

MICHAEL F. CUSATO

The Early Franciscan Movement (1205-1239)
History, Sources and Hermeneutics



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Préface

Depuis bientôt une vingtaine d'années, le P. Michael Cusato, OFM, actuellement directeur du « Franciscan Institute » et doyen de la « School of Franciscan Studies » à l'université Saint Bonaventure, dans l'état de New York, a publié une série de travaux sur le premier siècle franciscain dont l'intérêt n'a pas échappé aux spécialistes de cette question qui s'y sont souvent référés. Mais comme la plupart de ces articles sont parus dans des revues américaines ou des volumes de « Festschrift » à peu près introuvables en Europe, il était devenu indispensable de les réunir en un volume. Aussi doit-on se réjouir que la Società internazionale di studi francescani ait pris l'initiative de publier dans sa *Collana* ce recueil d'études qui contribuera à donner à l'œuvre de ce religieux, qui est en même temps un chercheur universitaire de haut niveau, le rayonnement qu'elle mérite. En fait, en réunissant en un livre les articles de Michael Cusato relatifs à la vie de saint François et aux débuts de l'ordre des Frères Mineurs, on ne fait, pour une part, que rétablir la cohérence de la thèse de Doctorat qu'il a soutenue en 1991 à la Sorbonne sur « La renonciation au pouvoir chez les Frères Mineurs au XIII^e siècle » et que j'ai eu le plaisir et la chance de diriger, ce qui m'a donné l'occasion de bien connaître son auteur et de l'apprécier à sa juste valeur. De retour aux Etats-Unis après un séjour de six ans à Paris, ce dernier s'est vu aussitôt assigner quantité de tâches au sein de son ordre et de fonctions dans son université qui l'ont malheureusement empêché de publier cet excellent travail rédigé en langue française. Mais il n'a pas cessé pour autant de travailler et d'écrire, dans la mesure où les fonctions qu'il occupait lui en laissaient le loisir, en approfondissant des pistes qu'il avait esquissées dans sa thèse et en en ouvrant de nouvelles. C'est de tout cet effort de réflexion, fondé sur une connaissance remarquable des sources et de l'historiographie franciscaines et nourri d'hypothèses stimulantes, que le présent volume vise à rendre compte.

Dans l'introduction qu'il a placée au début de ce livre, Michael Cusato définit sa démarche comme une sorte d'« archéologie de l'histoi-

re » qui, à partir des écrits de François et des textes hagiographiques le concernant – mais aussi de leurs silences ou de leurs contradictions –, vise à ramener à la surface des éléments oubliés ou abandonnés sur les marges et à mettre en lumière un aspect essentiel du mouvement lancé par le Poverello qui a été rapidement perdu de vue: la renonciation au pouvoir sous toutes ses formes. Plus que par l'attachement à la pauvreté que l'on considère généralement comme la caractéristique principale du franciscanisme et qui l'est effectivement devenue à partir du milieu du XIII^e siècle, le *propositum vitae* de François se définit avant tout par un refus du pouvoir économique et juridique qu'implique l'appropriation par l'homme des biens, terres, droits et privilèges, qui est à l'origine de toutes les formes de violence verbale, physique, légale et sociale. Plus largement, aux yeux du Pauvre d'Assise, tout ce qui rompt ou lèse les liens de fraternité entre les hommes, qui dérivent de leur commune filiation divine, est péché. On ne peut s'y soustraire qu'en acceptant d'être *minor*, c'est-à-dire soumis à l'arbitraire comme les pauvres et en absorbant sans la répercuter autour de soi la violence d'autrui. François ne dénonce pas le pouvoir: il propose à ceux qui le suivent d'y renoncer et d'entrer dans la voie de la pénitence. Celle-ci, comme M.Cusato le montre bien, n'est pas d'abord la reconnaissance ou l'aveu d'une faute, mais l'établissement d'une relation nouvelle avec Dieu qui conduit l'homme à prendre ses distances vis-à-vis de toutes les formes de supériorité ou de domination dans lesquelles il se complait spontanément. Cette composante essentielle de la *minoritas*, attestée par le nom même que se donnèrent la fraternité primitive et l'ordre qui en procéda autour de 1220, n'a pas échappé à ses contemporains et les biographes du Pauvre d'Assise ont, dès les premiers temps, exalté son humilité. Mais celle-ci se réduit souvent chez ces derniers à une vertu morale individuelle de type ascétique, au détriment de sa dimension collective et sociale qui a été rapidement oubliée ou occultée. Après la mort de François, quelques voix isolées, comme celle d'Hugues de Digne ou de Thomas de Celano, dans son *Mémorial*, s'élèveront encore pour rappeler à leurs frères qu'ils ne devaient pas usurper les tâches pastorales du clergé séculier, ni chercher à acquérir de l'influence en devenant les chapelains des cardinaux ou des rois. Leurs appels n'auront guère de succès et, avec Bonaventure, prévaudra définitivement l'idée que la vocation des Mineurs est de s'intégrer le plus possible au sein des institutions ecclésiastiques, sans hésiter à y occuper des fonctions hiérarchiques, et à s'appuyer sur les Grands de

ce monde – souverains, nobles ou bourgeoisie urbaine – pour accroître l'impact de leur prédication et de leur ministère sur la société ambiante.

Michael Cusato n'est certes pas le premier historien à avoir été frappé par la rapidité avec laquelle la référence aux réalités économiques, politiques, sociales et culturelles qui étaient celles d'Assise et de l'Ombrie au début du XIII^e siècle avait été perdue de vue par le mouvement franciscain, au fur et à mesure que s'accroissait son engagement dans les tâches d'encadrement pastoral. Paul Sabatier déjà, à la fin du XIX^e siècle, avait souligné l'importance de ce tournant essentiel, mais il avait eu le tort de l'attribuer exclusivement à l'influence du cardinal Hugolin – et donc de la papauté –, secondé dans cette entreprise de dénaturation du franciscanisme primitif par le frère Elie, présenté comme un homme de pouvoir attaché à réduire le rôle de la pauvreté au sein de l'ordre, et par leur complice Thomas de Celano, auteur de la *Vita prima* de saint François en 1229. Valorisant par contrecoup les témoignages laissés par le frère Léon, le disciple de Renan voyait dans les Spirituels les continuateurs authentiques du Poverello et ses seuls héritiers légitimes. Popularisée par le succès de sa *Vie de saint François* qui fut traduite dans toutes les langues importantes et connut un succès que nous avons peine à imaginer, l'interprétation de Sabatier s'est longtemps imposée; elle a été à l'origine d'une « historiographie du soupçon » qui a conduit certains auteurs à expliquer cette évolution, de façon schématique, par l'antagonisme éternel qui existerait entre le prophète et le prêtre, le charisme et l'institution, en oubliant que François n'avait jamais remis en question cette dernière et manifesta jusqu'à la fin le plus grand respect et une totale soumission vis-à-vis du sacerdoce. Michael Cusato a le grand mérite de dépasser ces oppositions simplistes, de remettre en question certaines légendes noires ou dorées et de se refuser à distinguer a priori les « bons » des « méchants ». Pour lui, comme il le montre bien l'article intitulé « From the « *Perfectio sancti evangelii* » to the « *Sanctissima vita et paupertas* » dans lequel il soutient de façon convaincante l'authenticité du *Privilegium paupertatis* donné à Saint-Damien – peut-être oralement – par Innocent III en 1216, la menace que certains canons du IV^e concile de Latran faisaient peser sur l'avenir de leurs fondations a obligé François et Claire à exprimer la spécificité de leur vocation en mettant en avant le refus de toute propriété en propre et en commun qui était à la base de leur genre de vie, ce qui constituait une définition limitative de la *minoritas* et allait ouvrir la voie à toutes les dérives ultérieures. Par la suite et surtout après la mort du Poverello, Claire, confrontée

aux pressions de Grégoire IX et d'Innocent IV, fut amenée à insister encore davantage sur cette identification de la pauvreté à l'absence de biens et de droits de propriété, puisque c'était le seul moyen pour sa communauté de « Pauvres Dames recluses » de se distinguer des moniales d'obédience bénédictine et d'affirmer son identité franciscaine. Au passage, dans une très belle étude consacrée aux relations entre Claire et Elie, Michael Cusato montre bien que ce dernier ne fut pas le traître que les Spirituels, et Sabatier après eux, ont voulu voir en lui: l'appui que Claire trouva auprès du ministre général dans le conflit qui opposa Saint-Damien et le mouvement franciscain féminin à Grégoire IX et l'estime qu'elle lui témoigna dans sa deuxième Lettre à Agnès de Prague (entre 1235 et 1239) suffirent à mettre en cause les idées reçues dans ce domaine. De même, dans un autre essai très suggestif, Michael Cusato donne une explication satisfaisante du « lâchage » d'Elie par Grégoire IX en 1239 et du ralliement de ce dernier à Frédéric II, en situant cet épisode dans un contexte eschatologique, commun aux deux hommes, qui les poussait à voir dans le souverain sicilien, pour l'un la septième tête de la Bête de l'Apocalypse dont Joachim de Flore avait annoncé les méfaits à la fin du second âge et, pour l'autre, l'empereur des derniers temps, seul capable de sauver l'Eglise et la chrétienté face à l'invasion des Mongols, assimilés aux peuples de Gog et de Magog. Comme il le dit à juste titre, « on commence à réaliser que le langage apocalyptique employé par les deux adversaires (le pape et l'empereur excommunié) dans leurs échanges polémiques mérite d'être pris au sérieux » et ne relève pas seulement d'une rhétorique de l'excès ou de l'allégorie. Ainsi la figure d'Elie, dont Giulia Barone avait déjà montré la complexité, se trouve replacée dans une lumière plus juste que celle, très sombre, qui l'entourait depuis les invectives lancées contre lui, pour des raisons différentes, par Salimbene et Ange Clareno. Par contraste, l'ambivalence de l'attitude du ministre général est mise en relief par le rôle de premier plan que Michael Cusato attribue à Césaire de Spire, proche collaborateur de François dans la rédaction de la *Regula non bullata* et, selon lui, auteur du *Sacrum commercium*. A l'en croire en effet, ce mystérieux traité anonyme, qu'on a daté tantôt de 1227, tantôt des années du généralat de Jean de Parme, aurait été rédigé entre 1235 et 1238 par ce partisan de la pauvreté intégrale, choqué de voir Elie construire une somptueuse et coûteuse basilique en l'honneur du Pauvre d'Assise loin de la Portioncule, ainsi que par la dépendance croissante que cela entraînait pour l'ordre vis-à-vis de la papauté et des Grands de ce monde qui

finançaient ce chantier pour l'essentiel. Sa démonstration sur ce point emporte l'adhésion, mais l'insuffisance de notre information sur le rôle exact joué par Césaire, après son retour d'Allemagne en 1223, auprès de François et de Claire rend problématique la tentative de voir en lui l'inspirateur de la version longue de la *Lettre aux fidèles*, dont M. Cusato démontre très clairement l'antériorité par rapport à la version brève, alors que K. Esser et L. Lehmann avaient soutenu la thèse inverse. En tout cas, le fait que Césaire ait été arrêté et emprisonné sur l'ordre d'Elie et qu'il soit mort sous les coups de son geôlier en 1238 ou au début de 1239 montre bien que le camp des partisans d'une fidélité intégrale au message et à la *forma vitae* du « Poverello » ne vibrait pas à l'unisson.

Sur d'autres points, les hypothèses formulées par l'auteur en l'absence de documents ou de textes incontestables auront le mérite, même si on n'y adhère pas entièrement, de relancer le débat sur des points essentiels: François était-il vraiment hostile à la croisade, comme l'affirme Michael Cusato? Personnellement j'ai du mal à le croire, car celle-ci n'était pas uniquement une sorte de guerre sainte orientée vers la reconquête des Lieux Saints, mais également une démarche pénitentielle, qui obligeait par exemple les couples, comme celui que formait Elisabeth de Hongrie avec son mari, le landgrave Louis de Thuringe, à mener, dès la prestation du vœu, une existence plus ascétique et pieuse que celle des autres laïcs. En outre, le « passage » vers l'Orient s'accompagnait, depuis le début du XIII^e siècle, de l'espoir d'une possible conversion de certains souverains musulmans, ce qui permet de mieux comprendre la démarche accomplie par François en allant trouver le sultan Malik-al-Kamil. Plus que d'un refus a priori de la croisade, celle-ci tient sans doute à ce que le Pauvre d'Assise, une fois arrivé à Damiette, ne se résigna pas à ce que les opérations militaires des croisés finissent par occulter la dimension spirituelle de l'expédition et par lui faire perdre son sens. De même, l'affirmation des hagiographes franciscains selon laquelle ce dernier se serait rendu en terre d'islam à la recherche du martyr ne peut, me semble-t-il, être totalement négligée ou traitée comme une lecture a posteriori plaquée sur l'attitude concrète, pacifique et évangélique, de François vis-à-vis de l'islam. Certes ce dernier n'a pas recherché le martyr à la façon d'un kamikaze ou d'un terroriste islamiste prêt à sacrifier sa vie pour accéder en vertu de son geste à une éternité bienheureuse; mais on ne peut exclure qu'il l'ait envisagé, à la limite, comme une issue possible et un témoignage « apostolique » qui pourrait accréditer l'authenticité

de l'appel à la conversion qu'il lançait à ses interlocuteurs musulmans, après l'avoir adressé aux chrétiens.

On doit également souligner l'importante contribution qu'apporte Michael Cusato à la compréhension de la stigmatisation de saint François dans un brillant essai intitulé « Of Snakes and Angels: the Mystical Experience behind the Stigmatization of 1 Celano ». Ce dernier n'en ayant jamais parlé à quiconque, nous en sommes réduits à essayer d'imaginer la réalité du phénomène à travers les récits des hagiographes et de celui qui en fut, semble-t-il l'unique témoin, le frère Léon. Michael Cusato montre bien que Thomas de Celano fut le premier à faire le lien entre les plaies reçues par François à La Verna et son expérience spirituelle, centrée depuis sa conversion sur le mystère de la Croix du Christ. Il rappelle que l'évènement s'est situé à proximité de la fête de l'Exaltation de la Croix (14 septembre) et qu'on lisait alors un passage de l'évangile de Jean (*Jn* 3,14-15) où il est dit que « comme Moïse éleva le serpent au désert, ainsi faut-il que soit élevé le Fils de l'homme, afin que tout homme qui croit ait par lui la vie éternelle ». Associant dans un symbolisme biblique très prisé par les clercs de son temps le serpent de bronze (*saraph*) et l'ange brûlant d'amour (*seraph*) qui est présenté par Isaïe comme le plus proche de Dieu, le biographe du Poverello aurait mis en rapport les stigmates de François non pas avec l'extrême ascétisme de François, comme l'avait fait discrètement Grégoire IX dans la bulle de canonisation *Mira circa nos*, mais avec un élan mystique au terme duquel il fut définitivement assuré du salut du monde et du sien propre. Car le séraphin qu'aurait vu le Poverello était un homme crucifié, le Christ élevé pour le salut du monde, avant d'être un ange, comme le représenteront souvent les peintres au cours du XIII^e siècle. L'exactitude de cette interprétation ne peut évidemment pas être démontrée, mais elle a pour elle d'expliquer l'accent mis par Thomas de Celano sur le fait que, contrairement à ce qu'avait dit Elie dans sa Lettre encyclique, les stigmates n'étaient pas des incisions mais des excroissances charnues qui venaient de l'intérieur de François et des profondeurs de son corps; en bref qu'il s'agissait d'un phénomène psychomatique provoqué par une dévotion intense, et non d'une blessure infligée du dehors et de loin par une apparition mal identifiée.

Il y aurait encore beaucoup d'éloges à faire à ce livre, qu'il s'agisse des trésors d'érudition et d'esprit critique déployés par son auteur pour établir de façon convaincante que la seconde version de la *Lettre*

aux fidèles constitue bien un message adressé par François à des pénitents laïcs d'obédience franciscaine, ou encore du brio avec lequel il étudie la dénomination des détenteurs des fonctions d'autorité, gardiens ou ministres, dans les premières communautés franciscaines. Ne reculant devant aucune difficulté, il aborde de même de façon subtile et nuancée le problème que pose à l'historien le fait que François, qui avait sans doute reçu le diaconat en 1220 lors du séjour qu'il effectua à la Curie après son retour d'Orient, n'en ait jamais fait état et soit qualifié de « lévite » par Thomas de Celano dans son récit de la nuit de Noël à Greccio, durant laquelle le Poverello fit la lecture publique de l'évangile dans le cadre d'une cérémonie liturgique. A chaque fois, on retrouve les mêmes qualités de finesse et d'intelligence mises au service d'une réelle empathie pour son sujet et d'une compréhension en profondeur des problèmes essentiels de l'histoire de François et du franciscanisme jusqu'à Bonaventure. C'est-à-dire jusqu'au moment où ce dernier, ayant compris combien il était difficile et dangereux – dans la perspective qui était la sienne – de maintenir une relation étroite entre le développement de l'ordre et la véritable figure de François, s'efforça avec la *Legenda maior* de détacher les destinées des Frères Mineurs de l'expérience historique de leur fondateur pour mieux les intégrer dans ce qu'il considérait comme le mouvement de l'histoire.

ANDRÉ VAUCHEZ

Preface

For almost twenty years now, Fr. Michael Cusato, O.F.M., currently director of the Franciscan Institute and dean of the School of Franciscan Studies at the University of St. Bonaventure in the state of New York, has been publishing a series of works on the first century of Franciscan history whose interest has not escaped the notice of specialists of these questions who refer to them often. But as the majority of these articles have appeared in American journals or in *festschriften* that are difficult to find in Europe, it has become indispensable to gather them together in one volume. Thus one must rejoice that the *Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani* has taken the initiative to publish within its *Collana* this collection of studies which will contribute to give to the work of this friar, who is at the same time a university scholar of high level, the exposure that it merits. Indeed, by gathering together into one volume the articles of Michael Cusato pertaining to the life of St. Francis and to the beginnings of the Order of Friars Minor, one can only, on the one hand, reestablish the cohesion of the doctoral thesis which he defended in early 1991 at the Sorbonne on « The Renunciation of Power among the Friars Minor in the 13th Century » and which I had had the pleasure and opportunity to direct. This gave me the chance to get to know its author and to properly appreciate the value of his work. Returning to the United States after a sojourn of six years in Paris, he immediately saw himself assigned to a number of tasks within his province and responsibilities within their universities, which unfortunately impeded him from publishing his excellent work, originally written in French. But, for all that, he has nevertheless not ceased working and publishing to the degree that his duties with which he has been occupied allowed him, deepening the paths which he had sketched out in his thesis and opening new ones as well. It is from this effort of reflection, founded upon a remarkable knowledge of the sources and Franciscan historiography – and nourished by stimulating hypotheses – which the present volume aims to make available.

In the introduction which he has placed at the beginning of this book, Michael Cusato defines his approach as a kind of ‘archeology of history’ which, starting from the writings of Francis and the hagiographical texts concerning him – but also from their silences or their contradictions – aims to bring back to the surface elements which have been forgotten or left on the margins and to bring back into the light an essential aspect of the Poverello which had been quickly lost sight of: the renouncing of power in all its forms. More than by an attachment to poverty which one generally considers as the characteristic principle of Franciscanism and which effectively became its hallmark since the middle of the thirteenth century, the *propositum vitae* of Francis is defined first and foremost by the refusal of economic and juridical power – which the appropriation of goods, lands, rights and privileges by human beings implies. Such appropriation, moreover, is at the root of all forms of verbal, physical, juridical and social violence. More broadly, in the eyes of the Poor Man of Assisi, everything that ruptures or fractures the bonds of fraternity between human beings – which are derived from the status they all share as creatures created by the same God – is what Francis calls ‘sin’. One can only remove oneself from this situation by accepting to become *minor*, that is, by becoming subject to the unexpected, like the poor, and by absorbing the violence of another so as to prevent its proliferation outward. Francis does not denounce power: he proposes to those who follow him to give it up and to follow the way of penance. This, as Michael Cusato has shown well, is not, first of all, the recognition or the acknowledgement of a personal fault, but rather the establishment of a new relationship with God who leads the human person to distance him- or herself from all forms of superiority or domination which one willingly delights in. This essential element of *minoritas* – attested to by the very name which the early fraternity – and the Order which evolved from it around 1220 – gave to themselves did not escape the notice of their contemporaries; and the biographers of the Poor Man of Assisi have, since the very earliest times, exalted his humility. But this is often reduced by these latter authors to an individualized moral virtue of an ascetical type, to the detriment of its collective, social dimension which was rapidly forgotten or eclipsed. After the death of Francis, a few isolated voices, like that of Hugh of Digne or Thomas of Celano in his *memoriale*, raised themselves again to remind their brothers that they ought not to usurp the pastoral duties of the secular clergy, not seek to acquire influence by becoming the chaplains of cardinals or of kings. Their appeals scarcely had any success and, with Bonaventure, the idea

which definitively won the day was that the vocation of the Minors was to integrate themselves as much as possible into the heart of the institutions of the Church, without hesitating to occupy within them hierarchical functions, and to rely for support upon the 'greats of this world' – sovereigns, nobles and the urban bourgeoisie – in order to increase the impact of their preaching and ministry upon the surrounding society.

Michael Cusato is certainly not the first historian to have been struck by the rapidity with which the reference to the economic, political, social and cultural realities of Assisi and Umbria at the start of the 13th century had been lost sight of by the Franciscan movement, which gradually emphasized its engagement in the tasks of pastoral involvement. Paul Sabatier, already at the end of the 19th century, had underlined the importance of this essential turning point, but he was really wrong to attribute this exclusively to the influence of Cardinal Hugolino – and thus, the papacy – reinforced in this enterprise of the denaturing of early Franciscanism by Brother Elias, presented as a man of power eager to reduce the role of poverty at the heart of the Order and by their accomplice, Thomas of Celano, author of the *Vita prima* of Francis in 1229. Valuing, by contrast, the testimonies left by Brother Leo, the disciple of Renan saw in the Spirituals the authentic continuators of the Poverello and his only legitimate heirs. Popularized by the success of his *Life of St. Francis*, which was translated into every major language and which knew a success which one can hardly imagine today, the interpretation of Sabatier imposed itself for a long time; it has been at the origin of an « historiography of suspicion » which has led certain authors to explain this evolution, in a schematic manner, through the perpetual antagonism which has existed between the prophet and the priest, charism and institution, while forgetting that Francis had never questioned this last and manifested to the very end the greatest respect and a total submission to the priesthood. Michael Cusato has the great merit to go beyond these simplistic oppositions, to question certain black-and-white readings and to refuse to identify *a priori* 'the good' from 'the bad' friars. For him, as he shows well in the article titled « From the *Perfectio sancti evangelii* to the *sanctissima vita et paupertas* » in which he supports in a convincing manner the authenticity of the « Privilege of Poverty » given to San Damiano – perhaps orally – by Innocent III in 1216. The threat which certain canons of Lateran IV came to have upon the future of their respective foundations had forced Francis and Clare to express the specificity of their vocation by putting into the forefront the

refusal of all property, both individually and in common, which was at the basis of their style of life. This constituted a narrowing of the definition of *minoritas* and it opened the way to all kinds of later divergences. Because of – and especially after – the death of the Poverello, Clare, faced with the pressures of Gregory IX and Innocent IV, was led to put the emphasis even further on this identification of poverty with the absence of goods and rights of ownership, since it was the only means for her community of « Poor Enclosed Ladies » to distinguish themselves from the nuns of Benedictine obedience and to affirm their Franciscan identity. In passing, in a wonderful study devoted to the relationship between Clare and Elias, Michael Cusato shows well that the latter was not the traitor which the Spirituals – and Sabatier after them – had wanted to see in him: the support which Clare found in the minister general during the conflict which put in opposition San Damiano and the female Franciscan movement to Gregory IX and the esteem which she showed to him in her *Second Letter to Agnes of Prague* (between 1235 and 1239) suffices to question the received ideas in this domain. Similarly, in another highly suggestive essay, Michael Cusato gives a satisfying explanation of the ‘dumping’ of Elias by Gregory IX in 1239 and of the rallying of Elias to Frederick II, by situating this episode in an eschatological context, common to both men, which pushed them to see in the Sicilian sovereign, for one, the seventh head of the Beast of the Apocalypse whose misdeeds at the end of the Second Age Joachim of Fiore had announced and, for the other, the Last World Emperor, alone capable of saving the Church and Christianity from the invasion of the Mongols, assimilated to the peoples of Gog and Magog. As he has rightly said: « one begins to realize that the apocalyptic language used by both adversaries (the pope and the excommunicated emperor) in their polemical exchanges deserves to be taken seriously » and cannot be simply explained by the rhetoric of exaggeration or allegory. Thus, the figure of Elias, whose complexity has already been shown by Giulia Barone, finds itself put into a more proper light than the really nefarious one, which has surrounded him since the invectives launched against him, for different reasons, by Salimbene and Angelo Clareno. By contrast, the ambivalence of the attitude of the minister general is highlighted by the leading role which Michael Cusato attributes to Caesar of Speyer, close collaborator of Francis, in the redaction of the *Regula non bullata* and, according to him, the author of the *Sacrum commercium*. Indeed if we were to believe him, this mysterious anonymous treatise, which one sometimes dates to 1227, sometimes to the years of

the generalate of John of Parma, would have been drafted between 1235 and 1238 by this partisan of more thorough-going poverty, shocked to see Elias construct a sumptuous and costly basilica in honor of the Poor Man of Assisi (contrasted with the Portiuncula) as well as by the growing dependence which this meant for the Order with respect to the papacy and the greats of this world who had mostly financed its construction. His demonstration on this point carries conviction, but our lack of information on the exact role played by Caesar, after his return from Germany in 1223 near Francis and Clare, render problematic the attempt to see in him the inspiration for the long version of the *Letter to the Faithful*, whose chronological priority Michael Cusato demonstrates with great clarity with respect to the short version, whereas Kajetan Esser and Leonhard Lehmann have supported the reverse thesis. In any case, the fact that Caesar had been arrested and imprisoned on the order of Elias and that he died through the blows of his jailer in 1238 or at the beginning of 1239, does not allow one to situate him in the same line as the minister general or Clare – that which really shows that the camp of the partisans of total fidelity to the message and *forma vitae* of the Poverello were not all singing from the same page.

On other points, the hypotheses formulated by the author, in the absence of incontestable documents or texts, will have the merit – even if one cannot entirely agree – to spur debate on essential points: was Francis really hostile to the crusade, as Michael Cusato affirms? Personally, I have difficulty believing it, for the crusade was not only a kind of war oriented towards the retaking of the Holy Places, but also a penitential journey which obligated, for example, couples (like that which Elisabeth of Hungary formed with her husband, the landgrave of Thuringia) to lead, upon taking the vow, a more ascetical and pious existence than that of other laity. Besides, the ‘passage’ to the East was accompanied, since the beginning of the thirteenth century, by the hope of a possible conversion of certain Muslim sovereigns – that which allows one to better understand the journey accomplished by Francis in going to find the sultan Malik al-Kamil. More than an *a priori* rejection of the crusade, this approach probably results from the fact that the Poor Man of Assisi, once having arrived in Damietta, was not content that the military operations of the crusaders ended up eclipsing the spiritual dimension of the expedition and making it lose its meaning. Similarly, the affirmation of the Franciscan hagiographers according to whom Francis would have gone to the lands of Islam in search of martyrdom,

cannot, it seems to me, be totally ignored or treated as a reading after-the-fact stuck onto the concrete attitude – peaceful and evangelical – of Francis vis-à-vis Islam. To be sure, he did not go in search of martyrdom in the manner of a kamikaze or an Islamist terrorist ready to sacrifice his life to gain by his action a blessed eternity; but one cannot exclude that he might have had it as a possible outcome and an ‘apostolic’ witness which could give credibility to the authenticity of the call to conversion which he extended to his Muslim interlocutors, after having addressed it to Christians.

One must also underline the important contribution which Michael Cusato brings to the understanding of the stigmatization of Saint Francis in a brilliant essay titled « Of Snakes and Angels: The Mystical Experience behind the Stigmatization Narrative of 1 Celano. » Since he had never spoken about this experience to anyone, we are reduced to try and imagine the reality of the phenomenon on the basis of the hagiographers’ accounts and of the one who, it seems, was the only witness: Brother Leo. Michael Cusato really shows how Thomas of Celano was the first to make a link between the wounds received by Francis on La Verna and his spiritual experience, centered since his conversion on the mystery of the Cross of Christ. Our author recalls how the event occurred around the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September) and that one was reading at that time a passage from the Gospel of John (Jn 3, 14-15) where it is said that « just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes might have eternal life through him. » Associating, by way of a biblical symbolism highly prized by the clerics of his day, the bronze serpent (*saraph*) and the angel burning with love (*seraph*) – the latter presented by Isaiah as closest to God – the biographer of the Poverello would have put the stigmata of Francis in relationship not with the extreme asceticism of Francis, as Gregory IX had discretely done in his bull of canonization, *Mira circa nos*, but rather with a mystical experience at the conclusion of which he was definitively assured of the salvation of the world as well as of himself. For the seraph which the Poverello would have ‘seen’, was a crucified man, Christ lifted up for the healing of the world, before becoming an angel, as painters often represented him in the course of the thirteenth century. The exactitude of this interpretation obviously cannot be proven, but it helps to explain the emphasis which Thomas of Celano put on the fact that – contrary to what Elias had said in his *Encyclical Letter* – the stigmata

were not incisions but rather protrusions of the flesh which came from inside Francis and from the depths of his person. In short, it was a matter of a psychosomatic phenomenon prompted by an intense devotion rather than a wound inflicted on him from the outside and from a distance by a misidentified apparition.

There are many more praiseworthy comments to make about this book, whether it be a matter of the treasures of erudition and of critical spirit deployed by its author to establish in a convincing manner that the second version of the *Letter to the Faithful* really constitutes a message addressed by Francis to lay penitents of Franciscan association, or again of the brio with which he studies the naming of the functions of authority, guardians or ministers, in the first Franciscan communities. Not backing away from any difficulty, he approaches in a subtle and nuanced manner the problem posed to the historian by the fact that Francis, who had probably received the diaconate in 1220 during the trip he had made to the Curia after his return from the East, never mentioned it in his writings and was characterized as a « levite » by Thomas of Celano in his account of the Christmas Eve at Greccio, during which time the Poverello publicly read the Gospel within the framework of a liturgical ceremony. Each time, one finds the same qualities of nuance and intelligence put at the service of a real empathy for his subject and a profound understanding of the essential problems of the story of Francis and of Franciscanism up to the time of Bonaventure. That is to say: up to the moment where Bonaventure, having understood how difficult and dangerous it was – from his own perspective – to maintain a strict relationship between the development of the Order and the authentic figure of Francis, endeavored with the *Legenda maior* to detach the destinies of the Friars Minor from the historical experience of their founder.

ANDRÉ VAUCHEZ

Introduction

In the introduction to a set of his essays published in 1994, *Representations of the Intellectual*, the late Palestinian-born American erudite, Edward W. Said, commented on the perspective which he considered essential for intellectuals who do their work apart from the dominant culture:

Witnessing a sorry state of affairs when one is not in power is by no means a monotonous, monochromatic activity. It involves what Foucault once called « a relentless erudition », scouring alternative sources, examining buried documents, reviving forgotten (or abandoned) histories... And there is something fundamentally unsettling about intellectuals who have neither offices to protect nor territory to consolidate and guard... But there is no dodging the inescapable reality that such representations by intellectuals will neither make them friends in high places nor win them official honors. It is a lonely condition, yes, but it is always a better one than a gregarious tolerance for the ways things are.¹

I came across this work of Said several years after the conclusion of my doctoral studies and dissertation at the Université de Paris – Sorbonne in January 1991. However, I felt at that time that he had described the approach to the history of the Franciscan order and especially the early minorite movement which I had slowly come to adopt over the years: first, during my studies in theology (1977-1981) at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, my master's degree in Franciscan studies which I was working on concurrently at the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, and then, in Paris, for the doctorate in the *science des religions* under Professor André Vauchez. Indeed, anyone who takes seriously the development of the early Franciscan fraternity will surely see that Francis and his brothers were keen on fashioning an « alternative narrative »: a specifically

¹ EDWARD W. SAID, *Representations of the Intellectual. The 1993 Reith Lectures*, New York, 1994, p. XVIII.

evangelical narrative intended to counter what Robert Schreiter has called « the narrative of the lie » – those stories and accounts that the world prefers to tell about itself, even though so often at variance with the truth.²

Historians throughout the ages – those who have either been charged to or, more simply, desire to fashion, in a serious manner, narratives re-presenting the past – have never been exempt from these same dynamics. It is, therefore, incumbent upon them, as much as possible, to be aware of those external forces contending for one's approval, loyalty or legitimation as well as those internal forces that push one's perceptions toward bias, overly-simplified ideological constructs or personal agendas. This is no small task since all human actors, historians included, live within contexts that inevitably shape the content of their work. However, attentive to the remarks of Said (and Foucault before him) and conscious of my own formation, first as a Franciscan friar and then as a trained historian, I have come to appreciate the tensions and struggles at the heart of the early Franciscan movement as well as to the contending narratives which vied with each other for a hearing and, more importantly, for a following within medieval Franciscan history.

That struggle, as I see it, was essentially between two rather different visions of Franciscan life. The earlier minorite vision of Franciscan life was sensitive to, critical of and reactive against the socio-economic realities operative in the Spoleto Valley at the turn of the thirteenth century and, for this reason, was desirous of living with and being at the service of the *minores* of their time. On the other hand, another vision preferred a more institutionalized form of the Franciscan charism, stressing the apostolic (and predominantly clerical) usefulness of the Franciscan order to Church and society through the excellence of its preaching, acuity of its learning and the impressive witness of its ascetical radicality. These two versions of the Franciscan charism while, in a sense, complementary expressions of the vision of Francis, were not, for all that, easily reconcilable or compatible with each other. The first tended to view the minorite life through a more narrow socio-economic lens, attentive to the concrete dynamics of power in society and its (often destructive) effects upon

² ROBERT SCHREITER, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, Maryknoll, NY, 1992, pp. 29-39.

the poor and disadvantaged; whereas the second tended to view the same foundational vision – including Francis himself – through the wider lens of theology and ecclesiology. Both represented spiritual visions; but the social formation and location of the friars from which these visions originated was not the same, thus conditioning their varying perspectives on the charism and explaining at least some of the differences and resulting struggles.

These are, of course, rather broad generalizations; but, at least on some level, they do reflect the truth about the historical evolution of Franciscan history in the thirteenth century. For reasons of personal temperament and by virtue of my own sensitivity and attraction to the social dynamics of early Franciscanism, my reading of that history tends to gravitate toward the minorite vision rather than to the institutional and theological version of it. As such, it is the less prominent and overlooked testimonies which interest me more often than do the official narratives and stylized theological interpretations of the Franciscan story.

This is why I resonate with Professor Said's remarks. It is, of course, a truism that history is usually written by the victors: those men – and occasionally those women as well – who over the course of time emerge as members of the dominant culture in roles of power, authority, prestige and influence within the society. In the process, however, the perspectives of the vanquished, the contrarian and minority cultures in a given society come to be muted, muffled, suppressed or simply forgotten over time, leaving subsequent generations partial and sometimes quite misleading accounts of what actually transpired in previous decades or centuries. In short, history finds itself at the mercy of its contemporary chroniclers and interpreters. It is left to later archaeologists of history – in the broadest sense of the term: those willing to unearth « buried documents » and bring back to life « forgotten (or abandoned) histories » that had once been pushed to the margins – to resurrect what had previously been lost or obscured by the dynamics of power at play in a particular society or, more specifically, among the various and competing social entities within a given period. Together, both official and less official testimonies offer a fuller and perhaps truer picture of the historical reality.

In his widely-appreciated overview of medieval Christianity dating from 1968, the historian Jeffrey Russell Burton identified this dynamic as a natural though often uncomfortable tension between

« order » and « prophecy »: the contrast between the forces that struggle to establish institutional stability and historical longevity, while requiring obedience and loyalty to dominant authorities which are in tension with other voices that attempt to inject creativity and non-traditional ways of thinking and perceiving into particular situations, while challenging established authorities and canonized orthodoxies.³ Both are necessary to the life of any society, including the Church – its institutions, structures and forms of religious living. The Franciscan phenomenon is no exception to these dynamics. But the writing of its history must be sensitive to them as well.

Indeed, once ideas concerning a topic for my thesis in Paris began to take shape in 1984, I decided that what I really wanted to explore was how the dynamics of power – the struggle between greater and lesser, stronger and weaker powers within a society or between various social groups – might have contributed to the inspiration of Francis to abandon a life of relative comfort and security within his own class in order to voluntarily place himself among those of a lesser and more despised class – the poor – and what his motivation (and those who decided to follow him) might have been in doing so – apart from the standard and, to my mind, inadequate explanations of the *imitatio Christi* and the following of the Gospel. But the more I plunged myself into this study, the more it became apparent to me that, within the early Franciscan fraternity itself, similar dynamics – the tension between the early prophetic charism of Francis and his early followers and the desire for more institutional order, structure and societal usefulness and influence – began to manifest themselves, creating strife and controversy: during the life of the founder himself and then, after his death, which became the very hallmark of Franciscan history in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

The essays in this volume represent an extension of the insights first mapped out in the dissertation which I completed in Paris in 1991. They only cover the first twenty-five years of early Franciscan existence: from the conversion of Francis, the gathering of his early companions and approval of their *forma vitae* (1205-1209) to the fall from grace of Brother Elias of Cortona (1239).⁴ Together, they

³ Jeffrey Russell Burton, *A History of Medieval Christianity: Prophecy and Order*, New York, 1968. A revised edition was co-authored with Douglas W. Lumsden in 2000 and published by Peter Lang.

⁴ A second, more wide-ranging collection of essays is currently being prepared,

present various aspects of that story. Among its numerous pages, several key themes – some already appearing in embryonic fashion in the dissertation – have become prominent areas of emphasis in my work. Allow me to highlight several of them. They are, in fact, linked to each other.

First: the famous hallmark of Franciscan identity, *paupertas*, was actually the expression of a deeper and more fundamental posture of *minoritas*: the choice to live among the *minores* of society – with the poor, as the poor and for the poor. The decision to call themselves *fratres minores* was intentional, indicating the central focus of their identity.

Second: the absolute centrality of the experience of Francis' encounter among the lepers. This experience was not only the key moment of his conversion but also irrevocably reflected the way he would henceforth look at created reality – the world, himself, other human beings and God. It is through this experience of the lepers that he discovered the sacred character of the universal fraternity of all creatures as brothers and sisters one to another; it is through this experience that he discovered the *minores* of the world and his desire to live as a *minor* among them, caring for them, since these brothers and sisters had been shamefully neglected by the city of his birth.

Third: to do penance (*facere poenitentiam*) – a key signpost of Franciscan identity – meant more to the early movement than simply atoning for past sins, confessing one's faults or engaging in acts of self-denial. « To do penance » meant consciously and continually choosing to distance oneself from all forms of power used by human beings which rupture the bonds of the human fraternity, destroying the awareness of our common creaturehood, placing some human beings 'over' others in relationships of dominance and submission; and some 'against' others in relationships of coercion, humiliation and destructiveness. Hence, « doing works worthy of penance » requires the renunciation of violence in all of its forms: physical, social, economic, even intellectual.

Fourth: the Tau – which Francis virtually adopted from current ecclesiastical usage at the Fourth Lateran Council as his own signature – was for him the pre-eminent sign of spiritual conversion

extending the period of treatment from the 1240s through the 1320s, with a few more recent studies on issues in the earlier decades.

(shorthand, one might say, for one's commitment to living a life of penance). As such, he never associated the sign of the Tau – the sign of the cross – as did the papacy at the council with the crusade movement against the Muslims. The Tau was not a sign of the violence of the cross but rather the healing of the human fraternity fractured by such violence. Francis' experiences in Egypt in 1219 and then at La Verna in 1224 ought to be understood within this same framework.

Fifth: the Emergency Chapter of September 1220, called by Francis immediately upon his return from the Holy Land, represented a watershed moment in early Franciscan history when a certain contingent within the Order began to clash with the founder over the direction and purpose of the *forma vitae fratrum minorum*. The seeds for the future conflicts in the Order after the death of Francis were sown here at this fateful chapter which ended with the resignation of Francis. Here begins in earnest the tension between differing narratives on Franciscan identity and the reduction of the original narrative to alternative status, requiring historians to become archaeologists of the sources in order for such forgotten treasures to speak again.

Sixth: the hagiographical texts written in the decades after the death and canonization of Francis need to be read with careful attention to their special genre and with an eye to the historical events hovering beneath the surface of the texts. Indeed, such texts are, generally speaking, the expression of the official mind of those in authority, those setting the direction of the community, those approved by the papacy with its own agenda and concerns. And, while hagiography is not meant to be history, history can be gleaned from 'within' the text, indeed 'under' the text, sometimes in quite unexpected ways. In some instances, the use of Scripture by medieval authors can reveal the wider perspectives and deeper intentions of the writer, often missed or dismissed by the modern reader either as typical expressions of piety or conventional literary flourishes.

Seventh: one of the most important – but relatively unknown – figures in the history of the Franciscan order during the 1220s and 1230s was a friar by the name of Caesar of Speyer. Through careful historical reconstruction and scholarly intuition, his importance as an invaluable literary partner for Francis after his return from the Holy Land and as the voice of the companions resisting the directions taken by the Order after his death has been able to be restored to its rightful

place in early Franciscan history, resulting in a much fuller picture of this crucial period in the formation of minorite identity.

And eighth: the voice of these companions finds its most eloquent expression in the decade after the death of Francis in the text known as the *Sacrum commercium beati Francisci cum domina Paupertate*, written, quite possibly, by this same Caesar of Speyer. A text of remarkable sophistication, combining a broad knowledge of Scripture with themes culled from the Cistercian adaptation of the *Legend of the Graal*, the *Sacrum commercium* explores the profound fissure which had developed within the Order over the nature of the Franciscan charism. Cast as a problem over the observance of material *paupertas*, the work actually grounds its critique in the more fundamental betrayal by friars of their primordial posture to embrace social and spiritual *minoritas*.

Most of the articles in this collection were originally conceived as scholarly contributions to medieval Franciscan history, supported by a careful examination of the sources, but written in such a way as to be relatively accessible to an audience having some familiarity with the early Franciscan phenomenon and its various themes. In a few instances, they represent slightly longer (original) versions of texts which were shortened for editorial or stylistic purposes. For the most part, the content has remained unchanged, except where obvious historical or editorial error needed to be corrected. Only one of the articles here is being published for the first time (cf. « Guardians and the Use of Power », p. 249). They are all, in some way, tributary from the approach and methodology that I first developed in my dissertation. It is my hope that, as disparate as these essays may be, they present a relatively cohesive panorama of important issues in the life of the early Franciscan fraternity.

I wish to thank, first, Professor André Vauchez, the director of my thesis at the Sorbonne (1984-1991) whose guidance of my scholarly work, both then as well as now, has been a constant source of encouragement to me as I found my way forward through the thicket of Franciscan history, its controversies and differing perspectives. I am profoundly grateful for his gesture in writing the preface for this volume.

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making corrections and thoughtful suggestions as to how to meld these disparate articles into a relatively cohesive whole.

And finally, I would also like to dedicate this volume to the memory of my parents, Helen and Frank Cusato, who bore with uncommon courage and love, my absence from the country for six long years in France as I endeavored to research and write my first major statement on Franciscan history. The dissertation which was the fruit of that time was dedicated to them while they were still living. Their desire to see it published, alas, was never realized in their lifetime. This volume, belatedly, is my long overdue tribute to them.

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