

## Jesus's Word: "Blessed Are The Peacemakers ..." In The Interpretation Of Francis Of Assisi

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*Studies in Spirituality* 3(1993)

**T**he image of Francis as a man of peace, so popular in these days, is not an invention of our times.<sup>1</sup> His performance as a peacemaker also made a great impression on his contemporaries.

He himself lets us know in some places in his writings that he saw bringing peace as his special vocation. Looking back on his life shortly before his death, he mentions that God had revealed to him that he should greet people with the salutation: "The Lord give you peace" (Test 18). Thus he knew himself to be sent; this he wanted to impress once more on his followers.

That he wanted no misunderstanding with regard to the place of the making of peace in his spirituality is clear from the fact that in the middle of his life-wisdom (i.e. in the collection of twenty eight wise sayings, known as his "Admonitions") he comments on this Beatitude twice:

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<sup>1</sup>This article was first published in Dutch in: Th. Zweerman, G.P. Freeman and A. Jansen, *De Heer geve U vrede*. Utrecht, Franciscans Studiecentrum (*Franciscaanse Studies*, nr. 6), 1990, 5-28. I dedicate this English version to the memory of Fr. Anthony Duynstee O.F.M., who translated the text into English. For the Writings of St. Francis I use the *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis* (ed. by C. Esser O.F.M.), Grottaferrata, 1978. As for the translation into English I use *Francis and Clare. The Complete Works* by R. J. Armstrong O.F.M. Cap. and I. C. Brady O.F.M., New York etc., 1982. But I am at variance with it, and prefer a different wording.

*Admonition 13*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God* (Mt 5, 9). A servant of God cannot know how much patience and humility he has within himself, as long as his wishes are being satisfied. But when the time comes in which those who were to satisfy his wishes give him the contrary, so much patience and humility as he has on that occasion so much he has and no more.

*Admonition 15*

*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God* (Mt 5, 9). Those are really peace-loving who in all that they have to suffer in this world preserve peace in soul and body for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In the following observations I shall try to interpret these two Admonitions. It is my intention to elucidate what Francis says here about peace by other sayings in his writings. Such a mutual elucidation of texts or text-fragments is a work of patiently listening and comparing. Only in this way can the deep layer of life be sounded, from which Francis in his meditation drew his far-reaching options. That characteristic radicality explains to a certain extent the convincing power his words have retained through the ages.

The sub-division of my search I borrow from a concise study by P. van Leeuwen O.F.M. In his survey, *Francis, Man of Peace*, he notes, after quoting the fifteenth Admonition: "Peace should be present in our heart as well as in our conduct." Francis expressly adds: "in all that they have to suffer in this world." By suffering is meant the actual following of the words and the footsteps of Jesus. Peace is not something to be taken for granted, but a gift of God. The authenticity of it may be tested in the suffering we have to bear, in soul and body.<sup>3</sup>

Four essential points in Francis's concept of peace are put together here by Van Leeuwen. These points will mark the stages of my interpretation—though I follow a different order: I change the places of the first and the fourth points.

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<sup>2</sup>Admonitions 13, 14, 15 and 16 each give a comment on one of the Beatitudes. These four Admonitions occupy a central and specific position among the other Admonitions.

<sup>3</sup>P. van Leeuwen, *Franciscus man van vrede*. In: *Relief 50* (1982) 289-298; 290.

1. The testing of the authenticity of peace finds its place in the suffering that we have to bear.
2. Suffering can function as the actual following of the words and the footsteps of Jesus.
3. Peace is a gift of God.
4. Peace is something that has to do with our heart, as well as with our conduct.

One more preliminary remark: in these two Admonitions, Francis apparently does not primarily think along socio-structural or, if one prefers, macro-ethical lines. Wider social problems are not being approached directly: let alone, would he discuss them on a world-wide scale (as this is now being done, e.g. in the discussions on the themes of the Conciliar Process).

Rather, Francis sounds the disposition or the attitude from which reforms of social relations could take place. The master is concerned with the testing of the *motivation* and the *orientation* which, according to him, are decisive for the worth of one's actual dedication to the improvement of society. The actual reform of social structures was, indeed, really important to him: his Rules and letters give indications that—from a religious point of view—he recognized its great importance. In our case, however, these indications, as they are attuned to the social situation in Francis's time, are mainly important as an elucidation of his gospel inspiration and orientation, which need a fresh expression in our modern situation.

### I. The Testing Of The Authenticity Of Peace Finds Its Place In The Suffering That We Have To Bear

Characteristic of the spiritual guidance of Francis is the emphasis he lays on the authenticity of one's behavior. Over and over again the question is heard in the collection of his Admonitions: whether the attitude that people seem to reveal in their pious conduct is authentic, i.e. does it reflect an inner reality? When listening attentively, we find that the Admonitions of Francis are mainly *testing words*<sup>4</sup>.

The Thirteenth Admonition also offers such a possibility for testing. A possibility of inspection is tersely contained in what presents itself as

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. P. van Leeuwen and S. Vethey, *Woorden van heil van een kleine mens*, [Commentary on the Admonitions of Francis of Assisi]; Utrecht, 1986, 154-162; 157.

*patience and humility*. Francis clearly wants to take a test or proof of what appears to be these evangelical virtues. But, one might ask, doesn't our attention shift away from Jesus's word on the peacemakers? What is the exact connection of patience and humility with peace? It is, indeed, remarkable that the word "peace" only occurs at the beginning of this Admonition, in the quotation of the Beatitude. After that, Francis concentrates his attention on the question of wishes and desires that are or are not being satisfied.

Might not we rightly call this way of commenting a bit surprising? The word that twice gets an important place in Francis's comment, namely *satisfacere*, means to fulfill, or to *satisfy* cherished desires. When Francis draws attention to that satisfaction or fulfillment, this apparently means that he sees a human being as basically desiring. The question for him is: what desire, or what wish, urges us? And how far can we bear being frustrated in those wishes and desires? In other words: can we do without the fulfillment, and bear the lack of satisfaction? Francis soberly ascertains: the patience and humility that you nevertheless can muster *in* this deprivation, reveals how much you really are at peace in this situation, and consequently how far you are able to pass on real peace to others. The proof of the answer to the question whether you belong to the peacemakers in the style of Jesus is given where a person is able to accept with the help of God that which is foreign to his nature, and to swallow what is bitter.<sup>5</sup>

Even if we, remembering Jesus's experience in Gethsemani or what Francis describes in the beginning of his Testament, try to grasp the value of this "swallowing," the question remains as to what the inner connection is between patience and humility on the one hand and peace on the other hand. What does Francis basically mean by "peace"? Before examining this question (under III), I shall try first of all to understand what in Francis's view the *making* of peace is about.

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. the first verses of Francis's Testament: The Lord granted me, brother Francis, thus to begin a life in penance: when I lived in sin, I found it very bitter to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them, what I found bitter had turned into sweetness of soul and body; and afterwards I lingered a little and I left the world'.



## II. Suffering Can Function As The Actual Following Of The Words And Footsteps Of Jesus

Jesus's seventh Beatitude in Francis's Latin translation of the Bible concerns the "pacific." In the new Dutch translation of the writings of Francis this word is translated by: "those who love peace." I think it would have been better to retain the usual translations: "those who bring peace," or "the peacemakers," because these translations give a better connection with the word Francis used. In the Latin word, as in the Greek original text, an aspect of activity can be heard: literally *peacemakers are conceived*. Only if we realize this, does the point of Francis's fifteenth Admonition become clear to us. Having repeated the quotation of the Beatitude, Francis continues:

Those are real peacemakers,  
who in all that they have to suffer in the world  
preserve peace in soul and body  
for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The two verbs holding up this admonition, are "have to suffer" or "endure" (*patiuntur*) and "preserve peace" (*pacem servant*). As these two words are more or less marked by passivity, they are clearly in contrast with what is being evoked by "peacemakers." I think that Francis realized this tension and that, in the use of his words, he wanted to draw our attention to the power that is hidden in that seemingly passive "endure" and "preserve." For the tension between active "peace-making" and passive "having to suffer" is, on closer observation, not a pure contrast. That which you can't help and which you have to undergo, may at the same time be a thing *with which* you can do something, namely which you can accept and take upon you as your situation. Francis adds that a person is able to do this "for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ." If a person is motivated in this way, "to have to suffer" may get the meaning of "consciously suffering through." As Etty Hillesum calls it: "to give shelter to what is painful," "bearing" it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>*Het denkend hart van de barak*. (Letters of Etty Hillesum); Haarlem, 1982, 29; *Het verstoorde leven*. (Diary of Etty Hillesum 1941-1943); Haarlem, 1981, 150 f. 177, 183. Etty Hillesum was a Jewish woman, deported and murdered in Auschwitz by the Nazis in 1943. The publication in the eighties of her diary and letters made an immense impression in the Low Countries.

In his writings Francis, too, makes it clear beyond doubt that the act of "bearing" takes a central place in his concept of life.<sup>7</sup> The acting power of people, according to Francis, is not seldom manifested in the *bearing power* that has been given to them. In this connection he speaks of the bearing of the other persons in their fragility (eighteenth Admonition); of the bearing of sickness and oppression (*Canticle of Brother Sun*) and of the bearing of the cross of Jesus Christ (fifth Admonition).<sup>8</sup> In each case the singer of the *Canticle of Brother Sun* is concerned with the act of accepting and putting up with the whole of reality, even where this is bitter and repugnant. For only in this way can people fully become co-operators with the Holy Spirit, who works towards the renovation and the re-creation of what has been damaged in God's good creation. Only in this way, as co-healers, will they be peacemakers.

The question of whether we can bear and co-operate in this concept of suffering is hard to evade. Isn't it a *superhuman* patience which Francis is recommending: a thing no person can muster? Speaking about people who preserve peace "in *all* that they have to suffer in the world," he apparently does not leave room for exceptions.

That this is not a pious slip of the tongue is proved by the fact that in other places in his Writings he expresses his conviction in the same comprehensive way. In his Rule he says:

And I beg the sick brother to give thanks to the Creator for *everything*; and whatever the Lord wills for him, he should desire to be that, whether healthy or ill,<sup>9</sup>

and in his *Letter to a Minister* he adds a little extra:

the things that hinder you in loving the Lord God, and whoever has become an impediment to you, whether brothers or others, even if they were to beat you, *all* this you should regard as grace.

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<sup>7</sup>Th. Zweerman, "Reddere" und "Sustinere." Sokratische Gedanken zur Freiheitsanfassung des hi. Franziskus von Assisi, in: *Franziskanische Studien*, 63 (1981), 70-98; 89 ff. And idem, On "Bearing." Some notes from the point of view of the philosophy of man and of culture, in: *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology. Essays in Honor of Vincent Brummer*. Ed. by G. van den Brink, L.J. van den Brom and M. Sarot. Karopen, 1992, 267-282.

<sup>8</sup>Part of the eighteenth Admonition is quoted later at the end of pan IV of this study. Cf. on "Bearing" also 2 LF 44 and the recently recovered *Canticle of Exhortation to Saint Clare and her Sisters*, 5.

<sup>9</sup>*Reg NB* 10, 3. Italics in the quoted texts, here and elsewhere, are mine (the author).

This should be your will and nothing else.<sup>10</sup>

It may be true that in these quotations it is re-affirmed that Francis's spirituality is marked by a tendency towards universality<sup>11</sup>—but is the universal standard he applies in his fifteenth Admonition, therefore, the less superhuman? Who can bring himself to do such a thing?

As far as Francis is concerned, it is advisable to be extremely careful in using the word "superhuman" not because in this exceptional man it would be especially difficult to ascertain what a person might accomplish, but because Francis, with regard to human capabilities, does not think on the lines of "piling up," in the sense of forcing up human capability. In the first place, Francis does not even begin to think that human beings, independent from God's assistance and of their own power, could accomplish something of permanent value. And besides, his view of man and his/her possible growth and blossoming is determined from the very beginning by the essential emotion that fascinated him in the person of Jesus Christ: the downward movement of the Love of God, who in His Son's incarnation has become flesh of our flesh. Because Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, has received "really the flesh of our humanity and fragility" (II LF 4), man received—though being and remaining fragile—his dignity from God. Thus man, among the other creatures, has really been put on a "sublime height," being created and shaped "into an image of the beloved Son in the body and into a likeness in the Spirit" (Adm. 5,1). But the very nobility of this being an image holds the mandate of the same descending love that is shown in the humility and the patience of Jesus.

If people in this following of Jesus appear to have capabilities (even more if they have great capabilities), this is always because the Spirit of Father and Son deigns to work in them and with them. What application does this cardinal understanding have with respect to the vocation of bringing peace.

### III. Peace Is A Gift Of God

As the standard applied by Francis, as we saw, exceeds the normal human measure, we are forced to surmise that when he speaks of

<sup>10</sup> *LMin* 2-3. Cf. also *Sal Virt* 6-17.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. L. Lehmann, *Tiefe und Weite. Der universale Grundzug in den Gebeten des Franziskus von Assisi*; Werl, 1984.



"preserving peace" he does not have a mere human (too human) peace in mind. Indeed, wasn't this emphatically true of the sayings of his Lord?

When Jesus promised his peace to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," He added "not as the world gives, give I unto you" (John 14, 7) What did Jesus mean when speaking of "my peace?" These words from the farewell sermon may get their full meaning when we relate them to the way in which the Risen Lord greets the disciples three times with the words "Peace be unto you" and then adds "receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>12</sup>

When promising his peace He apparently does not hand over something abstract, an idea or an ideal, but the Holy Spirit himself, i.e. the concrete Power of God that inspires Him and that is able to heal even the deepest fissures and clefts (just after the quoted words there follows: "Whose soever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them." The Holy Spirit is being offered by the risen Lord as his gift: *receive* the Holy Spirit. This Gift is the Life-power which in us and through us will help to bring about reconciliation and peace.<sup>13</sup>

In this light the words "my peace" in the mouth of Jesus are a hidden indication of the person of the Holy Spirit, whom He called the "Helper" (Assistance or Guide) elsewhere in the gospel of John, and whom He had named *the Gift of God* in the conversation with the woman at the well.<sup>14</sup>

Did Francis—who, where the bringing of authentic peace is concerned, sees the normal human measure being exceeded—also understand "peace" as the Gift of God, in imitation of Jesus? This would mean that when authentic peace is accorded to us, the Holy Spirit is at work in and through people. Then "peace" may be understood as one of the names of the Holy Spirit.

A careful comparison of his various texts may make clear that this question must probably be answered in the affirmative. From that "reflection" of texts one reference will emerge: that apparently Francis gives the full contents of what he had learned to understand by the biblical concept of "peace."

<sup>12</sup>John 20, 20, 21, 26, 22.

<sup>13</sup>Therefore, kissing your feet and with all that love of which I am capable, I implore all of you brothers to show all possible reverence and honour to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom that which is in the heavens and on the earth is brought to peace and is reconciled to the all-powerful God." (*LOrd* 12 f.)

<sup>14</sup>John 14, 16, 25; 15, 26; 16, 7; 4, 10.



A good starting-point for this search is the pair of virtues "patience and humility" (*patientia et humilitas*), which occurs twice in the thirteenth Admonition. How much patience and humility a person has within himself, we read, will become clear when he is frustrated in his wishes and desires. To *be satisfied* or not (*satisfactum*) proved to play a central role in this Admonition, in which, as we saw, the word "peace" doesn't occur, but where all attention is drawn to the way in which "a servant of God" treats discord or dissatisfaction.

The junction of patience and humility as well as the attention to the assimilation of dissatisfaction we come across in other places in his Writings. We shall draw these into our search now.

1. In his twenty-seventh Admonition, Francis places the combination of patience and humility opposite anger and agitation: "Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor disturbance" (Adm. 27, 2). A lapidary and somewhat puzzling word, which fits into a row of pairs of virtues that in this Admonition are being put opposite the vices which are also introduced in pairs. It has repeatedly been noted<sup>15</sup> that the twenty-seventh Admonition takes up a position all its own in the Book of Admonitions, and, indeed, stands aside in the whole of Francis's writings. Because this isn't the place to discuss this intriguing text in its overall structure and meaning, it may be sufficient to note that "patience and humility" are being marked by the rejection of "anger and disturbance."

In the inner struggle between the forces that are active in a person, the obscuring "anger and disturbance" constitute a threat to the serene "patience and humility." Did Francis have this danger in mind, when in his thirteenth Admonition he reminded us realistically of the deep dissatisfaction that may originate from the frustration of our wishes? (I shall return to this dissatisfaction under III.5.)

2. What was *positively* in Francis's mind in his repeated attention to the combination of patience and humility? A glance at the tenth chapter of the *Later Rule* may guide us on. There the pair of virtues appear in a somewhat broader context. In verse 8 ff. Francis says emphatically:

They (the brothers) will bear in mind  
that, above all, they must desire  
to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy working:

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. "Timor Domini." Versuch einer Deutung der 27. Ermahnung des hl. Franziskus von Assisi. In: *Franziskanische Studien* 60 (1978), 202-223; 202f, 223.

to pray continuously to Him with a pure heart and  
to have *humility and patience* in persecution and illness  
and *love* those who persecute, blame and accuse us.

The "persecution and illness" that Francis introduces here doubtless has to do with the situation he sketched in the thirteenth Admonition. Here as well he proposes the combination of patience and humility as the adequate Christian answer. But here he also completes his answer with a reference to the act of *love* for those who persecute, blame and accuse us. Is it allowed to infer from this that in fact this "loving" (*diligere*) is the fruit or manifestation—and thus the positive component—of the pair "humility and patience"? Presumably so. More certainty may only be obtained by the continuation of our collating search into Francis's writings.

3. One of the texts in which Francis gives us a brief sketch of his spirituality is the seventeenth chapter of his *Earlier Rule*. In the fifteenth verse the pair of virtues "humility and patience" figure again.

The Spirit of the Lord (...) strives for  
*humility and patience* and for the pure and simple  
and true peace of the Spirit,  
and above all he always desires  
the divine awe and divine wisdom and divine love  
of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Whereas in the tenth chapter of the *Later Rule* humility and patience manifested themselves in *loving*, here the same pair of virtues is joined with "the peace of the Spirit." The mentioning of that which is desired above all, which follows, gives a precious elucidation of this connection.

For the theme of love gets its most proper place there, where Francis in the trinitary enumeration connects love with the third Person of the Holy Trinity. That he at the same time relates "divine wisdom" to the Son is of importance to do full justice to the connection of "divine love" with the Holy Spirit. For in one of his letters Francis speaks of the Son of God as of *Wisdom* itself.<sup>16</sup> This identification of the Son with Wisdom has its

<sup>16</sup>"the Son of God (...), who is the true wisdom of the Father." 2 Let F 67. In Francis's *Praises of God the Most High*, a litany-like series of twenty-four short invocations, which from verse 4 constitute the central part of this prayer, humility and patience occur together in verse 4. And just as in the quoted text from the *Earlier Rule* they are closely connected again with love and wisdom. If one places the quoted text in the connection of a structural analysis of various other texts of Francis, it seems justified to relate the two quoted texts to each other.

counterpart in the Christian tradition in the identification of the Holy Spirit with Love. In combination, these data justify the conclusion that in Francis's mind "divine love" directly refers to the Person of the Holy Spirit and to what He works in the person who believes.

Combining what Francis says about humility and patience in the *Later Rule* (ch. 10, v. 8) and in the *Earlier Rule* (ch. 17, v. 15), we find that the pair of virtues "humility and patience" in both texts are part of a group of three, of which now love, now peace (of the Spirit, as Francis adds) is the *Dritte im Bunde*. And both with regard to peace and love Francis specially thinks of the Holy Spirit. This is affirmed when re-reading the tenth chapter of the *Later Rule*: here, too, the combination of humility and patience with love is apparently the fruit of the work of the Spirit of the Lord. Just before he exhorts his brothers to humility, patience and love with regard to those with a negative attitude, he had asked them to desire above all "the Spirit of the Lord and his holy working."

Also in the text of the seventeenth chapter of the *Earlier Rule*, under discussion here, it is expressly "the Spirit of the Lord" who inspires to humility, patience and peace of the Spirit.

4. The observation (under III. 3) that "humility and patience" are part of a "triangle" of virtues, in which love or the peace of the Holy Spirit is the complementary virtue, gets a clear corroboration when we "reflect" the second verse of the twenty-seventh Admonition, quoted under III. 1, in a word from the *Later Rule*. Referring to the way in which the provincial ministers should deal with the brothers who sin, Francis says:

And he should avoid growing *angry and disturbed*  
on account of a person's sin;  
for anger and disturbance are hindrances  
to love in themselves and in others (LR VII 3)

Whereas in the twenty-seventh Admonition "patience and humility" were put opposite "anger" and "disturbance," here the latter two are being denoted as hindrances to love (*caritas*), which is apparently the good companion of "patience and humility."

The fourteenth Admonition points in the same direction (a saying in between the two Admonitions under discussion). Here Francis relates

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Then, humility in particular refers to the Father, patience to the Son and peace to the Holy Spirit. For a further justification of this interpretation I refer to a forthcoming study, in which Francis's indications of the mystery of the Trinity are being investigated.



Jesus's Beatitude on the poor in Spirit to those who surrender themselves to pious and ascetic practices:

but they are scandalized and quickly roused to anger  
by a single word that they find unjust for their bodies,  
or by something that has been taken from them.

Then Francis puts the practice of love opposite the agitation because they are deprived from what they have a right to:

These are not poor in spirit, for a person who is truly poor in Spirit hates himself (Lk 14, 26) and *loves* the person who strikes him on the cheek (*Adm.* 14, 3).

5. The "dissatisfaction" which in the thirteenth Admonition is clearly a challenge to practice "patience and humility," and its attending temptation to agitation and anger (and consequently to lovelessness), gets an elucidation of its own in the tenth chapter of the *Earlier Rule*, where the way in which sick brothers should be served is discussed. Having in mind that the friars, due to their itinerant life, will not always be able to properly care for a sick brother, Francis gives the following guidelines:

But in extreme necessity they may entrust him to a person  
who must take good care of him in his illness.

Literally it says: "who must *satisfy* (or do justice to) (*satisfacere*) his illness." Francis goes on:

And I beg the sick brother that he gives thanks to the Creator for  
everything and that he desires to be such as the Lord wishes him to  
be,  
either healthy or ill. (...)

And when a person gets *disturbed or angry*  
either unto God or unto the brothers (...)  
this comes from the evil one, then he is *carnal*  
and he does not seem to be one of the brothers,  
for he *loves* his body more than his soul.

The contrast between disturbance and anger, (characterized here as "carnal"), and that which the Lord wishes, is clarified when we read the text in the light of the seventeenth chapter of the *Earlier Rule*, part of which was quoted under III.3. For the text quoted there has its place within the field of tension that determines a major part of the chapter: between the



aspirations of what Francis calls "the spirit of the flesh," and that which is the will of "the Spirit of the Lord." We remember that according to Francis the Spirit of the Lord concentrates on "humility and patience and the pure and true peace of the Spirit."<sup>17</sup>

Here too, that anger and agitation with which people often react to the frustration of their desires have their anti-pole in love which is the fruit of humility and patience, is corroborated in another way, when reflecting the text, in other texts where Francis speaks of the will of God; and also in the story of the real Joy (which, essentially, is a story about patience in an extreme situation, in which a fully justified desire of relief of primary needs is being frustrated in a malicious way).

To start with the latter: in this famous story (which certainly reflects something of his attitude towards certain brothers at the end of his life) Francis sketches the situation in which at dead of night he is denied shelter when, shivering from the cold of winter, he knocks at the door of his own brothers. The point of the story lies in the last verse:

If I had *patience* and did not get *agitated*, I tell you that  
in this is the true joy and the true virtue and the salvation of the  
soul.<sup>18</sup>

"True joy" is the genuine and pure satisfaction which is shown when the icy lovelessness of others is not being repaid in kind, but, on the contrary, borne lovingly.

6. The will of God is also introduced in his *Canticle of Brother Sun* and in the *Letter to the Faithful*. A careful reading shows unmistakably his conception of that will as the will to love. The verses in Francis's swan song, in which human existence is involved in the praise of God in a very special way, throw a light of their own on the connection of humility, patience, love, peace and the will of God.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those  
who grant forgiveness *through Your love*  
and *bear* sickness and tribulation.  
Blessed are those who *bear it in peace*,  
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

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<sup>17</sup>*Reg NB* 17,2 ff. "Flesh" and "fleshly," in the usage of St. Paul, which Francis adopts, denote man insofar as he wilfully withdraws from the will of God.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. A. Jansen, *The Story of the True Joy. An Autobiographical Reading*, in: *Franziskanische Studien*, 63 (1981), 271-288.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our sister, the death of the body,  
 from whom no living person can escape.  
 Woe to those who die in mortal sin.  
 Blessed are those whom she finds *in Your most holy will*,  
 for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and thank and serve Him with great *humility* (*Cant Sun* 10 ff).

The first verse of this last part of the song twice has the word "to bear" (in the old Italian version of the Latin word *sustinere*, which he also often uses elsewhere). As we saw under II, this is one of the key-words in Francis's spirituality. *Sustinere*, which in fact means "to bear," "to sustain," or "to support," is a verb to which, in Francis, the substantive *patientia* ("patience" or "bearing-power") answers. The last word of this part, and of the whole song, is "humility." Enclosed by this pair (patience and humility) the essential vicissitudes of human life are involved in the praise of God, and in particular through the force of love ("through your love") and within the space of peace and the will of God. Here "peace" takes up the central position: between "your love" and "your most holy will."<sup>19</sup>

It is, at the same time, remarkable that "peace" as well as "your most holy will" are denoted as an enclosing space: "*In your peace*" and "*in your most holy will*." If there are good reasons to conceive the theme of peace in Francis as a direct reference to the work of the Holy Spirit, the question cannot be evaded as to whether the will of God does not contain the same reference. Although it may not be possible to give a positive answer to this question with absolute certainty, it is nevertheless striking and clarifying to see how, in the Letter to the Faithful, the will of God is also being introduced. After an impressive picture of the descending movement which is visible in Christ's incarnation, Francis makes this humiliation reach its lowest point in the Garden of Gethsemani:

And his sweat became as drops of blood, falling on the ground.  
 Francis continues, again speaking of the will of God as of an enclosing and holding reality:

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<sup>19</sup>In Francis's *Canticle of Exhortation to Saint Claire*, "bearing" is again placed within the space of peace. Cf. 5:

Those who are being weighed down under illness  
 and those who have tired themselves out for them,  
 all of you, bear it in peace.

But He put his will *in the will of the Father* with the words  
 "Father, Your will be done, not as I will, but as You will."  
 And the will of the Father was such  
 that His blessed and glorious Son, Whom He gave to us  
 and Who was born for us,  
 should offer Himself through his own blood  
 as a *sacrifice and oblation* on the altar of the cross;  
 not for Himself, through Whom all things were made,  
 but for our sins, leaving us an example,  
 that we should follow in His footprints.  
 And He wills that all of us should be saved through Him,  
 and *receive* Him with a pure heart and a chaste body.<sup>20</sup>

Summing up, we can say that the will of the Father concerns His Son whom He has given us: that this Son "was to offer himself as a sacrifice and oblation (-.-)," so that we likewise should give ourselves. In a word: the will of the Father is an inspiration to *love*. Somewhat further on in this Letter, in verses 18 and 19, this word is used three times. After Francis, in this way, has urged his readers to love, he exhorts them to adore God *in the Spirit of truth*. The identification of God's will with God's love, and the identification of these with the peace in which the Holy Spirit imparts and reveals himself, is hard to doubt when surveying the series of texts that we have gone through and compared.<sup>21</sup>

7. Discussing the thirteenth Admonition, we saw that Francis, as a test of what may be called real peace, raises the question: can you endure with patience and humility that you are being frustrated in the just desire for recognition? To put it sharply, this test paradoxically resolves itself into this question: can you bear peacefully that you are not satisfied in an essential desire? Only if you have stood this test, may you be called a real peace-bringer in the sense of the Beatitude.

<sup>20</sup>LF 9 ff. Cf. also *The Office of the Passion* where in Ps. 6, v. 12 Francis makes the risen Christ speak in a prayer:

"Holy Father, You have taken me by the right hand; *in your will* You have taken me with You. You have taken me up gloriously."

<sup>21</sup>The former identification probably also emerges in the parallel which is to be found in H LF 50 ff. between "by the Holy Spirit," "do the will of His Father" and "through love and a pure and sincere conscience:" three ways of expressing, which all refer to one and the same reality, i.e. the Holy Spirit, who works the spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ in three relation-forms. (See under IV for this particular part of the text from *The Letter to the Faithful*.)



The fifteenth Admonition puts this conception of "peace" and "bringing peace" in a clear light, by expressly mentioning again some aspects that had been mentioned in the thirteenth Admonition. Thus, that which in the thirteenth Admonition had been described as "enduring in patience and humility" is summed up and elucidated in the fifteenth Admonition by the words "in all that they have to suffer in this world." And the full positive content of peacefully enduring essential frustration gets its expression in the fifteenth Admonition in the words "preserve peace in soul and body for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ."

These last words are essential. For we have seen that the connection of peace and love (combined with patience and humility) is repeatedly mentioned in Francis's writings. And we have also seen that for Francis apparently this connection, originates in the working of the Holy Spirit, who is "divine Love" himself. Gathering these data, the full meaning of that seemingly trite expression from the fifteenth Admonition, "for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ," can be opened up. "The love of our Lord Jesus Christ" is the Holy Spirit who can inspire people in such a way that they can preserve peace in *all* that they have to endure.

In this heart of his Admonitions Francis seems to have consulted the "Magna Carta" of hope voiced by St. Paul in the eighth chapter of his *Epistle to the Romans*, a chapter which abundantly testifies to the guidance of the Spirit of God.

And we know that *all things* work together for good to them that love God (...) who shall separate us from *the love of Christ*? (...) For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8, 28ff).

8. At the risk of overburdening the patience of the reader, if not his humility, I should like to quote one more text from the rich *Letter to the Faithful* at the end of this depth-sounding of what, for Francis, is hidden in the word "peace." It deals with the person in charge who is regarded as a superior, but should be a minor and "servant of the other brothers."

And he is not allowed on account of a fault of a brother *to get angry* with that brother, but he shall admonish and *support* him *benevolently* with all *patience and humility*. We must not be wise and prudent



according to the flesh, but, on the contrary, we should be simple humble and pure (11 LF 44 ff.).

Once again, there is the contrast between "getting angry" and "patience and humility" and, through the word "benevolent" (*benigne*), the reference to love. The word "support," or "bear" (*sustineat*) which Francis uses here gets underlined, as it were, when the author continues a little further on:

We must never desire to be over others,  
but, on the contrary, we must be servants  
and subject to every human creature for the sake of God.  
And upon all men and women,  
if they have done this and have persevered to the end,  
the Spirit of the Lord will rest and He will make His home  
and his dwelling in them.

"For the sake of God" (*propter Deum*) is, as it were, the echo of the words from the fifteenth Admonition, "for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*propter amorem Domini nostri Jesus Christi*). Under III.7, we have already seen how these latter words remind us of the Holy Spirit, who is the Love of God himself. No wonder that Francis immediately continues with a reference to the "Spirit of the Lord" who will rest (*requiescet*) upon them and "makes his home and dwelling in them."

Love and real peace or rest: they constitute, seen from different viewpoints, the one Reality and Activity of the Holy Spirit, who imparts himself as *the* Gift of God to the faithful person (*fidelis anima*).

At the end of their commentary on the fifteenth Admonition, Van Leeuwen and Verhey declare that this Spirit of peace is given to the world from God's future:

The knowledge of the Lord is the basic motif of the Admonitions. If one has got to know Him, one also can live from his love. From this basic experience of faith the love of God can become a reality in people. Because of love people can also share God's gifts with each other. Across the suffering of this world another reality breaks through: the eternal life that Jesus gives to his followers. Then the promise of future peace will be realized in our present world. Then the Beatitudes about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and the

life of the children of God come to their fulfillment. This is the peace which the world cannot give.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. Peace Is Something That Has To Do With Our Heart As Well As With Our Conduct

Francis's usual greeting was: "The Lord give you peace!" He remarked about this greeting that the Lord had revealed this to him.<sup>23</sup> This greeting had therefore to Francis an incomparably stronger meaning, as we realize from what has been said before, than that which we usually think to hear in a greeting. In the eyes of the man from Assisi the real peace-bringers are nothing less than bearers and bringers of the Holy Spirit: handing on that Spirit whom they have received for nothing.

This is pre-eminently true for Jesus His word: "Blessed are those who bring peace, for they will be called children of God" is in the first place true for Him, who, handing on the Spirit, is *the* Peace-bringer and *the* Child of God<sup>24</sup>—But those who try to follow Jesus, and in whom the Spirit of the Lord makes his home and his dwelling, they will be (Francis is sure)

children of the heavenly Father whose work they do. And they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Spouses we are, if the faithful soul is joined to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Brothers we are, if we do the will of His Father who is in heaven. Mothers, if we bear him in our hearts and bodies through love and a pure and sincere conscience; if we give birth to him by holy working, which should be a shining example to others.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to get an insight into the coherence of these various family relations with Christ, in order to be able to sound the depth of what Francis says in his fifteenth Admonition: "preserve peace *in soul and body*

<sup>22</sup>L.c. 97.

<sup>23</sup>Francis began every sermon to the people with the words "God give you peace." Cf. *Legend of the Three Companions*; nr. 26; *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies*. Ed. by M.A. Habig, Quincy, 1991, 916.

<sup>24</sup>Mt 5, 9; cf. Jes 9, 5; "a child is born unto us, a son is given unto us (...) Prince of Peace (...) The jealous love of the Lord of hosts will accomplish it."

<sup>25</sup>H LF. 49-53; cf.v. 56. "Oh, to have such a holy, such a dear, pleasing, humble, peace-loving, sweet, amiable and eminently desirable Brother and Son, Who laid down His life for His sheep."

for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ." If we relate this expression to the bold word of Francis on the motherhood given to those who in virtue of the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit bear Christ in their hearts and bodies, we see that, also with regard to peace, Francis is concerned with the actual attuning of the outward appearance to the inner reality of the body and the soul. To put it more pregnantly: it is a matter of expressing the inner attitude in an outer conduct, of a movement from inside to outside—in short, of the motherly event of bearing and giving birth.

Let us have a closer look at this point of view. "In soul and body," "from the inside and outside:" such expressions were dear to Francis. They occur more than once in his Testament, too. Affirming the blessing that he has called down from God over those who try to live in a gospel way in the last sentence of his last word, he ends as follows:

And I, little brother Francis, your servant, confirm for you inwardly and outwardly, inasmuch as I can, this most holy blessing (Test. 41).

In their Commentary on the Testament, Freeman and Sevenhoven give an excellent indication of what these words "inwardly" and "outwardly" evoke:

What lives in the inside, should also appear on the outside. And what is visible on the outside, says something about the inner person. These two are one, or, at least, they ought to be. That is why he had his habit lined inside and outside, and why he played with his temptations, contending with them. And therefore his biographers write about the greatest secret in Francis's life, that the sign of the cross, which had been impressed into his heart in San Damiano, broke out in stigmata at the end of his life.<sup>26</sup>

Outward appearance, not reflecting an inner attitude, was always suspect to Francis.<sup>27</sup> We have already seen how his critical sense is directed to the testing of outward conduct, in order to ascertain if it is authentic, i.e. if it is supported by a disposition of the heart. He is clearly

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. G.P. Freeman and H. Sevenhoven, *Der Nachlass eines Armen. Kommentar zum Testament des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi*; Werl, 1988, 153. An English translation is forthcoming.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. *Reg NB* 17, 11 f.: "For the spirit of the flesh strives after the possession of words, but little after deeds; and he does not seek a religion and holiness in the interior spirit, but he strongly desires to possess a religion and holiness of outward appearance to the people."



concerned with the actual implementation of the inner notion in those who have been moved by the Holy Spirit. If a person feels sorry for another, let him do something about it. Not in the illusion of being high and mighty, but in the clear realization that the Holy Spirit who moves us wants us to be fruitful in that way.

A century later Ruusbroec will say it like this: the Holy Spirit works *van binnen uitweert*, from the inside outward.<sup>28</sup> In his *Later Rule* Francis expresses this insight as follows: "Above all, the brothers must desire to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy working" (LR 10, 8). "The Holy Spirit" and "His working" (*operatio*) belong together. This is also completely true for those who have learnt to taste the Holy Spirit as Peace itself.

That Peace urges towards working through, i.e. towards embodying what the heart has received from God. Only in this working through is there proof of the authenticity and the solidity of the inner disposition. And this embodiment applies to each individual body, and to the large body of the church.

Francis's elucidation of Jesus's Beatitude couldn't have been pithier: "real peacebringers preserve peace in soul and body in all that they have to endure in this world for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ." This combination of bringing and preserving is surprising: he who preserves that Spirit of peace (this fire, this pure life) will also hand it on to others; and he who hands this fire on through his infectious conduct, keeps and "preserves" it at the same time. Real life is only in the producing of life; authentic peace is preserved in the passing on of that peace.

Francis's realization of what is meant by essential peace appears to be closely connected with one of the kernel-convictions of his spirituality, i.e. that all human beings have a vocation to motherhood, men as well as women.<sup>29</sup> And that only in this way, i.e. in the bearing and the feeding of the other who is our neighbor, true life in community and therefore real peace can be achieved. The patience and humility of the real peacebringers are therefore strikingly reflected in the bearing-power, discussed in the eighteenth Admonition (one of the texts that most strongly typify Francis's conception of life):

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<sup>28</sup>*De Verhevenheid van de geestelijke Bruiloft of de innige ontmoeting met Christus*; Tiel Amsterdam, 1977, 152-154.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. *On "Bearing."* l.c., 274.



Blessed is the person who bears his neighbor in his fragility, as he would want to be borne by him if he were in a similar situation (Adm. 18, 1).

### Epilogue

Was Francis's work as a peace-maker successful in the long run? If we may believe what historians say about the durability of what he has in fact accomplished with the trouble he took in this, we must be skeptical. Much seems to have been undone in his lifetime or soon after. But are his words in the thirteenth and fifteenth Admonitions robbed of their power by this fact? Does it tell against these Admonitions that the work of peace-making of the man who says those words was often frustrated, and nearly always was a laborious affair, in which initial success often resulted in failure? Or, on the contrary, is this experience an important affirmation of the spiritual quality of these two texts on the making of peace?

I think the latter is the case. If we assume that the Admonitions got their definite form in the latter part of Francis's life, and, consequently, were worded during a period in which the badly sick *poverello* felt in his own body how difficult it is to muster patience in such a situation (certainly for a person with such a dynamic character and a strong will), these two Admonitions become specially valuable. Then they bear the hallmark of a purification which has been fought in life.

Besides, Francis himself may have been able to ascertain that his work for peace and reconciliation appeared to be of a more volatile nature than he had hoped for. His consciousness of the absolute indispensability of God's "Assistance," if our human work is to thrive and strike root in some measure, will only have grown stronger. To this consciousness of the "Long-windedness" which enables our desire to continue, in spite of everything, in loving humility and patience, the thirteenth and fifteenth Admonitions bear witness. This same consciousness, and the same enthusiasm that made him radiate joy and peace until his last hour, remain fascinating and a challenge up to this day.

### Summary

In the very middle of the Book of twenty eight so-called "*Admonitions*" of Francis—characterized by scholars as the "*magna carta*" of his spirituality—four saws present an interpretation of three of Jesus's

Beatitudes. Two of these central Admonitions, the thirteenth and fifteenth ones, deal with Jesus's words "Blessed are the peacemakers...." The aim of this article is to elucidate how Francis in these two Admonitions interprets the word "peace." The procedure of this investigation is primarily based on the principle that Francis's written legacy can function as "sui ipsius interpretes." Among the fruits of this search is the fact that Francis clearly connects the concept of (inner) "peace" with the concepts of "patience" and "humility": these three virtues form a kind of semantic triangle.

This relationship enables us, by investigating the meaning of "patience" and "humility," to clarify indeed Francis's insight in the nature of Jesus's peace. Striking in this respect is the very close bond Francis seems to presuppose between the peace of his Lord and the working of the Holy Spirit—even to the extent that "Peace," as God's gift, appears as one of the names of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.