

SEEING ST. FRANCIS THE MOORMAN COLLECTION

ST. FRANCIS WAS NEVER SENTIMENTAL, BUT RATHER A "TERRIFYING PERSON" WHO STILL TODAY "THROWS DOWN A CHALLENGE TO THE VALUES OF A MATERIALISTIC SOCIETY," ACCORDING TO ONE OF THE GREATEST SCHOLARS OF FRANCISCAN HISTORY

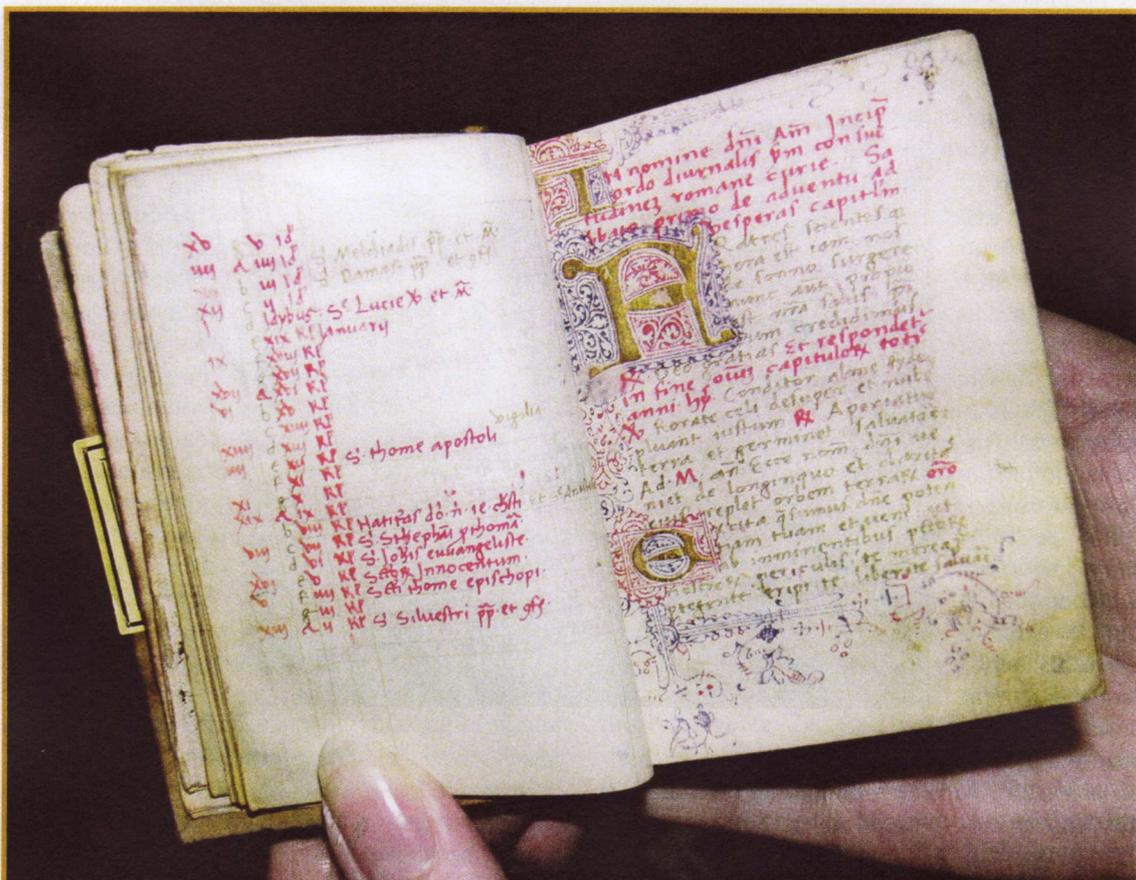


Photo: Lucy Gordan

A tiny 15th-century breviary written on parchment of 272 pages. It was used by an itinerant friar. Below, the Right Reverend John Moorman. An Anglican, Moorman was fascinated by St. Francis of Assisi and was perhaps the 20th century's leading historian of the of the Franciscan Order

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

Last July, thanks to the generosity of Visit Britain in New York City, Rail Europe, and the tourist board for England's North Country, as well as the hospitality of the warden, the Rev. Peter Francis, I had the opportunity to return to St. Deiniol's Library at Hawarden in North Wales.

For nearly a decade I had written extensively for a worldwide audience about this "intellectual hospice," founded at his home by William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1889), four times prime minister of England, "for the promotion of Divine learning." One of my articles, "St. Deiniol's



Library: The Place to Book Into" was published as an "Of Books, Art, and People" essay in ITV February 2006.

The purpose of my return visit was to study in greater depth the Moorman Collection, the largest collection of memorabilia (2,000 books) concerning St. Francis of Assisi and early Franciscan history ever to be in private hands, as well as the life of John Moorman, donor to St. Deiniol's Library as a bequest in 1989.

"Moorman chose St. Deiniol's because he knew our former warden, Rev. Peter Jagger, well; because he wanted his materials to be available open-access to scholars at a library already well-known for its theological content; and because he

wanted his collection to stay in Britain, but not in a big library with bureaucratic access restrictions,” Patsy Williams, head librarian, told me.

After I saw the habit worn by St. Francis when he received the stigmata (on display in the exhibition “*Petros Eni*”) and after I heard from Archpriest Angelo Comastri (who is in charge of St. Peter’s Basilica) that St. Francis was his favorite saint because “I relate to him; I find myself in him, my dreams, my aspirations, my sensibilities, my ideals,” I thought it was time to tell *Inside the Vatican* readers more about Moorman, a remarkable Anglican cleric, and his life-long devotion to St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) — the patron saint of animals, ecology, Italy, and tapestry makers.

MOORMAN’S DEVOTION

“I saw St. Francis,” exclaimed John Moorman (1905-89) in a 1979 interview. “I have spent a lot of time during the last 50 years reading and thinking about St. Francis, and spent some hours in the crypt of Assisi looking at the stone coffin in which his body was said to lie, so it was very moving to be present last year when the saint’s body was exhumed and re-encased before being replaced in the sarcophagus. I never thought that one day I would actually see and touch his bones.”

Moorman’s study of St. Francis and of the early history of the Franciscan Order was inspired by three incidents of his youth.

As a teenager, his mother gave him a copy of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

Then, as an undergraduate at Cambridge after reading the lives of the saint by Paul Sabatier (his father’s copy and the volume Moorman numbered no. 1 of his collection), by Chesterton, by Father Cuthbert and by St. Bonaventure (1221-1274), Moorman spent three weeks in Assisi. He stayed with the Poor Clares at San Quirico and immersed himself in the atmosphere of the Franciscan holy places.

Third, he met a Brother Douglas SSF, whose ministry among vagrants made a deep impression upon him as a modern example of St. Francis’ simplicity.

MOORMAN THE SCHOLAR

Moorman’s first writings about St. Francis were *Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (1940), in which he argued that the *Legenda Trium Sociorum* or *Legend of the Three Companions* (a letter written from Greccio by three friars, Leo, Rufino, and Angelo, on August 11, 1246, to Crescentius of Iesi) represented the earlier tradition and that Thomas of Celano’s *Vita Prima*

was the copy; *A New Fioretti* (1946, a collection of early stories of St. Francis previously untranslated); and a biography (1950), where he describes St. Francis as “the one perfect Christian” and insists that his calling was “not to escape from the world, but to give oneself to the world, asking nothing for oneself and ready to suffer and die for the souls of men.”

Moorman’s later works include his *A History of the Franciscan Order, From Its Origins to the Year 1517* (1968), *Richest of Poor Men* (1977), which owes its title to Thomas of Celano who in his *Vita Prima* calls Francis “*ditissimus pauper*,” and *Medieval Franciscan Houses* (1983), a list of some 4,500 Franciscan establishments for friars and Poor Clares, from China in the East to Cuba in the West, up to the year 1517, when the

Franciscan Order began to divide into three major groups, which all observe the same rule of life, but differ in their interpretation, each branch adopting a different color habit which would distinguish one from the other.

MOORMAN THE COLLECTOR

In an article about his Bibliotheca Franciscana, Moorman mentions the Pontifical Athenaeum “Antonianum,” (Via Merulana 124, 00185 Rome, tel. 06-70373571, librarian: Padre Maricio Portillo OFM, e-mail: portillo@mvant.enet.urbe.it) and the Quaracchi Library in Grottaferrata as the most extensive sources for Franciscan scholars.

Moorman points out that his personal library is concerned only with the medieval friars. It includes the writings of St. Francis; biographies of St. Francis; biographies of other early Franciscans; the early history of the Order; the history of the Poor Clares and tertiaries; and the works of leading Franciscan writers before 1517: Jacopone of

Todi, St. Bonaventure, Alexander of Hales, Duns Scotus, and *Doctor Mirabilis* Roger Bacon (who was mentioned in my article, “Eyeglasses: Made to Magnify God’s Word,” April 2006). The collection also contains periodicals dealing exclusively with Franciscan history. Moorman concedes that his collection, although “primarily the working library of a scholar, and not the pride and glory of a bibliophile,” does include “a number of old, uncommon and curious books.”

The oldest books in the collection are a handful of manuscripts. In my earlier article about St. Deiniol’s I mentioned the 15th-century Italian *Missale Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, of particular interest because it was “regularly used in a medieval friary” as well as the tiny Breviary “easy for an itinerant friar to carry in his pocket.” The others are a collection of works by St. Bonaventure: a “*Forma investiendi fratres tertii ordinis S. Fran-*



The complete works of St. Bernardine of Siena published in Venice in 1591

Photo: Lucy Gordon

cisci" written for the Third Order in Antwerp and containing the oath in German; and a little book of *inter alia* ("among other things"), a tract on cases of conscience by Friar Clarus de Florentia, of whose work very few examples have survived.

Contemporary with the manuscripts is a small group of *incunabula* (printed works from prior to 1500), most of which are works by St. Bonaventure, by St. Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444), and by scholastic theologian Alexander of Hales (n.d.-1245).

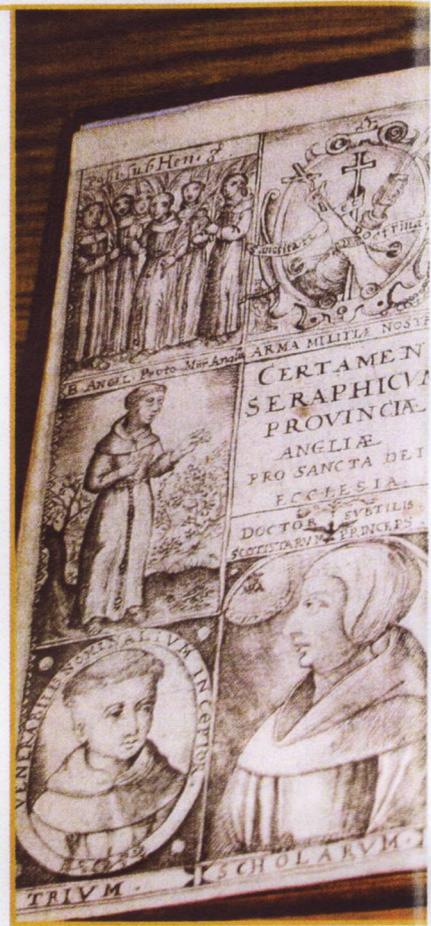
The rarest, however, is a copy in excellent condition of *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae* by Ubertino da Casale, printed in Venice by Andrea Bonettis de Pavia in 1485. Ubertino, who joined the Order of Friars Minor in 1273, was one of the leaders of the *Zelanti*, or Spirituals. "This is a very important book," comments Moorman, "for anyone studying the history of the Order; but, curiously enough, it has never been reprinted since the first edition of 1485."

Other rarities in the collection include a second edition of *Speculum Vitae*, accounts of incidents of St. Francis' life documented by Brother Leo in 1246, printed at Metz in 1509 and discovered by Paul Sabatier, the great 19th-century biographer of the

saint; *De Conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam domini Iesu Christi redemptoris nostri* ("On the Conformity of the Life of Blessed Francis to the Life of Our Lord Redeemer Jesus Christ"), material compiled in 1399 by a friar called Bartholomew of



Although Jacopone is often called "blessed" or "saint," he has never been beatified or canonized by the Church, in part because of the satires he wrote against frequently-maligned Pope Boniface VIII



JACOPONE DA TODI A LEGENDARY FRANCISCAN

Open until May 2, 2007, in the beautiful Umbrian hill town of Todi, is a splendid exhibition about its most famous native son, Jacopone da Todi, to celebrate the 700th anniversary of his death on Christmas night 1306.

Jacopone da Todi (Todi 1236-Collazzone 1306), an early Franciscan friar, is certainly not a household name. Nor is he among Italy's best-known writers. But he is famous for his 100 mystical *laudi* in the Umbrian dialect (songs in praise of the Lord). He also wrote two short prose works in Latin, *Dicta* and *Tractatus utilis-simus*; and the lyrics *Stabat mater dolorosa* are attributed to him. Probably being the first scholar who dramatized Gospel subjects for the stage, Jacopone, greatly admired by his contemporary Dante Alighieri, is consid-

ered a pioneer in Italian theater.

Although his biography, especially before his vows, has few reliable historical sources, it is generally agreed that, like his mentor St. Francis, Jacopone, whose given name was Jacopo Benedicti or Benedetti, was born into a wealthy family.

He studied law at Bologna, the oldest university in the Western world (1088) and the most distinguished in Italy at that time, and became a successful lawyer.

Probably in 1267 he married a very pious noblewoman called Vanna, daughter of Bernardino, count of Collemedio.

A decade later tragedy struck. Part of the floor of Jacopone's house collapsed during a party, killing his young wife.

During his attempt to revive her, he discovered that beneath her splendid robes she had secretly been wearing a hairshirt to mortify her flesh.

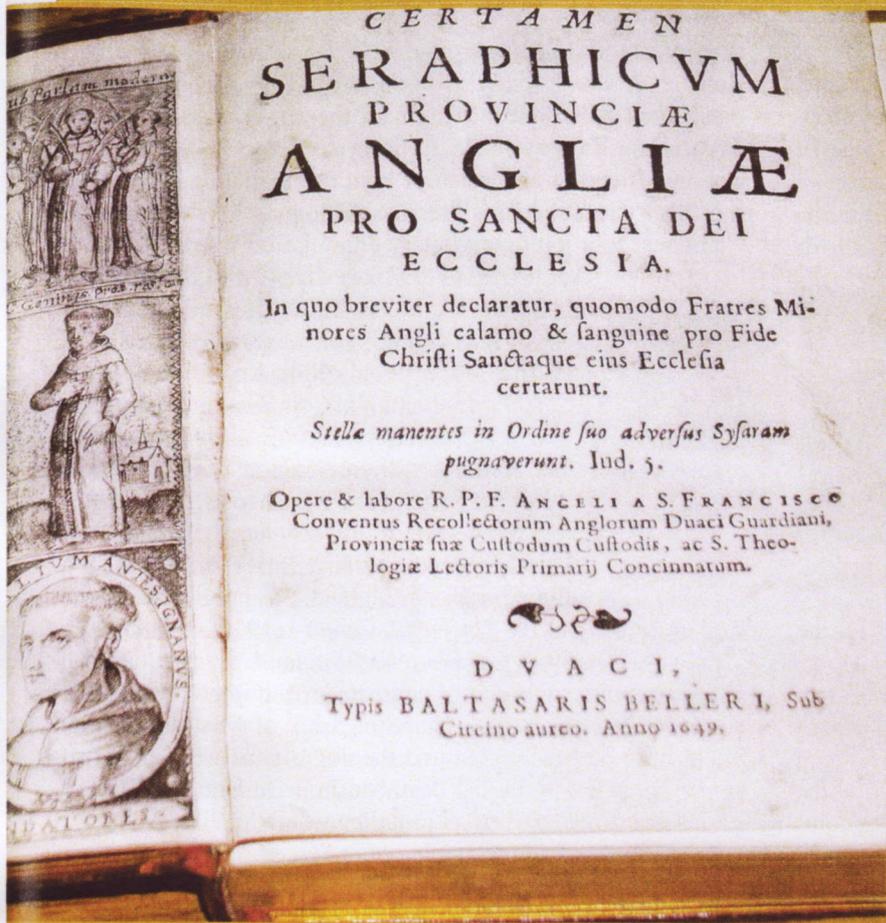


Photo: Lucy Gordon

Pisa, comparing the life of St. Francis with the life of Christ and printed in Milan by Gotardo Pontico in 1510 (over the next 200 years this book was declared blasphemous and used by Protestants, including Martin Luther, as evidence in an attempt to discredit the Roman Catholic Church); and *Certamen Seraphicum*, published in Douai in 1649, an account of the sufferings of the English Franciscans at the time of the Reformation, written by an Irish friar who called himself "Angelo a S. Francisco."

Over the centuries, many Franciscans and laymen wrote biographies of St. Francis (more than 100 of which, in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Swedish, are in the Moorman Collection), but Paul Sabatier's *Vie de Saint François* (1894) included information from newly-discovered material, and became justly famous. The collection includes an early edition of Sabatier's book inscribed by the author, as well as 30 other of Sabatier's works and many autograph letters.

Besides books, often annotated in the margins by Moorman, Gladstone-style, other items of interest in the collection are a Bull of Indulgence granted by French-born Gregory XI, one of the Avignon Popes, (1336-1378, reigned from 1370-78) on July 23, 1373, to six Franciscan friars of Scarzole in the diocese of Orvieto, to take effect one year after its receipt; a silver penny dating to the reign of Edward

Below, a miniature depicting Jacopone da Todi in the 15th-century manuscript number 2762 in the Biblioteca Riccardiana in Florence. Left, a fresco depicting Jacopone da Todi by Paolo Uccello, once in the Cappella dell'Assunta in the Cathedral of Prato, now in Prato's Museum of Mural Paintings

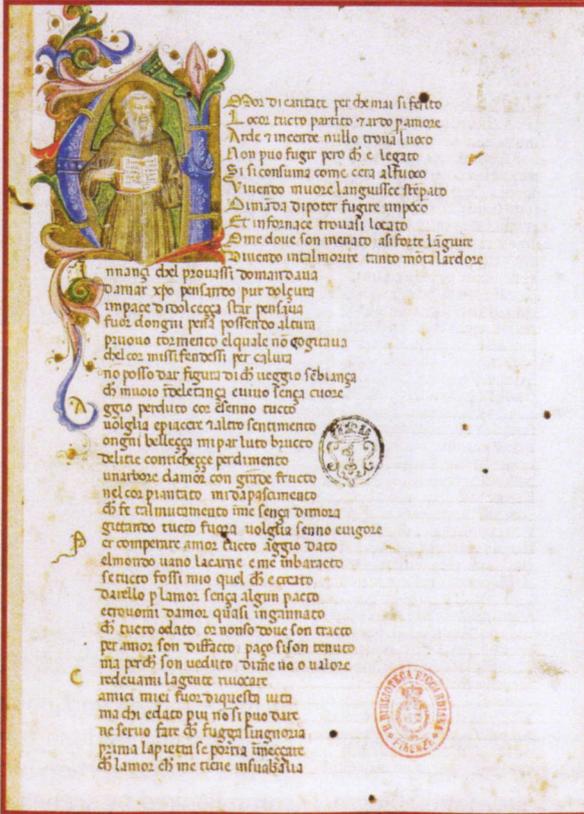
This fact and the death of his beloved shocked Jacopone so deeply that he gave up his law practice.

Much to the horror of his friends and relatives, wearing the habit of a Franciscan tertiary, he spent the next 10 years roaming the Umbrian countryside and subjecting himself to frequent ridicule. Yet as he wrote:

*"A wise and courteous choice he'd make
Who'd be a fool for the dear Lord's sake."*

Jacopone's folly was the folly of the Cross, and in 1278, he officially joined the Franciscan Order.

By that time, St. Francis being dead just over 50 years, the order had divided into two factions: one more lenient, the other more severe, supported by Pope Celestine V and Jacopone, preached absolute poverty and penitence. They hoped their example would



bring about a drastic change of attitude within the Church, too long marred by secularism and corruption.

But on Celestine's death in 1297, the newly-"elected" Pope Boniface VIII opposed his predecessor's and Jacopone's strict views.

In response, on May 10 of that year, Jacopone signed a covenant called the *Manifesto di Lunghezza* with Cardinals Giacomo and Pietro of the powerful Roman noble family Colonna, which called for Boniface's deposition. The Pope excommunicated them.

The military battle which followed the next year ended with the siege of Palestrina, a hill town outside of Rome, and the imprisonment of Jacopone and his allies for the next five years.

Even in jail, from his dungeon cell, Jacopone wrote some of his most touching and aggressive poems. He remained steadfast in condemning the corruption of the

III (1312-1377), "which must at one time have belonged to a friar living in the Franciscan house in Cambridge"; and a card index compiled by Moorman, "containing biographical notes on about 7,000 of a total of 10,000 Franciscans who lived in England between 1224 and 1538."

"Along with his bequest of books," said Patsy Williams, "Moorman left funds for a scholarship for *in situ* study of St. Francis. The Society of St. Francis, an Anglican group with a devotion to St. Francis, supports our purchase of new books, including almost everything published in English, which complement Moorman's original bequest and keep the collection up-to-date. They also advise us on what new publications are available."

MOORMAN'S ECUMENISM

When in 1962 Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey had to choose three Anglican observers for the Second Vatican Council, his choice of Right Reverend Moorman, the bishop of Ripon since 1959, as the chief, was universally approved. Moorman's obituary in the *London Times* on January 17, 1989, reports: "Moorman did credit to the Church of England in his encounters in Rome; he had a necessity of the historic episcopate, and his zeal for the Franciscan Order commended him to his hosts."

His personal account of the Council, *Vatican Observed*, was published in 1967. A year earlier, thanks to his personal inter-

ventions, the Anglican Centre in Rome (Piazza Collegio Romano 7, which today still houses the largest library outside the United Kingdom on Anglican theology) was set up, and Archbishop Ramsey made an historic visit to Pope Paul VI, a personal friend of Moorman. A joint declaration, prepared during this visit, called for "serious dialogue" between the two Churches, so a joint preparatory commission was set up of 10 Anglicans (with Moorman as their chairman) and 10 Roman Catholics from different parts of the world. This commission was succeeded in 1970 by the more permanent Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, whose final aim was "the attainment of full, organic union between our two communions," and issued an "Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine."

In addition to his scholarship on St. Francis, Moorman was also a respected historian of the Church of England. He published *Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century* (1945) and three editions of *A History of the Church of England*, first published in 1953. A strong supporter of ecumenism and inter-Church relations, for Moorman good churchmanship of whatever religion could only be based on sound theology. Thus what an appropriate homage that on his deathbed in a Durham hospital, his parish priest read to him — in Italian which he, like Gladstone, spoke fluently — the *Canticle of the Sun*. ●

Lucy Gordan is the culture and arts editor of Inside the Vatican.



Two modern biographies of St. Francis

Church and of royalty, strongly believing that they were only interested in their personal power and wealth and not in the welfare of the people.

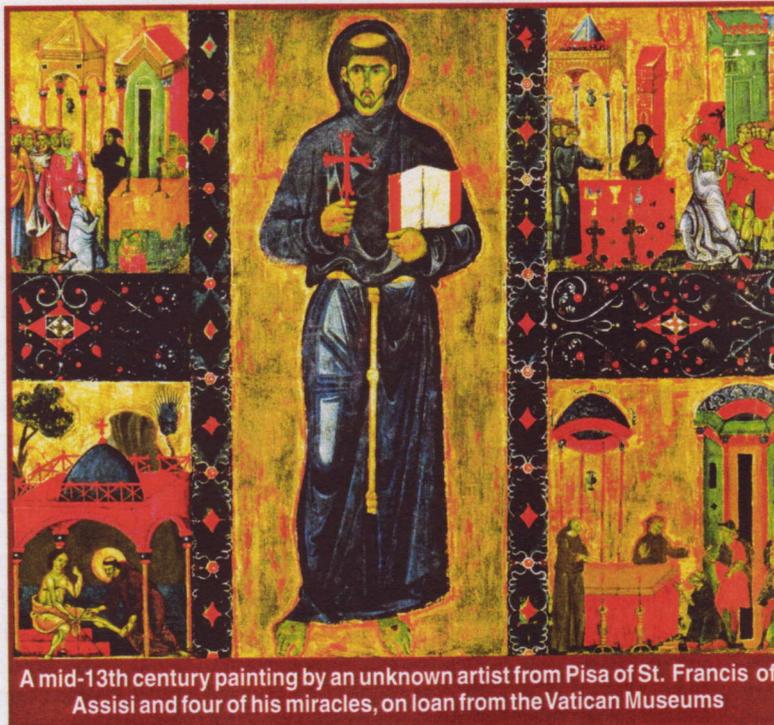
His frequent requests to Boniface for absolution were denied and he was not released until October 11, 1303, a month after Boniface VIII's death, thanks to Pope Benedict XI.

Jacopone seems to have spent his last years as a recluse in the hospice of the Friars Minor near the Poor Clare monastery of San Lorenzo, about 20 kilometers from Todi.

Since 1433 his bones have been buried in the crypt of Todi's Church of San Fortunato.

The first item on display in the first section of the exhibition is the manuscript of the *Manifesto di Lunghezza*.

Considered the most reliable source of the poet's biogra-



A mid-13th century painting by an unknown artist from Pisa of St. Francis of Assisi and four of his miracles, on loan from the Vatican Museums

phy because signed by him, it proclaimed Celestine V's abdication as Pope (the only Pope to do so), and therefore Boniface VIII's election, invalid and called for a new conclave.

There had long been hard feelings between Jacopone and Boniface (born in 1235), who spent his youth in Todi, where his uncle Pietro was the bishop from 1252 to 1276.

Other items of special interest are the Benedetti family tree; Boniface's Papal Bull against the Colonnas; several early biographies of Jacopone; manuscripts and early printed editions of his writings; and miniatures of him

in manuscripts and paintings of him, including a fresco by Paolo Uccello on loan from a museum in Prato.

The second section includes several paintings of St. Francis, some flanked by scenes of his miracles. ■