

The Attitude of Peace as a Style of Life

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Beginning with the existence experience of Poggio Bustone the following elements of the early Fraternity in its care for the style of life that was in direct relationship with the topic of peace are found:

Poverty

Once again the events narrated in the Biographies can help us to decipher the direct relationship between the life of poverty and the attitude of peace. These passages are found in the Legend of the Three Companions:

“The Bishop of the city of Assisi, to whom the man of God would frequently go for counsel, receiving him kindly, told him: ‘It seems to me that your life is very rough and hard, especially, in not possessing anything in this world’. To which the saint said: ‘Lord, if we had possessions, we would need arms for our protection. For disputes and lawsuits usually arise out of them, and, because of this, love of God and neighbour are greatly impeded. Therefore, we do not want to possess anything in this world’. The man of God’s reply greatly pleased the Bishop” (3Comp 35).

It is not necessary to give the christological foundation for Poverty in the following of the poor Christ in detail here. We presuppose it here and the response of Francis presented in the previous few lines deepens it. Poverty is converted into the premise of Peace. Given that Poverty as a style of life can only grow in following the footprints of the poor Christ, it can only mean that we are speaking of a theological foundation of the attitude of peace. Reflection from the point of view of praxis, poverty takes away the basis of discordance, of conflict and rows. The practical dimension of poverty found in the following is grounded christologically. In this sense, poverty, as it is considered here, is much more than a mere social-practical foundation for peace, rather is it the theological-spiritual basis that makes possible the attitude of Peace for the purpose of following Jesus Christ. Poverty that is christologically founded releases a prophetic force that is shown in the attitude of peace. Poverty as “being-without-possession” (I don’t need to defend anything from others as my property), as “being-without-position” (I have no position, no title, no prestige to lose) frees one from all fear of losses (I don’t need to fear for that which I have or for that which I am) and sets forces free to advocate with courage for the true peace before the powerful, those who hold sway, and before all. I think that simply because of this attitude of Poverty, Francis and his Friars were authorized to preach peace by the Pope and by the Sultan, by the citizens and by the nobility.

Work

The meaning of work played an important role in the attitude of peace. In his Testament Francis wrote:

“And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all my brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door” (Test 20-22).

The meaning of manual work in the early days of the Franciscan fraternity is multi-dimensional in the understanding of the attitude of peace:

1. The psycho-personal dimension: in so far as manual work avoids idleness it requires a balance in the person that contributes to personal satisfaction and interior peace.
2. The sociological dimension: in so far as the friar lives from his manual work he experiences independence, freedom from compromises before the powerful and the structures, an independence that is conditional to being able to rise up as an announcer of peace without being partial.
3. The social dimension: Manual labor in the time of Francis was undervalued and looked down upon. But it brought the friar close to the human beings who were marginalized from property and the means of production. Work links the friar to each person who is a loser in all peace agreements in socie-

ty: the marginalized, the waged, those expelled to the periphery, the oppressed, the lepers, etc. In this sense Francis and his friars mediated the possibility of peace for the Losers.

4. The theological dimension: in so far as Francis linked work to the absence of pretensions and to the renunciation of a wage, and with the possibility of recourse to the table of the Lord by begging for alms he cast anchor in the Generosity of God. The necessary basis of life is turned into a Gift of God. Peace as the basis for life comes from the very giver of all good things.

Contemplation

In the Carceri there is found a tablet with the inscription: Ubi Deus ibi Pax. This phrase refers to the deep connection that exists between Contemplation and the Attitude of Peace. The deepest meaning of contemplation as a fundamental element in the life of the early fraternities is documented in the sources. The few points of support that we have in order to be able to express with certainty the content of the contemplation of Francis and his friars, his own writings for example, present the action of God as central. The consideration of the action of God as the history of salvation, beginning with creation itself and passing through the Incarnation and Salvation right up to the eschatological culmination, appears to be the central nucleus of which contemplation consists. We are not dealing here with a purely mental consideration but of an almost descriptive consideration of the

whole of creation that includes all creatures (cf. ER 23). The central expression of this consideration of the divine action of salvation is precisely a message: that the action of God has as its end the procurement of peace and salvation for all men and all creatures (cf. CantSun). From here you can see the combination in the greeting: Pax et Bonum. The attitude of Peace of the friars is a consequence of the historical saving action of God who has as his objective a peace that embraces all. It therefore does not consist of presenting any kind of provisional peace with purely intra-mundane conditions, but rather for Francis and his friars it always consists of a peace that includes the historical salvation that comes from God alone. This peace that takes in all should be reflected in human structures. And so all the human peace agreements are referred to in the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom of God.

Poverty, Work and Contemplation construct the basis for Peace in promoting a way of life to which the Rule gives testimony:

“Let all the brothers be careful not to slander or engage in disputes; let them strive, instead, to keep silence whenever God gives them the grace. Let them not quarrel among themselves or with others but strive to respond humbly, saying: ‘I am a useless servant...’ (ER 11). ‘As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and non-believers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or

disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians... (ER 16).

Indeed, I counsel, warn and exhort my friars in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about through the world, they are not to quarrel nor contend in words (cf. 2 Tim 2:14), nor are they to judge others, but they are to be meek, peaceful and modest, meek and humble, speaking uprightly to all, as is fitting... Into whatever house they may enter, first let them say: ‘Peace to this house...’ (LR 3,10)”

Francis as a Peace-Maker

The sources of the life of blessed Francis give testimony to the presentation of the Saint as a maker of peace. Here are some examples that allude to this affirmation:

1Cel 23: the preaching of Penance as an allusion to Peace.

2Cel 4: The Peace Maker in the prison of Perugia.

2Cel 108: The Peace Maker in Arezzo.

The Legend of Perugia 44: The verse on Pardon in the Canticle of Creatures.

Theology and Spirituality as a basis for Peace

The following points illuminate the spiritual and theological context of the mission of Peace.

Celano

1Cel 23: Celano tells us about the activity of preaching by Francis. The

content of his preaching of Penance is the desire for peace and eternal salvation to which God calls all human beings.

1Cel 24: Celano informs us of the following by the first friar, called Bernard. His vocation is described as a reception of the message of peace. It is precisely this annunciation of peace that draws the others. Celano characterizes the first fraternity precisely with the Latin words: *pacis legationem*. That is, translating literally: bond or binding of peace. Unfortunately neither the Italian nor the German tradition concur exactly with that expressed by Celano. The importance is reduced since they speak more of the and “*messagio di pace*” (message of peace). In fact Celano points out the fraternity literally as a bond of peace.

1Cel 29: Celano describes the first missionary sending of the friars. The objective of the sending is to expand to the whole world the annunciation of Peace and Penitence for the forgiveness of sins. In order to announce credibly this News, the friars must be shown to themselves as humble.

1Cel 41: In this paragraph Celano describes peace as the basis of living together and of the behavior of the friar towards the world. The attitude of peace is united to the thanksgiving and the song of praise.

Julian of Speyer

16: Julian describes the greeting and the preaching of peace in conjunction with Salvation and closeness of Christ. It is precisely the renewed closeness to Christ that guarantees true peace. Conversion of life and commitment to Christ is being dealt with.

20: Julian writes about the missionary sending of the friars who announce peace through penitence and change in accordance with the evangelical requirements.

The Legend of the Three Companions

26: The text speaks of the revelation of the Greeting: Peace and Health. Francis preaches true peace in connection with Jesus Christ. In close connection to the greeting of peace, the way of evangelical perfection and the life of penance are found.

37: The text describes that the primary activity of the friars consists of the announcement of Peace. The prior condition of peace is to love and fear the Creator of heaven and earth and to keep the commandments (cf. also AP 19).

39: The fact retold presents the central place that the announcement of peace and penance occupies. It is the heart of what the friars, through their testimony, must try to transmit.

58: *The peace announced is fruit of their interior peace (cf. also AP 38).*

St. Bonaventure

LMj Prologue: In the prologue, St. Bonaventure presents Francis as a sign of the alliance with God and as the Angel of True Peace that announces peace and salvation to men through a life of penance and poverty. The principal point of view from which St. Bonaventure presents the life of Francis is the announcement of peace.

LMj II, 2: Bonaventure informs us also of the revelation of the greeting of peace. The preaching of Francis has peace and salvation as its content. They are found in closeness to God.

LMj III, 7: As in the other biographies, Bonaventure describes the missionary sending as a Mission for the active annunciation of peace. This peace is the result of penance and pardon of sins.

LMj IV, 9: The paragraph tells of the conversion of the troubadour Pacifiscus. His conversion is explicitly described as a conversion to peace.

Itin: It is worthwhile turning to the Itinerarium of St. Bonaventure where Francis is presented as the Herald of Peace. This peace is achieved, according to the example of Francis, only in the ascent to God that is offered to men in Christ.

A Resume of that found in the Sources

1. All the sources up to St. Bonaventure unanimously describe the Fraternity that gathered around Francis from very early on as a movement of Penance and Peace. The life of penance, which corresponds to the biblical metanoia, is the basis of the credible life of the friars for the announcement of peace.
2. Peace is postulated as a gift from God; the friar can understand himself as an announcer of the News of Peace of an eschatological origin.
3. The mediation of peace is, at the same time, a mediation of salvation, once again in the sense of the all-embracing biblical understanding of salvation.
4. There is a direct connection between the encounter with peace and the following of Jesus Christ. Peace has a christological connotation.
5. Peace with God in Christ is the basis of the relationships between men and of the respective world peace.
6. The commandments of God and the Gospel are the basis for assuring peace.
7. The search for Peace means equally the search for God.

References to the Third Order

*“The Alleluia Movement” of 1233 in the North of Italy (ie Parma, Venice). The restrictive prohibition of carrying arms: The Rule of 1289, through Pope Nicholas IV, n. 28: **Impugnacionis arma secum fratres non deferant, nisi pro defensione Romane Ecclesiae, christianae fidei vel etiam terrae***

ipsorum, aut de quorum licentia ministrorum.

This determination of the Rule is very ambivalent since, on one hand it makes the Third Order a pacifist movement that leads to the pacification of many conflicts within the cities but, on the other hand, tries to set up troops for the Pope, whose representative was in many cities and, placed at the orders of the Pope, were disposed to take up arms to defend the Church.

Constructing Peace and Reconciliation from the Sources, Theology and Franciscan Spirituality (work material written for presentation on 7th October 2000)

Francis himself says in his Testament: “The Lord revealed to me that we should say: “May the Lord give you Peace” (Test 23). Today the principal bibliographical sources of the life of Francis confirm this expression, so characteristic of him, and relate how the friars from the beginning used this greeting in different ways (cf. 3 Com 26; Leg Per 67; LMj III, 2; SpeMin 6; 2Spe 26). The Legend of Perugia and the Major Mirror of Perfection tie in the revelation of the greeting of peace with the revelation of the name of the Order: Minors (cf. LegPer 67; 2Spe 26; SpecMin 6). According to these sources both the giving of this name and the formula of the greeting of peace characterizes the movement of friars that were gathering around Francis. Both the Legend of Perugia and the Major Mirror of

Perfection, in the context of the revelation of the name of the Order and the greeting of peace tell of an event that perhaps might pass us by unperceived when we read too quickly. However, this event gives us an important reference and offers us a light to understand both the right meaning and the very emergence of the Friars. I quote the text from the Major Mirror of Perfection:

“Since it was revealed to blessed Francis that it should be called the Order of Friars Minor, he caused it to be written in his first Rule, which he took before the Lord Pope Innocent III; who approved and granted it, and later proclaimed it publicly in Consistory.

The Lord also revealed to him the greeting, which the friars were to use, and he caused this to be written in his Testament, saying: The Lord revealed to me that I should say as a greeting, ‘The Lord give you peace’.

In the early days of the Order, while he was travelling with a friar who was one of the first twelve, he used to greet men and women along the road and in the fields, saying, ‘The Lord give you peace’. And because people had never heard such a greeting from any religious, they were startled. Indeed, some said indignantly, ‘What do you mean by this greeting of yours?’ As a result the friar became embarrassed, and said to Blessed Francis, ‘Allow me to use some other greeting’. But the Holy Father said, ‘Let them chatter, for they do not understand the

ways of God. Don't feel ashamed because of this, for one day the nobles and princes of this world will respect you and the other friars for this greeting. For it is no marvel if the Lord should desire to have a new little flock, whose speech and way of life are unlike those of all its predecessors, and which is content to possess Him alone, the Most High and most glorious' (Mirror of Perfection 26).

This text describes to us how the first friars did not call due attention to their poverty or to the preaching on Penance but precisely to the Greeting of Peace. At that time there were many movements in search of poverty and preachers of penance similar to Francis and his fraternity. But the new and unknown for the people of the time, that which most drew attention and motivated them to show interest was the strange Greeting of Peace. When that friar wanted to renounce this greeting of peace, on becoming ashamed of it, Francis himself clarified that the greeting of peace pertains essentially to the understanding of the new Fraternity. We can, then, show that four elements permeated the initial understanding of the friars who gathered around Francis: minority, life of penance, fraternity as such and the greeting of peace. What's still more, to minority and the life of penance there is added what is really new in the early Franciscan movement: that greeting of peace; the other elements seem to be common to the other movements of the period. Keeping this historical background in mind, it really

calls out for attention the fact that the greater part of present day spiritual literature speaks principally of the movement of poverty and penance. Rarely do they speak with the same stress and evaluation of a movement of peace in the same way that they speak of a movement of poverty and penance. The following is an attempt to go deeply into this idea.

The Personal Experience of Francis

Young manhood between war and peace.

Christianity at the time of Francis was characterized by two great Crusades. The Crusade by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, from 1189 to 1191 and the Crusade promoted by Pope Innocent III from 1202 to 1204. Two other crusades by the Albigensians that mark this era can also be pointed out. The central Italy of the time of the youth of Francis was moved by the conflict between the Guelfs and the Ghibelines or those loyal to the Emperor and those loyal to the Pope in this struggle for predominance.

Assisi achieved its size in the formation of the bourgeoisie but not without its disputes through wars. In the early months of 1198 the citizens of Assisi took the Rocca, held by the forces loyal to the Emperor, by storm. Civil war broke out between the nobles and the bourgeoisie within the walls of the city of Assisi that lasted from 1199 to 1200 and which, in the end, lead to a provisional agreement of peace and marked the beginning of the free bourgeoisie. This was two years before conflict had arisen and been extended into a war between the city of

Assisi and Perugia with the definitive battle on the bridge of St. John in 1202. With the defeat of Assisi Francis remained a prisoner of Perugia. Despite the negative experience Francis set out again in 1205, this time to participate in a Crusade towards the South of Italy. But the apparition at Spoleto moves him to conversion.

This short presentation makes it clear that the topics of war and peace were not simply theoretical discussions. He experienced in his own flesh during his youth that which war and peace really mean.

In the unfolding of his life Francis is confronted continually with the problem of war and peace, as happened with the convocation of the Crusade promoted by Pope Innocent III on the 11th November 1215 during the Latern Council. Francis knew of this convocation between 1218 and 1219 during a trip to the Holy Land. From there on there were other conflicts in which he found himself embroiled, as for example, the disputes between the cities or between the power and the Bishop of Assisi or the conflicts of Arezzo, Bologna and others.

War and peace are not marginal realities or topics in the life of Francis but are an existential reality in him.

Internal Peace as a Basis for External Peace

The existential experience of war and peace left its clear mark in the life of

Francis, in my opinion. I discover in Francis a direct internal relationship between the experience of war, his search for peace and the religious experience in Poggio Bustone. Thomas of Celano relates to us, for example, the stay of Francis in Poggio Bustone:

“He remained there a long time with fear and trembling before the Ruler of the whole earth. He recalled in the bitterness of his soul the years he spent badly, frequently repeating this phrase: ‘Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner’. Gradually, an indescribable joy and tremendous sweetness began to well up deep in his heart. He began to lose himself; his feelings were pressed together; and that darkness disappeared which fear of sin had gathered in his heart. Certainty of the forgiveness of all his sins poured in, and the assurance of being revived in grace was given to him. Then he was caught up above himself and totally engulfed in light, and, with his inmost soul opened wide, he clearly saw the future. As that sweetness and light withdrew, renewed in spirit, he now seemed to be changed into another man” (1Cel 26).

This event is dated 1208, ie. in the initial times of the fraternity. Reflecting on the negative times that Francis experienced and on his clear consciousness of sin I see an allusion to the years of war in which he himself had participated. Through this bitter experience in his own flesh there also runs the experience

of the Grace of divine mercy. Francis experiences at the same time the interior peace he freely received as a gift from God. In this key experience at Poggio Bustone I seem to find the basis of the posture of which Francis was the

bearer for the world. It is the experience of the God of mercy as pure Gratuity that makes interior peace, joy and enlightenment in Francis possible and which constitutes the basis of his attitude of peace.