

# Franciscan Sources and the Challenges for the Friars Minor.

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## *ƒPIC in the Early Franciscan Fraternities and Its Development.*

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In this analysis it is hoped to investigate possible links between the self-understanding of the Friars, their style of life and activities with the topic of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. In other words, how did their self-understanding of the style of life and activity of the Friars influence their commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation?

For this analysis I have distributed the primary sources of the History of Franciscanism into four phases. Each one of these phases does not dissolve immediately on starting the next but they are intertwined when the step from one to the other is taken. But even then the step from one to the other can be indicated by means of a date or a characteristic event. The first phase is given in the period from 1210 to 1218/19. It begins with the verbal approval of the first Rule by Pope Innocent III until Francis' stay in the Holy Land and his sudden return on becoming aware of the misunderstandings in the Fraternity. The second phase goes from 1220 until 1230, that is,

from the date of the presentation of the "Quo elongati" by Gregory IX and the respective Interpretation of the Rule (28th September 1230). The third phase begins from this date of the Document until the Generalate of Bonaventure (which was from 2nd February 1257). The fourth phase goes from the Generalate of Bonaventure and continues until the different movements of the reform. For each of the four phases the self-understanding, the way of life and the activity has to be clarified. To do that they will be arranged by means of examples, some from eyewitnesses and some from Source texts.

### **Phase (1210-1218/19)**

#### **THE APPRAISAL BY EYEWITNESSES:**

a religious movement of men and women of all classes.

#### **SELF-UNDERSTANDING:**

itinerant preaching; Penitential and Peace movement.

**WAY OF LIFE:** living in poverty outside the structures of the world; not being sedentary; lodgings outside the towns, in shanties (primitive dwellings on the periphery of residential areas), or hermitages; in the immediate neighborhood of or in leper colonies, or according to need in the cities in the houses of benefactors; the friars come from different classes.

**MAINTENANCE OF LIFE:** Work and mendicancy (begging).

**OCCUPATION:** work, preaching, and contemplation.

**SPECIFICATION OF WORK:** manual work (including the clerics).

**Phase (1220-1230)**

**THE APPRAISAL BY EYEWITNESSES:** a new way of life, a new Order.

**SELF-UNDERSTANDING:** Friar Minor; preacher, movement of penance and of peace.

**WAY OF LIFE:** small churches and small houses with garden (friaries are unknown) on the edges of cities (areas of lodgings for foreigners, pilgrims, sick, lepers, poor people without citizen rights); up to ten friars live together; the friars come from different classes.

**MAINTENANCE OF LIFE:** work and simple begging, fruits of the harvest.

**ACTIVITY:** works of mercy like service to men and preaching as a commitment of faith; contemplative life on a limited scale.

**SPECIFICATION OF WORK:** manual work (including clerics).

**Phase (1230- approx. 1257)**

**THE APPRAISAL BY EYEWITNESSES:** the Order expands and becomes significant.

**SELF-UNDERSTANDING:** Order for the care of souls in commitment to the Pope.

**THE WAY OF LIFE:** Big houses built of stone (friaries with cloisters) and churches built in the cities; transferred to the cities with regulated rights (political, military, social and economic security); friars coming from the nobility and those already academical-

ly formed are especially accepted (clericalisation begins); the poor are no longer accepted into the Order since it is considered they are only seeking a better life; a monastic religious life among the men (adaptation to a monastic life).

**MAINTENANCE OF LIFE:** privileges; indulgences, financial help through rich benefactors; institutionalized begging (alms); receipt of pay for pastoral work (the interchange between spiritual services and pay in money begins); dependency on generous donors.

**ACTIVITIES:** traditional care of souls (preaching, Mass, confession, and in a limited way including funeral services); knowledge and study; prayer and cult; the poor change to being objects of good works (even though help to the poor is less material but more pastoral and moral accompaniment).

**SPECIFICATION OF WORK:** there is no longer manual work for the clerics, since this would impede their work of caring for souls; the lay brothers no longer work outside the friaries but within the enclosure.

**Phase (after the Generalate of St. Bonaventure to the Movements of Reform)**

**THE APPRAISAL BY EYEWITNESSES:** coming close to the people, the Order is established.

**SELF-UNDERSTANDING:** An Order of pastoral service for the salvation of mankind and within the Church.

WAY OF LIFE: small or big friaries and churches in the cities, but also open to the hermit life in the countryside (in accordance with the movements of reform); integration into the political, social and ecclesiastical structures; no ownership over property (poverty).

MAINTENANCE OF LIFE: interchange between spiritual goods such as service and the reception of material retribution. Institutionalized mendicancy (rights over alms).

ACTIVITY: traditional care of souls, administration of justice, care of the sick, and formation.

SPECIFICATION OF WORK: no manual work, the lay brothers take care of the work within the friaries and the gathering of alms.

Before trying to illustrate the connection between the phases in respect to the topic of “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation”, it is necessary to establish one premise. We must not use our concept of Peace, Justice and Ecology when dealing with the middle Ages. For that it is necessary to bring to the present time the concepts of Peace and Nature of the Middle Ages.

### **Concepts of Peace in the Middle Ages**

*Internal peace in the human being* (conversion from sin, penance and peace with God).

*The peace of Christianity* (war is avoided between Christians but at the same time war is waged against the enemies

of Christianity, non-believers and heretics, who threaten the existence of Christianity).

*The peace of paradise* (this is the aim of Christian believers through flight from sin, from the world and through the works of mercy).

### **Peace in the cities of the Middle Ages**

The city guarantees the inviolability of body, of life and of marriage to its citizens.

The city guarantees security of all goods within its walls.

The city guarantees the preservation of rights and social status of the citizens according to background.

The city demands the acquisition and preservation of citizen property.

The city takes on the duty of constructing and maintaining the peaceful relations between citizens.

The city takes on the duty of respecting the system of councils and of recognizing civil order.

### **Concept of Nature in the Middle Ages**

Nature was accepted as a creation of God but, despite this, it preserved something magical and mysterious. In general man feared nature and its power. It was seen often as a threat to humanity. The monastic life began to cultivate nature, or the utilization of nature in function of man, turning it into something peaceful. Mankind begins to cultivate nature in great plantations, just like taming wild animals.

## **The meaning of peace in the development of Franciscan history**

### **1. Phase**

The friars understood themselves as a movement of Penance and peace that has its origins in the history of salvation (reference to the lecture on the topic of Peace in the initial phases of the Franciscan movement).

Taking into account the relationship between the cities in the Peace Agreements of Assisi of 1203 and 1210 and comparing both can help to better understand the concepts of peace in this first phase. The peace agreement of 1203 has a feudal character in favor of the nobles. The peace agreement of the friars is of a communal character in favor of the citizens (the bourgeoisie). In contrast, Francis and his friars maintain a concept of peace set in a framework of the history of salvation that carries a new order of peace (the values of the Gospel). The friars must contribute to the peace that the feudal leaders of the time sought or that which the citizens were procuring. They gave testimony through their life and the practice of the penance of peace that had as its only aim that peace based on the gospel and on the Kingdom of God. The mediation for peace (e.g. Francis mediates between the Bishop of Assisi and the Authority of Assisi) has the aim of realizing the gospel and the Kingdom of God and is based on mercy. There is then a contentious element in the face of the political and social situation as a consequence of the behavior of the friars. The order of peace in the world is put in

doubt and substituted by a true peace of the Spirit.

### **2. Phase**

The friars understand peace as part of the Gift (Good) of God between them and the other human beings (cf. LR XVII). The basis of peace is God himself as the highest good from which all other good springs and to which all good must be re-integrated. This orientation towards God as the Supreme Good is converted into the necessary condition for peace.

In contrast with the Crusades, with which it was wished to establish Christian peace in the Middle Ages precisely by annihilating the enemy of peace (the non-believers), in the friars there is found the idea of a pacific life among the infidels and the possibility of pacific conversions as something real. In this phase there is found a contentious attitude before the church-world peace that pretends to establish itself with the Crusades, proposing concept of peace based on the Gospel instead.

### **3. Phase**

In the third phase the Crusades dominate the attitude of Peace of the friars. But there is no homogeneous descriptive picture. The friars minor have an ambivalent attitude. Many friars support the Crusades in that they preach and make collections in their favor. Other friars even work as military strategists and contribute to the planning of battles. These friars identify themselves with the con-

cepts of political-church peace of the middle Ages. Subjectively they were convinced that with this they served the building up of peace. As examples there can be mentioned: William of Cordelle (1235-41, preacher of the Crusades and military strategist), Berthold von Regensburg (1235 Preacher of the Crusades), Fidenzo of Padua, (*De Recuperatione Terrae Sanctae*, the plan of battle for the recuperation of the Holy Land, published in 1274).

Parallel to this there were also friars, especially the magnificent theologians, who rejected the Crusades and committed themselves to missions for peace. Examples are; Roger Bacon (*Opus Majus* III of 1267), Adam of Marsch (Letter No. 246). Guibert of Tournai (The treatise: "Eruditio Regum et Principium" of 1259). Salimbene interprets the fiasco of the last Crusade as the will of God and promotes non-violence (MGH SS XXXII, 494ss).

Equally, it is said, King Rudolf I protested to the Pope because the Franciscans did not want to preach whole-heartily in favor of the Crusades.

#### **4. Phase**

The Franciscans, especially during the different reforms, are sought after as mediators of peace between the cities. They offer a contribution to the maintenance of public and social peace in the cities and between the States. They act as stabilizers and they try to integrate even different rival forces in a common forum and into the established order. The social,

political and ecclesiastical situation, as such, is not questioned.

It is above all in the defense against the advance of the Turks (e.g. John Capistran) that the friars stand out and become famous. Here we must always keep in mind the view of the concept of peace as a Christian arrangement of the Middle Ages in order to understand this posture of the friars. The friars even unleashed persecution against the Jews. This is understood only by taking into account as background the concepts of medieval peace. The Jews were seen as destroyers of peace since they lived in peace with the devil and with him they became obstacles to Christian peace.

In this phase it is positive to emphasize the different commitments of the friars in favor of Christian peace. But it must also be shown as negative that the friars were fixed in the social concepts of the era that made them incapable of questioning this order of peace in the world in favor of a new order of peace of the true Kingdom of God.

### **The meaning of justice in the historical Franciscan development**

#### **1. Phase**

Firm references are found on the eschatological justice of the Kingdom of God. This is shown especially in the life of the friars with and among the poor. In so far as the friars live among those human beings, who are excluded from the world order, they refer prophetically to the new order established by God. Equally, in so far as the friars have recourse to the table

of the Lord (alms) when they are denied a just wage, then they construct a new order that refers to the justice of God. This does not mean consolation in the great beyond since the justice of God begins here in this world. The disposition of the friars to accept all who come to them, be they robbers or prelates, also refers to the justice of God that has its culmination in charity.

In a special way the renunciation of the exercise of control serves the construction of justice. When the friars want to be submitted to others they infringe on the established medieval order.

## **2. Phase**

The life on the edge of the cities under the marginalized, hospitality and the lack of possessions points towards justice in an evangelical sense.

## **3. Phase**

In this phase the friars take on the positions of power in society and the church. They no longer live among the poor but among the citizens and they become givers of alms. They are mediators of gifts and they dedicate themselves to pastoral work among the unattended social classes. Moral preaching is put in the place of material help.

## **4. Phase**

In this phase a feeling of responsibility above all is developed in the friars. Theo-

logically an ethic of the market begins to function: against usury and in favor of just prices; types of cooperatives are formed for self help among peasants and artisans. Hospices are built and managed; a lot of material help is given to the poor; new discussions arise on the prophetic value of poverty; in spirituality a strong eschatological tendency, which refers to the justice of Jesus Christ who is to come again, is developed.

## **The Meaning of Ecology (preservation of creation) in the Historical Franciscan Development**

### **1. Phase**

Creation is understood as Good. During the Middle Ages creation was understood essentially as a threat and so this point is very significant.

The monastic life had begun to cultivate creation, i.e. human beings made it fruitful. Creation is changed into a cultural sphere for mankind. In Francis and the first friars, on the contrary, a sense of caring for creation is found.

### **2. Phase**

The friars live in and with nature (small gardens).

### **3. Phase**

In this phase a relationship with nature is no longer found. Theological reflection begins on the ethics of creation, especially with Alexander of Hales and St.

Bonaventure. Scientific interest in nature is very great.

#### **4. Phase**

The work of theological reflection is that of an ethic of a continuous creation. Franciscan theologians especially carry

this effort forward. This is given above all in theory. The praxis of an action related to nature, however, is hardly found. This also is understandable since the majority of friars live within the walls of the cities. Relations with nature were cultivated principally by the hermit movements.