

SHORT HISTORY OF THE ORDER OF THE SERVANTS OF MARY
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Chapter I

THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

From the origins of the Order (ca. 1233) to its approval (1304)

The approval of the Order. In the year 1233... Florence in the first half of the thirteenth century. The beginnings at Cafaggio and the retreat to Monte Senario. From Monte Senario into the world. The generalate of St. Philip Benizi. Servite life in the Florentine priory of St. Mary of Cafaggio in the years 1286 to 1289.

The approval of the Order

On 11 February 1304, the Dominican Pope Benedict XI, then in the first year of his pontificate, sent a bull, beginning with the words *Dum levamus*, from his palace of the Lateran in Rome to the prior general and all priors and friars of the Order of the Servants of Saint Mary. With this, he gave approval to the Rule and Constitutions they professed, and thus to the Order of the Servants of Saint Mary which had originated in Florence some seventy years previously.



For the Servants of Saint Mary a long period of waiting had come to an end, and a new era of development began for the young religious institute which had come to take its place among the existing religious orders.

The bull, or pontifical letter, of Pope Benedict XI does not say anything about the origins of the Order; it merely recognizes that Servites follow the Rule of St. Augustine and legislation common to other orders embracing the same Rule. It mentions the title of "Servants" proper to the brothers of the Order as a proof of their consecration and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. It also lists the reasons for the approval of the Order; these were already to be found frequently in the "opinions" of the curial lawyers.

At the time of the definitive approval of the Order by ecclesiastical authorities, the Servants of Mary numbered at least 250 friars living in twenty-seven priories in Italy and four in Germany. These priories (see maps) were divided into five religious provinces, four in Italy (the provinces of Tuscany, Patrimony of St. Peter, Romagna and Lombardy), and on Germany (the province of Germany).

How did this new religious order originate and what were the stages in its formation? It was similar, from the very outset to other orders of an evangelical-apostolic lifestyle such as Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites, all known as mendicants.

In the year 1233...

In Lombardy, Emilia, Venice, and the Kingdom of Sicily, as practically everywhere else in Italy, various initiatives were undertaken, sometimes with a political overtone to them as well, to combat heresy and reinstate Christian attitudes in everyday life and social behaviour. Contemporary and later chroniclers named it "the year of the great alleluia" because the preachers of the time finished their sermons or prayer meetings with a triple *Alleluia*.

A long-established tradition makes 1233 the year of the foundation of the Order of the Servants of Mary. Within the Order, this tradition has been reinforced by the fact that one of its greatest saints, Philip Benizi (d. 1285), was born in Florence that same year.

Available documents suggest the period 1233-1240 as the time when the Order began, born out of a vocation shared by seven adult men in Florence. This would be the first - and, until our times, the only - example of a religious order founded in the Catholic Church, not by one or two people, but by a whole group, the "Seven Founders" canonized together by Leo XIII in 1888.



The origin of the Order was described at length in a narrative written about eighty years later (1317-1318) called the *Legenda de origine Ordinis fratrum Servorum Virginis Mariae* (The Legend of the origin of the Order of the Friars Servants of the Virgin Mary). It must be made clear at once that the term *legend* has nothing to do with a work of fiction but rather denotes a piece of writing considered suitable reading matter for spiritual edification.

It is necessary, however, to complement the *Legenda de origine* with other earlier documents in order to obtain a satisfactory account of the principal stages in the spiritual journey of the Seven Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary and thus have some idea of the origin of the Order itself.

To start with, we shall present a brief sketch of the political, economic and religious situation in Florence in the, first half of the thirteenth century.

Florence in the first half of the thirteenth century

One of the main characteristics of the history of Florence in the period 1200 to 1250 was the doubling of its population, from forty to eighty thousand inhabitants.

A second city wall was built, and the four districts of the city were reorganized into six. Florence struck its own coinage, first a silver piece and later the fine, 24-carat gold florin which rapidly became the international unit of currency in the commercial world.

Wars with Siena and Pisa, excommunications launched by the pope against the emperor and whoever supported him and the struggle against heresy did not prevent the city of the lily from carrying on a flourishing commercial activity.

The guilds and official corporations were more than twenty in number. First there were the major guilds: judges and notaries, bankers and cloth merchants, money-changers and dealers in wool and in silk (Por Santa Maria), doctors and herbalists, and furriers. Then there were the middle-class corporations: second hand merchants, smiths, butchers, shoemakers and stonemasons. Last, there were the lower guilds: vintners, oil merchants, innkeepers, dealers in salt and cheese,



tanners, coachbuilders and arms dealers, bronze and metal workers, timber merchants, bakers and pastry cooks.

Competition was fierce between related guilds, and often gave rise to monopolistic tendencies, as well as the firm refusal to share premises with others.

The major guilds, especially the bankers and wool merchants, were wholehearted supporters of the independence of Florence, and even more so of their own. They generally supported the Guef or papal cause.

Florence was, without doubt, full of life and vigour in the first half of the thirteenth century; the conflict between pope and emperor did not directly damage the interests of the city and, reading between the lines of history, it is clear that Florence, or at least its leading citizens, knew how to draw maximum profit from the vicissitudes of both sides in the struggle.

The wisest and shrewdest, while being on the side of the pope, took care not to arouse the hostility of the emperor. When a choice could not be avoided, they could take advantage of the fact that both contenders were far away from Florence itself.

If the prosperity of Florence is not given its proper weight, it is not easy to understand why the many types of religious ferment found there in this period all have the same characteristic of a vigorous appeal for poverty. Both the heretical movements, against whom excommunications were frequently launched, and those that stayed faithful to the teaching of the Church all preached a call to poverty and penance.

The Waldenses, the Cathari, the Patarines and the Humiliati (these last, before their reconciliation with the hierarchical Church) claimed the right to collective as well as individual poverty. Within the ambit of orthodox Christianity, the following are significant dates: in 1206, Dominic of Caleruega, founder of the Dominicans, was preaching in the south of France; in 1208, Durandus of Huesca, founder of the Poor Catholics, was reconciled with the Church; in 1209, Francis of Assisi began his itinerant preaching, taking up the idea of poverty that, as Dante was to write, "had been set aside for a thousand years, until he came to espouse its cause." In 1221, Francis was in Florence. In the years that followed, lay groups characterized above all by their poverty began to be established.

At the time of the founding of the Order of Servants of Mary, religious movements in Florence were many and dynamic. "A land of monks, it enjoyed the presence of foreign and native-born religious for many years; they were exponents of reform and an austere type of eremitical life. The Camaldolese and the monks of Vallombrosa and of Cluny settled in the city itself, and the Cistercians arrived in the Badia suburb on 17 June 1236. Of the new movements, the Humiliati came to San Donato a Torri in 1239; the Franciscans, after first entering the city in 1209, settled at Santa Croce in 1228, having lived first at the San Gallo hospital from 1218; the Dominicans arrived in 1219, and were given the little church of Santa Maria Novella in 1221; the Poor Clares were at Monticelli from 1218 onwards, and the Dominican nuns at San Iacopo a Ripoli from 1229. The group of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance in Florence was one of the most important in Italy. These movements formed a counterweight to the large Patarine or Albigensian community, which, under the leadership of its own bishop, was carrying out propagandist activities throughout the whole of central Italy; their Opposition to the hierarchy of the Church and their devaluation of the role of the human nature of Christ in the work of salvation and of the divine motherhood of the Virgin Mary forced the orthodox lay groups in Florence to openly embrace these very aspects" (F.A. Dal Pino).

The beginnings at Cafaggio and the retreat to Monte Senario

The Legenda de origine has little to say about the family and business life of the seven Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, apart from noting those spiritual and moral qualities that presaged their decision to found an order. The date of 15 August 1233 is traditionally given as

the moment when they decided to abandon their families and businesses to devote themselves to a life together of prayer, penance and poverty. The place to which they retired was Cafaggio, just outside the walls near the "Balla" gate; we are certain of this. One of the most important of the Order's priories, that of the Santissima Annunziata, stands today on that very site.

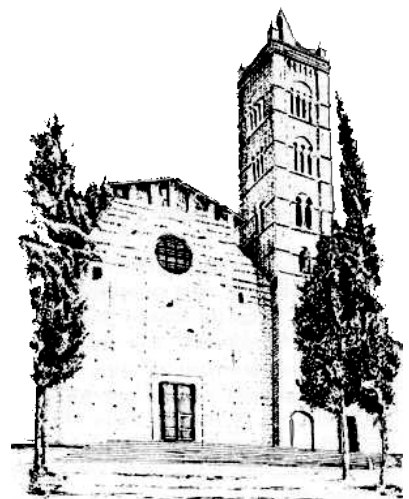
The Seven's retirement from public life and their decision to embrace the religious state aroused great amazement, so much so that well-wishers and the curious flocked to the new hermitage. We are sure of the names of only two of the Seven: Bonfilius and Alexis; those of the others are uncertain but are generally given as Amadeus, Bonajuncta, Manettus, Sostene and Hugh. Supported by Ardingo, the bishop of Florence, in their desire to reflect more deeply about their choice of life, they retired about eighteen kilometres outside Florence. It cannot be ruled out that the critical situation of the Guelfs in the city played some part in this decision. This transfer took place around 1245, at about the same time as the Dominican preacher, Saint Peter of Verona, an energetic defender of the prerogatives of the Pope, an admirer of the Seven and a man of sincere devotion to the Virgin, began his mission to the city of Florence.



From the time of the Seven Founders' retreat to Monte Senario, the priory there has remained a focal point for the Order, and even today Monte Senario is regarded as the symbol and a concrete reminder of the origins of the Order; the remains of the Seven Founders still rest there. Even though modern roads now provide much easier access, the austere surroundings of the place are a continual reminder of the need for constant fidelity to the origins.

From Monte Senario into the world

Some clear and unambiguous documents still extant from the years 1249-1251 give us some idea of the life of the Order in its early days. This is F.A. Dal Pino's concise summary: "The community to whom Ranieri Capocci, cardinal legate of the pope and titular of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, addressed the first recorded act (in 1249) appears already composed of a prior and friars stationed at a little church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin on Monte Senario; they were generally known as 'Servants of Saint Mary.' The cardinal placed the community under the protection of the Apostolic See, confirmed the permission they had received from Ardingo, the diocesan bishop, to observe the Rule of St. Augustine and its related legislation and allowed them to receive new members and keep those who had already joined them. He also stated that those who had professed vows could not leave except to embrace a more austere form of religious life and with the approval of the prior. On 18 February of the following year, Capocci's successor, Cardinal Peter, titular of San Giorgio in Velabro, gave permission for the prior and friars at Monte Senario who were priests to absolve from excommunication those laymen who wished to embrace their way of life but who had previously been adherents of the Emperor Frederick II. In another letter bearing the same date and addressed to Bonfiglio, bishop of Siena, the cardinal legate asked that the same Servants of Mary be presented with the first stone and authorized to build a new



church on their own land outside Florence. The bishop carried out this mandate with a letter dated 17 March and addressed to 'Fra Bonfilius, prior of the aforesaid place, Monte Senario'. The purchase of the land for the church was carried out in Florence on 1 July, and the terms of the bill of sale indicate that Bonfilius and his companions intended to maintain a strict regime of community poverty. Other documents give evidence of this intention too, including the first act of a chapter that has come down to us. Drawn up on 7 October 1251, it lists, after Fra Figliolo (or Bonfilius), prior of Monte Senario, the names of nineteen other friars, the first of whom is Alexis.

This "act of poverty" is remarkable for its severity and demonstrates that the first community of the Order had a clear imprint of fraternal life and, judging from the location chosen, a leaning towards eremitical-contemplative, or monastic, life.

The indirect approval of the pope contained in the letters from the two cardinal legates mentioned above was made explicit by Pope Alexander IV on 23 March 1256 with the bull *Deo grata*.

It would seem clear that the favour shown the first Servites by the cardinal legates of Innocent IV was motivated by their complete orthodoxy in the fight against Frederick II and by their support of the Holy See in political matters. In other words, either for reasons of social class and political background or because of more contingent reasons, the first Servite community was of the Guelf tendency.

The priories in Siena, Citta' di Castello and Sansepolcro, as well as that at Cafaggio near Florence and Monte Senario, all date from the period before 1256.

The generalate of St. Philip Benizi

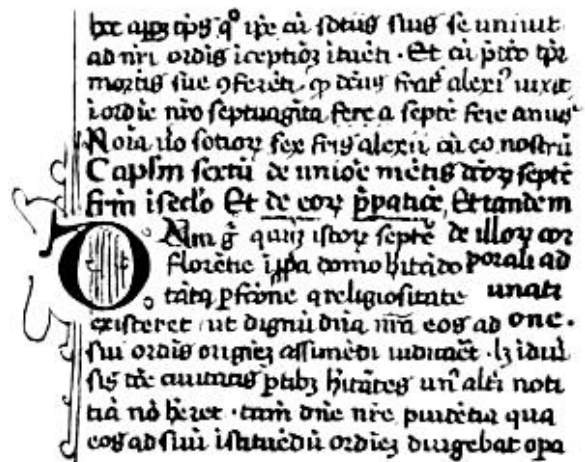
In spite of a promising start and the support of Peter of Verona, the Servites were soon to encounter such difficulties that the very survival of the Order was placed in jeopardy.

The chief protagonist in this tempestuous period was St. Philip Benizi of Florence. He had entered the Order about twenty years after the original decision of the Seven, and was to die in 1285, probably before most of them.

In order to understand this period properly, two dates have to be kept in mind: 1215 and 1274. In 1215, during the pontificate of Pope Innocent III, the Fourth Council of the Lateran was held. In

1274, the Second Council of Lyons was celebrated in the reign of Pope Gregory X. Between these two dates the Dominicans and the Franciscans became established and flourished.

Apart from its principal concern, the fight against heresy, the important matters before the Fourth Lateran Council was how to put some order among the many religious movements that were springing up throughout the Church. The unifying policy of Pope Innocent III could not allow these to escape the control of the Roman Curia. Canon 13 of the Fourth Lateran Council stated in blunt terms that any individual or group who wanted to embrace religious life had to choose one of the existing forms approved by the Church authorities. If any individual or group really wanted to found a "new" form, they would have to adopt one the approved "Rules" - those of St. Benedict and St. Augustine for the West, and that of St. Basil for the East. This did not mean that a new foundation had to be subordinate to one of the existing orders in the Church, but it did make it rather difficult to found new orders because every individuating characteristic could be termed "new" and therefore a reason for the Church to withhold recognition.



Nevertheless, new religious movements did spring up after the Fourth Council of the Lateran, even though the majority of them took the precaution of adopting either the Rule of St. Benedict or that of St. Augustine.

As we have already seen, new religious orders did receive ecclesiastical approval from the local Church authorities and explicit protection from the Roman Curia. But, if the papacy itself is immutable, individual popes come and go.

The Second Council of Lyons decided to dust off the thirteenth canon of the Fourth Lateran Council. It stated that the Lateran Council's ruling had been so far disregarded that there was now an unbridled multiplication of new religious institutes. And so it, decreed, with even more severity, that the founding of new mendicant orders was now forbidden. Those established since 1215 were forbidden to receive new entrants, and were therefore condemned to eventual natural extinction. In the dispositions of the Council, this ruling was valid even for those institutes established after 1215 which had received approval from the Holy See but which professed total poverty and relied on the uncertain proceeds of begging for their support.

The Servants of Mary fell into this category; the act of poverty of 1251 had included the renunciation of all goods, property and possessions of any kind.

The situation was now more serious than after the Lateran Council. There were many exceptions to the Council of Lyons' ruling. The concept of "mendicants" as defined by the Council included both the Franciscans and the Dominicans, but these were explicitly exempted from the law. Since, moreover, the Council did not name all the orders concerned and some of them, even of quite recent origin, had powerful protectors at the Council, more than one, condemned on paper, in fact managed to escape.

Some chroniclers of the period included the Servants of Mary among the suppressed orders. The Servites, indeed, now entered into one of the most critical periods of their early history, and managed to save themselves from extinction, humanly speaking, though the energy, courage and ability of their prior general, St. Philip Benizi.

Philip was born in the Oltrarno district of Florence in 1233, the son of Giacomo Benizi and Albaverde. The *Legenda de origine* and the *Legenda beati Philippi* give ample space to the details of his life. The brief reconstruction given here is based chiefly on these two documents.

On Easter Thursday 1254, Philip received his mysterious but clear call to religious life while at prayer in the Servite church at Cafaggio. He entered the Order on 18 April of the same year. Tradition has it that, a few days after receiving the religious habit, Philip asked Fra Bonfilius if he could go to live at Monte Senario. "St. Philip's Cave," on the eastern slope of the hill, is still pointed out to visitors today, along with the nearby spring known as "St. Philip's Fount."

Hiding his education, Philip had asked to join the Order as a lay-brother. He was one for four years until an unexpected incident occurred, which forced him to reveal his learning. The story is told by the *Legenda of St. Philip*, which puts into the mouth of the saint one of the oldest and most touching descriptions of the nature and mission of the Servite Order. The episode reads like this: "It happened that Philip, out of obedience, went on a journey to Siena with a friar by the name of Victor. On the road were met by two religious of the Order of Preachers coming from Germany. These were puzzled at seeing our friars' habit. Their curiosity soon led to a conversation with Blessed Philip, and they inquired what kind of life they led and what Order's habit they were wearing. The man of God, Philip, in true humility but with marvelous wisdom, made the following reply: 'If Your question is about our place of origin, we are sons of this land. But if you wish to know our status, we are called Servants of the glorious Virgin, the habit of whose widowhood we wear. We live the life instituted by the holy Apostles, and follow the rule of the saintly doctor Augustine.' As they continued their conversation profound questions, to which the in wisdom and conviction, proving his adherence to true doctrine in every case and his ability to support it with numerous authorities and examples from the lives of the saints. When they had finished, each went his own way. Then Bless Philip's companion said to him, 'Brother, when you were received into the Order, why did you not make known the knowledge you possess, as we are so short of men of

learning. Just now, you have shown great scholarship in debating with those two religious. I can tell you for a certainty that this very day the light of learning has begun to shine in our Order.' Then Blessed Philip begged him on his knees, for the love of God, not to reveal this to anyone. But as soon as they had both returned to Florence, Fra Victor began to speak and make known to all the others how Blessed Philip had dealt with those strangers. This caused much rejoicing among the friars. They promoted Philip to the clerical state and gradually advanced him to sacred orders."

Philip Benizi was ordained priest probably in 1258 or 1259, and a pious tradition tells of the celebration of his first Mass in the Chapel of the Apparition on Monte Senario. Nine years later, at only thirty-four years of age, he was elected prior general of the Order.

We shall omit the traditional story of how Philip Benizi refused the papacy. Afterwards, he is supposed to have gone to pray by himself on Monte Amiata, and the spring of mineral water produced by his prayers still flows today, at the place now called Bagni di San Filippo, near Castiglione d'Orcia in the province of Siena.

Philip Benizi was elected prior general in 1267. Seven years later, he was confronted by the situation resulting from the decisions of the Council of Lyons. The Servants of Mary found themselves at a crossroads, for they had been founded well after 1215. F.A. Dal Pino describes the position thus: "Either they could recognize that they fell into the category of mendicant order described by the Council, and therefore resign themselves to gradual extinction like the Brothers of Penance of Jesus Christ and their namesakes, the Servants of Mary of Marseilles, or they could attempt to prove that juridically they were no longer a mendicant order as they had been at the time of their foundation. They could argue that they could be classed as one of the orders founded after the Fourth Council of the Lateran but which followed an accepted Rule and had the Holy See's approval, and hence they had the right to continue in existence."

Philip chose the latter path. Some have argued that this meant that he must have imposed a "historical turnaround" on the Order, but in fact, Philip was only continuing and consolidating a direction the Order had been following since at least the general chapter of 1257.

In support of the line that the Servites were a mendicant order there was the "act of poverty" of 1251; there were also the letters of Popes Innocent IV and Alexander IV recognizing that act, as well as deeds of purchase of property in which, in obedience to the act of poverty, they had stated that they were acquiring on behalf of the Holy Roman Church, not for themselves.

On the other hand, in support of the opposite position - and the only way for the Servites to survive - the prior general could argue that noteworthy exceptions had been made to the act of poverty, at least from 1257 when the general chapter had first requested this; these all received due permission from the Church authorities. Furthermore, the Order had, right from the start, followed the Rule of St. Augustine; its legislation (perhaps after a careful and quick revision) contained nothing that could be interpreted as a prohibition of property.

Providence decreed that a saint like Philip Benizi was needed to pursue such a course of action. It involved some compromises and manipulations along the way. Perhaps it is better that saints have to defend positions that may not be altogether sound, than that evil men should uphold justifiable causes.

Elected to an office he was reluctant to accept, Philip carried out his mandate with the integrity, coherence and lack of self-interest that are typical of saints.

S. Philip's plan of action to counteract the Council's injunctions about the suppression of religious orders founded in the last sixty years was based on the sensible idea of one small step at a time. He understood that time was on the side of the Servites, and that it is the interplay of unexpected events that often determines the course of history.

The first of these unexpected events was the rapid succession of popes in the years immediately following the Council of Lyons. Gregory X, who had wanted the Council and had every intention of carrying out its dictates, died at the beginning of January 1276, before even getting back to Rome from the Council. Innocent V was then elected but reigned for only six months, to be succeeded by Adrian V, who died before his coronation. Next there was John XXI, who reigned but a year. There followed Nicholas III, whose pontificate lasted three years, Martin IV, who held office for four years, Honorius IV with a reign of two years, and Nicholas IV, who ruled for four years. He was succeeded by Celestine V, who only held office for a few short months, to be followed by Boniface VIII, who reigned nine years. Finally, Benedict XI came to the papacy; his pontificate too was quite brief, but during it the Servites finally obtained their definitive approval, in 1304.



A sixteenth-century Servite historian described how Philip, before deciding which course of action to take in the complicated affair of the approval of the Order, secretly called together all the priors and leading figures of the Order at Monte Senario, there to plan a united campaign. It was during this meeting that they decided on the recitation of a series of prayers to the Blessed Virgin, to be offered daily by the friars for the welfare and survival of the Order. This "Vigil of the Blessed Virgin" is still recited by the Order; it is generally known by its opening words: *Benedicta Tu* (Blessed are you).

Since it was a juridical problem, Philip was constrained to have recourse to the leading lawyers of the time, and did not hesitate to beg the money necessary to pay these curial experts' fees from the priories of the Order. The communities, for their part, made it their business to look for bequests and offerings, and all this also helped demonstrate that they were not in fact "mendicants." The pope himself, in the person of John XXI, ratified a big donation of land made by Count Henry of Regenstein in April 1277 to the Servite priory of St. Mary of Paradise in the German diocese of Halberstadt.

Sincere friends of the Order were not lacking among the cardinals; a good example is Ottobono Fieschi, who became Pope Adrian V although death overtook him before his coronation.

According to the *Legenda de origine* and other authoritative sources, Philip's activities to secure the survival of the Order also included some of an indirect nature. He was a peacemaker in Florence and Forlì, and this helped to gain the respect of the papal legates, who were unlikely to forget his services to their cause.

His mission to Forlì had one remarkable side-effect. He arrived at the Servite priory in the city in the period, when the city had been placed under interdict by Pope Martin IV (26 March 1282 - 1 September 1283). His mandate was to preach to the populace and urge them to return to obedience to the pope.

Not all of them heeded his words, and a group of hotheads seized and manhandled him out of the city. Among them was the young Peregrine Laziosi, who quickly repented of his part in it and asked to join the Order. Later, he was to be proclaimed the patron saint of the city; the priory there now bears his name and contains his tomb and many important relics of his life.

The uncertainties about the Order's future were slow to resolve themselves, and Philip had to undertake frequent journeys to Rome. On one of these, while staying at the poor and insignificant priory in Todi for a brief period of rest, he died, at the age of fifty-two, on Wednesday 22 August 1285.

In order to defend the Order's case for survival, Philip had been forced to accentuate, or at least to give prominence to, the reversal of the original commitment to poverty that had been gradually taking place in the Order. He came to die in the very poorest Servite priory.

Many portraits of Philip Benizi depict him with a book in his hand, a not uncommon symbol and capable of different interpretations. A pious tradition that came to light in the sixteenth century recounts that, on his deathbed, Philip repeatedly asked for "his" book, the crucifix.

The seed sown by Philip to save the Order from the death sentence pronounced by the Second Council of Lyons bore fruit under his successor, Lotarigo of Florence. Indeed, scarcely a year after his death, another series of favourable "opinions" from the lawyers at the Roman Curia helped unblock the situation once and for all; the Order's position was now more secure, and the way was open towards definitive approval by the Holy See.

This long and laborious business had its price. As has been seen, the "act of poverty" of 1251 had been incorporated in the bull Alexander IV granted the Order in 1256. In the documents of recognition obtained from the Holy See in the period from 1274 to 1304, there is not a single mention of that act. This enforced silence, as Aristide M. Serra has pointed out in his biography of St. Philip, leads us to suppose that "Philip had arranged for modifications to be made to the sections on poverty in the original Constitutions of the Order."

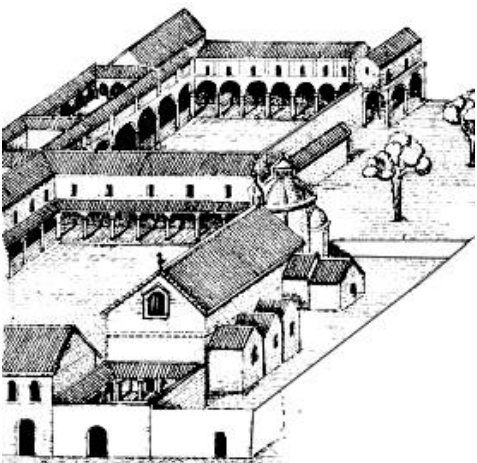
Careful research in some of the oldest priories of the Order confirms that, even in the period between the Second Council of Lyons and 1304, Servite communities continued to live in poverty, though not all of them in the same way. Some latent contradictions were to come to light when the Order, after its approval, began to give its attention to the continuing questions of its development and updating to meet the needs of the times while striving to remain faithful to its origins. One of the Founders of the Order, Alexis Falconieri, was indeed still alive in 1304. He is believed to have died in 1310.

The Order underwent multiple and sometimes contrasting experiences in little more than fifty years; these were perhaps inevitable in its growth towards an organized religious institute.

One can now ask: How did Servite communities actually live in the thirteenth century? In most cases, the question cannot be answered, for the documents have not come down to us, but a look at one of the most important of them can give us some general indications of how a typical community of the Order arranged its life.

Servite life in the Florentine priory of St. Mary of Cafaggio in the years 1286 to 1289

In 1966 Eugenio M. Casalini OSM published a book on the life of the friars at St. Mary of Cafaggio in the three years 1286-1289. This was based on an analysis of the financial register of the priory, and here is a page of his book:



"St. Mary of Cafaggio Priory in Florence was home for about thirty religious in the years 1286-1289... Their living space must have been rather cramped for in this very period stonemasons and carpenters, helped by at least ten labourers were at work on another dormitory, referred to as 'the new house' or 'the dormitory house.' That space was limited in the old priory is also seen from the fact that they were having installed thirty new choir stalls of inlaid wood, which the master carpenter William of Calabria had agreed to build for the sum of fifty gold florins... In these buildings there were a refectory and kitchen, an infirmary and some sort of schoolroom, since they had a 'grammar school' at Cafaggio, entrusted to the care of two lay masters.

"Along with the thirty or so friars, there were five or six servants to do the heavy manual work of the priory...

"We can see too that the whole community was under the orders of the prior, who was elected annually at the general chapter... There were other officers of a certain importance. Chief among these was the procurator, who took care of the more important tasks: the finances, business

negotiations with outsiders and suppliers, dealings with the diocesan curia and the city council. The subprior looked after the internal running of the priory; he was not a vicar prior, as in other orders, but rather a person in charge, perhaps what we would call a majordomo...

"It is not possible to establish with certainty how many of the thirty friars were priests. We do know that some important offices, such as that of procurator, could be held by lay brothers. This can be seen in the registers for 1286-1289 where Fra Ruggeri is referred to as the lay procurator to distinguish him from Ruggeri the priest, another member of the same community."

Casalini goes on to note that the apostolic activities of the friars were quite restricted because of the uncertainty about their survival after the Council of Lyons. He concludes his study with these words: "The Order of Servants of Mary was in full growth in the years 1286-1289 in spite of the threats to its survival which had been hanging over it for fifteen years... Religious life was, however, lived in a way that was more adapted to coping with the adversities of the times than the austere eremitical regime of the founding days of the Order. Based on the Rule of St. Augustine, the Constitutions reflected the same organizational structures as other mendicant orders. However, the flow of people, dignitaries and religious confraternities to the church at the Balla gate on the feasts of the Blessed Virgin [the Purification, the Assumption, the Nativity and, most solemn of all, the Annunciation] demonstrates quite clearly that the friars at Cafaggio were professing and spreading a Marian spirituality that corresponded to their name, Servants of Mary. We cannot therefore passively accept the idea advanced by some that this was a common feature of all thirteenth century piety, which was permeated with devotion to Mary. Within the walls of Florence, other orders and many churches could and did satisfy the demands of this devotion to the Mother of God. We cannot believe that bishops such as Andrea de' Mozzi would get involved or that special feasts would be proclaimed and handsome offerings of gold and candles made, without some good reason which attracted crowds of people to these events. It is obvious from our study that there was no other particular apostolic activity or special religious finality that distinguished the Servites, apart from this honouring of the Blessed Virgin, their Lady."



Dates to Remember

- 1233 The "Year of the Great Alleluia," considered to be the year of birth of the Order.
St. Philip is born in Florence.
- 1245 ca. The retreat of the Seven Founders to Monte Senario.
- 1247 Death of Ardingo, bishop of Florence.
- 1249 Letter with which the papal legate in Tuscany, Cardinal Ranieri, takes the Servants of Mary of Monte Senario under the protection of the Holy See.
- 1250 The cardinal legate, Peter, allows the prior of Monte Senario, then Fra Bonfilius, and his friars to build a church outside Florence (at Cafaggio, the Santissima Annunziata of today).
- 1251 "Act of poverty" of the Servants of Mary meeting in the priory of Cafaggio.
Foundation of the priory in Citta' di Castello, the first in Umbria.

- 1254 Philip Benizi enters the Order.
Two letters from Innocent IV in favour of the friars of Florence.
- 1256 Alexander IV, with the bull *Deo grata*, takes the prior and friars of Monte Senario under his protection (as Innocent IV seems to have done in 1251/1252).
- 1257 General chapter in Florence (the first of which we have precise records).
- 1261 Coppo di Marcovaldo's "Madonna in majesty," painted for the Servite priory in Siena (founded in 1250); he painted another, ca. 1268, for the Orvieto priory.
- 1263 Urban IV's letter *Inducunt nos* which allows the prior and friars of the Servants of Mary to hold a general chapter and elect at it a prior general who is to be confirmed in office by the pope.
- 1265 First evidence of Servites in Bologna, the oldest priory north of the Apennines.
Henry of Baldovino offers himself and his goods (act of oblation) to the priory of Cafaggio, into the hands of the prior general, Fra Manettus of Florence.
- 1267 Philip Benizi is elected prior general after the resignation of Fra Manettus.
- 1272ca. Blessed Joachim of Siena is received into the Order by St. Philip.
- 1273 The Order is given the parish church in Foligno.
The name of a prior provincial appears for the first time, for the province of the Patrimony of St. Peter.
- 1274 The Second Council of Lyons (the fourteenth ecumenical council).
- 1275 The Servites are in Forli.
- 1276 The priories in Romagna have their own prior provincial.
- 1277 A concession of Pope John XXI in favour of the priory of St. Mary in the diocese of Halberstadt, founded a few years previously.
The "opinion" of certain lawyers at the Roman Curia: the Servites are not included in the list of religious orders to be suppressed in accordance with the regulations of the Second Council of Lyons.
- 1282-1283 St. Philip Benizi is in Forli, then under interdict. The conversion of Peregrine Laziosi.
- 1285-1300 The generalate of Fra Lotaringo of Florence. By this time, the legislation of the Order had been codified in a text which came to be called the *Constitutiones antiquae*; other decrees promulgated by various general chapters were added to these, and these additions, made after 1295, came to be known as the *Constitutiones novae*.
- 1286-1287 Various "opinions" from the lawyers in favour of the continued existence of the Order.
- 1287 Letters of Pope Honorius IV in favour of various Servite priories in Italy.

- 1288 Blessed Francis enters the Order in Siena.
- 1288-1292 The pontificate of Nicholas IV with many letters addressed to Servite priories.
- 1290 ca. Peregrine Laziosi enters the Order in Siena.
- 1294-1295 Foundation of the priories at Asti and Alessandria; they are placed under the jurisdiction of the prior provincial of Lombardy.
- 1297-1302 Numerous letters in favour of the Servites from Boniface VIII (one of which, in 1299, is for the province of Germany).
- 1304 11 February: Benedict XI gives definitive approval to the Order with the bull *Dum levamus*.