

Capuchins in the East: Presence and 'de facto minority'



Br. Pio Murat, General Councilor OFM Cap

Current events continue to document the daily drama of the Middle East. Barbarous killings in Syria and in Iraq, attacks in the Holy Land, repeated violations of human rights. We know all too well, unfortunately, these realities, hostile and cruel. Powerless, we note also that Christians, among others, are easy objects of a violence that knows no end.

In this region of the world, the Capuchins are present and share the drama of these humiliated people. Let us recall: one of our friaries in Syria completely destroyed; a million and a half Syrians fleeing to Lebanon; others – thousands – in exile in Mersin in Turkey. In such contexts our brothers, directly involved, work in silence to comfort and soothe the sufferings.

In the Middle East, we are present in Jerusalem, in Greece, in Lebanon, in Turkey, in the Arabian peninsula, and in Pakistan. Thus we form ASMEN, the smallest among the Conferences of the Order. The prospects for the 'implantatio ordinis' are truly thin and our fraternities – in large part – are made up of foreign brothers.

The 'common denominator' of all of our presence in the Middle East is the condition of 'de facto minority.' Here, in the political, religious, and social context of these countries, 'minority' is anything but an abstract and theoretical concept; it is a concrete condition of life. Almost everywhere the brothers are living in misunderstood Christian communities, deprived of their fundamental rights and, at times, as prey of hate and persecution. In some situations, the brothers cooperate to maintain the life of the Church, but, in other cases, when there aren't Christian

communities, they—in the spirit of St. Francis (Earlier Rule XVI), witness to the Gospel simply with their lives.

To understand better the value of our presence (encouraged by the General Minister), the brothers of ASMEN have begun a path of reflection: "In the countries where we are, how can we live our condition of 'de facto minority,' imposed by the context in which we live? In relation to ecumenical dialogue, to interreligious dialogue or facing the possibility of losing our churches, what sense does our presence have? What does perseverance mean?"

The process of development undertaken by the Conference will certainly be a support not only for the brothers involved, but will also raise awareness in the whole of our Capuchin fraternity.

PCO VII clearly affirms: "Inspired by the teaching to proclaim the Good News even in the midst of trials and persecutions (cf. Mt 24:9), the Capuchin Order encourages our brothers in those countries where Christianity is a negligible minority to bear witness to the Gospel, like leaven in the dough (cf. Lk 13:21), through example and word in a spirit of minority akin to that of St Francis before the Sultan. Our brotherhood pledges to stand by and support our brothers, especially in those lands where the freedom of religion is at risk, religious intolerance is on the increase and religious fundamentalism is spreading rapidly." (PCO VII, 16)

May these intentions, good and just in themselves, lift up the spirit of fraternal solidarity in as many forms of expression as are possible.

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a Capuchin councilor of the Pope

Y*ou are the only American – and Capuchin – called to counsel the Pope on the reform of church governance. What can you tell us about the council's mission?*

As has been announced, there is a desire to reform the Curia, to make it more at the service of the Holy Father and the local Churches. The goal is to make the Curia more efficient and thus to allow the Holy Father to govern more effectively. It is important to review the functions of the dicasteries and pontifical councils, to see how they can work better. The Holy Father is also concerned about the pastoral care of people working in the Curia. Many within the Curia have given their lives in service to the Church. But there should not be an approach of careerism, but of mission. The Holy Father wants to make sure that is the spirit of the Curia. Further, the Church has grown so much and is more international. So there is a desire to internationalize the Curia to some extent. The council is not only to reform the Curia, but to advise the Holy Father on the government.

Recently, there has been discussion about expanding consultation within the Church more widely. Is this council appointed by the Pope a model for Church governance at other levels?

The Church is not a democracy. But the Church can only function if there is a sense that you are trying to discern God's will, and we don't do that just as individuals; we do that in an atmosphere of dialogue and prayer. But ultimately, the Holy Father will make decisions, and we will abide by them.

Pope Francis has asked us to be a "Church for the poor." Does that involve leading a simpler lifestyle?

In the Church, we have always encouraged people to adopt a simpler lifestyle. The Holy Father's interest in ecology gives another dimension to this concern. We need to be more conscious of people's needs and be willing to forego superfluous wealth and creature comforts. The Order of Malta has the tradition of seeing the

poor and sick as "our liege lords." Mother Teresa said the poor are Christ in a "distressing disguise." We need to see the value of people who might be invisible to the culture, and that includes the unborn child, the Alzheimer's patient, the drug addict. Some of these people have very challenging situations, and they aren't the beautiful or productive people, the glitterati. We are called to see their value in God's eyes. Socrates said, "People believe me because I am poor." The witness of a simple lifestyle is important in the Church. It doesn't mean that people shouldn't live according to the demands of their station of life — not everybody has a vow of poverty. When we read about the first Christians and see how they shared with each other, there was a sense of responsibility for the poor, the orphan and the strangers in their midst. We need to do more.

In his interview in America magazine, Pope Francis spoke about his own deep experience of spiritual paternity, but he also made it clear that all Church leaders and pastors should reach out to others like a spiritual father.

For any priest, it is important to see ourselves as the spiritual father of our people. The Holy Father, during his chrisem Mass homily, said, "The shepherd should have the smell of the sheep." As the father of the family makes many sacrifices for his children, a priest needs to make many sacrifices for his people. When the father makes those sacrifices, he doesn't feel sorry for himself; he sees this as his mission. And that is the way a good priest has to function. I fear, however, that the clergy-abuse crisis has led some priests to stay apart from people so their motives won't be suspect.

In 2012, you were elected the chairman of the USCCB Committee for Pro-life Activities. What are your goals for this critical work of the conference?

In the last year, I tried to bring up the importance of changing the mentality of the country around

adoption. In 1988 I read Paul Swope's article in *First Things*, "Abortion: A Failure to Communicate." Swope pointed to research that showed how women in difficult pregnancies ended up choosing abortion. They see three options available to them: keeping the child, having an abortion or putting their child up for an adoption. Keeping the child is often interpreted as a personal death. Giving the child up in an adoption is seen as a terrible option — they are a bad mother who is exposing the child to abandonment, abuse and neglect. Somehow we have to break through that view of adoption and help women see that there are many wonderful childless couples who are well-equipped to be loving parents. We need to do more to support adoptive parents. The USCCB Pro-life Activities Committee is also promoting post-abortion care. So many women have had an abortion. They believe they have committed an unspeakable crime beyond forgiveness, and they live with that guilt. We need to help them find the path to reconciliation and experience God's mercy. That is one of the beautiful things about Pope Francis. He is showing how the Church must be a "field hospital," reaching out to those who have been devastated by sin.

In many countries and also in the USA, there legalization of same-sex marriage has begun. What has been the experience of the Church, pastors, and families?

In Boston, we have a commission set up to study the impact of same-sex "marriage" and the issue of homosexuality. We are looking at what is being taught in the public schools. We know it is an entirely different anthropology from that of the Church. There is such an aggressive attitude toward anyone defending traditional marriage that many people are intimidated. And there is a movement now that is trying to stop religious people from adopting. The challenge we face now is helping people focus on the fact that marriage involves families. As

Archbishop [Salvatore] Cordileone [of San Francisco] explained in his report to the conference this week, “Every child comes from a man and a woman. Marriage recognizes that reality and binds the children to their parents.” Every study shows that the optimal circumstance for raising a child is with their biological parents in a loving, committed marriage. But at the same time, we need to communicate — and this is difficult — that homosexual persons are not unwelcome in the Church. The great threat that marriage faces is cohabitation. As Charles Murray reported in *Coming Apart*, almost 50% of children are born out of wedlock in the white working-class community. Cohabitation and the divorce mentality have both been bad for marriage, and I am so glad the Holy Father will give this issue more focus with the Synod on the Family. He also wants us to find ways to help people in second marriages to return to the sacraments and be reconciled and to see if the annulment process can be more user-friendly.

You have served immigrants and undocumented workers from the early days of your priesthood. It looks like comprehensive immigration reform will not go forward this year. What does that mean for people who were hoping for a reprieve in the USA?

Part of the problem is that we need immigrants; our quotas have often been far too low. There are also horror stories of someone coming into the country as a political refugee, but their children must wait 10 years to get in the country. Immigration law is very complex, and sometimes it can be very punitive. The immigration issue won the election for President Obama. His promise of amnesty for the students locked in the entire Hispanic vote. Yet Obama is the president who deported more Hispanics than any other president. He was facing that charge, and conservative Republicans weren't anxious to take advantage of that issue because of their own attitude about immigration. We need immigration reform, but it has fallen victim to the polarization that we see in government. (National Catholic Register)

Br. Raniero Cantalamessa Lenten preaching 2015

Vatican City – “Two lungs, one breath: East and West united in the same profession of faith.” This is the theme chosen by the Preacher of the Papal Household, Br. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., for preaching to the Pope and the Roman Curia beginning this Friday, February 27, 2015. The theme, he explains, means to be a small contribution to the unity of the Body of Christ that is the Church that breathes with “two lungs,” as St. John Paul II said, speaking of East and West. Given that in recent times, the efforts in finding the paths for dialogue have sought to build on what unites us, that is, the great mysteries of our faith, instead of highlighting the differences, even if, briefly, Br. Raniero wishes to note that we believe in the same Great Mystery revealed or understood in

different ways. Citing for this the wisdom of pagan thinker of the fourth century, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, who reminds us of a truth that acquires all its value when it is applied to the various theologues of East and West: “Uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum” (One does not arrive at such a great mystery by traveling a single path.) Therefore, the image of the embrace between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras and more recently between Pope Francis and Bartholomew, show forth more positive effect than long theological debates. And it is on this ‘embrace in the same Spirit’ that Br. Raniero has placed hand and heart in order to show us a path toward a “spiritual ecumenism that prepares for that of doctrine,” in the words of Cardinal Walter Kasper.

The Capuchin friary of Monterosso is a ‘place of the heart’ for Italians



LA SPEZIA, Italy – The friary of the Capuchin Friars of Monterosso was elected a ‘place of the heart’ for Italians. The evocative, seventeenth century friary that dominates the bay of Monterosso al Mare (La Spezia) is the winner of the seventh national ‘Places of the Heart’ survey, promoted by FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano – Italian Environment Fund) in collaboration with a bank. The friary, struck by the flood of 2013, holds works of art within and is surrounded by gardens and vineyards. In second place was the Certosa di Calci (Pisa) followed by Calatubo Castle in Alcamo, in the province of Trapani. This year more than 1,600,000 Italians took part in the voting, indicating also among the ‘places of the heart’ the Cappello Borsalino Museum (Alessandria) and the Church of Sant’Agnello (Maddaloni, Caserta). (www.viaggi.guidone.it)

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Appointment of two new Capuchin bishops

VATICAN CITY - The Holy Father has appointed Bishop of Krk (Croatia) our confrere Ivica Petanjak, OFM Cap., until now Guardian of the house in Osijek and Provincial Councillor.

On this past January 29 the Pope appointed bishop of the diocese of Lolo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) our confrere Jean Bertin Nadonye Ndongo, General Councillor.

Best wishes to our brothers in their new and demanding service to the Church.

(www.ofmcap.org)

Palestine will have two new saints

BETHLEHEM, Israel - The Palestinian people will have two new saints to commemorate. The Consistory of February 15, in fact, has inscribed among the saints Mariam Baouardy and Maryam Sūltanah Danil Ghattas. They will be canonized on May 17, 2015. For the land of Jesus these are the first two women saints of the modern era. Mariam, who took as a religious name Sr. Mary of Jesus Crucified in the Order of Discalced Carmelites, was born of a Lebanese family in the Palestinian village of I'billin, near Nazareth, on January 5, 1846. Her tomb is in the church of the Carmel of Bethlehem, where she died, at just 32 years of age, on August 26, 1878. After having lost both her parents, little Mariam was adopted by a paternal uncle. Running away from home at 13 in order not to be forced into marriage, she was almost killed by a Muslim who wanted to make her renounce the Christian faith. With her throat cut, the girl awoke in a cave cared for by a woman whom she identified as the Virgin Mary. After having wandered from Alexandria in Egypt to Jerusalem and Beirut and finally to Marseille, she entered as a novice, at 19 years of age, the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition in Marseille. Under the guidance of Mother Veronica of the Passion, she was directed to the Carmel of Pau in the Atlantic Pyrenees. In 1870 she was among the foundresses of the Indian Carmel of Mangalore and in 1875 among the foundresses of the Carmel of Bethlehem. Mariam is considered a mystic and to her is attributed the miracle of having saved a Sicilian baby, just born and doomed to a certain death.

Maryam Sūltanah Danil Ghattas, on the other hand, born in Jerusalem on October 4, 1843, was a Palestinian religious and foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary of Jerusalem of the Latins. She died at Ein Kerem on March 25, 1927, and is known by the religious name of Mary Alphonsina.

Latin America looks toward PCO VIII

ÑAÑA, Peru - With a first meeting in Peru, which was held in our fraternity in Ñaña from February 9 to 13, the CCA began a series of meetings in each circumscription in order to animate the friars on the themes of PCO VIII. A commission, composed of three friars, Br. Carlos Azcona of Ecuador, Br. Alfredo Mirando of Peru, and Br. José Luis Cereijo of Río de la Plata, held the meeting that was on the realities of work in our contemporary world; pastoral work in a church that 'goes out'; the Biblical dimensions of work; work in our Franciscan Sources; and concluding with the challenge of the grace of working in our fraternities. After Peru, the next meetings in April will be in the Custody of Paraguay and in the Province of Río de la

Plata; in the month of May in the Provinces of Ecuador and Chile; and finally, in June, in the Custody of Venezuela and in the Province of Colombia. There will then be a synthesis of the contributions of all the friars, which will serve the delegates in order to offer the next PCO the ideas and way of thinking of the whole Conference. In Latin America all this work will conclude with the meeting of ALAC (Latin American Assembly of the Capuchins), during with the Provincial Ministers and the Delegates of the Conferences will also have time to reflect on 'The Grace of Working.' Thus we are inspiring each other, making our way to celebrate, in communion with all the brothers, this great event of the Spirit in our life as brothers and minors.

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15 years of the joy of being sisters

COCA, Ecuador - Among the celebrations of the Year of Consecrated Life, which is still in course, the Church of Agaurico is rejoicing in the celebration of 15 years of the presence of the Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe of the Capuchin Poor Clares. Founded in mission land, the community of the monastery brings the announcement of joy that comes from the common life in constant prayer, like 'sentinels of the morning and guardians of the night.' In a world marked by diverse and opposing changes and developments, the presence of a contemplative monastery in this local Church

is a cutting edge bid that offers to old conflicts and inequalities an alternative of joyous serenity, fraternity, and sisterly solidarity, all nourished by a life lived continually before the Blessed Sacrament. The brief and fruitful story of the monastery motivates the sisters, on this anniversary, as Pope Francis says, "to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to look to the future with joyful hope, having the certainty that it is the Lord guiding his work. It is thus time to sing a paraphrase of the psalmist: "How sweet and pleasant it is for sisters to live together in harmony."

