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Intervention of H.E. Msgr. Angelo Becciu at the presentation of the book “Francesco il Ribelle” (13 March 2018)

On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, the book *Francesco il Ribelle* (“Francis the Rebel”) by Father Enzo Fortunato, Director of the Press Room of the Sacred Convent of Assisi, was presented yesterday in Rome, at the Luigi Sturzo Institute. The book, a new biography of the Saint of Assisi, is introduced by a preface by the Vatican Secretary of State, His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

The following is the intervention by H.E. Msgr. Angelo Becciu, Substitute of the Secretariat of State, given during the presentation:

Intervention by S.E. Mons. Angelo Becciu

I gladly consented to present the book *Francesco il Ribelle*, edited by Fr. Enzo Fortunato, for two reasons: firstly, because you can not remain indifferent to the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi. Despite having read other biographies, one is always intrigued to know new details about his life. Indeed, the history of Francis of Assisi continues to fascinate even today, almost eight centuries after his death (1226), because it is a captivating story not only for those who are more advanced in years and who are in a position to better understand human experience, but also and above all, for many young people who see in Francis an example of the inner freedom to which they aspire, and also a model to refer to in order to live their own religious experience.

Secondly, because with today’s presentation we wanted to pay tribute to Pope Francis on the anniversary of his election to the papal throne. Indeed, in this book of his Fr. Fortunato also wanted to offer a glimpse of the topicality of thought and action of Pope Francis who is linked to the *Poverello* of Assisi in a very special way. He has continually given us his testimony, with his words and deeds, from the first moment of His election, when to general surprise he assumed the name of Francis. The Holy Father has often cited Saint Francis of Assisi: in his speeches, homilies, Messages, documents, interviews, meetings, audiences and in the Sunday Angelus. His frequent reference to Saint Francis, his remembering of the poor, the weak and the sick in every circumstance of his ministry, in every situation, event, journey, his building of bridges to all men of good will, believers and not,

for a constructive dialogue to build peace, show that his life and his teaching are inspired by the teachings of the *Poverello*.

Coming to the book, I wish to thank the author, Fr. Enzo Fortunato, whom I knew as a dynamic conventual friar, creator of various initiatives and successful media events based always on the figure of his Master and of the convent of Assisi, but it is the first time I have come across one of his writings of particular importance such as this publication. I have to admit, and for this I congratulate him, that his flowing, captivating, engaging style helps one love the character he describes. It is true that Saint Francis, as I said before, is appealing by himself, but the desire to know him better is supported by the readable style of our author.

As we enter the pages of the book, it seems to me that the reader's desire is to find evidence confirming what is announced by the title of the work: *Francesco il Ribelle*, Francis the Rebel. What meaning did this description have, and does it have today, applied to Saint Francis? According to the common categories the rebel is one who eternally rages against everything and against everyone, very often wishing to destroy violently that which, and those who, oppose his plans. Alas! History is littered with such wicked examples. The rebellion of Francis is of a different dimension. It has been so "sui generis" that, unlike other rebellions, it still remains and becomes a model of life for thousands of his followers, in every corner of the earth. The non-conformism of Francis can not be explained if you do not look at the crucial moment of his life, when he denounces his past and challenges the right-minded of the time (life companions, civil authorities, ecclesiastics, his own family) and throws himself into the adventure that will lead him to live the Gospel "sine glossa". Francis experiences the beauty of the Gospel that, lived "without ifs and buts", transforms one's life and, by contagion, that of others. Eloquent is the page in which our Fr. Fortunato mentions the passage from the inner struggle that tormented the young Francis for a long time, his use of distractions of all kinds, and the peace of the soul he found in embracing the lepers. The Gospel word that had inspired him to make such a gesture was "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me". From then on his life was guided only by the Gospel, lived radically. This resulted in a revolution in the Church and in society itself, the effects of which are still felt.

As Fr. Fortunato writes, he showed himself to be "a rebel against his time, which tended towards the victory of individualism and of the 'owning society', rebel not against the Church or even against the hierarchy" (pg. 10). Francis did not "wage war" (that is, rebel) against anyone, ever: he never rebelled by opposing a law or a constituted authority. Reform yes, for giving a new order, a better form, to transform a situation, a society, but by his example. Authority and veneration came to him precisely from his way of living. By this point the die had been cast: he had crossed the Rubicon that held him back in the past and went on to live a life filled only with God. With God, chosen as his only ideal and as his only wealth, it was logical to challenge the opulence of the rich, embracing poverty, overcoming discriminatory barriers, extending his love for all, distinguishing himself from the protesters of time, and bowing to the provisions of ecclesiastical authority, seen as an expression of God's will. A true restorer, his desire was to bring back to its original state the divine image and likeness in those whom he met and considered his brothers, so as to revive broken spirits, restore values, and re-establish a better world around him.

Saint Francis still provokes us and teaches us to do like him: not to presuppose the beauty of the Gospel, but to live its pages with radicality.

I would like to conclude with the words that Cardinal Parolin writes in the Preface to the book: "Assisi is a special sanctuary, because normally in shrines we go to ask for a grace, a miracle. In Assisi no, in Assisi we go to meet Francis ... a man who lived the Gospel. I would say that one goes there to meet the Gospel itself, *sine glossa*".

Thank you, Fr. Fortunato, for giving us the opportunity to turn again to Assisi to draw the ever fresh water of the great saint.
