart than with the voice. [C, 36]

747. The Office was said slowly, with proper pauses and moderate voices. [IV, 23]

They got up for Matins

748. Matteo da Schio was very zealous about the Divine Office. Although he was often quite tired, nonetheless he always got up for Matins. If he was in the house, he hardly ever failed to come to choir. He said, "I don't feel I have said the Office unless I say it in choir with the others." [III, 379]

749. When he was on visitation, Bernardino d'Asti hardly ever failed to get up for Matins in choir with the others and to stay on for the discipline and prayers, even if he was very tired. He strongly reprimanded those who failed to make the effort to get up for Matins. [III, 185]

He esteemed Matins especially

750. Father Bernardino d'Asti was very zealous about the Divine Office. Although he was Superior and on visitation, he went to all the hours. If he arrived at a house when the Office was being sung, he entered the choir to sing it with the others. He especially Matins and the discipline, which he never missed, even if he arrived late in the evening and was tired from his journey.

While singing the psalms, he devoutly remained standing without stooping. In his old age, when he couldn't stand firm, he stayed kneeling. He gave his mind so attentively to that sacred function that his confessors noticed he never confessed to being distracted.

He severely reprimanded those who, without urgent reason, stayed away from choir at the due times. He did not allow friars to be dispensed from choir, whatever their occupation was, whether study or business. He avoided all superfluous conversation and tasks, not only to come to the Divine Office, but in order to be free for extra prayer. He said the devil cleverly supplied such tasks to divert the friar from prayer. [VII, 224]

The friar who loves the choir

751. Battista da Norcia was a great lover of the choir. Even though he was infirm sometimes, he still liked to say the Office in choir with the others. He severely reprimanded friars who missed choir for trivial reasons. He said, "It is

impossible for the friar who loves choir not to be a good friar. However, one who avoids it will leave the Order in the end.” [VI, 135]

He annoyed the sacristans

752. Matteo da Cascia was very simple, but was made Guardian for many years in certain little friaries because of his good life. He ruled his community with an iron rod. He was very zealous about the Divine Office, keen that not a night or day should pass without the Office being said at its proper hour. Sometimes he got agitated about matters, and annoyed the sacristans because of his great zeal about the Divine Office. Sometimes he was so tired out of weariness or because he'd just got back from a journey that he could hardly stand up, yet he always rose for Matins. He never missed going to all the hours, and the prayer and the discipline, when he was in the friary. [III, 155]

Even when he was infirm

753. It was wonderful to see how enthusiastic Brother Amadeo da Antegnate was about choir. Even when he was travelling he always went to day and night Office and prayers when he stayed at a friary. He did this even when he was sick: he would hastened to choir so long as he could stand on his feet. His last illness in Bergamo lasted three months, and right up until his death there he was keen to go to choir. He said that, if a friar does not give in to laziness, God gives him sufficient strength to go to choir and to praise him. [VI, 320]

Angelo da Sant' Angelo in Vado

754. Brother Angelo da Sant' Angelo was very zealous about the Divine Office. Later, if a friar was zealous about the Divine Office, people would say: “He is another Brother Angelo da Sant' Angelo.” [III, 55]

There was no one so serene

755. During the Office Antonio da Monteciccardo stood up in choir with great composure, and was utterly absorbed in God. While he was standing, he never moved his eyes, except to look at the psalter. With his arms joined and his face lifted up to heaven, it was as if he was elevated in ecstasy. I saw this with my own eyes, and I have never seen anyone so serene. [III, 234]

756. While Vincenzo da Foiano was at Monte Casale, he always knelt with his hands joined when he said the Divine Office. He contemplated with his mind what he said with his mouth and heard with his ears. [III, 338]

757. Francesco da Soriano found he had to say the Divine Office by himself most of the time because of preaching commitments. But he always said it the proper hour standing or kneeling, with the required bows, just as if he were in choir. [III, 166]

He sang like an angel

758. Brother Giacomo da Novara sang like an angel during the Office. He had great ability to stay attentive, and had a wonderful mind, which grew richer all the time. His voice was sonorous and clear, and his bodily gestures reverential. He stood quite upright, not leaning on anything, gazing up to heaven with a devout look on his face. He uttered intermittent sighs when the other side of the choir sang its part. Burning devotion was stamped all over him, and it was edifying to see him. Thus it was that once in Cremona some gentlemen saw him singing the Divine Office, and were moved and uplifted by the sight. When they were leaving and had got as far as the chapel door, one of them - a doctor - asked the others to do him a favour and wait while he went back and took a last look at that holy old man singing the Office. When he got to the choir door he stayed and watched him for a while, enjoying and admiring the serene gestures he made to God while he was singing.

He recited the Office of Our Lady as devoutly as that of Our Lord, showing marked devotion when he came to the second psalm of Sext. At that point he always wept. The young friar who helped him recite it noticed that this always happened. When the old man became aware that he could not hide anything from him he tried to explain it by saying that he cried because he was old.

As he recited the psalms he interspersed frequent sighs with reverent movements and gestures, compelled as he was by his burning interior devotion. No incident ever caused him to break off the Office and make a comment, but if one of the young friars made a mistake when they were praying it together, he would admonish him with a glare. [VI, 381]

Have you given the dead anything to eat?

759. Let both the clerics and the lay friars say the five Offices for the Dead. [C, 30] Let no additional Office be said in choir, except that of Our Lady. [C, 42]

760. Bonaventura da Montereale never missed saying his daily Office of the Dead, often adding the seven penitential psalms. When he found clerics standing talking, he would call them over and say, "Sons, we do not have time to waste. Have you given the dead anything to eat?" When they answered "No", he would reply, "Yet you have eaten well." He would then immediately intone the antiphon for the dead. [III, 314]

761. When he was not too weak, Francesco da Soriano always said the Office of the Dead. [III, 166]

762. Bonaventura da Cremona usually said the Office of the Dead, the seven penitential psalms and other devotions every day. [III, 240]

The Passion of the Lord

763. Secular people heard them weep many times over the Passion of the Lord. Their tears were so copious you would think they were actually present at it. [II, 189]

Prayer as their proper activity

764. The friars gave themselves completely to prayer, apart from the necessary tasks they had to do. They considered prayer their proper activity, especially meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ Our Lord. Later this meditation was regularly taught to the novices and practised by the whole Congregation, as is proper for the friars of Saint Francis, who always desired to be conformed to Christ crucified. [V, 156]

He wept over the Passion of our Lord

765. Bernardo da Fossombrone merited to receive from God an unusual gift of tears. He carried the Passion of our Lord engraved in his heart, and wept almost all the time. When he travelled, he always went a little ahead of his companion. However, when these fervours came to him, forced by the superabundance of the Spirit, he would go off into some small wood or place where he could not be seen. As a result, he would then lag a long way behind his companion, and was often reprimanded about this. He wept so copiously over the Passion of our Lord that often secular people in the vicinity would run to see what was happening. When he saw them, Brother Bernardo, still weeping, would begin to speak so vehemently about the Passion of Christ that all those seculars would dissolve into tears with him.

Once when he was in Assisi at the time of the Indulgence, a strong preacher of ours gave a homily in the city's cathedral, called San Rufino. He got up, full of fervour, and spoke of the virtues of Saint Francis and the opposite vices that were in the city, using a kind of dialogue form. He said, "Saint Francis was humble, and you, Assisi, are proud," and went on for a long time in this vein. When Brother Bernardo heard our Father Saint Francis and his virtues named, he began to weep so copiously that he drowned out the preacher, who could not be heard by the people. Although he was aware that he was doing the wrong thing, the impulse of the Spirit was so great he could not control himself.

I was present at this. Such outbursts of fervour were by no means uncommon with him. The sagacious friars said they happened because he was totally detached from the world and kept his mind always purged from every earthly affection. Because of this he was always ready to respond to the inspiration of God. [III, 30]

He stretched out his arms in a cross

766. Bonaventura da Montereale was very zealous about spiritual things, and his simplicity nourished his compunction. He was devoted to the Passion of our Saviour, and would dissolve into tears on reading just a few lines about it in a little book. It was as if he witnessed Christ's death right there before his eyes. He would close the book and continue two or three hours in prayer. He used to stretch out his arms in a cross. Feeling this discomfort, small though it was, improved his ability to maintain his compassionate feelings for the suffering Jesus. He used to grip the rails with his hands to help him sustain that posture longer. He would not say Mass before first getting in touch with the pains of the suffering Christ by taking the discipline in the woods or in his cell. Those pains he would then renew by offering the mystical memorial at the throne of the eternal Father. He held that no greater help can be given to Holy Church and to the souls of the dead than by celebrating Mass. Therefore he never missed saying it every morning, except through necessity or because of infirmity. [VII, 490]

I cannot calm myself

767. I was aware that Bonaventura da Montereale had a book eloquent about the Passion of our Lord. The old man would open the book and read four or six verses, until he became filled with sorrow. Then he would shut the book quickly, and weep unrestrainedly over the Passion of Christ, just as if he had seen the Crucified One before his very eyes. Sometimes he stayed for a period of two or three hours with his arms outstretched, weeping all the time. Since he could not stand erect for a long time without leaning on something, he would lean on the altar rails of the Most Blessed Sacrament. [III, 315]

768. Giovanni da Puglia had a devout, good sized crucifix in his cell. He had adapted it as a cross for himself. Most of the time, day and night, the servant of God poured out tears before it. He was often heard, both by friars and by secular people, to weep copiously over the Passion of our Lord - to the extent that you could easily hear him half a mile away. Once I said to him, "It seems to me you're doing the wrong thing by weeping so noisily." He answered, "I can't control myself. When I consider that our Lord has died for us, and think of the atrocious pains he suffered for me, a wicked sinner, I can't pacify myself until I've poured out a bowlful of tears. When I weep, I tire myself out so much that my physical strength is completely drained away." [III, 421]

I don't know how one can persevere

769. Angelo da Sant'Angelo in Vado was very devoted to Our Lady. He prepared himself for her feasts with great devotion and fasted on the vigils on bread and water. He said, "I don't know how anyone can persevere in the Order if he doesn't have a particular devotion to the Mother of God. The graces

this most sweet Mother does not obtain from her Son, will be gained only with difficulty by another saint." [III, 57]

770. Battista da Norcia never put aside the rosary of Our Lady. When he found young friars who put aside the Office of Our Lady, he reprimanded them strongly and harshly. Out of kindness he would say to them, "Sons, you will not persevere in the Order if you are not devoted to Our Lady, who is the mother of all, but particularly of her devotees." [III, 273]

Advocate of the friars minor

771. Matteo da Schio fasted on all the vigils of Our Lady. Once I was there on the vigil of the Assumption, and, through concern for him, begged him not to fast on bread and water, saying he wouldn't be able to stand up to the effort of preaching. The servant of God answered me, "I believe you must be aware that when I eat just a little, I go red in the face, even scarlet. I have a strong constitution. And, you know, how can anyone not want to fast on bread and water on the vigil of the Mother of the God? How is it possible for someone to be called Christian if he is not devoted to Our Lady? This is especially true of Friars Minor, since she is their particular advocate." When he took me as his companion, it was a wonderful experience. He gave such a fervent sermon on Our Lady, it was as if a flame of fire was coming out of his mouth. [III, 379]

He seems like another Jerome

772. The servant of God, Girolamo da Montepulciano had an outstanding devotion to the Mother of Christ. In his day, when a friar was devoted to Our Lady, it was said, "He seems like another Girolamo da Montepulciano." When a solemnity of Our Lady came around, he always celebrated the octave by fasting on bread and water, four days before and four days after. He usually said the Mass of Our Lady whenever he could. It was a firmly held opinion that the Queen of heaven had often appeared to this faithful servant of hers, although no one knew that for certain. For the humility of this servant of God was so great that no word could ever have escaped from his mouth that would result in his being praised. [III, 325]

He spoke with great joy

773. Tomaso da Città di Castello was very devoted to the Blessed Virgin. He said her Mass every Saturday. It was his intention or wish never to deny anything asked of him for love of the Most Blessed Virgin. With great joy he spoke and listened to discussions about her, and willingly preached about her and listened to such preaching. [VI, 296]

He dedicated himself to making rosaries

774. Matteo da Cascia persevered in the holy Congregation for about forty years. When the holy man was old, and thought he could do nothing else, he gave himself over to making rosaries. He presented them to the friars, inviting them to say the rosary of Our Lady. [III, 156]

Always carrying the rosary in his hand

775. Brother Liberale of Domodossola was also very devoted to the Most Blessed Virgin, and took up the practice of carrying his rosary in his hand all the time. He said it whenever he could.

This was displeasing to the demons, who attacked him many times to wrest it from his hands, but they never prevailed. He didn't want this known, being a most faithful observer of divine secrets, but it became known while he was travelling on a journey with many other Fathers to the General Chapter of Napoli, where Ochino was elected.

Ochino was on a donkey, and as they were travelling along the coast of Gaeta he saw the rosary in the hand of this Father, who was saying it as they went along. He said to him: "Brother Liberale, why do you say so many rosaries? God has no need of so many Our Fathers."

Liberale replied: "What? Shall we be heretics?" Ochino answered quickly, "No, no. But let me have that rosary for a little while."

Liberale gave it to him out of obedience. When Ochino wouldn't give it back to him, even though he begged for it, he said in the end, "The demon has often wanted to take this rosary from my hand and never could. So neither can you deprive me of it, either." Ochino became flustered, and gave it back to him. [VI, 509]

Our Lady appeared to him four times

776. Pietro da Portogallo was very devoted to Our Lady, and on all her vigils he fasted on bread and water. He was endowed by God with the gift of holy contemplation, in which Our Lady appeared to him four times and revealed many things. In particular she appeared at the end of his life and said he had been granted full remission of all his sins. [III, 145]

Lady, who are you?

777. I found myself in the same fraternity as Bonaventura da Cremona in the friary at Forli, not long after that wretch Father Bernardino da Ochino left us. This holy man told me that he was praying in the middle of the day in the friary at Faenza, when a woman entered his cell. A brilliant light radiated from her. Greatly amazed by the vision and much afraid, the servant of God looked at the

woman and said, "Lady, who are you? How did you get in here so easily?" The woman approached him when he spoke and said, "Fear not, Brother Bonaventure. I have come to console you, for I have seen how very sad you are, shedding many tears for your Congregation." Brother Bonaventure decided that she must be the universal advocate of sinners, the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all. With great humility, he said to her tearfully, "O Lady, I commend to you the poor Congregation." Without revealing who she was, the woman answered "Fear not, Brother Bonaventure. The Congregation is greatly loved by God, but since there was a rotten part, he wanted to purify it." Then without saying anything else, she suddenly disappeared.

Well, one day when we were in Forli, the holy man said to me, "The same sort of thing has happened to me again, today during None. I was in my cell kneeling on my pallet, when I suddenly heard the cell door open. I saw the same woman there before me. I was dumbstruck, but she said with great joy, 'Fear not, Brother Bonaventure. I am the woman who appeared to you last year in the house at Faenza. I have come to console you. There is still some part of your Congregation that is dissolute. Know that the Lord God has purified it and wants to purify it so that his eternal Majesty may be glorified in it faithfully.' Then, naming certain Religious and a prelate of the Church, she said, 'Woe to such Religious and woe to such a Prelate!'

She then quickly disappeared." [III, 240]

She obtained for him the remission of his sins

778. Brother Bernardo d'Offida avoided conversations. He stayed in the church or in the woods to pray. His customary practice was to meditate on the Passion of Our Lord, and he had the special gift of tears. He rarely went to rest after Matins, even though the friars always get up at midnight, but would often sleep a little beforehand. He was often visited by the Blessed Virgin, who revealed many things to him and obtained for him the remission of his sins and even the certainty of his salvation. This glorious apparition became known. When it was divulged, it came to the ears of the Duchess of Camerino, who questioned him about it. It was believed that he did not deny it. The Lady had a great regard for him, and often sought to speak with him. When he was leaving her, she knelt down and begged him to give her his blessing. He refused, saying, "Lady, you have asked for the blessing of a sinner." He finally gave in and said, in a subdued and tearful voice, "May the Lord Jesus Christ and his most sweet Mother bless you." [V, 137]

Devoted to the Most Blessed Virgin

779. The good father Serafino da Savona had a heart full of tenderness towards others, and was outwardly kind, gentle, gracious and most loving, both in the

words he used and the way he used them. Everyone, secular people and friars alike, considered him to be a saint, and said so.

The extent of his devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin during his life was shown in a clear sign at his death. In his last illness, she let herself be seen by him, bringing with her incredible consolation. She reassured him of both the grace of his salvation which he had begged of God, and told him that he would pass happily from this life on the sacred day of her blessed Assumption. This is just how it happened in the year 1574 in the friary at Genova.

There was a singular privilege and testimony of how acceptable he had been to God and devoted to the Most Blessed Virgin. While he was saying the conventual Mass of that feast, in time between the consecration of the host and the chalice, he devoutly made his *transitus*, as if through the midst of that most Holy Sacrament. It can be argued that Christ graciously welcomed him into heaven. [VI, 527]

I see Our Lady

780. Brother Felice da Cantalice was very devoted to Our Lady. When he was sick and very close to death, that kind Mother did not want to fail to visit her servant to console him in that final moment. (It was believed she had appeared to him at other times also.)

When he had eaten a little, he rested. The friar who served him, however, did not leave him. Behold, all of a sudden, the servant of God raised his arms in the air. Holding them open he said, "Oh, oh, oh!" three times. He stayed this way for the space of three or four *Misereres*. When the friar asked him what it was he saw, he answered, "I see Our Lady with the angels." He asked him to leave the cell, the door of which was open, and the friar did this. After a little while Brother Felice started raising his arms again. However, he wanted freely to enjoy the visit of the Queen of heaven, who wished to console her servant Felice, so he again asked the friar to leave. The friar did this in order not to disturb him during those consolations, and left Felice alone in her holy company. [III, 473]

HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

The Capuchin Friars were conscious of having a mission to fulfil in the society of their time. From desolate and prayerful solitude they returned to the world eager to make spiritual conquests. Not all were at the summit of learning. However, all were on fire with love. In those days, as in our own, people had more need of hearts that knew how to love than intelligence that knew how to discuss.

A burst of love will do more to save the world more than a segment of knowledge.

As authentic crusaders "they went with the crucifix in hand." Their evangelical work knew no limits in regard to either places or persons. They announced "voices and virtues, punishment and glory" everywhere and to everyone: in the cities and in the villages, from the pulpits and in the squares; to people in the street and to people of learning; to the poor and to the rich, to prelates and to dignitaries.

Like the teaching of their divine Master, the message of these heralds of the Gospel was universal.

The most noble mission of preaching requires first of all that the preacher live a holy life. From the love of Christ comes the fertile dynamism of apostolic souls. In the fervour of prayer and in the recollection of meditation apostles are formed who fruitfully spread the Gospel light in the world. Educated in this school, the Capuchins felt the need to work for the glory of God and the reform of Christian mores. Zeal for the salvation of souls was not the exclusive domain of the learned, for simple priests and the lay friars also had spiritual riches to communicate to souls. This they did with the humble frankness that persuades and conquers.

The unlearned and the illiterate preachers, and also the learned ones, preferred the good people of the countryside who were abandoned and neglected. Intentionally they did not seek out the intellectual and aristocratic audiences of the cities. Nevertheless, good orators who gained great applause in the most distinguished pulpits were legion. They aroused the admiration and the enthusiasm of the city crowds, who filled the churches and overflowed into the squares. From the Italian pulpits of the time there resounded words and arguments that were more of the world and of the schools than of God and the Gospel. As the Capuchins began to preach the Sacred Scripture with fervour, they contributed effectively to the restoration of evangelical preaching. In the face of their new form of preaching, souls could not remain indifferent. The evangelical simplicity of their teaching and life, and the vehemence and candour of their words recalled the most glorious times of the Franciscan apostolate. A powerful reawakening of Christian vitality reanimated society. Consciences were aroused, practices reformed, and good works flourished. The only reward the friars asked in return for the divine gift of preaching was the conversion of souls.

Eloquence without charity does not edify

781. Announcing the word of God, after the example of Christ, the Teacher of life, is among the most worthy, useful and exalted Divine Offices there are in the Church of God, and the salvation of the world largely depends on it. So we order that no one may preach unless the office has been granted him after he has first been examined and approved by the General Chapter or the Father Vicar General, just as the Rule says. No such office ought be given to friars unless it is clear they are of holy and exemplary life, sound and mature judgment, and strong and ardent will. For knowledge and eloquence without charity do not edify: on the contrary, they often destroy. When Superiors impose such an office, let them be careful not to be respecters of persons, or be

moved because of friendship or human favour. They must act simply for the honour of God. It is better to have a few, good preachers than many unsuitable ones. [C, 110]

Let them return to solitude

782. When, the friars feel their spirit diminished because of their dealings with seculars, let them return to solitude and stay there until, filled again with God, zeal moves them to dispense the graces of God through the world. [C, 114]

Let them ascend the mountain of prayer

783. The friars should put aside their contact with people occasionally, so that they themselves do not become reprobates while they preach to others. May they climb the mountain of prayer and contemplation with our most gentle Saviour, and there strive to become inflamed with divine love like seraphim. Then, when they are completely rekindled, they can invigorate others. [C, 120]

How important the example of the preacher is

784. Brother Angelo d'Asti, a very well educated Parisian doctor, came from the Zoccolanti to the Capuchin Reform, and was received by Brother Bernardino d'Asti. He was assigned to the Province of Saint Francis. He was truly of great spirit and came with the great desire to abide by this Reform. However, he judged himself to be weaker than he was, and told the General he could not preach during Lent while fasting. The General weighed the importance of the preacher's example to the people when they hear the word of God from him. With this in mind, he didn't want to open the door for friars to stop fasting while they were preaching. Besides, the friars are obliged to fast by the Church and by the Rule. So the General said adroitly to Brother Angelo: "If you cannot do both, do not preach, because you are not obliged to preach."

Brother Angelo was consoled. However, he then regretted not preaching. He returned to Bernardino and said, "Father, if you wish, I will put myself to the test. If I cannot preach while fasting, I will do as much as I can."

This pleased the General and he sent him to preach in the neighbourhood of Spello. The good learned preacher in fact experimented to see if he could do both. He could. To show that many friars are soft on themselves, using the excuse that they are not being able to fast, he preached the Passion for a good eleven hours on Good Friday while fasting. [VI, 291]

First he preached to himself

785. When Girolamo da Montepulciano was asked why he didn't preach he said,

"I haven't preached to myself yet. We must preach to and convert ourselves first before preaching to others. Then no one will say to us, 'Hypocrite, first take the beam out of your own eye, and then take splinter out the eyes of others.' It's wrong of me to reprimand pride in others when I'm full of it myself. And it's the same with the other vices. Now I am in the Order, with the desire to preach to myself. When it pleases the Lord that I have preached well to myself, I will also preach to others if that task is imposed on me."
[III, 324]

This is true preaching

786. Matteo da Schio had to give the sermon on the Assumption of Our Lady. Out of compassion for him I said, "Father, tomorrow morning you have to preach in the cathedral of Narni. How will you preach if you fast today on bread and water?" He answered:

"God willing, I will preach with my lips. This is true preaching: first with works and then with teaching. Once there was a painter who was so devoted to the Mother of God that when he had to paint a figure of the Madonna, he always fasted two or three days on bread and water. He asked the Lord to give him the grace so he could faithfully paint the image of the Madonna - such as when she carried her baby in her arms - as perfectly as possible. God gave him the grace. Even though others who were better than him in the art of painting tried to surpass him, no figure was more beautiful or more gracious than his. Now, if someone who wanted to represent the beauty of Our Lady with brush and colours prepared himself so well with fasts, how much more should preachers prepare themselves? They not only have to demonstrate the physical beauty of the Mother of God but also her high virtues, which are such that an angel can't describe them. Someone who's never tasted honey can speak of its qualities, but he can't know properly what its sweetness and other qualities are like. In the same way, one who does not taste the virtues in his own self can't know their greatness. The one who willingly fasts, preaches with more efficacy, feeling in himself the fruit that the soul acquires from it. When we speak about the things we love, we speak of them to great effect. This is very important for giving delight, from which comes the fruit of the sermon."

When he went in the morning to preach it pleased God that I was his companion. I saw the effects of his words, for he preached so divinely and with so much fervour that he inflamed the whole city. It was as if a flame of fire came from his mouth. [III, 379]

Almost everyone preached

787. So great was the great devotion of the seculars who desired to see the friars and to hear them speak of the things of God, that almost all the friars preached - priests and lay-brothers alike. [IV, 43]

They were requested everywhere

788. The Congregation flourished in the time this holy man Bernardino d'Asti governed. It came to a greater and more established acceptance than it had at the time of Ochino. It increased a lot in numbers, so that it covered almost the whole of Italy. God wanted to offset generously the short period of silence that the Capuchin preachers had kept earlier. He gave them the outstanding grace of preaching. So much wonderful fruit came from this that they were popular everywhere. They were listened to with great attention. At the same time, there were many holy friars. Having passed through tempestuous waves, the friars now enjoyed peace and a wonderful harvest. [VI, 179]

In the manner of priestly trumpets

789. When the Capuchins appeared the times were extreme, but the world was astonished at how odd they were. When it saw men given to a desperate life - as it was labelled - the world said that God had sent these holy religious for its comfort and help. As the Capuchins went about they frightened people with the horror of their harsh life, and provoked them to penance with their fiery words. These words were delivered from pulpits, on foot and in discussions with individuals, moving people to penance by exhorting them especially to Confession and Communion, sacraments that had almost disappeared into oblivion. Not only had there been no one to urge the people on, but there was hardly anyone to minister to them. The abuses and the chastisement of wars and plagues had brought the clergy into disarray, and the worship of God had come to a very sad pass. There was no one who knew how to care for souls, nor anyone who wanted to do works of charity.

The coming of the Capuchins was very opportune. Their life and preaching were like the sound of priestly trumpets, and they began to topple Jericho's wall of worldly life. [V, 412]

They stirred up almost the whole of Italy

790. Simple and ignorant though the friars were, the majority of them seemed like fiery Seraphim as they spoke mightily of the things of God and the great goodness and glory of the life to come. They amazed everyone who heard them, and stirred up almost the whole of Italy into religious fervour. It seemed like the hand of God, for, after examining their lives, many people abandoned their evil ways for virtuous ones. The times themselves demanded this, for the

world had reached the extremity of its tribulations. Everyone thought they were being punished and chastised by God for their sins. [II, 257]

They spoke so highly

791. When the friars saw what great fruit was being borne, Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone gave permission to them all - priests, cleric and lay friars - to speak about the things of God whenever they were in the presence of seculars. The power of the spirit was momentous, and when the lay friars spoke so extraordinarily of the things of God, they were regarded as great and learned preachers. When people heard that they were lay friars, there were amazed. [IV, 192]

Lay friars or simple priests

792. It would take too long to recount examples about each particular friar. Although they were lay friars or simple priests they bore wonderful fruit through their exhortations. While they didn't usually give sermons, when they saw people gathered, they went and preached to them. [IV, 192]

793. Liberalino da Col Val d'Elsa preached in out-of-the-way places, not only because he was not very learned, but also because he thought preaching to simple people bore more fruit. He condemned vices most severely, and delighted when he had gatherings of devout people. He preached very earnestly, mostly about cases of conscience and the holy virtues, just as you can read today in his Lenten exhortations. [IV, 330]

O Lord, who has you put on the cross?

794. Ludovico da Foligno become a priest. He had a piece of cloth sown on the front of his habit, where he carried a book of his everyday sermons. He did this to avoid having to have pockets. When Ludovico da Fossombrone saw that he was a man of honest and dignified example, he gave him authority to preach in villages, castles and out-of-the-way places, even though he was scarcely literate. He exercised this office with great simplicity, preaching the commandments of God and other useful things, and the Lord produced wonderful fruit in simple people through the preaching of his servant.

Once he was preaching in a village in the mountains of Foligno, where great enmity had arisen between two of the principal families. Although the Priors of the city of Foligno and many other people of importance had tried to get them to settle their differences peacefully, no one had succeeded. It pleased the Lord God that when this servant of his was preaching, the protagonists of both sides were present for the sermon. In his great fervour he held up a crucifix. He spoke as if holding a dialogue with it, saying, "O Lord, who has put you in this cross? Was it the scribes and Pharisees?" The Lord answered no. After he had held a long dialogue, with the Lord repeatedly answering no, he switched the

answer to, "Those present here at the sermon who do not want to be forgiven. They have put me on the cross." This inflamed him with so much ardour that, turning first to one side then to the other, he threatened them in a loud voice with the anger of God. Frightened by these words, they all embraced each other there and then in the church. [III, 287]

Send me also to bear fruit

795. Domenico da Boschetto had little learning and was by nature a very quiet man. However he was very fervent in the service of God. When our Superiors were aware of the great fruit he bore, they allowed him to preach. He exercised this office for many years, preaching everywhere: in castles, villages and out-of-the-way places. Through his holiness and simplicity the Lord God produced much good fruit. He inflamed everyone so much with the love of God, that many times when they were offered educated preachers, the people rejected them in favour of simple Brother Dominic. No matter how difficult it was to reconcile people, he was always successful. The people were so devoted to him that anyone blessed by him considered himself truly happy. He performed many miracles with the sign of the cross.

His zeal for the salvation of souls was so great, that when he was not appointed to go and preach on feast days, he was completely dejected. It seemed to him that he was wasting time. Often when he felt very downhearted, the friars, who knew his condition, would say to him, "Brother Dominic, if you weren't so sick, you could go and preach." Immediately the servant of God would leap up from his bed and say, "I'm not all that sick! With the grace of God I'll get better. Send me out to bear fruit." Then he would instantly recover. [III, 384, 385]

Ring the bell for the sermon

796. The lay friars preached the commandments of God, giving examples and delivering strong reprimands against the vices. Their preaching produced the greatest fruits among the simple people.

Brother Egidio d'Orvieto was a lay friar of great worth. He arrived at a castle in the countryside of Rome, and as soon as the people gathered around him, he wanted to preach. However he was nervous that there might be an educated person present, so, to find out, he used a holy trick. He asked for some paper and an inkhorn, saying he wanted to make a note of something. The peasants answered, "Father, we have neither paper nor inkhorn here. None of us is literate." Brother Giles said, "Go and ring the bell for the sermon! I want to preach to you!"

His preaching pleased them so much that he was as good as compelled to preach to them for about fifteen days. He aroused great fervour in them and gave them a profound peace. It was something to marvel at.

A feast day came round, and a friar of Saint Augustine, a master of theology, turned up. Brother Giles was worried that this friar would find fault in something he said, so with great humility he begged the master of theology to preach, and had him give a sermon. The peasants didn't like this at all, and wanted him to stop and Brother Giles to take over.

He did wonderful things not only in that castle, but also in many other places. [IV, 44]

Having put aside the subtleties

797. Great preachers put aside the subtleties that were preached at that time, and joined the ordinary friars in preaching the Gospel of Christ and the Sacred Scriptures with simplicity. [IV, 193]

798. Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo said this:

"Back in the beginning, I preached a series of sermons called *The Disciple*. God cooperated there in such a way that my preaching bore the greatest fruit. Then, I began to introduce some doctrine into my preaching in reaction to the heretics. When I used to preach simply, the Church was always full. Now there aren't three people there. Know that God has chosen this Congregation to preach to the simple, teaching them his commandments and what a Christian needs to do to be saved. Nor will we have to take care of preaching in the cities, which want learning, because there is no shortage of learned ones to preach there. However, the poor country dwellers are abandoned by preachers because they have no money to pay them. Oh yes, the Lord has sent us for these people!" [III, 64]

Everyone desired to hear them

799. They preached with so much fervour that everyone wanted to hear them. Because their reputation was so good, it spread throughout Italy. In the Marches of Ancona people wrote letters about them to say that certain Religious had appeared who preached with so much fervour they seemed to be sent from paradise. [II, 188]

800. When the educated preachers came along, they became so famous throughout Italy that the majority of them did not go anywhere to preach except through an Apostolic Brief obtained by the communities from His Holiness. Sometimes three or four Briefs were sought for the same friar. However, His Holiness ruled that the first one should prevail. At their sermons they had fifteen and twenty thousand persons at a time. Anyone who managed to hear them thought himself fortunate. Portraits were made of many of them. Many noblemen kept these portraits in their rooms out of devotion, as if they were saints. [IV, 44]

The particular grace of reconciling enemies

801. Matteo da Leonessa burned with charity towards others, and this often moved him to go preaching. Even though he was quite learned, he was very willingly to preach in villages and castles, where his preaching produced the greatest fruit. He had the particular grace of reconciling enemies. The people of his homeland, Leonessa, always had recourse to him while he lived, so that whenever any enmity flared up he would immediately go there to remedy it with holy peace. [VI, 223]

It seemed they had come from the other world

802. Bernardino da Reggio gave a sermon in Palermo, and his simple preaching was not acceptable. The magistrate thought that he could not be a preacher in their city, where only famous preachers were welcome to give sermons. They were about to tell him to go and preach in some part of the countryside. He asked the emissary if they would agree to hear him one more time. Then, if he was not acceptable to them, he would go to wherever they sent him.

They agreed. The sermon was so lofty and full of spirit that they were astonished. They were of the opinion no one like that would ever be heard again in Palermo.

Therefore, accompanied by example and austerity, he continued his sermons in the city, attracting with the huge throngs of listeners and producing much fruit in souls. His was a new way of preaching. He was careful to strike at vice and extol virtue with the powerful reasons of punishment and glory. People saw a new way of life before them in this man dressed in a lowly habit patched with sack cloth, barefooted, gaunt and pale. He himself was seen only in the pulpit, for he always busied himself praying in recollected silence. Nothing came from his lips except words of spirit. Nothing came from his behaviour except the glow of perfection. In this way he stole the hearts of the people. To them it seemed this man had come from the other world.

Hence he easily planted the Reform in those parts. He passed through those regions preaching with abundant fruit. [V, 201]

It was fitting for him to preach in the field

803. For his own reasons, Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo didn't want to read to the friars or to preach to the people. However, since God wanted to show him that his zeal was indiscreet, he sent him a vision. While he was alone in the church of the friary at Camerino and praying at length after Matins, he fell into a light sleep. He saw a judge come in with many soldiers and sit down in front of the altar. Looking at Brother Bernardino he said to one of the soldiers, "Go and cut out the tongue of that friar. He has a tongue but doesn't want to speak." As the soldier drew near to carry out the command of the judge,

Bernardino was so frightened that he woke up startled and cried out, "Jesus!" Finding himself alone in the church and thinking over that apparition, he said to himself, "Truly this is not a dream, but a vision and I deserve to have my tongue cut out. For God has given me the knowledge and the office of preaching, and I have failed so badly in this act of charity."

So he resolved to go to the Provincial and put himself under obedience again. He did this immediately, confessing to the Provincial his fault of having resisted him. Then he freely put himself into his hands both to read and to preach. Thus having received from him the blessing and a companion, he went preaching throughout the Marches, not stopping long in any one place. When he arrived at the gates of a city or region, he and his companion would kneel down and cry out in a loud voice: "Jesus!" He would go about preaching in the main streets, exhorting the people to do penance and putting before them judgment and hell. In this way an huge number of people would be attracted to him by the novelty of his habit, the unusual manner of his going along the streets, preaching; and by the wonderful strength of his words, which were full of fire. They would follow him with wonder until they arrived at the church or in some square. He would then give them his prepared sermon, with it bearing abundant fruit. When he left any place, people would follow him in large numbers, so that sometimes crowds from three, four or even five regions would follow along behind him. He had to preach to them in an open field before he could dismiss them. When he had given them his blessing, he would send them back home.

He continued like this initially, when the Capuchin habit was new and not known by the people. Little by little, when the first fervour had passed, he preached in a more organised way in the cities and in the country. [VI, 228]

One of the worthwhile and fruitful preachers

804. Brother Giovanni da Fano stayed some time in Abbazia (Brescia), since there was a church there and some rooms, although it was uncomfortable because the farmers lived there too. In the middle of the winter, he used to go out from there barefoot and in great fervour. In the morning he went into the city, a journey of a good two miles, and went straight into the church. There he waited without any relief to preach, and when the time came he mounted the pulpit. As soon as the sermon was over, he returned all the way to the poor little place of Abbazia, not waiting to take rest or refreshment. His preaching was so fervent that once when he was preaching about hell and looking down as if he were looking into the abyss, the people got up to see if the ground had opened and the depths of hell were visible. [V, 218]

805. After he had been withdrawn to the house at Scandriglia for some months, Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone sent him into Lombardy to preach and open some friaries in those parts. He thought Giovanni the most suitable one for such an enterprise.

The first city he preached in dressed in the Capuchin habit was Verona. His first sermon pleased the Bishop and all the people very much. As a result, the crowd could not fit into the church at the second sermon. Since he stopped there many days, they were compelled to arrange a pulpit in the square for him to preach from. The Bishop came there every time, as did the *Signoria* and a huge number of people. The square was often filled completely, as people who were present have told me. The servant of God did not want to stay in the Bishop's palace. Rather, as a true Friar Minor, he gathered with his companions in a little church which was not being used for services. There he had quarters shaped like a choir where he ate and slept. Each morning he celebrated the Mass in the church.

His preaching bore the greatest fruit in that city. One morning in particular he invited the people for the following day, saying he wanted to preach about death. The throng of gentlemen and ladies who came into the square on coaches, together with the multitude of the people was very great. The square was so tightly packed that if you threw a grain of millet into the crowd it would not have reached the ground.

When the holy old man found himself in the pulpit and saw the great enthusiasm of the crowd, he was so fired up that it seemed a flame would flare out of his mouth. His face was so ruddy that it looked like bright scarlet. His voice was so resonant and clear it was as if it came from the mouth of a bull. Thus it was that he began to preach with great eloquence about death and about despising the world. He linked three things together throughout: the dread of death, the vanity of our life, and despising the world. He did this in such a way that he frightened the entire multitude. They listened to him in such complete silence it was as if there was no one else there except the preacher. Finally, he produced a skull, and proceeded in turn first to address the people then to address the skull.

His sermon was so effective and penetrated the hearts of the gentlemen and ladies so deeply that the whole city was reformed from the vanities indulged in by the women and the young men. Through this effort, helped by the work of the holy Pastor, this reform lasted for many years. [III, 94]

806. Having sown the good evangelical seed in Verona over many, many days, he went away to do the same in other cities in those parts. By means of that man the Lord God showed everywhere the strength of his grace through the fruits of that work.

The great fervour this servant of Jesus Christ showed in his preaching is beyond words. We can discourse about his knowledge, for he was well educated and a good theologian. But neither pen nor tongue can do justice to his grace in speaking and his inventive genius; his highly effective eloquence; his attitude towards things; the strong reasons he put to persuade and dissuade; his vehemence in reprimanding; his attack on the vices; his ability to strike and

hammer at the hearts and souls of sinners; his bringing them low and showing them the depths of hell; his ability to show how wonderful the virtues are; his inspiring each one to follow the virtues; his ability to lift the good ones into paradise. O how many were buried in their sins, dead and full of stench, who returned to a better life through his sermons. Now they offer the most sweet fragrance of their lives to the world! How many were leprous with a contagious leprosy of the soul, and were healed! How many were blind to the life of God and were enlightened! How many were lame, paralysed and could not move, and were returned to perfect health in the beautiful way the Son of God taught about! How many were burned and consumed by the most ardent fevers of a thousand errors, and, freed from that burning, were returned to the best of health! Numberless were these sorts of miracles that God did by means of this truly holy man.

I only want to write this brief account of his sermons so that he may be known. He had the knack of making people laugh by a turn of phrase, even when they were choking with tears. In the same way he could make people produce great tears of sorrow in the middle of a joke. If he wanted to offer the hope of salvation, his speaking was so strong that he could give hope. I don't mean to the demons, but to someone condemned to hell because of his sins. On the other hand, when he preached about the justice of God, he demonstrated it with such a terrifying voice and with such fright, that there was not a man, be he ever so holy, who did not have hell gaping open before him and was not afraid of falling in.

On top of these outstanding gifts he also had a most impressive presence, truly noble man that he was. He also had a kind, lucid, melodious and attractive voice, except when he wanted to frighten. Then he turned it into one that was harsh, terrible and fearful. His pronunciation was clear, without accent, and he used the common language that was understood and accepted by all, without any affectation.

There was nothing that he set out to do when preaching that he did not do. Oh how many reforms he accomplished regarding the dress of women and of men! Venice knows it because he preached there. He was accepted there and in other great cities in Italy, where he left many beautiful and very holy regulations through these reforms.

Without my going on for too long, it is enough to say that in his time he was one of the most courageous and fruitful preachers whoever climbed into a pulpit. His very useful preaching was accompanied by holiness of life. [I, 298]

He was regarded as the best preacher in Italy

807. When Brother Francesco da Soriano came to the Congregation of Capuchins he burned with an incredible fervour to observe his profession perfectly. He couldn't wait any longer after learning that Brother Bernardino

d'Asti had become a Capuchin, and was received by Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone. He was already a preacher, and was no sooner invested than he began to preach with great fervour. In his time, he was regarded as the best preacher in Italy.

He was not very learned, though he had such a good grasp of all the sciences through experience, it seemed that he had studied them. When they heard him preach so loftily, all the learned friars who did not know him regarded him as the best philosopher and theologian in the world. Referring to the Scriptures and Sacred Theology, he handled philosophy so well in the pulpit that he astonished the world.

He preached in the main cities of Italy. His sermons almost always lasted three hours. He delighted his hearers so much that his preaching didn't seem to last even half an hour. Sometimes he had twenty five thousand people at his sermons. His voice was so resonant and fair that the person furthest away heard as if he were below the pulpit. He reprimanded them so strongly, that when people left his sermon, they went home astonished and quite frightened, and in such a state that they couldn't concentrate on temporal matters. He used to conduct the Forty Hours Prayer in a way that was better than that set up by Brother Giuseppe da Ferno. At each of the sessions, when the hour was up, he gave a short sermon, and had all the people embrace and be reconciled with one another. The Lord God gave him such power that there was no quarrel he couldn't resolve by leading people to the Prayer. When the Prayer was over, he had brought peace to the whole city.

At the end of his sermons, he always turned to the crucifix. He spoke to it with great fervour, sometimes for the space of an hour. He spoke in words that were so moving that there was no one - worldly, cruel, or hard though he may be - who would not weep most copiously. Where he preached, he put so much fear into the hearts of people that, being extremely frightened, they abandoned their shops and their work. Nothing was attended to except confession, Communion and the frequenting of the churches and fraternities. His fame was such that his name spread throughout Italy. When he went anywhere to preach, it was almost always because he had been asked by the city authorities, the Protector of the Order or His Holiness.

Through his sermons the Lord God produced the greatest fruits: the restitution of goods; the conversion of whores; many young ones left the world and became friars; the greatest reconciliations. This was particularly so on the Island of Sicily. He preached there for about three years in all the principal cities with so much acclaim that it seemed the time of the Messiah had returned. Although the cities and the regions where he preached were far apart, people came in small groups from all around. On feast days in particular, four or five thousand could be seen coming in from the region. The devotion and great fidelity of these people toward him was so strong that they brought out their

sick or possessed and put them down on the streets where he had to pass by. As he passed, almost all were cured with the sign of the cross.

It's impossible to enumerate the remarkable things he achieved regarding the restitution of goods, leaving concubines and other such enormous sins.

Thus the impartial grace of this holy man was evident in his preaching. He was finely skilled in his inventiveness. His enunciation was telling. His approach to things; his strong arguments in persuading and dissuading; his vehemence in reprimanding; his attack upon vices; his ability to strike the hearts and souls of sinners; his hammering of their hearts; his ability to bring them low; his submerging them in hell; his ability to make the virtues great; his encouragement of each person to follow the virtues; his ability to lift up the good ones to paradise - no pen could write it, nor could any tongue say how many this servant of God took out from the depth of hell and directed them along the way of the holy virtues.

He also had a most engaging presence and physical appearance. He wasn't very tall. He had a long memory, a gracious face, and a full, long beard. His voice was wonderfully resonant. I was one present in the city of Perugia when he was preaching, and heard him address the crucifix with a *fevorino* that lasted more than an hour. At the end, when everyone thought he'd have no breath left, he roared out in a voice that could have lifted the tiles off the roof, as they say. His companion said to me, "I have been his companion for many years and have heard him give some really terrifying sermons. But let me tell you, I've never heard anything as terrifying as this one!" His booming roar was heard outside the church as if it had come out the mouth of a cannon.

Traps were never in short supply for him. Many times he was given poison, and was protected miraculously by God. I witnessed this when he was preaching in a city in the Province of Saint Francis. Because of the severe reprimands he had given to certain dishonest persons, a small flask of poisoned wine was given to his companion in my presence. He was told, "Give this wine to the preacher, because he is very good. It's *vernaccia*." His companion answered, "Will it be good for Mass?" The evil doer said, "It's no good for Mass. Give it to the preacher." Because of these words, as a prudent man, he suspected it might be poisoned. When the doctor came he conducted an experiment and found that it was a very potent poison.

I can't count how many snares were set for this servant of God. May these I put down suffice in order to know how holy he was in tolerating patiently so many evils for the love of God, and how dear his life was to God who preserved him in so many dangers.

I will not dwell on how zealous he was about the observance of the Rule and holy prayer. Although he preached as usual, he did four or five hours of mental and vocal prayer, usually at night.

Finally, it pleased the Lord God to reward this hard working servant of his. He preached in Rome at Saint Lawrence in Damaso, and when he finished the sermon, an obedience came for him to go to preach in Napoli. The servant of God set out on the journey, but became gravely ill because he was old and not very healthy. He was so ill it that was necessary for him to return to Rome, where he deteriorated. Well disposed and full of merits, after receiving all the most holy sacraments, that happy soul passed away to its Creator. He was buried in the friary at Rome.

To the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his most sweet Mother, and of Father Saint Francis. Amen. [III, 157-167]

Which rendered terror and brought reverence

808. The Superiors of the Order imposed on Matteo da Leonessa the office of preaching. He attended to this on almost every feast day. In preaching, he had the outstanding grace of bringing about reconciliations, a grace in which his different talents concurred.

He was learned, and his sharp intellect helped him to reason convincingly, while he was able to communicate well. God worked through this in outstanding ways, to bring about effects that Matteo often begged from him with penance and prayers. Matteo was of tall, of dark complexion, with a beard diffused with grey. He was lean and austere in appearance, an impression that was reinforced by his patched, rough habit and his bare feet, all scratched and muddled. This appearance put people off, but also prompted reverence. He was utterly charming in his ways and exuded charity and piety. He was so tenderly compassionate to the miserable, that he was loved by all. No one knew how to refuse him anything he requested. He was known as a very good religious and was commonly regarded as a saint. Anyone who kissed his clothing considered himself blessed. He was highly favoured by God, as was evident in his virtuous actions and in the wonderful works God did through him.

Because of his skilfulness and effectiveness, he was often sought out by people from diverse parts, to the extent that he was compelled to be involved in this office of charity for most of the year. He did this very readily, and seemed to be unaffected by the effort and inconvenience involved such works of charity. [VII, 539]

Preachers have to be cherished

809. Bonaventura da Montereale was very zealous about giving good example to seculars. He often told the Friars about the example of Father Saint Francis, who blessed the friars who gave good example and cursed those who did the opposite. Thus, when the friars told him about the great fruit which one of our preachers produced in Perugia, he was completely filled with joy. For many

days he frequently had them repeat the great things God worked through that preacher. He listened to them with hands joined and tearful eyes, looking as if he was in paradise. He said that preachers have to be appreciated, because they are instruments of the Holy Spirit. Nor can anything be done that is as acceptable to God as the conversion of souls to Jesus Christ through good example and good teaching. [III, 319]

Let them preach Christ crucified

810. Preachers are forbidden to use nonsense, tales, poetry, stories or other vain, superfluous, curious, useless things, including harmful sciences, in their sermons. Rather, after the example of Paul the Apostle, let them preach Christ crucified, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God. Nor should they cite anyone other than Christ - whose authority prevails over all the persons and reasoning of the world - and the holy doctors. [C, 111]

Evangelical preachers

811. This blessed office is excellent and most acceptable to Christ, our God, who demonstrated this when he wanted to fulfil it himself with the great fervour of his divine charity for the salvation of our souls. He proposed to us the most wholesome teaching of Gospel. We want to imprint better in the hearts of preachers the norm and the way they should behave, and so we add and impose that they use Sacred Scripture, mainly the New Testament and especially the Sacred Gospels, in their sermons. Thus they should replicate it and inculcate it in their preaching in some way. Let them do this so that they may announce Christ crucified more worthily, preach the kingdom of God, and work fervently for the conversion and salvation of souls. Thus, being Gospel preachers we also make Gospel people. [C, 117]

The vices and the virtues

812. Let the friars put aside all vain and useless questions and opinions, lewd songs, and subtleties intelligible to only a few. Let them preach according to the example of the most holy Precursor John the Baptist, the most holy Apostles and other holy preachers inflamed with divine love. Let them follow the example of our most gracious Saviour, who said: *Do penance, the kingdom of God is near*. They should keep to what our Seraphic Father counsels in the Rule: *Let them preach about vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity of word*. [C, 118]

813. In those times the Capuchins preached the commandments of God, the Gospel and the Sacred Scriptures. They condemned vices very severely and exalted and magnified the holy virtues. This greatly amazed all Christianity, because it was a new kind of preaching. They did it with so much fervour that they inflamed everyone.

For at that time nothing was preached except the theological questions of Scotus and Saint Thomas. Preachers always started by talking about dreams. They said things such as: "Last night there appeared to me...etc." They preached about philosophy and the fables of Aesop, and always concluded by singing some verses of Petrarch or Ariosto. The Gospel or the Sacred Scripture were never mentioned. It was happening like this when the Capuchins came along.

The Capuchins came preaching the Scriptures with fervour, and if preachers from other Orders wanted to be heard they had to adapt themselves to preaching the Sacred Scriptures [IV, 159], and to leaving aside all their questions, subtleties and philosophies. If they didn't, they preached to empty pews. Thus the Capuchins gave occasion for the Scriptures to be preached [IV, 193]. This was universally welcomed, so that if the Gospel wasn't being preached, people didn't want to listen. Thus preachers were compelled to forget about fables and to preach the Gospel of Christ if they wanted to please the congregation [IV, 44].

814. The great they bore fruit in the church of God was that from then on everyone preached the Scriptures. [IV, 160]

815. Others came out to preach the Sacred Scriptures, especially the Gospel. With apostolic ardour they threatened with hell and proposed the mercy of Christ. The General, Brother Matteo, had given everyone, even lay friars, permission to give talks to seculars to teach them to do penance for their sins, lead them to observe the holy precepts of God, and to frequent the sacraments. [VII, 74]

The abundant fruit

816. No one can describe the abundant fruit those first Capuchins produced through their preaching. [IV, 45]

All Christianity woke up

817. It was a wonderful thing, that all Christianity woke up at their preaching. Where at first people went to Communion hardly once a year, now they began to go more often. Many associations arose, whose members gave excellent example in frequenting the most holy sacraments and dedicating themselves to works of mercy. For in that time the Christian way of life was quite run down. However, because of the preaching of the Capuchins, many lords, gentlemen and distinguished persons began to lead a spiritual life. Among the people many made restitution for past wrongs, and many were converted to the spiritual life. [IV, 193]

Dances, games, plays

818. Many, especially the simple preachers, took delight in putting an end to the dances, games, plays and other gatherings that dishonoured Christ. The reputation of the Capuchins in censuring these things had grown so much, that when people heard they were coming, they often fled and left the dances, tore up cards, and stopped other such games themselves. Often they stood up on some prominent place in the middle of a dance and began to preach with such vehemence that they turned the so-called feast into an occasion for weeping and tears. [IV ,45]

A great multitude of demons

819. Once Alberto da Napoli saw a great multitude of demons leave a city because of the sermons of a Capuchin preacher. He asked the Lord, "Oh my Lord, what does this multitude of fleeing demons mean?" He answered, "These are the fruits of a preacher whose preaching has been so acceptable that many have been led back to penance. They were possessed by those demons you saw." [III, 310]

Behold, God is still in Ferrara

820. Pursuing his vocation among the Capuchins, Brother Giacomo da Molfetta produced great fruit through his sermons. He was a very subtle and strict interpreter of the canons and cases of conscience. Since he was contradicted by many other religious, it was often necessary for him to debate publicly.

To remedy the scandals given by the heretics, he preached at Forli where he started a holy enterprise called the shop of Christ (*la bottega di Cristo*). Many alms were left there and was business transacted for the benefit of the poor.

Later, one Advent he was sent by Iesi, the General, into Ferrara to do the same thing. But there had been adverse criticism of him, and he found that no one would provide a room or food, or a church in which to preach. Furthermore, he had not been invited by anyone, simply commissioned by the General, who suspected there was some malaise there that he could cure through Catholic preaching.

His companion was Brother Raffaele d'Asti, a lay friar of the Province of Genova, a religious who was greatly distinguished because of his many virtues. He went into the city and found a room, empty except for two bare pallets. He found a church, too, where the preaching could take place, since the main churches already had their own preachers. But Brother James did not waver, even though no one was willing to provide for their needs. Trusting in God, he said, "Let's go and see if God is still in Ferrara."

At the time the Bishop's Vicar was Ugo Boncompagni da Bologna, who later became Gregory XIII. Brother Raphael, the preacher's companion, went to ask

him for his permission to preach, showing him their obedience. The Vicar questioned him about a few things, then said he had thought they were heretics and had preached heresy in Forli. This false information, designed to arouse suspicion, had come from covert heretics who feared that he had come to Ferrara to confute them as he had done in Forli. They employed this stratagem to block him.

To set the Vicar straight, Brother Raphael thought the best remedy would be to invite him to the sermon on behalf of the preacher without telling the preacher what the Vicar had said. The Vicar accepted the invitation and went.

Brother James' first sermon was about predestination in which he refuted the Lutheran heresies most learnedly. The Vicar was very pleased with this, and visited the preacher to encourage him, and gave him his support from then on.

When Brother James went to give this first sermon, he was brought into a room where there was nothing to sit on and no fire to warm him up. After he had preached, he went back there again and, found that wood had been put there since. There were mattresses and something to eat, along with all the other necessary provisions. So then Brother James said, "See, God is still in Ferrara!"

That Advent he preached ten sermons almost every day against heresies, and they produced great fruit. The above mentioned Vicar wanted him to preach them again after Advent in the Cathedral, where he could be heard by more people. [VI, 250]

Have you danced? Ah, the fire will come

821. When a religious was preaching at Mondovi against dancing, he frightened the people. The governor came to him to ask him permission to have a private dance in the home of a nobleman during the days of *carnevale*. However, he refused him most ardently. He said he must not, and could not grant him permission as if he were a Bishop or a Superior. The governor went away without another word, and held the dance privately. The preacher heard about it and said in the pulpit, "Have you danced? Ah, fire will come from heaven upon the castle, and it will burn it down!"

Before this he had preached in Asti and had the women bring all their vain trinkets - masks, veils, cards and other similar things. He made a small mountain of them and set fire to it. Meanwhile a German took a feather fan - *un piumazzo* made of precious feathers arranged in a bunch and perfumed with scent, which the women of Asti carry, covering their faces with it. A canon said to the preacher, "Look, Father. He's taking a feather fan away." The preacher said, "Let him go. God will chastise him in a few days." In fact, three or four days later he died miserably. This frightened everyone. [VI, 557]

He is an angel of God

822. The words of Francesco d'Iesi had a lot of influence with seculars, and God brought forth wonderful fruit from it. The following case demonstrates this. When he was Provincial in the Province of Saint Francis the whole region around Norcia was up in arms, with factions formed that were ready to cut each other to pieces. Francesco was on the road, and as he drew near Norcia the inhabitants heard of the arrival of this holy man, and went to petition a meeting with him. They begged him to come and help them in their great need, and he kindly condescended to their petitions. In Norcia they even gave him a room in Saint Benedict's, where he gave two sermons. However, since the crowd was so big it could not be contained in the church, he gave four sermons in the square. Through these he made peace again between all the people, with more than a hundred reconciliations being brought about. So they had a feast with solemn joy and fireworks, ringing bells and canon fire. They said: "This man is an angel of God." [VI, 131]

This same way of catechising

823. The Provincial gave Bernardino da Monte dell'Olmo an obedience to preach and assigned him a companion. Brother Bernardino began to fulfil his task with fervour and amazing diligence, so that it seemed he wanted to make up for the lack of it in the past. For he passed through the Marches without stopping at the friaries, preaching all the while.

When they arrived at the gates of the cities or regions, he and his companion would kneel down and cry out "Jesus!" in a loud voice. Preaching as he went along the main streets, he would exhort the people to do penance, warning of their imminent judgment and of hell. Stirred by the novelty of his crude habit, his unusual way of preaching, and the wonderful force of his fiery words, a great number of people would follow him in wonderment until they arrived at a church or some square. There he would give them his prepared sermon, which produced the most abundant fruit.

To tear up the shoots of heresy which had contaminated all of Italy because of the wars and other miseries of the times, he began to go purposely to houses, here or there, under the pretext of lodging. Taking up the occasion to discuss, he exposed and confounded the errors. He taught Catholic doctrine and exhorted them to flee from their sins. He gave them holy texts for the good ordering of individual souls and of families. As for well-off people, he would have them open their chests in his presence (which, because of their great devotion, they did not decline to bring to him). When he saw a coat or a petticoat, or another item of clothing, he would say, "Oh my, poor thing! Do you see this worn out clothing you no longer use? It cries out to God against you! Up you get and give it to the poor! It will cover over your sins." They did this willingly.

When he left he would be followed by numerous people, sometimes from three, four or five regions. He would make them line up in procession and respond while he chanted the litanies. Knowing that many of them did not know the basic elements of Christian doctrine, he would lead them onto a little mountain, and there intone, word by word, the ten divine commandments, the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary*, the *Creed*, and so on. By having them repeat the words after him, he managed to imprint these things on their memories. To teach them to have recourse to God, he made them cry out in a loud voice, "Mercy! My Lord, forgive us our sins! Holy Mother of God, pray for us!" To remove the sin of blasphemy, he also had them cry, "May God be blessed! May Jesus be praised!" He made them do other similar acclamations, which moved their simplicity to compunction, such was their need of spiritual food.

He continued to observe this same way of catechising the crowds if a good occasion presented itself to him, even when he went on visitation as Provincial.

Other preachers and friars of that time did the same. They had all learnt this from Brother Matteo. [VII, 397]

The work of the little orphans

824. The fruit Giovanni da Fano produced by divine mercy in the two cities of Bergamo and Brescia was wonderful. In Brescia, with the holy lord Girolamo Miani, founder of the *Somaschini*, he set up the orphanage for boys (*orfanelli*) called "Mercy." He got some of them together and had them stay in the choir while he preached. At the right moment he had them cry out, "Mercy!" to move the people to show mercy to them. The plan worked well, for the city was moved so much that a house was given to them near the gate of Saint John, and they have been there ever since.

Later the orphanage for girls (*orfanelle*) was located near the hospital for the incurable, founded by Brother Francesco of Milan. He was a most learned and fruitful preacher in his time, and because of his sermons, some noblemen were converted to lead a spiritual life. They became the instigators of many good works done in that city. Milan used to be distinguished by enmities and factions, but is now illustrious by the holy works done there, started by those first nobles.

With the preaching of the Capuchins around the year 1570, the ringing of the bell for evening prayer began. When it rang, families gathered together in their homes to pray to God. The Capuchin preacher who preached this and introduced it into Brescia, did the same in Milan under the very holy Archbishop, Cardinal Charles Borromeo. [V, 218]

The holy institution of the Prayer of the Forty Hours

825. Through that holy man, Brother Giuseppe da Ferno, the pious institution of the Forty Hours Prayer had its origin. There were two ways it was done. One was by having the prayers continuous but changing churches forty times, once for each Forty Hours. The second was by holding the Forty Hours once a year. In this way, its use was extended further than at first, and it was put into practice in many places. It spread by means of other Capuchin preachers throughout Italy, and to France and Flanders. [VI, 397]

826. The Forty Hours Prayer, prized so much today, was devised by the Capuchins, by the venerable Brother Giuseppe da Ferno in Milan. Moreover many worthy arrangements were made regarding the care of hospitals, especially the care of orphans and other pious works. This was because everyone was stirred up by the preaching of the Capuchins. [IV, 194]

They set up associations

827. Liberalino da Col Val d'Elsa said, "If something is not set up so that they can keep their ardour and frequent the most holy sacraments, once the preacher has departed, all the teaching they have gained through his preaching will quickly disappear into oblivion. However, ardour can be maintained through associations." [III, 330]

828. Onorio da Montegranaro said fruit was not borne from preaching unless some association was set up. This leaves people some form of devotion through which their spirit is restored, and they continue with the most holy sacraments. In particular, he set up associations of Our Lady because he was very devoted to her. [III, 113]

The glory of God and the salvation of souls

829. When the friars preach, let them neither desire nor seek anything other than the glory of God and the salvation of souls redeemed with the most precious blood of the spotless Lamb, blessed Christ Jesus. [C, 118]

830. It is prohibited for preachers to receive meals. They should live as poor friars and beggars, just as they have willingly promised for love of Christ. Above all let them guard against every kind of avarice, so that preaching Christ freely and sincerely, they may produce fruit in greater abundance. Because of this it is prohibited for them to quest when preaching, either for themselves or for the friary. Then it will be clear to all that, following apostolic teaching, they do not seek their own desires, but those of Jesus Christ. [C, 115]

Not for temporal gain

831. They received nothing from seculars except a little bread, which they ate at some well or after withdrawing into some hidden place. [II, 188]

832. Ludovico da Reggio showed his charity in holy sermons, with which he inflamed all the main cities of Calabria in the love of God and in the desire for salvation. At the same time his sermons greatly inspired affection towards the Congregation of Capuchins. The servant of God did not spare himself in the efforts he made, and he was sought by regions, castles and villas. He preached to them kindly and with such ardour that it seemed the preaching of the holy Apostles had been renewed in the Province of Calabria. He stirred up the whole country by his new way of preaching, the novelty of his habit, and the holiness and good conduct that could be seen in him. People realised that he did not preach for temporal gain but, inflamed by the Holy Spirit, sought nothing but the honour of Jesus Christ and the salvation of souls, exhorting them to leave their sins, observe the commandments of God and attend the most holy sacraments. His impact was such that everyone wanted to hear him, as if he were a messenger of God. [III, 204]

833. Eusebio d'Ancona never liked to accept food when he went preaching. He would take only a particle of the simple fare that was sent him and leave the rest, especially dainty foodstuffs. He said a dainty food does not go with the Capuchin habit. To show austerity by wearing the habit in the pulpit and then to eat dainty food in one's room is what the hypocrites do. They make a display of holiness to gain money and then sit down to a convivial meal. [III, 122]

834. Ludovico da Foligno, wanted no one to provide for him when he had finished preaching. Instead he went with his companion to quest a little bread and then retired into some forest where there was some water. There he joyfully ate the bread dipped in water, along with some onion or garlic or truly pungent herbs. [III, 287]

Other forms of apostolate

835. The intention of our first Fathers was to imitate Father Saint Francis, who distanced himself from the world as far as possible, and usually started new houses two miles from the city. So as not to have occasion to get involved with the world, they put in the Constitutions that the friars should not hear the Confessions of seculars. Nor should they go to the dead or accept burials. It's not that these things aren't good. It's because we want to live according to our Rule, so we are not bound to do these things, nor do we hold these offices in the Church of God. Our obligation is to pray, and to preach with good example and sound, Catholic doctrine. Those other things are the responsibilities of secular clerics, and we can't get involved without displeasing them. There have oftentimes been the greatest scandals because Religious, through some

privilege, have sought to work in the care of souls and have greatly scandalised others. [IV, 42]

The rabid envy of the heretics

836. Brother Ludovico da Saxony was invested as a teacher after just finishing the course of theology, and was sent to Appenzell. The Nuncio gave him unqualified authority to preach, confess, absolve and reconcile. He was most agreeable, although he suffered beyond imagining, and his companion lost most of his toenails because of the terrible cold.

The Commissary went there in February. He, too, endured great suffering, for he had to walk barefoot through a great deal of snow and ice, and had to pass through the territory of heretics, who willingly would have eaten him alive. He chose a site to build a friary, and drew the design of the building on the snow, which lay on the ground as thick as the height of a man.

There Brother Ludovico remained to preach during Lent. He heard confessions until Easter, more than one thousand one hundred Catholics coming along. There were a good hundred heretics, too, who were converted and received Communion in the Catholic way. However, he wasn't content just to preach there, but went through other regions where there were Catholics, his efforts always producing great fruit.

He was a displeasing torment to the obstinate heretics, especially those that were preachers. You can well imagine this if you are aware of the frenzied envy that heretics and inventors and promoters of heresies can exhibit. In fact two preachers agreed to kill him while he was in a region where he had preached with great consolation to the Catholics. When he was returning from there to Appenzell, the two waited in some woods he had to pass through. They jumped out on him, but a Catholic peasant came by unexpectedly, and they only had enough time to insult with their words, before being constrained to let him continue on his journey. The *Signoria* came to learn of the case, arraigned them, and then banished them. [VI, 461]

Many heretics were converted

837. Thus it was that Brother Ludovico brought peace to Appenzell and completed the friary, all the while going about and doing wonderful work for the people. On the feast of Assumption of Our Lady more than three hundred and thirty persons received Communion - something then no longer seen or heard of in that country. It continues to profit in virtue through divine grace. Many heretics were converted, and many who had thought they were walking securely on the way of heaven, began to become aware of their error and change their minds. Many of those who were weak in faith became confirmed and established in it and many that had been years and years without confessing, went to confess to the friars. Some, religious as well as seculars, came more

than a day's travel to confess to them. Many made general confessions. Fruits born like this are still being collected in great abundance. [VI, 466]

Among the non-believers

838. The conversion of non-believers was close to the heart of our Seraphic Father. For the glory of God and for the salvation of non-believers, we order, according to the Rule, that if any perfect friars, ardent with love of the blessed Christ and with zeal for their Catholic faith, should want by divine inspiration to go to preach to non-believers, let them have recourse to their Vicars Provincial or the Father Vicar General. If they are judged suitable by them, let them go on this very arduous undertaking with their permission and blessing. But the subjects should not presumptuously judge themselves suitable for such a difficult and dangerous enterprise. Rather, with all fear and humility, let them submit their desire to the judgment of their Superiors.

A distinction can be made between the non-believers. There are those who are very gentle, flexible and disposed easily to receive the Christian faith like those newly discovered by the Spanish or Portuguese in the Indies. And then there are the Turks and *Agareni* who sustain and defend their cursed sect only with weapons and by inflicting torture.

Let the Superiors not consider the small number of friars nor grieve about the departure of good ones. However, casting every care and uneasiness upon the One who continually takes care of us, let them act in all things by following what the Spirit of God dictates. Let them arrange everything with charity, which does nothing evil. [C, 143]

The liberation of slaves

839. Guided by a great zeal for piety, the Lord Guardians of the Arch-confraternity of the Gonfalon, wanted to be involved in the pious work of rescuing slaves. They not only sought the liberation of the slaves but also the consolation and the salvation of their souls. So they sent redeemers to Algiers with the permission of Gregory XIII. Among them were two professors of the Order of Friars Minor called Capuchins. They would not only rescue the slaves, but they could and would help them spiritually: hearing confessions and administering the Church's sacraments to them; consoling the afflicted; consolidating those weak in faith; confirming the doubtful and vacillating; and instructing those who needed teaching. Where there was the greatest danger, they showed themselves to be the most diligent ministers of Christ. Those who went were solicitous about the freedom and the salvation of the souls of the slaves, enlightening them with word and example. They also did other useful things both to edify the others and to exalt the Catholic faith. Finally touched by the contagion of the pestilence, to the great groaning, sorrow and tears of the slaves, they fell asleep in peace. [VI, 477]

Let us go to offer our life to Christ

840. For many months, on every occasion that they met, they talked about the favours our Lord God gave them, and how he inspired them interiorly. They began to discuss among themselves about everyone going away to the land of the infidels to preach to them the Christian faith and to die for it. They said to one another, "The Lord has sent us so many tribulations for no other reason than to make the world a hindrance for us. The whole world despises us as being useless members of society. We have suffered so much that we have nothing left now but our miserable lives. Let us go to offer them to Jesus Christ. He died for us, so let us die for love of him, and to convert others to the true faith." [II, 215]

SOWERS OF GOODNESS

The Capuchin Friars wrote dazzling pages of heroism in the history of Christian charity.

To men struck by suffering, to those on whom the hope of salvation no longer smiled, to all the suffering ones and derelicts they spoke with a comforting word, and served them with dedication and generosity.

In the lazaret and the hospitals they spread the joyous serenity of the Franciscan spirit. They taught everyone the perfect joy of knowing how to suffer and how to die.

These poor men were rich in help and comfort not only towards languishing humanity but also to hungry humanity, the abandoned or needy poor, and towards afflicted and desolate souls.

At the service of the infected

841. It pleased the Lord God that in 1523 a great pestilence should spread through the city of Camerino and many parts of Christendom. Brother Matteo was in the Zocolanti Fathers' convent at Camerino at the time. He was aflame with an immense desire to die for Christ, as he saw that great servant of God, Saint Bernardino da Siena, do. He went off to the Father Guardian of that friary. With great fervour and tears he bid his Guardian to give him the merit of holy obedience and, with his blessing, let him go to serve the infected. The Guardian understood Brother Matteo's great desire, and also knew very well about his good and holy life. He knew about Matteo's exemplary conversation, and that he was a man proven in the spiritual life. The Guardian gave him his blessing and the merit of holy obedience.

With great joy and solicitude that was a wonderful example to the city, Brother Matteo immediately went out among the infected to serve them and provide them with bodily food and other needs. More importantly though, he served them with spiritual food, exhorting them to receive the most holy sacraments

and to give back goods stolen from others. He provided for the needs of many who were abandoned. When there was no one to bury them, he gave them burial with his own hands. He heard their confessions and administered all the other sacraments to them. Then at the time of death, he comforted them with astonishing tenderness. The example and service which this servant of God gave in the city were so good and inspiring, that he was regarded by everyone as a saint. [II, 102]

What are we doing?

842. In 1528 and 1529 there was the worst of pestilences and the worst of famines. I know this because I had the plague on my thigh, and I remember everything very well. In those dreadful times one could see nothing but people who'd died of hunger, or the plague, or were killed by the worst kinds of men or soldiers. Things were in such a way that wherever one went, there were corpses and wolves eating them. It was terrible to have to travel, because there were so few people. Many cities had been burned down and whole regions were abandoned.

In that time the humble Capuchins were at peace, because all the persecutions ceased and there was something else to think about. The only concern the Orders had was those who were sick and those who had died. It seemed that the sky wept. Because of this, the fire of love that burned in those servants of God could not stay concealed. A whisper began among them "What are we doing? Now is the time to give our lives for Jesus Christ, when so many poor ones, our brothers, are dying in a desperate state, seeing themselves abandoned by everyone. And the majority die without the sacraments. Let us go to find Brother Ludovico and with his blessing, if it pleases him, let us go to these places and serve those infected." After making it known to everyone, they went off to Camerino to the friary of Colmonzone.

Brother Ludovico knew it was the God's work that his servants should be so eager to do such blessed work involving so much danger to their own lives. He showed great joy over it, and kept them one day and one night. In that time together, they prayed most fervently. They commended themselves ardently to our Lord Jesus Christ so that he would deign to protect them in such a difficult work and not let them be deceived over this venture.

The following morning Father Ludovico celebrated the Mass of the Holy Spirit and gave Communion to them all. When he finished the Mass he gave them a most beautiful sermon. He said this:

"Blessed sons and brothers, prior to this, I myself was involved in a similar undertaking to serve the infected. In 1523 a great pestilence came to the villas of Camerino. I began to serve them. From experience I know the dangers there are. Therefore do not trust in yourselves. Rather, trust only in the Lord God, who may have to

deliver you from all the temptations of the devil. Because of this be careful to go always two by two, because you will have to work with all sorts of people. You will have ample opportunities to do wrong. However, I say this to you, because I have experienced it myself: those who go with the right intention are marvellously helped by God. Strive at night to spend one part of it in the praise of God. Say your Office and Mass in the morning. During the day you will not have time. Watch yourselves. Do not keep money for anyone, nor get involved with any sort of goods. Rather only attend to winning souls. Know, too, that to offer your lives for the salvation of others is a kind of martyrdom and is very acceptable to the Divine Majesty. Therefore be united in your minds with Jesus and because of his simple love, go and do this work of love. And if you die there, you will be most sure of your salvation."

When Brother Ludovico said these and many other things, those servants of God began to weep. Crying, they all said with a loud voice, "Now may it please my Lord that I may die for his love in order to serve others just as he has died for me. However, my sins are so numerous, I don't believe I am worthy of such great good. But, my Father, pray God for us that he may keep us so that we do not offend him."

Brother Ludovico answered, "It is not fitting that I rest while my sons remain in so many labours." So he accompanied them, and took a companion and went away to another part to serve those infected.

Once they received the blessing, they all went away joyfully to where they were assigned by Brother Ludovico.

The people's felt great joy when they realised they had two Capuchins in their region. They thought all their sickness would go away. When the friars entered the countryside they started in one area and in a short while they had visited the infected. They assessed their needs and provided each one's. Hence they confessed the one who was getting worse. Some were dying of hunger. So they went to the rich and to get provisions for their necessities. Many poor girls without father or mother were in danger of coming to grief. These they placed in convents and other safe places. Some who died had no one to bury them because of their poverty, so the servants of God buried them. When they were at the point of death, the friars comforted with great fervour those who were sorry for their sins and hoped for the mercy of God. They made their will and arranged their affairs, and so that they would return the goods taken from others. Those poor infected ones had faith in the friars as they would in angels of God. They did not administer any sacrament but Confession, which is necessary for salvation. Because of their good words many made restitution. Many poor people, who would have died like irrational animals without

Confession and other things necessary for salvation, went to Confession. They repented. Then seeing those servants of God before them, they died joyfully.

The clamour was so great, that their fame spread throughout Italy. Those servants of God made such an impression on the hearts of all those people that they are remembered even to this day.

Their noble example benefited the poor Congregation very much. For that very illustrious Lady Duchess of Camerino, Catherine Cibo wrote to her uncle, Pope Clement, about these heroic deeds when she heard about them. She said that those Capuchins, to whom His Holiness had granted the brief, were all saints. She told him about the things they did. She seized on the least little thing to write to him enthusiastically about the abject Capuchins. The Pontiff was very happy about this, and shortly after granted them the Bull. It was reported that, while chatting with his associates, His Holiness said, "See how much good we have done to listen to those poor Capuchin Religious! See what my niece writes to me about them!" Then he had it read publicly.

It pleased the Lord that the friars should continue in that service, and, as they themselves said later, they were preserved by God. They said, "We have been like so many wooden blocks. The slightest improper thought never passed through our minds." This was something remarkable. They worked with all sorts of people day and night, male and female, with girls in houses where there was no one else but them. But the friars seemed like angels, without bodies. They said, "The one who does not have a very strong will and is not protected by God should not take up such tasks. Unless a friar has been well proven, we would never advise him to begin such an enterprise. There are too many dangerous opportunities! Some threw us purses full of *scudi* and said, 'Father, do with them as you please.' We answered them, 'We are not permitted to keep money for anyone. Nor can we give it out or receive it. And our Rule doesn't even want us to touch it.' Then the sick person would begin to call out something or other and say, 'Now these are true servants of God. During plagues there is large scale theft, and those who burying the dead and working for the infected do so because of their greed for money. These servants of God do it because of God's love and die in order to help the rest of us. May you be blessed!' "

It became known everywhere that these holy Religious didn't want anything, but did everything for the love of God. Because of this many trusted them as they would their own children.

It pleased the Lord God that the plagues should end in 1530. As I understood it, it was said that more than a third of the populace died, and in many parts more than half. The plague was quite universal throughout Europe, and most of the world.

Together our Capuchins returned to Brother Ludovico. They told each other the great things God had worked through them, and how God had preserved them so that none of them ever had so much as a headache, but they were always healthy and lively. Many regretted not dying; but with great joy they all thanked God. One day the Lady Duchess went personally to the house where they were and asked to see them all. She said to them, "You don't have to fear any more that your Congregation might fail. For your merits are so many it is impossible that God would abandon this holy Reform." [II, 222]

Let the friars serve

843. It is a sweet, just and proper thing for those who do not have an earthly love to die for the one who died for us on the cross. There we order that in times of plague the friars may serve according to the way their Vicars organise things. In such situations let them strive to be careful and discreet about charity. [C, 89]

May God render you merit for it

844. It happened that a great pestilence spread through the city of Reggio. For many days the holy man, Brother Giacomo da Reggio, laboured more than usual in holy prayer, praying the Lord God to put it into the heart of his Guardian to give him permission to go to serve those who were stricken. His wish was granted. One day the Guardian called him and said to him, "Now, Brother James, where's your zeal? How many poor people there are dying with no one to give them a sip of water! Off you go! I've decided that you can go and serve them." When the servant of God heard this, he was thrilled with excitement and could not contain it. Kneeling down he kissed the hands of the Father Guardian and said to him, "May God reward you with merit for this, my Father, for you have deemed to reward me with such merit, I who am the lowliest and most useless person there is." He called on a particular friend of his to whom he told all his secrets. He said to him privately, "You know, Brother, ever since I heard about the plague in the city of Reggio, I've wearied myself praying to the Lord constantly to give me this grace. He has kindly granted my wish, and has revealed to me that I must die there." [III, 45]

He desired to die for Christ

845. Bonaventura da Cremona told me he was once in a city where there was a great plague. This was a long time ago, and I can't remember where the city was, although I do remember that he told me about it in our house at Forlì. Well, with his Superiors' permission he went into the middle of that plague and did great good and bore great fruit for souls, administering the most holy sacraments to them. He served the many who were abandoned. He buried the many dead who, because of poverty, had no one else to bury them. His own constant desire was to die for Christ. [III, 241]

Wonderfully he consoled the troubled

846. Brother Girolamo da Novara always talked about good things so that he could edify people. He was wonderful in consoling troubled people who sought him out, because his words came from a heart totally on fire with God. He spoke to them with great feeling. Thus, once he tried to console a lady at the friary in Brescia by speaking about the Passion of our Lord. But he got so choked up with tears and internal feelings that he was compelled to leave abruptly without saying anything else. He left the lady very edified, and as were those with her. [VI, 377]

He medicated their sores

847. The servant of God, Giustino da Panicale, ministered to the plague stricken. With the permission of his Superiors, he plunged into the middle of the great plague right at its onset. He brought great benefit to the bodies and souls of the poor infected ones. He had them go to Confession to his companion, medicated their sores, and buried many of them who had no one to bury them because of their poverty. [III, 432]

Many died in these acts of charity

848. After this, in the same period (1576), Brother Paolo da Salò followed the plague to many places across Italy. He was especially active in Milan, where the Capuchins ministered with great charity, and had been given complete temporal and spiritual responsibility for the lazaret. They had full authority to hear Confessions, and the civil authority required to punish offenders. This latter was necessary in order to curb fornication in that mix of two thousand people, for it was easy to get away with this unless strict rules were applied. This was harmful not only to the soul, but also to the body because in this way people gave the plague to one another. Therefore the vigilance of those in charge was the cause of great good.

When the plague died down in Milan and spread to Brescia, that same friar, Brother Paolo da Salò, supervised the lazaret at Brescia too. Two or three years later, when the plague went to Marseilles, he found himself in Marseilles, and carried out the same office of charity with the greatest fruit. He also converted some heretics who were at the point of death. In these ministries of charity many friars died. [VI, 343]

They began in the hospitals

849. In order to observe the *Testament*, the friars began to serve lepers in the hospitals, as was seen in Rome, Napoli, Genova and in other parts. However this was especially notable in Saint Giacomo degl'Incurabilis in Rome. This hospital was almost abandoned, but when the Capuchins went there, they

restored it to such good order that it came to be regarded as the best hospital in Italy at that time. They collected so much by way of alms that the number of rooms was increased by more than a half. The alms-giving was on such a scale that after timber was collected there were sometimes as many as five hundred beds, and all were filled by the sick. All the ministering was done by the Capuchins, to the great edification of the whole of Christendom. I was told by the Fathers who took care of the hospital, and witnessed for myself, that at times they received sums of twenty thousand *scudi* in alms. The hospital was restored to such great cleanliness, good order and governance that many gentlemen and lords had themselves brought to the hospital to enjoy that service and be taught about the things of the soul by the venerable servants of God.

They ministered to the sick day and night, and had them first go to Confession and receive Communion. Then, when they had recovered from their illnesses, they all went away converted. At meal times, spiritual lessons were always read. Mass was said for them every day, and often they there was a sermon.

The friars' zeal to serve the lepers was so great, that very many of them sought permission from their Superiors to serve in that ministry. Many remained there, and died saintly deaths. [IV, 196]

They are my library

850. Francesco Tittelmans worked willingly at the humblest tasks for the relief of the poor sick and to keep the dirty places clean. He washed bandages, brought food, swept up, and did other tasks with such great fervour and care that he seemed like another Saint Francis. [III, 173]

851. He was greatly admired because of this, and was visited by many ultramontane Fathers, who knew he was held in high esteem in the Order. Now they saw him deprived of books, like a simple brother, barefoot and dressed in a habit of *arbaschio*. He served those infirm poor people with so much love that those Fathers asked him with great admiration, "Oh Father, how were you able to give up study completely?" The servant of God answered them, "I have taken up the work that our Seraphic Father Saint Francis taught me. See, I have exchanged my Augustines, Jeromes and Chrysostoms for these people. They are my library now. I serve these poor people commended to us so much by the Lord God. [II, 281]

He was the comfort of everyone

852. Ludovico da Stroncone lifted up his hands to heaven when it pleased the Lord God that his Superiors placed him at the service of the hospital. Thanking God, he said, "Now I see that the Lord wants me to exercise myself in the virtue of charity towards others."

In the hospital he took on the worst task there was, preparing bandages for the lepers. There was the holy man, wearing an apron, with scissors in his hand, cutting, sewing and adjusting the lepers' bandages! As a result, those poor patients in the hospital never asked for anyone except Brother Ludovico while he was there in the ministry of healing. When he had dispensed the bandages, he went about with a joyful face comforting them one by one, asking them if they had any needs.

He was in that ministry without a break for fourteen years. It was amazing that while he was surrounded by those horrendous bandages all the time, and especially during the hot extremes of summer, no one ever heard him complain. Nor did he ever seek to be transferred. When the lepers were being treated, he went about comforting them one by one with so much love on his face that he seemed like an angel of God. I was there many times. All you could hear were the voices of the poor sick people calling for him: "Brother Ludovico! Where is Brother Ludovico?" He was the refuge of each one. One task he had was to read while the sick ate and to bless the table and say Grace. He said Mass every morning for the sick in the hospital.

The service of this holy man was so acceptable to God and to the people that, when the hospital was almost destroyed and abandoned because of bad management, he restored it to good order. It was the best hospital in Rome. It was kept so clean and the medicine was administered so carefully, that many gentlemen and noble persons, went there when they were sick to be comforted and attended by that venerable Father. I often heard them say that in summer there were so many sick, they put three beds together, one in front of the other, and then three other beds on the other side, and one had to walk through the middle. Quite often there were as many as five hundred beds occupied. If there was nothing else he could do other than attend souls that were dying, he would stay as long as needed to do what he could. He never failed in all these tasks.

He said, "Anyone who has lost the Faith, let him go into the hospital of the Incurables. I found the hospital in debt by ten thousand *scudi* while the throng of sick people increased. I often lost hope of being able to meet such huge expenses. But God is wonderful! We were unaware that some personage had died and left us many beds, sheets and other things for the needs of the hospital. Everything was doubled. Twenty, thirty and forty thousand *scudi* have been left at a time."

The people were moved so much to devotion towards the hospital, especially the Cardinals and great lords. So when they wanted to give away lots of alms, they addressed the gift to Saint Giacomo degli Incurabilis, care of the Capuchins. They said, "We know that these alms will be administered well, and that Brother Ludovico does not hoard money for himself." When Ludovico lacked something for the hospital, one hint was enough. It was immediately provided.

When it seemed to the holy man that he was unable to exercise himself very much in contemplation, because of the many labours he performed in the hospital and because he could not say the Office as it should be said, he revealed this to His Holiness Paul III. The Pope granted him a plenary indulgence for every time he entered the hospital chapel where the most Blessed Sacrament was kept and said five *Our Fathers* and five *Hail Marys*. The service of the Capuchins in that hospital gave great edification to the whole world.

The servant of God, Brother Ludovico, continued in this ministry of charity for about twelve years, giving the very best example. Then the idea came to him to return to the Province of Saint Francis to rest a little from such heavy labours, because he was old. But it was only with great difficulty that he received permission for this both from the supervisors of the hospital and the Superiors of the Order. For he was so well known and regarded as a holy man by everyone, that his departure would hurt the hospital very much, both in the care of the sick as well as the collection of alms. Nonetheless they had compassion for his old age.

When he returned, he was assigned to the house of the Carcerelle in Assisi. I was in the family there with him for many months, and heard from his own lips all these things I am writing.

When the Guardians and supervisors saw the great harm done to the hospital, they brought so much pressure to bear by way of the Cardinals that our Father General was forced to have him return. The servant of God rejoiced very much over this, because he felt his move from the hospital was his own doing. On bended knees and with tears he thanked God who, against his own wish and through holy obedience, had made him return to die among those poor people.

After returning, he was there about two years. But he could not be of much service any more because of his sickness and old age, and he began to get downhill. When he had received all the most holy sacraments, well disposed, he passed away to a better life.

There was mourning by all those poor people in the hospital. All Rome grieved over his death and said with a great voice, "The great servant of God, Brother Ludovico da Stroncone, is dead! There has never been a holier man in the hospital, or one who served with so much charity. We hope that if he has helped us in this world, from now on he may do much more in heaven in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has served so faithfully for many years."

To him be honour and glory for ever. Amen. [III, 264]

They were compassionate

853. They were compassionate towards the poor, especially those who were failing because of some infirmity or other adversity. Whatever help they could offer because of their profession, they gave willingly. [I, 267]

Heartfelt compassion towards the poor

854. The Holy Spirit was pleased to imbue Vincenzo da Foiano from childhood with kindness of heart towards others. When he became a friar, the Holy Spirit then refined this gift for him in the fire of prayer and regular fraternity. By experiencing the sufferings of poverty, he grew in heartfelt compassion towards the poor, and never ceased commending them to God, to the friars, to relatives and to friends. When bread was scarce he ordered the doorkeeper to give away to the poor the bread set aside for his meal, because he would be content with vegetables or fruit.

Adding fear to comfort, he gently protested that the first fathers had predicted that anyone who showed himself inhuman to the poor would become an apostate later on. For it is unbearable to God that a cruel person live off the charity of the benefactors in the Order, where he professes on the Gospel the highest degree of apostolic and seraphic charity.

When he wanted to perform a desirable act of virtue, but was restricted in what he could do, he would occupy himself either with tasks to help the community, such as fixing the roof, or to help a particular friar, such as assisting the cook. [VII, 442]

Joyful and readily he served all

855. Brother Martin was from the country of Flanders. There he became a friar of the Observants. Because of humility he wanted to be a lay friar. He knew Brother Francesco Tittelmans wanted to come to the Capuchin reform in Italy, so he pestered him until he got the singular favour of coming with him. He was received with him in Rome. There, because the Capuchins took care of the leper hospital of Saint Giacomo degl'Incurabilis, he asked as a grace to minister in this work of charity and humility. He spent all his time in there, and ministered for fifteen years. He was so diligent and humble that he was a marvel and an example to the whole of Rome. He wanted to perform the most nauseating and disgusting task there was, which was to wash the bandages of the lepers. However he served all the sick, because his readiness and gentleness gave them confidence to ask him for what they needed. He served them all joyfully and readily. [VI, 185]

His tears fell

856. Brother Bernardo d'Offida combined zeal with a true compassion toward others. Hence he often said, "Sons, do not fail to pray for the poor seculars and for our benefactors who are in so many travails and in danger of being lost. Because of this help, they will give us their alms." When he learned of someone's hardship, he wept and warmly commended him to God. This great charity of his was so acceptable to God that he chose to demonstrate it with remarkable miracles. [VII, 501]

Born to comfort the afflicted

857. Brother Giuseppe da Milan was in the same friary in Milan. He was man who could comfort the condemned, not only by teaching but by his kindness and gentleness. It seemed he was born to comfort the afflicted. [VI, 305]

To visit the sick

858. Brother Giustino da Panicale was uneducated, but he was young and capable, and so was assigned to the office of infirmarian. He served in it for some years with great charity. In this office he had wonderful experiences.

He was very charitable towards others. Wherever he was, when he heard someone was sick, he very charitably went to visit that person. He performed the many services of his art for the sick. Many people said, "When I am sick, I don't bother doctors if Brother Justin is available." [III, 435]

Alms

859. Francesco da Macerata had great simplicity. When he the poor begged him for something for the love of God, his heart softened so much that he didn't know what to do. He couldn't stop himself from giving them alms, provided he had something in his pocket. [III, 405]

860. Vincenzo da Foiano liked very much to eat greens, vegetables or chestnuts as sustenance for his body. He ate a little bread. He said to the doorkeeper, "For the love of God I beg you, please to give my share of bread to the poor, and let me have some chestnuts." [III, 340]

861. If any superfluous food is given to the friars, let them thank the donors but refuse the food, or, with their consent, give it to the poor. [C, 54]

862. Since there was a great famine at the time, those servants of God went about obtaining grain, beans, bread and other things to eat from the rich and wealthy. They then dispensed these to the timid poor, who were in very great necessity. [II, 188]

863. We order that friars deputed by their Superiors should quest in times of famine to provide for the needs of the poor, following the example of our most kind Father, who had great compassion towards the poor. [C, 85]

While there was bread in his pocket

864. Francesco da Macerata was no less kind towards the poor. If he saw them at the side of the road when he was questing, and they begged from him for the love of God, his heart softened. He became so distraught that he was almost beside himself. He could never keep himself from giving alms while there was bread in his pocket. Hence it happened to him many times that he returned home with his pockets empty. His Superiors reprimanded him over this many times.

It pleased God to show that this action did not come from foolishness or a lack of obedience and discretion. Rather it came from prudence and a spirit higher than his exterior simplicity showed. For one day, after he had gone to quest with the order to return at the meal time - because there was no bread in the house either for the friars or for certain masons who were working in the house - he allowed so much bread to be taken from his hand by the poor that no more than twenty rolls remained to take home. Lo and behold he came upon twenty Germans as he walked along the road. They were returning from Rome, but because of the famine at the time they had been unable to find any refreshment, and lay on the ground, almost dead from hunger. Touched by that pitiful sight, Brother Francesco turned to his companion and said to him, "Brother, in the great need these wretches have, this bread is theirs, not ours. Therefore let us do our duty and not let them die." Handing them the little bowls they had, with his companion he started to soak some of the bread and pour in some wine. Then he put some of that soup to the mouth of each of them in turn. [VII, 472]

That poor man was Jesus Christ

865. When Giustino da Panicale was in the house at Bettona, there was a knock at the door late in the evening. The doorkeeper opened the door and a poor person asked him for alms with great humility. The doorkeeper told him to wait. He went and brought him a loaf of bread. He said to him, "Forgive us, for we only have a little." The poor man answered, "I know how much you have, and I know what you can do." As the doorkeeper closed the door, the holy man Brother Justin, who was Guardian at the time, was at prayer in the chapel. There and then our Lord appeared to him with the bread in his hand. He said to him, "I got this from your friars," and promptly vanished. Immediately Brother Justin began to weep copiously. He said, "O sons that poor man was Jesus Christ. What have you done by sending him away with only one loaf!"

From then on he wept whenever he remembered this, and said, "It's clear that the Lord wanted to show us what little charity we had." [III, 432]

Almsgiver to the poor

866. Girolamo da Montepulciano was always charitable in all the positions he held, and he gave alms to the poor. When he had nothing else to give them, he gave them a handkerchief, telling them to sell it and buy bread. [VI, 200]

May God give you paradise

867. The charity of Francesco da Macerata towards others was tremendous, and he never denied anything to anyone. When he went questing for the friars, many poor people begged alms from him, and he would give them all he could. So sometimes it happened that his pocket was empty and he had nothing to take to the friars. If any friar asked him for some assistance, he would answer, his voice trembling as if he were on the verge of tears, "My brother, I am a good for nothing! I can't do anything for you, but if I could, I would pour out my blood."

He served a long time at the hospital for the incurable at Rome, so full of charity and good example that everyone considered him to be holy. And there was no labour that he would not take up among the friars to serve the infirm. He was kind with everyone, and very careful not to offend anyone in the slightest way.

He had acquired such tranquillity of mind that it was not possible for him to get angry towards anyone, apart from himself, so marvellously did he combine humility, simplicity and charity. When he met people, he said: May God give you paradise. [V, 147]

Do not let the poor man leave

868. Both in his sermons and in his talks to the community, Brother Matteo exhorted everyone to do good to the poor. He said, "Do not let the poor man leave you without giving him something. If you have nothing you can give him, sweep the house. Do something so that at least a little of that dust may be carried away on his feet." He asserted that those who, through meanness, withheld from the poor the wages of their work - making them even worse off because they simply had to buy some things - should do much more to make up for this. Matteo would not accept alms from such people. Sometimes, with terrible menacing, he reproached them over the blood they sucked from the poor by squeezing them. [VII, 91]

And similar pious works were promoted

869. Brother Matteo discouraged asking Hebrews into regions because it was so easy for people to fall into debt. He believed that sort of people, the enemy of

the name of Christ, consumes the sweat of the poor in particular, and quite often their souls too by turning the simple and needy towards the most atrocious sacrileges and enormous wickedness. Sometimes they dirty their hands with Christian blood. Instead of these people, he encouraged the establishment of *Monti di Pietà*, a grain heap that was borrowed from each year and replenished after the harvest.

Similar pious works are promoted up to this day by different Capuchin preachers, with great benefit and consolation to the poor peasants. It is something that needed the strong backing of the princes. [VII, 92]

Many poor come to the door

870. Brother Alessio da Budrio had been doorkeeper in the friary at Rome. He was a good religious, with an easy going nature and never got agitated. Whenever there was some difficulty with a friar, he didn't let it get to him, but just laughed it off. He had great charity towards the poor, and had the Guardian's permission to do this for them: he took pieces of useless cloth from the friary and made little caps and slippers for them. Since a lot of poor people came to the door, he had a pile of these things ready in a corner. [VI, 480]

From the Capuchins, from the Capuchins, Holy Father

871. From then on Brother Giustino da Panicale was diligent and ardent in embracing the opportunities that presented themselves to him to practise charity to whoever was there.

While I was writing about this, one of his contemporaries confirmed it for me. I was saying, rather fancifully, that it could very well have been that the community had a shortage of bread and rooms. For neither the Guardian nor the doorkeeper, who was Brother Dominic of Buschetto, both holy men, would have lied. Therefore it seems that the servant of God did not deserve that reprimand.

He answered me, "God is not content with an ordinary charity from us Capuchins, but wants it to be whole-hearted." Therefore he used this treatment of Brother Justin not to rectify in him something essentially lacking, but to refine the virtue that was in him. This was seen afterwards, because he was never satisfied just to meet the needs of the poor with material things, no matter what situation presented itself to him. For myself, I have never lacked alms. However; but if there has been an abundance for me - it is because of having shared amply with the poor.

However, this is a teaching human prudence can hardly accept, although the wisdom and spirit of Father Saint Francis teaches it. He gave away the choir Bible, and gave his mantle to the poor, and assigned his companion to take care of the sick whom he found along the way.

In the Holy Year, when Clement VII asked the ultramontane poor from which Order they received the most charity, they answered, "From the Capuchins, from the Capuchins, Holy Father." Because of this the Pope conceived a great love for the Order. [VII, 529]

They are fresh roses

872. Giovanni da Puglia spoke about having seen and known a friar of our Order who was accustomed to distribute to the poor for the love of God all those titbits that made their way to the friars at table. When the Father Guardian of that house thought that he was doing rather too much, he commanded him to be more moderate in giving alms. But the servant of God was so compassionate, that, as the numbers of poor increased, he could not hold back from giving alms to them.

It happened once that he was carrying a quantity of morsels, bread rolls and half rolls, in the apron he wore when he served the friars at table. The Guardian noticed him and said, "You're going too far! What's that you're carrying in the apron?" He answered, "Father Guardian, they are fresh roses." The Guardian said, "It's bread, not roses." The servant of God answered, "They are only roses, which in the middle of winter the most high Creator has created to correct avarice on our part. For we trust so little in his goodness." When he opened the apron, what was bread before had been transformed into the freshest roses by the Lord God. The Guardian was stupefied when he saw this, and threw himself down before him in great astonishment. Kneeling, he confessed to him that he had been at fault, adding, "From this moment on, my Father, you have permission to give to the poor all you want." He was completely edified by the holy man.

This was the reason why Brother John, when he was in Rome in 1536 at the drafting of the first constitutions, had it inserted that the Capuchins should give to the poor everything that made its way to their table, because the Discalced of Spain lived this way. [III, 427]

To console the afflicted

873. When it was necessary for Capuchins to lodge with secular people, their neighbours assembled to hear them speak about the things of God. [IV, 45]

874. Secular people had recourse to the Capuchins whenever they had problems. When the Capuchins spoke to them, they regarded what they said as if the words had come from Jesus Christ himself. [II, 284]

875. Matteo da Leonessa had received from God the great grace of bringing about reconciliations. He did this so often that he was sought out by people from all over the place. He had to do this nearly all year round, but counted the effort as nothing when he saw that he could benefit others. He had a gentle

nature, and was as loving and compassionate to others as he would have been were all his children. On their part, the seculars had a great affection for him, so that they followed his advice. As long as he lived, everyone in the region of Leonessa had recourse to him. When the servant of God heard that enmity was arising somewhere, he immediately hurried to the place and brought the people to peace again. [III, 148]

876. When Francesco da Macerata heard of the tribulations of a poor secular, he would invariably shed tears for him and say to the friars, "O my brothers, I don't know if you realise the tribulation our benefactor is suffering? Don't forget about him. Pray for him so that grace may be given to him and his poor soul may not be lost." [III, 407]

877. Let the friars remember their benefactors in all their Masses and prayers, praying God to reward them abundantly in the present and in the future. [C, 34]

To encourage the soldiers

878. At that time, Pius V led the Christian princes with holy zeal against a powerful army of the Turk. He ordered the Capuchins to go to confess and encourage the soldiers and also to serve the sick. Among those who went were Brother Girolamo da Pistoia, the famous preacher, and Brother Otto da Napoli, a friar of the Province of Milan. Both put their lives at service of Christendom.

Brother Jerome had already left the Zoccolanti many years ago. In the Capuchins he had governed Provinces, and when he was not Provincial he was nearly always a Reader. He sent into print some popular sermons and a book on the formalities of Scotus. He had Saint Bonaventure reprinted, since at the time there was a great lack of his books. Among his other virtues he was most charitable to all, but especially to the sick. In the end God wanted to crown this charity with a distinguished act which, covering or protecting the dust of human imperfections, would lead him to the reward of his labours. Moved by zeal to serve the infected soldiers, and without fearing death at all, he carried them in his arms when it was necessary. In everything he ministered to them most humbly and kindly. Stricken by the plague during this ministry, he passed on to a better life. In the Generalate of Brother Giovanni Maria, the Lord Cardinal Protector of Santa Severina had his body brought back to Italy and had it buried with honour in Caserta. [VI, 326]

THE CLOISTER AND THE STREET

In regard to their social relations the first Capuchin Friars taught and practised a theory that merits knowing and being meditated on. It provoked an experience fruitful for instruction. The greater their detachment from the world, the more they understood the affection and the veneration the world professed for them.

Society could not remain outside that total renewal of Gospel life. We know the world requires a lot from reformers. However, authentic reformers offer much more than the world claims. Their plans of reform never err, because they are governed by Providence, which orders and arranges everything with gentleness and strength. The final triumph is of those who trust in God, and under his gaze apply themselves to the victory of truth and good.

The cloister and the street are two contrasting forces. Either the friar draws society towards God or it entangles him in its worldly spirit. The danger is real. It would be naïve not to appreciate its seriousness. Therefore superior souls flee from noise and love solitude. They are perfected in silence and in hiding. Nevertheless those who embrace the mixed life in imitation of Christ and Francis have to present themselves on the scene of the world, and appear in the squares and on the roads of the cities.

The first welcome given the friars “who with so much perfection had put the world beneath their feet” (II, 194) was certainly not among the most joyful. Episodes are told that have the immediacy and vivacity of instant photographs. But the friars underwent these rather unpleasant confrontations willingly. With joyful faces those little brothers cheerfully recounted those things with inexpressible joy, thanking God that he had given them the grace to suffer for his love.

They went everywhere doing good. They sowed smiles and good words. They were courteous, amiable, peaceful, kind and humble towards all - speaking to everyone in a fitting manner.

And the world benefited. It experienced the charm of Capuchin life. The cloister was victoriously present on the street. There the Capuchins were surrounded by an aura of popularity seldom seen in history.

Infrequent conversations

879. Let our conversations be infrequent, not only with women, but also with men, because too much familiarity with them is harmful for us [C, 138]

With a nod of his head he fled away

880. Because of this Vincenzo da Foiano rarely conversed either with seculars or with friars. An idle word never fell from his lips. If secular persons sought him out of devotion, he would conduct himself very awkwardly, soon detach himself, and, with a nod of the head, flee away. This confirmed them in thinking that he was a holy man, just as did the wonderful air of sanctity with which he was gifted. [VII, 436]

Two contrary goals

881. Those holy men said: We have two contrary goals, the world and God. The more we distance ourselves from the world and worldly fascination about clothing, living, eating and conversing, the more we come closer to God. But if

by leaving simplicity aside we approach secular pomps and curiosities, we will distance ourselves further from God and the pure observance of our profession. Then when we think we are edifying the seculars, we will be scandalising them, because they seek nothing from us except good example and simplicity. To see a Capuchin dressed in his habit of sackcloth around the city all day with the citizens is incongruous. To see him however in a forest - this is his place. To see him in a beautiful, large, ostentatious, whitewashed friary is something revolting and deformed. However, to see him in a small, poor and simple friary is entirely appropriate. To see him at table with a scanty little tablecloth but fine dishes of meat and delicacies is not fitting. A scrappy little serviette, a slice of bread with a little meat on top, simple jugs and cups: these are things suitable to our profession of poverty. [IV, 166]

Familiarity with seculars

882. They avoided seculars and excessive familiarity with them. When the Superiors came on visitation, they reprimanded nothing more harshly than too much familiarity with seculars. They said it is impossible for a secularised friar to have the spirit. Familiarity with seculars has always done great harm to the Order, said those servants of God. That is, familiarity with seculars and their conversation should not be for the sake of friendship, as are secular friendships, but should be centred on piety. When the friars go to the house of seculars, they should not go for friendship, or for eating and bodily recreation, but in order to turn them towards the way of God with good words and good example. The same holds for seculars. They should not come to our friaries because of friendship, or to eat with the friars and to and enjoy worldly recreation with them. Rather let them come out of devotion to hear their Masses and their Offices and to receive some good teaching from them.

The venerable Fathers said all holy men avoided secular conversations, as is obvious from the lives of the holy Fathers. That friar can be called blessed, who can distance himself furthest from seculars in harsh desert places and is never seen by anyone. As blessed Giles said, "Many went to fish and because they did not know how to fish, they were drowned." He was referring to preachers who do not have the perfection that is needed to converse in a praiseworthy way with seculars. Many think they will convert the seculars to the spiritual life. But it's the seculars who convert them to worldly life. When they think they're converting others, they bring death to their own souls, and the things of the world come to delight and please them so much that the things of the Order become a nuisance. Then they are happy only when they are at recreation with seculars.

Furthermore, the alms that seculars give because of their friendship have little merit before God. Secular friendships are the reason for missing many Masses, saying the Office badly, making a tatter of prayer and filling the mind with vain things. That is, when they want to gather at the time of prayer with God, they

cannot, because whether they want to or not, at prayer it is necessary to remember those things they have thought and talked about earlier. Therefore it comes about that the spirit is lost. When spiritual delight is lost, worldly delights and amusements are easily sought. Then little by little, one falls into every kind of vice.

Therefore this is what those holy and true Superiors were most eager to reprimand. [IV, 163]

The secularised friar

883. Bernardino d'Asti called all non-essential work tricks of the devil to make us miss prayer. He reprimanded the wandering friars very much, who conversed too much with seculars. He called them dead bodies that should be thrown up without delay from the sea of the Order onto the shore. He said, "A secular friar is an enemy of Saint Francis. It is impossible for a secularised friar to have the spirit." [III, 188]

They are the plague of religious persons

884. Bernardino Ochino found himself confirmation by being re-elected and released from the fear of being deposed. So, his ambition eased, he now gave greater attention to carrying out his designs. This man, who was never moved by good intent, took no account of prayer, since he was always busy visiting important people. Hence Father Asti said to him once, "Father, you do not pray. In the end you will find yourself with your hands empty, a soldier of Christ without any weapons." To which he replied with this quotation: "He does not cease praying who does not cease doing good." He applied this saying incorrectly, as many do who make it an excuse for their distractions and secularised occupations which are the plague of religious persons.

The miserable fellow made such great progress in this error that he no longer prayed. He was so far led astray that he didn't have time for the Office either. In Napoli especially, the visits of those lords were so frequent that he did nothing else but hold audiences: they all ran to him for advice as if he were an oracle. Because of this Paul III absolved him again from the Office with more dispensations. Hence it is no wonder the unhappy fellow was lost in the happiness of earthly honour. [VI, 40]

A continuous battle with the world

885. Battista da Norcia said:

"Religious life is nothing other than a continuous battle with the world, the devil and the flesh. If you were to ask me which is the greatest enemy of these three, I'd say the world. Do you want to know why our Congregation is regarded as perfect by everyone?

For no other reason than we are detached from the world. But when the number of friars multiplies, they will begin to lose the spirit. They will do nothing other than become friends again with the world by building beautiful places near cities, giving themselves to studies to appear learned, and wearing beautiful habits in order to appear distinguished while dealing with nobility. Can't you see that drawing near to the world has always ruined the Order? None of the other enemies is as harmful as this one." [III, 275]

He reprimanded the friendship of seculars

886. Ludovico da Foligno was a great lover of solitude. Therefore he avoided the friendship of seculars, to the extent that he could be ten years in a place and not known to any secular. He reprimanded friendship with seculars, saying that often the reason they give us alms is not out of love of God but to win our esteem. Hence they lose the merit of giving. By coming to our friaries frequently, they make us waste time and often make us complain. Furthermore, when we want to show them kindness we bother those who run the friary, and if we don't show them such kindness the seculars are displeased. Therefore the friar who is a friend of seculars is an enemy of the Order. [VI, 197]

The one who wants to stay in peace

887. It pleased the Lord God that Brother Ludovico da Fossombrone sent this holy man, Ludovico da Foligno, back to his Province of Saint Francis. There he was Guardian many times, and governed with great maturity. His chief delight was holy prayer, and he did everything possible to avoid friendships with seculars. Indeed, he could be ten years in a friary and never start up a friendship with anyone.

I was with him many times in the same family, and heard him say:

"The friendship of seculars is the cause of much laxity in the Order. Often they give alms for friendship and not for love of God, and so they lose the merit of giving. When they come to our friaries they cause the friars to waste a lot of time. When friars get into friendships, they are embarrassed about showing their friends proper affection. Often this is very irritating for those who run the friary and causes a lot of grumbling. And if affection is not shown to the seculars, they are affronted. Therefore, let the friar who wants to maintain peace not get caught up with seculars. Ordinarily, secularised friars are enemies of the Order. No friar can get near them, and because of this many of them are ruined. Our conversation with seculars must be infrequent, and give the best of example. When they come to our friaries, let them come to us because of piety, to receive good teaching for the salvation of their

souls, and not for secular friendship. Just as religious have left the world and material goods for the love of God, so they should leave worldly friendship, which impedes the spirit in them no less than material goods do." [III, 188]

888. Liberalino da Col di Val d'Elsa admonished, "The one who delights in associating with seculars too much always finds bad in it, or that he has wasted time, or has given bad example, or it has been a nuisance to the friars." [III, 381]

To avoid making friendships with seculars

889. Gratiano da Norcia never wanted to do anything beyond what was necessary to sustain physical life, not even to learn to make little crosses. He saw such activities as occasions of little use to the spirit, involving some kind of act of ownership. And he avoided making friendships with seculars, whose conversation he avoided as much as he could. Indeed, with the permission of his Superiors he went away to stay in the Province of Sicily, to avoid ever again seeing or getting close to his relatives. After staying there twenty years, he was sent back into his Province of Saint Francis. However, since he could not endure being known to anyone - and also the habit cloth of that Province seemed to him to be too fine - he asked to return to Sicily after three or four years. He finished his life there, dying a holy death. [VI, 301]

Hands full of flies

890. Brother Bernardino d'Asti, who had been Ochino's predecessor, said to him, "Father, you are engulfed in these troubles because of seculars and studies, and we never see you praying. Be well aware of your situation. Keep yourself firm in humility. Also, take care of your soul, otherwise God will confound you and in the end you will find yourself with your hands full of flies, a soldier of Christ without any weapons." To this Ochino replied with that phrase: *Non cessat orare, qui non cessat facere bene*. Like him many have badly misused this quotation as an excuse for secular and distracting occupations that are the plague of religious. [VII, 264]

Love solitude

891. Giacomo da Cetona always sought out solitary places, occupying himself almost continuously in holy prayer. He was very wary about letting seculars get to know him. He said dealing with seculars caused the friars to waste too much time. "As for myself," he said, "whenever I've talked with seculars they've always left my head full of stories so that when I returned to prayer, the enemy brought them all back to my mind. And very often I couldn't make even the smallest prayer." He would frequently say to the young friars, "Sons, love solitude, because it is the mother of the spirit. Without solitude it is impossible

to have the grace of prayer in our Order. There are three necessary things: silence, abstinence and solitude. A fourth is purity of mind." [III, 356]

Solitude the mother of the spirit

892. Battista da Norcia avowed:

"It is very important that Religious are rarely seen by seculars. We experience this, for example, in this city of Perugia which is so devoted to us. When two friars leave from Montemalbe and enter the city, the people come around on every side because of their desire to see them, just as they would if they were Apostles of Christ. This is because they rarely see us. I have found myself going three or four months without ever leaving the friary, neither myself nor my friars. Yet a great quantity of goods comes to the house, and I have to make the greatest efforts to send them back, in order not to offend our poverty, since it seems excessive to accept everything. This clearly shows how important good example is, for this is where the affection of the seculars springs from. It is also a means for our true observance of the Rule, because the seculars bring us our necessities, which we would otherwise have to obtain in an illicit way. If we had to have recourse to privileges, it would be necessary for us to have procurators and to accept money. The devotion the seculars have towards us frees us from all these things. It is good, therefore, for our the friaries to be some distance from the cities, so that we can be more isolated. Solitude is the mother of the spirit, but conversation with seculars is the mother of every vice. However devout a secular may be, when he deals closely and at length with the friars, he loses his devotion. Because of this, buildings in cities are hazardous, since it is necessary to be involved with seculars all the time, and prayer is completely lost." [III, 272]

Only the doorkeeper spoke

893. He arranged things so that when any secular devotee of ours came to our friary, only the porter or Guardian spoke to him. No other friar appeared. They all scattered, one to the woods, another to his cell and another to the church. [II, 456]

Far places

894. They took up dwellings far from the cities. They detached themselves as much as possible from unnecessary conversation. Because of this, they grew so much in the affection of the seculars that anyone who could see them and speak with them considered himself privileged. [IV, 173]

Let me go to prayer

895. They avoided all friendships and conversations with seculars. Often when devotees came to speak with them, they would all scatter. They would say to their devotees, "As long as you keep us here speaking with you, we are not praying to God for you. Let us go to prayer, then things will work out for the best." With these holy injunctions, they would break away from them. [IV, 184]

They plunged into the woods

896. During the day, when they had said the Office, they abandoned their dwelling and plunged into the woods to pour out tears. They were so inflamed with the love of God they seemed like a host of Seraphim. When they emerged from the woods later and returned to church, they seemed like many Macariuses, Anthonys and Hilarians. Those servants of God always kept themselves unshakeable in the Congregation with keen suffering like that. [II, 399]

An anchoritic life

897. You can see that in all the Provinces the friars took up houses far from the cities, so that many were three or four miles away. This was also why they took title: Capuchin Friars of the Eremitical Life. Many of them were still not content with the isolation of the friaries, solitary though they were, and withdrew into the woods and surrounds and put up crudely built cells. There they led an anchoritic and solitary life. [IV, 190]

898. It would take far too long to tell about all those who led the anchoritic life, for there have been some in every Province. The Congregation was filled with so much desire and fervour for this, that if the Superiors had allowed it, the majority would have led anchoritic lives. However, they granted permission only to special individuals. Consequently, they put it in the Constitutions that anyone who wanted to stay withdrawn in the woods and lead a solitary and anchoritic life could do so if the Fathers judged him suitable. [IV, 191]

They made themselves some little shacks in the woods

899. When the foundation was laid at Foligno in the 1531, the little cells turned out to be dark, damp and uncomfortable. In this way the friars demonstrated that early rigour. They built themselves some little dry-walled shacks in the woods, covered with broom plant. In these they passed their time before a rough cross in silence, discipline, prayer and tears. When it was necessary to rebuild the friary, it was moved somewhat nearer the town for the benefit of the infirm. [VII, 500]

The love of relatives

900. The holy old man Bonaventura da Montereale said, "It is not possible to acquire the true spirit in the Order if one does not first strip himself of all self-love. I have known many who had a love of their relatives, so that they never settled, and brought great disturbance to the Order. With time nearly all of them were ruined."

And he told of one such case. When he was in a convent near Aquila, where the woods are enclosed by walls, there was a young friar living there. One night after Matins, this friar went out walking along a lane in the woods, saying the Office of Our Lady. The moonlight shone bright and beautiful, and, lo and behold! his uncle appeared before him. Greeting him, the friar asked what he was doing going about at night, and how did he get in. The uncle answered, "I entered through the wall because I do not want to be seen by the friars. The reason is this. You know about the poverty of your nieces, daughters of our dead brother. I have found a great fortune in hidden treasure, but I cannot retrieve it without a priest being there. So I have come to you. Let's go. If we hurry, when we come back no one will know." The friar answered, "I cannot come without the permission of the Father Minister, who is in the house." The uncle said, "If you do that we'll be discovered. You know what the result will be." The Friar answered, "I don't want to go against my conscience." The uncle said, "You have no charity! How do you think these poor girls will be able to marry? I'm not suggesting this to harm them. Do this small thing as your part in helping them, and you will be the cause of great good. A good intention isn't enough. Let's go. Let's not linger any longer."

So his uncle led him out through the walls and they went off together, his uncle talking all the time about the things of the world. They went along on top of certain very steep mountains, and the friar fell many times, trying to hurry. His uncle kept comforting him, saying, "We've only got a little further to go." They reached the edge of a great precipice, and the friar stumbled and fell to the ground, landing on his back. He was in pain, and cried out strongly, "Jesus, Mary and Francis! Where have you brought me?" The devil, who had appeared as his uncle, turned to him with hideous look and said, "Oh you disgraceful friar! If you hadn't called that name, I would have you pitching headlong down these cliffs by now!" He at once disappeared, leaving the friar so terrified that he almost expired. However, he was able to comfort himself as best he could at the mercy of God, and retraced his steps, shaking all over and reciting psalms. In the morning the Minister absolved him from the excommunication in my presence. The friar shook so much he couldn't control his legs.

"See what the love of relatives holds out to the servants of God! The greatest good we can do them is to pray for them." [III, 316]

They found little charity

901. In the meantime, since those servants of God were little known, they suffered many grave setbacks on the journey, because it was often necessary for them to lodge under trees, or in caves, barns, taverns and hospitals. They found little charity. Secular people they did not know them, and thought they were rogues and men up to no good. [IV, 156]

They formed a poor idea of them

902. God wanted the Order to share in the reward Brother Onorio da Montegranaro had acquired with so much sweat, because this novelty gained credibility for the Capuchins in the city Bologna, where before they were very little known.

When they asked in the city for permission to found a house there, the city granted it, but with the stipulation that the friars should not exceed eighteen in number. There are many more there now, but despite their numbers they live more comfortably than those first few did then. They were called the friars of the manglers or cribs, for anyone who went to visit them would find they had woven little litters for themselves from twigs, which they on put on top of a little straw to sleep on. Just like the manglers for animals! Because they were withdrawn outside the city on a hill and rarely let themselves be seen, people got the wrong idea about them. Consequently, when a friar went questing the people used to make fun of him, and he would regularly meet some sort of derision before he returned home. Once someone grabbed a cleric by the point of his cowl and pulled him up on his shoulders. With the friar hanging from his back like a sack, he carried him through the street amid a thousand whistles and blows from labourers and artisans. The poor friar did not dare resist, not even with a word of protest. In those days the people were very miserly about giving alms to beggars.

However when this miracle became known, the populace began to see their religious customs more clearly and to regret not having known them before. They were really impressed with their example, which they had earlier considered to be servility and base cowardice. And people began to frequent the church of the Capuchins. [VII, 466]

Let it be for the love of God

903. Four of them were journeying from the Marches on their way to Rome, and reached a castle in Foligno on the mountain called Colfiorito. There, a vicious man seized his sword and whacked those poor friars from behind with the flat of his blade, calling them thieves, knaves and assassins. When a poor woman saw the spiteful fellow maltreating the wretched friars in that way, she said to that abominable person, "You stupid fellow! Don't you know that these

are poor Religious? Why are you treating them so badly?" The wicked one answered, "You won't speak like that when they steal your chickens. These are the biggest knaves on earth. You do not know them!" And he continued to hit them in turn. This assault lasted for a space of three miles, until he had quite worn himself out making those poor fellows hurry along so quickly. They themselves never stopped thanking God. The tormentor fell to the ground from exhaustion, as if he were dead. When they saw he could no longer carry on assailing them, they knelt down and with great joy, said to him with one voice, "Let this be for the love of God and your charity." [II, 307]

They ran away frightened

904. When the women and children saw the friars, they ran away frightened. Sometimes they hurled some stones at them and threw mud or other filthy things at them. When they returned together, they recounted with great joy the things they had suffered for the love of Christ. When they entered the cities, the crowds of children pestered them so much that the poor friars could not enter any district, and no one wanted to give them lodging. [IV, 157]

They laughed and made fun of them

905. As soon as Giovanni da Fano entered into the city and the people saw this new kind of Religious, the artisans, children and other people began to gather around them. They laughed at them with great scorn and made fun of them. The children threw little stones at them, among other things. Many missiles hit Giovanni on the head, for when they saw him with no head covering, completely bald because of his age, they took delight in seeing little stones bounce off his pate. The clamour made by those children was so great that a large part of the city gathered to watch. Although many stones hit him on the head, they did him no harm, and the holy old man walked on with a totally serene countenance, remembering the scorn that our Lord Jesus Christ suffered for love of us. Without ever showing the least impatience, he went off to the city's cathedral, accompanied by the huge crowd. When the friars entered the church, they knelt down before the most Blessed Sacrament with humility. When the crowd became aware that they were kneeling with so much devotion, they all withdrew. Persevering in prayer and commending themselves to God, they remained there patiently, waiting for the Lord God to provide them with a place to lodge and to begin preaching. [III, 93]

Being chased with stones

906. They suffered a lot of ridicule and many beatings, even to the point of being chased with stones, since there is no shortage in the world of people who do such things. The poor fellows continued along with great patience, even with great joy. In many instances, even tepid people did not fail to oppose

those Fathers and show themselves as formidable enemies. When they could not rebuke them for anything else, they said they were mad, and must be driven away like madmen. People who act like this are foolish and quite mindless, and their villainy and viciousness should have no place in the Church. [I, 278]

The most worthless and failed people

907. Since we have arrived at this passage, I do not want it to go unsaid - albeit with brevity - how the poor friars were despised not only by some Religious, but even by seculars and people of the world. This happened not only in Calabria, but also in other regions. They were despised, insulted and valued less than if they were the sweepings from a very dirty house. They were despised as if they were, I say, the most worthless and useless failures in the world, truly sordid, the faeces (pardon my language) and offal of humanity.

Oh how many wretched friars were maltreated and afflicted just like thieves. Others were imprisoned as spies in order to put them to death. Others were led before magistrates, like suspect and infamous people. Others were even brought to be tortured on the rack. When they stripped them, they found these pitiable friars wore the roughest hairshirts under their clothing. Thus they were pardoned from being stretched by ropes, yet they had been prepared for it and resigned to endure it. Other friars were placed in solitary confinement and left to die of hunger, but in the end were miraculously freed by God. Some were stripped naked and had everything taken from them, not only the bread and whatever else they had, but they were robbed even of their own clothes. Some friars were kept tied to a tree all day in the heat of the sun. When night came, and the cruelty of their impious captors subsided, they were allowed to continue on their journey. Others were thrown into the darkest dungeons for many, many days to make them relinquish the habit. Some were chased by a raging mob, with everyone crying out that they were evil doers and deserved death. Terrified by such rage, they hardly had the strength to flee to save their lives.

That is enough to conclude this list. There was no kind of tribulation these poor friars did not suffer. Some often took the risk of being killed in the frenzy of a barrage of rocks, and against arms and naked swords, the blades sometimes pressed against their throats. I could tell you how the devil loosened the reins of his rage, in order to give vent to it on those servants of God. Yet they remained more patient and joyful than ever. Afterwards, when they returned to the friary, they would make the greatest celebration about these things with their other brothers, relishing the benefits gained on their journeys. [I, 371]

Just like the hardest of rocks

908. At that time the poor friars suffered afflictions and similar things everywhere they went. Nonetheless those good friars walked constantly and

solidly along the way of perfection. Just like the hardest of rocks, they resisted the mighty blows of the turbulent sea. They were joyful in those tribulations and persecutions, which they called lilies and roses, or the finest and most precious gems. [I, 374]

You are welcome

909. It often happened that when some kind secular person came and spent some time with a friar he would start speaking, and go on talking to the friar for a good while about beautiful things. Then the friar would turn to the secular and say, "Ah! You're most welcome! When did you come?" A bit puzzled at this, the secular would say, "Father, I've been talking with you for a while now." And the friar would say, "Forgive me, I forgot. I thought I was just meeting you." This happened because they were perfectly estranged from earthly things. [II, 283]

The neighbours gathered together

910. Some friars who did not have the grace of preaching, kept to discussions about the things of God, and showed so much familiarity with them that very often the discussions bore more fruit than sermons did. When it was necessary for these friars to lodge with seculars, the neighbours gathered together to hear them speak about the things of God. Although they were simple lay friars, they spoke so loftily about God that the seculars thought they were learned. Because of the great example that these friars gave, their life itself was a sermon. If people found themselves completely immersed in troubles, they would send for the Capuchins. And when they heard them speak about the things of God, they would be consoled. It often happened that significant reconciliations came about through these discussions. The friars considered that talking with seculars about the things of the world was a serious burden on the conscience. [IV, 45]

The seculars were moved

911. There was silence all the time. Nor did they speak except from necessity and then with a subdued voice. They were all withdrawn, some in their cells, some in a deserted spot or in the church to pray. Others were busy elsewhere, engaged in some appropriate labour. Hence it seemed as if no one was in the house.

The seculars only needed to see them or their house to be moved and feel uncomfortable, saying, "And what will become of us sinners? They are like angels of innocence and holiness, and yet they do such a lot of penance."

The Duchess of Camerino got wonderful comfort from the friars, in quite exceptional ways. She had a great affection for these poor humble friars, who were her favourites, and whom she considered as if born from God. She always called them "my Capuchins." She provided amply for their needs, and would

have done more if they had not refused it because of modesty and to retain their impoverished state. She often visited them, delighting greatly in hearing from their holy documents. Dressed in simple words, these were all the more penetrating since they came from hearts full of God and faithful to him. [VII, 74]

Angels descended from heaven

912. The fame of this new way of life was not slow in spreading everywhere through Calabria. The people were astonished when they considered the extreme suffering of the friars; their devout praying of the Office in church day and night; their strict poverty, which breathed a certain severity from their friary, their utensils and from everything; their devout silence and solitude; and their spiritual conversations. When they saw them in those unusual habits, harsh and unpretentious and with faces that radiated kindness through their gauntness; when they heard their fiery words, which were much more penetrating than any they'd ever heard before: then they regarded them as angels, descended from heaven to take pity on them and to remedy their many spiritual and temporal miseries. [VII, 311]

Like burning coals

913. Anyone who heard the friars speak of God considered himself blessed, because they were like burning coals, inflaming the hearts of everyone who heard them. [II, 248]

914. They seemed like Seraphim, inflamed with the love of God. When they spoke with seculars they were like flaming coals, rekindling the love of God in everyone. To them it was as if they suffered nothing, for the harshness of their life was eased so greatly by their living in most high poverty amid so many persecutions. [II, 273]

He was loving by nature

915. Matteo da Leonessa did not stop to count the cost when he saw he could be of benefit to others. He had a gentle nature and was so loving and compassionate towards the others that they all seemed like sons to him. At the same time, seculars held him in such regard that they did whatever he wanted. [III, 149]

May God be thanked

916. Benedetto da Subiaco never sought involvement with seculars. When it was necessary for him to speak a little with them during the period they were building he always spoke with great modesty and few words. He always mixed the talk about a task with the words about God. He would say some words of

what he was doing, and then added, “May God be thanked, and his most sweet Mother and Father Saint Francis” [III, 134]

He seemed like an earthly angel

917. No one ever saw Ludovico da Reggio angry. Rather, the tranquillity of his mind, his speech, his gestures, his conversation and, indeed, of everything about him was so outstanding that he seemed like an angel on earth. He was so constant and patient in adversity, that he inspired people everywhere with every virtue. [III, 204]

He seemed impeccable

918. Nothing other than edifying words were ever heard to come from the from the lips of Pietro da Portogallo. The modesty of his conversation with seculars was so great that he appeared impeccable. He was never seen to be embarrassed, and displayed a holy modesty in all situations. [III, 305]

May God give you paradise

919. When Francesco da Macerata was greeted by seculars he answered, “May God give you paradise.” His voice trembled somewhat. It always seemed as though he was about weep. He had wonderful charity towards others. When he looked into someone’s face, he had a certain kindly gaze, such that it seemed he carried everyone in his heart. He could never think evil of anyone, except of himself, whom he regarded to be the greatest sinner of the world. When he requested for alms, he often returned home with his pockets empty, because for the love of God he gave away almost all the bread he got. [III, 405]

He embraced him by the neck

920. Raniero da Borgo San Sepolcro was enlightened so highly by the Holy Spirit that he knew how much the love of others pleased God. It seemed that all of them were his dear brothers. Impartially, he loved each one so tenderly that he bore all his brothers engraved upon his heart. If anyone asked him to pray God for him, he would make the sign of the holy cross over whatever infirmity he suffered. Then he would quickly embrace him round the neck, and kiss him tenderly and unashamedly, forgetting about religious modesty, which judges such acts unfitting and not to be done by a Religious. If his companion said to him, “Oh Brother Raniero, you have done wrong!” the servant of God would answer, “Forgive me, I forgot myself.” This came from the great purity of heart God had given him. God often concurred, to ensure everyone knew the exchange was prompted by His Majesty, giving perfect health to most of those whom the holy man signed with the sign of the cross. [III, 491]

He was loved so much

921. The servant of God, Giles of Sant' Angelo in Vado, was a man of such great austerity, that very few have been able to follow him. He never ate more than once a day. For almost all the Lenten observances, Fridays and vigils throughout the year, he fasted on bread and water. He always went barefoot. At no time ever did he wear shoes. He was content with only one habit, without wearing a mantle or other clothes.

He begged alms in Rome for about thirty years, and gave such a good example to the seculars, that all Rome regarded him as holy. He was greatly loved by gentlemen and prelates of Holy Church, and had to make great efforts to detach himself from them. They were greatly delighted to hear him speak about the things of God! [III, 140]

He never displeased anyone

922. The servant of God, Brother Felice, never alienated anyone, even though he dealt with a great number of people of every condition for a good many years. With his holy life he has edified and brought, as far as possible, every kind of spiritual favour. He helped destitute people with alms in so far as he could, and gave such an example to great lords and noble persons that he was loved and regarded as a holy religious by everyone. Although God gave him a rustic nature and a very simple way of speaking and conversing, nevertheless the Holy Spirit operated in this servant of his so that his rusticity bore the greatest fruit for souls, and especially with noble women and great ladies. He conversed familiarly with them, like an angel on earth, and this produced the greatest fruits in them. His behaviour was so pleasing that, even though he often reprimanded them harshly, albeit with great modesty, they all carried him engraved in their hearts. When they received him to their homes, it was as if they were receiving Saint Francis.

In that time the Lord God worked many miracles because of the great affection and faith they had for him. For, it was remarkable that this servant of God never stained himself in mind or body while conferring with so many kinds of people over such a long period of years. The Lord God gave him so much grace that in the midst of the world he behaved as if he was in the midst of the woods. Indeed he garnered fruit from it. Because he was full of charity, when he saw the miseries of the world, he would spend all night in church praying to God for the many needs he saw in the poor people. [III, 466]

The people ran

923. No one can describe the great veneration everyone had for the friars. Since they were rarely seen by seculars, they were an even greater cause for astonishment. When it was necessary for them to go outside, the people ran

from everywhere to see them and to hear them speak about the things of God. [II, 257]

They took the greatest edification

924. The seculars took the greatest edification from them. They regarded them all as saints. Because of their great faith, the Lord God worked many great miracles through these his servants. In all their tribulations the people had recourse to the Capuchins. They regarded everything the Capuchins said to them as if they were words spoken by Jesus Christ. [II, 284]

May you be blessed

925. The Capuchins visited the Cardinals and Prelates and had a very cordial meeting with them. After long discussions they were completely convinced, and took a liking to the friars. Often they were heard to say that when they saw two Capuchins with their minds completely lifted up to God, they felt themselves tremble with a certain reverential fear. The same thing happened among the people. When they came to understand matters, as some of them did, they were amazed to see friars, for as long as they looked at them, standing bolt upright, in total silence with their hands joined. Many wept and said, "May you be blessed! You are true servants of God who have put the world beneath your feet." They would say to one another, "Our times have never seen more mortified or holier Religious." Before this, many people had fled from them, and some had sneered at them saying, "They're buffoons!" and insulted them. Now, if anyone could take them into his house and do some good for them, he counted it as if he were seeing Saint Francis. Anyone who could hear their sermons and good instructions considered himself blessed. [II, 33]

It was written about

926. The fame of their holiness was so great that it was written about throughout all Christendom. [II, 248]

927. Everyone said, "These friars reprimand us just by their presence." [II, 94]

These are saints

928. The Lord God worked wonders. It seemed that the Capuchins evoked admiration and awe in everyone who saw them. The people would sigh and say, "These men are all saints, and yet they do such harsh penance. What, then, will become of us, miserable sinners?" [II, 257]

929. The example given by the Capuchins to the secular people was so extraordinary, everyone said they were saints. The good example of the friars and the affection for them of the seculars began at that time and has lasted right up until today. When the seculars saw them, they all stood in silence and

looked at them with great admiration. Many of them said with tears, "These are true servants of God, who have put the world beneath their feet. It's obvious that they suffer. None of them has any colour in his cheeks." [IV, 19]

930. Once when I was present the Most Illustrious Marquise of Pescara came to the house at Narni to visit the holy old man Brother Antonio da Monteciccardo. As she discussed with him at length the things of God, the bell was rung for Office. In an instant that Lady saw the majority of the friars emerge from the woods with tearful eyes, barefooted and stern. Startled, she rose to her feet and made the sign of the cross. To her it was as if she was looking at those ancient holy Fathers who came from the desert. [IV, 184]

They pass by with reverence shown them

931. The people in Solothurn are simple, for they were not educated due to a lack of ministers. Because they were surrounded by heretics, there was little else lacking to stop them becoming perverted. When the friars came in the beginning, many people mocked and laughed at them. Many took fright and fled. One said one thing, another said something else. Finally, however, all came to hold them in great respect. They looked upon them with great admiration. When they pass by now, the people show great reverence by rising to their feet and honouring them with much adulation.

These and similar things are unique to the Capuchin Friars, and not found in others. Just as they cause great wonder in people who have never seen men like them before, so they inspired these people with great respect. Thus it follows that many now send their alms to the friary each week in very large amounts. Such a thing is not usually seen in Italy.

The Friars still produce much fruit in souls by celebrating, preaching, confessing, and edifying though holy example. [VI, 467]

He seemed like a Capuchin

932. The Cardinal of Trani said:

"My Father, be of good heart! I am completely edified by this holy Congregation. I have seen very well and touched with my hand, that there is no ambition among you, which we feared. But it is all simplicity. I have always favoured you and will support you more than ever. Be careful how you enjoy this beautiful state that our Lord God has granted you in the bosom of Holy Church in these very wicked times. Do not fail yourselves or Holy Church, who hopes so much in you. You are regarded as saints by everyone. The eyes of everyone are turned on you. There is no other mirror today that reflects for us the apostolic life. Nor is there an Order in which there is the semblance of holiness and of the observance of the

Gospel of Christ, except your Congregation. I tell you that in Court, when some metaphor of holy men is needed, we say, 'He seems like a Capuchin!' On the other hand, since the enemy of human nature will not fail to plant some wild and foul smelling weeds in this garden of Saint Francis among so many beautiful plants, fortify yourselves with the example our Lord gave us. After his holy resurrection he appeared to Magdalene in the form of a gardener with hoe in hand. It is as if from then on he is always prepared to uproot all the weeds which, after his ascension into heaven, would come forth in the garden of Holy Church. Do the same. Do not spare the hoe." [II, 396]

I have given reverence to two saints

933. So from the words of that venerable Father, His Holiness Paul III felt sure of the goodness of the Congregation, and from that time on it received from him all possible support. He held the Congregation in such high regard that one day, while taking some exercise, he met the Father General with another Father. With great reverence and humility the good Shepherd blessed them. He greeted them and bowed respectfully to them. The Master of Ceremonies did not think it was good thing for His Holiness to bow to two friars in public. When they were at table for a little recreation, he said to him, "Holy Father, you breeched protocol this morning when you bowed to those two Capuchin Friars." His Holiness answered, "Tell me, am I not obliged to do reverence to the relics of the saints?" He answered, "Yes." And the Pope said, "I was giving reverence to two saints, so that was not a breech of protocol. Those are holy Religious. The apostolic life and holiness of life shine out more among the members of their Order than in any other Religious in these times." [II, 411]

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