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YEAR OF FAITH

FAITH IN THE WRITINGS AND LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS

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INTRODUCTION

There was, in the past, a mistaken conception about the importance of the writings of St. Francis. Since in some of them Francis declares himself 'illiterate,' the scholars found themselves snubbing them, considering it unlikely that they would find in them any teaching worthy of note. Therefore, almost all the scholars favored his biographies for understanding how Francis had lived the Christian faith.

It was only the flourishing of critical editions in the twentieth century that gave us the correct interpretation of the importance of the writings and biographies for a more accurate knowledge of the person and spirituality of St. Francis. For example, G. Miccoli defines the writings of St. Francis as "filter and touchstone."¹

In this brief examination of the meaning of "faith" in the writings of St. Francis, I will try first of all to point out how many times the word *fides* appears. After having synthesized and grouped these into definitions and meanings, I will discuss the themes, namely: (a) the faith as personal encounter with God; (b) faith in the Catholic Church; (c) faith (respect and veneration) of Francis toward priests, clerics, and churches. We will review these three contexts of faith with reference to the writings and to the life Francis lived.

FAITH IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. FRANCIS

Although he called himself "ignorant and stupid,"² Francis left to posterity valuable writings that set out his first intuition and illustrate his spiritual path.

The word *fides* appears only a few times in the writings of St. Francis; more precisely, it is found ten times scattered in seven of his writings:

1. **The Prayer before the Crucifix:** "Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true **faith**, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out Your holy and true command."³
2. **Admonitions:** "Blessed is the servant who has **faith** in the clergy who live uprightly according to the rite of the Roman Church. Woe to those who look down upon them; for even though they be sinners, no one should judge them because the Lord alone reserves judgment on them to himself."⁴

¹ "filtro e pietra di paragone." G. Miccoli, Francesco d'Assisi: Realtà e memoria di una esperienza cristiana, Einaudi, Torino 1991, 41

² *Letter to the Entire Order*, 39. Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, 1,119.

³ FA:ED 1, 40.

⁴ *Admonition XXVI*, 1-2. FA:ED 1, 136.

3. **The Praises of God:** “You are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things... You are our hope, You are our **faith**, You are our charity...”⁵
4. **The Earlier Rule:** “Let all the brothers be, live, and speak as Catholics. If someone has strayed in word or in deed from the Catholic **faith** and life and not amended his ways, let him be expelled from our brotherhood.”⁶
 “All of us lesser brothers, useless servants, humbly ask and beg those who wish to serve the Lord God within the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church...to persevere in the true **faith** and in penance for otherwise no one will be saved.”⁷
5. **The Later Rule:** “If there are any who wish to accept this life and come to our brothers, let them send them to their provincial ministers...Let the ministers examine them carefully concerning the Catholic **faith** and the sacraments of the Church. If they believe all these things, will faithful profess them, and steadfastly observe them to the end...”⁸
 “In addition to these points, I command the ministers through obedience to petition from our Lord the Pope for one of the Cardinals...so that, being always submissive and subject at the feet of the same Holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic **faith**, we may observe poverty, humility, and the Holy Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised.”⁹
6. **Testament:** “And the Lord gave me such **faith** in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say, ‘We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ...’”¹⁰
 “Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such **faith** in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their order that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them.”¹¹
7. **True and Perfect Joy:** “Again, that my brothers have gone to the non-believers and converted all of them to the **faith**; again, that I have so much grace from God that I heal the sick and perform many miracles. I tell you true joy doesn’t consist in any of these things.”¹²

Paolo Martinelli, in his recent book, *Dammi Fede Diritta: Con Francesco d’ Assisi per ricominciare a credere* (“Give me a Right Faith: Beginning Again to Believe with Francis of Assisi”), takes up the theme of faith in the life of St. Francis from a theological-spiritual perspective: “because it puts at issue the gift of God insofar as it relates to the freedom of the human person, called in faith to respond to it.”¹³ Mentioning the term ‘faith’ in his book, the author confesses: “Entering now into the theme [of faith], it must be said, with a certain surprise, that strangely, the study of faith in the Franciscan writings and biographies and in the spirituality of St. Francis overall is, to my knowledge, very limited. Few books have dealt directly with this question.”¹⁴

We can summarize the above citations under three situations in life where faith is born and grows for Francis. They are:

- Born in the personal encounter with the object of faith that is God: cf. *Prayer Before the Crucifix: FA:ED 1, 40; Praises of God 1,6: FA:ED 1, 109.*
- Growing in obedience to and veneration of the Catholic Church: cf. *Earlier Rule XIX, 1-2: FA:ED 1, 77; Earlier Rule XXIII, 7: FA:ED 1, 83-84; Later Rule II, 1-3: FA:ED 1, 100. Later Rule XII, 3-4: FA:ED 1, 106; True and Perfect Joy 6: FA:ED 1, 166.*

⁵ 1,6. FA:ED 1, 109.

⁶ XIX, 1-2. FA:ED 1, 77.

⁷ XXIII, 7. FA:ED 1, 83-84.

⁸ II, 1-3. FA:ED 1, 100.

⁹ XII, 3-4. FA:ED 1, 106.

¹⁰ 4-5. FA:ED 1, 124.

¹¹ 6. FA:ED 1, 125.

¹² 6. FA:ED 1, 166.

¹³ “perché esso mette a tema il dono di Dio in quanto si relaziona alla libertà della persona umana, chiamata nelle fede a corrispondere in esso.” Paolo Martinelli, *Dammi Fede Diritta: Con Francesco d’Assisi, per ricominciare a credere*, (Edizione Porziuncola, Assisi 2012), 8

¹⁴ “Entrando ora nel tema [fede], si deve dire, con una certa sorpresa che stranamente lo studio della fede negli scritti e nelle biografie francescane e complessivamente nella spiritualità di san Francesco è, a mia conoscenza, assai contenuto. Pochi libri tematizzano direttamente questa questione.” Ibid.

- Giving fine fruits of obedient respect before the ministers of the Church: cf. *Admonition XXVI: 1-2. FA:ED 1, 136; Testament 4-5: FA:ED 1, 124; Testament 6: FA:ED 1, 125.*

Let us now examine the three above points in light of the life of St. Francis.

1. FAITH = PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

From the group of the writings of St. Francis known [in Italian editions of the Franciscan sources] by the title, "Praises and prayers," one can understand that for him faith means maintaining a personal encounter with God. Francis's first approach to God is to ask for and request faith. In the crucial years of his conversion (1205-1206) he asks God for illumination. As a beginner in spiritual things his first prayer is a prayer of petition: "give me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity." Surely the Lord heard his prayer, for twenty years later, Francis in his *Testament* tells us: "And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say, 'We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ...Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them.'"¹⁵ For Francis, the most high, glorious God is the giver of every grace. In this prayer Francis asks God for the three theological virtues that are the channels to communion with God. For Francis faith is a grace, a gift to be asked for, as says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 153: "When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood", but from "my Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 16-17) *Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him.* "Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.'"

Francis feels answered not only by stating, as quoted above, that God had given him faith in the Catholic Church and in the ministers who live according to the form of the holy Roman Church, but because toward the end of his life he declares in the *Chartula* given to Br. Leo that God himself is faith, hope, and charity: "You are our hope, You are our faith, You are our charity."¹⁶

This is one of the few citations where Francis defines what faith is. And there is a relationship between the two citations that I wanted to bring together in this way, because in both Francis speaks not only of faith but about the three theological virtues. And these two citations seem to be the beginning and the end of his journey of faith: in the first quote, which refers to the first moment of his conversion, Francis asks the Most High God for a right faith, a certain hope, and a perfect charity; in the second quote, composed after he received the stigmata, when he was totally conformed to his Christ, a sublime and contemplative expression emerges that tells us how faith was, for him, a personal encounter with God.

Francis did not ask the grace of faith only for himself or just once. In fact, exhorting his friars he says, "humbly ask and beg those who wish to serve the Lord God within the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church...to persevere in the true faith and in penance"¹⁷ and this makes us understand that perseverance must follow the request for faith, that the faith is not a static by dynamic thing that involved the whole path of existence. Therefore one has to persevere.

It is interesting to note that when the *Dizionario Francese* discusses the worth 'faith,' it does not focus so much on an exposition of the concept of faith that Francis might have held, but, following his spiritual path, highlights the fact that, for Francis, to have faith meant to live the faith. And this assertion, according to the *Dizionario*, is confirmed by his writings and by his oldest biographies. Again, for the *Dizionario*, the source from which flows all of Francis's spirituality and the force which energizes all life for his followers is faith understood as an encounter with the Lord: "That the origin of the whole adventure of Francis is a unique experience of faith coming from a personal encounter with Christ implies that the one light that can give us a true sense of his mentality is precisely the passionate love of Christ. Neither psychology nor sociology nor Church history will be able to provide the true figure of the Poverello. To study of the psychology of the temperament of Francis is not sufficient to explain the kiss of the leper...it would also be a distortion to explain

¹⁵ 4-6, FA:ED 1, 124-125.

¹⁶ *The Praises of God* 6, FA:ED 1, 109.

¹⁷ *Earlier Rule* XXIII, 7. FA:ED 1, 83-84.

the Franciscan movement by beginning from the cultural and social problems of the twelfth and thirteenth century.”¹⁸

It is then stated that in Francis’s journey of faith, we can distinguish three phases: “the first from 1202 to 1209, the second from 1209 to 1219, and the third from 1219 to 1226.”¹⁹

In the **first phase** five principal steps can be distinguished:

- (1) The prison in Perugia, where what could be called the conversion of the senses takes place in Francis;
- (2) The dream at Spoleto, where we note the conversion of mind;
- (3) Kissing the leper, where there is conversion of heart;
- (4) The apparition of the Crucifix of San Damiano;
- (5) The disrobing before the bishop of Assisi and the hearing of the Gospel of the mission of the Apostles in the church of the Portiuncula.

In this first phase of Francis’s itinerary of faith we notice that his conversion ends with a clear knowledge of his vocation, namely to live the Gospel.

In the **second phase** faith helps Francis to live his vocation peacefully, but this will only last for a short time, for right away there will come, “Christ’s new attack to impose his total and transfiguring rule in the soul of saint.”²⁰

In the third and final phase, faith has taken such total possession of the life of the Saint that Francis is not only transfigured exteriorly by the stigmata, but is intimately united, identified with Christ. This is confirmed by the prayer: “My Lord Jesus Christ, I pray from you two graces for me before I die: the first, that in my life I should feel in my soul and in my body, as far as is possible, the pain that you, sweet Jesus, endured in the hour of your most bitter passion, the second that I may feel in my heart, as far as is possible, that overflowing love with which you, the Son of God, were inflamed to willingly endure such suffering for us sinners.”²¹

2. FAITH = BELIEVING IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Speaking in the Testament of his vocation and conversion as well as the beginning of the minoritic fraternity, Francis gives all the credit to the Lord: “The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance...the Lord himself led me...the Lord gave me such faith...Afterwards the Lord gave me, and give me still, such faith...the Most High himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel...The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say...”²²

Although this was revealed certainly and totally to him personally, he still wanted to submit to the approval of the Church, or, as he says, to the confirmation of the “Lord Pope.” After discovering the Most High God as Father, it was logical that should have the “Roman Church” as mother, as summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* number 181: “‘Believing’ is an ecclesial act. The Church’s faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers. ‘No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother.’” This was the motivation that prompted Francis to seek validation from the Church for the revelation he had received. Profession of the Catholic faith was so important for Francis that he wrote in the *Rule*, “If there any who wish to accept this life and come to our brothers, let them send them to their provincial ministers...Let the ministers examine them carefully concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. If they believe all these things, will faithfully profess them, and steadfastly observe them to the end...”²³

¹⁸ *Che l’origine di tutta l’avventura di Francesco stia in una singolare esperienza di fede avvenuta nell’incontro personale di Cristo, implica che l’unica luce che ci può dare il vero senso delle sue attitudini è proprio questo amore appassionato di Cristo. Né la psicologia, né la sociologia né la storia della Chiesa ci potranno dare la vera figura del Poverello. Non è sufficiente lo studio psicologico del temperamento di Francesco per spiegare il bacio al lebbroso, ... sarebbe anche una deformazione spiegare il movimento francescano partendo dall’ambiente culturale e dai problemi sociali dei secoli XII e XIII. AA. VV. Dizionario Francescano, Edizioni Messaggero, (Padova 2002), 675.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 682.

²⁰ “un nuovo attacco di Cristo per imporre il suo dominio totale e trasfiguratore sull’anima del santo.” *Ibid.*, 684.

²¹ *Third Consideration on the Stigmata*

²² *Testament*, 1-23. FA:ED 1, 124-126.

²³ *Later Rule*, II:1-3. FA:ED 1, 100.

For Francis, not only is it impossible to begin life in the Order without being Catholic, but neither can one live as a true Franciscan without submission to the Church. For him, there is no pleasing God with poverty or a promise to live the holy Gospel without remaining firmly in the Catholic faith: “In addition to these points, I command the ministers through obedience to petition from our Lord the Pope for one of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, who would be the governor, protector and corrector of this fraternity, so that, being always submissive and subject at the feet of the same Holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic **Faith**, we may observe poverty, humility, and the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised.”²⁴

3. FAITH = RESPECTING AND HONORING MINISTERS AND CHURCHES

Francis uses the term ‘faith’ not only to highlight his relationship to God through Jesus Christ and to declare his faithfulness to the Roman Catholic Church, but also to express his great respect for her ministers. The third group of citations (*Admonition XXVI*: 1-2. FA:ED 1, 136; *Testament* 4-5: FA:ED 1, 124; *Testament* 6: FA:ED 1, 125) expresses this approach and Francis’s strong recommendation that his friars do the same. In priests, even though they be sinners, he sees nothing else but the person of Jesus and thus he warns his brothers: “Woe to those who look down upon them; for even though they be sinners, no one should judge them because the Lord alone reserves judgment on them to Himself.”²⁵

It is interesting to note that Francis speaks of the fervor of his first fraternity and remembers it with much nostalgia: “And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: ‘We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ...’”²⁶ For Francis, churches and priests were both sacraments of the presence of God.

Francis’s faith in priests and churches is precisely his faith in the Eucharist. He expresses it in this way: “The Fathers dwell in inaccessible light, and God is spirit, and no one has ever seen God. Therefore He cannot be seen except in the Spirit because it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. 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.”²⁷ For Francis, as the Eucharist is the sacrament that brings together, in daily life, the sacrifice of the cross and the actualization of the mystery of the incarnation such that they become contemporaneous, in the same way it is priests who minister and the churches that make the presence of Christ contemporaneous with our daily lives. The Word of God as well, both written and preached, can be said to make present the Eucharistic mystery.

This sacramental vision of the world that led Francis to express his faith in priests and churches at a time, like his, in which the Church was in ruins both in the unedifying behavior of priests and also in the many abandoned and ruined churches like the Church of San Damiano near Assisi, “is striking in that Francis has his decisive encounter with Christ not first in the splendid cathedral of San Rufino in Assisi, where he had received his baptism, but in a church that was ‘defective’ and ‘injured,’ like San Damiano: a church that was collapsing. It was here, as the biographical sources narrate to us, that there was the unique dialogue between Francis and the Crucifix. This makes us understand that the essential importance of the Church in the life of faith does not derive from the perfection of all its members and parts, but by the fact Jesus Christ is present in her and can be met there; it is in the Church that God speaks and addresses himself to Francis. In this way he teaches us that one can encounter Christ in a church that is dilapidated and fragile.”²⁸

CONCLUSION

In this “Year of Faith” in which we have also had the surprise of a Jesuit Pope who wanted to be called Francis, it is for us Franciscans a special year of grace, because both events (the Year of Faith and the election

²⁴ Ibid., XII:3-4. FA:ED 1, 106.

²⁵ *Admonition XXVI*, 2. FA: ED 1, 136.

²⁶ *Testament*, 4-5. FA:ED 1, 124.

²⁷ *Admonition I*, 5-7. FA:ED 1, 128.

²⁸ Martinelli, 17. “*Colpisce, che Francesco viva il suo incontro decisivo con Cristo innanzitutto non nella splendida cattedrale di San Rufino ad Assisi, dove aveva ricevuto il suo Battesimo, ma in una chiesa “difettosa” e “ferita”, come quella di San Damiano: una chiesa che sta crollando. Qui, come ci narrano le fonti biografiche, avviene il singolare dialogo tra Francesco e il Crocifisso. Ciò fa capire bene che l’importanza essenziale della Chiesa nella vita della fede non deriva dalla perfezione di tutti i suoi membri in tutte le sue componenti, ma dal fatto che in essa è presente e si può incontrare Gesù Cristo; nella Chiesa Dio parla e si rivolge a Francesco. In tale modo ci insegna che si può incontrare Cristo anche in una chiesa diroccata e fragile.*”

of Pope Francis) give us the opportunity to confirm the foundations of our faith. We must make an examination of conscience and ask ourselves, 'Do we have the same faith that animated the life of Francis: a christocentric and theocentric faith, a personal and committed faith, a tender and dynamic faith?' Are we aware of this wonderful richness of faith that we have inherited from St. Francis?

Pope Blessed John Paul II reminds us: "The world needs men and women who know how to gather the spiritual heritage of those who have gone before us, becoming courageous witnesses of a God who does not cease to fill the heart of man with his infinite love. Indeed, the desired new evangelization requires modern saints to continue the wonderful flourishing of such persons that Providence has forged into masterpieces of supernatural beauty. A missionary spirit is needed in going to meet people where they are, and to proclaim to them the Gospel of hope and joy."²⁹

We must begin again to believe in the manner of Francis, and make our prayer the prayer of the father who had the possessed, epileptic son when he said out loud and with humility: "I believe [Lord]; help my unbelief." (Mk 9:24)

NEWS—CHAPTERS—VISITATIONS—MEETINGS

Cape Verde, fraternal and pastoral visitation: March 6-13

The General Minister, Encarnação del Pozo, and the General Assistant, Br. Amanuel Mesgun, OFM Cap., were found in Cape Verde for the fraternal and pastoral visit, celebrated during the days of March 6-13, 2013.

At Nelson Mandela International Airport in Praia (the capital of Cape Verde) they were met by the National Minister, Maria Filomena Rodriguez Gomes (Filù) and the National Assistant, Br. Gilson Frede, OFM Cap., and they spent the night in the Capuchin friary in Achada De Sao Filipe.

On 8/3/13, accompanied by the Minister, the National Assistant and the national President of YouFra, Edilson de Pina, they made a courtesy visit to the Bishop of diocese of Praia, His Excellency Arlindo Furtado. At 6:30 on the same day the two Visitators met with the emerging OFS-YouFra fraternities of Achada De Sao Filipe and with the YouFra of Achada De Sao Antonio. In this meeting, where 30 seculars were present, after the introduction the National Minister and the National Assistant spoke. The General Minister and the General Assistant, after having introduced themselves, explained to those gathered the meaning and purpose of the fraternal and pastoral Visitation. The young people inspired the meeting with Franciscan songs. The YouFra members from Achada De Sao Antonio are assisted by Sr. Irene of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. On Saturday morning, 9/3/2013, the two Visitators met with the National Assistant, Br. Gilson Frede, and the National Minister, Maria Filomena (Filù) to review the plan of the Visitation and for an exchange of ideas. At 6:30 they made a 30 minute trip by plane to visit the fraternity of the island of Fogo. At 21:00 the two Visitators participated in the "prayer vigil" in preparation for the "promise" that the YouFra of Sao Filipe (Fogo) would make the next day. On Sunday 10/3/2013, at Sao Lourenço, in the Church of the Capuchins, 21 young people made their "promise" in the hands of the General Minister, delegated for this by the local Minister. After the Mass and the secular brethren and the members of YouFra from the island of Fogo (=Sao Filipe, Sao Lourenço, Campana, Monte Vacca, and Mosteiros) met for dialogue and for fraternal sharing with the Visitators. About 120 brothers and sisters from the island of Fogo participated at this meeting. After having had a frugal lunch, the Visitators met with the national Council during the noon hour.

On March 11 the Visitators met with the fraternities of the island of Fogo in their respective places. Local fraternities are constituted, even though very few are found on paper. The fraternity of Campana was erected in 1983, that of Monte Vacca in 1986, that of Mosteiros in 1984 and that of Sao Filipe in 1982. On the same day, in the afternoon, the Visitators had a meeting, in the home of an OFS sister, with the local fraternity of Sao Filipe of Fogo. The problem of ownership of the three houses owned by the OFS in the island of Fogo (Sao Filipe, Monte Vacca, and Campana) came up at this meeting. The local Assistant, Br. Ademario, explained the status of the question to the whole assembly to everyone's satisfaction. In the afternoon of 12/03/2013, in the Capuchin friary of Achada de Sao Filipe (island of Santiago), there was a meeting with

²⁹ Leonardo Sapienza (Ed.), *Giovanni Paolo II, La Sinfonia della fede*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2012, 340. "il mondo abbisogna di uomini e di donne che sappiano raccogliere l'eredità spirituale di quanti li hanno preceduti, diventando i coraggiosi testimoni di un Dio che non cessa di colmare con il suo amore infinito il cuore dell'uomo. Si per l'auspicata nuova evangelizzazione occorrono santi moderni che prolunghino la meravigliosa fioritura di persone che la Provvidenza ha forgiato in capolavori di soprannaturale bellezza. Bisogna andare incontro con un spirito missionario agli uomini là dove essi vivono, ed annunciare a loro il Vangelo della speranza e gioia."

the National Assistant to communicate impressions to him and to see together what could be planned for the future. At 17:00 on the same day, before leaving, the Visitors met with the members of the local fraternity of Achade De Sao Filipe of the island of Santiago for a fraternal dialogue. On the last day of the Visitation (13/03/2013), before leaving the island of Fogo, the Visitors had a brief talk with the two Assistants: Br. Gilson and Br. Ademario, to finish the report on the Visitation and clarify some points. The Visitors were very grateful for the fraternal welcome of the Capuchins and the attentive care they received from the National Minister and Assistant.

Animation and local Chapter in Bulgaria: April 19-21

Benedetto Lino, the Counselor for the area of Italy, and Br. Amanuel Mesgun, OFM Cap., the General Assistant, met at Sofia on April 19-21 to plan a local Chapter of the one fraternity of the OFS in Bulgaria. On the 19th, the General Assistant met with all the friars of the Custody and explained the new legislative texts of the OFS and YouFra (Rule, General Constitutions and Ritual) to them and dwelt at length on the duty, the need, and the urgency of spiritual and pastoral assistance that friars of the First Order and Third Order Regular have toward the OFS and YouFra in compliance with the mission entrusted to them by the Holy See. On the 20th, Benedetto Lino gave the secular brethren instructions on the preparation and celebration of the elective Chapter of the OFS. After fraternal sharing between the Visitor, the seculars, and the friars present, the elective session began in the afternoon. The brothers and sisters called to serve the OFS of Bulgaria for the triennium 2013-2016 are the following: Liuben Bosilkov as Minister, Vesselin Krastev as Vice-Minister and Formation Director, Milka Valova as Secretary, and Elisabetta Bosilkova as Treasurer. After being confirmed, the newly-elected local Council made the profession of faith and of service during Sunday Mass on April 21. It was Good Shepherd Sunday and therefore the World Day of Prayer for Vocations (the 50th Day this year). Thus, the General Assistant in his homily developed the theme, "Planning with God... Living the future." After Mass the two Visitors met with the new Council and proposed their recommendations. The lone, for now, local fraternity of the OFS in Bulgaria is made up of 8 seculars, all professed, and 8 members of YouFra in initial formation. The local fraternity of Sofia is assisted by Br. Elko Terziiski OFM Cap. The Visitors are very grateful to Sr. Boriana Gagova who facilitated much of their mission in her service as interpreter through the whole time of their stay. We would also thank the Custos of the Capuchins, Br. Yaroslav, both for the hospitality as well as for his commitment and dedication to the spiritual and pastoral assistance of the OFS.

South Korea - Fraternal and Pastoral Visits

Fraternal and Pastoral Visits to the SFO of South Korea took place from April 29 till May 1st 2013. The meeting followed a program prepared with utmost care two months before. The visitors were: Doug Clorey, SFO's Vice Minister General and Fr. Martin Bitzer OFMConv., Assistant General of SFO & YFRA. They were welcomed by the members of the S.Korea's National Council of SFO (including Lee Catherine, National Minister and Yoon Augustine, International Council) and the Friars Minors Conventuals who gave them hospitality in the Provincial Curia in Hannamdong. The various meetings held at the Franciscan Centre of Formation in Seoul were attended also by the SFO & YFRA's National Assistants of S. Korea, namely Fr. Changjae Kim Damien, OFM.; Fr. Jincheol Jeong Mark, OFMConv.; and Fr. Honam Hong Cosmas, OFM Cap. The Visitors had the chance to see for themselves the success, in terms of vitality of the SFO in S. Korea, has managed to score. Again they were able to witness the contribution given by the Spiritual Assistants of the SFO to the Young Franciscans who are learning to walk. It is worth pointing out the translation into the Korean language and the publication of the main SFO & YFR's official documents and the fact that all the fraternities at the local, regional and national levels receive regular spiritual and pastoral assistance. An important moment of the visits was the meeting of the Provincial Ministers of the First Order: Fr. Kyongho Ki Francis OFM., Fr. Jongil Yoon Titus OFMConv. and Fr. Edward Dowley OFM Cap. Admirable are the apostolic activities carried out by some secular Franciscans at the Sant'Ana's Old People's Home. The meeting with the members of the YFRA, with Regional Ministers as well as with some SFO's local fraternities have completed the series of programmed meetings. Doug and Fr. Martin have greatly appreciated the rich Korean culture, especially with regard to its history, gastronomy, traditional style of dressing etc. The visitors were impressed to learn about the huge number of martyrs the Korean church is being blessed with; in addition to taking part at the daily Eucharist being celebrated at early hours of the morning, the visitors took part also in various other moments of prayer. After the positive outcome of this Visit combined with the good state of mind of the secular Franciscans, of the young Franciscans and of the Friars in S. Korea there are some indications that a bright future is forthcoming for the Franciscan Order in general in this south-east Asian nation.

S. Korea – Fourth Congress of Asia and Oceania SFO & YFRA

The SFO & YFRA of Asia and Oceania celebrated their IV Assembly at Sejong – a special self-governing city – from 3 to 8 May 2013. The generous hosts of the event were the secular Franciscans of S. Korea. 56 delegates from 19 nations were present, including the 6 members of CIOFS's Presidency, namely: Doug Clorey, SFO's Vice Minister General; Lucy Almirañez, Council member; Ana Fruck, Council member as a delegate for YFRA; Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano TOR., Fr. José Antônio Cruz Duarte OFM. and Fr. Martin Pablo Bitzer OFMConv. General Assistants. They all contributed to the arguments being discussed and which were of major interest to the participants. The work in groups and the plenary sessions studied in depth the arguments being proposed. Reports from the various fraternities – both the well established and the emerging ones – of the concerned areas were followed by the presentation of two studies regarding the History of the Church and that of the Franciscan Order in S. Korea. The two studies were presented by Lee Catherine, National Minister and Yoon Augustine, member of the International Council (both are secular Franciscans of S. Korea). The day ended with the celebration of S. Korean's SFO 75th anniversary of its foundation. The programme envisaged, among other things, Eucharistic celebrations presided over by some Korean bishops, for example the head of the diocese of Daejeon and the Franciscan bishop, Francisco Xavier OFM. The others who performed such a duty were: Fr. Kyongho Ki Francis OFM. and Fr. Jongil Yoon Titus OFMConv., Provincial Ministers; Fr. Changjae Kim Damiano OFM., Spiritual Director and Fr. Amando and Fr. Martin, General Assistants. The cultural event which encompassed dances, songs, poetry, short stories, wearing traditional dresses etc. embellished the feast started after dinner. The Proceedings of the Congress, to be published soon, will be useful in guiding the future work of the secular Franciscans engaged in the nations of Asia and Oceania. Warm thanks are due to Lucy, to the members of the SFO-S.Korea National Council, to the S.Korean Young Franciscans and to all those who, directly or indirectly, contributed to make the Congress a success.

TOR of Saint Francis' Elective General Chapter

The 111th General Chapter of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis was celebrated at Gamin, Austria, from 12 to 24 May 2013. In the first part of the Chapter, reports - highlighting the positive achievements scored and the challenges awaiting for the future – were presented from the General Curia and from the other institutions of the Order. The second part of the Chapter was dedicated to the dialogue on the priorities to be adopted for the next six years and to voting the resolutions and recommendations to the new governing body of the Order. In its third part the Chapter held the election of the Minister General, his Vicar and the Council. Resulted elected: as Minister General, the Most Rev. Fr. Nicholas E. Polichnowski of the Sacred Heart Province in the USA; as Vicar General, Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano (México); as members of the Council: Fr. Paolo Benanti (Italy); Fr. Tomeu Pastor (Spain); Fr. Thomas Kochuchira (India); Fr. Calogero Favata (Sicily) and as Secretary General, Fr. Danijel Gornik (Croatia). On May 23rd Tibor Kauser, OFS addressed the Capitulars in his quality of special envoy of the SFO's Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo.

A New General Minister OFM

The American, Fr. Michael Anthony Perry is the new General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor. He succeeds, in this service, Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo appointed, last April 6th, by Pope Francis, Secretary of the Congregation for the Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life. As Fr. Michael Anthony Perry was already Vicar General of the Order, in line with the disposition of the Constitutions of the Friars Minor, he will have the job of concluding the mandate of his predecessor up to the next Chapter, due to be celebrated in the year 2015. Born in Indianapolis (USA) in 1954 and solemnly professed in 1981, Fr. M. A. Perry was ordained priest in 1984. Previously he had held the position of Minister of the Sacred Heart of Jesus' Province, in the USA. His academic achievements are extensive and include a Ph.D. in Theological Anthropology. He served his Province by undertaking the formation of the young members of the Order, particularly the post-novices. He also worked as member of the International Commission for Justice Peace and Ecology, as well as being, for ten years, missionary in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Again, he put himself at the service of the Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the USA.