

**THE MIRROR OF THE OBSERVANCE: IMAGE, IDEAL AND IDENTITY IN
OBSERVANT FRANCISCAN LITERATURE, c.1415-1528**

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis has been composed by me, that the work is entirely my own, and that no part has been published in its present form.

Clare Lappin

Abstract

This thesis examines the image, ideal and identity of the Franciscan Observance as it was represented in the literature of the congregation. The Observant friars emerged from the discredited Spiritual Franciscan tradition in 1368. The early brotherhood was devoted to the literal interpretation of the Rule, which entailed a quasi-eremitical life of austerity, poverty and prayer. However, from c.1430 the community, now called the Regular Observance to distinguish it from the earlier Literal Observance, moved towards an extremely successful active preaching vocation. This mitigated the traditional austerity of the congregation but allowed it to become one of the most popular and influential orders in the Renaissance world. A study of the image, ideal and identity of the Observant congregation raises many questions about the self-perception of the Observant friars. To what extent were they conscious of their history and identity? How did the shift from the extremely austere, quasi-eremitical ideal of the Literal Observance to the moderate active life of the Regular Observance affect the brothers' perception of their congregation? Did the brotherhood propose a distinctively Observant model of sanctity and how did the Observance define itself within the Franciscan Order as a whole? In order to place these questions in context, the introduction to the thesis offers a brief discussion of the emergence of the Observant movement between 1334 and 1368 and the development of the congregation in the fifteenth century. The thesis itself is divided into two parts. Part One deals with the connection between image and identity, examining the Observant texts which aimed to cement public recognition of the community as a separate entity. Chapter Two examines the fundamental legislative texts of the community, the constitutions and expositions of the Rule, and shows how Observant legislation fostered the ideals propounded by the Regular Observance whilst reducing the influence of the Literal tradition. A study of the historiography of the congregation in Chapter Three shows how the Observants became keenly aware of their past, and both fascinated and alarmed by their radical roots. The chroniclers justified their brotherhood with appeals to a past which they were often careful to shape in their own image, and presented the Observance in unashamedly partisan terms. Chapter Four looks at the ways in which attacks on the congregation shaped its self-perception and vocation, examining the polemical tracts which flew between the Observance and the majority Franciscan Conventual party between 1415 and 1528. These tracts show that such controversies, particularly the crisis of the 1450s, were a crucible from which the Observants emerged convinced of the necessity of institutional separatism and a distinct identity. Part Two of the thesis looks at the ideal of the congregation and its influence upon the Observant sense of identity. Three chapters focus upon Observant hagiography and the model of spirituality nurtured by Observant writers. The first deals with the cult of Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444), showing how the Observance's first saint (cn.1450) was promoted as a model for his fellow brothers and became a key symbol of the new Regular Observance. Chapters Four and Five concentrate upon two of the most important Franciscan hagiographers of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Giacomo Oddi (†1487) and Mariano da Firenze (c.1477-1523). Their lives of the Observant brothers reveal a model of sanctity which diverges substantially from the Bernardinian pattern and is based more upon the traditions of the Literal Observance, indicating that such ideals remained alive in certain sections of the community.

Abbreviations

AA.SS.	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
AF	<i>Analecta Franciscana</i>
AFH	<i>Archivum Franciscanum Historicum</i>
ALKG	<i>Archiv für Literatur- und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters</i>
AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
An.Min.	Wadding, <i>Annales Minorum</i>
BA	Bernardino Aquilano da Fossa, <i>Chronica Fratrum Minorum Observantiae</i> in <i>Fragmenta Franciscana</i> (Rome: Typis Sallustianis, 1902), pp. 1-111.
BSB	<i>Bullettino di Studi Bernardiniani</i>
CS	Mariano da Firenze, <i>Vite quaranta quattro di vari Uomini Illustri in Santità</i> , Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II di Roma, Cod. Sess. 412 (Ms. 2063).
FP	Mariano da Firenze, <i>Vita del Beato Padre Fra Paulo de Trinci</i> in M. Faloci Pulignani, 'Il B. Paoluccio Trinci da Foligno', <i>Miscellanea Francescana</i> 6 (1896), pp. 97-128.
LF	Mariano da Firenze, <i>Vite di Sancti et Beati</i> , Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Cod. Landau-Finally 243.
MEFR	<i>Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome</i>
MF	<i>Miscellanea Francescana</i>
MF	Mariano da Firenze, <i>Compendium chronicarum fratrum Minorum</i> , AFH 1-4 (1908-1911).
NG	Nicholas Glassberger, <i>Chronica</i> in <i>Analecta Franciscana</i> 2, 1887.
PS	<i>Picenum Seraphicum</i>
SI	H. Goyens, ' <i>Speculum Imperfectionis Fratrum Minorum compactum per venerabilem et religiosum P. F. Iohannem Brugman O.F.M.</i> ', AFH 2 (1909), pp. 613-25.
SF	<i>Studi Francescani</i>
SQ	F. van den Hombergh, 'Ein unbekannter Brief des Johannes Brugman über die Observanz: <i>Solutiones quorundam obiectorum contra sacram Observantiam</i> ', AFH 64 (1971), pp. 338-366.
VS	Mariano da Firenze, <i>Via Spirituale</i> , Biblioteca Guarnacci di Volterra, Cod. LVII, 7, 7, fols. 1-131.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Around the year 1509, Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466-1536) composed *In Praise of Folly*, a work which mocked the failings of the Church. The humanist had certainly witnessed Franciscan Observant attempts to gain recognition for their congregation within the Order as a whole. He had the Franciscans in mind when he complained of the friars:

They all take remarkable pains to be different from each other in their rule of life. They aren't interested in being like Christ but rather in being unlike each other. Consequently, a great deal of their happiness depends on their name. Some, for instance, delight in calling themselves Cordeliers [*funigeros*, i.e., the French term for the Franciscans], and they are subdivided into the Colettans [*coletas*], the Minors [*minores*, i.e., Conventuals], Minims [*minimos*] and Bullists [*bullistas*, i.e., Observants] ... as if weren't enough to be called Christians.¹

Erasmus was clearly aware of the tensions that had pulled the Franciscan Order apart during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. During this period, eleven lesser congregations emerged from the main body of the Franciscan Order besides the Observance itself. In 1434 one Franciscan writer was able to identify six different ways of interpreting the Rule, each championed by friars who held that their interpretation was the only correct one.² In 1517 Pope Leo X finally proclaimed the Observance, founded in 1368, to be the main party in the Order, but in 1528 the congregation was once more disquieted by the authorisation of the stricter Capuchin community. To survive and flourish during the fifteenth century, the Observants had been forced to establish their own version of the Franciscan ideal as a definable and justifiable alternative to the main

¹ Erasmus, *Moriae encomium id est stultitiae laus* in *Desiderii Erasmi Opera Omnia* IV-3, ed. C. H. Miller (Amsterdam and Oxford: North Holland, 1979), p. 160. Translation taken from Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, trans. B. Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971; repr. 1980), p. 165. All translations in this thesis are my own unless otherwise stated. On the *Moriae encomium*, see G. Thompson, *Under Pretext of Praise: Satiric Mode in Erasmus' Fiction*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); and Z. Pavlovskis, *The Praise of Folly: Structure and Irony* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983).

² For a summary of the lesser reforms that affected the fifteenth-century Franciscan Order see R. M. Huber, *A Documented History of the Franciscan Order (1182-1517)*, (Milwaukee: The Nowiny Publishing Apostolate, 1944), pp. 482-489. Detailed accounts of two of the more important congregations, the French Colettans and the Spanish Recollectio Villacreciana, may be found in D. Nimmo, *Reform and Division in the Franciscan Order 1226-1538*, 2nd edn, (Rome: Capuchin Historical Institute, 1995), pp. 433-575. The six types of Franciscan life perceived by François Futz, a Conventual polemicist who spoke against the Observance at the Council of Basle, ranged from what might be termed 'relaxed conventualism' (the open acceptance of annual incomes) to strict eremitical observance. See C. Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance discutée au Concile de Bâle', *AFH* 83 (1990), pp. 389-390.

traditionalist Franciscan body, the Conventuals, and to the multiplicity of Franciscan forms developed by lesser congregations. In short, the Observants had to define, disseminate and defend a distinctive Observant identity.

This search for identity is faithfully reflected in their literature. The Observants often used the traditional medieval conceit of the mirror in their writings. Indeed, Johannes Brugman (†1473) and Giacomo Oddi (†1487), both of whom are the subject of later chapters, named their works respectively the *Speculum Imperfectionis* (c.1451) and the *Specchio de l'Ordine* (1474). Stemming from St Augustine's (354-430) recurrent description of the Scriptures as a mirror in his Rule, Soliloquies and meditations upon the psalms, the use of the metaphor remained immensely popular throughout the Middle Ages.³ In his eighth century *De virtutibus et vitiis liber*, Alcuin of York (c.730-804) set forth the functions of the literary speculum in terms which were to become customary in late Medieval mirror-works:

In the reading of the Holy Scriptures is the knowledge of divine blessedness. Man can consider himself in them as in a mirror: he can see what he is and what he aims at. Attentive reading purifies the soul.⁴

Thus the literary mirror traditionally had a two-fold function: it showed readers a clear reflection of their own state, allowing them to see their own failings in the virtues of others; and offered an ideal to which they could re-form themselves. The mirror-works of the Observants fulfil these functions. Observant writers reflected at length upon the state of their congregation. Spiritual guides and polemics bewailed the Order's failings; statutes and hagiographical works proposed an ideal to which the brothers should conform. Thus the literature of the congregation mirrored the Observants' identity and self-perception on both the conscious and subconscious level.

The sociologist Stephen Mennell has formulated a clear definition of the concept of identity:

³ R. Bradley, 'Backgrounds to the Title *Speculum* in Medieval Literature', *Speculum* 29 (1954), pp. 103-105. On the use of the mirror conceit, see particularly H. Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. G. Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and E. Mår Jonsson, 'Le sens des titre *Speculum* aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles et son utilisation par Vincent de Beauvais' in *Vincent de Beauvais: Intentions et réceptions d'une œuvre encyclopédique au Moyen Âge*, Actes du XIV Colloque de l'Institut d'études médiévales, (Paris: Les Éditions Bellarmin, 1990), pp. 11-32.

Identity implies ... a level of conscious awareness by members of a group, some degree of reflection and articulation, [and] some positive emotional feelings towards the characteristics which members of a group perceive themselves as sharing and in which they perceive themselves as differing from other groups.⁵

Both image and ideal were intimately bound up in this process. Image could be both tangible and abstract. It encompassed the outward marks of the congregation's institutional identity, such as the skimpy Observant habit and the characteristic *zoccoli* (clogs) which inspired the popular Italian name for the brotherhood, the *zoccolanti*. In less concrete terms, it also encompassed the reputation which Observant writers wished to propagate amongst their confrères and which the congregation attempted to project in the public domain. The Observants were also concerned by the often damaging image of the congregation which was disseminated by their Conventual peers in an attempt to discredit their reform. In a similar way, the ideal proposed by the community was an important part of the Observant identity, for it formed a model of sanctity to which the brothers were encouraged to aspire. This ideal derived from Franciscan traditions drawn from every era of the Order, including the idea of *imitatio Francisci*, the moderation of the thirteenth-century Bonaventuran Community, the radical poverty of the Spirituals and the examples of the Observance's own greatest figures, their founder Paoluccio dei Trinci (1309-1390) and their first saint, Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444).

Thus Observant identity and institutional self-consciousness were formed from a complex mixture of beliefs which encompassed the brothers' convictions about the Order's past and its providential future; their developing conception of the Observant ideal (whether actualised or theorised); their sense of institutional separatism within the Order; and the public marks of that separatism - their dress, their Chapters and administrative hierarchy, their saints and holy men. However, the congregation did not exist in a vacuum: it was also shaped by the expectations and needs of others. The Observants

⁴ Alcuin, 'De virtutibus et vitiis liber', *Patrologia Latina* 101 (1863), p. 616. Quoted by R. Bradley, 'Backgrounds to the Title *Speculum*', p. 102.

⁵ S. Mennell, 'The Formation of We-Images: A Process Theory' in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. C. Calhoun (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), p.177. There has been little work on the development of specifically Order-related religious identities by sociologists. On sociological theories of identity see R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); M. A. Hogg, *The Social Psychology of Group Cohesiveness: From Attraction to Group Identity* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); and *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, ed. D. Abrams and M. A. Hogg, (New York, London etc.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

were forced to negotiate their role with the papacy, laity and, in highly polemical terms, with other sections of the Franciscan Order, particularly the Conventuals. Moreover, the meaning of the Franciscan ideal as it related to Observant identity was a topic much discussed within the Observance itself as the congregation's vocation developed through the fifteenth century.

Nature of Sources and Aims of Thesis

In examining the Observant identity I have concentrated upon texts written between 1415, when the brotherhood was authorised by the Council of Constance, and 1528, when the foundation of the Capuchin congregation finally stripped the Observance of its claim to be the only major reformed branch of the Franciscan Order. Generally I have limited my study to Franciscan works. The greatest part of the material examined here was composed by Observant writers, but certain Conventual texts have been included in order to gauge the impact of Conventual allegations upon the Observant self-image. The nature of the evidence has dictated the scope of the study. Although this thesis concentrates mainly upon Italian writers, key texts by French, German and Dutch Observants, such as Ultramontane constitutions, the chronicle of Nicholas Glassberger of Nuremberg (†1508), and the polemics of the Dutch preacher Johannes Brugman, cannot be overlooked.

This thesis will examine the image that the Observants tried to fashion for the outside world, the identity nourished and cultivated amongst the brothers, and the ideal to which they aspired between c.1415 and 1528. Such a study raises a number of questions. To what extent were the Observants conscious of their history and identity? How did the shift from the extremely austere, quasi-eremitical lifestyle of the Literal Observance to the moderate active life of the Regular Observance from the 1430s affect the brothers' perception of their congregation? Did the brotherhood uphold a distinctively Observant model of sanctity and how did the Observance define itself within the Franciscan Order as a whole?

The thesis itself is divided into two more or less equal parts. Part One is concerned with the fundamental texts which fostered and disseminated the Observant self-image. The administrative sources of the congregation are examined in Chapter Two. A

large number of statutes were issued by general and provincial chapters between c.1415 and 1528. These fundamental legislative documents regulated the daily life of the brothers and were carefully devised to foster a moderate ideal which struck a cautious balance between zeal and pragmatism. Between 1430 and 1528 Observant authors also produced eleven expositions of the Rule. Two of the best examples will be studied here; the *Constitutiones Bernardini* of 1440 and Giovanni Pili da Fano's *Dialogo de la Salute* (1527).⁶ In tandem with the constitutions, these texts worked to modify the influence of the early Observant ideal and prescribed a moderate interpretation of the Rule which would allow for the new active life proposed by Bernardino da Siena and his companions.

The texts examined in the following two chapters are extremely self-conscious and often seem aimed at a wide audience which needed to be persuaded to accept the Observants' image of themselves. The congregation's historiography, examined in Chapter Three, is particularly revealing. Three of the most important Observant chronicles have been selected for analysis: Bernardino Aquilano's *Chronica Fratrum Minorum Observantiae* (c.1480); Nicholas Glassberger's *Chronica* (c.1508); and the *Compendium chronicarum Fratrum Minorum* (c.1521) by Mariano da Firenze.⁷ Such Observant histories were consciously written to advance a favourable image of the Observance. They aimed to bolster Observant claims to be agents of both continuity and change within the Franciscan Order. Above all, by appropriating of the Franciscan past on behalf of their congregation, they were of key importance in the congregation's attempts to refute Conventual charges that the Observance had no right to call themselves Franciscans.

These charges are dealt with in Chapter Four which examines the ways in which the Observant identity was shaped by adversity and conflict. The Observant and Conventual polemical texts analysed in this chapter were composed in haste and filled with rash judgements: they allow us to glimpse the candid and often intemperate opinions of both sides. The writing is extremely self-conscious. There is a sense of both parties playing to the gallery in their attempts to disseminate a damaging image of their rivals.

⁶ M. Bertagna, 'Lettera volgare inedita di S. Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 54 (1957), pp. 86-90; B. da Lapedona, 'Il *Dialogo di salute* di Giovanni Pili da Fano', *L'Italia Francescana* 7-10 (1932-1935),

⁷ B. Aquilano da Fossa, *Chronica Fratrum Minorum Observantiae* in *Fragmenta Franciscana*, ed. L. Lemmens, (Rome: Typus Sallustianis, 1902), pp. 1-111; N. Glassberger, *Chronica Fr. Nicolai Glassberger*, *AF* 2 (1887); Mariano da Firenze, 'Compendium chronicarum fratrum Minorum', *AFH* 1-4 (1908-1911).

The polemics also illuminate the fraught processes that played such a part in developing the Observance's institutional separatism and independent-mindedness during the fifteenth century and show how the Observants often explicitly defined their own congregation in reaction to the Conventuals.

Part Two of the thesis is concerned primarily with the ideal formulated by the congregation and its impact upon the Observant sense of identity. From c.1430 the Observant brothers moved from an ascetic ideal of absolute poverty, solitude and contemplation towards an active preaching mission which brought them into the thriving Renaissance towns and increased their numbers and influence. This shift in vocation is reflected in the ideal developed in Observant hagiography. These sources are particularly rich and evocative, describing a model of sanctity by means of hagiographical exempla which recall many brothers now otherwise lost to history. Chapter Six traces the cult of the Observance's first saint, Bernardino da Siena (cn. 1450). In it, a wide range of material has been utilised, including Bernardino's own writings, Observant sermons on the new saint, and the fourteen *vite* devoted to Bernardino in the fifteenth century; as well as Conventual works which laid claim to the saint. These texts constructed the Observant ideal out of Bernardino's active preaching vocation. In contrast, the works of two of the Observance's greatest hagiographers, Giacomo Oddi (†1487) and Mariano da Firenze (†1523), which are examined in Chapters Seven and Eight, tend to advance a model of sanctity that diverges somewhat from the Bernardinian pattern. The lives of Observant brothers recorded in Oddi's *Specchio de l'Ordine*, more commonly known as *La Franceschina* (1474), and Mariano's *Via Spirituale* (1518) and *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* (completed in 1523), often exalt the early Observant life of solitude, poverty and contemplation in preference to Bernardino's active engagement with the world.⁸ Mariano's works are particularly interesting, for they exist only in manuscript form and have never been fully studied or published in their entirety.

⁸ G. Oddi, *La Franceschina: Testo volgare Umbro del sec. XV*, 2 vols., ed. N. Cavanna, (S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi: Tipografia Porziuncola, 1929; repr. 1981); Mariano da Firenze, *Via Spirituale*, Biblioteca Guarnacci di Volterra, Cod. LVII, 7, 7, fols. 1-131; idem, *Vite di Sancti et Beati*, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Cod. Landau-Finaly 243; and *Vite quaranta quattro di vari Uomini Illustri in Santità*, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II di Roma, Cod. Sess. 412 (Ms. 2063).

The Franciscan Tradition and the Observance

The Franciscan Observance cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the history of the Franciscan Order. The Observants constantly looked back to the Franciscan past in their attempts to shape their ideal. The congregation was the product of two centuries of troubled Franciscan history and was but one of a series of reforms that affected the Order. Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries the Friars Minor divided again and again along the same lines, arguing constantly over whether to follow a precarious quasi-eremitical existence or settle in urban convents, to practice absolute poverty or accept fees and rents, to be educated preachers or unlettered contemplatives. In the broadest terms, there arose two major traditions. Firstly, those following the moderate life mitigated the austerity of the Rule to ensure stability for an existence of preaching and teaching; secondly, those advocating strict observance followed the Rule to the letter and emphasised the contemplative life of prayer, poverty and solitude. These divisions were present within the Order in the fifteenth century, but they derived from the earliest days of the Friars Minor.

The perfectionist ideal proposed by St Francis (†1226) weighed heavily upon his Order, making it particularly prone to division and renewal. Francis's ideal was based upon an uncompromising vision of a powerless community of poor, often unlettered brothers so devoted to the dregs of society that they lived amongst them doing God's work. His religious vision was a double one, incorporating both a strain of contemplative eremitism and an exhortation to an active life of charity and preaching. The two strands were bound together by a vow of individual and corporate poverty, the distinctive and radical mark of Franciscan austerity.⁹ These two facets of the Franciscan ideal created tensions within the Order, for even Francis himself was torn between these two ideals. The *Legenda Maior* (1263) by Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, Minister General of the Order

⁹ This is not the place to examine the early ideals of Francis, for they are too complex to be dealt with briefly. The best English account of the saint and his Order is J. R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (London: Clarendon Press, 1968). R. B. Brooke, *The Coming of the Friars* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975) offers a good introduction to the background and early development of both the Franciscans and Dominicans. On the place of poverty in Francis's thought, see *La povertà del secolo XII e Francesco d'Assisi*, Atti del II Convegno internazionale di Studi Francescani, (Assisi: Università di Perugia Centro di Studi francescani, 1975); and M. D. Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty* (London: SPCK, 1961). The latter volume has recently been revised and updated: Lambert, *Povertà francescana: La dottrina*

between 1257 and 1274, showed Francis anxiously discussing with his brothers whether he should devote himself to contemplation or to preaching:

He discussed this problem with the friars over a number of days, but he could not make up his mind which course of action he should choose as being more pleasing to Christ. The spirit of prophecy had enabled him to penetrate the deepest secrets, but he was unable to solve his own difficulty satisfactorily.¹⁰

Such uncertainty, combined with Francis's strong emphasis upon the radical doctrine of absolute poverty, comments in the *Regula bullata* (1223) which suggested that the brothers' should trust to their own conscience rather than their superiors in matters of observance, and the sentiments expressed in his Testament (1226), in which he urged the brothers to observe a strict interpretation of the Rule, led to problems which continued to dog the Order in the fifteenth century.

In fact, the divisions and conflicts which racked the Order in the fifteenth century often echoed the events of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. When the Observants looked back at Franciscan history they took inspiration not only from the charismatic figure of the founder, but also from the major factions of the thirteenth-century Order: the moderate Community and the radical Spirituals. After Francis's death, the Franciscan Community, led above all by S. Bonaventura, took inspiration from the founder's instruction to preach and live an active life of charity in the world. The Franciscans surged into the universities, princely courts and urban pulpits of the thirteenth century. Papal bulls were procured which mitigated the uncompromising austerity of the Rule, allowing for 'spiritual friends' who could oversee the Order's financial dealings (1230) and papal dominion over Franciscan goods (1245).¹¹

This spirit of accommodation allowed for the spectacular rise of the Order but it horrified certain friars who cherished and recorded the memories handed down by the companions of Francis.¹² These *zelantes*, and the more intransigent party to which they

dell'assoluta povertà di Cristo e degli apostoli nell'ordine francescano (1210-1323) (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1985).

¹⁰ Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, 'Major Life', trans. B. Fahy in M. A. Habig (ed), *St Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979), p. 721.

¹¹ *Quo elongati* (1230) and *Ordinem vestrum* (1245) are reproduced in *An. Min.* ii, 244-247; iii, 129-131. For a convenient summary of both bulls, see Moorman, pp. 90-91, 116-117.

¹² Much has been written on the early Franciscan sources, in particular by historians attempting to untangle which passages are authentic and which are later Spiritual interpolations. The matter, known as

gave rise after the 1270s, the Spirituals, drew their inspiration from the other facet of Francis's religious vision; the contemplative life of absolute poverty to which Francis had retreated in the years before his death. The Spirituals insisted upon the purity of the Rule and Testament, emphasising that it was the founder's intention which mattered, not the intricacy of laws and glosses that had been imposed upon his Rule over the years. Their rallying cry was the call to observe the Rule *ad litteram sine glossa*; to the letter and without gloss. Inspired by Francis's comment that he was to be 'the form and example of all friars', they wished to imitate his life as closely as possible.¹³

Thus by the end of the thirteenth century there were unofficial divisions between the majority moderate Community and the radical Spirituals. Tensions between the two parties increased from the 1280s. The Spirituals' rigid devotion to poverty became explosively mixed with a passion for a radical Joachite eschatology that characterised Francis as the Angel of the Sixth Seal and the Spirituals themselves as the elect who would convert the world in the Last Days.¹⁴ Their intransigent zeal and uncompromising criticism of the wealth of both Order and Church were ultimately their undoing. Their fall was spectacular. After many years of rising tension within the Order, the Spirituals were outlawed by Pope John XXII in 1323. Pursued by their fellow Franciscans, many returned, chastened, to their old houses. Other more intemperate brothers who would not relinquish their eschatological hopes so easily fled the Church and settled in the abandoned Franciscan hermitages of central Italy where they became popularly known as the Fraticelli. There, aided by a receptive laity and harried by the Inquisition, they persevered

the 'Franciscan Question', is still under dispute. See *La 'Questione Francescana' dal Sabatier ad oggi*, Atti del I Convegno Internazionale, Società Internazionale di Studi francescani, (Assisi: Università di Perugia Centro di Studi francescani, 1973); J. R. H. Moorman, *Sources for the Life of St Francis of Assisi*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1940); and G. Philippart, 'Les écrits des compagnons de S. François', *AB* 90 (1972), pp. 143-166. For an excellent reconstruction of the so-called Leonine sources and a comprehensive bibliography on the 'Franciscan Question' see R. B. Brooke, *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci*, Oxford Medieval Texts, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

¹³ The best general accounts of the Spiritual dispute are *Chi erano gli Spirituali?*, Atti del Convegno internazionale Assisi 16-18 ottobre 1975 (Assisi: Società internazionale di studi francescani, 1976); D. Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty: the Origins of the Usus Pauper Controversy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); D. Douie, *The Nature and Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli*, Publications of the University of Manchester no. 220, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1932); and Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*.

¹⁴ On the millennial hopes of the Spiritual party see M. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 175-228; and M. D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 2nd edn (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), pp.189-214.

in their life of radical poverty and preached unceasingly against the corruption of the clergy and papacy, declaring their brotherhood to be the one true church.¹⁵ The Fraticelli proved to be remarkable survivors. They were finally dispersed by major inquisitorial trials which took place in Foligno in 1455 and Rome in 1466. Denounced and questioned by Observant friars, the testimonies of the accused revealed a network of secretive followers across Umbria, Tuscany and the Marches.¹⁶

The Development of the Observance

The rise of the Observance was in part a reaction against the further relaxation of the majority faction in the fourteenth-century Order, the Conventuals. Although many Conventuals persevered in their attempts to pursue the Franciscan life, contemporary texts such as *De planctu Ecclesiae* (1335) by the Franciscan bishop Alvarus Pelagius (1275-1349) make it clear that a substantial number of friars enjoyed a life which would have horrified the founder: houses subsisted on rents, friars received fees and constantly circumvented the teachings of the Rule.¹⁷ The Observance was also shaped by the ideological tensions which affected the Franciscan Order in the fourteenth century. Despite his horror at the excesses into which the Spirituals and Fraticelli had fallen, the founder of the Observant congregation, Paoluccio dei Trinci (1309-1390), wished to continue the life of poverty and humility advocated by such fallen Spiritual leaders as Angelo Clareno (†1337) and Ubertino da Casale (1259-1330). The foundation of the Observance is traditionally dated to 1368, when Paoluccio received permission from his Minister General Tomasso da Frignano (1367-1372) to retreat to the hermitage of Brugliano on the border between Umbria and the Marches. Within five years he had settled his brothers in ten other friaries in central Italy.¹⁸

¹⁵ On the Fraticelli movement see the works of Douie; Reeves; G. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2 vols, (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 167-258; and *I Fraticelli: santi o eretici?*, ed. R. Ceccarelli, Atti del Convegno Cupra Montana 3 ott 1997 (Cupra Montana: Comitato Sagra dell'Uva, 1998).

¹⁶ F. Baldaccini, 'Processi a Foligno contro i Fraticelli nel 1455', *ASI* 115 (1957), pp. 176-182; N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (Sussex: Sussex University Press and Chatto Heinemann, 1975), pp. 16-59, pp. 42-54.

¹⁷ A. Pelagius, *De planctu Ecclesiae*, 2 vols, (Venice: [n. pub.], 1560), lib.ii, ch. 66-67. On the Conventual way of life, see Moorman, pp. 350-383; Nimmo, pp. 205-239. On the criticisms of the Order, see C. Erickson, 'Fourteenth-Century Franciscans and their Critics', *Franciscan Studies* 35 (1975), pp. 107-135 and 36 (1976), pp. 108-147; and P. R. Szittya, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986). In the fifteenth century certain

However, the origins of the Observance are not as clear-cut as they might seem. Paoluccio was also linked to earlier attempts at reform which were led by Giovanni della Valle (†1350) and his disciple Gentile da Spoleto (†1362). All three men had lived together in the convent of S. Francesco in Foligno in the 1320s and 1330s.¹⁹ It seems that the reforms of Giovanni, Gentile and Paoluccio were linked by the ties of friendship. In his *Annales Minorum* (1625), Luke Wadding cited the Observant historian Mariano da Firenze in claiming that Giovanni, Gentile and Paoluccio were close companions. He also stated that Giovanni was influenced by the friendship of the prominent Spiritual leader, Angelo Clareno, who had fled the Franciscans to form his own order of hermits in the hills of Umbria.²⁰ The reforms were also linked by common ideals: despite the defeat of the Spiritual party and the fierce inquisitorial persecutions directed against the heretical Fraticelli, the urge to observe the Rule *ad litteram* had not disappeared.²¹ The reforms were distinguished by a withdrawn life of absolute poverty, contemplation and prayer; the brothers' disparagement of learning and ecclesiastical influence; and their adoption of meagre habits.

The congregations of Giovanni della Valle and Gentile da Spoleto were manifestations of the desire to observe the Rule *ad litteram sine glossa*. In 1334 Giovanni

Conventuals recognised the need to reform their community; a detailed plan for this reformation was formed in 1455 by a Conventual theologian, Francesco Micheli del Padovano, but it was never put into practice. See R. Pratesi, 'Francesco Micheli del Padovano di Firenze, teologo ed umanista Franciscano del secolo XV', *AFH* 47 (1954), pp. 293-366; 48 (1955), pp. 73-130. Micheli's *Advisamenta pro reformatione* is reproduced in the latter volume, pp. 109-130.

¹⁸ Excellent accounts of the early Observance are to be found in L. Brengio, *L'Osservanza francescana in Italia nel secolo XIV*, Studi e testi francescani 24, (Rome: Edizioni Francescane, 1963); M. Sensi, *Le Osservanze francescane nell'Italia Centrale* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1985); M. Sensi, *Dal movimento eremitico alla regolare Osservanza francescana: L'opera di Fra Paoluccio Trinci* (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1992); Nimmo, pp. 353-414; idem, 'The Genesis of the Observance' in *Il rinnovamento del Francescanesimo: L'Osservanza*, Atti del'XI Convegno Internazionale, Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani, (Assisi: Centro di Studi Francescani, Università di Perugia, 1985), pp. 107-147; and Moorman, pp. 368-383.

¹⁹ Paoluccio entered S. Francesco in 1323 and Giovanni's presence is recorded there two years later. The date of Gentile's entry into the house is unknown, but must have taken place some time before 1334. See Nimmo, p. 366.

²⁰ *An. Min.* VII, 168, xxiv. See also Brengio, pp. 38-40. Nimmo's suggestion that Paoluccio was a follower of Giovanni and Gentile has been fiercely attacked by Arthur L. Fisher in his review of Nimmo's work in the *Catholic Historical Review* 75 (1985), pp. 491-492, despite the testimony of Mariano and Wadding. It seems reasonable to assume that the three reformers were acquainted and shared common ideals.

della Valle obtained permission from the Minister General Geraldo Odone (1329-1342) to retreat to Brugliano with four companions, one of whom was Gentile da Spoleto. Giovanni's attempt to re-establish the reformed life came only eleven years after Pope John XXII had tried to destroy the radical wing of the Franciscans forever by declaring the doctrine of Christ's poverty to be heretical. Giovanni remained at Brugliano in poverty and austerity until his death in 1351. The second phase was led by his disciple, Gentile, under whose direction the brothers settled in four new houses and, due to their ascetic lifestyle, requested and were granted unprecedented autonomy from the Conventual hierarchy through Pope Clement VI's *Bonorum operum* (1350). However, the brothers adopted the ragged habits traditionally worn by both Spirituals and Fraticelli and were quickly accused by the Conventuals of rejecting the authority of the General Minister and harbouring known Fraticelli heretics. The community was duly suppressed by Pope Innocent VI in 1355, and the brothers, Paoluccio dei Trinci among them, were forced to return to their previous Conventual houses.²² Gentile himself was imprisoned in the Conventual convent at Orvieto.²³

Such antecedents make clear how precariously balanced the early Observant movement was between orthodoxy and heresy. Mario Sensi has established that the retreats of both Giovanni della Valle and Paoluccio dei Trinci to Brugliano, situated on the very border between Umbria and the Marches, coincided with campaigns against the Umbrian Fraticelli by the Inquisition, concluding that the early Observants were perhaps attempting to escape similar persecution.²⁴ Both Sensi and Duncan Nimmo have traced further links between the nascent Observant movement and the groups of Fraticelli and hermits that flourished around Foligno and Perugia during the fourteenth century.²⁵ Indeed, the lifestyle and beliefs of Paoluccio's primitive Observant community appeared at times to be perilously similar to those of the heretical Fraticelli. Like the Fraticelli, Paoluccio and his disciples lived by begging and manual work. They observed the Rule *ad litteram sine glossa*, wore the patched habits which had been the distinctive mark of the Spirituals, and pursued a contemplative life of absolute poverty. In 1474 Giacomo Oddi,

²¹ See Nimmo, pp. 352-364.

²² Nimmo, p. 391; Moorman, p. 371.

²³ There is an good account of Gentile's career in Nimmo, pp. 382-394.

²⁴ Sensi, *Dal movimento eremitico*, pp. 24-25. On the retreat of Giovanni della Valle, see pp. 15-16. See also Sensi, *Osservanze*, p. 40.

²⁵ Nimmo, pp. 353-414; Sensi, *Osservanze*, pp. 29-39, 137-146 *passim*.

Paoluccio's first hagiographer, wrote an account of the heroic deprivations which marked the Observance's early days:

It was conceded to Fra Paoluccio that he could live with four or five companions in the place of S. Bartolomeo at Brugliano. ... In this place he reduced himself to a holy life of austerity and laudable conversation, practising most strict penitence and living in the greatest of poverty. And because he could find few who were willing to persevere in such austerity, he lived for a long time either alone or accompanied by a single companion.²⁶

Paoluccio's followers, when they came, tended to be uneducated lay brothers, like Paoluccio himself who was famously described by Oddi as 'an unlettered, simple layman'. However, whilst Paoluccio's brotherhood shared common ideals with the Spirituals and Fraticelli, the Observants had learned from the suppression of Gentile da Spoleto's congregation. They were always conscious of the need not to repeat such faults, and Paoluccio himself was careful to emphasise his obedience to his Order and the Holy See at all times. Indeed, the central anecdote in the fifteenth-century *vite* of the beatus was an account of how, at the request of his Conventual superiors, Paoluccio preached against the Fraticelli of Perugia and expelled them from their stronghold of Monteripido, which thereafter became one of the Observance's principal houses. His winning argument was a simple one: 'The friars must always be subject and subordinate to the holy Church, and stable in the Catholic faith.'²⁷

By the time of Paoluccio's death in 1390, the early Observance had expanded into around twenty reformed houses in the provinces of Umbria, the Anconan Marches, Rome and Tuscany, and the brotherhood was a small, tightly-knit, inward-looking community. The Observance came to prominence along with the rise of Bernardino da Siena, Giovanni da Capestrano and their companions from c.1430. After Bernardino's death in 1444, Capestrano proudly claimed that the saint had inspired the foundation of almost two hundred new Observant houses, encouraging thousands of men to join the Observant Family.²⁸ Along with this spectacular rise came a distinct shift in the role of the Observant congregation and a corresponding change in the self-perception of the community. The Observance of the fifteenth century - often called the Regular Observance to distinguish it

²⁶ Oddi, I, p. 86.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 88.

²⁸ Giovanni da Capestrano, 'S. Bernardini Senensis ordinis seraphici minorum vita' in *Sancti Bernardini Senensis Opera Omnia*, tom. I (Venice: Andrea Poletti, 1745), p. xxxix.

from Paoluccio's Literal Observance – now came to imitate the moderate Community of the thirteenth-century Order. Under Bernardino's leadership, the Observants attempted to fuse the active and contemplative aspects of Francis's vision which had been separated by the radicalism of the Spiritual party and the progressive relaxations of the Conventuals. The fifteenth-century Observants tried to find a *via media* between the extremities of these two models, combining austerity with an active life of preaching and mission.

Bernardino da Siena placed great emphasis on the pastoral role, particularly on the duties of preaching and confessing which emerged as fundamental to his conception of the Observant vocation. As he preached to the Sienese in 1427:

Jesus Christ said to his disciples, 'Go and preach the Gospel to every creature.' We have taken on the apostolic life under the seraphic Francis who in his Rule orders us, amongst other things: 'Preach to the people of vice and virtues, of punishment and glory,' and I have promised to observe it.²⁹

However, this stress on pastoral duties gradually eroded the distinctive nature of Paoluccio's Literal Observance. In 1438 Bernardino, who had become Vicar General of the Observance in 1437, began the process of marginalising the eremitical impulse within the Observance. He issued a letter which forbade the Vicars to receive hermits into the congregation and insisted that any friar who wished to retreat to a hermitage required the permission of the Vicar General. The same circular instigated a clericalisation process that would provide the congregation with preachers, teachers and confessors. Bernardino forbade lay brothers to ascend to the clergy, to be educated or to take confession, citing the passage in the Rule discouraging the lay brethren from learning. Novices who could not recite the Divine Office were not to be accepted.³⁰ Moreover, Bernardino set up the first Observant *studium* at Perugia in 1440 and even taught lessons there himself. His initiative was followed by Giovanni da Capestrano's 1443 decree that each Province should have its own house of study.³¹ A hierarchy of preachers was introduced and privileges were

²⁹ 'Del danno del giudicare' in *Le Prediche Volgari: Bernardino da Siena*, ed. C. Cannarozzi, 2 vols (Pistoia: Alberto Pacinotti & Co, 1934), II, p. 1.

³⁰ The text of this circular, dated August 5 1438, is reproduced in Bernardino's *Opera Omnia*, VIII, pp. 314-315.

³¹ Moorman, p. 506. On the place of education in the Observance see also U. Nicolini, 'I minori Osservanti di Monteripido e lo "Scriptorium" delle Clarisse di Monteluca in Perugia', *PS* 8 (1971), pp. 100-130; M. G. Bistoni, 'La biblioteca del convento di Monteripido in Perugia', *AFH* 66 (1973), pp. 378-404; and M. Fois, 'La questione degli studi nell'Osservanza e la soluzione di S. Bernardino da Siena' in *Atti del simposio internazionale cateriniano-bernardiniano*, ed. D. Maffei and P. Nardi, (Siena: Accademia

accorded to each grade.³² Above all, in 1440 Bernardino issued a set of statutes, later known as the *Constitutiones Bernardini*, which imposed a moderate interpretation of poverty and discouraged the more heroic aspects of the traditional ideal of *imitatio Francisci*. Such measures went some way towards undermining the way of life practised by the traditionally non-clerical, quasi-eremitical and contemplative community. The effects of this shift upon the self-perception of the Observant brothers are clearly visible in their literary works.

Although this change in orientation entailed a re-formation of the Observant self-image, ideal and identity, it also allowed the congregation to enter fully into fifteenth-century religious life. Their new ideal, which was echoed in the reform of the other mendicant orders, was in keeping with the post-Schism atmosphere in the Church which emphasised 'reformation in head and members'.³³ The Observants' new active apostolate gained the patronage of the papacy and many prominent Churchmen who appreciated their religious zeal and their dependability in preaching and teaching. They were favoured by the secular aristocracy who supplied them with splendid houses and even subsidies, further eroding the traditions of the literal observance.³⁴ Most importantly, they became integral to the everyday life of the towns. Their concern for the lost and the poor drew them into revivalist preaching and, from the 1460s, the foundation of the low interest cash and corn banks, the *Monti di Pietà* and *Monti Frumentari*.³⁵ Their emphasis on a living spirituality led them into the world of the lay confraternities which sheltered rich and poor, learned and unlettered alike.³⁶ The Observants rose to the demands of the fifteenth

Senese degli Intronati, 1982), pp. 477-497. This promotion of study was reflected in the Franciscan art of the later fifteenth century. See M. A. Pavone, *Iconologia francescana: Il Quattrocento*, (Todi: Ediert, 1988), pp. 56-57, 74.

³² A. Ghinato, 'La predicazione francescana nella vita religiosa e sociale del Quattrocento', *PS* 10 (1973), p. 92.

³³ For a good overview of the reforming impulse in the Renaissance Church, see *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, ed. K. Elm, *Berliner Historische Studien* Band 14, *Ordensstudien* VI (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1989); and for the Observance's role in this reform, M. Fois, 'L'Osservanza come espressione della *Ecclesia semper renovanda*' in *Problemi di Storia della Chiesa nei secoli XV-XVII* (Naples: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1979), pp. 13-107.

³⁴ N. Rubinstein, 'Lay Patronage and Observant Reform in Fifteenth-Century Florence' and G. Brucker, 'Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence', both in T. Verdon & J. Henderson (eds.), *Christianity and the Renaissance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), pp. 63-82; p. 51.

³⁵ For a good account of the foundation of the *Monti*, see V. Meneghin, *Bernardino da Feltre e i Monti di Pietà* (Vicenza: LIEF Edizioni, 1974).

³⁶ On Observant involvement in Italian confraternities, see J. Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 38-44, 113-154; C. Black, *Italian Confraternities*

century. They supported the papacy against the rise of conciliarism and secular power; preached crusades against the Turks who battered at the doors of Christendom and conquered Constantinople in 1453; and stood against the proliferation of heresy as the doctrines of Wyclif and Hus gained new converts.³⁷ The early sixteenth century found them wrestling with the forces of Protestantism and the dissolution of the one holy Roman Church.³⁸

The rise of the Observance during the Quattrocento led to clashes with the majority Conventual party. The Conventuals had tolerated Paoluccio's tiny contemplative brotherhood but the new Regular Observance, expanding into former Conventual houses and into the active role that the Conventuals thought was their own, appalled them. Martin V's attempt to impose a set of moderate constitutions upon both parties, called the *Martinianae* after their papal sponsor, failed in 1430. Relations between the two sides deteriorated, and in 1446 Eugenius IV sanctioned the *de facto* separation of the two parties with his bull *Ut sacra*, which established an almost entirely independent administrative structure for the Observance. The Observant brotherhood was now led by two Vicars General presiding over the Cismontane and Ultramontane areas and was linked to the Conventuals only by the figure of the Minister General, though even he had little say over the acts of the Observant hierarchy. The tensions within the Order affected the Observants deeply. As they shifted into the traditionally Conventual life of active preaching there was an even greater need to establish a distinct and separate identity from their rivals, with

in the Sixteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 69; and N. Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 45-46.

³⁷ On Capestrano's crusade of 1455-6 see F. Szakály, 'S. Giovanni da Capestrano e la difesa dell'Europa' and A. Masala, 'S. Giovanni da Capestrano e l'assedio di Belgrado', both in *S. Giovanni da Capestrano: un bilancio storiografico*, ed. E. Pasztor, Atti del convegno storico internazionale, Capestrano, 15-16 maggio 1998 (L'Aquila: Amministrazione Provinciale, 1999), pp. 315-332, 333-354. Both Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca waged a long campaign against the Hussites in Bohemia. See J. Hofer, *Giovanni da Capistrano: Una vita spesa nella lotta per la riforma della Chiesa*, trans. G. di Fabio (L'Aquila: [n. pub.], 1955), pp. 373-497; idem, 'Der Hussitentraktat des hl. Johannes Kapistran', *Franziskanische Studien* 20 (1933), pp. 326-337; and G. Galamb, 'S. Giacomo della Marca e gli eretici di Ungheria' in *San Giacomo della Marca nell'Europa del '400*, ed. S. Bracci, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, (Padua: Centro di studi Antoniani, 1997), pp. 211-220.

³⁸ Paul Nyhus has studied the German Observance and its reaction to the Reformation: P. L. Nyhus, *The Franciscans in Southern Germany, 1400-1530: Reformation and Revolution*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, ns vol. 65 pt. 8 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophy Society, 1975); idem, 'The Observant Reform Movement in Southern Germany', *Franciscan Studies* 32 (1972), pp. 154-167; and

whom they now shared so many characteristics. Simultaneously, the development of small splinter movements, such as the *Recollectio Villacreciana* (c.1404-1460), the *Capuciolae* (1426-1434), *Amadeiti* (from 1455), *Capriolanti* (1467-1481), and *Guadelupensi* (from 1489), all of which were devoted to a strict literal interpretation of the Franciscan Rule, threatened the Observance from the opposite direction. The mid-Quattrocento congregation, attempting to follow a *via media* between these two poles, was attracted to both the unworldly asceticism of the literal observance and the influence of the more moderate life. Such uncertainty about their role and even their very existence was bound to make the Observants more aware of the need to formulate clearly their ideals and identity. Their literature reflects these difficulties.

The success of the Observance during the fifteenth century prompted constant sniping within the Franciscan Order, leading to the decision of Leo X to issue *Ite vos* in 1517. This bull recognised the Observance as the main body of the Franciscan Order, incorporated the lesser reformed congregations into the Observant denomination and relegated the Conventuals to a secondary position as the minority brotherhood. The Observance was thus established as the principal bearer of the Franciscan name. Nevertheless, *Ite vos* did not halt the development of the Order. The reforming impulse remained strong. It gave rise to the Capuchin congregation, whose brothers openly declared their admiration for the Spirituals, and whose life of poverty and eremitical contemplation was strikingly similar to Paoluccio's reform of a hundred and sixty years before.³⁹ In 1528 Pope Clement VII authorised the 'Friars Minor of the Eremitical Life', as the Capuchins were originally known. His bull, *Religionis zelus*, finally stripped the Observance of its claim to be the only major reformed branch of the Franciscan Order. The rapid success of the Capuchins attests to a continuing desire for literal conformity to the Rule within the Regular Observance: there was still a stubborn minority of Observants who hankered after the life advocated by Paoluccio dei Trinci.

'Caspar Schatzgeyer and Conrad Pellican: The Triumph of Dissension in the Early Sixteenth Century', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 61 (1970), pp. 179-204.

³⁹ On the Capuchins, see Father Cuthbert, *The Capuchins*, 2 vols, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1928); T. MacVicar, *The Franciscan Spirituals and the Capuchin Reform*, Franciscan Institute Publications History Series no. 5, (New York: The Franciscan Institute of St Bonaventure University, 1986); I. de Villapadierna, 'I Cappuccini tra eremitismo e predicazione' in *I Frati Minori tra '400 e '500*, Atti del XII convegno internazionale, Società internazionale di Studi Francescani, (Assisi: Università di Perugia Centro di Studi Francescani, 1986), pp. 51-80; and E. G. Gleason, 'The Capuchin Order in the Sixteenth Century'

The Observant Ideal: d'Alatri and Merlo

The shift from the Literal to the Regular Observance and its impact upon the Observants' sense of identity have been the subject of a certain amount of scholarly discussion in recent years. In particular, Mariano d'Alatri has argued that the traditions of the two models, Literal and Regular, which he dubbed the 'two souls' of the Observance, were 'different tendencies and options which manifested themselves in the heart of the Observant movement'; in other words, distinctive and divergent ideals.⁴⁰ As we have seen, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Franciscan Order became fundamentally split along a faultline which effectively disassociated the idealised life of eremitical poverty pursued first by the *zelantes* and then by the Spirituals and Fraticelli from the more pragmatic life of active engagement with the world practised by the Community and later by the Conventuals. Furthermore, the descent of the Spirituals and Fraticelli into outright heresy did much to discredit the eremitical life. However, there have been arguments against the idea that the Literal and Regular tendencies within the Observance were mutually exclusive or necessarily in conflict with one another. For instance, Grado G. Merlo contends that the 'two souls' harmoniously co-existed within the fifteenth-century congregation. He reacts against scholarly traditions which 'rigidify the development of the Observance into two overly distinct phases – one eremitical, the other apostolic'.⁴¹ He argues that neither the Literal nor Regular interpretations of the Rule represented pure distillations of the Observant ideal, but rather that both were combined in a pragmatic compromise which allowed for the tranquil accommodation of the eremitical and the active in a single brotherhood.

I would argue that the truth lies at some point between these two arguments. The 'two souls' of the Observance were not as separate and irreconcilable as d'Alatri suggests, yet nor were they as easily accommodated as Merlo holds. Whilst much Observant literature illustrates how profoundly the congregation was influenced by Bernardino's

in *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation*, ed. R. L. DeMolen (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), pp. 31-57.

⁴⁰ M. d'Alatri, 'Le due anime dell'Osservanza francescana nella lettura di tre vite della *Franceschina*' in *Il beato Antonio da Stroncone*, II, ed. M. Sensi, Atti delle Giornate di studio, Stroncone 8 gen 1994 e 28 gen 1995, (S. Maria degli Angeli: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995), p. 6.

⁴¹ G. G. Merlo, 'Dal deserto alla folla: persistenti tensioni del francescanesimo', *Le Venezie Francescane* ns. 6 (1989), special edition on 'Predicazione francescana e società veneta nel Quattrocento: committenza, ascolto, ricezione', Atti del II convegno Internazionale di studi Francescani (Padua, 1987), p. 69.

conception of the active Franciscan life, there is some evidence, on the other hand, of discomfort and doubt about the moderate values of the Regular Observance. Writers such as Mariano da Firenze and Giacomo Oddi articulated the fears of those who felt that too much of the literal, eremitical tradition was being discarded in favour of the active life. Other sources show that some lay brothers felt disparaged and undervalued by the new clerical class. There are hints of grass-roots opposition to Bernardino's policy of clericalisation and his marginalisation of the eremitical impulse. Indeed, certain writers looked back to an Observant golden age of poverty and austerity which they felt had been compromised by the community's success.

Historiography

The study of the Franciscan Order caught the attention of the scholarly world at the turn of the last century through the pioneering works of Paul Sabatier.⁴² Since then the Order has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly interest. In an area crowded with important works, several stand out, particularly Malcolm Lambert's *Franciscan Poverty* and J. R. H. Moorman's *A History of the Franciscan Order*.⁴³ Moorman's work is remarkable for its calm overview of over three hundred years of Franciscan history. His study of the Observance forms only a small part of the work as a whole, yet it is an invaluable introduction to the period and its principal figures. Whilst many historians have chosen to study the medieval Franciscan Order, there are surprisingly few books that deal solely with the Observance. Indeed, it took some time for interest in the Observant congregation to develop fully: the *Società di Studi Francescani* devoted a conference to the Observance only after eleven years of publications.⁴⁴ Three major themes have emerged from the study of the Observance over the last century. The first is the interest in the prominent figures of the Observance, ranging from Iris Origo's evocative account of the

⁴² Sabatier was one of the first to rediscover the work of the Observant chronicler Mariano da Firenze. See P. Sabatier, *Fratri Francisci Bartholi de Assisio Tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae Portiuncula*, Collection d'études et de documents sur l'histoire religieuse et littéraire du Moyen Age 2, (Paris: Fischbacher, 1900) (on Mariano, see the Appendix, pp. 137-164). Sabatier's most famous works were his 1894 *Life of St Francis of Assisi*, trans. L. Seymour Houghton, (New York: Scribner, 1921); and his controversial edition of the *Speculum Perfectionis* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1898).

⁴³ Lambert's classic *Franciscan Poverty* has recently been revised, translated and republished: Lambert, *Povertà francescana: La dottrina dell'assoluta povertà di Cristo e degli apostoli nell'ordine francescano (1210-1323)*, (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1985).

⁴⁴ *Il rinnovamento del Francescanesimo: L'Osservanza*, Atti del'XI Convegno Internazionale, Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani, (Assisi: Centro di Studi Francescani, Università di Perugia, 1985).

world in which Bernardino da Siena preached to Johannes Hofer's seminal account of the life of Giovanni da Capestrano.⁴⁵ Many aspects of the congregation have been illuminated through the study of Bernardino, Capestrano and their peers. The second theme in recent historiography is the social aspect of the Observant vocation, focusing upon the preaching and social teaching of the friars, their relations with the poor and attitude towards marginal groups such as prostitutes, witches and the Jews.⁴⁶

Finally, the third major theme is the relationship between the ideals of the Observance and those of the Spiritual movement of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Interest in this subject was first sparked in 1916 and 1935 by the studies of Livarius Oliger and Emmerich Blondeel d'Isegem who proved that the Observants utilised Spiritual writings in their own texts, a proposition later confirmed by Roberto Rusconi in his comprehensive review of references to Spiritual authors in Observant documents.⁴⁷ More recently, Mario Sensi and Duncan Nimmo have confirmed the influence of Spiritual ideals upon the early Observance. Sensi's volume, *Le Osservanze francescane nell'Italia Centrale*, is one of the best accounts of the reforming impulse that gripped Central Italy in the late fourteenth century.⁴⁸ In his *Reform and Division in the Franciscan Order*, Duncan

⁴⁵ I. Origo, *The World of San Bernardino* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963); J. Hofer, *Joannes Kapistran: Im kampf um die Reform der Kirche*, 2nd edn, 2 vols., (Heidelberg-Rome: F. H. Kerle Verlag, 1964). Hofer's work has been well translated into Italian as *Giovanni da Capistrano, una vita spesa nella lotta per la riforma della Chiesa* (all citations are taken from this translation). A full bibliography on Bernardino da Siena is provided in Chapter Five. On Capestrano, see also S. *Giovanni da Capestrano nella Chiesa e nella società del suo tempo*, ed. E. and L. Pasztor, Atti del convegno storico internazionale Capestrano, (L'Aquila: Arti Grafiche Aquilane, 1989); and S. *Giovanni da Capestrano: un bilancio storiografico*, ed. E. Pasztor, Atti del convegno storico internazionale, Capestrano, 15-16 maggio 1998 (L'Aquila: Amministrazione Provinciale, 1999).

⁴⁶ A. Ghinato, 'La predicazione francescana nella vita religiosa e sociale del Quattrocento', *PS* 10 (1973), pp. 24-98; B. Paton, *Preaching Friars and the Civic Ethos: Siena, 1380-1480*, Centre for Medieval Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College (London: University of London Press, 1992); R. De Roover, *San Bernardino of Siena and Sant'Antonino of Florence: The Two Great Economic Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, Kress Library of Business and Economics No. 19 (Boston: Kress Library, 1967); F. Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ L. Oliger, 'De relatione inter Observantium querimonias Constantienses (1415) et Ubertini Casalensis quoddam scriptum', *AFH* 9 (1916), pp. 3-41; E. Blondeel d'Isegem, 'L'influence d'Ubertin de Casale sur les écrits de S. Bernardin de Sienne', *Collectanea Franciscana* 5 (1935) pp. 5-44; 6 (1936), pp. 57-76; and R. Rusconi, 'La tradizione manoscritta delle opere degli spirituali nelle biblioteche dei predicatori e dei conventi dell'Osservanza', *PS* 12 (1975), pp. 63-137.

⁴⁸ M. Sensi, *Le Osservanze francescane nell'Italia Centrale* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1985). Sensi has also published a work dealing with the Observance at Brugliano: M. Sensi, *Dal movimento eremitico alla regolare Osservanza francescana: L'opera di Fra Paoluccio Trinci* (Assisi: Edizioni

Nimmo traces the ideals of the Spirituals, studies the origins of the Observance in France, Spain and Italy, and examines the main areas of conflict within the Order.⁴⁹ His work often brims with detail, though Nimmo is perhaps rather too sympathetic towards the proponents of the literal observance.

The study of the institutional self-consciousness of the Order is a relatively new preoccupation, and the Observance itself has never been fully analysed from this perspective. Aside from the articles of d'Alatri and Merlo, Giovanna Pasqualin Traversa has examined Giacomo Oddi's *La Franceschina* for its conception of Franciscan *minoritas*.⁵⁰ Similarly, the 1981 volume *Lettura delle fonti francescane attraverso i secoli: Il 1400* is a fine collection of essays which touch tangentially upon the same idea, examining such subjects as the interpretation of the Rule in the fifteenth century and the sources utilised by Observant authors.⁵¹ In contrast, the identity cultivated within the Franciscan Order prior to the rise of the Observance has often been more fully and directly examined. Two writers, Roberto Lambertini and Andrea Tabarroni, have approached the problem of the conflicts which shaped the Franciscan identity in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Lambertini's work is concerned with the period 1255-1279 when the Franciscan identity was forged in the crucible of public disputes with the secular clergy.⁵² Lambertini is much more concerned with tracing the development of Franciscan self-consciousness than Tabarroni, whose work on the Franciscan texts produced during the Order's dispute with John XXII concentrates primarily upon the legal definitions that

Porziuncola, 1992).

⁴⁹ D. Nimmo, *Reform and Division in the Franciscan Order 1226-1538*, 2nd edn, (Rome: Capuchin Historical Institute, 1995). As well as his article in *Il rinnovamento del francescanesimo*, Nimmo has also published several other pieces dealing with the same theme: 'Reform at the Council of Constance: the Franciscan Case', *Studies in Church History 14: Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*, ed. D. Baker, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp. 159-173; 'Saint Francis within the Observance' in *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia*, vol. I: Secoli XIII-XV, ed. S. Gieben, Atti del primo convegno di studi per l'VIII centenario della nascita di S. Francesco, (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1983), pp. 161-172; and 'The Franciscan Regular Observance: The Culmination of Medieval Franciscan Reform' in *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, ed. K. Elm, Berliner Historische Studien Band 14, Ordensstudien VI, (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1989), pp. 189-205.

⁵⁰ G. Pasqualin Traversa, *La 'Minoritas' francescana nell'interpretazione della 'Franceschina'*, Collectio Assisiensis 23 (S. Maria degli Angeli: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995).

⁵¹ G. Cardaropoli and M. Conti (eds), *Lettura delle fonti francescane attraverso i secoli: il 1400* (Rome: Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto Apostolico Pontificia Università Antoniana and Ed. Antonianum, 1981).

⁵² R. Lambertini, *Apologia e crescita dell'identità francescana (1255-1279)*, Nuovi Studi Storici 4 (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1990).

bounded the Franciscan conception of their ideal.⁵³ However, both writers conclude that the doctrine of absolute poverty was the key to the Franciscan understanding of their Order; Tabarroni adds that the suppression of this doctrine by John XXII seriously affected the Franciscan sense of identity.⁵⁴

Two further writers have examined the phenomenon of Franciscan historical self-consciousness. The first to touch upon it was Stanislao da Campagnola in his volume on Franciscan historiography, *Le origini francescane come problema storiografico*.⁵⁵ This important study examines the representation of the Order in histories from the thirteenth to the mid twentieth century. Campagnola scours Franciscan chronicles for signs of historical self-consciousness and devotes a short chapter to the chroniclers of the Observance. More recently, Bert Roest's examination of Franciscan historiography between 1226 and 1350 has reaffirmed the important role played by a wide range of Franciscan texts in inculcating a specific Franciscan self-image which was based upon a rich understanding of the Order's past. Roest concludes:

Internal discord, leading to the Observant movement after 1368, brought about a change in the Order's self-representation and had its own impact on Franciscan literary output. All this in itself justifies further study.⁵⁶

The need for such a study of Observant self-representation provides sufficient justification for this thesis.

⁵³ A. Tabarroni, *Paupertas Christi et Apostolorum: L'ideale francescano in discussione (1322-1324)*, Nuovi studi Storici 5 (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1990).

⁵⁴ Both works are analysed and reviewed by Felice Accrocca in his article 'Per una storia dell'autocoscienza istituzionale dell'ordine francescano', *Collectanea Francescana* 61 (1991), pp. 635-647.

⁵⁵ S. da Campagnola, *Le origini francescane come problema storiografico* (Perugia: Pubblicazioni degli Istituti di Storia della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 1974).

⁵⁶ B. Roest, *Reading the Book of History: Intellectual Contexts and Educational Functions of Franciscan Historiography 1226 - ca. 1350* (Groningen: Stichting Drukkerij C. Regenboog, 1996), p. 28.

CHAPTER TWO

For the Edification of the Brothers: Constitutions and Expositions of the Rule

The Observant interpretation the Franciscan Rule is perhaps the best place to begin an examination of the way in which the Observant brothers developed and expressed their identity and ideal. The Franciscan Rule was the fundamental expression of the Order's identity. Every Franciscan believed that it was a divinely revealed document which regulated the brothers' daily existence. Observant writers were not slow to relate what they thought of as the miraculous story of its composition. In c.1474 the Observant hagiographer Giacomo Oddi followed Franciscan tradition in comparing Francis's Rule to a new set of Commandments:

[Francis] wrote the Rule as it was revealed to him by the blessed Christ from his most holy mouth, adding nothing of his own but writing in it only those things which Christ revealed to him from heaven. And his companion copied down [the words] that this Moses, Francis, received from Christ.¹

There were in fact two surviving Rules: the strict *Regula prima* or *non-bullata* composed by Francis in 1221, and the substantially similar but more moderate *Regula bullata*, devised by Francis in 1223 and modified by the Chapter General of the same year, which superseded the earlier document.² Both were considered to be divinely revealed, although it was the *Regula bullata* which was known simply as 'the Rule'. Despite its reputedly divine origins, the Rule's provisions were hotly debated from the founder's death in 1226 onward. Although, or perhaps because, its twelve chapters were simply and sparsely written, it became a battleground for differing interpretations.³ Its status was complicated by Francis's contentious Testament (1226), overturned by Gregory IX in 1230's *Quo elongati*, which sternly forbade the brothers to re-interpret the Rule or to appeal to the papacy to gloss it with dispensations and privileges. Such admonitions, combined with

¹ Oddi, I, p. 30. The idea that Christ dictated the Rule was first clearly formulated in the *Legenda Perusina* (1311). See Habig, p. 1087.

² Both the *Regula non-bullata* and *bullata*, were based on the original Rule of 1209, a collection of Gospel admonitions which had long been lost and remains so to this day. On the development of the Rule, see T. Desbonnets, *From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983); and A. Quaglia, *Storiografia e storia della Regola francescana* (Falconara: Edizioni Francescane, 1985).

³ For a comprehensive account of the disputes over the Rule in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Douie and Lambert.

the general belief that the Rule was an expression of Christ's will, gave rise to the desire of the Spiritual party to observe the Rule *ad litteram sine glossa*.⁴ The Observant writers who approached the Rule were aware of its controversial nature. In 1440 Bernardino da Siena acknowledged that there had been much 'speculation as to the truths' of the Rule and hoped to correct this,⁵ whilst Giovanni Pili da Fano wrote in 1527 that the purpose of his exposition was to eliminate all error and ignorance 'for the Rule is spare and brief, and for this reason obscure in many places.'⁶

In 1527 Giovanni Pili da Fano asserted the unparalleled importance of the Rule by reporting Francis's own evaluation of the document:

Francis said that for his zealots the Rule and its vow were the book of life, the hope for well-being, token of glory, marrow of the Gospel, the life of the cross, the state of perfection, key to paradise and pact of eternal faith. He wished all the brothers to have a copy, and that all should love it, meditate upon it and discuss it from time to time.⁷

The Observance took some care to inculcate the values of the Rule. Certain constitutions of the congregation assumed that all brothers should have a copy of it, whilst others ordered that expositions of the Rule, papal declarations and constitutions were to be read aloud in the refectory.⁸ The Rule set out the very fundamentals of the Franciscan life, briefly describing the observance of poverty and charity that was to be the Franciscan hallmark. Francis himself had been aware of its paramount importance in shaping the lives of his brothers. He was wary of any mitigation of the Rule and used his Testament, which so unbendingly counselled a life of extreme poverty and humility that in 1230 the friars successfully petitioned Gregory IX to mitigate its authority, to command the brothers not to gloss the Rule or use sophistries to alter its meaning:

⁴ The works of the prominent Spirituals Angelo Clareno (†1337) and Ubertino da Casale (1259-1330) best express this ideal. See particularly Angelo Clareno, *Expositio Regulae fratrum Minorum*, ed. L. Oliger, (Florence: Quaracchi, 1912).

⁵ *Constitutiones Bernardini* reproduced in M. Bertagna, 'Lettera volgare inedita di S. Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 54 (1957), p. 88.

⁶ Giovanni Pili da Fano, *Dialogo di salute* (1527) in B. da Lapedona, 'Il *Dialogo di salute* di Giovanni Pili da Fano', *L'Italia Francescana* 7-10 (1932-1935), p. 301.

⁷ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 8 (1933), p. 48. Pili took his phrasing from the Spiritual-influenced *Speculum Perfectionis* (1318). See Habig, p. 1207.

⁸ The best example of this occurs in the Provincial statutes of Saxony (1467). The Chapter issued a precise timetable of monthly readings which amounted to a programme that indoctrinated the friars in the tenets of their Order. See B. Kruitwagen, 'Statuta provinciae Saxoniae condita Brandenburgii an. 1467, immutata Luneburgi an. 1494', *AFH* 3 (1910), pp. 280, 287-288. Similar orders appear in many other statutes, including the 1461 General Chapter held at Osimo, and the constitutions of the Provincial

In virtue of obedience, I strictly forbid any of my friars, clerics or lay brothers, to interpret the Rule or these words, saying, 'This is what they mean'. God inspired me to write the Rule and these words plainly and simply, and so you too must understand them plainly and simply, and live by them, doing good to the last.⁹

Despite Francis's warnings, after his death learned brothers did not shrink from issuing their own readings of the Rule, producing a series of expositions that interpreted the Rule according to the spirit of the times. The Observant expositions of the Rule can thus tell us much about the Observant ideal in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹⁰

The Observant expositions and constitutions which comment on the Rule function in several different ways. They provide an insight into the preoccupations of the Observants at the most fundamental level of their identity, illuminating the ways in which the average brother might question the Franciscan life and how the Observant hierarchy chose to deal with these questions. In this way they also give an explicit reflection of the contemporary ideal proposed by the congregation's greatest figures. The constitutions in particular provide glimpses of the daily life of the community, how the friars felt it ought to be and how it actually was. The expositions of the Rule show that the Observants reacted to attacks on their congregation by carefully defining their ideology in times of trouble, but they also attest to conflicts within the Observant brotherhood. Most importantly, they document the period, beginning in c.1430, during which the congregation made a definitive shift from the predominantly eremitical life of poverty, contemplation and literal observance towards the policy of *usus moderatus* which allowed for an active life of preaching and charity.

The Papal Declarations and Observance *ad litteram*

An important factor to take into account before any examination of Observant expositions of the Rule is the way in which the congregation approached the ideal of observance *ad litteram sine glossa*. This had been the Spiritual and Fraticelli battle cry,

Chapters of Apulia (1467), Genoa (1487), Abruzzo (1505) and Tuscany (1507).

⁹ 'The Rule of 1223' in Habig, p. 69.

¹⁰ For a list of Observant Rule expositions, see F. Elizondo, 'Doctrinales Regulae Franciscanae Expositiones usque ad annum 1517', *Laurentianum* 2 (1961), pp. 449-492. The best introductions to Observant legislation are A. Sousa Costa, 'Le fonti francescane nei testi legislativi francescani del 1400' and A. Boni, 'La regola francescana nell'interpretazione del 1400', both in *Lettura delle fonti francescane*

and it occurs time and again in Spiritual-influenced Franciscan literature. For instance, the *Legenda Perusina* (1311) stated that Christ told his servant:

Francis, nothing in the Rule comes from you; everything in it comes from me. I wish this Rule to be observed to the letter, to the letter, to the letter, without gloss, without gloss, without gloss.¹¹

From their reading of the early Franciscan sources and through their personal links to Francis's *zelante* companions, the Spirituals had concluded that observance *ad litteram sine glossa* was the only way to lead a truly Franciscan life. Angelo Clareno (†1337) had stated this flatly in his comment that, 'the proper, true, pure, faithful and spiritual observance of the Rule is the literal observance.'¹² The Observants, influenced by their strong grounding in Franciscan literature, also followed this line. In fact, in c.1474 Giacomo Oddi repeated Clareno's comment verbatim in his own judgement on the Rule:

From the commandments and the words of St Francis it appears that he received the Rule through revelation, and that the proper, true, pure, faithful and spiritual observance of the Rule is the literal observance, which was taught and fulfilled and received immediately from Jesus Christ by the founder.¹³

Yet only a page earlier Oddi had proudly listed the prestigious privileges given to the Order by a succession of popes, including the bulls *Quo elongati* (1230), *Ordinem vestrum* (1245) and *Exiit qui seminat* (1279). Such bulls had horrified Clareno and the Spirituals by mitigating the austerity of the Rule: their provisions rejected the authority of Francis's Testament, allowed for 'spiritual friends' to deal with the Order's economic needs, and set up the legal fiction of papal dominion over Franciscan goods. Oddi merely declared that:

The Order was commended by many Popes who fortified it by many ways and means as the beloved vine of God ... not only with privileges but with excommunications and eternal curses upon anyone who would attempt to dissipate or disgrace it in any way.¹⁴

The contradiction between Oddi's frequent assertions of the necessity of observing the Rule *ad litteram* and his acceptance of glosses which mitigated the severity of the Francis's

attraverso i secoli: il 1400, ed. G. Cardaropoli and M. Conti, Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto Apostolico Pontificia Università Antoniana, (Rome: Ed. Antonianum, 1981), pp. 139-262, 263-281.

¹¹ Habig, p. 1088. This story must have made a great impression on its readers. In the *Speculum Perfectionis* (c.1318) it was plucked out of the main text to form the prologue to the work; Habig, p. 1125.

¹² A. Clareno, *Chronicon seu historia septem tribulationem ordinis minorum* in *Fontes Francescane* (Assisi: Movimento Francescano, 1977), p. 1788, n. 2129.

¹³ Oddi, I, p. 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

original vision suggest either that he was automatically parroting his sources with no thought to their actual meaning, or that he sincerely believed that the Observants were pursuing the Rule to the letter, despite the fact that they retained the papal privileges.

In fact, the Observants saw the Rule and the papal declarations as one integrated tradition directing the Franciscan life. In this approach they followed Bonaventura's moderate thirteenth-century Community and the fourteenth-century Conventuals who incorporated the papal commentaries directly into the text of the Rule so that they became thought of not as glosses, but as extensions of Francis's own will. As early as 1254 Bonaventura had defended Gregory IX's *Quo elongati*, which had disposed of the Testament and reinterpreted the nature of Franciscan poverty, by implying that it was not a gloss but rather an extension of the Rule as Francis wished it to be observed since, '[Gregory IX] himself testifies that he assisted St Francis in writing the Rule and thus had a deeper insight into his intention.'¹⁵ The Conventual chronicler Arnaldus de Sarnano elaborated upon the same idea in his 1365 treatise *De cognatione S. Francisci*. Speaking of 'those friars who wish to observe the Rule purely,' he wrote:

They say that [we] do not serve the Rule, or at least not to the letter, since it has been glossed and declared upon by the Popes. It is rash to argue this and insane to pursue it. ... The pontiffs declared on the Rule according to the intention of St Francis ... wherefore I do not doubt that the community of the Order understands the Rule and wishes to observe it without gloss according to the intention of St Francis.¹⁶

Duncan Nimmo has described this interpretation of the Rule, which openly asserted that the observance of the papal declarations *was* observance of the Rule *ad litteram sine glossa*, as 'a piece of double-think and self-deception'.¹⁷ However, this interpretation gained widespread acceptance within the Order as the Franciscans struggled to adapt their mission to the needs of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The Observance itself came to the same conclusion in the early fifteenth century. Though the early Observance had attempted to live the Franciscan life *ad litteram*, it proved difficult for the growing community to expand without the latitude provided by the papal

¹⁵ Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, 'A Letter in Response to Three Questions of an Unknown Master (1254-55)' in *Works of St Bonaventure vol. V: Writings Concerning the Franciscan Order*, ed. G. Marcil, introductions and translations by D. Monti, The Franciscan Institute, (New York: St Bonaventure University, 1994), p. 45.

¹⁶ *De cognatione S. Francisci*, ed. F. Delorme in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 42 (1942), pp. 103-131.

¹⁷ Nimmo, p. 351.

declarations. The idea that the declarations formed an integral part of the Franciscan life as Francis had intended it to be lived mitigated the profound and difficult austerity of the Rule and became the established orthodoxy within the congregation. The papal declarations were certainly accepted by moderate Observants before 1430, the date of the *Martinianae* constitutions and the first Observant expositions of the Rule, all of which assumed that the papal declarations were acceptable within the framework of reform. The *Defensorium Observantiae contra deviantes* (c.1506), written to counter those who advocated a strict literal interpretation of the Rule, encapsulated the nature of the Regular Observance in its appeal to the traditions of the Order to support the Observant position:

We read that saintly canonised men of the Order, famous doctors and many others have venerated these most perfect [papal] declarations and have lived by them, and many General Chapters have stated that living by them is the same as living a perfect life in accordance with the intention of St Francis. To hold otherwise is to err.¹⁸

The use of the historical example both of Francis and of the 'holy men' of the Order is characteristic of the Observance, which constantly referred to the past in a bid to justify and validate its own interpretation of the Franciscan life. The explanation that the papal declarations were extensions of Francis's will enabled the later Observants to present themselves as the founder's true successors who obeyed the Rule 'unglossed' as he had wished. This careful definition also allowed them to recognise themselves in the early, often Spiritual-influenced, Franciscan sources which they assiduously collected, translated and inserted into their own works, and which had so celebrated the *zelantes* who abided by the Rule to the letter.¹⁹ By way of contrast, they were able to present the Conventuals, who lived a life bounded by modern statutes such as Pope Martin V's *Ad statum* (1430) which allowed them property and incomes, as having decayed from the purity of the Franciscan ideal. Thus the Observants felt themselves able to state with a clear conscience that they alone observed the Rule *sine glossa*, whilst the Conventuals had turned their back on the true Franciscan life by diminishing the authority of the Rule with modern privileges and declarations.

The Constitutiones Bernardini, 1440

¹⁸ *Defensorium Observantiae contra deviantes* in *Monumenta Ordinis Minorum* (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter, 1506), fol. CLXXXVr.

¹⁹ For a full account of the presence of Spiritual texts in Observant works see Rusconi, 'La tradizione manoscritta delle opere degli spirituali'.

It is clear that the idea that the papal declarations formed an integral part of the Rule was commonly accepted by the early fifteenth century, for even the earliest surviving Observant Rule expositions, dating from 1430, took the acceptance of the papal glosses for granted. However, the relatively high number of Observant expositions of the Rule composed during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries attest to some discussion over the interpretation of the Rule. Between 1430 and 1528 eleven tracts were written to guide the Observant brothers in their reading of the Rule. The timing of these tracts show that the Observants composed Rule expositions when they felt that the community was under attack. The major expositions are clustered in the years between 1430 and 1456, when the defensive community faced fierce attacks from the Conventuals over the *Martinianae* and *Ut sacra*, and between 1506 and 1528, when the Observants were forced to justify their 1517 papal authorisation as the principal Franciscan party.²⁰ The most important of fifteenth-century Observant Rule expositions were the so-called *Constitutiones Bernardini* of 1440.[†] Issued in the name of Bernardino da Siena, the *Constitutiones* were in fact composed by a small committee of the greatest figures in the Observant hierarchy, including Bernardino, Nicolò da Osimo and Giovanni da Capestrano. The *Constitutiones* were the primary exposition of the principles of the new Regular Observance. They dealt solely with the concerns surrounding the two supreme Franciscan virtues: poverty and obedience. Bernardino's constitutions came down firmly on the side of obedience, mitigating the level of poverty and placing great powers in the hands of the superiors who were to be obeyed in all matters.

Because the *Constitutiones Bernardini* are so important to the history of the Observance in the fifteenth century, it is worth examining them closely. They consist of seven judgements on questions that had vexed the Order for some time: five statements dealt with the question of poverty and two with obedience. The concerns are reminiscent of the discussions on the Rule which took place during the later thirteenth- and early fourteenth centuries under the rebellion of the Spirituals. Leone Bracaloni writes that, 'amongst the primitive Observants there was no lack of those who were willing to derogate obedience through their zeal for poverty, and it was against these men that the *Constitutiones* of 1440 were aimed.'²¹ The first constitution stated: 'The Friars Minor are not bound by their vow to any other advice or even commandment in the Gospel ... except

²⁰ For a list of the major Observant expositions, see F. Elizondo, 'Doctrinales Regulae Franciscanae Expositiones usque ad annum 1517', *Laurentianum* 2 (1961), pp. 449-492.

[†] N. Betagna, 'Lettera volgare veduta di S. Bernardino da Siena', *Studi Francescani* 54 (1957) pp. 86 - 90

those which are particularly mentioned in the Rule.¹²² This expressly denied the *zelante* view that the Gospel, as well as the Rule, was to be observed to the letter, as was implied in Francis's opening exhortation in the *Regula bullata* of 1223: 'The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without property, and in chastity.'¹²³ This emphasis on the Gospel as the basis for the Franciscan life had been echoed in Francis's Testament by the statement that, 'When God gave me some friars, there was no-one else to tell me what I should do; but the Most High himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of the Gospel.'¹²⁴

The *Constitutiones* particularly denied that the Order was held to the Gospel precept of Luke 10:5 to 'carry nothing with you on your journey' which had been included in the *Regula non bullata* of 1221. The Leonine sources, written by Francis's earliest and most zealous companions, reported that this precept had given rise to conflict within the early Order. It was forcibly removed from the *Regula bullata* of 1223 by the Franciscan ministers, despite the opposition of the founder and his affirmation that the brothers were 'bound to obey the Gospel in its perfection'.²⁵ Thus the Observant rejection of the Gospel's pre-eminent authority over the Franciscan life was an implicit rejection of the Leonine and Spiritual ideals of *imitatio Francisci* and *intentio Regulae*.²⁶ The *zelantes* and Spirituels had scoured every scrap of Francis's writings in an attempt to follow the life of the founder as closely as possible, arguing that, as Francis himself had proclaimed, they should be allowed to 'observe the Rule spiritually' and not just in accordance with strict

²¹ L. Bracaloni, 'La povertà francescana in San Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 45 (1945), p. 89.

²² *Constitutiones Bernardini*, 88. This view had already been stressed by Nicolò da Osimo in his c.1430 *Commandamenti della Regola*: 'Intelligitur autem observantia evangelii non quantum ad omnia que continentur in evangelio, sed quantum ad illa evangelii que in regula ponuntur.' A. Wilmart, 'Le commentaire de Nicolas d'Osimo sur la règle de saint François' in *Analecta Regimensia; Extraits des manuscrits latins de la reine Christine conservés au Vatican*, Studi e testi 59 (Città del Vaticano: [n.pub.], 1933), p. 303.

²³ Habig, p. 57.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 65

²⁵ *Constitutiones Bernardini*, p. 88. Compare Francis's recommendation in the *Regula non bullata* of 1221, 'As they go about the country, the friars are to take nothing with them on their journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money.' (Habig, p. 42) to the same section in the *Regula bullata* of 1223 (Habig, p. 60) where the brothers are merely advised not to travel on horseback. The Leonine sources were particularly insistent that this mitigation was against Francis's wishes. See Brooke, *Scripta Leonis*, p. 208.

²⁶ This idea is advanced by Leone Bracaloni amongst others. In his article, 'La povertà francescana in San Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 45 (1945), pp. 83-90, Bracaloni comments that in the *Constitutiones Bernardini*, 'in realtà si viene ad una definitiva demolizione di quelli ch'erano i caposaldi dello spiritualismo francescano' (p. 85).

legal precepts. With the 1440 *Constitutiones*, the Regular Observance announced its intention to govern the spiritual life of its adherents. The brothers were to be bound to live the Franciscan life solely according to its interpretation of the Rule. The ideal of *imitatio Francisci* laid no claims on the fifteenth-century friar. In this the Observants followed the judgement of Clement V in *Exivi de paradiso* (1312), the papal reply to the concerns of the Spirituals.²⁷ That the same concerns were obviously still vexing the Observants over a century later is indicative of how much the congregation had been influenced by its radical origins in the hermitages of central Italy. There were still primitive and Spiritual tendencies within the community that its leadership felt it best to eradicate once and for all.

The second declaration was of equal importance and confirms this tendency to refute beliefs which might link the Observance to the former Spiritual party or to the groups of Fraticelli which still survived in central Italy despite fierce inquisitorial persecution. It stated:

The brothers are not held through their vow to any other strict use of things but that which is particularly expressed in the Rule. ... According to the Rule and the whole truth, the moderate use of things, except for the use of money, is conceded to the brothers for the support of life and the execution of office.²⁸

Other declarations in the *Constitutiones* also attempted to ease Observant scruples over their level of poverty. The fourth decision, necessary due to the expansion of the Observance into former Conventual houses, stated that 'the superfluity and curiosity of the houses are not good enough reasons for the brothers to leave them', whilst the fifth and sixth decisions allowed the brothers to eat meat and to 'use chalices and patens of silver, as long as they are not of too great and excessive size or preciousness'.²⁹

Again, these declarations implicitly rejected Spiritual and Fraticelli ideals. The debate over strict use (*usus pauper*) had raged between the Conventuals and the Spirituals. The ideal had been formulated by one of the greatest figures of the Spiritual era, Pierre Déjean Olieu (Peter John Olivi) (1248-1298).³⁰ He proposed that Franciscans were bound by their vow not only to a total renunciation of ownership, but also to the most basic level of use possible for each brother. The Order had always advocated some form of poor use

²⁷ *An. Min.* VI, 203.

²⁸ *Constitutiones Bernardini*, p. 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁰ On Olivi see D. Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty*; and Douie, pp. 81-119.

(*Exiit qui seminat* (1279) had denied the brothers the use of 'any superfluity, wealth, or plenty which would derogate from poverty'³¹), but Olivi linked poor use to the vow, making it a mortal sin if disregarded.³² This became a popular principle amongst the Spirituals. Nimmo writes of Ubertino da Casale that, 'fiery pamphleteer as he was, he recognised the theory's great controversial potential, and made of it almost the Spirituals' key concept.'³³

The Spiritual concept of *usus pauper* had displeased certain sections of the Order, partly because it imposed an extremely strict ideal that many brothers had felt unable to live up to, but also because the authority of the superiors had been lessened by making the level of use implicit in the vow of obedience. The 1440 *Constitutiones* targeted this idea as well, stating in the third declaration that:

Because the temperance or moderation of the said use must be judged according to the quality of the people involved or the variety of weathers, the conditions of the house and other accidental circumstances ... the subject brothers cannot and must not judge for themselves, but the ministers, *custodes* or those they appoint to this authority must prudently judge each case according to their conscience.³⁴

This assertion formed the core of the *Constitutiones*. Not only were the brothers tied to moderate use, but the standard was to be determined by their superiors and the brothers were to be held in obedience to follow this judgement. This injunction was aimed at any brothers who might follow the Spirituals in repudiating the authority of their superiors with an appeal to Francis's statement in the *Regula Bullata* of 1223. Francis here enjoined the brothers to obey their ministers in everything that 'is not against their conscience and our Rule'.³⁵ Such a formulation gave zealots with a scrupulous conscience rather a wide range for complaint. However, the final declaration of the *Constitutiones* made clear that any brother who disagreed with his superior's estimation of moderate use was to be severely punished:

In all areas of doubt ... [the subjects] are held to abide by the judgement of their prelates. Those who do otherwise are held to be transgressors of

³¹ Quoted by Nimmo, p. 62.

³² Lambert, pp. 149-183, in particular pp. 150-152. David Burr has published Olivi's tracts on *usus pauper*: Petrus Joannis Olivi, *De usu paupere: the Quaestio and the Tractatus*, ed. D. Burr, (Florence: Olschki, 1992).

³³ Nimmo, p. 102.

³⁴ *Constitutiones Bernardini*, p. 88.

³⁵ Habig, p. 63. For an examination of the arguments surrounding the vow of obedience in the Franciscan Order see Nimmo, pp. 34-38.

obedience and must justly be punished by their superiors with ecclesiastical censure or other suitable punishment.³⁶

It could be argued that the promulgation of the *Constitutiones* does not represent a pivotal moment in the history of the Observance. It is certainly true that since the 1420s Bernardino and Capestrano had already been busily preaching their doctrines and living their exemplary lives of moderation and obedience. Ten years earlier the *Martinianae* (1430) had already posited a moderate Franciscan life in accordance with the papal glosses. By 1440, the congregation had long been growing in popularity and size and was as comfortable in the bustling towns of Renaissance society as it was in the tiny and isolated hermitages of the early Observance. Yet the *Constitutiones* represent something very important. One by one the rulings consciously addressed the ideals of those who pursued a literal observance of the Franciscan Rule and then carefully removed the possibility of justifying those ideals in any context but that of heroic individualism. A saint might pursue the austere demands of *imitatio Francisci*, but the congregation as a whole was to be rooted in a daily, practical ideal of moderation and obedience. There was a weight of tradition that supported the heroic literal observance, of which the Observants, with their love of rummaging amongst what they felt to be the 'authentic' sources of the Order, were well aware.³⁷ From c.1368 to c.1415 the early Observance had been based in precisely this culture.

The uncompromising practicality of the *Constitutiones* was therefore an unprecedentedly explicit development away from the congregation's background and as such, extremely important. The *Constitutiones* formed a statement of intent. By allowing for an expansion that would consolidate the Observance in the towns, marketplaces and schools, they equipped the congregation for a long and effective career. The *Constitutiones* were a public affirmation that the brotherhood could be trusted by Church and papacy: it would not self-destruct into heretical arguments over poverty as so many reformed Franciscan congregations had done before. Instead, with their emphasis on

³⁶ *Constitutiones Bernardini*, p. 89.

³⁷ The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sources for the history of the Order, often written by or including interpolations by Spiritual writers, tended to emphasise the necessity of a strict observance of the Rule and Francis's own example. See Habig; and Brooke, *Scripta Leonis*. On the Observant devotion to these sources see R. Rusconi, 'La tradizione manoscritta delle opere degli spirituali nelle biblioteche dei predicatori e dei conventi dell'Osservanza', *PS* 12 (1975), pp. 63-137.

obedience, Bernardino's statutes proclaimed that the brothers would be humble servants to the papacy in an era of conciliarism and religious upheaval. Thus the *Constitutiones* represent an important reformulation of the ideal and self-conception of the Observance. They determined the daily life of all Observants and thus influenced their perception of their own identity. This was done by presenting a distinctive ideal that emphasised the virtues of obedience and moderation; a practical ideal that set to one side the more traditional heroisms of *imitatio Francisci*. In sum, they presented a new face to the outside world, promoting the Observance as a dependable and moderate congregation.

Giovanni Pili da Fano and the *Dialoghi de la salute*

The *Constitutiones Bernardini* were intended to be the definitive reply to the questions and doubts of the Observant brothers. Yet Giovanni Pili da Fano's two expositions of the Rule, the *Dialogo de la salute* (1527) which he radically revised in second edition of 1535, offer evidence that the *Constitutiones* and the other Rule commentaries of the Regular Observance had not entirely quietened the concerns of the brothers. Pili responded to worries over the correct level of poverty, the extent to which the congregation should follow a policy of *imitatio Francisci*, and the brotherhood's position within the Order as a whole. In his first version of the work, Pili, writing with the threat of the Capuchins in mind, addressed these concerns with characteristic directness. Born c.1469 to a noble family in the Marches of Central Italy, he had entered the Observance in 1485/6, was ordained to the priesthood and became a renowned preacher. In 1518 he was elected Provincial Minister for the Marches. In 1525 the province he governed became the birthplace of the Capuchins and Pili was the first Observant forced to oppose the new Franciscan movement. As Provincial Minister he dealt harshly with those who fled their houses for a stricter life. In 1525 he declared the Capuchin founder Matteo da Bascio a fugitive from the Order and had him imprisoned. Later in the same year he also pursued the Capuchins' second founder Lodovico da Fossombrone as an apostate from the Order, until Lodovico procured a papal bull allowing himself and his followers to persevere with their eremitical vision. The first version of the *Dialogo de la salute* (1527) was Pili's response to the rise of the Capuchins.³⁸

³⁸ B. da Lapedona, 'Il *Dialogo di salute* di Giovanni Pili da Fano', *L'Italia Francescana* 7-10 (1932-1935).

However, Pili, always known for his personal austerity, began himself to have doubts about the standards of the Observance. He felt that the congregation had lost much of the energy and idealism that had characterised its early development. In 1534 he fled to Rome and requested admittance to the Capuchins from Lodovico da Fossombrone, the friar he had once castigated for similarly leaving the Observance. The second *Dialogo de la salute* (1535) was composed after Pili's defection from the Observance. It was rewritten from a Capuchin standpoint and was suitably emended to reflect the author's new convictions, but was never published.³⁹ Pili quickly became a significant figure in the Capuchin Order. Not only was his sensational defection greeted with great joy and compared widely to St Paul's Damascene conversion, but his administrative talents also became very useful to the new community. He immediately took up positions of authority, becoming Commissary General for North Italy in 1535, Diffinitor General (1535 and 1538), Provincial Minister for the Marches (1537), and founder of the Capuchin provinces of Venice and Milan. He died in 1539 at the age of seventy.⁴⁰

The first redaction of the *Dialogo de la salute* was written in 1527 under the early pressures of the new Capuchin reform. Published in the same year at Ancona, its full title was *Dialogo de la salute tra el frate stimolato et el frate rationabile circa la regula de li frati Minori et sue dechiaratione per stimolati*. As the title makes clear, the *Dialogo* approached the Rule through the conceit of a discussion between two friars; the 'ardent brother' (Frater Stimulatus), an eager youngster who scrupled over every doubt and yearned to follow the Rule purely, and the learned 'reasonable brother' (Frater Rationabilis), an upright pillar of the Observance who counselled him sagely and with pious restraint. Pili intended the exposition to sway friars who might be having doubts about their position in the Observance, and wrote with these men always in mind. He tailored the work to their needs: 'This is written in the vulgar mother-tongue so that the simple and unlettered might understand it. And it is short so that it can be read more often and may be remembered more easily.'⁴¹

³⁹ B. da Lapedona, 'Il *Dialogo di salute* del P. Giovanni Pili da Fano (Trascritto dal cosiddetto 'Codice Cingolano')', *L'Italia Francescana* 10-13 (1935-1938).

⁴⁰ For a full account of Giovanni Pili da Fano's life see B. da Lapedona, 'P. Giovanni Pili da Fano', *L'Italia Francescana*, 37-39 (1962-1964); O. de Veghel, 'Jean de Fano' in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, VIII, pp. 506-509; and C. Urbanelli, 'L'Osservanza e la riforma Cappuccina nei due *Dialoghi* di Giovanni Pili da Fano', *PS* 12 (1975), pp. 160-177.

⁴¹ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 7 (1932), p. 302.

In his introduction Pili declared himself aware that the Rule could be interpreted in different ways, but accused the reformers of becoming innovators in their search for an authentic observance:

Many in the Order walk by different roads, for some, in following a way that is too wide, show an open, dangerous and scandalous relaxation. Others choose a narrow life, difficult, scrupulous and almost unwise, and by leaving the life that was led by our most learned and ardent holy fathers, they live and preach a novel and eccentric [*nova et singulare*] life. Whether they do well or err in this shall be shown below.⁴²

Unsurprisingly, they were shown to err. A worried Frater Stimulatus echoed the complaints of the reformers when he confessed his disquiet over the aspects of the Observant lifestyle that seemed to him to contradict the Rule:

Firstly, the glosses and declarations of the holy Popes on the Rule, which the blessed Francis absolutely forbade. ... Secondly, the unwarranted recourse to spiritual friends for money and the indiscreet acceptance of money for masses and offices. ... Thirdly, the general relaxation of our way of life in things which touch on the Rule and the statutes of the Order, such as buildings, vestments, food and the habit. ... Fourthly, from the variety of reforms and differences in habit ... it seems that it is not possible to observe the Rule without schisms and sects.⁴³

These concerns have a familiar ring, for they deal with the same questions that had vexed the Franciscan Order almost continually since the death of Francis in 1226. In essence they are the same problems that Bernardino had addressed: all four questions are obviously closely bound up with the relative merits of poverty and obedience, the extent to which the brothers were held by *imitatio Francisci*, and how much weight should be placed on the idea of *intentio Regulae*. The *Constitutiones* had not been able fully to reconcile some brothers to the need for a moderate interpretation of the Rule.

Pili's response to these fundamental doubts is very revealing. What becomes particularly interesting about Pili's exposition is that he could see cracks in the Observant identity. The Observant self-consciousness delineated by Pili was muted and rather ambivalent. His sometimes bullish defence of the congregation could not hide the fact that the Observance, only a decade after the triumph of *Ite vos*, was undergoing a crisis of identity caused by the rise of the Capuchins. The two versions of the Franciscan ideal that had marked the evolution of the congregation - the contemplative eremitism of the early Observance and the active pastoral life of Bernardino and Capestrano - were, with the

⁴² Ibid., p. 302.

revolt of the Capuchins, coming into conflict. Pili wrote from the centre of that conflict and his strategies for dealing with it affected his representation of the Observance. Firstly, he acknowledged the imperfections of the contemporary, sixteenth-century Observant life. Secondly, in contrast to the carefully practical nature of the *Constitutiones*, he consciously attempted to promote an Observant vocation that he later admitted to be more an abstract traditional ideal than a contemporary lived reality:

It was always my intention in the first *Dialogo* to commend the way of life ordered and observed by the aforesaid holy men [Bernardino, Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca] and not the way of life of the many, especially of modern times.⁴⁴

This ideal closely followed the example of these 'holy men', advocating a moderate lifestyle and explicitly denying the need for *imitatio Francisci*. Finally, Pili examined the history of the Order to trace the development of reform across the centuries. Here, he stressed the need for the Observance to take on an identity that was authorised by orthodox Franciscan tradition rather than more radical ideals. Whilst stigmatising other attempts at Franciscan reform, he presented the Observant congregation as the only legitimate response to a desire to obey the Rule fully.

Pili was honest enough to admit to his readers that the Observance was a less than perfect creation. He could see that the congregation, though affirmed by Leo X in 1517 as the principal branch of the Franciscan Order, faced problems caused by lack of discipline and a waning of enthusiasm for the spiritual life. Some sense of his anger at the way that Observant standards had fallen is revealed in Rationabilis's vituperative passage against the Guardians of Observant houses:

If the Guardians were to do their duty, [the *stimulati*] need pursue no other reformation; instead they are a potent cause of all the transgressions in the Order because they are negligent and pusillanimous, do not care for the Observance, are the first transgressors, and do not burn to reprehend and punish others. For all the relaxations and defects, for every loss and damage that the Order and its observance suffers because of them, because of their negligence and bad lives, they will render an account to God at the point of death. It would be better for their souls if they were unlearned and simple.⁴⁵

Commenting later on the necessity of obedience, Rationabilis once more acknowledged Observant faults but defended the congregation by arguing that gradual relaxation was a

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 388-390.

⁴⁴ *Dialogo de la salute emendato* (1535), *L'Italia Francescana* 12 (1937), p. 16.

common theme in all religious orders. However, he advised that some kind of reform was a necessity:

I say that the Order is relaxed, not only in the essentials of the Rule but also in the things written in the Rule which serve the essentials. ... However, it is common to all the servants of God, as much to secular clerics as to religious, that those who relax from their good customs should be reformed. ... I say that the subject brothers must be forced to reformation and to the observance of the constitutions.⁴⁶

This may sound like a call for drastic reform, but the ideal that Pili wished the brothers to conform to was conspicuously traditional. In attempting to refute the Capuchins, Pili felt it necessary to follow rigidly the examples of Bernardino and Capestrano in presenting a moderate Observance. The keynote to his exposition comes in the section on the use of glosses. Here Pili emphasised his traditionalism when he failed to perceive any contradiction between his assertion that the Rule should be observed *ad litteram sine glossa* and his unreserved approval of the use of papal declarations and Rule expositions:

I do not mean to gloss the Rule, nor change it in any way, because the blessed Francis affirmed that he received it from Jesus Christ who wished it to be understood and observed to the letter and without gloss. I wish only to rediscover its true and rational meaning in the way that our holy fathers, eminent in sanctity and illumined in doctrine, and also the holy popes, ordered it to be understood and observed.⁴⁷

He relished the papal privileges awarded to the Observance and deemed it heretical to question the papal declarations on the Rule, which were permitted because 'the blessed Francis cannot issue laws to the holy pontiffs'.⁴⁸ Francis's personal influence was to be further eroded. Where the *Constitutiones* had merely specified that the brothers were not bound to obey anything outside the Rule, Pili linked this explicitly to the idea of *imitatio Francisci*, stating forthrightly that: 'the brothers are not bound to the perfection that the blessed Francis achieved in his own life, but only to what is contained in the Rule'.⁴⁹ Thus the challenging standard of *imitatio Francisci* was no longer to be held up as an ideal for the average Observant brother.

⁴⁵ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 7 (1932), pp. 584.

⁴⁶ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 8 (1933), p. 186.

⁴⁷ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 7 (1932), p. 302.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 502, 391.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

Pili also followed the traditional stance of the Regular Observance on the virtues of obedience and poverty. He stressed the absolute necessity of obedience. Addressing the desire of the *stimulati* to fast, wear a poor habit and practice flagellation, he placed the virtue of obedience above these traditional penitential practices:

In this the brothers are held to obedience even if it is not necessary on health grounds, for sometimes it is necessary to abandon good [deeds] in favour of obedience. And even if this seems to be against the Rule, nevertheless, if the prelate is moved by reasonable grounds ... you must submit your own judgement to the judgement of the prelate, and you must obey.⁵⁰

On poverty, he allowed the common ownership of books (though preachers could have 'a book or two of sermons' for their own personal use⁵¹), concluded that brothers should own one habit and hold hoods in common, and specified the level of *viltà* permitted in the habit:

We are not allowed to wear a habit that is deformed in colour, coarseness or age. For it is one thing to be a poor Friar Minor of whom it is expected that he maintain a standard of respectability, poverty and honesty, in conformity with reason and in uniformity with the community; it is quite another thing to be a scoundrel and a hermit.⁵²

Pili here used 'hermit' as a general term of abuse: by 1527 any Franciscan who desired the eremitical life was deemed a scoundrel. The Regular Observants had come a long way from the eremitical poverty of their origins. Pili's stance on the ordinances of the Rule offered an eminently practical ideal which carefully abided by Regular Observant tradition and which gave little ground to the austere hopes of the Capuchins on strict poverty, contemplation and eremitism.

In line with his rigid adherence to previous expositions of the Rule, Pili placed great emphasis on the necessity to assume a historically-defined identity. He himself commented, as quoted above, that he aimed to follow 'our holy fathers, eminent in sanctity and illumined in doctrine' in his gloss of the Rule.⁵³ He also had *Rationabilis* continually refer to the way that the Observant life had been sanctified by the example of 'our holy fathers'. The laws and statutes of the institution were more important in creating

⁵⁰ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 8 (1933), p. 49.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁵³ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 7 (1932), p. 302.

the identity of the Observance than the idea of *imitatio Francisci*. Citing the *Constitutiones*, Rationabilis quoted from Proverbs 22:28, 'Remove not the ancient landmark which your fathers have set', and went on to explain:

From which it is clear that in the observance of the Rule no-one may proceed according to his own ideas, but must follow the ways that our holy fathers ordained and defined.⁵⁴

Yet while Rationabilis defensively relied on the sanctity and authority of Bernardino and Capestrano to justify the Observant life, he accepted that this life had deteriorated somewhat since their time:

Certainly we cannot deny that among those who profess Gospel perfection there are some who are imperfect. ... But look at the declarations of S. Bernardino when he was first Vicar General during the first reformation of the Order; along with B. Giovanni da Capestrano and many other holy brothers he issued a declaration on the Rule. There you will find it clearly shown that the way of life of the Family of the Observance is very safe and that the brothers may have quiet consciences. And this way of life (although it is now somewhat distanced from that first reformation) is not wholly annihilated and destroyed.⁵⁵

In a further attempt to show how the Observance had been sanctified by history, Pili offered an account of the many scandalous reform attempts within the Franciscan Order from its first days right up to the revolt of the Capuchins to which the *Dialogo* was a response. This formed an answer to the query as to whether it was possible to observe the Rule without giving rise to schisms and sects. Pili showed Franciscan history to be puckered and scarred with scandals and tribulations:

This is certainly due to human nature, which is prone to seeking evil, and not less to the envy of demons, who, seeing their fruitfulness for the Church, demanded of God that they should be allowed to destroy the Order.⁵⁶

Each era had its cast of villains. Pili described those who pushed for reform as 'rash, proud, scandalous, seditious and heretics'⁵⁷, tracing a line that led from Elia da Cortona, Francis's successor as Minister who had presided over the first relaxations of the Order, through Spirituals such as Ubertino da Casale, Michele da Cesena and the Fraticelli to the contemporary Capuchins. Interestingly, he also condemned Gentile da Spoleto, the

⁵⁴ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 7 (1932), p. 393.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 497.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 500.

associate of Giovanni da Valle and Paoluccio dei Trinci, for his failed attempt at reform, though he did not link Gentile to the origins of the Observance. The Observant reform was the only one that Pili felt was justifiable due to the parlous state of the late fourteenth-century Order: 'because of this,' he wrote, '[the Observants] had good cause to part from the transgressors and renew the observance of the Rule'.⁵⁸

Pili saw no shadow of the Capuchin situation in his description of the early Observance: 'many good brothers, zealots for the Rule, went to the hermitages; some others wanted to live honestly in their convents. Both groups suffered tribulations.'⁵⁹ Yet Pili chose to exalt the institutionalised life of the later-fifteenth century Regular Observance rather than the brotherhood in its earliest idealism. He presented the Observance as being divinely ordained. It was protected by its own ingenuity, as well as by the favour of God and the prayers of St Francis:

And so, with the grace of God, this Family came to this way of life and progress, and it will continue to go from good to better and will endure eternally: for Chapters General have been held [since *Ut sacra* (1446)] in both the Ultramontane and Cismontane provinces, and many orders have been issued for the conservation of the Observance. This holy Family of the Observance has not lacked in persecutions, for the Conventual brothers have many times tried to ruin it; but, spurred on by the prayers of the seraphic father [Francis], God has never allowed this.⁶⁰

In a passage that illuminates the Observant craving for respectability above all else, Pili condemned the Capuchins for their one-sided attempt at a policy of *imitatio Francisci*:

Truly those poor little things fool themselves by reading some of the works that Francis wrote at the start of his vocation. Because there were so few brothers they went about alone, they stayed in the wilderness and in the homes of layfolk, and wore differing habits. But once the Rule was confirmed, Francis ordered that they should live together in houses, and go about two by two. He reduced the Order to suitable respectability [*conveniente decentia*], not to what the Capuchins think at all.⁶¹

The key words used by Pili emphasised this idea. He repeatedly characterised the Observance with the terms *decente*, *rasonevole*, and *rationabile*, contrasting the 'innovations' of the Capuchins with the 'reasonable' Observant interpretation of the Rule.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 629.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 501.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 502.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 628.

For Pili, anyone who challenged the Observant conception of the Franciscan identity was inspired by the devil:

I say that [the Capuchins] are rash, ignorant of the Rule and its profession: they are vagabonds, proud and ambitious men who wish to be called reformers of the Order. They see perfection in the exterior habit, but hardly care for the inner life. They are impatient, hard-headed, of bad conscience (for they murmur slanders against the Order, even among layfolk), and without any spirit of devotion.⁶²

These accusations are strikingly similar to the criticisms made of the Observance by the Conventual party in the fifteenth century and show that the Observance was willing to lash out when its own conception of the Franciscan identity was under threat.

Only seven years after writing the first version of the *Dialogo de la Salute* Pili fled to the Capuchins and in 1535-6 produced the *Dialogo emendato*. The work falls outside my period of study, but the *Dialogo emendato* is interesting for its new depiction of the Observance. The reasons that Rationabilis gave for his move to the Capuchins are particularly revealing:

Firstly, because [the Capuchins] have found a way of life that accords with the purity of the Rule and conforms with the intention of St Francis and his companions. Secondly, because they have been greatly opposed and persecuted (which is the best sign that the community is of God). ... Thirdly, because the reformations of the Conventual fathers and the Family [of the Observance] have been found wanting in almost every way.⁶³

As a Capuchin, Pili now believed that the Observants' rebuttal of the ideals of *intentio Regulae* and *imitatio Francisci* had fatally damaged their reform. The *Dialogo emendato* placed great emphasis on these central concepts, abiding by the Testament 'because in it our father shows his intention', and asserting that 'we have rediscovered the true intention of our father St Francis over the observance of the Rule'.⁶⁴ The life of Giovanni Pili da Fano illustrates clearly the divide between the 'two souls' of the Observance. His works straddled this divide: one *Dialogo* was based in a practical vocation which engaged closely with secular life; the other promoted an essentially contemplative ideal of perfecting the soul through the imitation of Francis's more heroic virtues. His defection shows how these two ideals had existed uneasily within the Observance until the advent of the Capuchins brought the tensions between them into the open.

⁶² Ibid., p. 627.

⁶³ *Dialogo di salute emendato* (1535), *L'Italia Francescana* 10 (1935), p. 587.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 492, 588.

The Observant Constitutions

The Observant constitutions between 1430 and 1527 dealt less directly with the Rule than the expositions, for they expanded upon the document rather than interpreting it, but they can be equally revealing. They put into practice the conclusions of the expositions on a day-to-day level. By dealing so closely with the concerns and problems of the congregation at their roots they provide an unself-conscious representation of the Observant life. Along with the expositions of the Rule, the constitutions were the most important factors in the formation of the Observant identity. The constitutions affected every friar equally and so were concerned with promoting a practical ideal that could be followed by all the brothers. There was a strong emphasis on administrative duties, including details of visitation rights, voting procedures and the processes involved in accepting alms. In the earlier statutes these measures had the effect of fostering and developing the institutional separatism of what was still a relatively new congregation. The values of the moderate Regular Observance, represented by Bernardino and Capestrano, were developed and disseminated. Thus the constitutions were based less on the ideal of *imitatio Francisci* than on reverence for the institutional traditions of the Order. They emphasised the need for education, restraint in poverty, the importance of obedience and moderation, and also evinced some signs of concern over the Observant image. Yet the constitutions not only show the ideal that the Observants were aiming for; they also illuminate the problems that the congregation was constantly struggling against. The repeated censures of an array of crimes and failings show a seamier side of the Observant life that the leaders of the congregation were continually battling to control through regulations and discipline.

The fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Observant constitutions that survive have never been published in collected form. Some have been printed in journals and periodicals; others were shortened and incorporated into contemporary Observant chronicles; and a few remain only in their original manuscript redactions.⁶⁵ The statutes were composed at General or Provincial Chapters which were chiefly responsible for

⁶⁵ For instance, I was able to examine a fifteenth century manuscript collection of Observant constitutions which includes statutes from several Italian Chapters to 1492: *Constitutiones Fratrum Minorum*, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Cod. Landau Finaly 18. The manuscript is dated to the 1490s.

Observant governance. Because the administration of the Observance had been split between the separate Cismontane and Ultramontane regions in 1446, each area produced its own independent constitutions. However, most Observant statutes remain markedly similar, even when geographically or chronologically disparate. All have a common source in the *Farinieriae* constitutions of 1354 which had been the fundamental Conventual expression of the Franciscan life and which had regulated the Order unchallenged until the promulgation of the *Martinianae* in 1430.⁶⁶ The *Farinieriae* were moderate, legislating for a measure of relaxation from the standards of the thirteenth century: they tacitly acknowledged both the acceptance of rents and the incurrence of debts, allowed for the ownership of goods, and permitted the brothers to receive personal financial support from family or patrons.⁶⁷ Of the *Farinieriae*, Moorman commented that 'the picture which they give is of a highly organised society of men with a strict rule of life expressing austerity rather than destitution, and simplicity rather than insecurity.'⁶⁸

The influence of the *Farinieriae* is evident in all the collections of constitutions between 1430 and 1526. Altogether I have examined the statutes of over eighty Chapters, both Provincial and General, Ultramontane and Cismontane, which date from this period. The majority of the statutes emanated from fifty-one Italian Provincial Chapters.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁶ For the text of the *Farinieriae*, see M. Bihl, 'Statuta Generalia Ordinis edita in Capitulo Generali an. 1354 Assisii celebrato', *AFH* 35 (1942), pp. 35-112, 177-253.

⁶⁷ For a thorough examination of the *Farinieriae* see Nimmo, pp. 210-222.

⁶⁸ Moorman, p. 329.

⁶⁹ A good selection of Italian constitutions have also been published in the leading Franciscan journals: G. Abate, 'Le costituzioni degli Osservanti della provincia di S. Bernardino (Abruzzo) del 1505', *MF* 30 (1930), pp. 3-16; M. Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia Fratrum Minorum Observantium Thusciae ann. 1457 et 1518', *AFH* 8 (1915), pp. 146-188; idem, 'Ordinazioni di Capitoli Generali degli Osservanti cismontani (1490-1512) e di Capitoli Provinciali degli Osservanti veneti (1467-1513)', *Le Venezie Francescane* 32 (1965-1966), pp. 3-35; I. Calamandrei, 'Constitutiones Fratrum Minorum Observantium provinciae Thusciae ann. 1507 et 1523', *AFH* 8 (1915), pp. 189-225; C. Cenci, 'Privilegi e Costituzioni in un codice dell'Osservanza di Siena', *AFH* 77 (1984), pp. 68-80; L. Oliger, 'Statuta Observantium provinciae S. Angeli in Apulia a. 1448 et tabula congregationis Observantium cismontanorum a. 1467', *AFH* 8 (1915), pp. 92-105; G. Picconi di Cantalupo (ed.), 'Minoritica Provincia Bolognese: Ordinazioni provinciali del secolo XV' in *Centone di memorie storiche concernanti la minoritica provincia di Bologna* tom. II, (Parma: Tipografia della SS. Nunziata, 1911), pp. 365-375; A. Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta provincialia Fratrum Minorum Observantium Ianuae an. 1487-1521', *AFH* 22 (1929), pp. 114-138, 358-378, 529-47; idem, 'Statuti Provinciali dei frati Minori Osservanti di Toscana an. 1456-1506', *SF* 20 (1923), pp. 115-157. Finally, some constitutions were also incorporated into early modern Franciscan collections of the Order's laws and privileges, though very rarely in complete form. They can be found in the following texts: A. de Casarubios, *Compendium Privilegiorum Fratrum Minorum* (Cologne: Joannem Kinchium sub Monocerote, 1619); *Chronologia historico-legalis seraphici ordinis fratrum minorum santi patri Francisci*, tom I (1209-1633), (Naples: Ex typografia Camilli Cavalli, 1650); J. B. Confettius, *Collectio*

other twenty-four collections come from Chapters held in France, Bohemia, Germany and Spain.⁷⁰ Only six of the sets of statutes were promulgated at General Chapters. The General Statutes are of particular interest, for they regulated the lives of a far greater number of brothers than the Provincial constitutions and are more likely to reflect and express the Observant mentality. Of these I was able to examine four collections that were compiled in Italy (the *Martinianae* of 1430, and those composed at Osimo in 1461, Mantua in 1467 and Assisi in 1526) and two sets from the Ultramontane General Chapters of Barcelona (1451) and Lyons (1518), as well as the condensed and paraphrased versions of many General Statutes to be found in the 1508 chronicle of Nicholas Glassberger.⁷¹ Whilst this survey of Observant constitutions is by no means exhaustive, it is possible to draw at least some tentative conclusions from such a large number of statutes.

Firstly, as is to be expected, the constitutions played a vital part in the creation of the Observance as a separate institutional entity within the Franciscan Order as a whole. Nearly all the legislation described in great detail the administrative duties that were the most fundamental sign of the Observants' separation from the Conventuals. The responsibilities of the guardians, Provincial Vicars and the Vicar General were established. The relationships that existed between each level of the congregation were regulated and the obligations due at each level were standardised. The Genoese Observants even divided their Provincial statutes (1487-1521) into sections according to the hierarchy of the congregation, defining the duties of 'Guardians', 'Preachers and Confessors', 'Priests,

privilegiorum sacrorum Ordinum Fratrum mendicantium et non-mendicantium, (Cologne: Joannem Kinchium sub Monocerote, 1619); *Monumenta Ordinis Minorum* (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter, 1506); Wadding, *An. Min.* (Florence: Quaracchi, 1931-1933).

⁷⁰ N. Glassberger, *Chronica Fr. Nicolai Glassberger*, *AF* 2 (1887); J-X. Lalo, *Les premiers mémoires imprimés de l'Ordre Franciscain*, Studi e testi francescani n. 58, (Venezia: L.I.E.F Edizioni, 1976); M. Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia provinciae Coloniae O. F. M. Observ. annorum 1474 et 1524', *AFH* 7 (1914), pp. 710-738; F. Delorme, 'Les actes de deux chapitres tenus à Toulouse (1437 et 1518)', *Miscellanea francescana* 38 (1938), pp. 557-571; G. Fussenegger, 'Statuta Observantium provinciae Bohemiae annis 1471 et 1480 condita', *AFH* 47 (1954), pp. 367-384; B. Kruitwagen, 'Statuta provinciae Saxoniae condita Brandenburgii an. 1467, immutata Luneburgii an. 1494', *AFH* 3 (1910), pp. 98-114, 280-293.

⁷¹ *An. Min.* X, 147-160; M. Bihl, 'Statuta generalia Observantium Ultramontanorum an. 1451 Barcinonae condita. Eorum textus editur; de eorum methodo, indole etc. disseretur', *AFH* 37 (1945), pp. 106-197; A. Matanic, 'Statuti Lionesi dei Frati Minori, redatti nel 1518', *SF* 72, 1975, pp. 49-82; A. Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta Observantium cismontanorum in compendium redacta in congregatione generali Auximi an. 1461', *AFH* 16 (1923), pp. 493-506; L. Oliger, 'Statuta Observantium provinciae S. Angeli in Apulia a. 1448 et tabula congregationis Observantium cismontanorum a. 1467', *AFH* 8 (1915), pp. 92-105; P. Capobianco, 'Statuta Generalia Fratrum Minorum regularis observantiae anno 1526 edita', *SF* 58 (1961), pp. 287-317.

Clerics and Lay Brothers' and 'Servants'.⁷² A comprehensive set of rules covering financial dealings, living standards, contraventions of the rules and their punishments was created and continually revised. The election procedures for officials were organised and repeated regularly. Such legislation was practical rather than idealistic, but these fundamental orders provided the underpinning of the congregation and created the institutional apparatus of a separate identity.

Secondly, the way of life that was fostered by the Chapters was one that reflected the aspirations of the moderate Regular Observance. The fifteenth-century congregation was keen to establish its moderation through a vocation which conformed to the broad fundamentals of Francis's vision, yet was acceptable both to Church and laity. It was intended to be an inclusive ideal, not limited to the few brothers heroic enough to follow a strict life of *imitatio Francisci*. The constitutions emphasised this point, for they added to the founder's Rule, making it both more understandable and more observable and, to all intents and purposes, glossing it just as Francis had forbidden. On the other hand, neither the ideal of *imitatio Francisci* nor the founder himself played a large role in the Observant constitutions. Francis was a distant figure and seems to wield surprisingly little authority. This is partly due to the particular nature of the constitutions. Since they commented around the Rule, merely filling in the cracks and responding to situations that Francis had never anticipated, they referred to little outwith their own strictly administrative boundaries.

However, it is still notable that the founder was directly cited as an example to the brethren only six times in the eighty-one sets of statutes I have examined, which span nearly a hundred years of Observant administration. References to Francis include the highly unusual ruling of the Bohemian constitutions of 1471; 'Item, let the Testament of St Francis be read to the brothers,' and the statute promulgated at Basle (1453), which encouraged the brothers to reform their spiritual life by concentrating on mental prayer, 'so that they are able to partake of the spirit of God and the mind of our most blessed father Francis'.⁷³ As well as these brief references there are a few extremely short passages citing Francis's example in the practice of fasting, and three mentions of the celebration of

⁷² Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta provincialia Ianuae 1487-1521', pp. 126-130.

⁷³ Fussenegger, 'Statuta provinciae Bohemiae 1471 et 1480', p. 84; *Memoriale Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* in Lalo, p. 82.

the founder's feast-day.⁷⁴ In the constitutions, Observant devotion was directed less towards the charismatic and contradictory figure of the founder than towards the Rule as a legal and administrative document or more modern traditions such as their own constitutions and expositions, in particular the *Constitutiones Bernardini* and Giovanni da Capestrano's statutes of 1443.⁷⁵

The moderation of the constitutions is visible above all in the way in which they deal with concerns that were of particular interest to the Observance. The congregation based itself firmly in the institutional traditions of the Order, using the *Farinieriae* statutes as a foundation for its own vision. Thus many of the concerns revealed in the Observant constitutions echoed those of earlier generations. However, there are so many repetitions of certain statutes that it is possible to identify subjects of particular importance to the congregation. For instance, in line with Bernardino's clericalisation programme of the 1430s and 1440s - itself based on the passage in the Rule which discouraged the lay from learning - the statutes continually stressed that care must be taken over the reception and education of lay brothers.⁷⁶ The 1461 Chapter General statutes of Osimo repeated Bernardino's order of 1438 that lay brothers should not be allowed to ascend to the clergy. The statutes did not even allow for the possibility of a lay brother obtaining a special licence from his superior: this was to be a blanket ban.⁷⁷ The same constitutions called for particular caution when receiving lay brothers into the congregation, and they were also forbidden to study or read any books other than pamphlets on the Rule.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the 1505 statutes of Abruzzo proclaimed that any lay brother found to be 'reading or learning ... must flog himself for the length of a *Misere mei, Deus* for each time he did it.'⁷⁹

⁷⁴ The references to Francis's feast-day in the Barcelona General Statutes of 1451 and the *Statuta Generalia* of Assisi (1526) simply order that a mass must be sung in the saint's honour. See Fussenegger, 'Statuta provinciae Bohemiae 1471 et 1480', p. 379; Bihl, 'Statuta generalia 1451 Barcinonae', pp. 133, 158; Capobianco, 'Statuta Generalia 1526', p. 315.

⁷⁵ See for instance, Oliger, 'Statuta provinciae S. Angeli 1448 et 1467', p. 103.

⁷⁶ The 1223 *Regula bullata* stated: 'Those who are illiterate should not be anxious to study. They should realise instead that the only thing they should desire is to have the spirit of God at work within them, while they pray to him unceasingly with a heart free from self-interest.' Habig, pp. 63-64.

⁷⁷ Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta generali Auximi 1461', p. 498.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 501; idem, 'Statuta provincialia Ianuae 1487-1521', p. 129.

⁷⁹ Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 10.

Simultaneously, provision was made for the further education of the clergy. Declaring themselves horrified that many in the Curia thought the Observants ignorant, the legislators at the 1458 General Chapter held at Aracoeli in Rome resolved that all those who entered the congregation should henceforth be taught 'basic learning and the Scriptures'.⁸⁰ In 1464, a German Chapter even ordered that all brothers should talk to each other in Latin on pain of punishment.⁸¹ Immediately following the sentence of flogging for any lay brother who tried to study, the 1505 constitutions of Abruzzo ordered:

Because the priests and clerics must know the Scriptures to the letter in order to satisfy the laity in confession and preaching, it is commanded that there must be good provision for study in the Province. ... [We] order that grammar, logic, philosophy and theology be read in the Province according to the needs of those who wish to learn.⁸²

Such concern for the education of the clerical brothers shows two important facets of the Observants: their real care for a pastoral role, and their desire to prove themselves as orthodox and moderate. Their stress on learning was in part a reaction to Conventual taunts which had stigmatised them as unlettered and ignorant zealots like the Fraticelli.⁸³ Education was a necessary step in the creation of a public role for Observant brothers as preachers and churchmen, and whilst the Rule directly admonished the lay brothers to remain unlearned, there was no such counsel for the other brothers. Those who supported the ideal of *imitatio Francisci*, however, could look to the literature of the Order, if they had access to it, for some inflexible statements attributed to Francis on the vanity and futility of learning.⁸⁴ By clericalising and educating the community, whilst simultaneously ordering that the lay brothers were to remain unlearned, the Observants could have the best of both worlds. They could present themselves as learned, active and trustworthy tools of the Church, and as the humble and unlettered heirs to Francis.

⁸⁰ Glassberger, p.378.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 414.

⁸² Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 10.

⁸³ These disputes will be dealt with at length in Chapter Four.

⁸⁴ For instance the *Speculum Perfectionis* (c.1318) declared: 'The most holy Father did not wish his friars to hanker after learning and books, but taught them to build their lives on holy humility. ... He said, "Because they will think themselves more gifted, more filled with devotion, fired with love, and enlightened by divine knowledge through their study of the Scriptures, they will as a result remain inwardly cold and empty. ... When they have preached to the people, and learn that some have been helped or moved to penitence, they grow conceited and congratulate themselves as though the others' gain were their own.'" Habig, pp. 1202-1203.

In their constitutions dealing directly with the virtue of poverty the Observance once more attempted to strike a balance between the 'two souls' inherent in the Observant identity. At first reading the statutes can appear to be strict, but on closer examination they allowed a fair amount of latitude, placing great emphasis on the authority of the Superiors whose job it was to interpret the Rule as severely or loosely as they saw fit. Unsurprisingly for a brotherhood which had been founded in observance *ad litteram*, the statutes attempted to impose a strong sense of the necessity of poverty within the Order. In 1467, the Provincial Chapter of Saxony reaffirmed the need for a high standard of austerity, which was particularly necessary since the patrons of the German Observants often placed them in houses formerly occupied by the Conventuals.⁸⁵ Thus the statutes ordered:

Item, with careful diligence (for there is danger in delay), all convents and houses which have any properties, rents, houses, vineyards, beehives or anything else that has been acquired, must get rid of them. And not only such things as these, but also our clothes, food and books; and the things we use in the divine service, such as vestments, ecclesiastical vessels, paintings and suchlike, must all shine forth [*luculenter apparent*] with the holy poverty, austerity and simplicity to which we are certainly bound by our vow.⁸⁶

Such an uncompromising order is of interest because, as has already been mentioned, Bernardino's *Constitutiones* of 1440 had dealt with the ideal of poverty in houses that were adorned with 'superfluity and curiosity' and used 'chalices and patens of silver'. His moderate solution had been to reconcile his brothers to such riches when they were inherited rather than actively procured.⁸⁷

Saxony was not alone in trying to impose a relatively stringent interpretation of the Franciscan vow of poverty, but what emerges most clearly from the Observant constitutions is their attempt to legislate for a balanced life that incorporated poverty as only one facet of their identity. The constitutions attempted to conform to the basics of the vow, but the Observants of the later fifteenth century were willing to fall back on earlier Franciscan methods of mitigating the austerity of their Rule which, whilst not strictly illegal - and sometimes hallowed by time and tradition - certainly violated the spirit of the Rule. For instance, the compilers of the Genoese statutes of 1487-1521 saw no conflict

⁸⁵ For cases in Heidelberg (1426) and Nuremberg (1445-1458) see Glassberger, pp. 282-285; 316-320, 342-343; and Nyhus, *The Franciscans in Southern Germany*, pp. 12-15.

⁸⁶ Kruitwagen, 'Statuta provinciae Saxoniae 1467 et 1494', pp. 98-114, 282.

⁸⁷ *Constitutiones Bernardini*, p. 89.

in following legislation on the employment of lay servants with a deliberation entitled 'On serving poverty' which exhorted the brothers to observe 'the most high purity of poverty'.⁸⁸ Other constitutions offered advice on how to bypass the tricky rules that forbade the Order to accept stable incomes. The 1456 statutes of Tuscany included a passage explaining a typical legal fiction. They asserted that the brothers should not procure annuities, but added that donors should be informed that if they 'spontaneously' offered such alms it was licit to accept them.⁸⁹ The issue of the acceptance of alms drew much attention in the statutes. By the start of the sixteenth century it was becoming common to give increasingly precise definitions of what it was acceptable to receive. The 1505 statutes of Abruzzo and those from Tuscany in 1507 and 1518 all offered clear numerical guidelines: in Tuscany a brother could receive up to one ducat from his guardian and forty soldi from a layman; in Abruzzo the amount went up to between four and ten ducats.⁹⁰ These were not insubstantial sums: forty soldi was more than a skilled craftsman might earn in a day.⁹¹ The brothers were also allowed to sell goods up to the value of five soldi.⁹²

The Observants' attempt to cling to the basic principles of Franciscan poverty within a moderate framework was further encouraged by their desire to preserve a separate identity from the Conventuals. In 1430, after rejecting the moderate unified life devised in the *Martinianae* constitutions, the Conventuals had procured the bull *Ad statum* which allowed them to receive property and permanent incomes.⁹³ All Observant constitutions were careful to outlaw such a blatant mitigation of Francis's vision. There is also some

⁸⁸ Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta provincialia Ianuae 1487-1521', pp. 129-130.

⁸⁹ Idem, 'Statuti Provinciali di Toscana 1456-1506', p. 132.

⁹⁰ Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia Thusciae 1457 et 1518', pp. 168-169; Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 8. See also Calamandrei, 'Constitutiones provinciae Thusciae 1507 et 1523', pp. 199-200.

⁹¹ Frederick Lane and Reinhold Mueller give a summary of average wages for Italian workers in 1424. An unskilled labourer at the Venetian Arsenal earned 10 soldi, a skilled craftsman also at the Arsenal 20 soldi, and a stonecutter 32 soldi. There were 124 soldi to the Venetian ducat. See F. C. Lane and R. C. Mueller, *Money and Banking in Medieval and Renaissance Venice, vol. 1: Coins and Moneys of Account*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 12, 249; and P. Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks no. 13, (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1986). Eight ducats was certainly a substantial enough sum to repair or construct small buildings, for the Abruzzese constitutions also ordered that 'non se facciano edificii che excedano el valore de octo ducati, senza licentia del Capitulo.' Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 8.

⁹² Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuti Provinciali di Toscana 1456-1506', p. 135.

⁹³ *An. Min.* X, 164-165.

evidence that the constitutions distinguished the Observants from the Conventuals in other ways, showing some signs of concern over the public image of the congregation. When compiling legislation dealing with participation in processions, the statutes of Genoa ordered that, 'our brothers should in no way be associated with the Conventuals in processions and suchlike'.⁹⁴ The Observants also showed concern over the public dignity of their habit. Giovanni da Capestrano had proved himself to be very aware of the importance of the habit as an exterior mark of the Observance's separate identity. In 1452 he had ordered his novices, 'by no means wear white tunics, for the Conventuals never remove them now: it is convenient for them to wear the same colour as us. As you differ in your interior acts, you must also differ on the outside'.⁹⁵ Some constitutions required that in processions the habit should not be obscured by vestments and the traditional statute that forbade the lending out of the habit to Carnival players was also adopted.⁹⁶ Equally, however, the Observant friars were admonished not to put off their habits when they themselves participated in plays over Carnival.⁹⁷ The Chapter of Barcelona issued precise measurements for all habits; in Saxony the brothers were instructed not to wear furs; whilst in Abruzzo they were reminded that no-one should have a habit made of different material to his fellow brothers.⁹⁸ The institutional public image of the congregation depended on such statutes.

Of course, the Observant statutes may be read in two ways: as proof of the desire of the Observance to follow a carefully controlled and relatively rigorous interpretation of the Franciscan life; or as evidence that certain houses or brothers were not fulfilling this interpretation - hence the need for so many strongly-worded admonitions. If the latter is the case, it suggests that the Observance had particular problems imposing a suitable

⁹⁴ Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta provincialia Ianuae 1487-1521', p. 129.

⁹⁵ Glassberger, p. 343.

⁹⁶ The 1284 Chronicle of Salimbene de Adamo illuminates the Franciscan concern for appearance that led to such a statute. Salimbene condemned a group of millers at Reggio who borrowed Franciscan habits to wear at Carnival: 'They did this through the instigation of the Devil, who sought to *lay a blot on the elect* [Eccl 11:33], so that it would appear to passers-by that it was the Friars Minor themselves who were doing such things in order to bring shame and scandal upon the Order.' Salimbene de Adamo, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adamo*, trans. and ed. J. L. Baird, G. Baglivi and J. R. Kane, (New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986), p. 635. On processions, see Calamandrei, 'Constitutiones provinciae Thusciae 1507 et 1523', p. 196; and Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia Thusciae 1457 et 1518', p. 163.

⁹⁷ Calamandrei, 'Constitutiones provinciae Thusciae 1507 et 1523', p. 204.

⁹⁸ For the measurements of the habit see Bihl, 'Statuta generalia 1451 Barcinonae', pp. 129-130; Kruitwagen, 'Statuta provinciae Saxoniae 1467 et 1494', pp. 98-114, 281; Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 13.

degree of austerity, for every set of constitutions had much to say, often repetitively, on the necessity of disciplining the brothers for their many failings. There were repeated orders forbidding the brothers to buy goods or to set up their own illicit businesses in things as diverse as fruit from their orchards to precious hand-made rosaries.⁹⁹ In various statutes the brothers were forbidden to sell the goods given to them by the convent for their own use, to practice alchemy, to write tracts, paint or cook for layfolk, or to give away the convent's saffron.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the 1505 statutes of Tuscany even issued the startling order that, 'No friar may have swords made without the knowledge and licence of the Provincial Vicar, nor may he amass them for himself.'¹⁰¹

Finally, the constitutions also show that the Observance was by no means united in its pursuit of the reformed life. The 1495 statutes of Abruzzo included the ruling that 'whosoever voices divisive words or speaks out against union ... should be whipped.'¹⁰² This edict comes too late to refer to the relationship between the Observants and Conventuals who not had considered themselves unified since 1446's *Ut sacra*. Rather, it clearly referred to brothers within the Observance who either criticised their fellow brothers or wished to pursue the kind of strict interpretation of the Rule practised by the congregation's smaller offshoots. Ten years later the statutes of the same province yielded yet more evidence of internal divisions. The 1505 constitutions of Abruzzo indicate that there were rifts between the lay and clerical elements of the Observance which may have resulted from tensions between the traditionally lay nature of the congregation and the clerical culture encouraged by the Regular Observants as the fifteenth century progressed. The statutes stated baldly:

Item, no priest or cleric should say improper or villainous things to the lay brothers through contempt for them, nor should they ignore them, nor speak ill of them, nor say bad things in general, on pain of the aforesaid punishment; for we are all brothers.¹⁰³

This suggests a split between the upper and lower levels of the congregation which is also implied in the 1451 statutes of Barcelona. These ordered 'again' that the superiors must

⁹⁹ Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ For examples of such statutes, see Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia Thusciae 1457 et 1518', pp. 169-170; Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta provincialia Ianuae 1487-1521', p. 138; G. Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuti Provinciali di Toscana 1456-1506', p. 157.

¹⁰² *Constitutiones Provinciae S Bernardini an. 1495* in A. Chiappini, 'De vita et scriptis Fr. Alexandri de Riciis', *AFH* 21 (1928), p. 302.

¹⁰³ Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 16.

live the same life as their charges and not take separate meals, have private rooms or wear different clothes.¹⁰⁴ Other divisions came about for less lofty reasons. The 1471 statutes of Bohemia forbade the brothers to insult others for being 'Bohemian, German, Moravian or Silesian,' or to accuse them of other sins such as: 'You lie, you are a rascal and a thief!' The statutes of Apulia (1448) and Munich (1483) and Abruzzo (1505) made similar declarations, revealing a high level of antagonism between brothers from different areas.¹⁰⁵ It is clear from such statutes that the congregation could often be divided along both regional and hierarchical lines.

These statutes provide an insight into the problems that the Observance faced in trying to ensure a respectable semblance of the Franciscan life. Yet it is notable that most statutes which forbade violations of the Rule added the caveat that such transgressions were illicit 'except by licence of the Provincial Vicar'. This suggests that the hierarchy sometimes accepted infringements of the Rule and constitutions. The careful moderation of the constitutions included a recognition that it was the duty of the Superior to interpret both Rule and constitutions on behalf of the brothers according to his own conscience. Thus the statutes implicitly recognised the pre-eminent role of obedience in the Observant life. In a chapter dealing with the punishments due for disobeying the constitutions, the 1518 provincial Chapter of Tuscany issued a statute that stated this clearly. After ordering that 'the present constitutions must be fully observed', the legislators immediately mitigated this statement by placing interpretative power in the hands of the Provincial Superior:

However, it is conceded that the reverend father may, in particular cases and with reasonable cause, commute and mitigate the aforesaid punishments, in whatever way seems most expedient to him according to the will of God.

However, whilst the Observant legislators emphasised the qualities of obedience and moderation above all else, they were careful to set limits even to these virtues:

¹⁰⁴ Bihl, 'Statuta generalia 1451 Barcinonae', p. 134. Similarly, the Chapter of Nuremburg (1463) ordered that all brothers should be made to eat in the refectory on certain feast days, suggesting that it was common for senior brothers to have separate meals in their own chambers. See Glassberger, p. 410.

¹⁰⁵ Fussenegger, 'Statuta provinciae Bohemiae 1471 et 1480', p. 374; Oliger, 'Statuta provinciae S. Angeli 1448 et 1467', p. 101; and Glassberger, p. 487; Abate, 'Costituzioni della provincia di S. Bernardino 1505', p. 15.

But if through this practice the rigour of regular discipline is dissolved or relaxed too far, report must be made to the Provincial Chapter and the Superior should be gravely reprehended and punished.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Such a ruling is a good example of the continual attempts of Observant legislators to strike a cautious balance between zeal and pragmatism. This tendency is visible both in expositions of the Rule and constitutions. These texts were the fundamental legislative and administrative documents of the congregation and they deeply affected the Observance throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their influence lay behind all Observant meditations on the Franciscan ideal and shaped the brothers' sense of who they were, and what they should be. The standards laid down in the *Constitutiones Bernardini* became the pattern for all later expositions of the Rule. Such works prepared the Observants for a life of ecclesiastical service by stressing that the desire for poverty should be tempered by conscientious moderation, and that obedience to one's superiors and to the Church came before all else. The leeway afforded by the Spiritual ideals of *imitatio Francisci* and *intentio Regulae*, both of which allowed for a personal understanding of the Franciscan life, was jettisoned in favour of a corporate vision in which superiors dictated the interpretation of the Rule and the friars' level of observance. The constitutions were likewise a tool for the propagation of the moderate life. They mitigated key aspects of the austere ideal which had been proposed by both the Spirituels and early Observants, playing down the role of lay brothers, setting high standards of education for the clergy, and allowing for the appropriation of Conventual houses and the tacit acceptance of annuities.

This moderation and the way of life it gave rise to - active, practical and orthodox - became deeply ingrained into the character of the fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Observance. However, such ideals did not fully satisfy all the brothers, as the continued discussion over the Rule makes clear. The rise of the Capuchins brought to light the internal tensions that had resulted from attempting to accommodate the traditions of both active moderation and contemplative eremitism in a single brotherhood. By 1527, Giovanni Pili da Fano had no hope to offer those who desired a stricter interpretation of the Rule. His solution was to exhort such brothers to practise obedience and patience, and

¹⁰⁶ Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia Thusciae 1457 et 1518', p. 179.

to recapitulate the moderate and practical identity of the Regular Observance by appealing to the authority of Bernardino and Capestrano whilst explicitly curtailing the influence of *imitatio Francisci*. Pili's characterisation of the Observants as reasonable and respectable, as compared to the supposedly irrational ravings of the Capuchin 'scoundrels' and 'vagabonds', is a key insight into the self-perception of an Observant community which prided itself on its moderation and practicality. However, Pili's own defection to the Capuchin community and his subsequent championing of *imitatio Francisci* and *intentio Regulae*, ideals which he had once discouraged, shows that the Observant community had not been able to integrate fully its 'two souls' into one functioning body. In the following chapter we shall see how Observant historians dealt with the historical origins and radical manifestations of these two traditions.

CHAPTER THREE

Things Worthy of Memory: Observant Historiography

History and tradition were important to all the religious orders of the Middle Ages, but especially so to the Franciscans, whose past was so glorious and so painful. The Observance gave birth to a generation of historians whose chronicles created a sense of institutional identity and preserved a feeling of institutional continuity.¹ Two major Franciscan chroniclers, Arnaldus de Sarnano (*Chronica XXIV Generalium*, c.1375)² and Bartolomeo da Pisa (*De conformitate*, 1399)³, had emerged from the fourteenth-century Conventuals, but during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Conventual brothers produced no important works of history. In contrast, during the same period five prominent Observants tackled the history of the Order and the Observant congregation in nine major historical works. Two writers based in L'Aquila utilised the archives of their city to produce important texts: Bernardino Aquilano da Fossa (c.1420-1503) wrote the *Chronica Fratrum Minorum Observantiae* (c.1480) which he enriched with personal anecdotes⁴, whilst Alessandro Ricci completed his *Chronica Ordinis Minorum* shortly before his death in 1497.⁵ In Germany, the historian Nicholas Glassberger wrote his *Chronica* between 1506 and his death in 1508⁶, whilst in Poland Johannes Komorowo (†1536) composed both the *Tractatus cronice Fratrum Minorum Observantie* (1510) and the *Memoriale Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* (1535).⁷ Finally, Mariano da Firenze (c.1477-

¹ There is no adequate survey of Observant historiography, although there are monographs on individual writers which will be referred to below. The most comprehensive examination of Franciscan historiography is S. da Campagnola, *Le origine francescane come problema storiografico*. However, since the author covers Franciscan historiography from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries, his survey of each era is necessarily brief and he accords only a short paragraph to each of the Observant historians (pp. 73-82). For an examination of the sources used by Observant historians in the fifteenth century, see A. G. Matanic, 'Le fonti francescane conosciute dagli storici del '400' in *Lettura delle fonti francescane attraverso i secoli: il 1400*, ed. G. Cardaropoli and M. Conti, Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto Apostolico Pontificia Università Antoniana, (Rome: Ed. Antonianum, 1981), pp. 107-118.

² Arnaldus de Sarnano, *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum*, *AF* 3 (1897).

³ Bartolomeo da Pisa, 'De Conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu', *AF* 4-5 (1906, 1912).

⁴ B. Aquilano da Fossa, *Chronica Fratrum Minorum Observantiae* in *Fragmenta Franciscana*, ed. L. Lemmens, (Rome: Typus Sallustianis, 1902), pp. 1-111 (hereafter referred to in the text as BA, followed by page number).

⁵ A. Chiappini, 'De vita et scriptis Fr. Alexandri de Ricciis', *AFH* 20 (1927), pp. 314-335, 563-574; 21 (1928), pp. 285-303, 553-579.

⁶ N. Glassberger, *Chronica Fr. Nicolai Glassberger*, *AF* 2 (1887) (hereafter referred to in the text as NG, followed by page number).

⁷ J. Komorowo, *Tractatus cronice Fratrum Minorum Observantie*, ed. H. Zeissberg, *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte*, 49-50 (1972-3), pp. 297-425. Komorowo's history of the Franciscan Order,

1523), whose hagiographical works will be examined in Chapter Seven, embarked upon the most comprehensive history of the Order ever attempted prior to Luke Wadding's *Annales Minorum* (1625). The five volumes of Mariano's *Fasciculus chronicarum* (completed 1503, updated to 1518) profoundly influenced later Franciscan historians such as Marco de Lisboa (1556) and Wadding. Unfortunately the work was lost during the later eighteenth century.⁸ However, we possess Mariano's own summary of his *Fasciculus*, the *Compendium chronicarum Fratrum Minorum* (1521).⁹ Mariano also produced histories of the Second and Third Orders in 1519 and 1522 respectively.¹⁰ In addition, Giacomo Oddi's *La Franceschina* (1474), which will be discussed in Chapter Six, has also been defined as a work of history, though in truth it tends more towards hagiography than historiography.¹¹ As well as such individual works, there also survive the anonymous annals which were included in the polemical compilations of the early sixteenth century. These brief *Memoriale* were slanted to reflect the beliefs of whichever group - Observant or Colettan - funded the publication of the compilation.¹²

Here my examination will concentrate particularly upon the work of Bernardino Aquilano, since his *Chronica* is the most individualised and revealing of the histories, as well as upon the chronicles of Nicholas Glassberger and Mariano da Firenze. I shall refer only fleetingly to the works of Ricci, Komorowo and the anonymous annalists. The

composed in 1535, falls outwith the chronological limits of this survey. See J. Komorowo, *Memoriale Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, ed. X. Liske & A. Lorkiewicz in *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* tom. V (Lwów: [n. pub.], 1888), pp. 1-418.

⁸ The last attested reference to the *Fasciculus* placed it in the Vatican Library in 1769. See G. Abate, 'Le fonti storiche della cronaca di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *MF* 34 (1934), pp. 46-52; and C. Cannarozzi, 'Una fonte primaria degli *Annales* del Wadding (Il *Fasciculus Chronicarum* di Fra Mariano da Firenze)', *SF* 27 (1930), pp. 251-285.

⁹ Mariano da Firenze, 'Compendium chronicarum fratrum Minorum', *AFH* 1-4 (1908-1911) (hereafter referred to in the text as MF, followed by volume and page number).

¹⁰ Mariano da Firenze, *Libro delle dignità et excellentie del Ordine della seraphica madre delle povere donne Sancta Chiara da Asisi*, ed. G. Boccali, (Florence: Edizioni Studi Francescani; S. Maria degli Angeli: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1986); *Il Trattato del Terz'Ordine*, ed. M. Papi, (Rome: Editrice Analecta T.O.R., 1985).

¹¹ Da Campagnola included *La Franceschina* in his brief survey of Observant historiography, but was forced to conclude that it conformed more to the pattern of the *Fioretti* than to historiographical criteria. *Origine*, pp. 90-91.

¹² *Memoriale Ordinis* in *Monumenta Ordinis Minorum*, (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter, 1506), fols. cc-ccxxi; *Speculum Minorum*, (Rouen: Martin Morin, 1509), fols. 60r-87r; *Firmamenta trium ordinum beatissimi patris nostri Francisci*, (Paris: Jean Petit, 1512), fols. xxvii-xli. See also J-X. Lalo, *Les premiers mémoires imprimés de l'Ordre Franciscain*, Studi e testi francescani n. 58 (Vicenza: L.I.E.F Edizioni, 1976). For more on these compilations, see Chapter Four.

published portions of Ricci's work are extremely fragmentary, consisting mainly of letters culled by Ricci from the L'Aquilan archives. Unfortunately, I was unable to examine the manuscript of the *Chronica Ordinis Minorum* during my visit to L'Aquila as the volume was then undergoing restoration.¹³ As I have not yet had access to the full text, my judgements are necessarily tentative. In contrast, Komorowo's chronicles have both been published in full. However, the more interesting of the two, the *Memoriale Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, which deals with the history of the Order from the birth of Francis, was composed after 1528 and is therefore outside the chronological limits of my study. Komorowo's history of the Observant congregation, the *Tractatus cronice Fratrum Minorum Observantie*, is comfortably within these limits, but unfortunately it is principally concerned with the minutiae of Observant administration in Poland. The works of Ricci and Komorowo will therefore be used for illustration only.

The Observant Chroniclers

Although all the chronicles were composed in Latin, suggesting that they were intended for a limited audience of educated, mainly Observant brothers,¹⁴ the works of Aquilano, Glassberger and Mariano exemplify three radically different approaches to historical writing. Bernardino Aquilano's *Chronica* is an eyewitness account which concentrates upon the period between 1445 and 1468, during which Aquilano was highly active in the upper echelons of the Observant administration. After having studied jurisprudence at the University of Perugia, Aquilano joined the Observance in 1445, though his works attest to an early interest in the congregation, for he wrote of attending Observant sermons as a young boy.¹⁵ Aquilano was quickly promoted to significant administrative duties after his ordination. He was Provincial Vicar for Abruzzo in 1454-1460 and 1472-1475, and for Bosnia and Dalmatia in 1464-1467. He was present at the

¹³ Alessandro Ricci, *Chronica Ordinis Minorum*, Cod. S.73, Archivio di Stato dell'Aquila.

¹⁴ Certainly, Mariano da Firenze was accustomed to writing in the vernacular when he wished to reach a wider readership. He composed his histories of the Poor Clares and the Tertiaries in Italian, presumably because members of these orders were less likely to be able to read Latin. He also composed certain tracts aimed at a wide range of Observant brothers, including his *Vite de sancti Frati Minori*, in the vernacular. See Chapter Seven.

¹⁵ Aquilano also wrote of attending Giovanni da Capestrano's sermons in L'Aquila in 1426: 'io fanciuletto, tenuto da mio padre nelle sue braccia, vidi cogli occhi miei ... [che] predicò lo beato padre [Giovanni da Capestrano] del Nome di Jesù.' See B. Aquilano da Fossa, *I due Frati Minori: beato Filippo di Aquila e beato Antonio di Sulmona*, ed. N. Farina di Scanno, (Sulmona: Prem. Tip. di P. Colaprete, 1904), p. 18; and also *Chronica*, p. 19.

General Chapters of the 1450s and 1460s and revealed fascinating details in the *Chronica* of the discussions which lay behind certain Chapter decisions. Moreover, he was closely involved in combating Conventual attacks during this difficult period. In 1453 he was among the Observant and Conventual brothers formally appointed by Pope Nicholas V to discuss the relationship between the two congregations at the Curia. Later he was also involved in the controversy over Calixtus III's *Bulla Concordiae* (1456), which dissolved hard-won Observant independence in favour of the unity of the Order.¹⁶ These duties made him acutely aware of the threats to his congregation and surely fuelled his decision to write a history of the Observance which would justify its existence and assert its rightful place within the Franciscan Order. Aquilano was a prolific preacher and writer. He composed several volumes of sermons, a number of tracts and at least three biographies of Observant brothers, including a life of Bernardino da Siena which has since been lost.¹⁷ Aquilano's hard work was appreciated during his lifetime; not only was he a popular preacher and trusted administrator, but he twice declined the bishopric of L'Aquila.¹⁸ After his death in 1503 he became the subject of an enduring cult within the Observance and in L'Aquila (approved in 1828), and in 1572 his works were edited by his nephew, Antonio da Fossa, who also composed a biography of his uncle.¹⁹

¹⁶ The *Bulla concordiae*, also known as *Illius cuius*, was composed by Giacomo della Marca and released by Calixtus III on 2 February 1456. It forced the Observants to attend Conventual Chapters and subjected all Observant elections to the approval of the Conventual Minister General. In practice, the bull was subverted by both sides. The Observants circumvented Ministerial authority, whilst the Conventuals refused to allow the Observants to take part in the election of the General. It was effectively repealed by Pius II in October 1458 with the issue of *Pro nostra* which allowed the Observants to return to the way of life laid down by *Ut sacra* (1446).

¹⁷ As well as *I due Frati Minori*, a few of Aquilano's works have been published: *Cronaca della presa di possesso del Convento di Sant'Angelo d'Ocre*, ed. G. Marinangeli, (L'Aquila: L'Aquila, 1980); and V. Meneghin, 'S. Bernardino da Siena ed un sermone in suo onore scritto dal Beato Bernardino da Fossa', *BSB* 6 (1940), pp. 203-223. For an examination of Aquilano's manuscripts see Leonhard Lemmens's introduction to the *Chronica*, pp. xxiii-xxxi; and Piera Tomassi's unpublished thesis, *Gli scritti del beato Bernardino da Fossa (1420/22-1503)*, Tesi di Laurea, Università degli studi di Perugia, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia (Perugia, anno acc. 1968-1969).

¹⁸ On the life of Aquilano, see AA.SS., Novembriis tom. III, pp. 686-723; G. Pansa, 'Bernardino da Fossa contributi bibliografici', *Bollettino della società storia patria Anton Ludovico Antinori negli Abruzzi* 5 (1983), pp. 221-227; R. Pratesi, 'Amici, Bernardino (da L'Aquila, da Fossa)' in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 1, pp. 1005-1006; idem, 'Amici, Bernardino (Aquilano, da Fossa)' in *DBI* 1, pp. 778-780; and F. Wagemans, 'Bernardin d'Aquila' in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 1, p. 1514.

¹⁹ Antonio Amici, *Vita B. Bernardini Aquilani* in L. Lemmens (ed.), *Fragmenta Franciscana*, pp. xi-xix; and AA.SS., Nov. III, pp. 700-703. A second life, by Marco de Lisboa, is also printed in AA.SS., pp. 699-700. The author stated that his evidence came from Mariano da Firenze's *Fasciculus chronicarum* (c.1503-18).

Aquilano's *Chronica* of c.1480 is a remarkable document. An unashamedly partisan account of the battles and tribulations suffered by his congregation, it provides an inside view of the beliefs and assumptions of the Observants during the turbulent 1450s and 1460s when the very survival of the congregation was at stake. Aquilano's writing is as lively as his subject. He favoured an authorial narrative in which he often praised his own acts in both the first and third person terms, and filled his work with the details of his personal conversations with some of the greatest figures of the Observance. Aquilano did not organise the *Chronica* on strict chronological principles. He left gaps of several years between entries and devoted twenty-one of his thirty-two chapters to an account of the conflicts between the Observants and Conventuals in the years between 1443 and 1458. He included no contemporary documents, but rather delighted in recounting incidents at which he had been present. The *Chronica* might perhaps be better termed a historical memoir than a chronicle. Unlike other Observant historians, whose works were saturated with their knowledge of earlier Franciscan chronicles, Aquilano declared that he depended solely upon personal testimony and his own experience. His prologue revealed his frustration that none of his confrères ~~was~~ interested in recording the remarkable history of the Observant congregation:

I know that in this Family of ours there are many other friars who are deeply learned in the art of eloquence and could write this work with ease; yet I have not been told that anyone is doing so. As I said to the brothers at the General Chapter; although many wonderful things have been done in this Family through divine love ... no record has been made of our memories [*nulla penitus de nostra recordatione extimatio facta fuit*]. It is on this account that, although I am ignorant of the art of eloquence, I nevertheless prefer to disclose the truth in an unpolished style for the consolation and information of those to come. For since so many important [things] worthy of memory are lost through damnable silence, I prefer to be accused of presumption rather than useless reticence. Many brothers informed me of things which I was not able to witness, since they happened long before I was received into the Order: I will relate these things just as they were told to me. I knew most things, for I was present; I saw; I heard; and, in accordance with my small intelligence, I considered things well. (BA, 1)

Nicholas Glassberger's *Chronica* is a markedly different work. Glassberger entered the Observance in Moravia in 1472. Little is known about his early life. Walter Seton suggested that he may be identified with the Nicolaus Glassberg who matriculated at Leipzig University between 1456 and 1458. Certainly, Glassberger was well-educated. He studied at Basle in 1475-1476 and was connected to humanist circles in Nuremberg

from the 1480s.²⁰ These influences are visible in his use of a large number of sources, his considered style, and his interest in secular history. Other than the *Chronica*, Glassberger's major works were another chronicle, the *Maior cronica Boemorum moderna* (c.1508); and a meticulous copy of the most important Franciscan chronicle of the fourteenth century, Arnaldus de Sarnano's *Chronica XXIV Generalium* (1491).²¹ Glassberger was much more indebted to literary sources than Aquilano: he himself mentioned that he used the archives of his province and often introduced extant letters and tracts into his work. The editors of his *Chronica* claimed to be able to trace the influence of at least fifteen works of Franciscan and secular history in the volume, in particular the *Chronica XXIV Generalium* with which Glassberger was so familiar.²² Unlike Aquilano, Glassberger seems to have had little interest in personal reminiscences which could not be verified by written sources. His *Chronica* is a classically proportioned linear history of the Order since the birth of the founder in 1180. Glassberger constructed his work around the administrative structures of the Church and Order. The election of every Pope, Minister and Vicar General was meticulously noted; the decisions of General and Provincial Chapters were recorded; the Order's fluctuating relations with papacy, councils and princes were traced year by year. Glassberger was particularly interested in the contemporary history of his own German province, which merited several digressions, and openly sided with the Observant position whenever a conflict between the Observants and Conventuals arose. Whilst the *Chronica* is an effective and efficient piece of ecclesiastical history, Glassberger lacked Aquilano's vivacity and insight into the workings of the Observance or Mariano da Firenze's deep concern for Franciscan spirituality.

Mariano da Firenze's *Compendium chronicarum* (1521) is the last of the major Observant chronicles. As it is merely a condensed version of the now lost five-volume *Fasciculus chronicarum* (c.1503), the *Compendium* has often been undervalued by modern historians. Stanislao da Campagnola barely acknowledged its existence, merely stating: 'The *Compendium* ... is nothing but a summary of the *Fasciculus*, and as such it

²⁰ W. Seton, *Nicholas Glassberger and his Works*, British Society of Franciscan Studies XI, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1923), pp. ix-xxi; and L. Oliger, 'De quibusdam operibus Fr. Nicolae Glassberger', *AFH* 13 (1920), pp. 388-402.

²¹ Seton, pp. xxi-xxix.

²² Glassberger, pp. xvii-xxv. The editors also claimed that Oddi's *La Franceschina* was one of Glassberger's sources. This seems unlikely, as the only surviving manuscripts of *La Franceschina* are in Umbria, where it was written. Seton also casts doubt on this claim; pp. lv-lvi.

has scant historiographical value, for it is little more than a dry list of facts.²³ Indeed, it is regrettable that the *Fasciculus* has been lost, for Franciscan historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attested to the importance of Mariano's major work. Wadding cited the *Fasciculus* as one of his principal sources, describing it as 'soundly written, despite its humble, indeed, frequently barbarous style'.²⁴ However, a study of the shorter *Compendium* is not as profitless as Campagnola believed, for it provides us with an outline of Mariano's historiographical style. It is clear from his surviving works that Mariano was a skilled historian, hagiographer and devotional writer. He was born in c.1477 to a minor family in Florence and had joined the Observance by 1498, immediately devoting himself to a life of study.²⁵ In a career that lasted until his death in 1523, he scoured the Franciscan libraries of Tuscany and Umbria for written sources and solicited new oral testimonies from a wide range of brothers. He completed a total of sixteen major works, including his histories of all three Franciscan Orders; and the *Via Spirituale* and *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* which will be examined in Chapter Seven.²⁶

The *Fasciculus chronicarum*, completed in 1503 and continued up to 1518, was Mariano's first major work. The *Compendium* summarises and then extends the earlier chronicle, beginning with Francis's birth (which Mariano placed in 1181 rather than 1180), and ending in 1521 with the rubric, 'Everything in this volume was written by me, Fra M[ariano]; I now relinquish it to be edited and corrected by my superiors.'²⁷ Mariano utilised a vast array of sources for his compilation, ranging from the major thirteenth- and fourteenth-century histories of the Order to contemporary sermons and hagiography.²⁸ Indeed, one of the most distinctive aspects of Mariano's *Compendium* is its concentration on the spiritual side of the Franciscan life. Unlike Aquilano and Glassberger, Mariano gave significant weight to a series of lives of saints and beati which he chose to integrate into the text of his chronicle. Although these were rendered in the *Compendium* as a succession of single-line descriptions of particularly pious or prominent brothers, it is

²³ S. da Campagnola, *Origine*, p. 95.

²⁴ *Compendium*, AFH 4 (1911), p. 559. An. Min. I, ix.

²⁵ C. Cannarozzi, 'Ricerche sulla vita di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 26 (1926), pp. 121-179, 295-326; 27 (1930), pp. 4-28, 31-71.

²⁶ The best summary of Mariano's writing career is Massimo Papi's introduction to his edition of Mariano's *Libro come Santo Francesco istituì et ordinò el Tertio Ordine: Il Trattato del Terz'Ordine*, ed. M. Papi, pp. 263-329. The literature on Mariano and his works is fully outlined in Chapter Seven.

²⁷ *Compendium*, AFH 4 (1911), p. 339.

²⁸ *Compendium*, AFH 4 (1911), pp. 561-562; and G. Abate, 'Le fonti storiche della cronaca di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *MF* 34 (1934), pp. 46-52.

clear from their redaction in Wadding's *Annales* that many of these lives were substantial pieces of work, often including a full description of the life, duties and miracles of the brother in question. Mariano clearly felt that the dissemination of these lives was an important part of his duty as a chronicler. They were set apart from the usual records of the deaths of prominent brothers, forming substantial blocks of writing which interrupted the narrative flow of the chronicle. For instance, under his entry for 1450, Mariano broke off his history to eulogise forty-one contemporary saintly brothers over several pages. Between the years 1415 and 1521 he incorporated the lives of 313 brothers, almost all of them Observant, into his chronicle alongside more orthodox historical records of Vicarial elections and the procurement of papal privileges. The inclusion of these biographies transforms Mariano's *Compendium* into a work that crosses the boundary between historiography and hagiography. His chronicle, to a much greater extent than those of Aquilano or Glassberger, was intended to validate the Observance's sacral historical mission, a mission communicated not only through the triumphant progress of the Franciscan institution but also through the personal example of Franciscan brothers.

Although the chronicles of Aquilano, Glassberger and Mariano were composed in markedly different styles, they are linked by a unity of intention, understanding and common purpose. Observant authors wrote history in order to justify and bolster the reputation of their congregation. It was vitally important for the Observants to chronicle the Franciscan past. Through the mere act of writing the Observant historians laid claim to the Order's heritage on behalf of their congregation. The impulse towards historiography was common to all medieval religious.²⁹ The past was extraordinarily close to the people of the Middle Ages, and the sacred past even more so. However, the Observant inclination to record the history of their Order was particularly meaningful, for one of the principal Conventual charges against the fifteenth-century Observants was the allegation that they had seceded from the Order and could no longer call themselves Franciscans. The Conventuals were confident of their past due to a lineage which led directly back through a line of Ministers General to the figures of Bonaventura and Francis. The Observants, led by Vicars who had first been formally instituted by the Council of Constance in 1415, were less sure of themselves. As early as 1433, François Futz, the

²⁹ On medieval historiography, see particularly B. Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974); D. Hay, *Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the VIIIth to the XVIIIth Century* (London: Methuen, 1977); and E. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

Conventual representative at the Council of Basle, informed the assembly that the Observants had no right to claim a Franciscan inheritance: 'they are no longer Friars Minor, or of any other Order; and so they are nothing.'³⁰ Such claims necessitated the Observant appropriation of the Franciscan past. By writing the history of the Order and inserting the Observance into the narrative of the Franciscan tradition, Observant authors were able to refute charges that their congregation had seceded from the Order and was no longer obedient to Franciscan convention. The very fact that Glassberger and Mariano so meticulously recorded the elections of Observant Vicars acted as an assertion of the legitimacy of the Observant administration in the face of Conventual polemic which denounced the Vicars as a violation of Francis's Rule.³¹

In the only modern work to offer an overview of the works of the Observant historians, Stanislao da Campagnola concluded that:

The works ... do not reveal an awareness of an authentic break in the course of Franciscan history with the coming of the Observance. Conventualism is of course not only warned against, but openly denounced as a decadence which imposed itself slowly upon the purity of the primitive Franciscan ideal. ... Despite this degeneration, the chroniclers believed that the 'observance' had always existed, for there had always been movements of faithful *zelanti* who observed the Rule *pure et simpliciter, sine glosa*, although they were persecuted and dispersed.³²

Whilst I agree with da Campagnola that Aquilano and Mariano (though not, I would argue, Glassberger) sought out a tradition of 'observance' within the Order which would provide their brotherhood with a link to the past, I would disagree with Campagnola's conclusion that the Observant historians thus perceived no break in Franciscan history. On the contrary, all the Observant chroniclers recognised the Observance's new start to a greater or lesser degree. They acknowledged that the congregation was part of a strong Franciscan tradition, yet they also believed that their brotherhood initiated a new and exciting phase of Franciscan history.³³ These two themes - bolstering the congregation with strong antecedents, but also acknowledging the re-formation of the Franciscan Order under Observant influence - were constantly held in tension in the Observant chronicles.

³⁰ C. Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance discutée au Concile de Bâle', *AFH* 83 (1990), p. 402. For more on these charges, see Chapter Four.

³¹ For the Conventual arguments discrediting the Observant Vicars, see Chapter Four.

³² Da Campagnola, *Origine*, pp. 90-91.

³³ I feel that Giacomo Oddi also perceived a break in Franciscan history with the coming of the Observance. His conception of the Order's past will be examined in Chapter Six.

The Origins of the Order and Congregation

The opening passage of Mariano da Firenze's *Compendium chronicarum* presents the reader with a dramatic tableau. The scene is set in a stable where a woman is giving birth:

In a stable and upon hay, next to the animals' manger, our most blessed father Francis was born. ... An angel of the Lord took up the new-born baby in his arms, marked the sign of the cross upon his right shoulder, and held him over the baptismal font as the Bishop of Assisi christened the child Giovanni at his mother's request. Eight days later the child's father returned from France; and so he was called Francis. (MF 1, 99-100)

This Christ-child Francis, marked at birth with the crusader's cross, was a fifteenth-century development. The motif made no appearance in early Franciscan texts or in Bartolomeo da Pisa's *De conformitate*, the encyclopaedic collection of Francis's conformities with Christ which was approved by the General Chapter of 1399.³⁴ The legend that Francis's mother laboured in great pain until a divine vision urged her to give birth in a stable seems to have been nourished by the Observance.³⁵ The scene first occurs in art in Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes of the life of Francis painted at the church of S. Francesco in Montefalco in 1452 (see Fig. 1).³⁶ Mariano's decision to begin his chronicle with this theme, despite its lack of literary corroboration, is extremely revealing.

³⁴ Only one aspect of the story is found in the early fourteenth century *Legenda trium sociorum*, which refers to a mysterious pilgrim (often interpreted as Christ) who requested to hold the newborn child and prophesied his future greatness. However, the pilgrim did not sign Francis with the cross or aid in his baptism. See 'Legend of the Three Companions' in Habig, pp. 890-891.

³⁵ I have been unable to trace an earlier account of Francis's birth in a stable; Mariano was perhaps the first author to record what must have been a late oral tradition. The legend is recounted briefly by Henry Thode in *Francesco d'Assisi* (first published 1885), and by Raoul Manselli in his 1983 article 'Continuità e ripresa del francescanesimo nella Controriforma', but neither scholar refers to any source other than Mariano. See Thode, *Francesco d'Assisi e le origine dell'arte del Rinascimento in Italia*, trans. R. Zeni, Donzelli Editore (Rome, 1993), pp. 154-156; and Manselli, 'Continuità e ripresa del francescanesimo nella Controriforma' in *L'immagine di San Francesco nella Controriforma*, Comitato nazionale per le manifestazioni culturali per l'VII centenario della nascita di San Francesco d'Assisi, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Istituto nazionale per la grafica, (Assisi: Edizioni Quasar, 1983), pp. 17-19.

³⁶ Although the church of S. Francesco was Conventual, it has been noted that the brother charged with creating the iconographical plan of Gozzoli's cycle had links to the strong Observant congregation in the city. Fra Jacopo da Montefalco was a member of Giacomo della Marca's confraternity of St Jerome in Montefalco, which also housed Observant brothers, including the Provincial Vicar. Such links are confirmed by the presence of Bernardino da Siena in the chapel's frieze depicting famous Franciscan saints. See D. C. Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli*, (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1996), pp. 41-64; and E. Giese, *Benozzo Gozzoli's Franziskanuszyklus in Montefalco*, Europäische Hochschulschriften vol. 52, (Frankfurt am Main, Berne and New York: Peter Lang, 1986).

In a single dramatic stroke he reversed Francis's incomparable position among the multitude of saints, and traced the line of the Franciscan Order back to a founder who was chosen by God to be a poor child on earth.

The ways in which the Order has developed since the origins of their own congregation are equally revealing. Perhaps the most intriguing account of the origins of



Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Birth and Youth of St Francis*, 1452, Montefalco, Museo Comunale di S. Francesco, Choir.

The scene is set in a stable, where the Virgin Mary kneels in prayer, holding the infant Jesus. Joseph is seated nearby, and a cow and donkey are present. To the right, a group of people, including a man in a red robe and a woman in a blue robe, are gathered around a table, possibly preparing food or drink. The background shows a simple building with a window. The entire scene is framed by a decorative border with Latin text in Gothic script.

In a single dramatic stroke he asserted Francis's incomparable position among the multitude of saints, and traced the line of the Franciscan Order back to a founder who was chosen by God to be a new Christ on earth.

The ways in which the Observant chroniclers dealt with the origins of their own congregation are equally revealing. Perhaps the most intriguing account of the origins of the Observant congregation was provided by the brotherhood's first chronicler, Bernardino Aquilano. Aquilano's first chapter begins not with the story of Francis's birth, but with the travails of 'a certain few good friars':

I have been told that there were once a few good friars (whose names I do not know), who, when they saw that the Order was lacking in the rigorous observance of the Rule, were moved by their zeal for their vow to try to congregate together and separate themselves from the community of brothers, so that each could observe the Rule simply as far as he was able [*secundum fragilitatem suam*]. But through the work of the devil, a great storm of persecution was raised against these bereft friars, who were thus dispersed to different parts [of the world]. (BA, 3)

It might initially be assumed that this was the story of the first Observants, but as the chapter proceeds it becomes clear that these 'few good friars' were in fact the Spirituals:

There was a certain notable man of holy life named Fra Angelo Clareno, who burned with longing to observe his Rule by any means possible. He wished with the greatest desire to separate himself from the tumult of the brothers of the community along with a few of his followers so that he could serve his vow according to the will of our blessed father Francis. But he and his movement were greatly persecuted, and he could not attain that which he desired, indeed his tribulations were greatly increased. (BA, 4)³⁷

Such open regard for Clareno (†1337) is surprising in the context of other Observant writings. Neither Glassberger nor Giacomo Oddi felt able to mention the former Spiritual in their works, whilst Mariano restricted his comments to a brief summary of Clareno's Greek translations and avoided any mention of his more controversial actions, which

³⁷ Clareno was one of the most famous Spirituals. He led a group of Italian zealots who were imprisoned by the Order for eleven years (1278-1289) due to their stubborn pursuit of a life of absolute poverty. Celestine V's dispensation of 1294 allowing Clareno and his followers to split from the Franciscan Order was annulled after the *gran rifiuto*. The group subsequently fled to Greece and was excommunicated by Boniface VIII. Clareno returned to Italy in 1305 and gradually established his congregation despite persecution and many comparisons with the Fraticelli. He died in 1337. The best works on his life are L. von Auw, *Angelo Clareno et les Spirituels italiens*, (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1979); and G. L. Potestà, *Angelo Clareno: dai poveri eremiti ai Fraticelli*, (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1990). See also Douie, pp. 49-80.

included flight from papal discipline and the attempted division of the Order.³⁸ In contrast, Aquilano was clearly well-informed about Clareno's turbulent career, and proceeded to relate that Clareno, caught between the Scylla of Conventual opposition and the Charybdis of his vow, chose to leave the Franciscan Order in order to serve Francis's Rule in his own order of Poor Hermits. However, before his death he ordered his brothers to rejoin the Franciscan Order if it ever returned to 'the good observance':

So it was that when our father Fra Giovanni da Capestrano said to certain of the Clareni, 'Behold, now there is the Observance in the Minorite Order. You cannot remain outside in good conscience; you should return to it,' he so terrified the majority of them that twenty-seven of their priests immediately returned to our Family. (BA, 5)

Aquilano's account of the reabsorption of the Clareni upon Giovanni da Capestrano's command thus had the effect of bestowing Clareno's posthumous blessing upon the Observance.

The Spiritual Tradition in the Observant Chronicles

This extraordinary opening chapter presented the Observant congregation as the heir to and culmination of the Spiritual movement. Aquilano did not trace the Observant line back to Francis, who makes no appearance in the *Chronica*, but to the traditions nurtured by the Spiritual party in the early fourteenth century. Indeed, Aquilano seems to have regarded the Observants as successful Spirituals for, unlike Clareno and his followers, they had not had to leave the Order to fulfil the Rule. Of the major Observant chroniclers, Aquilano thus seems to be the most aware of the Observance as a new phenomenon which engendered a break in the pattern of Franciscan history. He was the most prominent chronicler to confine his history to the Observance rather than compose a chronicle of the whole Order from the time of Francis onward. Moreover, his *Chronica* was based upon the very notion of fracture. By closely linking the Observance to Angelo Clareno who had fled the Order to found his own brotherhood of hermits, and then skipping over the long period between Clareno's death (1337) and the inception of Paoluccio's Observance (1368), Aquilano further ruptured the narrative of Franciscan history. Aquilano's opening chapter is also interesting for what it reveals about Observant assumptions. Aquilano was the first Observant historian to write about the congregation, and his work establishes that certain Observants preserved a rich oral tradition surrounding

³⁸ *Compendium*, AFH 2 (1909), p.470.

the Spirituals. It was a tradition which Aquilano assumed his educated readers would recognise and acknowledge. He stated in his prologue that he had discussed the need for a history of the Observance at an unspecified Chapter General; his work was thus presumably recognised, if not actively commissioned, by the Observant hierarchy.³⁹ Indeed, Aquilano himself was a member of that hierarchy and remained prominent in the Observant administration until his retirement from the active life in the 1480s.

However, whilst Aquilano was willing to present the Observance as the heir to Claren's radical ideal, he was less willing to link the congregation to the associates of Paoluccio dei Trinci, namely Giovanni della Valle and his disciple Gentile da Spoleto, whose reformed congregation had been accused of accepting Fraticelli and was thus suppressed in 1355. It was common for the Observants to disown all knowledge of this period, for the fifteenth-century congregation tended to be wary of any heretical taint which might compromise its successful role in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Although Angelo Claren was amongst the most prominent of the Spirituals and might therefore be considered dangerous, he had in fact left the Franciscan Order before the Spirituals were excommunicated. His own early excommunication for his intransigent views (lifted by 1310) and his flight to Greece with his band of religious outlaws (1295-1305) were eclipsed by his last years as the respected leader of his own group of Poor Hermits and his posthumous reputation as a writer and translator of religious texts. He was thus a relatively safe figure with whom to be associated. In contrast, Gentile da Spoleto had been formally tried and imprisoned by the Order, and died in obscurity at Brugliano in 1362. Aquilano's *Chronica* moves straight from the first chapter on Claren, who died in 1337, to a second chapter dealing with Paoluccio dei Trinci's foundation of the Observance in 1368. Paoluccio thus emerged as a lone reformer, uncontaminated by any outside influence other than a reverence for Francis's Rule which he shared with earlier reformers. Mario Sensi suspects that this elision was not a mistake, but that it 'clearly shows a preoccupation with giving an apologetic version of the facts when writing of the Observance.'⁴⁰

³⁹ Aquilano's presence was recorded at the General Chapters of L'Aquila (1452), Assisi (1455), Milan (1457), Rome (1458) and Mantua (1467), but this discussion does not seem to be documented. See R. Pratesi, 'Amici, Bernardino (Aquilano, da Fossa)' in *DBI* 1, pp. 778-780

⁴⁰ M. Sensi, 'Brogliano e l'opera di Fra Paoluccio Trinci', *PS* 12 (1975), p. 76.

The other Observant chroniclers were less willing than Aquilano to link their congregation openly to the Spiritual era. Nicholas Glassberger presented a surprisingly long and detailed account of the Spiritual controversy. At times, parts of his work can even seem slyly sympathetic towards Spiritual aspirations. For instance, when writing of the 1310 disputation over *usus pauper*, Glassberger described the Spiritual protagonists as 'being zealous for the observance of the Rule,' and transcribed Ubertino da Casale's tract in detail, whilst according little space to Conventual arguments (NG, 114-6). Because he lived in Bavaria, to which Michele da Cesena and followers had fled in 1328, he was also able to utilise surviving material in order to give a very full and balanced account of Michele's arguments against John XXII.⁴¹ His account of this period is enhanced by the transcription of a large number of contemporary documents (NG, 141-56). However, Glassberger could also be openly condemnatory of the more radical wings of the Franciscan Order. He warmly approved of the Minister General Crescenzo da Jesi's persecution and condemnation of the *zelantes* in 1244, although this episode had been viewed by Angelo Clareno as the third great tribulation which proved the sanctity of the Spiritual ideal, and was also used by Mariano da Firenze to illustrate the devil's persecution of virtuous Franciscan brothers.⁴² In addition, Glassberger's description of the events which surrounded the suppression of Gentile da Spoleto's community in 1355 was markedly unsympathetic. Without linking Gentile's brotherhood in any way to Paoluccio dei Trinci or the Observance, he detailed the charges of heresy brought against the congregation and approved of its dissolution (NG, 186-9).

Perhaps because he wrote in Germany, far from the rich oral traditions that were available to Mariano and Aquilano in Italy, Glassberger was less interested in identifying past 'observances' in order to provide the Observance with a recognisable lineage. He made no reference whatsoever to Giovanni della Valle or Paoluccio dei Trinci in his *Chronica*; and even Bernardino da Siena's entrance into the Order in 1402 merited no reference to ^{the} advent of the Observance. Indeed, Glassberger failed to record any mention

⁴¹ The Franciscan Minister General Michele da Cesena (1316-1328) clashed with John XXII over the suppression of the doctrine of Christ's absolute poverty in 1323. Michele fled to Germany with his followers (popularly known as the *fraticelli de opinione*) in 1328 and carried on his campaign against the Pope from the safety of the court of Louis of Bavaria. He was deposed from his office in the same year and died in 1342 still convinced that he was the last lawful Franciscan Minister General. See Moorman, pp. 313-330; Douie, pp. 153-201.

of the new congregation prior to 1415, when the brotherhood was officially authorised by the Council of Constance. Here he broke off his narrative to insert the text of the decree issued by Constance. The narrative of the chronicle was symbolically recommenced after 1415 and thereafter the work became a history of the Observance rather than a chronicle of the Order as a whole. Glassberger devoted the greatest part of his post-1415 history to a meticulous record of the Observance's expanding administration; elections, statutes and the settling of new houses. Glassberger's Observance thus had no antecedents; the congregation seems to spring fully formed from Constance. Other than making the symbolic choice to write a history of the Franciscan Order rather than the Observance, Glassberger made no attempt to create a traceable line of descent for his congregation.

Glassberger's account of the Spiritual and early Observant eras provides an interesting contrast to Mariano da Firenze's *Compendium*, which touched more fully upon the influences on the early Observance. The latter's treatment of the Spiritual era was not as radical as that of Aquilano, but Mariano still gives the impression of being quietly sympathetic towards Spiritual aims. He included a number of prominent Spiritual brothers in his passages on eminent Franciscans of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, ascribing to Olivi a particularly long list of saintly qualities (MF 2, 461-2). His account of the banning of the Spiritual habit in 1317 (in John XXII's *Quorundam exigit*) seems more regretful than anything else: 'The Lord Pope removed the hood which the blessed Francis wore and handed down to his Order, which was worn by the rebels in the Order, and made all wear the hood that was used by the Community' (MF 2, 640). He insinuated that John XXII's condemnation of the doctrine of absolute poverty in *Cum inter nonnullus* of 1323, which provoked 'scandal and tribulations' in the Order, arose from indignation rather than good theology. Moreover, Mariano viewed Michele da Cesena's opposition to the Pope in a surprisingly positive light. Although he criticised the former General's descent into outright heresy, he commended Michele for the way in which he 'prudently, powerfully and constantly resisted the Pope, affirming that the doctrine of Christ's poverty was not heretical, but sound, Catholic and faithful' (MF 2, 638).

More importantly, Mariano was the only major Observant chronicler to refer extensively to the attempted reforms of Giovanni della Valle between 1334 and 1351, and

⁴² Glassberger, p. 69; Clarenò, *Historia Septem Tribulationem* in *ALKG* 2 (1886), pp. 108-336; and Mariano da Firenze, *Via Spirituale*, BGV, Cod. LVII, 7, 7, fol. 52r. On Mariano's account of the

Gentile da Spoleto between 1351 and 1355.⁴³ Indeed, Mariano explicitly asserted Giovanni della Valle's role in the foundation of the Observant congregation. In his entry for the year 1334 he wrote:

Fra Giovanni della Valle ... was chiefly a zealot for the observance of the Rule who obtained from the Minister General the uninhabited hermitage of Brugliano ... where with his followers he lived until his death in great perfection following the pure and simple or literal observance of the Rule. ... The family of the Regular Observance was propagated or had its origin from this Fra Giovanni. (MF 2, 641)

It is clear from Wadding's *Annales Minorum* that the *Fasciculus chronicarum* went even further in tracing the Observance back to its radical roots. Citing Mariano's *Fasciculus* as his authority, Wadding stated:

Fra Giovanni della Valle had as advisors and friends pious and learned men: Fra Angelo Clareno, who was in the last years of his life; Gentile da Spoleto; and the brother who later helped to restore the dignity of the Order, Paoluccio dei Trinci.⁴⁴

Moreover, Mariano's treatment of Gentile da Spoleto's suppressed reform, a passage of Franciscan history which was often left unmentioned by Observant writers, is surprisingly sympathetic. Mariano did not allude to the charges brought against Gentile and his followers which alleged that they had embraced the heresy of the Fraticelli. Rather, he implicitly paralleled the sufferings of Gentile's congregation with the tribulations endured by his own Observance in the fifteenth century by suggesting that Gentile's brotherhood was suppressed simply because of Conventual suspicion of any group which practised absolute poverty and thus moved toward secession from the authority of the Conventual Ministers. Under his entry for the year 1352, Mariano recorded that Giovanni della Valle's congregation was threatened with dispersal due to the death of the founder. His disciple, Gentile da Spoleto, accordingly petitioned Pope

persecutions of the Franciscan Order in the *Via Spirituale*, see Chapter Seven.

⁴³ Glassberger's commentary on Gentile da Spoleto was extremely meagre. Johannes Komorowo referred to the two reformers in his *Memoriale Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* (1535), stating that Gentile da Spoleto was accused of heresy, though he failed to link either Gentile or Giovanni della Valle to the Observance of Paoluccio dei Trinci. See *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* V, pp. 128-129. However, Komorowo chose to begin his 1510 chronicle of the Observance with the life of Paoluccio dei Trinci, and immediately segued into the life of Bernardino da Siena, thus avoiding any mention of compromising heresy and emphasising Bernardino's role as apostolic successor to the Observant Vicariate. See *Tractatus cronice Fratrum Minorum Observantie*, pp. 322-323.

⁴⁴ *An. Min.* VII, 168, xxiv.

Clement for the right to take over several uninhabited hermitages. The petition was granted:

In these houses the brothers led a difficult life according to the purity of the Rule. Their separation gave rise no little disturbance in the Order. It was accompanied by the greatest of agitation, for in nearly every province there were a few perfect men who also retained their zeal for the perfection of the Rule, and who were thus encouraged to do the same. ... In 1354, the Chapter General ruled that the Minister General should labour in the Curia against the privilege accorded to Fra Gentile. ... In 1355, the Minister General ... dispersed and totally destroyed the aforesaid congregation. (MF 3, 302-3)

Mariano chose to blame the suppression of this proto-Observant congregation on the jealousy and fear of the Conventuals despite the evidence of one of his major sources, Arnaldus de Sarnano's *Chronica XXIV Generalium* (c.1375). Sarnano, a Conventual, gave an altogether less sympathetic account of Gentile's reform:

In the same year a certain lay brother called Gentile of Spoleto of the Province of St Francis and certain others, seduced by some fatuous zeal, had the audacity to oppose themselves against the whole community of the Order and attempt to divide it with a great schism.⁴⁵

Mariano's account was tailored to an Observant audience who would see the similarity between the difficulties faced by Gentile's congregation and by the Regular Observance during the fifteenth century. Where Gentile's brotherhood had failed, the Observants had triumphed. Mariano's narrative was thus an oblique warning to the Observants of what could have happened to their own brotherhood, and an affirmation of the election of the Observant brothers who had succeeded due to God's love for the congregation. By writing so sympathetically of Giovanni della Valle and Gentile da Spoleto, Mariano also made it clear that the Observance was a congregation with a distinctive lineage which could be traced from Paoluccio, Gentile and Giovanni, through Angelo Clareno, who in turn had personal links to Francis's closest companions, and thus to Francis himself. This conviction is reflected in his fleeting references to Paoluccio dei Trinci's reform, which he described in similar terms to the earlier attempts. The early Observance founded in 1368 practised 'the pure and simple literal observance of the Rule'; it was 'a separation from the Conventual [community]'; 'a new little plant' (MF 3, 305, 702). Mariano's unshakeable confidence in a separate identity for the Observance suggests that he had been reassured by the papal vindication of his congregation's conception of the Franciscan life through *Ite*

⁴⁵ Arnaldus de Sarnano, *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, AF 3, p. 547; translated by Nimmo, pp. 383-384.

vos (1517). This bull had legitimised the brotherhood in the eyes of the world, and Mariano's chronicle reflects an institutional self-confidence that allowed him to examine the earliest impulses towards Observant reform without the evasions of earlier historians.

Unfortunately, due to the comprehensive editing of the *Compendium*, very little remains of Mariano's work on the Paoluccio's early Observance. However, Mariano's *Vita di Paoluccio dei Trinci* survives in his own manuscript redaction of his *Vite de sancti Frati Minori*. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, it provides an excellent insight into the author's conception of the origins of the Observance. Despite the zealous editing of the *Compendium*, it remains clear that Mariano was aware that the Observance was something new in the history of the Order. Although Mariano had, unlike Glassberger, followed the path of the early Observant movement from its first faltering steps in 1334, he too made a symbolic recommencement of his chronicle in 1415 just as the German chronicler had chosen to do. At this date he interrupted his narrative to deliver a long eulogy on the Observance's greatest figures; Bernardino da Siena, Giovanni da Capestrano, Alberto da Sarteano and Giacomo della Marca. From 1415, the *Compendium* was devoted almost entirely to Observant administrative affairs. After this date, Mariano also chose to exemplify the Franciscan way of life with biographies of brothers who nearly all belonged to the Observance.

The Representation of the Observance

Observant historians tended to advance a surprisingly uniform representation of their congregation. This suggests that the Observance cultivated a strong institutional self-consciousness which was shared by the chroniclers and diffused by them. Moreover, certain comments make it clear that the Observant historians were aware that their works could be useful in the polemical battles which raged between the two wings of the Order during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Mariano was eager to set the record straight on matters of dispute. He covered Bernardino da Siena's acts as defender of the Observance, and added: 'I say this for the confutation of those who mendaciously write that this saint never entered or lived in the Vicarian Family' (MF 3, 712).⁴⁶ Nicholas Glassberger hotly denied rumours circulating in Germany which alleged that Capestrano

was vain and greedy for popular acclaim, or that his miracles were suspect (NG, 336-9). Johannes Komorowo used his 1535 *Memoriale Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* to attack one of the Observance's greatest opponents, the Colettan brother Bonifazio da Ceva (†1517), who had devoted his life to the reunification of the Franciscan Order under the Conventual Ministers. Komorowo wrote of Bonifazio's 'bitter wrath and hatred' for the Observant Family, and warned his readers to 'be cautious, and do not trust all you read [in his works]'.⁴⁷ Clearly, all three authors intended their works either to be used by those who might publicly refute Conventual claims, or perhaps even to be read by non-Observants who may have been gulled by Conventual allegations. The best evidence that the Observant chroniclers intended their works to have a polemical edge is their treatment of the fifteenth-century Franciscan Order: each and every Observant chronicler was extremely partisan when dealing with the recent past. Their claims reveal how deeply ingrained Observant institutional self-consciousness had become by the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento.

The overriding theme of Aquilano's *Chronica* was the persecution of those righteous men who wished to return to a true observance of the Rule. He followed his chapter on Clarenò with several more devoted to the troubles of the nascent Observance. Like Clarenò, Paoluccio was presented as gathering together a tiny brotherhood devoted to the true observance of the Rule in an eremitical setting. Paoluccio's community was shown to be a necessary reform which was protected and nurtured by God. Aquilano commented: 'It is not remarkable that the community of the Family was raised up, conserved and increased through the favour of laymen, for the divine will wished it so' (BA, 8). Aquilano's *Chronica* also contains one of the earliest and finest descriptions of Paoluccio's experience at Brugliano, which stressed that Paoluccio and his followers observed the Rule *ad litteram sine glossa*, and made much of their simple, unlettered piety (BA, 6-11).

Aquilano's account of Paoluccio's reform became more controversial when he dealt with the gradual growth of the congregation. He made it clear that the new

⁴⁶ After his death in 1444, the Conventuals began to claim that Bernardino had never been an Observant brother and attempted to appropriate the new saint for their own community. Such arguments provoked great fury in the Observance. This subject is treated fully in Chapter Five.

⁴⁷ Komorowo, *Memoriale*, p. 146. Komorowo's advice could apply equally well to the readers of the Observant chronicles.

brotherhood was necessary due to the decline of the Conventual way of life. For instance, he recorded in rather unseemly detail the insults used by the Perugian Fraticelli against the Conventuals, remarking that the Fraticelli tugged at Conventual shirt-collars and cried before the people, 'Father, St Francis never taught you [to wear] such things!' (BA, 10). Aquilano related that the austere life practised by the Fraticelli in pre-Observant Perugia earned them such devotion that their popularity eclipsed that of the Franciscans themselves. In 1374 the Conventuals therefore made the decision to invite Paoluccio and his brothers to the town in an attempt to draw the people's reverence away from the heretical Fraticelli. Aquilano wrote of a Conventual friar who, at the height of Fraticelli popularity in Perugia, gave his superiors advice which acknowledged that the Conventuals had ceded their claim to be the true sons of Francis to the new Observant congregation:

Inspired by God, one of the lesser brothers said ... 'There is no other way under heaven of expelling those bad friars [the Fraticelli], except by inviting the true friars of St Francis to this city.' The others replied, 'Indeed, you speak the truth, but where are these true friars?' And he replied, 'At Brughiano.' (BA, 10)⁴⁸

This rather unconvincing Conventual dialogue allowed Aquilano to proclaim that even the Conventuals recognised the Observants' superior virtue and greater claim to Francis's heritage. Aquilano thus presented the early Observance as the orthodox alternative to the Fraticelli. Both groups shared a life of extraordinary poverty and asceticism, but from common roots the two congregations took different paths. God's elect Observants remained faithful to the Church and were destined to multiply and become successful, whilst the heretical Fraticelli dwindled and were finally eradicated by zealous Observant inquisitors.

The fraught relationship between the two major Franciscan factions emerges as the principal seam running through Aquilano's *Chronica*. Aquilano intimated that the Observant congregation was tormented by the Conventuals from the very beginning. He wrote that, as the Observants increased and were nourished by the veneration of the laity, they were forced to build new houses outside the towns primarily because of the indignation of the city-dwelling Conventuals 'with whom they lived in a state of

⁴⁸ Aquilano was the first to recount this particular detail of the Observant foundation legend, for which he cited the authority of 'quidam venerabilis antiquus pater nomine frater Franciscus de Stroncona'. Aquilano depended greatly upon Giacomo Oddi's c.1474 *vita* of Paoluccio for his account of the Observant founder. Aquilano's *vita* was in turn copied almost verbatim by Mariano da Firenze in c.1517. See Oddi, I, pp. 85-89; M. Faloci Pulignani, 'Il B. Paoluccio Trinci da Foligno', *MF* 6 (1896), pp. 97-128.

continuous war' (BA, 15). It is surprising that Aquilano, usually very keen on the traditions of the eremitical *observantia ad litteram* here chose to imply, presumably for polemical reasons, that the need for seclusion was a secondary motive. He railed against Conventual perfidy which had ruined the reformation promised by the *Martinianae* (1430), and which, aided by the devil, had halted the election of the Observant Alberto da Sarteano to the Generalate in 1443 (BA, 32). He also complained about the precariousness of life under the Conventual Ministers before *Ut sacra* accorded the Observance a separate administration in 1446, commenting that the Ministers often opposed the Observant brothers and attempted to obstruct their way of life (BA, 25).

Aquilano's disdain for the Conventual way of life emerges again and again in the *Chronica*. Aquilano delighted in anecdotes which showed the Conventuals at their worst or being bested by the superior talents of the Observants. When the 1452 Observant Chapter General proved too well-attended to be supported by the tiny Observant hermitage of S. Giuliano, the Conventuals in L'Aquila kindly offered to house and feed the extra delegates. Aquilano approvingly quoted the Observant response: 'It is better to be dead in S. Giuliano than alive in a convent in the city.' Such a reply emphasised that the Observance was utterly separate from the reprehensible Conventuals in its reverence for the eremitical life. Aquilano added, 'In my opinion, this was the most pious Chapter General we have ever had in our Family' (BA, 39). Likewise, his account of Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce's campaign against his estranged Observant confrères from 1452 bubbled with anger, for Aquilano admitted that Caracciolo had been a friend before he defected to the Conventuals (BA, 55-6). Aquilano contemplated the preacher's Conventual career and concluded:

Roberto displeased God by leaving our Family and afterwards his work was no longer fruitful. It is certainly a sign of great esteem that our Lord God loves this Family so much that no-one who leaves it can do good deeds; or if they do, there is little to show for it. (BA, 41)

Indeed, he implicitly compared Caracciolo to Lucifer: the preacher was 'cast out like Satan' into a Conventual hell because of his pride and lust for power (BA, 51, 55).

The difficult relationship between the Observants and Conventuals gave rise to an extremely important and common motif in the chronicles, in which the Observants were presented as martyrs whose congregation was persecuted, but who remained faithful to the true interpretation of the Rule and were rewarded with divine approval. This theme

echoed Francis's concern that his Order should be poor and defenceless. Francis's counsel had been refined by the Spirituals and Fraticelli who were pleased to provoke the antipathy of the worldly with their tattered habits and extreme doctrines: persecution merely confirmed their election. Aquilano in particular had assimilated the terminology of the Spirituals: his *Chronica* is littered with the rhetoric of Observant martyrdom.⁴⁹ He constantly referred to the troubles of his congregation as tribulations, persecutions and wars waged against the *pauperculi* and *veri fratres minores*, emphasising his confrères' poverty and powerlessness. He believed that the congregation was alone in the world: it was incessantly persecuted by the Conventuals, was suspected by Pope Calixtus III of heresy in 1455, and suffered from 'great tribulation and cruel desperation' throughout the 1450s. The rhetoric of martyrdom and victimhood ran so deep in Aquilano that he was unable to conceive of his congregation as an aggressor or as an equal partner in a mutually destructive relationship: 'Our greatest tribulation,' he wrote, 'was that it was we who endured persecution, yet we were accused of persecuting our persecutors' (BA, 55). Aquilano seems unaware that his own chronicle offers ample evidence of the Observant willingness to stick the knife into the Conventual brothers.

Other chronicles confirm that the Observants' perception of their congregation was firmly rooted in the concept of martyrdom. For example, Alessandro Ricci deemed it important to include in his text a large number of letters written by the Observance's leaders to one another. Many of these allow us to glimpse the inner workings of the Observance, and afford an insight into the very personal fears of the Observant leaders. In one letter, written three days after the release of the *Bulla Concordiae*, the Vicar General Battista da Levanto wrote to Giovanni da Capestrano in Germany to describe the ongoing Observant crisis. 'Alas, father, may God spare us!' he wrote, 'Never has the Family suffered so much. For eight months without interruption we have persevered through this martyrdom.'⁵⁰ An earlier letter of Battista's, dated 8 July 1455, articulated the same anxiety in more picturesque language, informing Capestrano that the Conventuals took advantage of his absence to 'thrust the Family into the wine-press.'⁵¹ Such letters affirm

⁴⁹ R. Rusconi, 'La tradizione manoscritta delle opere degli spirituali' is the best overview of Spiritual influence on Observant literature. Rusconi concludes that Spiritual texts were widely available in Observant libraries and that the themes and language of Spiritual writers continued to be influential throughout the Quattro- and Cinquecento. Rusconi also draws attention to Aquilano's particular fascination with the Spirituals.

⁵⁰ Chiappini, 'De vita et scriptis Fr. Alexandri de Riciis', *AFH* 21 (1928), p. 290.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

that the rhetoric of martyrdom was common parlance amongst the Observants during this period.

Aquilano preserved some splendid examples of the ways in which the Observant hierarchy used the congregation's battles with the Conventuals to encourage and enrich the Observant institutional identity. For instance, he set down his own speech to the Observant brothers who gathered together to discuss Caracciolo's campaign against their congregation in Rome in 1453:

I do not fear the Lord, for God is the patron of truth and the defender of virtue. I do not fear his creatures, because if God is for us, who could be against us? This one thing I fear: let us not be divided, for every realm which is divided within itself will be desolated. If we are united, God being for us, I fear neither demons nor men: victory is ours. (BA, 49)

This speech, clearly inspired by a passage from Matthew 12:25, is a striking testimony of the ongoing process of instilling the brothers with a strong institutional self-consciousness. It occurs in a long passage which has the taste of a heroic war-briefing, with Aquilano starring as the determined colonel. The account concludes with each brother vowing to defend his congregation:

I [Aquilano] said, 'With my brothers, I fear nothing in the world. We will be victorious.' ... Thus the brothers who had gathered together for this cause were all comforted by God; and we lauded the Lord's goodness with all our hearts and minds, for he did not leave his servants in their time of need. And each one of us prepared himself with good heart for the battle, not of attack, but of necessary defence. (BA, 49-50)

The idea that God alone sustained the Observance was tempered by Aquilano's obvious pride in the lay support for his congregation. He often adduced the approving comments of laymen, allowing citizens to explain the virtues of the Observance in lay terms.⁵² He also mentioned such prominent protectors as Francesco Sforza of Milan, commenting of the duke's support during controversies with the Conventuals in 1443: 'I reckon that, if the friars had wished, a great battle could have been prepared for our defence' (BA, 31). However, God continued to be the Observance's most trusted support in times of trouble. Aquilano reported his own conversation with the Observant Vicar

⁵² For instance, Aquilano cited one lay man commending the Observance's eremitical life, another proclaiming his devotion to the Observance in the face of Conventual criticism, and several defending the congregation's traditionalism against those who claimed that it was an unauthorised novelty. See Aquilano, pp. 15, 48, 54- 55.

General Marco da Bologna in 1458, when the Observants were faced with the messy compromises of the *Bulla Concordiae* and with the fierce attacks of the Conventuals. Marco echoed the earlier words of Battista da Levanto when he told Aquilano:

In truth, I have never seen us in greater danger than we are today. The Minister General [Giacomo da Sarzuela] is Catalan like the Pope [Calixtus III] and goes to him whenever he wishes; our cardinal protector is helpless; and we have few friends who truly wish to help us.

Aquilano simply laughed and replied:

We have been through many years of the Family's tribulations together. We have taken many precautions, but none ever worked. Yet through the Lord's goodness and compassion, he has arranged divine providence for us much better than we imagined. I am sure that he won't now abandon his poor little servants who so cherish justice. (BA, 88-9)

Thus Aquilano represented the Observance as dangerously vulnerable to the worldly politicking of the Conventuals and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but protected and nourished by divine regard. The fostering of such a siege mentality greatly encouraged individual identification with the institution.

Although no other chronicler gives such intimate insights into the rhetoric of Observant identity as Aquilano, similar themes emerge in other chronicles. Mariano da Firenze agreed that the Observance had taken up the baton of Franciscan holiness. In his entry under the year 1424, he commented, 'Just as the Conventuals declined from the footsteps of Francis, so the brothers of the Observant family flowered by following those footsteps in all perfection and sanctity' (MF 3, 709). The Observant relationship with the Conventuals once more became a locus for the developing conception of the Observant identity in Nicholas Glassberger's *Chronica*. Glassberger compared the Observance to David and the Conventuals to 'the most proud and evil-spirited Goliath', whom the Observant brothers ought to counter with 'the five stones with which he can be vanquished; that is, threats, vows, love, imitation and prayer' (NG, 447). He also transcribed a tract addressed to the Council of Basle which discussed the conflict between the two parties in 1433. Duncan Nimmo believes that the tract reveals 'undeniable psychological acumen' in its portrayal of the relationship between the Observants and Conventuals:

It is almost universal that, where one estate contains different or opposed ways of life, there will be zealous arguments [*zelum et contentionem*], particularly as the less ardent oppose those who are more so, just as Esau resented Jacob, the sons of Israel their saintly brother Joseph, and Saul,

David. ... These arguments are sparked off because the better life is an implicit criticism of the worse and allows men to say, 'Why don't you live like them?' And these arguments are greatly increased because it is a few poor and simple brothers who are seen by their life to be criticising the majority of powerful and learned brothers, and refusing to follow them; according to the text of St John: 'Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?' (NG, 294-5)

Glassberger also transcribed into his *Chronica* a letter written by Giovanni da Capestrano which provides interesting evidence of Capestrano's conscious development of the image of his congregation. The letter is dated 15 November 1452 and is addressed to Albert Puchelbach, Guardian of the Observant house at Nuremberg, where Glassberger himself lived from 1482 until his death in 1508. Capestrano intended his letter to be a convenient summary of the Observant way of life. He opened by stressing the need for mental prayer and the importance of the preaching office, and touched upon confession, Marian devotions, discipline, and relations with the laity. The letter shows Capestrano to have been particularly mindful of the benefits to the Observance of projecting a certain image in public, for he chastised the brothers for entertaining lay visitors at table. Instead he advised them:

Brothers, flee from worldly company and love solitude. Believe me, the more you flee from the laity, as our blessed father Francis said, the more they will embrace you with devotion and charity. Now, because they see you eat, they reckon you just like other men. But when they are rarely allowed to see you, they will reckon you to be angels. Many of them will come to you, and this Family will flourish. (NG, 343)

Here Capestrano unashamedly counselled his brothers to mould the image they presented to the laity. His primary aim was to encourage the brothers in a life of sanctity, but he was also aware of the importance of the image of the congregation. The brothers must be holy, but it was also important that they should also be seen to be holy. Virtue must be a recognisable quality, consciously developed and promoted to benefit the Observance both spiritually and materially. Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, Capestrano ordered the novices to wear a habit which fully distinguished them from the Conventuals, 'for just as you differ from [them] in your interior acts, so you must differ on the outside' (NG, 343). If the brothers followed his counsel, Capestrano declared, the Family would increase in fame, in virtue and in number.

In the same year, 1452, Fra Serafino da Gaeta gave a speech at the Chapter General at L'Aquila which echoed Capestrano's pride in the Observance. It was reported and glossed by Bernardino Aquilano:

Master Serafino said to the brothers: 'Truly I believe that the Minorite Order has never stood in such great repute.' This statement was remarkable and bold, since the time of the blessed Francis and certain of his companions seemed to be a school for saints. Nevertheless, at that time [the Observance] had an even greater reputation: here, there were the miracles of S. Bernardino; there, the reception of the preachers; yonder, the exemplary life of the brothers, so that [the congregation] seemed to be a model for the whole Church. (BA, 43)

It was certainly remarkably bold to state that the Observance rivalled Francis's primitive brotherhood in its sanctity, but Aquilano clearly felt it was not excessively presumptuous. Indeed, Aquilano's admission that his community enjoyed 'an even greater reputation' than the early brotherhood communicates his profound pride in the Observance. This passage is revealing in a number of ways. Firstly, as we shall see below, it is significant that, in praising the reputation of the Observance's greatest preacher-saint and the duties performed by his followers in preaching to the people, Aquilano chose to define his congregation's sanctity with the virtues exemplified by its moderate wing. It is also characteristic of the Observance that both Serafino da Gaeta and Aquilano fastened so keenly upon the idea of *reputazione*, preferring to focus upon the perception of outsiders rather than on the fact of the Observance's actual actions. Since both concentrated upon what layfolk thought of their congregation, the *sanctitas* of the Observant preachers and holy-men was related through the filter of external perception. Most Observant writers, like Capestrano above, laid similar weight on the importance of cultivating a favourable public image, for the congregation depended on its reputation for survival. Finally, the statement attests to the self-confidence of the Observance which remained undented and was even reinforced by persecution and setbacks.

The Observant Ideal

Aquilano's statement that the preaching life played a major part in earning the Observance 'an even greater reputation' than Francis's own early brotherhood becomes important when we examine the portrayal of the Observant ideal in the congregation's historiography. The chronicles evince some tension over the 'two souls'; the traditions of the literal observance, involving a life of contemplation, seclusion, utmost poverty and disdain for learning, and the inclination towards an active life of learning, preaching and

ecclesiastical administration which was fostered by Bernardino, Capestrano and the Regular Observance. The chroniclers attempted to advance a representation of the Observance which was tailored to their readership, and their works were intended for educated brothers who could read Latin. Such men were likely to be part of the wave of friars who became prominent in the Observance after Bernardino da Siena's 1438 clericalisation programme, which marginalised uneducated lay brothers and played down the traditional eremitical nature of the congregation in favour of encouraging a new educated class of clerics and preachers.

Aquilano's *Chronica* fostered a synthesis of the eremitical model of the Literal Observance and the active life of the Regular Observance. Aquilano devoted his sixth chapter to 'the Family's principal brothers, by whose life and doctrine Christendom was illumined'. The friars chosen by Aquilano predominantly reflect the values of the Regular Observance: seven of the twelve were famous for their preaching careers, including the most prominent of Observant preachers; Bernardino, Capestrano, Giacomo della Marca and Alberto da Sarteano. Indeed, Aquilano's long final commentary on his choices reveals that he believed the Observance to have had an eschatological role which could only be fulfilled through the medium of preaching. He opined that the people of the world had walked sin and darkness, suffering the pangs that foreshadowed the last days - plagues, famines, murder, slavery, the incursions of the Turks - until the coming of the Observance:

The preaching and sanctity of the aforesaid [Observant] fathers seemed to cut them from this life, as is written below. Many of them rushed to join our Order or others; some changed their lives for the better; and all religious seemed to convert to a better life. (BA, 23)

However, Aquilano tempered his strong vindication of the active life with a deep regard for the traditional Franciscan virtues of poverty and eremitism, which he closely identified with the apostolic tradition. In the *Chronica*, he made much of a long anecdote concerning the competing sermon cycles in L'Aquila in 1452 of the Observant preacher Domenico da Leonessa and Caracciolo's fellow defector from the Observance, Giovanni da Volterra. Aquilano emphasised that Domenico had nowhere to preach in the city, since the Observant hermitage of S. Giuliano was isolated from human contact far outside the city walls. Without a church to shelter him, Domenico preached in an orchard. 'It was necessary,' Aquilano wrote, '[for Domenico] to preach outside the Hospitallers' church

using the Hospitallers' bell [to call the people to sermon], in an unroofed, windy and open place' (BA, 42-3). Despite having nowhere to lay his head in the city, Domenico's sermons attracted a far greater audience than Giovanni da Volterra's cycle in the more comfortable church of S. Francesco. Aquilano considered this, and a run of clement weather which allowed for Domenico's open-air services, to be a divine miracle. Aquilano revelled in his congregation's visible poverty and outcast status. The anecdote perfectly illustrates Aquilano's conception of the Observant ideal, in which the active life of the preacher was balanced by the need for poverty and isolation and both were united by divine approbation.

In other passages Aquilano revealed his natural predisposition to lean towards the literal tradition. For instance, he depicted himself arguing against the need for Observant schools at the 1452 Chapter General in L'Aquila. In reply to a suggestion that the only asset which the Observance lacked was learning, Aquilano argued that there was no need for the proposed *studium litterarum* since God already called educated men to the Order: 'the friars are devoted to prayer, devotions and the divine liturgy; and thus God defends and increases his Family' (BA, 44). Although the hero of the *Chronica* (after Aquilano himself) was undoubtedly Bernardino da Siena, Aquilano's other works show him to have been a vocal supporter of the eremitical impulse. Despite Bernardino's 1438 circular which marginalised Observant eremitism, Aquilano's regard for the retired life permeates his works. In particular, his *Cronaca della presa di possesso del Convento di Sant'Angelo d'Ocre*, probably written in the 1480s, which meticulously detailed the process by which Aquilano and his Observant brothers established themselves in a tiny hermitage in the Abruzzese mountains in 1481, reveals the writer's deep love of the secluded life to which he retired in his old age. Indeed, the *Cronaca* might be regarded as an instruction manual for the perpetuation of the eremitical life.

It is clear that Aquilano attempted to maintain a balance between the Literal and Regular models of the Observant life in his *Chronica Fratrum Minorum Observantiae*, synthesising into a single Franciscan ideal the eremitical tradition and the life of preaching and teaching which followed and at times subsumed earlier practices. Mariano da Firenze found it less easy to synthesise the two divergent Observant ideals. His works give a particularly clear example of the tensions engendered by the 'two souls' inhabiting a single Observant body. When the lives of saints and beati which Mariano chose to integrate into

his *Compendium chronicarum* are compared to those brothers praised in his vernacular work, the *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* of 1523 (examined in Chapter Seven), it becomes clear that the author tended to praise different types of virtue in the two works. The 313 beati lauded in the learned *Compendium* between 1415 and 1521 were predominantly lettered and active brothers of the type personified by the four pillars of the Observance. Although it can be difficult to evaluate *vitae* that have sometimes been condensed into little more than a single line, nevertheless Mariano's scrupulous editing means that every word was carefully chosen and was intended to carry meaning. The terms that Mariano used to define his Observant beati are thus revealing. He described fifty-seven per cent of the beati as educated men, a category which included a hundred preachers, fifty-four administrators and twenty-three authors (one of whom was Bernardino Aquilano). Only twenty-two per cent of the beati were stated to be lay brothers; a mere five were defined by the fact that they led a contemplative life; and Mariano commended as few as three of the 313 for their love of poverty. Such findings contrast sharply with the virtues promoted in the *Vite de sancti Frati Minori*, a vernacular work which Mariano wrote for the edification of the whole congregation. Here, Mariano predominantly chose to lionise Observant beati who pursued a contemplative life of extreme poverty, prayer and seclusion.⁵³

The contrast between the portrayal of the nature and ideal of the brotherhood in the different texts is extremely vivid and was presumably dictated by Mariano's intended readership. In the *Compendium*, Mariano based his model of sanctity on the examples of Bernardino, Capestrano, Giacomo della Marca and Alberto da Sarteano. Under his entry for 1415, the year in which Constance formally acknowledged the Observance, Mariano grouped these figures together and honoured them with a long panegyric which stressed their defence of the vulnerable Observant congregation:

These four men were the firm pillars of this weak and small Family, and its four most able charioteers, by whom this Family was guided on the right and proper road and was saved. They were four strong shields, always resisting our enemies; four fearsome swords, wounding those who envy us with their saintly words and doctrines; four resonant trumpets, whose sound roused innumerable brothers. (MF 3, 707)

Mariano was the first writer to link Bernardino, Capestrano, Giacomo and Alberto together as the 'four pillars' of the congregation, a tag which has since become a familiar theme in Observant historiography. However, similar terms had been used in an earlier

⁵³ For a detailed account of the virtues inculcated by Mariano's *Vite de sancti Frati Minori*, see Chapter

Observant history. In his *Chronica*, Alessandro Ricci referred to Bernardino, Capestrano and Giacomo as the 'cornerstones and founders of our poor [L'Aquilan] province', and to Bernardino as 'the marble column of the Observance'.⁵⁴ Mariano's extravagant praise of the 'four pillars' emphasises that he viewed these men as the perfect models of sanctity for the educated readers of his chronicle. However, only two (Bernardino and Capestrano) were accorded lives in the vernacular *Vite de sancti Frati Minori*, and their example was overwhelmed by a far larger number of beati who were lauded for their lives of poverty or contemplation rather than their active engagement with the world of ecclesiastical politics and preaching.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Observant chronicles is the fact that they are so similar, despite stylistic differences, the forty years which separated the works of Aquilano (c.1480) and Mariano (1521), and the geographical distances which divided Glassberger in Germany or Komorowo in Poland from their Italian confrères. Differences are certainly detectable, particularly in the chroniclers' natural concern for the minutiae of their own provinces, but the histories are broadly united by a shared sense of Observant institutional identity. Although the chroniclers may have approached the history of their congregation in different ways, their general conclusions were the same. Aquilano's account of the Spiritual era and Mariano's meticulous chronicle of the early reform attempts in Umbria were both intended to create a traceable lineage which would assert the Observance's place at the very heart of the Franciscan Order.⁵⁵ However, whilst Aquilano was positive about the influence of the Spirituels and Mariano felt able to declare Paoluccio's links to the proto-Observant congregations of Giovanni della Valle and Gentile da Spoleto, Nicholas Glassberger was much less willing to endanger the image of his community by linking it to such radical predecessors. Aquilano was particularly keen to acknowledge the Observance as a new phenomenon, albeit it within an accepted

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⁵⁴ A. Chiappini, 'De vita et scriptis Fr. Alexandri de Riciis', *A FH* 21 (1928), pp. 553, 575.

⁵⁵ Indeed, this was a traditional role played by religious historiography in the Renaissance and Early Modern periods. Simon Ditchfield has commented: 'For Catholics ... history had an altogether positive, constructive role. It was charged with no less a task than demonstrating the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition between the early persecuted Church of the martyrs, and the present.' S. Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 273. Many of the Observant chronicles display the same tendencies in microcosm.

Franciscan historical tradition. His *Chronica* was the only one to celebrate the Observance rather than the Order as a whole and his opening chapter linked the new reform to Spiritual traditions. Glassberger and Mariano saw the Observance as a continuation of primitive Franciscan traditions, yet both writers also perceived a break in Franciscan history which came with the 1415 authorisation of the Observance.

All the historians celebrated the Observant re-shaping of the Franciscan Order, consciously using the Observant relationship with the Conventuals both to highlight Observant virtue and to encourage identification with the Observant institution by stressing its vulnerability to Conventual wiles. Moreover, the tone of the chronicles remained fairly constant despite the passing of the years: all the chroniclers adopted a slightly ambivalent characterisation of the Observance which combined profound pride in their brotherhood with a self-pitying conviction of their own martyrdom. Indeed, the historians of the Observance could be said to reverse Benedetto Croce's famous dictum that all hagiography is contemporary historiography.⁵⁶ For Aquilano, Glassberger, Mariano da Firenze and the other Observant chroniclers, all historiography became a form of hagiography. Each chronicle was intended to commemorate and reaffirm the virtue of the Observant brothers. This aim justified the subtle rearrangement of facts and the blatant composition of Observant propaganda to counter Conventual claims. However, the tension at the heart of the Observant congregation emerged in the chroniclers' varying treatment of the Observant ideal. Aquilano's veneration for the eremitical life of the Literal Observance was balanced by his regard for the preaching of Bernardino and his companions. In contrast, Mariano's chronicle unambiguously celebrated the ideal exemplified by the learned administrators and preachers whose labours made the Observance one of the most influential religious orders of the Renaissance. As we shall see in Part Two of this thesis, Observant hagiographers, including Mariano himself, found it equally difficult to balance the ideals of the Literal and Regular Observance in their works.

⁵⁶ Cited in Ditchfield, p. 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

Through a Glass Darkly: Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century Polemic

Observant-Conventual enmity was a primary force in forging the self-perception of the fifteenth-century Observance. The sociologist Richard Jenkins has commented on the significance of such antagonistic relationships: 'Defining "us" involves defining a range of "thems" also. ... Similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary. At the boundary we discover what we are in what we are not.'¹ The Observants and Conventuals were intimately related; children of the same father, brothers in habit, at times sharing a warm relationship (Bernardino da Siena borrowed Conventual books and died in a Conventual house²), at other times divided by jealousy and even hatred. The Observance had emerged from the Conventual grouping in 1368 and the line between the two congregations remained fairly fluid until the middle of the fifteenth century. Despite cautious Observant statutes restricting such practices, Conventuals often entered Observant houses; or, in defiance of a number of papal briefs which forbade religious to move to a less strict community, Observants tired of their comparatively austere lives and joined (or rejoined) the Conventuals.³ Despite the *de facto* autonomy of the Observance, the two congregations remained united by the leadership of the Minister General even after the institution of the Vicars General in 1446's *Ut sacra*.

Such intimacy often led to a difficult relationship, particularly as the Observants moved away from their quiet eremitical life and began^{to} intrude upon the Conventual vocation by successfully taking up the preaching calling from the 1420s. By the middle of the century the Observants were no longer unthreatening younger brothers who could be indulged and disciplined by turns; they were now popular preachers whose renown was eclipsing that of the Conventuals and whose condemnation of sloth and vice could seem uncomfortably close to personal criticism. An anonymous Conventual writing in c.1452 showed himself to be aware of this change. In the early 1400s, he wrote, the Observants had 'lived in humility and the greatest of peace, in prayer and abstinence. ... When they

¹ R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 81.

² Bernardino's letter of 27 September 1440 to the Conventual brothers of Santa Croce in Florence asking to borrow a volume of Olivi's *Expositio super Matthaeum* still survives, and is printed in his *Opera Omnia* VIII, p. 321.

came to the Chapters, both Provincial and General, they were received as if they were God's angels.' However, he believed that since the *Martinianae* (1430) they had turned against their Conventual benefactors: 'After they began to condemn the prelates of the Order, God took from them all good sense, so that those who had been spiritual became mere flesh.'⁴ From the early fifteenth century, the Observants and Conventuals competed for donations, recruits, papal favour and lay following, and their rivalry became fiercer after the failure of the *Martinianae* and the independence granted to the Observants through *Ut sacra*. It added an undertone of hostility and defensiveness to much Observant literature, and it rose to the surface in a number of vitriolic polemical works composed by authors from both sides.

The majority of Observant and Conventual polemics were composed in France, though there are also tracts written by Flemish, German and Italian authors. These writings were written in anger and in haste. At times uncontaminated by any trace of inhibition, they provide an extremely important insight into the mentalities of the two sides. The themes they dealt with remained largely unchanged between 1410 and 1517. In the early sixteenth century the Conventuals were still accusing the Observants of the faults with which they had charged the new congregation in the early fifteenth century. Chief among these were the claims that the Observants were disobedient, ignorant, heretical, hypocritical and unreasonably opposed to the Conventuals. Such charges intimately shaped the Observant identity. Much effort, both in act and in writing, went into proving to Church and laity that such accusations were lies or exaggeration. The very existence of such vitriolic polemics within a single Order shows that the two opposing congregations were polarised in their awareness of the differences and institutional separateness of their communities. Moreover, the grinding constancy of Conventual opposition further contributed to the Observants' defensive sense of their own distinctive identity and election. The Flemish Observant polemicist Nikolaas van Haarlem (fl.1420-1460) wrote in his *Responsio obiectorum quibus status et vita Fratrum Minorum de Observantia* (c.1460):

³ For a good example of the statutes restricting the intake of 'fratres forestieri' see Oliger, 'Statuta provinciae S. Angeli 1448', pp. 99; on the papal briefs see M. Fois, 'I Papi e l'Osservanza Minoritica' in *Il rinnovamento del Francescanesimo: L'Osservanza*, p. 89.

⁴ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), p. 384.

Those who are jealous of the Observants pretend that we took on this way of life through our own invention, but we believe God's provision for us to have been made through the virtues and prayers of the blessed Francis.⁵

In his *Apologia status Fratrum Minorum de Observantia* of 1516, the German Provincial Vicar Kaspar Schatzgeier (1463-1527) asserted: 'This is my reason for writing: to defend the reputation of our Family', whilst the anonymous introduction to the Flemish *Minorica elucidativa* (first published in 1497) stated that the aim of the volume was to show the 'origins and difference of the Observance' and prove why the Observant reform had been necessary.⁶

Three main periods of Observant-Conventual polemic span the years between 1410 and 1517. The earliest polemics were addressed by French Observants to the Parliament of Paris (1410), and the Councils of Constance (in 1415) and Basle (1433) which were to decide upon the fate of the Observant congregation.⁷ Though these polemics were primarily a French concern, the decisions of the Councils were to affect every corner of the Franciscan world. In 1415 the prelates at Constance acceded to the pleas put forward by the French Observants in the *Quaerimoniae propositae in Concilio Constantiense*. This document argued that reform of the Order was beneficial to the Church and would fulfil the true observance of the Rule, but that such reform was blocked by the Conventual Ministers who broke up Observant communities or imported corrupt brothers into reformed houses in an attempt to disrupt the process of renewal. The Observants

⁵ F. A. H. van den Hombergh, 'Nikolaas van Haarlems Widerlegung von Vorwürfen gegen die Observanten', *AFH* 73 (1980), p. 152.

⁶ K. Schatzgeier, *Apologia status fratrum ordinis minorum de Observantia*, (Basle: [n. pub.], 1516), fol. 3v; *Minorica elucidativa*, (Paris: Jean Petit, 1499), fol. 2r. The catalogue of the British Library follows Franciscan tradition in attributing *Minorica elucidativa* to the Italian Observant Alessandro Ariosto (†1484). However, it is more likely to be the work of a French or Flemish brother, for it particularly targets the claims of the Colettans who were the Observance's most stubborn opponents in France and the Low Countries. An inscription which appears in the first publication of the work suggests that it was compiled and perhaps partly composed by a Flemish Observant named Nicolas de Louvain: 'Iste tractatulus debet esse ad usus fratris Nycolai de Lovanio qui eum combinavit, conscripsit ac cum magno labore in quantum potuit correxit anno MCCCXCVII penultima ianuarii.' See *Minorica Elucidativa* (Deventer: Jacobus de Brida, 1497), fol. 30r.

⁷ L. Oliger, 'De relatione inter Observantium querimonias Constantienses (1415) et Ubertini Casalensis quoddam scriptum', *AFH* 9 (1916), pp. 3-41 gives the full text of the complaints addressed to the Paris Parliament in 1410 (pp. 34-41) and quotes long passages of the 1415 *Quaerimoniae* presented to the Council of Constance (pp. 27-34). Although the *Quaerimoniae* is an important text in the history of the Observance, it has never been published fully in a modern edition. The complete document is reproduced in the *Speculum Minorum* (Rouen: Martin Morin, 1509), fols. 175r-185v. The Observant and

appropriated the zealous reforming language of Ubertino da Casale's Spiritual manifesto *Sanctitas vestra*, one of the fundamental statements of the Spiritual ideal in which Ubertino had attacked the failures and laxity of the fourteenth-century Franciscan Community.⁸

The French Observants adopted the language of *Sanctitas vestra* in order to present their grievances and ambitions to the Council of Constance, yet they made important additions to and omissions from the earlier text, in particular mitigating Ubertino's strict interpretation of the Rule to allow for the use of the papal declarations. Although the Observants rejected the more radical aspects of Ubertino's conception of the Franciscan life, they made full use of his polemical thrusts against the Conventuals. Using Ubertino's accusations, the *Quaerimoniae* painted a bleak picture of Conventual life. The Observants further claimed that they themselves suffered from Conventual arrogance and hostility. They were accused of disobedience, and were labelled 'excommunicates ... heretics and destroyers of the Order'.⁹ Thus, in line with early fourteenth-century Spiritual polemic, the *Quaerimoniae* uncompromisingly presented the Observants as victims of Conventual persecution, but also as an elect group which truly understood the Rule and the mind of its author, Francis.

The Council of Constance acceded to the Observant pleas and granted them a Vicar General to preside over a hierarchy of Observant Provincial Vicars. Although the prelates of Constance had foreseen and forbidden future criticisms, admonishing the Conventuals 'not to disquiet, molest or afflict the brothers of this Observance in the present or future on account of their Vicars, either calling them a new sect or any such insult ... defaming them ... or accusing them falsely of heresy, under pain of excommunication,'¹⁰ relations between the two sides worsened after 1415. The Conventuals brought their complaints before the Church and in 1433 the two sides faced each other once more across the chamber of the Council of Basle. The tracts composed by the representatives of the parties

Conventual arguments at the Council of Basle are dealt with in C. Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance discutée au Concile de Bâle', *AFH* 83 (1990), pp. 369-404; 84 (1991), pp. 23-50.

⁸ *Sanctitas vestra* was originally addressed to the papal commission at the Council of Vienne which had been appointed to judge the conflict between the Spirituals and the Community in 1309-1312. It is published in *ALKG* 3 (1887), pp. 51-89. See also Oliger, 'De relatione inter querimonias Constantienses et Ubertini Casalensis quoddam scriptum', pp. 3-34; and Nimmo, 'Reform at the Council of Constance: the Franciscan Case' in *Studies in Church History 14: Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*, pp. 159-73.

⁹ *Quaerimoniae* in *Speculum Minorum*, fols. 179v-189r.

- François Futz for the Conventuals and Pierre Reginaldi for the Observants - have survived.¹¹ Another anonymous Observant pamphlet addressed to Basle was included by Nicholas Glassberger in his 1508 *Chronica*, whilst Wadding dated the tract *Quaestiones super decreto concilii Constantienses* by the Parisian Observant theologian Jean Brixius (†1445), published in 1499, to 1433.¹² Such early polemics are notable for the fact that they already address all the themes that would become vitally important in the later polemics between the two sides, though their language is somewhat less emotive and gives little sense of the fierce conflicts which would later rack the Order. Because the French Observance was already intent on attaining some measure of autonomy, the Observant tracts seem the more aggressive and contentious. The French Observants did not shrink from accusing their Conventual brothers of greed, hypocrisy and corruption. In contrast, François Futz, who unsuccessfully represented the Conventuals at Basle, seems remarkably restrained. Although his tract touched on nearly every point that would be raised by later Conventual polemicists, Futz seems to have been constrained by politeness: he made his points but failed to drive them home. Such diffidence seems old-fashioned when compared to the polemics of the 1450s when battle was well and truly joined.

The 1450s and 1460s gave rise to the greatest number of polemical tracts, the majority of which emanated from Italy and the Low Countries. The era was characterised by fierce controversies. It opened with Eugenius IV's contentious bull *Ut sacra* (1446) which accorded the Observance a separate administration over which even the Conventual Minister General had little authority. Many Conventual tracts attacking the provisions of this bull survive, along with Observant replies. In addition to the ongoing battle surrounding *Ut sacra*, the Observants suffered the indignity of seeing one of their most promising preachers, Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce, defect to the Conventuals in 1452. Caracciolo, a gifted polemicist, was at the forefront of the Conventual campaign against the Observants which raged with some success at the Curia and before the laity throughout

¹⁰ *An. Min.* IX, 374, vii.

¹¹ C. Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 83 (1990), pp. 369-404; 84 (1991), pp. 23-50.

¹² Glassberger, *Chronica*, pp. 294-298; *Magistralis quaestio magistri Johannis Brixii doctoris Parisiensi super decreto concilii Constanciensi* in *Minorica elucidativa*, fols. 41v-49r. See also Wadding, *An. Min.* X, 213, xi.

the 1450s.¹³ Pope Calixtus III attempted to salve the wounds which had been opened in this debate by commissioning Giacomo della Marca to prepare the bull *Illius cuius* (1456), better known as the *Bulla Concordiae*, which was intended to re-establish the unity of the Order. Instead, the *Bulla* gave rise to yet more polemical pamphlets. Observant authors despaired of Giacomo's generosity, for he attenuated almost every aspect of the life that the Observants had struggled to establish since the 1370s, in particular reintroducing the power of the Conventual Minister General over the Observant hierarchy which had effectively been abolished by *Ut sacra*.¹⁴ On the other hand, the Conventuals were angered that the *Bulla* did not definitively reunify the Order and that it was almost immediately rescinded by *Circa regularis*, issued by Pope Pius II in 1458 after earnest Observant pleas.¹⁵

The legacy of these battles and the hostile relations they had provoked continued well into the 1460s and beyond. The fate of both communities was very finely balanced, and the vulnerability felt by both factions during these years can be seen in the viciousness of many of their polemical tracts. Neither side drew back from characterising their opponents with the most reckless of charges: their estranged confrères were lechers with a taste for women and young boys; they were drunkards, heretics, hypocrites, and limbs of Antichrist. Many such charges emanated from the Conventual camp: on the defensive and aware that many churchmen and layfolk favoured the Observant reform, the Conventuals seem to have been willing to use every possible slur in a desperate attempt to retain their own position. However, the Observants, too, felt extremely insecure during this period and many did not scruple to charge the Conventuals with all manner of sins. The *Solutiones quorundam obiectorum* (1460) by the Low Countries preacher Johannes Brugman (c.1400-1473), which will be examined below, is a particularly good example of the way in which the Observants both stigmatised the Conventuals and used them as the

¹³ On Caracciolo's eventful life, see S. Bastanzio, *Fra Roberto Caracciolo predicatore del secolo XV*, Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum Facultas Theologica, Theses ad Lauream n. 43 (Isola dei Liri: Tip. Editrice M. Pisani, 1947); and Z. Zafarana, 'Caracciolo, Roberto' in *DBI* 19, pp. 446-552.

¹⁴ For instance, Giacomo della Marca's first suggestion was that 'omnes fratres de familia Observantiae regularis Ordinis Minorum tam capita tam membra in omnibus et per omnia teneantur firmiter obedire rev. patri generali Ministro.' Giacomo's suggestions for the bull and the comments added to the text by the Conventual Minister General, Giacomo da Mozzanica, are published in C. Piana, 'Silloge di documenti dall'antico archivio di S. Francesco di Bologna', *AFH* 49 (1956), pp. 61-76.

¹⁵ An outline of the events of this controversial period is given in Moorman, pp. 447-453, 479-486. Bernardino Aquilano's *Chronica* provides a detailed, if partisan, eyewitness account of the same era (pp. 47-75).

antithesis against which the identity of the Observant community could be defined.¹⁶ Brugman and his fellow polemicists were clearly alarmed by the ferocity of Conventual attacks which for a time seemed to be successfully turning the laity and papacy against the Observant reform.¹⁷ As Bernardino Aquilano remarked concerning the Observant response to Conventual criticisms in 1453, 'each one of us prepared himself with good heart for the battle, not of attack, but of necessary defence.'¹⁸

The last great era of Observant-Conventual polemic came in the early sixteenth century before the final division of the Order in 1517. A glut of polemical works reflect the horror felt by Conventuals and Colettans (the reformed French Franciscans who remained under the authority of the Conventual Ministers) at Observant advances. One result of the increasing hostility within the Order during this period was the publication of compilations of Franciscan texts which were produced by the different parties to support their respective claims. In 1506 the Spanish Observants at Salamanca issued the *Monumenta Ordinis Minorum* (reprinted in 1511), whilst the *Speculum Minorum* was published by the Rouen Observants in 1509. In 1512 the Colettan polemicist Bonifazio da Ceva replied with the *Firmamenta trium Ordinum* published in Paris, and this was followed by the anonymous *Speculum seu Firmamentum trium Ordinum* (Venice, 1513). These compilations were miscellanies of papal bulls, extracts from the works of major Franciscan figures such as Francis, Bonaventura and Bernardino, polemical or propagandistic tracts, and partisan chronicles. They were intended as propaganda in support of the Observant reform or the Conventual *status quo*.¹⁹ If the arguments did not fall neatly into place, the compilers gave them a helping hand: Bonifazio da Ceva, putting together the *Firmamenta*, was not above interpolating editorial comments and altering texts to suit his own purpose.²⁰

Bonifazio da Ceva was also at the centre of a polemical dispute which gave rise to a stream of tracts from both sides and led to public hearings before the University of Paris in 1514, the governor of the Low Countries (later emperor Charles V) at Brussels in 1516,

¹⁶ F. van den Hombergh, 'Ein unbekannter Brief des Johannes Brugman über die Observanz: *Solutiones quorundam obiectorum contra sacram Observantiam*', *AfH* 64 (1971), pp. 338-366.

¹⁷ See N. Dal Gal, 'Epistola S. Jacobi de Marchia ad S. Joannem de Capistrano ex autographo', *AfH* 1 (1908), pp. 94-7; Moorman, pp. 479-486.

¹⁸ Aquilano, *Chronica*, p. 50.

¹⁹ For a brief examination of each compilation see Lalo, *Les premiers mémoires*.

and the French Parliament and the Fifth Lateran Council in 1517.²¹ Bonifazio da Ceva joined the campaign of the Conventual Minister General Egidio Delfini (1500-1506) to pursue what seems to have been a two-man battle against the Observance.²² Ceva's stubborn denial of the legitimacy of the Observant reform in his *Defensorium elucidativum* (1515) called forth a number of Observant tracts defending the congregation.²³ These works, written by French and German Observants who felt secure in the visible success of their congregation, can often seem smug and supercilious. However, although the polemics of the sixteenth century are evidence of, in the words of Hugolin Lippens, 'an open war, a battle to the death'²⁴, they concentrated less heavily upon the kind of personal insults that had been so prevalent in the 1450s and 1460s. Instead, the sixteenth-century polemics dealt predominantly with questions about the Rule and its observance.

Although the effects of Observant-Conventual polemic were extremely important and can be detected in many literary genres, most markedly in the chronicles of Observant historians, the congregation was also caught up in polemical debates with other groups. Despite the Observants' early roots in the Spiritual tradition, they assiduously composed tracts against those who wished to observe the Franciscan Rule more strictly than the

²⁰ M. Bihl, 'Fra Bonifazio da Ceva e i suoi giudizi su Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 42 (1945), p. 147.

²¹ The University of Paris set the standard for these enquiries when it threw out Bonifazio da Ceva's case, declaring that 'status vivendi [Observantiae] est securior, eligibilior et magis accendens ad intentio B. Francisci quam vivendi modus sub Ministris.' This judgement caused Bonifazio to abandon hurriedly his earlier assertion to his Observant opponents: 'Se i dottori dichieranno migliore la vostra Osservanza, io e tutti i miei frati l'abbraceremo.' Bihl, 'Fra Bonifazio da Ceva', p. 150. For other accounts of this controversy, see C. Schmitt, 'Bonaventura Neveu, Guardiano del Convento di Metz, difende l'autonomia degli Osservanti nel suo *Defensorium* (Parigi, 1517)', *SF* 89 (1992), pp. 37-54; Lippens, 'Jean Glapion', *AFH* 44 (1951), pp. 3-70; 45 (1952), pp. 3-71; and A. Renaudet, *Préréforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie (1494-1517)* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1916), pp. 556-558, 570-572.

²² Moorman, pp. 569-574 provides a good background to Delfini's generalate.

²³ The *Defensorium elucidativum Observantie regularis fratrum Minorum* (Strasburg: J. Schott, 1515) was Bonifazio da Ceva's principal work against the Observance. Replies to Bonifazio's anti-Observant campaign of the early 1500s included the compilations *Monumenta Ordinis Minorum* (Leipzig: Melchior Lotter, 1506), *Speculum Minorum* (Rouen: Martin Morin, 1509) and *Speculum seu Firmamentum trium Ordinum*, (Venice: [n. pub.], 1513); and tracts by individual writers such as Kasper Schatzgeier, *Apologia status fratrum ordinis minorum de Observantie* (Basle: [n. pub.], 1516); and Bonaventure Neveu, *Tractatulus dictus Deffensorium Fratrum Minorum de Observantia et familia* (Paris: Regnault Chaudière, 1517); as well as Jean Glapion's letters to patrons and Pope Leo X. In addition see Bihl, 'Fra Bonifazio da Ceva', pp. 132-72; P. L. Nyhus, 'Caspar Schatzgeier and Conrad Pellican: The Triumph of Dissension in the Early Sixteenth Century', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 61 (1970), pp. 179-204; Schmitt, 'Bonaventura Neveu', pp.37-54; and Lippens, 'Jean Glapion'.

²⁴ Lippens, 'Jean Glapion', *AFH* 44 (1951), p. 44.

moderate Observance advocated. In 1431 Giovanni da Capestrano attacked the Spanish reformer Felipe Berbegal whose brand of strict eremitical Franciscanism was thought to verge upon heresy.²⁵ Capestrano's tract influenced Eugenius IV's decision to dissolve Berbegal's Capuciolae congregation in 1434. In c.1458 Giacomo della Marca wrote a treatise condemning the Fraticelli.²⁶ In c.1506, the Spanish Observant Francisco de Ledesma composed the *Defensorium Observantiae contra deviantes* which defended the Observance against the criticisms of an eremitical branch of the Order in Spain known variously as the Guadelupensi, Capuciati or Discalciati which had been founded in 1487.²⁷ Observant writers did not only target other Franciscan congregations: there is even a rare instance of an Observant criticism aimed at the community itself. In around 1451 Johannes Brugman composed the *Speculum Imperfectionis*, which will be examined below. It is a highly unusual work written in the form of a warning letter to the Observant hierarchy.²⁸ Brugman gave an anguished portrayal of the congregation, showing it to be mired in corruption and pessimistically predicting its further decline unless the brothers could return once more to the purity of the original Franciscan vision.

Naming the *Fratres de Familia*

In the war of words that waged between the two principal Franciscan congregations in the fifteenth century, even the most basic aspects of the Observance were attacked by Conventual commentators. The name by which the Observants referred to their congregation is an important indicator of how they conceived of their community. A name provided a badge of identity that could be recognised by Observant brothers, layfolk

²⁵ L. Oliger, 'Documenta inedita ad historiam Fraticellorum spectantia', *AFH* 6 (1913), pp. 710-747. Berbegal had been authorised to found a new house by Martin V in 1426. However, he denounced the moderate *Martinianae* (1430) as contrary to the intentions of Francis, and seceded from the Observance. The Capuciolae adopted a distinctive habit, lived in abject poverty and criticised the Church. See *An. Min.* X, 213, xi, ad an. 1433; Moorman, pp. 454-455.

²⁶ Giacomo della Marca, *Dialogus contra Fraticellos addita versione Itala saeculi XV*, ed. D. Lasic (Ancona: Biblioteca Franciscana, 1975).

²⁷ *Defensorium Observantiae contra deviantes* in *Monumenta Ordinis Minorum*, fols. 181r-195r. The Guadelupensi congregation was created by Juan de Puebla (†1495) in 1489. He founded a series of hermitages in Spain and fostered an extremely ascetic life of meditation, fasting and poverty. The congregation thrived and managed to avoid being incorporated into the Observance in the 1503 and 1517 bulls of union. See Moorman, pp. 499-500; and Huber, pp. 485-487.

²⁸ H. Goyens, '*Speculum Imperfectionis Fratrum Minorum* compactum per venerabilem et religiosum P. F. Iohannem Brugman O.F.M.', *AFH* 2 (1909), pp. 613-25; H. Goyens, '*Supplementum ad Speculum*

and fellow religious alike. It was a clear and public mark of the congregation's role, nature and institutional solidarity. However, it was also a fluid marker which changed through time and was twisted by Conventual opponents who used derisory names to brand the congregation as inauthentic, schismatic or heretical.

Communities are created and consolidated by a common language. Developments in the Observants' own choice of nomenclature allow us to map the progress of Observant institutional self-consciousness. In the earliest phase of the movement's history the Observant brothers were simply known, like their Conventual confrères, as the *fratres Ordinis Minorum*.²⁹ Other names which gradually came into use in the 1370s and 1380s show that the Observance was recognising itself and being recognised as a distinguishable grouping, singled out in public estimation for the eremitical life of rigorous poverty which it favoured. The brothers became the *fratres fratri Paolucio de Fulgineo commissi* (1374), the *fratres eremitariorum* (1374), *fratres simplices et devoti de familia* (1375), or *fratres pauperculi et devoti* (1384).³⁰ In 1427 and 1445 there were also references to the Observants as *fratres spirituales*, a title which reflected their austere and secluded lifestyle. Such usages indicate that by this time the term *spirituales* had probably lost many of its radical connotations.³¹

In the fifteenth century, the Observants most commonly defined themselves in their own writings by the title of the *fratres de familia*. Such a name emphasised that the Observance was a compact and self-contained grouping, and its early use also helped to reassure the Conventuals that the reformed brothers considered themselves simply a minor faction within the Order as a whole. In particular, it was intended to emphasise that the Observants had thrown off all other worldly ties to enter their new spiritual family. The earliest recorded usage of the title *fratres de Observantia* was at the Council of Constance in 1415, when the French brothers of the Family appealed for and were granted a *de facto*

Imperfectionis Fratrum Minorum compactum per venerabilem et religiosum P. F. Iohannem Brugman O.F.M', *AFH* 4 (1911), pp. 314-317.

²⁹ See *An. Min.* IX, 78, vi, ad an. 1385.

³⁰ See *An. Min.* VIII, 350, xxxi, ad an. 1374; VIII, 382, ad an. 1375; IX, 49, xxix, ad an. 1380; IX, 71, iv, ad an. 1384.

³¹ In Foligno, two brothers of the house of S. Bartolomeo (Brugliano) were referred to as 'fratres spirituales' when they witnessed a document in 1427. In 1445 Giovanni da Capestrano was referred to as 'vicarium fratrum spiritualium' in a document from the Conventual basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi.

separation from the Conventuals.³² The title quickly came into wide use, but it infuriated Conventual critics who felt that it was vainglorious of the Observants to assume such a name, as well as insulting to the rest of the Order, of whom it was thus implied that they did *not* observe the Rule. In 1433 the Conventuals tried to have the Observance's independent existence dissolved at the Council of Basle. Amongst other complaints, the Conventual representative, François Futz, protested that the Observant choice of name proved 'how greedy that congregation is for praise and foolish glories'. Further, he traced the use of the term 'observance' in Franciscan history, citing references to an *observantia regularis* within the Order in the constitutions of the 1292 General Chapter of Paris and the text of Clement V's bull *Exivi de paradiso* (1312), as well as later statutes.³³ He thus attempted to prove that the 'observance' had always been part of the Conventual interpretation of Franciscanism and that the *fratres de familia* should therefore not be separated from their fellow Conventual brothers.

In response, Pierre Reginaldi, representing the Observance, replied that although other Franciscans might be 'observers' of the Rule, they were not automatically Observants: there was a difference between a name and a legal title. He agreed that in an ideal world the title of Friars Minor should need no qualification. However, due to the gradual corruption of the Order, new names were now needed to distinguish between those who observed the Rule and those who were known to transgress it. He also asserted that the name *fratres de Observantia* had not been intentionally assumed by the Observance but imposed upon it by the Council of Constance and by the laity.³⁴ In a long letter written to Pope Calixtus III in 1456, Giovanni da Capestrano repeated these arguments when he raised the issue of the use and derivation of the term *Observantia*:

Oh most holy father, deign to consider how favourably, how lovingly, how affectionately [the laity] proclaim our privileges and thunder their support for the observance of the Rule; how they hate to hear those who envy us [the Conventuals], who are heedless of the health of their own souls, named in any way. Because of which they were wont to fasten upon us this name, which we were able to find in the first chapter of our

The latter may be a case of the Conventuals renaming the Observance with controversial names. See Sensi, *Osservanze*, p. 49, n. 101.

³² See Sensi, *Osservanze*, p. 49, n. 101; *An. Min.* IX, 371-4, vii.

³³ Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 83 (1990), p. 388.

³⁴ Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 84 (1991), p. 41.

Rule where it says: 'The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.'³⁵

Capestrano went on to cite usages of the term *observantia regularis* in Gregory IX's *Decretales* (1234) to prove that such an observance was regarded in a positive light and was associated with the reform of the Church.³⁶ In his *Apologia status Fratrum Ordinis Minorum de Observantia* (1516), Kaspar Schatzgeier piously asserted that his confrères were called the Friars Minor of the Observance, 'because they are not only humble, but are perfect zealots who fulfil the holy Rule.'³⁷ Thus the Observants turned around Conventual accusations that the Observants were relinquishing any claim to a Franciscan heritage by adopting a non-Franciscan name. Instead the Observants argued that their name, like their way of life, gave them a better claim to the Franciscan tradition than that of the lax Conventuals. Their name testified to their greater virtue and, crucially, this testimony came from public recognition of the congregation's integrity rather than Observant presumption.

Such arguments did not pacify Conventual critics. In reply to the bull *Ut sacra* (1446), which had referred to the reformed brothers as the *fratres de Observantia* and allowed them an unprecedented level of autonomy, an anonymous Conventual commented that:

This superstitious, scandalous and dangerous name should be withdrawn. For if they truly claim to be the *fratres de Observantia*, this is nothing other than to abolish the most holy name of the legitimate and true friars, that is, the Minors; to condemn their past, and to imitate the Pharisees with reprobate boasting and vainglory.³⁸

In the 1460s, the Colettan brother Pierre Chambon charged the Observants with preferring a multiplicity of lesser names to the one true title of the Franciscan Order:

These men have withdrawn from the Order and spurn its true name [*paterno nomine*], that is, the Friars Minor ... they no longer call themselves Minors, but the *Fratres de Observantia*, or *de provisione* or *de*

³⁵ Glassberger, *Chronica*, p. 355. A longer version of the same letter is also published in Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 72 (1979), pp. 62-73.

³⁶ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 72 (1979), pp. 70-72

³⁷ Schatzgeier, *Apologia status*, fols. 20r-v.

³⁸ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), p. 383.

bullae, the friars of the *zoccoli*, the brothers of the Family or of S. Bernardino.³⁹

Through such accusations the Conventuals attempted to emphasise that the Observants had seceded from the true Order and were an inferior and unauthorised branch of the Franciscans. In particular, such charges stressed that the Observants had thrown off the yoke of the Order's history and the authority of Francis who had himself chosen the name *Minores*, ordering that his followers 'be the lesser brothers'.⁴⁰

In all their polemical tracts, the Conventuals were careful to refer to the Observants as 'the brothers commonly named the Observants'. They never conceded that *fratres de Observantia* had become the official name of the congregation. Instead, the Conventuals tried to baptise the reformed congregation with a series of less flattering names which were intended to emphasise that the Observants were disobedient and dangerous upstarts.⁴¹ Thus the Observants became the *fratres Constantienses* or *fratres de bulla*, a group created in the fifteenth century by the legalistic processes of the Council of Constance and *Ut sacra*, and not by Francis in 1210. Of this name Kaspar Schatzgeier commented sourly in his 1516 *Apologia status*:

The derogatory name of *fratres de bulla* is harmful to the reputation of the brothers of the Family: it implies that they do not truly observe their Rule and the vow they promised to God, but rather violate completely their principal vow of obedience.⁴²

The Conventuals also commonly called their rivals the *fratres Vicariani*, implying they had seceded from the authority of the Order's Ministers whose powers had been ordained by Francis. Worse, the Observants were called the *fratres Beguttas*, the Beghard brothers, an incendiary appellation which asserted that they were ignorant lay friars, schismatics and heretics. As late as 1493 the Observants were forced to request a papal bull outlawing

³⁹ Bihl, 'Fra Bonifazio da Ceva', p. 170. Such names were current, but only two - the *fratres de Observantia* and *fratres de Familia* - seem to have been adopted by the Observants themselves, and they were usually careful to add *de Ordinis Minorum*. For the other names, see below.

⁴⁰ 'First Life of St Francis by Thomas of Celano', ch. 38, in Habig, p. 260.

⁴¹ The Conventuals also suffered from being dubbed with unsatisfactory names. They were often called the *fratres deformati* or *abortivi*, even by Colettans such as Bonifazio da Ceva who defended the Ministerial regime against the Observants. The Observants also noted that the Colettans' name was suspiciously similar to the Nicolaites of Revelations 2:15 whose doctrine Christ condemned; they therefore concluded that the Colettans would give rise to great scandal in the Church. See Bihl, 'Fra Bonifazio da Ceva', p. 134; J-X. Lalo, *Les premiers mémoriaux*, pp. 23-24; and, on the Nicolaites/Colettans, the *Tractatus defensori eiusdem status apologia nominatus* in *Minorica Elucidativa*, fol. 15r.

⁴² Schatzgeier, *Apologia status*, fol. 17r.

these names.⁴³ Similarly, in c.1460 the Observant polemicist Nikolaas van Haarlem complained that the Conventuals were publicly accusing the Observants of schism and superstition and were calling the Observant brethren 'the brothers of a certain sect'; the implication being, as was stated more openly elsewhere, that the Observants were affiliated to the heretical Fraticelli.⁴⁴ Even in 1517, a hundred years after the original council, the French Observant writer Bonaventure Neveu (†1526) was still protesting that his confrères should not be called the *fratres Constantienses* or 'a new or reprobate sect'.⁴⁵

Heresy and Disobedience

Such insinuations played an important role in the most common and most harmful accusation levelled against the Observants by the Conventuals: the charge that they were disobedient schismatics. In an age which was familiar with religious upheaval - with the humiliating internecine conflicts of the Great Schism which ended only in 1417, the rise of conciliarism, and the growing confidence of heretics and princes who questioned the supreme power of the one Church - disobedience was considered the greatest of sins. No Conventual polemicist missed an opportunity to accuse his Observant counterparts of propagating disobedience and schism. Indeed, the values of the Observant congregation were in part moulded by such charges. The emphasis on the virtue of obedience in Observant writings surely originated not only in the moderate Observance's distrust of the Spiritual example, but also in reaction to Conventual criticism and in an attempt to limit the impact such criticism could have on the Observant public image.

The theme of Observant disobedience and schism is present in the earliest surviving Conventual polemic, François Futz's 1433 *Allegationes factae pro fratribus Ordinis Minorum in communi viventium contra fratres eiusdem Ordinis de Observantia noncupatos*, which was addressed to the Council of Basle. Futz included a long series of charges which skirted around his main theme of disobedience. His first point, in which he piously quoted Francis's admonition in the Rule that the brothers 'must be humble and patient in persecution ... loving those who persecute us', was surely carefully chosen to portray his own congregation as the aggrieved but patient party and the Observants as the

⁴³ Glassberger, *Chronica*, p. 508.

⁴⁴ Van den Hombergh, 'Nikolaas van Haarlem' pp. 141-142. The charge that the Observants had fallen into the same faults as the Fraticelli will be investigated in more detail below.

heartless persecutors who disobeyed the founder's instruction.⁴⁶ However, Futz saved the central tenet of the Conventual argument for the last of his twenty-three points. In his final few chapters he dealt with the knotty subject of obedience and the religious life. He stated the key point of all Conventual polemics when he raised the objection that the Observants could not be observing the Rule as closely as they claimed since they refused to obey the Order's Ministers. He focused in particular upon the fact that the Observant superiors instituted by the Council of Constance in 1415 were named Vicars, whilst Francis's Rule explicitly stated that the superiors of the Order were called Ministers. Any Observant claim to observe the Rule *ad litteram* was thus null and void.⁴⁷ Furthermore, all Franciscans made their vow of obedience to the Pope through the intermediary figure of the Minister General: since the Observants no longer vowed to obey the Minister, neither did they vow to obey the Pope.⁴⁸ Finally, he accused the Observants of seceding from the obedience of the Conventual hierarchy, and thus seceding from the authority of the Order and Francis himself: 'they are no longer Friars Minor, or of any other Order; and so they are nothing.'⁴⁹

Such claims were repeated in every Conventual polemical tract written up to 1517 and focused particularly upon *Ut sacra* and the lesser bulls issued in the Observance's favour by Eugenius IV during his long pontificate (1431-1447). The accusations of disobedience gave rise to even more damaging claims. As early as 1433, Futz hinted that the Observants were not to be trusted: referring back to the *Quaerimoniae*, which had depended upon Ubertino da Casale's *Sanctitas vestra*, he accused the Observants of relying on suspect works written by Spiritual writers whose views had been unequivocally condemned by John XXII in 1323.⁵⁰ In 1455, three years after he had fled the Observance for the Conventual congregation, Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce was openly accusing his former confrères of harbouring heretical tendencies. Giovanni da Capestrano's disciple Nicolò da Fara wrote despairingly to his master of new polemics written by Caracciolo: 'Roberto has written disgraceful tracts against the Family ... in

⁴⁵ Schmitt, 'Bonaventura Neveu', p. 42.

⁴⁶ 'The Rule of 1223' in Habig, p. 64; Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 83 (1990), p. 374.

⁴⁷ Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 83 (1990), p. 400.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

which he called us rebels against obedience, comparing us to the Fraticelli.⁵¹ The c.1460 polemic written by the Conventual master Francesco da Rimini detailed a series of charges which dealt with the same theme of disobedience and culminated in similar accusations of heresy:

The Observants subject to *Ut sacra* seem to me to be transgressors and not observers of the first chapter of the Rule of the Friars Minor of St Francis, which they vow to serve. Firstly, because they do not obey the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, but increasingly condemn it. ... Secondly, because although the Rule says, 'the other brothers are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors,' that is, the Generals, the Observants disdain to obey the Minister General. ... Thirdly, because the main reason they give for their disobedience is that they believe that our Ministers do not obey the Rule, and so they fall into the heresy of the Fraticelli, although they dare not explain this to the Pope and prelates lest they be burned.⁵²

These insinuations were influential. Bernardino Aquilano lamented that Pope Calixtus III (1455-1458) suspected the Observants of harbouring heretical tendencies.⁵³

The Observants defended themselves from such dangerous accusations by constantly asserting their absolute orthodoxy and obedience to the Holy See, both through their literature and their life. The saintly reputations of Bernardino da Siena and Giovanni da Capestrano were adduced to prove that the Observants were fully authorised by and obedient to the Holy See. The author, possibly Nicolas de Louvain, of the *Apologia* (c.1497) replied to Conventual charges:

The blessed Bernardino ... lived and died under the Vicariate conceded to us by papal provision. You claim that he did not live according to the Rule which is directly against the decisions of the Church that proclaimed him a saint; and so you ought to be considered heretical ... And was not that holy man Giovanni da Capestrano decorated with innumerable miracles, though he too lived under the same obedience, and was Vicar after Bernardino?⁵⁴

However, an interestingly ambiguous use of the obedience motif emerges in other Observant texts. In his 1508 *Chronica* Nicholas Glassberger transcribed a letter written by Giovanni da Capestrano to Pope Calixtus III in 1456.⁵⁵ Capestrano was horrified that Calixtus had suspended *Ut sacra* at the insistence of the Conventual Minister General,

⁵¹ Chiappini, 'Fr. Nicolae de Fara epistolae duae', p. 398.

⁵² Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), pp. 354-355.

⁵³ Aquilano, *Chronica*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ *Tractatus defensori eiusdem status apologia nominatus* in *Minorica Elucidativa*, fol. 19v-20r.

⁵⁵ This letter is also published in Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 72 (1979), pp. 62-73.

Giacomo da Mozzanica. Capestrano argued that obedience was not necessary if it went against the Rule and lauded the worthiness of his own congregation. He reminded the Pope of his duty to support the reform of the Church and continued:

What will the Christian people do when they see the servants of God who wish to give their vow to God being persecuted and suffering violence from those who ought to protect them? What about the kings, princes and other lords, both ecclesiastical and temporal ... who shrank from obedience to the Holy Roman Church, and to whom I preach that they must faithfully observe Christ's worship? And what of the infidels who, if they wish for eternal life, are bound to live under the yoke of obedience to the Church?

In the same letter Capestrano reminded the Pope 'how affectionately [the laity] proclaim our privileges and thunder their support for the observance of the Rule'.⁵⁶ Capestrano thus broadly hinted that a volatile people who were impressed by Observant sanctity might begin to lose trust in the Church if the Observants were not protected. To lose the Observance would be to lose the greatest preachers of the era and to risk widespread displeasure with papal authority. Capestrano therefore assured the Pope of his obedience, but hinted at what could happen if this obedience were undervalued. Similar warnings can be seen in Jean Brixius's 1434 tract which cautioned that if the decree of Constance was revoked, the 'lords, ladies and layfolk' who supported the Observance might 'agitate against the clergy, which is greatly to be feared, since the priests and secular clerics who now persecute the Friars of the Observance ... will be in mortal danger'.⁵⁷ The Observants were clearly aware of the leverage provided by a strong public image and following.

However, the writer who made the most open use of Observant popularity as a lever in ecclesiastical powerbroking was not an Observant, but Enea Silvio Piccolomini. At the date of writing in 1454, Piccolomini was Archbishop of Siena; four years later he became Pope Pius II. Having considered joining the Observance in 1425 after witnessing a particularly inspiring sermon by Bernardino da Siena, he was always sympathetic to the congregation's cause and retained particular reverence for Bernardino.⁵⁸ His letter, dated 11 December 1454, was addressed to Domenico Capranica, the Cardinal Protector of the Franciscan Order. Reporting on Capestrano's preaching tour of northern Europe,

⁵⁶ Glassberger, *Chronica*, pp. 354-355.

⁵⁷ J. Brixius, *Questio super decreto concilii Constatiensi* in *Minorica elucidativa*, fols. 48v-49r.

⁵⁸ See C. M. Ady, *Pope Pius II* (London: Methuen, 1913), p. 21.

Piccolomini insinuated the same kind of veiled threats as those contained in Capestrano's letter:

Truly it does not seem to me expedient that the Pope should provoke the Family. ... Fra Giovanni is a man of God and the people of Germany almost believe him to be a prophet. If he wished, he could raise a great mob [*magnam turbam*] simply by raising his finger. I hear from his entourage that he is angry at the opposition to Eugenius's bull [*Ut sacra*] ... but I know his firm constancy, and one need not fear that he will turn his tongue against the Apostolic See whose dignity and eminence he has always preached.⁵⁹

It is not hard to see the underlying warning in Piccolomini's letter. The Observants held their forces on a leash because of their obedience to the Holy See, but if that service was not sufficiently appreciated or their congregation assailed, they could, even within the bounds of the vow of obedience, make life very difficult for the papacy.

Observants on Conventuals

Observant writers usually dealt with the issue of obedience in more diplomatic ways, though their efforts often antagonised Conventual writers. For instance, in their anti-Conventual polemics, Observant writers did indeed, as Francesco da Rimini and other Conventuals complained, attempt to justify the existence of their congregation by arguing that the Rule was not observed by the Conventuals and that therefore the Ministers had forfeited the right to command obedience. The French authors of the earliest Observant polemics addressed to the Parisian Parliament (1410) and the Council of Constance (1415) were particularly intent upon proving that the Rule was flouted by certain sections of the Order. In the first tract of 1410 the Observants meticulously described the austerity of their own way of life and then detailed the many ways in which the Conventuals failed to meet such high standards. They claimed that the unreformed brothers demanded payment for masses and confession, received and handled money-alms, owned precious goods of silver or gold, gorged themselves on rich food, allowed women into their cloisters, wore extravagant habits and committed many other sins.⁶⁰ The *Quaerimoniae* addressed to the Council of Constance appropriated the zealous language and arguments of Ubertino da Casale to assert that the Conventuals had denied the humility inherent in the name of the

⁵⁹ Glassberger, *Chronica*, p. 346.

⁶⁰ Oliger, 'De relatione inter querimonias Constantienses et Ubertini Casalensis quoddam scriptum', pp. 40-41.

Friars Minor. They 'chased humility from the Order with the study of vanity, pompous learning, abuse of privilege ... mutual discord, ambitions to rule, [and] panting after position and honours'.⁶¹ Pierre Reginaldi, the Observant theologian who replied to François Futz's tract at the Council of Basle in 1433, repeated such claims. He went to the heart of the Observant argument by proclaiming that the true Franciscan Order was made up only of the minority of friars who fully observed their religious vows; in other words, the Observant brothers. Reginaldi thus asserted that it was the Conventuals who had distorted Francis's message and separated themselves from the true Order.⁶²

The Observants found many parallels for their desire to distance themselves from their less zealous confrères. In c.1434, the Parisian master Jean Brixius argued that in order to save the health of the Franciscan body the *fratres deformati* should be separated from the *fratres reformati*, 'just as lepers, or those with the falling sickness and other contagious diseases are sensibly separated from healthy men so as not to infect them ... or as the good angels were separated from the bad angels ... or the Egyptians from the Israelites'.⁶³ In 1516 Bonaventure Neveu, the Provincial Vicar of Metz who was Bonifazio da Ceva's principal opponent, agreed that the Conventual Ministers no longer observed the Rule and concluded that the Observants should be removed from Conventual influence for their own safety, just as baptised Jewish children whose parents would not educate them in the Christian life were removed from their families.⁶⁴

In the *Solutiones quorundam objectionem* (1460), Johannes Brugman also identified the Conventuals with the stiff-necked Jews who would not heed the truth of the apostolic word. He made ample use of the imagery of blindness, a traditional motif in anti-Judaic writing.⁶⁵ When writing of his own time in the Conventuals before his conversion to the Observant cause in 1445, he compared himself to a Jew who stubbornly clung to his old religion:

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 31-32, 30.

⁶² Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 84 (1991), pp. 33-34.

⁶³ *Magistralis quaestio magistri Johannis Brixii doctoris Parisiensi super decreto concilii Constanciensi in Minorica elucidativa*, fol. 43r-v.

⁶⁴ Schmitt, 'Bonaventura Neveu', p. 46.

⁶⁵ For an outline of anti-semitic imagery in the Middle Ages see particularly J. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943); and R. Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley and London: California University Press, 1997).

Just as neither the obstinate Jew [*radicatus Iudaeus*] will give up his own faith and practices without difficulty, or the pompous learned man the blind glory of his philosophy, so neither would I give up my ingrained and sinful inconstancy.⁶⁶

Brugman associated his fellow Observants with the evangelical apostles who came to preach the true word of God and Conventualism with discredited Judaism, a criticism which was all the more damning since Brugman professed to understand the Conventual psyche due to his own time in the congregation. Brugman further stigmatised the Conventuals with Biblical quotations that linked them once more to the Jews, heretics and sub-human animals. Thus he referred to the Conventuals as 'deformed' brothers, 'irreligious religious' and 'dogs ... false Christians or brothers'; compared them to the Pharisees and hypocrites of Matthew's Gospel and to the wolves in sheep's clothing that would destroy the Christian flock. In the *Speculum Imperfectionis* (c.1451), he paraphrased Psalm 79 in his description of lax Conventuals who converted to the Observant cause: 'These men are lions, boars, foxes and dogs who consume and destroy the vineyard of God and the blessed Francis'.⁶⁷ Such comparisons attempted to justify Observant separatism by assimilating the Conventuals to the animals that traditionally symbolised heresy in the medieval world.

Polemical Interpretations of the Rule

Although Observant writers stigmatised the Conventuals as corrupt sinners, they still needed to justify the fact that their congregation had seceded from the authority of the Franciscan Order's designated superiors, the Ministers General. The Observants had difficulties responding to Conventual accusations of disobedience. We have already seen that the *Constitutiones Bernardini* emphasised the importance of obedience and that Giacomo della Marca valued the virtue so highly that he was willing to antagonise his own community by inserting a vow of almost unlimited obedience to the Conventual Minister General into the *Bulla Concordiae* of 1456. Although every Observant writer emphasised the virtue of obedience, those who replied to Conventual accusations often found themselves arguing against the strict interpretation of the virtue. In his *Responsio obiectorum* (c.1460) Nikolaas van Haarlem fell back upon the arguments which had been so treasured by the Spirituals in the early fourteenth century and which turned on the

⁶⁶ Brugman, *Solutiones*, p. 350.

⁶⁷ Brugman, *Speculum Imperfectionis*, p. 616

ambiguity inherent in Francis's words in the Rule of 1223; 'I strictly command [the brothers] to obey their ministers in everything that they have promised God and is not against their conscience and our Rule'.⁶⁸ Van Haarlem wrote:

That which the Conventuals say about our brothers being disobedient to their ministers and destroyers of the unity of the Order, abandoning union under the heads of the Order (that is, the Ministers General), is false. For all the brothers obey the Ministers General of the whole Order and are held by God and the Rule to obey them. Yet they are not bound simply to obey them in all things, as the Rule clearly sets forth. For according to the doctors, any obedience is unwise in which the lesser brother would have sinned if he obeyed his superiors.⁶⁹

Van Haarlem followed this with a quotation from the first chapter of the Rule: 'Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to his holiness Pope Honorius and his lawfully elected successors and to the Church of Rome. The other friars are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.'⁷⁰ He continued:

By which we are clearly given to understand that the brothers are bound to obey the Minister General insofar as his superiority and authority are held in obedience and subjection to our lord Pope of the Roman Church.⁷¹

Such an argument was calculated to highlight the fact that fifteenth-century popes had, with few exceptions, been favourable to the Observance and had granted the congregation its autonomy through a series of bulls. His argument also slyly insinuated that the Conventuals had forfeited any claim to leadership and were verging on heresy since they denied the legitimacy of Eugenius IV's *Ut sacra* and continually attempted to discredit papal support for the Observance. Nikolaas van Haarlem thus suggested that since the Conventuals questioned the authority of the papacy, the Observants were fully justified in pursuing their own autonomy. Nicolò da Osimo asserted this openly in his 1441 tract in defence of the Observance, stating, 'It is sacrilege to dispute the judgement of the Pope.'⁷² Similarly, in the c.1497 tract probably composed by the Observant friar Nicolas de Louvain, the Colettans and Conventuals were chided for doubting the word of the papacy and thus threatening 'to destroy the Church of God with schism and heresy'.⁷³ The Observants emphasised these claims by procuring papal bulls which reiterated that the

⁶⁸ Habig, p. 63.

⁶⁹ Van den Hombergh, 'Nikolaas van Haarlem', p. 152.

⁷⁰ Habig, p. 57.

⁷¹ Van den Hombergh, 'Nikolaas van Haarlem', p. 153.

⁷² Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 72 (1979), p. 42.

Vicars instituted by Eugenius IV were legitimate Franciscan superiors.⁷⁴ Such measures neatly turned Conventual arguments of heretical disobedience back upon them. In contrast with the Spiritual controversy of the fourteenth century, it was now the Conventuals who were in danger of putting the authority of the Rule before that of the papacy.⁷⁵

The position taken by Observant polemicists on the Rule contrasts with that of the constitutions and expositions of the Rule which were examined in Chapter Two. The constitutions tended to revere the Rule as an administrative and legal document over the charismatic figure of Francis. In contrast, Observant polemicists relied on the latitude provided by a 'spiritual' rather than a strictly literal interpretation of the Rule, and thus emphasised the ideal of *imitatio Francisci* rather more than did the legal documents of the Observance.⁷⁶ In response to the insistent Conventual accusations of disobedience which turned on the specific title held by the Franciscan superiors, the Observants chose to portray themselves in their polemics as a congregation more interested in the spirit than the letter of the law. Just as the Spirituals had done in the early fourteenth century, the Observants chided the Conventuals for the dogmatically literal way in which they interpreted the Rule. They claimed that such legalistic interpretations valued surface piety over true understanding. The anonymous author (probably Nicolas de Louvain) of the

⁷³ *Tractatus defensori eiusdem status apologia nominatus* in *Minorica Elucidativa*, fol. 16r-v.

⁷⁴ For instance, the text of Pius II's bull *Circa regularis* (1464) was conscientiously included in every Observant compilation of key Franciscan documents. See Glassberger, *Chronica*, pp. 399-400.

⁷⁵ The Conventual polemics transcribed by Celestino Piana attest to Conventual discomfort on this point. For instance, a 1450s tract attacking *Ut sacra* stated the belief that the Rule was a sacred document which should not be tampered with: 'Bulla ista contradicat regulae beati Francisci, quae approbata est per apostolicam Sedem ... Non est verisimile quod d. Eugenius regulam tam sanctam, in qua beatus Franciscus dixit se evangelium Christi praecipere, voluerit in aliquo derogare.' This dilemma was solved by asserting that Eugenius had not fully authorised *Ut sacra*: 'Bulla illa aut falsa sit aut subrepticia, nec umquam de plena mente d. Eugenii emanaverit.' Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), pp. 376-377. The writer made no reference to the declarations and privileges which modified the Rule and bounded the Conventual life. He presumably believed that *Ut sacra* altered a principal vow (that of obedience) whereas *Ad statum* (1430), which permitted the Conventuals to accept incomes and property, was a logical development of such papal declarations as *Exiit qui seminat* (1279) and *Exivi de paradiso* (1312) which had allowed the Franciscans to accept alms through *amicos spirituales*. On the pre-fifteenth century developments which allowed the Franciscans to accept goods and money, see Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*.

⁷⁶ Indeed, in the early sixteenth century the Conventuals began to accuse the Observants of ignoring the Rule in favour of the authority of Francis. Kaspar Schatzgeier responded indignantly to their assertion that, 'Nullus iuste hereditate obtinet patris et matris quamdiu denegat esse patrem similiter et matrem, sed fratres vicariani donec ad obedientiam redierint patrem Franciscum et matrem regulam negant.' Schatzgeier, *Apologia status*, fol. 42r.

c.1497 *Apologia* stressed that the true Franciscan way of life was not a matter of dry words on pages, but of actions:

It is clear that the life of the Friars Minor exists in the words or syllables of the Rule only insofar as they are made manifest in daily observance [*operativa observantia*] ... for, as the common proverb says, it is the way of life and not the habit that makes a monk. Therefore it is not sufficient for a Friar Minor to make his profession by choosing a habit: he must also observe both the life and Rule of the Friars Minor.⁷⁷

Schatzgeier made the same point, claiming that his fellow Observants fulfilled Francis's intention by observing the Rule 'morally and spiritually, not grammatically or superficially [*corticaliter*],' as did the Conventuals.⁷⁸

Observant Polemics against the Strict Observance

Although the Observant polemicists extolled the virtues of the spiritual observance in response to Conventual attacks, they were less willing to allow other Franciscans to follow such a vague and mutable interpretation of the Rule. Indeed, they often seem less able to countenance varying levels of observance than the Conventuals. For instance, François Futz, the Conventual representative at the Council of Basle, listed six ways in which it was possible to observe the Rule, ranging from what might be termed 'relaxed conventualism' (the open acceptance of annual incomes) to strict eremitical observance.⁷⁹ Futz seemed happy to allow all levels a place within his Order as long as the Order itself remained undivided. In contrast, the Observants demanded a greater level of collective uniformity. They fiercely attacked both those who were less zealous than themselves and those who wished to pursue a stricter ideal. For Observant writers, the only legitimate interpretation of the Rule was the Observant interpretation. Indeed, the authors of Observant polemics reserved their deepest scorn for those who espoused the strict observance. In a direct disavowal of their own roots, they asserted that observance *ad*

⁷⁷ *Apologia* in *Minorica Elucidativa*, fols. 16v-17r.

⁷⁸ Schatzgeier, *Apologia status*, fol. 16v.

⁷⁹ The six levels of Franciscan observance discerned by Futz were: 1) Living on annual incomes and stocking wine- and grain cellars; 2) Not accepting annual incomes, but keeping wine cellars and granaries (this level was, according to Futz, observed by the majority of Conventual houses); 3) Not accepting incomes but allowing the brothers to receive alms according to their needs (practised by the moderate French Observance); 4) Gathering provisions to last only for a limited time, usually between a week and a month (the Observants of Italy and Spain); 5) Not amassing provisions but begging from day to day (strict Observants); 6) Owning nothing and living by begging (hermits). See Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 83 (1990), pp. 389-390.

litteram was practically impossible. Addressing the strict Guadelupense congregation of Spain, 'those who wish to observe the Rule to the letter and without dispensation', Francisco de Ledesma stated in the *Defensorium Observantiae contra deviantes* (c.1506):

If you resolve that the Rule must be obeyed by all who profess it and you will not permit dispensations to be allowed, then I dare say that none of you will be able to obey it. ... It is impossible that you will not transgress it in at least one point, and you know that he who fails on one point, fails all [*scis aut quod in uno offendit, omnino est reus*].⁸⁰

The Observants recycled Conventual criticisms of their own congregation and used them against the strict movements which emerged from the Observance itself, and against reformers who affiliated themselves with the Conventuals. Just as the Conventuals accused the Observants of dividing the Order, so the Observants condemned those who chose to follow a stricter interpretation of the Rule as schismatics. Indeed, the *Apologia* includes a passage scolding the Colettans for dividing the Observant movement, despite the fact that the Colettan congregation had emerged from the Conventuals in 1412 and, remaining under the authority of the Conventual Ministers, had never been associated with the Observance.⁸¹ In 1433 Giovanni da Capestrano attempted to discredit Felipe Berbegal's literal observant movement with accusations which must have seemed very familiar to his own congregation: he charged Berbegal with adopting a new type of habit and falling into the heresy of the Fraticelli.⁸² In c.1458, Giacomo della Marca's *Dialogus contra Fraticellos* accused the Fraticelli of the very sins with which some Conventual authors were tarring the Observants. Giacomo reproached the Fraticelli for 'wanting to live in the spirit of liberty without any law ... going to houses with women to commit the most wicked of sins.'⁸³ Capestrano had already declared in 1449 that the Fraticelli indulged in sexual deviancy, ritual infanticide and the ceremonial consumption of burnt infant remains; his accusations were revived at Rome's last trial of the sect in 1466.⁸⁴ The Observants were clearly unnerved by those who pursued a stricter interpretation of the

⁸⁰ *Defensorium Observantiae contra deviantes* in *Monumenta Ordinis Minorum*, fols. 184r.

⁸¹ *Apologia* in *Minorica Elucidativa*, fol. 14v; on the Colettans, see Nimmo, pp. 460-466

⁸² Oliger, 'Documenta inedita ad historiam Fraticellorum spectantia', p. 717.

⁸³ *Dialogus contra Fraticellos*, p. 143. For background on the 'spirit of liberty' with which Giacomo della Marca tarred the Fraticelli, see R. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Similar Conventual charges against the Observance will be detailed below.

⁸⁴ On the charges brought at this trial, see N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (Sussex: Sussex University Press and Chatto Heinemann, 1975), pp. 42-54.

Rule, for the existence and success of such groups damaged the Observants' claim to be the only true heirs to the tradition of Franciscan poverty and radicalism. However, there were other reasons for Observant authors to compose such polemical tracts: they functioned as reaffirmations of the orthodoxy of Observant obedience to the Holy See. Indeed, Capestrano's treatise against Berbegal's Capucciolae was commissioned by Pope Eugenius IV, whilst the *Dialogus* condemned the very group with which the Observants had been accused of sympathising. Thus these tracts were intended to publicise the Observance's obedient orthodoxy as well as to combat heresy. Moreover, such tracts reinforced the Observant sense of their congregation's election by emphasising that the Observant way of life was the only legitimate interpretation of the Franciscan ideal.

Conventual Accusations

The evidence provided by polemical texts is particularly important when studying the development of the Observant image and identity, for the polemics deal explicitly with the public image of both the Observants and Conventuals. Much Conventual energy was expended on criticising the outward symbols by which the Observance was recognised. We have seen that Conventual polemicists attacked Observant attempts to use a new name to publicise and confirm their identity, and that each side continued to stigmatise the other with derogatory titles. The Observant habit gave rise to similar criticisms. Francesco da Rimini's tract included four separate points dealing with the Observants' clothing alone.⁸⁵ Such comments were obviously familiar even to lay observers. In a chapter devoted to Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce in his satirical work *Il Novellino* (1475), Masuccio Salernitano (c.1420-1475), a satirist writing in southern Italy in the 1450s and 1460s, lingered upon the enmity between the two Franciscan parties and summarised Caracciolo's objections to the Observance:

[Roberto] affirmed that the Friars Minor who wish to be called the Observants clearly fail to observe the most important things ordered by the seraphic Francis and observe some useless and superstitious practices instead: they wear coarse and poorly-made *zoccoli*, which Francis had never even seen, simply to show themselves off to the ignorant as humble, poor and obedient; they wear mantles of different coloured patches with a leather buckle and a bit of wood for a button, and other similar hypocritical appearances neither written of nor thought of in their most holy Rule.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), p. 355.

⁸⁶ Masuccio Salernitano, *Il Novellino*, p. 82.

Nikolaas van Haarlem recorded the Conventual complaint that 'the Observant brothers seem to display their sanctity to the people in an excessive manner' by wearing a meagre habit and ostentatiously refusing to touch money-alms.⁸⁷ The Observants, as well as their critics, were clearly aware of the important signals given out by image and appearance.

Moreover, the Conventuals were concerned that the fates of the two congregations were so intertwined that Observant efforts to secure their own reputation automatically endangered that of the Conventuals. One Conventual wrote in c.1452:

By calling themselves good friars, [the Observants] label the Conventuals bad friars. I say that this is enough to show that *they* are the bad ones, since they praise themselves by insulting others.⁸⁸

This statement touched upon one of the major themes in Conventual polemics: the accusations of hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness with which the Observants were charged. Francesco da Rimini recorded a dozen arguments to prove the hypocrisy of the new congregation. They ranged from the Observants going drinking when they claimed to take mass, or cursing the Conventuals 'as the Jews curse the Christians', to proclaiming their poverty and asceticism but greedily gathering alms and eating rich food at every opportunity. Indeed, Francesco gleefully reported a jingle which he claimed was popular in the city-states of Italy: 'Chi se vole bene impire la panza, si se fazza frà dal observanza' (He who wishes to fill his belly joins the Observant brothers).⁸⁹

Some Conventual accusations struck alarmingly close to home. For instance, Francesco da Rimini criticised the Observants for employing servants; the Observant constitutions of Genoa, among other documents, show that paid secular servants were indeed an accepted part of many Observant households.⁹⁰ Conventual writers asserted that the Observants were not as poor as they proclaimed and even hoarded alms; Giacomo Oddi's comments on the 'wine ... grain, one or two servants, one or two beasts of burden and similar things,' enjoyed by the brothers of S. Maria degli Angeli in the mid fifteenth

⁸⁷ Van den Hombergh, 'Nikolaas van Haarlem', p. 144.

⁸⁸ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), p. 386.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 356-358.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 359. For evidence of Observant servants, see Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta provincialia Observantium Ianuae 1487-1521'; and Brugman's *Speculum Imperfectionis*, which show that secular servants were common.

century shows that such things were not unknown.⁹¹ However, other accusations were wilder and potentially more damaging, particularly in the decade or so after the *Ut sacra* controversy (1446). The anonymous Conventual polemicist of c.1452 wrote:

[The Observants] accept into their Order mere wages-men, and infamous pimps. ... Secretly, but without shame, they insult men of every status; they vilify the prelates of the Church, and irreverently defame the Conventual brothers. ... Truly it is awful to hear in what wickedness many prelates of the Observant Family go unpunished! They are discovered to own possessions and money, to consort with women [*mulierum commixtio et familiaritas*], or to have lewd carnal relationships with young men.⁹²

The same writer also stated that certain Observants who supported *Ut sacra* conspired in the death of the Observant preacher Giacomo Donzelli da Bologna. This polemicist told how Donzelli had begun to repent publicly of his part in procuring *Ut sacra*. Whilst visiting the house of Monteluco near Spoleto, a stronghold of Observant separatism, he fell ill. The friars there refused to let doctors tend to Donzelli, forbade him medicine and poured his urine away rather than allowing experts to examine it. Under such treatment the preacher died.⁹³ The claims of this particular writer owe a great deal to the traditional charges laid against heretics in the medieval period. Such marginal groups, like the Fraticelli whom Capestrano had condemned in 1449, were commonly discredited with allegations of lechery, sexual deviancy and murder.⁹⁴

However, Conventual accusations did not play a wholly negative role in the development of the Observance. In some ways, they were in fact instrumental in shaping the fifteenth-century congregation, for they forced the Observants to look closely at their way of life and to justify it before both clergy and laity. As we have seen, Conventual charges of disobedience spurred the Observants to emphasise the virtue of obedience in their own writings and hagiography. Similarly, Conventual accusations of ignorance played at least some part in the development of education within the Observant congregation. Whilst attacking the Observants at the Council of Basle in 1433, François

⁹¹ Oddi, I, p. 152. Francesco da Rimini accused the Observants of failing to fast and of accepting and storing a 'superabundance' of goods and food, adding that superfluous food was not donated to the poor but allowed to rot. Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), pp. 357, 359.

⁹² Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), pp. 385-386.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁹⁴ For the traditions which lay behind such charges, see Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 16-59.

Futz twice asserted the necessity of study and accused his opponents of ignorance.⁹⁵ In c.1452, the anonymous Conventual polemicist asserted that the Observants were too arrogant to apply themselves to their studies. He claimed that they believed learning to be damnable and accused Observant Vicars of allowing ignorant brothers to take confession and preach.⁹⁶ Nikolaas van Haarlem indignantly recorded the Conventual assertion that the Observants 'seem to condemn and to hate the study of the scholastics and the Holy Scripture.'⁹⁷ Such charges only emphasised the need to develop an organised system of study within the Observant congregation. Early Observant hostility to learning, which derived from Francis's own distrust of the pride engendered by excessive erudition, began to dissipate under the influence of Bernardino da Siena's study and clericalisation programme. Initiated in 1438, it gathered pace in the following decades. By the 1480s a high proportion of Observant brothers were educated enough to have taken holy orders. Alessandro Ricci's necrology of the Observant brothers of his own province of S. Bernardino (Abruzzo) who died before 1494 shows that 136 were in orders (a figure which included at least thirty-three preachers) compared to 112 lay brothers.⁹⁸ This was a significant development for a congregation which, as Bernardino Aquilano reported, had shared a single priest between three houses in 1415.⁹⁹ Indeed, in 1460 Johannes Brugman felt able to respond to Conventual accusations of ignorance with scornful confidence: 'I answer that this is false, for I have seen both masters in theology and baccalaureates in the Observance, and moreover we have masters of arts at every faculty and university'.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, during the 1450s the Conventuals continually accused the Observants of suffering from internal divisions. Francesco da Rimini listed the ways in which the Observants were 'divided amongst themselves, so that they persecute each other,' and provided a list of Observant brothers who had called for the union of the Order, inscribing the names of Bernardino da Siena and Giacomo della Marca alongside that of Roberto

⁹⁵ Schmitt, 'Le reforme de l'Observance', *AFH* 83 (1990), pp. 379, 391.

⁹⁶ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), p. 385. As we have seen, Bernardino da Siena had forbidden uneducated brothers to take confession in 1438.

⁹⁷ Van den Hombergh, 'Nikolaas van Haarlem', p. 143.

⁹⁸ The necrology formed part of Ricci's chronicle and is reproduced in Chiappini, 'De vita et scriptis Fr. Alexandri de Riciis', pp. 555-562.

⁹⁹ Aquilano, *Chronica*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Brugman, *Solutiones*, p. 357.

Caracciolo da Lecce.¹⁰¹ An anonymous Conventual writing in the 1450s asserted that many Observants would have preferred to remain under the authority of the Ministers, and that some had gone so far as to petition the papacy to this effect.¹⁰² Such allegations antagonised the Observants, who wished to present a united front to their critics. However, these claims also helped to convince the Observants of the need to cultivate a fully separate identity for their congregation that could be communicated to, and shared by, all Observant brothers. It is notable that a high proportion of Observant literature was composed only after the 1450s. This phenomenon is in part attributable to a rise in the number of educated brothers and to the newly comfortable lifestyle that provided them with the time and means to pursue their literary ambitions. However, it is also due to the crisis of the 1450s, which proved to be a crucible in which the Observance was tested and from which it slowly emerged stronger and more self-reliant. Those who wrote after the 1450s often seem to have been affected by the feelings of vulnerability which the congregation suffered during this time, and which then gave rise to a sense of bullish pride that the Observance had survived at all. Certainly, Bernardino Aquilano, the first historian of the Observance, had been deeply influenced by his experience of the difficult years between 1450 and 1470. As we have seen, he had been one of Nicholas V's commissioners in the 1453 investigation into the Observance, which was charged, at Conventual insistence, with deciding whether the Observant brothers wished for and were worthy of autonomy. In 1456 he helped Giacomo della Marca to produce the *Bulla Concordiae*, which made him aware of internal tensions within the Observance and forced him to parry Conventual attacks at the Roman Curia and at a series of General Chapters. The main body of Aquilano's *Chronica* (c.1480) was, as we have seen, a long and partisan description of the battles between the two sides. The many Observants who composed polemical tracts were also keenly aware of the need to defend their congregation in public. Likewise, the cult of Bernardino da Siena was developed and disseminated during this key period, whilst Giacomo Oddi's work on *La Franceschina* also began in the turbulent decade before 1460.

¹⁰¹ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), pp. 361-363.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 379.

The Polemics of Johannes Brugman

The works of Johannes Brugman (c.1400-1473) provide persuasive evidence for the strengthening of Observant institutional self-consciousness in the two decades between 1450 and 1470. After converting from the Conventuals to the Observant cause in 1445, Brugman became an influential reformer, administrator and popular preacher. He was involved in the establishment of the Observance in his native Low Countries (1447-51), and eventually became Provincial Vicar of Cologne (1462).¹⁰³ He wrote two important works which touched upon the theme of Observant identity. The first, *Speculum Imperfectionis* (c.1451), is that rare thing: a work of Observant self-criticism. Brugman attacked the failings of the Observance with all the scorching zeal of a recent convert. Written in the form of a letter to the Observant leadership in the Low Countries, Brugman used the *Speculum* to deplore the decline of the congregation and lament the sins of the brothers in the extravagant language traditional in Franciscan polemics. Brugman devoted a chapter to the criticism of each of the congregation's fourteen levels, from servants through novices, lay brothers, clerics, teachers and preachers, to the guardians of the convent. He obviously felt that, due to the dogged public support for the Observance in the Low Countries and the relatively recent establishment of the congregation in the province, the Observants were secure enough to withstand his criticisms and still idealistic enough, despite their faults, to take them to heart.¹⁰⁴

His second work, *Solutiones quorundam obiectorum contra sacram Observantiam* (1460), was a more orthodox polemic which refuted Conventual claims about the failings of the Observant life. The *Solutiones* survives only in a manuscript held in the Library of the University of Edinburgh (EUL ms. 328, fols. 27v-28v, 127rv, 29r-30r), and due to a torn folio (fol. 127*) six of Brugman's original sixteen points have been lost.¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰³ On Brugman's life, see F. A. H. van den Hombergh, *Leven en werk van Jan Brugman OFM*, (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1967); J. Goyens, 'Brugman, Jan' in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* 10, (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1938), pp. 907-8; and E. G. Hoekstra, 'Jean Brugman' in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 8, pp. 311-313. On his work as a reformer, see L. Ceysens, 'Les Ducs de Bourgogne et l'introduction de l'Observance à Malines (1447-1469)', *AFH* 30 (1937), pp. 391-419.

¹⁰⁴ On public support for the Observance in the Low Countries, see Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion* IV, p. 439.

¹⁰⁵ The *Solutiones* is included in a collection of texts gathered together in the late fifteenth century by an unknown Dutch Observant. The collection is concerned mainly with the interpretation of the Rule, the Franciscan ideal and the conflict between the Conventuals and the Observance. Its small size (112x70mm) suggests that it was perhaps the pocket-book of a friar interested in the conflicts and preoccupations of the

Solutiones, an impassioned defence of the Observant congregation, testifies that Brugman's sense of institutional self-consciousness had developed in the nine years since he had written the *Speculum*. The crisis of the 1450s had evidently affected him. The *Solutiones* gives no hint that its author had once felt secure enough of his congregation to deplore it. Rather, the tract reveals a wary and defensive Brugman who was insecure about the safety of his congregation and worried about its vulnerability to criticism. Rebuke became stinging, impassioned defence.

Public Image in the *Speculum Imperfectionis*

The *Speculum Imperfectionis* is often known by its popular title, *De ruinis Observantiae*, reflecting Brugman's pessimistic evaluation of his congregation. However, like so many other Franciscan authors of the same period, Brugman named his work with care. His chosen title parodied one of Franciscanism's greatest texts, the *Speculum Perfectionis* (1318), allowing Brugman to contrast the perceived decadence of the Observance with the ardent poverty and perfection of Francis himself. Brugman also made use of the Medieval mirror conceit which posited the idea of the mirror as an ideal or perfect model. Francis was thus held up as the model of perfection in the *Speculum Perfectionis* whilst, paradoxically, the *Speculum Imperfectionis* held up the Observance as the perfect form of corruption. The tract allows us an insight into Brugman's conception of the Observant ideal, although his work functions rather like Lewis Carroll's topsy-turvy looking-glass world where all things are reversed: we may only discern the outline of the perfect Observant only from Brugman's criticism of the imperfect friar.

The imperfect Observant comes across with the full flavour of his lip-smacking sinfulness. Brugman risked sounding like one of the more scabrous satirists of the later Middle Ages as he provided lists of the faults of the brethren:

Alas, *there is death in the pot, o thou man of God* [4 Kings 4:40] ... if [the Confessors] are proud, or seek to be carnally pleased like beasts; if they receive little presents of wine, meat, spices, perfumes and other sweet things for the care of their flesh; if they are inflamed with private love for

Observance. For a full description of the manuscript see N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 615-17. The manuscript is not included in the Library's own catalogue edited by C. R. Borland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1916). The work has been published by van den Hombergh and will hereafter be cited within the text as SQ, followed by page number.

silly women and study to please man rather than fear God; if, through foolish love, they call women their 'daughters' ... or encourage in their pride the women who wear horned and feathered head-dresses, or receive in a friendly way usurers, pimps, adulterers and other such public offenders. ... These many things threaten the ruin of this most sacred Order. (SI, 620-1)

Each of the chapters had the same kind of litany, naming dozens of sins but never giving specific examples, for Brugman was careful to couch his stark censures in the cautious conditional tense. The principal faults complained of were ambition, dissimulation, lack of zeal and laziness. Brugman believed these failings entered the congregation through the influx of lax Conventuals who had chosen to join the Observance as it prospered:

I hear it said that, just as the Observance is maintained by good and ardent Conventual converts, so by such as are tepid and remiss, for whom it is sufficient to spend the days of this life in food, inactivity and drink, it is ruined and weakened and in short the whole Observance is cast down. It suffices such men to say the Hours with their lips, not to be reputed fornicators, not to have money, not to beget sons and daughters. They think little and care even less to imitate the better graces of prayer, silence and compunction, of mortifications, ceremonies and the exemplary life, of simplicity and deep humility. (SI, 616)

This is a revealing comment, for it exposes the level of observance which Brugman found acceptable. The first line could be read as a somewhat immodest reference to his own career in the congregation since his defection from the Conventuals in 1445, but as always he was more concerned with the failures than the successes. Here the ideal was presented as something more than a basic level of religious observance. It was not enough 'not to have money'; the friar must also respect the spirit of the Franciscan life of poverty, though Brugman did not advocate *usus pauper*; this was rather a dig at the Conventual practice of accepting goods and rents. Thus Brugman presented his congregation as one which went beyond the basic tenets of the Franciscan life as practised by the Conventuals, entering into a deeper understanding of the Franciscan Rule. Just as with other Observant polemicists, Brugman's idealised Observance did not allow for different levels of religious observance in its ranks; it ought to be a congregation made up solely of those willing to go beyond the tepid shallows of public religiosity and into the deeper spiritual waters of the spiritual life.

Brugman was keenly aware that image was something which could be created and manipulated. He distinguished between public image and private reality, true and false devotion. He wrote of brothers who wore a public mask of piety to deceive both the laity

and their own brethren and depicted a world in which the assumed identity was deemed more important than the true. Brugman drew a line between what the brothers were and what they appeared to be, yet he was interested in both these aspects of the Observant identity. A good Observant must be pious, yet Brugman was concerned that he must also be seen publicly to be pious so that the congregation might flourish under the protection of a satisfied laity. This concern can be seen in the first chapter, 'On servants', in which Brugman counselled against permitting the household servants^{to} become too close to the brothers, for if 'they are allowed to be idle they may see weak friars, and through familiarity become contemptuous of the brothers'. Even worse for the reputation of the Observance, 'they are allowed to procure [goods] privately for the brothers and for themselves without the knowledge of the Guardians or Vicar, so that afterwards they leave and confound us with their gossip' (SI, 615). Here Brugman showed himself to be highly concerned with the public reputation of the congregation - it was not just the obtaining of possessions that he minded, but the fact that the servants might leave and, no longer having any ties to the Observant brothers, decide to tell all about their faults in public. The crime was perhaps not just that of procuring goods (though such an act was explicitly against the Rule of St Francis), but of being seen to do so. Brugman identified a vital difference and showed himself to be concerned as much with the public image of the Observance as with its acts.

Brugman was keenly aware of the importance of the Observance's public reputation. He darkly warned the congregation that as its faults became more obvious, men would proclaim in the taverns, 'After I have consumed and wasted my substance in drink, dice and fornication, spending it with harlots and jesters [*histrionibus*], I shall yet be a good friar Minor' (SI, 615). However, the *Speculum* also suggests that Brugman was alarmed that the Observant hierarchy might be in danger of being seduced by the importance of image over substance. In the chapter 'On priests and their celebration [of the Mass] and their idleness' he warned that:

Those [priests] who come are less prepared, less meditative, less crucified with Christ, less ordered [than before]. Moreover, among these, singers are multiplied and preferred above orators, bawlers are preferred to weepers, garrulous little preachers to those who sigh devotedly. (SI, 618)

Such concerns are reminiscent of Erasmus's scorn for the empty gestures of the mendicant preachers in his 1509 tract *In Praise of Folly*: 'What toning, what bawling, what singing, what squeaking, what grimaces, making of mouths, ape's faces, and distorting of their

countenance; and this art of oratory as a choice mystery, they convey down by tradition to one another.'¹⁰⁶ Brugman claimed that the hierarchy not only promoted such instances of showmanship over true piety, but was actually infected with the same problems itself. Thus the Vicars, second only to the Guardians in Brugman's great chain of command, were presented as con-men using all the weapons at their disposal to maintain their position: 'They pretend to be the voice of correction but in their acts they deny it; they pretend to be zealots in the presence of zealous prelates, yet they pour forth a deadly poison with their detractions' (SI, 623). Brugman had no suggestion for the cure of such deceptions and lies but for prayer, better discipline and a good dose of Franciscan literature.

Franciscan Literature and Observant Identity

The *Speculum* shows Brugman to have been deeply concerned about what he perceived as the Observant failure to foster a strong sense of collective identity. He felt that the leaders of the congregation had abdicated their duty to teach novices how to be true Observants. In the sixth chapter, 'On newly-professed clerics', Brugman turned to the problem of the self-perception of the congregation and proclaimed the importance of Franciscan and devotional literature in the inculcation of a truly Franciscan consciousness:

Alas, it may be said that the young brothers relinquish the font of the holy living water of prayer, devotion, recollection and compunction. Nor, indeed, are they instructed in the writings of the Order, in the Rule or in the declarations on the Rule by the most high popes and doctors. Neither are they instructed in the general statutes, papal or otherwise, or in the *Actus beati Francisci*, *Speculum Perfectionis*, *Legenda Maior*, nor the aforesaid Ubertino [the *Arbor vitae Crucifixiae* by Ubertino da Casale], through the study of which all could become zealots for the Order, excellent prelates and other directors.¹⁰⁷

Brugman further recommended the reading of meditative books such as the *Imitatio Christi*, the devotional works of the German Franciscan David of Augsburg (†1272), Augustine's Manual and meditations, and the meditations of St Bernard of Clairvaux. He continually returned to the necessity of grounding the brothers in the literature of the Order. In chapter five he described how a novice-master would 'ruin many souls ... if,

¹⁰⁶ *Desiderii Erasmi Opera Omnia* IV-3, p. 162; translation from *In Praise of Folly*, anon. trans., (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915; repr. 1951), p. 151. This translation has been preferred for its vigour.

¹⁰⁷ Brugman, *Speculum*, pp. 616-617. Hereafter this work shall be referred to within the text as SI, followed by page number.

compelling the young to write books for him, he ignores the writings of the Order' (SI, 620). In chapter thirteen he rebuked Guardians who 'do not take care to read out and explain to the simple the declarations, statutes and writings of the Order' (SI, 624). In the *Supplementum ad Speculum*, a much more positive continuation added to the *Speculum* soon after 1451, he ordered of the novice-master that:

He must be competently read in the books of devotions, and also in religious learning and such things, especially in those works which touch on his profession and Rule, such as the declarations, statutes and suchlike. ... Above all else, he must study to inculcate in [the novices] the writings of the Order, which so few endeavour to study after they have made their profession.¹⁰⁸

Thus Brugman insisted on the primary importance of a thorough understanding of Franciscan literature in fostering a sense of Observant institutional self-consciousness. The neglect of such study was pinpointed as the primary reason for the failure of the Observant ideal.

The texts Brugman chose to illustrate his point are revealing of the kind of ideal he envisaged for his congregation. He described the lax brothers as 'not founded in the basics' [*non fundati in primitiviis*] of Franciscan literature: thus the texts he named were those he considered to be the basic building blocks of the Observant identity. Hence he cited above all the Rule, statutes and papal declarations, followed by the *Actus b. Francisci* (c.1322-8), *Speculum Perfectionis* (c.1318), Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior* (1263) and Ubertino da Casale's *Arbor vitae Crucifixiae* (1305) as the fundamental works on the Franciscan life.¹⁰⁹ We have already seen that the Rule and statutes were considered the most basic texts of Franciscanism. Of the other works named by Brugman, all, apart from Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior*, were deeply influenced by the ideals of the Spiritual movement. Indeed, Bonaventura's life of Francis was Brugman's least controversial choice. It had been intended to be the definitive *vita* of Francis: upon its completion the Chapter General of 1266 ordered that all earlier *vitae* should be destroyed.¹¹⁰ The work was owned by every Franciscan convent and, although it had been attacked by the

¹⁰⁸ H. Goyens, *Supplementum ad Speculum Imperfectionis Fratrum*, p. 316.

¹⁰⁹ *Actus b. Francisci et sociorum eius* ed. J. Cambell, M. Bigaroni and G. Boccali, Pubblicazioni della Biblioteca Franciscana 10 (Assisi: Biblioteca Franciscana, 1988); 'The Mirror of Perfection' in Habig, pp. 1103-1265; 'The Major Life' in Habig, pp. 614-787; Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu Christi*, Monumenta politica et philosophica rariori, ser. 1, n. 4 (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1961).

¹¹⁰ Moorman, p. 287.

Spirituals who had chafed at its relative moderation, was considered to be of primary importance in tracing the life of the founder.

In contrast, the *Actus* and *Speculum* were compiled by Spirituals who felt that Bonaventura had lost the immediacy of Francis's vision.¹¹¹ In the fifteenth century these works were believed to reflect the experiences of Francis's earliest companions (the repeated 'nos qui cum eo fuimus' of the *Actus*) and to include the stories famously put together by Leo, Angelo and Rufino.¹¹² The *Actus* also contained anecdotes concerning the Franciscan *zelantes* of the Italian Marches of the late thirteenth century, and was later translated into the vernacular as the *Fioretti* (1370-85). Since both the *Actus* and the *Speculum* in fact emanated from Spiritual circles, they stressed the need for a high standard of poverty and austerity within the Order, opposing its increasingly clericalised and educated nature and proclaiming Francis's hatred for any relaxation of the primitive ideal. Ubertino da Casale took this radical ideal even further in his fiercely Spiritual tract which denounced both the Franciscan Order and the Church itself for their decadence and failings. The *Arbor vitae Crucifixiae* was an extraordinary mixture of apocalyptic commentary, mysticism, scriptural exegesis and biting criticism.¹¹³ Ubertino was primarily concerned with proving the necessity of absolute poverty and advocated the division of the lax and zealous wings of the Franciscan Order. He remained a controversial figure even in the fifteenth century, capable of inspiring great fascination but still considered somewhat dangerous.¹¹⁴ However, the wave of redactions of Franciscan works from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth centuries made Spiritual texts both more accessible and more acceptable.¹¹⁵

Brugman thus prescribed literary works which had been hallowed by age but which were still delicately spiced with the flavour both of Francis's original radicalism and

¹¹¹ Moorman, *The Sources for the Life of S. Francis of Assisi*, p. 133.

¹¹² These early sources have been edited and reproduced in Brooke, *Scripta Leonis*.

¹¹³ On Ubertino, see G. L. Potestà, *Storia e escatologia in Ubertino da Casale* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1980); and M. Damiata, *Pietà e storia nell'Arbor vitae di Ubertino da Casale* (Florence: Studi Francescani, 1988).

¹¹⁴ For instance, Bernardino da Siena was indebted to Ubertino's *Arbor Vitae* for preaching material, using forty-seven of Ubertino's 101 chapters (sometimes copied verbatim), yet he never openly cited the Spiritual. See Blondeel d'Isegem, 'L'influence d'Ubertin de Casale sur les écrits de Saint Bernardin de Sienne'; and Moorman, p. 460.

¹¹⁵ Duncan Nimmo has traced the diffusion of Spiritual-influenced manuscript collections during this period. See Nimmo, pp. 311ff.

the more intransigent zeal of the Spirituals. Nevertheless, it is interesting that he neglected to mention any of the other writings by and about Francis which had so fascinated the Spirituals and early Observants who had attempted to imitate the life of the founder as closely as possible. There was no mention of the more radical doctrines contained in Francis's *Regula non bullata* (1221), his *Regula pro eremitoriis* (1222/3) or his Testament (1226), texts which proclaimed the need for absolute poverty, humility and the contemplative life. These writings had profoundly influenced the early Observants and remained important to the minor congregations which split from the Observants to pursue a stricter interpretation of the Rule, such as the friars of the *Recollectio Villacreciana* of fifteenth-century Spain.¹¹⁶ Instead Brugman's choices illustrate how the Observance of the later fifteenth-century combined ingrained moderation with a continued and heartfelt interest in the ideals and ideas that lay at the heart of Francis's original vision, whilst his recommendation of devotional works testifies to the continued importance of contemplative prayer in the Observant ideal. Through his concern for the study of the Order's literature Brugman paid close attention to the need for a written and sustainable Franciscan identity, placing great emphasis upon the important role played by a sense of a communicable Observant institutional self-consciousness.

Negative Conceptions of Identity: the *Solutiones*

Whilst the *Speculum* was predominantly concerned with the internal life of the Observance and how this was reflected in the public eye, the *Solutiones quorundam obiectorum*, written in 1460, was a more orthodox polemic concerned with the fundamental relationship between the Observants and the Conventuals. Though the *Solutiones* was, like the *Speculum*, addressed to the leaders of the Observance in the Low Countries, it seems Brugman had his eye on a broader audience, for the language and style of the work suggest a very public polemical dispute. It was perhaps designed to provide other Observant preachers with the means with which to refute Conventual criticisms in public. Thus Brugman took sixteen Conventual accusations - of which only ten now remain - and denied them one by one amidst much polemical posturing.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ See Nimmo, pp. 500-514 on the *Recollectio Villacreciana*'s reverence for these texts.

¹¹⁷ The criticisms were: 1) The Observants shunned the Conventuals as excommunicates; 2) The Pope allowed the Conventual life, therefore the Observance was not legitimate; 3) The Observants sowed discord amongst clergy, people and prelates; 4) They received goods and money secretly; 5) Their convents competed with those of the Conventuals; 6) They were unlearned; 7) They preached heresy; [8-

The *Solutiones* has a valuable role in tracing the institutional self-consciousness of the Observance, for it offers two versions of the Observant identity. One is a positive vision of the congregation's virtues; the other, a series of negative contrasts that present the Observance solely as the antithesis of the Conventual party. The first allowed the Observants to stand alone as the heirs to Francis, the second suggests that the Observance needed to match themselves against the Conventuals, without whom their image and identity would suffer from a lack of definition. Brugman's work once again provides an interesting companion to *In Praise of Folly*. As we have already seen, Erasmus was scornful of the Franciscans' eagerness to be distinguished from one another: 'They all take remarkable pains to be different from each other in their rule of life. They are not interested in being like Christ but in being unlike each other'.¹¹⁸ It is certainly true that Brugman seems more interested in creating the congregation's image in negative terms, presenting his confrères simply as non-Conventuals rather than as specifically more Franciscan than their rivals. Thus there was barely any mention of Francis in the text. Brugman only once presented the founder as a model for imitation, preferring instead to hold forth the Conventuals as a model for rejection.

The idea that the Observant identity was inextricably bound up with that of the Conventuals was made clear by Brugman. Using images from the world of nature he presented both congregations as the inevitable products of Franciscanism; one natural and healthy, the other debased and deformed:

But should anyone say: Is it possible that from your Observance should spring up a shoot of life unlike the distorted life? I reply to this: From the wheat there comes chaff as well, and moreover the husk which contains both of them is thrown away. In the same way ferrous matter lies hidden in wine, and the dregs of the oil stands with the oil, the earth stands along with the gold, the shell with the pearl, and the thorn with the flower. (SQ, 362)

Following a common preaching pattern Brugman often used pairs of contradictions to illustrate the vices of the Conventuals and virtues of the Observants. The clearest and most interesting example of this comes in the fourteenth chapter, in which Brugman denied that the Observants were the forerunners of Antichrist. In a passage worth quoting

13 missing]; 14) It had been prophesied that they would destroy Christianity; 15) They were disobedient; 16) They had different habits and customs.

¹¹⁸ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, (1915), p. 165.

at length for its rich imagery, he set up a schematic pattern of opposites that simultaneously exalted the Observants and derided the Conventuals. He began by condemning the hypocrisy and laxity of the Conventuals:

Perhaps they want it to be understood in this way; that they are the true Minors, holy men, and the illustrious imitators of the blessed Francis their father, and we are bastards, sons of Belial and not of Francis. ... Truly it is such men as these who destroy the Christian Church by their scandalous way of life, their scandalous profit and their scandalous commerce.

Brugman next turned to his Observant confrères:

O Observant brother, because you are clothed in the colour of ash and of death you are called wolf, but the true friar of the Conventuals who is dressed in costly cloth is called the lamb. Because you do not accept or possess money you are called grasping; your rich and enormously wealthy brother lacks teeth. Because you roar and shout, because you chastise the depraved and their vice, you are defamed as one who brings ruin and affliction; your greater brother, namely of the Community, because he is obsequious, remains silent, howls for and fawns upon the powers of this age, is praised as the glorious protector and unifier of the flock. Renounce [the example of] the dead, foolish little brother of the Observance, dress yourself in expensive cloth, devour gold and silver, be unwilling to condemn the wickedness of men, howl with the wolves, and you will be called a lamb, nor from this time forward will you be called false or hypocritical, but a famous man. (SQ, 361)

In this extraordinary passage Brugman used biting sarcasm to show that the achievements of the Observance were inextricably linked to the failings of the Conventuals; they were two sides of the same coin. In a world where virtue was ignored, each facet of the Observant identity became inverted. In an echo of Brugman's earlier preoccupations in the *Speculum Imperfectionis*, image became more important than truth: the good were accused of evil, justice was seen as injustice, and the wicked thrived. In this carnal world the identities of the Observants and Conventuals were exchanged and confounded. They became Janus-faced aspects of each other, absolute opposites whose ideals and ambitions stemmed from the same source but diverged toward light and dark. Where the Observance was humble, poor, and penitential, the Conventuals were proud, rich and sinful; yet one was victimised and the other exalted. The wolf-lamb contrast was relished by Brugman for its use in categorising the two communities as polar opposites, and was echoed by other Observant writers, such as Aquilano and Mariano da Firenze, who also presented the Observants as innocent victims of the rapacious Conventuals.

By using this type of imagery Brugman connected the Observance inextricably to the Conventuals: the congregation needed opponents against whom it could define itself. Thus Brugman defined the Observant identity in the most narrowly negative terms as simply the antithesis of that of the Conventuals:

If it were necessary, I could show by each point of our Rule, declarations and statutes how different ... the Observant is from the non-Observant ... since in both ways of life I am, as God judges, an expert. To observe and not to observe are greatly different, as the experts know; and these differences are both short and many. (SQ, 364-5)

However, when Brugman looked at his congregation in a more positive fashion, his work suddenly became transformed:

O most blessed brother, whatever men may say, whatever your enemies may have said, follow the Gospel, observe the Rule, embrace Christ, imitate Francis. And however much the whole world proclaims you a wolf, a false prophet, a dissembling hypocrite, interrogate your conscience, likewise look closely at your life and make sure that your life corresponds to the Rule which your lips have graced. (SQ, 362)

This is the only point at which Brugman held up Francis as model for the Observant friar, and one of the few moments when he offered a positive vision of the duties an Observant must undertake. Brugman had already exhaustively listed the things an Observant ought not to do in the guise of a litany of Conventual sins, but here the Observant life was stripped to its basics and took the form of an exhortation to cling to the four foundation stones of Franciscanism: Gospel, Rule, Christ, Francis. Brugman presented the Observants as victims of persecution, struggling to fulfil their vocation in a world which vilified and attacked them, yet finding strength in the struggle. As an exhortation, and coming as it does in the midst of an extended passage detailing the persecutions inflicted by the Conventuals, it carries great emotive force. Brugman, an experienced popular preacher, knew how to rally his troops.

Conclusion

Brugman echoed the concern for public *fama* that can be traced in many other Observant writings. Observant polemics were preoccupied with creating and sustaining an image and identity that was distinctive and separate from that of the Conventuals. This was to be achieved not only through the prominent adoption of the trappings of an institutional identity (habit, title, the cult of Bernardino da Siena), but through the medium of polemic itself. The fact that the Observant-Conventual conflicts were played out on a

public stage is highly significant. The two sides faced each other across the debating chambers of the Councils of Constance and Basle, and constantly lobbied the Curia. Masuccio Salernitano's wickedly accurate parody of Caracciolo's sermons against the Observance show that these disputes were not mere internal memos but extremely vocal battles for the hearts and minds of the laity and Church hierarchy. Such openness shows how important public reputation was to both communities and how much they relied on popular acclaim: both the Observants and Conventuals were highly conscious of the need to impress their own version of their identity onto a watching society.

The relationship between Observants and Conventuals shaped the identity of the reformed congregation in fundamental ways. The relationship was so close that Observants such as Brugman often could not help but define themselves in negative terms as 'non-Conventual' Franciscans. Since the Observant polemicists took their cue from Conventual criticisms, they fashioned an ambivalent image of their congregation in their works. In contrast to their legislation, they presented themselves as observing the spirit and not the letter of the Rule; yet whilst they portrayed themselves as rigorists for the benefit of their Conventual opponents, they also condemned those who desired a stricter interpretation of the Franciscan Rule than was advocated by their own moderate leaders. They proclaimed their obedience and orthodoxy, but subtly threatened the papacy with hints of the chaos that could be caused by a less docile Observance. Conventual polemic played an important part in shaping the Observant self-consciousness. It refracted the Observant identity through a distorting mirror by focusing on the aspects of the Observant way of life which were most open to censure. Such processes influenced the Observants' discussion of their own congregation. The need to react to criticism forced the Observant brothers to re-examine, redefine and reaffirm their identity as Observant Franciscans. Allegations of murder and sexual deviancy were wild enough to be immediately scorned, but other criticisms were noted and the practices which had invited them were amended so that the Observance was less vulnerable to attack. The crisis of the 1450s shaped the congregation profoundly, and the Observant move towards moderation during the mid-Quattrocento was in part a reaction against the constant Conventual allegations that the Observants were no more than ignorant, disobedient and fanatical Fraticelli.

Perhaps the most important message of the polemics is how important the two parties felt their respective beliefs to be. The polemicists did not deal in facts; they dealt in

ideals. The melodramatic rhetoric of Observant tracts and the histrionic charges of Conventual works were felt to be justified because the polemicists wrote to protect their brothers and their dearest ideals. The aggression poured into these pamphlets is an important illustration of the religious vitality of the Franciscan Order during the fifteenth century. Only fiercely held convictions could give rise to such uninhibited vitriol: Francis's words and intentions were still things to be discussed at every level of the Order. The final chapter of Brugman's *Solutiones* perfectly illustrates this mixture of passion and bitterness which characterises the Franciscan polemics of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century:

Indeed it is true that in our habit we differ [from the Conventuals] on the outside, but much less than we differ on the inside: we worship one God, who made both heaven and earth, but we live differently, as I would have been willing to show in a thousand ways if I had the opportunity. ... Thanks be to God that he gives us lice rather than money, rags rather than rich garments, detractors instead of procurators, makes us suffer from many lies instead of being gloriously spoken of in this world. (SQ, 364-5)

CHAPTER FIVE

Speculum praedicatorum: The Cult of Bernardino da Siena

Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444) was certainly the most influential figure within the fifteenth-century Observance. He joined the congregation in 1402 and by 1418 had become its most famous popular preacher. After a lifetime of preaching, Bernardino's death in 1444 gave rise immediately to a popular cult. Many towns, including Siena and Perugia, held memorial services in his honour. In L'Aquila, the place of his death, a vast church was built to house his remains, and Louis XI of France presented the Observant brothers with a sumptuous silver sarcophagus in which to lay his withered body. He was without doubt the most prominent Franciscan of the fifteenth century. As such, Bernardino could not help but shape his fellow brothers' understanding of their Observant congregation, in death as in life. When he entered the movement in 1402 it was still the small brotherhood founded by Paoluccio dei Trinci, devoted to contemplation and poverty. By the time of his death in 1444 it had, as we have seen, expanded across Italy and Europe and was famous for its popular preachers. Vespasiano da Bisticci, the bookseller and Florentine intellectual who wrote a brief account of Bernardino's life in 1453-9, captured the way in which both Bernardino's actions and his image altered the Observance:

He had many Observant houses built, and under him the congregation grew and multiplied. Through the fame of his virtue it gained a very great reputation. One could say that Bernardino established this Order of the Observance in its present form.¹

Bernardino became a model for all Observant brothers. In his life he directed the Observance as Vicar General, subtly shifting the Observant vocation and reshaping the Observant ideal. He was a key figure in the institutionalisation of the congregation. In death he became the most widely recognised symbol of the Franciscan Observance.² Bernardino's canonization was pursued zealously by Giovanni da Capestrano and, when Pope Nicholas V celebrated the ceremony only six years after the saint's death, it was considered to be a validation of the Observance both as a separate institution and as the

¹ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vita di Santo Bernardino da Massa di Maremma* in *Vite di Uomini Illustri del secolo XV*, ed. P. D'Ancona and E. Aeschelimann, (Milan: Editore Ulrico Hoepli, 1951), p. 138.

true interpretation of the Franciscan ideal. Bernardino's name was constantly invoked by Observant preachers and writers. His manifest sanctity was used to support the Observance in times of trouble and persecution. His public image was carefully constructed. In the hagiographies written of him and the sermons preached about him he became the perfect late medieval saint; a holy child, a devotee of the Virgin, a preacher who brought light to a people who walked in darkness, the son of Francis and gentle father to his erring flock. But Bernardino's cult also provided ripe pickings for the critics of the Observance. The Observant construction of Bernardino as a heaven-sent providential figure was accompanied by opposing voices, often Augustinian or Dominican, which marked him as a heretic and a pseudo-prophet, deceived by his own ambitions. As his popular post-mortem cult took hold, the Conventuals began to claim him as their own, declaring that the Observance's Vicar General had never left the Conventual congregation in the first place, or had indeed been an Observant, but one who was opposed to any separatist tendencies in the movement. Bernardino's *fama sanctitatis* became a battleground upon which the Observants fought to preserve and define their own reputation.

Bernardino's Vision of the Observance

During his lifetime Bernardino played a major role in the repositioning of the Observance, drawing it towards the active life of preaching and social care. The brothers he originally joined in 1402 preferred to look inwards to their own souls rather than outwards to the needs of the laity and the secular world. Although Bernardino was ordained in 1404 and began preaching soon after, it took him more than ten years to be recognised as a popular preacher. He became famous after a series of sermons in Milan in 1417-1418 and his reputation remained high until his death. He preached almost constantly for forty years.³ As his fame grew, Bernardino refined his vocation.

² There is a vast literature on Bernardino. The first volume of the *Enciclopedia Bernardiniana*, ed. E. d'Angelo, (L'Aquila: Centro promotore generale delle celebrazioni del VI Centenario della Nascita di S. Bernardino da Siena, 1981) forms a comprehensive bibliography of works on the saint up to 1980.

³ Bernardino's own copies of his sermons, originally composed in Latin, have been published in *S. Bernardini Senensis Opera Omnia*, 9 vols, (Florence: Quaracchi, 1950-1965). There are several collections of Bernardino's vernacular sermons: *Prediche volgari di S. Bernardino da Siena dette nella Piazza del Campo l'anno 1427*, ed. L. Banchi, 3 vols, (Siena: Tip. Arciv. S. Bernardino Edit., 1880-1888); *Le prediche volgari: Predicazione del 1425 in Siena*, ed. C. Cannarozzi, 2 vols, (Florence: Tip. E. Rinaldi, 1958); *Le prediche volgari*, ed. C. Cannarozzi, 2 vols, (Pistoia: Alberto Pacinotti & Co, 1934); and *La fonte della*

Throughout his life he spoke of preaching with undiminished fervour. In 1427 he explained to the Sienese that his own sermons were vital to the sustenance of the Christian faith:

Tell me; what would become of the world, by which I mean the Christian faith, if I didn't preach? In a short time the faith would decline. ... And so the Church has ordered that there shall be preaching every Sunday, no matter whether a little or a lot, as long as there is preaching; and she has ordered you to go and hear mass. And if of these two things you can only do one, you should let the mass go rather than the sermon. There is less peril for your soul in not hearing mass than in not hearing the sermon. ... For tell me, how could you believe in the Holy Sacrament on the altar, but for the preaching you have heard? ... And how, but for sermons, would you know what sin is? ... All that you know comes from the word that you hear, and from this comes your understanding and your faith.⁴

He even allotted himself and other preachers a providential role, arguing that sermons were a force that kept the Antichrist at bay. He felt that the apocalypse could only unfold in a silence in which Christ's message was no longer taught and the people were ignorant of Christian doctrine, so his own continued preaching implicitly became a bulwark against the powers of Antichrist:

What is it that John says in Revelations 8:1? *And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour* ... And this means that when the faith of Christ is no longer spoken of, in the time when Antichrist will go around the world preaching and obscuring the Christian faith, then this silence will come about. ... Christ spread his faith little by little, and in the time of the great preachers it was greater than it has ever been. But now, little by little it decreases, and it will decrease until there is that great silence about his word, and nothing will be preached of him. ... And you may clearly see that Antichrist will never be able to come unless there is silence in our faith.⁵

Thus preaching became not only a moral obligation for suitable Observant brothers, but also a providential duty.

As a preacher, Bernardino implicitly criticised the tendency of many Observants to retreat from the world and lean more towards the contemplative life. In his Latin sermon

vita: Prediche volgari, ed. G. V. Sabatelli, (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1964). Bernardino's *itinerarium* has been reconstructed in A. Chiappini, 'Regestum chronologicum vitae Sancti Bernardini Senensis ex Chronica Ordinis Fr Alexandri de Ritiis', *Franciscan Studies* 27 (1967), pp. 109-113.

⁴ *Fonte della vita*, pp. 52-53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55. It has been much noted that Bernardino's preaching became markedly less eschatological after the 1420s. During his early career he was famous for his cycles of apocalyptic

on Francis, Bernardino argued that Francis's first perfection was in his pursuit of the active life. Indeed, Bernardino was so unsympathetic to the pure contemplative life that the passage in the same sermon nominally devoted to the praise of contemplation in fact turned into a commendation of the moderate mixed life, which he felt to be one of Francis's greatest conformities with Christ.⁶ In 1425 he preached to his beloved Sienese that 'all extremes are dangerous, the middle way is best.'⁷ Accordingly, Bernardino counselled a life that blended learning and prayer. He was distrustful of the eremitical vocation. His humorous sermon on his own early attempts to become a hermit show his scepticism of any vocation that depended on excessive asceticism. He described how 'a wish came to me to live like an angel, I don't say, like a man'. He retreated into a life of solitude, but was defeated by the arid diet of the hermit, 'and so I got rid of all temptation; for I know well enough now that it *was* a temptation.'⁸ In his Latin sermon series *De inspirationibus*, he wrote of the dangers inherent in the contemplative life and his fear that spiritual men were deceived by visions and portents.⁹ He was horrified by the ignorance displayed by some of these men. In 1425 he preached:

My dearest brothers, this Lent I wish to speak against the thing that is more contrary to the health of the soul than anything else in the world; than all wars, all pestilence, all infirmity of soul and body. What is this thing? It is ignorance.¹⁰

Feeling that the friars had a duty to make a difference in the wider world, he shifted the Observance towards a programme of clericalisation and education, and quoted St Jerome: 'Holy rusticity benefits itself alone'.¹¹

Such sermons provide an insight into Bernardino's conception of the religious life, but Bernardino also used his sermons to communicate his vision of the Franciscan vocation more directly. In a sermon of 1425 addressed to 'those who wish to serve God,

sermons, but after c.1424 he ceased to preach on the Last Days. See R. Rusconi, 'Apocalittica ed escatologia nella predicazione di San Bernardino da Siena', *Studi Medievali* ser. 3, 22 (1987), pp. 85-128.

⁶ *Op. Om.* V, p. 195.

⁷ Translated and quoted by Origo, p. 194.

⁸ Banchi, II, pp. 351-352; translated and quoted by A.G. Ferrers Howell, *S. Bernardino of Siena* (London: Methuen, 1913), pp. 92-93.

⁹ *Op. Om.* VI, pp. 183-328, in particular pp. 264-271.

¹⁰ Quoted by C. Mesini, 'La sociologia di San Bernardino da Siena' in *San Bernardino da Siena: Saggi e ricerche pubblicati nel quinto centenario della morte* (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1945), p. 346.

¹¹ Translated and quoted by Origo, p. 217.

especially friars', he spoke delightfully of the joy he took in the deprivations of the Franciscan life:

This is the Rule of the Friars Minor: to go barefoot. ... Certainly it is a joy, for in winter you acquire merit and in summer you stay cool. ... You must not have money, and this is a pleasure, for the man who has no money has no cares. I have never worried since I first became a friar. ... You must sleep in your clothes which is a luxury. Shall I show you how? ... In winter, if you undress, you must get out of your warm clothes and into your icy nightclothes, and when you wake you must leave your warm bed and put on your icy clothes. ... The friars must go begging, and this is a greedy morsel, for ... anything you want, you may get it, and your only labour is to go and fetch it.¹²

In these lines, Bernardino perfectly captured the joyfulness expressed by Francis and his companions. He made poverty one of the defining characteristics of the Franciscan vocation and delight in poverty of central importance to the Franciscan spirit.

Yet, although he acknowledged the unique nature of the Franciscan vow of poverty, Bernardino was also aware that excessive veneration of the virtue had brought the Order to the destructive crisis of the early fourteenth century and had led the Fraticelli into outright heresy. He was thus careful to limit the practical importance of poverty within his congregation. The *Constitutiones Bernardini* of 1430, which imposed a moderate level of poverty upon the Observance, were partially composed by Bernardino and issued in his name, and have already been examined in Chapter Two. Such caution is also clearly visible in his preaching. He was conspicuously restrained in his Latin sermon on poverty, included in a series on the Beatitudes written after 1439. Here he comprehensively disowned the Spiritual idea that poverty was the greatest of virtues and had eschatological significance. Instead he explained that poverty in itself was not a virtue, but that merit lay only in the love of poverty and indifference to worldly things. A rich man could share in the virtue of poverty, if only he felt his belongings to be worthless. Despite such caution, Bernardino still considered voluntary poverty to be virtuous and imitative of Christ. Like all Franciscan *zelantes* before him, he associated poverty with worldly persecution, noting that when Christ preached on the mount, he promised the kingdom of heaven only to those who were poor in spirit and those who patiently suffered persecution for the sake of

¹² Cannarozzi (1958), II, pp. 138-139.

righteousness.¹³ In a vernacular sermon of 1427 he offered the jingle 'Chi nulla non ha, in vita eterna se ne va'.¹⁴

In another echo of the *Constitutiones Bernardini*, Bernardino also preached on obedience and explicitly stated that it was a greater virtue than poverty. In his 1425 sermon to friars he publicly admonished them to be obedient, 'for [obedience] is the foundation-stone of religion,' and preached that it was the key to all knowledge of God:

He who loves God becomes lord over his mind; he who reigns over his mind, reigns over his body; and so the body is subjected to the mind and the mind to the soul, and the soul is subjected to God. In the Our Father you know that you say, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. St Augustine said, 'Obedience is the will of God'. And so in obedience the soul possesses God.¹⁵

He later asserted that the vow of obedience was 'more superior and perfect than [the vows of poverty and chastity]' for three reasons. Offering one's free will to God in obedience was a greater sacrifice than offering one's goods (poverty) or body (chastity). Secondly, the vow of obedience contained within it the vows of poverty and chastity: an obedient brother would, *ipso facto*, be poor; but a poor brother might not necessarily be obedient, as the Spirituals had shown. Finally, obedience was the only vow that was utterly essential to the religious state. Anybody could be chaste or poor; it was the religious vow of obedience that made such states virtuous.¹⁶ The Spirituals had argued that obedience could be mitigated if poverty was endangered by lax superiors. Bernardino disagreed. Nothing was more important than obedience. Thus the Regular Observance under Bernardino's influence once more implicitly rejected the more radical elements of its Spiritual heritage, thus signalling that it could be relied upon by Church and Papacy.

As a trusted preacher, Bernardino travelled far and wide across Italy. He wished his Observant congregation to take up a key social role and implement a comprehensive programme of individual moral reform. His sermons, which touched on every aspect of contemporary Renaissance society, surely created a strong sense of Bernardino's Observant ideal in the minds of those who heard them: he upbraided gamblers,

¹³ *Op. Om.* VI, pp. 348-364.

¹⁴ Banchi, I, p. 710.

¹⁵ Cannarozzi (1958), II, pp. 133-134.

¹⁶ This Latin sermon was titled 'De summa perfectione evangelicae obedientiae atque de obedientia cuiuscumque Religionis', and was written in the late 1430s or early 1440s. *Op. Om.* VII, pp. 355-356.

sumptuously-dressed women, and those who pursued *vendette*, exhorting his listeners to peer into their souls and reform themselves.¹⁷ Contemporary accounts show how Bernardino's sermons were surrounded by choreographed enthusiasm that fixed both the preacher and his message in the minds of his listeners. In his post-1482 sermon on Bernardino, the Observant chronicler Bernardino Aquilano described the popular ceremonies that surrounded the preacher's entrance into the towns where he was to speak:

The people's devotion to Bernardino was so great that often when he came to a town they would go into the streets singing and carrying branches in their arms, just as the Jews had once done for Christ on Palm Sunday.¹⁸

Once he had entered a city, Bernardino often preached in the open due to the vast crowds he attracted; in the main square, at the cathedral, or outside the Franciscan church. His sermons must have made an amazing spectacle. Two panels, painted between 1444 and 1450 by the Sienese artist Sano di Pietro (1405-1481), show Bernardino preaching in Siena first in front of the Conventual church of S. Francesco in 1425 and then before the magnificent Palazzo Pubblico (itself adorned with the monogram of the Holy Name of Jesus) in 1427 (see Fig. 2). In the latter, the women kneel on Bernardino's right, each head covered, each face turned intently towards the saint. On the left the men kneel with their hands clasped. Every eye is fixed on the preacher. The emaciated saint stands at his pulpit, elevated above them, holding up his tablet engraved with the Holy Name of Jesus in the classic depiction that occurs time and again in portrayals of Bernardino. City-state, Observant saint and citizens are bound together under the banner of Christ.¹⁹

¹⁷ See particularly F. Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Renaissance Italy*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁸ V. Meneghin, 'S. Bernardino da Siena ed un sermone in suo onore scritto dal Beato Bernardino da Fossa', *BSB* 6 (1940), p. 216. Edith Pasztor has described this kind of fifteenth-century ceremony as 'una delle forme nuove della religiosità'. See E. Pasztor, 'S. Bernardino e l'episcopato italiano del suo tempo', p. 736.

¹⁹ These panels are now displayed at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Siena. They cannot be dated exactly, but were surely painted before Bernardino's canonisation in 1450. In both, Bernardino is depicted with the rays of a beatus rather than the halo of a saint. Sano di Pietro painted several panels showing miracles performed by S. Bernardino and was commissioned to provide a portrait of the Observant for Giovanni da Capestrano in 1448. Art historians have commented upon Sano's role in creating a public image for the Observance in Siena and Tuscany: 'Sano became the interpreter of St Bernardino and the major exponent of the Observant movement. His depictions of St Bernardino found a receptive audience throughout southern Tuscany, and his innovative scenes of the saint preaching and various representations of his miracles are part of our collective image of the Franciscan reformer.' K. Christiansen, L. B. Kanter and C. B. Strehlke, *Painting in Renaissance Siena 1420-1500*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), p. 138. On Bernardino's relations with the Sienese state see B. Paton, *Preaching Friars and the Civic Ethos: Siena, 1380-1480*, Centre for Medieval Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, (London: University of London Press, 1992).



Sano di Pietro, *S. Bernardino preaching in the Campo di Siena*, c.1444-1450, Capitolo del Duomo, Siena

In order to further impress his message upon the minds of his listeners, Bernardino organised the theatrical spectacle of massive bonfires of the vanities. The Perugian Observant Giacomo Oddi, writing sometime between 1450 and 1474, described Bernardino's visit to Perugia in 1425. He wrote of two huge bonfires onto which game-boards, dice, false hair, garlands, amulets, unguents and magic potions were piled, 'so that two great castles were made of such diabolic and superstitious things.' The Observants contrived to make the sight even more memorable:

One of Bernardino's venerable companions, the blessed Fra Nofrio da Seggiano, a holy man ... made a great banner on which he painted the image of the prince of all these things, that is, Satan, inventor and father of all vanity and superstition. This banner was planted on top of one of these castles and when, with all the town present, the bonfires were set alight, they burnt so that this banner of Satan was raised up so high by the heat of the fire that everyone could see it.²⁰

Thus Bernardino used visual spectacle and unparalleled preaching talent to ensure his audience would listen to and remember his message. His example and methods fixed in the minds of the laity the image of the Observants as popular preachers: through his activities the Observant life was changed fundamentally both in the public eye and in the minds of the brothers.

Bernardino's canonization in 1450 displayed the same kind of public ritual and theatrical ceremony that Bernardino himself had utilised in his preaching career. The Observants were closely involved in planning, executing and recording the events of the canonization. The Observant chronicler Bernardino Aquilano proudly boasted that, '4,000 ducats were spent on the ceremonies which the Church uses in the canonization of saints.'²¹ The Observant friar Sante Boncor devoted most of his hagiography of Bernardino, the *Fior Novello* (1450), to a long and detailed account of every stage of the canonization itself. He clearly felt that this recognition of Bernardino's sanctity was a recognition of the Observance itself. He conveyed the massive scale of the ritual, the sense of commotion and reverence, presenting the process as a gigantic show-stopping public set-piece. He described the procession of Franciscans (Observant and Conventual, for both groups were in Rome to take part in their General Chapter) who set out for St

²⁰ Oddi, I, pp. 375-376.

²¹ Aquilano, p. 36.

Peter's on the morning of the canonization itself (24 May 1450), watched by a huge crowd:

There came through Rome a procession of 5,777 Friars Minor, as I was informed by one who counted them. They carried a banner showing the blessed Bernardino in triumph that was cheered by the whole city [*che tutta la citade fece triumphare*]. On behalf of the Pope, each had been given a large candle to hold, and in this holy way they made their way to St Peter's on streets that were strewn with flowers. ... I cannot express how great was the crowd that gathered to see this great spectacle, and with what tumult and commotion it was greeted.²²

Such ritual helped to reinforce the message that the Observance was being officially acknowledged by laity, Church and God. This sense that the Observance had been validated by Bernardino's canonization was made more explicit in Boncor's final words:

Well could the sons of Francis rejoice when they saw that their mother [i.e., Order] had given birth to such a gentle flower that the most high Church could adore in such a way. ... Oh holy Order, now you may rejoice in yourself; oh devout servants of such a saint, dissolved in love [*stemperative d'amore*]! Oh Friars Minor, truly you are great, and how the world embraces your glory!²³

The Observant Construction of Bernardino

Bernardino was, *par excellence*, the symbol of fifteenth-century Observant sanctity. He was the subject of a large number of lives and sermons, many of which were composed by Observant brothers. Six of the fifteenth-century lives dedicated to Bernardino were written by his Observant confrères:

- Giovanni da Capestrano, *S. Bernardini Senensis Ordinis seraphici Minorum vita* (c.1447-9).²⁴
- Anonymous Observant, *Vita sancti Bernardini* (1444-9).²⁵
- Anonymous Observant, *Compendium vitae S. Bernardini* (1444-9).²⁶

²² S. Gaddoni, 'Vita inedita di S. Bernardino da Siena scritto circa il 1450 da Fr. Sante Boncor O.F.M.', *La Verna* 10 (1912-1913), p. 22.

²³ Ibid., pp. 23, 31.

²⁴ Giovanni da Capestrano, 'S. Bernardini Senensis ordinis seraphici minorum vita' in *Sancti Bernardini Senensis Opera Omnia*, I, (Venice: Andrea Poletti, 1745), pp. xxxiv-xliii.

²⁵ Fr. Van Ortroij (ed), 'Vie inédite de S. Bernardine de Sienne par un frère mineur, son contemporain', *AB* 25 (1906), pp. 306-338.

²⁶ F. M. Delorme, 'Une esquisse primitive de la vie de S. Bernardin', *BSB* 1 (1935), pp. 1-22.

- Sante Boncor, *Fior Novello* (1450).
- Giacomo Oddi, *Vita di S. Bernardino* (1450-74).²⁷
- Lodovico da Vicenza, *Vita S. Bernardini Senensis* (after 1472).²⁸

Bernardino was also the subject of eight further lives composed by non-Observants during the fifteenth century, including those written by his childhood friends Barnabò da Siena and Leonardo Benvoglianti before he was even canonised.²⁹ In a similar vein, nine fifteenth-century Observant sermons devoted to Bernardino, commonly preached on his feast day (20 May), have been published, such as those by his companions Giovanni da Capestrano (c.1453) and Giacomo dalla Marca (1460), and his namesakes, Bernardino Aquilano (after 1482) and Bernardino da Feltre (1493).³⁰ Many other contemporary documents dealing with the Observant cult of S. Bernardino have also been published, including the records of Bernardino's canonization inquiry and the compilation of his miracles collected by the German Observant Conrad of Freyenstadt under Giovanni da

²⁷ Oddi, *Vita di S. Bernardino* in *La Franceschina*, pp. 359-397.

²⁸ Lodovico da Vicenza, *Vita post corporis translationem composita* in AA.SS., Maii tom. VI, pp. 93-107.

²⁹ Barnabò da Siena, *Vita S. Bernardini Senensi*, AA.SS., Maii tom. V, pp. 107-114 (composed 1445); Fr. Van Ortoy (ed.), 'Vie de Bernardin de Sienne par Léonard Benvoglianti', *AB* 21 (1902), pp. 53-80 (1446); Anonymous, *Vita S. Bernardini auctore anonymo*, passages transcribed in AA.SS., pp. 258ff, 306, 309, 312ff (1450); Maffeo Vegio, *Vita S. Bernardini Senensi*, AA.SS., pp. 117-135 (1453); Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vita di Santo Bernardino da Massa di Maremma* in *Vite di Uomini Illustri del secolo XV*, pp. 135-141 (1453-9); *Vita S. Bernardini scripta a Iannotio Manetti Florentino*, ed. D. Pacetti, *BSB* 1 (1935), pp. 186-190 (1453-9); Antonino da Firenze, *Chronica Antonini*, (Lyons: apud Aegidium et Iacobum Huguetan fratres, 1543), pp. clxxxviii-ccxiii (1457-9); Lorenzo Surio, *Vita S. Bernardini Senensis*, passages in AA.SS., pp. 87-148 passim, in particular pp. 135-148 (after 1481). See D. Pacetti, *De Sancti Bernardini Operibus*, *Commissio Operibus S. Bernardini Senensis edendis proposita* 1, (Florence: Quaracchi, 1947); and M. Montesano, 'La memoria dell'esperienza di Bernardino da Siena nell'agiografia del XV secolo', *Hagiographica* 1 (1994), pp. 271-286.

³⁰ F. Doelle, 'Sermo S. Iohannis de Capistrano ineditus de S. Bernardino Senensis', *AFH* 6 (1913), pp. 76-90; C. Delcorno, 'Due prediche volgari di Jacopo della Marca recitate a Padova nel 1460', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 128 (1969-70), pp. 135-205; D. Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', *AFH* 36 (1943), pp. 75-97; P. Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 1 (1935), pp. 205-36; 2 (1936) pp. 58-65, 164-173; P. Sevesi, 'Un sermone inedito del B. Michele Carcano su S. Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 28 (1931), pp. 69-92 [it is now accepted that this sermon is in fact by Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce: see G. Pagnani, 'Un discorso in lode di S. Bernardino da Siena recitato da Roberto Caracciolo falsamente attribuito al b. Michele Carcano', *AFH* 47 (1954), pp. 203-207.]; V. Meneghin, 'S. Bernardino da Siena ed un sermone in suo onore scritto dal Beato Bernardino da Fossa', *BSB* 6 (1940), pp. 203-223; Bernardino da Feltre, *De Sancto Bernardino* in *Sermoni del Beato Bernardino da Feltre nella redazione di Fra Bernardino Bulgarino da Brescia Minore Osservante*, 3 vols., ed. C. Varischi da Milano, (Milan: Edizione Cassa di Risparmio delle provincie Lombarde e Banca del Monte, 1964), II, pp. 487-498.

Capestrano's supervision.³¹ There has also been great interest in the iconography of Bernardino's cult.³²

The Observants dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to the propagation of Bernardino's cult. In the days after Bernardino's death, the first thought of his companions was to communicate news of the new saint and the lineaments of his cult.³³ Writing in the first three days after Bernardino's death on 20 May 1444, Fra Giuliano da Milano wrote to the Observant brothers of Milan to describe Bernardino's last hours and the scenes of popular veneration which followed, in which layfolk fought with each other to touch the body and coffin:

I beg you, as soon as you receive this letter, to go down to the Guardian at S. Angelo [the Observant house outside Milan] and ... tell him everything. And then go to all the other monasteries and make it known, that they may thank God for it. ... Tell it all over Milan, or I'll get you excommunicated.

Fra Giuliano's letter reveals his close identification of Bernardino with the Observant cause, and how he saw the birth of a new saint as a chance to avenge old enmities and raise the Observance to greater heights. He continued:

It would be good to find that swine of a buffoon [Amadeo da Landis, who had opposed Bernardino in life] and his sect, and wash his mouth out with soap and water [*lavargli il capo senza sapone*], and the same to all who spoke badly of Bernardino. If you don't do this, I will be angry with you. You must do everything for the honour of God, St Francis, and all his friars, who every day suffer hardships for this world. Anyone who speaks badly of them ought to be shut up in prison.³⁴

³¹ C. Piana, 'Processi di canonizzazione', *AFH* 44 (1951), pp. 87-160, 383-435; F. M. Delorme, 'Ex libro miraculorum S. Bernardini Senesisi et Ioannis a Capistrano auctore Fr. Conrado de Freyenstat', *AFH* 11 (1918), pp. 399-441.

³² D. Arasse, '*Fervebat pietate populus*: Art, dévotion et société autour de la glorification de Saint Bernardine de Sienne', *MEFR* 89 (1977), pp. 189-263; D. Arasse, 'Saint Bernardin ressemblant: la figure sur le portrait' and M. A. Pavone, 'La circolazione dell'iconografia bernardiniana in ambito meridionale nella seconda metà del '400' both in *Att del simposio cateriniano-bernardiniano*, pp. 311-332, 741-752; M. A. Pavone, *Iconologia francescana: Il Quattrocento*, Ediar (Todi, 1988); *Enciclopedia Bernardiniana vol II: Iconografia*, ed. M. A. Pavone & V. Pacelli, (L'Aquila: Centro promotore generale delle celebrazioni del VI Centenario della Nascita di S. Bernardino da Siena, 1981).

³³ Although Fra Giuliano da Milano wrote only days after Bernardino's death, did not hesitate to refer to the dead man as a saint, and explained to his fellow Observants: 'Non vi maravigliate se io dico santo, perchè quello che à fatto missere Domendio per affermare la dottrina e vita degli altri santi, à fatto per questa, come ordinatamente più giù intenderete.' F. Donati, 'Notizie su S. Bernardino con un documento inedito', *Bullettino Senese di Studia Patria* 1 (1894), p. 70.

³⁴ Donati, 'Notizie su S. Bernardino', p. 75. In 1442-3 Bernardino had denounced Amadeo da Landis, a Milanese mathematician, for spreading errors in the faith. Amadeo was acquitted after a papal inquiry. His

Giovanni da Capestrano was particularly active in the task of raising recognition of Bernardino's *fama sanctitatis*, campaigning tirelessly to have his friend's claims to sanctity investigated and established. He was present at each of the three official inquiries into Bernardino's life at L'Aquila in 1445, 1447 and 1448.³⁵ He harried Popes Eugenius IV and Nicholas V. His companion and biographer, Fra Cristoforo da Varese, even reported that he suggested to Pope Nicholas that Bernardino's suitability for canonization should be tested in an ordeal by fire, and himself volunteered to lie beside the corpse on the burning pyre.³⁶ Capestrano continued his interest in Bernardino's reputation after the official canonization. He disseminated Bernardino's cult across northern Europe. In Vienna in July 1451 he preached a sermon on Bernardino every day for a week, using the new saint to attract converts to the Observance. At the culmination of this series, Capestrano formally accepted the first Observant house in Austria and dedicated it to Bernardino, and then invested the house with ten novices whom he expressly charged to compare themselves to the preacher-saint: 'Of the ten new friars who will be received today, will at least one become such a preacher as to bring 4,000 new brothers to the convent?'.³⁷ Due to Capestrano's zealous promotion of Bernardino's cult, the Observant brothers in Poland were commonly known as the Bernardine Friars.³⁸ Capestrano also oversaw the compilation of Conrad of Freyenstadt's *Liber miraculorum*, which collected together accounts of miracles performed by Bernardino between 1424 and 1457. It is conspicuous that the majority of the miracles date from the period of Capestrano's preaching tour in northern Europe: of 2,507 miracles, more than 1,500 arose from Capestrano's missions, and more than half of these took place in the first four months of his tour (May to October 1451).³⁹

complaints against Bernardino slowed, and even threatened to stop, the Observant's canonization process, for he claimed that Bernardino had never abjured his denunciations and therefore died in sin. See C. Piana, 'Un processo svolto a Milano nel 1441 a favore del mag. Amedeo de Landis e contro fratre Bernardino da Siena' in *Cateriniano-bernardiniano*, pp. 753-792.

³⁵ Piana, 'Processi di canonizzazione', pp. 87-160, 383-435.

³⁶ Cristoforo da Varese, *Vita S. Joannis a Capistrano scripta a Fr. Christophoro de Varisio* in *AA.SS.*, Octobris tom. X, p. 510.

³⁷ Hofer, pp. 351-352.

³⁸ J. Kloczowski, 'Culte de S. Catherine et de S. Bernardin en Pologne' in *Cateriniano-bernardiniano*, p. 935.

³⁹ Hofer, pp. 372-373; F. M. Delorme, 'Ex libro miraculorum S. Bernardini Senesisi et Ioannis a Capistrano auctore Fr. Conrado de Freyenstat', *AFH* 11 (1918), pp. 399-441. For an examination of Bernardino's miracles see P. Jansen, 'Un exemple de sainteté thaumaturgique à la fin du Moyen Âge: les miracles de S. Bernardin de Sienne', *MEFR* 96 (1984), pp. 129-151.

Capestrano was highly conscious of the importance of the outward symbols of Bernardino's cult. He campaigned for a church to be built in L'Aquila that would be suitable to hold the remains ^{of} a great saint. Such a church would honour God and the saint, would exalt the Observance in the eyes of men, and would set the congregation's separate identity in stone. Bernardino's body was being held as an interim measure in the Conventual church of S. Francesco and Capestrano wanted to remedy this situation as quickly as possible. In 1454, infuriated by L'Aquila's cautious plans to house Bernardino's body in a chapel rather than a vast basilica, he wrote to the council with dark warnings: 'Your city has grown fat thanks to Bernardino, but you are acting in such a way as to provoke God to make your faces lean once more with new afflictions'.⁴⁰ Giacomo della Marca, also impatient at L'Aquila's delays, took it upon himself to mark out the foundations of the new basilica, and was later criticised by fellow Observants for deciding upon such grand dimensions.⁴¹ In 1472 Bernardino's body was finally laid to rest there. Like Capestrano, Giacomo della Marca dedicated himself to the dissemination of Bernardino's cult. In 1460 he preached on Bernardino's feast day in Padua, describing how, after praying at Bernardino's tomb, he had been healed of an illness which made his arms and hands tremble 'like the branch of a tree when it is buffeted by a great wind'. Giacomo told his listeners that he had vowed to propagate the cult of his friend and fellow Observant:

I know of no other way to do honour to such a miracle by this glorious saint other than never, never, never to let my tongue cease to laud and sanctify him [*deificarlo*], and always to hold him in devotion and the greatest of reverence whilst I live. And so I pray of you, my dearest Paduans, that you will give him more honour than ever, and hold him in great devotion, for as I have shown you, for a long time there has been no saint who has had such wonderful qualities, graces and gifts.⁴²

The Observant lives and sermons on Bernardino were a formidable tool in the construction of the congregation's public image. Through sermons lauding the saint, the

⁴⁰ Quoted in Hofer, p. 618.

⁴¹ R. M. Berardi, 'Esigenze religiose ed egemonie politiche nella fabbrica di S. Bernardino all'Aquila' in *Luoghi sacri e spazi della santità*, ed. S. Boesch Gajano and L. Scaraffia, (Turin: Rosenberg and Sellier, 1990), pp. 507-525. For criticisms of the size of the basilica at the 1455 Chapter General of Bologna, see A. Chiappini, 'Fr. Nicolae de Fara epistolae duae ad S. Ioannem de Capistrano', *AFH* 15, 1922, pp. 394, 401.

⁴² Delcorno, 'Due prediche volgari di Jacopo della Marca recitate a Padova nel 1460', p. 195.

Observants disseminated the image of the ideal Observant brother and emphasised that this ideal had been acknowledged by both papacy and God. Such propaganda worked not only on the laity but on the Observance itself. Bernardino became the model for all Observant brothers. The details of how to observe his cult and feast day were enshrined in Observant constitutions, which ordered that 'the octave of S. Bernardino should be celebrated with the same solemnity and in the same manner as the feast of St Anthony of Padua'.⁴³ St Anthony had hitherto been the Franciscan first Order's second saint; Bernardino now began to usurp this position.⁴⁴ His name was bestowed upon novice Observant brothers. Together with many less well-remembered Observants who bore Bernardino's name in his honour, at least ten Franciscan beati who died in the period between Bernardino's death (1444) and the rise of the Capuchins (1528) were named after him.⁴⁵ A few may have been given the name at birth, showing the living popular cult dedicated to Bernardino. Most, like the chronicler Bernardino Aquilano who joined the Observance in the year after Bernardino da Siena's death, were renamed upon entering religion. Despite his desire to retain his baptismal name of Giovanni, Aquilano was given his new name by Giacomo della Marca 'in memory of and through veneration for the blessed Bernardino, and not without meriting the admiration of his namesake.'⁴⁶

Convents were founded in Bernardino's name. In the *Annales Minorum*, Wadding transcribed a contemporary document which recorded all the houses used by the

⁴³ Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuti Provinciali di Toscana an. 1456-1506', p. 131. This order was issued in 1456. In 1506 the same province prescribed the antiphons that were to be sung during Bernardino's feast (p. 156). For other references to Bernardino's feast day see Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuta generali Auximi 1461', p. 501; Kruitwagen, 'Statuta Saxoniae 1467', p. 107; and Fussenegger, 'Statuta Bohemiae 1471 et 1480', p. 384.

⁴⁴ Fabio Bisogni has commented that fifteenth-century artists often depicted Francis accompanied by Bernardino, 'il quale soppianta così il fino ad allora indispensabile Antonio da Padova per imporsi come il continuatore diretto del santo di Assisi.' F. Bisogni, 'Per un census delle rappresentazioni di S. Bernardino da Siena nella pittura in Lombardia, Piemonte e Liguria fino agli inizi del Cinquecento' in *Cateriniano-bernardiniano*, p.381.

⁴⁵ The ten fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Franciscan beati named after Bernardino included in the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, vol. II, are: Bernardino da Apricena (†c.1520); Bernardino da Bibbiena (†1490); Bernardino de' Busti (†1513/15); Bernardino da Feltre (†1494); Bernardino Aquilano da Fossa (†1503); Bernardino da Neto (†c.1452); Bernardino da Perugia (†1450); Bernardino da Rende (†c.1488); Bernardino da Rionero Sannitico (†c.1505); Bernardino da Torrijos (†c.1510). Observants were not the only Franciscans to be named for the saint. The Minister General who presided over the Conventuals during the fraught negotiations over the division of the Order in 1517 was named Bernardino da Chieri (1513-1517), whilst the controversial leader of the Capuchins who fled to Protestant Geneva in 1542 was named Bernardino Ochino (1487-1564). On the Conventual attempts to appropriate the figure of Bernardino, see below.

⁴⁶ A. Amici, *Vita B. Bernardini Aquilani in Fragmenta Franciscana*, p. xiv.

Observance between 1506 and 1513. Thirty-eight convents in Italy were dedicated to Bernardino. This is a high number, for although the Observance held 506 houses in total in Italy, the congregation commonly moved into houses previously held by the Conventuals or Fraticelli which were already dedicated to a saint. Bernardino's cult was popular throughout Italy. All but two of the fifteen Italian provinces, Sicily and Campagna being the only exceptions, had at least one house named in his honour. The province of Genoa had nine, founded between 1452 and 1507. Twelve convents in other provinces including Austria, Bohemia, Poland and Germany - obviously influenced by Giovanni da Capestrano's impassioned promotion of his confrère's cult during his 1451-1455 preaching tour of northern Europe - were also named after the saint.⁴⁷ This evidence that Bernardino's cult was alive beyond Italy's borders is confirmed by a survey of art featuring Bernardino in Europe up to 1550. Representations of the saint can be found in such countries as Flanders (7), Spain (31) and France (6).⁴⁸

Bernardino's disciples imitated both the manner and content of his preaching, so that there could be said to be a corporate style common to Observant preachers. Bernardino inspired the preaching careers of Giovanni da Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca as well as many others. Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce, who had promised to become one of the Observance's greatest preachers until his defection to the Conventuals, exhaustively listed no fewer than twenty Observant preachers who imitated their master. Despite his long estrangement from the Observance, Caracciolo also publicly admitted to

⁴⁷ *An. Min.* XV, 318-351, ad an. 1506, gives the following houses as being named after Bernardino. I have added the province they belonged to, as well as the dates of foundation or re-dedication if known. In the Cismontane Provinces: Provincia S. Francesco, i.e. Umbria: S. Leonardo al Monte. Rome: Orte (1463). Le Marche: Urbino. Tuscany: La Capriola near Siena (1473), Vetrete near Massa Marittima (1445). Provincia S. Antonio, i.e. the Veneto: SS. Job and Bernardino in Venice, Trento (1452). Genoa: Sale (1452), Alessandria della Paglia, Asti (1472), Chivasso (1507), Saluzzo (1474), Albenga (1472), Trino (1453), Alba, Bene Vegienna. Milan: Ivrea (1456), Mortara (1447), Caravaggio (1472). Calabria: Rossano, Bisignano, Morano (1452), Amantea. Apulia: Molfetta (1451). Provincia S. Bernardino, i.e. Abruzzo: L'Aquila (1472), Città Sant'Angelo (c.1460), Campli (1448). Provincia S. Angelo, i.e. Molise: Agnone (1451), Monteodorisio, Troia (1449). Brescia: Crema (1455), Chiari (1456), Isola Dovara, Salò (1476). Basilicata: Lauria. Dalmatia: Pirano (1452), Hercegnovi, Kotor. Austria: Vienna (1451), Langenlois (c.1455). Bohemia: Bratislava, Brno (1451). Poland: Kraków (1453), Lublin (before 1460). In the Ultramontane Provinces: France: Avesnes (1460). Castille: Poza (1453). Germany: Lenzfried near Kempten (1461). Unfortunately, Wadding only records the dates of foundation for the houses in Genoa. Other dates have been gleaned from J. R. H. Moorman, *Medieval Franciscan Houses*, Franciscan Institute Publications History Series no. 4, (New York: The Franciscan Institute of St Bonaventure University, 1983). These show that Bernardino's cult remained strong even into the early sixteenth century.

fashioning himself as a preacher in Bernardino's image and told his audience: 'All the Friars Minor [listed] are famous for using Bernardino's way of preaching, and many others in the mendicant orders also endeavour to imitate Bernardino's manner, model and style. ... I too followed his style in my preaching and writing.'⁴⁹ Giacomo della Marca reported borrowing Bernardino's volume of sermons when he had a particularly pressing Lenten series to preach, whilst Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote that Bernardino had compiled these volumes so that his style could be studied and imitated by other Observants.⁵⁰ Bernardino was explicitly presented as a model for imitation. The anonymous Observant who composed the *Compendium vitae* in 1444-9 counselled that 'those who come after him should not ignore the example of his life.'⁵¹ Even before his canonization, Bernardino had become the perfect fifteenth-century Observant.

Such outward manifestations of Bernardino's *fama sanctitatis* were important in validating his reputation as a saint. During the official inquiry into Bernardino's life, the question was not 'Was he saintly?', nor even 'Do you think he was saintly?', but 'Was he *reputed* to be saintly?'. The key to the canonization, and the phrase repeated again and again in the processes, was *publica vox et fama*.⁵² In a rather circular argument, the preachers who disseminated Bernardino's cult explicitly stated that the saint's fame was a vital proof of his sanctity: their own sermons therefore proved the validity of his reputation, whilst also enhancing and increasing his cult.⁵³ Thus it was vital that the Observants should control what was reported of the putative saint: three Observant biographies of Bernardino were completed even before he was canonised, whilst Leonardo Benvoglianti's 1446 *Vita S. Bernardini* was requested by Bernardino's companions and addressed to Giovanni da Capestrano. The Observants' carefully formulated construction of Bernardino quickly became the basis of the officially-accepted

⁴⁸ See *Enciclopedia Bernardiniana vol II: Iconografia*. This valuable work notes every known portrayal of the saint.

⁴⁹ Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce, *Sermo de Sancto Bernardino predicator nostri temporis principe* in *Roberti de Licio Sermones de Laudibus* (Reutlingen: Michael Greyff, 1495), fol. 222v. This sermon must have been delivered after 1482, for Caracciolo referred to canonizations other than Bernardino's which had taken place 'in tempore meo' (1425-1495) and included those of Caterina da Siena (1461) and Bonaventura da Bagnoregio (1482).

⁵⁰ Delcorno, 'Due prediche volgari di Jacopo della Marca', p. 187; Vespasiano da Bisticci, p. 140.

⁵¹ Delorme, 'Une esquisse primitive de la vie de S. Bernardin', p. 18.

⁵² Piana, 'Processi di canonizzazione', pp. 87-160, 383-435.

cult. Observant biographies and sermons on S. Bernardino and those written by non-Observants are strikingly similar. As will be seen, all the sermons and lives share many characteristics. However, Observant panegyrists were particularly keen to establish Bernardino as an Observant, not simply Franciscan, saint. They advanced a picture of Bernardino as the model Observant, fostering a life that was based in the active preaching vocation.

Certain Observant preachers emphasised their own friendship with Bernardino. Such a tactic emphasised that Bernardino was a recent saint whose personal presence within the Observant congregation had sanctified the individual brothers who recalled his memory, as well as the community as a whole. In both his Latin and vernacular sermons, Giacomo della Marca recalled Bernardino's Observant background by meditating on his close personal relationship with the new saint. He lingered on the companionship that Bernardino had offered his disciple, emphasising Bernardino's humanity and humility by recollecting the meals that they had taken together, the time they had fished on the Lago di Trasimeno, and that Bernardino had been a good cook.⁵⁴ In 1493 Bernardino da Feltre preached that Bernardino's very existence allowed Observants to be sure of their congregation's sanctity:

Fathers, it gives us such confidence to have seen him eat and drink with us, and now he sits in glory with great splendour. O what security this gives us! Was he not one of us, our brother? And now he is in heaven. [God], who reigns over us, called forth Michele Carcano da Milano, Cherubino da Spoleto, Giovanni da Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca, but above all, S. Bernardino. And what security it gives us, that this poor Family should be so favoured and loved by God!⁵⁵

In order to emphasise Bernardino's positive choice to become an Observant, many hagiographers mentioned his attempts to find a satisfactory religious vocation: his time caring for plague victims in the hospital of Sta. Maria della Scala; his failure to adapt to the life of a hermit; and his first and not greatly successful attempts at preaching. Many were careful to stress that Bernardino had indeed been professed into the Observance by noting

⁵³ For instance, in c.1480 an anonymous Observant preacher offered a series of proofs of Bernardino's sanctity, the second of which was, 'eius sanctitatis fame dilatatio. Nam sanctitatis eius ubique divulgatur, et eius magnalia ubique predicantur.' Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 2 (1936), p. 170.

⁵⁴ Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', p. 93; Delcorno, 'Due prediche volgari di Jacopo della Marca', pp. 186-188.

⁵⁵ Bernardino da Feltre, *De Sancto Bernardino*, p. 496. The Observant brothers cited here by Bernardino da Feltre had been the foremost preachers of the previous generation.

his move from the convent he first entered, the Conventual house of S. Francesco in Siena, to the Observant convent of Il Colombaio outside the same city.⁵⁶ The anonymous Observant author of the *Vita S. Bernardini* made Bernardino's choice even more significant by giving a brief account of the foundation of the Observance under Paoluccio dei Trinci, and then asserting that Bernardino, who had already joined the Franciscans, had appealed to Paoluccio to join the new brotherhood:

When news of Paoluccio's reform reached the ears of this blessed man, he wrote letters to Paoluccio without delay, saying: 'I wish to join your congregation [*societati tue*]. And if you wish, according to the bulls which you have lately received [allowing Paoluccio to accept houses for the Observance], I could take possession of a certain small house near Siena ...' Paoluccio replied, writing: 'I rejoice greatly in your fellowship, and it is settled that you should receive the house. ... And that you may better accomplish this, I shall send some brothers to you.'⁵⁷

This story showed the two greatest promoters of the Observance working together side by side to advance reform. Unfortunately it is historically impossible, for Paoluccio died in 1390 when Bernardino was just ten years old: the latter was not to join the Order until 1402. Still, Bernardino gained authority from the juxtaposition of the two, which allowed him to be seen as Paoluccio's direct successor, continuing the founder's work of reform.

Preaching and Reform

This reforming role played a prominent part in the hagiography of Bernardino. Most biographers agreed that Bernardino had reformed the Franciscans, presiding over the *renovatio* of a fallen order. In 1446, Leonardo Benvoglianti - not an Observant, though his work was sponsored by the congregation - believed Bernardino himself to have been the founder of the new brotherhood:

O, it is worthy of great marvelling and praise that, by word and deed, this man of God, through his great Family, revived, raised up and glorified the extreme poverty of the apostolic life under the Rule of the seraphic leader, Francis, which was by then almost lost and extinct.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Giovanni da Capestrano was particularly insistent in his claim that Bernardino had only spent a few days in the Conventual house. See 'S. Bernardini Senensis ordinis seraphici minorum vita', p. xxxviii. This was a particularly important fact to establish, for the Conventuals began to claim that Bernardino had never left their congregation and was therefore never an Observant. For more on the Observant-Conventual battles over Bernardino, see below.

⁵⁷ Van Ortro, 'Vie inédite de S. Bernardine de Sienne par un frère mineur', p. 313.

⁵⁸ Van Ortro, 'Vie de Bernardin de Sienne par Léonard Benvoglianti', p. 78.

This assumption was echoed by the anonymous Observant preacher, possibly a *socius* of Giovanni da Capestrano, who delivered three sermons on Bernardino not long after 1476.⁵⁹ Giovanni da Capestrano noted the huge numbers of Observant brothers who joined the congregation after hearing Bernardino preach and described the Observants as 'phoenixes', presumably because they rose up from the ashes of the Conventuals.⁶⁰ Such things were not noted solely by proud Observants. Fra Giuliano da Milano in L'Aquila, writing his letter home in the first days after Bernardino died, told his brothers in Milan of a funeral sermon by an Augustinian master of theology (an order traditionally hostile to Bernardino's cult of the Holy Name of Jesus) who had lauded Bernardino as a second founder of the Franciscans; he had converted new brothers, built new houses, and instructed a new generation of preachers.⁶¹

Certain writers meticulously described the way of life that the preacher had sanctified and passed on to his congregation. The anonymous author of the *Compendium vitae* reassuringly defined the limits of the model that Bernardino embodied for others who perhaps did not themselves feel drawn to the pastoral vocation:

Those who come after Bernardino should not ignore the example of his life ... for at length, God revealing to him that *God will have all men to be saved who hath chosen the best part* [1 Tim 2:4], [he pursued] a mixed life of actions and contemplation, which, though it was active in works, never forewent the sweetness of contemplation.⁶²

⁵⁹ 'Nam triplex mirifica eius operatio declarat ipsum a Deo singularmente electum. ... Primo, reformando nostram Religionem, que tota erat tempore suo ad nihilum redacta, adeo ut vix inveniretur qui regulam B. Francisci servaret, ut plura nunc sint Observantiae loca quam tunc Fratres.' P. Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 2 (1936), p. 166. Although the sermons are anonymous, the preacher often refers to Giovanni da Capestrano, mentioning, for instance, that he was with Capestrano at Lonigo (p. 228), Padua and Verona (p. 234), so it is probable that he was one of Capestrano's companions.

⁶⁰ Capestrano, 'S. Bernardini Senensis ordinis seraphici minorum vita', pp. xxxix, xxxviii.

⁶¹ Donati, 'Notizie su S. Bernardino con un documento inedito', pp. 71-72. Bernardino's popular cult of the Holy Name of Jesus aroused great hostility, particularly from Dominican and Augustinian preachers. After some years of opposition, Bernardino was formally accused of heresy and idolatry in 1426, when it was claimed that he encouraged people to venerate an abstract name or symbol rather than Christ himself. His principal accusers were Manfredo da Vercelli, a Dominican preacher who himself was later accused of heresy; the Augustinian Andrea Biglia, who wrote two fierce tracts criticising the cult; and another Augustinian, Andrea da Cascia. In 1431, the Dominican Order once more procured a papal inquiry into the cult. Eugenius IV acquitted Bernardino. The accusations were only finally refuted at the Council of Basle in 1438. See E. Longpré, 'S. Bernardin de Sienne et le Nom de Jésus', *AFH* 28 (1935), pp.443-516; 29 (1936), pp.142-168, 433-477; and G. Melani, 'San Bernardino da Siena e il nome di Gesù' in *San Bernardino da Siena: Saggi e ricerche*, pp. 247-300.

⁶² Delorme, 'Une esquisse primitive de la vie de S. Bernardin', p. 18. The passage detailing Bernardino's ostracism will be examined below.

Most writers emphasised the preaching vocation for which Bernardino was most famous and showed how this vocation was at the centre of his conception of the Observant life. Several biographers mentioned Bernardino's early apprenticeship to his craft. In c.1474, Giacomo Oddi followed custom by writing of Bernardino's childhood, during which the saint made a small play altar at which to worship and imitated the mannerisms of popular preachers for the edification of his family:

Sometimes Pia [Bernardino's aunt and guardian] persuaded him to go to a sermon, and when he returned she would call him and make him stand on a bench in the house and recite everything he had heard. In this way he so ordered his gestures, words and style that all those who saw and heard him prophesied that he too would become a priest and preacher.⁶³

Giacomo della Marca recalled how the saint had taught him to follow a moderate life that would serve his preaching vocation, fondly remembering the time 'when you taught me to preach. And when you scolded me for not wanting to eat meat, in case I wouldn't be strong enough to keep preaching.'⁶⁴

Giacomo della Marca was also fascinated by the social aspects of Bernardino's preaching mission. Much of his 1460 vernacular sermon on Bernardino was given over to praising the saint's preaching style: he had invented four ways of making preaching better (invention, eloquence, gesturing and scolding) and was so eloquent that it seemed that Cicero had returned to life; he had touched the consciences of 'poor, rich, gentlemen, merchants, artisans, townspeople, courtiers - all are devoted to this saint'. Moreover, Bernardino had had a real effect on the lives of the lost and poor, healing *vendette*, converting prostitutes and reforming gamblers.⁶⁵ The humanist Maffeo Vegio likewise

⁶³ Oddi, I, p. 360. Such pious play had been recommended by late fourteenth century preachers such as the Dominican Giovanni Dominici. Dominici 'proposed that a kind of psychodrama be conducted: the child should deliver a sermon to the household (to which all would listen attentively without laughing), and on the next occasion the parent would preach.' S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 104.

⁶⁴ Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', p. 93. There are many monographs on Bernardino's innovative preaching style. See in particular *Bernardino predicatore nella società del suo tempo*, Convegno del centro di studi sulla spiritualità medioevale XVI, (Todi: Presso l'accademia Tudertina, 1976); C. Delcorno, 'L'ars praedicandi di Bernardino da Siena' in *Cateriniano-bernardiniano*, pp. 419-450; and Z. Zafarana, 'Bernardino nella storia della predicazione popolare' in *Da Gregorio VII a Bernardino da Siena: Saggi di storia medievale*, ed. O. Capitani, C. Leonardi, E. Menestò and R. Rusconi, Quaderni del Centro per il Collegamento degli Studi Medievali e Umanistici nell'Università di Perugia 17, (Perugia and Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1987), pp. 249-278.

⁶⁵ Delcorno, 'Due prediche volgari di Jacopo della Marca', pp. 202, 183.

praised Bernardino for conforming to the classical ideal of the orator.⁶⁶ The Florentine bookseller Vespasiano da Bisticci, with his humanist background, commented that the old sermons of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura da Bagnoregio were no longer enough to interest a new generation of sinners inured to the familiar tricks of preachers: Bernardino's new style was needed to awaken a world sunk in lassitude.⁶⁷

Bernardino's Providential Role

Unsurprisingly, Bernardino's preaching vocation forms by far the greatest element in the hagiography and panegyrics devoted to the saint. Bernardino's sermon-led *renovatio*, these writers maintained, was not confined solely to the Franciscan Order; the preacher had reformed the whole of Christian society. The saint's preaching vocation was discussed in terms of a providential or eschatological role and Bernardino himself was compared to an Angel of the Apocalypse. Bernardino's providential role was composed of several narrative components. Firstly, in Observant sermons he was commonly identified with a range of biblical tags, often chosen for their popular revivalist image of heat and light, such as 'His light is as the morning star in the midst of cloud' (Apocr. Eccl. 50:6).⁶⁸ He was also compared to a whole host of apocalyptic angels, including the Angel of the Seventh Seal, in citations from Revelations 10:1, 18:1 and 14:6. Next, Italy's sinfulness prior to Bernardino's mission was established, often in dramatic terms. In his Latin sermon, Giacomo della Marca combined all these biblical images to reveal a terrible vision of an irreligious society:

I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made light with his glory [Rev 18:1]. The earth was made light with his glory, for before this star, Bernardino, appeared, the whole of Italy had been in darkness: neither God nor the saints were known; no-one confessed themselves or took communion, indeed they were ashamed to take communion; no-one went to mass or visited the churches. Instead,

⁶⁶ *An. Min.* X, 8, xvi-xvii.

⁶⁷ Vespasiano da Bisticci, p.140.

⁶⁸ Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', p. 78; Delcorno, 'Due prediche volgari di Jacopo della Marca', p. 174; Sevesi, 'Un sermone inedito del B. Michele Carcano su S. Bernardino da Siena', p. 77; Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 2 (1936), pp. 65, 167; Van Ortro, 'Vie inédite de S. Bernardine de Sienne par un frère mineur', p. 307. This, the most common biblical tag associated with Bernardino, was also used of Francis. Bonaventura da Bagnoregio quoted it in the preface to his *Legenda Maior*, whilst the Conventual author Arnaldus de Sarnano cited it in his *Chronica XXIV Generalium* (c.1375). See Habig, p. 631; G. Odoardi, 'Il S. Francesco della Comunità nei secoli XIV e XV' in S. Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia* I, p. 149.

all were given over to luxury, blasphemy and other vices, and totally forgot about the health of their souls.⁶⁹

Once the wickedness of the world was established, Bernardino's role as a heaven-sent reformer came to the fore. In his first sermon of c.1476, the anonymous Observant preacher gave a very vivid account of the heavenly altercations that led to Bernardino's birth and once more associated Bernardino with the prophetic role of world-reformer previously held by Francis:

What can we think but that, when such evils multiplied so that judgement was nigh, as had been the case in the time of our most blessed father Francis and St Dominic, God commanded the world to be destroyed? But the most glorious Virgin went to him and begged him that he should at least deign to send an apostle to Italy. He bowed to her prayers and asked, 'Who shall I send?' And she replied, 'Bernardino.' 'So be it,' he said. And immediately one of his subjects, whose name was Tollo da Siena ... was given this blessed son to care for [*hunc benedictum filium procuravit et impetravit*].⁷⁰

Thus Bernardino became a providentially-placed individual created specifically for his preaching task. This was made clear in several ways. Many writers mentioned the miracle in which God healed Bernardino's voice, previously hesitant and croaky, so that it became the strong and subtle instrument that was to hold audiences spellbound.⁷¹ Others stated that it was God who gave the preacher's words the power to melt the hearts of impenitent sinners.⁷² The anonymous Observant preacher whose three sermons on the new saint have survived even assimilated Bernardino's preaching vocation to Francis's providential duty to rebuild the decaying Church. He reported that, just as Francis had received a divine message to repair God's house through the crucifix of S. Damiano, Bernardino's divine order to go and preach in Lombardy come through the medium of a talking crucifix rather than the more commonly reported novice friar.⁷³

⁶⁹ Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', p. 81.

⁷⁰ Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 1 (1935), p. 209.

⁷¹ Bernardino da Feltre explained in his sermon of 1493 that Bernardino originally shrank from preaching: 'Chè se vedeva inepto, quia habebat vocem rocam, quando venit quel globo igneo che gli purificò la lingua, che poi parlava le cinque, sei e sette hore, cum tanta eloquentia che non errabat pur d'una parolla etc. Dio se lo fece a suo modo.' Bernardino da Feltre, *De Sancto Bernardino*, p. 494.

⁷² Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 2 (1936), p. 165.

⁷³ Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 1 (1935), p. 210. Giacomo Oddi also reported that as a young man Bernardino attempted to decide upon his vocation whilst contemplating a crucifix, and heard a voice within himself telling him to join the order 'nella quale se vivea nudo et crocifixo, [quale] era la religione del seraphico Francesco.' *La Franceschina* I, p. 369. On Francis's miracle, see 'The Second Life of St Francis by Thomas of Celano' in Habig, pp. 370-371.

The first sermon preached by this anonymous Observant preacher in c.1476 is particularly interesting in its comparison of Bernardino to an Angel of the Apocalypse. The preacher cited the authority of the controversial twelfth-century abbot Joachim of Fiore (c.1132-1202) on this point. Joachite eschatological beliefs were extremely influential in the later Middle Ages. Joachim had foreseen the transformation of life on earth and the coming of a millennial kingdom of peace and prosperity. More importantly, he had insisted that these events would take place soon: his followers predicted that the Antichrist would unmask himself in 1260. He also prophesied the coming of two orders of *viri spirituales* who would battle against the Antichrist by converting the heathens and preaching peace in the Last Days before the advent of the Messiah.⁷⁴ These orders were interpreted as the Franciscans and Dominicans. One order was characterised as 'following in the footsteps of Christ' and having 'no desire for earthly things'; these comments were taken by the Franciscans to be references to their own Gospel life and extreme poverty.⁷⁵ The Franciscan Joachite theory that their own brotherhood had been elected to play a major role in world history had a great impact on the thirteenth-century Order. Many brothers believed themselves to be the chosen tools of God. In 1257 the seventh Minister General, Giovanni da Parma, was forced to abdicate because of his controversial Joachite sympathies. The Spirituals enthusiastically adopted Joachite eschatology and used their self-proclaimed apocalyptic role to castigate the Church and Franciscan Community for their wealth and corruption. The Fraticelli proclaimed that they made up the one true Church, branded Pope Boniface VIII the Antichrist and plunged into heresy.

Because of this controversial background, quoting Joachim as an authority was freighted with meaning for Franciscan writers. Joachite beliefs were still considered

⁷⁴ There is a vast literature on Joachite prophecy in the Middle Ages. The works of Marjorie Reeves offer an unparalleled insight into the works of Joachim of Fiore. Her classic volume *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*, is one of the best introductions to medieval Joachite thought, though its chapter on the Joachism and the Observance has been challenged and redeveloped in more recent works. For more current treatments of Joachite prophecy in the Renaissance period see particularly *Il profetismo gioachimita tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, ed. G.L. Potestà, Opere di Gioacchino da Fiore Strumenti 3, Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Studi Gioachimiti, (Genoa: Marietti, 1991); R. Manselli, 'Età dello spirito e profetismo tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento' in *L'età dello spirito e la fine dei tempi in Gioacchino da Fiore e nel Gioachimismo medievale*, pp. 237-253; M. Reeves (ed.), *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); R. Rusconi, 'Apocalittica ed escatologia nella predicazione di San Bernardino da Siena', *Studi Medievali* ser. 3, 22 (1987), pp. 85-128; and C. Vasoli, 'Dall'Apocalypsis Nova al De Harmonia Mundi. Linee per una ricerca' in *I Frati Minori tra '400 e '500*, pp. 257-291.

somewhat questionable in the fifteenth century, although they had become much less dangerous within the Order due to their widespread dissemination in the Conventual Bartolomeo da Pisa's *De conformitate* (1385-99). Despite this, the anonymous preacher proclaimed that Bernardino had fulfilled Joachim's interpretation of the vision of John of Patmos: 'I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with cloud, and a rainbow was upon his head. His face was as it were the sun and his feet as pillars of fire. And he ... cried out with a loud voice as when a lion roareth,' [Rev 10:1-3]. This passage had been interpreted by Joachim to mean a great preacher armed with the power of prophecy.⁷⁶ The Observant commented on the passage and on Joachim's interpretation:

S. Bernardino conforms to this prophecy. ... He was *mighty* in faith and in the way he tolerated his enemies. He *came down from heaven* to earth, that is, from the contemplative life to the active, for in the house of Il Colombaio he was devoted to the contemplative life until he was called upon by God to preach. ... *His face was like the sun*, for he was reputed to be most renowned and gracious. ... He *roared like a lion* against sinners, crying 'To hell! To hell!'⁷⁷

The anonymous preacher thus assimilated Bernardino to the Angel of the Seventh Seal who in Revelations 10:6 'swore ... that there should be time no longer. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished'. Did this preacher implicitly furnish Bernardino with an eschatological role? Did he believe that the Observance's leader or his followers would usher in the end of temporal history? Perhaps not, since he never dwelt on the providential future that would come after Bernardino; yet though he may have seen no immediate Apocalypse, 'there should be time no longer...' surely hovered at the edge of his consciousness. Giacomo della Marca may also have anticipated the end of the world. He preached that, just as John the Baptist had been the morning star, preparing the way for God, Bernardino was the evening star, calling all to the Last Supper which the Lord had prepared.⁷⁸

Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce likewise characterised Bernardino as an angel of the apocalypse, sent, as Francis had once been, through the agency of the Blessed Virgin to save the world from destruction by reminding sinners of the word of God.⁷⁹ Giacomo della Marca once more compared Bernardino to a prophetic angel in his Latin sermon,

⁷⁵ Nimmo, p. 163.

⁷⁶ Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 1 (1935), pp. 208-209.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁷⁸ Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', p. 84.

though he chose a different angel from that spoken of by the anonymous preacher. The blessed Giacomo mused:

Bernardino is that angel of the Apocalypse 18:1-2, where it says: 'I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. And he called out with a mighty voice: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon great!"' This angel who descended from heaven was the proclaimer of evangelical peace, and through humility came down from the heights of divine contemplation to search amongst the dirt and the sins of the people. ... And he had *great authority* because so great was his virtue in the divine word that no creature, however hard-hearted, and no sinner, however stubborn, could resist his powers.⁸⁰

In another sermon, *De adventu Turcorum*, Giacomo compared both Bernardino and the Dominican preacher Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419) to the Angel of the Seventh Seal 'who swore ... that there should be time no longer', and elsewhere he stated that, 'according to the Scriptures we are now at the end of time'.⁸¹ Such statements echoed the Joachite theory of two orders of *viri spirituales* led by two preachers - originally Francis and Dominic, but now their successors Bernardino and Vincent Ferrer - who were destined to take up an apocalyptic role. Both Michele Carcano da Milano and Bernardino da Feltre spoke of the providential advent of Ferrer and Bernardino in the same breath, even though Ferrer had died as Bernardino was only just becoming recognised for his preaching. In the 1460s Carcano claimed that 'there has never been as many preachers announcing that God's judgement is near as there are today', and preached that Bernardino and Ferrer in particular 'announced the last times by clamouring against the vice and wickedness of the people'.⁸² In the 1490s Bernardino da Feltre warned the Pope, princes and dukes to prepare themselves, 'for the day of judgement is nigh': the Sixth Seal had been opened in the time of Francis and Dominic and the world was now old and corrupt. Bernardino da Siena and Vincent Ferrer were presented as the new Francis and Dominic (who had, in turn, been the new Enoch and Elias). Like these earlier preachers and prophets, they had been sent to revive religion before the coming of Antichrist.⁸³

⁷⁹ Sevesi, 'Un sermone inedito del B. Michele Carcano su S. Bernardino da Siena', p. 78.

⁸⁰ Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', p. 80.

⁸¹ Quoted in A. Gattucci, 'San Francesco e l'Ordine francescano nei sermoni di San Giacomo della Marca' in *San Giacomo della Marca nell'Europa del '400*, p. 266.

⁸² R. M. Dessi, 'Entre prédication et réception. Les thèmes eschatologiques dans les *Reportationes* des sermons de Michele Carcano de Milan (Florence, 1461-1466)', *MEFR* 102 (1990) p. 467.

⁸³ Bernardino da Feltre, *De Fine Mundi* in *Sermoni del Beato Bernardino da Feltre* II, pp. 521-522.

It is important to note that these preachers accorded Bernardino a providential role through his preaching, not through poverty, though the latter virtue had traditionally been placed at the heart of all Franciscan eschatological schema.⁸⁴ This providential calling was partly an eschatological role, but it was also a way of justifying the new moderate, educated, active Regular Observance that had grown up in Bernardino's image. For Giacomo della Marca, as for the anonymous preacher, it was part of God's plan that Bernardino should, like the Angel of the Apocalypse, 'descend from the contemplative to the active life'. For all five preachers, Bernardino's active vocation and his transformation of the Observance through a process of clericalisation and education became both divinely ordained and providentially significant. The Observant panegyrists communicated to laity and Order that it was the prophetic duty of Bernardino and his Observant imitators to renew both the Franciscan and the Christian world through the power of the Divine Word. Preaching was all.

The Conventual Bernardino

The Observants' careful creation of Bernardino as the model Observant preacher, saint and prophetic figure was extremely successful and was disseminated across Italy and Europe by Observant preachers and writers. In fact, it was so successful that the Conventual Franciscans began to lay claim to Bernardino themselves in an effort to partake of the Observance's high reputation. Though Observant writers indignantly noted how they had persecuted Bernardino during his lifetime, after his death the Conventuals appropriated him as a symbol of Franciscan, not specifically Observant, sanctity.⁸⁵ A popular, though erroneous, belief grew up in the Conventual congregation that Bernardino had been stoutly opposed to any division within the Order.⁸⁶ He therefore became, in a sense, a Conventual hero. In 1465 the Conventual Francesco da Rimini, who had assisted

⁸⁴ See for instance Douie; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*; R. Manselli, 'L'Apocalisse e l'interpretazione francescana della storia' in *The Bible and Medieval Culture*, ed. W. Lourdaux & D. Verhelst, Medievalia Lovaniensa Series I, Studia VII, (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1979), pp. 159-170; D. Burr, 'Olivi, Apocalyptic Expectation and Visionary Experience', *Traditio* 41 (1985), pp. 273-89.

⁸⁵ For Observant complaints over the Conventual persecution of Bernardino during his lifetime, see Piana, 'Scritti polemici fra Conventuali ed Osservanti', *AFH* 72 (1979), pp. 41, 95.

⁸⁶ Though initially in favour of union, after 1430 Bernardino became progressively more willing to contemplate separation. See D. Pacetti, 'San Bernardino da Siena Vicario Generale dell'Osservanza (1438-1442) con documenti inediti', *SF* 42 (1945), pp. 7-69, in particular pp. 50-55.

the Minister General Guglielmo da Casale (1430-1442) and so had close dealings with Bernardino, asserted:

S. Bernardino was a most gracious man, and loved by the whole Order, and he never wanted the Order to be divided. ... Indeed, he asked forgiveness of the Minister General for a certain papal bull procured by other Observants during his Vicariate, and he imprisoned the lay brother Fra Costantino of the Campagna province who agitated for such a division.⁸⁷

Under the strains of the polemical battle between the Observants and Conventuals such claims developed and became more intricate. It seems that the Conventuals realised the need to target the figure of Bernardino, so important to the Observants as the saint who sanctified their way of life, their independence and their very existence. Since Bernardino's cult was well established and his *fama sanctitatis* strong, it was easier to appropriate the saint rather than to attempt to discredit him. The Conventuals at S. Francesco in L'Aquila, where Bernardino's body was held until the Observance could construct a basilica suitable for such a saint, campaigned to keep his remains. Bernardino Aquilano, the Observant chronicler who himself lived in L'Aquila and took part in the negotiations with the Conventuals over the saint's relics, recorded the squabbles that occurred between the two sides. The Conventuals refused to relinquish Bernardino's body. In 1454 they petitioned L'Aquila's council to recognise their claim to keep the relics, preached that this was their right, and disputed publicly with the Observant brothers, Aquilano amongst them, who had been sent to retrieve the body. The struggle descended into petty bickering. Though the Observants had the right to enter the Conventual house to look after Bernardino's tomb, Aquilano complained that the Conventuals had organised for the friary to be fitted with new locks and would not give the Observant brothers the keys.⁸⁸ The conflict was finally resolved in 1472 when the new Observant basilica was consecrated and Bernardino's body formally translated. As in L'Aquila, Conventuals in other cities also fostered the external symbols of Bernardino's cult. At least fourteen Quattrocento chapels dedicated to Bernardino were housed in

⁸⁷ A. G. Little, 'Nota Fr. Francisci Ariminensis O. M. Conv. de relatione S. Bernardini Senensis ad Fratres Observantes', *A FH* 2 (1909), pp. 164-165. The bull referred to was procured by Nicolò da Osimo in 1440 from Pope Eugenius IV, and exempted the Observants from the government of the Conventual Ministers. It was withdrawn after complaints from Guglielmo da Casale. See Pacetti, 'San Bernardino da Siena Vicario Generale dell'Osservanza', pp. 34-35.

⁸⁸ Aquilano, p. 59.

Conventual churches.⁸⁹ In c.1475 a Conventual, Pietro Ridolfi da Viglevano, composed one of the liturgical offices used to celebrate Bernardino's feast day.⁹⁰ Indeed, one anonymous Conventual even alleged that, compared to his own congregation, the Observants were completely uninterested in the public manifestations of Bernardino's cult and even attempted to hinder them.⁹¹

Such outward manifestations of Conventual devotion to Bernardino were matched by other written claims to the new saint. Pierre Chambon (†1473) was another friar who denied that Bernardino had wanted the Observance to have a separate administration or identity. He was a Colettan brother; a member of a reformed branch of the Franciscan Order, particularly strong in France, which remained under the Conventual ministers and opposed Observant autonomy. Shortly before his death he issued a circular letter in which he denied that Bernardino had ever joined the Observance:

[The Observants] no longer call themselves Friars Minor, but the Friars of the Observance ... or of S. Bernardino, though in truth the blessed Bernardino was never of their party or of their sect. Instead, when he saw the party-feeling arising in the Order, almost like the beast that arose from the deeps [in Revelations 13:1], he wrote an admirable sermon on party-feeling in which he exposed its evil, showing how bad things were done because of it.⁹²

These claims were later picked up by the greatest and most stubborn Colettan opponent to the Observance, Bonifazio da Ceva (†1517), who inserted them into his collection of Franciscan texts, the *Firmamentum trium Ordinum* (1512). He also published the *Defensorium elucidativum* (1516), in which he baldly stated: 'Bernardino ... renounced divisions and died under the obedience of [Conventual] Ministers. It is false when the Vicarian Friars say that he was the Vicar of their Family. No Vicarian brother has ever been canonised.'⁹³ In this way, the figure of Bernardino was fundamentally reconstructed by non-Observant Franciscans to become a reproach to Observant pride and hypocrisy.

⁸⁹ Odoardi, S. *Bernardino da Siena e i Frati Minori Conventuali*, pp. 137-142. Odoardi, a Conventual Franciscan, has traced the Conventual cult of Bernardino and investigated Conventual claims to the saint. He concludes that Bernardino was 'né tutto Conventuale, né tutto Osservante' (p.38), though his work tends to be far more sympathetic to the Conventual than the Observant cause. Odoardi has also published an article dealing with the same themes: G. Odoardi, 'San Bernardino da Siena e la comunità dell'Ordine o Frati Minori Conventuali', *MF* 81 (1981), pp. 117-174, 439-515.

⁹⁰ F. M. Delorme, 'Un second office rythmique de S. Bernardin', *BSB* 2 (1936), pp. 35-57.

⁹¹ Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), p. 385.

⁹² M. Bihl, 'Fra Bonifazio da Ceva e i suoi giudizi su Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 42 (1945), p. 170.

⁹³ Bihl, 'Fra Bonifazio da Ceva', p. 171.

Colettans and Conventuals re-made Bernardino into a faithful Conventual. The Observance's saint had never been an Observant at all. Such a claim was an attack at the very roots of the congregation's identity. It was impossible to be the 'Bernardine Friars' (as Chambon insisted they called themselves, and as the Observants in Poland were popularly named) when Bernardino had supposedly never led the congregation at all.

There were Observant replies to such assertions. Bernardino Aquilano's chronicle indignantly relayed the disputes between the two sides over Bernardino's reputation. The Observant polemicist Johannes Brugman, who wrote his *Solutiones quorundam obiectorum contra sacram Observantiam* in 1460, attacked the Conventuals for their attempts to claim Bernardino:

And if they say that S. Bernardino was a Conventual, it is false, because he left the great convent at Siena and came to the Observance. ... I know that when I was amongst the Italian Conventuals along with them I persecuted S. Bernardino and the holy man Giovanni da Capestrano because they were of the Observance. But now the Conventual brothers dedicate their churches to his name and paint his image there; they do this because of the great devotion of the people. I don't say that this is because of their greed and desire for alms, but to imitate him whose image they paint, whose churches they build, whose name and glory they preach.⁹⁴

Such angry refutations were repeated in the pages of other Observant polemical tracts, such as the *Minorica elucidativa* (1499) which denied Conventual claims that Bernardino had died under the authority of Conventual Ministers.⁹⁵ Brugman and Observant writers thus explicitly stated the Observant view of Conventual attempts to foster Bernardino's cult: the Conventuals simply wished to clothe themselves in borrowed Observant sanctity. By laying claim to Bernardino they also laid claim to the Observant public image and could partake of the lay piety directed towards the reformed congregation. And by defining Bernardino as a Franciscan saint, rather than as an Observant, they subtly obstructed the Observants' own attempts to use him to advance their congregation. The Observants wished to identify Bernardino as one of their own, an exclusively Observant saint. Using him as a model, they attempted to shape the Observance in his image and create a congregation of saints with an acknowledged saint at its head. The Conventuals, naming Bernardino as a Franciscan, or worse, a Conventual, hindered this attempt to assert the Observance's separate and God-given identity. And of course, though Brugman

⁹⁴ Brugman, *Solutiones*, p. 359.

⁹⁵ *Minorica elucidativa*, (Paris: Jean Petit, 1499), p. 19v.

studiously denied that 'greed for alms' was amongst Conventual reasons for venerating Bernardino, he did not scruple to insinuate it. In his view, the Conventuals were hypocritical, greedy and corrupt. They had no right to claim Bernardino, pristine in his poverty.

Opposing Constructions of Bernardino

Whilst the Conventuals recognised the value of the Observant construction of Bernardino, others within and without the Franciscan Order were less willing to accept Bernardino's reputation. Although the preachers and writers of the Observance conscientiously promoted Bernardino as the model Observant, there were still parts of the congregation that were reluctant to accept his active life as the true Observant vocation. There were murmurings against Bernardino within the Observance itself as he and Capestrano attempted to shape the congregation in their own image. For instance, the friars of the tiny hermitage of Il Colombaio outside Siena, which Bernardino entered in 1402, were accustomed to a retired life of humility and poverty and were horrified by their new confrère's stubborn desire to preach. The *Compendium vitae*, written by an Observant hagiographer before Bernardino's canonization in 1450, stated:

Because of their lack of culture, their humility and their poverty, our brothers truly felt that not just preaching but even the desire to preach was almost sacrilege. The books needed for the office of preaching seemed to them to be against poverty, the lack of brothers against the divine office [since preachers were excused other duties], and study against devotion. And so when these poor men saw Bernardino studying suitable books, they began to trouble him continually.

In fact, although Bernardino took care to fulfil all his other duties - to take mass every day and assiduously sing his part in the choir; to pray, go for alms and take part in all the ceremonies ordained by his superiors - his confrères continued to look askance at him because 'he would not follow in their footsteps [*quod in vestigiis non esset*].' They tried to draw him away from the 'temptation' of preaching with onerous duties and criticisms of his fitness and voice, 'adding that in the exercise of preaching is the dissolution of devotion.'⁹⁶ Such opposition shows how suspicious the early Observants were of

⁹⁶ Delorme, 'Une esquisse primitive de la vie de S. Bernardin', pp. 20-21.

Bernardino's vocation.⁹⁷ It also shows the Regular Observance, through the work of the hagiographer, criticising such reactions.

There are other hints of early Observant opposition to Bernardino. In the twenty-seventh article of the 1448 canonization process witnesses were questioned as to whether Bernardino had patiently suffered persecution for preaching God's word. Amongst evidence relating to Dominican and Augustinian opposition to Bernardino's cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, the Observant lay brother Fra Nofrio da Seggiano admitted that, 'He had also heard that Bernardino suffered a great many persecutions both from religious of his own Order and of others.'⁹⁸ The anonymous Observant preacher who may have been Capestrano's companion recalled the persecutions that Bernardino had suffered from his fellow-Observants. After writing of opposition to Bernardino's cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, he continued: 'This would have been bearable if it had only been secular clergy [who criticised Bernardino], but when Observant religious and those who professed to be zealous also persecuted him, it truly seemed unbearable.'⁹⁹ Maffeo Vegio wrote of certain Observant brothers being openly hostile to Bernardino after he had supported Conventual claims to have authority over the Observance in 1443.¹⁰⁰ The best-known evidence for Observant opposition to Bernardino comes not from an Observant, but from a Conventual. Francesco da Rimini reported that Bernardino was cruelly persecuted by Observant brothers on two counts: firstly, because he was willing to compromise with the Conventuals on the division of the Order; and secondly, because his clericalisation policy deprived angry lay brothers of treasured authority.¹⁰¹ In 1580, Dionisio Pulinari, who depended upon the Observant Mariano da Firenze's now lost *Fasciculus chronicarum*

⁹⁷ Luke Wadding gives a similar account of the attitude of the Early Observants towards education and the preaching vocation in *An. Min.* XI, 110, xxvi.

⁹⁸ Piana, 'Processi di canonizzazione', p.424.

⁹⁹ Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 1 (1935), p.231. There is some disagreement as to whether this passage refers to the Franciscan Observance or the reformed congregations of other orders. See Piana, 'Processi di canonizzazione', p. 424.

¹⁰⁰ AA.SS., Maii tom. V, p. 128. On the events which gave rise to this hostility, see Nimmo, pp. 628-630.

¹⁰¹ Little, 'Nota Fr. Francisci Ariminensis de relatione S. Bernardini Senensis', pp. 164-165. These allegations were repeated almost verbatim in another polemical tract against the Observance dated to c.1460 which is published in Piana, 'Scritti polemici', *AFH* 71 (1978), p. 354-372. See also Pacetti, 'San Bernardino da Siena Vicario Generale dell'Osservanza', pp. 34, 62; and I. da Milano, 'San Bernardino da Siena e l'Osservanza Minoritica' in *San Bernardino da Siena: Saggi e ricerche*, p. 397 n. 1.

(c.1503), also noted that Observant lay brothers censured Bernardino for his clericalisation of the congregation and that his policies made him unpopular in the Tuscan province.¹⁰²

Bernardino's reputation also had to be defended against those outwith the Franciscan Order who criticised the new saint. Aquilano's tract defending the acceptance of money-alms at the shrine devoted to Bernardino in L'Aquila was designed to placate his fellow Observants, but it also testifies to some public scandal over the practice.¹⁰³ Critics cast doubt upon Bernardino's humility and poverty, still a sensitive issue for the Observants who had, under the leadership of Bernardino and Capestrano, officially rejected the policy of *usus pauper* in the *Constitutiones Bernardini* of 1440 in favour of the preaching vocation. Amongst many other miracles, the Observant hagiographer Giacomo Oddi recorded two in which laymen who criticised Bernardino were punished. In the first miracle a man named Penestrino, seeing Bernardino riding his mule out of Lucca with his entourage, joked, 'There goes the Pope riding by.' He was immediately blown into the air by a miraculous wind and fell, breaking all his bones. Recognising his fault, he begged Bernardino's forgiveness and was pardoned and healed.¹⁰⁴ In the second, a University master in Mantua, listening to Bernardino's erstwhile companion, Fra Silvestro da Siena, preach on the miracles of the new saint, began to mutter: 'Did we ever know this man? He ate well and drank better.' Immediately his mouth began to twist out of shape, and soon he was unable to speak. Eventually he was induced to repent of his sin and was cured. Fra Silvestro heard of the miracle and preached it to the people.¹⁰⁵ In Vienna in 1451 Giovanni da Capestrano preached of a similar miracle:

¹⁰² D. Pulinari, *Cronache dei Frati Minori della provincia di Toscana*, ed. S. Mencherini, (Arezzo: Cooperativa Tipografia, 1913), p. 37.

¹⁰³ It is clear that the Observants' acceptance of money had attracted criticism, for Aquilano defended his congregation by arguing that Bernardino's shrine had not been constructed with the intention of extorting money, concluding: 'Et si quis iniquus ex invidia vel aliqua phantasia scandalizaretur, scandalum est puxillorum, imputabitur sibi, non fratribus.' The tract, entitled 'Quomodo liceat procuratori fratrum recipere pecunias quae offeruntur in spelunca in qua corpus Sancti Bernardini requiescit et in utilitates fratrum vel aliter expendere. Bona et licita declaratio', is published in Meneghin, 'S. Bernardino da Siena ed un sermone in suo onore scritto dal Beato Bernardino da Fossa', pp. 219-223.

¹⁰⁴ Oddi, I, p. 381. This miracle was also reported by Conrad of Freyenstadt. See Delorme, 'Ex libro miraculorum S. Bernardini Senesisi et Ioannis a Capistrano auctore Fr. Conrado de Freyenstat', *AFH* 11 (1918), p. 411

¹⁰⁵ Oddi, I, p. 388.

Upon hearing the stories of Bernardino's miracles, a certain bishop said: 'I knew S. Bernardino; he often ate freely of good chicken and fish just as I did.' And after three days this bishop died; miserably, I fear.¹⁰⁶

During his lifetime Bernardino had to contend with opponents outside the Franciscan Order who attempted to identify him as a heretic, enemy of the Church or limb of Antichrist. In 1427 the Augustinian friar Andrea Biglia (†1435) composed a tract attacking Bernardino and the Dominican preacher Manfredo da Vercelli for their heretical tendencies. He criticised Bernardino for promoting the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus and presented the Observant as an ignorant, stubborn and vainglorious heretic.¹⁰⁷ Such constructions turned Observant characterisations inside-out. For instance, we have seen how the Observants believed Bernardino to have had an important providential role. Bernardino's opponents took these ideas and twisted them, associating him with the Antichrist. Andrea da Cascia, an Augustinian who criticised Bernardino's cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, wrote of the Observant in terms calculated to shock: he became a 'beast, pseudo-prophet ... so proud that he wished the people to honour him as if he were Christ.' In 1431 he composed a tract, *De decem signis ad conoscendum antichristum et adventum eius*, which he presented to the Council of Basle, which directly accused Bernardino of idolatry, heresy and being a limb of Antichrist.¹⁰⁸

In the Augustinian's hands, situations that proved Bernardino's sanctity to Observant writers instead proved his depravity. Bernardino Aquilano had written, marvelling, of the outbursts of lay veneration that accompanied Bernardino's entrance into cities: singing, processions, the waving of olive branches. Andrea da Cascia also noted the same phenomenon in Spoleto in 1426, but interpreted it in darker tones:

Bishop Jacobus, seeing all the people of Spoleto made ready in the town with olive branches, and the people of Montefalcone likewise going outside their city with olive branches to accompany this beast in procession to Spoleto, said to his servant, 'Even Christ did not enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with such honour, rejoicing and cheers as this beast'. The bishop

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Hofer, *Giovanni da Capistrano*, p. 296, note 50.

¹⁰⁷ B. de Gaiffier, 'La mémoire d'André Biglia sur le predication de Saint Bernardin de Sienne', *Analecta Bollandia* 53 (1935), pp. 308-358; D.M. Webb, 'Andrea Biglia at Bologna 1424-7: A Humanist Friar and the Troubles of the Church', *Bullettin of the Institute of Historical Research* 49 (1976), pp. 41-59; A. Morisi, 'Andrea Biglia e Bernardino da Siena' in *Bernardino predicatore nella società del suo tempo*, pp. 335-359.

¹⁰⁸ See G. Gonnet, 'S. Bernardino da Siena e la cosiddetta 'eresia' del Nome di Gesù' in *San Bernardino da Siena predicatore e pellegrino*, pp. 41-51.

forbade this procession, but this beast or pseudo-prophet was so indignant that he did not want to come into the town without the palm and olive branches and the entreaties of the citizens to enter. Once he finally entered, he was so inflated with pride that he did not wish to preach.¹⁰⁹

Here Bernardino was depicted as if he were truly the anti-Christ. Edith Pasztor, who has published a brief but penetrating examination of this passage, has commented on the way in which Andrea da Cascia fundamentally reinterpreted Bernardino's actions to prove his sinfulness. She describes Bernardino's actions as part of a 'canonically unexceptional procedure': the ceremonies surrounding his entrance were outbursts of popular veneration; he politely refrained from entering the city until invited to do so by its citizens; and would not preach until permitted to do so by the bishop. When Andrea da Cascia wrote of such occurrences they became symbols of Bernardino's diabolic pride. He would not enter Spoleto without the popular adoration that assimilated him to Christ; he would not preach through pique; he despised the bishop's authority.

Such claims continued even after Bernardino's canonization. In c.1458 Giacomo della Marca was forced to deny angrily similar allegations from Fraticelli heretics. He allowed his Fraticello opponent in the *Dialogus contra Fraticellos* the perceptive observation that the Observants were intent on building up Bernardino's cult simply to support their congregation:

You Observants damage others whilst you try to justify yourselves. For you claim that your Fra Bernardino is a saint and performs many miracles, but we firmly believe that he is a limb of Antichrist, just as our Lord Jesus Christ predicted when he said: There will be raised up false Christs and false prophets who will show many signs, and they shall deceive even the elect.¹¹⁰

The blessed Giacomo asserted in reply that Bernardino's preaching career proved him to be a true Christian; his good doctrine was confirmed by papal patronage and his achievements compared favourably with the triumphs of the apostles. In contrast, the Fraticelli themselves had failed to win over a single educated man to their cause, gulling only 'simple fools and a few silly women'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by E. Pasztor, 'S. Bernardino e l'episcopato italiano del suo tempo' in *Cateriniano-bernardiniano*, pp. 715-739.

¹¹⁰ *Dialogus contra Fraticellos*, p. 253. The biblical passage cited is a contraction of Matthew 24:5 and 24:11.

¹¹¹ *Dialogus contra Fraticellos*, p. 255.

An examination of the hagiography and panegyrics devoted to Bernardino da Siena leads us naturally to the figure of Francis. It has long been recognised that the study of the perception of Francis within his Order plays a key role in understanding the changes in Franciscan ideology in the later Middle Ages.¹¹² If Bernardino was promoted from the mid-fifteenth century as the model Observant - a figure for admiration and imitation - what had become of Francis's role in the congregation? Did Bernardino become *alter Franciscus*, just as Francis had himself become *alter Christus*? Did the ideal of *imitatio Francisci* make way for *imitatio Bernardini*?

The cult of Francis was of central importance to his Order, although Théophile Desbonnets, studying the Conventual Franciscans of the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, sees Francis as 'an absent image', a hole at the centre of an Order which preferred to pursue a Franciscan ideal created and nurtured by Bonaventura and his moderate Community rather than Francis's own direct example.¹¹³ The Observants were deeply influenced by the Spiritual conception of Francis. The Spirituals had revived the figure of the founder, simultaneously pursuing a policy of *imitatio Francisci* - an attempt to conform to the founder in every aspect of life - whilst also emphasising themes which had been present in Franciscanism since the mid-thirteenth century: the characterisation of Francis as *alter Christus* and the Angel of the Sixth Seal. The Spiritual view of Francis was thus a double one. He was the historicised and very human *Poverello*, clad in his patched habit; the personal master to an unbroken chain of disciples leading directly through Leo, Egidio, Angelo and Rufino *et al* to Corrado da Offida, Angelo Clareno and Ubertino da Casale. Yet he was also a providential figure, conformed to Christ through his evangelical poverty and stigmata, greater than any other saint in his peerless perfection,

¹¹² Some of the key works on this theme are S. Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia*, vol. I: Secoli XIII-XV, (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1983); *L'immagine di San Francesco nella Controriforma*, (Assisi, Edizioni Quasar, 1983); and *L'immagine di Francesco nella storiografia dall'umanesimo all'Ottocento*, (Assisi: Università di Perugia, Centro di studi francescani, 1983).

¹¹³ T. Desbonnets, 'Le Saint François de la communauté des origines au Concile de Vienne' in Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia* I, p. 36.

presiding over the last phase of pre-millennial history: barely a flesh and blood man at all.¹¹⁴

By the end of the fourteenth century the themes of *alter Christus* and Angel of the Sixth Seal had gained greater currency through Bartolomeo da Pisa's highly influential *De conformitate*, a vast compilation tracing Francis's similarities to Christ.¹¹⁵ The fourteenth century also gave rise to the Conventual promotion of Francis as primarily the founder and Minister General of the Franciscan Order, a theme that was partly a reaction against the apocalyptic pauper described by the Spirituals.¹¹⁶ The Observants were influenced by both the Spiritual and Conventual conceptions of Francis. The early Observants, led by Paoluccio dei Trinci, were profoundly influenced by the ideal of *imitatio Francisci* and the urge to follow the personal example of the historical Francis. The themes of Francis as *alter Christus* and Angel of the Sixth Seal were also current amongst Observant preachers and writers, though often seemingly drained of much of their pressing eschatological meaning.¹¹⁷

There have been several studies on 'St Francis within the Observance' (as Duncan Nimmo puts it), many of them contradictory.¹¹⁸ Nimmo himself sees Francis, albeit a

¹¹⁴ There are many works dealing with the Spiritual conception of Francis, since it influenced nearly every aspect of Spiritual thought. See in particular S. da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del sesto sigillo*; L. di Fonzo, 'L'immagine di San Francesco negli scritti degli Spirituali' in Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia* I, pp. 63-122; W.-C. Van Dijk, 'La représentation de Saint François d'Assise dans les écrits spirituels' in *Franciscains d'Oc: Les Spirituels ca.1280-1324*, Cahiers de Fanjeaux 10, (Toulouse: Centre d'Etudes Historiques de Fanjeaux, 1975), pp. 203-230; D. Burr, 'Franciscan Exegesis and Francis as an Apocalyptic Figure' in *Monks, Nuns, and Friars in Medieval Society*, eds. E.B. King, J.T. Schaefer, W.B. Wadley, Sewanee Medieval Studies no. 4, (Sewanee: The Press of the University of the South, 1989), pp. 51-62.

¹¹⁵ C. Erickson, 'Bartholomew of Pisa, Francis Exalted: *De Conformitate*', *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972), pp. 253-86; M. d'Alatri, 'L'immagine di San Francesco nel *De conformitate* di Bartolomeo da Pisa' in Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia* I, pp. 227-237.

¹¹⁶ G. Odoardi, 'Il S. Francesco della Comunità nei secoli XIV e XV' in Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia* I, pp. 123-159.

¹¹⁷ See for instance Bernardino da Siena's c.1428 sermon *De stigmatibus sacris gloriosi Francisci* in *Opera Omnia* V, pp. 204-230, which utilises both themes. See also Rusconi, 'Apocalittica ed escatologia nella predicazione di San Bernardino da Siena', pp. 85-128; and S. L. Zindars-Swartz, 'Joachite Themes in Sermons of St Bernardino of Siena: Assessing the Stigmata of St Francis's in *Il profetismo gioachimita tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, pp. 47-59.

¹¹⁸ See for instance D. Nimmo, 'Saint Francis within the Observance' in S. Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia* I, pp. 161-172; R. Rusconi, 'San Francesco nelle prediche volgari e nei sermoni latini di Bernardino da Siena' in *Cateriniano-bernardiniano*, pp. 793-809; idem, 'Francesco d'Assisi nella predicazione italiana del '400 e del primo '500' in *L'Immagine di Francesco nella storiografia dall'umanesimo all'ottocento*, pp. 77-108; A. Gattucci, 'San Francesco e l'Ordine francescano nei sermoni

somewhat simplified, de-historicised Francis, as a key influence in Bernardino da Siena's spiritual expression and preaching vocation. He argues that Francis became a symbol of moral and spiritual reform for the Observants, citing a passage in which Bernardino placed the image of the stigmatised Francis at the very centre of his call for reform, exhorting his listeners to 'copy the example of Francis, the *Poverello*,' in cultivating the wounds of Christ in the hearts.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, Carlo Delcorno and Roberto Rusconi argue that the figure of the founder had by the mid fifteenth century become no more than a dry institutional prop drained of all historical and personal vitality. In Rusconi's opinion, the Observants mainly used Francis to confer authority upon the Franciscan institution, to attract layfolk into the Third Order with a promise of heavenly intervention on their behalf, and to collect money through the Porziuncola Indulgence. He comments:

The unifying theme [in the Observant representations of the founder] is clearly the radical emptying of the figure of Francis of Assisi, not only in historical but also hagiographical terms, reducing him to a simple role as a living 'bull', through his stigmata, of the salvific mediation operated by the Order of the Friars Minor.¹²⁰

Though the example of St Francis is not invoked in the hagiographies and panegyrics on Bernardino as much as might be expected, the Observant saint was at times compared to the Franciscan founder. It has already been noted that certain themes from the hagiography of Francis were developed in Bernardino's cult; for instance, the characterisation of Bernardino as the providential successor to Francis's Angel of the Sixth Seal. In addition, Bernardino's fame as the leader of the Observance led to him being seen, along with Paoluccio dei Trinci, as the reformer of the Order and even as founder of the Observance. Such obvious similarities with Francis's role fashioned Bernardino as an *alter Franciscus* figure. Though he was not himself a Franciscan, the humanist Maffeo Vegio was one of the very few writers to explicitly suggest that Bernardino was directly inspired by *imitatio Francisci* to match Francis's virtues.¹²¹ Taking a step further, the anonymous Observant preacher implied that through his perfect love for and imitation of

di San Giacomo della Marca' in *San Giacomo della Marca nell'Europa del '400*, 245-300; Delcorno, 'Il racconto agiografico nella predicazione dei secoli XII-XV' in *Agiografia dell'Occidente cristiano*, pp. 79-114.

¹¹⁹ *Le prediche volgari*, ed. P. Bargellini (Milan, 1936), p. 715. Cited in Nimmo, 'Saint Francis within the Observance', p. 167.

¹²⁰ Rusconi, 'Francesco d'Assisi nella predicazione italiana del '400 e del primo '500', p.87. See also Delcorno, 'Il racconto agiografico nella predicazione dei secoli XII-XV', p.111.

¹²¹ Maffeo Vegio, *Vita S. Bernardini Senensi*, p.120.

Francis, Bernardino became, like Francis, another *alter Christus*.¹²² Two early liturgical offices dedicated to Bernardino, composed in c.1457 and c.1475, carefully imitated the pattern set by the liturgy for Francis's feast day: the first addressed Bernardino as 'this imitator of Francis' whilst the second once more compared him to an Angel of the Apocalypse.¹²³ However, the majority of comparisons between Francis and Bernardino rested on the preaching vocation. Lodovico da Vicenza described Bernardino's first attempt to deliver a sermon in 1405, when he stripped off his habit to carry a cross to Seggiano and lectured to those who gathered to gawp at him, as 'following in Francis's footsteps' because he relied not on the words of worldly wisdom but on the divine spirit of truth.¹²⁴ In the 1490s Bernardino da Feltre described Bernardino as being 'Francis revived' through his providential preaching vocation.¹²⁵

Veneration of Francis could be an occasion for the veneration of Bernardino. In 1445 the city of Perugia issued an ordinance which instituted annual civic processions to mark the feast of St Francis. The ruling stated that such actions were taken 'in the happy memory of the blessed Bernardino and the Friars of the Franciscan Observance'.¹²⁶ The uncanonized Observant was thus honoured by ceremonies ostensibly celebrating the founder. Occasionally, Francis seems almost forgotten in the rush to venerate Bernardino. In 1460 Giacomo della Marca asserted:

Since the time of St Peter to now, there has never been a saint who was canonised before twenty or thirty years had passed after their death, and some waited a hundred years or more to be canonised. But this glorious S. Bernardino was canonised within a year by Pope Nicholas V; instantly, you might say.¹²⁷

Giacomo della Marca, one of the Observance's leading administrators, a great preacher and Franciscan, surely cannot have been unaware that Francis had been canonised in a

¹²² Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 2 (1936), p. 63.

¹²³ Z. Lazzeri, 'Un Ufficio ritmico di S. Bernardino nel primo Breviario Franciscano del 1474', *BSB* 1 (1935), pp. 105-119; F. M. Delorme, 'Un second office rythmique de S. Bernardin', *BSB* 2 (1936), pp. 35-57. The reading from the Apocalypse is Rev. 14:6.

¹²⁴ Lodovico da Vicenza, *Vita post corporis translationem composita*, AA.SS., Maii tom. V, p. 96.

¹²⁵ *De Fine Mundi in Sermoni del Beato Bernardino da Feltre II*, pp. 521-522.

¹²⁶ A. Fantozzi, 'Alcuni memorie intorno al culto di S. Antonio di Padova e del B. Egidio d'Assisi nella città di Perugia', *AFH* 33 (1940), p.228; quoted by M. G. Dickson, *Patterns of European Sanctity: The Cult of Saints in the Late Middle Ages*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University unpublished doctoral thesis, 1975), p. 488.

¹²⁷ Delcorno, 'Due prediche volgari di Jacopo della Marca', p. 201.

mere two years, and that Bernardino's canonization process had taken not one year, but six.

The anonymous preacher who gave three sermons on Bernardino was the Observant most fascinated by the new saint's relationship with Francis. He observed that 'just as Bernardino was Francis's true son in life, so he was in death', joyfully struggling out of his habit to die naked and poor.¹²⁸ He also compared the prophetic roles of both Francis and Bernardino, declaring that the Observant saint could justly be considered not only Francis's direct and prophesied successor, but his equal:

It is read in our Chronicles (that is, of the Friars Minor), that in the time of the blessed St Francis a certain demon, speaking at length of Francis and his Order, said: 'When they have been brought down, and seem almost totally to have fallen from their original state, then will rise up one amongst them who will be reputed to be of the same industry and poor life as [Francis]. He will reach such perfection that he will do almost as many great things as Francis'.¹²⁹

In some ways, it seems as if Bernardino was taking over from Francis as the primary role model for Observant brothers. The scholars who have argued that Francis's role was diminished in the fifteenth-century Franciscan Order have detected a corresponding rise in the reputation of Bernardino. Delcorno and Rusconi comment that the real model of sanctity in fifteenth-century sermons was not the founder but the Observant saint.¹³⁰

Bernardino's rise as one of the primary Franciscan saints is confirmed by Mario Alberto Pavone in his splendid examination of Franciscan art during the Renaissance and by other historians of late Quattrocento religious art. Three major themes emerged in fifteenth-century Observant iconography. Firstly, Bernardino began to replace the Franciscan saints more usually painted alongside Francis, primarily St Anthony of Padua and St Louis of Toulouse.¹³¹ He was also painted in iconographically equal terms to Francis, with both saints being depicted in similar proportion or in similar roles in the

¹²⁸ Sevesi, 'Tre sermoni inediti su S. Bernardino', *BSB* 1 (1935), p. 215.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 209. The 'chronicis nostris' referred to by the preacher are the greatest of the fourteenth-century Franciscan compilations: Arnaldus de Sarnano, *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, *AF* 3 (1897), p. 27; and Bartolomeo da Pisa, 'De Conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu', *AF* 4-5 (1906, 1912), tom. 5, Fructus IX, Pars Secunda, p. 437.

¹³⁰ Delcorno, 'Il racconto agiografico nella predicazione dei secoli XII-XV', p. 111; Rusconi, 'Francesco d'Assisi nella predicazione italiana del '400 e del primo '500', p. 92.

¹³¹ F. Bisognò, 'Per un census delle rappresentazioni di S. Bernardino da Siena nella pittura in Lombardia, Piemonte e Liguria fino agli inizi del Cinquecento' in *Cateriniano-bernardiniano*, p. 381.

same painting.¹³² Secondly, there was the increasing assimilation of the figure of Francis to his disciple Bernardino, whose own iconography was extremely consistent and recognisable. The founder gradually came to be depicted as older, more emaciated and in general physiologically similar to Bernardino.¹³³ Finally, a rise in portrayals of Bernardino coincided with a decline in portrayals of Francis; for instance, the theme of Francis as a miracle-worker disappeared almost completely, whilst representations of Bernardino's miracles rose sharply after the mid-fifteenth century.¹³⁴

Whilst Francis was certainly still an inspiring figure, his cult was by now established and constricted by tradition. Perhaps Francis was also distanced by the supernaturalised elements of his *fama sanctitatis*: an *alter Christus* who was destined to be resurrected and call up the Apocalypse was not an example to be easily imitated by mere mortals. Bernardino, the less distant figure, presented a much more concrete example of the Franciscan life and ideal to those fifteenth-century Observants who preached his virtues, many of whom had known him personally. Certainly, Giacomo della Marca's sermons on Bernardino are crammed with personal detail and reveal a vibrant spirituality, so that his sermons on Francis and the Franciscan Order seem very dry in comparison. Indeed, the sermons on Francis delivered by both Giacomo della Marca and Michele da Carcano celebrated the saint as a preacher, Rule-giver and, above all, the founder of the Order. Both provided long lists of notable Franciscans of all three orders, particularly the doctors, masters and prelates who brought the Order such honour.¹³⁵ In contrast to the fifteenth-century sermons on Bernardino, there is little sense of Francis as a close and personal example.

¹³² Pavone, *Iconologia francescana: Il Quattrocento*, p. 105.

¹³³ According to Mario Alberto Pavone, Bernardino became the physical model for other Franciscan figures as well as Francis: 'Un fenomeno sorprendente è quello dell'assimilazione della figura di Francesco a quella di Bernardino, che parallelamente trova un interessante corrispettivo nella costante utilizzazione del prototipo senese per le raffigurazioni de Giacomo della Marca, spesso riconoscibile solo dall'ampolla.' Pavone, *Iconologia francescana: Il Quattrocento*, p. 115.

¹³⁴ 'Si assiste pertanto ad un lento processo di sostituzione del santo fondatore con il santo più recente, motivato dal fatto che, mentre il primo si offriva come simbolo di una sostanziale ambivalenza conventuale-osservante, Bernardino, fin da beato tutelava la specificità del messaggio osservante, in un momento in cui l'Osservanza, attraverso la difesa di caratteri originari, accresceva la propria volontà di predominio all'interno dell'ordine.' Pavone, *Iconologia francescana: Il Quattrocento*, p. 130.

¹³⁵ N. Dal Gal, 'Sermo de Iacobi de Marchia: *De excellentia Ordinis S. Francisci*', *AFH* 4 (1911), pp. 303-314; Sevesi, 'Il sermone inedito del B. Michele Carcano sul serafico S. Francesco d'Assisi', pp. 321-342.

Conclusion

During his lifetime Bernardino da Siena did more than any other Observant to shape and mould the Observance, and his reputation performed the same function after his death. His actions forged the public image of the congregation; his preoccupations influenced Observant sermons and writings; his cult was promoted as representing the divine and worldly approbation of the movement. He was a key figure both for those who had known him personally and for those who only came to the congregation after his death. Above all, his cult was used to anchor the Observance in its new moderate way of life. The development of Bernardino's *fama sanctitatis* marks an important step in the creation of the Observant identity, for the congregation now had its own saint, and one who represented a particular way of life. Bernardino was the only modern Franciscan whose reputation could approach, if not perhaps equal or exceed, that of Francis himself. He was portrayed as a preacher whose apostolic role was divinely inspired and divinely ordained. In Observant eyes, his sermons gave meaning to his whole existence: they reformed Church, Order and laity; simultaneously held off the apocalypse and presaged it. However, there were struggles over the development of Bernardino's particular vision for the Observance. The moderate ideal was cultivated by and through Bernardino, but it was also subverted by Conventual strategies, the opposition of critics and satirists, and even by the reluctance of some Observants to fully accede to the new way of life sanctioned by the saint. Still, the Observants made sure to use all available media to develop the new cult, aware that this was a circular process which, by bolstering Bernardino's *fama*, at once raised the profile of the Observance. They met with great success. Bernardino Aquilano's tract justifying the acceptance of money-alms at the saint's tomb shows that Bernardino had become big business by the later fifteenth century. Yet although Bernardino's active life of preaching and education was the most influential model of Observant sanctity in much fifteenth-century hagiography and panegyric, there were other traditions which remained alive within the congregation. We shall see in the next two chapters that Bernardino's example was not the predominant ideal recorded and fostered by two of the greatest Observant hagiographers of this period; Giacomo Oddi and Mariano da Firenze.

CHAPTER SIX

Reflecting the Franciscan Ideal: Giacomo Oddi and the *Specchio de l'Ordine*

The greatest Observant collection of hagiography is the *Specchio de l'Ordine Menore* (1474) by the Perugian friar Giacomo Oddi (†1487/8). More commonly known as *La Franceschina*, the name bestowed upon it by later readers, it is a remarkable work. It illustrates eleven principal Franciscan virtues through a compilation of the lives of Franciscan saints and beati, starting with the founder himself and including Observant beati who had died as late as 1472. *La Franceschina* offers a stimulating mix of history, anecdote and edification. Oddi recorded his hopes for his work in the Third Prologue:

I want to call this holy work the *Speculum Ordinis*, for it deals with the works of Francis and his devoted sons, the mirrors of the Minorite Order. ... In the name of he from whom all good proceeds and without whom no good can be carried out, I hope that this work will kindle the hearts of those who wish in truth and with all their souls to follow our poor and humble father St Francis with the fruits of their good work. (I, 52-53)¹

The work was intended to function as a mirror, reflecting the image of the perfect Franciscan friar and holding this ideal up for imitation: it was to be a looking-glass into which the Observant friar could gaze to find his own face mirrored in those of his predecessors. Oddi's aim was didactic, and so the work gives a fascinating insight into how an Italian Observant friar of the fifteenth century perceived the history and identity of his Order. Oddi's concept of the Observance becomes particularly clear when looking at *La Franceschina* from three different angles. Firstly, the virtues that Oddi recommended to his readers give a clear picture of the ideal that he wished to promote within the Order. Secondly, when Oddi's treatment of the Order's past is examined, it becomes clear that he smoothed over the controversial passages of Franciscan history and portrayed the Observants as sole heirs to the vision of St Francis. Finally, the new biographies which Oddi composed on Observant beati attest to tensions inherent within the Observant identity. They provide insights into the way in which the congregation dealt with the Franciscan ideal, as well as portraying its preoccupations and self-image.

¹ G. Oddi, *La Franceschina: Testo volgare Umbro del sec. XV*, 2 vols., ed. N. Cavanna, (S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi: Tipografia Porziuncola, 1929; repr. 1981), I, pp. 52-53. Hereafter, references to *La Franceschina* will be given within the text citing volume followed by page number.

La Franceschina is particularly interesting because it was written by an author who seems to be a perfect example of the committed and unassuming friars who made up the backbone of a congregation more famed amongst both contemporaries and historians for its flamboyant preachers. Oddi was born in the early Quattrocento to a noble family in the Franciscan heartland of Perugia and was educated for the life of a good merchant-citizen. In 1442 he was enrolled in Perugia's Collegio della Mercanzia and in 1447 had his first taste of civic office. Nevertheless, inspired by the charismatic preaching of Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce, he joined the Franciscan Observance in 1448 and quickly became a respected figure in the community. By 1453 he was Guardian of the Porziuncola and he went on to govern S. Maria degli Angeli (1458), Monteripido (1460), and S. Maria delle Grazie at Terni (1477), all important Observant houses, before his death in either 1487 or 1488.² *La Franceschina* seems to have been Oddi's only literary work. It was completed by 1474, but its modern editor, Nicola Cavanna, believed it possible that Oddi embarked on his literary project much earlier. Cavanna argued that Oddi's testimony that he accompanied his Provincial Vicar to the death-bed of Francesco da Pavia in 1450 suggests that the Vicar summoned him to record the life and last words of the beatus in order to include them in his book.³ If Cavanna is right about the long planning of the work, it shows that the institutional self-consciousness of the congregation was well advanced: the Observants wished to preserve a record of their experiences and did all they could to facilitate this process.

In fact, the evidence that Oddi gathered at the death-bed of Francesco da Pavia is of particular interest, for it is one of the relatively few sections of *La Franceschina* to be

² *La Franceschina*, Introduction, I, p. lxxxi-xcii. Cavanna dated Oddi's death to 5 March 1488. Ugolino Nicolini in his article 'I minori Osservanti di Monteripido e lo 'Scriptorium' delle Clarisse di Monteluca in Perugia', *PS* 8 (1971), p. 101, argued that Cavanna had misread the entry in the records of the Collegio della Mercanzia, attributing to Oddi the date of death of the next man on the list. Nicolini preferred to follow the Chronicle of Perugia composed by Oddi's contemporary, Pietro Angelo di Giovanni, which gives the date of Oddi's death as 25 June 1487.

³ *La Franceschina*, Introduction, I, p. lxxxviii. Cavanna argued that Oddi was planning his work by 1454, for he took this date to be the year of Francesco da Pavia's death. However, it has recently been convincingly argued by M. Bigaroni in 'B. Francesco Beccaria da Pavia e Fr. Roberto Caracciolo: Precisazioni cronologiche', *AFH* 89 (1996), pp. 251-262, that Francesco in fact died in 1450. Due to this new dating, we can now posit that Oddi was already collecting material for *La Franceschina* twenty-four years before the work was finally completed.

written by Oddi himself without recourse to other source material. Unsurprisingly, given that much of his work dealt with long-dead saints and beati, Oddi was generally very reliant on written sources and particularly relished fourteenth-century works which had been shaped by the stresses of the Spiritual controversy and the growing relaxations of the Conventual party. His main source was Bartolomeo da Pisa's *De conformitate b. Francisci* (1385-1399) from which he copied long passages and through which he gained access to earlier Franciscan works, such as Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior* (1263), the *Speculum Perfectionis* (c.1318) and the *Actus beati Francisci* (c.1322). Oddi also relied upon Arnaldus de Sarnano's *Chronica XXIV Generalium* (c.1375) for *La Franceschina*'s brief history of Franciscan administration, and Angelo Clareno's fiercely Spiritual tract, the *Historia septem tribulationem* (c.1320), which was rich in eschatological imagery and Spiritual ideals. In addition, he utilised more contemporary writings. Cavanna detected the influence of no less than five fifteenth-century biographies of Bernardino da Siena in Oddi's account of the saint (I, 359). Oddi tended to add little of his own to the evidence of his sources, mainly paraphrasing and rearranging what he found written there. The text he composed without reference to earlier material is scattered thinly throughout the work, and as well as the life of Francesco da Pavia notably includes descriptions of the famous Observants Paoluccio dei Trinci, Thomà da Firenze and Antonio da Stroncone. Bernardino da Siena, Giovanni da Capestrano and the Spiritual poet Jacopone da Todi are also prominent in material that depends on earlier authors.

Only four manuscript redactions of *La Franceschina* have survived; the earliest, from the Franciscan house of Monteripido in Perugia where Oddi himself joined the Order and later became Guardian, is dated 1474. Cavanna calls this manuscript the 'prototype', though it does not seem to be Oddi's autograph.⁴ In 1481 a plan by Oddi's merchant brothers to publish *Lo specchio de l'Ordine dey Frate Menore*, as they called it, came to nothing.⁵ All the surviving manuscripts are to be found in Umbria, but despite the

⁴ Biblioteca Comunale di Perugia, ms. 1238. Of the three further surviving manuscripts, two date from c.1484, whilst the fourth was copied at Monteripido in 1574. For Cavanna's thorough examination of each manuscript see *La Franceschina*, Introduction, I, pp. lx-lxxx.

⁵ Perugian records show that in 1481 Francesco and Galeotto Oddi commissioned a 'Magister Stefanus Iohannes de Amburg de Sassonia' to print fifty copies of *Lo Specchio de l'Ordine*. The agreed payment was 100 florins. Since there are no other references to the work being published and no printed copies survive, it has been assumed that the project never came to fruition. The contract is reproduced in C. Tabarelli, *Documentazione notarile Perugina sul convento di Monteripido nei secoli XIV e XV*, *Fonti per la storia dell'Umbria* n.12, (Perugia: Deputazione di Storia patria per l'Umbria, 1977), p. 196.

seemingly modest nature of its dispersal, *La Franceschina* gradually became an influential work. Mariano da Firenze was aware of Oddi's work and used it liberally, as did later Franciscan historians such as Marco de Lisboa (1556), the Capuchin Bernardino da Colpetrazzo (1584), the Conventual Pietro Ridolfi da Tossignano (1586), Luke Wadding (1625) and Lodovico Jacobilli (1647).⁶

More recently, Oddi's work has often been insufficiently appreciated by scholars. Cavanna edited *La Franceschina* superbly in 1929, producing a beautiful two-volume work complete with comprehensive footnotes and reproductions of the original illustrations. However, although the edition includes an excellent introduction, Cavanna's examination of the work's themes and concerns was somewhat limited in scope. In later works, J.R.H. Moorman condemned *La Franceschina* as 'too uncritical to be of much use to the modern historian', whilst Stanislao da Campagnola restricted himself merely to praising the freshness of Oddi's Umbro-Tuscan vernacular.⁷ In 1974 Jérôme Poulenc once more called attention to the volume and suggested further research:

As a living testimony of the way in which Franciscan values were formulated and understood at the level of everyday life in the Umbrian convents of the Observance during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, *La Franceschina* has a number of elements which could serve a study of how the spirituality of this religious group was shaped by its mentality and modes of expression. The work certainly deserves attention.⁸

Only one writer, Giovanna Pasqualin Traversa, has examined *La Franceschina* in greater detail. Her book, *La 'Minoritas' francescana nell'interpretazione della 'Franceschina'*, provides a valuable overview of the work and makes many interesting points about how Oddi portrayed the Franciscan ideal, yet there are aspects of the work which she only touches upon briefly. In particular she takes no account of the riches contained in the original sections which Oddi wrote on Observant beati.⁹

⁶ *La Franceschina*, Introduction, I, pp. xxxiv-xl.

⁷ Moorman, p. 545; da Campagnola, *Le origine francescane*, p. 90-91.

⁸ J. Poulenc, 'Jacques Oddi de Pérouse' in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, VIII, p. 51.

⁹ G. Pasqualin Traversa, *La 'Minoritas' francescana nell'interpretazione della 'Franceschina'*, Collectio Assisiensis 23, (S. Maria degli Angeli: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995).

Franciscan Identity in *La Franceschina*

Like Johannes Brugman, Oddi named his work with care. The title he chose, *Lo Specchio de l'Ordine*, linked his text to the vibrant conventions of medieval mirror works and shaped the text in important ways. The literary conceit had become exceedingly popular in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and *La Franceschina* assumed the functions traditional to the medieval mirror-title. In the life of Jacopone da Todi (†1306) in his seventh chapter, 'On holy humility', Oddi quoted a laud by Jacopone which gave voice to the central idea of the mirror conceit. Jacopone proclaimed: 'O life of Jesus Christ, / immaculate mirror, / your perfect state / reflects my sin' (II, 103). Oddi's speculum was likewise intended to edify and reform his confrères, as he explained in his Third Prologue:

This work is called the *Specchio de l'Ordine* because it deals with the marvellous works of St Francis and of his true sons of the Friars Minor, who wanted truly and simply to follow the cruciform and seraphic life of St Francis, in this way clothing themselves in virtue, so that they became to the world shining stars who perfectly illumined anyone who mirrored himself in them, as I will show. (I, 53)

Thus his work was a tool for reflection in both senses: the brothers were to contemplate what they saw there, and also to imitate it, conforming their own reflection to the image they perceived through the looking-glass.

Yet Oddi's mirror also worked in another way. The exemplary mirror described in medieval literature was often a restricted tool, made for individual contemplation only. Oddi's mirror was intended to be used by individuals, but it was also an institutional speculum, as the title makes clear. It reflected the identity of the whole Franciscan Order from an Observant perspective. In the language of medieval Italy, the idea of the mirror symbolised an ideal. Oddi continually used the word *specchio* in his text to signify perfection. Thus Francesco da Pavia's conversation was 'tucto specchio et santità,' and his companion was 'uno specchio de santità et forma ad tucti de la vita spirituale' (I, 146, 151). The title of Oddi's work could thus be translated as 'The Ideal of the Order'. Both the Observant and pre-Observant beati whom Oddi chose to laud personified this Franciscan ideal. In this way, the reader could look into the mirror to recognise the Order's qualities, as formulated by an Observant, reflected in the lives recorded there. A single reader might look into the mirror, but hundreds of faces peered out at him. This sense of an institutional speculum was emphasised by the implicit contrast between Oddi's

Specchio and the *Speculum Perfectionis* (c.1318). Unlike the latter work, which was essentially a character study of the founder with supernatural asides, Oddi's text focused on a host of brothers rather than concentrating on the virtues, however exemplary, of a single man. The use of the mirror-title also explicitly stated the Observant interest in the earliest days of the Franciscan Order and the congregation's desire to imitate the perfection of the primitive life, thus subtly appropriating that past on behalf of the Observant community.¹⁰ Oddi was interested in the Franciscan institution as a whole, from the time of Francis to his own day. He wanted his readers to recognise and refashion themselves not only in the image of an individual, but in the communal identity of the Franciscan Order as it was interpreted by the Observance.

Oddi intended his work to be accessible even to the lowliest brothers, and thus used a beautifully clear and direct Tuscan-Umbrian dialect rather than scholarly Latin. Giovanna Pasqualin Traversa argues that Oddi decided to write in an unaffected vernacular in order to make his work 'an effective instrument of mass communication.'¹¹ This is perhaps a somewhat exaggerated claim. Although his siblings attempted to publish *La Franceschina*, there is no suggestion in the text that Oddi intended his work to be read by anyone other than Franciscans; indeed, he seems to have assumed a predominantly Observant readership if his many references partial to the congregation are taken into account. He divided his work into thirteen chapters, each concerned with a different Franciscan virtue or aspect of the Franciscan life, 'in conformity with the thirteen companions of our glorious seraphic father, Francis' (I, 52-3). To these he added three prologues which sketched the early life of Francis, the ordinances of his Rule and the providential role of the Order in the history of the world. He laid out each chapter rather like a medieval sermon, beginning with a Latin excerpt from the Bible which was immediately translated and explained. Each individual chapter follows a rough internal chronology, offering edifying anecdotes about Francis, his companions and Franciscan beati from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century who epitomised the virtue in question. Oddi often digressed from his intention to laud a specific virtue. Many of the sections on

¹⁰ Edith Pásztor has commented on this aspect of the mirror-title when writing of the rise in the number of such titles under the Observance: 'Solo con l'Osservanza avviene una nuova svolta, fra l'altro anche per le esigenze di una ricerca di identità anche rispetto alla *fraternitas* primitiva, come l'attesta lo stesso recupero del termine *Speculum*, divenuto vero e proprio segno, carico di significati. ... L'uso del termine *Speculum* si rende palese come l'originale rappresentazione abbia conservato il suo valore d'esemplarità.' Pásztor, 'Le fonti biografiche di S. Francesco' in S. Gieben (ed.), *Francesco d'Assisi nella storia* I, p. 16.

individual beati became condensed lives, whilst he limited others to a single line recalling the beatus's name and the fact that he had lived a holy life.¹²

Poverty and the Franciscan Ideal

The chapters devised by Oddi reveal the way in which he constructed his vision of the Observant identity. The first four chapters deal with the principal vows of all religious: retreat from the world, combined with the three-fold vow of obedience, poverty and chastity. The order in which Oddi tackled the principal religious virtues is perhaps significant. As we have already seen, the virtue of obedience was highly valued by the Regular Observance, and Oddi placed the chapter devoted to it immediately after contempt for the world and before poverty, including anecdotes that made clear its pre-eminent position in the Observant hierarchy of virtues, as will be shown below. Yet it seems that Oddi's own heart lay with the virtue of poverty. The chapter on poverty is one of the longest in *La Franceschina*, reflecting its traditional position as the characteristic Franciscan virtue: in it, Oddi wrote of the poverty of seventy-five Franciscan beati to obedience's thirty-nine. He identified the virtue particularly closely with the Observance; Observant beati made up nearly a third of these seventy-five friars. In fact, of the thirty-two lives of Observant beati included in *La Franceschina*, Oddi entered twenty-one under poverty, and only six under obedience. Of the other Observants, two each were entered under chastity and charity, whilst a solitary brother, Paoluccio dei Trinci, was singled out for his contempt for the world.¹³

Those who adhered to the Franciscan vow of poverty considered it to be unique, for it embraced both individual and communal poverty. The way in which Oddi wrote of the virtue reflects this perception, but his work also reveals a certain defensiveness. The title of the chapter on poverty, 'De la madopna et santa povertade sposa del nostro glorioso patre santo Francesco', emphasised the virtue's significance by drawing attention to the traditional personification, heavily influenced by the courtly love traditions of the High

¹¹ Traversa, *La 'Minoritas' francescana*, p. 41.

¹² The chapters run as follows: On contempt for the world; On obedience; On poverty; On chastity; On charity; On prayer; On humility; On patience; On penitence; On virtues in general; On the annihilation of the self; On the punishment of the bad friars who do not observe the Rule; On the reward received by the true friars who observe the Rule.

¹³ On the lives of Observant beati included in *La Franceschina*, see below.

Middle Ages, of poverty as a lady who was to be courted, wedded and obeyed. This theme was common in Franciscan literature and reached its apotheosis in the tract on Francis and Madonna Povertà, *Sacrum Commercium*.¹⁴ There is a touch of defensiveness in Oddi's formulation which is reflected in his introduction to the chapter. Here he listed the benefits of observing poverty and traced its practice back to Christ. He then devoted a long paragraph to further vindication of the virtue:

O happy poverty, which Christ the king and his mother loved so much that [Christ] wished that it would always abide and remain with them, and would hang with him upon the cross! Who, then, will despise such a noble virtue? Who will not wish to love such poverty, and follow in its footsteps? And who will not honour it with their lips? Who will not magnify and exalt it with words? Who will not embrace it with act and with affection? (I, 180)

Such a formulation suggests that Oddi felt that there were indeed those within the Observant congregation who chose not to embrace the virtue as fully as he would wish.

Oddi may also have been reacting against the Observant tendency to emphasise the virtue of obedience over poverty. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries evangelical poverty slowly lost its primary role as a signifier of medieval sanctity. André Vauchez has traced this decline, and comments that by the late fourteenth century, 'the pauper was no longer seen as the human face of Christ, or even as a privileged intercessor with God.'¹⁵ Surveying his own era, the Observant chronicler Bernardino Aquilano also recognised that the role of poverty as the primary symbol of sanctity was waning. In 1456 he wrote, 'Truly, I can say that poverty is less recognized amongst the common people than other virtues, even though it is the virtue that makes man the lord of the universe.'¹⁶ The decline in public recognition of the virtue may have influenced the leaders of the

¹⁴ *Sacrum Commercium* has been the subject of much controversy. It was originally believed to be one of the earliest Franciscan texts. Although seven of its codices are undated, thirteen give the date of its composition as 1227. More recently this dating has been challenged, as scholars have traced the preoccupations of the Spirituals in the text's deep devotion to Lady Poverty. Thus it has more recently been dated to the middle or later thirteenth century. For a very good account of the discussions over the text see Stefano Brufani's introduction in *Sacrum Commercium: sancti Francisci cum domina Paupertate*, ed. S. Brufani, (S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1990), pp. 3-55.

¹⁵ A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. J. Burrell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 396. For an interesting account of the rise of poverty as one of the primary medieval virtues see L.K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, (London: Paul Elek Ltd, 1978). On its decline, see H. Baron, 'Franciscan Poverty and Civic Wealth in Humanist Thought', *Speculum* 13 (1938), pp. 1-37.

¹⁶ Aquilano, *I due Frati Minori*, p. 40.

Observance, who emphasised in their proclamations that the need for poverty could not overshadow the other duties of a good Franciscan. The 1430 *Constitutiones Bernardini* were the most prominent example of this, and their ordinances echoed Bernardino da Siena's public pronouncements. Likewise, in 1431 Giovanni da Capestrano scolded Felipe Berbegal, the Aragonese leader of the Capuciolae, an offshoot of the Spanish Observance which resembled the Fraticelli in its strict interpretation of the Rule, for his excessive veneration of the virtue:

[The Devil] catches in the snare of perverse and stubborn disobedience many wounded souls who through zeal observe poverty and wear a short hooded habit. ... You seem to want to revive the heresy of the Beghards and Beguines, claiming that those who are able to arrive at such a grade of perfection ... are not subject to human obedience, nor bound to any other ecclesiastical precept.¹⁷

Giacomo della Marca once more asserted the lesser status of poverty in his c.1458 tract against the Fraticelli:

The Christian faith is not founded in poverty, as you falsely claim: it is founded in perfect charity, as the blessed Christ himself declared. ... For no rational creature is poorer than the Devil; not just because he lives in hell, but because he has no charity, like you. No-one who bases himself in charity can be harmed. ... As I have told you, the basis for the holy Gospel is not poverty, but holy charity.¹⁸

This last comment becomes particularly illuminating when Oddi's chapter on charity is examined, for Oddi closely identified the virtue with the practice of preaching. Charity was love for one's fellow man: preaching and saving souls was a practical way of showing this love. Thus Giacomo della Marca here contrasted the Fraticelli life of contemplative poverty with the Regular Observance's active preaching vocation and found poverty wanting.

Oddi was a good Regular Observant, and he was aware that the virtue of poverty could no longer be the single cornerstone of the Franciscan life, as the Spirituals had once maintained. He unquestioningly accepted the papal declarations which mitigated the Rule and was exceedingly proud of the Order's noble patrons, popes, bishops and cardinals (I, 40; II, 356-71). The contemporary illustrator of *La Franceschina* followed Regular

¹⁷ Oliger, 'Documenta inedita', pp. 719-20. On Berbegal's movement, which was founded in 1426 to pursue the literal observance of the Rule, and subsequently repudiated the papal declarations, split from the Observance and adopted a short hooded habit, see Nimmo, pp. 612-615; and *An. Min.* XI, 213, xi.

¹⁸ *Dialogus contra Fraticellos*, p. 237.

Observant traditions by portraying the Observant brothers, at least two wearing their characteristic *zoccoli*, piously processing under the very real weight of the yoke of obedience (see Fig. 3). Yet, despite the fact that the Observant leaders and Observant constitutions were distancing the congregation from a strict interpretation of poverty, Oddi venerated the virtue with intense devotion. The example of strict poverty was too deeply ingrained in the traditions of the Order to be entirely displaced, even if it was increasingly becoming an abstract ideal rather than a widely lived reality. When Oddi's work is examined as a whole, poverty is revealed as the enduring key Franciscan virtue. The poverty of every virtuous beatus was noted and approved. Oddi constantly praised those who were so poor they 'wanted nothing but [their] habit, cord and underwear' (I, 217, 398); surely the perfect description of *usus pauper*.¹⁹ In particular, poverty was seen as an essential factor in the Order's apocalyptic role. As we shall see below, Christ was believed to have specified the necessary level of Franciscan poverty and to have promised in return an unparalleled role in world history (I, 29). Oddi ended his passage on Francis's poverty with a heartfelt declaration:

Therefore, by example of the patriarch Francis our glorious father and the founder and observer of this most holy poverty, we happily and readily embrace Madonna Povertà with all our hearts: and so in this way we seek with every thought to fulfil to the utmost that which we have promised to observe. (I, 187)

Whilst poverty was certainly important in Oddi's conception of the Franciscan identity, it was still but one of eleven major virtues. The largest number of brothers, at least seventy-eight in all, were singled out not for their poverty, obedience or chastity, but for patience, a quality which Oddi assigned almost solely to martyrs. This chapter describes a series of horrific deaths patiently endured by Franciscan (but not Observant) brothers, accompanied by gruesome contemporary illustrations which depict their suffering at the hands of remarkably inventive Saracen torturers (see Fig. 4). Such brothers became perfect Franciscans not through their contemplative poverty but through their choice of an active preaching life and the martyrdom to which this choice led.

¹⁹ Oddi's constant use of this phrase echoes Francis's admonition as recorded in the *Spiritual-influenced Speculum Perfectionis* (c.1318): 'My intention is that the friars should possess nothing but a habit, with a cord and undergarment, as the Rule requires.' Habig, p. 1128.

The last two chapters of the *La Franceschina* manuscript, c.1484, are devoted to the good. These chapters are the 'Conventual Franciscans' (Conventualis Franciscani). The name used by Oddi has been used in the 'Conventualis' (I, xv). Although the 'Conventualis' is a part of the 'Conventualis' (I, xv). On the other hand, the 'Conventualis' is a part of the 'Conventualis' (I, xv).



Fig. 3: Illustration from the Porziuncola manuscript of *La Franceschina*, c.1484: The friars under the yoke of obedience. Note that two of the brothers are wearing the characteristic Observant *zoccoli*.

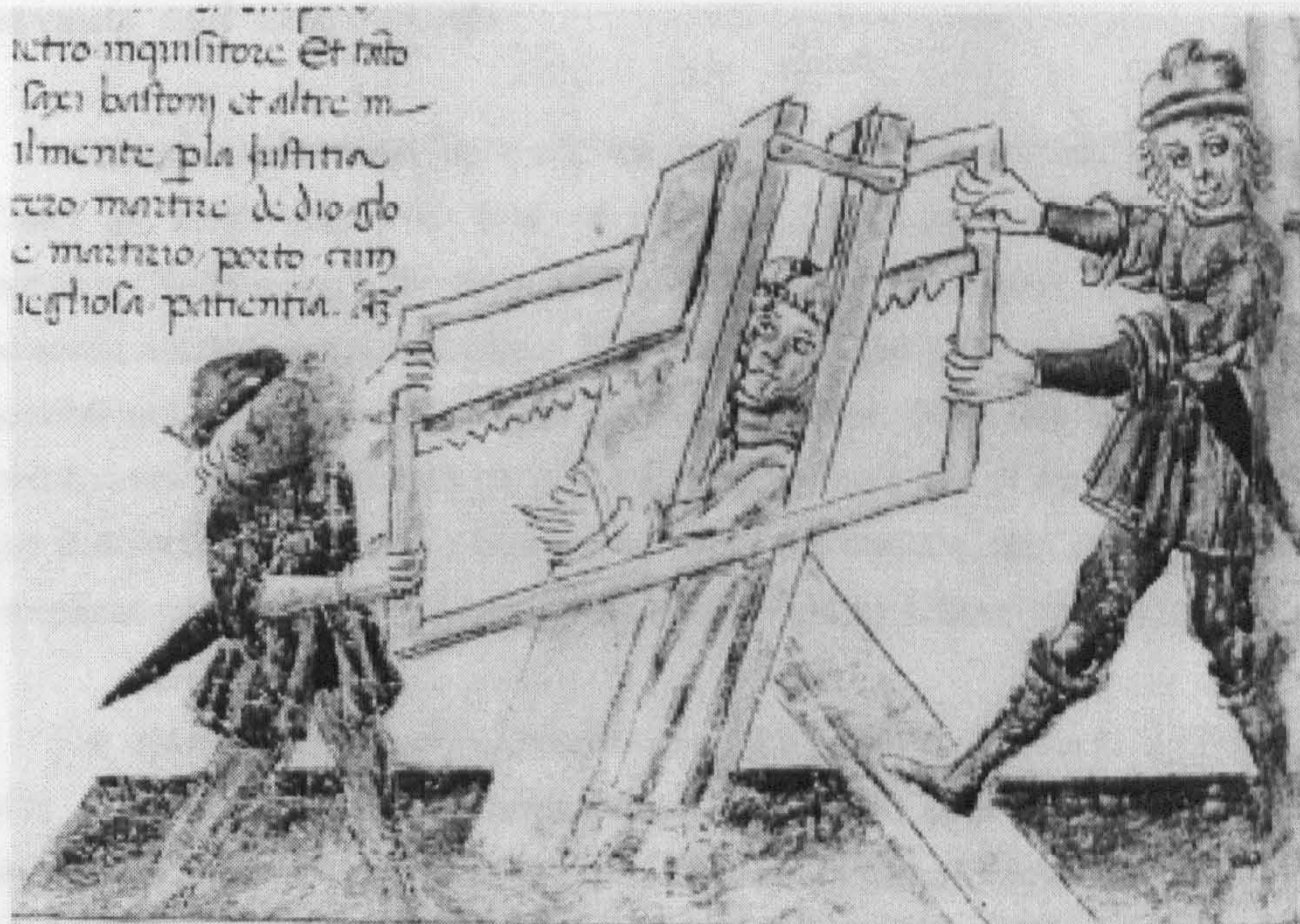
²⁰ Similiter de Capite...
²¹ Quoted in Hoyer, *Chronicle of the Franciscan Order*, p. 109.
²² Quoted in Hoyer, *Chronicle of the Franciscan Order*, p. 109.

The last two chapters of *La Franceschina* offer the most explicit delineation of Oddi's Franciscan ideal, for they deal with the punishment of bad friars and the triumph of the good. These chapters may have been a veiled polemic on the relaxed state of the Conventual Franciscans. Cavanna states in his introduction to *La Franceschina* that the genre used by Oddi has been considered as 'a flowering of partisanship ... with polemical overtones' (I, xv). Although Cavanna criticises this understanding of the work, Oddi's promotion of such a stringent ideal for the Order could certainly be seen as a criticism of laxer Franciscans.²⁰ On the other hand, Oddi was too discreet to criticise the Conventuals openly, and the chapter only uses examples which are based firmly in the past. Yet Oddi also exhibits a kind of sleight of thought in his refusal to recognise that the strictest of his standards were flouted by practically all Franciscans, whether Conventual or Observant. He leant heavily on his sources to define an ideal which the bad friars had failed to live up to; yet many Observants would also have fallen short if judged by the same standards, for these chapters emphasised the kind of literal observance that had been rejected by the Regular Observants in the *Constitutiones Bernardini*.

Despite this fact, those who opposed such a literal interpretation of the Franciscan life were deemed to be 'bad friars who do not observe the Rule, and the persecutors of [the Rule]' (II, 372-3). Contemporary illustrations show devils torturing Franciscan friars for their transgressions of the Rule: accepting money alms, riding on horseback, greedily gobbling food or wearing an extravagant habit (see Fig. 5). Oddi repeated accounts of visions from *De conformitate* in which Francis became an implacable judge who stood before the celestial court to condemn erring friars to the agonies of hell for the sin of owning books (I, 386-7). Such judgements could legitimately have worried many Observants, including some of the congregation's most prominent figures. In 1455 Giovanni da Capestrano had written to the Vicar General Marco da Bologna complaining that he could not return to Italy from Germany because it was so difficult to find enough porters and carts to carry his 'many cases of books, which I cannot do without'.²¹

²⁰ Stanislao da Campagnola detected the same kind of veiled polemic in the *Fioretti*: 'si può credere che lo scrittore, nel tratteggiare queste figure di uomini trasumanati e contemplanti, abbia inteso additare ai frati della comunità, alloggiati in spaziosi edifici e implicati in altercazioni e dispute dottrinali, l'ideale di un *ordo quiescentum* tra l'incanto della natura.' S. da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del sesto sigillo*, p. 309.

²¹ Quoted in Hofer, *Giovanni da Capistrano*, p. 624. Capestrano had been preaching in Germany, Bohemia and Poland for three years when Marco da Bologna requested that he return to Italy in order to aid the Observance in its battle against the Conventuals, as relations between the two sides were reaching crisis point.



Martirio di Antonio di Milano



Fra Geremia e compagni martiri

Fig. 4: Illustrations from the Porziuncola manuscript of *La Franceschina*, c.1484: Martyrdom

Observants and Conventuals

Although Oddi called his work the *Specchio de l'Ordine* and attempted to portray the Order as whole since the time of Francis, *La Franceschina* was written from a distinctively Observant perspective. Oddi was always circumspect, humble and moderate, but he could not hide his sympathies. The chapter on the punishment of bad friars makes the possible polemical use of the work particularly clear. Since the Observance's principal self-justification, stated once more in *La Franceschina*'s life of Paoluccio dei Trinci, was that the Rule was not properly observed by the Conventuals, this chapter could be loaded with implications which would have been understood by Observant readers.

The open hostility to the Conventuals in the life of the Observant Thomà da Firenze (†1447), expanded by an anonymous copyist in c.1484, contrasts with Oddi's reluctance to criticise his fellow Franciscans plainly. The anonymous Observant copyist at Norcia made no bones about his identification with the Observant party. Perhaps the Norcian's open hostility to the Conventuals was due to the growing Observant conviction in the 1470s and 1480s that the Conventuals could never be reformed, and that official separation was the only answer to the travails of the Order. In this period, the arguments of the Observant separatists were strengthened by the Conventual Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484), who issued three successive bulls which endorsed and increased Conventual privileges and allowed the Conventuals to accept legacies and gifts to alleviate their monetary problems.²² Writing of 'the friars of our Family,' the copyist described the decay of the Conventuals who 'were going towards the abyss of relaxation and imperfection' (I, 224). In an inversion of the Conventual claim that the Observance was tainted with Fraticelli doctrine, the Norcian linked the Conventuals and heretics together and accused both groups of diabolically-inspired jealousy and malice towards the Observance:

²² The Conventuals petitioned Sixtus for the release of *Dum fructus uberes* (1472) which allowed the Conventual Minister General to accept all legacies and gifts that were offered to his congregation, and to receive the goods of all friars joining the congregation. This was followed in 1474 by *Regimini universalis ecclesiae*, better known as *Mare magnum*, which reaffirmed the privileges that had been issued to the Order by previous Popes. Finally, *Sacri pradicorum et minorum* (1479), addressed to both Franciscans and Dominicans, once more reaffirmed and extended mendicant privileges, particularly in connection to their relationship with the parochial clergy. The Observance officially refused the privileges offered by the Papacy in these bulls. See Moorman, pp. 487-488.

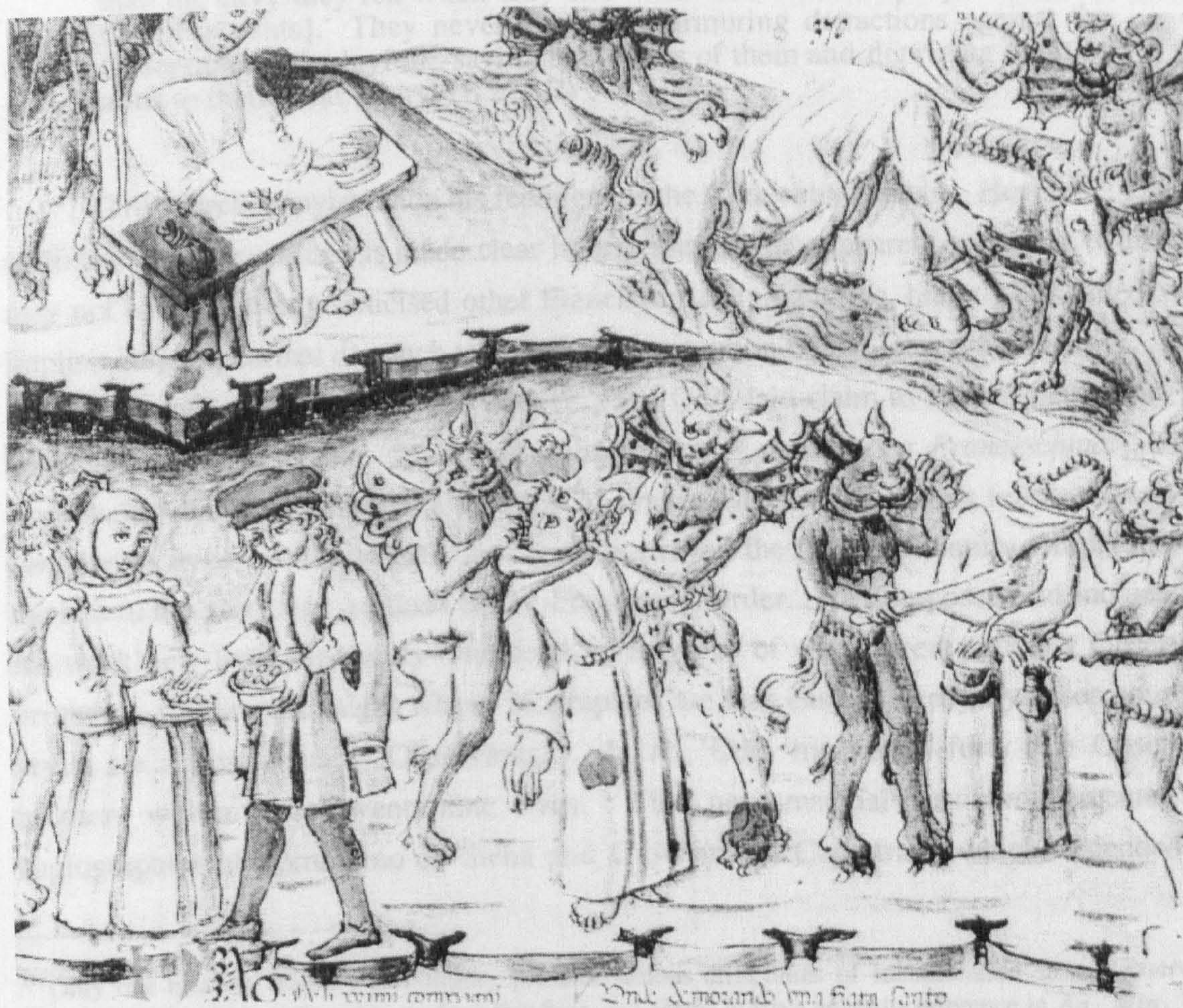


Fig. 5: Illustration from the Porziuncola manuscript of *La Franceschina*, c. 1484:
Punishment

That ancient serpent, hater of all good men, could not abide such sanctity and marvellous perfection. He began to wage war against these perfect men and prepare his traps, setting against [the Observants] the Conventual brothers and even the pestiferous heretics. Indeed, I could not tell of all the insults and injuries that Fra Thomà [da Firenze] and his disciples suffered from them. On the part of the Conventuals this was from nothing more than the envy they felt when they saw what devotion the people had [for the Observants]. They never stopped murmuring detractions against the Observants to the layfolk, saying bad things of them and depriving them of alms to their great injury. (I, 226-7)

The Norcia copyist made his feelings for the Conventuals plain. However, Oddi's attitude to the Conventuals is made clear in less immediately apparent ways for, whilst he may not have explicitly criticised other Franciscan congregations, his work is filled with implicit judgements that do much to reveal his conception of the Observant identity. Like other Observants who wrote of the Order's past, Oddi laid claim to Franciscan history on behalf of his congregation through the simple act of writing *La Franceschina*. More importantly, he also claimed the tradition of Franciscan sanctity for his fellow Observant *veri fratres minores*. He unself-consciously portrayed the fifteenth-century Observance as the heir to the glorious traditions of the Franciscan Order. He composed and included in his work new lives for twenty-nine beati, twenty-one of whom were certainly Observant brothers. Of the other eight whose biographies are less easy to verify by other sources, seven are almost certainly Observants.²³ In all, Oddi mentioned forty-two Observant brothers within these twenty-nine lives. This new material was complemented by hagiographies of Bernardino da Siena and Giovanni da Capestrano which depended on

²³ Only one brother, Martino da Foligno, presents serious difficulties of identification as an Observant. Cavanna declared himself unable to place this friar, and seems to have missed a reference in *An. Min.* VIII, 104, ii, where Wadding alludes to a 'frate Martino laico Fulginate' as Gentile da Spoleto's right-hand man [*coadjutore*]. Cavanna identified the new lives composed by Oddi as follows: In Chapter One, 'On contempt for the world': Paoluccio dei Trinci (I, 85-9). In Chapter Two, 'On obedience': Francesco da Pavia (I, 140-170); Filippo da Todi (I, 170-3); Gabriele d'Ancona (I, 173-4); Anastagio da Milano (I, 174); Sante da Montebaccio (I, 174-5); and Pietro da Sanseverino (I, 175). In Chapter Three, 'On poverty': Thomà da Firenze (I, 215-249); Angelo da Monteleone (I, 250); Giovanni da Stroncone (I, 250-1); Giovanni da Norcia, Savino da Campello, Giovanni Tedesco, Cristoforo da Pavia, Pietro da Perugia and Paolo d'Assisi (all I, 251); Marco da Bergamo, Benedetto da Camerino, Gabriele da Spoleto, Francesco da Firenze, Giovanni da Perugia, Antonio da Todi and Bartolomeo da Giano (all I, 252); Nofrio da Seggiano (I, 253); Giovanuccio da Valterranò (I, 253-5); Pietro da Rieti (I, 255); and Giovanni Buonvisi da Lucca (I, 255-6). In Chapter Four, 'On chastity': Antonio da Stroncone (I, 397-410). Finally, in Chapter Five, 'On charity': Martino da Foligno (I, 523-4). See *La Franceschina*, Introduction, I, p. xli.

earlier sources. Thus fifteenth-century Observant beati were shown to fit smoothly into the traditions and history of the Order. Even the structure of *La Franceschina* supports this claim, for the lack of an orderly chronological narrative tying together the individual chapters increases the impression of the Order since its inception as a great whole into which the Observance was fully integrated.

In contrast, the fifteenth-century Conventuals were allotted no place in Oddi's portrait of Franciscan sanctity. No contemporary Conventual beati were honoured with a place in *La Franceschina* apart from the Ministers General who were briefly mentioned in Oddi's continuation of Arnaldus de Sarnano's *Chronica XXIV Generalium* (II, 345-7). Indeed, Oddi seems to have been unwilling to mention the Conventuals in any way at all. He made only passing references to the difficult relationship between the two parties in the fifteenth century, and was reluctant to name the Conventuals outright. For instance, the Observant beatus Francesco da Pavia performed miracles that protected the Family against 'the obstacles and maulings of those who howled and barked against his devoted Family,' but these beast-like wrongdoers were never openly identified as the Conventuals who petitioned the Curia for the repeal of *Ut sacra* (I, 155). This process of excising the fifteenth-century Conventuals from Franciscan history is all the more interesting for being so unself-consciously straightforward. Oddi simply depicted the Order as he saw it, and it is surely significant that his only representatives of fifteenth-century sanctity came from the Observance. Oddi may not even have recognised this position as being controversial. He merely assumed that his own congregation was the true and sole heir to the Franciscan tradition.²⁴

In fact, the miracles of Francesco da Pavia give an extremely important insight into this belief. In the first of these miracle stories, Francesco was commanded by Giacomo Primadizzi, the Vicar General of the Observance from 1446^{to}_^1449, to beg God to 'conserve this poor little Family' and show it how to hold firm against repeated attacks from the unnamed Conventuals. After much prayer, Francesco received a vision in which he heard a voice speaking to him in the words that Christ had first spoken to St Francis himself:

²⁴ This assumption was shared by the various contemporary illustrators of *La Franceschina* who often portrayed Francis wearing the wooden *zoccoli* which were the widely-recognised institutional symbol of the

Why do you weep, my poor little Francesco? Did you make this Family? I made it and I placed you in it as a shepherd in a field. Don't worry about those who don't wish to live well, for I don't care for them. This Order will always have friars of good will, and when the good are lacking, I shall send more.

Now Francesco saw a great wheel. A friar was told, 'Turn this wheel, and send downwards those who are against the good life of the [Observant] Family,':

And the friar did so, and so the wheel was turned to fulfil all our needs. ... This blessed Francesco heard a voice which said, 'In your hands, in your hands.' And by this he understood that this wheel was in the hands of the Family, so that they could turn it for their aid. ... By this revelation it was understood how much the Lord has a particular care for this holy Family, as long as it remains humble and lowly. (I, 156)

This vision gives a fascinating insight into the way that the institutional self-image of the Observance developed during the conflict with the Conventuals, hardening the Observant tendency to view itself as an institutionally separate community with greater right to the Franciscan inheritance.

The vision is also extraordinary on at least two counts. Firstly, Christ's proclamation that he would be active in the history of the Franciscan Order, a paraphrase of a passage first recounted in Tomasso da Celano's *Second Life of Francis* (c.1247), was addressed with deliberate parallelism to 'Francesco', the name of both founder and follower. Thus the words simultaneously had both a historical and a contemporary meaning. Oddi's readers knew that Christ had first spoken them to St Francis when the founder was distressed and disturbed by the lukewarm brothers who were becoming prominent in the Order during the 1220's. Yet now Oddi showed Christ addressing the same words to Francesco da Pavia in the 1440's and seeming to address the Observance in particular, for he used the name by which the Observance was commonly known ('Did you make this Family?'), rather than the more usual and inclusive terms 'Order' or 'brotherhood'.²⁵ Thus the Observants filled two roles. In prophetic terms they were the

Observant congregation. A fascinating appendix of these illustrations is included at the end of Cavanna's edition of the work.

²⁵ The original source for this passage, Tomasso da Celano's *Vita secunda*, uses the term 'Order': 'Cur tu, homuncio, conturbaris? An ego te super *religionem meam* sic pastorem constitui, ut me principalem nescias esse patronum' (italics mine). Fr. Thomae de Celano, *Vita secunda S. Francisci* in *AF* 10, 'Legendae S. Francisci Assisiensis', Collegio S. Bonaventura (Florence: Quaracchi, 1926-1941), Ch. 117, p. 222. Oddi's main source, Bartolomeo da Pisa's 'De Conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu', *AF* 4-5 (1906, 1912), repeats the same term (Tom IV, Fructus IX, Pars Secunda, p. 428). Oddi's

brothers whom Christ had promised Francis he would send in a future which had now finally arrived. Simultaneously, in contemporary terms the Observants had revived Francis's primitive brotherhood and were now promised in their turn that Christ would protect them and send them new converts.

The miracle, therefore, explicitly identified Christ with the Observance, and had the Saviour implicitly repudiate the unnamed Conventuals as 'those who don't want to live well'. The Observants' position as the favoured sons of Francis was made even more clear in the vision of the wheel of grace that followed, in which the Observance was given divine power to confound its enemies. It was commonplace for Franciscans to feel themselves especially beloved of God, for the literature of the Order tended to emphasise the role of Christ in planting and directing the Franciscan life. The same passage in which Christ reassures Francis of his care for the Order was widely disseminated and very well known, for it was first written by Celano, and then included in Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior* (1263), the Spiritual-influenced *Legenda Perusina* (c.1311) and *Speculum Perfectionis* (c.1318), and Bartolomeo da Pisa's *De conformitate* (1385-1399), whilst Christ was also said to have dictated the Rule and detailed every aspect of the Franciscan way of life to the founder.²⁶ Oddi himself transcribed many of these Christocentric traditions in his Prologues, which will be examined more closely below. Yet in Francesco da Pavia's vision, the Observants were the sole recipients of Christ's concern. The Conventuals were not honoured with the chance to control the wheel of grace; indeed, they were implicitly identified as the wrongdoers who were sent downward at Francesco da Pavia's order.

Christ's love for the Observant brothers gave the congregation powers beyond mortal comprehension which could be used against anyone who insulted or opposed the Family. Francesco later used the same wheel to advance the canonization of Bernardino da Siena in 1450. Saddened by the reluctance of the Pope and Cardinals to inscribe Bernardino's name in the list of saints, Francesco prayed fervently to God. Once more he received a vision of the wheel, and heard God's voice telling him to use it to influence those who opposed the canonization:

choice 'fameglia' to translate this word suggests that he did indeed take the voice to mean the Observance rather than the Franciscan Order as a whole.

'Take it, Francesco. This is the wheel of grace. Turn it and spin it towards the Pope and the Cardinals who are against the canonization of Fra Bernardino.' And then the blessed Francesco was not slow, but quickly spun the wheel of grace towards their hearts. And once he had spun the wheel, everything changed, and those who were once against [the canonization] were now favourable. The Pope was filled with more of this grace than the Cardinals, so that they all came to agreement immediately. They named the time and the day, and the canonization was carried out. (I, 160)

These miracles re-told the recent history of the Order from the Observant perspective. In Francesco's visions, the Observants were at once victims of worldly persecution and yet also endowed with a divine strength that enabled them to overcome every obstacle. The visions presented the Observants with a separate institutional identity that was divinely inspired and nurtured by Christ, and so strong in its simplicity and humility as to be able to win out against the sophistries of both Conventuals and Curia.

The Order's Providential Role

The theme of Christ's care for his Franciscan sons was extremely important to Oddi's depiction of his Order's mythologised past and providential future. He detailed these aspects of the Franciscan self-perception in three prologues which introduce *La Franceschina*. The First Prologue concentrates upon the prophecies that foretold the coming of Francis and the Franciscans, along with the role that the Order would play in the Apocalypse. The Second Prologue focuses upon Francis's role as *alter Christus* and the important part played by Christ in directing the Order's ideology and activity. The Third Prologue draws comparisons between the disciples of Christ and of Francis, and explains the structure and title of the work. Thus Oddi gave full vent to traditions which had developed in the Order since the mid-thirteenth century. Although much of the text in these prologues was copied verbatim from the works of Bartolomeo da Pisa and Angelo Clareno, Oddi obviously believed that these themes were extremely significant, for he placed them in a prominent position at the very beginning of his work. Moreover, Oddi's conception of his Order's providential function is markedly different from the providential duties ascribed to Bernardino da Siena by the Observants who preached on the new saint. Whilst Bernardino was believed to have received his role through his preaching vocation,

²⁶ See 'Major Life of St Francis by St Bonaventure' in Habig, ch. VIII, n.3, p. 690; 'Legend of Perugia', ch. 85, p. 1061; 'Mirror of Perfection', ch. 81, p. 1212; and Bartolomeo da Pisa, 'De conformitate', p.428.

Oddi followed earlier *zelante* and Spiritual Franciscan traditions in associating an apocalyptic role almost exclusively with the virtue of poverty.

The pre-eminent role that Francis played in the mythology of his Order is made particularly clear in these prologues. The status of the father reflected on his sons. Oddi used the figure of the founder to justify and vindicate his Order, and perhaps, in narrower terms, to justify the Observance. For, whilst Oddi never directly stated that these prophecies would be fulfilled solely by the Observance, we have seen that the Observants believed themselves to be the rightful heirs to the founder. When Francis bequeathed a providential role to his 'true sons', it is likely that the Observants saw themselves, and not the Conventuals, as the recipients of this high honour. This interpretation is bolstered by the way in which Oddi, copying his sources faithfully, made poverty the essential factor in the Order's eschatological role. In their public disputes with the Conventuals, the Observants made the defence of communal poverty one of their major polemical points. We saw in Chapter Four how the Observant polemicists presented their congregation as the party of poverty and attacked the Conventuals for accepting papal privileges such as the bull *Ad statum* of 1430 which allowed them to retain property and rents. Thus, they publicly identified themselves as the true heirs to Francis's legacy in all its aspects. This interpretation adds piquancy to the prophecies recorded by Oddi.

The main themes running through the Prologues are the ideas of Francis as Angel of the Sixth Seal and *alter Christus*, and how these roles transmitted a particular providential importance to his Order.²⁷ In the First Prologue, Oddi copied a series of prophecies concerning the coming of Francis and the Franciscan Order which Bartolomeo da Pisa had already noted in *De conformitate*. Oddi wrote of Francis's prefiguration in both the Old and New Testaments and compared the founder to a long list of Biblical figures including Adam, Noah, Moses, John the Baptist and most of the Apostles (I, 5). In particular, he drew attention to the celebrated passage in Revelations 7:2 which foresaw the opening of the Sixth Seal: 'I saw a second angel ascending in the east, having the seal of the living God.' This passage had been associated with Francis since the mid-thirteenth century. Bonaventura himself had drawn the same comparison in his *Legenda Maior* (1263) in which he meditated upon Francis's mission and his stigmata (the 'seal of the

²⁷ For an examination of these themes, which fascinated the Franciscans from the thirteenth century onward, see S. da Campagnola, *L'Angelo del sesto sigillo e l'Alter Christus*.

living God'), concluding: 'Therefore there is every reason to believe that it is he who is referred to under the image of the Angel coming up from the east.'²⁸ This identification had been the crux of Franciscan apocalyptic beliefs. It strengthened the assumption, particularly common amongst the Spirituals, that the Order was operating in the last phase of world history. For, as Oddi went on to note, Francis had opened the Sixth Seal 'in the time of Emperor Frederick II' (1210-1250) (I, 7): thus the world was surely nearing its end.

Francis also bequeathed an apocalyptic role to his Order. Oddi cited the authority of the controversial Joachim of Fiore (†1202) on this point. Before referring Joachim's prophecy of an 'Order of the Dove' (the Franciscans in their ash-coloured habit) and an 'Order of the Crow' (the Dominican blackfriars) who would usher in the Last Days with their preaching, Oddi was careful to point out that Joachim's works were in fact approved by the Church. He continued:

Speaking of Francis and his Order, [Joachim] said; 'There will be two men ... (which is interpreted as two Orders) ... the first a dove and the second a crow. ... The Order of the Dove will endure right to the end, that is, to the day of Judgement. ... This Order will convert many people to the Lord; idolatrous folk whose language we don't understand who will come from the ends of the earth. ... There will come a time when it will fight powerfully to the death against the Antichrist by preaching against him, and many multitudes of that Order will pass over to God by the way of martyrdom.' (I, 10-11)

The image of the Order of the Dove was also used to emphasise Franciscan obedience to the Church and papacy, for Oddi declared that, like the dove that Noah sent out from the ark, the Franciscans would return to the bosom of the Church bearing the palm of victory (I, 15).

Thus the Franciscans had been selected by God to play a pivotal role in the history of the world. Because of the Order's importance, Oddi believed that it was divinely protected from persecution by the forces of Satan, 'for the Lord visits the said Order, and conserves and governs it in its trials and needs' (I, 11). Christ's interest in the Franciscans was in great part to do with the identification of Francis as *alter Christus*. In his second prologue Oddi made much of the Franciscan conviction of an extraordinarily close relationship between Christ and the founder, and by extension his Order. Following

²⁸ Habig, p. 632.

Franciscan traditions which had been especially dear to the Spirituals, Oddi showed Christ to be involved in every aspect of the creation and growth of the Franciscan Order. He described how Christ loved Francis with especial care, for the founder 'seemed a new Christ come into the world with his holy apostles, full of the Holy Spirit' (I, 16). Oddi also followed tradition in asserting that Christ had dictated the Rule to Francis. Indeed, he diverged from the evidence of his sources to provide a long newly-composed speech in which Christ exhorted the founder, 'Take this book from my hand. ... This is the form and life to which I and my disciples held' (I, 16), thus reinforcing the belief of the *zelantes*, repudiated in the *Constitutiones Bernardini*, that the Rule was synonymous with the Gospels. In Oddi's prologues, Christ's intercession in the development of the Order was direct, personal, and supportive of the *zelantes*.

Oddi went so far as to posit a fascinating triple relationship between the Order and Christ. Firstly, Francis had become conformed to Christ through his stigmata: '[Christ] appeared to him in the shape of a crucifix and in this way he transformed Francis into himself' (I, 16). Thus the Order, like Francis, also conformed to Christ through the evangelical life that he had bequeathed to the Order of the *christo novello*: 'Whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever persecutes and despises you, despises me also' (I, 20). In a second image, Francis's followers were the sons of Christ - 'They will be my sons and I shall be their father' (I, 20) - who were guided and chastised by the Saviour and attempted to live the Franciscan life as he showed them. Yet the Order was also destined to fulfil a third, truly remarkable role. It was to become a second mother to Christ during the last phases of worldly history:

This Order has been chosen to conceive spiritually and give birth to Christ in the shelter of the Church during the Last Days, like another inspired Virgin Mary. (I, 29)²⁹

Thus Oddi's vision for the Franciscan Order extended far beyond the limited chronological frame of his work. Foreseen thousands of years before their existence, Francis and his followers were prefigured in the Old Testament and the life of Christ. Similarly, the Order's role went beyond the fifteenth century and reached into a providential future in which the Franciscans would openly wield their divine authority. Such a vision could not

²⁹ This motif was also used by Giacomo della Marca in his Latin sermon on S. Bernardino in which he praised the saint's preaching talent: 'erat quasi mater parturiendo Christo animas, et nullus poterat resistere nobili virtuti sue gratiose lingue.' This theme may have been connected to Bernardino's role in the sermon as an Angel of the Apocalypse. See Pacetti, 'Giacomo della Marca: *De S. Bernardino*', p. 82.

but fire the brothers with a sense of pride in the unparalleled importance of their chosen Family.

Oddi's Historical Self-Consciousness

As well as presenting an Observant vision of the Order's mythologised past and providential future, Oddi also used *La Franceschina* to create an ideologically acceptable lineage for the Observance which would simultaneously support the congregation whilst promoting it as the true heir to the Franciscan ideal. Although Stanislao da Campagnola claimed that Oddi's ambition was 'to revive and maintain the arguments of the Spirituals, showing that they corresponded to the primitive Franciscan ideal,'³⁰ Oddi was particularly careful to make very little mention of the past tribulations of the Order and avoided any reference to the controversies surrounding the Spirituals and their policy of *usus pauper*. This is interesting, for as a native of Perugia he could not have failed to be aware of the deep divisions suffered by his Order in the fourteenth century which continued to influence fifteenth-century brothers. Umbria had been a centre of Spiritual and Fraticelli activity, and remained so even into the fifteenth century. The region continued to support a thriving culture of official orders and unrecognized sects which were influenced by the ethos of primitive and Spiritual Franciscanism, including the remnants of Angelo Clareno's order of hermits.³¹

Oddi was extremely circumspect when dealing with the fractured past of the Franciscans. He was careful to smooth over the cracks of history; in particular, he never referred to the Spiritual controversies. Chapter ten, 'On holy virtues in general', comprises a brief history of the Order based around the Generalates of Franciscan Ministers from Francis to Zanetto da Udine (1469-1475). Amazingly, when writing of Michele da Cesena (†1342), the Minister who had refused to accept John XXII's condemnation of Franciscan evangelical poverty, Oddi contrived not to give any hint that Michele had sensationally fled to Germany in 1328 and continued his campaign against the Pope from the safety of the Imperial court. He merely commented that Michele 'governed the Order in great peace for twelve years' (II, 340). Likewise, he did not record the lives of any Spirituals, only figures from the early *zelante* wing of the Order, such as Hugues

³⁰ S. da Campagnola, *Le origine francescane*, pp. 90-91.

³¹ Sensi, *Le Osservanze Francescane*, pp. 147-170.

de Digne (†1254/7) (I, 214-5), Giovanni da Parma (†1289) (II, 319-27), and Corrado da Offida (†1306) (I, 350-8), who all enjoyed reputations for sanctity that were relatively untainted by their zeal for Spiritual ideals; as well as Jacopone da Todi, whose fame as a poet outshone his notoriety as a rigid opponent of clerical wealth (II, 85-156).

Although Oddi was undoubtedly well-read in Angelo Clareno's fiercely polemical *Historia de septem tribulationem*, little of Clareno's Spiritual interpretation of the Franciscan past was allowed to seep into *La Franceschina*.³² One of the most obvious of Oddi's evasions comes in the life of Giovanni da Parma. Describing Giovanni's Generalate, Oddi omitted any references to his deposition from office over his controversial belief in the Joachite prophecies surrounding the Order. He also ignored Giovanni's subsequent trial of 1257, presided over by the new Minister General, Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, at which the former Minister was sentenced to life imprisonment (later commuted to a life of retirement at Greccio). More importantly, Oddi repeated a vision involving Giovanni da Parma but significantly altered its meaning, thus rejecting its radical intent. The vision had been received by Fra Giacomo da Massa and had previously been detailed in Clareno's *Historia septem tribulationem* (c.1320), the *Actus beati Francisci* (c.1327-42) and its vernacular translation, the *Fioretti* (c.1370-1385). The original vision was of a tree which bore Franciscan brothers as fruit. Christ decided to test the Order and sent Francis to offer a chalice to each brother. Those who drank from it fully shone like the sun; those who drank only part or refused it, 'became dark and black and deformed and horrible to see, like devils.' Giovanni drank fully but Bonaventura, his successor, spilled part, and then usurped Giovanni's place at the top of the tree:

And when he was in that place, the nails of his fingers turned to iron and became sharp and cutting as razors. And leaving his place, he wanted to attack Fra Giovanni with rage and fury, to hurt him. (II, 325-6)

Francis was sent by Christ to cut Bonaventura's nails, and after this Christ sent a howling wind which felled the tree. Those who had drunk fully from the chalice were borne to heaven; the others were carried off to hell by devils.³³ In dramatising the dispute between the Spirituals and the moderate Bonaventuran Community, the vision transparently evokes the Spiritual sense of persecution and election. Yet Oddi crucially altered its meaning. In

³² For Oddi's dependence on Clareno, see Traversa, *La 'Minoritas' francescana*, pp. 59-63.

³³ For a full account of this vision, see 'The Little Flowers of St Francis' in Habig, pp. 1412-1414.

transcribing it he chose to omit any mention of Bonaventura's supposed treachery, transforming the vision from a very specific polemical thrust into a timeless moral exemplum.

This vision was to prove important in Oddi's conception of the Observant position within the Franciscan order. In Chapter Three we saw that Stanislao da Campagnola has argued that Oddi and the other historians of the Observance, 'do not reveal any awareness of an authentic break within Franciscan history with the advent of the Observant reform.'³⁴ However, Giovanna Pasqualin Traversa has pointed out that Oddi was well aware of the tensions within his congregation, and intended his work to draw Franciscan brothers back towards the primitive traditions of the Order.³⁵ I would argue that Oddi was conscious of the Observance as a new movement which initiated a new phase of Franciscan history. It is certainly true that Oddi attempted to create a portrait of the Order from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, so that the *beati* tend to merge into a single timeless mass. However, his creation of a controlled version of the past that supported the claims of the Observance led him not only to portray the congregation as a fulfilment of Franciscan tradition, but also as an innovation that was set apart from the normal run of Franciscan history.

Because he included the life of Paoluccio dei Trinci in his work, Oddi was forced to confront the origins of the Observant movement. In fact, Oddi used personal testimonies from his fellow brothers to make much of Paoluccio as a second founder of the Order, symbolically placing his life at the very beginning of *La Franceschina*. Paoluccio is honoured in the first chapter on contempt for the world. It is the only chapter not to extol the virtues of a host of brothers: it contains only the lives of Francis and Paoluccio. The first Observant was thus implicitly compared to the founder. He was shown despairing over the standards of the fourteenth-century Order. Earnestly wishing 'to follow in the footsteps of his glorious father St Francis ... he became bitterly aggrieved [*multo stava amaricato nella mente sua*], for it seemed to him that he was not fully observing those things which he had promised in the Rule' (I, 85-6). Oddi recorded Paoluccio's retreat to the hermitage of Brugliano. There, through his sanctity and perseverance, 'this Family, blessed by God, grew up and was founded' (I, 87). The

³⁴ S. da Campagnola, *Le origine francescane*, p. 89.

³⁵ Traversa, *La 'Minoritas' francescana*, pp. 39-40.

genesis of the Observance was retold to give the congregation unimpeachable credentials. Oddi made no reference to earlier reforming endeavours. He recorded the virtues of Giovanni della Valle but made no reference to his attempts to nourish the literal observance at Brugliano between 1334 and his death in 1351 (I, 191). He also discreetly bypassed the embarrassing dissolution of Gentile da Spoleto's congregation in 1355, though he must have known about this ill-fated attempt at reform not only through oral traditions, but also through the account preserved in one of his principal sources, the *Historia XXIV Generalium* of Arnaldus de Sarnano.³⁶

This reformulation of the advent of the Observance in fact served to make its genesis even more dramatic. Oddi used *La Franceschina* to assimilate Observant virtues and ideals to those of the primitive Order, so that the congregation became fully integrated into a timeless and dehistoricised pattern of Franciscan ideology. However, as he made no references to earlier Franciscan reforms, his community's reforming ethos was cut adrift from its historical anchorage. The Spiritual and primitive Observant antecedents of the congregation were lost and Paoluccio became a radical second founder whose separatist reform had no equivalent within the Order. This perception that the advent of the Observance began a new phase in Franciscan history was increased by Oddi's appropriation of Giacomo da Massa's Spiritual vision which had looked towards a radical reformation of the Order. Thus he described Paoluccio's congregation as a new shoot which sprang from the dead tree of the Franciscan Order:

Since the time of St Francis to now there has never been a friar in this Order who brought forth such good fruit on this earth as [Paoluccio]. And it seemed that he fulfilled the holy brother's vision of the tree of religion, in which the tree was ruined by the whirling of the wind. But soon afterwards he saw in the said vision that from the root of that tree was reborn a tiny shoot or little sapling and in a short time it grew high and became a great tree, as will be told below. (I, 89)

Here the Observance was presented as the Order reborn, untainted by the controversies and failures of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.³⁷ It was simultaneously rooted in the Rule of St Francis and a new growth of Franciscanism. Incidentally, Oddi's last words show once more that he intended *La Franceschina* to assimilate a specifically

³⁶ See Chapter Three, note 45.

³⁷ Oddi's statement calls to mind Giovanni da Capestrano's assertion that, through their renewal of the Franciscan life, the Observants seemed almost like phoenixes rising from the ashes of the Order. See Giovanni da Capestrano, 'S. Bernardini Senensis ordinis seraphici minorum vita', p. xxxviii.

Observant identity into the glorious past of the Order, for he envisioned his work as an illustration of the growth of this little Observant sapling. Thus the life of Paoluccio dei Trinci suggests that Oddi was well aware of a change in the Order brought about by the Observance. His uneasy awareness of the community as a new phenomenon may even have played a part in his decision to write *La Franceschina*. Novelty was not a quality greatly valued in the Middle Ages, and, as we have seen, one of the principal Conventual criticisms of the Observants was that they had broken from their Order to found a new religious congregation. Thus *La Franceschina* supported the Observance by laying claim to its Franciscan heritage and bolstering it with the authority of tradition and history.

Observant Beati

This process was reinforced by Oddi's inclusion of thirty-one Observant beati in his work (twenty-nine in newly composed lives) and the complete and unapologetic exclusion of fifteenth-century Conventuals from this communal representation of Franciscan sanctity. The presence of Observant beati brought Oddi's portrait of the Franciscan ideal into his own lifetime. Many of the beati were the subject of recent cults: Francesco da Pavia had died in 1450, Antonio da Stroncone in 1461, and Giovanni Buonvisi da Lucca in 1472, only two years before *La Franceschina* was completed. In fact, at least sixteen of the thirty-one beati died after the 1440s, when Oddi first entered the Observance. Nearly all seem to have had close links with the Observant convents of central Italy: most were recorded as having lived or died at houses in Umbria and the Marches. Oddi was thus able to rely on his own personal knowledge and on trusted eyewitness accounts from his fellow brethren. The names of all but two of these beati (Filippo, buried at Castel di Miro, and Giovanni Tedesco) were later set down in the *Martyrologium Franciscanum*, many presumably because of the evidence of *La Franceschina* itself. However, most of Oddi's Observant beati enjoyed a restricted reputation for sanctity, with their cults usually recognised only within the Order and perhaps in the town in which they were buried. Only two, Bernardino da Siena and Giovanni da Capestrano, were canonised; in 1450 and 1690 respectively.

Oddi dealt with some of the Observant beati in the briefest of terms, merely including a line to record their sanctity and where their relics rested. He gave others much more attention. These fuller lives repay close examination, for they offer an insight into

the way in which the ideals and identity of the Observance were shaped and communicated. In Oddi's passages on Observant beati, Mariano d'Alatri discerned an important aspect of Observant development:

Even though one may not yet speak of a post-Observant Franciscanism, nevertheless the pages of *La Franceschina* testify to a dramatic divide between the Observance as it had been up to the 1420s and as it was at the close of the century.³⁸

Oddi's beati, most of whom lived through the central period of Observant development during the middle years of the fifteenth century, found themselves at the cross-roads of the Observant way of life. Many had entered a brotherhood that held up *imitatio Francisci* as the primary Observant virtue, but found themselves living in a congregation which increasingly emphasised the values of moderation, education and the active life. Their lives show them struggling to accommodate the contradictions inherent in these 'two souls'.

This conflict is best illustrated in the life of Francesco da Pavia, which constitutes one of the longest and most interesting of Oddi's original *vite*. Oddi began by recording his own links to the beatus: Francesco's miraculous embrace had healed Oddi's master, Domenico da Genova, of a terrifying demonic possession which had prevented him from saying mass (I, 164). Oddi cited the testimony of a number of Francesco's companions and in 1450 he even travelled specially to the house of Monteluco near Spoleto to be present at the beatus's death-bed:

On my journey, I was told many things about this blessed Francesco by an old and trustworthy father. ... I was present when all the venerable fathers gathered [in the cell] where this beatus was gravely ill. A short time before the beatus passed over to the Lord, the Vicar, like a man illuminated by God, secretly commanded him that through holy obedience he must reveal any secret thing in his life since his entry into the Observance, for this would bring honour and praise to God, and would edify the brethren. This blessed son of obedience was somewhat disturbed when he heard this order, but nevertheless he revealed many things, some of which we have repeated in this work. (I, 169)

Francesco da Pavia lived a life that adhered closely to the standards of primitive Franciscanism. In the world he had been a military man, married and well-off, but he began to receive visions of Christ and the devil disputing for his soul and finally heard a

³⁸ d'Alatri, 'Le due anime dell'Osservanza', p. 6.

divine voice ordering him to join the 'order of the blind', the Observance: 'Giving away his worldly goods, for he was very rich, he took up the habit of the Friars Minor. ... Thus for the love of God he voluntarily made himself blind to all worldly and transitory things' (I, 143). Francesco loved poverty with all his heart. Oddi showed him spurning Bernardino's carefully formulated *usus moderatus* in favour of an *usus pauper* that denied him all but the absolute necessities: 'he wished for nothing under heaven but for his habit, cord and his underpants. Even when he was old and ill his superior could never get him to use anything extra for his needs' (I, 145). He avoided company and prayed continually in the woods or his cell, telling those who asked for his advice that they should flee from their confrères (I, 145-6). He humbly chose to remain in minor orders despite his learning:

Although he was asked to become a priest, he was so humble that he never wanted to rise to such a status and felt unworthy of it. Instead, he always remained a cleric without holy orders. ... And though he was lettered he never showed his learning either in deeds or words. He never wanted any book apart from a little one in which were written certain spiritual things for his devotion. ... He did humble and base domestic duties with great promptness, cheerfulness and much charity: washing the bowls and clothes, sweeping the house, bringing water and firewood to the kitchen, washing the brothers' feet and going for alms. (I, 145-6)³⁹

This was the pattern of a primitive Franciscan. Francesco's practises remained anchored in the traditions of the Literal Observance, but the development of his beliefs, as recounted by Oddi, illustrate the evolution of the Observant congregation during the mid-fifteenth century.

Francesco lived an itinerant life, which had become increasingly uncommon by the mid-Quattrocento as Observant legislators issued statutes discouraging it.⁴⁰ His wandering led him across the path of Fra Lancelao Unghero (†1445), another Observant who was also journeying in search of the true observance of the Rule:

³⁹ It is interesting to note that seeking alms, the foundation of Francis's vision for his order of paupers, was felt by Oddi to be a 'base' duty suitable only for lesser brothers.

⁴⁰ It was common for Observant constitutions to legislate against *gyrovaghi* who lived an itinerant life or left their convents without the approval of their superiors. The 1457 statutes of Tuscany ordered of the Vicars, 'che non mandino frati fuori della sua provincia, nè li custodi fuori della sua custodia, nè li guardiani fuori della sua cercha sença necessità o vero evidente utilità, assignandoli el termine infra el quale debbino ritornare.' The statutes of the 1451 Chapter General of Barcelona ordered that Observant brothers who went from province to province without licence should be sent back to their original house and imprisoned. See Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia Thusciae 1457 et 1518', p. 158; idem, 'Statuta generalia an. 1451 Barcinonae', p. 138.

[Lancelao] was always intent upon trying to observe the Rule of the Friars Minor as purely and devoutly as he could, as he had vowed. Amongst his many virtues, he was greatly intoxicated by [*stimolato*] and zealous for holy poverty. He loved and desired it with the greatest tenderness, and all other things seemed as nothing compared to poverty. To better embrace it, he searched through nearly all the provinces of the Order so that he could dwell where it was best observed. And so he lived for a short time in every house in every province, but his soul never felt at ease. (I, 147)⁴¹

This would seem to be an implicit indictment of the general level of poverty advocated by the fifteenth-century Observant statutes which fostered a practical level of moderate observance for the main body of the friars, and left *imitatio Francisci* to those heroic enough to live up to such an austere example.

The encounter between Francesco da Pavia and Lancelao Unghero is symbolic of the tensions between these two conceptions of the Observant life. Lancelao had finally found men who truly observed the Rule in the Observant Province of St Francis (Umbria), but, called by the Holy Spirit, he travelled north to become Guardian at an Observant house in Milan. Francesco visited the house and was amazed to meet him there. He addressed Lancelao:

Father, how does your conscience rest now, particularly in this place, considering that for so long you were a pilgrim within the Order because of your desire to find poverty? You never found either a province or a house that suited your tastes, and now you have ended up in a convent filled with sumptuous vestments and other superfluous things. I greatly marvel at it all.

Lancelao's reply would have warmed the heart of Bernardino da Siena. He explained to Francesco that, 'in the past I was completely deceived. For the real perfection of the Franciscan lies in holy obedience, and he who observes it purely and sincerely observes poverty, chastity and every other virtue as a true Friar Minor.' Oddi commented dryly that, 'This reply did not greatly please Fra Francesco.' At Lancelao's death Francesco still doubted the wisdom of his confrère's choice of obedience over poverty:

Hearing of [Lancelao's] death, the blessed Francesco da Pavia greatly wished to know what had happened to his soul, particularly wondering if

⁴¹ The life of Lanzilao Hungero is also included in two manuscripts written by Mariano da Firenze, which will be examined in the next chapter: *Vita di Lanzilao Hungero* in Mariano da Firenze, *Vite di Sancti et Beati*, BNCF, Cod. Landau-Finaly 243, fols. 186r-189r; and *Vite quaranta quattro di vari Uomini Illustri in Santità*, BNCVR, Cod. Sess. 412 (Ms. 2063), fols. lxxvi-lxxix. Wadding also gives a brief account of Lancelao's deeds in *An.Min.* XV, 239-240, xiii-xvi.

his soul would have any hindrance or punishment because of the reply which he had given on poverty. (I, 148)

Francesco's doubts over the efficacy of the virtue of obedience are reminiscent of the excesses of the Spiritual position and utterly alien to the self-conscious moderation preached by Bernardino and Capestrano. This passage has been called 'a clear indication of surviving Spiritualism amongst the early Observants,' for Francesco saw poverty as the fundamental Franciscan virtue: its needs were so imperative as to eclipse all else, and its neglect could lead to hell.⁴² However, in a vision Francesco was shown the vindication of Lancelao, seen rejoicing at the feet of the enthroned Christ surrounded by throngs of angels and Franciscan saints, and was forced to learn his lesson: 'seeing how the virtue of obedience was accepted into the bosom of God ... thenceforth he was always completely dead in the hands of his superiors' (I, 149). Francesco was so affected by what he had seen that he made obedience his primary virtue:

He often said, 'My brothers, I would make more of a friar who was truly obedient than of one who revived the dead. And I tell you honestly that I wouldn't give a penny-candle for a worldly miracle-worker; but a friar who is as one dead in the hands of his superior, truly I would do him the honour of a great beeswax candle.' (I, 144)

Thus Francesco became a truly edifying figure for those Quattrocento friars still hovering between the old Spiritual-influenced ideals of the early Observance and the new moderate identity fostered by Bernardino.

However, this new identity was not so deeply entrenched as to go unquestioned. Oddi's life of Francesco da Pavia evinces further doubt over the new ideals of the Regular Observance. Firstly, it was well that obedience was emphasised, for Francesco went on to receive visions of his fellow friars and superiors being tortured by demons for their abuses, suggesting that reassurance was needed that it was indeed necessary to obey superiors who might be more sinful than those they governed. Francesco's vision of devils tormenting the soul of an Observant Vicar who had failed to curb abuses in his province reinforced the message that it was necessary for the hierarchy to ensure that the Rule was fully observed (I, 159). Secondly, continued doubts about the policy of *usus moderatus* had to be divinely appeased. Oddi recounted that the consciences of the Observant friars of S. Maria degli Angeli, a house which Oddi himself governed in 1458,

were stung by the convent's riches. Although the Observants had occupied the house in 1415, it seems that they had been reluctant to accept the conditions attached to its upkeep by the previous Conventual incumbents: 'wine for the many visits of layfolk and friars who continually arrived there, and also a certain amount of grain, one or two servants, one or two beasts of burden and similar things which it seemed [the house] could not well do without.' According to the *Constitutiones Bernardini* this was acceptable if, as was the case here, the conditions were inherited and not actively procured by the Observants, yet obviously this generous definition of *usus* pained stricter friars within the community. The Provincial Vicar of Umbria finally asked Francesco to pray to God for a sign to show whether these possessions were acceptable. Francesco received a vision in which Christ told him, 'The things that the friars have are necessary to them. I brought them [those things] myself ... so that they could devote themselves to my worship.' This handy formulation was received with relief. Oddi added that, 'before Fra Francesco had this reply, he never liked to stay in the house but took care not to enter it, nor to eat or drink there, but afterward he stayed there voluntarily' (I, 152).⁴³ By reporting Francesco's vision Oddi once more provided reassurance that the mitigation of the strict life of the Literal Observants was both divinely engineered and sanctioned by the congregation's holiest brothers. Thus, between his entrance into the Observance in 1417 and his encounter with Lancelao in 1445 Francesco represented the austere ideal of the early congregation. In the last five years before his death in 1450, after he received his miraculous visions of Lancelao, he declared divine support for the new moderation whose riches permitted an expanded active role. *La Franceschina* captured the spirit of both the Literal and Regular ideals.

The majority of the beati whose lives Oddi chose to record espoused the primitive Franciscan virtues favoured by the early Observance. Many of their miracles implicitly assimilated them to Francis and his earliest companions. Some echoed the most iconic moments of Francis's life: Francesco da Pavia tamed a ferocious wolf with soothing

⁴² L. Bracaloni, 'La povertà francescana in San Bernardino da Siena', *SF* 45 (1945), p. 89. Bracaloni refers to the story as it was reported by Wadding in *An.Min* XI, 240, xiv, and seems unaware of Oddi's earlier account.

⁴³ Whilst Francesco supported the growth of the house at S. Maria degli Angeli, he was less keen to see the development of the Spoletan house of Monteluco. Francesco was reported as telling one of Oddi's informants, Fra Antonio da Gubbio: "'Carissimo frate, Dio non vole che quisto loco de Monteluco s'acconcie altramente che como sta." Et per questa cagione li frati non l'anno voluto mai aconciare.' (I, 160).

words, whilst Thomà da Firenze preached to wolves and to birds perched on his shoulders (I, 155). After his death Thomà obediently ceased the miracles that were overshadowing the campaign for the canonization of Bernardino da Siena at Capestrano's requests (I, 247-8), an incident which recalled William of Anglia's post-mortem cessation of miracles which had threatened Francis's cult.⁴⁴ Likewise, just as Francis had retreated to La Verna with his closest companions, Oddi's Observant beati pursued lives of eremitical contemplation. The lay brother Pietro da Rieti (†1464) lived in a solitary cell some distance from the house of Speco di S. Urbano: 'He was always alone, except during mass and at mealtimes. ... His poverty was amazing, for he reputed extreme poverty and the use of poor and base things as a great wealth' (I, 255). Perhaps in the eyes of their fellow brothers these beati could, at times, have an excessive attachment to poverty. Antonio da Stroncone (†1461) was accused by his Provincial Vicar of secretly cutting down thirty vines in the vineyard of an unnamed convent because Francis had ordered his brothers to take no thought for the morrow: 'he had not done such a thing, but because he was a zealot for holy poverty, the friars thought it must have been him' (I, 401). Such an anecdote shows that there was active disagreement amongst Observant brothers as to the level of poverty within the congregation.⁴⁵

Many of Oddi's beati humbly chose to live as lay brothers in the pattern of the primitive brotherhood and the early Observance. Oddi specified the status of eighteen of the twenty-nine Observant beati for whom he composed new lives: fifteen had chosen to remain in the lay state; Francesco da Pavia took minor orders; and only two (Gabriele d'Ancona and Marco da Bergamo) were explicitly identified as priests. Many of the lay brothers, like Anastagio da Milano, 'cared for no other state' (I, 174): despite having been educated men in the secular world they humbly preferred to be infermarers, tailors or cooks. Like Francis, the Spirituals and the early Observants, Oddi's Observant beati

⁴⁴ The earlier miracle was recounted in Arnaldus de Sarnano's *Chronica XXIV Generalium*. William of Anglia joined the Franciscan brotherhood in 1209 and was one of Francis's companions. Wadding states that he died in 1230 and was buried in Assisi. According to Sarnano he performed post-mortem miracles which amazingly threatened to overshadow those of Francis himself. The then Minister General, Elia da Cortona, commanded him to cease obscuring Francis's fame, and from that day forth William performed no more miracles. This story does not seem to be included in any of the other major Franciscan sources. See Arnaldus de Sarnano, *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, AF 3 (1897), p. 217; and *An. Min.* II, 292, xxiii.

⁴⁵ The statutes of Tuscany repeatedly warned zealous brothers not to cut down orchards in deference to Francis's admonition. See Bihl, 'Statuta provincialia Thusciae 1457 et 1518', pp. 159, 176; Van den Wyngaert, 'Statuti Provinciali di Toscana 1456-1506', pp. 128-129

disparaged status and learning as detrimental to true Franciscan humility.⁴⁶ Thus Giovanni da Capestrano's great learning was explained as a divine gift rather than the product of long years of worldly study (I, 496). Although the Regular Observance emphasised the need for education to provide for the active life, grass-roots opposition remained. It was reflected in the choice of so many of Oddi's beati to remain lay and unlettered, and was celebrated in an anecdote concerning one of the disciples of Thomà da Firenze; Girolamo della Stufa (†1451).

Girolamo was one of the foremost preachers mentioned in the Observant sections of *La Franceschina*. He was a lay brother, but despite his ignorance he was encouraged to preach by his master and fellow lay brother Thomà da Firenze, even though this contravened Observant legislation:

[Girolamo] was a simple man within the Order and a lay brother, and he had never studied either [Christian] doctrine or worldly wisdom. ... Because he had no books to study except for some sermons which he himself had composed in the vulgar tongue, he was sometimes asked by other friars where he had studied what he preached, and he replied by showing them with his fingers the shape of the cross. (I, 232)⁴⁷

Girolamo's sermons proved immensely popular, attracting crowds who ignored the most famous Conventual and Augustinian preachers in favour of this lay Observant. Oddi wrote of a master of theology, Antonio d'Arezzo, who discussed with a layman why it was that people who left his own sermons 'dry and arid', were reformed by Girolamo. In a reply reminiscent of the arguments of St Francis and the Spirituals, Antonio concluded that the humble lay brother had a spontaneous insight into the Christian life which had been leached out of his own preaching through dry book-learning:

Those who come to my sermons leave as they arrived because when I preach I recite things in exactly the way I have read them, for I am like a spent coal without a core of heat. But this little poor and simple friar is a

⁴⁶ Oddi charmingly captured the primitive Franciscan scepticism of learning in the life of B. Egidio, one of Francis's earliest companions. Egidio told preachers not to trust to their own learning, but to preach on the themes of 'Bo, bo, molto dico et poco fo' ('Alas, I speak much but do little') and 'Fate, fate et non parlate' ('Don't talk; act!') (I, 268).

⁴⁷ This was a repetition of traditional themes. In his Preface Oddi had written of Francis's companions that, 'De la carità et pietà erano per tal modo vestiti et adornati, che totalmente tucto lo loro studio era in ciò ... et in loco de libri aveano la dicto croce.' (I, 62.) As has already been shown, in 1438 Bernardino da Siena forbade lay brothers to preach, teach or take confession, much to their dismay.

burning coal all aflame, so that when he casts forth a word into your hearts
he easily kindles you and lights you up with divine love. (I, 233-4)⁴⁸

This realisation induced Antonio to leave 'his magisterial pomp' and join the humble Observance. Thus the essentially lay, unlearned but zealous spirituality of the early Observance was exalted. The example of Girolamo showed that true spiritual understanding did not come from education but from prayer, humility and divine aid.

La Franceschina's account of the life of Girolamo della Stufa's master, Thomà da Firenze, is equally revealing of the tensions that lay at the heart of the fifteenth-century Observance. Thomà's life represents the resolution of the Literal and Regular ideals. Thomà, whose life Oddi entered in his chapter on poverty, was a lay brother who went barefoot, wore a coarse and patched habit, searched out solitary and woody places in which to dwell and pray, and fasted continually. And yet Thomà was also a Guardian, founded Observant houses, became a missionary in an attempt to convert the Saracens, and was companion to two of the most famous Observants of his time, Giovanni da Capestrano and Alberto da Sarteano. The exempla recounted in his life stress the virtue of obedience above all. When ordered by Giovanni da Capestrano, Thomà obediently carried burning coals and held them for the length of a *Miserere*^e *mei, Deus* (I, 222-3).

Thomà passed on the lesson to his own disciples. In one anecdote, Siena's educated and noble-born *podestà*, Polidoro Romano (†1454), joined the Observance under Thomà's care. Thomà informed him that he was ignorant and useless, and commanded him to remain a lay brother, care for the ass and act as orchard-keeper. Polidoro piously obeyed (I, 231). In another exemplum, the virtue of two young Florentine friars was tested. Thomà charged them to prove their obedience by being 'as dead men' in his hands: a grave was dug, the two lay in it, and earth was shovelled in until Thomà finally relented. The two had proved that they would be obedient even unto death. They promptly expired eight days later and were buried in the grave that had been dug to test them (I, 234-6). Thomà thus made an unforgettable public exhibition of the virtue of obedience. Such an exemplum shows that he valued it over every other virtue: like Francesco da Pavia, he had learned that it was above all obedience, not poverty, that conferred a special status on the Observant friar of the mid-fifteenth century. It is difficult to determine if the emphasis

⁴⁸ A similar anecdote concerning the Observant preacher Serafino da Gaeta, whose 'theologia ... non invenitur in chartis', is recounted in Aquilano, *Chronica*, Appendix, pp. 124-125.

placed on obedience by rigorist beati was a personal reaction to the remembered chaos of Spiritual indiscipline; an attempt, whether conscious or subconscious, to conform to the acknowledged pattern of Regular Observant sanctity; or a hagiographical formulation which allowed Oddi to coax stubborn Observant *zelantes* towards the moderation of the Regular Observance. Perhaps all these factors came into play. The example of beati like Francesco and Thomà proves that, although the 'two souls' often diverged from one another, they were not distinct and estranged traditions but could be carefully combined in a balanced and holy life.

Conclusion

La Franceschina offers an intriguing insight into the mores and assumptions of the Observant friars of fifteenth-century Umbria. Most importantly, the work reveals an Observant author carefully integrating his congregation into the traditions of the Franciscan Order. Oddi's non-chronological portrait of the Order allowed him to assimilate fifteenth-century Observant beati and thirteenth-century *socii* into a single model of Franciscan sanctity. Oddi's ideal was exemplified by hundreds of beati, yet this collection of perfect individuals became something greater than the sum of its parts: *La Franceschina* was a portrayal of an institutional identity that reached back in history to the very birth of the Order and forward into the providential future, but found its basis in the contemporary Observance. In Oddi's view, his congregation alone of the fifteenth-century Franciscan groupings was honoured with Christ's particular favour, an apocalyptic role, and the chance to turn the divine wheel of grace to confound its opponents. The Observance was at once the heir to Francis's vision - its beati standing alongside the greatest Franciscan saints in a relationship of equality – and also a new phenomenon which sprang from the trunk of an Order felled by the just judgement of Christ.

The work also attests to the difficulties inherent in the creation of a truly Observant identity. The congregation felt that it had to wrest its Franciscan heritage from the hands of the Conventuals in order to establish a separate and yet still fully Franciscan identity. *La Franceschina* itself played a role in this, for Oddi appropriated the Franciscan past by inserting only his congregation into its historical and providential scheme. Like the Regular Observance in which it was rooted, *La Franceschina* hovers between a stringent interpretation of the Franciscan ideal and the moderation that allowed for an active role.

Oddi doggedly defended the virtue of poverty and declared it the key to the Order's providential duties. His own passages on Observant beati also suggest that the doctrines of the Spiritual-influenced early Observance remained current within the congregation even as it moved towards a moderate position which emphasised *usus moderatus*, learning, preaching and involvement in the wider world of religious politics. Many of the Observant beati celebrated by Oddi exemplified these primitive traditions, but Francesco da Pavia's conversion to the cause of obedience and Thomà da Firenze's mixed life of poverty and duty also served to proclaim to any sceptics that the moderation of the Regular Observance was as godly as the austerity of the primitive congregation. Thus the *Specchio de l'Ordine* mirrored the tensions within the congregation as well as providing an ideal reflection in which brothers could seek their own images. In his final paragraphs, Oddi reaffirmed the need for a true observance of Francis's Rule and dwelt upon the meaning and use of *La Franceschina*, meditating upon the series of reflections within reflections that characterised his work:

Throughout this book, called the *Specchio de l'Ordine Menore* or *La Franceschina*, we have shown the prize that lies in heaven for the true Friars Minor and Franciscans who have purely observed the Rule of St Francis. ... And we have shown that this is true through the example of this whole book, truly the Mirror of the life of those who mirrored themselves in the Franciscan life [*veramente Specchio de vita de quilli che in essa vita se sonno specchiati*]. Amen. (II, 444-5)

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Spiritual Way: The Observant Ideal According to Mariano da Firenze

Mariano da Firenze's sixteenth-century hagiographical works addressed many of the same concerns that had preoccupied Oddi in the fifteenth century. Like Oddi, Mariano (c.1477-1523) intended his *Via Spirituale* (c.1518) and *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* (c.1510-1523) to provide moral guidance for his fellow Franciscans. *La Via Spirituale* – markedly similar in format and structure to *La Franceschina* – was a spiritual manual for Minorite brothers and sisters, designed to lead them closer to God by the true Franciscan path. The *Vite* were also intended to edify and enlighten. Like Oddi, Mariano wished both to record the exemplary lives of his brethren for posterity, fearing they were being forgotten, and also to present an ideal to be studied and imitated by his fellow brothers. Mariano explicitly noted both these aims in his introduction to the life of Leone da Pietra di Bugno Corso (fl.1445):

We must seek out the deeds of our holy fathers and restore them to our memory ... because reading of their marvellous works ... revives us and awakens us from the slumber of laziness and ... through their example we are moved to good works and to guard ourselves from evil and are incited to imitate them.¹

Moreover, Mariano fiercely believed that his work was necessary, for he felt that the Observance was losing its distinctive reformist spirit and falling into sin and decay.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Mariano's hagiographical works is the way in which they differ from his historiography. Both the *Via Spirituale* and the *Vite* were aimed at a popular Franciscan audience, for Mariano wrote in his native Tuscan dialect rather than the Latin he favoured in his more learned historical works. As a historian, Mariano had promoted the moderate ideal personified by the educated preachers and administrators of the Regular Observance. As a hagiographer, he gave voice to an Observant ideal that harked back to the earliest traditions of the movement, for the beati he chose to commemorate in the *Vite* were contemplative men, seeking the peace of the forests and the consolation of prayer. There is barely a priest or preacher amongst them. The *Via Spirituale* is a more didactic work, buttressing its conclusions with theological arguments, but it too shows itself to be concerned with the Observant image and identity.

¹ Mariano da Firenze, *Vite di Sancti et Beati*, BNCF, Cod. Landau-Finaly 243, fol. 205r. Hereafter, Cod. Landau-Finaly will be referred to within the text as LF, followed by folio number.

Mariano used the work to promote a more balanced ideal, emphasizing the need for obedience with the use of effective exempla, and showed concern for the public image of the Observant brothers. He traced the history of the Order through a series of tribulations, declaring his belief that the Observance was the heir to a golden age of Franciscanism whose traditions had been passed through an unbroken chain from the founder himself. However, he considered this *età aurea* of religious virtue to be over. Thus the *Via Spirituale* was intended to recapture and reinculcate the virtues of the primitive Franciscan and early Observant eras for a sixteenth century audience.

Mariano da Firenze

Mariano da Firenze was born in Florence sometime between 1477 and 1480. By 1498 he had certainly entered the Observant house of S. Salvatore al Monte on the Oltrarno. Even at this early stage in his Franciscan career, Mariano was devoted to the study of his Order. He was a prolific writer and spent much of his time travelling to Observant houses in central Italy searching out material for his histories (his *Compendium chronicarum* has already been examined in Chapter Three) and his hagiography. His presence was recorded in houses in Florence (c.1493-1506, 1520, 1523), Giaccherino (1506), Empoli (1510 and 1522), La Verna (1510), Siena (1513), Val d'Elsa (1515), Rome (1516) and Volterra (1518-20).² It seems that Mariano wrote continually, seeking out oral and written evidence for the history of the Franciscans at each house he lived in. As he modestly commented of himself in his *Defensorio della verità* (1506), 'I have some knowledge of the truth of the stories about Minorite Order, for I have delighted in them since I first entered [the Observance].'³ He had a wide-ranging interest in the Franciscan Order and wrote vernacular histories of the Poor Clares (1519) and the Third Order (1522) as well as chronicles which recorded both the worldly and religious past of his native province, Tuscany.⁴ However, his prolific writing career was cut short in a markedly Franciscan fashion. In 1580 the Franciscan chronicler Dionisio Pulinari recorded

² C. Cannarozzi, 'Ricerche sulla vita di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 26 (1926), pp. 121-179, 295-326 and 27 (1930), pp. 4-28, 31-71.

³ D. Cresi, 'L'opuscolo *Defensorio della verità* di Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 61 (1964), p. 173.

⁴ Mariano da Firenze, *Libro delle dignità et excellentie del Ordine della seraphica madre delle povere donne Sancta Chiara da Asisi*; *Il Trattato del Terz'Ordine*; G. Cipriani, 'Il *Tractatus de Origine, Nobilitate et de excellentia Tusciae* di Mariano da Firenze', *Studi Etruschi* ser. 3, 48 (1980), 149-158.

Mariano's death in his *Chronache dei Frati Minori della Provincia di Toscana* (itself a continuation of Mariano's *Brevis chronica Tusciae* of 1510-14):

He died on the 20th of July 1523 of plague in the poorhouse, where he had gone in charity to confess the ill, and unfortunately a good part of his works have disappeared.⁵

Mariano is an important figure in the historiography of the Franciscan Order, and his life and work have been the subject of much interest. Although his writings, in particular the *Fasciculus chronicarum*, were used liberally by the Order's most famous historian, Luke Wadding, his fame had faded until the early twentieth century. Interest in Mariano's work was revived by Faloci Pulignani's publication of his *Vita di Paoluccio dei Trinci* from the Sessoriano codex in 1896, and Paul Sabatier's appendix devoted to the Observant historian in his 1900 volume on the Porziuncola indulgence.⁶ These works inspired a series of articles on Mariano, notably those by Zefferino Lazzeri and Ciro Cannarozzi, and newly edited versions of Mariano's principal works.⁷ The *Via Spirituale* and the *Vite* are among Mariano's less well-known writings. One prominent Franciscan historian even believed that Mariano's *Vite*, like his five-volume Chronicle, had long been lost.⁸ Although Mariano carefully gathered his *Vite* together in a single work, several have been published separately. A few were appropriated by Wadding for his *Annales*, some have appeared in the *Acta Sanctorum*; and others have been edited by Franciscan historians investigating the life of a particular beatus or saint.⁹ In 1922 Lazzeri published

⁵ D. Pulinari, *Cronache dei Frati Minori della provincia di Toscana*, ed. S. Mencherini, (Arezzo: Cooperativa Tipografia, 1913), p. 1. The best modern account of Mariano's life and works is Massimo Papi's introduction to his edition of *Il Trattato del Terz'Ordine*.

⁶ M. Faloci Pulignani, 'Il B. Paoluccio Trinci da Foligno', *MF* 6 (1896), pp. 97-128; P. Sabatier, *Fratri Francisci Bartholi de Assisio Tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae Portiuncola*, Collection d'études et de documents sur l'histoire religieuse et littéraire du Moyen Age, tom. 2, (Paris: Fischbacher, 1900) (on Mariano, see the Appendix, pp.137-164).

⁷ Z. Lazzeri, 'Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 7 (1921), pp. 263-268; 8 (1922), pp. 369-397; C. Cannarozzi, 'Pensiero di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 26 (1929), pp. 4-28; idem, 'Una fonte primaria degli *Annales* del Wadding (Il *Fasciculus Chronicarum* di Fra Mariano da Firenze)', *SF* 27 (1930), pp. 251-285; M. Bertagna, 'Per un nuovo incontro con Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 79 (1982), pp. 473-479.

⁸ When writing of Giovanni Buonvisi, whose *Vita* appears in the Landau-Finaly codex in Florence, Ugolino Nicolini mistakenly commented that Mariano's biography of the beatus was known 'solo attraverso le *Croniche* di Marco da Lisbona e gli *Annales* del Wadding.' See U. Nicolini, 'Buonvisi, Giovanni (Giovanni da Lucca)' in *DBI* 15, p. 326

⁹ Martino Bertagna cites the *Vite de santi e beati toscani* by Sivano Razzi (Florence, 1593) as the most complete published collection of Mariano's biographies, including twenty-nine of the fifty-three lives from the original codex. For full details of published lives, see M. Bertagna, 'Sulle orme di S. Bernardino', *SF* 52 (1955), pp. 87-113.

the prologue to the *Via Spirituale* and in 1965 Domenico Cresi published the headings and selected short passages of text from the work.¹⁰ Despite this interest, neither the *Via Spirituale* nor the *Vite* have ever been published entire, nor have they ever been examined fully or thematically. They deserve closer study, for they are rich with the passion that Mariano felt for his Order.

The *Via Spirituale*

The manuscript of the *Via Spirituale* is held by the Biblioteca Guarnacci di Volterra. It forms the first part of codex LVII, 7, 7 which was transcribed in the Poor Clare convent of S. Lino in Volterra by Mariano's amanuensis Suor Dorotea Broccardi.¹¹ The volume measures 31x22cm and comprises 310 folios of paper in contemporary binding. It has been tentatively dated to 1518, and was certainly transcribed before 1520 (Mariano's presence was recorded in Volterra between 1517 and 1520).¹² Mariano used *La Franceschina* as a model, broadly imitating Oddi's structure and aims. The work is incomplete. In his prologue Mariano listed fifteen chapters of which only eight were transcribed by Suor Broccardi, although references to later chapters within the work suggest that they may have been written or at least carefully planned at that time. The surviving chapters are: on contempt for the world (5v-15v), on spirituality (16r-25v), on subjecting the flesh to reason (26r-34v), on diverse temptations (35r-67v), on the fear of God (68r-77v), on patience (78r-99v), on humility (100r-117r), on holy obedience (117v-131v). Planned chapters that were not transcribed include those on poverty, chastity, charity, prayer, silence, solitude and perseverance. In an attempt to illustrate the virtues recommended by the author, the work utilizes many exempla from the *Vite* of Observant beati which Mariano worked on from c.1510-1523, but the *Via Spirituale* is not merely a collection of anecdotes. It is a spiritual work intended to guide the Franciscan on his or her journey towards God. In the prologue Mariano wrote:

¹⁰ Lazzeri, 'Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 8 (1922), pp. 369-397; Cresi, 'Una compilazione ascetica di Mariano da Firenze (*La Via Spirituale*)', *SF* 62 (1965), pp. 129-157.

¹¹ Mariano da Firenze, *Via Spirituale*, BGV, Cod. LVII, 7, 7, fols. 1-131. At fol. 309v, the manuscript includes the comment, written in a different hand, 'Scritto da Suor Dorotea Broccardi sorella di Faviano delle Vele.' The contents of the manuscript are as follows: 1r-131v *Via Spirituale* / 132r-146v *Legenda di S. Francesco per tre compagni* / 147r-185r *Specchio di perfezione* / 185r-218r *Fiori spirituali di S. Francesco* / 218v-224r *Vita di frate Ginepro* / 224v-243v *Vita di frate Egidio* / 243v-246r *Decti notabili del beato Iacopone* / 247r-309v *Specchio della perfectione humana di Henrico Herp*. Hereafter, the *Via Spirituale* will be cited within the text as VS, followed by folio reference.

Because my heart burned so with the desire to please God and our father St Francis I decided to write a useful work, very necessary to my fellow brethren [*al proximo*], which would draw them away from the worldly life and lead them to the way of God. ... And so this book may conveniently be called the *Via Spirituale*. (VS, 1r-v)

The *Via Spirituale* shows how alarmed Mariano was at the state of his Order. He wrote the work soon after the Observant triumph of *Ite vos* in 1517, yet the papal vindication of the congregation had not quietened his mind. Mariano felt that the distinctively Franciscan nature of his Order was being lost, and that memories of the Order's most virtuous beati were being forgotten. Alarmed at the decline in religious fervour that he perceived around him, he advocated a conscious return to the ideals of Francis, his companions and the primitive Observants. Mariano hoped to use such exemplars to fashion a model that his fellow Franciscans could imitate:

I intend to speak of these virtues in this work, in accordance with the views of the holy doctors, inserting and putting forward many examples from the lives of our holy fathers about whom I am fully informed, so that their memory may live perfectly in those who hear of them. For I know that, according to St Gregory, men are more moved by example than by words. Since one of my principal reasons for writing this work is that the examples of our forefathers should not be lost, let no-one be surprised if I add many exempla. (VS, 1v)

The exempla Mariano chose to transcribe are of particular interest due to his own fascination with the Observant brotherhood. After anecdotes about Francis and his companions, Mariano referred most often to Observant beati. Many of the stories he copied are little known elsewhere, for Mariano went in search of oral traditions which were otherwise unrecorded. Because of their origins as tales told amongst the brothers of the minor hermitages of Tuscany and Umbria, these exempla testify as clearly as *La Franceschina* to the existence of tensions within the Observant community over the interpretation of the Franciscan ideal. Yet Mariano did not only confine himself to pious anecdotes. The *Via Spirituale* is also noticeably learned, citing an enormous number of authorities to buttress its arguments and displaying its author's wide knowledge of biblical and patristic sources, classical writers, the Scholastics and medieval hagiography, as well as his thorough grounding in Franciscan literature.

¹² Cannarozzi, 'Ricerche sulla vita di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 27 (1930), p. 63.

Another interesting aspect of Mariano's work is that he addressed himself to the Franciscan Order as ^awhole - the Second and Third Orders as well as the First; the Conventuals as well as the Observants. Writing after *Ite vos* had confirmed the Observance as the main branch of the Franciscan Order, he made no formal distinction between the different congregations, yet the ideal he proposed for all was still recognizably Observant. The exempla he used to illustrate his points deal predominantly with Observant beati, interspersed with passages on Francis and his companions, saintly men of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and famous beate of the Poor Clares. In a section on the tribulations suffered by the Order, Mariano explicitly identified himself with the Observant party, citing Conventual opposition to the *Martinianae*, *Ut sacra* and *Ite vos* as persecutions led by the devil, who 'in the form of a roaring lion attempted to destroy the spirit of God within the fervent hearts of the zealots of the Regular Observance' (VS, 52r). The *Via Spirituale* was thus intended to function as a spiritual guide that would bring all Franciscans to the Observant path. Mariano was particularly concerned with the identity of the Observance. He was proud of the congregation's past, describing it as the heir to an *età aurea* that had been presided over by Francis, yet he recognized that its reputation was diminished. He was particularly interested in the tribulations suffered by the congregation and how these formed its identity. Finally, he was also deeply preoccupied by the issue of appearance: how the brothers might fashion themselves so as to appear holy, and how this fashioning was occasionally used to mask vice with a thin veneer of virtue. His inconsistent statements on such matters reveal a deep concern for the image of the Observance in the early sixteenth century.

Obedience in the *Via Spirituale*

Mariano was above all a product of the moderate Regular Observance of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In his chapter on obedience, he avowed that he followed the reasoning of S. Bernardino in making it the principal Franciscan virtue.¹³ In an argument which would not have looked out of place in the *Constitutiones Bernardini*, he concluded: 'the vow of obedience is more essential to the Order than the others, so that if someone were to make a vow of poverty and chastity but not of obedience, he could not partake of the perfection of his Order' (VS, 118v). This explicit rejection of the particularly Spiritual and Fraticellian idea that the vow of poverty took precedence over

that of obedience is echoed in some of the exempla Mariano chose to transcribe. For instance, he offered the story of the educated Observant brother Mathia da Tiburi (fl.1495), whom he criticized for succumbing to the temptations of the devil and disobeying his superiors. Mathia's story is a clear statement of the frustrated desire for a literal interpretation of the Rule that existed within the Observance, even as late as 1495 when these events took place. Appearing to Mathia as Jesus, the devil told him that the papal declarations and the expositions on the Rule 'were evil, unjust and false doctrine, and that those who observed them were damned unless they made penitence.' Thus, like the Spirituals, Mathia derided the procurators and refused to confess brothers who made use of them, would not accept money for saying mass, and attempted to observe the Rule *ad litteram sine glossa*. Mariano was scandalized by such actions. This was a radically different conception of the Franciscan ideal and could not be pursued within the Observance. Horrified, Mariano detailed how Mathia refused to obey his superiors and led a group of eighty friars out of the Observance. Such sins could not go unpunished:

Frate Mathia became completely mad and returned to a [Conventual] house. He who had felt such great zeal for poverty was reduced to riding on horseback and using money, and finally he died most unhappily. (VS, 36v)

Mariano unreservedly condemned those friars who, like Mathia, attempted to pursue any private vision of the Franciscan ideal that was not fully authorized by the congregation.

An exemplum in the life of Egidio da Firenze (†1484) again emphasized the importance of obedience in less condemnatory tones. Egidio was an Observant lay brother who venerated the practice of prayer and contemplation above all else, and who 'attempted to reach perfection in all the virtues, except the two principal ones, obedience and charity.' His Guardian, wishing to impress the laity, called on him to clear a path for the layfolk who would arrive to celebrate the feast of St Francis. Egidio ignored the summons, telling a fellow brother that, 'It will be more pleasing to God and to Francis if we spend this time in prayer and contemplation rather than losing it clearing the forest paths.' After his third refusal to obey his Guardian, a great demon appeared. It seized the unfortunate Egidio by the shoulders and was bearing him off to hell until the quick-thinking Guardian doused it in holy water, causing it to disappear:

¹³ For Bernardino's comments on the virtue of obedience, see Chapter Five, note 16.

After a few days in the infirmary, Fra Egidio recognized his error. He cried bitterly over his fault and made penitence, and, completely altered, without losing his other virtues, he devoted himself to the purity and simplicity of obedience. (VS, 121v)

Egidio's example showed that obedience to superiors, the needs of the active life and the good reputation of the congregation amongst the layfolk all took precedence over the demands of the contemplative life

Tribulations and the *Età Aurea*

Such failings pained Mariano deeply, for he believed that the Observance had been destined for greater things. In his third chapter he detailed his conviction that the Observants had been the last in a long line of religious to partake in a golden age of virtue which had originated in the early Church and had later been presided over by St Francis. The fundamental virtue he proposed for this *età aurea* was that of profound joy in poverty. However, Mariano placed this golden age firmly in the past, for he believed that such virtue had been squandered by his own generation. Thus, speaking of the privations gladly suffered by the saints of the early Church, he wrote:

[These virtues] existed particularly in this first age, called the golden age, which Boethius lauded, calling it most happy. Truly this golden age of religion remained for a long time after St Francis. [It continued] in the beginning of the Family of the Observance when the great brothers studied to subject the sensual appetite to reason. The blessed Giacomo della Marca wrote of this first golden age in one of his sermons on St Francis ... and afterwards he talked of the beginnings of the Family, and he said, 'I remember that it is already forty-six years since all the brothers vied to see who could fast the most, and many observed seven Lenten fasts every year.' ... And the blessed Alberto da Sarteano, writing in a letter to Messer Poggio [Bracciolini] of those men who so strenuously mortified the appetites of the flesh, said that he had seen men in the Order dressed in a thin habit and poor clothes, with no hoods, their feet bare and muddy, drinking water sweetly. (VS, 27v-28r)

This long age of ecclesiastical sanctity was a dehistoricised, almost mythological past in which Francis and Paoluccio were the direct heirs to the traditions of the apostolic life. In part, it was merely a customary medieval *topos* to deprecate the present in favour of a glorified golden age. Yet Mariano's feeling that the sixteenth-century Observance fell far short of the ideal proposed by Paoluccio and his disciples in the congregation's golden days went much deeper than a convenient *topos*. The very existence of the *Via Spirituale*,

which was, as Mariano himself commented, 'very necessary to my fellow brethren [to] draw them away from the worldly life' (VS, 1r-v), attests to the author's sense of unease.

In part, Mariano chose to blame the Observance's post-golden age decline on the work of the devil. Like Bernardino Aquilano and Johannes Brugman, Mariano revelled in the tribulations suffered by the Observance which he felt confirmed its elect status. By far the longest chapter, entitled 'On diverse temptations' and running to twenty-seven folios, depicts friars being tested in increasingly bizarre ways by cunning demons who offered bountiful food, money, and worldly fame; cozened the more spiritual brothers with false visions; or tempted the flesh with lascivious dancing girls. The decline of a true reverence for poverty could also be blamed on demonic plots. Mariano offered the example of the Observant hermitage of Scarlino in a story that, like Oddi's lives of Observant beati, clearly reveals tensions between the proponents of the strict and moderate Observant ideals. Here, he claimed that the high standards of poverty set by Thomà da Firenze were compromised when the devil wormed his way into the entourage of the Signore of Piombino, who had particular reverence for the brothers of Scarlino. Thomà had encouraged his brothers to partake of meat only rarely and certainly never to procure it. In an attempt to corrupt this pristine poverty, the devil persuaded the Signore to offer meat to the brothers every time he visited them:

Some of the brothers rejoiced in these platters of meat, but others were saddened. Slowly these friars began to become angry [with those who wished to accept the meat], for they felt that they were being frustrated in their good intentions, particularly since on the days when the brothers ate the meat it ended up that they all lost much time in idle talk and in neglect of every good action. (VS, 55v)

Luckily, Guasparre da Firenze (†1477), the pious Guardian of Scarlino who was also the subject of one of Mariano's biographies, recognized this corruption of Observant austerity as a diabolic trick and went in search of the demon, 'who immediately disappeared in fury and rage.' This story testifies that the pious brothers did not hesitate to attribute any mitigation of the strict observance to the wiles of the devil. When they re-told the stories of their experiences they were willing, in the name of the Observance, to stigmatize the less zealous brothers as diabolic dupes or even as the knowing agents of Satan. Despite such anecdotes, Mariano also made it clear that although individuals might bring the institution into disrepute, the Order would always survive, just as Christ had promised Francis. In one symbolic tale he described how Fra Tomasso da Pistoia had stolen four

hundred ducats intended for the Florentine Monte di Pietà. Though his fate was to be torn apart by wild dogs and wolves, his habit, the symbol of the Order, survived unscathed:

Nothing was discovered of him except that his head and an arm were found, savaged by a dog, in the river. And his habit was found in a small wood, entire and unharmed, though full of fat. (VS, 33r)

The *Via Spirituale*, in common with much Observant literature, is infused with the notion that the congregation's election was proved by the way in which it was constantly assailed and persecuted. Mariano provided a list of times when the Order had been particularly under attack. These tribulations began in Francis's own lifetime with Elias's persecution of the 'spiritual friars' and continued without much pause through the various crises of the thirteenth century (Giovanni da Parma's resignation, the Spiritual controversy) up to the foundation of the Observance. Mariano's perception that these persecutions tested the virtue of the elect confirms the more equivocal suggestions in his *Compendium chronicarum* that he was sympathetic to the Spiritual cause and traced the lineage of his own congregation through these radical forbears. Indeed, the first five of his tribulations broadly correspond to those listed in Angelo Clareno's ardently Spiritual *Historia septem tribulationem* (c.1320), although the second five deal solely with the conflicts between the Observants and Conventuals.¹⁴ Mariano saw the fifteenth century as a long series of tribulations, reaching through the *Martinianae* and the conflicts over *Ut*

¹⁴ Angelo Clareno, 'Historia Septem Tribulationem', *ALKG* 2 (1886), pp. 108-336. Clareno defined the tribulations of the Franciscan Order as: 1) Francis being disobeyed by his friars and clergy; 2) Minister General Elia da Cortona (1232-1239) persecuting the primitive ideal; 3) Minister General Crescenzo da Jesi (1244-1247) valuing education and honours over the Franciscan ideal, despite opposition from Giovanni da Parma; 4) Under the Generalate of Bonaventura (1257-1274), Giovanni da Parma was deposed and persecuted, and Joachism suppressed; 5) and 6) The persecution of the Spiritual party up to 1322; 7) The decrees of John XXII. In comparison, Mariano cited the following tribulations: 1) Elia da Cortona's persecution of 'spirituali et santi frati' during Francis's lifetime; 2) Two more instances of Elia persecuting the zealous after Francis's death (1232-9), and Giovanni da Parma's forced renunciation of his Generalship (1257); 3) The persecutions during Crescenzo da Jesi's Generalate (1244-7); 4) The election of Bonaventura over Giovanni da Parma (1457); 5) Conflicts between the Community and the Spirituals during the Generalates of Bonagrazia da Bologna (1279-83), Arlotto da Prato (1285-6), Raimondo Gaufredi (1289-95), Michele da Cesena (1316-28), and Gonsalvo Hispano (1304-13); 6) Problems during the Generalship of Tomasso da Frignano (1367-72), perhaps referring to his early doubts about the nascent Observance; 7) Disputes during the papacy of Martin V (1424-1430), culminating in the *Martinianae* (1430); 8) Conflict during the 1450s over *Ut sacra* (1446) and the *Bulla Concordiae* (1456); 9) The papacy of Sixtus IV (1471-84), during which Sixtus, a Franciscan Conventual, favoured the Conventual party; 10) The papacy of Julius II (1499-1506), during which there was another failed attempt to reunify the Order; 11) The papacy of Leo X (1513-21), and the Generalships of Cristofano da Forlì (1514-17) and Francesco

sacra to the arguments over *Ite vos* and beyond. These tribulations were ongoing, for even *Ite vos* could not halt the persecution of the Observant community. Mariano's final entry was for the time of Francesco da Lecco (Minister General 1518-1520): even as Mariano completed the *Via Spirituale*, still the devil was attempting to corrupt the Observance. Yet Mariano was not without hope:

Our ancient enemy ... has attempted to destroy the spirit of God within the fervent hearts of the zealots of the Regular Observance, but even with all his wiles, he was not able to attain his ambitions, for though it has often seemed suffocated and spent, the fervent spirit has nevertheless always emerged victorious. (VS, 52r)

Mariano's tales of these persecutions show how the Observance embraced tribulations as a sign of divine favour. In true Franciscan fashion, the Observant beatus Giovanni Buonvisi (†1472) welcomed the insults of layfolk, the criticisms of Conventuals and the pains of illness and suffering. He told his brothers:

Good friars must tire themselves out with the necessary and most useful study of perfection, which does not only consist in poverty, abstinence, prayer and other virtues, but also in the abnegation of oneself, and in suffering adversity, insults, abuse and persecution against one's will, and in desiring these things ... When I was not afflicted, then I felt most afflicted in thinking that God had abandoned me, for he gave me no profit. When I was insulted once more, I was like the sick man who must take medicine to regain his health, and says to himself, 'Drink, drink, for it will do you good.' (VS, 115v)

We have already seen how writers such as Bernardino Aquilano and the Observant polemicists found profit in characterizing the Observants as martyrs who were persecuted on earth but granted divine favour. In common with these writers, Mariano saw the sufferings endured by the Observants as a sign that the devil was jealous of their great virtue. The Observants were content to show themselves as victims in this life, the more to be victors in the next.

Public Image and the Observance

This interest in the reputation of the Observance is reflected in the most intriguing aspect of the *Via Spirituale*: its concern over the appearance and image of the Observant

da Lecco (1518-20); i.e., the conflict over *Ite vos* and its aftermath. Mariano termed these last tribulations as occurring 'in questi nostri tempi'. See *Via Spirituale*, fol. 52r.

brothers. This theme recurs again and again in the work, sometimes in contradictory forms. Mariano was aware of the possibilities for dissimulation in the public image of the brothers. He wrote of Observant brothers who cultivated a mask of sanctity to advance their careers. These men inevitably met bad ends, but they were honoured in life by confrères who failed to recognize the vice beneath the pious exterior. Thus Alexo da Vilante, infirmarer at the house of S. Bernardino in L'Aquila, who 'was reputed by all to be a saint for his apparent life and good habits, but in secret was given over to sensual appetites', died on horseback with money in his fist, having been shot by thieves. 'And so,' Mariano concluded, 'God punished him for his hypocrisy' (VS, 33v). Likewise another Observant, Fra Baptista, 'very sensual, but composed in his exterior habits', was honoured with high office due to his apparent graces, but died without confessing his many sins. His ghost returned, black with decay, to tell the brothers not to celebrate any masses for him, for he had been condemned to hell (VS, 29r).

Another anecdote shows how easy it was for the brothers to manipulate their image according to their own needs. Mariano offered the example of the lax Observants who succumbed to the devilish temptations of greed and luxury:

In the refectory these men fervently and happily forget every paucity and austerity of the holy fathers, and they fill up their bellies without any fear or zeal for poverty. To cover up their insatiable greed they claim that they follow the authority of S. Bernardino who said, 'Do not be agitated if a friar eats gold, as long as you do your own duty.'

Mariano was infuriated at this misuse of the Observance's highest authority. He spluttered that these lax brothers had the temerity to cite Bernardino, yet failed to discuss any of his other admonitions on the more spiritual life:

And they make fun of those who speak of these things, calling them hypocritical and sanctimonious. They say, 'It is enough for me to enter the doors of paradise, I don't wish to go past them.' (VS, 41r)

Thus the less zealous brothers inverted the usual estimation of virtue. The pious brothers were characterized as the sinners, guilty of hypocrisy, vainglory and pride in their superior sanctity, whilst their laxer brethren presented themselves as moderate, modest and honest. The virtues inculcated by the Regular Observance - moderation and obedience to the authority of superiors - were thus turned around and used against the congregation by its least virtuous members.

Mariano also showed his interest in the outward appearance of the Observant friars in a more positive fashion. In contradictory passages in his seventh chapter on humility, he first lauded brothers who courted vilification by cultivating an appearance of madness and caring little for worldly respect, and then claimed that true friars could be recognized by their modesty of garb, speech and action. Promoting the traditional Franciscan ideal of the friar who was 'mad for Christ', Mariano transcribed the popular exempla which showed Bernardino preaching naked to the people of Seggiano in imitation of Francis, and Giovanni da Capestrano wearing a mitre on which he had written a list of his sins, 'the which spectacle provoked many to laughter ... and worldly folk believed that he had lost his wits' (VS, 14r). Giovanni Buonvisi once more provided the principal example of an Observant brother who scorned moderation in favour of a reputation for ridiculousness. Buonvisi's antics are more fully described in Mariano's *Vita di Johanni de Buonvisi* and will be mentioned again in the next section of this chapter. In the *Via Spirituale* he was depicted as consciously attempting to cultivate a reputation for madness, as Francis had once done:

Giovanni Buonvisi da Lucca was as humble [as St Francis and the blessed Egidio]. He was reputed by some to be worthless, of little character and no value. He was mocked because through humility he repeated even the slightest thing which passed through his mind to the infirmarer or his confessor. He replied to a friend who reproved him for this, 'I don't seek honour, apart from the honour which God gives me. I want to obey my conscience. I don't care if I am reputed to be worthless and foolish. In fact, I have always tried to be so reputed.' (VS, 114v)

The life of Buonvisi in the *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* gives more details about how he tried to cement this reputation for foolishness. Conversing with some Perugian noblemen in the Piazza S. Lorenzo of the city, he dropped his underpants in an attempt to excite their disapproval (CS, 141v). Another time he charged through the town with a skinned sheep's head on his shoulders (VS, 141r, 142r).

However, within pages of approving Buonvisi's tactics, Mariano set forth a radically different ideal for the public image of the Observants. Again, Francis was the model for brothers who were modest and humble in all their comportment. These men gave no cause for laughter:

He who possesses humility is composed and serious in his ways. ... The man who goes about like a beggar, all haste and rage, and not like a religious, should be disparaged and laughed at. Such men as these are reprehensible and scandalize the world. ... Secondly, the true possessor of

humility is serious and disciplined in his speech. He speaks with a submissive voice in a humble way, using humble words and not curious ones. ... Thirdly, he is composed in all his actions, so that he does everything with a singular maturity, diligence and care; he does not act suddenly or presumptuously like a boy or a madman.

Mariano was even able to quote Francis on the importance of the appearance and image of his followers:

The disposition of the body shows the quality of the mind. The Gospel says: 'By the face may you know the man.' The sensual man may be recognized by an examination of his face. St Francis said, 'If you wish to know the inner brother, look at how he seems on the outside.' I have found some saints and beati who particularly resembled [*singularmente passorono*] St Francis in these standards: St Bonaventura, St Louis [of Toulouse], S. Bernardino, Fra Angelo da Chivasso, Fra Pietro da Travanda, Fra Guasparre da Firenze, Fra Lodovico da Siena, Fra Paolo Tedesco, and Fra Paolo da Lucca, master of holy theology. In their speech and aspect, these men seemed to be angels of God. (VS, 111r)

Once again, this angelic appearance is a specifically Observant image. All the friars cited here, apart from the obvious exceptions of Bonaventura and Louis, were Observant brothers. Five of the seven were the subjects of biographies by Mariano, whilst Angelo da Chivasso had once been his master, so he knew their virtues well. It is a measure of his pride in the Observance that these fifteenth-century men could be said to resemble the founder in their saintly bearing.

The Vite de sancti Frati Minori

The *Via Spirituale* depended on examples from the lives of saints and beati to press home its point. Mariano's thorough knowledge of the saintly men of his congregation is displayed even more fully in his *Vite de sancti Frati Minori*, the majority of which deal with Observant brothers. The *Vite* are deeply bound up with the Observant ideal and identity. For instance, Mariano's life of Paoluccio seems to be a post-1517 document. In it, Mariano seems confident of the Observance's separate identity, stating the congregation's intention to separate from the Conventuals in its earliest days. The beati whom Mariano chose to celebrate are also revealing of his ideal for the Observant life, for they were more likely to follow the contemplative virtues and lifestyle of the early Literal Observance than the pattern of active moderation laid down by the Observance's 'four pillars'. Mariano went searching in the friaries of Tuscany and Umbria for authentic oral traditions which he feared would otherwise be lost. Thus his beati tended to be lesser

figures who devoted their lives to poverty and prayer. They were men whose stories were kept alive through tales told around the refectory table; men who would be forgotten today without the *Vite* themselves. These beati were mainly second generation Observants who entered the congregation as it became prominent in its active role in Renaissance life, and yet preachers and educated men are few amongst them. They are presented as contemplatives, miracle-workers, poor men and humble followers of Francis. Nevertheless, these beati also represented a fusion of Literal and Regular ideals. They were men who devoted themselves to extreme poverty and privation, and yet preached moderation and toleration. They are introduced to the reader as an ideal to meditate upon and imitate, but their virtues are also seen as exceptional and almost inimitable. Once more, as in the *Via Spirituale*, Mariano intimated that this ideal was no longer a living one, but one located in the past. He hoped to inspire a new generation of pious Observants to revive that past once more.

The *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* survive in three manuscripts, two of which were examined for the purposes of this study. The first is the untitled codex Landau-Finally 243 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze which contains the lives of thirty-four Franciscan beati dating from the 1250s to 1510 (of whom only Umiliana de' Cerchi, Jacopone da Todi and St Bonaventura are not Observant), twelve non-Franciscan beati (mainly fifteenth-century Carmelite or Brigettine brothers), and three tracts (Mariano's own *Defensorio della verità* which attacks those who criticized his Order, Bonaventura's *De vita religiosa* and the *Expositio super Pater Noster*, wrongly attributed to Francis).¹⁵

¹⁵ Mariano da Firenze, *Vite di Sancti et Beati*, BNCF Cod. Landau-Finally 243. The contents of the manuscript are as follows: fols. 1r-10v Vita della beata Umiliana de' Cerchi by Raffaele Maffei da Volterra / 11r-38v Defensorio della verità by Mariano / 39r-70v De vita religiosa by Bonaventure / 71r-87v Vita di San Bonaventura / 88r-88v Blank / 89r-119r Vita di San Bernardino da Siena / 119r-134r Vita di Jacopone da Todi / 135r-147v Paoluccio de' Trinci / 147v-172r Thomà da Firenze / 172v-175v Polidoro Romano / 175v-179v Girolamo della Stupha / 179v-186r Antonio da Stroncone / 186r-189r Lanzilao Hungaro / 189v-200 Guasparre da Firenze / 200v-204v Antonio da Siena / 205r-208r Leone di Pietra di Bugno Corso / 208r-210r Pietro Corso da Brieta / 210r-212r Herculano da Piagale / 212r-218v Michele da Barga / 218v-220r Iacobo da Pavia and Francesco da Barga / 220r-231v Pietro da Travanda / 231v-249v Giovanni Bonvisi / 249v-250v Pietro da Firenze / 251r-253r Gerardo da Firenze / 253r-253v Baptista da Firenze / 253v-254r Domenico da Firenze / 254r-255v Egidio da Firenze / 255v-256v Bastiano da Firenze / 257r-258r Clemente Capponi and Domenico da Campi / 258r Giovanni da Monte Ilcino / 258r-261r Piero Francioso / 261r-261v Paulo Francioso and others / 261v-264v Lodovico da Siena / 264v-274v Paulo Tedescho / 275r-276v Blank / 277r-286r Bartolomeo da Anghiari / 286r-292r Mariano da Lugo / 292v-297v Blank / 298r-308v Angelo Carmelitano / 309r-316v Romolo da Firenze / 317r-320v Piero da Firenze prior of Lucca / 321r-323r Pietro Belfredelli da Firenze / 322r-323r Antonio da Mugello / 323v-324r Michele da Firenze / 324r-326v Bianco da Lanciolina / 326r-328r Nanni di Gualtieri da San Gimignano /

The majority of the beati were born or lived in Tuscany. The manuscript is written in the Tuscan vernacular, with the exception of the Latin works on the Pater Noster and Umiliana de' Cerchi, and folios 1-87, 135-204 and 277-352 are in Mariano's own hand. The manuscript measures 210x140mm, and is made up of 358 folios of paper in a nineteenth-century binding. Modern numeration is in the bottom left-hand corner; the old numeration in the top right starts anew with each separate section. It has been dated to some time before 1523, the year in which Mariano died.

The second manuscript is closely related to Landau-Finaly 243. Codice Sessoriano 412 of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II di Roma is a near-identical collection of the same *Vite* copied under the auspices of Dionisio Pulinari at the convent of Sant'Orsola in Florence in 1541.¹⁶ It comprises the first two volumes of a three-volume work; the third volume, which I was unable to examine, is preserved in a manuscript at the Franciscan house of Giaccherino near Pistoia.¹⁷ The manuscript measures 276x206mm, comprising 265 folios of paper copied in a single hand of clear humanist miniscule. Old and modern numeration are both in the top right hand corner, the former in Latin and the latter in Arabic numerals. There is no contemporary title, but the first page has been titled in a later hand *Vite quaranta quattro di vari Uomini Illustri in Santità*. Cod. Sess 412 is slightly different ^{from} the Florentine manuscript. The order of lives has changed; it does not contain seven of the *Vite*, including those of Bernardino and Bonaventura, which are to be found in Landau-Finaly 243; and the tracts attributed to Francis and Bonaventura have been omitted. Although the index to the Roman manuscript lists the lives of Giovanni da Capestrano and Pietro Pettinaio neither are contained in the text; instead both are to be found in the third volume at Giaccherino.¹⁸

328v Blank / 329r-345r Amadio Spagnuolo / 345v-351r Manno di Svetia / 351v-352r Piero da Firenze / 352r-352v Bernardo brother of Piero / 353r-354r Expositio super Pater Noster by St Francis / 354v-358v Blank.

¹⁶ BNVER Cod. Sess. 412 (Ms. 2063). For a full description of this codex, see Livarius Oliger, 'Il Codice 2063 (Sess. 412) della Biblioteca Nazionale di Roma, opera di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *Luce e Amore* 4 (1907), pp. 361-368.

¹⁷ For a description of the Giaccherino manuscript, see E. Bulletti, 'Il codice G. H. della Biblioteca del Convento di Giaccherino', *Luce e Amore* 4 (1907), pp. 550-554.

¹⁸ The full index of Cod. Sess. is as follows: fols. I-XXVII Defensorio della verità / XXVII-CLIIII Jacopone da Todi / CLIIII-LIIII Humiliana de' Cerchi / LIIII-LXVI Paulo de' Trinci / LXVI-LXVIII Polidoro Romano / LXVIII-LXXI Girolamo della Stupha / LXXI-LXXVI Antonio da Stroncone / LXXVI-LXXIX Lanzilao Unghero / LXXIX-LXXXVIII Guasparri da Firenze / LXXXVIII-XCI Antonio da Siena / XCI-XCV Leone di Pietra da Bugno Corso / XCV-XCVII Pietro Corso da Brieta / XCVII-C Herculano da Piagale / C-CVIII Michele da Barga / CVIII-CXI Iacobo da Pavia and Francesco da Barga / CXI-CXXVII

Mariano was continually gathering written material and oral testimonies from his fellow brothers during his visits to Observant houses across Italy from around 1510 to 1523, and the lives of the Florentine and Roman manuscripts were written on and off during these years of travel. Certain lives can be dated more securely than others. In 1510 Mariano's presence was recorded at Empoli where he witnessed the death of Bartolomeo da Anghiari. In 1513 he was at Siena for the translation of the remains of Paolo Tedesco (†c.1483) and Lodovico da Siena. In 1515-16 he was present at the beatification inquest into the life of Pietro da Travanda in Cetona.¹⁹ These occasions must surely have given him the opportunity to gather both literary testimony and oral anecdotes. It seems that Mariano began to collect his hagiographical writings together in 1520-21 in order to publish a book of lives of the beati of the Franciscan first, second and third Orders. In his *Vita di San Francesco* Mariano explained:

In praise of God I have decided to accede to the prayers of certain devoted and spiritual persons to put together in one volume certain legends and lives of holy brothers and sisters of the three Orders of St Francis, which at different times I have written, dictated and in part collected from the old legends. Reduced in this way into one volume, ... [I will] publish them for the consolation and edification of those devoted to the glorious St Francis.²⁰

It seems that the Landau-Finaly codex of the *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* was Mariano's first draft of this projected volume which was never printed, perhaps because of the author's sudden death in 1523.

Pietro da Treguanda / CXXVII-CXXX Bastiano da Firenze / CXXX Giovanni da Monte Ilcino / I-XXVIII Giovanni Bonvisi / XXVIII-XXXII Piero da Firenze / XXXII-XXXVI Gherardo da Firenze / XXXVI Batista da Firenze / XXXVI-XXXVII Domenico da Firenze / XXXVII-XL Egidio da Firenze / XL-XLII Clemente Capponi / XLII-XLVI Piero Francioso / XLVI-XLVIII Paulo Francioso and others / XLVIII-LII Lodovico da Siena / LII-LXIX Paulo Tedesco / LXIX-LXXVII Bartolomeo da Anghiari / LXVII-LXXXIII Mariano da Lugo / LXXXIII-XCII Angelo Carmelitano / XCII-XCIX Romolo da Firenze / XCIX-CIII Piero da Firenze prior of Lucca / CIII Pietro Belfredelli da Firenze / CVIII-CV Antonio da Mugello / CV Michele da Firenze / CV-CVIII Bianco da Lanciolina / CVIII-CX Nanni di Gualtieri da San Gimignano / CX-CXXIII Amadio Spagnuolo / CXIII-CXXX Manno di Svetia / CXXX-CXXXIII Piero da Firenze and Bernardo brother of Piero / CXXXIII-CLXXXVI Johanni da Capestrano / CLXXXVI Pietro Pettinaio. [Last two missing: manuscript ends at fol. CXXXIV]

¹⁹ Cannarozzi, 'Ricerche sulla vita di Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 27 (1930), pp. 60-63.

²⁰ Mariano da Firenze, *Vita di San Francesco*, BNCF, Cod. II, II, 449, fol. 1r. This life is not included either in Landau-Finaly 243 nor Cod. Sess. 412. It has been published by D. Cresi, 'La vita di San Francesco scritta da Fra Mariano da Firenze', *SF* 64 (1967), pp. 48-90.

Mariano shared some of his reasons for recording the lives of Observant beati in the introduction to his life of Pietro da Travanda (†1492) in the Sessoriano codex. Of Pietro he wrote: 'His name will live forever, and his sacred memory must never be forgotten by the living. Considering this ... I set myself to writing' (CS, 113r). Twice he despaired that no-one before him had thought to record the actions of these modern beati who had been manifestly saintly in their lifetimes. He promised to recount the wondrous exploits of Paolo Francioso, but although he claimed to have many details from 'trustworthy people, and particularly from one who talked much with [Paolo] and was his confessor', he admitted that he could not write in as much detail as he wished, 'because his remarkable deeds, works and miracles have been forgotten through the negligence of writers' (CS, 187v). Likewise, in his *Vita di Thomà da Firenze* (†1447), Mariano revealed the labour he had put into researching the life of the beatus:

I cannot fully describe his works and deeds because of the negligence of the writers who lived in his time. I can only write a few of the many things, which, travelling on foot with no little difficulty to different parts of Italy, I found and learned from wise and pious men who knew the aforesaid beatus and saw him with their own eyes, or heard of him from his disciples. (CS, 147v)

Thus Mariano felt that knowledge of Observant beati had an important role to play in the education of his fellow brothers. They lived lives that were worth seeking out, recording and repeating to provide a pattern for inspiration and imitation.

Vita di Paoluccio dei Trinci

Just as Oddi had done in *La Franceschina*, Mariano placed his life of Paoluccio dei Trinci at the head of his *Vite*. Paoluccio was thus acknowledged by Mariano as the first amongst Observant brothers: he was both founder and exemplar. The *vita* also gives a deeper insight into its author's conception of the Observant identity, for it deals with the historical beginnings of the Paoluccio's Observant community and its position in the Order as a whole. Mariano's *vita* seems to depend greatly on *La Franceschina* and Bernardino Aquilano's *Chronica Ordinis Minorum* (though neither work is cited), yet, as we shall see, he added much that Oddi in particular was perhaps too cautious to include. As Oddi had done in his own version of Paoluccio's life, Mariano justified the need for an Observance by deploring the state of the Order in the fourteenth century, depicting the Order as irretrievably compromised by its bad habits. Mariano showed the Conventuals fiercely persecuting the saintly Paoluccio: 'once they beat and whipped him so severely that his

face was livid [with bruises].²¹ The Conventual brothers were so distanced from the primitive Franciscan life that they looked on Paoluccio's desire to observe the Rule to the letter as something rather eccentric. Mariano wrote that, 'amongst the Conventuals, Paoluccio was considered bizarre, capricious and self-willed [*fantastico, capitoso et di propria volontà*]' (FP, 105).

Only a tiny group of the brothers around Paoluccio kept alight the reforming spark that had never been allowed to die out completely. Mariano showed Paoluccio pondering on his own position within the Order:

He often thought of how ... he had denied himself [many things] in order to follow in the footsteps of St Francis, but seeing himself robbed of his desire he was most sad, for he saw that the Order in those days was very distant from perfection and almost totally ruined. [The brothers] lived under dispensations and privileges, apart from a few who lived according to the purity of the Rule. These men were the companions of Fra Gentile da Spoleto and disciples of the holy man Giovanni della Valle who were still hindered by the prelates [of the Order]. (FP, 104)

As we have seen in Chapter Three, of the Observant historians only Mariano fully acknowledged the earlier attempts at a fourteenth-century Umbrian literal observance. Gentile da Spoleto had been imprisoned in 1355 for his alleged contacts with the Fraticelli; the fifteenth-century Observance, unsure of its strength and wary of being tarred with the Fraticelli brush, had therefore preferred to present Paoluccio as a lone reformer. Mariano had no such reservations. Probably writing after *Ite vos* (1517) had fully legitimized the Observance's conception of the Franciscan ideal, Mariano felt confident enough to associate Paoluccio with the reform attempts of both Giovanni della Valle and Gentile da Spoleto. He reappropriated the radical language of the fourteenth century when he described Paoluccio being surrounded by a supportive group of 'poveri fraticelli zelatori' and 'frati spirituali':

Paoluccio prayed continually that the poor zealous fraticelli ... would be allowed some spiritual peace and the opportunity to do their good works [*commodità di bene operare*]. ... Already in the past the saintly brother Giovanni della Valle had lived and died [at Brugliano] in purity of life and observance of the Rule, just as [Paoluccio] desired to do now. [Paoluccio] talked of his ideas with certain spiritual brothers who came to seek him out.

²¹ Faloci Pulignani, 'Paoluccio Trinci da Foligno', p. 105. Henceforth this source will be referred to within the text as FP, followed by the page number.

Mariano was confident that through this living tradition of the literal observance, Paoluccio's congregation had an identity that was distinct from that of the Conventuals, even as early as its official foundation in 1368. When Paoluccio finally fulfilled his desire to retire to Brugliano, his withdrawal was recorded with the simple phrase, 'Fra Paolo separated himself from the Conventuals' (FP, 105-6).

Mariano presented this separation as part continuation, part renovation and part innovation. Paoluccio's brotherhood was shown as a continuation of the work of Giovanni and Gentile. Furthermore, Mariano also lauded the way in which, through Paoluccio's work, 'the golden age of St Francis seemed to be renewed,' and also called his congregation 'the strict and new Observance' and 'God's new Family' (FP, 107-9). The origins of Mariano's favourite theme, that of the *età aurea*, were also to be found in Paoluccio and his companions:

Through the saintly and courageous observers of most holy poverty who were called the brothers of the Family of the Observance of Fra Paolo, the Order of the Friars Minor began to be raised up once more and to return to its original golden state [*primo Aureo stato*]. Through which not only was the holy Church once more reformed and heartened, but the whole world was illumined. (FP, 107)

The exceptional virtue of the Observant community was emphasized in Mariano's contention that God was directly active in the institutional history of the community. According to Mariano, the shift from a quasi-eremitical existence in previously abandoned hermitages to a more active life in the towns was due to divine guidance. In an important passage he justified the first step in the gradual move towards the Regular Observance and perhaps pre-empted the criticisms of the more zealous brothers of his own time with tales of divine approbation:

In order to gather abundant fruits and fill the mansions of Paradise once more, the most high God wished to expand and enlarge his new Family, which had already grown in the deserts, and bring it to the notice of his people. And so, in a marvellous way, he drew the said brothers away from the deserts and solitary places and brought them to live near the cities amongst the people. (FP, 107)

Despite this divine approval of the more active life, the virtues personified by Paoluccio were resolutely in the tradition of the literal observance, centering on poverty, humility, obedience and the contemplative life. Paoluccio was an unlettered lay brother who adopted the visual symbols of the ardent Franciscan:

The habit he wore was very coarse and patched, and he was the first friar to wear *zoccoli*. He was very humble and composed in his bearing, and he practised great abstinence through continuous fasting and long prayer. (FP, 107)

He undertook penitential feats such as praying with his arms outstretched in a cruciform position, and was so fervent in contemplation that he was found suspended in the air and burning like fire. Mariano showed Paoluccio to be determined but humble, reluctant to accept a position of authority, fleeing glory and preferring instead to retreat into solitude in order to contemplate the Franciscan life and divine mysteries. His strict life was the perfect pattern for Mariano's later Observant beati.

Observant Beati: Literal Virtues

The *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* are particularly interesting as Mariano was the Observant writer who most clearly perceived the zealous and moderate aspects of the Observant life as two distinct traditions. We saw in Chapter Three that Mariano's Latin *Compendium chronicarum* (1521) promoted the moderation of the Regular Observance by recounting the lives of educated beati whose virtues were personified by the 'four pillars' of the Observance, a tag which was first formulated by Mariano. Yet when he came to compile his vernacular 'volume [of] certain legends and lives of holy brothers and sisters of the three Orders of St Francis', he chose for the most part to lionize different men. He could have included in this volume the lives of the Observance's most famous fifteenth-century beati: apostolic preachers like Giacomo della Marca, Alberto da Sarteano, Pietro da Mogliano, Michele Carcano da Milano, Bernardino da Feltre, Cherubino da Spoleto, or his own venerated master, the papal administrator and former Vicar General Angelo da Chivasso whom he had praised in the *Via Spirituale* for his resemblance to Francis. Instead, he chose to record the lives of minor figures: infirmarers, cooks or novice-masters. Some attained the position of Guardian, a few were Vicars or preachers; the majority were lay brothers, contemplative and eremitical.

Even the men who played an active and prominent role in the congregation's administration were often lauded by Mariano for other reasons. For instance, Thomà da Firenze was presented as an example less for his missions to the Holy Land or his foundation of the house at Scarlino, than for his deep humility and the life of retired prayer which won him a miraculous relationship with the animals of the forest in which he

meditated. Of course, Mariano venerated beati who advocated the active social vocation of preaching, administration, political work and charity, as well as those who lived a life of poverty, contemplation, seclusion and physical discipline. Yet it is perhaps revealing that his collection of lives, intended to illustrate the Franciscan Observant life for the common brothers, so squarely recommends the life of contemplative poverty. This was where he felt the heart Observance truly lay, despite its glittering success in the fields of preaching and ecclesiastical politics.

Mariano regarded these beati as representatives of the lost *età aurea*, although the majority flourished in the mid to late Quattrocento; indeed, Gerardo da Firenze and Bartolomeo da Anghiari had died as recently as 1506 and 1510 respectively. Above all, the beati personified the virtue of poverty, humility and obedience. Moreover, many also represented a model that was in fact disregarded by the Observant constitutions and Rule expositions. As we have seen in Chapter Two, Observant administrators preferred to use their statutes to inculcate a practical ideal that all the brothers, not only those particularly endowed with virtue, could follow. Despite the authority of the *Constitutiones Bernardini*, which advocated *usus moderatus*, the majority of Mariano's beati made a special virtue of poverty. Lodovico da Siena (†1468) warned his brothers not to be fooled into anything less than observance *ad litteram*, for the slightest weakening would lead to irretrievable decline (CS, 185r). Without exception the brothers fasted heroically. For example, Leone da Pietra di Bugno Corso practised fierce austerity. He restricted himself to a single meal a day and only a few hours sleep, spending his time in prayer, penitence and weeping over his sins until he almost went mad (CS, 205v). Giovanni Pili da Fano's exposition stated that the health of the body should come before fasting.²² Like Leone, many of the brothers devoted their lives to prayer and contemplation. Paolo Tedesco was so afire with prayer that his mind was elevated to the level of the empyreal heavens (CS, 186v), whilst Baptista da Firenze was found by laymen levitating prayerfully in the forest at Campli (CS, 170v). Indeed, the brothers lived close to nature, just as Francis and his first companions had done.²³ Thomà enjoyed a miraculous relationship with the wild beasts of the forest around Scarlino. He called birds and allowed them to perch all over

²² See Chapter Two.

²³ On this aspect of the Franciscan life, see R. D. Sorrell, *St Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Towards the Environment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

him, used a wild deer instead of an ass to carry alms, and induced his brothers to process through the woods with wild wolves which then joined them in prayer (LF, 158r-v).

Reflecting the disregard for learning and position that had characterized the primitive and Spiritual Franciscanism, thirteen of the beati were directly stated to be lay brothers, and the non-clerical state is implied for a further nine. Some of these men, such as Polidoro Romano (LF, 174r), Antonio da Stroncone (LF, 181v) and Lanzilao Hungero (LF, 187r), humbly chose the lay state in preference to the honours accorded to the clerical rank, although they were lettered. Many disdained learning. Of the six men stated to be preachers, Girolamo della Stufa (whose story was detailed in the previous chapter), was an uneducated lay brother (LF, 71r-v); Bartolomeo da Anghiari shrank from preaching and would not use Latin because he felt it was too conceited (CS, 208r); whilst Pietro da Travanda refused to use books due to his devotion to poverty (CS, 116r). Giovanni Buonvisi professed himself to be horrified by the worldliness and learning of the congregation. Speaking to his followers, he lamented: 'One brother is reputed to be holy, yet he has had rich houses with large libraries built. Yet another is inclined to rule over convents, and send the brothers off to study!' (CS, 153v). The statutes, of course, encouraged learning.²⁴

These beati typically withdrew from the company of their fellow brothers and avoided all contact with the laity: Mariano's watchwords were 'selvatico et solitario' (LF, 251r; CS, 204v). Gerardo da Firenze (†1506) told his superior that he had lived at the house of Muro for twenty years and yet knew no-one from the surrounding countryside (CS, 166r-v). Thomà da Firenze disappeared into the forest at Scarlino for up to six days at a time (LF, 153r), whilst Pietro da Travanda advised his disciples to flee from their fellow brothers, except at choir and at table (CS, 115v). In contrast, as we saw in Chapter Two, Giovanni Pili da Fano defined hermits as 'scoundrels'.²⁵ Despite their seclusion from the world, many of the brothers were careful to shape a distinctive public image. Guasparre da Firenze forbade women to come near Scarlino, 'to better preserve his reputation [*el fama sua*] and that of his brothers' (LF, 190r-v). As was detailed in the *Via Spirituale*, Giovanni Buonvisi was extremely concerned about his reputation and public image: 'It was always his desire to mortify himself and to appear contemptible to all' (CS,

²⁴ See Chapter Two, pp. 53-54.

²⁵ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 8 (1933), p. 51.

141v). Buonvisi courted the disdain and mockery of his fellow brothers at Monteripido and of the laity of Perugia. However, his shame brought him honour:

[Giovanni] was held in great reverence by the Perugians and was reputed to be a saint. One day he was talking in the main square of S. Lorenzo with some nobles who were showing him great reverence. To humiliate himself he slipped his hands inside his habit and, loosening his underpants, let them fall to the ground. Once the nobles had seen them, he quickly snatched them up again and stuffed them into his sleeve. Yet this did not bring him shame, as he had hoped, but rather praise and greater reverence. (CS, 141v)

The beati clung to the patched habit as a visual symbol of their Observant Franciscan identity. Although constitutions such as the 1451 statutes of Barcelona had carefully detailed the permitted measurements for Observant habits, most of Mariano's beati were described as being barefoot and dressed in tight and shabby habits.²⁶ Giovanni Pili da Fano, commenting on the Rule in 1527, condemned the wearing of 'deformed' habits that were too coarse, but Antonio da Stroncone (†1461) exemplified the personal appearance of Mariano's chosen beati:

He never wore anything but a short, tight and coarse habit on his naked flesh. He never at any time wore *zoccoli* or sandals, but always went barefoot through snow and ice, so that it was pitiful to see the cuts he had on his feet. (LF, 157v)

Giovanni Buonvisi, journeying across Spain and Italy in search of a house that observed the Rule to his satisfaction, was made to wear a normal habit by the Guardian of a house in which he rested, but would not continue on his journey until his old poor habit was returned to him (CS, 137v-138r). Image certainly mattered. The poverty of Jacopo da Pavia (†1493) was widely considered to be so extraordinary that it made him into a tourist attraction for the pious:

Fra Jacopo was so rich in poverty that his first habit was sewn up with so many patches and rags that only half of it could be seen. Because of this many people came from all parts to witness his sanctity, including a *Signore* from the territory of the duke of Ferrara who pleaded with him to accept a new habit he had had made for him. Fra Jacopo could not resist his prayers and promised to wear it, but after having worn it for two or three days he could not rest. He gave the new habit to his Guardian and put his old one back on. (CS, 111r-v)

²⁶ On the prescribed measurements of habits, see Chapter Two, note 97; for Pili's comments on *viltà* see Chapter Two, note 51.

Image was an important signifier of sanctity: Jacopo was famous for his tattered habit and his reputation gave rise to a popular post-mortem cult that flourished despite an initial lack of encouragement from the Observants themselves (CS, 112v).

Observant Beati: Regular Values

Although Mariano lauded the virtues that were traditionally identified with the literal interpretation of the Rule, this was tempered by the appearance of those qualities particularly championed by the Regular Observance. Thomà's wondrous relationship with animals was due to his pre-eminent virtue of obedience: 'God restored him to the pristine obedience of our first father Adam, so that the timid birds and wild animals were obedient to him' (LF, 182v). Thomà even obediently ceased his post-mortem miracles when Giovanni da Capestrano begged him to, as Oddi had also recorded (LF, 170v-171r). Others also made a special play of obedience. Although the brothers of La Verna were worried at the violation of the vow of poverty, Piero Francioso preferred to obey the wishes of his Guardian rather than oppose the acceptance of rich garments from Cosimo de' Medici (LF, 259v). Giovanni Buonvisi was said to be like a dead man in the hands of prelates (CS, 154v), and he ordered his brothers never to do anything according to their own will but rather as their superiors commanded (CS, 151r). The exemplum about Egidio da Firenze, whose refusal to obey his Guardian was detailed in the *Via Spirituale*, was repeated once more (CS, 172r-173v), as was the story of Francesco da Pavia's encounter with Lanzilao Hungero (already detailed in Chapter Six) (LF, 187v-189r). Though many brothers disparaged learning, a few devoted themselves to a life of preaching and pastoral care. Despite the historical importance of preaching in the Franciscan Order, Bernardino da Siena and Michele da Barga were the only beati whose *Vite* were primarily concerned with their achievements in the fields of preaching, confessing, the celebration of the Mass and relationships with the secular world (CS, 102r-110v).²⁷ Four others were also mentioned to be preachers, though this did not play a major part in their depiction in the *Vite*. Some of the beati were founders of Observant houses: Piero da Firenze (CS, 164r) and Herculano dal Piagale (CS, 99v) were particularly singled out for their work in this field, whilst others were Guardians and even

²⁷ Bert Roest has commented on the place of preaching in fourteenth-century Franciscan literature: 'The importance of preaching is reflected in Franciscan chronicles. In these works Franciscan preachers and

Vicars, or companions to famous preachers. Thomà da Firenze was all these things, and he also made missionary trips to the Holy Land as part of Giovanni da Capestrano's tour as Papal Legate.

Mariano's beati also advocated a policy of charity and toleration. They acknowledged that not all brothers could reach their own level of virtue. Antonio da Stroncone argued that eating well would help his body but damn his soul; nevertheless he told his companion:

Don't look to me, but eat your fill: not everyone can treat their bodies as I treat mine. My meal is a cup of water and some bread and this is enough for me, but you cannot rule over yourself in this way, so freely eat the food I have obtained for you through charity. (LF, 182r)

Likewise, Giovanni Buonvisi made a point of stressing the need for balance in the community, arguing that both active and contemplative men were necessary to the Order (CS, 154r). Indeed, despite his own austere life, Buonvisi accepted the riches that almost inevitably accompanied the congregation's rise in popularity and influence:

This beatus was displeased by many things within the Order, particularly the beautiful and sumptuous convents, great libraries, and the appropriation of Conventual houses. He did not wish to consent to such things, but he tolerated them because of his perfection. (CS, 156v)

Mariano's beati were thus true exemplary figures. They personified the ideals of the mid fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Observance, which took its inspiration from the present as well as the past. Their austerity encouraged the less scrupulous to marvel at and attempt to imitate their miraculous virtue. Their deference and discretion was an example to rigorists who might need persuading that eremitical contemplativism and poverty could survive alongside learning, obedience and duty to the Order. Indeed, the emphasis placed on obedience in Observant hagiography may have been intended to forestall the protests of frustrated zelantes who desired a rigorist community. The *Vite* thus encouraged the weak and reassured the strict.

The Decline of the *Età Aurea*

anecdotes about their effective pastoral mission figure prominently.' The works of Mariano and Oddi represent a clear divergence from this tradition. Roest, *Reading the Book of History*, p. 217.

In the *Vite*, as in the *Via Spirituale*, Mariano took care to emphasize that the virtues that were so recognizably Observant now belonged to a past that was being not only lost, but forgotten. The greatest compliment he could pay was to comment that a beatus 'seemed like a man of another century' (140r, 175r CS). His feeling that his own generation had witnessed the deaths of the last representatives of this golden age was possibly influenced by the general sense of crisis that overtook Italy from the 1490s onward, which encompassed renewed outbreaks of plague, the French invasion of Italy, the financial decline of prominent city states (including Mariano's native Florence) and the rise of Protestantism in northern Europe.²⁸ The beati were shown to recognize that their own generation was the last to represent a golden age of observance. Many showed concern for the future of the community, prophesying tribulations to come, foreseeing unavoidable decline, or exhorting the brothers not to neglect poverty. Antonio da Siena and Antonio da Stroncone (CS, 90v), Pietro da Travanda (CS, 124r), Giovanni Buonvisi (CS, 136v) and Bartolomeo da Anghiari (CS, 207r) all foresaw tribulations for the Observance; Pietro even prophesied *Ite vos*'s division of the Order. They also predicted more general ordeals: Pietro prophesied the French invasion of Italy and was given to apocalyptic visions, as was Antonio da Stroncone (CS, 123r ; LF, 185r).

The death-bed appeal was a popular way of voicing concern that the congregation's spirit of accommodation had gone too far. At his death in 1468, Lodovico da Siena apologized to the friars who had disagreed with his rigorist policies as Provincial Vicar of Umbria, explaining that his more intemperate actions had solely been due to his zeal for the Franciscan life, and exhorting the brothers to observe the Rule to the letter (LF, 263r-v). Thomà da Firenze encouraged his disciples in their humility and poverty (LF, 160r). Pietro da Travanda (†1492) called all his confrères to his bedside to preach to them for the last time:

The brothers gathered round the saintly old man to administer the sacraments to him. With sweet words he exhorted them to abide by the observance of the Rule and particularly of holy poverty, and he encouraged them to endure patiently the future tribulations that would soon come. (CS, 127v)

²⁸ For more detail on this turbulent period see *The New Cambridge Modern History, vol 1: The Renaissance 1493-1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), particularly C. M. Ady, 'The Invasion of Italy', pp. 343-367.

The last words of Bartolomeo da Anghiari, who died in 1510, show him to have been particularly despairing about the future of the Observance. Mariano confessed Bartolomeo on his death-bed. He witnessed the beatus's warning that his brothers must 'flee conversation and remain secluded [*salvatichi*] if they wished to remain with Jesus Christ', and his exhortation that they should observe the holy vow of poverty. Bartolomeo's final words were deeply pessimistic, but it was a pessimism that Mariano felt had been fully justified by later developments:

Speaking with some young brothers about the transgressions of the friars, it seemed as if he could see all the things that were to come. He told them, 'My brothers, I am old and ill and soon I will die, but if God calls you to him while you are still young you should be immensely grateful to him.' He said these things not just once but many times, as if he was certain of the relaxations and scandals and tribulations that we have seen come after his death. (LF, 281r)

The fears of the brothers could be revealed in other ways. The blessed lay brother Mariano da Lugo lived an exemplary life of humility looking after the pack-ass at La Verna. He practised penitential feats, received visions of Christ and the Virgin, and miraculously healed the sick. Before his death in 1495, whilst acting as door-keeper at S. Salvatore al Monte on the Oltrarno (Mariano da Firenze's own first house; he may even have heard Mariano da Lugo himself recounting his experience), he received a vision of St Francis:

One evening he was alone at the entrance of the house and saw two strange friars approaching on the road from Florence. They refused to enter into the house and passed by on the road to the tabernacle of the Virgin which is behind the house. There, the elder brother turned to Mariano and said, 'I do not want to enter because that place is no longer mine. I have been driven away from it, for my houses must be small, humble and poor.' And having said this, they immediately disappeared. And Fra Mariano sadly returned to the house and publicly told the brothers what he had heard from St Francis. (LF, 289v)

These sentiments are made all the more powerful by being Francis's only personal appearance in the whole of the *Vite*, and the only time he speaks directly to the brothers. The vision makes use of a theme which recurs time and again in Observant hagiography. In the last chapter we saw that, according to Oddi, Francesco da Pavia had been reluctant to set foot in the well-appointed friary of S. Maria degli Angeli until he received a vision in which Christ claimed its property for his own. Mariano related that the blessed Pietro da Travanda would not enter Observant houses that he felt to be too rich. Once the new

church dedicated to Bernardino was built at La Capriola, he preferred to pass through Siena without resting there rather than to set foot in the friary (CS, 116r).

Mariano da Lugo's vision plainly reflects his concern for the Observant community, and, just as significantly, the concern of the author who chose to recount this vision. It shows their fear that the congregation was moving steadily away from a life of literal observance towards the wealth and power conceded to it by its patrons. Though this vision is not set in context in the *Vite*, Mariano da Lugo's scruples must certainly hark back to the dispute of 1465 when the friars at S. Salvatore had finally acquiesced to the plans of their patron Castello Quaratesi for their new church and friary. He proposed a beautiful Renaissance building; they felt it was too rich and 'no longer seemed a place for friars, but some kind of castle,' (according to Pulinari in 1580). Castello replied, 'that they did not intend to build it according to the status of the friars, but according to what was suitable to the city.'²⁹ The house was built to his specifications.³⁰ This was but one instance of the compromises that the fifteenth-century Observance was forced to make with the secular world, but it was one that obviously disturbed and worried the more pious elements of the congregation. Mariano da Lugo saw the visual symbols of the congregation's Observant identity disappearing. The small and humble hermitages were becoming rich and solid stone houses. The Observance thus became a permanent feature of Renaissance society, literally set in stone, but many of its most treasured ideals were compromised in the transition, as the anguished testimony of both Mariano da Lugo and Mariano da Firenze reveals.

Conclusion

The *Via Spirituale* and the *Vite* reflect the transitions that had taken place in the Observant congregation between the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Having seen *Ite vos* vindicate the Observance, Mariano da Firenze was confidently able to affirm the institutionally separate identity of his congregation and intended the *Via Spirituale* to instil a specifically Observant Franciscan ideal both in tepid Observants and resistant Conventuals. His *Vita* of Paoluccio dei Trinci is further proof of his confidence in the

²⁹ Pulinari, pp. 187-188. For more on the house of S. Salvatore al Monte see G. Brucker, 'Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence' in *Christianity and the Renaissance*, pp. 41-62.

Observance as a valid and separate institution within the Franciscan Order, for, unlike earlier Observant writers, he openly acknowledged the congregation's roots in the Spiritual tradition and its links to the proto-Observant reforms of fourteenth-century Umbria. Likewise, Mariano's feeling that the community was constantly being assailed and persecuted led him to identify the Observance's tribulations with those of the Spirituels in the fourteenth century. The persecution of the Observants by both Conventuals and devils were a continuation of the historical tribulations delineated by Angelo Clareno in the 1320s. Mariano's works thus reveal him to have been open-minded about his Order's radical past and often sympathetic to the travails of the Spirituels.

The *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* in particular show that the Observants, like their Spiritual predecessors, continued to struggle with the legacy of Francis's perfectionist ideal. Mariano's nostalgic conception of the *età aurea*, a dehistoricised past in which Francis and Paoluccio stood together with the apostles and all Observants were exceptionally pious, was a reaction to the perceived decline in his congregation's energy and idealism. The ideal he promoted in his *Vite* was mainly based in the traditional virtues of absolute poverty, eremitical contemplation and a disdain for learning which had marked the Literal Observance. This ideal was noticeably different to the learned moderation he had supported in the *Compendium chronicarum*. Although Mariano also celebrated such Regular Observant concepts as obedience and moderation in the *Via Spirituale* and *Vite*, he nevertheless saw the devil's hand in the decline of Observant devotion. He was alarmed by the falsity of seemingly pious brothers, although he advised his confrères how to fashion themselves so that their actions would proclaim their holiness. He was deeply pessimistic about the Order's present and future, recording the lamentations of beati who deplored the state of the Observance and foresaw its further decline. True virtue was only to be found in the *età aurea*; a lost age which could only be retrieved by conscious imitation of its most saintly men. His own works were to play a role in such a revival, for, as Mariano wrote, 'I hoped by this work to become more ardent myself, to enkindle the frigid, and make the fervent even more so' (VS, 1v).

³⁰ See F. Cappecchi, 'Le vicende del complesso conventuale di San Salvatore al Monte a Firenze', *AFH* 89 (1996), pp. 469-536.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Observant literature testifies to the careful nurturing and communication of the Observant image, ideal and identity. Writers such as Aquilano, Oddi and Mariano deplored the fact that so little of the Observance's past had been deemed worthy of record. They avowed that they set down its history for posterity so that those who came after them could truly understand their congregation and fashion themselves in the image of its most perfect brothers. The statutes ordained that the Rule, constitutions and Franciscan literature should be read aloud at table, whilst Johannes Brugman added his own list of texts which he felt would, with careful study, shape the perfect Observant brother. The many allusions to the Order's earlier chronicles and hagiography show that such literature preserved a strong sense of institutional continuity. The Observants often saw their own congregation as a continuance or culmination of historiographical traditions: their travails had been prefigured in primitive or Spiritual Franciscan works and the advent of their saints and beati prophesied by earlier mystics. A sense of Observant identity was fostered and communicated in other ways. Oddi and Mariano wrote of their dependence on the rich oral traditions which were preserved and passed on by their unlettered confrères. Bernardino Aquilano portrayed himself exhorting his gathered brothers to defend their congregation at General Chapters. Polemicists pledged themselves to the preservation of the Observance, defining what Observants were by decrying what they were not. Legislators carefully determined the weight, quality and dimensions of the Observant habit, thus both inculcating their charges with a sense of corporate identity and defining a vital aspect of the congregation's public image.

There can be no doubt that Observant literary production was intimately related to the brothers' sense of their own identity. The great surges in Observant literary endeavour took place during the years in which the community felt its way of life or its very existence to be under threat; and in defending their brotherhood, the Observants created a literary mirror of their self-perception. The crisis of the 1450s and 1460s, in which every Conventual attack was matched by an Observant counter-strike, shaped the mentality of a generation of Observant writers, including Aquilano, Oddi, the Observant polemicists and many of the preachers and writers who disseminated the cult of Bernardino da Siena. The

controversies which shook the Order prior to its reorganisation by Leo X in 1517 also inspired a glut of inventive polemics from every corner of Europe and must surely have influenced Mariano da Firenze and Giovanni Pili da Fano. Yet it is clear from Pili's *Dialogo de la Salute*, the latest of the documents examined here, that in 1528 the Observance was on the verge of another crisis of identity prompted by the rise of the Capuchins and the resulting clash with the new congregation. Such developments illustrate one of the most significant points of this thesis: the Franciscan identity was fluid and evolving. More importantly, the interpretation of the Franciscan ideal remained a live issue even into the sixteenth century, three hundred years after the Order was first founded. The passion poured into polemics, the deep piety evident in hagiography, the practical rigour applied to legislation: all demonstrate the vitality of the Observance and Franciscan Order as a whole. The ideals of Francis continued to be worthy of debate and disputation.

However, even Francis himself had not been fully able to synthesise each aspect of his ideal: early Franciscan material showed him musing on whether to follow an austere contemplative vocation or an active life of preaching and reform. His Order split again and again along the same lines; into Community and Spirituals, Conventuals and Observants, Observants and Capuchins. The Observance itself suffered these fractures in microcosm. Indeed, the history of the Observance is the history of the Franciscan Order in miniature. Like the Order, the Observance began as a tiny brotherhood devoted to absolute poverty. As the movement grew, its radical austerity was mitigated to provide for a more active ideal. Such moderation displeased certain brothers who yearned for the strict interpretation of the Rule. By 1528 the congregation had come full circle. The Observants now formed the majority Franciscan party, were the official holders of the Order's great seal and were often established in grand houses provided by their urban benefactors. In short, the Observance had become the establishment against which any would-be *zelantes* had to rebel.

Despite the similarities between the two reforms, many Observants stubbornly refused to see any similarities between Paoluccio's early Observance and the advent of the Capuchins, who were at the time provisionally named 'the Friars Minor of the Eremitical Life'. In 1527 Giovanni Pili da Fano saw no foreshadowing of the Capuchin situation in his pious description of the early Observance: 'many good brothers, zealots [*zelatori*] for

the Rule, went to the hermitages: some others wanted to live honestly in the convents. Both groups suffered tribulations.¹ In contrast, Pili characterised the Capuchins as eccentric, egocentric, hot-headed scoundrels. His own defection to the new reformed congregation in 1534 confirmed that the Observance was no longer the natural home of the reforming impulse. Pili was joined by a number of prominent Observants whose withdrawal from the older congregation drained it of many of its most pious and energetic brothers whilst providing the Capuchins with a new class of administrators, preachers and defenders.

The success of the Capuchins was not the only challenge to the Observance in the sixteenth century. The congregation's very existence was threatened by the rise of Protestantism. The Franciscan houses of Germany were suppressed in the 1520s and many Observant brothers chose to abandon the religious life altogether rather than persevere in so hostile a climate. In England, the Observants, who had first been established at Greenwich in the 1485, were the only religious to refuse the oath of supremacy, steadfastly declaring that it was 'clearly against their profession and the Rule of St Francis'.² Their houses were confiscated in 1535 and a number became martyrs for their faith. Many English friars who fled to the neighbouring Scottish province survived only to face the dissolution of the Observance in Scotland in 1559-60.³ In France and Italy the Observants were concerned with preventing the spread of heresy and preached constantly against Protestant doctrines. The Observants of the sixteenth century faced a world in which all religious certainties had been shattered. There would never be another Observant saint or beatus who, like Bernardino da Siena or Giovanni da Capestrano, would be as venerated in northern Europe as in the south. Yet though the Observance lost its pre-eminent place in religious life to the new Counter Reformation orders, many of its brothers, such as Cardinal Francisco de los Angeles Quiñones (c.1482-1540) and the blessed Francesco Gonzaga (1546-1620), bishop of Cefalù and Mantua, became key figures in the Counter Reformation Church.⁴ Others followed the example of the twelve

¹ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 7 (1932), p. 501.

² E. Hutton, *The Franciscans in England, 1224-1538* (London: Constable, 1926), pp. 238-247.

³ W. M. Bryce, *The Scottish Grey Friars*, 2 vols, (Edinburgh: William Green and Son, 1909), vol. 1, pp. 141-160. On the Dominicans during the Reformation, see J. P. Foggie, *The Dominicans in Scotland, 1450-1560* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh unpublished doctoral thesis, 1998).

⁴ See L. Oliger, 'Quiñones, Francisco de los Angeles' in *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* vol. 12, pp. 613-614; and C. Schmitt, 'Gonzaga, Francesco' in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* vol. 21, pp. 632-633. On the Observance during the Counter-Reformation, see *Santità e spiritualità*

Observant friars led by Martin de Valencia and Juan Juarez who followed Cortés to Mexico in 1523 to become prominent amongst the religious pioneers in the New World.⁵

The way of life forged by the Quattrocento Observance was a significant factor in preparing the congregation for these new duties. The moderate life allowed for a high degree of flexibility which permitted the community to fit itself out for a long and varied ecclesiastical career. The need for such moderation is clearly signalled in Observant legislation, which marginalised the heroic model of *imitatio Francisci* in favour of a practical ideal that could be imitated by the very least of the brothers. The statutes were the fundamental texts through which the ideal of the Regular Observance was fostered and disseminated. They legislated for the provision of education whilst diminishing the influence of the unlettered lay brothers, imposing a moderate interpretation of poverty and demanding a high level of obedience. The discussions over the Rule show that there was a great deal of dispute within the Observance as to the correct interpretation of Francis's vision for his Order. The injunctions of the *Constitutiones Bernardini* reveal that the worries of the brothers were substantially the same as those of the Spirituals in the early fourteenth century, for the *zelantes* continued to question the limits set on *usus pauper* and chafed against the strict obedience demanded by moderate superiors. The authors of the *Constitutiones Bernardini* attempted to quell these disputes by insisting that the requirements of obedience eclipsed all other demands. This argument influenced the fifteenth-century Observance profoundly but factions remained who were not fully convinced. Giovanni Pili da Fano's two *Dialoghi de la salute* testify that passionate discussions over the interpretation of the Rule continued to rage in the 1520s and 1530s. Pili's work also suggests that the sixteenth-century Observance was so in thrall to its own history that it was unable to change its course, despite an awareness that all was not well within the congregation. Pili's appeals to the authority of Bernardino and Capestrano were unlikely to influence the scrupulous *zelantes* when Pili himself admitted that the Observant life was 'now somewhat distanced from that first reformation'.⁶ Indeed, Pili's assertions that the Observant way of life was safe indicate that he was worried that the

francescana tra i secoli XV et XVII, Atti del Convegno storico internazionale L'Aquila 26-27 ottobre 1990 (L'Aquila: Università dell'Aquila, 1991).

⁵ See A. Prosperi, 'America e apocalisse: Note sulla *conquista spirituale* del Nuovo Mondo', *Critica Storica* 13 (1976), pp. 1-61.

⁶ *Dialogo de la salute* (1527), *L'Italia Francescana* 7 (1932), p. 390.

moderation propounded by Bernardino had gradually become relaxation; a suggestion confirmed by his subsequent defection to the stricter Capuchin congregation.

Observant legislation thus indicates that the brotherhood continued to be profoundly affected by the perfectionist ideal passed down by Francis and elaborated by the fourteenth-century Spiritual party. Observant historiography confirms this testimony. The historians of the Order often seem sympathetic to the tribulations of the Spiritual era and the afflictions of others who wished to follow the Rule to the letter. Bernardino Aquilano even began his history of the Observance with a favourable portrait of the Spirituels rather than with Francis's foundation of the Order, whilst Mariano da Firenze lamented the suppression of Gentile da Spoleto's proto-Observant community in 1355. The chronicles also offer an important insight into the creation of institutional identity within the congregation. The chroniclers leaned towards the propagation of the moderate active life of the Regular Observance. When writing as an historian Mariano da Firenze markedly chose to celebrate beati who favoured a life of learning, administration and obedience rather than the eremitical and contemplative austerity of the beati whom he lauded in his hagiographical works. Observant historiography had a polemical edge, for it symbolically appropriated the Franciscan past in order to justify the new community at a time when the decision to write a history of the Observant congregation rather than the Order as a whole was freighted with significance. The chroniclers portrayed the Observance as the culmination of a long and distinguished lineage. Moreover, they made great use of the rhetoric of independence. Aquilano's rabble-rousing speeches to his confrères confirm that the institutional self-consciousness of the Order was well advanced by 1480:

This one thing I fear: let us not be divided, for every realm which is divided within itself will be desolated. If we are united, God being for us, I fear neither demons nor men: victory is ours.⁷

The polemical edge discernible in Observant historiography becomes vividly clear in the texts which flew between the Observance and Conventuals in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Observant polemic was a public medium which aimed to shore up the image of the congregation: the conflicts delineated in the pages of Franciscan polemics were open and fierce. More importantly, the Observant relationship with the Conventuals

⁷ Aquilano, *Chronica*, p. 49.

was a primary force in shaping the identity of the reformed congregation. The vitriolic bickering between the two parties accelerated the Observants' tendency to view themselves as a separate entity within the Order, whilst Conventual criticisms helped spur the Observants to reposition their vocation towards a more educated and active life. Conventual accusations that the Beghard Brothers (as they mockingly called the Observants) dabbled in the heresy of the Fraticelli urged the Observants towards moderation and proclamations of obedience. In addition, the Observant writers such as Johannes Brugman played on the perceived contrasts between the reformed brothers and their unreformed Conventual rivals to create a positive public image for their congregation. Allegations of Conventual laxity allowed the Observants to present themselves to clergy and laity as a distinctively reformed party within the Order. Indeed, polemical treatises constructed an Observant identity that was substantially different from the actuality delineated in legislative texts. In direct disavowal of their own constitutions and expositions of the Rule, polemical writers proclaimed that the Observants followed the spiritual observance of the Rule and abided by the ideal of *imitatio Francisci* rather than being restricted solely to the provisions of the Rule. However, Johannes Brugman's *Speculum Imperfectionis* attacked his own community for its failure to abide by such stringent standards. Brugman lamented the declining interest in the literature of the Order, the study of which would, he proclaimed, fashion perfect Observants, and bewailed the Observance's dangerous fascination with image over substance. Meanwhile, Observant polemicists simultaneously targeted the austere congregations which aimed for a strict interpretation of the Rule, proclaiming that such observance was almost impossible in practice.

In fact, it was a careful balance between moderation and reform that became the distinctive mark of the Regular Observance's fifteenth-century ideal. The key component in the dissemination of this ideal was the cult of Bernardino da Siena, the Observance's first and greatest saint. Bernardino's widespread *fama* was of primary importance in the cultivation of his congregation's separate identity and public image. The conscientious moderation preached by Bernardino facilitated his rise as one of the Renaissance's most celebrated saints. His life of itinerant preaching and ecclesiastical administration became identified with the Observant vocation by the adoring laity. Bernardino furthered this development by preaching that sermons such as his own held off the apocalypse and publicly extolling the virtues of moderation, obedience and active charity. Bernardino's

1450 canonisation served to sanctify his community. The Observants increased the identification of the new saint with the congregation by doing everything in their power to promote his cult. Houses were dedicated to him, brothers were named after him and sermons were preached in his honour. The Observant preachers and writers who disseminated Bernardino's cult emphasised the sanctity of his moderate life, proclaiming that it was his steadfast preaching which won him a providential role in the history of mankind. The characterisation of Bernardino as a divinely-ordained Angel of the Apocalypse or Angel of the Seventh Seal who was sent to enlighten a people who walked in darkness was compared to Francis's role as Angel of the Sixth Seal. Indeed, Bernardino's *fama sanctitatis* was assimilated to the founder's; in turn, Francis's iconography began to resemble somewhat that of the new saint. The success of Bernardino's cult led to Conventual attempts to partake in his reputation by proclaiming the Observant saint to have been a Conventual sympathiser or, more simply, a Conventual. Others were less willing to accept Bernardino's reputation for sanctity. The Observance's Augustinian and Fraticelli opponents characterised the saint as a limb of Antichrist, whilst preachers spoke of certain laymen who challenged his reputation and were converted by miraculous punishments. Even some Observant brothers were seen to question Bernardino's values.

Although Bernardino's cult was undoubtedly one of the most influential factors in the development of the fifteenth-century Observance, there are signs in the hagiography of Giacomo Oddi and Mariano da Firenze that some brothers felt ambivalent about the ideal sanctified by the new saint. Both writers gave voice to the traditions of the 'two souls' which inhabited the Observant body. We have seen that these Literal and Regular tendencies have been characterised as separate and divergent ideals by Mariano d'Alatri, whilst Grado G. Merlo contends that they were fully reconciled and tranquilly accommodated into a single Observant model. Although he was always circumspect in his writing, Oddi's conception of the Franciscan ideal tended to emphasise the virtues of poverty and humility above all else. In accordance with Spiritual Franciscan traditions he asserted that it was poverty, not preaching, which won the Order a providential role. He defensively praised the virtue, which he associated particularly with the Observance; the greatest number of new Observant lives were included in the chapter on poverty. Such original pieces of writing on Observant beati introduced the congregation into *La Franceschina's* portrait of Franciscan sanctity. Whilst Oddi did not record the life of a

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single fifteenth-century Conventual beatus in the work, the forty-four Observant brothers whose lives he lauded were fully integrated into the Order's historical and providential schema. Oddi thus subtly declared the Observants to be the sole heirs to Francis's vision. He further asserted that the congregation was particularly favoured by Christ, who allowed Francesco da Pavia to turn the wheel of grace to bring down the Conventuals and those who obstructed Bernardino's canonisation. Like Francesco da Pavia, many of the beati celebrated by Oddi conformed to the literal tradition. They were often lay brothers; unlettered, eremitical and contemplative. However, Oddi was careful not to associate his congregation openly with the traditions of the Spirituals or Fraticelli. He carefully smoothed over the fractures of the Franciscan past, avoiding all mention of the Spiritual controversy and proclaiming that Paoluccio dei Trinci refounded and re-formed the Order: the Observant congregation was a new shoot which sprang from the fallen trunk of the Franciscan Order.

Like the majority of the Observant beati whom Oddi chose to laud, the friars praised by Mariano da Firenze in the *Via Spirituale* and *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* exalted the life of the Literal Observance and mourned the passing of traditional virtues. Indeed, they were willing to stigmatise as diabolic dupes the less zealous brothers who were unwilling to adhere to their rigorous standards. Mariano was deeply preoccupied with the Observant image. Whilst he roundly condemned those who merely adopted a veneer of piety to mask their sinfulness and ambition, he presented two images for pious brothers to imitate. The first was the capering foolishness of the friar who was 'mad for Christ' and courted public ridicule and disdain; the second, the measured dignity of the humble brother whose worth could be recognised in his composed face and manners. Mariano's beati conformed to both images. They used their patched habits as a visual shorthand to impress their reputation for poverty upon an admiring laity; they disparaged learning and lived 'solitario et selvaticcho' in the woods of Tuscany and Umbria. Their lives attest to the survival of observance *ad litteram*, yet their example also served to reassure Observant brothers of the importance of the Regular virtues of obedience and moderation which allowed the congregation to deal in the world of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. However, sections of Mariano's *Via Spirituale* suggest that he felt that such accommodation had perhaps gone too far. His concept of the Franciscan *età aurea* was a strangely dehistoricised phenomenon which he identified strongly with the austere ideals of the early Observants, whether these ideals were practised by beati who flourished

during the earliest days of the community or in the early sixteenth century. His mournful remarks over the congregation's decline from its 'primo Aureo stato' reveal his regret that the austere standards of the early Observant beati had survived into an age of moderation only in individual instances. Further passages in the *Vite*, in which dying beati foresaw tribulations, decline and division, confirm that Mariano and his fellow idealists were pessimistic about the future of their congregation.

The works of Oddi and Mariano thus show that the traditions of the Literal Observance survived into the early sixteenth century and were cherished by Observant writers. It is surely symbolic that, whilst Mariano recognised the virtue of learned Observant administrators, preachers and churchmen in his *Compendium chronicarum*, he did not include many such men in his *Vite de sancti Frati Minori* which he confessed he wrote 'for the consolation and edification of those devoted to the glorious St Francis'.¹⁸ The distinctively different ideals fostered by Mariano in his works - the learned model of the Regular Observance's greatest preachers in his Latin chronicle, and the eremitical poverty of the majority of beati celebrated in the vernacular *Vite* - are the clearest sign that the 'two souls' were not as easily reconciled as Merlo has argued. Likewise, evidence of a modicum of internal opposition to Bernardino and his policies from Observant brothers, as well as hints in Observant constitutions that there were tensions between the clergy and laybrothers, further argues against the tranquil accommodation of the two ideals.

Of course, both Oddi and Mariano also praised the virtues associated with the Regular Observance. The beati they exalted may have been poor unlettered laybrothers, but they were often also obedient Vicars, novice-masters or founders of new Observant houses. Mariano's *vita* of Giovanni Buonvisi counselled the zealous to accede to the needs of the majority, recalling that Buonvisi 'was displeased by many things within the Order, particularly the beautiful and sumptuous convents [and] great libraries ... but he tolerated them because of his perfection'.¹⁹ Oddi's life of Francesco da Pavia constructed a beatus whose role was consciously developed to reassure those brothers who felt that the Regular Observance was mitigating the traditional austerity of the congregation. Francesco's oft-stated anxieties over the observance of the Rule and the derogation of poverty echoed those of some of his confrères. The divine visions which calmed his fears

¹⁸ Mariano da Firenze, *Vita di San Francesco*, BNCF, Cod. II, II, 449, fol. 1r.

¹⁹ BNVER Cod. Sess. 412, fol. 156v.

led him to exalt the virtue of obedience above all else and served to reassure and encourage those brothers who shared his former concern for the congregation. His approval of the Regular Observance was confirmed by visions in which he confounded the enemies of the congregation by turning Christ's wheel of grace. The Observance's 'two souls' were thus not absolutely separate nor fully reconciled. The traditions formed two recognisable, often overlapping models within the congregation. There were tensions between their adherents, but at a fundamental level the congregation was united in its pursuit of the reformed Franciscan life.

However much Observant hagiographers celebrated the lives of the poor, unlettered and eremitical beati, by the later fifteenth century the congregation was undoubtedly most famous for the achievements of its popular preachers who harangued an admiring laity, set off on dangerous missions to convert the Hussites or Saracens, were the emissaries of popes and princes, and oversaw the *Monti di Pietà* and the flourishing confraternities of Renaissance Italy. Indeed, an exemplum related by Oddi in *La Franceschina* could be interpreted as the symbolising the submission of the Literal Observance to the Regular. Thomà da Firenze was a lay brother who went barefoot, wore a coarse and patched habit, sought out solitary and woody places in which to dwell and pray with wolves, and fasted continually. He died in 1447 and was buried in the city of Rieti. Miracles began to occur around his tomb:

As his fame spread through the surrounding countryside many sick people came to his tomb, and all of them were healed. Amongst them were some who had been to the tomb of S. Bernardino but had not been healed there. But when they came to Fra Thomà's tomb, they were liberated, and so Thomà's fame began to grow and Bernardino's to lessen. ... It was already murmured in the [papal] court that S. Bernardino had not been able to cure some who had later been healed by this blessed Thomà.

Giovanni da Capestrano, battling at the Curia for Bernardino's canonisation, became concerned at Thomà's eclipse of the Observance's most famous preacher. He travelled to Rieti and, kneeling before Thomà's tomb, pleaded with his former confrère:

'O Fra Thomà, your miracles are hindering my campaign for the canonisation of our blessed father Fra Bernardino. And so, as you were obedient to me in life, now I command you through the virtue of holy obedience not to perform any more miracles until Bernardino has been canonised, and to pray to God for the canonisation, and for me and the

whole of our Family.' Marvellous thing! From that point on, there were no more miracles.¹⁰

Just as Francis's companion William of Anglia had reputedly ceased his post-mortem miracles so as not to obscure master's nascent cult in 1230, so Thomà now ceded to the greater importance of Bernardino's *fama sanctitatis*.¹¹ The lay brother stepped aside with true Franciscan humility, symbolically allowing the new Observant ethos personified by Bernardino to take centre stage. The old Observance gave way to the new and it was Bernardino's life of active preaching, learning and administration which thereafter became publicly recognised as the Observant ideal.

¹⁰ Oddi, *La Franceschina*, I, p. 247.

¹¹ On William of Anglia, see Arnaldus de Sarnano, *Chronica XXIV Generalium*, AF 3 (1897), p. 217; and *An. Min.* II, 292, xxiii.

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