Sixteenth-Century Franciscan Reform Movements*

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"Movimenti francescani di riforma nel cinquecento"

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In the life of Saint Benedict the Moor (c.1526-1589) we read that he became a religious (c.1545) among the disciples of Girolamo Lanza. When the latter were suppressed, he joined the Observants (1562) and finally became a member of the Reformati (1578), among whom he died.[1] To be sure, the story of his life does not give us a full picture of the extremely dynamic and varied world of sixteenth-century Franciscanism. Nevertheless it is an important gauge of the spiritual climate and of the ideals pursued by the sons of Saint Francis in the sixteenth century.

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[1]Among the better biographies of the saint are the following: Léon [de Clary], *L'auréole séraphique. Vie des saints et des bienheureux des trois Ordres de saint-François*, II (Paris: n.d.), 5-24; Albaret Pol de Léon, *Saint Benoît l'Africain, le premier noir canonisé* (Paris: 1965); Umberto Castagna, *Nera fonte di luce. Storia di San Benedetto, il Moro* (Palermo: 1989). See also these more recent publications: Benedetto Maria Albergame – Salvatore Mangione, *«Pelle Beata», opera agiografica su San Benedetto da San Fratello* (Sanfratello: 1988); Ludovico Maria Mariani, *S. Benedetto da Palermo, il Moro Etiope nato a S. Fratello* (Palermo: 1989).

An Attempt at Union

Therefore I think it is more than appropriate to discuss the topic given to me. To a great extent it is the key to interpreting our saint's life. And so, in summary fashion, I will touch on the various reform movements that marked sixteenth-century Franciscanism. Essentially they are the historic reforms of the Order, the ones that thrived and lasted longest.

With the bull *Ite vos* (29 May 1517), Leo X intended first of all to bring about unity within the Franciscan Order.[2] But in reality it marked the juridic and *de facto* division of the great Observant and Conventual families. According to the provisions of *Ite vos*, the minor reforms of the Martiniani, the Amadeiti, the Colettans, the Clareni, and the Guadalupesi (also called Friars of the Holy Gospel, Friars de Capucio, or Discalced)[3] were supposed to join the Observant family. But in fact the Clareni and the Amadeiti continued to exist autonomously until 1568, when, through the wishes of Saint Charles Borromeo and Pius V, they were united with the Observants.

The plan to restore unity to the Order, which had already been pursued for some time, was carried out at the cost of great sacrifices and amid difficulties of every kind. This shows the importance attached to it by the Holy See. And yet, during the same year 1517, Leo X approved a new Franciscan congregation, subject to the general of the Conventuals. It was the Spanish congregation of the Pasqualiti, a name derived not from *Pasqua* ("Easter") but from the name of their founder, Giovanni Pasqual.[4]

The Sixteenth-century Reforms

Not even ten years later the Capuchin reform began. It was started in 1525 by an Observant friar from the Marches, Matteo da Bascio. In 1528, through a whole series of events and in a highly unusual manner, this reform gained the right of autonomous existence, although it remained formally dependent on the Conventual general. This was in accord with the bull of Clement VII, *Religionis zelus*, addressed to the brothers Ludovico and Raffaele Tenaglia and to those who would later choose the same way of life. A reformed family on paper and *in voto*, one might say. But between 1532

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[2]Lorenzo di Fonzo, "I Francescani," *Ordini e congregazioni religiosi*, I (Turin: 1951), 185-87; Duncan Nimmo, *Reform and Division in the Medieval Franciscan Order. From Saint Francis to the Foundation of the Capuchins*, Bibliotheca Seraphico-Capuccina, 33 (Rome: 1987), 640-42.

[3]For brief information and essential bibliography on these minor reforms, see the entries in *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione* (Rome: 1974-2003): I, 502f; II, 1114f, 1211-17; IV, 1451-56; V, 1028f.

[4]G. Odoardi, "Pasqualiti," *DIP*, VI, 1196-99.

and 1535 it gained strength and stability because of the distinguished Observant friars who joined (we need only recall Bernardine of Asti, Francis of Jesi, John of Fano, Bernardino Ochino, and many others). Many of these had worked for reform within the Observance, and the experience they brought with them would soon be codified in the Capuchin Constitutions of 1535-36.[5]

The need to establish houses of stricter observance within the Observance had already been recognized in the years 1518-19, when houses of recollection were begun in Brescia, Abruzzo, and Lazio. The brothers who lived there practiced a more austere form of life, considered to be more in accord with the Franciscan Rule. Among these houses of recollection was the sanctuary of Fonte Colombo, which in January 1519 had been given to the two reformers Bernardine of Asti and Stefano Molina. But the official birth of what for centuries would be *the* Franciscan reform must be fixed in 1532. That is when Clement VII, with the bull *In suprema militantis Ecclesiae*, ordered that brothers wishing to live a more austere life should be given houses subject to a special custodian.[6]

The reform movement within the Observance also took the so-called ultramontane provinces by storm, although with certain distinctive features. Thus in Spain there were the Discalced, also known, especially in Italy, as the Alcantarines because of the charismatic personality of Saint Peter of Alcantara who had given new impetus to the Pasqualiti, who later returned to the Observance in 1563. In 1568 the Discalced also gained the kind of autonomy enjoyed by the Reformati in Italy, with their own custodies, which were later raised to the rank of provinces immediately subject to the minister general.[7]

The introduction of the reform in France came much later. Not until the 1680s do we find the first houses of recollection, from which derives the name "Recollects" given to the brothers who lived there. Their spread in France and Belgium was greatly encouraged by the minister general Bonaventure of Caltagirone.[8]

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[5]Melchiorre da Pobladura, "Cappuccini," *DIP*, II (Rome: 1975), 203-52; Callisto Urbanelli, *Storia dei cappuccini delle Marche*. Part One. Volume I: *Origini della Riforma cappuccina, 1525-1536* (Ancona: 1978), 129-379.

[6]H. Holzapfel, *Manuale historiae Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: 1909), 303-11; Lorenzo di Fonzo, "I Francescani," *Origini*, 222f; R. Sbardella, "Riformati francescani," *DIP*, VII (Rome: 1983), 1723-48.

[7]H. Holzapfel, *Manuale historiae*, 293-98; G. Odoardi – A. G. Matanic, "Alcantarini (o Francescani scalzi)," *DIP*, I (Rome: 1974), 472-78.

[8]H. Holzapfel, *Manuale historiae*, 298-302; P. Péano, "Recolletti," *DIP*, VII (Rome: 1983), 1307-22.

There was also a reform within the Conventuals, first in Italy and then in Poland. Its members were called Reformed Conventuals. There had already been a first attempt at reform around the middle of the 1620s, in Rome, in the friary of the Holy Apostles, as mentioned by Brother Boniface of Anticoli during the canonical process for Saint Felix of Cantalice.[9] More successful and lasting (until 1624-26) was the congregation of reformed Conventuals, with houses all over Sicily, the Kingdom of Naples, Abruzzo-Molise, Lazio, Umbria, Tuscany, Liguria, and Veneto, governed by their own guardians and custodians. It seems sufficiently proven that by the end of the 1650s there was a congregation of reformed Conventuals in Naples.[10]

Their reform was solemnly recognized by Sixtus V with the bull *Apostolici muneris*, 15 October 1587, which must be seen as the Magna Charta of the reformed Conventual friars in Italy. In it we find mentioned Girolamo Lanza's hermits of Saint Francis, two of whom (Antonio of Calascibetta and Bonaventure of Partanno) made an act of submission to the general of the Conventuals on 13 November of that same year.

The history of these hermits was brief, like the flash of a meteor. They had begun to meet in the hermitage of S. Domenico near Caronia, led by Girolamo Lanza, a rich and noble citizen of S. Marco d'Alunzio. After renouncing his family and possessions with considerable fanfare, he had withdrawn to that solitary place to live as a penitent. But soon, in order to safeguard their own peace and to escape from pious pilgrims, the hermits were forced to relocate: first in Raffadali in the region of Agrigento, then in the wilderness of Mancosa between Partinico and Carini, and finally on Monte Pellegrino.

In 1550, at Lanza's request and with a bull addressed to him (*Exponi nobis*, 14 March 1550), Julius III approved the new congregation, which, besides the hermits, included Friars Minor and Dominicans. By a rescript of 1551 from the Penitentiary, they were authorized to open four other places. Then, unexpectedly, by decree of 10 March 1562, the cardinal protector of the Franciscan Order, Rodolfo Pio di Carpi, ordered the congregation dissolved. The brothers were invited to transfer either to the Capuchins or the Observants. Instead we find that the hermits actually joined the Observants (one of them was Saint Benedict the Moor), the Capuchins (Luke of Palermo), the Third Order Regular (Luke of Cerami, venerated with the title of blessed), and especially the reformed Conventuals, who had

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[9]*Processus sixtinus Fratris Felicis a Cantalice cum selectis de eiusdem vita vetustissimis testimoniis*, ed. M. d'Alatri (Rome: 1964), 131.

[10]G. Odoardi, "Conventuali riformati," *DIP*, III (Rome: 1976), 94-106.

settled in the Monte Pellegrino hermitage. Lanza was also a reformed Conventual and seems to have still been alive in 1587.[11]

Lanza's congregation presents several anomalies. Apparently it began as a fraternity of tertiaries. Then it found itself accepting hermits, Friars Minor, and Dominicans, who professed the Franciscan Rule "in the poverty of the Capuchins" and who were committed to a "Lenten" way of life, dwelling in separate little cells and caves. But above all, they were totally autonomous with respect to the generals of the great Observant and Conventual families. Cardinal Di Carpi explicitly notes this anomaly, writing that they live "in obedience to Fra Hieronimo Lancia" instead of being subject to "the major heads." Moreover, there were only "a few brothers." How many exactly? Brother Boniface Bonibelli says there were 70, but the Conventual Philip Cagliola, more realistically I think, puts their number at 18.[12]

Elements Common to the Various Reforms

Beginning in the first half of the seventeenth century, it became customary to represent the Franciscan Order as a large tree, the so-called "Seraphic Tree"[13] on which the older branches of the Observants and Conventuals are prominent, but on which there is also a place for the branches of the various reforms, which themselves receive life from the sap of the tree that represents Francis. Although these reforms are numerous (we have mentioned Observants, Clareni, Amadeiti, Martiniani, Guadalupesi, Colettans, Capuchins, Reformati, Pasqualiti, Alcantarines, Recollects, Hermits of Lanza, and reformed Conventuals) and have certain distinctive features, they all show common characteristics. First of all, they were not imposed by anyone but all began as free grass-roots movements, motivated by genuine and deep spiritual needs.

Another common element is this: they all have as their point of reference the image of the father and founder Francis. He is always, for all of them, the starting point, with the Rule, the examples and, even more, the exemplary nature of his life. Those who study the Franciscan reforms should by no means lose sight of this reality, even if, like all historians, they are

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[11]G. Odoardi, "Lanza, Girolamo," *DIP*, V (Rome: 1978), 451f.

[12]Flaviano da Polizzi, "Gli eremiti di san Francesco," *L'Italia francescana* 44 (1969): 396-406; G. Odoardi, "Eremiti di san Francesco di Monte Pellegrino-Palermo," *DIP*, III (Rome: 1976), 1199-1202.

[13]Raffaele da S. Giusta, *L'Albero serafico dei tre Ordini di san Francesco esposto nella chiesa dei Frati Minori Cappuccini di Oristano* (Parma: 1937); Emilio de Sollana, "Del «Arbol seráfico»," *Miscellanea Melchor de Pobladura*, I (Rome: 1964), 465-79.

more intent on finding the things that differ and change rather than those that remain permanent and unchanged. The reforms were not a flight from Egypt in order to enter the Promised Land. What triggered them was the need to reincarnate, as perfectly as possible, not only the father's Rule and intentions, but his very image.

Everything leads us to believe that a monumental work, first published in 1510 and then reissued just three years later in 1513, played an important part in the creation of this need. The two editions appeared in Milan, the first by the Observants, the second by the Conventuals. Some might see this as an attempt by the two rival families to claim to the work as their own. But there is no question that the brothers of the "community" as well as those of the "family" recognized themselves in the monumental work, *De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu*, written by the Conventual, Bartholomew Rinonico of Pisa, between 1385 and 1390.[14]

But in this work, which Sabatier said was certainly the best and most complete work on Saint Francis, Rinonico accepts not only the saint's writings and the official lives circulating within the Order, but also the aspirations and writings of spiritual authors. In this way he paints a picture of Francis that is able to elicit consensus and create a need for imitation, and hence for reform.[15]

The *De conformitate* was read even before the printed edition appeared, as seen from the great number of manuscript copies that have come down to us.[16]

What were the privileged elements in this commitment to imitate the father, to return to the heroic early days of the Order? I think we can and should honestly admit that in every reform, at least initially, certain factors are constant and always recur. First is what might be termed the "call of the wild," in other words, the need for a solitary, recollected and eremitic life, accompanied by strict and at times almost inhuman penitential practices, with fasting, vigils, scourging, rough and meager clothing, very poor dwellings. Judging from appearances, it might even be seen as a Manichean concept of life. The reformers were accused of living a life of

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[14]Currently available in the two-volume edition prepared by the Quaracchi Fathers, *Analecta franciscana*, IV-V (Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: 1906 and 1912).

[15]The salient features of the image of Francis in the *De conformitate* are outlined by M. d'Alatri, "L'immagine di san Francesco nel *De conformitate* di Bartolomeo da Pisa," *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia, secoli XIII-XV*, ed. Servus Gieben (Rome: 1983), 227-37 (cf. supra, n. 27).

[16]A description of the manuscripts used by the Quaracchi Fathers for their critical edition is in *AF*, IV, xxv-xxxiii; V, lxix-lx.

"desperation."[17] But this was not only in the sixteenth century. The colorful thirteenth-century chronicler, Salimbene de Adam, was already writing that the Florentines of his day were not scandalized when a Friar Minor left the Order, but rather marveled that he had stayed so long.[18]

At the heart of the reforms is always the prickly question of poverty, seen in all its concrete elements (legacies, fixed revenues, wide-range begging), use of money (direct or indirect, for personal or community needs), way of life (food, clothing, horseback riding, servants), activity (manual labor or intellectual effort), ministry (preaching, sacramental ministry, missions), roles and offices in the Church (inquisitors, prelates, degreed masters), houses (size and furnishings, in solitary places or in the city).

Along with a vocation to solitude (perhaps it would be more correct to say *despite* a vocation to solitude), another common element at the beginning of the reforms was a commitment to pastoral ministry. Since they did not live in the city and thus lacked daily contact with the faithful, a large number of the brothers devoted themselves to an itinerant apostolate and went looking for an audience in the churches of others (their own were too small and out-of-the-way), in the squares, in the remotest villages, and anywhere the opportunity presented itself. It was the age of itinerant prophets, accompanied by an intense spiritual reawakening and sensational mass conversions, even though the latter were often short-lived. Who was there to ensure that they would last? And so another thing can often be observed as the Franciscan reforms became part of city life: not infrequently it was decided to build large churches and accept the care of shrines, because the brothers wanted to be nearby and available to those who came.

In the dynamism of reform there are two focal points. One is the complex relationship between spiritual heritage and historical needs, that is, the need to return to the beginnings (in this case personified in the image and example of the father and founder). The other is the adaptation or updating demanded by cultural changes and the current needs of the Church. The first calls for a moral reformation, the second for a more or less definite but irrevocable break with institutions that have become overly rigid and anachronistic.

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[17]Bernardinus a Colpetrazzo, *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum (1525-1593). Liber tertius: Ratio vivendi fratrum, ministri et vicarii generales, cardinales protectores*, ed. Melchiore a Pobladura (Rome: 1941), 17.

[18]Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, new critical edition by Giuseppe Scalia (Bari: 1966): I, 117: "We marvel that he stayed in the Order so long in any case, since the Friars Minor are *homines desperati* [hopeless cases] who torment themselves in all sorts of ways."

Actually all the reform movements, even those that placed more emphasis on the eremitic vocation, did not remain self-enclosed but were open to pastoral activity. In the end, the option for greater austerity and the quest for solitude had no other purpose than to offer a witness and pastoral service that were credible.[19]

Another common element in all the reforms: after a longer or shorter period in which the initial impetus prevailed, they all found a way of moderation and thus began to resemble the family they had left and the other already-existing families. It is a series of recurrences that can be observed, and we need not appeal to the theories of Vico. Still, not everything became the same. Many differences and special features remained, not only in name and in the form of the habit, but also in usages and customs, in that complex and hard-to-define thing we call identity, in the kind of pastoral activity and how it was done, in dwellings, and in the manner of dealing with the people. In short, the initial inspiration or thrust continued to influence the individual reforms in the form of historical memory, as a need to return to the heroic days, as a recovery of authenticity and the special charism. And the quasi-obligatory term of comparison was the past. All this defined a way of being and acting that ensured a reform's lasting effectiveness. But note well: in no way did this mean that faithfulness to initial choices excluded adaptation and progress.

Evolution within the Reforms

Especially in the last forty years, Franciscan scholars have devoted much attention to what has been called the clericalization (a horrible term!) of the Franciscan Order during the thirteenth century. This phenomenon has been seen, if not as a betrayal of Saint Francis's intentions, certainly as foreign to them.[20] Behind the ill-famed clericalization was the option for studies, a stumbling block all the reforms had to face. And I think we can say that, at least in the beginning, the pioneers and founders agreed about curtailing opportunities for study, to the point of almost doing away with it.

Symbolic in this regard is what happened at the beginning of the Observance, the first great Franciscan reform that would later offer very

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[19]See Raoul Manselli, in the Round Table on the theme: "Il fenomeno delle riforme nell'Ordine francescano," that appeared in *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia, secoli XVI-XIX* (Rome: 1983), 380 [cf. supra, n. 27].

[20]Lawrence C. Landini, *The Causes of the Clericalization of the Order of Friars Minor 1209-1260 in the Light of Early Franciscan Sources* (Chicago: 1968); and R. Manselli, "La clericalizzazione dei Minori e san Bonaventura," *S. Bonaventura francescano*, Todi, 14-17 Ottobre 1973 (Todi: 1974), 181-208.

ample opportunities for study. Much like all the reforms that followed, the Observance started with a strong prejudice against study. The difficulties Saint Bernardine of Siena encountered at the beginning of his apostolate leave no doubt about this. Someone might even feel justified in using the word "aversion."

The author of the *Compendium vitae S. Bernardini* tells the story.[21] In 1405, after the saint received from the minister general, John de Perreto, letters patent to preach "for the benefit and edification of the people, he immediately began to preach." But the brothers living with him in the hermitage at Seggiano did not look kindly on the matter and objected. The reason for this aversion was the lack of books, the small number of brothers, and the impossibility of taking part in the divine office by day and by night. Essentially, preaching was opposed because it was considered contrary to the spirit of devotion and solitude, to which the first Observants had dedicated themselves. Therefore, even though Bernardine celebrated Mass daily, took part in the divine office day and night, and did more than his share of the household work, whenever the brothers saw him carrying some books he had borrowed "they immediately began to harass him" because they regarded preaching as a temptation of the devil and one step short of apostasy from the spirit of the Observance: "It seemed almost a sacrilege." For this reason Bernardine's conscience was "greatly perplexed." But in the end he overcame the brothers' aversion to study and convinced them to abandon "holy ignorance" in order to be ready to serve and be useful in the Church, which availed itself of their pastoral activity to bring about the moral reform everyone was calling for but no one was lifting a hand to begin.

Not all the Franciscan reforms, however, were able to make such a choice, and by that very fact condemned themselves to extinction. This was the fate of the Villacrecians, the Guadalupesi, the Pasqualiti, the Amadeiti, the Clareni, the Hermits of Monte Pellegrino, and even the Reformed Conventuals. I say "even" because they were born within the Conventual family where study was always esteemed, and thus it is hard to understand their attachment to "holy ignorance" or "simplicity," which saw study as a betrayal of the true Franciscan vocation rather than a means for the apostolate.[22]

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[21]Ferdinand M. Delorme, "Une esquisse primitive de la vie de S. Bernardin," *Bullettino di studi bernardiniani* 1 (1935): 1-22.

[22]Paolo Maria Sevesi, "S. Carlo Borromeo e le congregazioni degli amadeiti e dei clareni (1567-1570), *AFH* 37 (1944): 104-64; G. Odoardi, "Conventuali riformati," *DIP*, III (Rome: 1976), 95 and 103.

And so the story of the various reforms of the Franciscan Order ends up showing that the option for study made by the thirteenth-century brothers (among whom Saint Bonaventure occupied an important place) was correct and providential. It enabled them to perform a valuable and needed pastoral service in the Church, service that was appreciated especially by the faithful. Indeed, when we study the various reforms, we should not lose sight of what took place in the lives of the faithful, among the laity, how they reacted, that is, what they imagined and expected a Franciscan to be. The reforms could not be self-enclosed, under penalty of failure or extinction; they had to live and work for others, in the economy of salvation.

Franciscan Reforms and Protestant Reform

When talking about the sixteenth-century reforms, we have to ask what relationship they may have with what is usually considered *the* reform, the Protestant Reformation. First it must be said that there is no cause-and-effect relationship at all between the Protestant Reformation and our Franciscan reforms. It has been historically shown that the reform movement affected not only Franciscanism, but all religious Orders in general, even though to a greater or lesser extent. In some cases I would dare to say dramatically. This happened well before the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, as shown by the different fifteenth-century observances, and thus not only before the crucial year 1517, but even before the Fifth Lateran Council (and obviously before the Council of Trent). It might be said that the charismatic Church is more sensitive to the movements of the Spirit than the institutional Church. It is very tempting to exclude a providentialist view of history, but I do not think we can do so at the crucial moments in salvation history. In such a view it could be said that God prepared in advance those who would carry out the plans for reform drawn up by the councils.

On the other hand, the socio-cultural situation of the time strongly influenced the reforms. The option for austerity was seen, on the one hand, as a reaction to the hedonism of the elite classes (princes, nobles, people of letters, artists, prelates), while, on the other hand, the wretched conditions in which the people were struggling caused many religious to reflect seriously on their own vocation. The chronicler Bernardino Croli has some dramatic pages on the subject. He writes: "Hardship gives a person understanding." After the Sack of Rome, "the members of the [Franciscan] Religion began to reflect on their situation, and many holy persons, inspired and enlightened by God, returned to the hermitages and little places and

there gave themselves completely to the practice of holy contemplation and observance of the Rule."[23]

Another basic difference may be seen between our reforms and the Protestant Reformation. While the former were disciplinary and left much room for asceticism, the Protestant Reformation was doctrinal. Think of the rejection of all the sacraments except baptism and the Lord's Supper, not to mention the denial of the primacy of Peter. What is more, our reforms arose from below and were embraced freely, whereas the Protestant Reformation was imposed by the secular princes.

The Protestant Reformation did, however, demonstrate the need for profound reform, religious Orders included, and served to emphasize its course. It also produced a response, especially in the pastoral area, where the Franciscan reforms soon devoted themselves (in Germany, France, Switzerland, Bohemia, and more or less everywhere) to preventing the people from being overcome by the propaganda or the violence of the supporters of Protestantism.

The Flowering of Holiness and the "Sacrament of Unity of the Order"

From the very beginning, the reforms bore the seal of holiness. Even if they were not canonized by the Church until later centuries, those who lived in the sixteenth century included the Reformati Saint Benedict the Moor and Blessed Humilis of Bisignana (d.1637); the Alcantarines Saint Peter of Alcantara (d.1562), Saint Pascal Baylon (d.1592), Saint Peter Baptist Blásquez (d.1597), and the six Japanese protomartyrs, and Blessed Peter of the Assumption (d.1617); the Capuchins Saint Felix of Cantalice (d.1587), Saint Seraphin of Montegranaro (d.1604), Saint Joseph of Leonessa (d.1612), Saint Lawrence of Brindisi (d.1619), and Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen (d.1622), plus Blessed Jeremiah of Valacchia (d.1625) and Blessed Benedict of Urbino (d.1625).

We find some of these religious working in missions among the infidels in Mexico, the Philippines, Japan, and Constantinople, or among the heretics in Switzerland, Bohemia, and Moravia.[24]

In fact, despite their vocation to solitude and contemplation, the reformed devoted themselves extensively not only to pastoral activity, but

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[23]Bernardinus a Colpetrazzo, *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum (1525-1593)*, I, ed. Melchior a Pobladura (Assisi: 1939), 23f.

[24]See: Lorenzo di Fonzo "Santità serafica, santi, beati e venerabili dei tre Ordini Francescani, 1209-1989," *MiscFran* 89 (1989): 137-237, esp. 176-85 passim.

also to study and works of charity such as the care of soldiers, slaves, and plague victims. These are the fruits of the seed abundantly sown in the sixteenth century, which was the century of the pioneers and creativity. If we wished to mention them all, we would have to tell the story of over four and a half centuries of Franciscanism, an impossible task here.

The most serious accusation raised against the reforms is that they broke what might be called the sacrament of unity of the Franciscan Order. This idea of "sacrament" had been so deeply rooted since the thirteenth century that the terrible tragedy of the Spirituals and Fraticelli remains inexplicable unless we take it into account. To those who have said that the reforms can be seen as the critical conscience of Franciscanism, of being a Franciscan, someone facetiously replied that there was too much criticism and too little conscience. By "conscience" he meant awareness, a clear vision of Franciscanism as a whole, in the historical and religious context in which it is called to live and work.

But is that really the case? Separated by time, we can understand better the real meaning of the reforms, taken as a whole, as a recurring phenomenon over the centuries. The passage of time has not only managed to lessen misunderstandings and animosities; it has also amassed a vast array of facts that deserve the utmost attention. For one thing, we should not think of the reforms as movements that arose solely in reaction to the bad state of the religious family their pioneers and founders left. The need to flee from Egypt or Babylon was not the real reason for the rise and success of the reforms. No, the reformers simply wanted to be better situated to respond to the needs of the time. The reformed (whatever the particular name used to distinguish them)[25] were ready to read the signs of their time: the witness of poverty in the fourteenth century, which was the century of suffering, misery, and poverty; moral preaching in the fifteenth century; the defense of orthodoxy and opposition to hedonism in the sixteenth century; a reaction to the frivolity and emptiness of life in the seventeenth century. And all this was accomplished by men who were pursuing a way of life capable of lending credibility to the message.

Conclusion

The reforms arose from below; they were not imposed by any authority, religious or political. They arose from the awareness of the

[25]In the sixteenth century the terms "reform" and "reformed" were considered quasi-taboo, and so names were used that referred to persons (Clareni, Amadeiti, Alcantarines), to clothing (Capuchins, Discalced) or to empirical circumstances (Recollects, Friars of the Most Strict Observance).

brothers, more often than not the simplest among them. And they are an expression of the religious unrest that was very deep among the Christian people, especially in the sixteenth century.

The reforms are not just a more-or-less acute search for an original identity (what the founder was and how he wanted his brothers to be) to be let down into everyday reality. They are the search for an identity of one's own, which evolves in a complex dialectic between the founder's intentions, the influence of the Holy See, the need for preaching (study and other suitable aids), the choices made by the other Franciscan families, competition from other Orders, changed social conditions, and many other factors.

Recently, scholars like Manselli have spoken and written about popular religiosity and learned religion. The Franciscan reforms were also a form of popular religiosity, especially at first. Not without reason did the Observance arise through the actions of some lay brothers at Brogliano, a hermitage perched like an eagle's nest on the mountains that separate Umbria from the Marches. The first Capuchins—according to the early chronicler Mario Fabiani—were "lost, runaway, frightened *fraticelli*."[26]

Sentiment prevailed over logic, especially at the beginning of the reforms. Thus it is not surprising that later they saw the need to re-evaluate, mitigate, define, establish precise rules. But if all this served to curb the initial impetus, it did not do away with the innovative thrust of these reforms. In fact, it is precisely because of that thrust that a new way of living Franciscanism was perpetuated in history for centuries. I would not hesitate to call it closer to the sources, to the founder's intentions, and—what cannnot and must not be forgotten—more faithful to the model offered by the man Francis, whose image they strove to imitate more faithfully.

This fact was in the minds of those who organized the two symposiums that the four Franciscan families decided to hold on the occasion of the eight-hundredth centenary of the death of Saint Francis. For this reason they chose a single general topic, "The Image of Saint Francis over the Centuries."[27]

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[26]Marius a Mercato Saraceno, *Relationes de origine Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, ed. M. a Pobladura (Assisi: 1937), 418.

[27]*Francesco d'Assisi nella storia, secoli XIII-XV*, Atti del primo convegno di studi per l'VIII Centenario della nascita di S. Francesco, Rome, 1981, ed. S. Gieben (Rome: 1983); *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia, secoli XVI-XIX*, Atti del secondo convegno di studi per l'VIII Centenario della nascita di S. Francesco, Assisi, 1982, ed. S. Gieben (Rome: 1983).

We found that the reforms reflect aspects of that image that are both real and striking. But the need to return to the purity of the beginnings was not the only thing that plagued the reformers. Their choices were influenced by historical considerations, to which we have referred. For this reason the reforms represent a high point in the evolution of the Franciscan Order.

In conclusion, let me confess a personal feeling. The vast phenomenon of the Franciscan reforms is in itself gigantic and deeply moving. The strong commitment of a host of generous souls and the difficulties they faced in trying to embody the father's charism cannot leave one unmoved. May the Lord give us a little of their holy unrest, essential for anyone who is diligently seeking God in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi.