

INTRODUCTION

In these considerations on Capuchin identity I wish to recall *briefly* some of the principles for the renewal of the religious life that emerged with Vatican II and subsequently. The documents also emphasise the importance within the Church of our fidelity to our charism. What will also emerge from these documents, I hope, is the important distinction between the *charism of the founders* and the *charism of the institutes* they founded, as well as the bond between the two.

By taking a *quick* glance of two moments in the history of the Capuchin Order, I will attempt to demonstrate that the identity of the charism of our Order has never really been entirely fixed or static, but has evolved in response to needs and even crises within the Order. The various editions of the Constitutions over the centuries bear witness to that evolution in the Order's interpretation of its charism. The identification of the Capuchin charism is a task for each generation as it struggles with the tension between fidelity to and continuity with Francis' charism and the principles that guided the Capuchin Order in the beginning, and the need to adapt the application of those principles to the particular circumstances in which the Order finds itself. "Faithfulness to the past is the guarantee of the charism in the present, and is a challenge for the future."¹ The assertion is not about nostalgia for the past and the 'good old days' with which to judge ourselves inferior to friars in the beginning. Nor does it allow us to fall prey to the temptation to regard the present as a time of apocalyptic demise for the Order. Instead, we may look back to the beginnings of the Order and be encouraged by its humanity and difficulties, and be inspired by the wonders of Divine Providence in the very survival and growth of the Fraternity.

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As "the primary provincial authority"² a provincial chapter elects the provincial minister³ and discusses matters relating to the life and activity of the province⁴. Like a General Chapter⁵ our chapter too should be a moment of grace and the Holy Spirit and consider ways to renew, protect and promote our Capuchin patrimony in Australia. Therefore the Provincial Chapter is a suitable place to "renew our knowledge of the

¹ "La fedeltà al passato è garanzia per il presente e stimolo per il futuro." F.A. CATALANO, C. CARGNONI, G. SANTARELLI (eds), *Le prime Costituzione dei Frati Minori Cappuccini, Roma – S. Eufemia 1536*, Roma, L'Italia Francescana, 1982, p.12.

² CC 1990 (Armstrong); 124,1

³ CC 1990: 127,3

⁴ CC 1990: 127,1

⁵ CRSI, "La vita religiosa nell'insegnamento della Chiesa i suoi elementi essenziali negli Istituti dediti alle opere di apostolato", II, 51, 31 May 1983: Il capitolo generale è un'istituzione ad hoc. È composto di membri *ex officio* e delegati eletti che ordinariamente si riuniscono per un solo capitolo. In quanto segno di unità nella carità, la celebrazione del capitolo generale deve costituire un momento di grazia e di azione dello Spirito Santo nella vita di un istituto. E' un'esperienza gioiosa, pasquale ed ecclesiale, da cui trae vantaggio l'istituto e la Chiesa intera.

genius and ideals of our Fraternity so that, correctly adapted to the times, our life may be consoled and inspired by the wholesome tradition of our brothers.”⁶

THE RENEWAL AND ADAPTATION OF THE ORDER

Many of us will remember the refrain from the Second Vatican Council concerning the renewal and adaptation of religious life. We will also remember some of the different ways religious accepted and strove to realize this *aggiornamento* based on a constant return to the sources of Christian life according to the original spirit of their Institute and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. *Perfectae caritatis* set out principles for renewal and adaption.

2. The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. This renewal, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church, must be advanced according to the following principles:

a) Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels, let this be held by all institutes as the highest rule.

b) It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions - all of which make up the patrimony of each institute - be faithfully held in honor.

c) All institutes should share in the life of the Church, adapting as their own and implementing in accordance with their own characteristics the Church's undertakings and aims in matters biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social.

d) Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church. In such a way, judging current events wisely in the light of faith and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to assist men more effectively.

e) The purpose of the religious life is to help the members follow Christ and be united to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels. It should be constantly kept in mind, therefore, that even the best adjustments made in accordance with the needs of our age will be

⁶ CC 1990: 4,1. The current CC in Italian have: Come Frati Minori Cappuccini dobbiamo conoscere l'indole e il progetto di vita della nostra Fraternità, affinché la nostra vita, rettamente adattata ai diversi tempi, si ispiri alla genuina tradizione dei nostri fratelli.

ineffectual unless they are animated by a renewal of spirit. This must take precedence over even the active ministry.⁷

Another challenge that faces the Order today is the transmission of the Capuchin charism. The inculturation and transmission of the charism can be problematic in the younger jurisdictions within Africa, Asia and Latin America. However in the provinces of ancient foundation in Europe and elsewhere the difficulty is no less formidable within a post-Christian, post-modern environment that has provoked a crisis of faith with the so-called demise of history, metaphysics, theology and religion and the consequent relativism, subjectivism and nihilism subtending the ideal of “personal truth.”

What today is Capuchin identity?⁸ The question is acutely felt by those responsible for the animation of initial and ongoing formation. Or to ask the question in other words: Can a non-Italian be a genuine Capuchin, or can he only approximate Capuchin identity? Regarding the so-called *creative dynamic fidelity*⁹ in the adaptation of the charism - translated into new cultural contexts or pastoral initiatives: We may ask whether inculturation and pluriformity compromise the Capuchin heritage and disrupt the historical continuity of the charism? How should we see the relationship between freedom for new expressions of the charism (pluriformity) and the bond with the historical roots of the charism itself? Are there universals or constants in Capuchin spirituality and life that are valid for all times, places and cultures and which distinguish and define the Capuchin? What may these be?

A variety of expressions - some labels, others approximate definitions - are used to indicate the existence of something that is distinctively Capuchin: the distinctive or proper character of the Order; the proper Capuchin identity; the portrait of the Capuchin; Capuchin spirit and life; traditional Capuchin spirituality and apostolate; «*ratio vivendi fratrum*»; the distinctive Capuchin virtues; the Order's lived patrimony and way of life, the characteristics original to the more authentic Capuchin Franciscan spirit; the constitutive and perennially distinctive features, traits and characteristics of the Order.¹⁰

On the matter of the renewal and adaptation of religious life in general, the post-Vatican II Magisterium¹¹ prefers the term *charism*.

⁷ *Perfectae caritatis*, n.2

⁸ For example, the vow of poverty may be ambiguous in places where the evil of material poverty exists on a large scale, and where social development focuses upon the eradication of poverty.

⁹ *Post-synodal apostolic exhortation Vita Consecrata of John Paul II to the bishops and clergy religious orders and congregations and societies of apostolic life secular institutes and all the faithful on the consecrated life and its mission in the church and in the world*, 25 March 1996, n.37

¹⁰ In this I rely upon FABIO CIARDI, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito. Per una teologia del carisma di fondatore*, Città Nuova, 1982

¹¹ For the recent Magisterium I have referred to *Perfectae caritas* (1965); Letter of Paul VI to the Capuchin General Chapter, 20 August 1974; Discourse of Paul VI to the Capuchin Capitulars of the General Chapter, 12 July 1976; *Mutuae relationes*, 23 April 1978; Discourse of John Paul II to Capuchin Capitulars of the General Chapter, 12 July 1988; *Vita consecrata*, 25 March 1996; Letter of John Paul II to Br. John Corriveau after the Convegno internazionale sulla dimensione laicale della vocazione, 18 September 1996; Discourse of John Paul II to Capuchin Capitulars of the General Chapter, 7 July 2000.

... your founders who were raised up by God within the Church ... in reality, the charism of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality that conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church¹²

Or again:

There are many Religious Institutes in the Church, each differing from the other according to its proper character (cf. *Perfectae caritatis* nn7-10). Each however, contributes its own vocation as a gift raised up by the Spirit by the work of outstanding men and women (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 45; *Perfectae caritatis* 1,2).

The very charism of the Founders (*Evangelii nuntiandi* 11) appears as an “*experience of the Spirit*,” transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church (*Lumen Gentium* 44; *Christus Dominus* 33; 35,1,2, etc). This *distinctive character* also involves a particular style of sanctification and of apostolate, which creates its particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its object elements.

In this hour of cultural evolution and ecclesial renewal, therefore, it is necessary to preserve the identity of each institute so securely, that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way.¹³

Thus the constitutive and perennially distinctive characteristics of the Order may be the empirical elements of Capuchin identity. However, we may prefer the term *charism* that includes identity, but which also embraces the theological dimension of the divine initiative in raising up holy founders and their institutes or movements within the Church and her mission in the world. And as a recognized school of holiness each charism is a reliable way for its members to live the gospel and grow in holiness.

This text contains an important distinction: The founder’s charism, as an “*experience of the Spirit*,” is transmitted to his disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them. The founder’s charism develops and comes into clearer focus within the life of the founder himself. The *charism of the founder*, transmitted to his followers posthumously (though not necessarily) becomes *the charism of the*

¹² *Evangelica testificatio* , (1971) n.11; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 45; *Perfectae Caritatis* n.1,2.

¹³ Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church*, 23 April 1978, n.11. The distinction between the founding charism and the charism of the institute is expressed more often in *Vita Consecrata* (1996).12, 36, 49, 61, 62, 72, 73, 80, 81, 97.

Institute that then has a history of its own as it responds to new historical circumstances and realities.

Consider the life of Saint Francis. Amid difficulties and uncertainties, Francis' conversion led him little by little to become the founder of a brotherhood. Amid tensions, difficulties and doubts, his charism evolved or developed in obedient and ongoing discernment of the will of the Lord. In the beginning he did not plan out the foundation and shape of his life or that of the Fraternity. Indeed there were crucial life changing moments when he required discernment. For example:

The humble servant of Christ, St. Francis, a short time after his conversion, having already assembled and received many brothers into the Order, was much troubled and perplexed in mind as to what he ought to do; whether to give himself entirely to the prayer, or now and then to preach the Word. Through his great humility, he had no opinion of himself or of the virtue of his prayers; and, wishing to know the will of God, he sought to learn it through the prayers of others. Wherefore he called to him Brother Masseo, and thus addressed him: "Go to Sister Clare, and bid her from me to set herself with some of the holiest sisters to pray to the Lord that he may show me clearly whether he wills that I should preach or only keep to prayer. Then go to Brother Silvester, and ask of him the same favour."

Brother Masseo reported their replies:

"The Lord has revealed both to Brother Silvester and to Sister Clare, that it is his will you should go about the world to preach; for you have not been called for yourself alone, but the salvation of others."¹⁴

There were other critical moments, e.g. the crisis at Fonte Colombo when some of the friars demanded of him a rule.

Last but not least, just before his death, Francis addressed these words to his fraternity: "I have done what is mine to do, may Christ teach you what is yours to do." Although Francis had handed on to the Brothers a gospel way of life articulated in the Rule, he recognized that the brothers, I believe both individually and in common, still had to discern the Lord's will for them within the Fraternity which, after his death, had to discern how his charism could and ought to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them.

The charism of the Institute should be inseparably bound to the charism of the Founder in order to remain authentic or genuine.

Every authentic charism implies a certain element of genuine originality and of special initiative for the spiritual life of the Church. In its surroundings it may appear troublesome and may even cause difficulties, since it is not always and immediately easy to recognize it as coming from the Spirit.

¹⁴ *Fioretti*, Chapter XVI

The specific charismatic note of any institute demands, both of the Founder and of his disciples, a continual examination regarding fidelity to the Lord; docility to His Spirit; intelligent attention to circumstances and an outlook cautiously directed to the signs of the times; the will to be part of the Church; the awareness of subordination to the sacred hierarchy; boldness of initiatives; constancy in the giving of self; humility in bearing with adversities. The true relation between genuine charism, with its perspectives of newness, and interior suffering, carries with it an unvarying history of the connection between charism and cross, which, above every motive that may justify misunderstandings, is supremely helpful in discerning the authenticity of a vocation.¹⁵

A permanent bond exists between the charism of the founder and the charism of the institute. While every religious institute derives its way of life from the Gospel, the insight, inspiration and direction of the Founder should continue to motivate, form and guide the Institute. That bond is an historical and moral link and an Institute needs to continually return to the original inspiration of the founder in order to retain the originality and authenticity of its charism. Indeed, the Church calls on each institute and religious to remain faithful both to the founding charism and to the institute's subsequent spiritual heritage or tradition.

There is the need for *fidelity to the founding charism* and subsequent spiritual heritage of each Institute. It is precisely in this fidelity to the inspiration of the founders and foundresses, an inspiration which is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the essential elements of the consecrated life can be more readily discerned and more fervently put into practice ... In every charism there predominates "a profound desire to be conformed to Christ to give witness to some aspect of his mystery". This specific aspect is meant to take shape and develop according to the most authentic tradition of the Institute, as present in its Rule, Constitutions and Statutes.¹⁶

On the one hand the ongoing renewal of the Order refers to a continuous study and ownership of the original inspiration of the founding charism – or fidelity to the founder's charism in a process which over the centuries establishes a tradition and historical continuity, and gradually defines the charism of the Order. On the other hand, that ongoing renewal also requires some 'reasonable and necessary' adjustment in the living out (and thus transmission) of the charism (spirituality and apostolate) in new and sometimes unprecedented cultural or pastoral contexts. Thus the renewal of the Order involves a continuous effort to respond to the needs of the times in the Church and the world in a legitimate and genuine manner: one that resonates with and preserves the original genius, spirit or characteristics of the charism of the Order. The resulting tension and struggle is certainly evident in the history of the Franciscan Family, of which the early Capuchin Fraternity is one such renewal or reform: an attempt to return to the essential charism of Saint Francis, a re-reading of the Rule and a restructuring of the life of the friars in an age of reform. In a sense the Capuchin reform is also in continuity with the turbulent history of Franciscan reforms. Perhaps we may say in a

¹⁵ *Mutuae relationes*, n.12

¹⁶ *Vita consecrata*, n.36

simple way that Franciscan history is one that reflects the ongoing tension between continuity and legitimate adaptation, at times marked by conflicting views over the degrees of emphasis on either continuity or adaptation - focused on the practice of poverty.

CAPUCHIN FRANCISCAN CHARISM

Discussion about Capuchin identity today is not a consequence exclusive to Vatican II, as if the renewal and reform desired by the Council may have introduced doubts about Capuchin identity and religious life in general. (As the story goes, after Vatican II religious life went “From night prayer to lights out, to light prayer and nights out.”)

To redress that impression it may be worthwhile to glance briefly at the relationship between the charism of the founder and the charism of the Franciscan Order and then the Capuchin Franciscan fraternity during the first decades of its life. This digression may stir memories of Cuthbert of Brighton’s *The Capuchins* or Duncan Nimmo’s *Reform and Division*, the texts from which many of us have received our understanding of Franciscan history.

During his own lifetime Francis’ fraternity grows, and as it grows it changes. More so after his death. The differences between the *spirituali* and the *conventuali* begin to polarize, as do the differences between the *letterati* and *ignoranti*: the learned and the uneducated. At the ascendancy of Bonaventure and the learned university friars the crisis concerning the interpretation of the Rule is critical. The General Chapter of Narbonne (1260) suppressed unauthorized biographies of St. Francis. Bonaventure collates earlier statutes made in the Order and composes the first Constitutions of the Franciscan Friars. While the Constitutions are seen as a hedge to defend the Rule, they also seek to apply to Rule to particular circumstances in the life of the friars. In so doing the Constitutions interpret the Rule. As such, the Constitutions are privileged *monumenta* or witnesses in the development or evolution of the charism of the Franciscan fraternity.

Church requirements for properly prepared preachers, teachers and confessors makes study essential for the ‘Pope’s armada’ of exempt and itinerant preacher Franciscan friars. And since only the educated friars may preach, the Order is now clericalised when the Constitutions of Narbonne prohibit the membership of lay friars in the fraternity without the express permission of the minister general, contrary it seems to the identity of the Franciscan Order at the time of its inception.¹⁷

Later other crises followed concerning the observance of the vow of poverty and the literal interpretation of the Rule or Francis’ charism) e.g. as with the *Fratricelli*; the *Celestini* or *Clareni*; the Observant reform; etc.)

We can leap now to the first years of the Capuchin Fraternity. The first official Capuchin “chroniclers” - Mario da Mercato Saraceno and Bernardino da Colpetrazzo - composed their accounts of the beginnings of the Capuchin fraternity with an explicit apologetic intent to demonstrate that:

¹⁷ cf. Conferenza dei Ministri Generali del Primo Ordine Franciscano e del TOR, *L’Identità dell’Ordine francescano nel suo momento fondativo* in *Analecta OFM Cap* 1998(114)924+

- The Capuchin fraternity is a reform, the culmination of earlier Franciscan reforms. The Capuchin reform is the last and greatest of the reforms among the Franciscan friars - a return to the life of Francis and his first companions, to replicate Francis' charism, seen as analogous to the life led by Jesus and the apostles. For the first Capuchins their habit was the genuine habit of Saint Francis. For them the habit signified the authenticity of their reform, *the* return to the life of Francis and his first friars.
- The Capuchins are unanimous in their charity and the other virtues, as well as the orthodoxy of their faith. They live in "holy uniformity."
- Bernardino Ochino was not the founder of the Capuchin reform. An official account was requested by Giulio Antonio Santori in 1578, the Cardinal Protector of the Capuchins 1575-1603, recently appointed head of the Roman Inquisition.

The story of the beginning as told by these two authors presents the first Capuchins in a rosy light. Colpetrazzo was particularly nostalgic for that 'golden period' at the beginning of the *bella e santa riforma*. The combination of apologia and nostalgia painted an idealized or romanticized picture of the first generation of Capuchins: a breed of super-heroes in more or less complete harmony of faith (with one or two exceptions) and unanimous in their concept of the kind of reform they sought together. We can lift the veil of this idealised portrait of the early Capuchins and recognise a radical development of the Capuchin Franciscan charism at its beginning.

WHO WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE CAPUCHINS?

Even towards the end of the Sixteenth Century this is still a vexed question. Relying heavily upon the story written by Mario da Mercato Saraceno, after Mario's death Bernardino da Colpetrazzo takes up the baton and begins his official account of the Capuchin beginnings in 1584 at the request of the General Chapter. (As I have already mentioned above, the Cardinal Protector of the Order¹⁸ by 1585 heads the Holy Office of the Roman Inquisition, and asks that the beginnings of the Fraternity be recorded. His written opinion in the 1560's about Caterina Cybo, Vittoria and Ascanio Colonna, and Bernardino Ochino have been recorded elsewhere.)¹⁹ The Vicar General releases

¹⁸ In his third book Colpetrazzo is brief in his descriptions of the Cardinal Protectors of the Capuchins, and his briefest is about Santori. On Santori see GIUSEPPE CUGNONI (ed.), "Vita del Card. Giulio Antonio Santori detto il card. Di S. Severina composta e scritta da lui medesimo" in *Archivio della R. Società Romana di Storia Patria* 12(1889) 327-372; 13(1890) 151-205; GAETANO ROMANO MORONI, "Giulio Antonio Santori" in *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni*, LXI, 1853, 80-82; MASSIMO FIRPO, *Il Processo Inquisitoriale del cardinal Giovanni Moroni. Edizione critica*, vol.I: *Il Compendium*, Istituto Storico Italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, Roma, 1981, 39-49; SAVERIO RICCI, *Il sommo Inquisitore. Giulio Antonio Santori tra autobiografia e storia (1532-1602)*, Roma, Saleterno Editrice, 2002

¹⁹ It seems likely, according to Massimo Firpo (*Il Compendium*, 49) that Santori was the "estensore" of the Compendium for Pius V, whose pontificate extended from January 1566 to May 1572. Thus the Compendium was composed while Santori was still vice-Protector of the Capuchins (1570-1578; cf. *Lexicon Capuccinum*, col. 1554) and contains about some key supporters of the Capuchins at the beginning: Bernardinus Ochinus instructor Ascanii Columnae ... Amicus Fregosii cardinalis... Intimus ducissae Camerini, in cuius domo laicalem habitum suscepit... Haereticus tectus ... Amicus marcionissae Piscariae (184); Ducissae Camerini haeretica, sectatrix haereticorum et doctrix monialium haereticarum (185); Marchionissa Piscariae filia spiritualis et discipula cardinalis Poli haeretici (192 among the many indictments of Vittoria Colonna due to her connections with Pole, Contarini, Moroni and Ochino). Little

Colpetrazzo from the task of composing his account and gives it to Mattia da Salò in 1587²⁰. Colpetrazzo eventually completes his manuscript in 1593, the year before his death. Like Mario da Mercato Saraceno, he believed it still necessary to demonstrate that Bernardino Ochino was not the founder of the Order:

Although the Congregation had already grown considerably by the grace of God, it pleased our Lord God that many prelates of Holy Church, as well as secular Lords, nobility and people, firmly believed that Bernardino Ochino of Siena began the Congregation²¹. This label and opinion deeply saddened our Protector, the most Illustrious Monsignor, the Cardinal of Santa Severina. To rid the Congregation of this reputation, he spoke with the Very Rev. Padre Girolamo da Monte Fiore, our General at the time. The Cardinal convinced him of the value of a written work that would bring to light the origins of our Congregation. Such a work would be useful everywhere. It would also make known the more remarkable things that our Lord God did in the Congregation so that the Friars might have the opportunity to imitate the example of the first Fathers. The Reverend Father General and our other Fathers liked the idea very much. The General wrote at once to the older friars throughout the Provinces to have them put to paper all the more important things they remembered that took place in our Congregation.²²

Bernardino Ochino's unexpected departure from Italy in late August/early September 1542 threatened the survival of the fledgling Capuchin fraternity. To refute the widely held opinion that he was the *de facto*²³ founder of the Capuchins, the chroniclers needed to identify a founder with a pedigree of orthodoxy. If Ochino was not the actual founder, who was? Ludovico Fossombrone? Although Ludovico was the *de iure* founder of the Order, the Order had expelled him during the General Chapter of 1536 held in Santa Euphemia. (I do not know how many religious orders have had the distinction of expelling their founder.) Therefore the Capuchin chroniclers do not name Ludovico as the founder. The only remaining candidate (excluding Paolo da Chioggia

surprise that the Cardinal Protector of the Capuchins should want the question of the origin of the Capuchins be put clearly into writing. His strident approach to the identification and prosecution of heresy, as well as the opinion of others mentioned in this paragraph concerning the dubious orthodoxy of the first Capuchins not only motivated the composition of Colpetrazzo's chronicle of the Capuchin reform, but it would seem plausible that the Cardinal's request may have contributed to the apologetic tone of the accounts written by both Mercato Saraceno and Colpetrazzo..

²⁰ It is believed that this task was entrusted to Mattia at the time of the General Chapter in 1587 (EDOARDO D'ALENÇON, *De Primordiis Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum. Commentarium Historicum*, Romae, Apud Curiam Generalitiam O.M.Cap., 1921, 4) and that Mattia enjoyed a friendship with the same Federico Cesi, at whose insistence Colpetrazzo completed his chronicle. cf. FRANCESCO DA VICENZA, "Vita del P. Mattia Bellintani da Salò" in *Collectanea Franciscana* 6(1936) 259

²¹ Colpetrazzo addresses this opinion about the founder of the Capuchins in BERNARDINO DA COLPETRAZZO, *A simple and devout history of the Origins of the Congregation of Capuchin Friars. Book One: The Main Events in the Birth of the Order*. From the critical edition by Melchior of Pobladura OFM Cap, Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum, Vol II, Assisi, 1939, Chapter 9 and Chapter 66, nn. 386+ (unpublished translation by Paul Hanbridge).

²² Colpetrazzo's final introduction to his account, in MHOMC II, n.4

²³ The *de iure* founding group of the new congregation named in the *Religionis zelus* (3 July 1528) is Ludovico and Raffaele Taglia da Fossombrone. However there is little doubt that the Order grew geographically and numerically in Italy thanks to the preaching of Bernardino Ochino.

as well as the Calabresi friars) was Matteo da Bascio. He had left the fraternity shortly after his election as its superior at the first Chapter in Albacina. But at least he later died in the odor of sanctity.

Where is the Capuchin charism during these early “golden years” of the Order?

As the story goes, in the Jubilee Year of 1525, Matteo da Bascio absconds from the Observant friary in Montefalcone. He takes himself to Rome and obtains verbal approval from Clement VII to live the life of an eremitical itinerant preacher, to report to the General Chapter in 1526 in Assisi which is to be presided by the Minister General Francisco Quiñones.

Ludovico Taglia da Fossombrone and his brother Raffaele also abscond. Colpetrazzo recounts:

The following year, in 1526, Fra Ludovico da Fossombrone came to join Fra Matteo. Few had heard of Fra Matteo the previous year (1525), partly because he had been in prison and partly because he had only preached in Montefeltro. Very few of the Friars knew he had altered the habit. After the old man of Carteceto had received that habit, no one felt moved to adopt it. In the following year (1526), however, because of his preaching and the (miracle of the) beans, everyone spoke about Fra Matteo. That is why so many Friars felt inspired, including Fra Ludovico da Fossombrone and his brother Fra Raffaele.²⁴

Given that the Fossombrone brothers abandoned their friary without obedience, they were formally apostates. Their provincial could not be blamed if he considered Matteo da Bascio in the same way.²⁵ His pursuit of these friars was not a persecution but the

²⁴ MHOMC II, n.118

²⁵ Matteo returned to the Observants shortly after he resigned as the superior of the new fraternity. There he received obedience from the Minister General for his way of life:

“Since you assert that you have received permission from the Supreme Pontiff to go about *ad libitum* announcing the divine Word in whatever provinces you wish, henceforth this is what I want too, wishing our approval aid such a holy work and in your desire to gain souls for Christ. In the tenor of the present letter, I grant you with the merit of salutary obedience wherever the spirit of Jesus may lead you and your companion, fra Giovanni da Forli, a devout cleric of the Province of Bologna, to go and be effective, provided that everywhere you sincerely observe the Rule that you have promised to God, to benefit that office of preaching and to achieve the greatest example and edification of the faithful.”

“Quum asseras te licentiam habere a Summo Pontifice ad libitum tuum quascumque velis provincias, divinum Verbum evangelizandi gratia peragrandi: hinc est quod ego quoquo volens ut tam sancto operi, ac quo ferves animas Christo lucrificandi desiderio noster accedat assensus: tenore praesentium, tibi cum merito salutaris obedientiae concedo ut, modo Regulam quam Deo Domino vovisti sincerius observes, quocumque, spiritus Jesu te conduxerit, una cum socio, fr. Joanne de Forolivio, provinciae Bononiae clerico devoto, praefatum praedicationis officium, majori quo poteris fidelium exemplo et aedificatione executurus ire possi et valeas...” Given at Mantua, 15 May 1536 by p. Vincent Lunel, Minister General of the Regular Observance. I have in my hands a text taken from the codex of p. Beato da Valagnesi, Ord. Min. Reformati (†1730) which is kept in Venice in the archives of the friary of Isola di S. Michele. Flaminius Corner published the letter in the work *Ecclesiae Venetae... illustratae, ac in decades distributae* (Dec. xi, pars posterior), Venetiis, 1799, p.32, n.4. From EDOUARD D’ALENÇON, *Beginnings of the Capuchin Friars Minor 1525-1534 An historical commentary* by, Rome, Capuchin General Curia, 1921. Unpublished translation of *De primordiis Ordinis fratrum minorum capuccinorum, 1524-1534: commentarium historicum* by Paul Hanbridge (2004).

execution of a papal brief that ordered superiors to have fugitive friars return to obedience, making use of the secular arm when needed.²⁶

As the story goes Ludovico, with Raffaele in tow, found Matteo who says he only has permission for himself and has no authority to accept others to his way of life. So the Fossombrone brothers go away to find the monks of the Camaldolese reform in the little hermitage of the Grotte di Massaccio. Ludovico knows about this old hermitage taken over by Blessed Paolo Giustiniani and his monks, for he, Ludovico, fulfilled his novitiate year in the Franciscan friary above the Grotte in the town of Cupramonta. To escape Giovanni da Fano the brothers leave in disguise to go to the Camaldolese monastery at Monte Cucco near Pascelupo. Their request to join the Camaldolese is rejected by that monastic chapter.

Via the good offices of Caterina Cybo, the Fossombrone brothers receive the Bull *Religionis zelus* from a cash-strapped Clement VII at Vitbero and a small number of friars join their ranks. The first Capuchin chapter elected Matteo da Bascio as their superior and the Statutes of Albacina were composed shortly afterwards. [In Mattia da Salò's Ms history of the Capuchin beginnings these ordinances have the title: *Constitutions of the Friars Minor, called (Friars Minor) of the Eremitical Life. The First Constitutions of the Capuchin Congregation.*²⁷] Just a short while after his election, Matteo resigns and returns to his life as an itinerant preacher among the Observants. The role of superior is in conflict with the life he had in mind for himself. And it would seem that the way of life Ludovico Fossombrone proposed for the friars does not correspond with Matteo's original concept of how to lead his Franciscan life.

Between 1534 and 1535 a large number of friars come to the Capuchins from the Observance, including Francesco da Iesi, Bernardino d'Asti, Bernardino Ochino and the same Giovanni da Fano. These will become the 'new leadership' of the Capuchin

²⁶ cf. EDOUARD D'ALENÇON, *Beginnings of the Capuchin Friars Minor 1525-1534 An historical commentary*, Rome, Capuchin General Curia, 1921 Chapter II, n.5: Unpublished translation by Paul Hanbridge: A few days before (11-12 March) Clement VII reinforced by affirmation the Constitution of his predecessor Leo X against friars outside the Order, who were wandering about without the permission of the superiors. He sent this to the superiors so that they might bring back such religious, even with force, and put them in prison, *etiamsi haberent litteras apostolicas*,† a clause in fact to compel those who lacked the permission of the superiors of the Order. Therefore there is no question whether Giovanni should carry out these parts of his office, even if unpleasant. Matteo could in no way legitimise his flight, much less prove the permission of the Pontiff. The visions and revelations, which he was convinced had instructed him, could calm his conscience to a certain point. The superior must not take these into consideration unless their truth be confirmed by some other sign. If not, the matter was to be settled by canonical discipline. I would not dare to condemn Matteo, a holy man whose miracles during his life and after his death make him outstanding. Nonetheless, nor would I dare recommend his way of doing things. Giovanni must not be blamed.

† Leo X, *In supremae dignitatis specula*, 8 January 1516; Clement VII, *Dudum felicitis ricordationis*, 11 March 1525. Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, vol. xvi, 553-556 and 667-669 respectively (original pagination cited by d'Alençon in his footnote.)

²⁷ Mattia's manuscript text is the version of the Statutes of Albacina that appear in *Constitutiones ordinis fratrum minorum capuccinorum saeculorum decursu promulgatae*, Vol. I, *Constitutiones Antiquae (1529-1643)*, *Editio anastatica*, Romae, Curia Generalis OFM Cap, 1980, pages 18-31. An Italian translation with the Latin text may also be found in COSTANZO CARGNONI, *I Frati Cappuccini I*, nn.81-223. Cf. MHOMC II, n.159

congregation. The new arrivals soon pressed Ludovico to convoke a General Chapter. Ludovico adamantly resists the idea to call a General Chapter *at that point in time*. (Later the Capuchin chroniclers - somewhat vehemently and perhaps conveniently – would attribute his hesitation to an ambitious and autocratic set of mind.) However Ludovico probably has other reasons to refuse to convoke the Chapter.

With a much larger number of friars the new leadership sees a fresh direction for the fraternity and has ideas contrary to Ludovico's about the Capuchin reform. Ludovico knows these ideas, which are already well developed prior to the General Chapter of 1535 and 1536 at Santa Eufemia. Ludovico sees that the new friars want to re-shape the substance of his reform.²⁸ Bernardino Ochino approaches Vittoria Colonna to ask her intervention with the stubborn Ludovico. Then as a 'special guest' of Vittoria's sister-in-law in Rocca di Papa, Ludovico is given the opportunity to ponder at length the benefits of the convocation of a long overdue general chapter.

Ludovico's suspicions are confirmed at the Chapter in 1535. The friars want to elect Bernardino Ochino as their general superior. (He declines, it is said, dispensed by a brief from the Holy See.) Bernardino d'Asti is elected instead. After the Chapter Ludovico successfully approaches the Holy See to have the chapter and its elections annulled. Again the friars seek out the intervention of Vittoria Colonna and the Holy See re-convenes the Chapter at Santa Eufemia in September 1536 and appoints a cardinal²⁹ to preside. Ludovico remains insistent on the importance of manual work; that the General of the Observance confirm the election of the Capuchin Vicar General rather than the General of the Conventuals; that the friars occupy themselves in the contemplative life and in friaries outside towns and cities. The showdown between Ludovico and the new leadership occurred during the re-convened Chapter. Colpetrazzo will later tell the story this way:

The Cardinal began to speak again. Turning to Bother Ludovico he said to him, "Brother Ludovico, I encourage you to be at peace and stay calm. If, for your peace of mind, you wish to propose something to the Congregation, say it with confidence in the presence of these Fathers so that anything that can be done to satisfy you may not be overlooked."

Brother Ludovico answered, "Monsignor and other Fathers. I ask for *three things that have always been my intention for the Congregation to observe*. The first is this. *I wish the Friars to work and that they may live partly from their own labours*. The second is this: *the Father General of the Conventuals confirms the election of our General, but according to the Bull our General should receive that confirmation from the Father General of the Zoccolanti*. The third is that *the Friars should lead an eremitical life and exercise themselves in holy contemplation*. It was

²⁸ I also believe it possible and likely that Ludovico, overshadowed by the prestige of some of the new arrivals, may have recognised that the new friars brought to the fraternity diverse notions about the project of reform reflecting the same ambiguity that existed within the Church even in Italy at the time. Reform was an umbrella for quite diverse ideas about what needed to be done, as well as differences over some aspects of Catholic teaching that had not been fully developed. It seems quite plausible that some friars saw in the new Franciscan reform the possibility to pursue their own reform projects. More on this below.

²⁹ Colpetrazzo identifies this cardinal as the 'Cardinal of Trani', who since 1517 had been Giovanni Domenico De Cupis (1493-1553).

never my will to do a Reform that would return again to the laxity of the others and be subject to many superfluous and fruitless ceremonies, but that the Vicars keep a sharp eye out only to receive just a few good men. Houses should be established far from the towns so that while being withdrawn the Friars will not get entangled with the world, but exercise themselves in abstinence and holy contemplation. For there is no need to make another Order that lives in a lax manner like the others – an Order which returns again to large convents, studies, confessions, learning to chant and other similar ceremonies ‘ however good these may be. The Church of God does not need someone to do these things since she has many who do these things already. Rather the Church needs someone to revive the ancient fervour and good customs of the early Fathers and holy Religious. For we see with religious Orders, if they become lax and leave their solitary houses they retreat to the delights of the city. *Therefore this was my intention: to make a Congregation of just a few, perfect observers of the Rule of Saint Francis who exercise themselves mainly in the true observance of poverty.* As for preachers who have to preach in the cities, these should be just a few good friars and only a few good ones among those learned men who come to the Congregation. If we return within a short time to that lax life which we led in the Order before, our Reform will be in vain. God has given us a great grace. He has distinguished us completely from others by our habit and customs. I would be content by an act of union in regard to making representation to and dependence upon the General. As for everything else we should be the kind of friars that our Father Saint Francis calls those of the desert. He says he wants to be one of those and calls them Friars of the round table. In deserted places His Majesty set them apart from all the other friars to listen to and attentively contemplate what Our Lord God says to their minds. This is the sorrow that has weighed on me the most. I can see this poor Congregation brought to this conclusion, that within a short time it will return to the flesh pots of Egypt after all the struggle undergone to establish it.”

Padre Ludovico concluded and the Cardinal turned to the Fathers, saying, “And you, Fathers, how do you answer?”

The Father General wanted the first Definitor³⁰ to respond. He replied, “Monsignor, to Brother Ludovico’s first proposal I reply that I have also always been of this opinion that that the Friars work manually in observance of the Rule. Nonetheless, some agree, some disagree. We are about to resolve that matter. We are of the contrary opinion about the second proposal to be under the Zoccolanti. As for the third, we will establish an arrangement that partly attends to contemplation, partly to the divine office, to study and other necessary things since preaching and helping one’s neighbour are just as important as working and staying in solitude.

³⁰ Bernardino Ochino

Somewhat stunned that the friar had replied with just a couple of words to such a long speech of Brother Ludovico the Cardinal rose to his feet. In a raised voice he said, “O Father, why did you have to speak?” With great kindness the Cardinal turned to Brother Ludovico and encouraged him to be at peace. Then the Father General with all the Father Definitors threw themselves upon their knees weeping before Brother Ludovico. They begged him to be at peace. They said he would always be the patron of the Congregation and offered that he choose whichever companion, province and house he wanted. They said that whatever he desired would always be given him. *However when the Cardinal saw that Ludovico was obstinate, he reprimanded him, forbidding him to ever come before him again.* Then he turned to the Fathers and said to them, “My Fathers, it is better for you that this Father live on his own because he will always oblige you to do something.”³¹

After the Chapter the Definitory and a few other friars composed the Constitutions of Santa Eufemia of 1536 within a few weeks, a speed that suggests that many of its ideas were already formulated in the minds of some of the friars prior to the Chapter. Again Colpetrazzo:

With the chapter agenda concluded and all the Guardians sent to their friaries, the four Definitors and the Father General and some other older Friars stayed back together and made the Constitutions. These Constitution were more heavenly than human.³²

These Constitutions articulate a far more adequate *ratio vivendi fratrum* than do the Ordinances of Albacina and are a significant milestone in the development of the Order. However the Capuchin friars were about to enter a new period of adaptive change occasioned by a dangerous crisis that would further shape the charism. The crisis shows that tension existed in the General Definitory, as well as strong differences among the friars themselves concerning the *preaching* of the friars.

Capuchin preaching was of the “new style.” According to Colpetrazzo people said Bernardino Ochino “was a master of the new preaching of the Sacred Scriptures.”³³ It seems, however, that some regarded the Capuchins with suspicion because of this approach. In 1536 Vittoria Colonna composed her famous letter to Cardinal Contarini, member of the papal commission appointed to decide the fate of the Capuchins. In it she refers to the “Lutheran” reputation of the Capuchins, a reputation based on their evangelical preaching that emphasised the primacy of grace. “They seem to be Lutherans because they preach the freedom of the spirit.” She answers this accusation:

If his imitators are Lutherans, Francis was a heretic too. If preaching freedom of the spirit over the vices, while subject to every regulation of the Holy Church, is called error, it would also be an error to observe the Gospel that says in many places: It is the Spirit who gives life.

³¹ MHOMC II, nn. 352-353

³² MHOMC II, n.227

³³ MHOMC II, n.383

Furthermore, those who say this (of the Capuchins) clearly show that they have not heard them preach.³⁴

Bernardino Ochino was highly regarded and sought after as a preacher. However, not all Capuchins were as moderate in their preaching. Nor did all the Capuchins belong to this new style of preaching the Scripture. By mid 1537 a vehement reaction to the preaching of the 'latent Lutherans' was already in evidence in Italy. For example, the Benedictine monk, Marco da Cremona, regarded as a man of holy life and sound doctrine, held public lectures on St. Paul in the monastery of Santa Giustina in Padua. The consequent disturbance aroused by those who "had plenty of zeal for God but very little knowledge" caused the exceptionally sober Cardinal Contarini, himself a Venetian, to intervene. On 12 June 1537 he wrote a letter to Gian Matteo Giberti, bishop of Verona (and like Contarini also a friend of Bernardino Ochino), upbraiding the monk's angry denigrators

"who, because Luther has said different things about the grace of God and free will, they are opposed to anyone who preaches and teaches about the greatness of grace and about human weakness. They believe they are contradicting Luther, but they are contradicting Saints Augustine, Ambrose, Bernard and Saint Thomas. In short, moved by great zeal, but with vehemence and anger, they are unaware that their objections deviate from Catholic truth and are close to the Pelagian heresy and stir up trouble among the people."³⁵

Among the reactionaries to this evangelical preaching (the primacy of grace as in the letters of Saint Paul) was another renowned Capuchin preacher, again Giovanni Pili da Fano. He had become a Capuchin in 1534. Already in September 1532 he had published a hostile rebuttal to "Lutheran" teaching: *A very useful work in Italian (!) for the simple against the very pernicious Lutheran heresies*. Its subtitle: *A very useful work in Italian called the burning of the Lutheran darnel, that is, against the very pernicious heresy of Martin Luther*.³⁶ In Rome in 1537 he denounced the Lutheran preaching of Agostino Museo da Treviso, an Eremitano. The result was a brief by Paul III (18 April 1537) that required the nuncio in Venice to imprison this *filium iniquitatis*.

Giovanni's zeal, already evident in the prosecution of Matteo, Ludovico and Raffaele, was not diluted any on becoming a Capuchin, it seems. He was elected to the first

³⁴ VITTORIA COLONNA, *Carteggio*, compiled and published by Ermanno Ferraro and Giuseppe Müller. Second edition with Supplement compiled and annotated by Domenico Tordi, Turin, Ermanno Loescher, 1892, p.110-123 from Archivi Segreti Vaticani, Concilio di Trento, vol. xxxvii, f.170. The *Carteggio* follows BARTOLOMEO FONTANA, "Documenti vaticani di Vittoria Colonna Marchesa di Pescara per la difesa dei Cappuccini" in *Archivio della Società romana di storia patria*, 9(1886) 345-371. Also in COSTANZO CARGNONI, *I Frati Cappuccini* II, nn.2020-2031, pp.216-227 reading from the same document, but noting a new pagination in the codex: f.175r-181r, replacing 170r-176r. See also BENEDETTO D'ALATRI, "Vigorosa apologia. Lettera di Vittoria Colonna al Cardinal Contarini" in *L'Italia Francescana* 22(1947)107-112. Originally the letter was addressed to the commission of cardinals. The plural form still remains in other parts of the letter.

³⁵ ALDO STELLA, "La lettera del Cardinale Contarini sulla predestinazione" in *Rivista della Storia della Chiesa in Italia* 15(1961)411'441, p.412.

³⁶ *Opera utilissima vulgare contro le pernitiosissime heresie Lutherane per li simplici. Opera utilissima vulgare chiamata incendio delle zizanie Lutherane, cioè contra la pernitiosissima heresia di Martin Luther*, Bologna, Giovan Battista Phaello, 1532.

Capuchin General Definitory and would not have been alone among the friars in his concern about ‘evangelical’ or so called ‘lutheran’ preaching. One wonders how Giovanni da Fano viewed Bernardino Ochino’s evangelical preaching expressed in the Constitutions of 1536³⁷ with its explicit emphasis upon the preaching and doctrine of Saint Paul³⁸ Concern over Bernardino’s preaching was not limited to Giovanni, who died in 1539. In 1542 when Bernardino was called to Rome from Verona where he was conducting a workshop on the Pauline letters with the young Capuchin preachers, he confided to Gian Matteo Giberti his concern about accusations made against him by Capuchins who had gone to Rome. Shortly after, Giberti wrote:

It seemed to him (Bernardino) that the call (to Rome) was not discreet since for two months rumour was already abroad that he was Lutheran, and for this reason was called to Rome. It was known that some Capuchins had arrived there to speak ill of him in this matter.³⁹

Suffice it to say that Colpetrazzo’s “golden years” of the Capuchin reform only existed before the Capuchin Order was approved or existed. That ‘holy uniformity’ among the brothers and unanimity of faith so desired and extolled by the Constitutions of 1536⁴⁰ did not exclude strong contentions among the friars, even in the General Definitory, in the first five or so years after the promulgation of the Constitutions. Indeed during these formative years the Order was on the verge of a great crisis occasioned by Bernardino Ochino’s departure from Italy, the Catholic Church and the Order. He was not the first Capuchin to join the exodus from Italy. Nor would he be the last. In fact some Capuchin preachers were radically Calvinist, e.g. Girolamo da Molfetta. And I believe that Paul III and his grandson Alessandro Farnese invited Bernardino to go to Rome urgently to help in the resolution of difficulties the Holy See had with the preaching of some of his friars. (In fact, with the inauguration of the Roman Inquisition a few days after the Farnese wrote to Ochino in July, any case of heresy regarding a religious was reserved to the supreme moderator of his or her Order.)

Because of Bernardino’s apostasy the Order was under threat of suppression and its preachers were silenced. Colpetrazzo recalls how the interim Vicar General, Francesco da Iesi, initiated *una diligentissima inquisizione* within the Order. Colpetrazzo uses a very graphic metaphor to describe the effect: “Just as the sea vomits up the dead” many lax and suspect friars were purged from the Order. With this careful examination of the Friars and the election of Bernardino d’Asti as Vicar General, the Order entered a new phase of its existence. Not without the motive of self-preservation the Order assumed characteristics of the nascent Counter-Reformation, adapting and transforming something of the charismatic spirituality and apostolate of the Order (e.g. the broad

³⁷ *The Capuchin Constitutions of 1536. A New Translation*, translated by Paul Hanbridge, 2007, revised 2009; <http://www.capdox.com/files/Translation%201536.pdf> p.45, lines 5-16

³⁸ *The Capuchin Constitutions of 1536*, 3,3; 19,3; 24, 24’25,1; 42,46; 43,2,11,17; 44,20.

³⁹ Letter of Gian Matteo Giberti to the Marchese del Vasto, from Verona, 11 September 1542 in KARL BENRATH, *Bernardino von Siena*, 1892, pp. 283-286.

⁴⁰ “All Christians, especially we friars of Saint Francis, must always keep the integral and pure apostolic faith of the Holy Roman Church, and firmly and sincerely preach that faith. We should be prepared to shed our blood even unto death for its defence. Therefore if any friar, because of diabolical temptation, find himself (*quod absit!*) tainted by some error against the Catholic faith, he should be placed in perpetual imprisonment. To punish these or other similar wrongdoers there ought to be strong but human jails in some of our friaries.” *The Capuchin Constitutions of 1536. A New Translation*, 34,1-7.

acceptance of hearing confessions). The Constitutions of 1572 will reflect this change more thoroughly since those Constitutions incorporate the requirements of the Council of Trent into Capuchin life, as for example, the stipulations regarding seminary formation.

This brief look at some aspects of the first decades of the Capuchin reform demonstrate that the Capuchin charism was not fixed from the beginning. While friars claimed Matteo da Bascio to be the founder, the way of life he envisaged for himself had little in common with the life Ludovico proposed. He was expelled from the Order in 1536 because he did not wish to compromise elements he believed to be essential to the reform he wished to introduce, and of which he was the legal founder. His expulsion and the composition of the Constitutions of 1536 were a milestone in the fraternity's growth as a distinct and robust religious Order. Finally, the Order quickly adopted the zealous, strident, zero-tolerance attitude of the Counter-Reformation. All the while human beings like ourselves lived out these dramas. They were not all super-heroes and the Order had to struggle to discern the character of its own developing and distinct Capuchin Franciscan charism. And this development is reflected by the Capuchin Constitutions of 1536, 1552, 1575, etc.

While the identity of the founder of the new Franciscan fraternity was debated, there was no doubt that Saint Francis remained the founder of the Franciscan family. The doubts and difficulties emerged with diverse interpretations of how Francis' charism might be interpreted or lived according to how it was understood. The Capuchin charism at the beginning was not monolithic and static. The 'golden era' of the *bella e santa riforma* was certainly not without internal and external tribulations that compelled the Order to review and define its identity and charism in the light of new circumstances.

In conclusion we can make a time jump to a later moment within the history of the Order. Perhaps *you might like to guess* when the Minister General made these reflections. And so we consider another period in the evolution of the Capuchin charism at a time when the Order was faced with difficult choices.

The spirit of our Seraphic Father Saint Francis lives in our Order. The way of life he began has evolved over the following centuries. However, in the history of the Order we find again and again the same internal difficulties, temptations and struggles that Francis himself experienced in regard to the matter of his vocation and the choice of a way of life. We might ask today which difficulty or temptation has invaded and spread throughout the Order?

My dear brothers, it seems to me that our Capuchin Order finds itself again at a crossroads. As it did within the heart of Saint Francis, a question burns within the heart of our Order: the choice between apostolate and the regular life according to our observance and tradition.

We always find this opposition, to a greater or lesser extent, within Orders of "mixed life." However, the current conditions of the Church and the world greatly increase this opposition ...

A shortage of priests exists in the diocese of Europe and in the Missions. In the immediate future this shortage will get worse ... Imbued by a doctrine of irreligious laicism young men have turned away from Christ. Consequently priestly vocations are fewer and less secure.

Since that is how things are, bishops lay their concerns before religious and strongly urge us, "Come out of your friaries and help us in the care of abandoned parishes in the pastoral care of the flock of so many refugees and those displaced by the war.

The Church cannot be denied helpers in the present struggle. Because of this all the oft repeated objections against the contemplative or mixed life are more serious. The contemplative life, they say, is selfish and obsolete, except for the ignorant and lazy. Contemplative men do not fit into the modern world. We need men of action. Earlier in the century the Holy See condemned these false ideas as *Americanism*.⁴¹

Clement of Milwaukee⁴² continues:⁴³

It so happens that we Capuchin Friars Minor have never refused to collaborate in the apostolate of the Church. Faithfully adhering to our mixed way of life of apostolate and contemplation we have always considered our norm Christ's saying in the Gospel: "*Haec oportuit facere et illa non omittere*" (Matthew 23, 23): These things should be done, without omitting the others. The history of our Order shows that we Capuchins have never exempted ourselves from apostolic work ... A glorious history of an active, generous and ongoing apostolate can be written of any of our friaries.

Let us adapt our apostolate to modern needs prudently and in a carefully considered way. Let us remain Capuchins and so let us not change our kind of life according to the modern apostolate. Rather, as much as possible, let us choose forms of apostolate that are truly in harmony with our life. We should not worry about relinquishing to others the forms of apostolate that are incongruous with our life ...

The foundation of the interior life for us is our serious application to Capuchin life. If we should neglect this, the external action of the

⁴¹ Pius XI, in the Apostolic Constitution in which *Statuta Ordinis Cartusiensis ad normam codicis revisa, definitiva approbantur* in AAS 16[1924]10, p.388-389, cited Leo XIII's refutation of Americanism in *Testem benevolentiae Nostrae* (22 January 1899): "...some protest that the so called false passive virtues have become obsolete and should be replaced by the practice of the active virtues. In *Testem benevolentiae Nostrae* the underlying principle of these new opinions is that to attract more effectively those who differ from the her, the Church should shape her teachings more in accord with the spirit of the age and relax some her ancient severity and make some concessions to new opinions. Many think that these concessions should be made not only in regard to ways of living, but even in regard to doctrines which belong to the deposit of faith." (www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/L13TESTE.HTM accessed on 27 September 2011).

⁴² Clement of Milwaukee was elected Minister General in 1946.

⁴³ CLEMENT OF MILWAUKEE, "Prolusio: Apatio Ordinis nostri ad necessitates apostolatus horum temporum" in *Acta Congressus interprovincialis "De hodiernis apostolatus necessitatibus, Romae 21-27 Novembris 1948, Romae, Curia Generalis*. Translate by Paul Hanbridge, 2011.

apostolate will remain fruitless for souls, and is especially dangerous for each of us. You might call Bernardino Ochino a typical example of this in our Order. He fell first into the heresy of activism and then into the heresy of the false reformers. Do not nearly all the provinces have their own Ochino?

Therefore we exhort and implore superiors to be carefully vigilant over the activities of the Province. We are ready to offer our service in the apostolate, but it is surely necessary to lead the Capuchin life.

Doubts or uncertainties today in the Order about the Capuchin charism and how to transmit it are not new. The present generation, I believe, should not see itself inferior to the first generations of Capuchins who also had to struggle with disagreement and with the occasional paradigm shift in interpreting the charism.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CAPUCHIN FRANCISCAN CHARISM

I attach here a short bibliography used to produce a panoramic survey of characteristics that together help to identify the Capuchin charism. See the addendum below.

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CONCLUSION

Recalling again the words of Saint Francis at his death: “I have done what is mine to do, may the Lord show you what is yours.” The charism of the Order seeks to be faithful to the Francis’ charism as founder, his inspiration, his spirit. Those words of Francis are applicable to each friar and the fraternity at every level. The charism of the Order - that which is perennially distinctive about our spirituality and apostolate - will always need to be reviewed and renewed, interpreted and lived according the circumstances where the Order finds itself. Tension exists between fidelity to the founder’s charism and continuity with the lived charism of the Order on the one hand and the reasonable and necessary adaptation on the other. The charism of the Order has evolved in the ongoing process of adaptation. Throughout the Order’s history, the Constitutions have articulated our charism as the Order has sought to live in fidelity to Francis’ charism expressed in a special way in the Rule and Testament.

As Capuchin Friars Minor we should renew our knowledge of the genius and ideals of our Fraternity so that, correctly adapted to the times, our life may be inspired by the wholesome tradition of our brothers.

It is especially important to imitate our first brothers by a return to their original inspiration, that is, to the life and Rule of our Father Francis. In this way our Order may always be renewed through a conversion of spirit.

Following their footsteps, let us strive to give priority to a life of prayer, especially contemplative prayer, to cultivate together with a spirit of minority, radical poverty both personal and communal; and, out of love of the Lord’s Cross to manifest a life of austerity and joyful penance, taking care as well that ever new forms of leading this life of ours, approved by legitimate superiors are discerned in light of the signs of the times.

While exercising among ourselves the freedom of brothers, let us joyfully live among the poor, the powerless and the weak, sharing their life, and let us maintain our characteristic approach to people. In many ways, above all in the work of evangelization, let us promote an apostolic dynamism that is carried out in a spirit of service.

In many ways, above all in the work of evangelization, let us promote an apostolic dynamism that is carried out in a spirit of service.⁴⁴

Finally Francis' charism and the charism of the Order spring from intimacy with Christ. Every charism in the Church blossoms and bears fruit from the root and stock of faith. The renewal and adaptation of religious life depends upon a constant return to the *sources of Christian life* (PC n.2). The first principle for the renewal of every charism and vocation and the guarantee of ongoing formation or conversion is our continuing immersion into our baptism, our communion in and through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus and the deepening or growth of faith.

Let us keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus who is the author of our faith and brings it to perfection (Heb 12,2). For if the Lord does not build the house in vain do the builders labour (Psalm 126,1).

⁴⁴ CC (Armstrong) n.4.

Proposed revision of CC n.4: Our specific form of life as Capuchin lesser brothers flows from a passionate intention to be faithful to the evangelical insights of Saint Francis, who inspired our first brothers. The sound tradition which began with them also inspires our form of life. Therefore it is necessary to know the nature and purpose of our fraternity, so that we remain always faithful to the Gospel and to our genuine spiritual tradition, by returning to the original inspiration, that is, to the life and Rule of our Father Saint Francis, through conversion of the heart, so that our Order may be constantly renewed. With this aim in view we should strive to cultivate and to protect the primacy of the fraternal evangelical life enlivened by a powerful contemplative experience acquired through faithful care for the spirit of holy prayer and devotion. Living as pilgrims and strangers in this world, we should practice radical poverty, both individual and communal, animated by a spirit of minority, and manifest a life of austerity and joyful penance out of love for the cross of the Lord. Gathered together in Christ as a single distinctive family, we should develop among ourselves relationships of fraternal spontaneity, and joyfully live among those who are poor, weak and infirm, sharing in their lives and maintaining our facility of approach to people. Being an apostolic fraternity, we should promote this dimension of our life and conduct it in a spirit of service and minority, especially through evangelization, but also through other various forms that are in harmony with our charism.

The proposed Italian text reads: La nostra specifica forma di vita, in quanto Frati Minori Cappuccini, si ispira alla sana tradizione iniziata dai nostri primi fratelli, pervasi dall'ardente proposito di fedeltà alle intuizioni evangeliche di san Francesco. Perciò è necessario conoscere l'indole e il progetto di vita della nostra Fraternità, affinché ci manteniamo sempre fedeli al Vangelo e alla nostra genuina tradizione spirituale, con il ritorno all'originaria ispirazione, cioè alla vita e Regola del nostro Padre san Francesco, attraverso la conversione del cuore, in modo che il nostro Ordine continuamente si rinnovi. A questo scopo sforziamoci di coltivare e tutelare il primato della vita evangelica fraterna, vivificata da una forte esperienza contemplativa acquisita nella fedele cura dello spirito della santa orazione e devozione; vivendo come pellegrini e forestieri in questo mondo, pratichiamo una radicale povertà, sia personale che comunitaria, animata dallo spirito di minorità, e offriamo l'esempio di una vita austera e di una lieta penitenza nell'amore della Croce del Signore. Radunati in Cristo come una sola peculiare famiglia, sviluppiamo tra di noi rapporti di fraterna spontaneità, viviamo con gioia tra i poveri, i deboli e i malati, condividendo la loro vita, e conserviamo la nostra particolare entatura nel popolo. Poiché siamo una Fraternità apostolica, promuoviamo questa dimensione della nostra vita, realizzandola sempre con spirito di servizio e di minorità, innanzitutto con la evangelizzazione, ma anche con varie altre forme consone al nostro carisma.

Characteristics of the Capuchin Charism

These characteristics often overlap. The text below each heading only contains notes or key words.

1. Continuous return to Saint Francis

To look continuously to Christ and the Gospel through the eyes of Saint Francis. Primacy of the Rule and Testament as for our Gospel and the desire to live in the light of the Rule and Testament in a faithful and Catholic spirit, symbolized by the habit

2. Intense life and spirit of prayer, devotion and contemplation

Primacy of contemplative life, mental and affective prayer, recollection and silence; life in the Spirit; spirit of prayer and recollection; emphasis upon a strong contemplative experience; mixed life. Importance of the Liturgy of the Hours celebrated without haste.

3. Radical practical poverty

Poverty of spirit and material poverty individually and in common in food (abstinence), clothing and dwellings, which results in austerity of life and penance. Poverty in the things necessary for our use. Trust in providence. Importance of manual work. Minority and sharing. Economic solidarity in the global Capuchin fraternity. Transparency and accountability. Joyful penance and love of the Cross. Poverty is most direct way to reach the sweetness of the contemplative life that is to be desired above all else. Poverty as the foundation of entire spiritual life, regular observance, prayer and contemplation

4. Preaching – evangelization

Apostolic commitment to preaching and hearing confessions (“traditional apostolates”), in simplicity and humility; preaching as heralds of the gospel. Missionary zeal to evangelize. Itinerancy. Be guardians of hope in this world. Prophetic mission.

5. Practical charity

Readiness to serve and love the needy. Sowers of goodness and peace, reconcilers. Carry out the works of mercy. Fully ready to serve all persons; ready contact with people, closeness to the needy and marginalized. Christ in the leper.

6. Love for and fidelity to the Church

Submission and total docility to the Holy Father and the Hierarchy as truly Catholic men; obedience does not exclude constructive criticism. Desire to remain in communion of mind, heart and action with the

teaching, directives and decisions of the Church authority in circumstances where we are called to serve

7. Fraternity

Mutual loving service and obedience. Fraternal charity that sweetens harsh austerity. Hospitality, especially to other brothers. Fraternal correction. Fraternity as the cenacle of love. A coenobitic life, exceptions only under obedience, as in preaching missions and other missionary and emissary tasks. Fraternity with creatures. Mixed institute.

8. Probity – chastity

Towards all persons, women in particular. Enclosure. Avoidance of earthly attachments (possessiveness and inordinate self-love). Acceptance and observance of professional standards

9. Solitude and recollected life

Enclosure and silence in service to the spirit of the contemplative life and recollection of the fraternity. “Friars of the eremitical life”; Sustained focus on the interior life and union with Christ. Ongoing conversion and formation.

10. Minority

Austerity of life – penance. Lesser brothers; no to dominion over others. Authority exercised in loving service; humility, lowliness and joyful simplicity

11. Austerity of life – penance

Poverty in food (abstinence), clothing and dwellings. Austerity is not only motivated by the practice of voluntary, radical poverty, but also love for Christ crucified. Love of the Cross; mortification of the self and self-indulgence (disordered self-love); Penance as ongoing conversion of heart and life. Sacrament of penance valued by the friars. The Capuchin love of the Cross led to their acceptance among Christian people as humble, simple and joyful – always ready to come to the aid of their neighbour, especially the poor, the sick and the sinners.

12. Holy and devout studies

Humble scholarship or attentive study at the service of others. Need for prepared preachers, teachers and confessors. Maintaining integrity of faith.

13. Manual work

An aspect of poverty. The nobility of manual work in service / sustenance of the fraternity, to reduce burden on the civilian community,

without unnecessary recourse to the 'table of the Lord.' Sharing of household work.

14. Lay dimension of Capuchin Fraternity

The priority, centrality and witness of evangelical fraternity of lesser brothers. Equality of brothers. A mixed institute rather than a clerical institute.

15. Itinerancy

"Capuchins in the cloister and in the square." Pilgrims and strangers in the world. To seek out souls, Capuchins preferred to avoid permanent pastoral situations, such as the administration of parishes;⁴⁵ preferred to be a "flying squad" (*agmina volantia*), leaving aside for others commitments not in harmony with our life/charism. Of the people, for the people. Life of the poor, for the poor..

⁴⁵ Vitus a Bussum. Interesting to note that the General Chapter of 1932 approved the following Ordinances: "Notice about not accepting parishes: The ancient custom of our Order of not accepting the administration of parishes is not to be renewed. However, whenever by way of exception the administration of a parish is to be accepted by our Friars, this should not occur except in an extraordinary case and for grave reasons, attentive to the special circumstances of the place, with the previous consent of the General Definitory and all other matters of law duly observed. ... Preliminary negotiations with the Diocese or civil authority regarding a parish to be accepted should not begin unless permission has been received from the General Definitors of the Order..." AOC 54(1938) p.257.