CHAPTER FOUR

CHURCH, STATE, AND SAINTHOOD: FRANCESCO QUERINI AND THE MIRACLE WITH THE DEMONIAC

The dramatic public manifestation of numinous power through the Cross on March 3, 1370, and the intervention during the night storm that delivered Vendramin’s ships the following weekend must have established the reputation of the relic as a mighty vessel of God’s grace. There can be little doubt that the confraternity lost no time in spreading the news of the miracles. As the next miracle demonstrated, attention was paid. Unfathomable as the ways of God might have been it would have hardly been lost on discerning minds that the apparent actions of the Cross were oriented to the material world. While enhancing the honor of the confraternity, the devotion of the faithful, and the sanctity of the city, the relic proved an apt vehicle for articulating some of the central social and economic preoccupations of contemporary society. A new revelation of the Cross, a show of its thaumaturgical capacity, reinforced that perception. This time around, the divine action appears to have had a bearing on the unstable boundaries between secular and sacred authority, a murky issue, prone to conflict, that resurfaced periodically in Venice and reached one of its peaks in the latter quarter of the fourteenth century.

In the days of Francesco Querini, patriarch of Grado, there was a demoniac in Venice. Querini was well known as a pious and saintly person, and the possessed man’s relatives asked him to exorcise the wretch, hoping he could successfully expel the demon. The patriarch responded that he did not have such powers, but perhaps the True Cross at San Giovanni could do it. The relic was promptly brought over to the patriarchal see. Armed with it, Querini duly liberated the demoniac. The highly public miracle cemented the Cross’s reputation.

As our sources have it, the narrative is quite short. It lacks the detail and broad-ranging description present in the stories of the first two miracles. The account reads more like a summary prepared for an aspiring saint’s dossier than an excited first-hand testimony to a wondrous event. The laconic rendering even hints at a later composition or redaction, with the reference to Querini as patriarch of Grado. This clarification would have been pointless before 1451 and would have become necessary only after
the patriarchal see was transformed into patriarchate of Venice during the tenure of Lorenzo Giustiniani, when both the metropolitan see of Grado and the city’s primary ecclesiastical institution, the episcopate of Castello, were suppressed. Short and straightforward as it is, though, the account touches on a number of issues that were quite sensitive at the time and was doubtlessly understood in that way by the informed public.

On the surface of it, there was nothing controversial in the choice of the divine to reveal itself one more time to chase away the agent of evil tormenting the demoniac. Nor is there much surprise that it chose to manifest itself through the mediation of the patriarch, the highest ecclesiastical authority in Venice. The incumbent, Francesco Querini, later beatified, was the scion of an illustrious Venetian family that included several members known for exemplary piety. Yet the same family had also produced an overly ambitious man, Marco Querini. In June 1310, in association with his son-in-law, Baiamonte Tiepolo, and other close family members as well as a Badoer, he stirred what was to be the last public disturbance in the city involving open fighting between factions of the ruling oligarchy. The story is well known: the action ended in disaster, Marco lost his life, several Querini were exiled, and the family palace was taken over by the government and converted to an office building for the supervisors of butchers’ craft. Although Marco’s miscalculation did not affect other branches of the clan, which served the republic faithfully in some of its highest offices, it was not easy to wipe clean the blemish of public opprobrium that was cast on the Querini. Nonetheless, as some of the highest-ranking nobility were involved, the authorities dealt carefully with the issue. While in the aftermath of the failed coup assassins were hired to take out the culpable individuals, during the next generation the remainder of the clan was gradually restored to its former position. A brother of Francesco’s was a procuratore of San Marco, demonstrating the public trust vested in the Querini. Still, the process was slow, and not until 1406 was the family fully re-integrated into the ruling class.1

In that aspect, Francesco’s reputation would have been a contribution to restoring the family name’s prestige. At the time of his election to the metropolitan see of Grado in 1367, he had already distinguished himself as a humble servant of God in a progression of important charges. Having embraced life in the church quite young, he proceeded to become a parish

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