

ANDREW CORSINI

Saint, bishop

Andrew Corsini was born in Florence at the beginning of the XIV century, one of the twelve children of Nicholas Corsini and Gemma degli Stracciabende. The first mention that we have of him is of Aug. 3, 1338: in a power of attorney he is the eighteenth among the fifty-two religious of the convent of Carmel in Florence. In the second half of April, 1343 (the document is dated 1344, according to the style of Pisa), we find him in Pisa, in a contract between the religious and the Company of the Battuti. In the 1344 chapter of the Tuscan province, he was appointed a counselor of the convent of Florence and bachelor; and he appears as such from June 1 of that year until May, 1347. Then, in the chapter of the following June 15, besides being confirmed as a counselor, he was named a lector of the same convent.

During the year 1348 he went into France for the general chapter of the Order at Metz. There he was made superior Of the Tuscan province, an office that he filled until the first days of 1350, even after his nomination as bishop of Fiesole. The acts of his provincialate of less than two years had to take account of the serious situation that had been created because of the black plague. The necrology of the Carmel records more than a hundred dead during the years 1348-49. That notwithstanding, the building of the church of Carmel did not stop; and the last registered act of his his provincialate, on Jan. 9, 1350, is exactly an accounting of the money for the said building. Meanwhile, with the bull of Oct. 13, 1349, Pope Clement VI had named him bishop of Fiesole, a see that had remained vacant at the death of "Filignus Oliveri Carboni".

At the same time, the Pope had communicated the nomination to the chapter of the cathedral, to the clergy, and to the people of the diocese; furthermore, he granted the indult for Andrew's consecration. The inscription on his tomb will say that "he was snatched from Carmel to the church and the miter of Fiesole". These words, perhaps, gave rise to the legend of his flight to the Carthusians and of his later acceptance of the nomination as bishop, as the result of a vision. We do not know when the letter of nomination arrived; but we find Andrew, as provincial, in the convent of Florence on Oct. 29, Nov. 27, and Dec. 6 of 1349. Hence it was not possible for him to disappear for too long a time. Unjustified and useless, therefore, was the haste Of the canons to elect another candidate; as a matter of fact, such a right of election had been revoked from them by the Pope.

We do not know when the consecration or the installation in Fiesole took place. The first recorded act of his episcopate preserved for us carries the date of March 28, 1350. Andrew broke the tradition of more than a century, according to which the bishops of Fiesole resided in Florence, next to the church of St. Mary in the Field. He wanted to remain always near his people, near his cathedral, which was indeed threatening ruin, and in his episcopal palace, even though this needed repairs and furnishings. He restricted his needs to the most indispensable; he reduced to six the number of his attendants, and with these and two religious of Carmel he led a monastic life. He wore the Carmelite habit and carried a small iron chain around his waist (which chain is still

preserved today). Scrupulously exact, he himself kept the accounts of administration Of the house, of the episcopal table, and of the contributions to the Pope. He accounted for and directed the various works of the churches and hospitals. The servants themselves entrusted to him the amounts scraped together during their time of service.

He reclaimed for himself the granting of ecclesiastical benefices, and kept them free of any kind of trafficking. He insisted that the beneficiaries have holy orders. He ordinarily had two vicars to help him in the government of the diocese, while a third was appointed for Casentino, too far away from Fiesole. He personally took account of the religious situation by means of canonical visitations. Vigilance was especially needed in regard to the conduct of the clergy, which left much to be desired: ignorance, bad habits, gambling, secular clothes. Some clerics were obliged to present themselves within a certain time, to be reexamined; in no way did he tolerate the clerics who failed in their obligation of chastity. Also, a short length of time was allowed to those who did not reside in their parishes; and if they did not return, they were punished by the revocation of their benefice.

For the purpose of having a better clergy in the future, he instituted, in 1372, a confraternity of priests who would contribute, by their example and works, to the scientific and moral formation of future priests. To his personal example he added the ministry of preaching, so that one of the praises engraved on his tomb could call him "marvelous by the example of his life and his eloquence." No less was his care in helping the needy. He defined himself as "the father and administrator of the poor". And the poor were not lacking, especially during his first years as bishop, in consequence of the plague of 1348-49. In fact, it is precisely a regulation on their behalf that on March 28, 1350, he emanated the first documented act of his episcopate. He was demanding in claiming the income of pious legacies, because it was necessary for the poor (to whom he gave "for the love of God") and for the restoration and furnishing of various churches. He also exercised a strict vigilance over the income destined for the sick and for pilgrims.

With regard to the condition of the sacred buildings, he continued the restoration of the cathedral, already begun by his predecessor. He restored the facade; he redid, at least in part, the roof. He had the new choir made by the master Peter Lando of Siena, spending 144 gold florins on the work. Today only the episcopal throne remains. He also restored and beautified the episcopal palace, perhaps with the hope that his successors would be induced to remain there. He restored several other churches, among them St. Mary in the Field in Florence (this church belonged to the bishop of Fiesole). He took particular care of the church of Figline Valdarno; and here he wished to have a room for himself, where he could stay, since it was a zone far from Fiesole. On the first of June, 1368, he consecrated the high altar and, on the following March 25, that of Our Lady in the abbey of Fiesole. He founded a monastery of nuns which was later transferred to Florence and was called that of the Ancoresses of St. Mary of the Flower, or of Lapo. He also gave twenty-four volumes on various subjects to the convent of Carmel. And the last entry signed by his hand is the gift of a rich chasuble to the chapter of the cathedral, on Dec. 28, 1373, nine days before his death.

Also extant are testimonials to the work he accomplished for the sake of peace. Ecclesiastics and rich merchants of Florence and Fiesole, powerful citizens of Prato, Pistoia and other cities had recourse to him as to an impartial and incorruptible arbiter. Not so well documented is the mission of peace with which he is said to have been charged by the Pope in the city of Bologna when this city was restored to the obedience of the Pope, against the intrigues of the Visconti of Milan. Del Castagno reports it from the account given in Florence by Cardinal Albergati. However, the year is not known; and Father Caioli thinks that there is confusion with the well-known mission of another holy Carmelite, St. Peter Thomas, in 1364.

Andrew died on Jan. 6, 1374 (1373, according to the Florentine calendar).

Del Castagno relates that on Christmas night, 1373, the Blessed Virgin advised Andrew of his death; he also relates other miraculous events. The clergy of Fiesole, notwithstanding the testamentary disposition of the saint of wishing to be buried in the Carmel of Florence, buried him in their own city. But the religious of Florence did not give up: perhaps with the consent of the new bishop, Neri Corsini, a brother of Andrew, named on Jan. 17, they came to Fiesole on the night of Feb. 2, stole the body, and carried it to Florence, where it was clamorously received by all the clergy, exposed for three days in the view of the people, and then buried. Twelve years later, still incorrupt, the body was placed in the monument erected by the relatives of the saint in the church of Carmel. This monument was destroyed in a fire of 1771 (though the body was able to be saved); but it was entirely like that of his brother Neri, still preserved today in the cloister of the Holy Spirit. It contained the Latin inscription attributed by Del Castagno to Coluccio Salutati.

The most ancient biographical notice of Andrew is that of the Catalogue of the Carmelite Saints, at the end of the XIV or beginning of the XV cent. It contains the affirmation of his sanctity, the mention of his episcopate at Fiesole, his death and burial, his miracles — recorded in a general way — and a transcription of the inscription on his tomb. This inscription was placed there in 1385 and tells of his charity towards the poor and of his oratorical eloquence, and reports the precise day of his death. Then one must wait until the middle of the XV cent. to have the first *Life*. This *Life*, attributed to the Carmelite, Peter Del Castagno, is quite debatable. Its author pronounced a panegyric of the saint in 1440 before a numerous gathering of Florentines desirous of hearing of the deeds of their illustrious fellow-citizen — from whom, exactly at that time, it was said they had obtained the signal grace of the victory of Anghiari over the troops of Piccinino.

The *Life* is found in the codex Vat. lat., 3813, ff. 28v-47v (end of the fifteenth century); the Vatican library received it on Aug. 21, 1601. A resume (with some details further developed), in Latin and by an anonymous author, was found in a manuscript of John Gielemans (d. 1484) and was published by L. Surio, *De probatis Sanctorum historiis* I, Cologne, 1570, pp. 143-48. The same resume — but in Italian, and perhaps contemporary — was published from a codex of the House of Corsini in Florence, in the

Rivista Storica Carmelitana, I (1929-30), pp. 8-20. This had already been published, from a codex of the Magliabechiana, but with the Italian adapted to the modern style, by Father Santi Mattei in his *Vita di S. Andrea*, Corsini, Florence, 1872.

The Life of Del Castagno was published for the first time by Father Dominic of Jesus in the *Acta Canonizationis S. Andreae Corsini*, Paris, 1638, pp. 174-224, with the notes on pp. 225-244. However, this was not copied directly from the codex Vaticanus, but from a transcription furnished him by R. Bertholet, a Carmelite and the suffragan bishop of Lyons. The Bollandists republished the work of Father Dominic, preceded by an introduction, in the *Acta Sanctorum Januarii*, II, Antwerp, 1643, pp. 1061-1073. A comparison with the codex Vaticanus shows some variants, not only in the Latin (generally bettered), but in matters that touch the substance of the text. After this Life, the Bollandists also published the Latin text of the anonymous author (*ib.*, pp. 1073-1077).

Practically all the Lives depend on Del Castagno, a source with little credibility. Furthermore, the attribution of the Life in the Vat. codex to Del Castagno is not entirely certain, at least in the full sense of the word. In the text, he is mentioned as the panegyrist of the Saint in 1440; and it is declared that "almost everything that has been said he preached publicly before the cardinals," etc. But several times mention is also made of the writer, who has taken accounts of miracles from notarial briefs: "I, the writer, took from..." These words have been taken as a token of modesty of Del Castagno, who did not want to be called the author; but they can, on the other hand, mean that the writer was someone else, even if for the greater part he used notes from the sermon of Del Castagno. This latter author would be a contemporary or, in any case, from before the year 1446. In this hypothesis, the many omissions and errors attributed to Del Castagno – which could have been avoided without much difficulty – would be more easily understood.

In fact, since Del Castagno was suddenly called on to preach before an assembly convinced of the intervention of the saint in the outcome of the battle, and in the midst of the extraordinary preparations for the festivities, he did not have the time or the opportunity to inform himself as he should have done, at least by consulting the books of administration that he had as close as the library of his convent. These were books that he (or others) did not even take the trouble to consult, although he (or they) did indeed find a way to look through the notarial acts with more calm, in order to find the reported miracles. These latter were more interesting to the people, and the saint's biographer was prompt to satisfy this interest.

The panegyric character of the compilation is evident, especially in the section where the words of the hymn of the Confessors serve as his inspiration. With this, we do not mean to say that the author invented these accounts; rather, we can suppose that they were the echo of oral tradition, a tradition which is more ample in regard to the episcopal period in the life of the saint. But it is also true that it was necessary, in the light of critical investigation, to fuse all the information into an organic whole. Only in 1929, however, through the merits of Father Paul Caioli, did hagiographical studies on

Saint Andrew progress notably. Various reviews of his book, however, demanded a still greater independence of Del Castagno; they were not far-fetched observations.

Del Castagno can be accepted (though not always) when he relates things seen or heard by him personally; as for the other material, especially for the period of the religious life of the saint, many elements must be taken as *topoi* /common types/ of a hagiographical tradition. Among these are, obviously, the sterility of his mother and the consequent vow to offer her firstborn to the Virgin; also his unbridled life-style up to his fifteenth year. Unconfirmed are: the dream of his mother, who believed she was giving birth to a wolf; the date of his birth (Nov. 30, 1301); the particulars of his entrance into religion and of his profession; the miracles worked before and after his ordination as a priest; the celebration of his first Mass in the chapel of St. Mary of the Woods / the *Se/ve*/ near Florence and the apparition of Our Lady on that occasion; the flight to the Charterhouse, in order to escape the bishopric; the peace mission to Bologna; and the attribution of the inscription on his tomb to Coluccio Salutati.

On the other hand, it is certain that his mother was not named Pellegrina, but Gemma (and in vain has it been suggested that Nicholas Corsini had two wives); the prior general of the Carmelites, in whose name the saint made his religious profession, was certainly not John Ballester. Moreover, it is not true that the saint studied three years in Paris, or that he passed through Avignon in order to visit his cousin Peter, who had become a cardinal in 1369. The saint was not a prior of the Carmelite convent in Florence; his election as bishop of Fiesole did not occur in 1362, but in 1349. His manner of election (namely, on the part of the chapter) was not that as described; and it is absurd that the body of the saint, carried from Fiesole about a month after his death, was kept seated on a throne, as if he were alive, up until 1440. Furthermore, this notice cannot be reconciled with another, also false, that his tomb was built in 1375. Finally, Del Castagno shows that he himself was completely ignorant of the fact that the saint was also a prior provincial of Tuscany.

CULT. The enthusiasm aroused by the virtues of St. Andrew was not extinguished after his death. Rather, it was fostered by the favors that the people attributed to his miraculous interventions — among which the most famous would have been that of the battle of Anghiari in 1440. The victory of Anghiari, in fact, occurred after a procession to the tomb of the saint, a procession that was said to have been requested by the saint himself on June 5, 1440. The army of Piccinino was defeated on the 29th of the same month.

The celebrations that were held, with particular ceremony, around the body of the saint in consequence of the victory were considered equivalent to a beatification, especially since Pope Eugene IV permitted them to be repeated annually. A special "provision" of the Florentine commune decreed that every year, in perpetuity, on the second Sunday of June, their Lordships and the Six of the Merchants' Union, together with the Captains of the Arts, should go in solemn procession to the Carmelite church, in order to offer a candle at the altar of the blessed Andrew, whose body was to be exposed to the sight of the faithful. Moreover, it was decreed that every year, on June 29, with a sum of 70

florins, twenty poor persons were to be clothed, and these would have the obligation of going to the church of St. Peter Major in order to make an offering and to assist at the solemn Mass. By a new «provision» of 1468, the authorities dispensed themselves from the procession; and it was decreed that, of the 70 florins, 30 be used to clothe Carmelite novices and the remaining 40 for twelve of the poor.

Urgent petitions of the Signoria /government of Florence/ to the Pope for Andrew's solemn canonization were sent in 1465 and 1466. The Pope named a commission in this regard; but only on April 29, 1629, did the solemn ceremony of canonization take place in the Vatican. However, the liturgical office was already being celebrated at Fiesole and in the Carmelite Order. Today the body of the saint reposes in the Corsini chapel, inaugurated on Oct. 24, 1683, of the Carmelite church in Florence; the architect was Francis Silvani.

J. B. Foggini sculptured the three great bas-reliefs, and Luke Giordano painted the saint in glory in the cupola.

Another chapel in the saint's honor was constructed in Rome in 1734, in St. John Lateran's, by Pope Clement XII (Corsini). The design is by the Florentine architect Alexander Galilei; Pincellotti, Cornacehini, Maini, Monaldi, Bracci and Montauti also worked there. Scenes from the life of the saint are illustrated in marble, while on the altar is a copy of the picture by Guido Reni on the occasion of the canonization. (The original is in the Barberini gallery.) Clement XII willed to be buried in this chapel.

The liturgical celebration has the rank of feast for the Carmelites (and obligatory memorial for the Discalced in Italy), and is assigned to Jan. 9.

SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY: *Catalogus Sanctorum*. The description of the cod. Vat. 3813 is found in the *Anal. Boll.* XVII (185.8), pp. 314-317. It may be useful to know that a copy of the rare book of Fr. Dominic of Jesus, *Acta Canonizationis S. Andrew Corsini*, together with the first edition of the biography by Del Castagno, is in the Vatican library, Barber. JJ. I. 30. For the rest one is referred to Fr. Caioli, O. Carm., *S. A. C., carmelitano e vescovo di Fiesole, Florence 1929* Among the reviews of this volume, the following offer contributions: Anastasio di S. Paolo, *De S. A. C. in Analecta O.C.D.*, IV (1930) pp. 238-250; R. Lechat, in *Anal. Boll.*, XLVIII (1930), pp. 432-434. Also useful are the studies of A. Cuschieri, *La biografia di S. A. C. nel secolo e nell'Ordine carmelitano, in Rivista storica carmelitana*, I (1929-30) pp. 21-39; B. Zimmerman, *Alcune osserv. sul "S. A. C." del P. Paolo Caioli Carm.*, *ibid.*, II (1930-31), pp. 37-40; D. Pochin-Mould, *Saint A. C.* New York (1962); C. C. Calzolari, *Santi e beati fiorentini*, Florence 1965, pp. 27-31.

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ICONOGRAPHY. The iconography regarding Andrew is mostly after 1629, the year of his canonization, and is generally related to a few outstanding episodes of his life. Nevertheless, in a XV cent, altar-piece, preserved in the sacristy of the Carmelite

church in Florence, there is narrated the apparition of the saint to the young Andrew Dazzi, whom St. Andrew ordered to suggest to the Council of the Ten an attack, on the feast day of SS. Peter and Paul, on the Milanese army which was devastating Tuscany. The other episodes of the same story are: the young Andrew Dazzi, who, having told of his vision to the superior of the Carmelites, thanks the saint, who repeats his order

to the youth; the Ten, who question the youth, in order to verify the truth of his message; and the Florentine forces, who, having set out for the attack with the relics of SS. Peter and Paul on the day arranged, are victorious.

Guido Reni represented the saint in prayer with his episcopal insignia, in a painting of the Corsini gallery in Florence, and the saint standing, with his eyes turned to heaven, in a picture of the Pinacoteca of Bologna. J. B. Foggini (XVII cent.) sculpted, in three marble bas-reliefs for the Corsini chapel of the Carmelite church in Florence, three important moments in the life of St. Andrew: the apparition of the Virgin on the day of celebration of his first Mass (the model of which, in terra cotta, is in the Victoria and Albert museum in London); the promise made to Our Lady by the saint, to accept the bishopric of Fiesole; the apparition of St. Andrew to the Florentine forces during the battle of Anghiari. The memory of this episode was to be preserved also in the sketches of Leonard da Vinci for the lost frescos of the Hall of the Five Hundred in the Palazzo Vecchio /Old Palace/.

During the XVIII cent. Lambert-Sigisbert Adam received from Pope Clement XII (Corsini) the commission to represent in marble the episode of the apparition of the Virgin to the saint, for the Corsini chapel erected in St. John Lateran's. The model of this work, in terra cotta, is found in the Museum of Nancy.

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