In chapter 13 of the *Chronicle* of Thomas of Eccleston, the author discusses the succession of ministers general after Brother Elias, who was deposed in 1239. Brother Albert of Pisa, a cleric and the minister provincial of England, succeeded Elias and led the order for less than a year. He was occupied primarily with the ‘deformation of the order’, as Eccleston explained. Albert was succeeded by Haymo of Faversham, who continued the work of restoring the order and convoked the only chapter of definitors held in Montpellier in 1241. From Montpellier a decree was issued that, in the provinces, brothers should list the problems with the *Rule* and send them to the minister general. These vexed passages in the *Rule*, connected to the ‘deformation of the order’ in Eccleston’s mind, were the basis for the origin of the constitutions issued by the general chapters, beginning in 1239.¹

The list of disputed passages received by the minister general was the origin of the *Exposition of the Four Masters on the Rule of the Lesser Brothers*, the first commentary on the *Rule*, 1241–1242.² A commission headed by Alexander of Hales, with members John of La Rochelle, Robert of Bascia and Eudes Rigaud, each of whom were educated clerics, were tasked with responding. They sent their *Exposition* to the minister general, Haymo, at the chapter of Bologna in 1242.

For England’s response, Eccleston reported that:

[T]here were elected in England Brother Adam Marsh, Brother Peter, the custos of Oxford, Brother Henry of Buford and certain other brothers. In that very night St. Francis appeared to Brother John Bannister and showed him a deep well; Brother John said to him: ‘Father, behold, the fathers want to explain the *Rule*; much better would it be for you to explain it

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to us.' The saint replied; ‘Son, go to the lay brothers and let them explain the Rule for you.’

Here again, the friars listed were clerics connected to Oxford University, in contrast to the vision of John Bannister who suggested that the ‘deep well’ of the Rule should be explained not by those masters of theology, but by the lay brothers. How seriously John Bannister’s advice was taken at the general level is not known, but Eccleston goes on to say:

Therefore, when certain doubts had been noted down, the brothers sent them to the [minister] general in a document without a seal, and they begged him, by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ, to let the Rule stand as it had been set down by St. Francis at the dictation of the Holy Spirit.

Though the English friars did send ‘aliquibus articulis’, at the same time they requested that the Rule be allowed to remain as it had been handed down by St Francis at the dictation of the Holy Spirit. Here Eccleston seems to be reflecting a story circulating at the time, describing the objection of the ministers to the Rule Francis was preparing at Fonte Colombo. As the story goes, Christ himself responded to the complaint of the ministers: ‘The voice of Christ was heard in the air, saying “Francis, nothing of yours is in the Rule: whatever is there is all mine,”’ The point of the story is that everything in the Rule came from the Holy Spirit, and, since this is so, the Rule must stand on its own, apart from Francis. In this context then, there emerges one of the primary issues of debate regarding the interpretation of the Rule, one that would be discussed throughout the thirteenth century, and which would become a central point

3 Eccleston, 71 [Engl. trans., 158]: ‘In diebus suis venit mandatum a caputulo, ut eligerentur fratres per singulas provincias ordinis, quo dubitabilia regulae annotarent et ad ministrum generalem transmitterent. Electi sunt ergo ad hoc in Anglia frater A. de Marisco, frater Petrus custos Oxoniae, frater Henricus de Boreford et quidam ali. In ipse vero nocte apparuit sanctus Franciscus fratri Iohanni de Banastre et ostendit ei puteum profundum; cui cum diceret: “Pater, ecce patres volunt exponere regulam, immo tu potius expone nobis regula”; respondit sanctus: “Fili, vade ad fratres laicos, et ipsi exponent tibi regulam tuam”’.

4 Eccleston, 71: ‘Igitur annotatis aliquibus articulis, mittunt eos fratres ad generalem, in cedula sine sigillo, obscurantes per aspersionem sanguinis Jesu Christ, ut regulam stare permittat, sicut a sancto Franciscso, dictante Spiritu Sancto, tradita fuit.’

5 Compilatio Assisiensis, no. 17, 1496: ‘Tunc audita est vox in aere Christi respondentis: “Francisco, nihil est in Regula de tuo, sed totum est meum, quicquid est tibi?” A version of this story found its way into Bonaventure’s Legenda maior 4, 11, in FF, 777–961, esp. 821.