



“The grace of our origins, a prophecy of the future”

in preparation for the VIII Centenary of the Order of Friars Minor

We Friars Minor, about to fulfil 800 years since the foundation of our Order through the approval of the *Rule of Life* by Innocent III, are preparing to celebrate “*The Grace of Our Origins*”.

According to historians, 1209 was the year in which Francis received approval of his “life project”, immediately called the “Proto-Rule”, from “the Lord Pope”. He himself recounts to us in his *Testament*: “And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me” (*Test* 14-15).

This early “form of life” continued to broaden out according to the needs of the Fraternity and was the basis of the *Rule* of 1221 and, later, of the *Rule* of 1223, confirmed by Honorius III; the texts of these, after many years, continue to be essential reference points for understanding Francis and ourselves.

The celebration of the VIII Centenary of the foundation of our Fraternity gives us an opportunity of grace to *remember the past with gratitude, live the present with enthusiasm and to open up with confidence to the future* (cf. *NMI* 1b). This is the way to celebrate the *Grace of Our Origins*. And so, at the beginning of this third millennium, we Franciscans wish to re-affirm our steadfast will to remain faithful to our charism by “living the Gospel in the Church according to the form observed and proposed by St. Francis” (*CCGG* 1, §1), re-creating it, however, in the light of the challenges of present-day Franciscan life.

We Friars Minor, joyfully accepting the invitation of the “lord Pope”, John Paul II, wish, first of all, through the celebration of the 800 years since the foundation of our Order, to *open up in gratitude* to the “Most High, all-

powerful, good Lord” (*Cant* 19), to the “Father of mercies” (*TestCl* 2), for the “wonders” God has done through the Friars who preceded us, especially through Brother Francis, and for the “wonders” which the Lord, “Almighty God, Merciful Saviour” (*PrG* 6), continues to do in and through the Friars and Sisters who walk determinedly along the paths of virtue (cf. *LtErm* 3). However, because we do not wish to, or cannot, “be satisfied with praising the works of our predecessors”, since it would be “a great shame for us that the saints have accomplished great things and we want only to receive glory and honour by recounting them” (*Adm* 6), we should sincerely desire “to be inspired by them in order to carry out the part that corresponds to us in our own historical period” (*LgP* 3) and “recognise the urgency of returning to the essentials of our experience of faith and of our Franciscan spirituality in order to nourish, from within, our fragmented and unequal world, which is hungry for meaning, with the liberating offer of the Gospel, just as Francis and Clare of Assisi did in their time” (*LgP* 2).

During the celebration of this great Franciscan jubilee, in contemplating the history of our Order, we Friars Minor joyfully recognise that we have “a glorious history to remember and to recount”, but, convinced as we are of the power and the currency of our “form of life” since it is essentially a form of gospel life inspired in Francis by the Almighty, we take up the challenge to continue to construct a great history with determination. To do this we sincerely wish to turn our eyes to the future, towards what we feel the Spirit is moving us in order to continue doing great things through us (cf. *VC* 110). In this way we wish to live *the grace of our origins* “not only as a *remembrance of the past*, but also as a *prophecy of the future*” (*NMI* 3).

Br. José Rodríguez Carballo ofm

BELGIUM - *The Minister General sends six Friars on mission*

The Minister General of the Friars Minor, Br. José Rodríguez Carballo, presided at the celebration of the “missionary sending” of six young Friars in the Franciscan Church of “Notre Dame des Grâces” in Brussels on the 15th December 2004. The period of preparation of the fourth group received by the international Fraternity “Notre Dame des Nations” came to an end with this gesture. The six Friars, of five nationalities, are all destined for the African Continent: Br. Floriano Reith (Germany) to Malawi, Br. Paul Kim (Korea) and Br. Miroslav Babić (Bosnia) to Kenya, countries which belong to the Province

of “St. Francis in Africa and Madagascar”; Br. Barnaba Dziekan (Poland), already a missionary in Central Africa, will go to Morocco, Br. Angelo Redaelli (Italy) to Congo-Brazzaville, while Br. Leopold Mičić (Croatia) will continue his preparation in view of the first Franciscan presence in Khartoum in the Sudan. The Minister General reminded the new missionaries that they go as Franciscans, in a spirit of service and with the internal desire to give their all, without limitations of time or energy. Present at the celebrations of “sending” was the Moderator General of missions, Br. Vincenzo Brocanelli, who encouraged

other young Friars who are being prepared in Brussels for the “ad gentes” mission. It is foreseen that, for next year, there will be a group of about ten Friars offering their

voluntary service to the missionary projects of the Order of Friars Minor, coordinated by the General Curia.

ROMANIA – *An itinerant fraternity in Bucharest*

Four Friars, Br. Cristian, Br. Stefano and Br. Giorgio of the Venetian Province and Br. Mario of the Liguria Province, lived a singular experience of itinerancy in Romania during the month of August 2004. The first stage was a time dedicated to mutual knowledge and prayer. After three days they left Italy hitch-hiking, taking no money with them and committed to begging for food alone, observing the times of prayer and not paying attention to the problem of the length of the journey or to the date of arrival.

The journey took six days, with two stop offs; in the convent of Popping in Austria and in the village of Telekiu in Romania. During the second stop-off they met some Venetian Friars and lay volunteers who had a summer camp for the local children. Having continued the journey by hitch-hiking, a man who gave them a lift, offered to pay the train fare to Bucharest for the Friars. They reached Bucharest at 6.30 in the morning and began Morning Prayer in the park opposite the station. “Seated on a bench - relates Br. Giorgio - we were interrogated by a young woman who began to shower us with questions: Who are you?, Why have you come here?” She was D., a prostitute, whom we often met again. A little later others came up to us, curious to see Friars praying in the street. Morning prayer lasted an hour and a half! We learned, though we did not understand Romanian, that it was not difficult to meet the people! The days spent in Bucharest were structured in this way: the Gospel of the day was proclaimed as soon as day broke, then Morning Prayer was said with a reflection for the day. After Morning Prayer we had breakfast, if anything remained from the previous day (very often there was!). A lot of time was given to silence and personal prayer, then “the table of the poor”, knocking on doors, or begging in bars and restaurants, especially at the end of the day when things were being thrown away. In Bucharest we begged in the great condominiums, hoping to find the doors open as it was it was not easy to explain

things by intercom. Going down from the top floor, we knocked on the doors and asked for bread, cheese or whatever they could give. We used the few words of Romanian we had learned: “We are Franciscan Friars, we live without money and we do not ask for any, we ask for something to eat, if it is possible. We thank you in any case.” It was fundamental not to accept money: it eliminated all ambiguity on asking. In the same way it was important always to answer with kindness, even when, through fear, the people did not respond to the request. We lived the dimensions of work and service. Directed by the Bishop, we helped the Missionary Sisters of Charity who offer a hot meal and the possibility to shower to the poor of Kittila, on the periphery of Bucharest. Br. Mario, who is a priest, celebrated Mass. In return for our work we received food. We had a significant encounter with street children. In Bucharest there are so many of them, they live in groups and many sniff glue. The second evening after our arrival, close to the station, a group of these children stopped and surrounded us. Curious, they began to ask us, in bits of English and Italian, “Why are you here in Bucharest?” We replied that we were “kalugari”, religious, Franciscan missionaries and asked them to direct us to a secure place of rest. This request amazed them: “But how is that you are “kalugari” and yet you do not have a monastery, a house?” There was an immediate friendship, some of them waited for us and prepared our bed for the night with cartons, welcoming us with joy. We slept a few nights in the company of these children, close to Bucharest station. The youngest was 12 years old. Before we slept we invited them to pray the Our Father in Italian and Romanian. On the last evening, before returning to Italy, we left a written message: “God, in Jesus, is close to you. And he asks you to love Him, to love yourselves above all with the same love with which He love you. Take care of yourselves”. We wished to leave this small seed of life, of sharing, of the word. “To you, Lord, and to your Grace, the rest”.

GENERAL CURIA – *Friars from Latin America at the service of the Minister General*

The first meeting of Latin American Friars who work in Houses dependent on the Minister General was held in the General Curia on the 11th December 2004. 23 Friars participated. The Minister General addressed the Friars present to thank and encourage them.

The meeting had two moments: the first part was dedicated to mutual knowledge in which each one presented himself and described the work he does, manifested his desires and the hopes that animate him. The Latin-American Friars at the service of the Minister are: 3 from Argentina, 6 from Brazil, 2 from Chile, 5 from Colombia, 1 from Ecuador, 1 from El Salvador, 1 from Guatemala and 15 from Mexico. Their duties are various: services in Fraternity (refectory,

sacristy, receptionist, tailor, driver, etc.), in the PAA (teaching, library, administration, etc.), in the General Curia (Secretariat for Evangelisation, JPIC Office, Pro-Monialibus, Protocol, General and personal Secretariats, translations, general and local bursars, formation of missionaries, inter-religious dialogue, General Government, etc.) and in the ministry of reconciliation. During the dialogue, the Friars manifested the desire and hope for greater and more profound knowledge which would favour the growth of Fraternity life.

During the second part of the meeting, in which the Vicar General, Br. Francesco Bravi, and the Definitor, Br. Miguel Vallecillo, took part, a liturgy of the word was

celebrated during which each one related the Christmas traditions of his country of origin (the family supper, songs, children's festival, Midnight Mass, etc). The experience was felt to be very positive. The trust and spontaneity in sharing experiences of life and the joy at being together were a sign of this. The desire to encourage fraternal meetings emerged and it was proposed to organise a trip for the Friars of Houses dependent on the

Minister General, to have spiritual retreats, with topics and methodologies suitable to the Friars in the various Houses and to encourage greater contact between the Friars, especially with those who do not live in the General Curia. It was suggested that the meetings should be broadened to include Latin-American Friars who live and study in the PAA. The meeting ended with a fraternal meal, generously offered by the General Curia.

ITALY – *Inter-obediential course for Formators*

An Inter-obediential Course for Formators was held at the Capuchin Centre for Formation in Frascati (RM) and In Assisi from the 3rd to 29th November 2004. 14 Friars participated, 6 Friars Minor, 6 Conventuals and 2 Capuchins. The Secretaries General for Formation and Studies of the three Franciscan Families and two translators, Br. Philippe Schillings among them, were present. The Friars came from Brazil, Colombia, Italy, Mexico, Paraguay, Romania, Spain and Vietnam.

The initiative, worked on for many years but postponed twice, was held despite the limited number of applications. The Course had as its topics: the foundations of the

Religious Life, the priorities of evangelisation and the spirit of prayer and devotion. Different and qualified members of the Franciscan Families made the presentations. The understanding and collaboration between the Secretariats guaranteed the success of the Course.

The positive results and the friendship established being considered, the participants asked to continue with other similar initiatives such as Spiritual Exercises and sabbatical periods in the Holy Land and Franciscan places, and to have the Franciscan Family informed of the positive results of the experience.

TURKEY – *A year since the opening of the Franciscan Fraternity in Istanbul*

The first year since the opening by the Minister General of the Fraternity of Friars Minor in Istanbul, Turkey, ends in February. The Fraternity is composed of Friars from different countries (Italy, Mexico, France and Congo). They were inserted into Turkish society after coming from different experiences of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. Wishing to begin dialogue and to establish contact with the numerous people attending the Church of Saint Mary Draperis and also with the aim of making relationships of friendship and fraternity with the open and sensitive Turkish population, the Friars began to study Turkish. The Fraternity of Friars Minor is a reference point for ecumenical prayer, which is celebrated twice a month in our Church. The Fraternity of Istanbul offers the opportunity to live in a city rich in religious experience and expression as one of the projects of the Order. Among the initiatives being worked out, there is a Course on the Bible, with a missionary slant, on the journeys of St. Paul and of the Church of the Apocalypse. The Friars have established good relations with the Christian Churches, participating in the more significant liturgical and ecumenical celebrations.

The Minister General, together with the whole Fraternity, went to visit the Patriarch Bartolomeos I in February 2004. On the 30th November 2004, for the Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, the Friars Minor attended the Divine Liturgy celebrated in the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate for the Holy Patron and the return of the relics of St. John Chrisostom and of St. Gregory Nazianzeno to Constantinople from Rome. The Minister General sent a message to the Patriarch Bartolomeos on that occasion. The Friars also met the Armenian Patriarch, Meshrod II, who showed a good disposition towards and welcome for the Franciscan presence. There are also cordial relations with the Chief Rabbi of Istanbul and with the Islamic authorities. The community of Friars Minor wishes to be a witness to fraternity between men, with Christians of the different rites, separated for different reasons, but also a leaven of unity between the believers of other religious traditions, especially with Jews and Muslims.

For further more detailed information about the Fraternity of Istanbul, please contact Br. Ruben Tierrablanca. Tel. +90.212.2440243. email rtierrablanca@ofm.org.

Franciscan Bookmark

• FRA GIOVANNI DI FEDANZOLA of Perugia, **Descriptio Terrae Sanctae**. Ms. Casanatense 3876, Ed.: U. Nicolini - R. Nelli, Italian Translation and notes: S. De Sandoli - E. Alliaia, English trans. by J. Boettcher, Coord.: A. Bartoli Langelì - A. Niccacci (SBF Collectio Maior 43). Jerusalem 2003. XXX+187 pp.; 77 plates, 2 fold outside the text. "My aim is to describe the Holy Land on the basis of different treatises and according to my own personal investigations. I, Br. John of Perugia, Minister Provincial of the Holy Land, although unworthy, have travelled the said

land on pilgrimage. I began at Dan, on the northern border of the same Holy Land, and continued to Beersheba, which is one the opposite, southern frontier. I walked mountains, hills and valleys, in the region of the Jordan river of the eastern region and along the plains and sea coast of the western part. I observed and carefully examined the places of the Old Testament in the company of experts in Jewish law, the places of the New Testament with Christians and the places of both Testaments with Saracens, in as much as they had learned during their assiduous visits to the places.

Those places which I could not visit personally, I have at least seen from the top of mountains and I observed them from raised places, always seeking to maintain faith in this method.”

- JEUSSET Gwenole, **Itinerance en terres d’Islam** (Itinerancy in the lands of Islam), Editions de Mailletard (Paris 2004), pp 219. Preface by Br. Giacomo Bini. Br. Gwenole offers us the testimony of a man “of the land”.

Small/Big News

- The **Minister General** of the Friars Minor, Br. José Rodríguez Carballo, was appointed a Member of the Congregation for the Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life by John Paul II on the 22nd November 2004. The Minister General is also a Member of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples.

- The “Vilmos Frankoi” award was bestowed on **Br. Karoly Harmath**, OFM, of the Fraternity of Novi Sad (Serbia and Montenegro) at the Hungarian Ministry for Culture in Budapest on the 22nd November 2004. The honour, established in 2000, is awarded on the 22nd of November each year, the date of the death of the historian Vilmos Frankoi, a Hungarian distinguished in theology, philosophy and history of the Church. The award was conferred on two Hungarians residing in Hungary and one living abroad.

In addition to Br. Karoly, the Hungarian Minister for Culture bestowed the “Vilmos Frankoi” award on Card. Pater Erdo, the Primate of Hungary, and on Ana Timar, a Cistercian Abbess.

- The “**Forma Vitae**” Commission met in our College of St. Bonaventure in Grottaferrata for the second time on the 11th and 12th December 2004. It has the task of preparing the VIII Centenary of the foundation of the Order and the Extraordinary Chapter of 2006. The next meeting, in which the Secretary of the Extraordinary Chapter, Br. Miran Spelic, and the Liturgical Commission of the Chapter will take part, will be held in Milan (Italy) from the 20th to 22nd May 2005. The Commission, presided over by Br. Ambrogio Nguyen Van Si, General Definitory, is composed of Br. Francesco Bravi, Vicar General, Br. Hermann Schalück, Br. Giacomo Bini, Br. Thaddée Matura and Br. José Maria Arregui.

- The XV edition of the Minerva Prize was held in the Hall of the Protomoteca in the Campidoglio of Rome (Italy) on the 26th November 2004. **Br. Pierbattista Pizzaballa**,

He gives us reasons and hope by showing us an Islam lived in peace and mutual respect, very different from the Islam which occupies the pages of international newspapers today. The author gives testimony to a rare spirit of communication and love, that of a Franciscan who cannot give up constructing a more extensive and open fraternity each day.

Custos of the Holy Land, was honoured for being an outstanding and respected contact person among the peoples of the Holy Land. The Minerva Award enjoys the Patronage of the Presidency of the Republic, which also conferred the Medal of the Head of State on the Custos. The Minerva Award is a brooch, designed by the Master Renato Guttuso in 1983, depicting the head of Minerva.

- The **Franciscan Fraternity of Tangiers**, in Morocco, celebrated the centenary of the presence of the Friars which began on the 8th December 1904, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The house, the brainchild of P. Lerchudi, was to be a place of missionary formation. With time the structure was divided into two parts to house the Episcopal Curia and the Fraternity of Friars Minor.

- On the occasion of the coming Christmas celebrations, a group of **Friars from the General Curia** visited the city of Naples on the 16th December 2004. Having admired the Basilica, Cloister and Museum of the Monastery of St. Clare, the Friars were guided by Br. Carlo D’Amodio, the local vicar, through streets lined by artisan workshops where typical Neapolitan cribs are made. During their visit to the Cathedral, to venerate the relics, the group witnessed the “liquefaction” of the blood of St. Genaro, the martyred bishop and Patron of Naples.

- On Sunday 19th December 2004, the Spanish television channel TVE gave a 30 minute spot to **Br. Emérito Merino**, Commissar of the Holy Land, to speak about the Nativity from a Franciscan point of view and to describe the present situation of the Holy Land. This was the third time during the course of the year that Br. Merino has been called on to speak about the Franciscans and the Holy Land. He had just completed a pilgrimage to the Land of Jesus with a group of more than 70 pilgrims. A television team had accompanied the pilgrimage to film a series on the Holy Land to be transmitted next year.

Agenda of the Minister General

- **6th January 2005** - Basilica of St. Mary in Aracoeli, Rome, Italy.
- **from 10th to 16th January** - Tempo forte of the General Definitory
- **from 17th to 26th January** - Meeting of the Minister and Definitory General with recently elected Provincials, Rome, Italy.

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