

Composing Sermons in the Age of Humanism. *Considerations on Penitence and the Memento Mori according to Bernardino Busti of Milan*

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In the *prohoemium* to his collection of Lenten sermons *Rosarium sermonum* (printed for the first time in Venice, 1498), Bernardino Busti (d. 1513), *Ordinis sancti Francisci de Observantia praedicator doctissimus*,¹ states the importance to invoke God in order to secure the success of one's literary work. This is clearly nothing astonishing. What is worth some interest, however, is that in order to explain this point the Franciscan preacher refers not only to Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Origen's homilies on Leviticus, but also and foremost to non-Christian authors:

Omnia bene et congrue geruntur si principium rei fuerit decens et amabile Deo. Per divini enim nominis invocationem humani actus perfecte prosperrantur in finem (...) Plato quoque in *Thimei* primo inquit: 'In minimis etiam quibusque rebus semper in principio divinum implorandum est auxilium'. Quo circa infideles etiam ac pagani in suarum principiis actionum deos suos invocare solebant. Unde Valerius Maximus in proemio sui libri inquit: 'Nam prisci oratores a Iove Optimo Maximo bene orsi sunt, et excellentissimi vates a numine aliquo principia traxerunt'. Titus quoque Livius in proemio sui operis dicit invocandum esse divinum auxilium, ut inceptum opus

1 "Incipit Rosarium sermonum predicabilium per quadragesimam et totum anni circulum editum per vite venerabilis religiosum fratrem Bernardinum de Busti [*sic*] ordinis sancti Francisci de Observantia predicatorem doctissimum": Bernardino Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, fol. Ira; throughout this article I rely on the copy of the *Rosarium sermonum* (and for complete bibliographical reference) see F. Conti, *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers: Pastoral Approach and Intellectual Debate in Renaissance Milan*. Turnhout 2015, 39-52; 55 ff.

successus prosperos habere possit. Qua propter Ovidius in prin(cipio) lib(ri) Meta(morphoseon) deorum suorum auxilium efflagitat dicens: 'In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas | Corpora, dii, ceptis, nam vos mutastis et illas [sic] | Aspirate meis'; et in sexto De fastis in principio de dei adiutorio se glorians inquit: 'Est deus in nobis agitante calescimus illo | impetus hic sacre semina mentis habet. | Fas mihi precipue vultus [sic] vidisse deorum | Vel quia sum vates, vel quia sacra cano'.²

Plato's *Timaeus* (through its Latin translation by Calcidius), Valerius Maximus, Titus Livius and Ovid are among the sources Busti refers to in order to show the use ingrained in classical authors of invoking the gods before commencing one's own work. Through the reference to Greek and Roman literary and philosophical authorities the preacher also aims to show his cultural level. In an interesting array of citations, Busti enlists more pagan and Christian *auctoritates*: Virgil, Sedulius, Claudian, Statius with his *Thebaid*, and Severinus Boethius are mentioned as examples of authors who invoked either the Muses or the Christian God; Dante's *Commedia* is also referred to in order to exemplify invocation as a literary means:

Dantes etiam in II cantu Inferni circa principium secundum morem gentilium invocatur dicens: 'O musa, o altum ingenium, nunc me adiuuate.' Idem quoque in principio I cantus Purgatorii ait: 'Et o poesis que mortua es resurge. O vos muse cum vestro sono. Et tu Caliope aliquando resurge.' Et in I cantu Paradisii inquit: 'O bone Apollo et ultime labor.'³

The use of quotations in Latin from *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* is particularly interesting, especially because the 1498 edition of the *Rosarium* printed in Venice quotes Dante in the original Italian vernacular. Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle (d. 1445), a Franciscan friar and the Bishop of Fano and Fermo, composed a Latin translation of the *Commedia* between 1416 and 1417 during the Council of Constance so that Dante's work could be disseminated more easily among intellectuals and within international learned circles.⁴ The use of these elements of literary culture in sermons – with the blend of the *topos* of invoking muses, deities and the Christian God – clearly testifies to Busti's awareness of the literary nature and aim of his text.

2 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, fol. Ira. Cf. Calcidius, *Timaeus*, 27c; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri*, I, *prohoem.*; Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, *praef.* 13; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 1-2; Ovid, *Fasti*, VI, 5-8.

3 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, fol. Irab refers to "O muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate" (*Inf.*, II, 7); "Ma qui la morta poesi resurga, | o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono; | e qui Caliope alquanto surga" (*Purg.*, I, 7-9); "O buon Appollo, a l'ultimo lavoro" (*Par.*, I, 13). The Latin translation of the *Commedia* was composed by Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle; as to Busti's quotes cf. Fr. J. De Serravalle, *Translatio et Commentum totius libri Dantis Aldigherii cum textu italico fratris Bartholomaei a Colle*. Ed. by M. da Civezza and T. Domenichelli, Prati 1891, 41, 436, 822 respectively.

4 On Da Serravalle see G. Ferrante, "Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle", in *Censimento dei Commenti danteschi*, 1: *I Commenti di tradizione manoscritta (fino al 1480)*. Ed. by E. Malato and A. Mazzucchi, Rome 2011, 224-240.

The introductory part of the *Rosarium* is concluded by six elegiac distichs in honor of the Virgin Mary, in which Busti asks her the gift of preaching well:

O tu gemma virens, adamas quoque candidus ortu
 Celorum reatrix angelicique chori:
 Tu pia pro nobis natum rogitare supremum
 Virgo tuum velis et numina tota poli.
 Eloquii pulchri fontes mihi porriges sacros
 Sis mea conductrix, presidiumque vie
 Sic ergo gratuitis donis et fonte rigatus
 producam fructus cum pietate bonos
 O lux clara nimis rutilo splendore refulgens
 O super ethereis stella Diana thronis
 Illustra nostrum de sacro lumine pectus
 Contio quam multis ut mea prestat opem.⁵

The *Rosarium's* classicizing style, using philosophical, literary and poetical sources in the *prohoemium* as one basis for religious and moral discourse, as well as the poetic verses that Busti offers to Mary denote an approach to preaching material that characterizes the work of other late fifteenth-century preachers, such as, for instance, Busti's master and confrere Michele Carcano (d. 1484), who was particularly fond of Greek philosophers.⁶ This way of composing sermons may support the idea of a "cultural reform" fostered by at least some of the Observant friars that became particularly evident during the second half of the fifteenth century.⁷

The group of Observant Franciscan preachers and confessors – to which Busti and Carcano belong – active in the friary of St. Angelo's in Milan during the last decades of the fifteenth century is of note for this reason. We know how the friary of St. Angelo's, which benefited greatly from the favor of the dukes of Milan, received endowments in books from wealthy novices as well as from humanists such as Giorgio Valagussa, who donated two ciceronian works to

5 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, fol. Ivb; the 1498 edition reads: "Ave Maria gemma preciosa | Rubino relucente e diamante chiaro | Per che tu sei tuta pietosa | Prega per nui el to filioli charo | Porgeme l'acqua o Vergene beata | Dil bel parlare dame il conducto | Si che essendo di gratia irrigata | Questa alma terra facia bon fructo | O luce clara ripiena di splendore | Stella diana Vergene Maria | Del tuo lume illustrami el core | Acio che util nel predicar sia. Amen".

6 Cf. Ch. M. de La Roncière, "Identités franciscaines au XV^e siècle: la réforme des communautés masculines", in *Identités franciscaines à l'âge des réformes*. Ed. by F. Meyer and L. Viallet, Clermont-Ferrand 2005, 33-53, (pp. 50-51). See also P. O. Kristeller, "The Contribution of Religious Orders to Renaissance Thought and Learning", *The American Benedictine Review* 21 (1970), 1-5, repr. in P. O. Kristeller, *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning*. Ed. and translated by E. P. Mahoney Durham, NC 1974, 95-158. On Michele Carcano see also R. Rusconi, "Carcano, Michele", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. XIX (1976), 742-44; R. Rusconi, "Michele Carcano da Milano e le caratteristiche della sua predicazione", *Picenum Seraphicum* 10 (1973), 196-218.

7 Cf. K. Elm, "L'osservanza francescana come riforma culturale", in *Alla sequela di Francesco d'Assisi. Contributi di storia francescana*, Assisi 2004, 345-361.

the library.⁸ In these friars, the traditional opposition between humanism and religious life is definitely put aside. The friars of St. Angelo's widely employed the tailored instruments of pastoral care – collections of Lenten sermons and confessional handbooks – whose spread was boosted by the use of the printing press. This would allow a more attentive systematization of the numerous issues the Milanese pastors dealt with, such as the debates concerning money lending, *Montes pietatis* and usury, the relationship with the Jews, the contrast with superstition as well as a clarifying and a partially original approach to witch-beliefs, just to name a few.⁹

The way these friars developed the multiple issues constituting their program for the (re)-evangelization of the laity includes an appeal for dealing with theological details as well as the use of a large variety of sources including Roman and Greek authors. The contrast with the earlier generations of friars – not only Franciscans – is from this point of view clear, especially when the long tradition of polemics between friars and humanists is considered, as the example of the Dominican Giovanni Dominici may contribute to show.¹⁰

We know how Bernardino da Siena (d. 1444) would condemn the reading of classical authors such as, for instance, Ovid: the preacher tells that in his youth he used to read those texts, and he subsequently changed his mind after reading their condemnation by St. Jerome.¹¹ The opposition between Christian and pagan cultural paradigms proposed by Jerome (*Epist.* XXII, 30) would become traditional for those who aimed to express their skepticism about reading pagan and profane literature. The Sienese's refusal of profane literature should indeed be considered within the revival of such a traditional line of religious rigor rather than as a direct closure towards humanism.¹² Yet, this approach would change in a few decades among Observant Franciscans. Besides Busti and Carcano, also – but not only – Bernardino da Feltre (d. 1494) and Pietro da Mogliano (d. 1490) would consistently use classical sources and models. Pietro, who at a certain point took care of the library of Giacomo della Marca, certainly displayed an interest in humanistic and profane culture.¹³

Giacomo della Marca's view was in line with Bernardino's, although in the case of Giacomo we can notice a change. As Bernardino did, Giacomo too condemned the use of classical authors, relying on Jerome; nevertheless, the library of

8 M. Pedralli, *Novo, grande, coperto e ferrato: gli inventari di biblioteca e la cultura a Milano nel Quattrocento*. Milan 2002, 60-61.

9 Cf. Conti, *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers*, cit.

10 See "Fрати e umanisti: ragioni di un conflitto", in *Humanisme et Église en Italie et en France méridionale (XV^e siècle-milieu du XVI^e siècle)*. Ed. by P. Gilli, Rome 2004, 17-42; A. Reltgen-Tallon, "L'Observance dominicaine et son opposition à l'humanisme: l'exemple de Jean Dominici", in *Humanisme et Église*, 43-62.

11 Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, pr. III. Ed. by C. Cannarozzi, Florence 1940, 237-238.

12 Gian Carlo Alessio, "Manoscritti di autori classici nelle biblioteche dell'Osservanza", in *Il Beato Pietro da Mogliano (1435-1490) e l'Osservanza francescana*. Ed. by G. Avarucci, Rome 1993, 333-351.

13 R. Avesani, "Il Beato Pietro e la letteratura profana", in *Il Beato Pietro da Mogliano*, 353-365.

Monteprandone does attest to the presence of some classical and profane authors: among others, Cicero's *De officiis* and *De senectute*, Seneca's Tragedies and the *Ad Lucilium*, in addition to Valerius Maximus, Lucius Anneus Florus, Pliny the Elder, and Virgil's *Bucolica*. They were all part of Giacomo's library along with Dante and Iacopone da Todi.¹⁴ The intensity of humanistic influences became progressively more relevant in the libraries of the friars during the second half of the fifteenth century, and it got even more irresistible towards the end of the century; this is one of the features characterizing the period between the Middle Ages and the early modern era. Indeed, we know how the separation between historical periods is a merely conventional thing. This is especially true as far as the history of cultural and intellectual structures is concerned. From this point of view the interconnections between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance – or between the “medieval” and the “modern” – with the references to, apparent anticipations of and contradictions of seemingly distant periods are of note.¹⁵ Developments and changes certainly run at a slower pace than one may suppose, although some of these changes are more meaningful and apparently sudden than others. This is also true as far as the history of religious orders and their peculiar approach to culture are concerned.

The work of a friar engaged in his pastoral duties mainly as a preacher and a confessor followed specific traditional intellectual patterns that were based especially – although not exclusively – on the Bible, the Church Fathers, and the key figures of Scholastic theologians. It has been described how among the Mendicants schools or *studia*, books and libraries constituted the pivotal elements for the establishment and the cultivation of such intellectual patterns between the thirteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries.¹⁶ The importance of books and learning in the *curricula* of Observant friars throughout the fifteenth century is certainly of note. The first Observant school attached to the friary of Monteripido, near Perugia, shows important signs of the use that friars made of those cultural *media* in order to develop their instruments for pastoral care, first of all the writing of model sermons. The school was established by Bernardino da Siena in 1440 and was especially dedicated to the teaching of moral theology and canon law, as well as the “portable libraries” made of several tens of books that Bernardino da Siena and Bernardino da Feltre used to bring with them in their travels.¹⁷ There is a sort

14 R. Avesani, “Cultura e istanze pastorali nella biblioteca di San Giacomo della Marca”, in *San Giacomo della Marca nell'Europa del '400, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Monteprandone, 7-10 Settembre 1994*. Ed. by S. Bracci, Padova 1997, 391-405.

15 J. Le Goff, *Faut-il vraiment découper l'histoire en tranches?* Paris 2014, 137-91; J. Monfasani, “The Renaissance as the Concluding Phase of the Middle Ages”, *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo* 108 (2006), 165-85 (p. 185).

16 L. Pellegrini, “Tra *sancta rusticitas* e *humanae litterae*. La formazione culturale dei frati nell'Osservanza italiana del Quattrocento”, in *Osservanza francescana e cultura tra Quattrocento e primo Cinquecento. Italia e Ungheria a confronto. Atti del Convegno Macerata-Sarnano, 6-7 dicembre 2013*. Ed. by F. Bartolacci and R. Lambertini, Rome 2014, 53-71.

17 L. Pellegrini, “Bernardino da Siena, il minoritismo e l'Osservanza: ambiguità e ambivalenze. A partire da Monteripido”, in *Giacomo della Marca tra Monteprandone e Perugia. Lo Studium del Convento del Monte e la cultura dell'Osservanza francescana*. Ed. by F. Serpico and L. Giacometti, Florence 2012, 21-35; Pellegrini, “Tra *sancta rusticitas* e *humanae litterae*”.

of permanent intellectual tradition, rooted in books and libraries, and fostered by specific *curricula* of study, which constitutes the backbone of a friar's work. What is relevant for us is to try to understand how the use of these cultural instruments varied over time and between the different preachers.

This traditional framework, within which preachers displayed their efforts of pastoral care and developed their intellectual reflection, did not close itself off from the cultural and social inputs deriving from the times and places it came in contact with. Those same *media* – books, libraries and *studia* – that aimed at shaping and preserving the friars' intellectual tradition could open them to elements of novelty. The fundamental question is whether the society had a need to orientate the preachers' focus and style or rather the other way around. Perhaps – as always – the answer is still somewhere in between. The core of the issue is, however, still and again the effectiveness of the friars' pastoral work: their adherence to an adamant intellectual tradition and their attitude towards a major opening to current cultural tendencies have to be seen as instruments through which preachers aimed at increasing their impact on society by developing more effective preaching.¹⁸

Busti urges preachers to open their sermons and preaching styles to elements that could satisfy the new cultural trends of his age and people's appetites, given that "Sunt enim multi qui non irent ad predicationem nisi causa curiositatis puta ut audiant poetarum allegationes seu philosophorum". Thus, for Busti people's *curiositas* and desire for the sayings of poets and philosophers become a means by which to attract them, like the right bait that hunters and fishers employ to catch their quarry. In this way the preacher becomes a "fisher of man": by means of employing a wide type of erudition that also includes literature or poetry, he can attract and finally convert his audience.¹⁹ One could wonder to what extent common people attending sermons in the town squares might be interested in listening to quotations from poets and philosophers, but this is a different issue. Undoubtedly Busti's note represents a clear sign of a cultural change in the sensibility of friars as well as of people in general. This consideration can therefore offer an insight into one specific aspect (the types of sources) regarding one of the multiple means (preaching) employed by one of the multiple branches of the Church (Observant friars) for creating and spreading intellectual patterns aimed at influencing people's ways of thinking and behaving. This would contribute to shaping what Pierre Bourdieu called religious *habitus*, a "system of durable, transposable dispositions, (...) principles which generate and organize practices and representations" through the acquisition of internalized schemas that orientate specific worldviews.²⁰ The preacher is clearly fully aware of the importance

18 Cf. M. G. Muzzarelli, "Introduction: From Words to Deeds-Reflections on the Efficacy and Effects of Preaching", in *From Words to Deeds. The Effectiveness of Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*. Ed. by Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, Turnhout 2014, 1-14.

19 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermon 1, fol. VIva (quote in Conti, *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers*, 71-72). On the "fishers of men" as a rhetorical *topos* for preachers see M. G. Muzzarelli, *Pescatori di uomini: Predicatori e piazze alla fine del medioevo*. Bologna 2005.

20 P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA 1990, 53.

of his job; in gathering and systematizing all the material he needs for giving a shape to the intellectual patterns at the base of the models he aims at spreading, he can now use a larger variety of sources than before, including those that were previously considered forbidden or not totally befitting the task.

In his Sermon 7 '*De septem catenis diaboli quibus tenet homines in peccatis ligatos ne convertantur*' for the Saturday before the first Sunday of Lent, Busti indicates how the devil keeps people tied to sin by means of seven bonds: *infidelitas, difficultas, exemplaritas, iocunditas, sumptuositas, longanimitas, desperabilitas*. I will briefly turn to these. For the moment it is worth noticing that, according to the preacher, the conversion of people was prevented by their sticking to improper behaviors. The work of the devil is preponderant from this point of view. At the beginning of Sermon 7, Busti highlights that not only biblical *auctoritates* but also *paganorum sententiae* point to the existence of demons. Quoting a number of Greek and Latin authors (only one of them Christian), Busti refers to Apuleius' *De deo Socratis* through Augustine's *De civitate Dei*; he quotes Plato (through Calcidius): "Invisibilium potestatumque demones nuncupantur prestare rationem maius est opus quam ferre valeat hominis ingenium"; Xenophon, who reporting the discourse held by Socrates before the Athenians "Inter cetera dixit: 'Eninvero mihi iam bis defensionem paranti demonium adversatur'"; Aristotle, who wondered "An sompnium procedat ab aliqua causa naturali vel ab operatione demonum"; Lactantius, who wrote: "Uterque demones esse affirmat inimicos et vexatores hominum"; and Thales of Miletus, who "Mundus dixit demonibus plenum".²¹ Only after having mentioned these authors does Busti pass to Scriptural *auctoritates*. It is first of all the Book of Revelation that gives the preacher indications that "Serpens antiquus qui vocatur diabolus et Sathanas (...) habentem clavem abyssi id est inferni et catenam magnam in manu sua id est diversa ligamenta ad ligandas animas ne peniteant. Cum qua catena vult eas demergere in profundum inferni".²² Busti actualizes the chain from Revelation and builds his model sermon in order to describe its septem nodi, the seven ways through which one continues to sin.

The first of them is *infidelity*, "Prima et catena magna", because it directly opposes faith; then, *difficulty*, through which the devil tells the sinner that abandoning sin is too difficult and therefore impossible; third, *exemplarity*, with the devil suggesting that sins are not as serious as preachers say, and shows bad examples from the clergy ("Mala exempla doctorum superiorumque ac sacerdotum et religiosorum"), so that "Dicunt enim ignorantes plebei: 'si licet doctoribus qui aliis predicant si confessoribus qui alios absolvunt peccare, quare non etiam nobis?'" It is interesting to note how Busti highlights the centrality of preaching and confessing

21 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermon 7, fols XXXVvb-XXXVIra: Calcidius, *Timaeus* 40d; Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, X, 27; Xenophon, *Apologia Socratis*, 4; Aristotle, *De somno et vigilia*, 463b, 15; Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum*, II, 15; the sentence attributed to Thales of Miletus - referred to by Aristotle - had to circulate in collections of aphorisms attributed to ancient philosophers; see for instance the anonymous and earlier attributed to Gualterus Burlaeus (Walter Burley) (d. c. 1343) *De vita et moribus philosophorum*, ed. Hermann Knust, Stuttgart 1886, c. I, s. 2: "Thales Millesio (...) principium omnium aquam posuit mundumque animatum dixit et demonibus plenum".

22 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermon 7, fol. XXXVIra. Cf. Rev. 12 and 20.

sins, thus denoting the nature and the duties of his readership of friars in a precise pastoral way. The fourth chain employed by the devil is *cheerfulness*, because sin is always connected to something attractive, which is basically the *dulcedo mundi*; the fifth is *arrogance*, which deriving from *superbia* connects itself to one of the most serious vices according to the Christian tradition; the sixth is *forbearance*, by means of which the devil encourages the sinner not to repent until the very last moment in his life since “Deus est patiens et longanimis”, or tries to convince the sinner that he still has time by saying: “Tu vero es iuuenis, tu habes corpus validum ac forte, habebisque longam vitam”. The seventh and last chain is *despair*, when the sinner is prevented from repenting because he despairs of the mercy of God.

These seven “chains” constitute seven strong concepts preachers can use to orientate the inner attitude of the penitent towards a precise understanding of sin. They also shape penitential behaviors by contrasting some common sense notions, such as thinking one has sufficient time to do something important, such as, in this case, to repent. When discussing *longanimitas* or forbearance, Busti proposes what handwriting on the left margin of the folio defines as “*Exempla multa et terribilia*”, short anecdotes whose aim was to remind the faithful that the certainty of having time ahead is totally mistaken:

Sicut accidit cuidam cubiculario Ducis Mediolani Mcccclxii die xxviii Julii, qui sub barbitonsore gaudens: subito cecidit mortuus. (...) Alius quoque eiusdem Ducis curialis dum ad curiam equitare vellet de stapha cadens retro expiravit. (...) Eodem etiam anno in Canavesio post Pascha nobilis quedam pregnans chorizando statim mortua est. Item in civitate Brixie quedam sponsa chorizans expiravit in medio choree. Padue nobilis quedam iuuenis cum tubis et timpanis ad maritum ivit die dominico, et infra septimanam omni die ad vota chorizavit. Dominica vero sequenti doloribus angustiata expiravit. Laude sacerdos novellus missam cantaturus die dominico in platea solemniter ornata, cum sabbato dormitum isset, mane mortuus in lecto repertus est. In Arona lacus maioris quidam ad tabulas ludens subito expiravit. Et alter ibidem cum uxore in mensa sedens similiter expiravit. In terra viglevani mulier dominico die se vestens ad missam itura cecidit mortua. Locarni lacus maioris sponsa sero quedam leta dormitum iit et nocte illa mortua est. Mcccclxviii in civitate Papie mortuo quodam nobili unus orator actu rhetoricam legens, cum iret ut super funus orationem faceret in media via expiravit. Pergami in eodem anno quidam denarios enumerans in die omnium sanctorum expiravit. Eodem anno Varisii quidam nobilis in festo Pasche usque ad horam tertiam noctis cum suis spacians cum dormitum iret doloribus corripitur et loquelam amisit ac mortuus est. Mcccclxxi, Papa Paulus cum sanus cenasset in camera sua dormitum vadens mortuus inventus est. Rome quidam vir ditissimus cum concubina dormiens, super corpus eius expiravit. Et idem accidit Mediolani cuidam peccanti cum quadam moniali et alteri religioso cum concubina sua peccanti. Mcccclvii, cum quidam nobilis ditissimus ad ignem pirum cum baculo voveret nullo presente inclinato capite expiravit et in ignem cecidit. Ibidem etiam cum quidam

predicator detestaretur larvas unus iuuenis xxvi annorum irrisit verba eius et nocte sequenti mortuus est. Pretermitto de multis principibus qui temporibus nostris sani et in multa prosperitate existentes ex improvviso in instanti sunt interfecti, et de quamp pluribus aliis qui iuuenes cum essent et robusti repentina morte sunt extincti.²³

These *exempla* give strength to the discourse of the preacher, pointing to the need for prompt repentance. The precise indication of time and place in which the events occurred gives an important touch of realism and veracity to the preacher's short anecdotes. It is also clear how an unexpected death was not considered to be a matter for just certain social strata nor simply a kind of punishment for sinners. The sudden death of Pope Paul II in 1471 – which we know was probably due to indigestion at dinner – as well as that of a young priest from Lodi who was expected to say a Mass in the beautifully decorated public square but who died the night before are two tales clearly reminding that death is impending for everyone. Some *exempla* highlight how death can be expected in the middle of everyday activities of usually busy lives. This is the case of a waiter of the Duke of Milan Francesco Sforza (r. 1450-1466) who died at a barber's; a member of the Milanese court falling and dying while riding towards the court; a pregnant noblewoman from Canavese who died while dancing after Easter; another noblewoman who died the Sunday after she was married; a bride from Brescia who died in the middle of the dance; a man who died while sitting at the table with his wife; still, the case of a certain woman who died on a Sunday in Vigevano while dressing up to go to Mass; a bride who went to sleep and died in the night in Locarno on the Lake Maggiore; an orator who had to give a speech at a funeral, but died in the middle of the street while walking towards the cemetery in Pavia; a man who was counting money and died on All Saints' day in Bergamo; and a rich man who had a sudden illness while cooking, died and fell into the fire. Death waits in ambush even during the most intimate moments of life, as highlighted by the case of a rich man who died in Rome on top of his concubine. More examples clearly highlight the occurrence of death on sinful occasions, such was the case of someone from Arona near Lake Maggiore who died while playing dice, or that of a certain nobleman who in Varese during Easter – the mention of the feast is here probably meaningful – had ambled with friends until late at night and died while going to sleep, as well as the telling case in Milan of someone who was sinning with a nun and of a priest who was sinning with his lover. The example of a preacher condemning the use of masks who was mocked by a 26-year-old man highlights the importance of respecting preachers, because that man died suddenly the following night. Busti warns that he might still go on with further *exempla*. The message is clear enough: death does not spare healthy and prosperous princes nor strong young men. The time of one's death is so uncertain that penitence has to be timely and constant, since death is always imminent. The preacher at a certain point even makes Death talk

23 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermo 7, fol. XLIIvab.

in a sort of grim reminder: “Ego sum per nomen vocata mors, vulnero quem sors tangit, non est homo adeo fortis qui a me surgere possit”.²⁴

Speaking of the importance of penitence, with regard to the seven chains of the devil – as well as of other issues dealt with in the *Rosarium* – a large number of profane *auctoritates* give Busti material to explain and discuss his moral teachings. Thus, concerning *longanimitas*, the preacher indicates how the reasons one should not play for time before doing penitence include ignorance of three basic elements of death: *hora*, *locus*, and *modus*, which are the moment, the place, and the way of one’s death.²⁵ In order to explain the awareness of these kinds of uncertainties, Busti contradicts Cicero, who in *De Senectute* wrote: “Nemo est adeo senex qui se non putet adhuc annum vivere”, considering this an “opinio pro certo falsissima”. While relying on *Ec. IX, 12* (“No one knows when their hour will come”) the preacher claims that the overall ignorance about the timing of death is the only element one can be sure about. Quoting Seneca who in his letters *Ad Lucilium* warned “Incertum est quo in loco te mors exspectet, tu quoque in omni loco si sapiens eris eam exspectabis”, Busti also affirms that one should expect the possibility of meeting the death in every place, and then reminds his readership of the impossibility to know even in which way death would happen. The core of Busti’s point is better explained by *Mt. 25: 13*: “Vigilate itaque, quia nescitis diem neque horam”, which implies that penitence must never be postponed. More classical *auctoritates* give sparks to this idea, such as Lucanus: “Tolle moras, semper nocuit differre paratis”; Horace: “Quacunq̄ue Deus tibi fortunaverit horas, grata sume manu nec dulcia differ in annum”; Martial: “Vivendi recte fatuus procrastinat horam”;²⁶ Cato: “Rem, tibi quam noscis aptam dimittere noli”, with Busti’s comment: “Ne rursus queras que iam neglexeris ante”; and Prosperus: “Quid iuvat in longum causas producere morbi? Cur dubium exspectat cras hodierna salus?”.²⁷ Thus, one

24 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermo 7, fol. XLIIra. The 1498 edition reads: “E sono per nome chiamata morte: ferisco a chi tocha la sorte, | non è homo così forte che da mi possa scampare” (Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermo 7, f. 42rb).

25 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermo 7, fols XLIva-XLIIra.

26 The reference to Martial is an intriguing one since the quote should actually be attributed to Horace, *Epistulae*, I, II 41 (“Vivendi qui recte qui prorogat horam, | rusticus exspectat dum defluat amnis; at ille | labitur et labetur in omne volubilis aevum”); however, in Chapter 224 ‘*Horam bene vivendi procrastinandam non esse*’ of Godfrey of Winchester’s *Epigrammata* it is said: “Vivendi recte fatuus procrastinat horam | Crastine, eras semper das mihi, nunquam hodie”. Due to his competence in writing epigrams, Godfrey was often mistaken for Martial during the Middle Ages (being actually known as the pseudo-Martial): he might be Busti’s actual source.

27 Cicero, *De senectute*, VII, 24 (“Nemo est enim tam senex qui se annum non putet posse vivere – sed idem in eis elaborant quae sciunt nihil ad se omnino pertinere”); Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, XXVI, 7 (“Incertum est quo loco te mors exspectet; itaque tu illam omni loco exspecta”); Horace, *Epistulae*, I, XI 22, 23 (“Tu quacunq̄ue Deus tibi fortunaverit horam | grata sume manu”); the reference to Cato comes from *Disticha Catonis*, II, 26; Prosperus, *Epigrammata ex sententiis Augustini*, LXX, PL 51, col. 520d; Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, I, 281: it is interesting to note that the sentence, which according to Lucanus, Gaius Scribonius Curio – a tribune of the plebs – told Julius Caesar to convince him to march towards Rome had a certain fortune being also referred to by

should not wait for the very last moment (*dies extremus*) before *poenitentiam agere*; after all, paraphrasing Augustine, the preacher points out that “*Impossibile est male vivere et bene mori*”: a “good death” is typical of someone who has been living a righteous life.²⁸

The preacher’s pace is pressing. It testifies to the central role of penitence fostered by the idea of death as always incumbent, with eternal salvation being the main issue in the entire economy of conversion fostered by the friar: this is a type of conversion that the call to prepare for death through penitence contributes to a sphere of intimate self-reflection. In these terms, Sermon 7 is strictly related to other sermons whose task was to explain some basic aspects of the “world of sin” and penitence.²⁹ Thus, Sermon 6 for the Friday before the first Sunday of Lent on the Seven Deadly Sins – which points to one of the most popular schemes for the classification of sin – and Sermon 8 for the first Sunday of Lent on the risks of doing penitence *in articulo mortis*, which reaffirms and specifies further the need for constant penitence, are both part of the cycle of Sermons (from 1 to 10) introducing to preaching and penitence. These sermons show the aim of the friar to change the habits of the faithful by introducing a “penitential mentality”, one that would foster penitence and confession throughout one’s life: “*Quilibet ergo peccator debet statim post lapsum resurgere a peccato et non expectare diem mortis*”.³⁰

The role of death is reconsidered in the second part of the *Rosarium*, where the words of Orpheus addressing Pluto and Proserpina in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* help Busti depict the idea of death as the last and common destination of all men:

Omnia debentur vobis, paulumque morati
Serius aut citius sedem properamus ad unam
Tendimus huc omnes, haec est domus ultima vosque
Humani generis longissima regna tenetis.³¹

Death is “the most enduring kingdom over the human race”: Busti shows that one should be aware of this and thus prepare himself for the voyage well in advance in order to avoid damnation. Repentance, penitence, and conversion of life are the only ways to avoid hell: since Busti highlights that one is not predestined to either salvation or damnation, one’s own efforts are important to secure his own salvation.

That is why, Busti explains, it is necessary for friars to preach about the terrible punishments awaiting sinners in the hell: as the mother who wants to wean her baby puts bitter unguent on her breast, so the good preachers who aim at

Dante in *Inferno* XXVIII 98-99 and employed in the letter of 1311 (§ 4) through which he wanted to convince the King of Germany Henry VII to intervene against Florence. Cf. F. Matarrese, *Interpretazioni dantesche*. Bari 1957, 329.

28 Augustine, *Sermo de disciplina Christiana*, 12,13: “*Non potest male mori, qui bene vixerit*”.

29 J. Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: La culpabilisation en Occident (XIII-XVII^e siècle)*. Paris 1983, 129 ff.

30 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermo 7, fol. XLIIra.

31 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Part II, Sermo 23 *De numero salvandorum respectu damnandorum* for the Saturday after Easter, fol. CCXXVIIra; cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, 32-35.

discouraging the faithful from the sensualities and the amusements of the world have to show them the bitterness of hell.³² Continuing from Sermon 21 *De septem penis inferni*, in Sermon 22 Busti expounds “on the seven further afflictions of hell” relying on Dante and Virgil:

De quo inferno inquit Dantes in iii c. i comedie inferni, loquentes vice eius et dicens:

Per me itur ad civitatem dolentem
 Per me itur ad perditam gentem
 Iusticia movit altum meum creatorem
 Fecit me divina potestas
 Summa sapientia primus amor
 Ante me non fuerunt res create
 Nisi eterne, et ego eternus duro
 Sinatis omnem spem vos qui intratis.³³

Sibilla quae cumana de inferno loquens Enee, ut refert Virgilius in VI Eneydes, inquit:

Vestibulum ante ipsum primisque in faucibus Orci
 Luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae,
 pallentesque habitant Morbi tristisque Senectus,
 et Metus et malesuada Fames ac turpis Egestas.³⁴

Thus, to the seven afflictions described in the preceding sermon – the deprivation of seeing God, terrible underground imprisonment, darkness, the great stink, the apparition of the devil, the harassment of worms, unbearable pain – Sermon 22 adds the impossibility for the damned in hell to change their state, starvation and thirst, intolerable cold, eternal fire, deprivation of the charity of God and neighbors, a never-ending lamentation (the *cantus damnatorum*, which is described as a real chant based on the six musical notes *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la* referred by the initial syllable of each biblical verse that the damned sung in alternate voices to show their pain) and eternal desperation as the last affliction of those in hell.³⁵ This all awaits those who die in mortal sin, especially, Busti points out, those who live outside faith: “Quo vadunt omnes qui sunt extra fidem?” – the preacher wanders – “Ad domum diaboli!” – he replies – then enlisting specific categories of sinners, among others: those who deny that the Church of Rome is the head of all churches, those who refuse the articles of the faith, those who doubt the immortality of the

32 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Part II, Sermo 22 *De septem aliis afflictionibus inferni* for the Friday after Easter, fol. CCXVIIva.

33 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Part II, Sermo 22, fol. CCXVIIvab.; Dante, *Inf.*, III, 1, 3-9: cf. De Serravalle, *Translatio et Commentum totius libri Dantis Aldigherii*, 50-51.

34 Virgil, *Aen.*, VI, 273-276.

35 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Part II, Sermo 22, fol. CCXXvb.

soul, those who defend heretics, and those who hold superstitious beliefs and practice magic.³⁶

Dante is constantly referred to by Busti to illustrate the afflictions of hell. Thus, for instance, speaking of the torment of the worms on the slothful:

Isti putridi qui nunquam erant vivi,
erant nudi et multum stimulati
a muscis et vespis que erant ibi.
Rigaverunt sanguine eorum vultum,
qui mixtus lachrymis usque ad pedes
a fastidiosis vermibus erat recollectus.³⁷

As well as to highlight the torment of cold and heat:

Ad sufferendum tormenta calida et frigida
similibus corporibus virtus disponit
que quo modo facit non vult ut sudemus.³⁸

In conclusion, pagan and profane literatures are widely employed in Busti's model sermons in order to foster his moral discourse.³⁹ Literary sources seem to offer a double type of use for the preacher: on the one hand a kind of "esthetical" use, as is clear from the *prohoemium* of the *Rosarium*, which aims at showing literary skills; on the other hand, a moralistic use often relying on texts employed in schools such as the *Disticha Catonis* or on collections of profane proverbs. As said, this seems to mark a change in the cultural sensibilities of at least some of the friars; this is also part of an overall process of transformation of the work of the preacher along humanist models whose exact nature and features would nevertheless need to be studied with regard to any single preacher. We know of the strict relationship existing between the art of rhetoric and the humanist: commenting on the treatise on humanists by Fabio Paolini, *De doctore humanitatis* (1586), it has been said that "In a way the perfect humanist was born under the suggestion of the perfect rhetorician".⁴⁰ From this point of view, one might wonder who was a more perfect orator than a preacher? The relationship between rhetoric and humanism needs

36 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Part II, Sermo 23, CCXXVIIrbva. The "superstitious" Busti mentions here are modelled on those included in the list developed fully in Sermon 16 of part I of the *Rosarium sermonum*; cf. Conti, *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers*, 159 note 2, and *passim*.

37 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Part II, Sermo 21, fol. CCXVrb; *Inf.*, III, 64-69: cf. De Serravalle, *Translatio et Commentum totius libri Dantis Aldigherii*, 54.

38 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Part II, Sermo 22, fol. CCXIXrb; *Purg.*, III, 31-33: cf. De Serravalle, *Translatio et Commentum totius libri Dantis Aldigherii*, p. 458. Busti here mistakenly refers to *Inferno* instead of *Purgatorio*.

39 Cf. M. E. Lage Cotos, "Auctoritates classicas para la salvacion humana. El Rosarium Sermonum de Bernardino de Bustis", *Euphrosyne* 27 (1999), 165-77.

40 R. Avesani, "La professione dell'umanista nel Cinquecento", *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 13 (1970), 205-232: 215.

to be rediscovered and checked in light of the works of preachers. This change of cultural sensibilities was one that allowed preachers to increase the instruments at their disposal and to develop their moral discourse, largely employing these instruments without the hesitations of earlier generations of friars. This is, therefore, as we have seen, an opening in the service of the preacher's message, the need for penitence, since, as Busti writes: "Qui tempus habet non expectet tempus" ("Chi ha tempo non expecti tempo").⁴¹

41 Busti, *Rosarium sermonum*, Sermo 7, fol. XLIIra (f. 42rb in the 1498 edition).