

## FRANCESCO GIORGI AND THE HARMONY OF THE WORLD

### PART ONE

#### SLIDE 1 TITLE

#### INTRODUCTION

#### SLIDE 2

*But there are symphonies which are no less signs of heaven, such as those (as Plato tells) are presided over by the various Syrens, who are said to be singers to God, who, placed in the firmament, make its influences harmonious.*

(GIORGI 1578 p.650)

#### SLIDE 3

As far as remember I first came across Francesco Giorgi – and his massive book *De Harmonia Mundi (On the Harmony of the World)* in 1979 – over forty years ago.

Dame Frances Yates wrote several immensely influential books about the esoteric ideas that lie behind the art and politics of the Renaissance. She popularised ideas that had been almost unknown outside academic circles - and hardly thought of even there.

#### SLIDE 4

Yates's *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* was published in 1979. I had it for Christmas.

There are several interesting ideas in the book - but one thing that stood out for me is her observations on Francesco Giorgi and *The Harmony of the World*.

Could this book, published in Venice in 1525, have been an influence in Elizabethan England – and an inspiration for Shakespeare?

In particular – the Merchant of Venice – with its great speech on the Music of the Spheres:

Sit Jessica – look how the floor of heaven

Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st

But in his motion like an angel sings,

Still quiring to the bright-eyed cherubins:

Such harmony is in immortal souls,

But whilst in this muddy vesture of decay

Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

## SLIDE 5

I had already been immersed in the world of divine harmony – pursuing the syrens’ song – since I was at school. In 1979 I was enchanted by the idea that everything in us and the world followed a dance – guided by poetic rather than material connections. (Not very original – I read Charles Williams.) I called it the Great Poetic Mystery. To join the dance was a strange delight. I wrote poetry – in 1981 even a novel – about it.

Could this Venetian friar, Francesco Giorgi, have inspired the sparkling dance of Elizabethan poetry, art and music – and the dreams of music in nature which survived in England over the next hundred years and more?

This can only be a personal point of view. I’m talking about a vast book that I haven’t read – there’s still no complete English translation. I *can* give an overview of recent research into this labyrinthine text – and I hope I can add some personal observations – which just might be valid.

The script of this talk gives full references.

## SLIDE 6

One very important element in the Franciscan friar, Giorgi’s, book is the Jewish mystical tradition of cabala.

Frances Yates, following an earlier researcher, Daniel Banes, sees the possible influence of cabala in the *Merchant of Venice*. The Venetian Friar had studied Jewish mysticism deeply and worked with Jewish scholars in his home city.

Yates ends her chapter -

It would seem from the Merchant of Venice that Shakespeare, like Spenser, found the Christian Cabalist philosophy of the Friar of Venice congenial. (YATES 1979 p. 133)

*“It would seem”.*

Is there any actual evidence that Shakespeare knew of Giorgi’s book? The idea of the Harmony of the Spheres was a poetic commonplace. The echoes of cabala are very dim indeed and might also be purely poetic commonplaces.

And yet –

## SLIDE 7

Giorgi's book *was* known in England. There were copies in private libraries, and Cambridge University. A French translation was published in 1578. This is available as a pdf on Google Books.

If Yates was right *the Harmony of the World* is of extraordinary significance.

Forty years later after her book there is still no complete English translation *De Harmonia Mundi* and no general study of Giorgi in English.

Why?

I think there's a simple answer – not that the book isn't immensely important – but that the many people who are interested in magic and the occult – and accept Yates's views – find the book is overwhelmingly Christian – is it about magic at all? – whereas, on the other hand, I can find no sign that the book has been studied as a religious text – perhaps because it seems too esoteric or occult.

## SLIDE 8

In 1993 Joscelyn Godwin published an invaluable book for people with my rather niche interests - *The Harmony of the Spheres. A sourcebook of the Pythagorean tradition in music.*

This includes some extracts from *De Harmonia Mundi*, translated by the editor. Godwin makes this absolutely crucial comment:

The scope of the work almost beggars description: not only is it full of the most encyclopaedic learning, but every page shines with Giorgi's own Franciscan piety.

(GODWIN 1992 p. 185)

This is, I am going to suggest, the key to understanding Giorgi's book –

**Francesco Giorgi's *De Harmonia Mundi* is a Franciscan book.**

It's the final, climactic, flowering of a certain Franciscan tradition – a theology in which everything in Creation comes from UNITY - has meaning – reveals God – is a theophany – and we can share in that divine Harmony and Unity.

I will begin by looking at Giorgi in a Franciscan context – and then look at the form and themes of the book – and finally I will ask again whether its influence - or, at least, the glow of the Cloud of Ideas which the book embodies - can be detected in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## FRANCISCAN BACKGROUND

## SLIDE 9

The very idea of a book on the Harmony of the World can be seen as a Franciscan theme.

The harmonious Cosmos is an essential part of the Franciscan positive view of Nature as Good – as revealing God.

St Francis's famous *Canticle of the Creatures* is a statement about the Cosmos and our place in it. Francis sings praises of God *with* Brother Sun, Sister Moon, the stars and the four elements – and also Sister Death. He sings *with* the harmonious creation – in tune with it.

(Giorgi's book might be seen as a vast commentary on Francis's song.)

An apparently simple legend has deep significance: -

When Francis was ill, at Rieti, he asked his brothers to let him hear the music of a new lute. They hesitated. Instrumental music might be suspect – not approved by the church – and the lute is an Islamic instrument.

So, an angel came and played for Francis.

(COBIANCHI 2020)

## SLIDE 10

The great Franciscan theologian Bonaventure's most famous book is his *Soul's Journey into God*. This text shows how God can be known in three ways – in Creation - in ourselves – and, thirdly, how the transcendent God can be sought beyond the Cloud of Unknowing.

The first part lists every way in which the vestiges, or footprints, of God, can be known in Creation. Bonaventure's world is this unified sacred Cosmos – in which the angels move the planets – and in which everything comes from Harmony – or number.

Bonaventure's meditations on *The Tree of Life*, I believe, also follow the pattern of the Cosmos, in guiding us how to be Christ-like – how to be attuned to God.

(BONAVENTURE 1978)

This heavenly idea of music inspired practical – real – music. The Franciscans developed liturgical music, and, very significantly, used particular musical modes to give chants a particular quality – so that the music itself could convey meaning in liturgy, beyond the words.

(LOEWEN 2013)

And so – for the Franciscan monk Giorgi to bring together all the ancient themes of Harmony, and all the newly discovered ancient wisdom of Greek and Jewish tradition – is a continuation of this Franciscan theme.

### 3 WHO WAS GIORGI?

#### SLIDE 11

Francesco Giorgi (or, in Venetian spelling, Zorzi, and sometimes Giorgio) was a leading figure in the Franciscan movement – deeply involved in the controversies in this time of tumultuous change in European religion, politics – and even change in our perception of the world.

(Biographical info from VASOLI)

He was born in Venice on April 7th 1466. It's not known when he entered the Franciscan Order. He probably studied at the Studio del Santo, the school of the Venetian Franciscan Province. His work shows his deep knowledge of theology – he often refers to the great Franciscan theologian Dun Scotus. He had a very wide knowledge of Platonic philosophers, probably thanks to Marsilio Ficino, who made many works known that had been lost to the middle-ages. He also studied Jewish traditions and knew the scholars of the Venetian Jewish Community.

#### SLIDE 12

He was not only an intellectual. He

...was considered the most eminent preacher of the city...in the basilica of San Marco

(BUSI 1997 p. 97)

He made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

In 1500 he became the guardian of the Monastery of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice. He was confessor to the Poor Clares, the female wing of the Franciscan movement, including the visionary Chiara Bugni, whose visions some have seen as an influence in *De Harmonia Mundi*.

In 1517 the two factions of the Franciscans, the Conventuals and the Observants, were permanently separated and Giorgi was named *definitore generale cismontano* of the Observants – which is now the largest branch of the Franciscans.

He retired to the monastery of San Girolamo in 1517 – but was elected Provincial Minister in 1523.

In 1530 Giorgi became involved in a crisis in English politics.

### SLIDE 13

He worked with Richard Croke, who was sent to Italy to gather evidence in Henry VIII's case that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was not valid and should be annulled.

Henry's case was that it was not permissible in biblical law for someone to marry their late brother's wife. Giorgi drew on the wisdom of his many Jewish scholar friends in Venice, including Marco Raffaele, a convert to Christianity, to support the case that Henry was right. He was summoned to Rome to discuss the case with Pope Clement VII.

### SLIDE 14

Henry and Giorgi, and all his Jewish advisors, might have been right - but Clement could not accept the argument because of the influence of Spain. He couldn't possibly dismiss Henry's Spanish queen.

If the Pope had been free to follow Giorgi's case the history of England and the world would have followed a very different course.

This exceptionally dramatic event might have supported the reception of Giorgi's work in England. It has been suggested that Giorgi came to England himself in 1530-1. His friend, the Jewish convert Marco Raffaele, certainly did come to England and was an advisor to the king for several years.

### SLIDE 15

Another possible factor in the awareness of Giorgi in England is Royal Music. From about 1540 Henry VIII brought several Venetian musicians to England - five brothers of the Bassano family as a recorder consort, and several members of the Lupo family as viol players. Descendants of Lupos and Bassanos were leading royal musicians into the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A candidate for Shakespeare's Dark Lady, Emilia Lanier was a Bassano. There seems to be no evidence that, as some have suggested, the Bassanos were Jewish converts.

### SLIDE 16

#### THE BOOK

*De Harmonia Mundi* is a vast work - 1000 pages long. I am going to give an overview of the book as a whole and then I will present eight brief TONES (following Giorgi's terminology) - of important themes that have been studied in depth by various scholars over the last few years - especially ones that might be of interest when I look again at the possible influence of the book in England.

The form of *De Harmonia Mundi* is, in itself, a statement of its meaning.

### SLIDE 17

The book is in three parts which are called cantos, or songs - and each canto is in eight tones. In other words, each song has eight sections reflecting a musical octave - so the whole book forms a musical scale of three octaves, encompassing the whole universe.

The first canto is the Canto of Creation – looking at God as Unity, and at Harmony. The second canto is devoted to Christ and the third Canto concerns the soul - the microcosm.

(The list of the 8 Tones of each Canto is given in the script.)

The form of the book, in three parts, reminds me of the works of the great 13<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan theologian Bonaventure. Ewert H. Cousins in his book *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* explains that all the Bonaventure's work is a unity. It's like a great gothic cathedral, built on three themes, which, to Bonaventure are the Trinity, Christ, and the Reflection of God in the Universe. (COUSINS 1978 p. 43)

An important theme in Giorgi's book is the harmonisation of three traditions – Christian, Greek and Jewish.

#### SLIDE 18

A medieval theologian like Bonaventure might revere but know only fragments of his work. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Ficino had published translations of the revered Plato's previously lost works and many other texts. More recently there had been a great discovery of Jewish mystical texts by Christian writers.

#### SLIDE 19

This raises a very important point.

God and the Cosmos are common to all.

How could someone who is pursuing religious truth NOT embrace these other traditions -m which are all branches of one common tradition – speaking of the same God – and the same Cosmos?

Giorgi sees this is a perennial philosophy passing through many paths, including the Brahmins.

Of course, from Giorgi's point of view Christ is the complete revelation of Truth and our means of ascending to God – but even this could be explained in cabalistic terms – the mystery of the Messiah.

Giorgi is, though, very critical of Arab philosophy – by which he means Averroes, the Islamic philosopher whose commentaries on Aristotle had disturbed Bonaventure and influenced an increasingly over-intellectual and abstract theology in Christianity and Islam.

#### SLIDE 20

In all these traditions God is One – Unity – the Source of All Being.

BUT –

This UNITY is known in Creation through HARMONY.

This is an absolutely essential point.

The first Canto is of Unity *and* Harmony.

In this worldview it would be impossible to think about God as the source and unity of everything without also thinking about harmony as the law which comes from God, and guides the formation of everything in creation.

This is the law which allows everything in creation to form freely

God is not a power which controls everything in the world.

### SLIDE 21

The world is free. We have Free Will - but there is a harmony within everything to guide all things in their free formation - and we share in that process of creation.

In the middle-ages and Renaissance it would be unthinkable to study Unity without also considering Harmony - which in the Middle Ages would be known through the whole of the Seven Liberal Arts.

Giorgi is writing at a moment in history when all this is about to be lost. New philosophies and new science will detach God from Creation.

If we are to detect the influence of this book, we need to define what its key themes are. I am thinking of these themes as a Cloud of Ideas which the book embodies – which encapsulate a Platonic-Franciscan-Cosmic worldview. In the end we might not be able to say that someone had read the book – but we can say whether the light reflected by this Cloud of Ideas is present.

### SLIDE 22

The key themes of this Cloud of Ideas are:

- 1 Unity known in Harmony – the Cosmos.
- 
- 2 Harmony in all Creation – Music as the language of Creation.
- 
- 3 the importance of Imagination.
- 
- 4 the optimistic view of the soul's ability to become attuned to God.
- 

In his article on Giorgi's astrology, published in 2021, Ovanes Akopyan describes the climax and purpose of the book:

### SLIDE 23



After reaching the ultimate tone one stands in a contemplative admiration observing the beauty of the universe. The resulting visions are enumerated and form 20 revelations from the lowest one (matter) to the highest one (total silence). Zorzi labelled these revelations as motets....The image of the celestial Jerusalem crowns the plenitude of revelation, thus making the whole treatise represent the degrees of spiritual ascension through which the reader reaches the highest sphere of contemplation. (AKOPYAN P.207)

This parallels Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God* in which, at the climax, the Soul ...by entering itself, enters the heavenly Jerusalem.

and

Filled with all these intellectual illuminations,  
our mind like the house of God  
is inhabited by divine Wisdom;

(BONAVENTURE 1978 p. 93)

#### SLIDE 24

As Giorgi writes in his Third Canto:

We will sing perfect and harmonious songs - so God grants - because we will sing in the highest together with the angels; and the choir of the saints will not only resound in language, but we will sing with the spirit, the soul, the body and all members, when we sing the praise of the creator, who is worthy to receive glory and honour in eternity.

(SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN 2010 p. 315)

This is, surely, evidence that this entire book is, in effect, a vast commentary on St Francis's *Canticle of the Creatures*, which is just as all-encompassing - is about singing with the cosmos in praise of God - but in rather fewer words!

#### SLIDE 25

##### **tone 1 - unity**

Joscelyn Godwin writes in his *The Harmony of the Spheres*:

For there is only one purpose behind his enterprise: to be reunited with God. Hence the friar's repeated emphasis, as found near the beginning of this extract, on the

inviolable Unity which embraces all things, and which the mystic may glimpse shining through them.

(GODWIN 1992 pp. 185-

Here is Giorgi on Unity in Chapter 8 of his book:

#### SLIDE 26

When all created things are separated and divided into many portions, they remain dissonant unless through due harmony they are brought into oneness. Consonance, as Boethius and Nichomachus define it, is the concord of equal and unequal voices reduced to one. Hence the consonance of this world-instrument is also a concord of equal and unequal things reduced to this first unity, such that all things are said to rejoice in this unity as Plato argues learnedly and profoundly in the *Parmenides*.

#### SLIDE 27

According to Orpheus, God is one through identity, whereas every other thing is called one through its diversity, dependence, participation and connection with the true One which is God. Now he creates them in their multiplicity of species: now he assembles them all into a single inventive Idea. And thus by enfolding them all with the principle from which they emanated, he drives and draws them to unity.

#### SLIDE 28

The key idea here is one that was discussed by early Greek theologians – the relationship of individual things with Unity, the Source of All Being. The seventh-century Maximus the Confessor explained that every individual thing was an expression of the Word, which was God. God was present in everything.

This extract, though, shows us how ancient learning had been rediscovered in the Renaissance, particularly thanks to Ficino, translating works by Plato and others that had been unknown in the west before. Now, in 1525, Giorgi support the idea that the Word is in everything with reference to Plato's *Parmenides*, which Bonaventure would not have known, and to *the Hymns of Orpheus*.

And, crucially, everything is drawn to Unity, as individuals, or combined "into a single inventive Idea."

The world is being COMPOSED in its infinite variety.

#### SLIDE 29

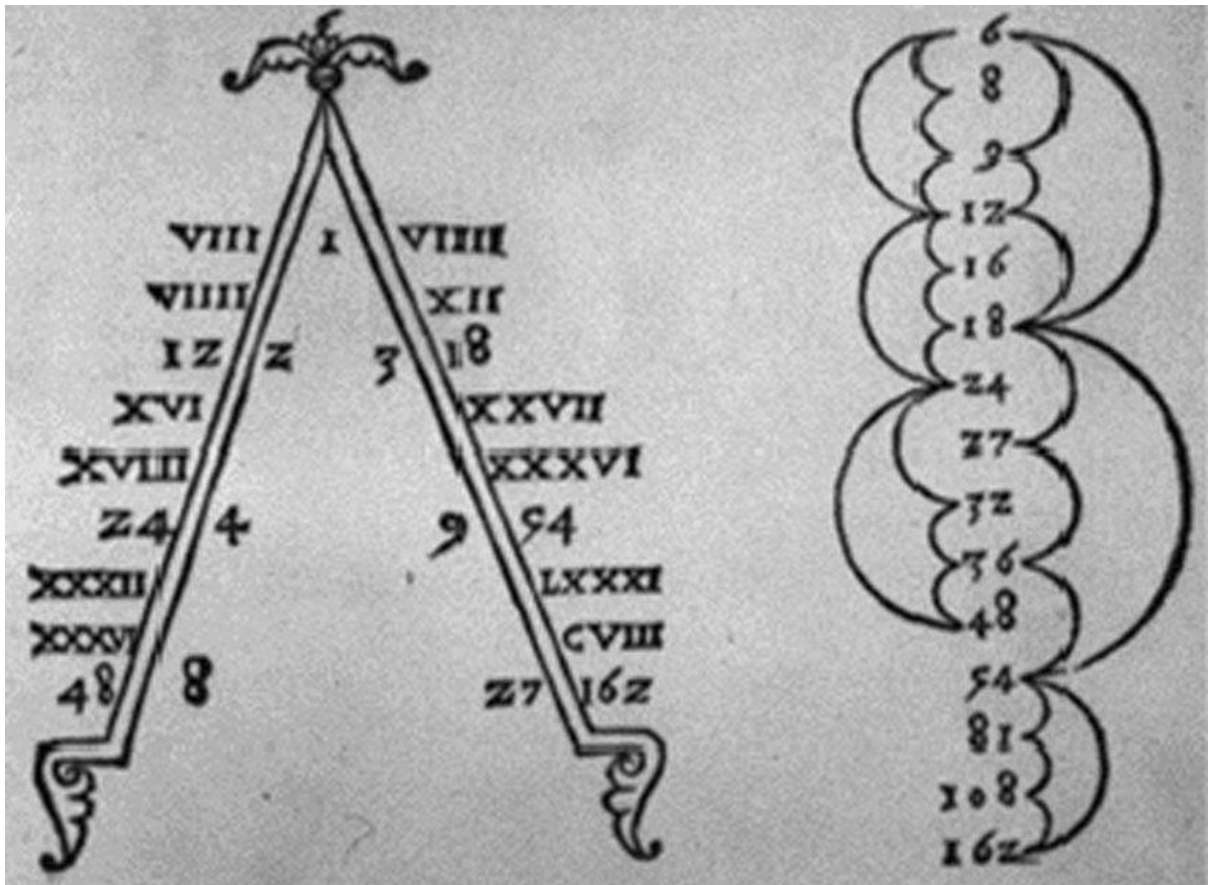
#### **STONE 2 – NUMBER**

Giorgi doesn't get lost in the complex mathematical speculation of some who try to look too closely at the physical basis of musical harmony. Giorgi's numbers are symbolic rather than mathematical. He unites the simple harmonic proportions with Platonic numbers.

27 was a key number to Giorgi. His use of numbers derives from Plato's *Timaeus* – the numbers from which the World Soul – the pattern of the world and human soul – was made.

**SLIDE 30**

He gives this illustration of Plato's numbers – arranged on the Greek letter Lambda, as described in the *Timaeus*.



**SLIDE 31**

In 1534 Giorgi was asked to provide a geometrical design for the layout of the rebuilt church of his Venetian friary, San Francesco dell Vigna. This was based on the number 27 and these interconnected trinitities. When the façade was added later the architect Palladio is said to have followed the same numerical scheme.

**STONE 3 – CREATION**

**SLIDE 32**

Giorgi sees the working of Creation, and everything else, in Trinitarian terms:

You move threefold the nature,  
 Connecting the soul, uniting the parts in consonance,  
 You return to yourself, as spirit embracing the depths,  
 And it is in your image that the heavens are moving

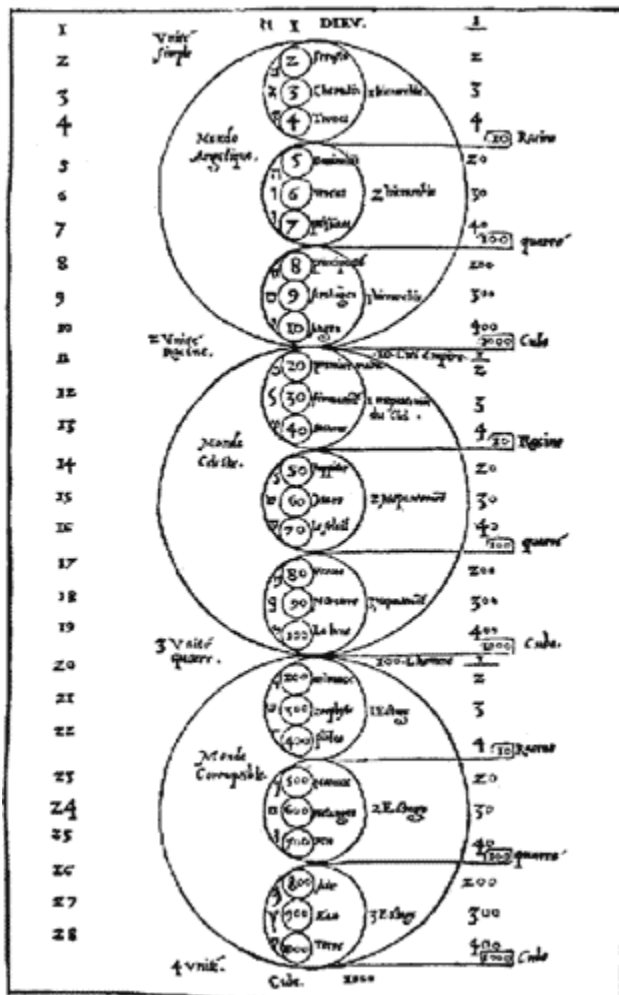
(SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN 2010 p. 309)

There are three worlds – The heavenly hierarchy, the cosmos and the material, or corruptible world - and these are all related to each other – as three musical octaves, with the same structure and harmony.

The Soul is a microcosm of the whole universe, linking the material to the spiritual.

SLIDE 33

The French edition of *De Harmonia Mundi* gives this diagram:



The Three worlds are -

I - Heavenly hierarchy

- the nine order of angels which communicate their influences to

## II - Cosmic hierarchy

- which communicates its influences to

## III- The Corruptible world

which Giorgi classifies as

- the four elements, stones, metals, plants, zoophytae (which are neither plants nor animals) and animals. All these things are under the influences of the planets, and so particular stones will communicate the influence of their ruling planet – which itself is ruled by its order of angels – which communicate the power of God.

The Planets communicate the divine influences to every part of what we think of as the material world.

This is the traditional Platonic Cosmos – but there is another essential aspect to Giorgi's Franciscan vision which might be overlooked.

### SLIDE 34

Giorgi writes:

In addition to what has been said before of the correspondence of the stars with the Angels, it seems to me that this point must still be considered:

This point is, that the Angels themselves are the Father's servants, who is the Fountain and the origin and the first mover of all things. This is why Saint Denis says: The moving Father, guides them.

These move the heavens for the sake of God, and these dispose our bodies and the things below to the consonance commanded by the prime mover of all things. This is how this can be: In order that such movements and influences should be in harmony, he has assigned his own intelligences to each sphere and to each star.

Understand that the Seven Supremes are assigned to the Planets, as we have said, and the twelve to the twelve signs and all this circle and the planets are given to the Queen of Heaven, and for this reason, they are called the crown of twelve stars, according to the number of the signs, and she is decorated with many septenaries, full of innumerable graces as the starry sky is full of innumerable stars.

And because she contains the virtue of all the heavens and of the angels who preside over them, she is rightly called "exalted above all the companies of angels."

(GIORGI p. 327)

Elsewhere he mentions that Metatron, the first of the angels (associated with Michael) belongs to her, as he demonstrates by cabala. (GIORGI 1578 p. 162)

In this world of the incarnation Mary is Queen of the Angels, Stars, Planets, Muses or Sirens – and the Seven Liberal Arts – and of all Images – and in Giorgi's world, as we will see, these archetypal qualities are also the sephiroth of the sacred language of cabala.

**SLIDE 35**

At the time Giorgi was writing his book this was the most outstanding image of the Virgin in Venice, in the other Franciscan church, the church of the Franciscan Conventuals - Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari – recently painted by Titian.



(Titian: Assumption of the Virgin, Santa Maria Gloriosi dei Frari. Venice, 1515-18)

As I've shown in my film Francis, Mary and the Language of the Cosmos, Mary, in bearing God, is mother of everything in the new Creation – and to medieval Franciscan writers she is the Language of Creation.

#### SLIDE 36

##### **TONE 4 – THE SOUL**

The Soul, though immaterial, has the same harmonic structure as the whole Universe. Plato explains this in his Timaeus. God first made the pattern of the World Soul, which is based on musical harmony. Every human soul is a reflection of that original – a microcosm.

Giorgi writes:

#### SLIDE 37

The soul is divided by the perfect measure of all things, which the creator followed when he divided the universe into intelligible pattern. This kind of immaterial intellectual and unadulterated division resides in the soul. It is the perfection of every animate substance, the generator of multiplicity which is in it and beneath it, bringing it to a single order through harmony. It joins sundered parts and is the cause of unsullied purity, giving to the soul a rational coherence of its multiplicity, so that the soul (as Timaeus and Plato teach) is both divisible and indivisible....

Thus the substance of the soul is a whole, having parts: one, and yet the multitude assembled in wondrous harmony. Whoever wishes to see it should not aim his industry toward the goal of mathematical speculations, but should arouse himself to the utmost toward the meeting-place of the living substance, weighing aright the triple whole.

(GODWIN 1992 p. 187)

#### SLIDE 39

##### **TONE 5 - ASTROLOGY**

In this philosophical and theological system, astrology is seen as an essential element that unifies heaven and the terrestrial world, and thus contributes to universal harmony. Ovanes Akopyan writes in 2020:

...in this context astrology is considered not as a purely predictive judicial tool but as one of the numeral logical and occult principles upon which the universe is based. Zorzi states that even the number of eight celestial spheres, which in his opinion harmoniously correlates with the octave, clearly illustrates that, at its heart, astrology is a fundamental element of philosophical and theological discourses.

(AKOPYAN 2020 p. 208)

#### SLIDE 40

In *De Harmonia Mundi* Giorgi is defending astrology from an attack by Giovanni Pico, who had written a condemnation of the art, possibly under the influence of the preacher Savanorola.

Giorgi aims to show that there is support for astrology from a wide range of ancient and modern philosophers and theologians.

The great question though, for a Christian astrologer, is Free Will. If the stars reveal the lives of individuals does this mean that our fates are controlled by the stars? Does this undermine the essential Christian doctrine of Free Will?

To a Christian astrologer this is certainly not the case.

#### SLIDE 41

The stars are part of God's Creation and reflect the patterns of our soul. The object of astrology was to make life accord with the stars.

Astrology was particularly important in medicine – and Giorgio, like Ficino, believes that an astrologer must take into account not only the stars but also the life-style and location of the subject. The stars do not control our destinies but are a sign of the complex influences that unite the individual with the cosmos.

Astrology, for Giorgi, was a key aspect of this unified creation – and this was a particularly Franciscan concern.

B. KANE writes

The devotion of the late mediaeval friars to the study and practise of astrology has long been acknowledged. Despite the reputation of the Dominicans for learning in the university schools, producing several noteworthy scholars of astronomy, it was the Franciscans who evinced a particular talent for this branch of study

(KANE 2010 p. 12)

This interest in astrology, as with Giorgi, would be an aspect of the Franciscan's affirmative attitude to Creation as a revelation of God.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century a Franciscan friar, Brother Stephen, was making accurate measurements of the heavens with his astrolabe only a mile from where I sit.

Seb FALK writes in 2021 of Brother Stephen:

He was not alone among Franciscans in this respect. A long line of late mediaeval minorites studied the stars with a range of scholarly and practical motivations, from Roger Bacon in the 13th century to the medical astrologer Ralph Hoby in the



15<sup>th</sup>...Some books from the Doncaster friary ended up in the library of the Elizabethan astrologer John Dee: they included works on arithmetic, geometry and astrology.

(FALK 2021)

John Dee also owned a copy of Giorgi's *de Harmonia Mundi*.

#### SLIDE 42

### STONE 6 – THE SPHERES

The spheres sing together.

#### SLIDE 43

Which harmony is very beautiful, and by its reciprocal singing is so sweet that there is no sweeter or more pleasant sound than that which by number and measures is led and regulated on an equal footing with the movement of the spheres, as we have clearly proved. But there are symphonies which are no less signs of heaven, such as those (as Plato tells) are presided over by the various Syrens, who are said to be singers to God, who, placed in the firmament, make its influences harmonious.

(GIORGI 1578 p. 649-50)

(In Plato's *Myth of Er* it is Syrens who sing the songs of the planetary spheres.)

#### SLIDE 44

This is not a distant fantasy. The Syrens influence this world and our music. Giorgi is aware of the working of real, earthly, music

Giorgi explains in the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of his first Canto that the Harmony of the Spheres, according to Plato, is diatonic – that is, fundamentally (though not quite) the same as the musical scale we use today – the white notes on the piano. This is an important point. The real music of the ancient Greeks used more complex tuning to get its effects.

(GIORGI 1758 p. 162)

This means that the musical modes used by sacred music in the west may not be the same as the modes used by Greek music, but they are related to the planets. Each sphere has its own mode, with its own qualities – some, not all, are simply scales beginning on the note belonging to the planet. Others are less easy to define.

The clearest image of the connections between the planets, deities – and muses – and the musical scale is the diagram by Gafori from 1496:

(GODWIN 1992)

The qualities of the planets which Giorgi gives are traditional.

#### SLIDE 45

For example, Schmidt-Biggemann writes of Venus:

The domain of Venus is beauty, and the actions directed by her are copies of her beautiful soul, which is itself Gods' image. For Giorgio this divine image in the type of Venus is the meaning of the heavenly rain taught by Dionysius, thus Venus is the planet of just rule and of the beginning. SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN 2010 p. 311)

I have to add myself that this association of Venus with just rule is related to Venus as an image of Astraea, Justice – who is associated with the whole world of Arcadia, thanks to Virgil's 4<sup>th</sup> Eclogue - and this idea of Venus's domain as beauty is echoed by Spenser in the Faerie Queene –

The *house* of goodly formes and *faire aspects*...

(Spencer, *Faerie Queene*, Book 3 Canto 6)

The qualities of the planets influence all manner of earthly things. These are traditional and familiar associations.

For example, as Giorgi writes:

The properties of Venus are gentle taste, salves, fine smell and all colours tending to white. Her stone is beryl. Her plants rose and Myrtle, her animal the dove.

#### SLIDE 46

Mercury has no specific element since he is the one who interferes. He is the helper and the accelerator. He therefore has no pure colours, only mixed ones. He is frequently inclined to those who are ruled by Saturn, to the sages and the ingenious ones. The prudent, the investigators and explorers and the versatile are mercurial characters. Mercury is the God of the arts, and he supports, in the type of Hermes Trismegistos, philosophy, literature and the art of focalisation and mystification in figures and characters.

#### SLIDE 47

### STONE 7 – MELANCHOLY AND MAGIC

#### SLIDE 48

Giorgi's works were not reviewed by the Roman Congregation for the Index until 1575, thirty-five years after his death and fifty years after the publication of *De Harmonia Mundi*.

One, I think, significant point that was censored, is Giorgi's denial of the idea of Original Sin in his *Questions Concerning the Holy Scripture*. (SPRUIT 2019 p.132) The doctrine of Original Sin is the idea that sin is inherited by everyone from Adam through procreation– that everyone has this intrinsic flaw. This doctrine derives principally from St Augustine, who grew to have a negative view of humanity in old age when Roman civilisation was under threat from barbarians.

It's still a controversial issue.

The Franciscans had a more positive view of human nature. Bonaventure, for example, believed that The Incarnation would have happened even if Adam had not sinned – it was a completion of Creation rather than a saving from sin.

To Giorgi (at least in *Questions*) we are not tainted by original sin, and we can heal our faults by becoming like Pythagoras, whom he calls “a man well harmonised by God.” (BRANN 2002 p. 126) The whole purpose of his book is to show that we are images of the divine harmony and that we can attune ourselves to the divine harmony.

The human soul is not separated from God.

Noel L. Brann writes:

Why, Giorgi asked, did Hermes Trismegistus refer to man as a great miracle - a *magnum miraculum*? Because, he answered, “the mind of man in relation to its creator in essence is not separated from him but is still conjoined, just as surely as the ray of the sun is joined to the sun.”

(BRANN 2002)

One can attune oneself in many ways – through prayer, virtue – and spiritual exercises like Bonaventure's *Tree of Life* meditations, which, I believe, follow the order of the heavens like Dante's Paradise. We tune the musical instrument of our soul to the great instrument of the cosmos.

#### SLIDE 49

One important natural means, with which we can attune ourselves, is through the careful use of Melancholy.

This idea comes from Ficino. For the Florentine philosopher to be melancholic is to be under the influence of Saturn – or we might say – under the influence of those archetypal qualities in our nature which Saturn represents. Saturn can be seen as a dark and negative influence, but Ficino, with a profound understanding of psychology, saw Saturn as positive, as Giorgi agrees. The sphere of Saturn is closest to heaven. Melancholy can attune us to the heavens.

The idea of melancholy became immensely important in Elizabethan England - we might think of Hamlet – but most of all in music. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century it is melancholy music, most famously that of John Dowland, that shows how music can move the soul – and

attune it. If we are feeling low happy music might make us suicidal. Melancholy music (for me it might be Bruckner) draws the feeling out of us and draws us to God.

Is Giorgi's book about Magic?

Magic, in the sense of the influencing of the world through occult methods, does seem to be implied by the fourth tone of Canto Three:

4 - The agreement of all things with benevolent man, so that he can command and work with them.

Is it possible that, in a cosmos in which everything, physical and spiritual, is interconnected, that a human could exert control on creation, or another individual?

Frances Yates wrote:

On the whole, one is inclined to the conclusion that Giorgi is a kind of magician, though a very, very white one, very ascetic and holy, with the magical core of his teaching so wrapped in folds of Franciscan piety and mysticism, that it would be hardly visible to an earnest follower who might well wonder whether this was the outlook of a miracle-working saint, rather than a magus.

(YATES 1979, p. 35)

D. P. Walker, in his *Spiritual and Demonic Magic, from Ficino to Campanella*, did not consider Giorgi to have been a magician.

Giorgi, says Walker,

...explains how we may attract favourable influences from the heavenly by means of the Soul of the World. (WALKER 1958 p. 113)

But we are not controlling these influences. Giorgi believes that our guardian angel guides the influences of the planets. We must, says Giorgi,

...having removed all hindrances, submit ourselves to our guiding spirit, which if we do not resist will show us the way to which the heavens, our *genius*, and the Supreme Ruler lead us.

(WALKER 1958 p. 114)

In arguing that Giorgi is not a magician Walker comments that Giorgi's symbols are often purely coincidental analogies. Often the connection between two kinds of thing or ideas is simply number, or simply, as Walker says, because Giorgi likes it.

This appears to be true – but I feel this comment highlights an important aspect of the book, which brings it forward into a different time and a different way of seeing the world.

In these terms, the correspondences between all these different kinds of works of Nature are not purely symbolic but real. We might not work as magicians, aiming to control the world, but working with this world of images, sacred language or music as artist, poet or composer, IS magical – IS Theurgy.

## SLIDE 50

### STONE & MUSIC

The entire Universe is structured in musical terms – the same tones sound in the Heavenly, Celestial and Corruptible worlds. This might seem to be simply a musical analogy – but there is another very significant point – which affects the way in which Giorgi – and we today – see music as a metaphor (or more than a metaphor) for the working of the Cosmos – or – I would say – the way in which MUSIC helps understand the working of this theophanic cosmos.

Giorgi is also thinking about actual Music.

He thinks in terms of the music of his time - polyphonic music – music with several independent parts, moving in harmony. No-one could have thought like this even in St Francis's day, when music was generally monophonic - a single melodic line, without harmony. Polyphony was just beginning in church music.

The (relatively) simple sacred music of earlier centuries might be seen as an analogy of the Music of the Spheres - but as music became more complex it could be seen as a model or example of the complex working of Harmony, as Music, in the Universe as a whole.

By the Renaissance music could be thought of as being in three parts – however many there might actually be. George Herbert wrote 100 years later

Or, since all musick is but three parts vied  
And multiplied... (George Herbert, Easter)

These three principal parts, to Giorgi, were like the three worlds, performing together:

As in tuned music the cantors, sub-cantors, and contra-cantors do not enter with the same notes yet come together in the same consonance this the three worlds, which we say have their different notes, come together in the same harmony. (GIORGI 1578 p. 36)

## SLIDE 52

Music was developing in such a way that it was more and more able to demonstrate the working of divine Harmony – and by the Renaissance this could incorporate discord and tension, yet still be a model of the working of Harmony in Nature – or more than a model – Music itself *is* the working of Harmony in Nature.

One of the principle themes throughout De Harmonia Mundi is Cabala, which I will turn to in Part Two – and then I will look again at the possible echoes of Giorgi's work in Elizabethan and Jacobean England – John Dee, Spenser, Shakespeare and beyond – and finally ask what place the book has in the Franciscan Tradition – and what meaning its vision might have today.

#### **FRANCESCO GIORGI SOURCES**

The 1578 French translation of De Harmonia Mundi is available at:

GIORGI 1578

[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/L\\_harmonie\\_du\\_monde\\_divis%C3%A9\\_en\\_trois\\_ca/mDp-16ej1foC?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/L_harmonie_du_monde_divis%C3%A9_en_trois_ca/mDp-16ej1foC?hl=en&gbpv=0)

#### **BOOKS WITH INFORMATION AND ARTICLES ON GIORGI**

AKOPYAN 2020

Ovanes Akopyan, *Debating the Stars in the Italian Renaissance*, Brill, 2020

[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Debating\\_the\\_Stars\\_in\\_the\\_Italian\\_Renais/ly4DEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=francesco+giorgi+harmonia&pg=PA205&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Debating_the_Stars_in_the_Italian_Renais/ly4DEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=francesco+giorgi+harmonia&pg=PA205&printsec=frontcover)

BRANN 2002

Noel L. Brann, *The Debate Over the Origin of Genius During the Italian Renaissance. The Theories of Supernatural Frenzy and Natural Melancholy in Accord and in Conflict on the Threshold of the Scientific Revolution*, Brill, 2002

[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The\\_Debate\\_Over\\_the\\_Origin\\_of\\_Genius\\_Dur/tJlsqilXeqMC?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Debate_Over_the_Origin_of_Genius_Dur/tJlsqilXeqMC?hl=en&gbpv=0)

BUSI 1997

Giulio Busi, *Francesco Zorzi. A Methodical Dreamer*, in *The Christian Kabbalah. Jewish Mystical Books and their Christian Interpreters*, edited by J. Dan, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 97-125.

GODWIN 1992

Joscelyn Godwin, *The Harmony of the Spheres*, Thames and Hudson, 1992

SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN 2010

Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis*, Springer, 2010

SPRUIT 2019

In Edited By Jacomien Prins and Maude Vanhaelen, *Sing Aloud Harmonius Spheres, Renaissance Conceptions of Cosmic Harmony*, Routledge, 2019

VASOLI

Cesare Vasoli, article on Giorgi in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, in collaboration with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach, *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, Brill. Available online at <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/dictionary-of-gnosis-and-western-esotericism>

WALKER 1958

D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, Daniel Pickering, 1958

YATES 1979

Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in Elizabethan England*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979

## **OTHER SOURCES**

BONAVENTURE 1978

Bonaventure, ed. Ewert Cousins, *The Soul's Journey Into God / The Tree of Life / The Life of St. Francis (The Classics of Western Spirituality)*, Paulist Press, 1978

COBIANCHI 2020

Roberto Cobiانchi, *Cithara Angelica: Experiencing God Through Music in Franciscan Imagery*, in Xavier Seubert and Oleg Bychkov (editors), *Aesthetic Theology in the Franciscan Tradition*, Routledge, 2020.

COUSINS 1978

Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1978

FALK 2021

Seb Falk, *'El Capri Kylex': A Franciscan astronomical mnemonic*, *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 2021, Vol. 52(3) 267–288, 2021

KANE 2010

B. Kane, *Return of the Native: Franciscan education and astrological practice in the medieval north of England*, in M. Robson and J. Rohrkasten, eds. *Franciscan Organisation in the Mendicant Context: Formal and informal structures of the friars' lives and ministry in the Middle Ages*. Vita regularis. (44) (LIT, Berlin, 2010). Accessed on-line.

LOWEN 2013

Peter Loewen, *Music in Early Franciscan Thought*, Brill, 2013

THE TONES OF THE THREE CANTOS (SCHMIDT-BIGGEMANN 2010)

The first Canto is the Canto of Creation. Its tones are

- 1 - On the generator of the world and of what harmony he rejoices in his super excellent oneness.
- 2 - On the harmony of the world and in what its portrayers concur and dissent
- 3 - the harmonic number in which the creator descends into the world
- 4 - the different circles in which the species of things concur
- 5 - through what intervals the harmony is impregnated
- 6 - through what harmony everything is coherent in man like a small instrument
- 7 - through what sound everything including the tiniest beings accord to the archetype
- 8 - about the final harmony in which all double octaves are united in one harmony

Each of these Tones is divided into many chapters.

The second Canto:

- 1 - Christ is the Messiah and God's wisdom, the Word containing everything, 'rationae ideale', and a man encompassing everything below him through his action.
- 2 - Christ is the life and the receptacle that unifies everything and draws everything to him.
- 3 - Christ is the real priest the true and holy bread that purify eyes all and pacifies all.
- 4 - Christ is the highest truth and the light that teaches and enlightens all.
- 5 - Christ is begotten in his existence before all times and as the head of the mystical body he influences everything.
- 6 - Christ is the scope and the complement of all acting he grants the power of fulfilling.
- 7 - Christ is the king of kings the highest commander who reigns and moderates all things.
- 8 - Christ is the mediator through whom everything moves to reach its goal.



The third Canto:

- 1 - The threefold harmony of the soul that body and the virtues.
- 2 - The harmony of the soul through its insight into things.
- 3 - The accordance of man with the holy heavenly intelligences.
- 4 - The agreement of all things with benevolent man, so that he can command and work with them.
- 5 - The harmony of the soul with the spirit itself and with all other spirits
- 6 - The sweet unanimity that makes men well disposed towards God
- 7 - The harmony of body and soul which will be improved after the resurrection
- 8 - The sweetest unity and rest granted into in eternal bliss

