

Francis' understanding of mission

« Living the gospel, going through the world, bringing peace »

by Jan Hoeberichts

When briefly defining the life and mission of Francis and his first brothers, authors characterize them often as *Wanderprediger*, »wandering preachers«.¹ »Wandering« and »preaching« are thus considered to be essential elements of Francis' life and mission. In this article I want to examine whether this view takes sufficiently into account the original intentions of Francis, and whether Francis perhaps placed different accents and developed his own understanding of mission. To answer these questions I examine how Francis understood »the model of the holy gospel« (*forma sancti evangelii*) which the Most High Himself had revealed to him (Test 14).² For it is only if we know what »the model of the gospel« concretely meant for Francis, that we can obtain a proper insight in how Francis saw himself, his life and his mission, in the light of the gospel of Jesus and how he, following »the teaching and the footsteps« of the same Jesus (RegNB 1,1), lived his life and mission in the world of his days.

1 vivere secundum formam sancti evangelii

Recalling the first beginnings of the brotherhood, Francis writes: »And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the model of the holy gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the lord pope confirmed it for me« (Test 14-15).

1 See GRUNDMANN. »Als mit Franziskus eine neue, selbständige, unbescholtene Gruppe der religiösen Armutsbewegung die Kurie zur Stellungnahme aufforderte, [bedurfte es] aufs neue einer schwerwiegenden Entscheidung, ob die Kurie der Armutsidee und der Wanderpredigt auch in diesem Fall freie Auswirkung in der Kirche gewähren [...] sollte« (129); »[Innozenz] verbot nicht, was Franz wollte. Er ließ ihn gewähren. Franz und seine Genossen sollten unbehindert weiter als Bußprediger herumziehen.« *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, Hildesheim 1961, 133. Following Grundmann, also Kajetan ESSER, *Anfänge und ursprüngliche Zielsetzungen des Ordens der Minderbrüder*, Leiden 1966, 54-60; Leonhard LEHMANN, *Grundzüge franziskanischen Missionsverständnisses nach Regula non bullata 16*, in: *FranzSt* 66 (1984) 68-81, here 69; »Nach allem, was die frühen Quellen

berichten, sind die Minderbrüder eine Gemeinschaft nicht sesshafter Wanderprediger.« More recently, F. RICHARDT: »Da Franziskus den Fußspuren Jesu getreu der Weise der Apostel nachfolgen will, gehört das Element der Wanderpredigt wesentlich zu seinem Weg als Büsser.« Die Predigt in der Frühzeit der franziskanischen Bewegung und ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklung des Franziskanerordens in der ersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts, in: *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 64 (2001) 179-213, here 182. Also G. P. FREEMAN: »The words *forma sancti evangelii*, »life according to the gospel« meant a clear choice of a model, a way of life: to wander about and to preach in poverty.« St. Francis, God's authority and the Pope's approval, in: Judith FRISHMAN / Willemien OTTEN / Gerard ROUWHORST (Eds.), *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation*. The Foundational Char-

acter of Authoritative Sources in the History of Christianity and Judaism, Leiden 2004, 322. A little further Freeman admits that there is no consensus on this point but does not elaborate on this: »If the judgement that the form of the Holy Gospel was especially directed towards preaching is correct – there is no consensus on this point among the scholars – it means that the brothers devoted an important part of their time to preaching« (323).

2 Texts from the writings of Francis and his biographies are quoted, though not always literally, from Regis J. ARMSTRONG / J. A. Wayne HELLMANN / William J. SHORT (eds), *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. I: *The Saint* and Vol. II: *The Founder*, New York 1999 and 2000, abbreviated FAED I and FAED II.

3 The text of the so-called *Anonymous of Perugia* (AnPer) can be found in FAED II, 34-58.

That Francis in his Testament mentions that the life according to the model of the gospel formed the central point of his way of life and that of his brothers, will not come as a surprise. For this had been his main concern ever since the priest had opened the gospel book and he and his first two brothers had heard the three gospel texts, namely Mt 19,21; Mt 16,24 and Lk 9,3, which were to become the foundational texts of the brotherhood (AnPer 11).³ And he had laid this down briefly as his programme of life in the opening verse the earlier rule: »The rule and the life of the brothers is this: to live in obedience, in chastity and without any property, and to follow the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ« (RegNB 1,1).

2 ... no one ... but the Most High Himself

Surprising, however, is the emphasis which Francis places on the fact that »no one showed [him] what [he] had to do«. Rather it was »the Most High Himself [who] revealed to [him] that [he] should live according to the pattern of the holy gospel«. Francis clearly indicates here that there existed a kind of opposition between people who eventually could have advised him about his way of life, on the one hand, and »the Most High Himself«, on the other hand. As regards possible advisers, we might think of Cardinal John of Saint Paul, one of the influential persons of the Roman curia who urged Francis »to turn to the monastic or eremitical life« (1 Cel 32-33; AnPer 32-33).⁴ Or also of pope Innocent III who replied to Francis' request for the approval of his Rule: »Your life is too hard and severe ...« (AnPer 34).

These reactions show that, despite the fact that Innocent and his curial staff did everything to keep the new movements within the church or to bring them back to the church when they had gone astray,⁵ they found it difficult to understand Francis' deepest motives.⁶ In fact, the differences were so deep that the official church authorities could not really advise Francis on the most central concern of his way of life.⁷ From their perspective of law and order they felt uneasy about these new movements and did not really know what to do with them. One even gets the impression that they rather preferred to get rid of them. In the end the authorities were prepared to tolerate them if these movements were willing to recognise the hierarchical church and its sacramental order and especially if

4 The text of 1 Celano or *The Life of Saint Francis* (1228/1229) can be found in FAED I, 180-308.

5 See GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen* (note 1), 70-156.

6 D. FLOOD recognizes a similar lack of understanding even later on in the bull *Quo elongati* of pope Gregory IX, the former cardinal Hugolino. Written in 1230, this bull fails to appreciate the proper character and significance of Francis' Testament by approaching and interpreting it as a juridical document whereas in its deepest essence it is a document in which Francis reminds the brothers of the spirit that inspired the original brotherhood. Flood describes the opposition between Francis as the writer of the Testament and pope Gregory as the authority behind the bull *Quo elongati* as follows: »Francis draws on the experience and theory of the Franciscan movement. Gregory IX speaks out of his experience and theory in

church administration. To use Desbonnets' distinction, Francis is still coaching the fraternity, whereas Gregory is legislating for the Order. It would be passing strange if the two men did not have highly distinct plans for »the brothers« (Francis' term) or »our beloved sons« (Gregory's term).« The Politics of *Quo elongati*, in: *Laurentianum* 29 (1988) 370-385, here 371. This failure to understand each other finds its cause in the fact that the ecclesiastical authorities »always aspire to include Franciscans in papal politics. When Pope Innocent III first tried that with Francis in 1209, Francis invoked Jesus' words to gain the necessary freedom for the brotherhood. In 1230, given the influence of clerical culture in the order pope Gregory IX had little trouble gathering the brothers with his resolution of the Franciscan dilemma [between brotherhood and order]« (385).

7 In his extensive study on Francis'

Testament, ESSER does not speak about the differences between Francis and the ecclesiastical authorities in his commentary on Testament 14-15. He does however use this occasion to explain very extensively against Paul Sabatier that there is no question here of a conflict between Francis and the official church. For Francis explicitly turns to the church to have his way of life approved. He shows great respect for the sacraments of the church and for those who administer them. However, the fact that Francis turns to the official hierarchical church, does not mean that there were no profound differences. They did in fact exist as Francis indicates in his Testament (25) and as all biographies confirm in their stories about Francis' visit to the pope. See Kajetan ESSER, *Das Testament des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi. Eine Untersuchung über seine Echtheit und seine Bedeutung*, Münster 1949, 160-166.

they would not preach without the official permission of the bishop or another competent authority; the most, however, they liked these movements to merge with existent religious orders or at least to adopt their Rule.⁸

3 Surprisingly new and unheard-of

The formulation in the Testament does not only point to the above mentioned differences with the church authorities, it also refers to the surprising character which the revelation of the Most High had for Francis. No one could tell him what to do or how to live his life. And then there was that unexpected revelation of the Most High Himself. At that time and place it sounded in his ears as something new and totally unheard-of. For where would Francis have been able to hear the radical message of the gospel when everywhere around him he heard people speaking the language of power and possessions?⁹ It came indeed as a complete surprise that overwhelmed him, as a wonderful gift that he gratefully accepted, as a revelation of the Most High Himself in which he recognised himself and his deepest desires.

In all its brevity and simplicity, the Testament does not inform us any further about the content of this revelation of the Most High. However, we can get a fair insight of it when we read the story about Francis and his first two brothers, Bernard and Peter, in the *Anonymous of Perugia* (AnPer 10-11) which we briefly referred to earlier. One day the three of them went to a priest »since none of them knew how to read very well«. The priest »opened the book and they immediately found the passage: ›If you wish to be perfect, go, sell everything you possess and give to the poor and you will have a treasure in heaven‹ (Mt 19,21). They opened the book a second time and discovered: ›Whoever wishes to come after me ...‹ (Mt 16,24). Opening the book a third time, they came upon: ›Take nothing for the journey ...‹ (Lk 9,3). When they heard this, they were filled with great joy and exclaimed: ›This is what we want, this is what we were seeking.‹ And blessed Francis said: ›This will be our rule.‹ Then he told both of them: ›Go and fulfil the Lord's counsel as you heard it.‹¹⁰

4 »A new access to an old text«

What was so surprising, so unheard-of in this revelation that Francis and his first brothers were overwhelmed by great joy? The passages they found were but old words which they had heard many times before. Did they really need a revelation of the Most High for this »discovery«? According to Francis, they did! Indeed, Francis had heard these words often, just like the ecclesiastical authorities of those days, but until now they had never really touched him. They went in at one ear and out at the other. This time, however, they had

⁸ This became the official church policy at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). In its *constitutio* 13, it forbade to start new religious communities because too great a diversity of such communities would cause great confusion in God's church. If someone wanted all the same to start a religious community, he would have to assume one of the approved rules: *Ne nimia religionum diversitas gravem in ecclesia dei confusionem inducat, firmiter prohibemus, ne quis*

de cetero novam religionem inveniatur; sed quicumque voluerit ad religionem converti, unam de approbatis assumat. See GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen* (note 1), 135-147, here 140. See also the Assisi Compilation [AsCom] 18. The English translation can be found in *FAED* II, 118-230, here 132-133.

⁹ Thus both the peace charters of 1203 and 1210 emphasize the increase of wealth which all the citizens of Assisi pledge to strive after. See David

FLOOD, *Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Movement*, Quezon City 1989, 10-14. Issues of power and possessions played also a central role in the conflict between bishop Guido and the canons of San Rufino about their respective roles and revenues in Assisi. The conflict lasted many years and was finally resolved in 1216 after the arbitration of cardinals Hugolino and Cenci, *ibid.*, 26. See also FREEMAN, *St. Francis* (note 1), where he writes: »the *forma sancti evangelii* was not

struck them deeply. This could only be because the Most High Himself had guided them to this place at this time and spoken to them. The Most High Himself had made it possible for them to hear these old words for the first time and to let them sink deep into their hearts. Thanks to the Most High »a new access to an old text« was opened for them.¹¹

5 A radical change of place

But why could this happen to Francis and not to the ecclesiastical authorities who had also heard these words often in the liturgy? The only explanation is that Francis had made certain definitive choices. Thus, after the Lord had led him among the lepers and he had shared daily life with them, Francis had decided to leave the world, very concretely, the world of Assisi and its value system. This choice meant a radical change of place. From his new place Francis looked with completely different eyes to reality and listened with completely different ears to the words which he heard, also to the word of God. He developed a greater sensitivity for words from the gospel which in the past had meant little or nothing for him but which now at his new place could come to life. To use his own expression, they could now become for him »words of spirit and life« (Test 13). And when this actually did happen at the opening of the gospel book, his first spontaneous reaction was one of great joy. The Lord had spoken to him and his brothers and confirmed them in their choice. They had recognised themselves and their deepest desires in the words of the gospel. Those words were a clear answer to what they were looking for. They wanted to live according to those words; they were from now on their guide, their rule.¹²

The same old words which Francis and his first brothers received with gratitude and joy as a revelation of the Most High, had inspired many men and women in the course of history. In the twelfth century this had led to the origin of several movements of men and women who wanted to follow the example of the twelve apostles and the seventy-two disciples who were sent out by Jesus (Lk 9-10). In their wake they renounced everything, wandered about in poverty and dedicated themselves to the proclamation of the gospel.¹³ As a result, the expression *forma sancti evangelii* obtained a clear well-defined meaning in which living in evangelical poverty and wandering about preaching the gospel occupied a central place.¹⁴ When Francis goes then to pope Innocent for the approval and confirmation of his *forma sancti evangelii*, it seems rather obvious also in Francis' case to understand *forma sancti evangelii* as »wandering about in poverty and preaching the gospel«. However, as I mentioned already above, the question is whether in this way we do not underestimate or even misunderstand the new surprising character which the revelation of the Most High had for Francis. This revelation was a unique experience for Francis in his new situation. Do we adequately do justice to its unique character when we just define it on the basis of the

common in his time, it was something original and unheard-of, that he could not find in the church« (320). »Was [the *forma sancti evangelii*] something new? Yes, in so far as the direct surroundings of Francis were concerned; for him it was a new, unthought-of possibility« (322).

¹⁰ For a good commentary on this story, see A. JANSEN, Franciscus ontdekt het evangelie, in: *Franciscans Leven [FL]* 66 (1983) 2-14.

¹¹ This well-chosen formulation is taken from G. P. Freeman: »God's revelation to which [Francis] referred was clearly not a flash from heaven but a new access to an old text« (321-322).

¹² I have elaborated these ideas in De verantwoording van een keuze, in: *FL* 83 (2000) 161-170 and Waarom weigerde Franciscus geld aan te nemen?, in: *FL* 84 (2001) 239-248.

¹³ These movements have been treated extensively by GRUNDMANN,

Religiöse Bewegungen (note 1), 5-69. He refers especially also to their church-critical character. This made them, quite understandably, suspect in the eyes of the authorities who repeatedly banned them as heretics and excommunicated them from the church. Above we mentioned already that pope Innocent III followed a different policy, trying to keep them within the church.

¹⁴ See note 2.

general characteristics of poverty movements whose members wander about preaching the gospel? Would it not be more appropriate to ask whether Francis, after his radical change of place, did not develop his own understanding of the *forma sancti evangelii* on the basis of the new and very personal concrete experiences he had gained in his new place away from Assisi and its value system? Or at least to examine whether he did not add some personal accents to it and give it a personal colour?

6 Once more the story from the Anonymous of Perugia

To answer these questions, I want to pay special attention to Francis' own writings. For who can better enlighten us on these questions than Francis himself. But before doing so, I first like to return for a moment to the story of *Anonymous of Perugia* 10-11. Here we are told how the brothers, while leafing through the gospel with help of a priest, find the text of Jesus' missionary discourse in chapter 9 of the gospel of Luke. In this brief discourse Jesus addresses the twelve apostles before sending them out to proclaim the gospel and to heal the sick: »Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor knapsack, nor bread, nor money, nor a spare tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave. And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as a sign to them« (Lk 9,3-5). The fact that the *Anonymous* refers to the opening words of Jesus' missionary discourse is for most authors sufficient reason to conclude that Francis and his first brothers did not only want to wander about in poverty like the twelve apostles, but also wished to imitate them in announcing the kingdom of God. For, so they argue, the full Latin text of the gospel, which certainly echoed in Francis' mind, speaks here indeed explicitly about *praedicare regnum Dei* (9,2).

Personally I attach more weight to the fact that the quotation from the gospel is limited to the command Jesus gives to the twelve: »Take nothing for the journey ...« and does not mention preaching. If preaching had been of essential importance for Francis and his first brothers, its mention could easily have found its way into the story. However, this did not happen. Moreover if we read the sequel of the story in the presupposition that preaching essentially belongs to a life according to the model of the gospel, we would have to conclude that Francis and his first brothers did not take seriously their own God-given rule of life.

For what did they do? After they had heard »the counsel of the Lord«, Bernard and Peter went to sell their possessions and distributed the money acquired from the sale among the city's poor people (AnPer 11b). After this distribution they went in search of a place to stay.

15 Reading the verb *hortabatur* one might think of the *verbum exhortationis* that suitable Humiliati with the approval of their bishop might address to members of their community during their Sunday service and that is clearly to be distinguished from preaching (*praedicatio*) about the articles of faith and the sacraments (see GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen* [note 1], 81, note 24). This interpretation looks very improbable to me because nowhere does the text speak about a permission from the bishop. The brothers would therefore supposedly speak this *verbum exhortationis* without the

bishop's permission and be seriously wrong, especially since the bishop's permission was a clear sign that there was no question of an heretical movement. Moreover, I think that here the author of the story does not have in mind public addresses, but rather simple words of admonition and encouragement which the brothers exchange with the people during their incidental meetings. This last point makes also the difference with RegNB 21,1 where Francis speaks about the exhortatio which his brothers may publicly proclaim to the people with the blessing of God.

16 In 1 Cel 22-23, Celano describes how Francis, still alone, attended mass at the Portiuncula chapel and heard the gospel being read about how the Lord sent out his disciples to preach. After Mass he went to the priest and asked him to explain the gospel which he did. Having heard his explanation, Francis exclaimed: »This is, what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart.« Francis then took of his shoes, put on a rough tunic and »began to preach penance to all with a fervent spirit and a joyful attitude« (1Cel 22-23). Comparing the stories in 1Cel and AnPer, it is evident that they

They »found a poor and nearly abandoned little church, called Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. There they built a small hut where they all lived together« (14a-b). Eight days later Giles joined them (14c). Next Francis took Giles on a trip to the Marches of Ancona. They were filled with great joy, and on the way Francis sang out »in French, praising and blessing the Lord« and one day made a prophecy about the growth of the brotherhood (15a-c). The story about the first three to four weeks ends then with the observation that until then »the man of God did not yet preach to the people (*adhuc non praedicabat populo*). But while they were going through towns and villages, he would encourage (*hortabatur*) men and women to fear and love the Creator of heaven and earth and to do penance for their sins« (15d).¹⁵

If we are to believe the story of the *Anonymous Perusinus* – and I am inclined to do so – Francis and his brothers did not see themselves as preachers. In fact, the observation that Francis did not yet preach appears even to have been inserted by the author, writing in 1240-1241, to correct the wrong impression which the brothers might have developed on the basis of the official life of Francis written by Celano some twelve years earlier (1228-1229).¹⁶ Also the people did not see Francis and his brothers as preachers. Even further on in the story, where the *Anonymous* briefly describes the actual life of the brothers as the people saw it, no word is said about preaching: »Every day [the brothers] devoted themselves with great zeal to prayer and working with their hands to avoid all idleness, the enemy of the soul« (25b). Preaching is mentioned only when the story is told about their visit to pope Innocent to ask him for the confirmation of their way of life according to the model of the gospel (31-36). Then the *Anonymous* writes explicitly: »From then on, blessed Francis began preaching to the people (*coepit populo praedicare*) in the towns and villages, as the Spirit of the Lord revealed to him.«¹⁷ I will return to this story later at the end of the article.

7 The initial basic agreements of the brothers

However interesting the stories about Francis may be, we will especially have to examine Francis' own writings if we want to answer the question whether and, if so, how Francis gave his own personal interpretation to the *forma sancti evangelii*. The original text of the basic agreements which Francis »had written down simply and in a few words and [which] the lord pope confirmed« for him (Test 15) has not been preserved. However, thanks to the pioneering studies of David Flood,¹⁸ it is at present almost generally accepted that the initial agreements can be found in chapters 1, 7 and 14 of the earlier rule, the so-called *Regula non bullata*. They form the original core of a rule which continued to develop over the years

show important differences not only on the matter of preaching, but also as regards the place of happening and the number of persons involved. These various differences are for me a clear indication that AnPer really wanted to correct the story as told by Celano; see also the article of Jansen, mentioned in note 10. He argues that Celano made the revelation happen in the Portiuncula chapel in order to stress and enhance the importance of the Portiuncula which by the end of Francis' life had become the central place of the brotherhood. He felt he could not do this better than by making the place where Francis' life

ended also the place where his new life began. Jansen does not discuss the difference between the two stories in the matter of preaching. In my opinion, Celano mentioned that Francis immediately started preaching, because this fitted very well with the increasing importance preaching had obtained within the brotherhood.

¹⁷ This more or less chronological description of what happened with Francis and his first brothers at the beginning of the brotherhood, is interrupted in AnPer 18 by a prophecy which Francis made in the woods next to the Portiuncula. In this prophecy Francis admonishes his brothers

not to be afraid how they, simple and illiterate people, are to preach. For, according to the word of the Lord, it is the Spirit of the Father who speaks in them (cf. Mt 10,20). We have to do here with an inserted prophecy which does not alter the order of events.

¹⁸ David FLOOD, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder*, Werl 1967; David FLOOD / W. v. DIJK / Thadée MATURA, *The Birth of a Movement*, Chicago 1975; David FLOOD, *Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Movement*, Quezon City 1989.

whenever Francis and his brothers were confronted with new situations that asked for taking a new stand and formulating new guidelines. That these three chapters contain the original agreements, is confirmed when we compare these key chapters with Francis' description of the first beginnings in verses 16-23 of his Testament.

This comparison presents us the clear image of a community in which the brothers share all that they possess in solidarity with the poor, not just at the beginning of their conversion when they are admitted to the brotherhood, but as a lifelong practice (RegNB 1; Test 16), live from the work of their hands, not understood as a means to acquire or to increase their possessions, but as a service (*eramus subditi omnibus*) to build a new society not on the basis of power and possessions but on mutual service (RegNB 7; Test 19-20),¹⁹ and wander around in poverty, bringing the peace of Jesus to all whom they meet on the road or during their work (RegNB 14, 1-3, Test 23). There were thus clearly three fundamental agreements that served as guidelines for the brothers: to live in poverty or rather in solidarity with the poor, to work with their hands and to bring peace.

8 Similarities and differences

When we compare this picture of Francis' brotherhood with that of other religious poverty movements at the time of Francis, we notice some clear similarities but also some rather striking differences. Thus the Humiliati, approved by pope Innocent in 1201, renounced all their possessions and earned a living by doing manual work. Some of them lived together in a community, but others lived at home with their families where they devoted themselves to a life according to the gospel. They attached great weight to Jesus' word in the Sermon on the Mount: »But I say this to you: do not swear at all ... « (Mt 5,34-35). In fact, this word of Jesus formed one of the serious points of discussion in their negotiations with Rome. So also the issue of preaching. As a result of these discussions, as we mentioned already earlier, the pope allowed suitable brothers from among the Humiliati living at home to say some words of exhortation (*verbum exhortationis proponent*) during their Sunday services with the permission of their bishop; they were not allowed, however, to speak about the articles of faith and the sacraments of the church. Further, according to the testimony of James of Vitry, the pope granted priests and trained lay people from among the Humiliati who lived in community the permission to preach not only in their own community but also in squares and towns, and in secular churches with the permission of the local ecclesiastical authorities – a preaching activity which they, according to another testimony of James of Vitry, used especially in their fight against heresy.²⁰

The situation with the Waldensians was again different. At the beginning of the 13th century two groups approached Rome, the group round Durand of Osca in 1208 and 1212 and the group round Bernard Primus in 1210.²¹ They were wandering groups of preachers who, according to the word of the gospel, did not want to possess anything and lived on alms from those who listened to their sermons. Manual labour was of secondary importance to them.

¹⁹ Remarkably, the word *subditus* which is a keyword in RegNB 7, returns explicitly in Francis' Testament after it had completely disappeared in its »Franciscan« sense from the official Rule of the Friars Minor approved by pope Honorius III in 1223. For a more extensive treatment of

this question I refer to my book: *Feuerwandler. Franciskus und der Islam*, Kevelaer 2001, 87-90; 120-132. The book is also available in English: *Francis and the Islam*, Quincy, Ill. 1997.

²⁰ See GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen* (note 1), 72-91.

²¹ See GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen* (note 1), 91-97; 100-127.

They saw it more as an ascetical practice to which they devoted themselves only when their study of the scriptures for the benefit of their mainly anti-heretical preaching allowed it.²² For them the most important point in their negotiations with the pope was the approval of their wandering existence as preachers. This, together with renunciation of all possessions formed the core of their life according to the gospel. The pope gave his approval after they declared themselves to be ready to recognise the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the priestly administration of the sacraments.

9 Francis and the other evangelical movements

All the various evangelical poverty movements followed thus their own interpretation of the *forma sancti evangelii*. While certain groups of Humiliati lived in residential communities and earned their living through manual labour, the Waldensians wandered about in groups and lived on alms. Both Humiliati and Waldensians considered preaching as an essential part of their evangelical mission. If we now look at Francis and the way in which he interpreted the *forma sancti evangelii*, it will become clear that he too made his own choice. He agreed with the Humiliati on the point of manual labour as the normal means of earning the necessities of life, but differed from them on the point of residential communities. On this last point he rather agreed with the Waldensians who in groups wandered around in poverty, but he differed from them because they saw manual labour as an optional practice. He also differed from them in that he only allowed the brothers to go begging for alms and »have recourse to the table of the Lord« (Test 22) if they were not paid for their work.

However, Francis differed from both Humiliati and Waldensians on the matter of preaching. While both these groups considered preaching essential for living according to the *forma sancti evangelii*, Francis does not even mention it, neither in the initial fundamental agreements in the earlier rule, nor in his remembrance of the first beginnings in his Testament. The obvious conclusion must therefore be that, in contrast with the Humiliati and Waldensians, Francis did not consider preaching as belonging to the core of the *forma sancti evangelii* as he saw it in his situation from his new place outside Assisi. For otherwise he would certainly have mentioned preaching just as he did explicitly mention the renunciation of all possessions and the practice of manual labour. Moreover, Francis did explicitly add, both in the agreements of the rule and in his Testament, that the brothers had to bring Jesus' greeting of peace to the people (RegNB 14,2; Test 23).

In this way Francis clearly indicates that, rather than preaching, bringing peace is an essential part of the *forma sancti evangelii*, and that, consequently, the mission of the brothers going through the world is essentially a mission of peace. Or, as Esser writes: »This peace greeting constitutes one of the important missionary tasks of Francis and his brothers. They have to announce peace in a world where enmity reigns between *maiores* and *minores*, between rich and poor, where city wages war against city and country against country ... In this world the lesser brothers have to fulfil a great task: to break down enmities and to be

22 For the place of manual labour, see the *Propositum* for Bernard Primus and his group, approved by the pope: »Et quamquam officium nostrum sit precipue, ut omnes discant scripturas sacras et omnes idonei exhortentur, tamen, dum tempus ingruit, propriis manibus

laboramus, ita dumtaxat ne pretium accipiamus conventum.« See GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen* (note 1), 122, note 103. For the anti-heretical preaching, see among others, the *Propositum* for Durand: »Cum autem ex magna parte clerici simus et pene omnes litterati, lectioni, exhortationi,

doctrine et disputationi contra omnes errorum sectas decrevimus insudare. Disputationes tamen a doctioribus fratribus in fide catholica comprobatis et instructis in lege domini dispensentur, ut adversarii catholice et apostolice fidei confundantur.«

mediators of peace.²³ As this strong emphasis on peace is absent or at least not so manifest in the evangelical movements of the Humiliati and the Waldensians, it is a clear sign that Francis had reached a different interpretation of what the *forma sancti evangelii* essentially implied for him and his brothers than the Humiliati and Waldensians whose outward activities, and especially their preaching, were moreover very strongly anti-heretical.

10 Again the importance of the context

Our comparison shows clearly that Francis' interpretation of the *forma sancti evangelii* has certain elements in common with the other evangelical movements, but also places its own accents. The reason for this is to be found in Francis' own personal experiences and his particular way of looking at the world from his new place outside Assisi and its value system. This is very much the case especially also in the high priority that Francis gives to the brothers' mission of peace. Already in his young years, – he was just twenty – Francis personally experienced the consequences of war when he was taken prisoner during the war with Perugia (2Cel 4).²⁴ And also afterwards, when the Lord had given him his first brothers, he was daily confronted with all the evils which the struggle for possessions and power caused everywhere around him. His was a world torn apart by strife and war.²⁵ Inspired by Jesus' words, Francis saw it therefore as the first task for himself and his brothers – a task entrusted to him by the Lord Himself and formulated in chapter 14 of the earlier rule²⁶ – to go through the world without possessions which were the root cause of division in society, and to bring people the much needed peace of the Lord, not only in words but especially in deeds (RegNB 14,1-3). The brothers did this first of all by greeting the people, as soon as

23 See ESSER, *Testament* (note 1), 171. That the brothers' greeting of peace was not everywhere welcome is clearly shown in *Assisi Compilation* 101, which captures very well the atmosphere round peace in those days. After having quoted Testament 23, the story continues: »At the beginning of the brotherhood, when blessed Francis went out with one of the first twelve brothers, this brother greeted men and women along the way and in the fields: ›May the Lord give you peace.‹ And because people had never before heard such a greeting from any religious, they were greatly amazed. Some even asked almost indignantly: ›What does this greeting of yours mean?‹ As a result this brother began to be quite embarrassed. Then he asked blessed Francis: ›Let me use another greeting?‹ Blessed Francis told him: ›Let them talk, for they do not understand what is of God. But do not be embarrassed, for one day the nobles and princes of this world will show respect to you and the other brothers because of this greeting.‹ « It is to such a situation of hostility that Francis refers in the last three verses of RegNB 14,4-6. These verses are no longer based on Jesus' missionary discourses in Lk 9 and 10,

but rather on the the Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5-7 and the Sermon on the Plain in Lk 6,20-49. Rather than shaking the dust from their feet and leaving town (Lk 9,5; 10,11; see however RegNB 16,14; Test 26), the brothers are advised »not to resist the evil«, but to meet it in a spirit of non-violence. They are to turn the other cheek and to give the second tunic. They are thus to make a final appeal on the inherent goodness of the people, in line with the last advice of the earlier rule which originally ended with ch. 17. There Francis writes: »When we hear or see evil spoken or done (*malum dicere or facere*), let us speak well and do well (*bene dicamus et bene faciamus*) and praise God Who is blessed forever. Amen« (19).

24 The English translation of 2 Celano or *The Remembrance of the Desire of Soul* (1245-1247) can be found in FAED II, 239-393. A survey of the latest studies on this text is offered by G. P. FREEMAN in his introduction to the recent Dutch translation of: THOMAS OF CELANO, *De oudste verhalen over Franciscus van Assisi*. Het Leven van Franciscus en het Gedenkschrift van Franciscus' daden en deugden, tr. R. HOFMAN, intr. and notes G. P. FREEMAN, Haar-

lem 2006, 11-36. In the recently reopened discussion whether there are two versions of the *Remembrance*, Freeman sides with Felice Accrocca and considers the second version the final version of the *Remembrance*, corrected by Thomas of Celano himself at the request of the general chapter of 1247. Personally, I am not convinced by their arguments.

25 We need to refer here only to the strife within the cities between the old feudal establishment and the new social and political force of the commune; to the wars between the various city-states, like between Assisi and Perugia, Genoa and Pisa, Padua and Venice, between pope and emperor, and to the crusades. Francis saw most if not all of this violence as a result of the people's strife to acquire and defend possessions. Interesting here is the discussion Francis had with bishop Guido. After the latter had expressed his concern about the rough and hard life Francis had chosen by living without possessions, Francis replied: »Lord, if we had any possessions, we would need arms to protect them because they cause many disputes and lawsuits. And possessions usually are an obstacle to the love of God and neigh-

they entered their houses, with the greeting of peace that the Lord had revealed to Francis: »May the Lord give you peace« (Test 23). For they did not come as robbers or plunderers, as happened all too often in those days, but as men who wished peace to everyone in the house (*domus*) – meant are not just private dwelling places, but farm houses or houses for the sick or the lepers. Next they tried to translate this wish of peace into deeds by sharing their lives in solidarity with the people, offering them their services and doing all kinds of manual work. And, at the end of the day, they had a meal with them, eating and drinking of whatever was available.²⁷ For did not the Lord say that the labourer deserves his wages (Lk 10,7)?

Francis and his brothers found the inspiration for their way of going through the world especially in the missionary discourses which Jesus held for the twelve apostles (Lk 9,1-6) and the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10,1-16) and which belonged to the three foundational texts of the brotherhood.²⁸ In both these discourses preaching is seen as basic to the mission of the apostles and the disciples. It is therefore surprising that, as I mentioned already earlier, preaching is not mentioned at all, neither in RegNB 14 nor in Francis' remembrance of the early beginnings in Test 14-23, whereas peacemaking is. And this is all the more so if preaching really constituted an essential part of the *forma sancti evangelii*. How to explain this gap? Just as in the case of the story of the *Anonymous* 11, several authors accept that, because of their familiarity with the often heard gospel texts, Francis and his brothers, when hearing the opening verses of Jesus' missionary discourses, mentally heard at the same time also Jesus' words about preaching without even having to say so explicitly. Hence even if preaching is not explicitly mentioned by Francis, this does not mean that it is not co-intended. In other words, following Jesus' instructions about going through the world without taking anything for the journey, Francis and his brothers naturally also followed Jesus' instructions about proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God (Lk 9,2.6; 10,9).²⁹

bour« (AnPer 17d). Interesting are also the different reactions of Francis and pope Innocent to the many wars in Italy. While Francis, according to a revelation of the Lord (Test 23), sent his brothers to bring Jesus' peace to the people, Innocent sent his legates, among whom cardinal Hugolino, to establish »peace« among the warring city-states in order to mobilize their men and money for a more successful crusade against the Saracens. See my *Feuerwandler* (note 19), 59-63.

²⁶ For a more extensive commentary on RegNB 14, see my *Feuerwandler* (note 19), 90-100.

²⁷ Apparently this last point kept troubling the brothers, for were they not supposed to observe all the special laws regarding fasting and abstinence laid down for religious? In the official rule of 1223 Francis and his brothers return to this problem and formulate the permission even stronger by explicitly adding: *Et secundum sanctum evangelium* (RegB 3,14) In Luke's gospel this permission is even mentioned twice! See Lk 10,7.8.

²⁸ The text referred to in AnPer 11 where the three foundational texts are mentioned, is taken from Lk 9. However, the text in RegNB 14,1-3 is a mixture of both Lk 9 and 10. While

v.1 is mainly, though not exclusively, taken from Lk 9,3, vv. 2-3 are taken from Lk 10,5 and 7. It is only in these two verses of Lk 10 that the peace greeting and the permission to eat from whatever is available are present whereas they are not mentioned in Lk 9. Since also the Testament singles out the peace greeting, I am inclined to think that the story in Lk 10 was the one that belonged to the original three texts. But this cannot be proven. For it is also possible that in Francis' mind one missionary discourse called up the other, and that Francis, more or less quoting from memory, did not further distinguish between them. The discourse from Lk 9 was read on Friday after Pentecost, its parallel text in Lk 10 was read on the feasts of the evangelists Mark and Luke.

²⁹ Thus, for example, G. P. FREEMAN who writes in a reply to an earlier shorter and less documented Dutch version of this article: »[The fact that Francis] only quotes that the disciple is not allowed to take anything along on the way, and does not mention preaching, does not matter. »Take nothing for the journey« is the slogan that covers the whole life of the apostles who go from town to town to proclaim God's word in

poverty. Thus it is also understood by the brothers. Take Jordan of Giano, who writes rather late, round 1260, but keeps himself far from polemics: »In 1209, [Francis] heard in the gospel what Christ had told his disciples when he sent them out to preach. He immediately set aside his staff, wallet and shoes, and changed his garb and put on the one the brothers now use. He became a follower of evangelical poverty and a zealous preacher of the gospel« (Jordan 2). »Minderbroeders, boeteprekers. Een antwoord aan Jan Hoeberichts, in: *FL* 88 (2005) 113-115, here 114. Another way to read »preaching« back into the text is found in P. MARANESI, »Dedit mihi tantam fidem«. *Lettura critica* dei vv. 4-13 del Testamento di Francesco d'Assisi, in: *Verum, pulchrum et bonum*. Miscellanea di studi offerti a Servus Gieben in occasione del suo 80° compleanno, a cura di Yoannes TEKLEMARIAM, Roma 2006, 31-76, here 34. Writing about the various interventions of the Lord in Francis' life mentioned in Test 1-23, he notes: »L'ultimo richiamo all'intervento di Dio è legato ad un tema specifico quale la predicazione, precisando di essa il contenuto generale della pace.« Was Maranesi influenced here

I agree with the gist of the argument about »explicit« hearing: that what Francis and his brothers heard with their own ears, and »implicit« hearing: that what echoed along in their minds when they heard a gospel text being read. But the argument simply does not apply here. For the question is not how much they heard either explicitly or implicitly, but rather why Francis, in formulating guidelines for his wandering brothers, chose some instructions like the ones on taking nothing along for the journey and wishing people peace from among the many they had heard either explicitly or implicitly while listening to Jesus' missionary discourses, and left out others like the one on preaching? The main, if not the only reason I can think of is that Francis attached a different weight to the various instructions with the result that some stood higher on his priority list than others. This leaves me with but one conclusion: Francis did not consider preaching a first priority for himself or his brothers. For if he had done so, he certainly would have mentioned preaching, even if only briefly, in his guidelines for the brothers. The fact that he did not, neither in RegNB 14 nor in his Testament, is clear proof of the fact that not preaching, but making peace by living a life of poverty in solidarity with and service to the people, and especially the poor and the lepers, was his first choice. But why would Francis support such a personal interpretation of the *forma sancti evangelii*, while other poverty movements placed such strong emphasis on preaching? To answer this question we will again have to look at Francis' own world of experiences.

11 No lover of words ...

A first possible answer may be found in the fact that Francis considered himself an »illiterate« (*idiotia*, Test 19; LetOrder 39).³⁰ As such, as a person of little formal education, Francis had not studied the Scriptures and hence did not consider himself qualified to preach the word of God. Perhaps he knew also about the objections which the ecclesiastical authorities made when illiterate people like he started to preach without permission. However, as I indicated already, I think it more important to look more closely at the experiences Francis had in his immediate surroundings. At that time Assisi was dominated by »a culture of the word«, under the guidance of bankers, traders, lawyers, notaries and the like, who for the success of their activities depended very much on the power of their words.³¹ Or, in Francis' own words, Assisi's leaders »desired and strove to have words but cared little about deeds« (*operatio*, RegNB 17,11).³² They did not want a religion and holiness that were focussed on realising God's intentions with humankind, but rather preferred

by Celano who also sees peace as the theme of Francis' preaching: »[Francis] divided them into four groups of two each and told them: »Go, my dear brothers, two by two through different parts of the world, announcing peace to the people and penance for the remission of sins« (1Cel 29). But the question remains why Francis, if both peace and preaching were so important for him, did mention peace but left out preaching in his description of the early beginnings.

³⁰ Looking at the immediate context in which the term *idiotia* is used in these two places, there seem to exist some nuances as regards its meaning. In LetOrder Francis uses the pair *ignorans et idiota*. If these two words are more or less seen as synonyms that mutually enforce each other, as is usually the case with pairs used by Francis, the translation »unlettered«, in the sense of lacking a higher education, seems rather obvious. We are then concerned here with the cultural meaning of *idiotia*. In Test 19, however, Francis uses the pair: *idiotae et subditi omnibus*. Presupposing that in this passage too

the two adjectives are two synonyms mutually strengthening each other, the term *idiotia* seems to have here a more social meaning, in the sense of: we were simple people who had little formal education and hence did not enjoy much esteem or authority among the people; we worked with our hands and in this way were subject to all through our service. Cf. RegNB 7,2: *minores et subditi omnibus*. But whether we take the cultural or social meaning, in both cases *idiotia* refers to a person of little formal education. For the distinction, see A. MATTIOLI, <Idiotia>: Mancanza di cultura o amore di ritiratezza.

a religion with much outward pomp (12) and which was hardly or not at all committed to alleviating the great suffering of »the poor, the lepers and the beggars by the wayside« (cf. RegNB 9,2). Because of all that he saw and experienced, Francis did not have a great esteem for people of the word.

For this reason Francis commanded his brothers in the last verses of his Testament »strictly through obedience not to place any gloss upon the rule or these words«. The brothers were rather »to understand them« simply and without gloss and to observe them through holy deeds (*sancta operatione*, Test 38-39). No glosses therefore, that is, »no learned annotations as they were made at the Scriptures or other legal texts in the universities ... [and] which caused the own strength of the bible to be lost in finespun arguments which extinguish the spirit«³³, and thus keep the brothers from the *operatio*. Certainly, in the same Testament, Francis explicitly shows his respect for theologians and ministers of God's word »as those who minister to us spirit and life« (Test 13). Regrettably, there were not too many of them! For a good number of Scripture experts »only wished to know the words, that they might be esteemed wiser than others and be able to acquire great riches«. Their knowledge did not lead them towards the *operatio* (Adm 7,1).³⁴

12 ... but deeds

Francis' experiences with theologians and ministers of the Word were thus ambivalent as too many of them had been influenced by the dominant culture of the word and were not ministering words of »spirit and life«. On the basis of these experiences, Francis felt that the focus on the *operatio* was much more important than preaching. The deeds of the brothers were in the situation of that time more eloquent than their words, of which there were far too many. This had caused an inflation which Francis wished to counteract: words alright but then not empty devalued words but words that truly come to life in the deeds of the brothers. Thus Francis had become convinced that the brothers could play a far greater role in the transformation of society according to God's plan if they would »preach« not so much by their words as by their deeds (RegNB 17,3). It is here, I think, that we have to look for the reason why preaching is not mentioned both in the guidelines of RegNB 14 and in the remembrance of the first beginning in Testament 14-23. When therefore the first biographies, especially 1 Celano, place such a strong emphasis on preaching, this must be interpreted as a reading back into the beginning of the later clerical development within the brotherhood, rather than as a faithful account of the historical situation.

Nota di lessicografia francescana, in: *Il Santo. Rivista antoniana di storia, dottrina, arte* 27 (1987) 121-144. However, Mattioli's interpretation that *idiota*, in line with its original meaning of »private, personal, special«, refers to Francis' desire to lead a strictly private, retired life, does not seem very convincing. Also his interpretation that, by calling himself *ignorans*, Francis accuses himself of not enthusiastically having linked up with the intellectual development within the brotherhood, because he rather wanted to continue living in the past, seems quite strange to me (134-137).

31 Z. ZAFARANA, La predicazione francescana, in: *Francescanesimo e vita religiosa dei laici nel '200*, Assisi 1981, 203-250, here 205.

32 *Operatio* occurs several times in the writings of Francis (RegNB 7,12; 17,11; RegB 10,9; 2LetFaith 53; Adm 21,2; Test 39). It can rightly be called a key word of Franciscan spirituality. *Operatio* or, even better, *sancta operatio* is that virtuous activity, inspired by the Holy Spirit (RegB 10,9, SalBMV 6), through which we give birth to Jesus in this world (2LetFaith 53) and so continue Jesus' work of salvation. No wonder that the *sancta operatio* is the theme Francis

returned to in the very last instruction he gave his brothers in his Testament (Test 39).

33 G. P. FREEMAN / H. SEVENHOVEN, The Legacy of a Poor Man: Commentary of the Testament of Francis of Assisi V, in: *Franciscan Digest* 6,1 (April-June 1996) 1-26, here 13.

34 The title of Admonition 7, added later on, summarizes very well the intention Francis had with this admonition: *Ut bona operatio sequatur scientiam*.

13 A further confirmation

This view on the priorities in the Franciscan movement is confirmed in the guidelines Francis wrote in 1220, more than ten years after the revelation of the *forma sancti evangelii* and the writing of the initial foundational agreements. These guidelines were especially meant for the brothers who, by divine inspiration, wanted to go among the Saracens and other nonbelievers. They formed chapter 16 of the *Regula non bullata* and functioned as a further concretization of the earlier guidelines about going through the world in chapter 14.³⁵ Because of the experiences he gained during his personal visit to the Sultan in 1219, Francis insists in these guidelines that the first thing the brothers have to do when they want to go and live among the Saracens in the spirit of Jesus is not to engage in arguments or disputes.³⁶ In the concrete historical context this means that the brothers have not to use the type of apologetic sermons which were very much en vogue among the clergy in the Holy Land. Since clerics were officially not allowed to carry arms, they saw it all the more as their task to fight the Saracens with words, according to the adage of Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny (1092-1156): *Agridior, inquam vos [Saracenos], non, ut nostri saepe faciunt, armis, sed verbis, non vi, sed ratione, non odio, sed amore.*³⁷ A good example of this approach is James of Vitry, bishop of Acre (1160/70-1240). He was an experienced preacher who was quite familiar with the apologetic method. For in 1213 he had been appointed to preach the crusade against the Albigensians in the diocese of Reims in the North of France. After he had been appointed bishop of Acres, he fervently wished to continue his preaching ministry when he reached there in 1216. In fact he was so eager to attack the Saracens with words that, when he could not preach directly to the Saracens, he wrote them letters in their own language, showing them the errors of Islam and the truth of Christianity.³⁸ But Francis did not want words, and certainly not words that would divide people rather than unite them.

Instead of a negative and divisive apologetic approach, Francis wanted the brothers rather to »be subject to every human creature for God's sake and so to confess that they are Christians« (RegNB 16,6). He uses here the same expression as in RegNB 7,3 and later on in Testament 19.³⁹ It is evident then that Francis wanted to extend his approach of being

35 For a more extensive commentary on RegNB 16, see my *Feuerwandler* (note 19), 100-183. Also Walbert BÜHLMANN, *Das Missionsverständnis bei Franziskus nach der Regula non bullata*, in: Arnulf CAMPS / Gerfried HUNOLD, *Erschaffe mir ein neues Volk*, Mettingen 1982, 13-29; Leonhard LEHMANN, *Grundzüge frankiskanischen Missionsverständnisses nach Regula non bullata 16*, in: *FranzSt* 66 (1984) 68-81.

36 It is a great pity that, despite Francis' rejection of arguments and disputes, Bonaventure, on the authority of brother Illuminatus, who accompanied Francis on his journey to the Holy Land, spread the story about Francis challenging the Sultan's priests to walk along with him through the fire (LegMaior 9,8). Unfortunately, this apocryphal story lives so much in the imagination of the people, thanks also to Giotto's fresco in the basilica of San Francesco

in Assisi, that the publishers of the German translation of my book on Francis and Islam gave it the title: *Feuerwandler* (note 19).

37 *Adversus nefandam sectam Saracenorum libri duo*. PL 189, 673. See James KRITZECK, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, Princeton 1964. In his book *Die Funktion der frankiskanischen Bewegung in der Kirche*. Eine pastoraltheologische Interpretation der grundlegenden frankiskanischen Texte, Schwyz 1977, 165-167, ROTZETTER sees Peter the Venerable as a forerunner of Francis. In my view however there are fundamental differences between their approaches. While Peter relies on words (*verba*) and reason (*ratio*) Francis wishes his brothers to preach through their deeds (*opera*), and very specially through their being subject (*subditi*).

38 Robert B. C. HUYGENS, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry*, Leiden 1960,

96-97. See also Penny J. COLE, *The Preaching of the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1095-1270*, Cambridge 1991; HOEBERICHTS, *Feuerwandler* (note 19), 64-74, 114-119.

39 See also 2LetFaith 47. It is remarkable that »being subject to others«, a core element of Francis' mission method, is not mentioned in the official *Regula bullata* of 1223, where moreover the missionary chapter is reduced to just two verses in the last chapter: 12,1-2. Was this because according to Canon Law Christians, as sons of the free woman, Sarah, could not be subject to Muslims, the sons of the slave woman, Hagar? See my *Feuerwandler* (note 19), 128-134. The expression returns, however, in Francis' Testament. This reappearance forcefully underlines its fundamental importance for Francis and Franciscan missionary spirituality.

40 Of course, this approach was difficult to understand for a fervent

subject to others also into the world of the Saracens. And just as this approach in the world of Assisi was directed towards uniting and reconciling people and bringing them Jesus' peace, so by following the same approach among the Saracens Francis hoped to bring Christians and Saracens together in peace rather than fighting each other in war. He opted for this approach not so much for practical strategical reasons, since in his experience wars, be they waged with words or with arms, did not work, but rather for good theological reasons or, in Francis' own words, »for God's sake«: God who in Jesus had come »not to be served, but to serve« (Mt 20,28; RegNB 4,6) and to bring peace to a divided world.

But what then about preaching these good words, this good news about God and Jesus? Did not the Saracens have to hear this message as quickly as possible, because they could not be saved without it? While other preachers were therefore in a hurry to spread the Christian faith, Francis was not. The good news had not to be preached with words, but first to be lived in deeds. For through the witness of a good Christian life the brothers were to create a surroundings in which the word of God would not be rejected offhand but rather heard with respect. Only when this condition would be fulfilled, God would be »pleased« (7) with the brothers' preaching because it would find a fertile soil in which it could bear much fruit. This implies that Francis did not exclude preaching, but it was also not his first priority.⁴⁰ He was prepared to wait for the right moment that he hoped would come one day if the brothers lived among the Saracens according to the model of the gospel. Consequently, the brothers were not to go among the Saracens as wandering preachers to fight the heresy of Islam, but rather as peacemakers who in the spirit of Jesus would live among them without arguments and disputes and be subject to them through the service of their work, while leaving all the rest to God's pleasure. This way of life, lived beyond the Christian world, was for the brothers a continuation and a particular concretization of their calling to go through the world and live there their evangelical way of life. Thus they confessed to the Saracens that they were not crusaders, but Christians, followers of the poor and humble Jesus, at a time when the ecclesiastical authorities were deeply involved in a crusade to win back the Holy Land.

Another confirmation of our view can be found in Francis' admonition to the preachers »not to appropriate to themselves [...] the ministry of preaching but to give it up without

preacher and crusader like James of Vitry. He writes then also in his sixth letter, written at Damietta in February/March 1220: »The head of these brothers, who also founded the Order, came into our camp. He was so inflamed with zeal for the faith that he did not fear to cross the lines to the army of our enemy. For several days he preached the word of God to the Saracens and made little progress« (FAED I, 581). A similar stress on preaching is also found in the Crusade Chronicle of Ernoul (FAED I, 605). However, in his *Life of Francis*, Celano does not stress preaching, but rather Francis' desire for martyrdom as this was the only way for him to make sense of such a foolish and dangerous plan like Francis' wish to visit the Sultan. Stressing very much that Francis »did not flinch at threats of torture and was not shaken by death threats«, the story ends by saying: »In all this, however, the Lord did not

fulfil his desire [of martyrdom], reserving for him the prerogative of a unique grace«, namely, the gift of the stigmata (1Cel 57). I am afraid, however, that also Celano reads his own views into the text. For the guidelines proposed by Francis are the best guarantee for not dying a martyr's death. See also Francis' insistence, even in his Testament, that the brothers, when they are not welcome in some place, »have to flee to another country to do penance with the blessing of God« (Test 26; RegNB 16,14; cf. Mt 10,23). Of course, this does not mean that Francis would not welcome martyrdom if it were to come his way. For as he reminds not only the brothers who go among the Saracens, but all his brothers »wherever they may be, [...] that they have given themselves and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. For love of Him, they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies [...]

because the Lord says: »Whoever loses his life because of me will save it in eternal life« (RegNB 16,10-11).

41 In an earlier version of the *Regula non bullata*, RegNB 4,6 continued in RegNB 17,5. The verses 17,1-4 were thus added later at a time when there arose problems about preachers and to a lesser degree about ministers. In these verses preachers are told that they are not to preach »contrary to the customs and regulations of the church or without the permission of their minister« (1). They are to preach not so much by words but »by their deeds« (3). Finally they should not appropriate their »office of preaching, but be ready to leave it when asked to do so« (4). It is interesting to note that in Admonition 2,3 the »appropriation of the will« is described as the sin committed in paradise. The use of this particular term in v. 4 underlines therefore the seriousness of the offence.

objection whenever they are told « (RegNB 17,4).⁴¹ If preaching essentially belongs to the *forma sancti evangelii* and, as authors state, justifies calling them: *Wanderprediger*, it is difficult to see how a brother preacher can be asked to give up something that is essential to his life and defines his identity. And where to find another more important task for which a brother preacher readily has to give up his preaching of God's word? Francis apparently thinks that such tasks exist. There is thus according to Francis something more important than preaching the word of God, namely living it! Hence, it is but natural for Francis that a preacher, a man of words, readily leaves his office without objection and starts serving the poor and lepers, thus becoming a man of deeds. Or, in other words, the *operatio* is more essential to the brotherhood and its mission in the world than the *praedicatio*,⁴² and this certainly if the preaching of the word rather often leads to »pride and vainglory« (9) and preachers »exalt themselves because of the good words and deeds [...] or any good that God sometimes says or does or works in and through them« (6).

14 Francis' visit to the pope

To support the view that from the beginning Francis considered preaching an essential part of a life according to *forma sancti evangelii*, authors often point to the fact that, according to almost all witnesses, pope Innocent gave Francis and his brothers the permission to preach when they visited him in 1209. However, this argument does not appear to be well-founded, especially when we compare the stories of these witnesses with what we know about the visits of the Humiliati and Waldensians to the Roman curia. One of the important issues in their negotiations with the authorities was preaching. Not only Rome but also the local bishops objected strongly against the preaching activities of the members of these movements, especially when they preached without their permission outside their control, and by their critical preaching distanced their listeners from the church.

However, in the stories of the first biographers and others about Francis' visit to the pope not a single reference is made to preaching.⁴³ In fact, they point to an entirely different prob-

⁴² In my article *Francis and the devil*. About the devil in Francis' writings, in the *Corpus Celanense* and in Francis-can art, in: *Miscellanea di studi offerti a Servus Gieben* (note 29), 97-153, here 110-112, I have argued that the satanic pretext: *sub specie operis* (RegNB 22,25) – which unfortunately is left out from the new English translation – refers most probably to situations where brothers preachers were involved who thought that they had to cling to their preaching office for serious pastoral reasons. They argued that the reform of the church, demanded by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), implied that good preachers be available who could be employed when- and wherever necessary for the salvation of the people, even without the permission of the local bishop. Asking for this permission delayed them often for days in their salutary mission. It would therefore be much better, so some broth-

ers argued, if Francis would obtain a letter from the pope allowing the brothers to preach everywhere without having first to ask the bishop's permission. Francis rejected their argumentation and sternly rebuked them that they did not understand God's will. For rather than through privileges, which might lead to pride, they should convince the bishop through their way of life, through their humility and respect (see *AsCom* 20). Despite this warning, some brothers seem to have approached the Roman curia all the same. For Francis returns to the problem in his Testament where he writes: »I strictly command all the brothers through obedience [...] not to dare to ask any letter from the Roman curia [...]

under the pretext of preaching« (Test 25). This severe command makes it unmistakably clear that Francis considered all the talk of learned brothers preachers about the need for preaching, even when supported by the ecclesiastical authorities, a dangerous pretext. In fact, all their rationalizations were, in Francis' eyes, subtle machinations of the devil, trying »to choke out the words and precepts of the Lord from their memory« (RegNB 22,19-20). These arguments, even though clothed in theological language and appealing to the need of the people, posed thus, according to Francis, a serious threat to the original ideals of the brotherhood. For if the brothers were to live according to the model of the gospel, or according to »the words and precepts of the Lord«, they were not to strive after or to hold on to positions of power and social prestige, however useful they might seem to be even from a pasto-

lem that, according to them, dominated Francis' discussions with the Roman authorities. I briefly mentioned this already earlier, but before concluding the article I like here to come back to it more in extenso. According to the *Anonymous*, the pope replied to Francis' request to live according to the model of the gospel: »Your life is too hard and severe, if you wish to found a community that possesses nothing in this world. For where will you obtain the necessities of life?« Francis answered that he puts his »trust in the Lord Jesus Christ«. This answer does not convince the pope. He points out that »human nature is fragile and never remains in the same state«. He proposes therefore to Francis: »Go and pray to the Lord with all your heart, so that He may show you what is better and more beneficial for your souls. Then come back and tell me and I will grant it.« During his prayer, Francis hears the voice of the Lord Who tells him the parable of the king who fathered many sons by a very poor but beautiful woman. As she did not have the means to care for them, she felt very sad and decided to put her problem before the king. The king answered: »Do not be afraid of your dire poverty, nor of the sons you have, and the many you will have. If the many hired hands (*mercenarii*)⁴⁴ in my house, have their fill of food, I certainly do not want my own sons to die of hunger. No, I want them to have even more than the others« (AnPer35). The story then continues: »Francis immediately understood that the poor woman symbolized himself. As a result, the man of God strengthened his resolve to observe holy poverty in the future. Getting up at that very hour, he went to the Apostolic Lord and told him all that the Lord had revealed to him.« After the pope had listened »with great amazement«, Francis »bowed down and humbly and devotedly promised obedience and reverence to the lord pope [who] approved the rule for him and his brothers [...] He gave him authority to preach everywhere [...] and the other brothers were also to preach, provided that blessed Francis gave them the office of preaching. From then on, blessed Francis began preaching to the people in the cities and villages, as the Spirit of the Lord revealed to him« (AnPer 35-36).

The whole discussion with the pope, both the first conversation and the later parable, centres around the theme of an evangelical life in poverty. All attention in the story is focussed on this topic. At the end, the *Anonymous* adds then very briefly in one sentence, as a kind of afterthought, that the pope granted Francis also the permission to preach. All this

ral point of view. They should rather be ready to forego their exercise or even to give them up altogether for the sake of the gospel and to take up a humble job in service of others, being subject to them for God's sake.

⁴³ In what follows I refer mainly to the story in AnPer 31-36. For the visit itself, see also 1 Cel 33, LegMaior 3,9-10. For the parable which Francis told the pope and which is described in AnPer 35, see also 2Cel 16; LegMaior 3,10 and the collection of Sunday sermons of Odo of Cheriton (FAED I, 590-591); Latin text in: AFH 22 (1929) 584-586. For Odo, see also FREEMAN, St. Francis (note 1), 329-330.

⁴⁴ When hearing the word *mercenarius*, a listener familiar with the gospel will immediately be reminded of the parable of the good shepherd in John 10. There the *mercenarius* is described as »the hired man who, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming; then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep« (John 10,12-13). I think it legitimate to conclude that the *Anonymous* voices here an implicit, though for a trained hearer quite clear criticism on the Roman curia. Something similar happens also in the reference to Francis in the Sunday sermon of Odo of Cheriton. According to him, the king answered: Tot pravi et inutiles in curia mea comedunt cibum. Remarkable here is the use of *curia* instead of *domus* in AnPer. Further

Odo speaks about *inutiles* which echoes the *inutilis servus* in Matthew's parable of the talents (Mt 25,30). Celano speaks about *de mensa mea nutriuntur extranei*: »strangers« (2Cel 16). Such criticism is not unusual. James of Vitry, for example, after his visit to the Roman curia in 1216, writes about »prelates who are like dumb dogs not able to bark« (FAED I, 580).

indicates, in my view, that Francis did not go to the pope to obtain the approval for himself and his brothers as a group of wandering preachers. The fact that the pope gave him and his brothers the permission to preach seems to be beyond discussion. But that Francis from then on became an indefatigable preacher who felt that, always and everywhere, he had to fulfil his God-given calling of wandering preacher, appears to me a presentation of facts that cannot be justified by a close reading of the other stories in the *Anonymous*, and certainly not on the basis of an analysis of Francis' own writings. Undoubtedly, Francis did preach occasionally but he did not attach the same importance to preaching as the *Wanderprediger* did. For them preaching was the be-all and end-all of their life as wanderers in this world, following the example of Jesus and his disciples.

15 Conclusion

On the basis of the preceding analysis of the writings of Francis and the witness of the *Anonymous* I think it justified to conclude that it is not correct to call Francis and his brothers *Wanderprediger*. To characterise them in this way takes away, or at least underestimates, Francis' own personal interpretation of God's revelation that he had to live according to the model of the gospel. It sacrifices the unique view of Francis to a systematisation of history which places the general and universal above the individual and particular. Certainly, general classifications are of utmost importance if we want to find our way through the overwhelming mass of information about persons and events that reaches us at every moment of the day, but the danger exists that we lose ourselves in generalisations, that obscure the real identity of a person, and make us overlook that what makes a person the special individual he or she is. I think that this danger materialised in the case of Francis and his brothers.

Classifying Francis and his brothers as *Wanderprediger*, authors do not sufficiently focus on the fact that Francis wanted his movement above all to be an evangelical peace movement of lesser brothers, as they called themselves, who wandered through the world in poverty wishing all people peace in words and especially in deeds. Starting from the insight, gained by experience, that the human drive to acquire and increase possessions is one of the main causes of war and violence in the world, they commit themselves, inspired by the example of Jesus and his disciples, to lead a life according to the model of the gospel. In the concrete violent context of their days, this means that they wish to bring the people Jesus' peace by renouncing all possessions and by sharing, wherever their wandering takes them, their life, work and earnings with the people in a spirit of solidarity and service. That is their rule and life, that is their mission of peace, Jesus' peace! And whenever the opportunity presents itself, or, in the words of Francis, »whenever they see that it pleases the Lord« (RegNB 16,7), they may preach, provided the bishop has given his permission and they have been approved by their minister. Preaching, however, is not an essential part of their life and mission as Francis and his brothers have come to understand them in light of the *forma sancti evangelii*. Not words, but deeds, being subject to every human creature for God's sake! It is through such deeds, more eloquent than words, that the brothers are to translate Jesus' greeting of peace into reality in the day-to-day life. This constitutes the fundamental aim of the Franciscan evangelical poverty movement and its mission in the world.

Zusammenfassung

Die Zuschreibung »Wanderprediger« trifft auf Franziskus und seine ersten Brüder nicht zu, weil für den Poverello die Bedeutung der Predigt nicht zentral war. Dies zeigt der Beitrag in mehreren Zusammenhängen auf, wobei vielfach spätere franziskanische Schichten des Interesses und der Interpretation abgetragen werden müssen. Im Gegensatz zu den Humiliaten bzw. den Waldensern, denen die (anti-häretische) Predigt bedeutsam war, setzt die franziskanische Bewegung auf Taten: die *operatio* ist wichtiger als die *praedicatio*. Franziskus sah sich als *ignorans* und *illiteratus* und konzipierte seine Bewegung der Minderen Brüder als eine des Friedens aus dem Geiste des Evangeliums.

Summary

The attribution »itinerant preacher« does not fit Francis and his earliest brothers since preaching was not of central importance to the Poverello. The contribution demonstrates this in several contexts, clearing away frequently much later layers of Franciscan interest and interpretation. In contrast to the Humiliati or the Waldensians to whom (anti-heretical) preaching was important, the Franciscan movement relied on deeds: *operatio* is more important than *praedicatio*. Francis considered himself to be *ignorans* and *illiteratus* and conceived his movement of the Friars Minor as one of peace derived from the spirit of the Gospel.

Sumario

La denominación »Predicadores andantes« no vale para Francisco y sus primeros hermanos, pues para el poverello la predicación no tenía un papel central. Esto lo muestra el artículo en diferentes contextos, para lo que tiene que apartar algunas capas posteriores de interés e interpretación franciscanos. Al contrario que los humilates y los valdenses, para quienes la predicación (anti-herética) era importante, el movimiento franciscano pone más bien el acento sobre las obras: la *operatio* es más importante que la *praedicatio*. Francisco se tenía por un *ignorans* e *illiteratus*, y concibió su movimiento de hermanos menores como un movimiento de paz en el espíritu del Evangelio.