

## A LETTER OF AMBROGIO OF VERONA O.S.A.

Ambrogio of Verona, O.S.A. (c.1505-c.1590) is known to us mainly through the references to him found in the registers of the Generals of the Order. From these registers Fr. David Gutiérrez, O.S.A., prepared a brief biography, summarized here with the addition of some information from other sources<sup>1</sup>.

Ambrogio was promoted from baccalaureus to magister on September 13, 1537 and became regent at Rimini. In 1538 he was named regent at Florence, in 1539-40 he was regent at Palermo. He served as prior at Verona from 1543 to 1546. In 1547 he was sent to assist at the sixth session of the Council of Trent. Later that same year the General commissioned him to preside at the chapter of the Province of Calabria where he served as provincial until 1551, when he again became prior at Verona. According to the chronicle of the house, Ambrogio remained as prior until 1555<sup>2</sup>. At the chapter in Venice in 1559 he was chosen as provincial of the Province of Venice or Marchia Tarvisina as it was then more usually called<sup>3</sup>. In 1561 he preached the sermon before the Council Fathers for the feast of St. Augustine in the Augustinian Church of Saint Mark. At other times before and after this Ambrogio received various preaching assignments from the General. In 1564 he became prior at Verona<sup>4</sup>. He held this office again in 1569-71 and 1574<sup>5</sup>. In 1579 he was assigned to

<sup>1</sup> David GUTIÉRREZ, O.S.A., *Patres ac theologi Augustiniani qui Concilio Tridentino interfuerunt* in *Analecta Augustiniana* XXI (1947-50), 55-177. Ambrogio's biography is found on 113-114.

<sup>2</sup> Material based on this chronicle and the house archives was published by Giambatista BIANCOLINI in *Notizie Storiche delle Chiese di Verona*, Libro settimo, (Verona, 1766), 228-249. The list of priors from the beginning of the foundation in 1245 until 1766 is found on 229-234.

<sup>3</sup> See the register of Christopher of Padua in the Archivio Generale Agostiniano in Rome, Dd. 29, f. 9v: *Analecta Augustiniana* IX (1921-22), 413. Gutiérrez errs in assigning the years 1560-63 to another term as prior at Verona, for the register refers to him as "Provinciali Veneto" (Feb. 1, 1561), Dd 29 f. 157v. BIANCOLINI, 232 lists Andrea di Monte Causario as Prior in 1560 and Lodovico di Verona in 1562.

<sup>4</sup> See Dd 29, f. 291v and BIANCOLINI, 232.

<sup>5</sup> BIANCOLINI, 232. Archivio di Stato, Verona, *Archivio S. Eufemia*, 92, f. 83 lists Ambrogio as prior as of Jan. 20, 1571. However, according to Biancolini, he did not finish out the year.

the convent at Trent as a senior not to be moved. His name appears in the register until 1589.

Another gauge of Ambrogio's importance in the life of the Order besides the offices that he held is his participation in five General Chapters of the Order in various capacities. At Naples in 1539, he was the discreet for the Province of Sardinia and was listed among those who had obtained the faculty of preaching from the General. At Rome in 1543 he was among the substitutes for absent provincials and named prior of the house of studies at Verona. At Recanati in 1547 he gave a sermon *de gratia et meritis pie simul ac erudite*. He again was among the substitutes for absent provincials and was named provincial of the Province of Calabria. He does not seem to have been at Bologna in 1551 or at Rimini in 1555. However, he was again present at Venice in 1559 as a definitor for the Province of Portugal and was named provincial of the Province of Marchia Tarvisina. Finally, at Milan in 1564 Ambrogio was the definitor for the Province of Marchia Tarvisina<sup>6</sup>.

A letter of Ambrogio to Aurelio della Rocha, O.S.A., is preserved in the Vatican Library collection of correspondence relating to Onofrio Panvinio, O.S.A. (Vat. lat. 6412). This letter is the earliest that we have with a mention of Panvinio. Ambrogio succeeded his friend Giovanni Battista Marchesino as prior at Verona. It was Marchesino, a relative of Panvinio, who had encouraged his mother to let the boy enter the Augustinians. When he died, in 1542 or 1543, Marchesino recommended the education of Panvinio to Ambrogio, who gave Panvinio special lessons himself and also sent him outside the convent to study with Daniele Aliense, a noted grammarian<sup>7</sup>.

In 1547 Girolamo Seripando, General of the Augustinian Order, sent the young Onofrio Panvinio to study at the studium generale at Na-

<sup>6</sup> All references are taken from the Acts of the various general chapters published in *Analecta Augustiniana* IX (1921-22). The citations for pages are as follows: Naples, 57 and 286; Rome, 122 and 298; Recanati, 141, 147, and 156; Venice, 411 and 413; Milan, 420 and 430.

<sup>7</sup> In his life of brother Onofrio, Paolo PANVINIO writes: "[Rdo. P. M. Gio. Batt. Marchesino] venendo à morte lo raccomandò caldamente al Rdo. P. M. Ambrosio Veronese, che a lui successe Priore nel detto Monasterio di Santa Eufemia, suo grande amico, il quale lo tolse appresso di sè, leggendoli continuamente le lettione di logica et di theologia, et anco lo mandò fuori di casa à scuola di un ms. Daniele Aliense grammatico, perché imparasse la buona lingua latina. Davide PERINI, O.S.A., *Onofrio Panvinio e le sue opere* (Rome, 1899), 215. Biancolini lists Gio. Battista di Verona as prior in 1542 and Ambrogio of Verona as prior in 1543.

ples and two years later he called him to the studium generale at Rome<sup>8</sup>. It is at this point that Ambrogio writes to his friend Aurelio della Rocha<sup>9</sup> bemoaning Panvinio's neglect of him and Aurelio's own recent transfer in May to Rome as prior of Sant'Agostino. The letter, sent from Paola, shows us something of Ambrogio's character as well as his fondness for displaying his learning. It is apparently the only document written by him that we have<sup>10</sup>.

## LETTER FROM AMBROGIO OF VERONA TO AURELIO DELLA ROCHA

PAOLA, JULY 27, 1549

(B.A.V., Vat. lat. 6412, f. 380r, original)

Salute et pace:

Maestro Aurelio mio, non so che vi fate. Vi vedo molto accostarvi a Roma in così sublimo scanno. Che sarà - il vostro [di] Verona dove il lassai, nella grande Calabria a spander sudori? Et unde hoc michi? Mi si lontana il figlio. O Onoffrio, quid feci tibi? Quo tendis? Vedi che gli è scritto: "Altiora ne te quaesieris." A Roma sei. Asceso supra astra celi, nubilia tonant. Et ego quo ibo?

O Maestro Aurelio, sapevo bene che Roma non poteva, essendo lì già il busto, stare senza voi che sete braza, mano et capo. Sed quid laetum ius michi? Quid gaudium tendit ad horam? Quid solatium capio de tali itinere tuo? Heu me infelix! Ruminant mea viscera plena dolore perpetuo in memorando tui.

Posso bene dire al Padre: "Elongasti a me amicum et proximum et impulsisti me in miseriam" come dice la lettera antiqua Hebrea. Dove noi habiamo "notos meos a miseria", l'ebreo dice: [hebrew letters] cioè, "me hai impulso in miseria". Del tutto sia laudato Iddio purchè voi sempre siate mio oratore appresso a sua santità.

Ho inteso dal lettore come ha scosso li dinari et mandatoli con [damage] ...mati; siché le cose sono a bon porto. Pregate Iddio che questo

<sup>8</sup> For more on Panvinio at this time of his life see Karl GERSBACH, O.S.A., *The Books and Personal Effects of Young Onofrio Panvinio, O.S.A. in Vat. Lat. 7205 in Analecta Augustiniana*, LII (1989), 54.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief biography on Aurelio della Rocha, see GUTIÉRREZ, *Patres* 121-123.

<sup>10</sup> My thanks are owed to Fr. Carlos Alonso, O.S.A., and Fr. Pietro Bellini, O.S.A., for their helpful suggestions regarding the transcription of the letter. Spelling has been somewhat standardized in this edition of the letter.

[damage] ...anno habia un altra bona predica, accioché possi fare qualche (?) [damage] altro bene.

Mi farete degno di aricomandatione al Padre Rev.[mo] [damage] al quale per hora non scrivo, perché spero venire questo settembre a vedere Sua Patemità Rev.ma et tutti voi altri. Aricomadateme a M.o Giovanni Baptista romano, al nostro M.o Giovanni Antonio paduano, al R.do M.o Gregorio, mio familiare, al Padre scrittore, olim mio servitore, al peruscino Regente, homo superbo, che di mio famiglio lo feci contra ogni debito salire a questo grado et hora non si degna, perhò alla venuta mia spero deponere superbos et exaltare humiles.

Al tutto il resto de' Padri me ricomandate sino a quell altro gnoco di Frate Joseph di Verona della buona natura del suo regente.

A voi baso la mano alla napolitana, alla spagnola, m'aricomando a vuestras mercé; alla fratescha, m'aricomando alle vostre orationi; alla romanesca, mi offero come promptissimo servitore di Vostra Signoria R.ma. Valet.

Data in Paula alli 24 di Luio 1549

Al mio sempre memorando Padre Procuratore del ordine nostro mi racomandate.

Il vostro Ambr.o di Verona

f. 380v Al R.do p. prior Maest.o Aurelio della Rocha in Roma a S. Aug.o

## COMMENTARY

The first paragraph makes reference to Aurelio's recent transfer in May from prior at Naples to become prior of the community of Sant'Agostino in Rome<sup>11</sup>. Ambrogio then mentions his departure from Panvinio in Verona when he was sent to Calabria in 1547. Obviously Panvinio has neglected to write to Ambrogio and he fears that the young man is becoming inflated with pride. Hence the warnings. Ambrogio cites *Sirach* (Vulgate: *Ecclesiasticus*) 3:22: "Altiora te ne quaesieris". His other Latin sentence seems to be based loosely on *Isaiah* 14:12-13: "Quomodo cecidisti de caelo, Lucifer, qui mane oriebas? corruisti in terram, qui vulnerabas gentes. Qui dicebas in corde tuo: in caelum conscendam; supra astra Dei

<sup>11</sup> Aurelio was assigned as prior at Naples in June 1547. See Dd. 22, f. 102r-v: *Hieronymi Seripando O.S.A. Registrum Generalatus V 1546-1548*, edited by David GUTIÉRREZ, O.S.A. (Rome, 1988), 178. On his appointment to Rome see GUTIÉRREZ, *Patres*, 122, citing Dd. 23, f. 84v.

exaltabo solium meum". Ambrogio may also have in mind the story of Phaethon.

In the second paragraph Ambrogio returns to Aurelio's transfer, flattering for Aurelio but with sad consequences for his friend.

In the third paragraph Ambrogio quotes and corrects the Vulgate version of Psalm 87:19: "Elongasti a me amicum et proximum et notos meos a miseria". To prove his point, Ambrogio cites a variant of the Hebrew text, which is not reproduced here because of difficulty in deciphering his writing of the Hebrew letters<sup>12</sup>. The reference to "sua santità" probably refers to God rather than to the pope.

The fourth paragraph has suffered damage in the manuscript, but clearly refers to a transfer of money. Perini assumes from this paragraph that Ambrogio went to Paola to preach the course of lenten sermons<sup>13</sup>.

In the fifth paragraph Ambrogio sends greetings to various members of the Order at Rome.

1) The General is, of course, Girolamo Seripando, who governed the Order from 1538-1551.

2) M.o Giovanni Baptista romano was assigned as socius for the Roman Province at the General Chapter of 1547. He was also prior of Sant'Agostino in Rome before Aurelio's appointment<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> We asked the opinion of Marc Vervenne, professor at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. He answered as follows: "The final sentence of Ps. 87:19 as found in the standard Hebrew text, the so-called Masoretic text, which, in fact, is a medieval textual form of the Old Testament, is very awkward. The ancient versions such as the Vulgate and Septuagint, as well as modern translations represent a smoother text, which, however, results from contextual exegesis. In his letter, Ambrogio seems to refer to a Hebrew *varia lectio*, which is reproduced in an indecipherable Hebrew (cursive?) script. The translation of this variant reading (*et impulsisti me in miseriam*) fits in very well with the immediate context. Even though various conjectures have been proposed in the long history of explaining the psalm (e.g. Jerome, e.a.), the rendering of the reading Ambrogio offers does not correspond to any of these. It is, moreover, neither in agreement with one of the ancient versions, nor does it occur in the well-known collections (Kennicott, de Rossi) of *variae lectiones* in medieval Hebrew manuscripts. We have no information concerning Ambrogio's knowledge of Biblical Hebrew. Contrary to the Hebrew orthography, the words of the sentence or expression he quotes in his letter seems to be written from left to right, for the characters that follow on the first four-letter word are squashed to fill up the line. A more thoroughgoing inquiry into this section of the letter of Ambrogio, preferably on the basis of the original manuscript itself, might lead to the identification of the presumed Hebrew variant, as well as to the definition of its nature. With regard to the latter, the Latin and Italian translation given by Ambrogio is rather indicative for a reading which results from contextual exegesis in view of ironing out an awkward text".

<sup>13</sup> PERINI, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dd. 22, f. 73v and 74r: *Registrum 1546-1548*, 137.

3) M.o Giovanni Antonio paduano had been assigned as socius for the Roman Province for the years 1549-51 at the General Chapter of 1547. He was to become provincial of the Roman Province in April 1550<sup>15</sup>.

4) M.o Gregorio may be Gregorio paduano, who spent the years 1549-1551 partly at Bologna and partly at Naples in the company of Seripando. Before this he had been provincial of Ambrogio's home Province of Marchia Tarvisina from 1547-1549<sup>16</sup>.

5) The phrase "padre scrittore" is not clear enough to determine the person intended.

6) The "peruscino Regente" is Thaddeus of Perugia, who succeeded Christopher of Padua as Prior General in 1570. He had been named regent at Rome at the General Chapter of 1547<sup>17</sup>. Ambrogio's rather uncomplimentary remarks seem to indicate that he felt his past help to Thaddeus was unappreciated.

Ambrogio concludes this section with a reference to the words of the *Magnificat*: "deposuit superbos et exaltavit humiles".

The next paragraph contains a mention of Joseph Panfilo of Verona, who later became papal sacristan and bishop of Segni. He had been transferred from Padua to Rome in 1547 and appears there as cursor in 1548 and as magister studii in 1549<sup>18</sup>.

The last paragraph is possibly intended to be humorous, perhaps an attempt to balance the gloomy mood of the earlier part of the letter.

The "Padre Procuratore" mentioned at the end is Christopher of Padua, who succeeded Seripando as General of the Order in 1551<sup>19</sup>.

Kenosha

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<sup>15</sup> See Dd. 22, 74r: *Registrum 1546-1548*, 137. For the appointment as Provincial see Dd. 23, f. 185r, April 26, 1550: *Hieronymi Seripando O.S.A. Registrum Generalatus VI 1548-1551*, edited by David GUTIÉRREZ, O.S.A., (Rome, 1990), 313.

<sup>16</sup> See GUTIÉRREZ, *Patres*, 145. For his appointment as Provincial at the General Chapter of 1547, see Dd 22, f. 73r: *Registrum 1546-1548*, 138.

<sup>17</sup> For biography see GUTIÉRREZ, *Patres*, 173-176.

<sup>18</sup> Dd. 22; f. 83r: *Registrum 1546-1548*, 148. Dd 23, f. 3r and 84v: *Registrum 1548-1551*, 15 and 151.

<sup>19</sup> Biographical information is found in GUTIÉRREZ, *Patres*, 85-91 and in *Christophori Patavini O.S.A. Registrum Generalatus I 1551-1552*, edited by Arnulf HARTMANN, O.S.A., (Rome, 1985), 1-19.