

## St. Francis of Assisi, Messenger of Peace in His Time

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*San Francesco d'Assisi messaggero di pace nel suo tempo*  
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**T**he statement is often made, with no reference to the sources, that St. Francis was "a social reformer whose equal the world has not seen since the time of Christ," who "enthusiastically espoused the cause of the oppressed and enslaved people" and "in particular instances guided the efforts of the *Minores* to a happy issue...; the Franciscan rule was the consecration and in a manner the cradle of democracy, especially in Italy."<sup>1</sup>

Sophronius Clasen, in his well-documented study of St. Francis and the social question,<sup>2</sup> and Heribert Roggen, in his study of the relationships between Franciscan life and Italian feudal and communal society,<sup>3</sup> have both shown that Francis had no intention of reforming the social structures of his

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<sup>1</sup>See Hilarin Felder, *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi*. Revised by the author for the English edition, translated by Berchmans Bittle, O.F.M. Cap. Eight-hundredth anniversary edition, Chicago 1982, 283-96; see p. 295 for these statements and the notes on p. 481 for the bibliography on which they are based.

<sup>2</sup>S. Clasen, "Franziskus von Assisi und die soziale Frage," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, (Mönchengladbach) 15 (1952) 109-21; see *Bibliographia Franciscana* X, no. 289.

<sup>3</sup>H. Roggen, *Die Lebensform des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi in ihrem Verhältnis zur feudalen und bürgerlichen Gesellschaft Italiens*, Mechelen, St-Franciskus-Uitgeverij, 1965. On Francis's concept of peace, see especially pp. 56-62: "The originality and orthodox stance of the Franciscan peace community comes out of the gospel origin of St. Francis's view of life. This had nothing to do with social schemes. His concept of peace was purely religious and was always linked with ideas about the kingdom of God" (60). For a summary of the main results of this work, see A. Pompei, *L'influenza religioso-sociale di S. Francesco e della sua primitiva fraternità* in *Miscellanea Franciscana* 66 (1966) 193-201, and my review in *Collectanea Franciscana* 36 (1966) 189-91, also in *Bibliographia Franciscana* XII, n. 317.

time. Nevertheless, his ideals of fraternity and minority did have favorable repercussions on the peace of medieval society.

As far as I know, no one has done an in-depth study of the gospel concept of peace which inspired the life and activity of St. Francis.<sup>4</sup> Thus I do not think it superfluous to take up the subject myself. Given its vastness, I could not hope to exhaust it within the limits of an article. But I do intend to examine the most important passages from the early sources, with special attention to relevant texts from the writings.<sup>5</sup>

My treatment will be developed under the following headings: 1) Gospel origin of the Franciscan message of peace, 2) Peace as the sign and fruit of messianic salvation, 3) The greeting of peace as a prayer for peace for the brothers, 4) The wish for peace flows from a heart at peace with God, 5) The effectiveness of peacemaking depends on the harmony of the brothers among themselves, 6) Others attempts at peacemaking accomplished by St. Francis

### 1. *Gospel Origin of the Franciscan Message of Peace*

We know that Francis's arduous journey of conversion ended in the chapel of the Portiuncula (probably in early 1208) when he heard the words of Jesus addressed to the apostles, or perhaps to the seventy-two disciples.<sup>6</sup> Our Lord's missionary discourse shone like a ray of sunlight on his path: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you" (Lk 10:5-6).

Francis took from these words not only the concept of peace but also the desire to be its instrument. The same words are found in the *Earlier Rule*.<sup>7</sup> Most likely they had already formed part of the *Protoregula*, the plan of life he

<sup>4</sup>For other studies on the concept and apostolate of peace in St. Francis, see I. Schlauri, *Saint François et la Bible. Essai bibliographique de sa spiritualité évangélique*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 40 (1970) 365-437, especially 415f; also in *Bibliographia Franciscana* XII, n. 740, 801-08, 831, 834-40; M. Conti, *La missione degli Apostoli nella regola francescana*, Genoa 1972, 223-24; *Il dono della pace* (more a biblical and patristic exegesis than an exposition of the Franciscan sources).

<sup>5</sup>See S. Clasen, *Miszellen zur Geschichte des hl. Franziskus von Assisi*, in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 35 (1972) 217-30, especially 219-24. See also n. 8 below.

<sup>6</sup>Lk 10:5f and Mt 10:12f; 1Cel 21f.

<sup>7</sup>RegNB XIV, 2f: "Whatever house they enter, let them first say: Peace to this house (see Lk 10:5; Esser, *Textkritische Untersuchungen zur Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder*. Grottaferrata (Rome) 1974, 179f). Let them eat and drink what is placed before them for as long as they stay in that house (see Lk 10:7)." We notice that in this chapter, which belongs to the primitive part of the Rule, Francis is obviously inspired by St. Luke (see D. Flood, *The Birth of the Rule*, in D. Flood - W. van Dijk - Th. Matura, *The Birth of a Movement*, Milan 1976, 69-73).



submitted to Innocent III for approval in early 1209.<sup>8</sup> The same admonition also occurs in the *Later Rule*.<sup>9</sup>

We should note that Francis, without prejudice to his deep respect for the text of Scripture, varied the words of his greeting according to the recipients. He says as much in his *Testament*: "The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: 'May the Lord give you peace.'" Thomas of Celano, speaking of Francis's ministry of preaching, states:

In all his preaching, before he proposed the word of God to those gathered about, he first prayed for peace for them, saying: 'The Lord give you peace.' He always most devoutly announced peace to men and women, to all he met and overtook. For this reason many who had hated peace and had hated also salvation embraced peace, through the cooperation of the Lord, with all their heart and were made children of peace and seekers after eternal salvation.<sup>11</sup>

Jordan of Giano relates a naive little incident that causes us to smile. Upon Francis's return from the Orient in 1220, he went to Pope Honorius III and greeted him with the words, "Father Pope, God give you peace."<sup>12</sup> It is not surprising that in 1215 the man who considered himself brother to all creatures should "in his usual way" address a large flock of birds gathered in a field near Bevagna with the gospel greeting: "The Lord give you peace."<sup>13</sup>

Personally, I think it is unnecessary to look for the reason why Francis, whether meeting individuals or addressing a crowd, preferred to use the blessing of Aaron, "The Lord...give you [*tibi* or *vobis* ] peace,"<sup>14</sup> instead of

<sup>8</sup>See 1*Cel* 32.

<sup>9</sup>*RegB* III: "Into whatever house they enter, let them first say: 'Peace be to this house!' (see Lk 10:5)."

<sup>10</sup>*Test* 23: "Salutationem mihi Dominus revelavit, ut diceremus: Dominus det tibi pacem" (Esser, *Das Testament des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi. Eine Untersuchung über seine Echtheit und seine Bedeutung*. Münster/Westph. 1949, p. 101). See other Franciscan sources and an historical comment, *ibid.*, 67f and 171f.

<sup>11</sup>1*Cel* 23. "In later years Francis declared that it was our Lord who taught him to greet people with the words: 'The Lord give you peace!' Therefore, when beginning to preach, he always gave this greeting of peace to all present" (L3S 26). In the same passage there is reference to an unnamed forerunner of Francis, who often went through the streets of Assisi greeting the people: "Pax et bonum! pax et bonum!" I am prescinding from this passage in which I think there is already a legendary element, driven by a concern for theological interpretation (John the Baptist/Christ: Forerunner/Francis). See A.G. Lamadrid, "Paz y Bien." *Resonancias bíblicas del saludo franciscano*, in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo*. 3 (1974) 249-62.

<sup>12</sup>*Cronica* 14 (ed. Boehmer, Paris 1908, 14).

<sup>13</sup>1*Cel* 58.

<sup>14</sup>See Num 6:24a, 26b and the Blessing for Brother Leo in D. Lapsanski, *The Autographs* 18-37, 34: "et [dominus] det tibi pacem." S.J.P. van Dijk, *Saint Francis's Blessing of Brother Leo*, in *Archivum*

"Peace to this house." In fact he is careful to adapt the biblical text to different circumstances and situations. The *Legend of the Three Companions* is correct in its description of the apostolate of the first brothers: "Whenever they came to a town or village or castle or house, they spoke the words of peace, comforting all, and exhorting men and women to love and fear the Creator of heaven and earth, and to observe his commands."<sup>15</sup> Francis and his followers announced the message of peace to individual persons or homes, to families living there, to groups of people in the cities, villages and countryside, as well as to Christians who came to hear their words.

## 2. *Peace As the Sign and Fruit of Messianic Salvation*

The question spontaneously arises: what did Francis have in mind when he wished men and women and even inanimate creatures peace. The answer is not difficult if we compare the many synonyms he uses in his the writings. They are pregnant with meaning. In Francis's mind peace is very closely connected with messianic salvation. That is why he uses it as a greeting to Brother Leo who was suffering from anxiety. Likewise in his letter to rulers encouraging them to promote devotion to the Eucharist, he begins by wishing them "health [salvation] and peace."<sup>16</sup>

Peace is a wonderful gift from God and is closely linked to the theological virtue of charity, as from the first words of the *Letter to the Faithful*: "Brother Francis, their servant and subject, sends esteem and reverence, true peace from heaven and sincere love in the Lord to all Christian religious people: clergy and laity, men and women, and to all who live in the whole world."<sup>17</sup>

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*Franciscanum Historicum* 47 (1954) 199-201, thinks that Francis was not inspired directly by the bible but by the *Ordo ad clericum faciendum* used at that time in southern Italy (see *Bibliographia Franciscana* XI, n. 190). For a plural form of the blessing, see 2 Thess 3:16: "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways."

<sup>15</sup> L3S 37.

<sup>16</sup> EpLeo: "F. Leo, F. Francisco tuo salutem et pacem" [Brother Leo, health and peace from Brother Francis!]; note the grammatical error, clear evidence of Francis's limited knowledge of Latin. EpRect: "*Universis potestatibus et consulibus, iudicibus atque rectoribus ubique terrarum et omnibus aliis, ad quos litterae istae pervenerint, frater Franciscus, vester in Domino Deo servus parvulus ac despectus, salutem et pacem omnibus vobis optans*" [Brother Francis, your little and looked down upon servant in the Lord God, wishes health and peace to all mayors and consuls, magistrates and rulers throughout the world and to all others to whom these words may come]. Regarding the authenticity of this letter, for which manuscripts are lacking, and the time when it was presumably written, see Esser, *Über die Chronologie der Schriften des bl. Franziskus*, in *Studien zu den Opuscula des bl. Franziskus von Assisi*. E. Kurten and Isidore de Vallapadierna, Rome 1973, 319-21.

<sup>17</sup> 2EpFid 1. With regard to the intended recipients of this letter, see K. Esser, *La Lettera di san Francesco ai fedeli*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 43 (1973), 65-78.



The salutary gift of peace flows from the redemption accomplished by Jesus on the altar of the cross "in Whom that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled."<sup>18</sup> These are the words of Francis to the brothers when he was sick. If peace is to flourish in the hearts of the Christian faithful, conversion is necessary, which opens them to this gift. Celano tells us that from the very beginning Francis "separated them [the brothers] into four groups of two each and said to them: 'Go, my dearest brothers, two by two into the various parts of the world, announcing to people peace and repentance unto the forgiveness of sins.'"<sup>19</sup>

### 3) *The Greeting of Peace As a Prayer for Peace for the Brothers*

It is important to note that Francis felt that the biblical salutation was expressly revealed to him and his order. He says this in the passage from his *Testament* cited above and it is also mentioned in the *Legend of Perugia*.<sup>20</sup> The wish of peace is a form of intense prayer expressed in the words of Scripture. The prayer of the brothers for the gift of Christ's peace, which is the sign and effect of divine love and salvation, was even more powerful in view of the hatred, war and destruction that had wrecked Italian society.<sup>21</sup> As Francis's reputation for holiness grew, people paid greater attention to his words of peace and received them with joy as a grace from heaven. They pledged to put them into practice, as Celano mentions in the passage cited above. The *Legend of the Three Companions* says: "He [Francis] indeed was filled with the spirit of prophecy; and taking up the words of his predecessor, by his own preaching and salutary counsels he was able to unite in peace many who had formerly hated each other and were living in sin."<sup>22</sup>

The beneficial influence of Francis's greeting of peace came also from the fact that it was unusual. Other contemporary evangelical movements were severe in their public criticism of others, especially those who held office. They vigorously called for a change in behavior. This was not Francis. Both in his private life and in his apostolate he tried to show again the meekness and kindness of Christ.

<sup>18</sup>*EpOrd* 13. According to Esser, this important document was probably addressed to the entire order, not to a general chapter, and was written not long after 1220 (*Über die Chronologie*, 306-16).

<sup>19</sup>*ICel* 29.

<sup>20</sup>*LP* 67: "The Lord also revealed to him the greeting which the brothers were to use and which he recorded in his Testament: 'The Lord revealed a form of greeting to me, telling me that we should say, The Lord give you peace.'"

<sup>21</sup>Roggen, *Die Lebensform*, 56, 60.

<sup>22</sup>*L3S* 26.

But the greeting of peace extended to one and all sometimes surprised his hearers. This was particularly true in the early days of the order, as the *Legend of Perugia* relates:

In the early days of the order, when blessed Francis was travelling about in the company of a brother who was one of the first twelve, the latter greeted men and women on the roads and in the fields by saying to them: 'May the Lord give you peace!' The people were completely astonished, for they had never heard any other religious greet them that way. Moreover, a few men asked in an offensive tone of voice: 'What is the meaning of that kind of greeting?' The brother was ashamed and said to blessed Francis: 'Brother, allow me to use a different greeting.' Blessed Francis answered: 'Let them talk; they do not have a sense of the things of God. Don't be ashamed, because nobles and princes of this world will show respect to you and to the other brothers because of this greeting.'<sup>23</sup>

#### 4) *The Wish for Peace Flows from a Heart At Peace with God*

Francis firmly believed that the source of peace can be found only in God. Its desired fruits need to mature within the human heart before they can be shared with others. Following his mystical crucifixion on LaVerna in 1224, the Poverello wrote a note in his own hand to Brother Leo to comfort him in a trial he was undergoing. In these praises Francis celebrates God most high, three and one, who is sovereign good, love, charity, security and inner peace.<sup>24</sup> Sustained by the certainty of the divine goodness, Francis begs God's peace for Brother Leo as for a true penitent.<sup>25</sup>

Interior peace grows to the extent that people open their hearts to the influence of the Holy Spirit, as Francis explicitly insists in the *Earlier Rule*.<sup>26</sup> Even amid trials the soul must remain open to the love that is the bearer of peace from the Spirit. In one of his Admonitions Francis repeats the beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be challed children of God (Mt 5:9). Those people are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace of spirit and body because of love of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> LP 67.

<sup>24</sup> *Laud Dei* 3-4: "You are good, all good.... You are love, charity.... You are security, You are inner peace" (see Lapsanski, *The Autographs*, 28).

<sup>25</sup> *Ben Leo*: "May the Lord...give you peace. May the Lord bless you, Brother Leo."

<sup>26</sup> *RegNB XVII*, 14-15: "The Spirit of the Lord, however, wants the flesh to be mortified and looked down upon, considered of little worth and rejected. It strives for humility and patience, the pure, simple and true peace of the spirit."

<sup>27</sup> *Adm XV*, 1-2.



Francis expressed the same sentiments when he was near death. He praised God for those who pardon offenses for His love and bear infirmity and tribulation. He called blessed those who endure sufferings in this way, with peace of soul, for one day they will be rewarded by the Most High Himself.<sup>28</sup>

But messianic peace is not a once and for all gift. It necessarily demands our active cooperation. As it gradually grows stronger, it leads to eschatological peace, almost without our realizing it. St. Bonaventure says this in his prologue to *The Soul's Journey into God*:

I call upon the Eternal Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that through the intercession of the most holy Virgin Mary, the mother of the same God and Lord Jesus Christ, and through the intercession of blessed Francis, our leader and father, he may enlighten the eyes of our soul to guide our feet in the way of that peace which surpasses all understanding [Eph 1:18; Lk 1:79; Phil 4:7]. This is the peace proclaimed and given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and preached again and again by our father Francis. At the beginning and end of every sermon he announced peace; in every greeting he wished for peace; in every contemplation he sighed for ecstatic peace...<sup>29</sup>

##### 5) *The Effectiveness of Peacemaking Depends on Harmony*

The *Legend of the Three Companions*, referring to the early general chapters, records how Francis admonished the brothers:

His great desire was that he and his brothers should abound in the good works for which people give glory and praise to God. He also said to the brothers: 'Since you speak of peace, all the more so must you have it in your hearts. Let none be provoked to anger or scandal by you, but rather may they be drawn to peace and good will, to benignity and concord through your gentleness. We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way. Many who may seem to us to be children of the Devil will still become Christ's disciples.'<sup>30</sup>

This is not the place to expound on this wonderful passage, which shows clearly the great importance attached to the "legation of peace and penitence." This expression is used by *Legend of the Three Companions* to describe the

<sup>28</sup> *CantSol* 10-11: "Praise be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, / and bear infirmity and tribulation. / Blessed are those who endure in peace / for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned." For bibliography on *The Canticle* see F. Bajetto, *Un trentennio di studi (1941-73) sul Cantico di Frate Sole. Bibliografia ragionata*, in *L'Italia Francescana* 49 (1974) 5-62.

<sup>29</sup> *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, prol., n. 1: *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera selecta*, ed. minor, V, Quaracchi 1964, 179; this edition contains bibliographical lists [English translation by Ewert Cousins in *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York, 1978, 53.]

<sup>30</sup> *L3S* 58.

Franciscan apostolate.<sup>31</sup> These words shed light on the essential connection between the effects of peacemaking, peace of heart, and harmony among people. From the context we can see the eminently positive nature of the brothers' gospel preaching as they went about in the world. Francis had no desire to frighten people with threats or reprimands but rather to overcome evil with good after the example of the Good Shepherd.<sup>32</sup>

More than once the founder insisted that his brothers cultivate perfect harmony of mind among themselves before they demanded it of others. Given the hardships of their itinerant life, with no assurance of food or shelter, he considered it even more necessary to instill this in his followers. The *Later Rule* has this admonition: "I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or dispute or judge others when they go about in the world (see 2 Tim 2:14 and 3:2); but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming."<sup>33</sup> The same thing is clear from Celano's account:

It happened that a certain brother named Barbaro once hurled an abusive word against another brother in the presence of a certain nobleman from the island of Cyprus. When he saw that brother somewhat hurt by the conflict of words, he took some asses' dung and put it into his mouth to be eaten as vengeance upon himself; and he said: 'Let the tongue that poured out the poison of anger upon my brother eat dung.' Seeing this, the knight was struck with astonishment and departed greatly edified....

All the brothers observed this unfailingly as a custom that if any of them at any time spoke a disturbing word to another he would immediately cast himself upon the ground and impress kisses upon the other's foot even if the other were unwilling. The saint rejoiced in such things, whenever he heard his sons bring forth from themselves examples of holiness; and he heaped blessings most worthy of entire acceptance upon those brothers who by word or deed led sinners to the love of Christ.<sup>34</sup>

Instead of shutting themselves up in a cloister, which would have isolated them from the world, they chose a wandering lifestyle with no fixed dwelling. This put them in constant and close contact with people who were sometimes hostile. There were good reasons for the exhortation to be at peace with such

<sup>31</sup> L3S 30: "Qui [Bernardus de Quintavalle] primo pacis et poenitentiae legationem amplectens, post sanctum decucurrit..." [T. Desbonnets, *Legenda trium sociorum*. Edition critique, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 67 (1974); the translation given in the *Omnibus* reads somewhat differently].

<sup>32</sup> See Rom 12:21.

<sup>33</sup> *RegB* III, 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> *2Cel* 155.



persons.<sup>35</sup> Referring to the religious training of the first followers, Celano says: "Amid all these things they strove for peace and gentleness with all, and always conducting themselves modestly and peaceably, they avoided all scandals with the greatest zeal."<sup>36</sup> Precisely and briefly he tells us the distinguishing mark of the spirit of Francis: "He always wanted the laws for strangers to be observed by his sons, namely, to be gathered under a roof that belongs to another, to go about peaceably, to thirst after their fatherland."<sup>37</sup>

Francis was particularly zealous always and everywhere to maintain harmony with the secular clergy. All the more so, given that the brothers' ministry of preaching and spiritual assistance to individuals and families aroused envy and hostility on the part of the pastors who were charged with the care of these faithful. Celano says:

Though Francis wanted his sons to be at peace with all and to conduct themselves as little ones among all, he taught by his words and showed by his example that they were to be especially humble toward clerics. For he used to say: 'We have been sent to help the clergy toward the salvation of souls so that what might be found insufficient in them might be supplied by us. Everyone will receive his reward, not according to the authority he exercises, but according to the labor he does. Know, brothers,' he said, 'the fruit of souls is most pleasing to God, and it can be better obtained by peace with clerics than by disagreements with them.'<sup>38</sup>

In Francis's mind only those who share in peace can create peace. He had a profound sense of the importance and necessity of spreading peace everywhere. This was part of Franciscan minority. In reality gospel humility is a powerful force for making peace; the humility through which we submit willingly to others for love of God, considering their dignity as superior to our own, preferring to associate with those burdened by poverty or sickness, or those regarded by others as inferior. In the *Earlier Rule* he explicitly says: "They must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and

<sup>35</sup>See the stories of hostility toward the first brothers recounted in *L3S*, 34, 38-40, 42. The exhortation to nonviolence found in the *Earlier Rule* is to be interpreted in the historical context of these episodes: "Let them not resist anyone evil, but whoever strikes them on one cheek, let them offer him the other as well (see Mt 5:39; Lk 6:29). Whoever takes their cloak, let them not withhold their tunic (see Lk 6:29)" (*RegNB* XIV, 4-5).

<sup>36</sup>*1Cel* 41.

<sup>37</sup>*2Cel* 59. See also *L3S* 59: "When all present [at the chapters at St. Mary of the Angels] had received his [Francis's] blessing, in great joy of spirit they started on their way through the world as pilgrims and strangers, taking nothing with them for the journey except their office book."

<sup>38</sup>*2Cel* 146. See also *LP* 19, 58.

looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside."<sup>39</sup>

6) *Other Attempts at Peacemaking Accomplished by St. Francis*<sup>40</sup>

For reasons of space I will mention only a few of the attempts to make peace that were successfully accomplished by Francis. They will suffice to show the specific nature of his peacemaking.

Arnaldo Fortini and others are correct when they maintain that the peace of 1210 between the *Majores* and *Minores* of Assisi, between themselves and with Perugia after a long and bloody war, cannot be attributed to Francis's influence. As yet he lacked sufficient spiritual authority to be chosen to settle a quarrel between the two factions. Moreover, the document shows no sign whatsoever of being inspired by the gospel.<sup>41</sup> Those authors who say that the "democratic" tendencies of the Middle Ages received a strong impetus from the fraternity and special mission of St. Francis must be read with a great deal of caution.<sup>42</sup>

The Poverello's aspirations for peace were eminently religious. We see this in the account of his journey to France in 1217:

When they arrived at Arezzo, they found the entire city a prey to the dreadful scandal and to a war that was raging night and day. There were two factions in the city, and they had been mortal enemies for a long time. Blessed Francis was staying in a hospital in the suburbs of the city. As he heard the din and shrieks night and day, it seemed to him that the demons were exulting and egging on the inhabitants to destroy their city by fire and other scourges. Moved by pity for this city, he called Brother Sylvester. He was a priest of admirable simplicity and purity, a man of God of solid faith, esteemed by blessed Francis as a saint. He said to him: 'Go to the gate of the city and, as loud as you can, order all the devils to leave that city.'

Brother Sylvester got up, went to the city gate and cried out with all his might: 'Praised and blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ. On behalf of God almighty and in virtue of the obedience due to our Father Francis, I order all the devils to leave

<sup>39</sup>RegNB IX, 2.

<sup>40</sup>For this topic, besides the studies mentioned in nn. 1-4, see also: H. Krah, *Erziehungswissenschaft. Der sozialerzieherische Aspekt franziskanischer Geistigkeit*, Werl/Westph. 1974, 42-45; A. Senftle, *Versöhnung und Friede. Ein Erbe des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi*, in H. Fries and U. Valeske (eds.), *Versöhnung. Gestalten—Zeiten—Modelle*, Frankfurt a. M. [1975], 57-66; W. Dirks, *Franz von Assisi und Nikolaus von der Flüe*, *ibid.*, 67-75.

<sup>41</sup>See A. Fortini, *Nova vita di San Francesco*, [S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi, 1959], I/1, 388-95; II, 192-97; III, 574-78; H. Roggen, *Die Lebensform*, 57f.

<sup>42</sup>See n. 1 above and also H. Roggen, *Die Lebensform*, 81-90; "Die franziskanische Frömmigkeit als Antwort auf die religiösen Probleme des 13. Jahrhunderts."



this city!' Thanks to the goodness of God and the prayer of blessed Francis, it so happened that peace and concord were restored between the inhabitants without any other kind of sermon. Blessed Francis was not able to preach to them on this occasion. But much later he said to them in the course of a sermon: 'I speak to you as people who formerly were enchained by demons. You were bound hand and foot and sold like animals; you had handed yourselves over to the power of the demons by subjecting yourselves to the will of those who have destroyed themselves, who continue to destroy themselves, and wish your own ruin and the ruin of your entire city. You are wretched and ignorant people, for you do not recognize God's blessings. Some among you do not know it, but some time ago, God freed your city through the merits of a most holy brother named Sylvester.'<sup>43</sup>

This ingenuous narrative shows the conviction of Francis that the power of the Evil One, which seeks to destroy us both here and hereafter, subjects us to hatred, envy and jealousy. To overcome this influence we must rely more on God's mercy than on the human abilities of a mediator.

A story told by the archdeacon Thomas of Spalato fits in perfectly with the above incident. He tells how peace was restored in Bologna through the merits of Francis on the feast of the Assumption in 1220. He writes as an eyewitness:

...I saw St. Francis preach in the public square in front of the public palace. Almost the entire city had assembled there. The theme of his sermon was: 'Angels, men, and demons.' He spoke so well and with such sterling clarity on these three classes of spiritual and rational beings that the way in which this untutored man developed his subject aroused even among the scholars in the audience an admiration that knew no bounds. Yet, his discourses did not belong to the great genre of sacred eloquence: rather they were harangues [*conciones*]. In reality, throughout his discourse he spoke of the duty of putting an end to hatreds and of arranging a new treaty of peace.

He was wearing a ragged habit; his whole person seemed insignificant; he did not have an attractive face. But God conferred so much power on his words that they brought back peace in many a seignorial family torn apart until then by old, cruel, and furious hatreds even to the point of assassinations.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup>LP 81; see also 2Cel 108. For other details, see M. Renzoni, *S. Francesco ed Arezzo*, in *Studi Francescani* series III 22 (1950) 129-55 (see *Bibliographia Franciscana* IX, n. 195).

<sup>44</sup>Latin text in L. Lemmens, *Testimonia minora saeculi XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi*, Quaracchi 1926, 10. For a French translation see D. Vorreux, *Témoins et chroniqueurs du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, in Saint François d'Assise. Documents, écrits et premières biographies*, Paris [1968], 1435. For a comment see K. Esser, *Origini e valori autentici dell'ordine dei Frati Minori*. [English translation taken from the *Omnibus*, 1601-02].

The preaching of Francis, which overflowed from his heart, providentially caused noble families in Bologna, long divided by mortal hatred, to reactivate their former peace agreements. This testimony from outside the order also alludes to the demons that provoked the discord. Once again and without hesitation the conclusion is clear: peacemaking comes, not from a mediator skilled in the art of compromise, but from a man who is deeply imbued with God. The religious authority and moral personality of such a person are enough to convert hearts infected by hatred to love of God and one another.

If the previous accounts demonstrate the religious nature of efforts for peace, the next one does so even more. Toward the beginning of 1225 Francis, already gravely ill and probably staying near the Poor Clares at San Damiano, reestablished peace between Guido II, bishop of Assisi, and Oportulo, podestà of the same city:

At the time when he was very sick—the 'Praises of the Lord' had already been composed—the bishop of Assisi excommunicated the podestà. In return, the podestà had it announced to the sound of the trumpet in the streets of the city that every citizen was forbidden to buy from or sell anything whatsoever to the bishop or to transact any business with him. There was a savage hatred between them. Blessed Francis, who was very sick at that time, pitied them. It pained him to see that no one, religious or lay, intervened to reestablish peace and concord between them. So he said to his companions: 'It is a great shame for us, the servants of God, that at a time when the podestà and the bishop so hate each other no one can be found to reestablish peace and concord between them!' On this occasion he added the following strophe to his canticle: All praise be yours, my Lord,/ Through those who grant pardon for love of you;/ Through those who endure sickness and trial./ Happy those who endure in peace;/ By you, Most High, they will be crowned.

He then called one of his companions and said to him: 'Go and find the podestà and tell him for me that he should go to the bishop's palace with the notables of the commune and with all those he can assemble.' When the brother had left, he said to the others: 'Go, and in the presence of the bishop of the podestà, and of the entire gathering, sing the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. I have confidence that the Lord will put humility and peace in their hearts and that they will return to their former friendship and affection.'

When everyone had gathered at the place of the cloister of the bishop's palace, the two brothers stood up, and one of them was the spokesman: 'Despite his sufferings, blessed Francis,' he said, 'has composed the 'Praises of the Lord' for all his creatures, to the praise of God and for the edification of his neighbor; he asks you to listen with great devotion.'

With that, they began to sing. The podestà stood up and joined his hands as for the gospel of the Lord, and he listened with great recollection and attention; soon tears flowed from his eyes, for he had a great deal of confidence in blessed Francis and devotion for him. At the end of the canticle, the podestà cried out before the entire gathering: 'In truth I say to you, not only do I forgive the lord bishop whom I ought to recognize as my master, but I would even pardon my brother's



and my own son's murderer!' He then threw himself at the feet of the lord bishop and said to him: 'For the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and of blessed Francis, his servant, I am ready to make any atonement you wish.' The bishop stood up and said to him: 'My office demands humility of me, but by nature I am quick to anger; you must forgive me!' With much tenderness and affection, both locked arms and embraced each other.

The brothers were in admiration to see that the sanctity of blessed Francis had fulfilled to the letter what he had said of the peace and concord to be restored between these two men. All who witnessed the scene ascribed the grace so promptly given to the two adversaries to a miracle due to the merits of the saint. These two men, forgetting all past offensive words and after a very great scandal, returned to a very great concord.<sup>45</sup>

Francis presented the gospel concept of peace to the warring parties by sending two of the brothers to sing the praises of God as his message, after the manner of jongleurs.<sup>46</sup> For the occasion he added a special strophe to the *Canticle*. Its four verses set forth the teaching of Christ on love of enemies for God's sake and patient endurance of injustice for the sake of the promised heavenly reward. Moved by the admonition of the suffering Francis as well as by divine grace, the two were won over by these insistent pleas. Like brothers they were reconciled and made public amends for the great scandal they had caused. The mystical peace of the man of God, who had already tasted the peace of heaven, overflowed into hearts formerly separated by rancor and hatred.

#### Conclusion

Having clarified Francis's concept and ministry of peace in light of the early sources, all that remains is to summarize briefly the main points of my study.

First of all, it must be emphasized strongly that Francis's concept of peace is based on the missionary discourse of our Lord to the seventy-two disciples or the apostles. The Poverello had a deep sense that the greeting of peace which was to be extended to all people was a mission personally entrusted to him by God. This same sense of a private revelation explains his eagerness to

<sup>45</sup>LP 44. Among the other historical commentaries mentioned in the bibliography in n. 28, see A. Fortini, II, 471-543.

<sup>46</sup>LP 43; Francis wanted Brother Pacificus to go through the world with a few brothers to sing the praises of God: "The best preacher would first deliver the sermon; then all would sing the 'Praises of the Lord,' as true jongleurs of God. At the end of the song, the preacher would say to the people: 'We are the jongleurs of God, and the only reward we want is to see you lead a truly penitent life.'" See H. Felder, *S. Francesco cavaliere di Cristo*, Milan (1949), 130-58: "The troubador and minstrel of God."

carry out this command and the great importance he attached to it for his own spiritual life and that of the order.

Francis saw an intimate connection between peace and the salvation wrought by Christ through the sacrifice of the cross, between peace and the divine love of which it is the chief fruit, between peace and conversion of heart through which we are open to the Holy Spirit, the giver of peace.

The goal of peace for Francis was entirely religious. He used the words of Scripture which he adapted to persons, places and circumstance to beg peace for groups of people in the cities, countryside, villages and public squares, for families and for individual Christians ("Peace to this house;" "The Lord give you peace"). Whether he was restoring peace or strengthening it, Francis's greatest help to individuals and social classes took the form of intercession for those brothers and sisters who were infected by the poison of hatred.

For the greeting of peace to have its desired effect, it must come from a heart sustained by the certainty of the divine goodness, security and inner peace. This peaceful disposition of heart is to be maintained even in the face of tribulation and suffering.

Despite their precarious existence as pilgrims, the brothers must diligently preserve love and harmony among themselves and with those they meet. This is necessary if their greeting of peace is to be efficacious. In addition to their supreme concern, which is to be at peace among themselves, they should also be agents of reconciliation. No matter where or when, they should emphasize the positive aspects of the Christian life and faith in order to overcome evil with good.

The efforts of Francis to bring about mutual reconciliation between individuals, as described in the sources, reveal the supremely religious nature of peace. The chief episode is the description of how in 1225 he restored friendship between the bishop and podestà of Assisi. He did this by adding a strophe on peace to the *Canticle of Brother Sun* and having it sung in the presence of the warring parties by two brothers in the guise of jongleurs.

To accomplish his mission as bearer of peace Francis did not make use of mediators to arrange a compromise. Nor did he intend to advise his contemporaries about social programs for overcoming class conflict or avoiding war. Instead, relying on the grace of God, he endeavored to use the language and teaching of the gospel, together with his own good example, to attract all people to the love of Christ and one another. In this regard we cannot deny the distinctive elements in the Franciscan charism of fraternity and minority, along with its message of peace, that had genuine effects for peace in the society of that time. But it is highly doubtful whether Francis can for the reason be called a supporter of "democracy."



Francis's ideas of peace and his activities on its behalf had a clear religious purpose. Their source was the gospel; their method was the meekness displayed by the Good Shepherd. What held it all together was his proposal to reawaken the love of God in human hearts. St. Bonaventure's *Major Life* contains these wonderful lines: "Like the rainbow shining among clouds of glory he made manifest in himself the sign of the Lord's covenant. He preached to men the Gospel of peace and salvation, being himself the Angel of true peace. Like John the Baptist, he was appointed by God to prepare in the desert a way of the highest poverty and to preach repentance by word and example."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>*LMaior*, prologue no. 1 [English translation by Ewert Cousins in *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York 1978, 180].