PART I

[illegible]	Britain asserts control over Egypt
[illegible]	Britain concedes limited independence
[illegible]	Muslim Brothers is founded
[illegible]	Free Officer movement overthrows Egyptian monarch
[illegible]	Crisis over the Suez Canal radicalizes Nasser
[illegible]	Egypt and Syria join in a short-lived United Arab Republic
[illegible]	Nasser embraces a socialist economic program
[illegible]	Egypt suffers stunning territorial losses to Israel in the Six-Day War
[illegible]	Aswan High Dam is completed; Nasser's death
[illegible]	Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, is assassinated and replaced by Hosni Mubarak

nonconfrontational relations with Israel while working to curb Islamic critics at home who objected, like many in the region, to a future conceived primarily in Western, secular terms.

Of Sadat's and Mubarak's Islamic critics, the organization known as the Muslim Brothers was the oldest, most popular, and best organized. Founded in 1928, it espoused a nationalism that held Islam critical to Egypt's future but also to the future of the region. It pursued a populist, reformist strategy, promoting land redistribution, workers' rights, broad access to education and medical care, and provision of emergency food aid. But it also had a violent side, directed from time to time against its enemies. Nasser repressed the Brothers in 1954 and then in 1966 hanged its leading thinker, Sayyid Qutb. The Brothers in general and Qutb in particular exercised a strong influence throughout the region, with offshoots springing up in Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Sudan. In the 1970s, following Sadat's shift to a more tolerant policy, the Brothers regained their prominence within Egypt. Frustration with government corruption, economic inequality, and lack of democracy led some members to reject the organization's emphasis on gradually building Islamic institutions. The militants launched a campaign of violence, including the assassination of Sadat and other government officials as well as attacks on tourists, Christians, and prominent secularists. State repression followed, setting off a costly cycle of conflict dividing the country and hobbling the tourist-dependent economy.

Colonial Crisis in Algeria

Algeria had the misfortune of becoming a battleground in the most violent process of decolonization that the North Africa–Middle East region would witness. Demands for independence ran up against a wall of French resistance. Geographical proximity does much to explain the French tenacity. Located just across

the Mediterranean from France, Algeria was by 1945 home to one million settlers, and Paris claimed the colony as an integral part of France itself. Talk of integration, however, ran up against a settler community resistant to any concessions to Algerians that might threaten its political dominance and economic privilege.

Amidst this paralysis of colonial policy, an Algerian nationalist movement took shape between World War I and World War II. Growing numbers of the poor and landless moved to the cities, where exposure to colonial practices and proximity to the settler community sharpened their anti-French sentiments. At the same time, French education made the Algerian elite sensitive to the gap between Europe's professed liberal and nationalist ideas and the colonial reality. World War II added impetus to burgeoning independence sentiment, encouraged by the Atlantic Charter's commitment to self-determination. Wartime economic deprivation and clashes with police heightened the sense of grievance. The more vociferous the calls for independence, the more stubborn settlers became in defense of the status quo and the more repressive the measures the French military took. In putting down one round of demonstrations at the end of the war, colonial authorities killed some 20,000 to 40,000 Algerians.

Tensions building for several decades came to a boiling point in mid-1954 with the formation of the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération National, or FLN). The Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu that year demonstrated that armed resistance to French forces was a viable liberation strategy. The FLN encouraged Algerians to believe that they too could break away from France. The Front leadership was highly diverse, including military men operating inside the country and those forming FLN armies in neighboring Tunisia and Morocco after those two countries gained independence from France in 1956. It included leaders such as Ahmed Ben Bella, who spent most of the struggle in French prisons, and others who guided the FLN from a sanctuary in Cairo provided by the Nasser government. Some among the leadership wanted nothing less than unconditional independence, whereas others were ready to settle for a compromise. Some viewed the world through the prism of European leftist and liberal ideas; others championed indigenous Arab and Islamic values.

Popular support came from an equally diverse range of groups—from migrant workers in France and French intellectuals to Algerian peasants, some newly arrived in the city. Women participated no less than men. The strategies of resistance employed in this at first seemingly impossible challenge to a formidable colonial presence were no less diverse. An underground organization challenged French administration. Guerrilla operations and cross-border raids by FLN forces threatened French control in the countryside. Urban terrorists struck at the settler population, against Algerians collaborating with the French, and within France itself. Street demonstrations and general strikes underlined the breadth of revolutionary support.

Paris responded to this bold defiance by deploying 400,000 troops. Increasingly frustrated and demoralized senior French military officers conducted the war with grim determination. They had surrendered to the Germans during World War II and more recently to the Vietnamese, had abandoned control of Morocco and Tunisia without a fight, and had suffered humiliation in the Suez

crisis. They were now eager to prove their mettle, vowing that they would not be deprived of this victory. The army's strategy of mass arrests, sweeps in the countryside, resettlement and destruction of villages, sealing off the border, and meeting FLN terror with counter-terror and torture successfully contained the FLN threat. These actions would in the end result in deaths on the Algerian side estimated as high as 300,000 out of a population of about eight million. Some 10,000 of the French forces would die.

However, the French could not turn the stalemate into victory. Repression deepened Algerian alienation from French rule, brought new recruits to the FLN, and provoked international condemnation of French policy. Within France itself, by the late 1950s the brutality of the highly publicized urban struggle and the costs of the war in terms of life and property had polarized the public and paralyzed the political system. Some regarded Algeria as a lost cause; others felt an obligation to defend the imperiled settlers and the last shreds of imperial glory.

Resolving this domestic political crisis in France ultimately proved critical to resolving the war in Algeria. Charles de Gaulle came to power in 1958 occupying a constitutionally strengthened presidency. With his base at home assured by 1961, de Gaulle moved to negotiate an end to the war over the violent objections of rebellious officers serving in Algeria and their allies within the settler community. Their acts of terrorism and threats of a military takeover in Paris gave special urgency and peril to de Gaulle's peacemaking. Finally in March 1962 de Gaulle and the FLN reached an agreement to bring this long, bloody war to an end. France yielded on independence but got in return continued access to military bases and preservation of economic ties. The agreement included safeguards for European settlers, but by the end of the year virtually all but the poor and elderly had fled.

Independence found the new Algerian government facing high public expectations but daunting circumstances. The educational system was rudimentary and the illiteracy rate high. Colonial policy had created an imbalanced economy. Agriculture, which provided employment for the majority of the population, had stagnated for half a century, whereas gas and oil production had developed rapidly beginning in the 1950s. Some three million rural people displaced by the war needed attention. The loss of capital and technical skills, resulting from the flight of the settlers, plunged the economy into crisis.

During the first years following independence, the FLN-controlled government was preoccupied with establishing its authority and formulating a coherent policy direction. Ben Bella led this process until 1965, when Colonel Houari Boumediene took power in a military coup. By 1967 Boumediene's position was secure enough for him to launch a state-directed economic development program. Determined to end economic subordination to France and other major powers, the Boumediene government nationalized foreign-controlled sectors of the economy such as gas, oil, and banking. It directed government investments into petroleum and heavy industry, leaving almost nothing for the consumer and agricultural sectors. The implementation of fresh land reform measures failed to lift agriculture out of its long-term stagnation. During the Boumediene years

(1965–1978) technical specialists, bureaucrats, and the military ran the country. GDP growth rates averaging 7.2 percent between 1967 and 1978 provided some insulation against critics of the FLN's authoritarian rule and secular policies.

The similarities of Boumediene to Nasser, apparent in intensifying domestic reform, extended to international affairs. Like Nasser, the Algerian government insisted on a position of non-alignment in the Cold War and joined India, Egypt and Yugoslavia in championing that position in the UN and at international conferences. It also expressed its commitment to third-world causes by strongly opposing imperialism in the Middle East and throughout Africa. It sharply criticized Israel and supported the claims of displaced Palestinians. And it was an outspoken foe of white-minority rule in South Africa and of surviving colonial regimes elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.

During the 1980s Algeria's post-independence order began to unravel. International oil prices declined late in the decade, thereby shrinking the country's prime source of revenue. Even before this setback, economic growth had barely kept up with population increase. The long-term FLN failure to raise living standards, followed by new economic difficulties and an austerity program imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), led to student and worker protests between 1986 and 1988. The FLN had lost its political legitimacy in the eyes of many. An even more potent expression of popular discontent arose in the form of an Islamist party, the Islamic Salvation Front. Its leader, Abbassi Madani, called for completing the Algerian revolution. The previous generation had expelled France *"physically"*; now the time had come "to banish it *intellectually and ideologically*, to break with its supporters who have sucked its venomous milk."[31] The Front swept to victory in 1990 and 1991 in the country's first free elections since independence. Its demands for restricting rights given to women and more generally for instituting an Islamic state frightened the more secular and Europeanized part of the population and prompted the military to intervene to nullify the election results and repress protest. As Algerian turned violently on Algerian, the country entered the 1990s needing more urgently than ever a consensus to ensure national cohesion but now realizing that democratic politics might accentuate internal differences rather than help transcend them.

DECOLONIZATION IN ALGERIA

1848	Algeria becomes a French colony
1954	The National Liberation Front takes up the independence struggle against France
1961	De Gaulle presses for a resolution of the bitter conflict
1962	Algeria gains independence, with Ben Bella as leader
1967	Boumediene moves Algeria toward state-directed economic development
1990–1991	Electoral gains by Islamic forces prompt a military crackdown

CONCLUSION

Looking back on the third world in the middle years of the Cold War, what is striking is the strong appeal of Marxism to many of its leaders. To understand that appeal we need to put ourselves in their place. Marxism helped them explain, as no other ideology could, how a few foreigners had come to subjugate their peoples and demean their old and proud cultures. "Imperialism" had driven economically advanced countries to dominate and exploit, just as "feudal" conditions had rendered the third world weak, divided, and thus easy prey. As third-world leaders began to think about the practical problems of ousting entrenched foreign influences and neutralizing native collaborators, they came to prize the single-party model often patterned on the tight Leninist party organization. It would enable them, as no open political system or democratic process could, to mobilize popular support and direct it through the often long, arduous liberation struggle. To be sure, the prominence of peasants in the third world ill accorded with the preoccupations of western Marxism, and the impatience of leaders to effect change collided with the ponderous planning ethos associated with development Soviet-style. But Marxism and Soviet leaders eager for influence were to prove flexible enough to accommodate diverse societies and ambitious timetables.

The Soviet Union—and then, by the 1950s, China as well—reinforced this radical trend. Even if Stalin had been cautious in offering help to anti-colonial struggles, at least the Soviet Union in his time had been bold in denouncing Western domination. Under Khrushchev, the third world found Moscow more inclined to back its rhetoric with offers of aid and protection. Mao's China also stepped forward with support even if on a more limited scale than the Soviets. In addition, both socialist powers followed a course of dramatic domestic development that inspired confidence in the capacity of a centralized system of state economic planning to transform a backward economy into a modern one.

The disappointing American record further accentuated the leftward drift in the third world toward socialist principles, state-directed economic development, and one-party politics. For a time elites had taken seriously public American professions of support for national self-determination. Woodrow Wilson had loudly proclaimed the principle during World War I. The Atlantic Charter in August 1941 had at Roosevelt's insistence included a sweeping commitment to "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live."[32] But by mid-1945 British and U.S. leaders were expressing reservations about colonial peoples rushing toward freedom without a suitable period of European tutelage.

Perhaps worst of all, as the independence fever spread throughout the third world, American officials privately expressed a sense of superiority that was hard to conceal. And their actions during the Cold War were consistent with their paternalistic and racist attitudes, sharpening the sense within the third world that the United States had betrayed its much-touted commitment to freedom. The United States either aligned with Britain and France on colonial issues or asserted its own restraining influence out of fear of instability and communist encroachment. Washington increasingly backed military dictatorships, launched covert operations against non-aligned or left-leaning governments (as in Iran, Guatemala, and Cuba), and occasionally dispatched U.S. forces (as in Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam). Repeated U.S. interventions to preserve the status quo created widespread disappointment and anger that further enhanced the appeal of radicalism that was so alarming to American leaders.

The sweeping ambitions associated with the radicalism of the 1950s and 1960s were proving difficult to realize, while U.S. hostility imposed costs that new and relatively poor countries could ill afford. East Asian success at integrating into the international market economy suggested an attractive alternative to development through import substitution and state planning. This combination of domestically inspired second thoughts, potent international pressures, and a booming international economy would break the spell of radicalism and push third-world countries in so many different directions that it would become increasingly difficult to find anything in common among them (see Chapter 9).

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Third-World Radicalism

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (1965), an extended reflection on the traumatic psychological effects of colonial domination, is a classic statement from the radical high tide. Forrest Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (1994), looks back disapprovingly on the radical notions that gripped the imagination of leaders in the third world.

East Asia

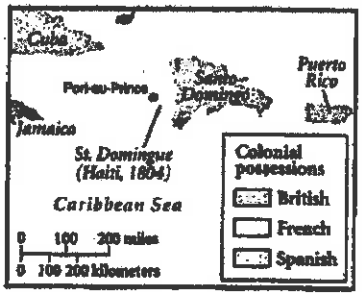
For **general treatments** of China and Vietnam, see the sources cited in Chapter 3. On the **second phase of China's revolution:** Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters, 1956–1971*, trans. John Chinnery and Tieyun (1975), offers a window into the elderly Mao's hopes and frustrations. Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution* (1983), is an engaging first-person account by a foot soldier in the Cultural Revolution. Michael Schoenhals, ed., *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966–1969: Not a Dinner Party* (1996), makes available a wonderful range of documents. Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (1991), details the life of a well-placed urban family during Mao's years in power. On **the struggle for South Vietnam,** see Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir* (1985), which recounts the revolutionary awakening of a young, well-to-do southerner and his subsequent disillusionment. For local studies that are critical to understanding Vietnam's rural politics and rural conflict during the period of deepening American involvement, see Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (1972), and Pierre Brocheux, *The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy, and Revolution, 1860–1960* (1995). The Saigon government perspective can be found in Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (1987); and Larry Engelmann, *Tears before the Rain: An Oral History of the Fall of South Vietnam* (1990).

The Caribbean Basin

For **general approaches to a region in ferment,** start with John C. Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (2001), a lively, balanced, up-to-date treatment that allots three of eleven chapters to the post-1945 period. On **U.S. regional dominance,** see the fine survey by Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America* (1998), as well as Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in*

PART II

Despite the efforts of a Paris club called the Friends of Blacks, most French revolutionaries did not consider slavery a pressing problem. As one deputy explained, "This regime [in the colonies] is oppressive, but it gives a livelihood to several million Frenchmen. This regime is barbarous but a still greater barbarity will result if you interfere with it without the necessary knowledge." (See Document, "Address on Abolishing the Slave Trade," page 613.)



St. Domingue on the Eve of the Revolt, 1791

In August 1791, however, the slaves in northern St. Domingue, inspired by the slogan "Listen to the voice of Liberty which speaks in the hearts of all," organized a large-scale revolt. To restore authority over the slaves, the Legislative Assembly in Paris granted civil and political rights to the free blacks. This action infuriated white planters and merchants who in 1793 signed an agreement with Great Britain, now France's enemy in war, declaring British sovereignty over St. Domingue. To complicate matters further, Spain, which controlled the rest of the island and had entered on Great Britain's side in the war with France, offered freedom to individual slave rebels who joined the Spanish armies as long as they agreed to maintain the slave regime for the other blacks.

The few thousand French republican troops on St. Domingue were outnumbered, and to prevent complete military disaster, the French commissioner freed all the slaves in his jurisdiction in August 1793 without permission from the government in Paris. In February 1794, the National Con-

Toussaint L'Ouverture
The leader of the St. Domingue slave uprising appears in his general's uniform, sword in hand. This portrait appeared in one of the earliest histories of the revolt, Marcus Rainsford's *Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (London, 1805). Toussaint, a former slave who educated himself, fascinated many of his contemporaries in Europe as well as the New World by turning a chaotic slave rebellion into an organized and ultimately successful independence movement. *(North Wind Picture Archives.)*

vention formally abolished slavery and granted full rights to all black men in the colonies. These actions had the desired effect. One of the ablest black generals allied with the Spanish, the ex-slave François Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803), changed sides and committed his troops to the French (see the illustration on page 614). The French eventually appointed Toussaint governor of St. Domingue as a reward for his efforts.

The vicious fighting and the flight of whites left St. Domingue's economy in ruins. In 1800, the plantations produced one-fifth of what they had in 1789. In the zones Toussaint controlled, army officers or government officials took over the great estates and kept all those working in agriculture under military discipline. The former slaves were bound to their estates like serfs and forced to work the plantations in exchange for an autonomous family life and the right to maintain personal garden plots.

Toussaint remained in charge until 1802, when Napoleon sent French armies to regain control of the island. They arrested Toussaint and transported him to France, where he died in prison. His arrest prompted the English poet William Wordsworth to write of him:

> There's not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
> Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

Toussaint became a hero to abolitionists everywhere, a potent symbol of black struggles to win freedom. Napoleon attempted to restore slavery, as he had in the other French Caribbean colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique, but the remaining black generals defeated his armies and in 1804 proclaimed the Republic of Haiti.

REVIEW: Why did some groups outside of France embrace the French Revolution while others resisted it?

Conclusion

Growing out of aspirations for freedom that also inspired the Dutch, Belgians, and Poles, the revolution that shook France permanently altered the political landscape of the Western world. Between 1789 and 1799, monarchy as a form of government had given way in France to a republic whose leaders were elected. Aristocracy based on rank and birth had been undermined in favor of civil equality and the promotion of merit. The people who marched in demonstrations, met in clubs, and, in the case of men, voted in national elections for the first time had insisted that government respond to them. Thousands of men had held elective office. A revolutionary government had tried to teach new values with a refashioned calendar, state festivals, and a civic religion. Its example inspired would-be revolutionaries everywhere, including in France's own colonies.

But the French Revolution also had its darker side. The divisions created by the Revolution within France endured in many cases until after World War II. Even now, French public-opinion surveys ask if it was right to execute the king in 1793 (most believe Louis XVI was guilty of treason but should not have been executed). The revolutionaries proclaimed human rights and democratic government as a universal goal, but they also explicitly excluded women, even though they admitted Protestant, Jewish, and eventually black men. They used the new spirit of national pride to inspire armies and then used them to conquer other peoples. Their ideals of universal education, religious toleration, and democratic participation could not prevent the institution of new forms of government terror to persecute, imprison, and kill dissidents. These paradoxes created an opening for Napoleon Bonaparte, who rushed in with his remarkable military and political skills to push France—and with it all of Europe—in new directions.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- **For suggested references, including Web sites, for topics in this chapter,** see page SR-1 at the end of the book.
- **For additional primary-source material from this period,** see Chapter 19 in *Sources of THE MAKING OF THE WEST,* Third Edition.
- **For Web sites and documents related to topics in this chapter,** see *Make History* at bedfordstmartins.com/hunt.

grown in India to British textile mills only to be returned to India in the form of finished cloth certainly retarded, if it did not destroy, the existing Indian textile industry. Resentment of this economic exploitation of India became one of the main sources of Indian nationalism in the late nineteenth century.

Latin America: An Empire of Trade

British policy in Latin America developed differently from the way it had in China and India, but it had the same effect of opening up new markets for British goods. Great Britain was a consistent supporter of the movements for independence that erupted in South America between 1810 and 1824 (see Chapter 17). Britain supported these movements not simply because it wished to undermine Spanish and Portuguese imperialism, but because it needed to acquire new markets for its industrial products. Britain did not need to use military force to open these areas to British trade, as it did in China. Once the countries became independent, they attracted large volumes of British exports. In 1840 the British cotton industry shipped 35 percent of all its exports to Latin American countries, especially to Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, and Chile. Britain also exported large amounts of capital to these Latin American countries by investing vast sums of money in their economies. Britain thus established an informal "empire of trade" in Latin America. These countries were not controlled by Britain, but they had the same economic relationship with Britain as other parts of the British Empire.

British investment and trade brought the newly independent nations of Latin America into the industrial world economy. In so doing, however, Britain assigned these countries to a dependent position in that economy, not unlike the position that India occupied in Asia about the same time. One effect of this dependence was to transform the small, self-sufficient village economies that had developed alongside the large plantations in Central and South America. Instead of producing goods themselves and selling them within their own markets, these villages now became suppliers of raw materials for British industry. At the same time the Latin American population became more dependent upon British manufactured goods. This transformation not only retarded or destroyed native Latin American industry but also created huge trade deficits for Latin American countries by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Ireland: The Internal Colony

Of all the imperial possessions with which Britain engaged in trade, the position of Ireland was the most anomalous. Despite its proximity to England, Ireland had always been treated as a colony. In 1801, after the unsuccessful Irish rebellion of 1798 discussed in Chapter 17, Ireland was incorporated into the United Kingdom, the Irish parliament was abolished, and Irishmen elected representatives to sit in the British Parliament at Westminster. Even though Ireland thus became formally a part of the British state, Britain nonetheless continued to treat the country as an imperial possession, especially with respect to its economy.

Throughout the nineteenth century Ireland remained almost entirely agricultural; only in the north, in the province of Ulster, which produced ready-to-wear undergarments for women and shirts for men, did industrialization take place, and that usually took the form of cottage industry. At the same time, large agricultural estates in Ireland, many of them owned by absentee British landlords, provided Britain with large imports of grain. Unable to afford the high cost of grain, which British protectionist legislation kept artificially high, and without the opportunity to find employment in industry, Irish tenants eked out an existence on the land, relying on a diet consisting almost entirely of potatoes. When a blight destroyed the potato crop in 1845, the country experienced a devastating famine that killed more than one million Irish people and forced another million to emigrate—many of them to the United States and Canada—between 1845 and 1848. The famine occurred despite the fact that Irish lands produced enough grain to feed the entire population. As the Lord Mayor of Dublin complained in 1845, British commercial policy inflicted on the Irish "the abject misery of having their own provisions carried away to feed others, while they themselves are left contemptuously to starve."[4] Thus, even in this internal colony, the British government's policy of promoting industry at home while importing resources from its imperial possessions promoted British economic interests at the expense of the countries under its control.

Conclusion

Industrialization and the West

By 1850 the Industrial Revolution had begun to bring about some of the most dramatic changes in human life recorded in historical documents. Not since the Neolithic Age, when people began to live in settled villages, cultivate grains, and domesticate animals, did the organization of society, the patterns of work, and the landscape undergo such profound changes. In many ways the Industrial Revolution marked the watershed between the old way of life and the new. It gave human beings unprecedented technological control over nature, made employment in the home the exception rather than the rule, and submitted

PART III

were citizens only when they found themselves in military uniform and were sent to fight in the trenches. One may go so far as to say that a national Italian public opinion, in the widest sense of the term, emerged only with the First World War. Which is to say that this public opinion was born in the shadow of a great torment and trial: from this time on, when a peasant had to consider the 'nation' his mind would naturally turn to the only one he had known, that of shoulder-stars and trenches, of sacrifices and humiliation. Correspondingly, in the mind of the petit-bourgeois, the wartime officer, the concept of the nation, though seen the other way round, was also associated with that of war: for him Italy was to be the Italy of Vittorio Veneto, which was celebrated with all the tinsel of D'Annunzian rhetoric. Thus, two types of psychological block were formed: the first led Italians to think that being Italians and patriots meant being D'Annunzians and interventionists, the second that being democrats, revolutionaries or republicans meant also being to a greater or lesser extent, defeatists and *Caporettisti*. The bitter results of this scarring of public opinion would soon appear, in the full post-war light.

The victory had solved none of the perennial problems of Italian society; it had, rather, aggravated and magnified them. There was an extremely concentrated, unbalanced apparatus of production; a state machinery that had grown too hastily, improvised, split into watertight compartments, and so largely taken over by the strongest economic groups; a managing personnel who were largely new and heterogeneous, held together only by a common inclination towards authoritarian methods; a public opinion which had taken shape under the shadow of war and suffering; Italy's old incongruity reproduced itself again, at a higher level – that of tragedy.

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR REVOLUTION?

The euphoria of victory soon faded. When in April 1919 the Prime Minister, Orlando, and the Foreign Minister, Sonnino, abandoned the Paris conference as a display of protest at the slight consideration of Italy's interests by the other victorious powers, the sense of disappointment that had for some time been insinuating itself through the country spread rapidly, and the government was forced to resign.

So the myth of the mutilated victory was born. In reality the peace negotiations which were later signed by the new government allowed Italy not only the Trento area and the city of Trieste, the traditional demands of the interventionists, but also the Alto Adige, with its strong German minority, and Istria, with its strong Slav minority. The question of Dalmatia, which the Treaty of London had assigned to Italy, remained to be settled with the new Jugoslav state, as did that of the city of Fiume, which on the other hand, according to the terms of the treaty and the point of view of the Allies and of Wilson, was to be left a free town. Italy's insistence in pursuing these two objectives certainly did not predispose the Allies in her favour, which must explain the final failure of Italian diplomacy on this point. Besides, many Italian politicians, including Bissolati, shared the opinion that in deference to the principle of nationhood it would be convenient to renounce Dalmatia. So the whole picture is not one of a diplomatic Caporetto, even if the peace treaty could probably have been more favourable to Italy, had the Italian government followed a straighter line, and displayed less ambition. However, the sense of disappointment that spread through the country from April to June 1919 – there was not even any commemoration of the date of Italy's entry into the war – and the myth of the mutilated victory itself had deeper origins than the recent diplomatic failures. These were no more than the last straw.

Once the storm was over Italy realized that she remained a poor country and, what was more, heavily in debt to her allies. The peasants who came back from the war found the same poverty that they had left behind, fields that were more badly worked and stables more empty; and the glittering wartime officers faced the prospect of uncertain salaries of inflated money: a far from exciting or attractive reward for men who had fought for three years in the trenches. Was this then what they had fought for? Was this what six hundred thousand Italians had sacrificed their lives for?

From this question to the answer that the war, with its losses, its waste, and its speculations, had been a folly, was a short step, which many Italians took. Had not the Pope reigning in the terrible year 1917 put out a pressing appeal to the governments to put an end to the 'useless slaughter'? And now that the accounts were drawn up, that was exactly how the war appeared. A profound surge of popular feeling rose against the Italian state and its ruling class, and those who had hoped that intervention in the war would prevent a revolution were terrified to witness this growth of a revolutionary restlessness that seemed more threatening and disruptive every day.

Few years in the history of modern Italy, and perhaps none save 1943, were years of such deep and general social and political crisis and revolutionary ferment as 1919. Labour was greatly agitated: the membership of the unions, a matter of hundreds of thousands before the war, was now to be counted in millions, and the figures for strikes and strikers went far beyond the highest point reached in the years

1901–2. Factory-workers went on strike and managed to win substantial wage-increases and an eight-hour day. There were strikes among employees of public services such as railwaymen and post-office workers, among the *braccianti* – unskilled agricultural labourers – of the Po valley and the central Italian *mezzadri*, and even among the faithful government clerks. In the countrysides of Lazio and southern Italy the peasants, now war-veterans, organized and encouraged by the associations that had been formed among ex-combatants, occupied the big estates, and forced the government to give the *fait accompli* some kind of legality. In June a number of cities experienced violent demonstrations against the cost of living, which in some cases had an openly insurrectional character; and in July a general strike, though one that had limited success, was put into effect, as a display of solidarity with revolutionary Russia. Then in September came D'Annunzio's invasion of Fiume, achieved with the connivance of the military authorities. This was, as we shall see, the first of a series of subversive acts from the right that was to culminate in Mussolini's march on Rome. But this did not prevent many people from greeting it, at that moment, as a further symptom of the existing revolutionary situation, and a proof that the germ of insubordination had also penetrated within the ranks of the army. There were even some who went so far as to moot the project of a union between D'Annunzio's nationalist subversion and the revolutionary ferment of the people; to this end there were contacts between the soldier-poet and certain representatives of Italian socialism and anarchism. The feeling that the days of the liberal state were by now numbered and that it was fast breaking up was by now general, and when in November 1919 elections were held – the first in Italian history on a proportional basis – some of those electors who traditionally voted for the candidates of order and for the government preferred to stay at home, convinced that by this stage every effort was useless, and paralysed by fear of the imminent inevitable defeat. The elections did, at least in part, confirm those fears: the socialist party was victorious, with 1,756,344 votes and 156 deputies, followed at a distance by the recently formed Popular party, which obtained 1,121,658 votes and had more than a hundred deputies, reaping the reward of the attitude the Church had taken towards the war. If the South, with its cliques and aristocracy, had not provided the government candidates with a large number of votes, the defeat of the old dominant class would have been catastrophic. But on the other hand, in the great industrial centres of the North and in the fertile countryside of the lower Po valley, the country's nerve-centres, the socialist party scored a resounding triumph.

But the socialist party was quite without any clear view of the situation or the way in which it could have been developed. It has often been stated that the Italian Socialist Party's main handicap in the immediate post-war period was its internal division between the 'maximalist' group, which held the majority, and openly proclaimed its revolutionary aims, and the reformists, who were on the other hand inclined, as always, towards a policy of reform and of co-operation with the most advanced sectors of the bourgeois parties. Starting from this assumption, it has been stated that if the reformists had not 'betrayed' the party the revolution would have been achieved in Italy, or conversely, if it had not been for the impatience and demagogy of the maximalists, a serious policy of reform could have been pursued, and the victory of fascism prevented.

In fact it was not the quarrel between two political possibilities that paralysed the Italian Socialist Party so much as its lack of any political line. The maximalists were not seriously revolutionary, nor the reformists seriously reformist. The vague ambition of Bombacci, Lazzari and even Serrati, who continually put off until the next day the revolution which they proclaimed to be inevitable, was balanced, on the other side, by the reluctance of the reformists, Turati in particular, to assume precise responsibilities, and their fear that by joining the government the socialists would find themselves involved in the bankruptcy of the bourgeois state. And the whole party shared a lack of sensitivity towards the new post-war situation that had taken shape in the countryside, where a general rush for land was taking place on the part of peasants now finally able to satisfy their age-long hunger for land, after the freezing of ground rents and the rise in prices of farm-produce. Between the census of 1911 and that of 1921 the number of small proprietors rose from 21 per cent to 35·6 per cent of the total population. By proclaiming their intentions of land-socialization and general expropriation, the socialists alienated large numbers of the peasant class. None of them knew, probably, that Lenin, for whom they professed such great admiration, had not hesitated, in the cause of revolution, to take over the agricultural programme of the social-revolutionaries, based on the multiplication of smallholdings. This failure of the socialist leaders to understand the peasant problem was accompanied by a preconceived hostility towards the Popular party and its syndical organization, whose basis and strength was in the countryside. Instead of trying to attract to the revolutionary camp the most advanced Catholic organizations and individuals, and so break the religious bond that held together socially and politically heterogeneous forces within the Popular party, the socialist party, with its traditional anti-clericalism, helped to strengthen this bond and to make more difficult any collaboration between socialist and Catholic syndicalists and workers.

The only group that applied itself seriously to the problems of the Italian revolution, which others confined themselves to prophesying as imminent and inevitable, was that gathered around the Turin weekly *L'Ordine nuovo*; it included Antonio Gramsci, Angelo Tasca and Palmiro Togliatti. Turin was without doubt the most proletarian of Italian cities, and its workers the most advanced section of the Italian proletariat. In April 1917 they had met with the cry '*Viva* Lenin!' the Menshevik delegates who had come to preach the necessity of continuing the war, and in August of the same year they had staged a rebellion against the cost of living and against the war which had had to be put down with troops and the use of force. In some of the main factories of Turin – that of Fiat in particular – they had gone on to constitute factory councils, modelled on the soviets. The men of the *Ordine nuovo* soon discovered in these councils the most suitable weapons of the revolutionary struggle, and an example of workers' self-government that could be held out to all the Italian proletariat when victory had been won. The Turin movement of factory councils was certainly the vanguard of the Italian revolutionary movement, its most advanced and most highly aware section, but like all vanguards, it could easily be isolated and defeated. During late 1919 and early 1920 the industrialists recovered from their defeats and formed a General Confederation of Industry, which became a counter-revolutionary general staff. They realized the weakness of the Turin movement and for this reason chose Turin as the battlefield for their final counter-offensive. The metal-workers of Turin were forced and provoked by the actions of their bosses into a general strike in April 1920; they were defeated, and Gramsci had to admit that the hope of making Turin the Italian Petrograd had shown itself to be without foundation, and that the rhythm of Italian life in general was far from keeping time with that of its advance guard. This was the first step in that long and difficult political meditation that was to lead him, in the fascist prisons, to define in his *Quaderni* the project for an Italian revolution that would be better adapted to the varied and contradictory reality of a country full of contrasts and disturbances of balance.

The defeat of the Turin metal-workers' strike marked the first receding of the revolutionary wave that had disturbed Italian society. Revolutionary energies were still powerful, but the forces of conservatism were already reorganizing themselves and already gave hints of passing decisively to the counter-attack. Things were entering on a period of uncertainty and precarious balance, a period which, as Gramsci was one of the few to realize, would only be ended by a final solution: either with a revolution or with an equally radical and violent reaction.

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ORIGINS OF FASCISM

During the tormented year 1919 and the first months of 1920 the government was led by Francesco Saverio Nitti, a southern politician of notable open-mindedness and knowledge, with an understanding of economic matters rare in an Italian Prime Minister, but lacking the vigour and energy that the times demanded. A man of deep democratic convictions, Nitti tried to obtain the support and co-operation of the left, but succeeded only in arousing the hostility of the right and of military circles, who execrated him for having granted an amnesty to deserters. His weakness was shown clearly at the moment of D'Annunzio's invasion of Fiume, towards which his attitude was indecisive and equivocal. When in June 1920 Nitti's government was forced to resign, the only politician with enough prestige to rule the country at such a difficult time was old Giolitti, who had never hidden his hostility to Italy's intervention in war, and who had kept himself apart for five years until he should be called for again. Giolitti's return, after so many accidents and misadventures, seemed a return to common sense and normality and to the old pre-war Italy; and for a short while it really seemed as if the veteran Piedmontese statesman could perform the miracle of reviving the past.

Consistent in his hostility towards any imperialist, adventurous foreign policy, Giolitti applied himself in the first place to settling the still open question of the Adriatic, signing a treaty with Jugoslavia in November 1920, according to which Italy renounced her claims to Dalmatia in exchange for recognition of her sovereignty over all Italy and the city of Zara, while Fiume was made an independent state. D'Annunzio, whether he liked it or not, had to accept the *fait accompli*, and in December he and his 'legionaries' left Fiume. So a dangerous furnace of nationalism, which had done much to overheat and poison public opinion, was extinguished. This success in foreign affairs had been preceded by another, far more ostentatious, in domestic policy. In September 1920 the metal-workers, who had for some time been involved in a union dispute with their respective employers, had occupied the factories, putting up the red flag, and guarding the factories with arms. For a few days it seemed as though the hour of revolution had finally struck. As on the previous occasion of the general strike of 1904, Giolitti immediately realized, rightly, that neither the socialist leaders nor the General Confederation of Labour would dare to push through to its final consequences a movement that did not in any case have real revolutionary possibilities; he temporized

until both parties to the dispute agreed to accept his mediation and to reach an agreement by which both saved face.

It really seemed as if the convulsions of the post-war period were over and that Italy, under the guidance of her wisest statesman, would return to the road she had successfully followed during the first decade of the century.

But it was not to be so. After the tumultuous, exuberant development of the wartime period, and the subsequent downward curve of the years immediately after the war, the Italian economy was in fact entering on a period of acute and general crisis. Production stagnated, and the difficulties of some of the larger industries soon involved the loan-banks. In December 1921 the *Banca di Sconto* closed down, involving thousands of small savers in its collapse and creating the feeling of a return to the time of the banking scandals of the 1890's. In the mean time the unemployment figures rose continually, while at the same time the number of strikes diminished. The main victim of the crisis was the union movement, which saw its effectiveness and its margins of manoeuvre and success enormously reduced. The stagnation to which it was confined naturally aggravated the differences and frictions in the socialist camp, which had already previously emerged on the occasion of the occupation of the factories and the strike at Turin in April. In this climate there was a series of splits within the party. The first, and the one that was to have most consequences, was the breakaway of the left wing, which in January 1921 seceded to form the Italian Communist Party, a small group whose radical extremism did not bode well for its future fortunes. The communist secession was followed in October 1922 by that of the reformists, so that when fascism came to power the old and glorious Italian Socialist Party was split into three parts.

The economic crisis weakened the Italian workers' movement, but had a galvanizing and fortifying effect on 'Italian reaction', a term that may be taken to include all the sects and groups – soldiers, industrialists, landowners – which had been helpless in the face of the wave of subversion of 1919, and dreamed of a return to the discipline and order of the state in wartime. The crisis of the unions and of the socialist movement, the disillusionment and bewilderment that were by now rife among the masses, allowed them to glimpse the possibility of an authoritarian and final solution. Giolitti, with his traditional policy of balance, seemed out-of-date. What was wanted was a man of greater strength and energy and bolder views, who would be able to replace a precarious and uncertain balance, providing the country with something stronger and more final.

As is well known, this man was found in the person of Benito

Mussolini. After his clamorous departure from the socialist party and his crossing to the interventionist camp, the exuberant Romagnolo had enlisted in the army, and stayed there long enough to adorn himself later with the title of ex-combatant and war-wounded, even though it seems certain that he never went into the front line, and was wounded during training. He then returned to the editorship of the *Popolo d'Italia*, and founded the fascist movement in 1919. This new political body, composed of demobilized soldiers and adventurers, and based on an extremely heterogeneous and demagogic programme, was a typical by-product of post-war disorientation, and such small prestige as it enjoyed derived, by reflection, from D'Annunzio's exploit in Fiume, of which Mussolini had made himself one of the noisiest advocates and publicists. In the elections of November 1919 the fascists succeeded in mounting a campaign only in Milan, where they polled a derisive vote of little more than four thousand. On this occasion Mussolini contemplated giving up the political struggle and devoting himself to some other of the many activities, from aviation to the theatre, in which he believed himself gifted. During the first half of 1920 the new fascist movement remained a circumscribed phenomenon of little importance. The only Italian city it succeeded in penetrating was Trieste, whose atmosphere was in many ways exceptional: the closeness of Fiume, the military administration to which the city was subjected, and above all the existence of a state of chronic tension between the Slav and Italian populations, which had been greatly aggravated by the end of Austrian rule, made Trieste a good breeding-ground for an intensely nationalistic movement such as fascism. With the smug complicity of the local authorities, the first fascist *squadre** were able to devastate Slav clubs and centres, attack the *Camere del lavoro* and besiege the poor quarters, as they waited for the time when they would be able to apply these methods to the rest of the country.

But this wait would certainly have been in vain if the economic crisis had not created in the country a situation ideally suited to the development of the fascist movement. The workers' movement's weakened capacity for resistance, the growing and encouraged authoritarian tendencies of the dominant groups and privileged classes, demobilization and the availability of large masses of unemployed men, the ebbing of the lower middle class away from the working class and the socialist movement: all these things combined to facilitate the first steps and self-assertions of fascism. Mussolini's unquestionable tactical and political ability and the grave crisis of the state and of the liberal ruling class did the rest. The economic crisis, far from generating

* The *squadre d'azione*, embryo of the fascist militia, were organized gangs consisting mainly of aggressive youths. Members of the *squadre* were *squadristi*. (Trans.)

the revolution, as some had hoped or feared, brought reaction: Italy's situation in 1921 and 1922 thus in many ways anticipates that of Germany in the years immediately preceding the rise of nazism.

FASCISM'S RISE TO POWER

Fascist *squadrismo* made its large-scale *début* at Bologna, a stronghold of socialism, on 21 November 1920; when a new socialist local administration was taking office, the fascists of Bologna managed to provoke serious incidents and a climate of civil war within the city. From that moment there began a pitiless guerrilla war in the countryside of Emilia and Tuscany between the fascist *squadre* and the socialist organizations and the workers; it gradually spread to the other regions of the country. In the first months of 1921 hardly a day passed without reports in the newspapers of a *Camera del lavoro* set on fire, a co-operative sacked, socialist or even republican and Popular party leaders forced to drink castor oil and 'banned' from their towns. It was a provincial war, with all the bitterness and passion of provincial wars, but it was above all a class-war without quarter. The hatred that the landlords of Emilia, financiers of the *squadre*, felt for their peasants, was no less than that which the nationalists of Trieste felt for the Slav population: it was an instinctive, almost racial hatred.

But the success of fascist punitive expeditions and raids would not have been possible without the silence and at times complicity of the army and the executive power. Many prefects and generals competed in their blindness to fascist violence and aggression, but later raged with particular severity against the eventual reaction of the fascists' adversaries. A particularly heavy responsibility for the protection of *squadrismo* must be laid on the shoulders of Giolitti's War Minister, the ex-socialist Ivanoe Bonomi, who in July 1921 became Prime Minister. Even so, the fact that soldiers, prefects, ministers and Giolitti himself favoured or at least permitted the actions of the fascists should not be taken as a sign and proof that the Italian political class was by now prepared to accept the fascist take-over of the state, or was resigned to this course of events. For many politicians of the time were convinced that because of its heterogeneous programme and social composition, and because it was more an emotional than a political phenomenon, fascism would have a brief life, and would dissolve from within. In the meantime it could be made useful, then discarded at the right moment.

Mussolini himself was fully aware of the inner weaknesses and

contradictions of the fascist movement. Unlike D'Annunzio, he did not believe in his own rhetoric, and was far from confusing his own desires and ambitions with reality. He soon realized that unless fascism made some concrete achievement it would suffer a crisis and dissolve, as soon as the short-lived political circumstances of its beginnings had passed. This achievement could only be power, and the identification of fascism with the state. But to achieve this aim fascism had to make itself more 'respectable' and purge itself of its more extreme elements. So between summer and November 1921 Mussolini conducted a victorious battle within his party against the fascist 'left wing' led by Dino Grandi, an ex-republican from the Romagna; Mussolini reassured the monarchy, first muting and then explicitly denying previous republican pronouncements; he won the trust of industrialists by declarations of total economic liberalism; finally, he abandoned his old anti-clericalism, and discoursed on the Catholic and universal mission of Rome. The Vatican was not entirely insensitive to these blandishments: the new Pope, Pius XI, elected in February 1922, contributed to the final victory of fascism by withdrawing the Church's support from the Italian Popular Party and its combative leader, Don Sturzo.

As fascism gradually became more respectable in the eyes of right-thinking people, the hindrances and barriers that had been raised against it fell. One by one, the men of the old liberal ruling class surrendered or actually moved over to the fascist side. First to do so was Salandra, the Prime Minister responsible for intervention. Some, like Giolitti, retained up to the last minute the illusion that they were able to dominate the situation, and involved themselves in a difficult game of battles, treaties and bargaining, which Mussolini ably controlled: at every 'victory' of the *squadre*, every successful blow, he raised the price of his demands. So passed several months of agitated political activity, disturbed in the way typical of periods preceding a final settlement. To superficial observers the situation might still have seemed fluid and open to several solutions, but in fact the game was over, and it was now only a question of tidying up its conclusion. In October 1922 this comedy of equivocations at last came to an end. When the Vatican was increasing its distance from the Popular party, and the socialist party broke its unity of action agreement with the General Confederation of Labour, in other words, when his last opponents were divided and defeated, Mussolini openly blackmailed the King and the state with the threat of insurrection. On 24 October, after a fascist meeting in Naples, the fascist *quadrumvirs* decided, with Mussolini's agreement, to march on Rome. The Prime Minister at that moment, Luigi Facta, a trusted Giolittian, advised the King to

sign a declaration of martial law, but the King, after some hesitation, refused to sign. Mussolini was awaiting events at Milan, and was ready if they took a turn for the worse, to take refuge in Switzerland. But now he was able to board a sleeping-car and come to Rome to receive from the King the invitation to form a new government, and to present himself in front of Parliament, to declare that it had been entirely thanks to his own will that he had not transformed it into a camp for his men. In spite of this bragging declaration, the Chamber gave a vote of confidence to Mussolini's new government, which included Popular and liberal ministers, by 306 votes to 116. Among the former were Bonomi, Giolitti, Orlando, Salandra and Alcide De Gasperi.

The 'fascist revolution' was thus accomplished with the assent and authorization of the established powers, and Italy, after four years of upheavals and hesitations, finally settled down. For in spite of everything the rise to power of fascism was, like all restorations, in some way a solution, in that it made possible the rediscovery of an equilibrium and the reconstitution of an 'order'. But it was the easiest and so the worst of the historically possible solutions. The forces of the Italian revolution had paid for their immaturity and their errors with a defeat which had very grave consequences. Their last rearguard fighters – in Parma, in the poor quarters of Rome, in old Bari, in Turin, where there were big strikes in August 1922, doomed to defeat from the start – saved proletarian honour, and laid down the basis for a long anti-fascist struggle.

18

From fascism to the war

FASCISM: FROM GOVERNMENT TO RÉGIME

Just as fascism's way to power had been smoothed by the economic crisis, the favourable state of the European and American economy on the whole from 1922 to 1929 did much to aid its process of consolidation. The new fascist government thus had to do no more than assist the current tendency, allowing those forces and men who controlled the country's economic life to have their own way. As early as his Udine speech on the eve of the march on Rome, Mussolini had railed against 'the railwayman state, the postman state, and the insurance-agent state', and once he had reached power he was not slow to put these anti-state aims of his into action, entrusting the Ministry of Finance to an economic liberal, Alberto De Stefani. The registering of bonds in the owner's name, introduced by Giolitti, was abolished, death duties reduced, the telephones denationalized, wages cut down. This extreme liberalism in domestic matters did not however prevent fascism from continuing the traditional Italian policy of customs protection, to which Giolitti had already made important concessions in 1921 by accepting the imposition of a new and stricter protective tariff. In this context we must also mention the policy of revaluing and stabilizing the lira launched in 1925 and taken to its end by Count Giuseppe Volpi, a man in the confidence of the industrialists, who succeeded De Stefani in the Finance Ministry; and the so-called 'corn battle', accompanied by the re-imposition of the protection duty on corn. Both these measures were intended to narrow the balance of payments gap and to permit the building-up of large supplies of hard currencies.

In short, this policy, combined with the favourable economic situation, yielded its fruit. In 1929 industrial production was 50 per cent higher than it had been in 1922. Particularly spectacular progress was made by the chemical industry, dominated by the Montecatini combine, which became easily the leading producer of fertilizers. Connected

with the chemical industry was the new and promising one of artificial silk and rayon, the principal producer of which was the Snia Viscosa company. As for the automobile industry, its rhythm of production was well sustained: in 1926 60,500 automobiles were produced in Italy, the majority by Fiat. Because of this increased industrial production, unemployment diminished: at the time of the crisis it had reached a fairly high level, which had helped to prevent the discontent and spirit of absolute hostility to fascist government that existed among the working classes from being expressed by an extended and organized struggle. Agricultural production too showed a general increase, however much this may have been due to the new impulse fascism gave to cereal-growing with the corn battle. The plan inherited from previous governments for the splitting up of the Sicilian *latifondo* was deliberately dropped.

The improved economic situation and the government's support of the social groups who were its greatest beneficiaries undoubtedly made it easier for fascism to liquidate the surviving structures of the liberal state and construct an authoritarian state. The forming of the voluntary militia for national security, which gathered together and gave paid employment to all the ex-members of the *squadre d'azione*, in January 1923, and the promotion of the Grand Council of fascism into an organ of state, paved the way. There was now a fascist army beside the regular army, and a fascist consultative body appointed by Mussolini beside the elective Parliament. In April 1923 the Popular ministers were expelled from Parliament, and in July a new electoral law elaborated, of a type that would permit an absolute majority, deliberately designed to assure a large majority for the list of government and fascist candidates, known as the *listone*, or 'big list'. The elections were held in April 1924, in an atmosphere of intimidation and violence towards the adversaries of fascism, and with a return of militia arson. In spite of this, the results did not come up to Mussolini's hopes: though the fascist *listone* won a majority of votes and seats, thanks to the mechanism of the law, it received fewer votes than the opposition list in the northern regions of Italy and in the big industrial towns.

The climate of illegality and oppression in which the elections had been held was denounced in the Chamber with great passion and courage by the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, on 30 May 1924. A few days later, on 10 June, this brave parliamentarian was kidnapped, and on 16 August his body was found in a thicket in the countryside near Rome. It seemed for a moment as if the government was alone, for few people doubted its complicity in the murder. Many fascist badges vanished from buttonholes, and Mussolini himself was aware of his own isolation. But he soon recovered his boldness, for on the one

hand the parliamentary opposition, led by Giovanni Amendola, left the Chamber in what was called the Aventine secession, and was unable to appeal to the country and propose a real alternative, being once again paralysed by the fear of revolution; and on the other hand, Mussolini could count on the support of the King and the neutrality of the Vatican. On 3 January 1925 Mussolini confronted the Chamber, taking on himself all responsibility for the Matteotti crime, and provocatively challenging the Chamber to avail itself of its right to impeach him. By rejecting this flung gauntlet the Chamber in effect signed its own death-warrant, and the liberal state finally ceased to exist.

As Mussolini had threatened in his arrogant speech of 3 January, words were quickly followed by deeds. The following months saw the 'fascistization' of the state, effected by decrees and 'very fascist' laws, as they were described. The activity of other parties was checked by a law on associations, the liberty of the press was crushed, the Aventine dissidents expelled from the Chamber, the administration purged of officials suspected of anti-fascism, the autonomy of local administrations restricted, with elected mayors replaced by the *podestà* appointed from above, and the codes of law reformed. The Italian state increasingly took on a totalitarian character; it was led by the *Duce*, whom a special law accorded pre-eminence over other ministers. Opponents had to face the snares of the *Ovra*, the régime's political police, and the rigours of the Special Tribunal, set up in 1925 after Zaniboni's attempt on Mussolini's life; this court was soon busy doling out years of prison or exile, and even death-sentences. For the first time since unification there were again Italian political emigrants, or, as the fascists said, reviving an old term of the days of the communes, *fuorusciti* ('exile-outlaws'). The fascist monopoly of union organization, imposed in July 1925, and the subsequent Vidoni pact between the unions and the representatives of the industrialists (by which, in exchange for a guarantee of collective contracts, workers committed themselves not to strike or form committees within the factories), more or less silenced workers' opposition. In the mean time the General Confederation of Labour, last stronghold of free unionism, had been dissolved, and a number of its leading members seduced by fascist corporativism, the theory of which was expressed in a Charter of Labour solemnly published on 21 April 1927, Rome's birthday. This fascist-devised celebration had some time before replaced the 1st May.

Fascism was thus transforming itself from a government into a régime: a régime in which the Duce, who 'was always right', was the god, and the radio his prophet. In a country where the circulation of newspapers was still fairly limited, this new, powerful means of

communication was in fact a deciding factor in forming and fixing public opinion. It was not for nothing that the fascist government had hurried to place it under its special control by forming a state corporation for radio transmissions in 1927. By means of the radio the Italians were daily informed of the successes of fascist Italy, however little Mussolini himself liked to speak directly to the microphones. He preferred, as he said, to address the crowd directly, at the great gatherings in the Piazza Venezia, where he harangued the people from the 'historic balcony'.

But Mussolini, as has already been emphasized, was too much of a politician to believe in the rhetoric of his régime. He realized clearly that even leaving aside the most evidently proletarian classes, broad sectors of public opinion were, if not declared opponents, at least unsure and mistrustful of fascism: it was therefore necessary to broaden the basis of common agreement. To this end the first approaches to the Vatican began, from 1925 onwards; Mussolini well understood that recognition from that quarter would, in a Catholic country, considerably strengthen the régime's prestige. The negotiations were long and difficult: they were greatly hindered by the fascist decision to ensure the monopoly of youth organizations with the creation of the *Balilla;* all others were dissolved, including the Catholic Boy Scouts. But although the régime was not prepared to make concessions as far as the fascist indoctrination of youth was concerned, it was ready to make some substantial ones in other fields. The Lateran Treaty of 11 February 1929 was reached: the Italian state recognized papal sovereignty over the territory of what was named the Vatican City, committed itself to a heavy indemnity, and revived and strengthened the article of Carlo Alberto's *statuto*, which declared the Catholic faith to be the national religion. The Holy See, for its part, declared that the Roman question was closed, and agreed to regulate its relations with the Italian state with a concordat, which, amongst other things, recognized that the Church marriage service had civil effect, and introduced the teaching of religion in state schools. This was the 'Conciliation', without doubt one of the actions of the fascist government which did most to strengthen its position, and one which had most effect on modern Italian history. For the validity of the Lateran Treaty is still explicitly recognized in the constitution of the Italian Republic.

Strong in this success, Mussolini was able to hold fresh elections, in March 1929. These followed the single list system, and were, from the point of view of democratic correctness, a farce. Yet it is probable that of the 8,506,576 ayes won by the single list (there were only 136,198 nays), many were a genuine expression of support.

The prestige of the fascist government was at its zenith: at home the re-establishment of order, the improvement of the economic situation and the conciliation with the Vatican seemed to right-minded people to represent so many good marks, while on the international level, in spite of its nationalism and its restlessness, fascism seemed a solid bastion against communism. Mussolini's début in foreign affairs – he held this portfolio too – had not indeed been such as to inspire confidence. In August 1923, following the killing of an Italian military envoy at Janina, Mussolini sent an ultimatum to Greece and occupied Corfu. But England's firm attitude soon forced him to withdraw from the island, and from then on fascist policy, partly because of the moderating influence exercised by career diplomats, was on the whole faithful to the traditional line of friendship with England. Indeed the most weighty recognition of Mussolini came from England: on 20 June 1927 the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, declared that if he had been an Italian he would not have hesitated to be a fascist from the start. Questioned by the Labour Opposition, the Prime Minister, Baldwin, in his turn found nothing reprehensible in Churchill's statements. The conviction that fascism was what Italy needed and Mussolini, as Pius XI had said on the eve of the Conciliation, the man sent by Providence, had gained some footing in foreign public opinion. Rebounding to Italy, it helped to strengthen the régime's foundations further.

FASCIST ITALY AND REAL ITALY

Every totalitarian régime tends necessarily to try to create an ideology of its own. The attempt to provide fascism with one was made by the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, without doubt the most authoritative and brilliant of the fascist intellectuals. As Minister of Public Instruction he had been among other things the author of a reform of the schools with which he had tried to introduce to teaching the criteria of idealistic pedagogy, but which had in practice amounted only to a reaffirmation of the leading place of the humanities and of the class-oriented delimitation of Italian schools. In the article on fascism in the *Enciclopedia italiana*, another of the most substantial and serious cultural achievements of the régime, he defined fascism as a 'style' more than a body of doctrine, or, to adopt his idealist philosopher's terminology, an act rather than a deed. This amounted to an implicit recognition of the heterogeneity and contradictions of the fascist movement, a movement in which some – a few – insisted on seeing an uncompleted

revolution in progress, and others – many – a completed and crystallized restoration. In fact this second and more real aspect of fascism was that which did most to form the régime's face. Gentile himself, who was replaced as Minister of Public Instruction by Cesare De Vecchi, a living example of reactionary obtuseness, perhaps realized this, and his dissertations on the voluntarist, actualist nature of fascism have a somewhat wishful and apologist ring.

In architecture the monumental 'archaeological' style of Piacentini, which was celebrated by demolitions and grandiose rebuilding in the historic centre of Rome, certainly represented the time and fascist taste more closely than did the experiments inspired by the rationalism of the *Bauhaus* that certain more alert and more accomplished architects sometimes managed to achieve, as, for example, in the fine station at Florence. In literature, D'Annunzio, however inimitable, remained the official poet. He never tolerated the obscuring of his fame by that of the Duce, and withdrew to the sumptuous villa assigned him by the state, where he spent a rancorous and idle old age, writing almost nothing. The official face of fascist Italy was, then, martial; in fascist language *littorio* (of the lictor). Its heroes were the transatlantic flyers and aces of aviation like Balbo and De Pinedo, its pride the great transatlantic liners that won the Blue Ribbon, its favourite motto one of the Duce's many 'lapidary' phrases that made a fine show of themselves inscribed on the régime's new public buildings. The one to be seen most often went: 'better to live one day as a lion than a hundred years as a sheep'.

This was the façade. The reality was a good deal more prosaic, and consisted in the euphoria of a rediscovered middle-class prosperity. None of the things that usually mark a period of prosperity in Italy were lacking: building speculation, the first modest automobile boom that came with the production of the first popular model, the *Balilla*, the general passion for sport, for the entertainment-oriented spectacles provided by the theatre and the cinema, and for popular songs. The beaches and mountain resorts were populated by middle-class families in the summer, while for those who could not afford the luxury of a complete holiday there were the popular trains organized by the national after-work organization, thanks to which it was possible to spend an enjoyable weekend, or rather 'fascist Saturday'. Nationalist pride, aroused by fascist propaganda, was no more than a pleasant added spice to this rediscovered well-being. Another spice of a different nature was provided by the jokes about the régime that were told with a knowing air, without being too seriously believed.

There was in this new wave of modest, circumscribed prosperity something profoundly different from the happy years of the *Belle*

Epoque and *Italietta*: there was more vulgarity, less sensitivity towards the very serious problems that still remained, and, above all, more corruption: a corruption that gradually increased as the régime consolidated itself, to the point of becoming almost an institution. The new men whom fascism brought to power, the so-called *gerarchi* (ie 'hierarchs'), were for the most part parvenus and provincials, of coarse tastes and little culture, completely without the habit of power and of detachment from it that are characteristic of seasoned and tested ruling classes. Such were Farinacci, *ras** of Cremona, who became party secretary, a vulgar and villainous man, Augusto Turati, another party secretary and provincial *ras*, and, finally, Achille Starace, worthy object of the most scurrilous and successful stories against the régime.

The pretentiousness of the façade made a singular contrast with the squalor and emptiness within, the clamour of big words with the poverty of feelings. It is no wonder that the best literature and art of the fascist period seem dominated by a sense of disgust at this contrast and this emptiness. Pirandello, whose adherence to fascism was made much of by the régime, had already populated his plays, which did not much please the public of the 1920's, with a disillusioned and hallucinated bourgeoisie. But Moravia's novel *Gli Indifferenti*, of 1929, gave a direct and unequivocal picture of the middle class of the fascist era, of its cynicism and intellectual poverty. Montale, perhaps the greatest Italian poet of our century, wrote of life's sadness, to which he opposed the 'prodigy of divine indifference'. Morandi, with his still-lifes and bottles, set an example of rigour and chasteness that was implicitly a protest against the rhetoric and noise of officialdom. Petrolini, an actor gifted with an instinctive and genuine comic force, created the character of Gastone, the inept and spoiled *figlio di papà*.

So the years of prosperity passed rapidly, amid the vulgarity and clamour of official rhetoric. The euphoria of a temporary, limited and artificial well-being was soon to pass, and the old Italian reality would return to beat at the door, as it had after the first decade of the century, but this time with a more tragic urgency.

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND CORPORATIVE ECONOMY

The great economic crisis of 1929 had less acute and spectacular repercussions on the economy and society of Italy than in America

* I.e. 'boss', nabob; the word comes from Ethiopia, where a 'ras' is second only to the negus. (Trans.)

or Germany, but its effects were perhaps deeper and more lasting in Italy. For the healing of the wounds of the crisis was a long and difficult process that effected fundamental changes not only in the country's economic structures but also in its political ones.

From 1930 the classic symptoms of the crisis emerged clearly in Italy too: the fall in prices and the consequent collapse of shares provoked drastic falls in production. Between 1929 and 1932 automobile production was halved, while production of steel fell from 2,122,194 tons per annum to 1,396,180, and that of cotton thread from 220,000 tons to 169,000. The average national income fell from 3,079 lire in 1929 to 2,868 in 1933, while unemployment rose from 300,000 in 1929 to 1,019,000 in 1933. In consequence consumption also went down, and the number of calories consumed *per capita* fell sharply. Frustration, and hunger, once more became widespread. The fascist policy of population-increase, followed for reasons of national prestige, did nothing to improve the situation.

To begin with, the fascist government considered reacting by intensifying, above all, the already-launched policy of public works. The large-scale demolitions in the centre of Rome, with the opening of the via dell'Impero and the via della Conciliazione, and the big project of land-reclamation in the Pontine marshes, begun in 1928, all belong to the years of crisis. The last-mentioned project was a truly impressive one, which fascism, however, did not fail to propagandize beyond its practical effect. But far more was needed to overcome the crisis and restore energy and future prospects to the national economy; what was needed was an overall revision and re-organization of the economic policy followed up to that date. This, save for the brief interlude when Count Volpi had occupied the Ministry of Finance, had followed a liberal line; but those same industrialists who at a time of prosperity had requested the government not to concern itself with their affairs now insistently demanded support and help. And once again the state flew to their side. The founding first of the *Istituto immobiliare italiano* (IMI) and then of the *Istituto per la ricostruzione industriale* (IRI) made it possible for state financing to salvage many industries that had been sorely tried by the crisis.

So there began a policy of increasing public spending and restricting private consumption, which first alleviated the effects of the crisis, and then made it possible to overcome it. While workers' wages remained low and indirect taxation reached record levels, state financing and industrial commissions increased continually. In many cases the industries financed and commissioned were those engaged in war production, which was to have grave consequences on the later developments of Italy's history. It became a patriotic duty, which the

state was the first to perform, to prefer the national product, even when its price was a good deal higher than that of a similar product on the international market. Certain products of the Italian steel industry, for example, were 50 or even 100 per cent more expensive than those of other countries. So the so-called 'autarchic' policy took shape: a new edition, on a larger scale and with a patriotic mask, of protectionism, under whose aegis Italian capitalism had been born and had developed. The founding of a whole series of public corporations, such as ANIC (*Azienda nazionale idrogenerazione combustibili*) and AGIP, and the development of electricity production, in the attempt to adjust Italy's negative balance in the raw materials of power, should all be seen in the context of the autarchic policy, as should the renewed impulse given to the 'corn battle', with the founding of the *Federazione dei consorzi agrari*, and of compulsory stores of grain. Finally, measures had to be introduced to prevent the overflow of population from the land to the towns, and the growth of urbanization; and fascist propaganda turned to exalting the beauty of the rural life: the song *Campagnola bella* became one of the most popular tunes.

The organization of the economy was thus in many ways reminiscent of that of the wartime period, and like the latter it gave to superficial observers the impression of containing elements of collectivism and of state planning. In fact the state, by means of the IRI, controlled many firms and whole sectors of production: so much so that the public sector of the economy was larger in Italy than in any other capitalist country. Besides, by means of the corporations, whose organization was perfected and made operative in 1934, the state itself declared that it wished to assume the functions of a mediator between the complaints and interests of employees and workers, and to harmonize the demands of public and private interests. Mussolini and his propaganda even proclaimed that the fascist corporative state represented a stage beyond capitalism with its extreme free enterprise, and beyond socialism, with its suffocating state domination. Some, like Giuseppe Bottai, who was for a time Minister of Corporations, believed in these theorizings, but then had to admit that things went very differently in practice. For although it was true that the state sector of the economy was larger and more solid, it was also true that the state was, owing to the way it had taken shape and developed, largely a 'private' state, exposed to, and to a large extent dominated by, the pressures of the strongest and most influential groups and economic concentrations. The corporations were far from being the instruments of mediation between capital and labour, and of placing private initiative within the context of the national economy, that the 'left wing' fascists would have wished them to be: they were, on the

contrary, dominated as they were by the main industries, the means by which the major monopolistic groups and concentrations such as Fiat, Montecatini, Snia Viscosa, managed to silence every remnant of working-class protest and demands, and to put pressure on the state to strengthen their position. Any surviving resistance they met with from state bureaucracy and administration could easily be got round, in the atmosphere of spreading corruption that such an interpenetration of state, party and corporation increased and encouraged.

So the price of overcoming the crisis of the '30's was an increase in the authoritarian and totalitarian character of the fascist régime. Now the fascist anthem *Giovinezza* accompanied and sometimes preceded the Royal March on official occasions. By this time party membership was increasingly becoming an indispensable passport to public offices, and every solemnity was employed to persuade Italians to put on black shirts and participate in the *adunate*.* In 1931, university professors were forced to swear loyalty to fascism: only eleven of them refused to do so. The régime's motto was now 'Believe, obey, fight.' So far, the last of these imperatives had had merely rhetorical force. But it was soon to have real meaning.

25

FROM THE ATTACK ON ETHIOPIA TO ENTRY IN WAR

The economic crisis had also shaken the régime's political prestige, especially among the lower class who were its main victims. Mussolini's high-sounding words in his speech to the workers of Milan in 1934 on the overcoming of capitalism, were certainly not enough to cover the reality of lower wages, lasting unemployment, reduced consumption among the common people. So the régime was faced with an uphill climb also in terms of its own popularity and public support.

The classic means was to seek for an assertion of prestige on the level of foreign policy; besides, war supplies would, and in fact did, help some sectors of industry to escape finally from the crisis. The chosen object was Ethiopia, the last independent African state, whose admission to the League of Nations had been under Italy's own patronage. The pretext for a quarrel was found in the usual border incident. That Mussolini's main motives were of internal policy and prestige is borne out of the fact that, in the feverish diplomatic consultations preceding the invasion, the Duce rejected every compromise solution,

* The standard word used by fascist rhetoric to describe the vast public gatherings of the time; it was usually accompanied by the adjective 'oceanic'. (Trans.)

even very advantageous ones, for he was firmly decided to take things to a trial of strength and prestige. On 3 October 1935 the call to arms went out, and Italy became engaged in what was to be the last colonialist enterprise of modern history.

Military operations, after a few initial failures, went fairly quickly, and in May 1936 they ended in the capture of the capital, Addis Ababa; there remained only a sequel of insistent and obstinate guerrilla warfare. The course of the war was no doubt hastened by lack of humanitarian scruples on the part of the Italian general staff, who did not hesitate to use poison-gas. On the other hand the shaky way in which the great powers applied the economic sanctions that the League of Nations had imposed on Italy did the rest. In spite of the economic blockade, petrol continued to reach Italy, and the Suez canal remained open to Italian shipping.

The brevity of the campaign made it more popular. The old nineteenth-century myth of the fertile land of Africa waiting to fall into the arms of enterprising Italian planters still had a strong hold on the peasants, especially in the South, while the nationalists' motive of revenge for the humiliation of Adowa had its hold on the lower middle-class. At that time the song *Faccetta nera* aroused much enthusiasm: it celebrated the civil and amatory virtues of the Italian legionary who, after freeing a beautiful Abyssinian girl from slavery, gives her further causes for satisfaction. When on 5 May 1936 Mussolini, in one of his speeches from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia, proclaimed that the Italian Empire was founded, the popularity of the fascist régime had once again reached a notably high point.

But the downward curve was not slow to begin, and once it had, it was rapid. The Ethiopian campaign, by provoking a serious deterioration in Italy's relations with England and France, had placed her in diplomatic isolation, and led her to draw closer to nazi Germany, relations with whom had gone through a period of tension as recently as June 1934, at the time of the nazi *putsch* in Austria and the threat of an *Anschluss*. The first overtures to Germany took a fairly prudent and muted form; the word used was not alliance but 'axis'. But later relations between the two countries became more and more an ideological and political alliance between two régimes inspired by the same principles. This alliance was sealed in 1936 by the common intervention of both Italy and Germany in the Spanish Civil War, in support of General Franco. This helped to win fascism the sympathy of the Church, but contributed to the further deterioration of relations with the western powers, who were committed to a policy of non-intervention, and to binding Italy closer to Germany. In fact, the more Germany became involved in the Spanish conflict, the more

care she took to involve Italy as deeply as possible. In 1937 came the Anti-Comintern pact between Italy, Germany and Japan, and in 1938 the transplanting to Italy of German racist legislation and persecution of the Jews. This was without doubt the most unjustifiable and lunatic act of the régime; one of the Italian citizens forced to leave the country was the great physicist Enrico Fermi, who went to America, where he was to play a leading part in the research that led to the first atomic bomb. But by now the chips were down: each day the régime slid further down the slope it was on, and each day it took another step towards the irreparable.

There was indeed one moment when it seemed that the downward slide could be stopped: this was when in September 1938 Mussolini actively strove for the success of the Monaco meeting. But in fact, aware of Italy's military unpreparedness, he had merely wished to win time: the idea of war at Germany's side had already won him over, even though he intended to keep an autonomy of initiative for fascist Italy, as he showed in April 1939 by occupying Albania. One month later, on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War, the 'Pact of Steel' was signed by Germany and Italy: Italy promised to intervene in support of Germany. It seems that when the pact was signed Hitler and his colleagues hid from Mussolini their intention of attacking Poland straight away, and gave him to understand that war would only break out in two or three years' time. It was only at the Salzburg meeting in August that Ciano, fascist Foreign Minister, was informed of the imminent attack. This explains how Mussolini, aware of Italy's lack of military preparation, consented to the declaration of Italian non-belligerence. But one year later, when it seemed that the collapse of France had decided the outcome of the conflict, he cut short all delay and hesitation: on 10 June 1940 Italy went to war.

Gradually, as the international situation worsened, and the shadow of war crept over Italy, there were further turns of the screw within the country, and the régime crossed the limits beyond which dictatorship becomes grotesque. Racial legislation, a true insult to the kindness of the Italian character, was accompanied and justified by an anti-Semitic campaign in which intellectuals of meagre stature and servile scientists distinguished themselves, and which was all the more repellent in that it was absurd and artificial. The use of the second person plural *voi* was imposed in place of the traditional polite form *lei*; and war was declared on the handshake, which was to be replaced by the fascist salute. These were unrealistic and gratuitous measures that clearly revealed the weakness and insecurity that lay concealed behind the régime's display of self-certainty and omnipotence.

So Italy went to war not merely militarily unprepared but in a state

of latent political crisis: the public consensus that had formed around the régime at the time of the Ethiopian exploit had rapidly dissolved. The increasingly near prospect of war and the unpopularity of the German alliance had quickly caused people to forget the régime's colonial successes, which had in any case yielded little fruit, after so many promises. When in September 1938 Mussolini returned to Italy from the Monaco conference, he was welcomed by huge popular demonstrations: it was a good moment to display loyalty to the Duce and hostility to the war at the same time. But the latter sentiment was in many cases stronger than attachment to the régime, when it did not generate actual aversion. The opposition consisted not only of the working class, who had never been fascists, and the great majority of intellectuals, who were disgusted by the régime's vulgarity and corruption; at the moment of entry into war there was an opposition current within fascist organizations themselves, especially youth and student bodies. This was a 'left-wing' opposition, but there was also a 'right-wing' opposition of industrialists anxious at the infiltration of German capital, soldiers concerned at Italy's lack of preparation for war, and high-ranking bureaucrats afraid that entry into war would disturb the social balance so laboriously established, and expose the country to dangerous upheavals. The main member of this group was the Foreign Minister, Ciano, who, after Monaco, adopted an ever-colder attitude towards the inconvenient German ally and had tried, with the timidity of a creature of the régime, to delay Italy's entry into war. Among the fascist *gerarchi*, Ciano's attitude was shared by Giuseppe Bottai, Dino Grandi, formerly Ambassador to London, and Italo Balbo, who was soon to meet his death in the sky above Tobruk, in circumstances that immediately attracted reasoned suspicions. Among the soldiers, the doubts of Marshal Badoglio, chief of the general staff, were well known, and among the bureaucrats, those of Arturo Bocchini, chief of police. In July 1943 these men, with the support of the King, who was also mistrustful and hostile towards Germany, took part in a palace conspiracy that put an end to the fascist régime. But before describing that event it is necessary to take a retrospective look at the anti-fascist movement, and at those men and political forces which were preparing themselves, after years of defeats and humiliations, to raise a prostrate and disorientated Italy up from fascism.

ANTI-FASCISM

The most internationally known figure of Italian anti-fascism is that of Benedetto Croce. To begin with, in the period immediately preceding and immediately following the march on Rome, his attitude towards fascism had not been without uncertainties and even some positive approval. But after the murder of Matteotti and the speech of 3 January, he moved to a position of definite opposition. In June 1925 he edited and promoted a manifesto that was signed by forty intellectuals, and represented the answer made by the best part of Italian culture to a corresponding fascist manifesto written by Gentile, which celebrated the funeral rites of the liberal state. Croce then withdrew to his study in Naples, in dignified and significant detachment, to concern himself with his studies. One of the first works he published was the already mentioned *History of Italy*, a eulogy and passionate evocation of liberal Giolittian Italy. After some years followed the *Storia d'Europa*, whose anti-fascist inspiration was evident in the reduction of European history to a 'history of liberty'. As long as the régime lasted, Croce and his review *La Critica* continued to be a lesson in dignity and a point of reference for all anti-fascist Italian intellectuals.

But they sought in vain in the pages of Croce's works the historic reasons for fascism's victory: there was no analysis of the fascist phenomenon and its place in Italian history. His *History of Italy* ends in 1915, almost as if he wished to emphasize that what had come later was irrational madness, and that the country's salvation consisted simply in a return to the values and behaviour of the pre-fascist liberal state. With some slight divergences such was also the point of view of the older of the political expatriates, Treves, Nitti, Modigliani, Turati, who had formed a *Concentrazione antifascista* in France in 1927, and began the publication of an Italian-language paper *La Libertà*. Gaetano Salvemini, too, who had been one of Giolitti's hardiest opponents, made a revaluation of pre-fascist Italy in the writings of his period of exile. But for young men like Piero Gobetti, who was removed by death from the anti-fascist struggle while still very young, or Carlo Rosselli, who, together with Ferruccio Parri and others, had managed Turati's escape, and who himself made an adventurous escape from Lipari in 1929, the answer to the question of why fascism had won seemed to be the indispensable premise for the success of the anti-fascist struggle. The conclusion they reached was that the victory of fascism had been made much easier by the weakness and complicity of the liberal ruling

class, and that post-fascist Italy should therefore be radically different from pre-fascist Italy. The political movement founded by Rosselli in France – 'Justice and Liberty' – was inspired by these principles, its programme was clearly revolutionary, and its ideology that of a libertarian socialism. Another reason for the break that soon emerged between the expatriates of an older generation and of the *Concentrazione* on the one hand, and the young men and 'Justice and Liberty' on the other, concerned the method of the anti-fascist struggle. The second group reproached the first for their delays and their rumination on platonic congressional resolutions; they maintained the need for a more radical type of struggle. In July 1930 the men of 'Justice and Liberty' organized Bassanesi's flight over Milan to drop anti-fascist leaflets, and other similar enterprises, and they applauded the attempt to assassinate the Prince of Piedmont, made by a very young man, Ferdinando De Rosa, at Brussels in 1929.

These were methods that the communists considered the expression of an amateurish activism, and an indication of lack of seriousness. They argued that the struggle against fascism was a struggle that had to go on every day, conducted by means of propaganda, syndicalist agitations and strikes; and it should be waged by the Italian workers and peasants, and by those militants who were prepared to stay in Italy in contact with the people. This was the road they had chosen. The party formed at Leghorn in 1921 had overcome, not without toil and internal struggles, the faction spirit of its early days, and had learned to its cost in terms of the blood of its own militants that it was untrue that all bourgeois governments, including fascist ones, were the same. It had flung itself into the anti-fascist fight with all its strength. After participating in the Aventine secession, but then realizing its uncertainty and weakness and returning to Parliament, the communist party had managed to keep up an organizational network, even after being declared illegal. Its press organ, *L'Unità*, printed clandestinely, managed to come out fairly regularly, and its activists stayed in the factories, in some cases even succeeding in organizing strikes and anti-fascist demonstrations. In Turin, Tuscany and Venezia Giulia some sort of communist organization continued to function throughout the fascist twenty years, and the communists, in spite of their rapid assimilation of clandestine methods, were by far the majority of the Special Tribunal's victims.

This was not all: of all the anti-fascists the communists were those who took the analysis of Italy's political and social reality in the light of fascist victory deepest, and produced a new and articulate programme of the forces and directions of the Italian revolution. This was contained in the propositions Antonio Gramsci presented to and had

approved by the party congress held at Lyons in 1926. They very clearly affirmed the need to oppose the industrial-agrarian bloc that had always dominated the Italian state, and of which fascism was the latest and most brutal expression, with a worker-peasant bloc, linking the workers of the North and the peasants of the South. The southern question, to which Gramsci had devoted another study, was thus indicated to be a national problem, not peculiar to the South. Peasants and workers could achieve victory only together, and should go ahead united, just as the bloc of Italian reaction was united: the experience of 1920, when the Turin workers and the *Ordine nuovo* group had wrongly thought that they could be the Petrograd of Italy, had been a salutary warning, and the Italian Communist Party was firmly resolved not to repeat the mistake of the socialists, who in the post-war period had, as we have seen, let the peasant movement advance on its own. Gramsci's plan for the Italian revolution certainly followed Lenin's plan for an alliance between workers and peasants, and also Stalin's formula for worker-peasant government. Even so, in giving body and substance to this general idea, Gramsci was naturally led to take into account Italy's history, and to give his own thought a pronounced national slant, or, to use a term that recurs often in his writings, 'national-popular'. He thus accentuated the historic peculiarities of the Italian revolution and, in consequence, the autonomy of the party at its head. Hence the perplexity he showed writing to Togliatti in 1926 about the developments of the political struggle and the process of bureaucratization in progress in the Soviet Union. Hence also his decision to return to Italy, which he took with full awareness of the risks it implied. For in 1926 he was arrested and condemned by the Special Tribunal to twenty years' imprisonment. Prison, the illness that undermined his weak constitution, the incomprehension occasionally shown by his party comrades who were his companions in prison, were not enough to prevent his brain from continuing to work, as Mussolini had ordered. The *Quaderni* he drew up in prison, and which were published after the liberation, bear witness that he never for a moment ceased to think and to work, and his letters to his wife and sons show that his rich and passionate humanity were never extinguished.

The subjects dealt with and touched on in Gramsci's prison writings are quite varied: from the philosophy of Benedetto Croce to the history of the Risorgimento, the character of the modern party, literature and its position in society. It would be a wasted effort to attempt to give here a résumé of his thought. It must suffice to say that the thread running all the way through it is the idea of Marxism which had also been Labriola's: the idea of Marxism as an open system. He argues on the other hand against mechanistic, systematic, interpretations.

A relevant example is his criticism of the textbook *On the theory of historic materialism*, by Bukharin. Antonio Gramsci died on 27 April 1937, in a Rome hospital, to which he had been moved from prison. No-one attended his funeral.

The man who had in the mean time succeeded to the party leadership, Palmiro Togliatti, had been at Gramsci's side since the days of *Ordine nuovo*, and they shared a common cultural background and sense of the peculiarity and individuality of the Italian revolutionary tradition. But the awareness that this tradition had partly been formed by anarchism and by a vulgar, inconclusive maximalism made him more sceptical and helped to give him a pedagogic attitude towards the party he led, and to plant firmly in him the belief that Italian communists had everything to learn from the Russian communists, who had achieved a revolution and been able to defend it against storms and high seas. Besides, for Togliatti, the outcome of political and social struggles, in the situation shaped by the reinforcement of reaction on a national and European scale, depended on unconditional class-solidarity with the Soviet Union. Hence his loyalty to the Comintern and the USSR, and the fact that he and Gramsci disagreed in their respective attitudes to the internal developments of Soviet policy. For Togliatti – as he was to declare later, in a speech of 1956 – there had to be 'a bond of steel' between the Italian Communist Party and the Soviet Union, and in the years 1926–45 he did not hesitate to follow all the wishes of Soviet policy and of the International. It seems that at the 6th International congress in 1928 he showed sympathy with Bukharin's ideas, but when, a little later, in the agitation provoked among communists by the 1929 crisis, the call went out for a struggle to the bitter end against the bourgeoisie and its social-democratic lackeys, he did not hesitate to expel from the party its right-wing members, including Angelo Tasca, formerly his colleague on *Ordine nuovo*, and a man of brilliant ability. Later, when the policy of the Communist International, of which he was a distinguished member, moved towards the idea of popular fronts, he was finally able to reconcile his most obstinate and mature convictions with his loyalty to the International itself.

This development of the Italian Communist Party did much to make the anti-fascist struggle more vigorous and more unified. In 1934 a treaty of unity of action was formed between the communist party and the socialist, which had in the mean time reunified itself. Later, all Italian anti-fascists took part in the Spanish Civil War. One of the first to reach the battlefields of Spain was Carlo Rosselli. This was the finest hour of Italian anti-fascism: five thousand Italian volunteers of the Garibaldi and International brigades fought for

Spain's freedom. In March 1937, at Guadalajara, these true volunteers found themselves face to face with false volunteers sent by fascism to support Franco, and defeated them: so the first military defeat of fascism was at the hands of Italians.

But after Guadalajara came sadder days and bitter experiences: the murder of the Rosselli brothers at Bagnoles-sur-Orne on 11 June 1937, by French assassins in the pay of the fascists, the fall of the Spanish Republic, the re-emergence of quarrels between the anti-fascist parties, the German-Soviet pact. But the bonds and sense of solidarity that had been forged during the Spanish Civil War were not entirely lost, and they would soon show their strength in the resistance.

19

The last decades

ITALY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Italy's unpreparedness for the First World War was as nothing in comparison with her unpreparedness for the Second. Mussolini had exalted the power of the eight million bayonets that formed the Italian army. Setting aside the exaggeration of this figure (at the outbreak of hostilities about one million Italians were mobilized), modern war was not fought with bayonets, nor even with the 1891 rifle issued to the army since the first African war. Tanks were needed – and there were in all four hundred pocket-sized ones; aeroplanes were needed – there were fourteen hundred, most of them antiquated and unable to fly long distances without re-fuelling; ammunition was needed – there was enough for sixty days of war.

Mussolini himself was aware of Italy's lack of military readiness; but he was equally convinced that the war was by now drawing to its end, and that England would soon suffer the same fate as France. What he most urgently wanted was a place at the peace conference table, with some partial military success to raise his stocks with the powerful German ally. His Germanophilia was in fact compounded of opportunism: in his heart not even Mussolini felt much love for the Germans or for their Führer, who aroused in him an acute inferiority-complex. The meetings between the two were often reduced to a monologue from Hitler with rare and timid interruptions from the Duce. Things were complicated by the fact that Mussolini was proud of his knowledge of German; but apparently Hitler's was particularly harsh and hard on the ear. However, since German victory seemed inevitable, it was necessary to rise above sympathies and resentments, and at the same time to preserve military autonomy, so as to arrive at the peace negotiations in a good bargaining position. In other words, Italy's war was to be 'parallel' to Germany's, with its own forces and its own aims. Considerations of this sort induced Mussolini,

a hundred hours before the French surrender, to order a futile and inglorious offensive on the western Alpine front, which resulted in a first resounding demonstration of the Italian army's lack of preparation.

The parallel war was later carried to Africa, where Italian troops managed to win British Somaliland, and carry out an offensive thrust in Libya, under the command of General Graziani, as far as the occupation of Sidi el Barani. At sea, there were a number of battles in the Mediterranean, resulting in the success of one side or the other alternately. The Italian navy, that branch of the forces which had been best able to maintain its independence of fascism, emerged honourably. But in the face of German prestige and omnipotence far more than this was needed to emphasize Italy's presence and autonomy. The German occupation of Romania in October 1940 irritated Mussolini and led him to cut short delay and put into action a political-military initiative that had been in his mind for some time, and towards which the German ally had earlier reacted with perplexity: the attack on Greece. Rarely has a military enterprise been prepared – or rather, improvised – with such amateurism and lack of reflection. The results were not slow to confirm as much: what Mussolini had been sure would be a military walk-over turned into a resounding defeat, and Italian troops were lucky to keep possession of Albania in face of the Greek counter-offensive. The soldiers of the Italian Alpine regiments, shod in cardboard-soled shoes, and sometimes without winter clothing, froze to death in their thousands in the mountains of Greece. A dolorous wartime song was born; like the German *Lili Marlene*, it seemed a foreboding of the inevitable defeat.

Meanwhile things went badly on the other fronts too. On 11 November 1940 English torpedo-craft had inflicted very grave losses on the Italian fleet while it was still at anchor in the bay of Taranto, while on the Libyan front the English had come to the counter-attack, and on 16 February 1941 they reached Bengazi. In East Africa too things took a decisive turn for the worst: it was now clear that the loss of Ethiopia was imminent.

On the home front the situation was no better. Rationing of foodstuffs and essential goods was strict, but this did not prevent those in privileged positions, including the fascist *gerarchi*, from evading the regulations and resorting to the black market. While the sons of the poor went to be massacred in Libya and Greece, the *figli di papà* found ways of evading conscription. Italy's economic dependence on Germany for basic materials was more marked every day; combined with military defeats, this soon scattered the illusion of parallel war. Italy was by now at the mercy of her ally, and her rôle that of a lowly second fiddle.

With the first months of 1941 began a new phase of the war that

saw Italy in a position of complete political and military subordination. The German intervention and victorious campaign in Greece and Jugoslavia put an end to Italy's old aspirations of dominating the Balkans. The annexation to Italy of the town of Ljubljana and the creation of a Kingdom of Croatia, under a member of the house of Savoy who in any case never set foot there, was a meagre recompense. Next, the arrival of a German expeditionary force in Libya, under General Rommel, and its victorious offensive as far as Sollum, seemed a recognition of the definite subordination of Italian command to German. The last act of servility towards the Germans was the despatch of an Italian force to Russia.

With the attack on the Soviet Union and the intervention of the USA in December 1941 the war, as is well known, took an increasing turn for the worse for the Axis powers. By autumn 1942 the sense of defeat was general: the English victory of El Alamein in October and the American landing in North Africa made it clear that the alternating war in Libya and Egypt was near its end. The process of sending supplies to the troops fighting in North Africa became more difficult all the time, and the long convoy war that had dragged on as well with alternating fortunes was also being settled in favour of the English fleet, which possessed a notable advantage in radar, and had Malta, a base which the Italians had in vain tried to overcome. The tragedy was sealed by the news from Russia: in December 1942 and January 1943 the Italian army of 110,000 men had been defeated, and more than half its men died under enemy fire or from the cold. The few survivors were to recount how their 'German comrades' had refused them the means of transport they needed to save themselves.

The discontent that had for some time been building up in the country was gradually developing into anger and organized opposition. Contacts between opposition groups were increased and in December 1942 it was possible to set up an anti-fascist committee in Turin, in which, beside the socialists, liberals and communists, two new parties were represented, the Action Party, and heir of the 'Justice and Liberty' movement, to which most of the intellectuals belonged, and the very recently formed Christian democrat party. The Vatican was in fact withdrawing from the régime. Also in Turin, the most anti-fascist and the most working-class of Italian towns, the workers of Fiat and of other large factories went on strike in March 1943, and were successfully followed by their comrades in Milan. The political significance of the event escaped no-one, especially not the fascist leaders, who still remembered how after the march on Rome the Turin working class had had to be subdued by force. Many of them at this point began to think that a lost war was always better than a revolution.

This belief was naturally strengthened as the military situation moved steadily towards disaster. In May the last troops in Tunisia were pushed into the sea, and in June the English and American forces landed in Sicily. In the mean time Italian towns had been subjected to murderous air-raids. So behind the scenes of the régime there began a desperate search for a way out that would allow Italy to detach herself from the Germans and end the war with the Allies. The court became the common ground of the fascist opposition – Bottai, Grandi, Ciano, who had left the Foreign Ministry in February 1943 and become Ambassador to the Vatican, members of the old ruling class and of the army, including the new chief of staff, General Ambrosio – who were all convinced that it was useless to continue any longer a war that was already lost. When in July 1943 Mussolini came back from yet another inconclusive meeting with Hitler without having even tried to persuade him to leave Italy free to decide her own destiny, it became clear that the first thing to do was to remove him from power. At the Grand Council session that began on 24 July Mussolini's opponents confronted him and, after a dramatic night-long sitting, were able to pass, by nineteen votes to seven, a motion that invited the King 'to assume command of the armed forces and the fulness of his constitutional powers', and so amounted to a disowning of Mussolini and of the régime he had founded. But Mussolini did not realize the implication of such a *pronunciamento*, and when on the afternoon of 25 July he went to see the King, who had in the meantime been informed by Grandi of the outcome of the Grand Council meeting, he was surprised to be told that his resignation had been accepted and a new government formed; he was surprised again when on leaving the palace he found himself at the door of an ambulance, which he was made to get into, to be taken first to a Roman barracks and later to Ponza.

The Italians learned of the event from the radio late that night, and the following morning there were scenes of indescribable enthusiasm in the piazzas of Italy. Everyone was certain that the end of the fascist dictatorship would be followed, after a brief interval, by the end of the war. But it was not so.

THE FORTY-FIVE DAYS AND THE ARMISTICE

The forty-five days from 25 July to the announcement of the armistice of 8 September are one of those historic moments in which farce is mingled with tragedy. There is no more signal instance of the foolishness of the Italian ruling class in all its history.

At the head of the new government appointed by the King was Marshal Pietro Badoglio, a Piedmontese soldier who had led the military action against Ethiopia, and after the failure of the aggression against Greece had resigned as chief of staff, wishing to indicate by this action that he dissociated himself from Mussolini's military enterprises. He was hemmed in on one side by the conservative preoccupations of the King and certain of his ministers, and on the other by the anti-fascist parties, who loudly clamoured for the liquidation of the régime and for peace. He did not wish to upset either party, and embarked on a policy of temporization and small acts of cunning, which was precisely the opposite of the great decisions that the gravity of the moment demanded. His first acts were to issue a proclamation announcing that the war was to continue, and to prohibit assemblies and meetings. The fascist party was dissolved, but the reconstitution of other parties was impeded; political prisoners were set free, but certain pro-German soldiers and officials were kept at their posts. Political life, Badoglio promised, would be resumed at the end of the war, with free elections; for the moment the Italians were asked only to have faith in the government.

But the government showed itself scarcely worthy of the trust it demanded. During August 1943, while Allied air-raids rained tons of bombs on Italy's towns every day, the government wasted precious time in the vain and futile quest for impossible solutions. When on 7 August the Foreign Minister, Guariglia, declared to his German opposite number von Ribbentrop that Italian foreign policy would undergo no change, approaches to the Allies, with an armistice in view, had already begun. The preliminary negotiations were drawn out by the Italian government's vain hope of persuading the Allies to withdraw their demand for unconditional surrender, and so to restore to some extent the prestige of a monarchy compromised by twenty years' collaboration with fascism. But in the mean time the Germans were not wasting time: they were pouring into Italy the divisions they had refused Mussolini when he had asked for them in his last meeting with Hitler. By its temporizings and hesitations Badoglio's government lost the trust of everyone: of the Germans, who scented the change of wind; of the Allies, who mistrusted the tergiversations and machiavellianism of the plenipotentiaries from Rome; and finally, of the Italians, who, as the strikes at Turin and Milan in August showed, were increasingly determined to express their desire for peace. Badoglio and the King would have liked to extricate Italy from the conflict with the Germans' consent, and after having won favourable armistice terms from the Allies. To this end they held up before both Germans and Allies the spectre of a communist revolution,

and chanted *après nous le déluge*. Even though the Allies were not impervious to this argument, military considerations were for the moment more urgent, and only formal agreements had been made with the USSR concerning the unconditional surrender.

In the end the unconditional surrender had to be accepted. The armistice was signed at Cassibile, a captured Sicilian village, on 3 September, by General Castellano. The Badoglio government was able to have the announcement of the armistice delayed until the Allied troops, who had already crossed the straits, were able to make a landing in southern Italy, which was to have been followed up by a paratroop landing in Rome. But on 7 September General Taylor, whom Allied High Command had put in charge of the Rome mission, declared that the planned paratroop landing was impossible, since the Germans were already in control of the capital's airports; so it was eliminated from the plan of operations. Meanwhile the fleet was already at sea, heading for Salerno, with its load of troops, and according to the terms of the Cassibile agreement the announcement of the armistice was now due. Badoglio tried in vain to persuade Eisenhower to delay the announcement or actually to divert the fleet's route. Naturally, the Allied Supreme Commander was adamant, and on the evening of 8 September, two hours after Radio London had already broken the news, he transmitted Badoglio's declaration announcing the armistice and ordering the troops to cease all resistance to the Allies but instead to resist 'possible attacks from other quarters'. Meanwhile, together with a group of generals and officials, Badoglio joined the King in his flight to Pescara, where a motor-boat awaited the unhappy refugees to carry them to territory already in Allied hands.

So, overnight, Italy found herself without a government, with a foreign army threateningly encamped on her soil, agitated by a whirl of contradictory reports. For some days there was chaos, and each person was left alone to make the right choices according to his own conscience. While some military commanders surrendered to the Germans and abandoned their units, others, like General Carboni in Rome, tried to organize resistance. The fleet, most anti-fascist of the forces, unhesitatingly complied with the terms of the armistice and sailed for Malta, where it arrived after losing one of its best ships on the way, the battleship *Roma*, sunk by the Germans. The soldiers of the Cefalonia garrison had no hesitations either, and 8,400 of them were massacred by the Germans. Many soldiers stationed in the Balkans joined the Jugoslav partisans. But the great majority of disbanded troops, who had suddenly found themselves without commanders and without orders, made the more elementary choice of the right road to get them home. Taking the wrong one meant falling into the hands of

the Germans and ending up in a sealed railway carriage heading for the German concentration camps. During these days of disbandment and chaos the Italian people's profound modest virtues of kindness and tolerance shone brightly. No soldier was refused civilian clothes, no Allied prisoner who found himself unexpectedly at liberty was refused shelter and help, no Jew was without a hiding-place. In misfortune the Italian people began to rediscover their old civilized qualities.

THE RESISTANCE

In the days following 8 September things became clearer: it was soon tragically evident to everyone that Italy was split in two. In the South were the Allied armies, who had reached Naples on 1 October, and so had established themselves along a line from the Adriatic to Pescara, by way of Montecassino; and there was the Badoglio government. In the North were the Germans and a fascist government led by Mussolini, who had been set free on 12 September by a detachment of German paratroops. Indeed, both Italian governments were puppets. Mussolini's, the Italian Social Republic, did not exercise even its nominal sovereignty over all the territory unoccupied by the Allies: a good part of the Veneto was directly under German administration, and in a half-way condition between occupied and annexed territory. But the southern government too had direct sovereignty only over Apulia initially, and not until February 1944 did the other provinces, formerly under Allied control, pass under its jurisdiction. In its details the pictures was even more disturbing and chaotic: in Sicily the old resentment of fascism and of Rome had found expression in a separatist movement; in Naples, which had rebelled against the Germans before the arrival of the Allied troops, squalor and degradation reigned. In the North the people experienced the terror of German manhunts, and the vindictive, desperate arrogance of the reconstituted fascist units, who seemed to have revived the original spirit of *squadrismo*. Everywhere there was hunger, the black market, disorientation. And there were no firm hopes of a quick solution: every day it became clearer that the Italian front was a secondary one for the Allies, and as Stalin among others demanded, after the Teheran meeting their forces were mainly concerned with preparing the second front and the Normandy landing. To this end some divisions were even withdrawn from the Italian front. So the war stood still south of Rome, and Italy waited, stagnant. The idea that she might be able to exert any pressure on the course of

events or make her own voice heard in some way seemed to most people utopian.

There was a first gleam of light in October, when the Badoglio government, after many hesitations, decided to declare war on Germany, thus showing that they attached a literal value to the Allies' promise to modify the conditions of peace according to the Italian contribution to the anti-fascist struggle. All those for whom the oath of loyalty to the King still had any value found themselves from this moment on authorized to disobey the government of the Italian Social Republic; and the first partisan units, organized by the communists and by the Action party, ranked themselves beside units commanded and formed by officers of the regular army. In the face of this upsurge of the resistance the Germans coined the strange epithet 'Badoglian communists', probably not realizing that their success in uniting the communists and monarchists in agreement could certainly not be put forward as a proof of their popularity in Italy.

In fact – to begin with at least – the communists and other anti-fascist parties were not at all in agreement with the King, whom they reproached for having made it easier for fascism to reach power and keep it until the catastrophe. At the congress of anti-fascist parties held at Bari in January 1944 the left-wing parties, led by the Committee of National Liberation, were unanimous in demanding the King's immediate abdication. But the old and wise Benedetto Croce had no difficulty in showing them that such a demand was completely unrealistic. For it was no secret to anyone that the Allies, and particularly England under Winston Churchill, supported the monarchy and were annoyed by the agitation of the anti-fascists. So there seemed no way out of the situation, and it was difficult to establish an anti-fascist and anti-German front.

The situation was resolved by an entirely unexpected person: the leader of the Italian communist party, Palmiro Togliatti, who landed in Italy in March 1944 after eighteen years of exile and of militant work for the International. Togliatti was in touch with the political attitude of the Soviet Union, which had a few days before been the first country to recognize the Badoglio government. He knew of Russia's eventual aim of dividing Europe into spheres of influence. But as before, in 1935, at the time of the popular fronts, he was profoundly convinced that this coincided with Italy's interests. Togliatti knew well what blood and tears had been spent in the attempt to build a socialist state, and he had no illusions about the possibilities of revolution in a country emerging from twenty years of fascism, quite apart from the presence of the Allied troops on Italian soil. So he thought that the 'Italian road' to socialism, as he called it, should pass by way of a

gradual process of democratization of the state, and by the collaboration of the communists with the other parties, in order to achieve a series of intermediate aims. The first of these was to drive out the Germans and free Italian territory; so Togliatti did not hesitate to accept the compromise formula worked out by Croce and De Nicola, according to which the King agreed to hand over his powers to his son, who took the title of Lieutenant, at the moment of the liberation of Rome, and to put off a final decision about the monarchy until after the end of the war. Immediately afterwards a new government was formed, again led by Badoglio, but including members of all the parties belonging to the Committee of National Liberation, except the Action party.

This took place in March/April 1944. Also at this time there took place the partisan action of via Rasella, perhaps the most famous episode of the Italian resistance, which cost the lives of thirty-two German soldiers, and was followed by the murder of three hundred and thirty-five Italian patriots in the Fosse Ardeatine. Also at this time were the big strikes of the northern industrial towns, which irrevocably tore apart the fascist republic's smokescreen of social demagogy. Every day the fascist republic had more the air of a body foreign to the country, a *revenant* from a past that was by now buried. Its only action to make an impression on public opinion – and far from favourably – was the murky trial of Verona, a settling of scores between fascist *gerarchi* which ended in the execution of Ciano and of other protagonists of the 25 July *coup*.

So the resistance got into its full stride, and soon won itself the right to be considered a valid partner by the Allies. When in June 1944 the Allied troops entered Rome, General Badoglio handed over to a new cabinet led by Bonomi, in which the leaders of the anti-fascist parties were included, and which declared itself the expression of the Committee of National Liberation. This was a bitter pill for Churchill, who wrote to Stalin about it; Stalin wrote in reply that he was amazed the Allies should have allowed any action not to their liking to be taken in a territory under their occupation. In fact England and the US had not acted together on this point, and Roosevelt had, on the contrary, supported the forming of a government that would express anti-fascism and the resistance.

The liberation of Rome and of Florence, in June and August 1944 respectively, and the imminent prospect of a final Allied victory certainly did much to intensify the activity of partisan formations organized by the various parties in the North; *coups de main* and acts of sabotage multiplied, and various 'free zones' were constituted, entirely occupied and administered by the partisans, such as the Val d'Ossola,

Carnia, the republic of Torriglia in Liguria, and others besides. The subsequent course of events showed moreover that the Italian resistance was not an ephemeral phenomenon, and that it in no way intended to confine itself to the position of a body of snipers and saboteurs supplementary to the Allied armies, as the Allies, worried by the political implications of the resistance, would have liked it to be.

The ten months from September 1944, when the Allied troops were held on the Gothic line, to April 1945, when northern Italy was liberated, were very hard months for the partisan movement. To this period belong the most massive German manhunts and the most pitiless reprisals against the civilian population. The most terrible of all these was probably that inflicted on the commune of Marzabotto in Emilia, where 1,830 people were killed. The Germans reoccupied many free zones; and it was during this period that most of the 46,000 dead of the war of liberation lost their lives. The combatants' morale was lowered even further by the proclamation from the English General Alexander on 10 November 1944 inviting them to cease their operations, and by the news of the disagreements that had emerged in the Bonomi government, between anti-fascists and conservatives who had been out of Italy for many years. In spite of all this, and in spite of the heavy losses they had suffered, the partisan forces overcame the crisis of autumn 1944 and carried on their struggle. At the end of April 1945, when on the other fronts hostilities were almost over, the Allied troops broke through to the Po plain, and found the main cities already in the hands of the army of liberation, and the main industrial establishments saved from German vandalism.

Strong in these successes, the Committee of National Liberation of upper Italy, which had organized the insurrection, was able to negotiate and act with the Allies, with the authority of their support. It took the initiative of ordering the execution of Mussolini, who had been captured while trying to reach the Swiss border, wearing a German uniform, and of the other fascist leaders with him, on the afternoon of 28 April. Later the corpses were hung on show in a piazza of Milan where partisans had been shot. It was a gesture that meant, above all, a break with the past and a warning to those, in and outside Italy, who thought they could evade the demands for regeneration expressed in the resistance. For the latter was not merely a military event, considerable though its military contribution to the Allied victory had been; it was above all a very wide political movement. It had been the achievement not only of the workers who had sabotaged and the men of the military formations who had fought, but also of the peasants who had fed them and the priests who had hidden them. All these people were now convinced that things had to change in Italy, that the time of

privileges and corruption was over; they wanted a clean and honest nation and were determined to fight for it and not let themselves slip into the quicksands of Italy's old political transformism. But the task was harder than the men of the resistance thought, in the enthusiastic days of the resistance.

POST-WAR HOPES AND FRUSTRATIONS

Anyone who wants to understand the spirit of the Italian resistance should consider the films of Roberto Rossellini, from *Roma città aperta* to *Paisà*, which inaugurated the Italian neo-realist school. They represent that spirit not only because many of their characters are men and women of the resistance – the Roman *popolana* superbly personified by Anna Magnani, the communist militant and the priest joined in martyrdom, the hungry and dogged partisans of the Polesine – but above all because of their completely successful attempt to provide a true and living image of Italy and its people, and because of their rejection of all consoling rhetoric and of all recrimination, because of the seriousness of their commitment and because of their rough emotion. But these films were considerably less successful in Italy than they would have been abroad. Why, many Italians asked themselves, display our miseries, the prostitution spreading through the towns, unemployment, the black market? Why probe and sound a past that was too near and too bitter? Was it not better to bury all that under a tombstone and begin to live and breathe again?

This refusal to realize what had happened, and to take a straight look at the reality of Italy, with its old evils, its inadequacies and injustices, was in the end an alibi, masking fear of innovation and a withdrawal from the effort to change things. Later it was to have a name, *qualunquismo*, and was to become a political movement with markedly reactionary characteristics. But in the wake of the liberation, many of the people who reasoned in this way were unaware of the political implications of their attitude. They merely wished to come out from the nightmare they had been in, and to start living again. Like every post-war period, this one had, besides its miseries, its pleasures and its euphoria: dance-halls multiplied visibly, American films, with their larger-than-life beauties, returned to the screens after many years' absence, the cyclist Bartali was back in action and winning again.

It was this second, *qualunquista* Italy, fond of peace and quiet, which prevailed in the end and, as after the First World War, the forces of

PART IV

One major doubt was whether working or begging offered the best ideal of the humble life. How did voluntary poverty relate to enforced poverty? Which of them was 'true' poverty? How should the apostle, the penitent, live in society? What was the value of work?

A basic ambiguity concerned the links between poverty and learning. Is learning not a form of wealth, a source of domination and inequality? Are books not among those temporal goods that we must reject? Faced with the intellectual explosion and the university movement that was soon to take over the Franciscan leaders, Francis hesitated. In more general terms, the question is whether, by the time of his death, Francis thought he had founded the last monastic community or the first modern fraternity.

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IN SEARCH OF THE TRUE SAINT FRANCIS

In quest of the true Saint Francis

On the face of it, nothing could be easier than to introduce Saint Francis of Assisi. He has left us several writings that acquaint us with his perceptions, his intentions and his ideas. As much a friend of simplicity in his writings as he was in his life and his ideals, deliberately ignorant of scholastic subtleties, he did not cloak his thinking and his literary effusions in learned or obscure vocabulary or a style demanding great efforts of elucidation or interpretation. A saint of a new kind, whose sanctity was manifested less by miracles – which were numerous nevertheless – and by the display of virtues – however rare and brilliant – than by the general course of a wholly exemplary life, Francis had in his immediate circle many biographers who not only had documentary information on him but were also concerned with painting him in the truth, simplicity and sincerity that always radiated naturally from him. The friend and brother of all creatures and of all creation, he poured out so much tender care and fraternal understanding to all, so much charity in the highest sense (in other words, so much love) that history has granted him, as though in exchange, the same sympathy and affectionate general admiration. All those who have spoken or written about him – Catholics, Protestants, non-Christians and non-believers – have been touched and often fascinated by his charm.

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Of course his context in geography and history gave him his personal frame and environment, in which his strong attachment to his native place is abundantly clear: to Assisi, located on a network of roads but in touch with the plains and mountains, within reach of humanity but close to solitude; to his Umbria, a land of winding paths on hills and valleys, full of silence and sound, of light and shadow, agricultural and mercantile, vibrant with a simple and thoughtful people, calm and full of burning passion, which sometimes suddenly blazed forth, a people in harmony with the trees, the earth, the stones and sinuous streams, and the company of noble and familiar beasts – sheep, cattle, donkeys and birds – including the doves, crows and jackdaws to which he preached, the falcon, the pheasant, the working bees and the humble cicada that came to sing on his hand; and to Italy, torn between Pope and emperors, cities rising up against one another, nobility and common folk, rural traditions and an advancing economy increasingly dominated by money. And these same ties bound him to his era, that dynamic time of urban development, of anxieties about heresy, of energy ready for death in the Crusade, of courtly poetry, itself split also between brutal passions and refined feelings.

How easy it seems to situate him! And in this amply illuminated setting, the historian is granted, by a final act of grace, another priceless gift: the poetry that issued from Saint Francis and the legend that emanated from him even in his own lifetime are so much part of his character, of his life, and of his action that in him Poetry and Truth become one. More than a century ago, Ernest Renan wondered 'that his marvellous legend could be studied very closely and be confirmed in the main by criticism'.

And yet the simple, open, so-often-told and so-much-depicted Saint Francis is hidden behind one of the thorniest questions of medieval hagiography. Paradoxically, this man who so distrusted book learning and scholarship can only be approached through at least an outline of the reasons that make it so very difficult to use the sources of his story.

Saint Francis in his writings

The first difficulty comes from the writings of Saint Francis himself. First, the saint, in his humility, did not tell his own story. His work cannot therefore be used as a source for any precise information on his life. He only makes allusions to some of the things he did, as examples

for his brothers. Thus in his *Testament*, the most 'autobiographical' of his writings, he recalls that he always sought to work with his hands so that the brothers would do likewise: 'And I worked with my hands, because I want to work that way; and I want all the other brothers to work in this honest way of labour.'[1] Furthermore, at least one of his most important writings, the first 'Rule' that he wrote for his brothers in 1209 or 1210, is lost. We know, notably from Francis himself and from Saint Bonaventure, that it was short and simple and essentially composed of a few passages from the Gospels. But the attempts of certain historians to reconstitute it remain very largely guesswork, and it is impossible to rely on this crucial document for a statement as to whether, at that time, Francis had accepted the idea of making himself and his companions into a new 'Order' integrated into the Church or whether he merely contemplated the formation of a little group of laity independent of the church organisation. Also lost, save a discovery made unlikely by the zeal with which researchers with Franciscan leanings have already excavated libraries and archives, are letters (we know of the existence of one to the brothers of France, another to those of Bologna, and several to Cardinal Ugolino, the protector of the Minors and the future Pope Gregory IX), poems, and songs. Of these poems we possess the one was probably the masterpiece, the 'Cantico di frate Sole', 'The Canticle of the Creatures' or 'Song of Brother Sun', but had we conserved the others, some of which we know were in Latin and some in Italian, still others perhaps in French, we would have a more complete picture of Saint Francis the poet – an essential aspect of his personality.

To these losses are added uncertainties about the authenticity of some of the writings that have been bequeathed to us in Saint Francis's name. These doubts relate only to texts generally considered as secondary, but for some of them what is at stake has some significance for an understanding of Saint Francis's thought. Thus, the letter addressed 'to all the potentates, to all the consuls, judges and rectors of the whole world as well as to all others whom this document might reach',[2] and known under the title 'A Letter to Rulers of the Peoples', can be attributed to Saint Francis only because of its contents. No external proof permits confirmation of its authenticity. Now, if the recommendations that it contains correspond to the saint's intentions known from elsewhere, if this call made to the rulers to respect the commandments of God and have them respected by others, seems appropriate to a time

when Christendom included temporal and spiritual powers in a single body and appropriate to a man who was always concerned with re-establishing harmony, peace and love in the civil communities and with contributing to the salvation of groups and individuals, it also presents some disconcerting aspects. The insistent allusion to the imminence of the end of the world recalls the apocalyptic ideas of certain Franciscan groups in the thirteenth century rather than the position of Saint Francis himself: he made mention several times of the importance of preparing for the Last Judgment in the life of Christians and clerics but does not seem to have believed in the historical proximity of this event. Similarly, the remarkable act of writing the letter might enshrine a properly 'political' Franciscanism, from which certain contemporary public speakers would willingly draw inspiration, but it seems to go beyond the more discreet and more profound thought and action of Saint Francis.

There is a tendency today to regard the letter to Brother Anthony of Padua as authentic, but its form, at least, remains dubious and the approval that Francis, in contradiction to his usual suspicion of learning, grants in it to the scholastic teaching of theology remains puzzling.

Finally, if the interpretation of the authentic texts of Saint Francis leaves little room for serious divergences, given the simplicity and the clarity of the vocabulary and style of their author, it is not the same for the circumstances of their composition. For example, what role did external pressures play in the changes that the saint made to the Rule of 1221 after it had failed to obtain the approval of the Pope and some of the Minors? Recently – without serious foundation, in my opinion – it has been believed appropriate to attenuate the importance of the *Testament* by claiming that Saint Francis, weakened by illness, dictated this text under the influence of the Friars Minor of the convent of Siena who had received him and that the austerity of this writing reflects the 'extremist' position of these brothers more than that of Saint Francis.

Thus, through this brief sketch of the problems posed by the works of Saint Francis, we can see the main source of the difficulties in Franciscan historiography. During the saint's lifetime, there existed two tendencies in the very heart of the Order, each seeking to pull the founder towards it and to interpret his words and writings in its own way. On the one side were the rigorists who required the Minors to practise total poverty, both collective and individual, to refuse all

display in the churches, convents, and liturgy of the offices of the Order, and to keep their distance from the Roman curia, who were suspected of compromising too easily with the times. On the other side were the moderates, convinced of the need to adapt the ideal of poverty to the development of a growing Order of friars, not to dishearten by refusing all exterior comforts the ever greater crowds that were turning to the Minors, and to consider the Holy See as the authentic source of truth and authority in a Church of which the Order was an integral part. Where was the real Francis placed between these two tendencies?

The problem of the biographies

It should be possible to answer this question by studying his life as well as reading his works. However, there is a major difficulty. As a result of the dissent inside the Order of Minors in the thirteenth century, there are no wholly reliable sources on the life of the Order's founder. These disagreements among the Friars Minor began during Saint Francis's lifetime; it was because of them that he returned from the Holy Land in 1220 and composed in 1221 a new Rule that he immediately had to modify; it was because of them that he gave up the leadership of the Order, handing it over as early as 1220 to Peter Catani, and then (after the death of the latter, in 1221) to Brother Elias. These divisions were aggravated after Francis's death, all the more so as Brother Elias, who ruled the Order until 1239 – although he had ceded the ministry general to Giovanni Parenti from 1227 to 1232 – engaged it decisively on the path of pomp, symbolised by the construction of the sumptuous basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, to the exasperation of the champions of austerity. In the second half of the century, the conflicts were accentuated – despite pontifical interventions and, sometimes, because of them – and the two tendencies represented actual enemy factions. The Conventuali (Conventuals) agreed to follow the Rule interpreted and completed by papal bulls that weakened the practice of poverty, while their adversaries – generally called the Spirituali (Spirituals), especially in Provence, or *Fraticelli*, principally in Italy – increasingly swayed by the millenarian ideas of Gioacchino da Fiore (Joachim of Fiore), and increasingly extremist in their austerity and hostility to Rome, found themselves reduced to heretical positions. The great hope that was sparked in them by the election to the papal

throne, in 1294, of the hermit Pietro di Morrone was very quickly extinguished, because after six months Celestine V was constrained, in the words of Dante, to make the *gran rifiuto*, to renounce the tiara. Although some Spirituals survived until the end of the fifteenth century (irreducible *fraticelli* or rigorist Minors who became 'Observants'), the quarrel among the Franciscans can be regarded as settled by Pope John XXII in 1322 with the bull *Cum inter nonnullos*, which favoured the side most opposed to absolute poverty and the Spiritual tendencies.

As regards the sources of the history of Saint Francis of Assisi, however, the decisive episode of this struggle took place in 1260–66. In the Order, there were always partisans of the happy medium, wishing to create a compromise between the two extreme factions. Like Dante, they thought of Saint Francis's family:

> His family, whose feet were following
> straight forward in his footsteps, is so turned round
> that the tail has twisted to the head,
> and soon we shall see the harvest
> of the bad tillage, when the tares
> shall wail they are excluded from the bins.
> I do admit that if one searched, leaf by leaf,
> our volume, one could still find a page
> which reads, 'I am what I always was',
> but it is not from Casale or Acquasparta
> that come such readers to the Rule,
> some who evade it, and others who narrow it.[3]

The specific person in whose mouth Dante put these words is Saint Bonaventure who was appointed to the ministry general in 1257 by the moderates to re-establish the unity of the Order, and who adopted a measure fraught with consequences for the historiography of Saint Francis. The Franciscans of the two tendencies had produced numerous biographies of the saint, lending him words and attitudes agreeing with their own position. People no longer knew which Saint Francis to devote themselves to. The general chapter of 1260 entrusted Saint Bonaventure with the task of writing the *official* life of Saint Francis that the Order would from then on consider the only one to depict the true Francis. This life, or *Legenda* (called the *Legenda major* to distinguish it from the *Legenda minor*, an abridged version in the form of liturgical lessons composed by Bonaventure to be used by the choir),

was approved by the general chapter of 1263, and that of 1266 took the decision to forbid the brothers ever to read any other life of Saint Francis and ordered them to destroy all the other, earlier writings about him. This was a surprising decision, dictated no doubt by the desire to put an end to internal divisions, and facilitated by the insensitivity of the age to scientific objectivity. It demonstrated a scorn for authenticity that is all the more curious as Saint Francis had, on the contrary, proclaimed his respect for the words and the spirit of authentic texts. Thus in his *Testament* he had declared: 'The minister general, the other ministers and the custodians, through obedience, must add or subtract nothing to these words. Let them always have this text attached to the Rule. When they read the Rule they will also read these words.'[4]

It is true that, as early as 1230, Pope Gregory IX, in the bull *Quo elongati*, had allowed the Friars Minor to disregard this passage from the *Testament* of Saint Francis. If one could neglect the words of the saint, all the more reason to ignore those of his biographers.

Unfortunately for historians, the Franciscans obeyed the order of 1266 so literally that searches for intact manuscripts have proved disappointing. But here we can still hope for further discoveries. Since the publication by the Bollandists, in 1768, of the *Legenda* known as *The Legend of The Three Companions* and of Thomas of Celano's first biography (*Vita prima*), a series of manuscripts have been discovered that limit – in part – the catastrophic consequences of the auto-da-fé of 1266.

It is also unfortunate that Saint Bonaventure's *Legenda* is relatively useless as a source for the life of Saint Francis; anyway, it has to be checked against documents that are more reliable. Indeed, engaged in his role of peacemaker, Saint Bonaventure, while inspired by profound veneration for Saint Francis and drawing on authentic earlier sources, produced a work that ignores the requirements of modern historical science, for it is tendentious and fanciful: fanciful in that it combines sometimes contradictory elements taken uncritically from different sources; tendentious in that it remains silent on anything that would have shown that the Franciscan Order had deviated from certain intentions of Saint Francis and sometimes on essential points, such as knowledge and education, manual labour, the visiting of lepers, and the poverty of churches and convents. Indeed, this Saint Francis of the happy medium is closer to that of the Conventuals than that of the Spirituals.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, it was nevertheless Saint Bonaventure's edited, mangled and saccharine Saint Francis, made even duller by recourse to a mediocre work of devotion written by Bartholomew of Pisa in the first half of the fourteenth century and approved by the general chapter of 1399, that was considered the true Francis.

The requirements of modern historical criticism led, at the end of the nineteenth century, to a revision of the traditional Saint Francis. A foretaste of this revision came with the celebration of the seventh centenary of the birth of Saint Francis in 1882 and the appearance, on that occasion, of Leo XIII's encyclical *Auspicato concessum*. But the real starting point of the quest for the true Saint Francis dates from the fundamental work of 1894 by the Protestant Paul Sabatier.

Since then, Franciscan historiography has developed and also become so complex that only a very simplified summary can be given here.

The essential sources of the life of Saint Francis are considered as ordered around two people, one of them representing the moderate and the other the rigorist Franciscan groups. Because it has been easier to discover more manuscripts of the moderate tendencies, the main issue is the critique of the sources of the so-called 'Spiritual' tendencies.

However, the works of the first group are not as straightforward to interpret as is believed. They are all authored by the Franciscan Thomas of Celano, who composed them at the request of high ecclesiastical personalities. Reputed for the elegance of his style, he first wrote a life of Saint Francis at the request of Gregory IX, the *Vita prima*, completed in 1228. This life, which was very well informed, remains silent on any hint of dissent either within the Order or between the Order and the Roman curia, emphasises the prominent role of Brother Elias, who was then very powerful, and draws inspiration from traditional hagiographical models, such as the life of Saint Martin of Tours by Sulpicius Severus and the life of Saint Benedict by Gregory the Great. Towards 1230, Thomas of Celano composed the *Legenda chori*, a synopsis of the *Vita prima* to be read at matins.

In 1244, the minister general Crescentius of Jesi asked Thomas of Celano to write a new life that would augment the *Vita prima* by bringing in new elements requested by brothers who had not known Saint Francis. He asked anyone who could to help Thomas of Celano by

writing their memories of Saint Francis for his information. Thus, the *Vita secunda* presents the following major problems: What are its relationship with and its differences from the *Vita prima*? To what extent does it convey the contributions of those who wrote down their memories to provide documentation for Thomas of Celano? To what degree does the *Vita secunda* suffer from the embellishment of these memories?

Among the sources used by Thomas of Celano were three brothers who had known Francis particularly well – Brothers Ruffino, Angelo and Leo. Brother Leo was in fact the central character in the rigorist group of Saint Francis's biographers. Moreover, this collaboration, which is difficult to define exactly, thus further complicates the problem of the *Vita secunda*.

In the covering letter written to Thomas of Celano in 1246 and sent with their *Legenda*, the three companions declared, 'Rather than report miracles that, in truth, do not constitute holiness but only demonstrate it, we have preferred to communicate the instructive life and the true intentions of our blessed Father.' This new 'progressive' concept of holiness did not satisfy the needs of the crowds, who were accustomed to being sated with miracles. It was to respond to these traditional needs that Thomas of Celano, at the request of the new minister general John of Parma, had to write *The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis* in 1253. Even though these miracles were mainly worked by the saint after his death and the *Treatise* was thus a complement to the two *Vitae*, it nonetheless marks a step backward in relation to the spiritual biography of Saint Francis.

In contrast to this coherent series, well established and exactly dated, of the writings of Thomas of Celano, the opposing group of Francis's biographies shows many gaps and great uncertainties. The central character, as either informer or author, is Brother Leo, who was Saint Francis's confessor and thus well placed to know the saint's inner life. However, none of the works that criticism attributes to him can be definitively classed as authentic. *The Legend of the Three Companions* (*Legenda trium sociorum*) that we possess is probably not the original addressed to Thomas of Celano. It is probably a compilation from the beginning of the fourteenth century, drawing simultaneously on Thomas's *Vita secunda*, on sources authentically attributable to Brother Leo but not used by Thomas, perhaps including his original text, the

Speculum perfectionis (*The Mirror of Perfection*), which may not be an authentic work by Brother Leo either, but was probably composed after his death on the basis of directly transcribed stories or writing by Leo. The *Manuscrit Philippe* is an older version of the *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum ejus – The Deeds of Saint Francis and his Companions* – a fourteenth-century compilation close to the *Fioretti*. This manuscript probably includes paragraphs reproducing an original text by Brother Leo. Finally, the most valuable of these texts is perhaps the *Legenda antiqua*, published in 1926, which seems the most authentic of the texts attributed to Brother Leo, but which presents problems as yet unresolved.

Thus, the use of this group of texts comes up against many difficulties. If it seems to introduce a Saint Francis who is more uncompromising, less slick, and more real than the 'official' Saint Francis, let us not forget that it probably also distorts Saint Francis but in the opposite sense. And historians who would like to counterbalance the 'revised and edited' version of Saint Francis with that of Brother Leo are forced to recognise that the auto-da-fé of 1266 succeeded in depriving us of texts that could have been used in complete security.

Among the other texts providing biographical data on Saint Francis, a place apart must be reserved for two works that are more legendary than historical, but that played a primary role in Franciscan mythology.

The first is the 'Sacrum Commercium beati Francesci cum domina Paupertate' ('The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty'), a short epic composed as early as 1227, expressing a theme doubtless born during the actual lifetime of the saint and destined for great success.

The second is the *Fioretti*, a compilation in Italian, assembling, about a century after the death of Saint Francis, brief instructive stories, some of them translated from various small devotional works in Latin, others illustrating through anecdotal examples the maxims of the *Speculum perfectionis*. This very popular work, after nearly falling into discredit due to modern criticism, is now enjoying a revival of some degree. It seems closer to authentic sources than had been believed, is strongly marked by the influence of the Spirituals and re-establishes a certain balance from the favouring of the official Saint Francis. It shows, finally, that very early on Saint Francis had inspired a literature in which legend and history, reality and fiction, poetry and truth were closely blended.[5]

Life of Saint Francis

Francesco Bernardone was born, in 1181 or 1182, in Assisi. His father, a cloth merchant whose business involved travel to France, was away at the time. In his absence, his mother had the child baptised 'John Baptist', after the saint of the desert and of preaching, the herald of Christ, to whom Francis always had a particular devotion. Nobody knows when and how the forename Francis, at that time 'odd and unusual', replaced that of John. Three main hypotheses have been advanced: back from France, the father changed the forename of the infant to that of the country he had just come from; his name was changed as a mark of respect to his mother who may have been French (though there is no proof of this); or a nickname may have been given him in his youth because of his taste for the French language and it lasted on. Of these, the last appears the most credible. The French that he learned before his conversion, because it was the language par excellence of poetry and chivalrous sentiment, continued to be the language of his intimate outpourings. 'When he was full of the ardour of the Holy Spirit,' said Thomas of Celano, 'he spoke out loud in French.' He sang in the woods in French, and one day he begged in French for oil for the lamp of San Damiano that he was repairing. The French language filled him with rapture and jubilation. In 1217, he wanted to go as a missionary to this land of France that he sensed would be receptive to his preaching and whose devotion to the Eucharist he admired so much that he wanted to die there because of this veneration for the Holy Sacrament. In any case, it is not immaterial to note that in a time when names had profound significance and were heavily laden with symbolic meaning, the mere fact of accepting and commonly using an unusual first name demonstrated Francis's will to innovate in his apostleship.

But the young Francesco Bernardone gave no inkling of his future vocation. Thomas of Celano accused his parents of having raised him deplorably and has blackened the depiction of his depraved adolescence, a commonplace of hagiography. But the young man spent his time on the usual entertainments of his social class, no more: on games, idleness, chatter, songs and the latest fashions in clothes. He may have tried to eclipse his companions and become the leader of what has been called, with much exaggeration, 'the golden youth of Assisi'. What is most interesting is that this merchant's son, by a natural

reaction of the young generation of his social group, sought to lead a chivalrous lifestyle, to imitate the behaviour of the nobles more than to practise the virtues and the failings of the mercantile bourgeoisie. If he was, indeed, 'a skilled businessman', he was above all 'a big wastrel'. It was his largess that made him comparable to the nobles. Thomas of Celano, who calls him 'very rich', recognises furthermore that the fortune available to him through his father was less than that of most of the young nobles: 'poorer in possessions, he was more giving in his largess'. Another similarity was his culture: a great admirer of courtly poetry, he stood out from his companions as a minstrel, a *jongleur*. A final point was his way of life: he was attracted to war and the profession of arms. Here he was not short of opportunities. In Assisi itself, two struggles were taking place: first between the partisans of the Pope and those of the Emperor, both groups equally anxious to predominate in this well-situated stronghold with its redoubtable fortress of La Rocca; and second between the nobility and the people of Assisi, that is, the old feudal families and the new mercantile bourgeoisie, who, with the support of the common people, formed a *comune* that assured the city its independence of foreigners – Germans or pontifical – and of the feudal aristocracy. This 'popular' party seems to have prevailed. In 1200, the people of Assisi threw the German garrison out of La Rocca, refused to hand over the fortress to the delegates of the Pope and, to strengthen their position further, destroyed it, demolished or burned the palaces of the nobles inside the city and their castles in the surrounding areas, killed off some of them and forced the others into exile, and finally protected themselves by sealing off the city with hastily constructed ramparts. That Francis Bernardone took part in these battles is more than likely. It has even been suggested that working on the construction of the ramparts introduced him to the art of masonry that he practised later as a builder and rebuilder of chapels and churches, starting with San Damiano.

What is certain is that one episode of these struggles ended badly for Francesco Bernardone. The noble families driven from Assisi – like that of the future Saint Clare, the Offreduccio di Favarone family – took refuge in Assisi's old rival, Perugia. To reinstate these families in their personal property and social position, the Perugians declared war on the people of Assisi. Francis took part in the battle between the two cities in 1202 at the Ponte San Giovanni on the Tiber. He was captured there by the Perugians and remained in prison in Perugia

for over a year. A characteristic detail reads, 'Since he lived in the manner of the nobles, he was imprisoned with the knights.' Freed in November 1203, he was not diverted from the desire for military glory either by this distressing experience or by a long illness that immobilised him for much of the year 1204. In 1205, he decided to travel to Apulia with a nobleman of Assisi who would serve in the papal armies against the imperial troops. A dream seemed to confirm him in his intention. He saw his whole house full of military dress and weapons. This was the dream of a noble, not of a merchant, as Thomas of Celano noted somewhat maliciously: 'He was not used to seeing such things in his house, but rather piles of cloth for sale.' He interpreted this vision as foretelling his future successes as a warrior in Apulia. He did not yet understand that the vision was symbolic, that he would be called to other battles, to use other arms, spiritual ones. It was indeed on the way to Apulia, in Spoleto, when he was stopped by another vision. He was not to reach Apulia; he was not to be a glorious warrior. His conversion was under way. He was to be one of the greatest saints in the history of Christianity. However, to his new life he would bring the passions of his youth: poetry and the taste for joy that from being profane would become mystical; the generosity that would consist in pouring out not money but words, physical and moral fortitude, all of himself unreservedly; the militant ardour that would enable him to endure every trial and to initiate the assault on all the fortresses standing in the way of his brothers' salvation, the assault of Rome, of the Sultan, and of sin in all its forms.

The conversion

Thomas of Celano's presentation of the conversion of Saint Francis shows inconsistencies, notably due to the difference in tone between the *Vita prima* and the *Vita secunda*. Attempts have been made to resolve these difficulties by assuming that Thomas had disparate sources available to him that he tried to harmonise without great success and by interpreting the two texts on different, but not contradictory, levels. The conversion would be presented in the *Vita prima* in a 'spiritual perspective', or a psychological one, and in the *Vita secunda* from a 'religious' or mystical point of view. Here it is enough to recognise that a conversion is difficult to analyse and that the most important task for the historian is to focus on the themes, on the episodes that

marked its stages, and to extract their historical significance. It is noteworthy that, despite the character of sudden illumination, of instant transformation that a conversion always takes on in a hagiography, that of Saint Francis, according to Thomas, extended over four or five years and followed a progressive development in several stages. First, the initial upheaval took place during an illness. Of the nature of this illness that lasted for months, we know nothing; but, from this point on an essential feature in the physical and spiritual personality of Francis is established: he was a sick man. He would suffer until his death from two kinds of illness: eye troubles, on the one hand, and disorders of the digestive system, stomach, spleen and liver, on the other. Travels, preaching, fatigue and ascetic practices would aggravate this ill-health. But Francis did not try systematically to mortify his body. His attitude towards it was ambiguous or, perhaps better, ambivalent. The body is the source and the instrument of sin. In this respect, it is therefore the very enemy of humanity: 'Many, when they sin or are wronged, often see it as the fault of their enemy or their neighbour. But that is a mistake, because everyone can master the enemy, that is, the body, which is the instrument of sin.'[6] But it is also the material image of God and more especially of Christ: 'Consider, o people, in what excellent state the Lord has put you, since he created and formed you *in the image* of his beloved son in the body, and *in His own likeness* in the spirit.'[7]

Thus, it is necessary to mortify the body, but in order to put it, like the soul, in the service of God's love. The body is, definitely, like all created beings, 'brother body', and 'our sisters, the illnesses' are vital opportunities for salvation. But we must not give way to them to the point of becoming their slaves if they make the body unfit for the work of salvation and love. Certainly, Francis had no special fondness for doctors, preferring the only real doctor, Christ, but when his eye ailment had almost blinded him, he willingly and humbly gave in to Brother Elias who persuaded him to consult the Pope's doctors by quoting to him the words of Ecclesiasticus 38:4, 'The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and the sensible will not despise them.' Similarly, during his stay with the papal doctors at Rieti, he asked one of his companions: 'I would like, brother, that you secretly take a zither into hiding and play some decent music on it so as to distract a little my brother the body which is full of pain.' To the brother, who feared what people would say, Francis said, 'Well, let's not talk about it any more! We

must know how to renounce so as not to scandalise.' But during the night, an angel would come with a zither to replace the overly timorous brother at the bedside of the sick man.

With roots in the physical pain that began to make him think about human destiny, and established the theme (fundamental in Francis) of the relationship between the *inner person* and the *outer person*, his conversion was revealed first by the renunciation of money and of material goods.

The chronology of the episodes of this stage is particularly confused in the writings of Thomas of Celano.

A first act seems to have taken place when he failed to depart for the war in Apulia. Francis met a poor knight in rags and gave him his coat. Of course, true or false, the gesture tends to make of Francis a new Saint Martin. And Thomas of Celano, who does not fail to establish the comparison, emphasises that it favours Francis, who gave his whole mantle, while Martin gave only half of his.

This was a significant difference between two different personalities, perhaps – Saint Francis was, from the beginning, a man who gave totally – and between two dissimilar times, very surely. At the turn of the fourth to fifth century, the immediate need of Western society was for goods to be shared, redistributed between the old rich and the new poor, while at the turn of the twelfth to thirteenth century, the question was whether or not to possess what money could buy with ever greater ease as the money economy spread.

After this first renunciation, this first symbolic rejection, back in Assisi Francis was chosen by his companions as the chief or king of youth, according to an old folkloric rite. But this profane king gradually withdrew from his subjects so as to prepare himself for a new life by going to meditate in a remote cave, accompanied by a single friend, the intimate confidant of his thoughts. To this friend he revealed the nature of the hidden treasure he said he was seeking and the betrothed that the people of Assisi suspected him of getting ready to marry. The treasure would be divine wisdom, and the spouse the religious life. Thus was prefigured the theme of marriage with poverty.

Poverty was the Lady to whom he was slowly moving closer. Little credence can be given to Thomas of Celano's story that has him go to Rome where he mingled with the crowd of beggars before the basilica of Saint Peter. Indignant to see the meagre offerings made to the head of the Church, the story continues, he gave him everything he had with

him. But this call to enrich Rome does not sound like Francis, and it must be seen as one of those pro-Roman episodes introduced by Thomas of Celano and the moderate Franciscans who fabricated them out of nothing.

Events then gathered pace. Shocked by the dilapided state of the little church of San Damiano, which the poor priest who served there did not have the means to repair, Francis gathered a bundle of cloth from his father's house, packed it onto a horse, and went to sell both it and the horse at Foligno. He came back to Assisi on foot and gave the entire proceedings of the sale to the poor priest. Furious at the disappearance of his merchandise, his father had him searched for. Francis hid in the cellar of an abandoned house, where his loyal friend secretly brought him food. Then, having decided to live up to his responsibilities, he left his hiding place and revealed himself to his fellow citizens. Now thin for lack of food, he accused himself publicly of laziness and idleness. This turnaround astonished the people of Assisi, who mocked him, called him a lunatic, and threw mud and stones at him in a foretaste of his persecution and quest for martyrdom, a sketch of the imitation of the suffering Christ, of the Ecce homo. Having heard the uproar, his father came running out, seized him and had him thrown in chains into a dungeon in his house. A few days later, overcome by compassion, his mother set him free. He went to take refuge with the bishop, and there, in the presence of the bishop as official witness and protector, openly facing his father who was livid with rage, he accomplished the solemn act that marked his break with his earlier life and that liberated him. He renounced all his possessions, then undressed completely and, naked, demonstrated that he had shed his past.

In the course of this period, he nonetheless had some doubts. Several times in a dream he saw a hideous deformed woman, exaggeratedly humpbacked. Was this a caricature of the expected spouse? Was it a repugnant image of the miserable life that awaited him? Francis finally cast out the apparition whom Thomas of Celano saw as the Devil and the historian perceives as like the temptation of Saint Anthony – another paradigm of Francis.

He had broken with mundane life; he had not yet become engaged in the new life. Some of his first tentative steps were false steps, showing his uncertainties, his difficulty in sounding the right note, in moving from one life to the other. In a forest one day, when he was singing

the praises of God in French, a band of brigands pounced on him, 'Who are you?' 'I am the herald of the great King.' They beat him black and blue and threw him in a ditch full of snow. 'Go then, peasant, you who think you're God's herald.'

Thus, there were still obstacles to overcome. A little later, another great step was made, the only one that Francis mentioned at the beginning of his *Testament* when he spoke of his conversion.

> The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, the grace to begin to repent; when I was still in sin, it seemed to me too painful to visit the lepers, but the Lord himself led me among them and I dealt with them with compassion; and when I left them, what had seemed unbearable was quickly changed into a sweetness of soul and of heart. Then I waited a little, and then I left the world.[9]

The leper's kiss introduced new themes into his life: repugnance overcome, charity to the suffering and to brother body, and service to the most unfortunate, the most insignificant.

What happened next? He used to question God in the church of San Damiano.. And, one day, God answered him. The crucifix spoke to him, the crucifix in the painting which expresses a new devotion to the suffering Christ and which still survives today at Santa Chiara. God said to Francis, 'Francis, go and repair my house that, as you can see, is falling all to ruin.' And Francis, who was not yet used to understanding the symbolic sense of the divine word, took the words of the crucifix literally. What were falling in ruins, in fact, were the material houses of God, the churches in disrepair and, to start with, San Damiano. Prefiguring the spiritual reconstruction of the Church, of which he would be one of the greatest artisans, Francis took up a trowel, climbed up the scaffolding and made himself a mason. Another theme entered his life – manual labour. When San Damiano had been reconstructed, Francis worked on the church of Saint Peter near the ramparts, and finally at the Portiuncula, an oratory lost in the forest but close to the two leper-houses of Santa Maddalena and San Salvatore.

The Portiuncula was, in the words of Saint Bonaventure, 'the place that Francis loved most in the world'. It was there that the final act of his conversion took place. God spoke to Francis again, this time, through the voice of a priest who, one day at Mass in the humble

oratory of the Portiuncula, read a Gospel text that Francis felt he was hearing for the first time. It was chapter 10 of Matthew:

> Go, said the Saviour, and proclaim everywhere that the kingdom of Heaven is upon you. You received without cost; give without charge. Take no gold, silver, or copper in your belts, no pack for the road, no second coat, no sandals, no stick, for the worker deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for some worthy person in it, and stay with him until you leave. And when you go into a house, salute it by saying: Peace on this house.

Francis cried, 'That is what I want, what I am looking for, what I desire to do from the bottom of my heart.' Brimming over with joy, he removed his shoes, threw away his staff and kept only a single tunic which he tied with a rope instead of a belt. He decorated this garment with an image of the Cross and made it so rough that it mortified his flesh, flesh of vice and sin, made it so poor and ugly that no one in the world would envy it.

It was the 'third year of the conversion' of Francis, on 12 October 1208 or 24 February 1209. Francis was 26 or 27 years old. From a convert he became a missionary. Saint Francis had been born; the Franciscans were yet to be born.

From the first to the second Rule

Thus, Francis began to preach 'with his voice that was like a burning fire'. He preached in Assisi, in or near the church where he had received his religious education as a small child and where he would first be buried – San Giorgio, today incorporated into Santa Chiara. His first convert in that year of 1209 was a simple and pious man about whom we know nothing. Then a rich man came, Bernard of Quintavalle, who sold all his goods and gave the money to the poor and joined Francis. The third was another man from Assisi, a lawyer and canon, who had studied in Bologna, Peter Catani, who would be Francis's successor as head of the Order in 1220. The fourth was Brother Giles.

From that period began the itinerant preaching. From time to time, we will note a particular stage marked by a well-known or significant episode, and we will dwell upon the furthest points of his journey –

towards Rome or outside Italy. But, except for brief retreats, Francis and his companions were now always on the road, preaching in the cities and the villages. His prime domain was Italy, from Rome to Verona, but mainly Umbria and the Marches. He accomplished his first mission, according to *The Legend of the Three Companions*, in the march of Ancona, which was to be a heartland of Franciscanism, the cradle of the *Fioretti*. Later, when there were eight brothers, Francis, who always sent them out in twos, as Christ did with the apostles (Mark 6:7; Luke 1:1), and who himself always travelled with a brother, sent Brother Bernard and Brother Giles to Santiago di Compostella. He and his companion went into the Rieti valley, whence they returned with new recruits, among them Brother Angelo who, with Brother Leo and Brother Ruffino, made up the team of the 'three companions'. Thus, like the Apostles, there were twelve of them, who met again at the Portiuncula in the winter of 1209–10.

Successes counterbalanced failures in these early days, some of the former sufficiently encouraging to confirm Francis in his mission, some of the latter so clear-cut as to worry him. During the first campaign in the Marches, people took him and his companions for maniacs. On the way to Compostella, Bernard and Giles were very badly received in Florence. If Thomas of Celano remains silent on these difficulties and emphasises certain successes, the 'three companions', no doubt exaggerating in the opposite sense, speak of total failure. There was another cause for concern: Guy, the bishop of Assisi who had protected Francis at the time of his conversion, became, if not hostile, at least wary. Francis must have had recourse to all his powers of persuasion to convince him of the legitimacy of his activities and way of life. To curtail these threats, Francis decided to go to Rome with the eleven brothers and ask the Pope to approve his conduct and that of his brothers.

Francis and Innocent III

This trip to Rome poses difficult problems for historians. First, was the approval that Francis wanted from the Pope for a 'Rule' and thus for the foundation of a new 'Order'? The text submitted to Innocent III has been lost, and what Thomas of Celano says is very vague: 'Francis wrote for himself and his brothers, present and future, simply and succinctly, a guide for living and a rule that was essentially composed of quotes from the Holy Gospels whose perfection he desired only

ardently to realise.' 'Vitae formam et regulam': it does seem that the biographer of 1228 added the word *regula* on his own initiative and that the truth lies in the words *formula vitae* – a simple formulary composed of a few sentences from the Gospels guiding the life and apostolate of the brothers.

Second, what was the attitude of Innocent III? Three interviews seem to have taken place between Francis and the Pope, and apparently it was difficult for the Poverello to extract approval from the pontiff.

What sort of men were these two? They were both pastors, whose personality, function and experience were the opposite in almost every way. Innocent III was imbued with the pessimistic spirituality of the monastic tradition; the work he wrote, *De contemptu mundi* (*On the Misery of the Human Condition*) is the exact opposite of Francis's declaration of love for all creatures. Although Francis aspired only to heaven, he aspired to it through them. Even if Innocent III was not the 'political' pope that many historians see in him, he was convinced of the primacy of spiritual power over temporal power; better yet, he was convinced that the vicar of Christ possesses the two swords, the two powers. Francis said,

> May all the brothers beware not to show any attitude of power or superiority, especially among themselves. The Lord says in the Gospel, *'The princes of nations dominate them and the great exercise their power over them.'* It will not be so among the brothers, but *anyone who would want to be superior among them, let him be their servant and their slave, and he who would be superior, let him be minor.*[9]

For Francis, enemies do not exist outside ourselves; they are our vices and our sins and, in any case, one must not judge others. Innocent III saw the Church assailed by troops of enemies, the princes who called themselves Christians and on whom in turn (on the Emperor, the King of France, and the King of England) he declared excommunication and anathema, these heretics who were swarming – the Poor Men of Lyon, who became Waldensians, and those Humiliates, who were only partly obedient, those Cathars and Albigensians, against whom he called for a crusade and prepared the Inquisition. Now – this layman in rags who came before the fat, luxurious and arrogant curia, to preach this scandal, the integral implementation of the

Gospel, the realisation of the Gospel in its entirety – was he not, in the eyes of the Pope, on the road to heresy, if not already a heretic? There would thus have been an initial stormy interview. This man with 'his miserable tunic, his unkempt hair and his enormous black eyebrows', Innocent III took him or pretended to take him for a swineherd: 'Don't bother me with your Rule. Go back to your pigs and preach all the sermons you want to them.' Francis ran to a pigsty, covered himself with dung and returned before the Pope. 'Lord, now that I have done what you commanded, have the goodness in your turn to grant me what I request.' The Pope, concluded the English chronicler Matthew Paris, 'reflected, and then regretted that he had received him so badly, and having sent him off to wash, promised him another audience.'

What seems certain is that, after a first hostile reception, either from the Pope himself or from the curia, Francis prepared for the new meeting with Innocent. He found people to introduce him, support and protect him. The mediator was Bishop Guy of Assisi and, through his intervention, Cardinal John of Saint Paul, a member of the Colonna family, finally agreed to pave the way for Francis to meet the Pope. However, when Francis was able to submit the text of his 'Rule' to Innocent III, the Pope was alarmed by its severity. The Gospel in its entirety – what madness! But Cardinal John of Saint Paul found the right argument to sway the pontiff, an argument both religious and political. 'If we reject this poor man's request on such a pretext, would we not be saying that the Gospel is impracticable and so blaspheming Christ its author?' Innocent III, moved but not convinced, merely said to Francis, 'My son, go and pray to God to show us His will; once we shall know it, we will be able to reply to you in all security.'

Francis and his allies took advantage of this new delay, and God manifested his will. Innocent III had a dream: he saw the Lateran basilica leaning as though ready to crumble. A 'small and ugly' religious was supporting it on his back and preventing it from crashing down. The man in his dream could only be Francis. He would save the Church.

And so Innocent III approved the text that Francis submitted to him, but in such a way as to hedge himself with many safeguards. He gave only verbal approval, not written. He demanded that the brothers obey Francis and that Francis promise obedience to the popes. Without conferring major Orders on them, he had all those who were lay tonsured and probably made Francis a deacon. Finally, he only gave them permission to preach, that is, to give people moral exhortations.

Francis was not asking for more. 'Go, my brothers,' Innocent III said, according to Thomas of Celano, as he blessed them,

> go with the Lord and may the Lord inspire you, preach penance to all. When the almighty Lord will have made you increase in numbers and in grace, come back joyfully to me and I will grant you more favours and I will entrust you more confidently with greater missions.

Reading between the lines of this optimistic account, it appears that while Francis had managed to obtain the essentials, he had not dissipated the Pope's distrust. And then Francis's companions, who had hastened to leave Rome, stopped in a remote spot in the Spoleto valley and questioned their own vocations: 'Rather than go and preach to people, wouldn't it be better to become hermits?' Francis once again needed all the resources of his impassioned discourse to persuade them not to shrink from their mission.

Sources other than Thomas of Celano cast greater doubt on whether Saint Francis was satisfied with his trip to Rome. Matthew Paris, following the Benedictine Roger of Wendover, dates a famous episode in Francis's life to his return from Rome, in the valley of Spoleto: the sermon to the birds. But he gives a rather different interpretation of it from the elegiac sense in which it is presented – at a later date – by the official biographers of Francis. He says that the saint, wounded by his reception by the Romans, by their vices and vileness, called the birds from the sky, even the most aggressive, those with dangerous beaks, birds of prey and crows, to teach *them* the good news, not the miserable Romans. It is easy to see that this anecdote comes from Revelation 19: 17–18:

> Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, 'Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders – flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great.'

This invective sounds quite unlike the gentle Francis, and it shows that the extremist Franciscan party may have wanted to have the Order's founder assimilate Rome and the Church with accursed Babylon. The

iconography of the thirteenth century preserved this memory: the images representing Francis preaching to the birds more or less copied other contemporary images showing the angel of the Apocalypse calling birds to the spoils – until Giotto definitively imposed the idyllic interpretation of the scene (see Plates 13–16). In any case, behind this tendentious and forced interpretation, it would seem that Francis could not have kept a happy memory of his relations with Rome and Innocent III. This could be an argument against the unproved allegation that he attended the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.

Back in Assisi, Francis and his companions went to settle on a plain at a bend in a meandering stream, the Rivo Torto. There they occupied an abandoned cabin, Francis reminding his brothers that 'one gets to heaven more quickly from a hut than from a palace'. They divided their time between caring for lepers, manual labour, begging and preaching, notably in Assisi. After a few months they had to leave their cabin because, according to Thomas of Celano, a peasant invited his donkey to enter the hovel to chase away its denizens, but more probably because the arrival of new brothers had made the tiny lodging uninhabitable. The bishop and canons declined to take responsibility, but the abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Monte Subasio conceded to Francis the chapel of the Portiuncula and a patch of adjoining land. The same life continued in the small community, which grew little by little. Among the new brothers in the year 1210–11 were Brother Ruffino, 'who prayed even in his sleep', Brother Juniper, 'the perfect imitator of the crucified Jesus', the paradigmatic 'jongleur of God' who has been called the 'typical Franciscan', Brother Masseo with his sturdy common sense, Brother Lucido, 'who never stayed more than a month in the same place, because we have no permanent dwelling here below', and finally, the pure and ingenuous Brother Leo, the most stubbornly loyal to Saint Francis, who made him his confessor because he was a priest, and who called him 'brother little lamb of God'.

Saint Clare

If the Portiuncula became Francis's favourite residence from the end of 1210, nevertheless he did often leave it, either to go and preach in Assisi, Umbria, central and northern Italy, and the land of the Infidels, or else to take solitary retreats in hermitages – the Carceri on the slopes of Subasio, on an island on Lake Trasimene, at Monte Casale, near

Borgo San Sepulcro, at Fonte Colombo near Rieti, in a place near Orte, at Poggio Bustone, in an oratory near Siena, at Celle near Cortona, at Sant' Urbano near Narni, at Sarteano near Chiusi, and finally at La Verna. He and his brothers were not always well received. In 1211 the Bolognese greeted Brother Bernard of Quintavalle with volleys of stones and heaped sarcasm on him in the great square of the city. But in 1212 Francis made a choice recruit. A noble young lady of Assisi, inspired by the sermons of the saint, escaped from her family home with a friend on the night of Palm Sunday and took refuge in the Portiuncula where Francis cut their hair and dressed them in homespun robes like his, and then led them to the Benedictine monastery of San Paolo de Bastia, a few kilometres away, in the marshes of Insula Romana. After a few days, they went to a safer place, the monastery of Sant' Angelo, where other Benedictines were living on Monte Subasio above Carceri. Chiara and Pacifica were joined there by Chiara's younger sister, Agnese, whose hair Francis also cut. Some time afterwards, Bishop Guido gave the chapel of San Damiano to Chiara and the 'Poor Ladies', who would later be called the Poor Clares, as the Franciscans would be named the 'Friars Minor'. Thus, in the tradition of monasticism with parallel branches for men and women, inaugurated by Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica, Francis and Clare always followed a common path until death. 'Since you have become the daughters and servants of the heavenly Father and the spouses of the Holy Spirit in choosing to live according to the perfection of the Holy Gospels, I promise to watch over you always, as I do over my own brothers', wrote Francis to the Poor Ladies. He kept his word and was always obeyed and cherished by them as he was by his brothers.

Miracles and peregrinations

The year 1212 was one of effervescence and hope for Christianity. The Christian kings of the Iberian Peninsula united their forces against the Moslems and, on 14 July 1212, defeated the Infidels in the most brilliant victory of the Reconquista at Las Navas de Tolosa. From June to September, waves of young people from France and Germany who wanted to go to the Holy Land arrived in northern Italy. This was the misnamed 'Children's Crusade', which ran into a thousand material and moral problems, including the hostility of the majority of the church hierarchy. It disbanded sadly. Like its members, Francis and

one of his brothers embarked on a ship leaving for Syria. But the ship was blown by unfavourable winds onto the Dalmatian coast, whence Francis and his companion returned to Ancona with great difficulty. Penniless, they secretly climbed on board a boat where the crew, on discovering them, threatened to make trouble for them. They escaped this fate only because the saint calmed a storm and also increased his meagre provisions enough to feed all the sailors, who were faced with starvation because of a long period without wind.

The journey, however, had merely been postponed. Two years later, in 1214, he set off once again to preach to the Saracens, this time for Morocco, where he thought he would find an audience with the Sultan, who must have been shattered by his defeat at Las Navas. But Francis fell ill in Spain and had to return to Italy. He would succeed – partially – in his enterprise only in 1219, in Egypt.

However, the companions of Saint Francis were ever more numerous, and their reputation was spreading. Among the newcomers were Giovanni Parenti in Florence and Brother Elias in Cortona, both future ministers general. An increasing number of miracles were attributed to Francis. At Ascoli, he healed the sick and converted thirty people at once, both clergy and laity; at Arezzo, the reins of a bridle that he had held in his hands healed a woman dying in labour; at Città della Pieve, one of his followers healed the sick by touching them with a rope that Francis had used as a belt; at Toscanella, he healed a lame man, and at Narni a paralytic; he exorcised the possessed at San Gemini, between Todi and Terni, and at Città di Castello. Near Bevagna he is believed to have preached to the birds, and at Gubbio, according to the *Fioretti*, to have influenced 'Brother Wolf' to stop being vicious. The man who had been jeered now inspired not just curiosity but reverence and enthusiasm wherever he went. When his arrival was announced in a town or village, all the people ran up to him with cries of 'Here is the saint!' ('Ecco il santo!') Bells were rung, people went before him waving branches and singing, he was given bread to bless, and bits of his tunic were cut off. In 1213, he preached at a festival in a castle of Montefeltro. The minstrel of God blended his voice with those of the profane troubadours. A member of the audience, Count Orlando de Chiusi in Casentino, was moved, and he made Francis a gift of the Mount La Verna so that he could establish a hermitage there for himself and his companions.

The Fourth Lateran Council

In 1215, the Church experienced a great event: Pope Innocent III called a council in Saint John Lateran, the fourth to be held in that church. The council decided on a new crusade and established the foundations of a church reform. This timid *aggiornamento* tended generally to coincide with Saint Francis's wishes, and the Pope chose as the emblem of the reform the sign of the tau, which marked the foreheads of the righteous and which was dear to Francis (he signed his letters with it and painted it on the walls of the hermitages). For these reasons there has been some interest in defining the exact connections between the council and Saint Francis. It has been claimed that he was present and met Saint Dominic there. Nothing proves this. But Innocent III, Francis and Dominic, in a different spirit and in different styles, sought to bring solutions to the same problem: to open new paths to salvation for humanity in a changing world. On the basis of this common objective, the conclusion was later drawn that actual meetings took place, whose purpose was to paper over the divergences separating the Roman curia from the two saints or, if not them, at least their spiritual heirs. That the council contained a threat for Francis, Dominic and their companions is obvious. Canon 13 strictly forbade the founding of new Orders, and Canon 10 provided for bishops to be assisted by auxiliaries 'not only to preach, but to hear confessions, distribute penances and for everything else related to the salvation of souls'. This role for auxiliaries, who were closely subordinated to the hierarchy, obviously ran counter to the intentions of Dominic and Francis. They attempted to avert the threat in different ways. By adopting the Rule of Saint Augustine for his Preachers, who were organised in a confraternity of regular canons, in 1216 Dominic succeeded in founding his Order under the fiction of simply continuing an existing tradition. Francis proceeded more discreetly. He was anxious not to turn his companions into a true Order, so as to retain greater flexibility for them, and he felt that by having the laity and clergy coexist, he could more easily build a bridge between the Church and the laity. No doubt, he was using Innocent III's verbal approval as grounds for considering that his brothers had already been recognised and were not affected by the council's decisions.

However, to consolidate their position with the faithful and the hierarchy, it has been alleged that in 1216 he requested and obtained from

the new Pope Honorius III the indulgence of the Portiuncula, that is, a plenary indulgence for anyone who visited the sanctuary on the anniversary of its dedication, 2 August – an inordinate privilege that put the oratory of Francis on the same plane as Rome, the Holy Land and Santiago de Compostella. Whether this happed is very dubious, because no reliable document provides confirmation of the existence of this indulgence before 1277, and its legend must have sprung from the crowds of pilgrims who were attracted to the place from very early on.

In any case, Francis gave his companions some degree of organisation, rendered necessary by their growing numbers and expanded activities. It is very difficult to give specific details on the periodical meetings of the first companions of Saint Francis, to whom the name 'chapter' has been given (with some exaggeration). It seems that as long as there were only a few brothers, Francis asked them to return twice a year to the Portiuncula, at Pentecost and Michaelmas. But when their numbers increased and their range of activity expanded, it became impossible for Francis to convene them more than once a year. This was probably already the case as early as 1216. The meeting of 1217 took on special importance as it was there that Francis decided that the brothers should preach outside Italy. Was it this meeting that is described in the *Fioretti* in the highly improbable chapter about rush mats, where the assembly of the brothers (who had built huts of willow-trellis for the occasion) is portrayed as a joyful and simple village fair. Francis then himself decided to leave for France with Brother Masseo. On his way through Florence, he went to greet Cardinal Ugolino, who was there preaching for the crusade. Was it then – or earlier – that the Cardinal was convinced by Francis? From that time on Ugolino lavished both practical advice and counsels of prudence on Francis and his companions. And, to begin with, he persuaded Francis to abandon the trip to France. Did this well-informed prelate fear the spread of enthusiasm for Franciscanism in France or did he understand that Francis would be risking a great deal by leaving his bases without consolidating them? The missionaries who had left Italy had in fact achieved nothing and were particularly badly received in Germany.

In 1219, however, Francis took up his old plan: to go to the Infidels, convert them or be martyred. Having sailed from Ancona on 24 June, he was present at the taking of Damietta by the crusaders on 5 November, and was disgusted by their greedy and bloodthirsty behaviour. He obtained a fruitless interview with Sultan Malik al-Kamil, and went

to Palestine where he may have visited the Holy Places. In Palestine, he learned that five of the brothers who had left for Morocco had suffered martyrdom there. Already distressed by this news, he then received an emissary demanding his return to Italy, where the brothers, in his absence, were going through a serious crisis. In the summer of 1220, he set sail again and, in the autumn, arrived in Venice. It seems that he travelled directly to Rome. In any case, he realised that he could not take the situation back in hand without obtaining the support of the papal curia and without, consequently, making them some concessions. In the decisions taken from 1221 to 1223 on the reorganisation of his movement, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between what Saint Francis wanted and what was imposed on him.

What had happened? On the one hand, the extremists had given free rein to extravagant tendencies: becoming pure vagabonds, associating with women to the point of 'eating with them, from the same bowl', and forming communities of lepers of both genders. On the other hand, the latitudinarians wanted, on the contrary, to distance themselves from rigorism and build beautiful stone churches, pursue and encourage studies, and ask for favours from the Roman curia. In one case, at least, Francis reacted ruthlessly and quickly. Going from Venice to Rome, he passed through Bologna, where Brother John of Staccia had established a house of study. He chased everyone away, even the sick, and cursed John of Staccia. A series of measures was taken, more or less in agreement with his wishes. One year of noviciate was required of anyone who wanted to enter the community from then on. A representative of the Holy See became the 'protector, governor and corrector of the fraternity'. This was Cardinal Ugolino. Francis ceded the administrative leadership of the community to Peter Catani, who died soon after on 10 March 1221, and was replaced by Brother Elias. Finally, Francis, who had remained the spiritual head of the community, had to transform it into a genuine Order and give it a firm Rule to replace the 'formula' of 1210.

Francis presented his Rule to the 'chapter' of 1221. It met with so many reservations, as much from some of the brothers as from the representative of the Roman curia, that the decision was taken to submit it to the cardinal protector. In the meanwhile, to accommodate the crowds of lay people who wanted to join the Order and probably at the suggestion of Ugolino, drawing inspiration from what had been instituted among the Humiliates, a 'third order' was created. This Third Order

certainly corresponded to Francis's desire to keep his fraternity as a small community of the pure. According to Thomas of Celano, he sighed, 'There are too many Minors! Ah! Let the time come when people, instead of meeting Minors by the side of every field, complain of seeing too few.' The *Fioretti* has him say 'Don't be in such a hurry' to the people of Cannara who wanted to leave everything and follow him. But the Third Order, in the form that it was given, corresponded chiefly to the desires of the Holy See to contain the Franciscan tide and to take advantage of it by diverting it into a combined secular and religious militia at the service of its spiritual and temporal interests. As early as December 1221, Pope Honorius III used the many Franciscan tertiaries of Faenza against the imperial party. The Third Order became an instrument of Guelphic politics. It may not be a coincidence that the first community of the Franciscan Third Order was probably founded in March 1221, in Florence (the chief Guelphic city), while Francis and Cardinal Ugolino were staying there. In any case, the Rule for the Third Order, dry and legalistic, composed in 1221 and approved by the Pope, bears little of Francis's personal stamp. It was perhaps also at that time that Francis approved the teaching inaugurated by a Portuguese brother known as Anthony of Padua in the same convent in Bologna from which he had just chased John of Staccia and his companions, mainly because they had engaged in study. But the letter from Francis to Anthony that supports this assumption is not necessarily authentic.

The *Regula bullata*

Nevertheless, the Pope and Cardinal Ugolino had asked Saint Francis to revise the drafted Rule of 1221. Saint Francis retired to the hermitage of Fonte Colombo near Rieti, in the company of Brother Leo and a brother who had some background in law, Brother Bonizzo. The revisions must have seemed insufficient to Elias as he lost the text entrusted to him by Francis, who then started the work again with Brother Leo. It was a difficult task: Francis was discouraged and sometimes even bitter. The saint curtly dismissed any brothers who came to bother him by asking him to introduce into the text tendencies contrary to his intentions. Finally, the new Rule was ready in the spring or summer of 1223. It was sent to Rome, where Cardinal Ugolino revised it again, and it was approved by Pope Honorius III in the bull of 29 November

1223, *Solet annuere*, whence its name *Regula bullata*. Most of the quotations from the Gospel in the Rule of 1221 were omitted from the new text, and the lyrical passages were removed and replaced with legalistic formulas. An article that authorised the brothers to disobey unworthy superiors was deleted. Also removed was everything about the care to be given to lepers and all the prescriptions meant to make the brothers practise strict poverty. The Rule no longer insisted on the necessity of manual labour and no longer prohibited the brothers from having books.

Francis, with death in his soul, accepted this deformed Rule. The biographers call this period of his life, at the end of 1223, the time of the 'great temptation' – temptation to completely abandon the new Order, if not orthodoxy. Obedience – the obedience to the Church that he had made a strict precept – suddenly seemed laughable to him. 'The obedient man', he said, according to Saint Bonaventure (taking up a tendentious passage of Thomas of Celano),

> must be like a corpse that can be placed anywhere, without protesting. If he is dressed in purple, he only seems more livid. If he is seated at a desk like a doctor, he certainly does not raise his head, but lets it fall down on his chest.

Then he resigned himself and became peaceful: 'Poor little man, the Lord said to him, why be so sad? Is your Order not mine? Is it not I who am its supreme pastor? So stop your grieving and instead take care of your own salvation.'

Thus Francis came to consider his own salvation as independent of the Order sprung from him, indeed, despite him. He serenely followed his path towards death.

Towards death

Thomas of Celano divided his *Vita prima* of Saint Francis into two very chronologically disproportionate parts. In fact, the second part covers only the last two years of Francis's life, from 1224 to 1226. At this point Francis retired from the world until his final illness made him return to it. He had, according to his biographer's words, 'left the secular crowds who every day hastened full of devotion to hear and see him'. Thomas of Celano thus ended his first part on a long note of gentleness

and sweetness, portraying Francis's love as overflowing: his love for the poor, whose bundles of firewood and burdens he bore on his shoulders, for animals, even snakes, and especially for sheep and lambs that he prevented from being sold and killed by buying them back with the gift of his coat, for all creation – from worms and bees to harvests, vineyards, flowers, forests, stones and the four elements. And the famous crib scene of Greccio was the crowning moment of this lyrical finale.

At the end of Francis's life, we can find other movements and another orchestration. After the 'great temptation' came a long period of peace in which episodes of overflowing tenderness and sublimated suffering alternated and mingled, leading Francis, through a slow and protracted death agony, to his last breath.

The first episode was Christmas 1223. Francis replied to the invitation from one of the nobles who had been influenced by him, Giovanni Velita, the lord of Greccio, who intended to celebrate the Nativity among the caves and hermitages of a steep mountain and asked his friend to reconstruct the crib of Bethlehem, as his poetic imagination inspired him.

> I wish to remember the child who was born in Bethlehem and to see with my own eyes the hardships of his needy childhood, how he rested in the crib, and how, between a cow and a donkey, he was laid in the hay.

On Christmas Eve, men and women from all around climbed the mountain with so many candles and torches that the night was completely lit up by it. They sang; the forest carried their voices; the rocks reverberated with them. Mass was celebrated. The saint of God was near the crib; he was singing the Gospel; he was preaching 'with his fiery voice, with his gentle voice, with his clear voice, with his ringing voice'. He proclaimed the eternal rewards. A man in the audience had a vision: he suddenly saw the child lying in the crib and Francis bending over him to wake him up. Greccio was a new Bethlehem.

After spending the winter and the spring of 1224 at Greccio, Francis went to the Portiuncula for the general chapter of June, the last for which he was present, and then travelled to another hermitage, that of La Verna. He took with him only a few brothers, those dearest to his heart, 'the three companions' Leo, Angelo and Ruffino, along with Sylvester, Illuminato, Masseo and, perhaps, Bonizzo. Having arrived

with them in the wilderness, he often left them for solitary retreats. He gave himself up to contemplation. One day, he opened the only book that he used to read, the only book he had brought with him, the Gospels, and he fell upon the story of Christ's passion. And on another day, perhaps 14 September, his last vision appeared above him: a man with six wings like a seraph, with open arms and joined feet, fixed to a cross. And as he meditated on this vision, full of both joy and sadness, bleeding holes opened on his hands and feet, and a wound appeared on his side. Francis had completed his path towards the imitation of Christ. He was the first Christian to bear the stigmata, 'the crucified servant of the crucified Lord'. The event made him as embarrassed as it made him joyful. He tried to hide his stigmata, wrapping his feet and hands with bandages. During his lifetime, according to Thomas of Celano, only Brother Elias saw them and Brother Ruffino touched them. On his death, those surrounding him rushed to his body and the number of people claiming to have seen Francis's stigmata grew steadily throughout the thirteenth century.

In the autumn of 1224, feeling confirmed in his mission by the stigmata, Francis recommenced his rounds, travelling by donkey. But his infirmities increased. He nearly went blind and he suffered from terrible headaches. Saint Clare, to whom he paid a visit in San Damiano, kept him with her for a few weeks to care for him. He built himself a willow hut in the garden and experienced one of his last periods of earthly peacefulness there. People like to think that he composed the 'Canticle of the Creatures' there, the song of all created beings. Brother Elias managed to persuade him to consult the doctors of the Pope, whose court then resided at Rieti. He accompanied him like a mother, according to Thomas of Celano, and like a supervisor, according to many historians. In Rieti, Francis lodged either in the bishop's palace or, as reported in the *Legenda antiqua*, in the house of 'Tabald the Saracen', probably a Moslem doctor of the Pope. The doctors' knowledge was in vain: Francis's condition deteriorated. The brothers of Siena invited him to stay with them, saying that they could take care of him and perhaps heal him. But, on the contrary, his illness worsened to such a degree that he dictated his will to them (of this Thomas de Celano breathes not a word) and Brother Elias hastened to his bedside. Francis improved. He then left Siena with Brother Elias for the hermitage of Celle, near Cortona. But there, illness seized him with such violence that Francis asked to be taken back to Assisi, in fact to the Portiuncula.

But if it was Brother Elias's wish that Francis should die in Assisi, the cradle of Franciscanism, there was great danger in his staying at the Portiuncula. Indeed, in the early thirteenth century, the mentality and behaviour of the masses and of individuals towards characters reputed to be saintly had not changed since the end of the fourth century, when the people of Tours stole the body of Saint Martin from the people of Poitiers. At the end of the tenth century, the Catalans thought of killing off the sick Saint Romuald so as to keep his relics. Around the dying Francis, covetousness lay in wait for the holy corpse. The great fear of the people of Assisi was of their traditional enemies, the people of Perugia. Now, the Portiuncula, in the plains, was at the mercy of a raid by the Perugians. The dying man was therefore transported inside the ramparts, into the episcopal palace, where Francis would be safe both from the Perugians and from any religious mavericks. Francis felt less at ease than ever in the palaces of the Church. He finally succeeded in having himself moved to the Portiuncula. He was watched over by the brothers and guarded by relays of armed men of Assisi. Francis had reached the last stages of the Imitation of Christ, and had already received the ultimate seal, the stigmata. On 2 October, he proceeded to the last supper. He blessed and broke the bread and distributed it to his brothers. The next day, 3 October 1226, he asked for 'The Canticle of the Creatures' to be sung to him, for the Passion from the Gospel according to St John to be read, and for a hair shirt covered with ashes to be placed on the floor. At that moment, one of the brothers who were present suddenly saw his soul, like a star, rise straight for heaven. He was 45 or 46 years old.

Everything happened very quickly afterwards. There was a stampede on the body, to see the stigmata and to touch the holy relic. The funeral, on 4 October, was simple, with a stop at San Damiano, where Saint Clare covered the body of her celestial friend with tears and kisses, and a temporary burial at San Giorgio. Then, on 17 July 1228, less than two years after Francis's death, canonisation was pronounced by the papacy, which, although not in the habit of hurrying, did make haste to curtail the controversies surrounding this saint who was still troublesome. By this time Cardinal Ugolino had become Pope Gregory IX, and the tribute he paid to his protégé contained a mixture of veneration and political scheming. Then, on 25 May 1230, there was the insult of the inhumation in the crypt of the ostentatious

basilica that Brother Elias had had built in violation of Francis's ethos. The final betrayal would be the horrible basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli with which, after 1569, post-Tridentine Catholicism would crown and smother the humble and authentic Portiuncula.

The works and the legacy

Saint Francis did not write much. Even if we possessed the first Rule and the lost letters and poems, all these riches would occupy one slender volume. The edition published by the Franciscans of Quaracchi is divided into three parts: (1) *The Admonitions* and the Rules; (2) the letters; and (3) the prayers. On the pretext of publishing only the works in Latin, the Quaracchi fathers mutilated the written work of Saint Francis by excising a vital masterpiece, 'The Canticle of the Creatures', written in Italian. Thus, it is advisable to improve and complete the presentation as Vittorio Facchinetti and Giacomo Cambell have done in Italian (I *Legislazione serafica*; II *La direttive del Padre*; III *La corrispondenza di un santo*; IV *Inni e preghiere*, 'Il cantico di frate Sole' included) and, in French, Alexandre Masseron (I *Le législateur*; II *Le messager*; III *L'ami*; IV *Le Saint en prière*; V *Le Poète*).

But underneath the variety of their outer forms, all these short works are only contributions to a single legacy: the spiritual training of his brothers and, beyond that, the communication of a message to humanity. Francis was not a writer – he was a missionary completing, with a few writings, a message whose essence he had expressed through the spoken word and through example.

Between the Rule of 1221, which was not approved, and the Rule still in use today by the Minors, which was confirmed in 1223 by papal bull, there are differences, whose main points we have summarised and which include the effects of condensing into twelve rather dry articles a text of twenty-three articles that are rich in evangelical quotations and effusions.

The exordium confirms the requirement for the Minors to respect the three rules of obedience, poverty and chastity. The goal that is assigned to them in the first Rule is to 'follow the teachings and the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ' and, more abstractly in the second, 'to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. The ministers general of the Order would obey the Pope; the brothers would obey the ministers general.

Then follow the conditions of entry into the Order – a novitiate lasting for one year, the giving of all personal possessions to the poor – and a description of the clothing: one habit with a hood, one habit without a hood, one belt, one pair of breeches, and all made of coarse fabric. The second Rule adds shoes to this, if necessary.

The *opus Dei* is brief. For the clergy there is the divine office and the breviary, for the laity twenty-four *Pater* at matins, five at lauds, seven for prime, tierce, sext and nones, twelve at vespers and seven for compline, and the prayer for the dead. The prohibition against possessing any books other than the breviary and the psalter – and only for those who could read – disappears from the second Rule. Of the two fasts imposed by the first Rule, from All Souls' Day to Christmas, and from Epiphany to Easter, the second, in the second Rule, was reduced to Lent, the fast from Epiphany to Lent becoming optional. Fasting on Fridays was added to this. But all food taboos were prohibited.

The relationships between the ministers and the other brothers were both more succinct and more strict in the second Rule. The brothers' duty to disobey any ministers ordering something contrary to the Rule or to conscience, 'for there is no disobedience where there is crime or sin' ('Quia illa obedientia non est, in qua delictum vel peccatum committitur'), disappeared, in the same way as the prohibition of calling anyone *priore*, as everyone was supposed to be called *frati minore*. The ministers were to order the brothers to do only that which is contrary neither to the good of their soul nor to the Rule, but the brothers were committed to complete obedience to them. The duty for all, ministers and brothers, to wash one another's feet also vanished.

The absolute prohibition against receiving money was maintained, but without the litany of details and curses of the first text and with the addition of the possibility for the ministers and custodians to receive, through the intermediary of 'amici spirituali', enough to take care of the sick and to dress the brothers 'according to the regions, the weather and cold climates' ('secondo i luoghi, i tempi ed i paesi freddi').

The regulations concerning work were equally weakened. This was no longer required of everyone, but only permitted to brothers 'to whom the Lord has conceded the grace to work' ('cui il Signore ha concesso la grazia del lavoro'). Begging was exalted to the skies: it was

> the sublime peak of this very high poverty that has made you, my very dear brothers, the heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven.
> (la vetta sublime de quell'altissima povertà, che ha fatto voi, fratelli miei carissimi, eredi e re del regno dei cieli.)

But it was taken out of the context that, in the first Rule, gave all its meaning to the practice. This context was twofold: social and apostolic. On the one hand, begging placed the brothers physically among the poor:

> They must be happy to be among people of low condition and of no account, among the poor and the weak, the sick, the lepers and the street beggars.
> (E debbono essere felici quando si trovano tra gente dappoco e tenuta in nessun conto, tra i poveri e i deboli, gli infermi, i lebbrosi e i mendicanti della via.)

This whole procession of the involuntary poor that gave meaning to voluntary poverty disappeared from the second text. Similarly, the christological and apostolic reference that said of Jesus, 'and he was poor and a pilgrim and lived off alms himself and with him the Holy Virgin and his disciples' ('e fu povero e pellegrino e visse di elemosine lui stesso e con lui la beata virgine ed i suoi discepoli') gave way to a vague allusion to Christ's poverty: 'the Lord for love for us made himself poor in this world' ('il Signore per amor nostro si fece egli stesso povero in questo mondo'). Of all the details concerning poverty while travelling ('When the brothers go travelling in the world, they may bring nothing for the journey, no purse, no bag, no money, no stick' ('Quando i frati vanno per il mondo, non portino nulla per il viaggio, nè borsa, nè bisaccia, nè pane, nè denaro, nè bastone'), there remained only the prohibition against horse riding, except in cases of illness or dire necessity.

The conditions for electing the minister general, reserved for the provincial ministers and the custodians, and the convocation of the general chapter at Pentecost, normally every three years, were specified; however, the electors could depose a general minister who seemed unsuited to fulfilling his office and serving the common good of the brothers.

Preaching, ordered to all the brothers in the first Rule, was strictly regulated in the second. It could take place only in dioceses where the bishops authorised it. It had to be subordinated to an examination and to a licence granted by the general minister. Preaching was limited to being brief and discussing moral and instructive subjects only – not theology, dogma or any subjects connected with church jurisdiction,

> for the use and the education of the people, addressing them on the vices and the virtues, on punishment and glory, in short sermons.
> (per utilità e edificazione del popolo, parlando loro dei vizi e delle virtù, della pena e della gloria, con brevità di sermone.)

The detailed and severe condemnations concerning contacts with women and fornication were replaced by a brief article mainly forbidding the brothers to enter, without special permission, the monasteries of cloistered nuns.

The long article on missionary work – highly recommended among the Saracens and other infidels – was reduced to four lines, advising the ministers to grant this permission only with great prudence; and the second Rule ends by mentioning that a cardinal had been given to the Order by the Pope 'as the governor, protector and corrector of this fraternity' ('come governatore, protettore e correttore di questa fraternità'). In the last line, however, Saint Francis was able to quote 'the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ' ('Il santo Vangelo del Signor Nostro Gesù Cristo').

To these two essential texts must be added the *Admonitions*, *Della religiosa abitazione nell'eremo* ('A Rule for Hermitages'), the *Testament* and the 'Short Testament'.

The twenty-eight *Admonitions* are very simple little spiritual texts summarising the teachings on the practice of the religious life that Francis gave orally to his brothers and that had not found a place in the Rule, being more recommendations than compulsory prescriptions. This is a short treatise on good and bad religious – or, as it has been called, 'Saint Francis's sermon on the mount'.

The text on the life of the brothers in the hermitages also completes the Rule, which remains almost silent on these retreats into solitude that corresponded to a hermit tradition valued and practised by Francis and most of his companions. It mainly decides on the relationship

between active life and contemplative life during the course of these retreats. In groups of three or four, the brothers should divide themselves between two 'mothers' leading the active life of Martha, and one or two 'children' leading the contemplative life of Mary Magdalene.

The *Testament*, probably written in Siena during the winter of 1225–26, is an essential text. Francis wanted to make it a complement to the Rule, with the same status as the law of the Order, something that Pope Gregory IX was quick to annul as early as 1230 in the bull *Quo elongati*. Francis seems to have sought to reintroduce into it a certain number of the principles or prescriptions that had been removed or weakened in the Rule of 1223. It has been said – as though Francis had guessed that his intentions would not be honoured – that he put into this text 'a heart-rending sadness in which we can sometimes even sense a tone of despair'. If Francis recalls there his reverence for the churches and his faith in the priests, including the theologians, he also evokes the crucial role of lepers in his conversion, the inspiration that he received from God alone to define his ideal: the duty of manual labour, the necessity to stay 'only as a stranger and pilgrim' in poor churches and convents, the absolute prohibition on asking for favours from the Roman court, and the strict duty to follow the Rule and the *Testament* without adding anything or taking anything away, and without putting glosses on them.

Finally, in the 'Short Testament', which Saint Francis dictated to Brother Benedict in April 1226, after blessing 'all my brothers who are in the Order and who will enter it until the end of the world' ('tutti i miei frati i quali sono nell'Ordine e che vi entreranno fino alla fine del mondo'), he reiterates the three core principles: love among all the brothers of the Order, respect for 'Our Lady Sacred Poverty' ('nostra signora la Santa Povertà'), and obedience to the 'Holy Mother Church' ('Santa madre Chiesa').

That which remains of the letters, even if restricted to those that are definitely authentic, is testimony to Francis's epistolary activity among his close associates, the Order and all Christians. Of his letters to friends, one to Brother Leo survives.

> I am telling you, my son, like a mother, everything that we have said on the road in a few words and one piece of advice; and you do not need to come to me later for counsel, because here is what I advise, 'In whatever way seems best to you to please God and to follow his footsteps and poverty, do it with the blessings of God and with my obedience. But if you need this for your soul and for your consolation and if you want to come to me, Leo, then come.'[10]

It was for Brother Leo again that he intended an exceptional document, an autograph parchment by Francis conserved in the Sacro Convento of Assisi, bearing on one side 'The Praises of God', and on the other 'A Blessing for Brother Leo' with the sign of the tau – Francis wrote it in September 1224, on La Verna. Another friendly letter is the one he had sent shortly before his death, asking her to hurry if she wanted to see him still alive, to the only female figure besides Saint Clare who appears in his life – the noble Roman lady Giacoma di Settesoli, whom he called 'frate Giacomina' and who prepared an almond cake for him that he took pleasure in eating when he was ill in Rome.

Letters concerning the Order's activities include a letter of obedience in which he ordered Brother Agnello of Pisa to go to England to fulfil the office of minister there, a letter to a minister speaking to him of problems concerning the Rule that he had to consider before the Pentecost chapter, and a letter to the general chapter and all the brothers. The last letter contained, besides his confession for having sinned 'either through negligence, or because of my weakness, or because I am ignorant and uneducated' ('sia per negligenza, sia a cagione della mia infermità, sia perchè sono ignorante e illetterato'), prescriptions concerning the Eucharist, Mass, Holy Scripture and singing (in which one must concentrate not 'on the melody of the voice but on identifying with the spirit' 'alla melodia della voce ma alla rispondenza della mente').

The correspondence to Christendom comprises a letter to all the clergy and one to all the faithful. The first, whose text comes from the monastery of Subiaco (with which Saint Francis maintained relations as much due to his taste for eremitism as to his desire to be attached to an authentic Benedictine tradition), called upon the clergy to respect the Holy Sacrament. The second, which was rather long, was a call to penance. The striking image that is made there of the impenitent man, dying among his relatives and friends, who were pretending to cry and eager to get their hands on his fortune, reveals both the satirical talent of the saint and the appearance of a theme that was to become very popular at the end of the Middle Ages.

The hymns and prayers are no less revealing of an even more profound aspect of the genius of the saint: his poetic and lyrical sensibility. 'The Praises of God', 'A Salutation of Virtues', 'A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary', and 'The Office of the Passion of Our Lord' bear witness to Francis's liturgical sense, to his need to complete his meditation and contemplation with effusive outbursts, and to the focuses of his devotion. These were the Lord as almighty Creator, Christ the Crucified, the Virgin as the Lady of the Lord, 'his palace, his servant and his mother', and the virtues as the Holy Ladies of religion: holy Wisdom, pure and holy Simplicity, holy Poverty, holy Humility, holy Charity and holy Obedience. But this contribution of Saint Francis to spiritual poetry, so characteristic of the thirteenth century, is eclipsed by his lyrical masterpiece, 'The Canticle of the Creatures'. Renan called this poem, which gives Italian poetry a marvel for its beginning, 'the most beautiful piece of religious poetry since the Gospels'. It sums up all of Francis's brotherly love for all creation. Having spread everywhere his love for living creatures, people and animals, he sings his love for inanimate creatures to which he gives life and soul, all the way to 'our sister death'. He had the song sung to him at the Portiuncula by Brother Angelo and Brother Leo when he felt death approaching.

Saint Francis: medieval or modern?

The novelty of the message of Francis, the novelty of his way of life and his apostolate, first struck his own contemporaries. It might be thought that Thomas of Celano, who tended to insist on the originality of the saint whose disciple he was, and of the Order to which he belonged and for whose publicity he was, to some degree, responsible, could have exaggerated this factor. However, it should be borne in mind that in an era when tradition was an essential value and when any novelty was shocking, he must have had a strong motivation to emphasise the novelty of Francis and his work:

> In a time when evangelical doctrine was sterile, not only in his country but in the whole universe, he was sent by God to bear witness throughout the entire world, like the Apostles, to the truth. He proved with evidence by his teachings that all the wisdom of the world is but folly and in a short time, guided

> by Christ, he brought people back to the true wisdom of God. The *new* evangelist of our age spread throughout the world, like a river of Paradise, the living waters of the Gospel and preached by his example the way of the son of God and the doctrine of truth. In him and by him the world experienced an unexpected revival and a re-*newal* of sanctity [*sancta novitas*]; the fertilisation of the antique religion soon *renewed* a world that had become old in routine and in tradition. A *new* spirit was inspired in the hearts of the elected, and the anointing of salvation was spread among them, when, like a star, the servant and saint of Christ illuminated them with a *new* rite and *new* signs. Through him the ancient miracles were *renewed*, and in the desert of this world, following an antique tradition but through a *new* order, a fertile vine was planted.*
>
> (*Vita prima*, 89)

The historians of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries echoed and exalted the *modernity* of Saint Francis as the initiator of the Renaissance and the modern world. The Frenchman Émile Gebhart, in *L'Italie mystique* (Paris, 1906), associated Francis of Assisi with Frederick II and saw in these first two great *moderns* of the Middle Ages those who – each in his own sphere – had liberated Italy and Christendom from contempt for the world, obsession with the Devil, and the burden of the Antichrist. Francis was the *liberator*,

> The distinctive features of the Franciscan religion, freedom of spirit, love, pity, joyful serenity and familiarity were long to form the originality of Italian Christianity, so different from the Pharisaic faith of the Byzantines, the fanaticism of the Spanish, and the scholastic dogmatism of Germany and France. There was none of that which, everywhere else, darkened or diminished consciousness; no subtle metaphysics, no refined theology, no casuistic concerns, no excesses of discipline and penance, and no extreme scrupulousness of devotion were henceforth to burden the Italians.

* Where, as here, words in quotations from St Francis or the biographers are in italics, these have been inserted by the author of this book to emphasise a particular point.

There is an area for which it has been claimed that the influence of Saint Francis, his sensibility and his devotion, were decisive and engaged the West on new pathways in modernism – art. The shock of Franciscanism is thus placed at the origin of the Renaissance. The German Henry Thode argued this in 1885 in an epoch-making book, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst des Renaissance in Italien* ('Francis of Assisi and the Beginnings of Renaissance Art in Italy'). Francis, he claims, dramatised the Christian religion and played a crucial role in the development of the *lodi* and the *sacre rappresentazioni*. He also popularised the taste for moralising anecdotes, the *exempla*; hence the references in painting to anecdotes and contemporary life. He discovered nature in its palpable form and introduced the portrait and the landscape into iconography. Realism and narrative in art, according to this theory, come from him.

But a more attentive examination has revealed that most of the currents whose origins were attributed to Saint Francis had earlier sources. An examination of specific themes shows how, at the turn of the twelfth to thirteenth century, the image of Christ in glory on painted crucifixes changes to that of Christ in pain, the Virgin in majesty declined in favour of the Virgin of maternity, and the iconography of the saints tended less to stereotyped figures and symbolic attributes and more towards true biography and accurate features.

As early as 1215, the Paliotto de Berardenga at the Pinacoteca of Siena narrates the story of the Passion on six little panels, with an episode on each, around an enthroned Christ. Similarly, historians have been struck by the novelty of the type of saint Francis imposed on his contemporaries. This is to be found as early as Thomas of Celano's *Vita prima*, where, next to the description of the inner personality of Francis, his outer physique is described, with very precise and detailed realism: that is, a Francis whose bodily appearance contrasts with the traditional beauty of the tall, blond saint – an aesthetic canon borrowed from the Nordic knight.

Francis is described there as follows:

> of medium height, almost short, with a round, medium-sized head, a long face, a small, flat forehead, medium-sized eyes, black and naive, very dark hair, straight eyebrows, a small and rectilinear nose, straight but small ears, flat temples, well-aligned teeth, regular and white, thin lips, a black beard, uneven hair, a thin neck, straight shoulders, short arms, small hands, tapering fingers, long fingernails, thin legs, smooth skin, a lank body.

The only contemporary portrait of Francis, that of Subiaco (see Plate 11), painted more the inner person, according to the canons of traditional beauty,[11] while the later one of Greccio (see Plate 12) indeed conjures up the dark little man who must have spoken to charm the crowds, the 'little black hen' to which he compared himself. This Francis of poor appearance is the same one found in the *Fioretti*, begging unsuccessfully with Brother Masseo,

> Saint Francis looked like a man who was too contemptible and short in height, and anyone who did not know him took him for a lowly little pauper, and so he gleaned only a few mouthfuls and scraps of dry bread. But to Brother Masseo, because he was a tall and handsome figure of a man, people gave lots of big, choice morsels and entire loaves.

But this realistic portrait of a saint had already been generally sketched more than a half century earlier in the *Vita* of Saint Bernard where the outer man, without being the object of so much attention as the inner man, is nevertheless described without complaisance.

For the rest, Francis was indeed in harmony with the main tendencies of Gothic sensibility, concerned with realism, with light, with delicacy. But if he did not create this sensibility, through his reputation and influence that continued in his Order, he supported and strengthened it to a remarkable degree. In 'The Canticle of the Creatures', despite an allusion to the symbolism of the sun, an image of God, it is in their tangible being and their physical beauty that the stars, the wind, the clouds, the sky, fire, flowers and grass are first seen and loved. The love that he bore for them was transmitted to those artists who, from then on, wanted to represent them *faithfully*, without distorting them or burdening them with the weight of alienating symbols. He did the same for animals, who from being symbolic became real.

Thus if Saint Francis was modern, it is because his century was so. And it does not diminish either his originality or his significance to observe, as Luigi Salvatorelli has admirably done, that 'he did not

emerge like a magic tree in the middle of the desert', but that he was the product of a place and time, 'communal Italy at its peak'.

In this context, three phenomena are decisive for the orientation of Francis: class struggle, the rise of the laity, and the advance of the money economy.

He was struck very early on by the bitterness and frequency of the social and political struggles in which he must have taken part himself before his conversion. The struggles between the partisans of the Pope and the partisans of the Emperor, between cities and between families only increased and aggravated the oppositions between social groups. Francis who, as the son of a merchant, was between the popular strata and the nobility, belonging to the people by birth but close to the aristocracy by fortune, culture and way of life, was especially sensitive to these divisions. He always wanted to be humble towards his superiors, but also towards his equals and his inferiors. Thus, he received the warning of a peasant working in his field, which Francis was crossing on a donkey: he urged him not to disappoint the faith that many put in him and to be as good as people said he was. Francis got off his donkey, kissed the peasant's feet and thanked him for his advice.

By contrast, he guessed the thoughts of Brother Leonard who was walking alongside him as he rode a donkey and who was saying to himself: 'His parents and mine did not play together as equals. And here he is riding while I am on foot and leading his donkey.' Francis at once got off his donkey and said, 'My brother, it is not right that I should ride and you should walk because in the world you were more noble and powerful than I.' It was indeed his aim to overcome these social divisions by making his Order an example of equality, and in his human contacts setting the example of descending to the lowest level, that of the poor, the sick and beggars. And, inside secular society, he sought to bring back peace, to be a peacemaker. To the Perugians, always ready to assault their neighbours, he predicted that internal quarrels would tear them apart and that by this judgment of God they would be forced in a bloodstained manner to rediscover the supreme good, harmony, *unitas*. Similarly, Thomas of Spalato, who witnessed him preaching in Bologna on 15 August 1222, described the scene as follows:

> His speech had nothing of the tone or manners of a preacher; it was more like a conversation and aimed only to calm hatred

> and restore peace. The clothing of the orator was miserable, his appearance wretched, and his face without beauty; but for all that his speech succeeded in reconciling the Bolognese nobles who for generations had not stopped spilling one another's blood.[12]

In any house he entered, he began by saying, 'Peace on this house', and in his letter to all the faithful he started by wishing them 'true peace'.

But how to restore this peace? First, lay people had to be associated in the life of the Church instead of being subject to the domination of the clergy and liable to excommunications and prohibitions (like the one Innocent III imposed on Assisi in 1204), which lost any effectiveness through being misused. Francis wanted his brothers to form not the Order that was in fact imposed on him, but a fraternity, a confraternity in which clergy and laity would cohabit. Thus he willingly accepted the institution of the Third Order. As much as to the clergy, he addressed his words to the nobles who had fashioned a culture, the knightly culture, the merchants who had started to dominate the cities, and the humble people who showed, by their work or their revolt, their role in society. In the finale of the Rule of 1221, he listed them beside the clergy:

> all the big children and the little children, rich and poor, kings and princes, workers and farmers, serfs and masters, to all the virgins, continent or married, to the laity, men and women, to all the babies, the adolescents, young and old, healthy and sick, to all the humble and the great and to all the people, families, tribes and languages, to all the nations and to all the people everywhere on earth.

It was thus necessary to preach, to preach the Gospel, to all the people. But what was essential in the Gospel? What was being forgotten and compromised all around him? It was simplicity and poverty. The progress of agriculture and the sales of the resulting surpluses, together with the expansion of small and big businesses: these were spreading corruption at an ever faster rate through the increasing attraction of the money that was replacing the simple practices of autarky and bartering. The way to salvation had been shown by Christ in the Gospel of St Matthew, as Francis had heard it at the Portiuncula. 'If you want

to be perfect, go, sell all that you own and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven; come, follow me.' To this was added another renunciation: 'He who would leave his father and his mother, his brothers and his sisters, his wife and his children, his houses and his fields for love of me, he will receive a hundredfold and will possess eternal life.' Giving up money was linked with giving up the family, a consequence of the gospel and Francis's troubles with his own family, and an element of the social and psychological context in which he was living. Indeed, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the traditional family institution had been disrupted. A gap had opened up between the extended family of noble lineage or of the (willingly) docile peasant community and the nuclear family made up of direct ascendants and descendants only, which had not yet come into being

But in what way was Francis's response to the questions of the day a modern one?

He brought the knightly culture and sensibility that he had acquired before his conversion into his new religious ideal: Poverty was his Lady, Lady Poverty; the Holy Virtues were so many courtly heroines; the saint was God's knight understudied by a troubadour, a jongleur. The chapters of the Portiuncula were inspired by the gatherings at the Round Table around Arthur. Does Saint Francis's modernity then amount to introducing the ideal of chivalry into Christianity, just as the early Christians had introduced the ancient ideal of sport – the holy athlete of Christ – and Saint Bernard the military ideal of the first chivalry – the *Militia of Christ*?

Francis's strictly religious orientations may seem just as traditional. The hermit tradition goes back at least to the establishment of Christianity in the fourth century and has continued uninterruptedly ever since. In all the hermitages that Francis and his companions stayed in, they were no different, at first glance, from a whole range of hermits who, at that time, haunted the caves, the forests and the heights all over Italy, from Calabria to the north of the Apennines. Manual labour is connected as much with original Benedictine practice as with the monastic reform of the eleventh–twelfth centuries led by Prémontré or Cîteaux. From the end of the eleventh century, poverty was the motto of all these *Pauperes Christi*, these 'Paupers of Christ' who were swarming all over Christendom.

Was Francis's originality merely that he resisted the temptation of heresy to which most of these Paupers had ceded? Certainly, back in

the early thirteenth century, some of them managed to remain within the Church: in 1201 a community of orthodox Humiliates, in 1208 the *Poveri Cattolici* of the Waldensians converted by Durando di Huesca and in 1210 another group of Waldensians around Bernardo Primo. But these were far outnumbered by the crowd of Albigensians and in Italy itself, in Francis's time, the Cathars who had a bishop in Florence and a school at Poggibonsi, and the Patarins, the Arnaldists, and the Waldensians. In 1218, a congress of *Poveri Lombardi* took place in Bergamo; in 1215, Milan was called a 'pit of heretics' (*fossa di eretici*); in 1227 Florence was still considered to be infested with heresy.

And, first of all, did Francis really almost become a heretic himself? The tendencies and the circumstances need to be analysed. There were certainly elements in both that could have led Francis to heresy. The uncompromising will to practise an integral Gospel, divested of all the contributions of the later history of the Church, the distrust of the Roman curia, the will to have almost absolute equality reign between the Minors and to allow for the duty of disobedience, the passion for simplicity taken to the extreme of nudism that Francis and his brothers practised, following the example of the Adamatists, the position granted to the laity – all this seemed dangerous, almost suspect, to the Roman curia. And, joining its efforts to those of the ministers and custodians who had been frightened to find so much intransigence in Francis, it put pressure on him and demanded of him, if not denials, at least renunciations that certainly led him to the brink of heretical temptation in 1223. He resisted it. Why? Very probably, in the first place, because he never entertained the feelings that led one part of the Franciscan Spirituals to heresy at a later date. Francis was neither a millenarian nor an apocalyptic. He never interposed an eternal Gospel, a mythical Golden Age, between the earthly world where he was living and the hereafter of Christianity. He was not the angel of the sixth seal of the Apocalypse with which he was unduly identified by certain Spirituals. The heretical eschatological lucubrations of the Spirituals came from Joachim of Fiore, not from Francis.

But what restrained him especially was the basic determination, endlessly repeated when he was not under pressure, for him and his brothers to remain at all costs (and he did pay dearly for it) within the Church. Why? Probably because he did not want to break the unity, or better, the community that he valued so much. But above all because of his feeling, of his visceral need, for the sacraments. Almost all the medieval

heresies were opposed to the sacraments. Now, in his deepest being, Francis needed the sacraments and, to begin with, the first among them, the Eucharist. To deliver these sacraments, a clergy and a Church were necessary. Also, Francis – and this may be surprising – was ready to forgive the clergy a great deal in exchange for this ministry of the sacraments. In an epoch when even orthodox Catholics were questioning the validity of sacraments administered by unworthy priests, Francis recognised it and said so unreservedly. It was because he carefully distinguished the clergy from the laity that he needed the former and stayed within the Church.

Therefore it has been said of him that like Saint Dominic but in different ways, he saved the Church when it was threatened with ruination by heresy and its own internal decadence. He realised the dream of Innocent III. Some, furthermore, have found this shocking and deplorable. Machiavelli said,

> The power of their new orders is the reason why the improbity of the prelates and the heads of our religion does not ruin it; for still living in poverty and having great influence with the people because of hearing confessions and preaching, they give them to understand that it is evil to speak evil of what is evil, and that it is good to live under the prelates' control and, if prelates make errors, to leave them to God for punishment. So the prelates do the worst they can, because they do not fear that punishment which they do not see and do not believe in.[13]

It is true that Francis was one of these alibis that the Church, entrenched in the world, finds from time to time.

Francis, then, may now be perceived as orthodox and more traditional than has often been thought. Was he not really an innovator? The answer is yes, and on essential points.

In taking and in giving Christ himself, and no longer his apostles, as a model, he engaged Christianity in an imitation of the God-Man that restored the highest ambitions and an infinite horizon to the doctrine of love for humanity.

In resisting the temptation of solitude, going into the midst of living society, into the towns, and not to the deserts, the forests or the wilds, he broke decisively with a monasticism of separation.

By proposing as a programme a positive ideal, open to love for all creatures and all creation, rooted in *joy* and not in morose *accedia*, in sadness, and by refusing to be the ideal monk of the tradition dedicated to *tears*, he revolutionised the medieval and Christian sensibility and rediscovered a basic joyfulness, which was quickly smothered by a masochistic form of Christianity.

In making Christian spirituality part of the secular chivalrous culture of the troubadours and the lay popular culture of peasant folklore with its animals and its natural universe, the wonderful Franciscan lifted the lid that clerical culture had closed tightly upon the old traditional culture of humanity.

This return to the sources was also the sign and pledge of renewal and progress. The term 'return to the sources' recalls that in the last resort Franciscanism was *reactionary*. In the context of thirteenth-century modernity, the reaction of Francis was not that of a social misfit like Joachim or Dante, but of a man who wanted to preserve essential values in the face of change. Some of these reactionary tendencies could appear empty and even dangerous: in the century of universities, he rejected learning and books; in the century when the first ducats, the first florins, the first gold crowns were struck, he had a visceral hatred of money. In the Rule of 1221, in defiance of any economic sense, Francis cried out, 'We must not grant more usefulness to money and to coins than to pebbles.'[14] Is this not dangerous and foolish? It would be if Francis had wanted to extend his Rule to all humanity. But in fact Francis did not even want to transform his companions into an Order, but only wanted to gather together a little group, an elite that would provide a counterweight, a question mark, an eddy in the rising tide of material comfort. This counterweight of Franciscanism has continued to be needed in the modern world, by believers and non-believers alike. And since Francis, in his words and by his example, preached it with a burning intensity, a purity and a poetry that are unsurpassable, Franciscanism still remains today, in the words of Thomas of Celano, a 'sancta novitas', a sacred innovation. The Poverello is not only one of the protagonists of history, but one of the guides of humanity.

The Canticle of the Creatures or The Song of Brother Sun

Most High, all-powerful and good Lord
yours are the praises, glory, honour and every blessing

to you alone, Most High, they do belong
and no one is worthy to speak your name.
Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures
especially Sir Brother Sun
through whom you give us the day and light
he is beautiful, radiant with great splendour,
and of you, Most High, he is our symbol.
Praised be you, my Lord, for Sister Moon and the Stars
in heaven you created them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be you, my Lord, for Brother Wind,
and for the air, and for the clouds
for the calm blue skies and for every changing weather
through them, you sustain life in all your creatures.
Praised be you, my Lord, for Sister Water
who is very useful and humble
precious and chaste.
Praised be you, my Lord, for Brother Fire
through whom you light up the night,
he is beautiful and joyful,
wild and strong.
Praised be you, my Lord, for our Sister, Mother Earth
who bears and nourishes us
who produces the many different fruits
and the colourful flowers and herbs.
Praised be you, my Lord, for those
who grant forgiveness for the love of you,
who endure trials and illness.
Blessed are they who endure in peace
for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.
Praised be you, my Lord, for our Sister Bodily Death
from whom no one living can escape,
woe to those who die in mortal sin,
blessed are they she finds doing Your will
because the second death cannot harm them.
Praise and bless my Lord,
and give Him thanks and serve Him
with all humility.

✤ 3 ✤

THE VOCABULARY OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND HIS THIRTEENTH-CENTURY BIOGRAPHERS

The problems of historiography posed, on the one hand, by the authenticity of some of the writings of Saint Francis and, on the other, by the objectivity of some of the testimonies of his first biographers are assumed to be known in their general outlines.[1] These problems are simply mentioned below in so far as this traditional textual criticism affects our research. Here again, we must work on two levels, relating the vocabulary of our texts to what we know from elsewhere of the realities that it designates, and relating this vocabulary to the mental world of its users.

The texts to be considered are contained in the slim volume of Saint Francis's complete works,[2] that is, the two Rules, the *Testament*, the letters, the prayers and the liturgical texts, and in the biographies assembled by the Fathers of Quaracchi.[3] Among these latter works, we have mainly used those of the following authors:

1 Thomas of Celano, an Italian Franciscan born in the Abruzzi Mountains, lived for part of his life in Germany, but mostly in Italy, and joined the Order towards 1215 'with many other educated and noble men' ('cum pluribus aliis viris litteratis et nobilibus'). The works used include:

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