

Xavier Barral i Altet

Saint Francis and Innocent III in Assisi: Some Observations on the Franciscan Iconography and the Mission of Evangelisation

The cycle depicting the Stories of St Francis in the Upper Church of Assisi, executed by the Florentine painter Giotto and his workshop in the nineties of the thirteenth century, includes a scene commonly called The Confirmation of the Rule, famous for both art historians and historians of the Franciscans. In the scene we observe St Francis kneeling before Pope Innocent III in the moment of receiving approval of the rules of the new order from the Pope. This paper examines the history of the image and reflects on what were the instructions, ideological rather than iconographic, given to Giotto to compose this painting, about sixty years after the death of the saint, and especially what were the cultural references Giotto decided to use. Among the conclusions the author speculates that Giotto was advised to insist on the Pope's message, which was to entrust Francis a mission of evangelisation, but not excluding the possibility that the occasion was taken to demonstrate the written rule, the rule already formalised. To put on this specific and very particular commission, Giotto uses two different cultural references that were accommodated in his imagery of a medieval artist: the ancient image of imperial audience along with the *Traditio legis*.