

Giovanni Battista Folengo

Wikipedia, April, 2020, translated into English by Google with modifications by Ann Mullaney. Hyperlinked notes are to the Italian version, but notes are translated below.

Disclaimer: Some of the biographical information is probably accurate. Some statements are incorrect, for example, "In 1585... the comment was republished devoid of every consideration not consonant with the conciliar directives."

Giovanni Battista Folengo (Mantua, 1490 - San Benedetto Po, 5 October 1559) was a Christian monk and an Italian theologian belonging to the Benedictine Order and brother of the famous poet Teofilo.

He was born to the notary Federico and Paola Ghisi in 1490, a year before Teofilo, and after brothers Placido, Ludovico and Nicodemo, who also took the Benedictine habit.^[1] Placido was ordained in the monastery of Polirone in 1495 and died 15 years later in Montecassino; Ludovico, professed in 1497, was prior of Polirone in 1517 and abbot of San Pietro in Perugia in 1524, while Nicodemo was ordained in Praglia in 1502.

Giovanni Battista made his monastic profession in the monastery of San Benedetto Po on 3 October 1507, he kept his name and began his training under the guidance of the cellarer Gregorio Cortese, future cardinal, having as fellow students, among others, Luciano degli Ottoni and Benedetto Fontanini. Around 1512 he transferred to the monastery of San Girolamo della Crevara and from here, together with the Cortese, to that of Lérins, in France, where the Benedictine Denis Faucher dedicated a *Deploratio de lapsu Ordinis monastici* and two eglogues to him.^[2]

In 1522 the chapter of the Congregation moved Giovanni Battista to the monastery of San Giovanni Evangelista of Parma, from where he spent the following year in nearby Santa Maria delle Nevi, in Torrechiara, where he found his brother Teofilo.^[3] Returning to Parma in 1525, he became prior and became a close friend of the biblical scholar, Isidoro Chiari (Isidorus Clarius).

Just as Teofilo Folengo had done in 1525, Giovanni Battista too left the Benedictine Congregation in 1528 with *regolare licenza* (valid permission) of his superiors: unlike Teofilo, who with the *Orlandino* in 1526 and the *Chaos del Triperuno* the following year, openly called into question the meaning of monastic life, thus entering into the then open debate on the validity of traditional ecclesiastical institutions, Giovanni Battista withdrew into isolation on Mount Conero, where he was joined in 1530 by Teofilo, and together they moved to Mount Luco, in Umbria, then to Abruzzo, and Tossicia and finally to the Hermitage of San Pietro, an old Benedictine establishment then abandoned in Crapolla, on the Sorrentine peninsula. Here they did not limit themselves to living in solitude, but had contacts with the evangelical circle which, despite the recent death of its founder Juan de Valdés, was still active in Naples.^[4]

In 1534 Teofilo and Giovanni Battista asked to return to the Congregation and were readmitted by the president Don Leonardo Bevilacqua who felt obliged to warn the Duke of Mantua of the provision in May 9, 1534, with a letter in which he hoped that the two friars would “set out to deport themselves better in the future than they have done in the past.” [\[5\]](#)

On 14 May Giovanni Battista sent a piece from Rimini to his friend and brother Luciano degli Ottoni in Latin entitled, not coincidentally, *Remigratio (Return)*, which is the twelfth of sixteen dialogues, the *Pomiliones (Nani/ Dwarves)*, which the Benedictine had already printed or was about to print that same year in Venice. The *Pomiliones* are the story of that eremitical experience shared by the two brothers and perhaps also the cryptic expression of reformist convictions. [\[6\]](#)

At the end of the 1530s, Giovanni Battista was in the Benedictine monastery of Santa Croce, in Campese, where he wrote a *Commentarium in Psalmos*, dedicated to Captain Camillo Orsini and published in Basel by Michael Isengrin, publisher of European fame. The preference shown to the publisher of Basel entailed a guarantee of quality and the possibility of greater diffusion of the work, but it cannot fail to suggest a choice in the direction of the reformist confession that had already put solid roots in Swiss cities. [\[7\]](#)



Sebastiano del Piombo: Cardinale Reginald Pole

Having moved in 1540 to Montecassino, he was transferred again to the nearby monastery of Santa Maria dell'Albaneta where, in 1542, he finished his commentary on all the biblical psalms. From 1546 he is documented in San Benedetto Po, where he completed a commentary on the *First Letter of Saint John*, published in Venice and reprinted the following year in Antwerp. The comment, then released concurrently with the opening of the Council of Trent, is dedicated to Cardinal Reginald Pole, on whom hope was placed by those who yearned, in the context of a renewal of the Church, to reconcile Christians in an atmosphere of tolerance and concord. In 1580 the book was

put on the *Index [of Forbidden Books]*.

The commentary is the most extensive among those published by Catholics in the sixteenth century “and for exegetical value it can honestly be placed next to the best.”

[8] In it there are also explicit criticisms of the Protestants, but above all the hope of harmoniously overcoming disagreements is expressed, so that in 1585, after the conclusion of the Council of Trent that defined the rift between the two confessions, the comment was republished devoid of every consideration not consonant with the conciliar directives. In 1552 he probably also wrote a *Vita Sancti Simeonis monachi*, intended to appear in an Office of the saint. [9]

In 1555 his comments on the two *Letters of Peter* and the *Letter of James* were published in Lyon, together with the reprinting of the commentary on the *Letter of John*. Dedicated to the two confreres his companions in the Spanish mission, they were composed in the court of Bondanazzo, a nearby property of the abbey of Polirone: although the commentary on the epistle of James appears particularly respectful of Catholic orthodoxy, the book also ended up in the Index in 1596.

The last years were spent by Folengo in the abbey of Polirone, where his death is documented on October 5, 1559. [12]

Works

- *Pomiliones*, On the promontory of Minerva, with Sirius burning, MDXXXIII: the *Pomiliones* (or *Pumiliones*, in Latin, *nani* [dwarves, short pieces]) are a collection of sixteen Latin dialogues published in 1534 in Venice by the typographer Aurelio Pincio with the false indication of the year (1533 instead of 1534) and especially of the place, Promontory Minervae – or Punta Campanella – in a volume of 112 sheets in-quarto [folded into 8 pages] in which [the dialogues] occupy the first 77 sheets [154 pages], and are followed by two works by Teofilo Folengo, the 68 poems of the *Vario Poema* and the poem *Ianus*. There are 15 copies of the volume, never subsequently reprinted: however, a dialogue has been published, the *Pomilio XIII*, by E. Puglia, *Due eremiti nella terra delle Sirene: Giambattista Folengo, Pomilio XIII*, 1980. The hypothesis is advanced that Teofilo Folengo also contributed to the *Pomiliones*. [13]

- *Commentarium in Psalmos*, Michael Isengrin, Basel 1540: is the first edition of a commentary of 44 psalms. The second edition, printed again in Basel for the presses of Isengrin, is from 1549, and includes the commentary to all 150 biblical psalms.

- *Commentarium in Sancti Johannis epistolam*, Aldo Manuzio, Venice 1546. In 1555 the comment was republished in Lyon by the typographer Sebastian Gryphius together with those dedicated to the two letters of Peter and to the letter of James, also by Giovanni Battista Folengo.

- *Vita Sancti Simeonis monachi*, in *Officium sancti Symeonis monachi and eremitae Armenii, cum illius vita nuper recognita*, Eredi Lucantonio Giunta, Venice 1552: the only known copy of the book, formerly preserved in the British Library, was destroyed

during the Second World War.

Notes

1. [^] For the composition of the Folengo family, see R. Signorini, *Un nuovo contributo alla biografia di Teofilo Folengo*, in *Cultura letteraria e tradizione popolare in Teofilo Folengo*, 1977.
2. [^] Edited by the monk, Vincenzo Barrali Salerno nella sua *Chronologia Sanctorum et aliorum virorum illustrium ac abbatum sacrae insulae Lerinensis*, Lyon, Pierre Rigaud, 1613. Concerning Faucher, Louis Mouan, *Études sur Denis Faucher, moine de Lérins*, Paris 1847 e Mario Chiesa, in Teofilo Folengo, Padova 1991.
3. [^] Pietro Calzolari Ricordati claims in his *Historia monastica IV*, 1561, that Giovanni Battista was abbot of the monastery of Torrechiara, but the notice appears unfounded.
4. [^] G. Billanovich, *Tra don Teofilo e Merlin Cocai*, 1948, pp. 141-142.
5. [^] The letter, in the Archivio di Stato di Mantova, b. 2521, is reported in G. Billanovich, cit., pp. 154-155.
6. [^] According to Goffis, cited.
7. [^] The thesis of Ugo Rozzo e di Silvana Seidel Menchi, *Livre et réforme en Italie*, 1990, p. 337.
8. [^] According to the Catholic biblical scholar, A. Vaccari, *IV cenenario d'un nobile esegeta italiano: Giambattista Folengo O. S. B. (1490-1559)* in «Rivista biblica» VIII, 1960.
9. [^] It is attributed to him by Arnolde Wion, *Lignum vitae*, 1595.
10. [^] According to Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini, editor, in 1745, of the correspondence of the English cardinal.
11. [^] E. Menegazzo, *Colonna, Folengo, Ruzante e Cornaro. Ricerche, testi e documenti*, Padua 2001.
12. [^] In G. Billanovich, op. cit., p. 174.
13. [^] According to Mario Chiesa e Simona Gatti, *Il Parnaso e la zucca, Testi e studi folenghiani*, 1995.