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Gian Luca Potestà: *Frati Contro*

Gian Luca Potestà is Emeritus Professor of History of Christianity at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan. He has written extensively on medieval prophetic and apocalyptic literature, messianism, and the Antichrist, especially in relation to the Franciscan tradition. He has written three significant volumes on the Antichrist, an important work on messianism (*L'ultimo messia. Profezia e sovranità nel Medioevo*), and another on the end times (*Segni dei tempi. Figure profetiche e cifre apocalittiche*). English readers know him especially from his article "Radical Apocalyptic Movements in the Later Middle Ages" in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Vol. 2, edited by Bernard McGinn, which presents some of the material found in this latest collection of articles discussed in this review.

"*Frati Contro: Dissidenti Conspiratori Fuggiaschi*" can be seen as a "greatest hits" collection of twelve studies that Potestà wrote over the course of forty years, two of which have not been previously published. He presents some of the major figures of the Franciscan movement from the founder himself, Francis of Assisi, to the end of the fifteenth century, including Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, Ubertino da Casale, Angelo Clareno, Bernard Délicieux, William of Ockham, and Giovanni di Rupescissa. Most of these are considered, as the title of the book suggests, dissidents, conspirators, and fugitives in relation to the mainstream medieval Franciscan tradition represented by the "community" that would be identified in history as the Conventuals.

In the preface to the volume, Potestà tells the reader that the great dispute over poverty constitutes above all a rhetorical conflict within which charismatic leaders, brilliant intellectuals, and skilled and courageous polemicists strove to create an original identity and theoretical legitimacy for the Spirituals as the authentic heirs ("figli legittimi") of Francis. Peter John Olivi opened the way, but on the planning and operational level, the strategies and tactics were developed primarily by Ubertino da Casale and Angelo Clareno. Potestà states that the controversies over voluntary poverty and its lexicon - apocalyptic and prophetic conceptions, historiographical and hagiographical constructions, translations and revivals of ancient Greek-Oriental ascetic and spiritual heritages - were conceived with a view to creating a new and authentic way of preserving and fully living the message of Francis of Assisi. On an institutional level, a form of autonomy for the Spiritual Franciscans seemed achievable at the time of the hermit-turned-pope Celestine V (1294) but then became disputable during the pontificate of Clement V (1305-1314). The project did not materialize, but that legacy of ideas became widespread culturally, permeating the religiosity and spirituality of numerous lay, Minorite, and monastic lives between the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

What unites these figures with the Spirituals - and Fraticelli in the strict sense - is their involvement in the many minority-driven dissidences that arose between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. In addition to a critique of the hierocratic claims of the popes of the time, these produced a historical and theological culture and a spirituality that had long been historiographically undervalued.

Potestà tells the reader in his preface that Francis was never a direct subject of his research and writing. However, he mentions him because Francis was a primary point of reference regarding the conflict in the interpretation of the Rule and its claim to call for a radical form of life based on evangelical poverty.

In the first pages of the first chapter ("*Regola e vita*"), Francis is the focus of the discussion of the Rule and life of Francis and his earliest companions as they struggled with how to live the Gospel way of life in relation to poverty, work, and economics, especially from 1239 onwards until the end of the thirteenth century. In this volume, Francis is referred to as an

"Another Christ" (*Alter Christus*), "the angel of the sixth seal" (Revelation 6:12-17), one of the two witnesses (along with Dominic) who were to appear at the end of time when the Antichrist appears, and the most perfect example (*perfectissimum exemplar*) of the true disciple of the poor and humble Jesus Christ. As the "renewer of the life of Christ" (*renovator vitae Christi*), both Ubertino da Casale and Angelo Clareno believed that Francis would be resurrected from the dead.

The second and third chapters deal with the legacy of Gioacchino da Fiore's apocalyptic thought beginning in the middle of the thirteenth century within the writings of the early Franciscan tradition. The second chapter concerns the friars (especially John of Parma, Bonaventure, Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, and Ubertino da Casale) and their active engagement with the apocalyptic thought of Joachim of Fiore and pseudo-Joachimite writings. The third chapter presents the theme of the "New Babylon" according to Joachim of Fiore (1132-1202) and Peter John Olivi (1248-1298), who was a significant interpreter of the twelfth-century apocalyptic writer. This chapter deals with the interpretation of Revelation 17:1-5, especially the mention of "Babylon the great, the mother of the fornications, and the abominations of the earth." Olivi believed that the Church of his time, corrupt from head to toe, was disfigured like a new Babylon. This reveals a common theme among Spiritual Franciscans that speaks of the corruption of the Church as a sign of the apocalyptic times.

The fourth to seventh chapters focus on the written works of Ubertino da Casale and Angelo Clareno. Potestà presents the significant spiritual texts that Angelo translated (c. 4) and transmitted to his readers, as well as the editions of his letters (c. 5). He also presents the Chronicle (*Chronica septem tribulationum Ordinis Minorum*), which records the persecutions suffered by the Spiritual Franciscans, which was a "bestseller" within the medieval Franciscan apocalyptic tradition (c. 6). The seventh chapter highlights the ideals and sanctity of Francis of Assisi, along with Brother Leo and John of Parma. The eighth chapter concerns Bernard Délicieux, a friar who was acknowledged as a "person of great modesty, of luminous science, of clear eloquence" and the "hammer" against Dominican inquisitors of the early fourteenth century. He was involved with the Spiritual Franciscans, accused of murdering Pope Benedict XI, and obstructing the Inquisition. Especially due to the accusation of murder, he has been characterized as a conspirator within the Franciscan tradition. He became a spokesperson for the Provencial Spirituals only during the final phase of their existence.

The ninth chapter concerns the thought of William of Ockham and his understanding of the origin and legitimacy of civil power in relation to Paul's Letter to the Romans 13:1 and the Gospel of John 19:10. This essay shows William's understanding of civil authority in the past as well as in his contemporary situation. As Potestà states in the preface, he can be considered a *fraticello* only because he was linked by fate to the deposed general minister Michele da Cesena, who likewise clashed with Pope John XXII. The tenth chapter concerns Cola di Rienzo, Charles IV, and the Oracolo di Cirillo. The Oracolo was a textual arsenal of symbolic figures and obscure allusions, whose reinterpretation in its own way allowed Cola to denigrate the Pope and cardinals, to celebrate the Emperor, and above all, to offer a supposed foundation for the presumed messianic role he attributed to himself. Cola was a fourteenth-century Italian politician and leader who styled himself as the "tribune of the Roman people," and aligned himself in various ways with the Spiritual Franciscans and their apocalyptic thought. The eleventh chapter is about the prophet of the Antichrist, the *reparator* , and the millennium. This chapter is mainly a commentary on the very influential apocalyptic text *Vade mecum in tribulatione* of Giovanni di Rupescissa, which is a synthesis of his apocalyptic and messianic conceptions. Potestà presents the fundamental themes and figures of this book, taking the *Vade mecum* as a point of reference for each of them, and then identifies the sources and developments, continuities, and transformations that can be found throughout the course of Rupescissa's prophetic production.

The last chapter concerns "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" from John of Rupescissa (d. c. 1370) to Pietro Colonna Galatino (d. c. 1540). John kept alive the doctrinal and prophetic heritage of the Spirituals, but was never condemned as one of them, and it is still debated whether he can be considered a full heir to the Spiritual Franciscan movement. This collection of articles presents the fruits of Potestà's scholarship during the last forty years. It presents the major participants in the world of Franciscan apocalyptic thought during the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries and the supporting cast of non-Franciscan writers such as Arnold of Villanova. It also offers a presentation and analysis of the major texts of the medieval apocalyptic tradition. It deals with government leaders, and above all, the papacy, from the Spiritual Franciscan hero (Celestine V) to the papal enemy (John XXII) regarding the key issue of the Spirituals: radical evangelical poverty. The volume includes an up-to-date bibliography and indices of biblical passages, cited manuscripts, and the names of persons covered in this book.

This is indispensable reading for anyone interested in medieval Franciscan apocalypticism, the papacy's relations with the friars, and the Spiritual Franciscan approach to the question of what constitutes faithful discipleship based on evangelical poverty as exemplified by Francis of Assisi.