

The Fourth Lateran Council and the Franciscan Fraternity: On the Matter of an Open Question

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In a significant recent study, a historian who is very aware of the Franciscan *Rule*, Armando Quaglia, has returned to his favorite theme in order to scrutinize certain issues, particularly one that is perhaps the most delicate: the subsequent stratifications of the *Rule* itself as well as the debated question regarding the existence or preliminary sketch of an abbreviated *Rule*, to use the expression used by Suiken, which would have been redacted by Francis around 1209-10. We are therefore dealing with the issue of a whole series of *Rules*, which really both simplifies and complicates the matter, and produces the problem of successive approximations of the *Rules* of 1221 and 1223.¹

In fact, the problem of Francis' *Rules* is a spiritual, philological and historical one. From a spiritual perspective, obviously it was most important to establish whether Francis had considered the problem of a *Rule* and in what terms from the beginning of the movement that took his name, also because of the journey of the group of which he was made the leader, from the condition of a *Fraternitas* to that of an *Ordo*, which cannot be reduced to a question of the juridical-institutional form. This is so obvious that it's hardly worth mentioning. But from the philological point of view the question can only be asked as a textual one. And there cannot be a textual question without a text. As a result, if the hypothetical rule of 1209-10 is no

¹A. Quaglia, *Storiografia della regola francescana nel secolo XIII* (Falconara: Edizioni Francescani, 1980).

longer identifiable with the *Regula non bullata* of 1221 (as was believed instead trusting in Bonaventure's text before the discovery and the valorization of the *Vita Prima* of Celano), from this it follows that – at least not being able to identify or reconstruct that ancient text, and reconstructions are by their very nature always hypothetical proposals – a philological discussion of the *Rule* of 1209-10 cannot be proposed.² From a historical point of view then, the problem takes on a different character: from the moment that a "Rule" of any kind, lacking pontifical approval, and one that is so approximate and abridged, to then disappear in the wave of subsequent stages in the development of the *Rule* cannot be for the historian anything more than a symptom of a growing preoccupation on Francis' part to give order to a penitential life that was beginning to bloom. It also involves a certain number of spiritual and ecclesial risks. Such growth accompanied all of these factors and was a function of it.

There is another important aspect of the question, one that can be called historiographical, but which is really more ideological. The vision of a Franciscanism from its earliest beginnings as a movement inspired exclusively by evangelical freedom, the Pauline "truth that sets you free" and therefore fundamentally anti-juridical – not because, of course, it would by vocation be hostile to norms but because it did not feel the need to pay attention to the norms which directly concerned it – was a vision, to be clear, which on the part of the one who writes was believed to be a vision which was possible to be shared, hiding the possible outcome, call it a

²Cfr. Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, III, 8. Bonaventure speaks clearly about a *formula vitae*, which would have had to have been established, according to Francis, from the moment that the number of friars grew: the two elements of this primitive *Rule* would have been the observance of the Gospel and a few other things necessary in order to arrive at a uniform way of life. The desire to have the pope to approve this *Rule* would have been the main motive for Francis having gone to Rome. The Bonaventurian text goes on underlining that the lack of formal assent by the pope to the *Rule* would have been determined by the opposition or at least strong reservations with regard to this issue advanced by some cardinals who found it too rough. An ambiguous situation, however, which on the one hand brings one to ask how it is that they neglected to take up this theme in the conciliar setting, while on the other hand, it is necessary to reintroduce the question of the relationship between nascent Franciscanism and *novae religiones prohibita*, as it is called by Chapter XIII of the Fourth Lateran Council. With regard to the historical reality of the primitive *formula vitae*, various hypotheses have been suggested, beginning with that of K. Müller from 1885. However, its incertitude and weak (although sometimes ingenious) foundation, has allowed others, among whom Quaglia is the most resolute, to negate its existence.: cfr., for the *status quaestionis*, Stanislaus of Campagnola, *Francesco d'Assisi nei suoi scritti e nelle sue biografie dei secoli XIII-XIV* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1977).

"danger" (I speak of "danger" at the level of exact historical evaluation not in terms of proper or even dogmatic interpretation) of opposing a "charismatic" Franciscanism of the origins – later abandoned or left behind, or even betrayed – to a later juridicized and hierarchized Franciscanism before which the Founder himself in the years immediately following the Rule of 1223, would not nor could not have been able to know (nor willed?) any better than to bow and surrender, closing himself off in isolation and silence. From here we have the hypothesis and perhaps the obvious and naive mythology of a betrayed Francis, of a deluded Francis, of a failed Francis.³

Regarding the question of the number and the dating of the various *Rules*, this is strictly connected to the *Testament*, a foundational document which among Franciscan scholars it belongs above all to Raoul Manselli to have evaluated it for its just importance. The *Testament*, as I mentioned with a note of regret with regard to primitive Franciscan spirituality, as an ode against the subsequent sclerosis of the Order, even as a voice of more or less veiled opposition to the rule of 1223? This has been said. The contested texts have their own sort of strange fascination; therefore they always seem more intelligent and newer, or at least they seem that way in our era of conformity to nonconformity than those which are uncontested. Every now and then, however, we have to yield to the evidence. The contested reading of the *Testamentum* goes back to Sabatier, who did not give it a right to a modern license.⁴ To summarize, the problems related to the *Rules* and interpretations relative to the *Testament* will end up by converging – and is I repeat, a danger – in a vision of a Franciscanism that was tumultuous from the origins and from its unhappy final design of aligning itself to the disciplinary will of the Roman curia.

It seems that this is how things went. What's more, it does not seem that such a parable of the earliest Franciscan movement was even vaguely credible in terms of its concrete historical development. Let me state clearly that the author is only slightly interested in the problem of whether there

³The line of Francis "betrayed" (and perhaps, traitor?) goes from Sabatier to Leprohon, but its suggestion spread to many Franciscan scholars and continues, through many streams and through ideological-historical transformations, to touch on authors who we cannot expect to be sensitive to this. Cfr. The rich general observations of R. Manselli, *I biografi moderni di S. Francesco* in AA.VV., *San Francesco nella ricerca storica degli ultimo ottanta anni*, (Todi: Presso l'Accademia Tudertina, 1971) pp. 9-31, and the adept, detailed observations of Quaglia, *Storiografia*, p. 9, especially note 20.

⁴P. Sabatier, *Vie de S. François d'Assise* (Paris 1894), 289ff; cfr. Stanislaw da Campagnola, *Francesco d'Assisi*, 38ff.

really was a fixed Franciscan legislation written before 1221, and is of the opinion that the encounter between Francis and Innocent III in 1209-10, was the nodal point of the biography of the Saint in the development of what would become the Order, but without making this necessarily coincide chronologically with a disciplinary development of the constitutive characteristics of the *fraternitas* as it existed then. The point is that there was an evolution in the *fraternitas*, but was weakened and developed over time until the phase of definitive normative finalization in the two year period of 1221-23. Of course, during the long interval between 1209-1221, there were events that weighed more than others on the development of the Franciscan movement and not only on it, and it is these events that need to be investigated in order to understand certain and even profound changes, too profound to be able to be explained as “logical” or even placed as the effect of the fire from a still fluid burning problem when Francis encountered pope Innocent.

A central event of this period is without a doubt the twelfth ecumenical council, which is better known as the Fourth Lateran Council.

Regarding the “Franciscan presence” at that Council (in the sense of an emerging Franciscan problem), Quaglia has dedicated a short but pointed series of clarifications.⁵ Having noted that from the *Assisi Compilation* and from the *Mirror of Perfection* and from the writings of Brother Leo he recovered the announcement of a rule presented by Francis to Innocent who presented it publicly – and we leave aside the expression of the *Assisi Compilation*, that is the famous “in counsel” or “in consistory”, and for better or worse Bigaroni translated it this way in the *Assisi Compilation* basing himself on the witness of Clareno.⁶ Quaglia decisively excludes the idea that in the Fourth Lateran Council there was ever a question about a Franciscan presence corroborating his thesis with judicious arguments.

With carefully measured discretion Quaglia speaks of a lack of consistency and of historical weakness rather than of true and proper impossibility or unlikelihood of the news of Brother Leo regarding the beginning of the Franciscan *Rule* during the Council. I would not disagree with him. As Quaglia shows, there are essentially three reasons. First, it is

⁵Quaglia, *Storiografia*, 142ff.

⁶Ibid., 126ff to p. 126 n.41. Quaglia brings to the surface the theme of the pericope *nos qui cum eo fuimus*, which was already fundamental in the exegesis of the Franciscan sources after the publication of R. Manselli’s very important *Nos qui cum eo fuimus. Contributo alla questione francescana* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1980); [English Translation: *We Who Were With Him: A Contribution to the Franciscan Question*, *Greyfriars Review* 14 (2000) Supplement.] For the expression in *consilio* see AC 101.

difficult to believe that if the new *Rule* had been discussed in a council in which there was a strong presence of French prelates they would have reserved for the first Franciscans in their region a welcome that was far less open than we know it was in 1217-1219 (and at this point Quaglia counterposes the information that James of Vitry gathered and published regarding the minorites which is all amply favorable, to that lack of welcome which was rather the fruit of a probable conciliar silence). Second, the conciliar acts of the Fourth Lateran Council do not record anything, at least not directly, regarding the Franciscan problem. Third, the testimony of Brother Leo does not receive further strength from being corroborated by the testimony of Clarenò, in as much as it is noted that Clarenò derives his information from Leo, putting aside the codicographical equivocations that could have been born in connection with the expression *in consilio*. And for the rest as Quaglia notes, these equivocations had already been overlooked by Olier, Clarenò's editor.

Related to the problem of the discussion or of the presentation of the primitive *Rule of St. Francis*, if there was truly a reference to it in those years in the council itself, is the presence of the Saint himself in that same council. The authority of the *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals*, accepted by Wadding and hypothetically taken up again by Hefele in his famous and monumental history of the Councils,⁷ is anything but incontestable, and the silence of the conciliar Acts it is a weighty evidence even if no one claims to rely totally on the *argument from silence*. But one cannot avoid the fact that one is the question of the presentation of the *Rule* – and for this the silence of the conciliar acts has a great circumstantial weight – and the other is a question of the physical presence of Francis (but presence in what sense, within what terms, and with what title?), something on which the conciliar written source materials are silent and which in any case is not surprising and in any case does not prove anything. It is true that the conciliar episode does not appear in the biographical tradition of Saint Francis: but once again, silence never constitutes an absolute proof.

It's clear that from a historical point of view the issue is really about something else. Speaking concretely, one must even have the courage to say that in itself it is necessary to ask what would change in the parable of the Franciscan experience and the story of the beginning direction of the *Fraternitas* that developed into an *Ordo* if Francis really had or hadn't participated in the Lateran assembly as an obscure or distant spectator. If we look for the mark of his spirituality in the decisions of that Council we will

⁷C.J. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles*, edited by H. Leclercq, V.II (Paris 1913), 1397; Quaglia, *Storiografia*, 1397.

certainly not find it; it was still too early and in any event as we know the Fourth Lateran represented a too important and intense moment of global reorganization of the structure of the Church to really be able to discern this or that subtle admonition, this or that persuasive voice. On the other hand one can look at things from the opposite perspective: that is, for the mark of the Council on the development of the Franciscan *Rule*. However, even from that perspective two observations must be made. First, one can indeed seek to identify such a mark if we definitely possessed two redactions of the *Rule*, one pre-conciliar and the other post-conciliar, which we know is not the case. Secondly, the Fourth Lateran Council was of such importance that one should not be astonished that we say that the Franciscan *Rule*, and every other aspect of church life immediately following it was informed or at least somehow conditioned by it.

On the other hand, it is logical that the minorite tradition found itself in certain circumstances – not to say of necessity – to attribute to the Franciscan Rule, and more generally to the relationship between Francis and the Curia, a preconciliar root. Above all, one still had to deal with the stumbling block of Chapter 13 – *De novis religionibus prohibitis*⁹. This presents a dilemma if one considers Franciscanism to be a religion that was launched before 1215 which, frankly always seems forced, or to maintain that it was constituted after 1215, and therefore contrary to the conciliar canons. Moreover, in order to be able somehow to impose enough peremptory authority there is one exception that somehow had to be justified. Now, of the two, either one insisted on a preconciliar elaboration of the exception and therefore on an orally approved rule if not in Council even less by the pope at the Great Council, and this would be a legalistic way; or one proposed the seraphic way, the charismatic way, and in this case the problem of *novae religionis prohibita*e could have been, or rather, in a certain sense had to be bypassed in order to provide the charismatic actors with a solid foundation for the exception. And therefore, in the end, what counted was not as much the relationship between Francis, the development of the *Rule* and the Fourth Lateran Council, as much as the relationship between Francis and Pope Innocent.

Why is this the case? Historically speaking, at this point the discussion must be articulated in some small way, even with great risk of falling back into a hole into which earlier generations of Franciscan scholars have stumbled and which contemporary scholars run the risk of running the boat onto dry ground, that is, the reduction of the Franciscan question to a

⁹See J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XXII, Neudr. (Graz 1961), col 1002; Hefele, *Histoire*, 1344.

textual question. Also, to reiterate, textual questions *without texts* cannot be asked, but on the other hand it is utopian to think of history as something that can be reconstructed only and inasmuch as the texts are known and available. In my opinion, the fact of the text of the *Rule* or of the earlier one(s) before the *Rule* of 1221 being more or less traceable or reconstructible matters little in the end, also because the absence of a text is never definitive proof of its historical non-existence. What weighs on us, something that seems to be an important historical problem, is the movement from *fraternity* to *religion*, and therefore the elaboration of the *Rules* that we know and which exist if textually speaking there remains a *terra incognita* historically constituting a darkness into which we must be able to see, a darkness to which our eyes must become accustomed until it is dispersed. Do we not want to believe in the existence of *Rules* that predate the *Rule* of 1221? Does the presence even of the simple appearance of Francis at the Fourth Lateran Council seem to us improbable? The sources and the *status quaestionis* give us ample authority to deny both, but I will not suggest that anyone subject the texts pertaining to Saint Francis to a puzzle, even an ingenious one, to the search for things that have disappeared, or of the "lost Francis" as was done years ago in the case of the "lost Aristotle."

Leaving this aside, let's bear in mind one foundational, historical given: the privileged relationship between Francis and Innocent. Can this relationship be interpreted charismatically? Is it a relationship that can also be interpreted beyond the Fourth Lateran Council? One could say yes, and at its root it is the old and often calumniated (not in our own day) Cardinal Bonaventure of Bagnoregio who shows us this path; without a doubt it is a "curial" path. Nevertheless, throughout the thirteenth century Innocent remained the measuring stick of the Church that with him definitively brought to maturity the way of reform that was undertaken in the eleventh century, and after him would be continue to be taken until the time of Boniface VIII, the way of maintaining the hierarchical and Rome-centered equilibrium that he had begun. With regard to this balance the mendicant orders were as everyone knows the first and most qualified, let's say the firstborn sons. The work of their members proves it, as pontifical legates, preachers, as supervisors in the gathering of tithes, as inquisitors, and frequently as bishops of reliable Roman obedience, who would clash again and again with the various ruling classes of the city with their high clerical expressions of their own instances and of their own interests. This is to say nothing of the presence of the mendicant orders in the mission fields and of their missionary vocation which blossomed right after the Fourth Lateran Council, and of which Francis offers a famous paradigm during the Damietta Crusade.

Therefore in a certain sense, the fundamental problem for the Franciscan tradition concerning the prehistory of the Rule is not at all whether or not the rule was in its earliest redaction presented to the Fourth Lateran Council, but rather that Francis had proposed to Innocent his firm intention in terms of a *Rule*. And it is not an accident that the word *intention* is the key word with regard to the issue of the primitive *Rule*. Innocent was the highest level of the Church, the Church that triumphed over thrones and principalities, which sat in judgment on the culture and the science of its time, which finally emerged undamaged (or almost) from the heretical wave that had shaken it throughout the preceding century. It was also preparing itself to open its tabernacles beyond the geographical limits of Christendom to the land of the infidels. Between the Church of Innocent and the seraphic message without a doubt there is an abyss, yet without the church this message would not have the space in which to raise its voice.

At this point one must add some brief iconological considerations to our discussion. It has been noted that the frescoes in the Upper Church of the Basilica of St. Francis reflect an overarching will to adhere to Bonaventure's hagiographical presentation of St. Francis and to accurately and systematically delete every spiritual "temptation." It would therefore be far-fetched to seek in those frescoes a confirmation for the Leonine position, in a decree at the Fourth Lateran Council (if, let me repeat, one can translate *in consilio* as "in the Council") as in a decree for whatever problem one desires. Also, the visualization of the *Legenda maior* alone offers ample room for points of reflection that cannot prevaricate unless they are changed by force, but which also cannot be reduced simply to casual coincidences. The syntax that presides over the narrowest coincidences, one is tempted to say the mirrored relationship between the scene of the "Dream of Arms" and the one depicting the Dream of Innocent, cannot be passed over quietly. We will not abandon a precise iconographical inquiry which could find us unprepared and which would nevertheless, in this context, be an evasion of our theme. In these two scenes I will limit myself to observe the triple parallelism that connects them and which makes it possible to read them in a complimentary manner:

	The Dream of the Palace		The Dream of Innocent
The dreamer	Francis	=	Innocent
The subject of the dream	Christ	=	Francis
The building in the dream	The "castle" of the future Order		The Lateran Basilica

We will leave aside at this point, as is obvious, the discourse of the subtle rearrangements undergone in the Assisi cycle, in particular from the second of the two scenes that we are dealing with here, where the great portico and the colossal Francis that predominates are successive additions, modifying a primitive reality of the scene in which Francis holds up, hovering in mid air, a Lateran Basilica much less imposing, but much more "dreamlike" than the actual one. These problems have already been studied and I have made reference to them.⁹ The substance of the iconographic message proposed here certainly seems to be a literal derivation from Bonaventure, but thanks to the much more preemptory language of the pictorial and the rhapsodic choice of the frescoed account through fixed scenes with respect to the fluid continuum of that narrative – it leads to the willed, programmatic (even if not explicit) exaltation of the charismatic element in the vocation of St. Francis. But it seems that there is also something more. The relationship between Francis and Innocent proposed in the parallel between the two visited by the prophetic dreams, places the head of the Church and the head of the Order on the very same exegetical level. This is the same relationship that we find between the "castle of the Order," the precise symbol of the future Franciscan company, and the Lateran Basilica the clear symbol of the Church militant and in this direction is qualified by the crusaders arms that can be discerned in the castle of the dream of Francis. But could the message that springs forth from this and which could be proposed "esoterically" only to the sons of the Poor Man of Assisi, not end up as an objective equation between the Franciscan Order and the Church in a type of absorption of the second into the first under a mystical-prophetic profile, an absorption even more significant than the one that is institutionally logical and which is determined by the ordering of the first within the second? And moreover, the same relationship between the Church and the Franciscan Order, the relationship – I underline – of the insertion of the Order into the ecclesial system, is a relationship within which the *Rule* plays a fundamental part.

Certainly from a comparison of the two scenes other things spring forth: one must ask whether in light of this Giotto-esque exegesis (prepared, recommended or simply begun by those who commissioned the artist?), it is legitimate to return for a moment to a re-reading of the *Legenda maior* and to ask oneself whether there isn't within it some kind of key to reading it that allows for an interpretation of a Francis who is much less "clericalized" than one that is usually presented. I am not suggesting, of course, a

⁹See above all M. Gabrielli, *Il ciclo francescano di Assisi* (Florence, 1970), with special attention to figures 1, 2, 8, 9, 13, 14.

"cryptospiritual" Bonaventure. However, the interpretive schema which today seems to be the majority opinion and the suggestion that we revisit the spiritual thesis is dissatisfying, and it has never been satisfying. With a certain dose of simplicity one sees the Seraphic Doctor unilaterally as the one who clericalized the figure of Francis and the minorite Order. Of course, this is just a hypothesis because the Giotto-esque version of the *Legenda maior* simply remains an interpretation: but, that's the problem! Did the eyes of Giotto and/or the desire of those who commissioned him see beyond or rather, more deeply within the Bonaventurian text?

It is true, however, that regarding the Francis-Innocent equation suggested by the comparison that we were just discussing, this must also be accompanied by the Christ-Francis equation, mystically even more important, that brings us right back to the discussion of Francis as the *alter Christus*. Continuing down this path one would have to derive from this an analogous system: Christ:Francis = Francis:Innocent, in which the "middle term" always remains Francis, who therefore in the Pope's vision ends up being something even more important and by a greater extent more the restorer of the Church. We should say that it ends with Francis being the intermediary between the Church militant and Christ himself. A whole ecclesiological message in a minorite key springs forth from this interpretation, underlined by the fact that it is similar to the Virgin who appears to Pope Liberius in the mosaics in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which are considered to be a model for the schema of the parallel dreams of Francis and Innocent. Francis appears to the pope as already *inter coelestia*, where vice versa in the preceding dream, the Saint and Christ are at the same level and their homogeneity is underlined by the possession on the part of each figure by a *nimbus* and by their participation in one space, while the pope is depicted as clearly distinct from the "dreamlike space" of his dream to which Francis belongs. In the "Dream of the Arms" the "dreamlike space" to the right of the viewer seems to exclude Christ who instead stands solidly not as a dreamlike vision but as a real presence next to Francis. The Francis-Christ dialectic, which is thus established seems to lead us back once again to the theme of Francis as the *alter Christus*, or specifically to the Pauline theme "it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Christ indeed seems to emerge at the top of the navel, from the middle of Francis' body, as if he is represented emerging from the Sepulchre at the Resurrection. From the perspective of the scene one certainly imagines him at Francis' bedside across from the viewer but from a symbolic perspective the cross formed by the two bodies is striking (with Christ as the vertical beam and Francis as the horizontal beam), in the same way in which the gesture of Christ's right hand stretched out towards

the left shoulder of the sleepy Assisian in a delicate but preemptory invitation to awaken strikes the viewer. The gesture, one might say of a resurrection from the dead, from that death of which sleep is a figure and whose shadow seems to hover over the deep sleep of Innocent in the other scene, as over the desolate drowsiness of the two figures who keep vigil (or rather, who wrestle with sleep), to the foot of the bed of the great pontiff. In a certain sense, the two figures of Christ and of Francis end by forming a sort of cruciform ideogram of which Christ seems to play the role of the spiritual part in a waking state, while Francis plays the material part in a state of potential death which would derive from a powerful act if the spirit were not awakened and animated (the left arm of Christ stretched out to indicate the castle).

At this point it is worth the trouble of adding to this that the church which the painter assumes to be a symbol of the Church is the Lateran Basilica, obvious and natural, indeed realistic; a reference to the seat of the Bishop of Rome and therefore suitable like none other to symbolize the universal Church as Innocent's thought conceived (and also Bonaventure's). However, at the same time the seat – the coincidences, again and always! – of the Council at which the presence or non-presence of Francis in the end is a pseudoproblem, or at least a problem having to do more with erudition rather than history.

Thus, let me say clearly that what the Saint might or might not have learned from the great assembly of 1215 is not really important: this event has so thoroughly permeated subsequent Church history that in the decades following no one could avoid its authority. And perhaps it is not less important to ask in what sense and to what extent a Francis who was still a "nobody" in the world of the universal church could have been able to influence the Council fathers. If he was there it is very unlikely that anyone would have noticed the poorly dressed, dark-complexioned, small, frail young man, even if the Pope received and perhaps understood him. The real presence of Francis – not necessarily physical (but who mistakes reality for physicality?) is that which Giotto succeeded wondrously to establish for us, that which remained in Innocent's mind after his prophetic dream. Let's hope, but not excessively, that no one be scandalized if we were to attribute to the "parallel dreams" of Francis and Innocent the Jungian connotation of a "significant dream,"¹⁰ and if on this basis we deduced that both Francis and Innocent could not but entrust themselves with an absolute confidence to that message of the dream, so precise, immediate, peremptory, from which one could not in any way subtract oneself as this occurs with anyone who is

¹⁰See C.G. Jung, *La psicologia del sogno*, tr. it. (Torino, 1980), pp. 80ff.

visited by a "significant dream." Here, in the intimate relationship between Francis and Innocent, and in the very solid guidance that Innocent knew how to impose at the Council, is the Franciscan influence on the Council, well beyond the problems, even important ones regarding the development of the *Rule*, less important it seems to us, than the physical presence of Francis at the Council.

And with regard to the immediate or mediate consequences of the conciliar work not only and not so much on what is stated in the *Rules* of 1221 and 1223, however globally on the whole Franciscan inspiration, it seems to us that no reasonable doubts can be proposed. The organization of regular chapters, the institution of the provinces, the rationalization of the problem of bringing the message to the land of the infidels, initiation into the minorite life; everything in the postconciliar Franciscan development speaks the language of strict adherence to the norms flowing from the Fourth Lateran Council. Thus, the historical question shifts - unlike perhaps those that are strictly textual or canonical - from liceity or less, from the primitive version through the redaction of the Rule and of the verbal and informal approbation on the part of the pontiff (but the bull of Honorius III would have regularized every possible outstanding account), to the conformity of the inspiration of the Order itself with respect to the conciliar designs of Innocent. It seems to us that such conformity exists beyond every reasonable doubt, and indeed it seems to constitute the profound conceptual basis of the motive for which, in the Franciscan tradition, there has been so much insistence on the concrete reality of the explicit but informal approval on Innocent's part, the approval with regard to which only that of Honorius would have constituted the official confirmation. Regarding Honorius III and Gregory IX, whose relationships with the Order were indeed very close even before ascending to the Pontifical throne, the Franciscan tradition firmly maintained the memory of the difficult and hazy but crucial privileged relationship with Innocent III. This is perhaps a choice that is considered a part of that fidelity to the origins which remains, for better or worse, a necessary stage of the Franciscan experience and of the position of Franciscanism before history and to itself.