

Book Review: *The Capuchin Reform: A Franciscan Renaissance*

30 September 2003

Capuchin Friars' Voice from the past

By Marilyn Rodrigues "Catholic Weekly"

"When I first picked up the original copy in Italian it was an amazing experience for me because I thought: 'Here are the friars speaking for themselves'".

"It was like sitting at the table with someone and trying to translate what he is saying to other people who are there listening.

"It was really a personal meeting and it was a very powerful experience to sit with someone who is still present after 475 years and has something to say (to people today)."

Fr Paul Hanbridge, is discussing "*La Bella e Santa Riforma dei Frati Minori Cappuccin*", by the Capuchin Friar Melchior of Pobladura.

The book is a compilation of primary source passages from the first 50 years of the Capuchin reform. They give a portrait of the fledgling Capuchin order (it was founded in 1528), mainly through anecdotes about the first friars.

Now Fr Paul is meeting a 21st century need for his order to have more of its historical documents available in English by translating records of its early years.

His first effort is the English translation of Fr Melchior's work, "*The Capuchin Reform: A Franciscan Renaissance*". Its publication coincides with the 475th anniversary of the order.

Fr Paul says Capuchin Franciscans and others with an interest in Franciscan spirituality can benefit from having an English translation of the prized 16th century Italian texts.

It will interest not only Capuchin Franciscans but also Church historians, those interested in spiritual and religious life and people seeking core spiritual wisdom.

After all, these are men who followed St Francis; one who Fr Paul says "has a capacity in his writings to put his finger on the heart of the Gospel".

A lot of Fr Paul's work, especially in the beginning, was laborious, especially as some of the Italian used was antiquated and his grasp of Italian owed much to his having grown up with vernacular Italian in Leichhardt.

He would often spend hours on one sentence or one paragraph and says the process was like walking a tightrope between fidelity to the text and readability.

"There is always a tension because when you are translating you are serving two masters, the author and the readers," he says. "And, however you try to do that, it is never 100 per cent faithful to either. But there were things in there when I first read it that impressed me and I hope they might help others.

There are things about prayer, which are quite extraordinary.

The friars described Capuchin religious life as they lived and understood it - the spirit of St Francis of Assisi, the meaning and practice of gospel poverty, being in the service of God and neighbour, the primacy of prayer from the heart and fraternal love.

People in the West don't realise they have a marvellous philosophical heritage that for many centuries paralleled with Christian sources."

Fr Paul's motive in doing the translation was to try to identify the Capuchin identity, partly by learning how the first friars saw themselves.

The first friars were dedicated to contemplation but they also worked, preaching, caring for the sick and even running a weaving business.

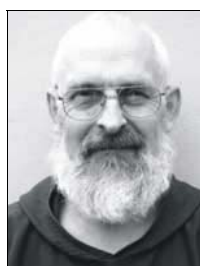
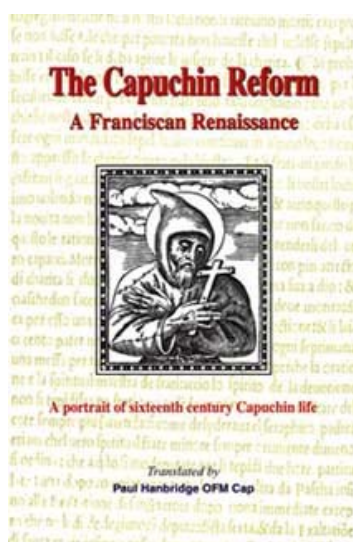
Fr Paul says Capuchin friars today are much the same, in that they are both contemplative and active.

The Capuchin reform, which was begun by Franciscan friar Matteo di Bascio and twins Louis and Raphael Fossombone, in Camerino, Italy, was approved by Rome on July 3, 1528.

Latest Arrivals

Historical texts from the first years of the Capuchin Franciscan movement are not generally available in English. This translation is the result of the belief that in these pages we can glimpse the life of the first Capuchins and meet some of them in the vivid recollections of their contemporaries. The Capuchin Reform had affected the entire Franciscan Family and took place against the background of the Renaissance and Reformation. Therefore the English title: *The Capuchin Reform – A Franciscan Renaissance*, adapting it from the heading of Pobladura's first chapter in his book, first published in Italian as *La Bella e Santa Riforma dei Frati Minori Cappuccini*.

The text is a place of encounter, and through such meetings, the shadowy image of these brothers takes on greater definition. And more wonderfully, their history becomes ours. Of course, such texts will be valuable for anyone interested in the Franciscan movement or charism and its remarkably diverse forms of expression down the centuries.



Paul Hanbridge

THE CAPUCHIN REFORM

A Franciscan Renaissance

Translated by

Paul Hanbridge OFM Cap

Price: Aus \$ 50

Pages 391

ISBN No. 81-7495-155-5

Born in Sydney, Australia and educated by the Christian Brothers. He joined the Capuchins in 1972 and studied Philosophy and Theology at the Catholic Theological Union Sydney. Ordained priest on 8 Dec 1979, he has been involved in Parish Ministry and initial Capuchin formation. Since 1998 he has been as member of the Capuchin Hermitage Murrurundi, New South Wales, where the Capuchin Province of Australia has a fraternity dedicated to the contemplative prayer. He has to his credit an English rendering of several Italian works. Currently at the Capuchin International College, Rome he is taking background courses for translating other sources of Capuchin Reform. The translation of Bernardino of Colpetrazzo's 3 volume Chronicles is already in course.