Letters and Politics: Gerald Odonis vs. Francis of Marchia

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Abstract
Gerald Odonis and Francis of Marchia, both Franciscan masters of theology active in the early fourteenth century, played an important role in the controversies that split the Franciscan Order as a result of Pope John XXII’s decisions concerning the theory of religious poverty. They fought on opposite fronts: Odonis was elected Minister General after the deposition of Michael of Cesena, whom Francis supported in the struggle against the pope. This paper reconstructs the different stages at which Francis became a target of Odonis’ repressive actions against his dissident former confreres, from the first mention of Francis’ name in the lists of rebels to the letter Quid niteris, where Odonis reproaches Francis for his purported violations of the Franciscan Rule. Odonis most probably intentionally avoided entering the slippery ground of the poverty controversy and preferred attacking Francis on ecclesio-political issues.

Keywords
Gerald Odonis, Francis of Marchia, John XXII, Michael of Cesena, apostolic poverty, papal power

The topic of this paper is Gerald Odonis’ actions with respect to his former Minister General and to one of his contemporary Franciscan confreres, who bore the same prestigious title of master of theology, Francis of Marchia (also known under different names, such as Francesco d’Appignano and Francesco della Marca). Although it is rather unusual, a relationship between thinkers will not be discussed mainly on the basis of academic works whose dependence can be historically proven, or—alas—on the basis of vague similarities among their ideas. The issue at stake will be the interpretation of the historical event of the clash between these two figures. Nevertheless, the fact that the forum for these polemics was not the academic milieu we are accustomed to
does not mean that the episode lacks any interest from an ecclesio-political perspective.

Historians of philosophy follow different standards when it comes to determining whether a comparison between authors or their texts can be seen as pertinent. For a topic like mine, on the contrary, documentary evidence is a \textit{conditio sine qua non}. I must begin, therefore, by admitting that we do not possess—at least to my knowledge—any proof of direct personal contacts between Francis of Marchia and Odonis, although they read the \textit{Sentences} in their Order’s Paris convent only a few years apart, which could also suggest, given the Franciscan regulations of that time, that both were on good terms with the Minister General of the Minorites, Michael of Cesena.\footnote{B. Roest, \textit{A History of Franciscan Education (c. 1210-1517)} (Leiden, 2000), in particular 102, n. 344.} That Odonis read the \textit{Sentences} some years later does not necessarily imply, as one might think, that he was younger. Considering what we know today about teaching careers in the mendicant orders, mostly thanks to the studies of William Courtenay, such an inference would be precarious.\footnote{See, e.g., W.J. Courtenay, ‘The Instructional Programme of the Mendicant Convents at Paris in the Early Fourteenth Century’, in \textit{The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy and the Religious Life. Essays in Honour of Gordon Leff}, ed. P. Biller and B. Robson (Woodbridge, 1999), 77-92.} Recent investigations suggest that Odonis was acquainted with some positions Francis had held in his \textit{Commentary on the Sentences}.\footnote{C. Schabel, ‘Francis of Marchia’s \textit{Virtus derelicta} and the Context of Its Development’, \textit{Vivarium} 44.1 (2006), 41-80, in particular 42-45 and 48-49; William Duba’s paper in this volume.} The possible connections that scholars have highlighted until now, however, are not directly relevant for the elucidation of Odonis’ ecclesiological or political ideas. Some years ago I pointed to Francis’ treatment of restitution in his commentary on book IV of the \textit{Sentences}, which has been transmitted in different versions.\footnote{R. Lambertini, \textit{La povertà pensata. Evoluzione storica della definizione dell’identità minoritica da Bonaventura ad Ockham} (Modena, 2000), 189-226.} After Scotus, some Franciscan authors writing in this context took the opportunity to discuss the origin of property and power.\footnote{O. Langholm, \textit{Economics in the Medieval Schools. Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money and Usury according to the Paris Theological Tradition} 1200-1350 (Leiden, 1992), in particular 404-418 on Scotus, 419-420 on John of Bassols, 421-426 on Francis of Meyronnes, and 533-535 on William of Rubio, who was a pupil of Francis of Marchia’s and the \textit{reportator} of a part of his commentary on the \textit{Sentences}.} This is not the case for Odonis, who prefers dealing with one of his favourite topics, usury.\footnote{S. Piron, ‘Perfection évangélique et moralité civile: Pierre de Jean Olivi et l’étique économique franciscaine’, in...}