Journal of Franciscan Culture
Issued by the Franciscan Friars (OFM Malta)
Our review of Franciscan culture is now at its one hundredth issue. The review was born in April 1986 with the Maltese name “Spirtu u Hajja”. It has been regularly published four times a year ever since. The idea of publishing a review of Franciscan culture was born in the mind of Fr. Raymond Camilleri ofm, founder of Edizzjoni TAU, the publishing house of the Maltese OFM Province, that has been publishing books and reviews on Biblical themes linked with the Holy Land and on Franciscan studies and spirituality ever since 1982, the year which marked the 800th anniversary of the birth of Saint Francis of Assisi.

The review was an initial and praiseworthy effort to encourage Maltese Franciscans to publish articles and studies relating to their specialised field, namely studies regarding the life, spirituality, sources and history of Saint Francis and the Franciscan movement. The review was a unique occasion for friars, such as Fr. George Aquilina ofm and Fr. Noel Muscat ofm, to be able to publish the results of their studies, and to spread the message that the Franciscan charism has a great role to play in the field of culture.

Although the response to the review was always modest, given the limited number of readers of Franciscan literature in Malta, “Spirtu u Hajja” continued to provide a unique occasion for the furthering of research and publications in the Franciscan sphere. During a quarter of a century many books and publications on Saint Francis and his movement have been offered to the Maltese public. The review retained its original aim of providing short papers, which can be read by the average person, while at the same time providing a solid scientific structure. Indeed, as time went by, the quality of contributions in the review improved and became even more professional.

Ever since January 2008 the group of Franciscans in charge of “Spirtu u Hajja” decided to continue publishing it in English, and to post it on-line in the website of the Maltese Franciscan Province, with the aim of reaching a wider section of the public. From the issue of January 2011 the same group of Franciscans decided to call the review with the English equivalent of the Maltese original name, “Spirit + Life”. In the meantime they stopped the publication of the review and chose instead to post it online in the website i-tau.com because of the advantages of green technology and since in English the review could easily be accessed by many other readers than the limited number of copies in the Maltese language.

Given the limited means and energies, as well as the various other commitments of these Maltese Franciscans who have been ministering in various countries during these last 26 years, the fact that the review has regularly been published and is now being posted online is, in itself, a praiseworthy and wonderful effort to spread the Franciscan message. Celebrating our humble achievements after having published 100 issues of “Spirtu u Hajja” – “Spirit + Life” we are still resolved to continue to enhance our effort for the benefit of Franciscans all over the English-speaking world.

Fr. Noel Muscat ofm
During this last year the attention of Franciscan studies has been focused upon the 8th centenary of the vocation of Clare of Assisi, who during the night between Palm Sunday and Monday of Holy Week, 28th March 1211 (according to others on 18th March 1212). Another important event, which is being commemorated, is the 750th anniversary of the death of Blessed Giles of Assisi (1262-2012), third companion of Saint Francis, who maintained intimate links with the first companions of the saint, and with Saint Clare and the Poor Ladies of San Damiano.

There is more hagiographic material on Brother Giles than on all the other companions of Saint Francis together. Giles is the only one among the first brothers to have been given officially the title of “Blessed” in the Church.

Sources for the Life of Brother Giles

The principal source regarding Brother Giles is an ancient Vita that has reached us in three different redactions. The shortest text, known as the Vita I, has been edited by L. Lemmens in 1901,3 by W. Seton in 19184 and by R.B. Brooke in 1970.5 These scholars attribute the Vita I to the pen of Brother Leo of Assisi, who wrote the life of Brother Giles according to Salimbene de Adam of Parma.6

The second life or Vita II was published by the Bollandists G. Hensken and D. Van Papebroek, who made use of a 15th century manuscript that used to be found in the conventual library of San Francesco al Prato in Perugia, and contained the Dicta B. Aegidii, the Anonymus Perusinus and the Miracula B. Aegidii. Lorenzo Di Fonzo attributed these writings to Brother John of Perugia, who was companion and confessor of Blessed Giles.7

The third life of Brother Giles, called Vita III, has been inserted in the Chronica XXIV generalium, written by Arnald of Sarrant in 1365-1374.8 This is a compilation which incorporates the other two preceding lives, but which adds material from other sources, including the Dicta of Brother Giles, that have been copied in many manuscripts and in various editions.9

Other biographies of Brother Giles are found in De conformitate, composed between 1382 and 1390 by Bartholomew of Pisa,10 in the Franceschina, an Umbrian text by G. Oddi, compiled for the second time between 1477 and 1484,11 in the fourth volume of the Annales Minorum of Luke Wadding, published by the Quaracchi editors in 1931,12 and in the Vita dei Santi e Beati dell’Umbria by L. Iacobilli, published in 1647.13

Brother Giles in the Franciscan Sources

The Sources for the Life of Saint Francis give us fragmentary evidence regarding Giles of Assisi. Thomas of Celano, in The Life of Saint Francis, written in 1228-1229, describes Giles who joins Francis, Bernard and Pietro: “Not much later, brother Giles followed, a simple and upright man who feared God. He lived for a long time: he was holy, living justly and piously. He left us examples of perfect obedience, work, including work with his hands, solitary life, and holy contemplation.”14

In the Letter of Greccio, written by Brothers Leo, Rufino and Angelo on 11th August 1246, the three affirm that they are addressing to Brother Crescentius, minister general, their memoirs regarding Francis, and that they have also recorded the memoirs of other holy
friars, among which “Brother John, who gathered these things from that holy Brother Giles, and from Brother Bernard of blessed memory, the first companion of blessed Francis.”

In The Major Life of Saint Francis, written upon the mandate of the general chapter of Narbonne in 1260, Saint Bonaventure underlines the following portrait of Brother Giles: “Not long afterwards five other men were called by the same Spirit, and the number of Francis’s sons reached six. The third among them was the holy father Giles, a man indeed filled with God and worthy of his celebrated reputation. Although he was a simple and unlearned man, he later became famous for his practice of heroic virtue, as God’s servant had prophesied, and was raised to the height of exalted contemplation. For through the passage of time, he was continually intent on elevations; and he was so often rapt into God in ecstasy, as I myself have observed as an eyewitness, that he seemed to live among people more like an angel than a human being.”

The Legend of the Three Companions, which is preceded by the Letter of Greccio in manuscript tradition, recalls how Francis joyously welcomes Giles, their first mission of evangelisation in the Marches, the prophecy of Francis regarding the newly born movement and the marvel of the inhabitants at the sight of these two strange brothers. The same events are narrated by the Anonymous of Perugia, whose author, who is probably Brother John of Perugia, writing in 1241, defines Giles as “a very dedicated and faithful man, on whom God bestowed many graces.”

The same author, speaking about the mission of Francis and Giles in the Marches, that “people remained nevertheless in awe at the holy way of life with which they seemed to be marked for the Lord’s sake.” The Assisi Compilation, composed after 1276, speaks about the first encounter between Francis and Giles, adding the episode of the mantle that Giles donated with joy to a poor man. It also speaks about the presence of Giles and Bernard close to Francis, who was blind and blessing the brothers before he died. The Mirror of Perfection, which was composed in 1318, offers the same information regarding the first encounter between Francis and Giles and regarding the offering of Giles’ mantle to the poor man, and confirms Giles’ presence at the Portiuncula, close to Bernard, during the moment of the death of Francis. In this same source we find the splendid definition of the good friar minor, given by Francis, which summarises the lives of some holy brothers and their best virtues. Regarding Giles it praises “the mind raised in contemplation which Brother Giles had even to the highest perfection.”

The Fioretti of Saint Francis, which are a late 14th century adaptation in the Tuscan vernacular of the Acts of Blessed Francis and His Companions, composed by Hugolino of Montegiorgio in 1327-1337, mention Giles five times: they praise the first companions of Francis and especially “one of them [who] was caught up to the third heaven like Saint Paul, and this was Brother Giles;” they mention the episode of Giles who visits Brother Bernard and encourages him during the moment of death; they describe the dream of one of the three robbers of Monte Casale, who was welcomed in paradise by Francis, Bernard and Giles; they narrate the famous, although legendary, encounter between Giles and Saint King Louis IX of France; they praise Brother James of Massa on the basis of the testimony given by Giles.

In The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus, composed on La Verna by Ubertino of Casale in 1305, there is a whole chapter dedicated to “Brother Giles, one of the saintliest of our fathers.” In this chapter the author recalls how “the holy man Giles used to wail aloud at the way the Rule was being destroyed before his eyes, so much so that those who were ignorant of the way of the Spirit thought he was insane.” “Many who witnessed it [Giles’ contemplation] told me, that as soon as the glory of Paradise was mentioned, he went into ecstasy at the pleasure of it.” “Here was a man who when he saw aspiring lectors or those ambitious to do studies, would, mockingly, make a trumpet of his two fists. This study and science of theirs, he would elucidate, was all for celebrity and worldly flourish, like the hollow sound of a trumpet.” “Due to the undoubted devotion he had to his holy father, the blessed Francis, he supported the idea of building a noteworthy church over the spot where the Saint’s body lay, if only to impress upon people insensitive to the spiritual how eminently holy he was.”

Dante Alighieri mentions Giles in the Canto XI of Paradise in The Divine Comedy, when he speaks about Lady Poverty and the first brothers: “Their harmony and their glad looks, their love and wonder and their gentle contemplation, / served others as a source of holy thoughts; / so much so, that the venerable Bernard / went barefoot first; he hurried toward such peace; / and though he ran, he thought his pace too slow. / O wealth unknown! O good that is so fruitful! / Giles goes barefoot, and Sylvester, / behind the groom – the bride delights them so.”

In The Chronicle or History of the Seven Tribulations of the Order of Minors, written circa 1325 by Angelo Clareno, we find the episode of Brother Giles who, together with Bernard, Angelo, Masseo and Leo, listens to some revelations and recommendations of Saint Francis. In the De adventu fratrum minorum in Angliam, written by Thomas of Eccleston in 1258-1259, brother Richard, during the provincial chapter of Oxford of 1238, narrates the vision of a certain friar in Paris in which Giles comments the seven questions...
of the “Our Father” in front of the learned friars of the Order. In the *Chronicle* of Salimbene de Adam, written between 1282 and 1288, Blessed Giles is described as a man of ecstasy who used to say that it is a great grace in heaven not to possess any grace, as a man who prayed that God would not work any miracles through his intercession, and who was buried in a stone coffin in the church of the friars in Perugia. According to Salimbene it was Brother Leo who wrote a life of Brother Giles. In the *Liber exemplorum Fratrum minorum saeculi XIII*, which is a collage of anecdotes regarding Franciscan themes composed in the years 1257-1274, Brother John presents the testimony of his master, Brother Giles, which relates to the words of encouragement that Francis addressed to the first brothers he sent on mission.

Besides these authors and text present in the Franciscan Sources, we can also recall other documents that speak of Brother Giles: the *Legenda S. Francisci Versificata*, composed in 1232/1234 by Henry d’Avranches, the *Liber de Laudibus*, composed in 1279 by Bernard of Besse, secretary of Saint Bonaventure, the *Catalogus sanctorum fratrum minorum* composed around 1335, the *Chronica* of Nicholas Glassberger, composed in 1508, the *Compendium* by Brother Mariano of Florence composed in 1522, the *Crónicas da Ordem dos frades Menores* written in 1550-1560 by Mark of Lisbon, the *Historiae seraphicae religionis* by Pietro Ridolfi of Tossignano, published in 1586, the *MartYROLOGIUM Franciscanum* of Arthur of Moustier, first published in 1637, the *Umbria Serafica* of Agostino of Stroncone, published in 1860. Numerous studies and articles regarding Brother Giles have also been published during the last century.

**Biography of Brother Giles**

Giles was born around 1190 in Assisi or its district. His Franciscan calling began on 23rd April 1208 when, after having prayed in the church of Saint George on the occasion of the feast of that saint, Giles went to look for Francis in order to follow him on the road of evangelical conversion, and was joyfully welcomed by the new fraternity at the Portiuncula, which was made up of Francis, Bernard of Quintavalle and Peter Cattani. The sympathy with which Francis welcomed the eighteen year old Giles among the companions is well expressed in the invitation that Francis made to him to rejoice since he had been chosen by the Lord “as his knight”, as well as by the announcement made by Bernard: “The Lord has sent us a good brother.”

The first part of the existence of Giles as a friar was characterised by an itinerant style of life that took the form of missionary expeditions or devout pilgrimages. During these journeys Giles would earn his daily bread by doing various jobs as an artisan or offering other humble services. Giles went on a first mission with Francis in the Marches, some time after he entered the Order. In the spring of 1209 Giles accompanied Francis and the first companions to Rome, in order to obtain from Pope Innocent III the approval of their *forma vitae*, and during that occasion he visited the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul. In 1211 he went to Florence together with Bernard of Quintavalle for another apostolic mission outside Umbria. During that occasion the two brothers gave witness of poverty, humility, gratitude to God and towards benefactors, and unwavering patience in front of insults and rejection. The same two friars, in 1212, went on pilgrimage to Saint James of Compostella in order to venerate the shrine of the first apostle who had suffered martyrdom for his faith in Christ.

In 1215, in the company of another friar chosen by Francis, Giles went again on pilgrimage, this time boarding a vessel from Brindisi in order to go to the Holy Land, where he devoutly visited the Holy Sepulchre of Christ and other holy places. Upon returning he landed in Apulia, went up to Monte Gargano to pray in the shrine of the Archangel Michael and then went to Bari to the basilica of Saint Nicholas. After returning from the Holy Land, Giles lived in Rome for many months, and edified everyone with his spirit of prayer and poverty, while always choosing the most humble jobs.

The last and unfortunate missionary journey of Giles was that of 1219. The chapter of Pentecost during that year had, in fact, established a major missionary opening for the Order, and had sent friars to France, Germany, Hungary, Spain, Morocco. Francis sent Giles and other friars to Tunis. They left with enthusiasm, convinced that they would convert the Muslims to the Christian faith and also suffer martyrdom. But, as soon as they arrived in Tunis and began to preach, the local Christian merchants, fearful that they would lose their source of livelihood because of the missionary ardour of the brothers that aroused an adverse reaction on the part of the Muslims, took them by force and made them embark on a vessel and sent them back to Italy.

In 1225 Giles lived in Rieti, where the Papal Curia was residing, and he accepted to remain in the palace of the Cistercian cardinal Nicolò di Chiaramonte, who greatly admired him, on the condition that he would be allowed to earn his daily bread with the work of his own hands. On 3rd October 1226 Giles assisted at the death of Saint Francis at the Portiuncula.

The second part of the life of Brother Giles is characterised in a special way by the contemplative...
dimension of his prayer life as Ubertino da Casale reminds us in the Arbor Crucifixae Iesu:

“But who is able to give an adequate account of the saintliness of the holy man Giles? He was the fourth friar minor, the third of the father’s true sons. He started out by throwing himself vigorously into the active life. He was a real Martha. He was to be seen as one whose hands were full continually, with so many virtues to be practiced, active ministries to be engaged in, like manual labour, looking after lepers, and other humble tasks. He stayed at this until the day he was caught up in contemplation under the influence of Jesus’ love, when he appeared to be more at home in the heavenly city than in the earthly one, though still living in the flesh.”

In 1214 Francis had sent Giles to a hermitage close to Perugia, after Giles himself had asked to be allowed to retire in contemplation. Francis loved and cherished Giles especially for his exemplary life, and would often say: “He is my knight of the round table.” For this reason Francis allowed Giles to wander about rather freely. One day, however, Giles was assailed by a scruple of conscience, and he asked Francis to decide where to send him, since in such a free obedience his soul was not in peace any longer. Francis chose for him the hermitage of Favarone. Here one night Giles had an extraordinary ecstatic rapture in which he beheld the great beauty by which the Holy Spirit had adorned his soul, and he felt much consolation. This episode is followed by another experience of a terrible diabolic temptation.

After 1214, except for the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the mission in Tunis and the months he spent in Rome and Rieti, which we have already mentioned above, for Giles it was a question of days, months and years lived intensely in the silence and peace of hermitages, particularly in the wooded regions of the Umbrian hills: besides Favarone, we have to mention Deruta, Cibottola, Agello, Preggio, Le Carceri and especially Cetona, near Chiusi in Tuscany, where Giles went together with another brother immediately after the death of Francis. Living in Cetona, on one occasion Giles had a dream in which he saw Francis, with whom he had a rather enigmatic discourse, and above all, three days before Christmas, he had a marvellous vision of the Lord that immersed him in a state of great sweetness. This experience repeated itself many times until Epiphany and it radically transformed Giles’ life directing him definitely towards the eremitic life. Around 1232 Giles went to live at Monteripido, on a hill outside Porta Sant’Angelo in Perugia, which was an ideal place for contemplation, and there he remained for nearly thirty years, until his death.

It was in this hermitage, that was later incorporated within the magnificent and imposing 15th century friary, that Giles lived in his beloved life of contemplation, working manually, spending long hours in prayer, going through diabolic temptations, receiving the visit of some friendly brothers, welcoming and giving spiritual direction to friars and lay people, both humble and important persons, who all admired his virtues and his ecstatic raptures, of which the most famous are those that occurred in front of Louis IX, the ministers provincial, the minister general Saint Bonaventure, “brother” Jacopa dei Settesoli and Pope Gregory IX.

Death and cult of Brother Giles

Gregory IX held Brother Giles in great esteem and veneration. After having assisted one day at a moment of ecstasy of this humble brother, he told him: “If you depart from this world before me, I will not wait for you to work any miracles; I will inscribe you immediately in the list of Saints.” The Pope, however, died on 22nd August 1241, while Giles lived on for many more years in his hermitage. During the last months of his life, in spite of rare occasions where he suffered vexations from the devil, Giles lived calmly, full of divine grace, love and spiritual sweetness. At the end of his life he would say: “I do not want to die a death better than that of dying in contemplation.”

In 1262 Giles developed a very high fever, and a whooping cough, which caused him great pain in the chest and in the head. He was constrained to remain in bed. The citizens of Perugia sent many armed men to the hermitage of Monteripido in order to watch over Giles, since they did not want his body to be stolen and taken to another city after his death. Giles made fun of these efforts and would say: “Tell the citizens of Perugia that they will never ring any bells, neither for my canonisation nor for any great miracles: they will only receive the sign of Jonah.” Surrounding by the brothers Giles died early in the morning of Sunday 23rd April 1262, feast of Saint George, the same day in which, 54 years before, he had followed Francis.

The citizens of Perugia and the companions of Giles wanted to give a decent burial to the venerable remains, since there was no church in Monteripido and the place was isolated and not secure, and his relics could be easily stolen. So they carried Giles solemnly in the city and buried him in the crypt of the church of the friars minor known as San Francesco al Prato, which had been built in Gothic style close to Porta Santa Susanna in the years 1251-1256.

The remains of Brother Giles were enclosed in a sarcophagus dating from the 4th century, which had been found in the same district of Campo dell’Orto, where the church of San Francesco was built, and where
there could probably have been an ancient Christian cemetery. The sculpture on the front of the sarcophagus depicted the story of the prophet Jonah thrown in the sea and swallowed by a fish and then thrown back on land. In this way the prophecy of Brother Giles before he died in 1262 came true.

After the earthquake of 1340 the entry to the tomb of Blessed Giles was blocked. In 1439 the ark with the relics returned to light and was made accessible once more, because the bishop of Perugia, Giovanni Baglioni, transferred it from the crypt to the altar of the Crispolti chapel, in the left transept of the same church of San Francesco al Prato.1

During the 18th century the church of San Francesco al Prato was on the verge of collapse because of the unstable terrain. On 5th November 1738 the bishop of Perugia, Riccardo Ferniani, ordered the unearthing of the body of Blessed Giles, which was still venerated in the ancient sarcophagus under the altar of the Crispolti chapel. In 1740-1748 the church of San Francesco al Prato was rebuilt, and on 5th May 1748 bishop Ferniani solemnly reopened it for public worship. On 11th November 1757 the same bishop ordered a new exhumation of the relics of Blessed Giles and replaced them with the ark in the Crispolti chapel “in ecclesia noviter aedificata.” The relics remained in this place until 1872, when they were transferred, because the church of San Francesco al Prato was again in danger of collapse and it was decided to close it once more.2

In 1872 the sarcophagus was taken to the civic museum of the University of Perugia. The remains of Blessed Giles, through the initiative of cardinal archbishop Gioacchino Pecci, who would then become Pope Leo XIII, were transferred to the chapel of the Episcopal palace. In order to be more accessible for veneration, in 1880 the sacred remains were taken and placed under the altar of the chapel of Saint Onophrius in the cathedral church of Perugia. In 1920, thanks to a decree published by the Congregation of Rites (16 November 1935), and after yet another exhumation, part of the relics were kept at Monteripido, whereas the remaining relics were restored to the Conventual friars Minor who had returned to San Francesco al Prato on 1st November 1932. Since the famous church dedicated to Saint Francis was still closed for worship, the relics were placed in the adjacent Oratory of Saint Bernardine under the altar. In 1946 the civic museum donated to the friars also the ancient sarcophagus where the remains of Blessed Giles had been originally buried, and the relics were placed in it once again in the same Oratory of Saint Bernardine, awaiting the day in which they could be returned to the church of San Francesco al Prato. In 1957 it was evident that insurmountable difficulties were in the way of reopening the church, and so the 1932 altar in the Oratory of Saint Bernardine was demolished and the ancient sarcophagus with the relics was put in its place, where it still enshrines the relics of Blessed Giles. The Oratory of Saint Bernardine3 was built in 1451-1452 and embellished with the renaissance façade sculptured by Agostino di Duccio in 1457-1461.

NOTES
1 This is a summary of a section of the paper by BERNARDO COMMODO, Il Beato Egidio d’Assisi nel 750° della morte, in Miscellanea Franciscana 111 (2011) 418-455.
3 Vita beatæ Aegidii Assisiatis, in L. LEMMENS, Documenta antiqua franciscana, I: Scripta fratris Leonis socii S.P. Francisci, Quaracchi 1901, 37-63.
4 W. SETON, Blessed Giles of Assisi, Manchester 1918, 52-89.
6 Cf. SALMINE, Chronicle 16.
8 Vita fratis Aegidii, viri sanctissimi et contemplativi, in Chronica XXIV generalum, Quaracchi 1897, 74-115. English translation of the Chronicle of the XXIV Generals by N. MUSCAT, in http://www.i-tau.org/franstudies/
9 Dicta beati Aegidii Assisienis sec. Codices mss. Emendata et denovo edita a PP. Collegii S. Bonaventuræ (a cura
53 Cfr. Vita III, 81-82 and Vita II, 221-222, which places this period of sojourn in Rome before the pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

54 Cfr. Vita II, 223; Vita III, 78.

55 Cfr. Vita I, 324; Vita II, 223; Vita III, 83-84.

56 Umberto da Casale, The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus, Book 5, c. 3 (FAED III, 184).

57 Vita II, 223; Vita III, 78. These works of St. Francis apply to Giles the same opinion that Francis had regarding the first companions according to AC 103 (FAED II, 208) and 2MP 72 (FAED III, 320). Francis’ words are a reference to the celebrated table of King Arthur around which he and his knights sat. According to the story, Arthur had the table made round so that none of his knights could claim precedence over the other.


59 Cfr. Vita I, 328; Vita II, 226; Vita III, 95-96.

60 Cfr. Vita I, 328-330; Vita II, 225; Vita III, 96-97. The experience was so decisive in the spiritual itinerary of Giles that one day he stated that he had been born four times: “The first time, he said, I was born from my parents; the second time, I was born in the Sacrament of baptism; the third time, I was born when I entered religious life; the fourth time, I was born when the Lord took pity on me and showed me his mercy when he appeared to me.” He admitted that if he were a priest he would not have sung “I believe in one God” but “I know one God, the Father almighty”: Vita III, 100. After this vision of ineffable sensations, in order to conserve in a better way the most particular grace he had received, Giles “was always to be found all by himself in his cell, keeping vigil, fasting, praying and dedicating himself to be vigilant of any evil words or actions”: Vita I, 334; Vita II, 225; Vita III, 98.

61 Vita I does not speak of Giles’ presence in Perugia and Vita II mentions it but without using the word “Monte”. The detail regarding the “Monte” appears instead in the Vita III, 94 and 104 (the episode of the well that the “fratres montis prope Perusium” wanted to dig, and the visit of Pope Gregory IX to Giles “ad locum Montis extra Perusium”). The “Monte” was the property of Giacomo di Bonconte Coppoli, who willingly consented to Giles to “I pose super lectum, et sic quasi sine tractu clausis oculis et ore rapta est illa hora mattinali, cum fratres sic eum portarent, posuerunt eum a. fantozzi, Alcune memorie intorno al culto di S. Francesco d’Assisi, di S. Antonio di Padova e del B. Egidio d’Assisi nella città di Perugia, in Archivum Franciscanum Historicum 33 (1940) 227-233.

62 Cfr. Vita III, 111-112. Giles suffered terrible vexations of the devil also before, for example in the hermitage of Favorone: cfr. Vita I, 328; Vita II, 226; and also when he was staying in the church of San Apollinare at Spoleto: cfr. Vita I, 328; Vita II, 226; Vita III, 111. San Apollinare was the first minoritic friary in that town, which was then transferred to Sant’Elia in 1226 and subsequently to San Simone around 1260. At Monteripido certain miracles are recorded: the miracle of the well for the friars, the three lilies that flowered as a proof of the perpetual virginity of Mary and the abundant milk given to a woman in order to nurture her babies: cfr. Vita III, 90, 101-102.

63 Among the old friends who went to visit Giles, there were Rufino, Juniper, Simone and especially Leo: cfr. Vita III, 89-92. Among the rare exits of Giles from the hermitage, we recall the occasion when he went to visit Brother Bernard on his deathbed: Vita fratris Bernardi de Quintavalle, Quaracchi 1897, 45.
The occasion of the 100th issue of our review *Spirit + Life* prompts us to examine the biblical and spiritual richness underlying this expression of Jesus in the Gospel of John 6:64: “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (Spiritus est qui vivificat, caro non prodest quicquam. Verba quae ego locutus sum vobis spiritus et vita sunt). Our brief analysis will include the biblical and liturgical importance of this verse in John’s Gospel, since Saint Francis was familiar with Scripture texts, which he then quoted in his writings, through the participation in the liturgy, particularly during Mass or the celebration of the Divine Office. We shall then examine Francis’ use of this Gospel verse in his writings, in order to understand its importance in his spirituality and maybe also in certain events of his life.

The link of this Gospel verse with the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life and writings of Saint Francis is certainly important. So is the reference to the Word of Jesus Christ, since the knowledge and preaching of the Word of God played such an important role in Francis’ spirituality, and he often speaks about those who preach the Word as preaching spirit and life. Last but not least the verse has to be taken within the context in which it was written, namely chapter 6 of John’s Gospel, which deals with the Eucharistic discourse of Jesus in the synagogue of Capharnaum.

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**SPIRITUS ET VITA (Jn 6:64)**

**IN THE LIFE AND SPIRITUALITY OF ST. FRANCIS**

*Noel Muscat ofm*

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The biblical and liturgical context of John 6:64

The context of John 6:64 is the conclusion of the Eucharistic discourse of Jesus in the synagogue of Capharnaum. The reaction of the listeners who had followed the words of Jesus on the living bread of life coming from heaven, were scandalized by his affirmation that they had to eat his body and drink his blood in order to have life in themselves. Their reaction became so aggressive that they abandoned Jesus. The Lord answers with the words we have quoted above.

In his words Jesus seems to be opposing the flesh to the spirit. In fact John does not distinguish two diverse parts in the human person, but is rather describing two different ways of living in relation to Christ and his message of salvation. The flesh indicates the human person that is prone to weakness and all kinds of physical, psychological and spiritual frailty. When man is left at the whims of his own possibilities, without any reference to God, the flesh cannot, by itself perceive the profound meaning of the words and signs that Jesus works, and therefore cannot believe. On the other hand the spirit indicates the human person that is vivified by the power of life that dwells in God himself and that enlightens the human person. In this way, the spirit that gives life is the presence of God in the power of his Word that makes a person believe. That is why Jesus says: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”

It is in the context of this unique unity between flesh and spirit seen as vehicles of God’s grace, that we can understand the true meaning of Jesus’ words. It is not a question of denying the flesh in order to give way to the spirit, but rather that of making the flesh arise beyond its natural weakness in order to contemplate God’s power living within it through the grace of the Holy Spirit and the enlightening power of the Word who is Christ. It is all about seeing and believing in Jesus, the living Word of God who is made man. We shall see how Francis truly and fully understands this verse within such a context, when he speaks about seeing and believing in the power of the Spirit of life dwelling in the flesh of Jesus Christ, particularly in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The liturgical context of this verse of John’s Gospel is also important in order to understand the use that Francis makes of it. In the Mass liturgy...
Gospel texts from John 6 were read especially on three occasions during the liturgical year, namely Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), Ember Wednesday after Pentecost, and the Feast of Corpus Domini, which however was only introduced in 1264 and therefore did not yet exist in the Roman liturgy during the time of Saint Francis. There is no indication that John 6:64 was included in any of these texts, but Francis was quite familiar with it, maybe because he would read the whole Gospel, if we are to accept what Brother Leo states when he writes that Francis had the entire Book of the Gospels copied together with his Breviary.

The words of Christ are spirit and life

The first instance in which Francis makes explicit reference to John 6:64 is found in the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful 2:3: “Because I am the servant of all, I am obliged to serve all and to administer the fragrant words of my Lord to them. Therefore, realizing that I could not visit each one of you personally because of sickness and the weakness of my body, I decided to offer you in this letter and message the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of the Father, and the words of the Holy Spirit, which are spirit and life.”

These opening phrases of the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful can be explained within the context of the final part of Francis’ life, when he was sick and could not visit the friars and other persons. Thus he decides to write down a message based on the “fragrant words” of the Lord. Francis considers himself as a minister of the Word who is Christ. For him the words of the Gospel that he proclaimed were synonymous with the person of Christ as Verbum Patris, Word of the Father, echoing the theology of the prologue of John’s Gospel.

Francis also refers to “the words of the Holy Spirit” and calls them by the Gospel text we have quoted, “spirit and life.” The expression refers to his faith in the divine inspiration of Scriptures, which are truly the words of the Holy Spirit. Therefore any word which echoes the words of the Scriptures becomes the word of the Spirit who speaks to us through Christ. The effect of these words of life is that they themselves become a sign of the presence of the Spirit within us, of that Spirit who is eternal life.

Francis is convinced of the intimate link between the proclaimed Word of God and the action of the Spirit working within the same divine Word. Just as Christ is the incarnate Word of God in the mystery of his divinity and humanity in which dwells the Spirit that gives life, so the disciple who comes into contact with the proclaimed Word of the Father, who is Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is also filled with the Holy Spirit who gives life and life in abundance.

The same expression of John 6:64 recurs in the conclusion of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 19-21: “In the love which is God we beg all those whom these words reach to receive those fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ written above with divine love and kindness. And let whoever does not know how to read have them read to them frequently. Because they are spirit and life, they should preserve them together with a holy activity to the end.”

This First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is sometimes considered to be a kind of exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Penance, although nowadays scholars are not always in agreement regarding this matter. What is of interest to us here is that Francis again refers to the Word of Christ as being “fragrant” and appealing to those who will receive it with charity. He also exhorts those who are illiterate to ask others to read out the Words of Christ to them. This is an interesting note, indicating that Francis was very much in favour of having the Gospel read, in the same way that Brother Leo tells us regarding the sick Francis who wanted to listen to the Gospel of the day’s Mass whenever he could not attend personally. These words are again indicated as being the “spirit and life” of those who receive them with faith and charity, and who concretely live their Gospel commitment by putting them in practice through their holy life.

In this way we see that, for Francis, the divine Word generates life in those who receive it only if they are ready to translate into good works the contents of the same Word they revere and read with utmost devotion. The divine Word, therefore, becomes spirit and life, only in the case of those who are coherent in their life-long commitment in favour of the same Word.

For Francis the link between Word and action was the norm of life. Thomas of Celano tells us that Francis “was no deaf hearer of the Gospel; rather he committed everything he heard to his excellent memory and was careful to carry it out to the letter.”

The Word, which is spirit and life in those who receive it, generates in them the virtue of charity. In this way Francis also considers the words of Christ in John 4:23 in the episode of the encounter of Christ with the Samaritan woman, where the Lord tells her that those who adore the Father should adore him “in spirit and truth.” The Word that is the fountain of life and dialogue with God through prayer becomes the guarantee for a life in truth, and we know that truth in the Gospel is synonymous with the gift of the Spirit of truth, as opposed to the devil, who is the father of lies. It is interesting to note this link between John 4:23 and the text of John 6:64 that we have been seeing, always within the context of The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful:

“How happy and blessed are those who love
Believing in the Eucharist with spiritual eyes

John 6:64 lies within the context of the Eucharistic discourse of Jesus in the synagogue of Capharnaum. Francis also makes use of it in one of his most important “Eucharistic writings”, namely the first Admonition, which is based on the Pseudo-Bernard’s Tractatus de corpore Domini, but which portrays Francis’ original approach to faith in the Eucharist, seen essentially as a faith in the humanity of Jesus Christ as a sacrament of the Lord’s divinity. Francis speaks about believing with spiritual eyes in the real and living presence of Christ in the sacrament of his body and blood:

“The Father dwells in inaccessible light (1Tm 6:16), and God is spirit (Jn 4:24), and no one has ever seen God (Jn 1:18). Therefore He cannot be seen except in the Spirit because it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer (Jn 6:64). But because He is equal to the Father, the Son is not seen by anyone other than the Father or other than the Holy Spirit.”

One could ask: how is it possible to see God the Father who dwells in an inaccessible light? The answer is given by Francis in this Admonition. It is impossible to see God physically, but God can be seen spiritually, through the light of the Spirit, that is, with spiritual eyes. In other words, man can “see” God only through the power of faith that is born of the Spirit. This passage from a purely physical act of seeing (in this case the bread and wine during Mass) and the spiritual act of seeing (believing that the same bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ, whose divinity is hidden in a sacramental way in the Eucharistic species) becomes the guarantee to acquire the “Spirit that gives life”. In this case Francis is quoting the first part of verse 64, which is intimately linked with what follows, namely that the Words of Jesus Christ are “spirit and life.”

Therefore, just as the vision of God is had in a complete and perfect way within the vital communion of the Trinity, so the earthly situation of seeing God through faith is the work of this same communion working in the hearts of the faithful through the action of the Holy Spirit. We note that Francis also quotes other verses from John’s Gospel, and especially John 4:24, in the episode of the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, where Jesus speaks about adoring the Father “in spirit and in truth” and John 1:18, in the prologue to the Gospel, where it is said that no one has ever seen God physically, except the Son who is always turning to face the Father, and who reveals the Father to those who believe.

The first Admonition therefore speaks in a profound way about the act of seeing and believing that the Words of Christ become spirit and life to those who come into contact with his humanity hidden in a sacramental way in his divinity. This process of spiritual vision is very evident in the case of the contact with the Word of Christ and with the Eucharist. Francis is very much down to earth in his spirituality. For him the human body becomes a vehicle of grace if it is open to the action of the Holy Spirit that dwells within it and sanctifies it in order to be Christ-like.

In chapter 22 of the Earlier Rule, Francis merges together a great quantity of Gospel texts, particularly taken from John’s Gospel in the farewell discourse of Jesus to the disciples. Although, at first glance, such a merging of Scripture texts does not indicate any originality on the part of Francis, in fact it becomes original if one examines the spiritual thoughts that flow one after another in this chapter. We shall only pause briefly to examine verse 39 within the context of what precedes and follows it:

“Let us always make a home and a dwelling place there for Him Who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit […] And let us adore Him with a pure heart […] God is Spirit and those who adore Him must adore Him in Spirit and truth (Jn 4:24) […] All of you are brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not call yourselves teachers (Mt 23:8-10); you have but one Teacher in heaven. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you (Jn 15:7). Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Mt 18:20). Behold I am with you until the end of the world (Mt 28:20). The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life (Jn 6:64). I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6). Let us, therefore, hold onto the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel of Him Who humbled Himself to beg His Father for us and to make His name known.”

The themes that Francis touches upon in these verses include the following: (1) the indwelling of the Trinity in those who believe; (2) adoration of the Father in Spirit and truth; (3) fraternity based on Christ the one and only teacher of all; (4) the effects of prayer in fraternity; (5) the Word of Christ are spirit and life; (6) Christ is the way, the truth, the life; (7) adhering to the words, life and teachings of the Gospel of Christ.

We cannot analyse all these themes in a detailed way, but will rather stop to see the intimate
link between such disparate Gospel texts. For Francis the human person is the place where the Trinity dwells, through faith, and through the action of the Holy Spirit. All those who see God with spiritual eyes, welcome His presence within them. This indwelling makes us children of God, and therefore we can call God “Abba”, Father, just like Jesus did. We can then adore Him in Spirit and truth, namely in the communion of Jesus, God and man, with the Holy Spirit who guided him during his earthly life. Thus Christ becomes our only teacher and master, and in him we build true fraternity, based on equality and co-sharing of the gifts of the Spirit. The effects of true fraternity are seen when the brothers can pray together with Christ who is present in their midst, and when they truly believe that their prayers will be answered. This perfect agreement between the Words of Christ and the prayer of the disciples is the guarantee that they have welcomed Christ, the Word of the Father, as spirit and life. They are vivified by the Word and therefore generate life in all those who listen to their words, since their words are in perfect harmony with the Word of Christ in the Gospel. Christ becomes for them the way, the truth and the life, in other words, the only Rule of life that they follow. Their own life commitment is a sign of adhering to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, in such a way that they become Christ-like in their words and actions. This can be described as an ideal, but true picture, of the first Franciscan fraternity and of what a Franciscan fraternity should be, namely a fraternity adoring God the Father in Spirit and truth and accepting Christ’s Word as spirit and life.

**Theologians and preachers administer spirit and life**

Another important aspect regarding the use that Francis makes of John 6:64 is found in the Testament, where Francis speaks about theologians and preachers: “And we must honour all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words and respect them as those who minister to us spirit and life (Jn 6:64).”

Francis’ respect for theologians and preachers is evident in other writings, such as the Letter to Brother Anthony, chapter 17 of The Earlier Rule and chapter 9 of The Later Rule. Francis not only did not oppose the teaching of theology to the brothers in view of preparing preachers for the Order, but he explained the practical aim of study and theological formation, namely that of making the friars become expert men of prayer and humble ministers of the Word. That is why he insisted that preachers should be examined by their ministers before embarking on the ministry of preaching.

This verse from the Testament gives importance to the respect that the brothers are to show to theologians and preachers, but it is even more concerned with the contents of theology and preaching, namely the Words of Christ which are spirit and life. The respect, therefore, is not aimed at the person of the theologian or of the preacher, but rather at the content of his message, namely the Words of Jesus Christ. This concept can best be understood in the light of the seventh Admonition. Here Francis quotes 2Corinthians 3:6: “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” Francis encourages all brothers to “follow the spirit of the divine letter” and not just to be content “to know the words and to interpret them for others.” This coherence between Word and life generates others to the life of the spirit: “And those people are brought to life by the spirit of the divine letter who do not attribute every letter they know, or wish to know, to the body but, by word and example, return them to the most high Lord God to Whom every good belongs.”

Francis attributes Scripture to its author, namely the Holy Spirit, and explains that the role of the Spirit is that of “vivifying” Scripture. The fact that the Spirit gives life to the divine Word refers to the inspiration of Scripture, as well as to the continual presence of the Spirit in Scripture, which thus becomes “life” for all those who listen to it with faith and devotion. Through the action of the Spirit, the holy Words become “spirit and life” to those who welcome Christ present and living in Scripture and model their own life according to the same Word.

Francis of Assisi became familiar with Scripture texts through his daily participation in the celebration of the liturgy, particularly the divine office and the Eucharistic sacrifice. His knowledge of Gospel text is thorough and detailed, and he recalled to memory whole verses that were object of his prayer life. Among these, the Gospel of John occupies pride of place, since Francis often quotes verses from the fourth Gospel. Among these the verse John 6:64 has a particular significance in his spirituality.

Francis concludes that the Words of Jesus Christ are spirit and life. They transmit the gift of the Spirit that gives life whenever the disciple welcomes these same “fragrant” Words with the eyes of faith, or with spiritual eyes. Francis is convinced that the same words that he writes to the brothers, or to lay people in general, are transmitting the same spirit and life of the Word of Christ, since they do not add anything which is Francis’ own, but simply propose and recall to mind the same Words of Christ.

This approach to the divine Word lies at the basis of the Franciscan way of studying theology, indeed of the whole Franciscan approach to the created universe. It should also form the basis of Franciscan approach to culture, to all that enhances and ennobles human nature. The aim of our review *Spirit + Life*
is that of providing such a Franciscan vision, rooted essentially upon a Christian vision of life that through the centuries has given life to a culture we call our own. It is up to us to preserve such a heritage and transmit it to our secularised world today, with a spirit of dialogue and openness that never denies its Christian matrix.

NOTES

1 Whereas the new edition of the Vulgate places these words of Jesus in John 6:63, the original Vulgate edition that was in use in the Roman Missal places them as John 6:64, because in the Vulgate verse 51 is divided into two verses. Since this was the edition that Francis would have known in the Roman Missal, we shall refer to this second enumeration.

2 *Inscription of Brother Leo* (1257-1260). This small parchment, preserved in the Breviary of St. Francis that is revered as a relic in the protomastery of St. Clare, is a proof of Francis’ attachment to the liturgical texts. Original version in: *Testimonio Minora Saeculi XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi*, compiled and edited by LEONARDUS LEMMENES, Ad Claras Aquas, Florence 1926, 61. English translation in *FAED II*, 773: “Blessed Francis acquired this breviary for his companions Brother Angelo and Brother Leo, and when he was well he wished always to say the Office, as it is stated by the Rule. At the time when he was sick and not able to recite it, he wished to listen to it. And he continued to do this for as long as he lived. He also had the Book of the Gospels copied, and whenever he would be unable to hear Mass due to infirmity or any other manifest impediment, he had that Gospel read to him, which on that day was read at Mass in Church. And he continued to do this until his death. For he used to say: ‘When I do not hear Mass, I adore the Body of Christ in prayer with the eyes of my mind, just as I adore It when I see it during Mass.’ After blessed Francis read the Gospel or listened to it, he always kissed the Gospel out of the greatest reverence for the Lord.”


4 *EpFid I*, 19-21 (FAED I, 44). Latin text in FRANCESCO d’ASSISI, *Scritti*, 178: “Et qui nesciunt legere, sepe legere faciant; et apud se reteineat cum sancta operatione usque in finem, quia spiritus et vita sunt (Joa 6,64).”

5 1C 22 (FAED I, 202).


7 *Adm* 1, 5-7 (FAED I, 128). Latin text in FRANCESCO d’ASSISI, *Scritti*, 352: “Pater lucem habitat inaccessibilem (cfr. 1Tim 6,16), et spiritus est Deus (Joa 4,24), et Deum nemo vidit unquam (Joa 1,18). Ideo nonnisi spiritu videri potest, quia spiritus est qui vivificat; caro non prodest quidquam (Joa 6,64). Sed nec Filius in eo, quod equalis est Patri, videtur ab aliquo altert quam Pater, altert quam Spiritus Sanctus.”


11 2C 163 (FAED II, 352).

12 *Adm* 7,4 (FAED I, 132). In the Prologue to *The Book of Chronicles or of the Tribulations of the Order of Lesser Brothers* (FAED III, 385), ANGELO CLARENO states: “Enlightened by Christ he taught them to respect, love, and honour the ministers of the sacraments of the Church as their lords, and above all that all these sacraments and divine words and all masters and doctors of sacred theology must be venerated and honoured because, he said, through this we share in spirit and life (Jn 6:64) through their ministry.”

BARTOLOMEO
DE RINONICHI DA PISA
AND THE BOOK OF
CONFORMITIES

This work is an English free translation and adaptation of Raoul Manselli, Bartolomeo da Pisa (da Rinonici, de Rinonichis), in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, available online at the website http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bartolomeo-da-pisa_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

Bartolomeo da Pisa (da Rinonici, de Rinonichis), has to be clearly distinguished from Bartolomeo domini Albisi as well as from Bartolomeo da san Corrado, with whom he has often been confused, since all three appear with the name da Pisa.

We do not know for sure whether the other name de Rinonichi, with which Bartolomeo is known in ancient documents refers to a locality close to Pisa or to the family de Rinoniches, which certainly lived in Pisa at that time. The form in which the name appears (de Rinonichi or de Rinonicho, and not de Rinonichis) leads us to accept the first hypothesis.

Bartolomeo appears as a Friar Minor for the first time in Pisa on 15 October 1352. Before 1373 he had acquired the academic title of bachelor in his hometown, and became lector in various study centres of the Order (Padua and Florence). The general chapter of Toulouse of 1373 sent him to Cambridge in order to acquire the title of Master of theology. The Hundred Years War prohibited him from reaching England. After having studied for some time in Bologna Bartolomeo acquired the title of Master from Pope Gregory XI, who addressed a bulla in Avignon on 27 April 1375. It does not seem that Bartolomeo ever lectured in a public university, although his name has sometimes been mistakenly included among the professors in Pisa or Florence.

Pisan documents record Bartolomeo’s presence in the town during the last years of the 14th century. He is mentioned in notary contracts between 19th June and 28th October 1397, and participated at the general chapter of the Franciscan Order held in Assisi in 1399. On 2nd August Bartolomeo presented to the chapter his voluminous masterpiece entitled De Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Iesu (The Book of Conformities of the Life of Blessed Francis with the Life of the Lord Jesus). The work was officially approved during the chapter proceedings.

According to a tradition dating from the Franciscan chronicler Mariano da Firenze, but which finds no other proof in other documents, Bartolomeo died in 1401. Others have placed the date of his death on 4th November of the same year, but without providing any documentary proof. The confusion resulted especially because of Bartolomeo domini Albisi, whose miracles and cult as a blessed were erroneously attributed to Bartolomeo da Pisa.

The same confusion between Bartolomeo da Rinonico, Bartolomeo domini Albisi and Bartolomeo da San Corrado exists regarding their works. Recent studies have succeeded in fixing three lists, not without errors. Bartolomeo is certainly the author of a treatise on Mary, entitled De vita et laudibus beatae Mariae Virginis, where the account of the biographical events of the Virgin’s life, taken from the Gospels, is overshadowed by long and detailed theological discussions, in which the author delves at length into parallelisms, as he does in the case of Saint Francis, which he calls conformitates, conformities, between Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, showing off also his vast philosophical and theological knowledge.

An important witness of the pastoral activity and skills of an orator of Bartolomeo is provided by two treatises and discussions, one held in Florence in 1390 and entitled De casibus conscientiae, and the other one held in Pisa in 1397 and entitled De contemptu mundi.

These two sets of Lenten sermons, which were very popular (the first one is made up of 88 sermons and the second one of 58 sermons) consist, like other works by brother Bartolomeo, of complex and articulate distinctions, in which the depth and variety of his culture is evident, since the author makes ample references to classical writers, to the Church Fathers, to philosophers and theologians, among whom he gives particular preference to Franciscan authors, often mentioning prominent friars in the Order.

Among these works the most important is undoubtedly the one that has earned fame for Bartolomeo along the centuries, namely De Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini
I Franciscan Order

Iesu, composed between 1385 and 1390, as is evident from the numerous chronological indications present in the work, which was officially approved by the Order.

The Book of Conformities is a vast compilation, in which the conformities between the life of Jesus Christ and that of Saint Francis, which were already present in the writings of the first Franciscans, are developed in all possible ways.

The idea behind these conformities was expressed as a need to follow and imitate Christ. It was present in Saint Francis and in his companions. During the time of the primitive Franciscan generation of friars, and particularly with the encyclical letter of brother Elias, this notion of conformities became a certainty that among all saints, Saint Francis was unique in being so close to his Divine Master as to become, if not identical, certainly conformed to Him.

A whole style of literature, in which some fantastic and legendary elements were also inserted, tried in all manners to find more points of “conformity” between the life of Christ and that of Saint Francis. During the second half of the 13th century, among the Franciscan Spirituals there grew the attraction towards the significance of the conformities, and the same friars also stated that Saint Francis would rise again from the dead in order to lead his Spiritual brothers who were being persecuted by their confreres.

This notion of conformity is synthetically enunciated at the end of the second prologue of the work (pages 16-18), with a series of synthetic parallelisms in verses that have rightly been judged as being among the most meaningful regarding the Franciscan awareness of Christ-likeness (E. Benz, Ecclesia spiritualis, Stuttgart 1934). As the life of Jesus had forty spiritual fruits, so the life of Saint Francis had also given the same number of fruits.

This vast work is divided into three books which present the life of Jesus and confront it with the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. The author makes profitable use of the greatest number of Franciscan sources that were available at the end of the 14th century: Thomas of Celano, Saint Bonaventure, the Mirror of Perfection, the Assisi Compilation, the Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius, the Fioretti, and then the legislative texts of the Order, the chronicles relating to the Order, even those coming from non-Italian authors. More interesting is the fact that brother Bartolomeo does not hesitate to accept among Franciscan writers the Spiritual friars Angelo Clareno, Ubertino da Casale and Peter John Olivi, even though he quotes them with great attention. Olivi, for example, is remembered as a famous personage in the Order, but Bartolomeo does not mention him by name when he refers to some of his ideas, which he takes directly from his writings or through the works of Ubertino da Casale.

Besides the Franciscan authors, who together with the Bible constitute the majority of the sources of The Book of Conformities, we also find classical authors, and especially the Church Fathers (Augustine, Gregory the Great, Jerome, Ambrose, John Chrysostom), as well as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Sant Anselm, Peter Lombard, Hugo of Saint Victor, Alexander of Hales, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Thomas, and even Joachim of Fiore and the Pseudo-Cyril.

In the course of his work Bartolomeo includes an exposition of the Franciscan Rule, a list of famous personages of the Order classified according to a systematic series (philosophers, theologians, exegetes, saints, etc.) and according to the geographical regions, and a complete and inclusive picture of the entire Order, distributed in provinces, custodies and friaries.

The work of Bartolomeo is rich and very detailed in its description of the situation of the Franciscan Order at the end of the 14th century, compiled with a passionate love and also with an intention to arrive at the truth with exactitude.

For us it is less valid but at the same time important at the period in which the Book of Conformities was composed, to see the spiritual and religious aims of the author, who tries to present Franciscan spirituality in all its richness, underlining its perennial validity in being centred in Christ and therefore conforming to Christ. The insistence which he proposes, passing “from one fruit to another” for forty times upon the exemplarity of Christ to Franciscan life might seem rather monotonous for the modern reader, but it is efficacious and conveys an undoubtedly persuasive power.

No wonder that the treatise had an enormous success, as is evident in the numerous manuscripts that we possess, particularly if one considers the length of the work (cfr. De Conformitate, IV, pp. XXV-XXXIX; V, pp. XLV-LX), the printed editions (3 in a period of 80 years until the 16th century, when the work ceased to be of interest), the excerpta taken from it, the translations in other languages from the Latin original, the imitations that were attempted on its style and especially the opposition that it created among Protestant circles.

A notorious contribution against Bartolomeo’s work was the pamphlet entitled Alcoranus Franciscanorum (The Koran of the Franciscans), written in 1542 by Erasmus Alberus of Rotterdam against De Conformitate, and which was translated into German by Martin Luther.

In this pamphlet Alberus attacked the Franciscans because, according to him, they substituted the example of a pure and simple man like Francis with that of Jesus Christ, and the Franciscan Rule with the Gospel. He also pointed out that the cause of this spiritual corruption was exactly the book by Bartolomeo da Pisa. The Franciscans considered this book non alio
loco quam Alcoranus a Turcis (not differently than the Koran by the Turks).

This work was translated also into French, and was the cause of polemics and imitations that lasted nearly till the 18th century, giving the wrong impression that De Conformitate was included among the forbidden books.

Besides this important work there are other works that have been attributed to Bartolomeo da Pisa, but which are lost: De laudibus Sanctorum; De laudibus S. Pauli Apostoli; De laudibus Sancti Benedicti; De laudibus Sancti Dominici una cum arboire Ordinis Praedicatorum, which is mentioned seemingly by Saint Antonino of Florence; Commentarii in IV libros Sententiarum, and finally other Sermones quadragesimales.

Bartolomeo da Pisa was a fecund and erudite writer. His style is spiritually alive, and he expresses with clarity the moment of reflection of Franciscanism, particularly in Italy, at the end of the 14th century. He re-examined the complex and rich tradition, in order to give to the Friars Minor an effort at the renewal of the Order through the Observant movement.

The complete published works of Bartolomeo da Pisa, according to the order of publication, except for De Conformitate, are: Quadragesimale Magistri Bartholomei de Pisis de contemptu mundi, impressum Mediolani, anno Domini MCCCLXXXXVIII; Sermones dubiorum et casuum conscientialium contemplativi et elucidative super Evangelii quadragesimalibus fratris Bartholomei de Pisis, Lugduni 1519; De vita et laudibus beatae Mariae Virginis libri sex, Venetiis 1596.

Regarding De Conformitate, except for the three 16th century editions (Milan 1510 and 1513; Bologna 1590), the copies of the third edition that were not sold were presented once again for sale in Bologna with some minor corrections in 1620, and were considered to be a kind of fourth edition. The critical edition of the work is De Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Iesu, auctore fr. Bartholomaeo de Pisa, 2 volumes, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi) 1906-1912 (Analecta Franciscana IV-V), the fruit of the work of the best Franciscan scholars of the time.

After this edition one can confer B. Bughetti, Una nuova compilazione di testi intorno alla vita di s. Francesco, in Archivum Franciscanum Historicum 20 (1927) 525-527; W. Seton, Two manuscripts of Bartholomew of Pisa, in Archivum Franciscanum Historicum 16 (1923) 191-199.

The ninth (sign that Francis was perfectly conformed to Christ) is the meditation of the Crucifix, the intense love with which he embraced and espoused [Christ Crucified]. Francis did not preach, know or meditate anything, and he did not encourage the brothers to meditate and speculate assiduously on anything else except the passion of the Lord. The continuous meditation of the Crucifix was revealed to Brother Leo, who saw Christ Crucified preceding Saint Francis with an immense light, while Francis was travelling towards Saint Mary of the Angels. The fact that Francis preached the Crucifix became evident when Brother Pacificus saw him preaching “between two shining swords in the form of a cross” (LMj IV,9). When he was praying and contemplating the cross, he was seen to be elevated in the air with his arms stretched out in the form of a cross. Francis did not want to glory in anything, he did not want to study anything, as is seen in the answer he gave to a brother. Indeed, when Blessed Francis was seriously ill and one of the brothers asked him to rest a while, and to listen to some holy reading from Scripture, he answered that he did not need to know anything else, and said: “I know Christ poor and crucified” (1Cor 2:2).

Prologue to The Book of Conformities, in Analecta Franciscana IV, 7.
Chapter XX
FRANCIS WILL AND DEATH
End September – October 3 1226

[333] The last days of Francis’s life are of radiant beauty. He went to meet death, singing, says Thomas of Celano, summing up the impression of those who saw him then.

To be once more at Portiuncula after so long a detention at the bishop’s palace was not only a real joy to his heart, but the pure air of the forest must have been much to his physical well-being; does not the Canticle of the Creatures seem to have been made expressly to be sung in the evening of one of those autumn days of Umbria, so soft and luminous, when all nature seems to retire into herself to sing her own hymn of love to Brother Sun?

We see that Francis has come to that almost entire cessation of pain, that renewing of life, which so often precedes the approach of the last catastrophe.

He took advantage of it to dictate his Will.

[334] It is to these pages that we must go to find the true note for a sketch of the life of its author, and an idea of the Order as it was in his dreams.

In this record, which is of an incontestable authenticity, the most solemn manifestation of his thought, the Poverello reveals himself absolutely, with a virginal candour.

His humility is here of a sincerity which strikes one with awe; it is absolute, though no one could dream that it was exaggerated. And yet, wherever his mission is concerned, he speaks with tranquill and serene assurance. Is he not an ambassador of God? Does he not hold his message from Christ himself? The genesis of his thought here shows itself to be at once wholly divine and entirely personal. The individual conscience here proclaims its sovereign authority. “No one showed me what I ought to do, but the Most High himself revealed to me that I ought to live conformably to his holy gospel.”

When a man has once spoken thus, submission to the Church as been singularly encroached upon. We may love her, hearken to her, venerate her, but we feel ourselves, perhaps without daring to avow it, superior to her. Let a critical hour come, and one finds himself heretic without knowing it or wishing it.

“Ah, yes,” cries Angelo Clareno, “St. Francis promised to obey the pope and his successors, but they cannot and must not command anything contrary to the conscience or to the Rule.”

For him, as for all the spiritual Franciscans, when there [335] is conflict between what the inward voice of God ordains and what the Church wills, he has only to obey the former.

If you tell him that the Church and the Order are there to define the true significance of the Rule, he appeals to common sense, and to that interior certitude which is given by a clear view of truth.

The Rule, as also the gospel, of which it is a summary, is above all ecclesiastical power, and no one has the right to say the last word in their interpretation.

Did the innumerable sects which disturbed the Church in the thirteenth century perceive that these two writings – the Rule and the Testament – the one apparently made to follow and support the other, substantially identical as it was said, proceeded from two opposite inspirations? Very confusedly, no doubt, but guided by a very sure instinct, they saw in these pages the banner of liberty.

They were not mistaken. Even to-day, thinkers, moralists, mystics may arrive at solutions very different from those of the Umbrian prophet, but the method which they employ is his, and they may not refuse to acknowledge in him the precursor of religious subjectivism.

[336] The Church, too, was not mistaken. She immediately understood the spirit that animated these pages.
Four years later, perhaps to the very day, September 28, 1230, Ugolini, then Gregory IX, solemnly interpreted the Rule, in spite of the precautions of Francis, who had forbidden all gloss or commentary on the Rule or the Will, and declared that the Brothers were not bound to the observation of the Will.

What shall we say of the bull in which the pope alleges his familiar relations with the Saint to justify his commentary, and in which the clearest passages are so distorted as to change their sense completely. “One is stupefied,” cries Ubertini of Casali, “that a text so clear should have need of a commentary, for it suffices to have common sense and to know grammar in order to understand it.” And this strange monk dares to add: “There is one miracle which God himself cannot do; it is to make two contradictory things true.”

Certainly the Church should be mistress in her own house; it would have been nothing wrong had Gregory IX created an Order conformed to his views and ideas, but when we go through Sbaralea’s folios and the thousands of bulls accorded to the spiritual sons of him who in the clearest and most solemn manner had forbidden them to ask any privilege of the court of Rome, we cannot but feel a bitter sadness.

Thus upheld by the papacy, the Brothers of the Common Observance made the Zelanti sharply expiate their attachment to Francis’s last requests. Caesar of Speyer [337] died of violence from the Brother placed in charge of him; the first disciple, Bernardo di Quintavalle, hunted like a wild beast, passed two years in the forests of Monte-Sefro, hidden by a wood-cutter; the other first companions who did not succeed in flight had to undergo the severest usage. In the March of Ancona, the home of the Spirituals, the victorious party used a terrible violence. The Will was confiscated and destroyed; they went so far as to burn it over the head of a friar who persisted in desiring to observe it.

**Will (Literal Translation)**

See in what manner God gave it to me, to me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance; when I lived in sin, it was very painful to me to see lepers, but God himself led me into their midst, and I remained there a little while. When I left them, that which had seemed to me bitter had become sweet and easy.

A little while after I quitted the world, and God gave me such a faith in his churches that I would kneel down with simplicity and I would say: “We adore thee, Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all thy churches which are in the world, and we bless thee that by thy holy cross thou hast ransomed the world.”

Besides, the Lord gave me and still gives me so great a faith in priests who live according to the form of the holy Roman Church, because of their sacerdotal character, that even if they persecuted me I would have recourse to them. And even though I had all the wisdom of Solomon, if I should find poor
secular priests, I would not preach in their parishes without their consent. I desire to respect them like all the others, to love them and honour them as my lords. I will not consider their sins, [338] for in them I see the Son of God and they are my lords. I do this because here below I see nothing, I perceive nothing corporally of the most high Son of God, if not his most holy Body and Blood, which they receive and they alone distribute to others. I desire above all things to honour and venerate all these most holy mysteries and to keep them precious. Whenever I find the sacred names of Jesus or his words in indecent places, I desire to take them away, and I pray that others take them away and put them in some decent place. We ought to honour and revere all the theologians and those who preach the most holy word of God, as dispensing to us spirit and life.

When the Lord gave me some brothers no one showed me what I ought to do, but the Most High himself revealed to me that I ought to live according to the model of the holy gospel. I caused a short and simple formula to be written, and the lord pope confirmed it for me.

Those who presented themselves to observe this kind of life distributed all that they might have to the poor. They contented themselves with a tunic, patched within and without, with the cord and breeches, and we desired to have nothing more.

The clerks said the office like other clerks, and the laymen Pater noster.

We loved to live in poor and abandoned churches, and we were ignorant and submissive to all. I worked with my hands and would continue to do, and I will also that all other friars work at some honourable trade. Let those who have none learn one, not for the purpose of receiving the price of their toil, but for their trade. Let those who have none learn one, not for the purpose of receiving the price of their toil, but for their trade. Let those who have none learn one, not for the purpose of receiving the price of their toil, but for their trade.

Let the Brothers take great care not to receive the assistance of all the heavenly virtues and all the saints.

I absolutely interdict all the brothers, in whatever place they may be found, from asking any bull from the court of Rome, whether directly or indirectly, under pretext of church or convent or under pretext of preaching, nor even for their personal protection. If they are not received anywhere let them go elsewhere, thus doing penance with the benediction of God.

I desire to obey the minister-general of this fraternity, and the guardian whom he may please to give me. I desire to put myself entirely into his hands, to go nowhere and do nothing against his will, for he is my lord.

[339] Though I be simple and ill, I would, however, have always a clerk who will perform the office, as it is said in the Rule; let all the other brothers also be careful to obey their guardians and to do the office according to the Rule. If it come to pass that there are any who do not the office according to the Rule, and who desire to make any other change, of if they are not Catholics, let all the Brothers, wherever they may be, be bound by obedience to present them to the nearest custode. Let the custodies be bound by obedience to keep him well guarded like a man who is in bonds night and day, so that he may not escape from their hands until they personally place him in the minister’s hands. And let the minister be bound by obedience to send him by brothers who will guard him as a prisoner day and night until they shall have placed him in the hands of the Lord Bishop of Ostia, who is the lord, the protector, and the corrector of all the Fraternity.

And let the Brothers not say: “This is a new Rule,” for this is a reminder, a warning, an exhortation; it is my Will, that I, little Brother Francis, make for you, my blessed Brothers, in order that we may observe in a more catholic way the Rule which we promised the Lord to keep.

Let the ministers-general, all the other ministers and the custodies be held by obedience to add nothing to and take nothing from these words. Let them always keep this writing near them, beside the Rule; and in all the chapters which shall be held, when the Rule is read let these words be read also.

I interdict absolutely, by obedience, all the Brothers, clerics and laymen, to introduce glosses in the Rule, or in this Will, under pretext of explaining it. But since the Lord has given me to speak and to write the Rule and these words in a clear and simple manner, without commentary, understand them in the same way, and put them in practice until the end.

And may whoever shall have observed these things be crowned in heaven with the blessings of the heavenly Father, and on earth with those of his well-beloved Son and of the Holy Spirit the consoler, with the assistance of all the heavenly virtues and all the saints.

And I, little Brother Francis, your servitor, confirm to you so far as I am able this most holy benediction. Amen.

After thinking of his Brothers Francis thought of his dear Sisters at St. Damian and made a will for them.

It has not come down to us, and we need not wonder; [340] the Spiritual Brothers might flee away, and protest from the depths of their retreats, but the Sisters were completely unarmed against the
With my voice I cry unto the Lord, / With my voice I

Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi.

Brothers, and came back with preference to Psalm 142,

At times he added his voice to those of his

Canticle of the Sun.

conforming to his wishes, they again sang to him the

They laid him back upon his bed, and

This was Thursday, October 1.

Brothers, “may the Christ now teach you yours!”

their union: “I [342] have done my duty,” he said to the

he embraced the twenty years that had glided by since

die in the arms of his Lady Poverty.  With one glance

clothing and laid upon the ground, for he wished to

He caused himself to be stripped of his

art in heaven!”  We cannot say; but he desired to finish

to God with an ineffable confidence, “Our Father who

his father, he had renounced all earthly goods and cried

Did he think then of the day when, cursed by

He was ready, he had finished his work.

Did he think then of the day when, cursed by

his clothing and laid upon the ground, for he wished to
die in the arms of his Lady Poverty.  With one glance
he embraced the twenty years that had glided by since
their union: “I [342] have done my duty,” he said to the
Brothers, “may the Christ now teach you yours!”

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They laid him back upon his bed, and

conforming to his wishes, they again sang to him the
Canticle of the Sun.

At times he added his voice to those of his
Brothers, and came back with preference to Psalm 142,

Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi.

With my voice I cry unto the Lord, / With my voice I

implore the Lord.
I pour out my complaint before him, / I tell him all my

distress.

When my spirit is cast down within me, / Thou knowest
my path.

Upon the way where I walk / They have laid a snare for
me.

Cast thine eyes to the right and look! / No one recognizes
me;

All refuge is lost for me, / No one takes thought for my
soul.

Lord, unto thee I cry; / I say: Thou art my refuge.
My portion in the land of the living. / Be attentive to
my cries!

For I am very unhappy. / Deliver me from those who
pursue me!

For they are stronger than I. / Bring my soul out of its
prison

That I may praise thy name. / The righteous shall
compass me about
When thou hast done good unto me!

The visits of death are always solemn, but the
end of the just is the most moving

sursum corda

that we [343] hear on earth.  The hours flowed by and the
Brothers would not leave him. “Alas, good Father,”
said one of them to him, unable longer to contain
himself, “your children are going to lose you, and be
deprived of the true light which lightened them: think
of the orphans you are leaving and forgive all their
faults, give to them all, present and absent, the joy of
your holy benediction.”

“See,” replied the dying man, “God is calling
me. I forgive all my Brothers, present and absent, their
offences and faults, and absolve them according to my
power.  Tell them so, and bless them all in my name.”

Then crossing his arms he laid his hands upon
those who surrounded him. He did this with peculiar
emotion to Bernard of Quintavalle: “I desire,” he said,
“and with all my power I urge whomsoever shall be
minister-general of the Order, to love and honour him
as myself; let the provincials and all the Brothers act
toward him as toward me.”

He thought not only of the absent Brothers
but of the future ones; love so abounded in him that
it wrung from him a groan of regret for not seeing all
those who should enter the Order down to the end of
time, that he might lay his hand upon their brows, and
make them feel those things that may only be spoken
by the eyes of him who loves in God.

He had lost the notion of time; believing that
it was still Thursday he desired to take a last meal
with his disciples. Some bread was brought, he broke
it and gave it to them, and there in the poor cabin of
Portiuncula, [344] without altar and without a priest,
was celebrated the Lord’s Supper.

A Brother read the Gospel for Holy Thursday,
Ante diem festum Paschae: “Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour was come to go from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world he loved them unto the end.”

The sun was gilding the crests of the mountains with his last rays, there was silence around the dying one. All was ready. The angel of death might come.

Saturday, October 3, 1226, at nightfall, without pain, without struggle, he breathed the last sigh.

The Brothers were still gazing on his face, hoping yet to catch some sign of life, when innumerable larks alighted, singing, on the thatch of his cell, as if to salute the soul which had just taken flight and gave the Little Poor Man the canonization of which he was most worthy, the only one, doubtless, which he would ever have coveted.

On the morrow, at dawn, the Assisans came down to take possession of his body and give it a triumphant funeral.

By a pious inspiration, instead of going straight to the city they went around by St. Damian, and thus was realized the promise made by Francis to the Sisters a few weeks before, to come once more to see them.

Their grief was heart-rending.

These women’s hearts revolted against the absurdity of death; but there were tears on that day at St. Damian only. The Brothers forgot their sadness on seeing the stigmata, and the inhabitants of Assisi manifested an indescribable joy on having their relic at last. They deposited it in the Church of St. George.

Less than two years after, Sunday, July 26, 1228, Gregory IX came to Assisi to preside in person over the ceremonies of canonization, and to lay, on the morrow, the first stone of the new church dedicated to the Stigmatized.

Built under the inspiration of Gregory IX, and the direction of Brother Elias, this marvellous basilica is also one of the documents of this history, and perhaps I have been wrong in neglecting it.

Go and look upon it, proud, rich, powerful, then go down to Portiuncula, pass over to St. Damian, hasten to the Carceri, and you will understand the abyss that separates the ideal of Francis from that of the pontiff who canonized him.
The eternal Word by which God produced creatures

Understand that no creature has proceeded from the most high Creator except through the eternal Word, "in whom God has disposed all things," and by which Word God has produced creatures bearing not only the nature of a vestige but also that of an image so that through knowledge and love creatures might become like God. And since by sin the rational creature had dimmed the eye of contemplation, it was most fitting that the eternal and invisible should become visible and assume flesh in order to lead us back to God. Indeed, this is what is related in the fourteenth chapter of Saint John: “No one comes to the Father but through me,” and in the eleventh chapter of Saint Matthew: “No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” For that reason, then, it is said, “the Word was made flesh” Therefore, considering the illumination of the mechanical arts as regards the production of the work, we shall see there the Word begotten and incarnate, that is, the divinity and the humanity and the integrity of all faith [...] And so it is evident that the manifold wisdom of God, which is clearly revealed in Sacred Scripture, lies hidden in all knowledge and in all nature. It is clear also how all divisions of knowledge are servants of theology, and it is for this reason that theology makes use of illustrations and terms pertaining to every branch of knowledge. It is likewise clear how wide the illuminative way may be, and how the divine reality itself lies hidden within everything which is perceived or known. And this is the fruit of all sciences, that in all, faith may be strengthened, God may be honoured, character may be formed, and consolation may be derived from union of the Spouse with the beloved, a union which takes place through charity: a charity in which the whole purpose of Sacred Scripture, and thus of every illumination descending from above, comes to rest – a charity without which all knowledge is vain because no one comes to the Son except through the Holy Spirit who teaches us all the truth, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio
(1217-1274)
On The Reduction of the Arts to Theology, 12 and 26.

2012 - April - June - SPIRIT + LIFE

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Cover picture:
Church of Santo Stefano, Assisi.

Built in 1166. According to a pious tradition its bells rang by themselves to announce the death of St. Francis at the Portiuncula in 1226.