



Chapter IV

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

From Blessed John Angelo Porro (d. 1505) to Angelo Maria Montorsoli (d. 1600)

A complex and troubled century. The religious situation at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Servants of Mary from the death of Blessed John Angelo Porro (1505) to the eve of the Council of Trent. The generalate of Fra Agostino Bonucci (1542-1553). The end of the Congregation of the Observance and the effects of the Tridentine reform in the Order. The Constitutions of the Servants of Mary in the sixteenth century. Priors and friars of the Order in 1581. The origins of the Congregation of Hermits of Monte Senario. The example of Fra Angelo Maria Montorsoli.

A complex and troubled century



It is more difficult to place Servite history within the chronological limits of the sixteenth century than of other centuries. The difficulty rises from the complex series of events which influenced the life of the Order in the sixteenth century and from the possibility of using other dates as points of reference (for example, the beginning of the Lutheran reform, 1517; the generalate of Fra Agostino Bonucci, 1542-1553; the Council of Trent, 1545-1563; the end of the Servite Observance, 1570; the restoration of the eremitic life at Monte Senario, 1593; the events surrounding Paolo Sarpi, 1552-1623, etc.). Therefore, it will not be possible to describe all aspects of Servite life during this century in the brief space that is available. In this difficult period the Order reflected the complex events affecting the entire Church. A simple illustration is the following: while in the fifteenth century the Order was guided by six priors general, in the period from the death of Alabanti (1495) to the death of Fra Angelo Maria Montorsoli (1600), the Order had twenty priors

general, about half of whom were personally named by the pope. Furthermore, in the early decades of the century, the Observance, already in decline, was seriously divided from the rest of the Order; by the end of the century, however, the Servants were fully reunited. The writing of Servite history began in the sixteenth century with such Servites as Giacomo Filippo called Androfilo, Filippo Maria Sgamaita of Bologna, Cosimo Favilla, Filippo Albrizzi, Raffaello Maffei, Ippolito Massarini and, above all, with the *Chronicon* of Michele Poccianti "who had a decisive influence on the historiography of the Servants for several centuries" (F.A. Dal Pino). Poccianti was then followed by the Florentine Arcangelo Giani, the first annalist of the Order.

The numerous works of Servite writers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have been presented in studies by the Servants of Mary, Giuseppe M. Besutti and Pacifico M. Branchesi. The contribution of Odir J. Dias is important for the chronology of the priors general in the early sixteenth century. The theologians of the Order at the Council of Trent have been studied by Marco M. Aldrovandi (Fra Agostino Bonucci) and Luigi M. De Candido (Fra Lorenzo Mazzocchio). The

celebration in 1978 of the second centennial of the suppression of the Congregation of Hermits of Monte Senario provided an opportunity for detailed study of the Congregation's origins (1593).

Nevertheless, the many lacunae in our knowledge of this period of Servite history necessarily affect this synthesis.

After a preliminary presentation of the religious situation at the beginning of the sixteenth century, we will describe: the life of the Order from the death of Blessed John Angelo Porro until the eve of the Council of Trent; the generalate of Fra Agostino Bonucci; the end of the Observance and the effects of the Tridentine reform in the Order; the Servite Constitutions in the sixteenth century; the origins of the Congregation of Hermits of Monte Senario; and the example of Angelo Maria Montorsoli. We will speak of Fra Paolo Sarpi in the following chapter.

The religious situation at the beginning of the sixteenth century

It has been said that the "religious history of sixteenth century Italy begins with the burning of Girolamo Savonarola at Florence on 23 May 1498" (V. De Caprariis). The austere Dominican whom Philip Neri considered a saint was not the last vestige of the Middle Ages as F. De Sanctis and Carducci held. Probably not far from the truth is the statement of Roberto Ridolfi in his monumental biography of Savonarola: "If his voice had been heard perhaps Luther would not have gained prominence or accomplish what he did; the reform desired by every Christian would have come from the Church of Rome itself."

Lively agitation for change within the Church did not succeed in finding a unified expression. Political concerns dominated the papacy; corruption threatened church institutions and took all credibility away from any theoretical defense of orthodoxy. The pontificates of Alexander VI (1492-1503), Julius II (1503-1513) and Leo X (1513-1521) were reigns of princes rather than pastors and very often the enemies of an ambiguous supremacy were singled out as enemies of the faith. In Florence, while Savonarola and the Dominican community of San Marco were directing the reform chorus of their supporters, their confreres at Santa Maria Novella were actively assisting a group opposed to Savonarola. When the stake did not resolve controversies, poison often did. The history of the Servite Order reflects the situation. There is a tradition that Prior General Antonio Alabanti died of poison in 1495 because of his ties to the Medici family. In 1503, the cardinal protector of the Order of Servants, Giovanni Michiel, was poisoned; his tomb is in the church of San Marcello, Rome. Luther himself was an Augustinian friar and demonstrates that the attack on the Church did not come from outside but from within. The unending resistance of Pope Paul III to the convocation of the Council cannot be explained by references to the inefficacy of the Lateran Council IV (1512-1517), but only as an inability to read the signs of the times.

The Servants of Mary from the death of Blessed John Angelo Porro (1505) to the eve of the Council of Trent

Fra Antonio Alabanti died at Vigevano in December of 1495 and a few months later, on 18 March 1496, Pope Alexander VI named an apostolic vicar general, Fra Andrea of Perugia. The general chapter a year later elected him prior general. From this date until 1542, the year in which Fra Agostino Bonucci was elected to guide the Order, no prior general was freely elected by a general chapter. The seven priors general who held the highest office in the Order during this period were imposed by the Holy See, by being named apostolic vicars general before the convocation of the general chapter. These were Andrea of Perugia, Taddeo Tancredi of Bologna, Ciriaco of Foligno, Clemente of Mantua, Girolamo Foschi of Faenza, Angelo of Arezzo, Girolamo Amidei of Lucca, and Dionisio Laurerio of Benevento.

During this period, certain events and persons deserve attention: the last years of Blessed John Angelo; the weak efforts at renewal by the "Sons of the Observance of the Prior General"; the

appeal in 1533 for the material and spiritual reconstruction of Monte Senario; the person and work of Fra Dionisio Laurerio, prior general and cardinal; other illustrious personalities.

Blessed John Angelo Porro died in 1505 at Milan where he had spent the last years of his life. Before his final return to the principal city of Lombardy, however, and after having been at Florence, the hermitage of Chianti and Monte Senario, it seems that the Blessed stayed at the small priory of Croara near Piacenza. Here he tried to initiate a reform of religious life in the communities of Servants as promoted by Prior General Alabanti apart from the Observance movement. This attempt took definite form under the generalate of Fra Taddeo Tancredi who approved the establishment of the "Sons of the Observance of the Prior General" in 1506. This new "observant branch" was closely tied to the Order but had little success, perhaps because the priors general guiding the Order during this period were imposed by the Holy See rather than elected by the friars.

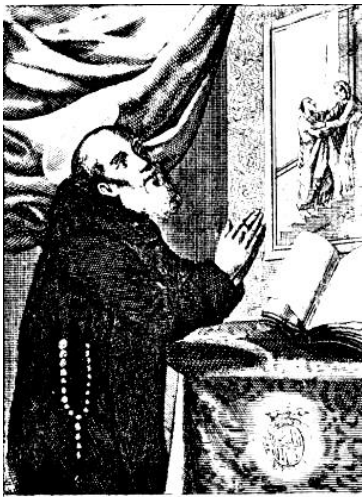
The example and initiative of Blessed John Angelo, however, left a lasting mark on both the Order and the church of Milan where the Blessed's catechetical work with children prepared the way for the pastoral innovations later introduced by Saint Charles Borromeo.

Confirmation of his fame for sanctity is found in the veneration which began soon after his death in the church of San Carlo in Milan where he is buried.

An event not without importance occurred during the generalate of Fra Girolamo Amidei of Lucca who governed the Order for twelve years (1523-1535). He had previously spent some time in Germany where he became known as an able opponent of Lutheran doctrines.

During the general chapter of Siena in 1533, Fra Girolamo made a moving presentation to the capitulars on the state of neglect and decay of Monte Senario. He insisted on the necessity of doing something before it was too late. The priory itself had been damaged shortly before by a serious earthquake; discipline had lapsed for a number of reasons, especially after the community had withdrawn from the Congregation of the Observance in 1473.

The appeal of the prior general, written in Latin, has come down to us in its entirety. Some passages of the talk seem to reflect a concern that goes beyond the situation of Monte Senario and extends to the entire Order.



Fra Girolamo Amidei first recalled that the Order was born on Monte Senario and many saints had lived there; he then added with bitterness: "For some time, however, perhaps through our own fault, we see Senario mortally wounded and its foundations almost destroyed; we can say with tears that the crown has fallen from our head." Recognizing the urgency of repairs, the prior general admitted two obstacles: the lack of available resources and the excessive divisions existing within the Order which made every community think only of itself and have little concern for the others. He added immediately: "Can any of you imagine that Monte Senario is not his own? if, in fact, there have been moments of rebirth in the Order who would dare deny that they began at Monte Senario? Who would have the courage to deny that Senario is the common home of all who desire to live a religious life of solitude, prayer and sanctity... I refuse to believe that anyone is opposed to my exhortation; otherwise, I would have to think that that person wishes harm to the entire family of our Order."

The invitation, unfortunately, was not accepted and Monte Senario was to remain almost abandoned for another sixty years.

The last of the priors general of this period to be nominated directly by the pope was Fra Dionisio Laurerio, a native of southern Italy. He entered the Order at a very young age and soon distinguished himself as an able theologian. In 1530, Henry VIII of England chose him as his representative in the Roman Curia. He was a close friend of Paul III who not only named him prior general of the Order in 1535, but in 1539 made him a cardinal and, the following year, bishop of

Urbino. The pope gave him numerous responsibilities which very often took him away from the direction of the Order. He was already prior general when he was named visitor and reformer of the Congregation of the Observance. The annalist of the Order, however, noted that his actions bore little fruit. Especially after becoming a cardinal, he governed the Order through vicars general. Laurerio died at the age of forty-five, shortly after the general chapter that elected Agostino Bonucci prior general.

A few interesting personalities of the early sixteenth century deserve to be remembered: Blessed Cedonio of Monza or Bologna, Fra Girolamo Foschi of Faenza, Blessed Lucia of Bagolino, Blessed Peter of the Cross.

Fra Cedonio, a native of Monza (ca. 1420) but said to be of Bologna because of his long residence there, could be called a Saint Alexis of the sixteenth century. Little is known of him, but during his life he was famous for his great simplicity, poverty and availability to those most in need. For many years he chose as his daily dwelling a cell constructed next to the bell tower of the church of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna. He was over one hundred years old when he died (1526) and was immediately included in the lists of the blessed of the Order.

Fra Girolamo Foschi (c. 1445-c. 1532) was truly unusual. History substantially confirms the extraordinary facts of a Latin epigraph dictated by Girolamo himself: "Fra Girolamo Foschi of the Servants of Mary, who travelled in Asia, Europe and Africa, arriving even in the Antilles, preaching the word of God throughout the world in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German..." Erudite, versatile, famous, and esteemed by Julius II, in



1511 he was named vicar general of the Order with the certain prospect of becoming prior general. Instead, because of his close ties to Cardinal Bernardino Carvajal, protector of the Order, he gave his allegiance to the Council of Pisa-Milan which was to become known as the "Conciliabulum." The pope immediately deposed him as vicar general and he would have ended up in prison had he not left the country in time. He soon repented of his rebellion and obtained pardon from a new pontiff, ending up in the shadows and solitude of the priory of Pietralunga near Faenza which he himself had founded in 1507. Before his death, however, the prior general entrusted him with important responsibilities.

The first edition of the Annals of the Order (1622) by Fra Arcangelo Giani speaks of a Blessed Lucia, foundress of the cloistered convent of Servants of Mary at Bagolino near Brescia who died around 1524 (Giani has 1520). Davide M. Montagna OSM recently published an important article about this holy nun who, within a few years of her death, was listed among the blessed of the Order. She should be remembered because very little documentation is available about the Servite nuns before Trent. The convent of Bagolino was founded in the territory of the Servite Observance thanks to the support of the vicar general of the Observance Fra Deodato Capirola of Brescia. The convent of Bagolino later returned in Servite history because of other cloistered saints faithful to the renewal begun by their foundress.

Blessed Peter of the Cross, a hermit from Germany, became ill at Viterbo during a local epidemic while making a pilgrimage to Rome. Still ailing, he asked for and received the habit of the Servants of Mary. He died in 1522 at the age of thirty-six. His body was venerated at Viterbo in the church of Santa Maria della Verità until its suppression at the end of the nineteenth century and then in the convent of Santa Maria della Pace of the cloistered Servants of Mary (founded in 1502 and closed in 1911). The sanctity of Blessed Peter of the Cross is recorded in Fra Michele Poccianti's *Chronicon* (1567). The historical archives of the Order in Rome contain a letter written to Blessed Peter in 1519 by King Charles I of Spain (later Emperor Charles V).

The generalate of Agostino Bonucci (1542-1553)

Together with Fra Angelo M. Montorsoli and Fra Lorenzo Mazzocchio, Fra Agostino Bonucci is one of the most Noteworthy figures of the Servite sixteenth century. Prior general of the Order and at the same time one of the general superiors of the mendicant orders present as "Fathers" at the Council of Trent, Bonucci carried out within the Order an effective programme of renewal necessary for its slow but certain revival.

Though also called Fra Agostino of Arezzo, he was probably born near Monte San Savino to a family related to Pope Julius III (1550-1555). There was no relationship, however, with Fra Stefano Bonucci from the same town, who was to be Fra Agostino's efficient collaborator and later would become prior general (1570-1573), bishop and cardinal, and whose name would be linked to the suppression of the Congregation of the Observance.

Fra Agostino Bonucci was elected prior general at the chapter held at Faenza in 1542. For the first time since the ginning of the century the friars were left free to choose the general themselves. But as often happens, the same persons who complain about a lack of freedom, do not know how to use it when they have it. At Faenza, the friars of the Congregation of the Observance used a pretext of procedure to oppose and then contest the election of Bonucci as prior general. The episode risked creating a break between the Order and its Observant branch. Precisely in these circumstances Bonucci demonstrated his leadership qualities and with firmness and patience managed to resolve the conflict and restore harmony with the friars of the Observance.

Although involved in the work of the Council of Trent where he demonstrated his doctrinal preparation, impartiality and thorough knowledge of both Catholic and Protestant positions, Bonucci laboured intensely for the renewal of the life of the Order.

He was intransigent in defending the rights of his friars, even threatening the pope to resign as prior general if certain rights of the priory of Perugia were not recognized. He was no less rigorous in his attempts at reform. Marco M. Aldrovandi OSM notes: "Bonucci's experiences during canonical visitations and his effort to restore religious spirit led to the publication of the Constitutions that bear his name. The fundamental themes of this text are the strengthening of authority, the reform of religious practice, the dignity of worship and the seriousness of studies. Tradition has given the title 'Constitutions' both to an established legislative text and to decrees at general chapters. The Constitutions of Bonucci were formulated in the general chapter of Budrio in 1548 and published the same year at Bologna. Rather than a legislative reform, these were a restatement of norms fallen into disuse, with some new directives suggested by changed circumstances ..." In his reforming efforts, Bonucci was concerned with reestablishing the authority of superiors while harmonizing it with the community spirit which regulated the life of the Order. To give community life a more profound spiritual dimension, he reawakened interest in worship by limiting exemptions and renewing the obligation of choral prayer, conventual Mass and the devotions of the Order. In reforming religious practice he insisted on the vow of chastity in the face of the relaxed spirit of the times and also on the vow of poverty by abolishing established privileges. For studies he introduced strict norms for the selection of students and professors. From the time of their entrance into the Order young friars had to have two masters: one of the spirit and one of grammar.

Knowing that the ideas and writings of Lutheranism were spreading in some houses of the Order, he did not rail against those taken in by these teachings but provided severe norms for the future, using the Council as a guide.



With the Constitutions approved and published, Bonucci personally involved himself in putting them into effect. The election of Pope Julius III gave even greater impetus to the activities of the general. During the jubilee Year of 1550, he went to great lengths so that the nuns of the Order could acquire the indulgence in their own convents. A papal brief charged him with the reform of the priory of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna. This was a considerable task since the priory was the largest in the city and an important centre of studies accused of sympathy for Protestant ideas.

Always concerned with safeguarding the unity of the Order, Bonucci in 1551 agreed with the vicar general of the Observance on common reform activities. Together, they asked the pope for authorization to correct abuses and for appropriate authority over those opposed to their actions. At the general chapter of Rimini in the same year Bonucci was reconfirmed as prior general; death was to cut him down at the age of forty-seven before the end of his term. His tomb, with a bust, is in the Servite church of San Pier Piccolo in Arezzo. The monument, attributed to Montorsoli, is actually by an unknown sculptor. Bonucci's friend and associate, Fra Stefano Bonucci brought the body of Agostino Bonucci from Rome to the city of their birth.

Alongside Fra Agostino Bonucci, Fra Lorenzo Mazzocchio of Castelfranco (ca. 1490-1560) who was prior general from 1554 to 1557 was among the Servite theologians who distinguished themselves at the Council of Trent. In his history of the Council of Trent, H. Jedin calls him a "perspicacious theologian." Having a vast cultural preparation, he was also a poet. Unlike Bonucci, who even in doctrine showed himself to be conciliatory, Mazzocchio was a theologian with a nominalist tendency but not to the point of presenting himself as one "of the school." During the conciliar debate on justification, the Secretary of the Council, Massarelli, said that Mazzocchio gave everyone the impression that he had contradicted the opinions of almost all the speakers who preceded him and they were not few in number.

His somewhat eccentric personality seems to have contributed to the agitated circumstances of his election as prior general and the rapid decline of his prestige. He resigned at the end of his three year term and was made prior of San Marcello in Rome. He became the object of serious false accusations and was for a time imprisoned. In the bitter solitude of the conventual prison, he wrote Latin and Italian rhymes which reflected a peaceful spirit. Freed because of failing health, he was made prior of the community of Santa Caterina in Treviso where he died in September of 1560 at the age of seventy.

The end of the Congregation of the Observance and the effects of the Tridentine reform in the Order

What Fra Agostino Bonucci had sought to begin in attempting a renewal of both the "conventuals" and the "observants bore fruit in the end of the Observance or better, in its full reunion with the Order. The operation, if such it can be called, was neither easy nor painless, but it proved to be positive. For an Order like that of the Servants, limited in numbers, the increasing autonomy of the Observance branch had ended in transforming it from an innovative "movement" into a separate body, thus multiplying the causes of friction. The decades following the end of the Observance show that its termination did not lead to a weakening of the vitality of the Order but to a general revival. At the same time, the "spirit" of the Council of Trent tended to impede internal divisions in religious institutes as is seen in the very serious difficulties encountered in the same period by Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross in their promotion of a reform of Carmel which led to the formation of the independent Order of Discalced Carmelites.

The bull of Pope Pius V which suppressed the Congregation of the Observance was read at the conclusion of the general chapter celebrated at Cesena in May of 1570. The prior general who had requested the papal document, Fra Zaccaria Faldossi, had died shortly after convoking the chapter. It was the task of his successor Fra Stefano Bonucci to face this delicate moment. In fact, the friars of the Observance present at the chapter reacted negatively and tried to have the pontifical

decision revoked, but to no avail. With the wisdom and tact of the earlier Bonucci, Fra Stefano healed the divisions and the rapid return to full union within the Order occurred without leaving serious scars. In 1574 the houses of the suppressed Congregation formed two provinces: Mantua and Venice.

The most difficult problem, however, remained that of a true spiritual reform of the Order.

Confronted with the new demands created by the birth of Protestantism and the beginning of the Catholic Tridentine reform, the older mendicant orders felt the need for updating, as we might say today. So much the more because within the context of the Council of Trent new "modern" religious congregations and orders were being formed: Theatines (1524), Capuchins (1525), Barnabites (1530), Somaschi (1534), Hospitalers of St. John of God (1537), Jesuits (1540), Oratorians (1575), Camillians (1582), etc. Eugenio M. Casalini OSM observes: "When the older orders compared their ideals with those of the new orders, they thought they could rejuvenate themselves by adopting some of the new styles. What they did not understand was that fraternity at all levels, authority as service, prayer in common and common dedication to the people of God could be very modern, understandable and pastorally effective if presented with the renewed spirit which was the real heart of the success of the modern congregations."

At the end of the century, two eminent Servants of Mary were working for the reform of the Order in different ways. They were Fra Lelio Baglioni and Fra Angelo Maria Montorsoli. Both were priors general: the first from 1590 to 1597, the second from 1597 to 1600. Both were Florentines and nephews of famous artists. Baglioni was the nephew of the architect Baccio d'Agnolo who had worked at Santissima Annunziata of Florence. Montorsoli was the nephew of the sculptor Giovannangelo Montorsoli (1507-1563), a disciple of Michelangelo and a Servite friar, well known for the fountains of Messina, the marble main altar of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna and noteworthy works of art in Genoa.

Fra Lelio Baglioni is credited with reforming the Order "from the top," by a series of concrete directives and by beginning the Congregation of Hermits at Monte Senario. To Fra Angelo Maria Montorsoli is attributed a more interior activity not opposed to that of Baglioni, but complementary. We will treat of him shortly.



The Constitutions of the Servants of Mary in the sixteenth century

D. AVGVSTINI
EPIS. REGVLA.
ET CONSTITVTIONES
Fratrum congregationis Seruorum
Beatae M. Virginis.



FERRARIAE,
Excudebat Franciscus Rubeus. 1579.

Inspired by the reform promoted by the Council of Trent, the Order set about reviewing and updating its Constitutions. We have already spoken of the "Constitutions" of Bonucci promulgated by the general chapter of Budrio in 1548. The first entirely revised constitutional text was printed in Rome in 1556 during the generalate of Mazzocchio. In 1569 another new text was printed in Florence under Fra Zaccaria Faldossi.

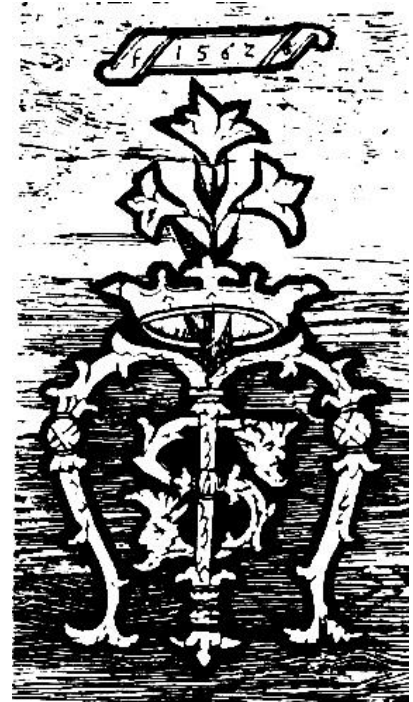
The general chapter celebrated at Parma in 1579 reelected Fra Giacomo Tavanati (1576-1582) as prior general for a second three-year term and mandated a constitutional revision. One who worked on this text was the prior provincial of Venice, the twenty-seven year old Fra Paolo Sarpi. The text, with notable differences from preceding ones, was printed at Venice in 1580. These

Constitutions remained substantially in force until the Second Vatican Council.

We present here a translation of a passage from Fra Giacomo Tavanti's Latin introduction to the Constitutions of 1580. For the sake of clarity, the translation is rather free.

"The Constitutions presented here for the observance of all, even if they can be called new in a certain sense, are not new at all. Everything, in fact, that pertains to the original piety of the Order and our holy Fathers, charity and the constant goal of eternal life is maintained in these Constitutions from the very beginning: that is to say, the commitment to serve God under the protection of the Mother of God, to abandon the world and its goods, to love one another, to pray to God at the altar of Christ for all; in them, therefore, no novelty will be encountered, and the ancient remains holy and unchanged. However, because of the changed conditions of our times, circumstances, locations and persons, something new will also be found. We are certain, in fact, that whoever, after our first fathers, sought to suppress something or introduce new norms, did so with the same constructive spirit for the purpose of serving God, obeying the Catholic church and teaching us the way of God..."

In the preceding chapter we spoke briefly of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Observance. A new revision of this text went into effect in 1570, shortly before the suppression of the Observance.



Priories and friars of the Order in 1581

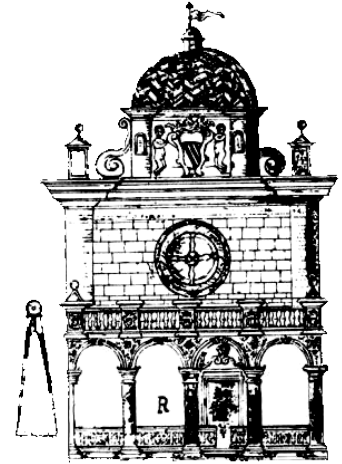
The following statistics based on data provided by Prior General Giacomo Tavanti present the numerical situation of friar Servants of Mary at the time of the provincial chapters in the spring of 1581.

| Province | Priories | Friars | | | | | Total |
|----------------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|-------|
| | | Priests | Clerics | Novices | Bothers | | |
| Tuscany | 23 | 143 | 32 | 35 | 32 | 242 | |
| Rome | 30 | 127 | 37 | 27 | 31 | 222 | |
| Romagna | 18 | 123 | 41 | 27 | 23 | 214 | |
| Lombardy | 38 | 124 | 38 | 14 | 57 | 233 | |
| March of Treviso | 26 | 73 | 20 | 19 | 22 | 134 | |
| Veneto | 24 | 128 | 39 | 19 | 53 | 239 | |
| Mantua | 37 | 155 | 60 | 27 | 65 | 307 | |
| Genoa | 19 | 62 | 16 | 8 | 23 | 109 | |
| Naples | 12 | 42 | 17 | 7 | 14 | 80 | |
| Provence | 8 | | | | | 20 | |
| Corsica and Sardinia | 4 | | | | | 10 | |
| Spain | 1 | | | | | 8 | |
| Total | 240 | | | | | 1818 | |

The first nine provinces (also called "greater") are those which, according to the Constitutions of 1580, could each send three representatives to the general chapter; the other two (Narbonne or Provence; Corsica and Sardinia together) were each represented by one friar only. Spain was not yet a true province for there was only the recently founded priory of Barcelona. This priory and those of Provence in France were the only non-Italian houses in this period. At that time, Italy geographically included Corsica (with three priories), Istria (four priories of the province of the March of Treviso) and the southern part of the Canton of Ticino (where the province of Lombardy had two priories). The German province, still flourishing at the end of the fifteenth century, had ceased to exist because of the new political-religious situation created by the Protestant reform (a prior provincial is mentioned in 1522 and a few houses managed to survive until the middle of the century).

The province of Veneto (or Venice) and that of Mantua were created in 1574 by dividing into two geographical areas the priories formerly belonging to the Congregation of the Observance. Together, these two provinces represented more than a fourth of the Order in numbers of priories and friars.

Under the Roman Province, Tavanti also records seventy four "cloistered nuns under the care of the Order" in the two Umbrian convents of Portaria and Spoleto (facts not included in the table).



The origins of the Congregation of the Hermits of Monte Senario

We possess extensive documentation on the Congregation of Hermits of Monte Senario which existed for nearly two centuries. It is possible to reconstruct, almost year by year, life at Monte Senario and other hermitages from 1593 until 1778, the year in which the eremitic phase of the Congregation formally ended and the cradle of the Order returned to the cenobitic community life which continues down to the present day. To be precise, the eremitic life ended at Monte Senario and San Giorgio in Lunigiana in 1778; at Cibona and Monterano in 1780.

On 24 August 1593 the Order decided not only to reconstruct the crumbling building of Monte Senario but also to restore an eremitic community of rigorous observance directly dependent on the prior general and the prior provincial of Tuscany, and affiliated to the Florentine community of Santissima Annunziata.

The friars chosen to begin the eremitic life arrived at Monte Senario on 22 May 1594; they were led by Fra Bernardino Ricciolini who had previously lived for two years at Camaldoli. The diaries of the hermitage call him the vicar.

The first decades of the eremitic life were years of great rigour and zeal. Much of the work centred on the buildings themselves: restoration of the church and the construction of the main well. These projects were carried to completion slowly, but without interruption. The forest was replanted with pines brought from Vallombrosa, Camaldoli and other places.

For those who desired, a completely solitary life was possible. A number of hermitages were built, on the side of the mountain; two of them can still be seen today.

The prior general was a frequent visitor to Monte Senario. The friars of the hermitage wore habits of coarse material and sandals, fasted at least three times a week and rose during the night for the night "hours" of the Divine Office. The seriously ill were taken to the infirmary (or "hospice" of the hermits) of Santissima Annunziata at Florence. If a hermit did not die at the hermitage, arrangements were made to return his body to Monte Senario for burial in the community's cemetery.

Constitutions for the eremitic community were drawn up in Italian and published at Florence in 1613. In small groups, the hermits from Monte Senario established other hermitages in

Tuscany and Lazio: San Giorgio in Lunigiana, Monteverginio, Cibona and Monterano. They were instrumental in the birth of the Order in Austria at the beginning of the seventeenth century; this will be discussed later.

It is interesting to note that during the period of greatest vitality in the life of the Congregation of Hermits of Monte Senario, friars from other communities of the Order often visited there and remained for some time. They were taking advantage of the generous and fraternal hospitality which is still today practised as a cherished characteristic of the community of Monte Senario.

Proof of how closely the rebirth of the Order's original spirit on Monte Senario responded to the Council of Trent's call to renewal is found in the encouragement and support given to the Congregation of Hermits of Monte Senario not only by the priors general of the Order but also by the Holy See. Pacifico Branchesi OSM notes that eleven papal documents written between 1593 and 1612 confirm this support.

Especially in its early period, the eremitic Congregation was respected within the Order. Proof is found in the hermitage diaries which record that more than six hundred friars of the Order contributed to the initial restoration of Monte Senario with money or supplies. For its part, the Congregation offered outstanding examples of sanctity and represented a stimulus and a point of reference for the entire Order.

The example of Fra Angelo Maria Montorsoli

We quote here the description of Montorsoli presented by Eugenio M. Casalini OSM during the Week of Spirituality held at Monte Senario in 1978 to record the second centennial of the end of the Congregation of Hermits.



"Fra Angelo Montorsoli ... without scorning decrees of reform and while continuing to sincerely esteem the hermits of Senario (among whom he counted some of his own disciples), had his own ideas about renewal. After receiving his doctorate in theology from the University of Florence, he was named a Teacher in the priory of Santissima Annunziata. In 1579, he printed the first results of his teaching years: the first volume of *Commentarii in librum I Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi* (Commentary on the First Book of Sentences of Peter Lombard); five other volumes followed during the next six years that he continued to teach. Montorsoli spent the time not given to teaching or study in preaching and hearing confessions.

"In 1588, the year in which his companion Lelio Baglioni was elected procurator general of the Order, Montorsoli requested his superiors for permission to live for the rest of his life as a recluse in a room of the priory of Santissima Annunziata ... Certainly, this type of eremitical life was rather unusual. It reflected a protest against the current life style, but not flight or withdrawal. It was characterized by asceticism, but not a denial of learning. It offered a rich contemplative life which was then communicated to others through letters and personal counsel and encouragement; during this period of eremitic experience, Montorsoli wrote five volumes of reflections on the Scriptures, two books of spiritual exercises modelled on those of St. Ignatius Loyola and other shorter ascetical works. For us what is important is the *Spiritual Letter* sent to the friars of the Florentine community in 1596.

"The *Letter* excludes the idea that observance of the rule in itself, can become a means of religious perfection. Neither does the *Letter* reflect a conviction that the restoration or change of structures might renew the Order. The only possibility of reform, according to Montorsoli, lies in

voluntary efforts at individual spiritual renewal according to the *sequela Cbristi* (following of Christ), the essence of which is contemplation in love".

Montorsoli's *Spiritual Letter* created some controversy. It did, however, favourably impress Pope Clement VIII who obliged Montorsoli to abandon his recluse life and then named him prior general of the Order in 1597.

Montorsoli accepted the office reluctantly, but dedicated himself to the renewal of religious life. He named Fra Bernardino Ricciolini initiator of the eremitical life on Monte Senario as prior of the important community of Santissima Annunziata. Among his primary concerns was the preparation of formation masters for the novices and professed students. For this purpose, he sent some friars to the Jesuits to begin the study and practice of the Ignatian spiritual exercises.

The historian of the Order, Fra Gregorio Alasia (1579-1626), carefully collected the letters of Montorsoli and noted that other letters, besides the *Spiritual Letter*, reflect his ideas on the renewal of religious life. Without a doubt, one of these is a letter to his teacher, the Prior General Fra Giacomo Tavanti, written in 1593 and published by F.A. Dal Pino in the 1958 volume of *Studi storici dell'Ordine dei Servi di Maria*.

Montorsoli describes his vision of the Order in another letter sent to the prior provincial of Romagna in January of 1597. He writes: "Our Order is small compared to the other mendicant Orders; with the diligent care of only a few persons united to God, it could easily become an impregnable fortress. But today it is practically an abandoned city and much must be done to

rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. There is no necessity of letting it go to ruin; rather as a work of the most holy Mother of God, it must be restored and enlarged with particular care. Other orders have at their head a saint who may truly be outstanding, but infinitely greater and without equal is the most holy Virgin, our patroness whose favoured Servants we are called."

The sixteenth century ends with Fra Angelo Maria Montorsoli. The following century, so eventful for the life of the Order, brings the Order to the forefront of secular history in the person of Fra Paolo Sarpi, without a doubt the best known Friar Servant of Mary.

Dates to Remember

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| 1505 | Blessed John Angelo Porro dies at Milan. |
| 1506 | The "Sons of the Observance of the Prior General" are established. |
| 1512-1517 | Lateran Council V. |
| 1515-1516 | Fra Filippo Albrizzi of Mantua is vicar general of the Observance. Updating of the Constitutions of the Observance. Albrizzi writes a brief history of the Order, a history of the Congregation of the Observance and a life of Blessed Philip Benizi. |
| 1517 | Beginning of the Lutheran reform. After some years, the suppression of the houses of the Order in Germany begins. |
| 1524ca. | Death of Blessed Lucia, foundress of the convent of Bagolino. |
| 1526 | Blessed Cedonio dies at Bologna. |
| 1533 | Prior General Girolamo Amidei of Lucca issues an appeal for the reconstruction of Monte Senario. |
| 1539 | First Servite cardinal: Fra Dionisio Laurerio of Benevento (prior general from 1535 to 1542). |
| 1542-1553 | Generalate of Fra Agostino Bonucci. |
| 1545-1563 | Council of Trent. |
| 1556 | First constitutional revision of the Tridentine period, followed shortly by two others in 1569 and 1580. |
| 1570 | End of the Congregation of the Observance which is reunited to the Order. |
| 1580 | Foundation of a Spanish house at Barcelona. |
| 1593 | Beginning of the Congregation of Hermits of Monte Senario. |
| 1596 | Spiritual Letter of Fra Angelo M. Montorsoli. |

1597-1600 Generalate of Fra Angelo M. Montorsoli.