

Francis the Peacemaker

Assisi Booklet number 2

This well-known prayer, while not believed to be authentic, nevertheless conveys the sense in which S. Francis is commonly perceived as a peacemaker. This paper looks critically at S. Francis's record in this respect, set against the social and political background of the first quarter of the 13th Century.

During this period, in North Italy, conflict was in progress on at least six levels:

1. Within families (obviously, when was it not?)
2. Between the aristocracy and the merchants
3. Between the city-states (e.g. Assisi and Perugia)
4. Between the Papacy and the Empire
5. Between the Papacy and heretics, notably the Cathars
6. Between the Papacy and Islam.

These distinctions were far from tidy in practice. For example the three political conflicts (between nobles and merchants, between city-states and between Papacy and Empire) were closely interwoven in Assisi at this time as we shall see. And the three conflicts involving the Papacy were all characterised by the latter as Crusades. But these categories form a useful framework and we shall use them in what follows.

Conflict within the family.

Francis was a cause of family discord from his birth. He was born, late in 1181 or early in 1182, while his father was away in France on business, probably at one of the great cloth fairs in Champagne. Francis's mother, Pica, baptized him Giovanni. When his father, Pietro Bernadone, got back with his bales of merchandise he peremptorily changed the boy's name to Francesco, the Frenchman - Francis. Why he did this is far from clear. At least it shows Pietro's enthusiasm for French ideas and his wish to flaunt them. Clearly it was he who brought the boy up to speak

French (although not very well) and to sing French songs, always spoken of as being a very unusual accomplishment.

Probably Francis did not go with his father on his long trading journeys. His schooling finished at the age of 14 and for two years he seems to have settled to working in his father's warehouse, probably just off the main square of Assisi. Then came the liberation of Assisi from the Imperial power. The German Duke Conrad of Lutzen handed over Umbria to the papal legates and the inhabitants of Assisi, intoxicated by freedom, jubilantly razed the imperial fortress to the ground. (The castle now on the *Rocca* is a papal castle rebuilt two centuries later). This was in 1198 and for the next four years or so, as all the biographies tell us, Francis, son of one of the richest families in the Commune, quick and clever at his trade, seems to have been allowed all the money he wanted. Roaming the city with young men of his age, eating and feasting, wearing the finest clothes, he became well known as a spendthrift. His parents seem to have been extremely indulgent, proud of the fact that their son had more money to throw about and better clothes to wear than the young sons of noble families (of which more later). Then in 1200 came the war with Perugia - mostly raids and reprisals for two years and then the great show-down at Collestrada. The immediate effect was that Francis spent a year as prisoner of war.

All the stories suggest that he did well as prisoner. He was kept with the young nobles, was unfailingly cheerful, looked after an ailing fellow-prisoner but became seriously ill himself. He was cared for by a charitable group in Perugia, then ransomed (with great delight one imagines) by his father and came home. A long period of depression followed. He walked around the house with a cane, went out into the fields and vineyards (many of which his father owned) and gradually began to resume his old lifestyle. Two years later he was sufficiently recovered to go to war again, this time not against Perugia but to join the Papal forces of Walter of Brienne. Count Walter, a famous warrior from Troyes in Champagne, had involved himself in a complicated dynastic struggle with German imperial forces in the south of Italy. His followers had been allowed by Pope Innocent II to regard themselves as crusaders and embroider the cross on their surcoats. So it was as a would-be crusader that Francis set out again, in 1204, magnificently fitted out with new arms and armour at his father's expense, in the company of a young nobleman of Assisi, possibly one of his companions in prison. They were aiming for Apulia, far away to

the south, but the upshot was farcical. Having got no further than Spoleto (about 20 miles down the road) Francis threw his hand in and came home. Exactly what caused to change his mind has never been explained. There is the story of a mysterious voice telling him to return. Sabatier suggests that the young nobleman with whom he was travelling had become fed up with Francis's ostentatious finery and boastfulness and brutally pointed out that Francis was only the son of a merchant and had no chance whatever of being knighted. It is equally possible that he simply lost his nerve - a homesick young man missing his mother, ineffective without his father, not in fact very brave. Why ride on quite unnecessarily towards a pointless and probably trivial death, for the sake of a dynastic struggle in a far off land?

The mockery that followed Francis' ignominious return must have hurt Pietro at least as much as Francis. He had spent a great deal of money on this abortive sortie. His other son Angelo was now doing well in the family business. Francis was still drifting, often depressed, but boastful as ever. Pietro seems to have taken Francis back as a sort of parasitic partner in the business and provided him with money, but he can hardly have been enchanted when Francis, more ostentatiously than ever, gave money to beggars and even food when his father was away on trading journeys. This was the time when Francis took to kissing the hands of inmates of the local *leprosarium* and giving them money, all his father's, of course. It is also the time of mysterious visits to caves in the mountains. No longer seeking glory in Apulia he planned great deeds at home. But of course no treasure was found, no bride won and the visits ceased.

Much worse was to follow. On a sudden impulse Francis was moved to pray in the Church of San Damiano and heard an inner voice telling him to repair the Lord's house. For some reason he took this literally. In Chesterton's inimitable words: "Francis sprang up and went. In the coarse conventional language of the uncomprehending world he stole. From his own enthusiastic point of view he extended to his venerable father Pietro Bernadone the exquisite excitement and inestimable privilege of assisting, more or less unconsciously, in the rebuilding of the church of San Damiano". He went to his father's warehouse, loaded a horse with cloth of different colours, rode to Foligno (a dozen miles away) sold the cloth and the horse, returned on foot to San Damiano, kissed the priest's hand and offered

him the money. The priest, guessing where it had come from, refused to accept it. Francis placed the money in a small box inside the church and asked to stay there as a guest.

For his father this was the last straw. He soon discovered what had happened and was so angry that, instead of walking down the hill to San Damiano himself, he collected a posse of friends to confront the young man. Thomas of Celano and others recount that Francis had already prepared a pit or secret cave for just such an emergency. If so it is extremely odd. It sounds as though he must have plotted the whole episode, possibly even invented the inner voice and certainly foreseen if not intended his father's wrath. It seems that he laid low for a whole month, hardly breaking cover to attend to the needs of nature, and was fed secretly by a member of the household who knew where Francis was. This is all but inexplicable. What sort of young man goes to ground for a month rather than face an angry father? When he finally did come home, bedraggled and looking completely foolish, his father was so incensed that he shut him up in a cellar. However regrettable this action Pietro was within his rights to do so. A statute of Assisi at that time, entitled *De Dissipatoribus et male utentibus suis substantiis*, - allowed this punishment for the crime of wasting the family substance - exactly what Francis had done.

From any normal point of view Francis's behaviour had been inexcusable. In the words of Anthony Mockler: "Instead of showing the slightest gratitude to his parents for a cosseted upbringing ... he had despised his father's profession, had come back all the same to live unabashedly off his family, repaid Pietro Bernadone for his tolerance by stealing and selling his goods, refused to hand back his father's money even when the person for whose benefit he had allegedly taken it had refused to accept it, created an open scandal, disappeared for a month without apparently any consideration for his very worried mother - and finally after all his boasting of princesses and treasure had come back yet again looking dirtier and more ragged than any tramp, without a word of regret or apology, expecting, to judge from his brazen air, the fatted calf to be slaughtered once more".

Pietro went off again on one of his trading journeys. Pica, having failed to persuade Francis to obey his father and stop restoring half ruined churches at his expense, 'moved by motherly compassion' let him go free. When Pietro returned and found

that Francis was back at San Damiano he abused his wife (poor Pica) and denounced his son at the *Palazzo Comunale*. The penalty for filial disobedience and misuse of paternal goods, under the statute I have just mentioned, was banishment from the town and district. One might have thought Francis would have been glad to escape this poisonous atmosphere. Instead he took refuge in Canon Law. Having attached himself to the church and the priest of San Damiano he claimed ecclesiastical privilege. This forced Pietro to summon Francis before the ecclesiastical court. The bishop took the case, probably in early February 1207. His judgement was clear and went against Francis. "Your father is highly incensed and greatly scandalised by your conduct. If therefore you wish to serve God you must first of all return him his money, which may indeed have been dishonestly acquired. God would not wish you to use it for restoring the church through sin on the part of your father whose anger will abate when he gets the money back. Trust in the Lord my son and act manfully". Francis accepted the judgement but, so far from showing the faintest remorse, chose to humiliate his father in the most exhibitionistic, scandalous and sneering manner possible. Having gone back into the Bishop's hall he re-appeared stark naked, dumped his clothes and the money in the porch and then said to all assembled "Hitherto I have called Pietro Bernadone my father, but because I am resolved to serve God I return to him the money on account of which he was so perturbed and also the clothes I wore which are his; and from now on I will say 'Our father who art in heaven' and not my father Pietro Bernadone". Maybe even at this late stage Pietro could have saved the day. He could have publicly forgiven Francis, re clothed him and even given him the money. Instead, 'burning with grief and anger', he gathered up clothes and money and took them home. The bishop gave Francis a tunic belonging to one of his farm hands. Francis traced a cross on it in chalk - purporting to be a crusader still - and set off for the north. (Of this, more later).

Soon he was back in Assisi but there was no reconciliation. Francis set about repairing churches with his own hands and begging for scraps of cooked food from door to door. Probably he could have fed at home if he had deigned to turn up. As the chronicler says "When his father saw him in this pitiful plight he was filled with sorrow for he had loved him very dearly; he was both grieved and ashamed to see his son half dead from penance and hardships; and whenever they met he cursed Francis". Francis responded with one last cruel gambit. He found an old man called

Albert, promised him a share of any food they begged, and had the man follow him around like a performing bear. Whenever they passed his father Francis turned to Albert and said 'Bless me father'. Albert's job was to make the sign of the cross and bless Francis as his father should have done. Francis's last recorded words to Pietro were 'Do you not realise that God can give me a father whose blessings will counter your curses' After this Pietro and Pica disappear from the story completely. Francis does not seem to have cared whether they lived or died and there is no record that he attended either of their funerals.

The judgement on Francis as peacemaker on the domestic scene is therefore bad. He was a source of trouble from the start. He seems to have had no inkling of the injunction to 'honour thy father and thy mother'. What he may have absorbed from his father and what he reacted against we will return to later. For the first 25 years of his short life (he died at age 45) he was about as dysfunctional a son as any family might dread acquiring.

The aristocracy and the merchants.

Our period was one of rapid social and economic change. It began with agriculture, when harnesses were developed that allowed horses to be yoked to a plough. Oxen were hardy but horses were better at ploughing and produced a greater yield. They in turn required more fodder which the new productivity made possible. Land and production began to be organised systematically to produce more food. This created a surplus with which to feed the towns, which freed the town-dwellers to specialise in other, non-agricultural trades. The towns and countryside began to energise each other and a new entrepreneurial culture began to arise. Great strides were made in banking and accountancy. Insurance could be bought. Outside shareholders and double-entry book-keeping were invented. By the end of the thirteenth century one fifth of the population of north west Europe was living in towns, coins had come back into circulation and the whole economy had been commercialised. [In passing this may throw some light on a puzzle that we discussed at the last meeting - Francis' refusal to countenance handling cash, treating it literally as dung. This refusal is, as we said, not to be found in the Gospels where Jesus' group was supported by wealthy folk (mainly women) and Judas carried the purse.

The point is that cash was a recent re-invention - indeed the first florin was not struck until 25 years after Francis' death. I think his hatred of it was in part a reaction against his father's commercialism but also a gut reaction against the arrival of a cash economy based on trade, and the disappearance of the simple world of knights and peasants based on feudal obligation. There are those to this day who protest - at Seattle or wherever - against globalisation and the economy of free markets, with all the uncomfortable social changes that they bring]. And the dominant social change of that time was indeed against feudalism. The merchant class - the bourgeoisie - was becoming increasingly powerful; within the Commune almost on an equal footing with the nobility. The nobles were gradually being forced, by these economic and social changes, to abandon their isolated castles and fortresses in the countryside and to come and live in the towns and cities - submitting however unwillingly to the power, the rules and regulations of the Commune. These statutes were immensely detailed, regulating property rights, trading practices and personal behaviour. Within the Communes the most powerful bodies were the guilds (*arti*) who laid down prices, standards and working hours within a trade. The most important guild was that of the merchants (*mercanti*) far wealthier than the shoemakers, ironworkers or butchers. And of these merchants the élite were those who dealt in cloth the *Arti della Lana*.

It is difficult to grasp the extraordinary importance of the wool trade in the Middle Ages. It gave employment to far more people than any other industry. The process of turning wool into cloth took six months. It had to be beaten, picked, greased, washed, combed, carded, placed on the distaff and spun (by numerous peasant women on their farms), measured off the warp and woven, curled, shorn while damp, stretched out to dry, teased and shorn again, handed over to the dyers, napped and shorn again and finally pressed and folded - in each case by teams of specialised workers. The wool merchants grew extremely prosperous. (A hundred years later the Bardi family had assets equivalent to the annual income of the English Crown.) And with money came power. There is a beautiful description of a typical wool magnate (Francesco Datini) as follows: "a self-made merchant, energetic, obstinate, querulous, self-willed and egotistic, ambitious, ostentatious, disdainful towards the minor nobles of his own town but immensely conscious of his own lack of breeding, dazzled therefore by the great nobility, impatient with opposition in his own family, unhappily married, dissatisfied and in a sense genuinely religious. ...On

the first page of his great ledgers stood the words 'In the name of God and of profit.'" This is the portrait of a whole society. It helps us to understand Pietro Bernadone. It also helps us to understand the issues between the new rising merchant class and the dying feudal aristocracy.

Another clue, in the case of Assisi around 1200, lay in its connection with imperial and Papal politics. Some years before Francis was born the Emperor Frederick I, Barbarossa, had descended with his German nobles on Umbria. A famous German warrior archbishop, Christian of Mainz, had razed Terni and sacked Narni. Assisi had submitted and for twenty years had been ruled from Spoleto by the Duke Conrad of Lutzen. Central Italy under German rule was fairly contented and increasingly prosperous. Inside Assisi, dominated by the Duke's fortress on the *Rocca*, the merchants quietly thrived. Outside Assisi the local nobles, many of them German, lived with their gangs of retainers in isolated little castles and towers, milking the merchants with exorbitant toll-fees on goods passing through their territories. Barbarossa died in 1190 on the Third Crusade. His successor Henry VI, an exceptionally able and energetic man, bloodily re-established German authority throughout central Italy and confirmed Conrad's authority in Spoleto. Then Henry VI himself died unexpectedly of a chill in Messina. It was 1197 and his heir, later to be the Emperor Frederick II, was a baby of three; half a Hohenstaufen (the German imperial family), half a Hauteville (Kings of Sicily and Dukes of Apulia). Early the next year Pope Celestine died and the cardinals elected a young and energetic canon lawyer, Lothar of Segni, a nobleman on his father's side and on his mother's a member of the great Roman family the Scotti. He was crowned as Pope Innocent III in February 1198 and set out to re-establish his authority throughout the traditional papal lands. There was a great popular movement against the feudal northerners heralded by the Troubadors. People as far south as the Duchy of Spoleto began to sing subversive songs in Provençal - Francis, now aged 12, doubtless among them. As we have seen the old Duke Conrad surrendered peacefully to the papal legates and had his castle on the *Rocca* torn down by the populace. It was like the fall of the Berlin Wall. >From their little castles dotted around the German nobles watched uneasily and their family houses in the town, grouped around the cathedral of San Rufino, began to have a beleaguered feel. Later that year came the visit of the Lord Pope and free elections. Consuls were henceforth elected annually as chief executives of the commune, judges in penal affairs, responsible for applying the

detailed statutes that we have already mentioned. The first consul to be so elected in 1198 was called Bonus Baro. We shall hear more of him later.

We shall also discuss presently the way in which the diminishing power of the nobles, particularly the lords of Sassorosso on the far side of Mount Subasio, led to war between Assisi and Perugia. Most of the nobles of Assisi took refuge in Perugia with their families, among them the lords of Coriano, the five sons of Offreduccio. The youngest Favaroni and his wife Ortolana had three daughters Agnes, Beatrice and Clare who were to become followers of Francis - as we heard at our last meeting. Only a few young nobles remained loyal to the Commune of Assisi - one of them no doubt the friend with whom Francis set out abortively towards Apulia a couple of years later. Clearly there was a streak of the social climber in Francis. All through his life he was acutely aware of being the son of a merchant. If the young nobles elected him as King of the Revels they did so largely because the King was obliged to pay. As Thomas of Celano says Francis was easy and affable, forever making himself foolish because of it. How very familiar; the son of a *nouveau riche* businessman trying to get himself accepted in society by throwing his father's money around and never quite making the grade. (Remember Sabatier's comment on the Apulia fiasco.). For Pietro of course this was an additional source of exasperation. The local nobility were dinosaurs, like today's hereditary peers, fighting a losing battle to keep their privileges against the forces of economic and political progress. He could have bought most of them up outright. And they were pale shadows of the real knights and nobles whom he had seen and admired in Champagne. He must have felt that he knew more about chivalry than these poor creatures did. How maddening for him that his son, by the mere accident of birth, was compelled to toady to these folk

To what extent did Francis serve as peacemaker in this poisoned atmosphere? By bridging the divide in his own way I suppose he did his best. And later, of course, he attracted followers. In 1208 aged 26, having worked on the restoration of San Damiano and the ruined chapel of San Pietro della Spina further down the hill, followed by work on Santa Maria della Angeli, he suddenly changed tack and adopted the new vocation of penitent. A first anonymous follower soon dropped away but then came Bernard of Quintavalle, *Messer Bernard of Quintavalle di Berandello*, not a nobleman exactly but a rich and respected man, presumably a

merchant. After seeking advice from scripture it was agreed that Bernard's whole estate was to be sold up and all the proceeds given to the poor. It must have been the greatest sensation in Assisi since the *Rocca* fortress came down. The next few followers to join were of no great standing: a certain Peter and a peasant called Giles. Francis took Giles on a spring tour (taking neither staff nor wallet nor bread nor money) and on their return found three more followers in the woods: Fra Sabbatino, Fra Morico the Small and Fra Giovanni di Capella. By autumn, with the hot weather over, all were despatched in pairs around the country, Bernard and his companion getting as far as Florence. That winter five more men joined, making twelve. The newcomers, were, Giovanni, Barbaro, Bernardo di Vigilante Philip the Long and Angelo Tancredi. The last two were of noble birth

The years 1209 to 1219 were the sunlit years of the Franciscan movement. After a complicated series of transactions between Emperor and Pope a period of peace broke out in Central Italy. The civil war between Perugia and Assisi finally fizzled out and the last of the exiled nobles returned, including the Lords of Sassorosso. A pact was declared between the nobles and the people that ended the period of bitter class warfare. The nobles recognised that the Commune had become a force that was entitled to speak for all citizens, themselves included. The merchant class admitted that the attempt to abolish feudalism root and branch had failed. Token concession was made to the imperial authority. And in this regard Francis' leadership cannot be faulted. It was the period during which the Order was growing exponentially. Francis was wildly eccentric but never exclusive. He was ferociously penitent but unfailingly cheerful withal. Above all he never condemned. He pitied, scolded and once or twice expelled. But he never condemned any class of people as a class, showing in this way a tolerance rare in any century. Alone of the great men of his time he never condemned anyone as an Antichrist. And within the Order he hated above all backbiting and malicious gossip, as countless stories relate. As a peacemaker in the troubled social scene of that time Francis was probably in a class by himself.

Assisi and Perugia.

Here we must go back nine years to the year 1200. The problem began, as I said, with the nobles, and the tolls which they charged on merchandise passing through their lands. It is said that tolls had to be paid sixteen times between crossing the Po and arriving at the borders of the Duchy of Spoleto. On top of this there were the tolls payable to the castles within the county of Assisi. While the days of their power were clearly numbered the more powerful nobles, like the Lords of Sassorosso, clung bitterly to their privileges. Their castle dominated the road from the county boundary to Spello and they lived handsomely on the tolls. Having seen the citizens of Assisi tear down the great imperial castle on the *Rocca* they realised that they needed protection. And so they turned to Perugia, followed by other aristocrats in the countryside. The Perugians, traditional rivals of Assisi, having tamed their own feudal lords, were happy enough to offer sanctuary to rebellious nobles from the next door commune who offered them fresh territory and alliances. In January 1200 most of the family from Sassorosso sought sanctuary in Perugia and the communal army of Assisi duly razed their abandoned castle. The consuls of Perugia issued an ultimatum requiring Assisi to rebuild Sassorosso and pay compensation. Assisi contemptuously refused. So there was war.

It is easy to deride the little wars between Italian city states. But it makes more sense to fight for a town and people one knows at first hand than for abstract notions like nation or empire. For almost two years, as I have said, the war was a matter of raids, crop burnings, destruction of towers and reprisals. Perugia made a pact with Foligno, Assisi with Nocera and Spello. Most of the nobles of Assisi and their families had by now taken refuge in Perugia. Pressure grew on both sides for decisive action. The day came in the autumn of 1202. Bells rang. Mass was celebrated. The army of Assisi assembled outside the cathedral and marched behind their banners through the Roman gate. With their allies from Nocera and Spello their army must have been 2000 strong. It was a short march down the hill and then some ten miles across the plain to the Tiber, border between the two communes. There they halted, at a place called Collestrada, among gentle hills where there were a small fort and some hospital buildings. They drew up in battle order, with crossbowmen by the hospital buildings and the cavalry in ambush. Francis, armed and mounted by his father, rode proudly with them. In the early afternoon the Perugian army crossed the shallow river and attacked. No clear account of the battle survives but it was a ferocious affair, not least when the exiled

lords of Assisi got to grips with their own commoner townsfolk. Two of the lords of Sassorosso were killed but the Perugians won the greatest victory in living memory. Anticipating Enoch Powell, the waters of the Tiber were literally flowing with blood. Once the Assisi line had broken the Perugians pursued the foot soldiers of Assisi back across the plain till dark. But the men on horseback, as usual in those days, were captured where possible and put into dungeons below the palace of the *Capitano del Popolo*.

Francis, as we know, was to spend a whole year there before being ransomed. As we have also seen this defeat and its aftermath, however traumatic, did not blunt his enthusiasm for war, and as soon as he had regained strength he was off again. Or at least he set off towards an intended war! We do not know what part he had played in the battle, how many Perugians he wounded or killed. He never spoke of it afterwards or, if he did, it was censored by pious biographers. He had seen war at its nastiest but never, in his later teachings, expressed any distaste for soldiering and bloodshed. Quite the reverse in fact, he developed an obsession, as we shall see, with the crusades. Of all people in the world, the only ones for whom he later showed positive distaste were the Perugians. It is easy to see why.

All this is speculation. Let me offer you some more. I mentioned that the first man to be elected Consul of Assisi, in 1198, was called Bonus Baro. This same man, as ex-consul, led the army of Assisi at the battle of Collestrada four years later. So much is known. The intriguing thing is this. Fra Salimbene, who received Fra. Elias into the order, wrote '*et vocabatur in saeculo Bonusbaro*'. Could they be one and the same? Indeed, if Elias was Francis' commanding officer in the battle of Collestrada it would explain much that is otherwise very difficult to understand - notably the extraordinary trust and even devotion that Francis accorded to a man so utterly different to himself. One can come to have just this sort of hero-worshipping admiration for one's commander in battle, even when he leads you into disaster! There is no proof, of course. Elias did not die till 1253, so he would have been a very young consul in 1198. But I like to think it was he!

The Papacy and the Empire

There is no time and luckily no need to follow all the twists and turns of the disputes between Pope and Emperor. We have already seen how Walter of Brienne, ostensibly crusading but actually fighting to regain his wife's territory in the south of Italy, had attracted Francis to join him in Apulia in 1204 - with the most bathetic consequences. In 1205 Walter of Brienne was killed in Apulia by Dipold, a German count, and Assisi, like other Italian cities, having previously accepted papal jurisdiction now trimmed in favour of the Empire. At that time, apart from the infant Frederick, there were two rival adult would-be emperors, Otto of Brunswick and Philip of Swabia. In Italy Philip (former governor of Tuscany) had the more support. On 29 July 1205 his *Curia* offered Assisi a 'diploma' whereby they undertook to make no separate pact with Perugia, to recognise the Consuls, not to rebuild the imperial castle on the *Rocca*, and to revoke the privileges of the self-exiled nobles who remained in Perugia. This last clause was a winner and the nobles, realising that their game was up, came trickling back into Assisi. (This included the Coriano clan with eleven-year old Clare and her two sisters). But the Pope was not to take this lying down. In June 1207, Innocent moved up to Viterbo and summoned a great Diet there of all the notables of the Duchy of Spoleto. The aim was to re-establish his authority; and such was his prestige that it would have been unthinkable for the Consuls of Assisi to refuse. So the pendulum swung back again and Francis, for one, will have been pleased. He was, at least in spirit, Walter of Brienne's man, never a great admirer of Germans or imperialists. Of course he played no part in any of these political manoeuvres, and turned with even greater enthusiasm to his church-restoring. Perhaps he now began to see it as symbolic. Certainly he was always to proclaim the utmost faith and loyalty to mother church thereafter. The power struggle between pope and emperor was to continue for centuries more. It cropped up at our last meeting, for example, when we heard of S. Clare seeing off some Sicilian Arab soldiers of the Emperor Frederick II. I have not read that Francis, for all his partiality for the papal side, played any further role in these disputes, whether as peacemaker or persuader. But certainly his appetite for crusading was undiminished. To this we now turn.

The papacy and heretics.

We all struggle with the problem of evil. How can God, who is all good, all loving and all powerful, have created the world in which there is so much indisputable evil? There are and always have been two opposing principles - one of light which we call God and one of darkness which we call the Devil. The God of light has created the soul of man and heaven for man to live in. The lord of darkness has imprisoned man's soul in its earthly flesh and in the world. Redemption is the process whereby the element of light is freed from the bondage of darkness. At what stage in that short recital did you spot that I had wandered into heresy? Quite late, perhaps, because there is a lot of sense in it. The dualist heresy - so-called - was first erected into a system by Mani of Ctesiphon in the third century AD, whose followers were accordingly called Manichaeans. Augustine of Hippo (no less) under the influence of Cicero, was a convinced Manichaean throughout his twenties and converted to catholicism only at age 32. Dualist sects flourished in the Eastern Empire and then, after the year 1000, began spreading in the west. They came under a score of different forms and names. Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th century founder of the Cistercians and a ferocious opponent of heresy, found them entrenched at Albi (near Toulouse) and called them Albigensians. (This was where, last week, a similar heresy came to light when a Macdonald's employee was sacked for giving free hamburgers to a beggar!) In northern France the heretics were known by a much ruder name. Gradually one term came to embrace them all - Cathars, from the Greek word καθαροί meaning pure. There was a strong streak of world- and self-denial in Catharism. Their ideal was perfect chastity. Death was a joyous release that might even, in certain circumstances, be hastened by self-imposed fasting. The highest ranking Cathars, were initiated by a ritual which had much in common with Christian sacraments but involved renouncing Rome and the priesthood, in open defiance of the church. In the early 1100s Catharism had flourished all over western Europe but in Francis' young days it was concentrated mainly in the south of France and in Italy north of Rome. The southernmost Cathar 'church' was in the duchy of Spoleto.

Things came to a head in Toulouse in about 1210. Barons from northern France started to harry the supposedly Albigensian subjects of Count Raymond. The Count himself was excommunicated and outrageous demands were made by Papal legates in exchange for lifting the ban. Raymond refused. Land-greedy 'crusaders' appeared from France, Germany, Lombardy and even Slavonia to suppress the Count, under

the leadership of Simon de Montfort, (father of our Simon). On the side of these 'crusaders' were the Archbishops of Paris and Rouen, the Bishop of Paris and, I am sorry to say S. Dominic. Terrible massacres occurred all over Languedoc. 'Our pilgrims' recorded a chronicler 'with immense pleasure burnt a great number of heretics'. The climax came in the summer of 1212 when King Pedro of Aragon, Count Raymond's brother-in-law, though not himself a Cathar sympathiser, decided to intervene on Count Raymond's side. De Montfort, with 400 squires and 1000 men-at-arms, ambushed the Aragonese and King Pedro was killed. Count Raymond fled to England and then submitted, as did most of his supporters. A peace of exhaustion fell on the whole south. It is said that Dominic, who had assisted at the council of war before the battle, was praying in the church of S. James while it was in progress and had the devotion to the rosary revealed to him!

Where was Francis in all this? Nowhere we may be sure. He had it in mind, as we shall see, to make a pilgrimage to Spain that summer which would have taken him through Toulouse. There can be little doubt that he postponed the journey. Certainly he drew a clear line, where the rest of Christendom did not, between a genuine crusade and land-grabbing persecution dressed up as one. And yet - here I offer one more bit of pure speculation. There were obviously elements of Catharism attractive to Francis. We discussed at the last meeting why he was so hard on his own body - which as we said then is not in the gospel. The Troubadors of Languedoc, inspired by Cathar beliefs, sang of the Lady to whom they had taken their vows, to whom they owed perfect chastity, to whom death alone could in the end unite them - a Lady as symbolic as Francis' Lady Poverty. There were Cathar communities in the Duchy of Spoleto, particularly among the merchants. The traders in wool were known as propagandists of Cathar beliefs. What if Pietro Bernadone were at least an open sympathiser with Catharist teachings? It would explain several puzzles. Why was Pietro, despite his wealth and influence, so unpopular? After the defeat at Collestrada the people of Assisi sought to replace the consuls with a *Podestà*, a sort of temporary dictator to repair their fortunes. In 1204 they elected one Gerardo de Gilberto, a Cathar. The Pope, of course, would have none of this, excommunicated the whole town, and quickly forced Gherardo's resignation. Maybe Pietro was one of the fifty leading citizens who had supported the *Podestà* and was made to eat humble pie, thus putting an end to any political pretensions he may have had. His name never appears in the documents of the

Commune thereafter, although Pica's does. Let's make one more guess. Pietro, whatever else, was a strong personality. Francis no doubt longed for his approval while detesting much that he stood for. Clearly Francis repudiated the Cathars' mysterious ritual and churchly top-hamper, declaring fervently for Rome and anxious to protect his brothers from all taint of heresy. But he may well have caught from his father something of the austerity and, if you like, 'spirituality' of the Cathars' lifestyle. Like him they believed not only in chastity but in simplicity and poverty - and they were pacifists. Like them, at the end, he welcomed Sister Death. Certainly, for whatever reason, Francis sought only peace with the Cathars and never showed the least desire to convert them.

Crusades against Islam.

We now come finally to what one might call genuine crusades, those against the Infidel. They began with Pope Urban's call to arms at the Council of Clermont in 1095. They ended with the final sacking of Acre and all other Frankish settlements in Palestine two hundred years later. They started as badly as possible with the massacre of Jews in the Rhineland - Spier, Worms, Mainz, Cologne, Trier and Metz - by bands of apocalyptic extremists, loose followers of Peter the Hermit. Nearly 100 years later, when Francis was only five, Saladin routed the crusaders at the Horns of Hattin and recaptured Jerusalem - not a building was looted and no person harmed. In 1190 when Francis was eight, Frederick Barbarossa's attempted crusade came to an ignominious end when the great man drowned while bathing in the River Göksu in Southern Turkey. In April 1203, when Francis was still a prisoner of war in Perugia, the Fourth Crusade, so far from going anywhere near the Holy Land, made common cause with the Venetians to sack the great Greek Christian city of Constantinople. We have already discussed the so-called crusade against the Albigensians in the next decade. This was also the time of pathetic tales of a childrens' crusade which ended with the sale of five ship-loads into slavery in North Africa. In 1215 Pope Innocent, his crusading zeal undiminished, called the fourth Lateran council - the greatest reforming council of the Middle Ages - which did much to shape the Catholic church as it is to-day. Laws were passed defining heresy and laying down rules of crusading. Innocent appeared in the scarlet robes of a Byzantine Emperor.

It is hard at this distance of time to understand what was really going on. It is quite clear that, despite all setbacks, the crusading movement was more vigorous than ever during our period, the early 1200s. As a devotional activity and as an expression of raw religious aggression it had kept its momentum and there was no lack of enthusiasts. The individual crusader was a man undergoing penance, a pilgrim for the good of his own soul. The spiritual benefits did not depend on success or failure of the campaign; that was in God's hands anyway. A disastrous crusade could still afford plenary indulgence of all sins. What Innocent was determined to provide was better regulation, better organisation and better support. Only the Papacy could provide these. He wanted to reduce the non-combatant elements on crusades, to re-deploy crusaders where necessary and to provide financial backing. The Lateran Council provided for all these things. For instance anyone who equipped a crusader was to receive the same indulgence as if he went on crusade himself. Innocent's successor, Honorius III needed above all an organisational structure to carry the crusading message to the people of Europe. For the most part he had to rely on the local diocesan hierarchy and Papal legates. But Ugolino, Cardinal Protector of the Friars Minor, was elected Pope Gregory IX the year after Francis died. In preaching the crusade this Pope found a new instrument to his hand - the mendicant orders of friars. The Dominicans and Franciscans were the first religious orders systematically trained in preaching. They were organised in a strict hierarchy of provinces, answerable to a minister-general and annual chapter, under rules of obedience, quite independent of the diocesan structure. Their forces were highly mobile. This made them ideal instruments of controlled propaganda. An English Dominican, Walter of S. Martin was sent by the Pope as preacher to the crusading army which embarked for the Holy Land in 1228. In 1235 the papal letter *Quantum nos urgeat* addressed to the Franciscans, allowed them to grant between ten and thirty days indulgence to anyone who attended their crusade sermons twice a week and to absolve from excommunication people guilty of arson or violence against clerics if they took the cross. The first Franciscan crusade preacher known by name was William of Cordelle, a Frenchman. From 1235 he was put in charge of campaign propaganda and finance for the crusading army in the French Kingdom and he accompanied that army to the Holy Land in 1239-1240. Gregory employed the mendicant friars widely and regularly for these purposes from the 1230s onwards. The evidence for this is now overwhelming. Nor need we supposed that the friars

took up this task unwillingly or were repelled by its unspiritual nature. For an illustration let's turn back to Bernard of Clairvaux, in the previous century, great spiritual revivalist and founder of the Cistercians. Listen to this letter from Bernard to the English people in which he commends the second crusade:

"Your land is well known to be rich in young and vigorous men. ... Gird yourselves therefore like men and take up arms against with joy and with zeal for your Christian name, in order to 'take vengeance on the heathen and curb the nations'. ... Now, O mighty soldiers, O men of war, you have a cause for which you can fight without danger to your souls; a cause in which to conquer is glorious and for which to die is gain".

The message is quite clear. In the view of no less a spiritual giant than S. Bernard, to take up the sword, under the banner of the Cross, for the slaughter of the Infidel, was a Christian activity of the highest spiritual merit. In our eyes the whole concept of indulgences seems unbearably superstitious. To the medieval Christian it was a royal road to heaven.

Francis was a man of his time. With this as background we can now examine in more detail his insatiable thirst for crusading. He set out on Crusade five times, four of them ending in humiliating failure. The first, his abortive expedition southwards to Apulia, we have already dealt with. The second I have touched on. After the disastrous show-down with his father, Francis traced a cross in chalk on the farm-hand's tunic that the bishop had given him to hide his nakedness. Perhaps this was simply bravado. Perhaps he had some vague idea of getting to Venice and on by ship. Anyway he went off on foot, into the winter woods, singing gaily in French. And there a band of robbers found him, beat him up and left him in a ditch. He sought shelter in a nearby monastery, probably the priory of Valfabbrica. He got some bread and a blanket to sleep in, stayed a few days till the weather improved, and then made his way to Gubbio - once a great crusading town that had sent a thousand crossbowmen to join Peter the Hermit. There, about 20 miles north of Assisi, he stopped again. A friend, Count Spadalunga gave him some rather better clothes. And after a while, astonishingly, he drifted home.

His third excursion was to the East. The year was 1212. The childrens' crusade was on everyone's lips. The great growth of the friars Minor had begun. The nobleman Rufino di Offreduccio had joined the order and sworn obedience, to be followed soon by his much more beautiful and talented cousin Clare. Clare was safely settled in San Damiano and Francis was off - intending to join John of Brienne (brother of the defunct Walter) recently crowned king of Jerusalem at Tyre. According to Thomas of Celano Francis was 'burning intensely with the desire for holy martyrdom'. Certainly he had itchy feet. According to the sketchy accounts, he found a ship and set off alone. Giles, on a similar mission at the same time, seems to have got through. Not so Francis. His ship was blown off course and forced to winter off Slavonia (now the Dalmatian coast). He could find no ship going on to Cyprus or Acre that year and, having no money either, stowed away on a ship returning to Ancona. With a companion whom he had apparently enrolled in Dalmatia, he moved off slowly northwards through the region of Le Marche. When he got to Urbino he found a banquet in progress celebrating the marriage of one of the Count of Montefeltro's sons. Climbing a little wall he preached - of the sufferings of Holy martyrs - so beautifully that it was 'as if it were the angel of God who spoke'. A great noble of Tuscany, Messer Orlando of Chuisi in Casentino, was so impressed that after some soul searching, he offered to give Francis a mountain. Although Francis never allowed his brothers to own property, he accepted for himself. La Verna was duly conveyed to him on 8 May 1213. So the expedition ended well, if not in the crusading sense Francis had intended, and certainly not with martyrdom.

His fourth crusading expedition was to the west, probably in 1214 because in the previous year, as we have seen, he would have tangled with the Albigensian imbroglio in Toulouse, What had happened was this. The Moorish overlord in Spain (Mohammed ibn Yakub al Mansur, known as the 'Miramolin') had gone on the offensive and brought over an enormous army from Morocco - supposedly half a million foot and nearly a hundred thousand horse. Three Christian kings, Pedro of Aragon, Sancho of Navarre and Alfonso of Castile appealed to the Pope for help and Innocent on 23 May 1212 duly declared a new crusade in Spain. On 16th July, at Las Navas de Tolosa near Jaen, the three kings, against all odds, won a terrific victory. Francis was thrilled, comparing this success with the legendary deeds of Charlemagne, Roland and Oliver at Roncesvalles 450 years before. As Francis told

his brothers, according to the *Fioretti*, 'all paladins and valiant knights who were mighty in battle pressed the infidels to death ... and by way of conclusion died fighting for the faith of Christ'. It is clear enough where Francis' sympathies lay. 'The prize of martyrdom attracted him so strongly' says the *Three Companions* 'that the thought of dying for Christ meant more to him than any merit he might earn by the practice of virtue'. 'And so', says Thomas of Celano, 'after a not very long time he started on a journey toward Morocco to preach the gospel of Christ to Miramolin and his people'. He was to walk through Languedoc and Provence and then across the north of Spain from Navarre into Leon, Castile and Galicia. In short he made, not for Morocco at all, but for Santiago de Compostela. If he started after the Pentecost Chapter of 1214, the 'crusade' in Toulouse being over, he could just have made it to Santiago in time for the feast of the apostle. One of the S. James's revered at Santiago is known as the Moor-slayer. That was as close to the action as Francis got.

And this time he was not alone. Bernard of Quintavalle went with him but was left behind en route to look after a sick beggar. Maseo was with him, tall, handsome, a favourite of Francis' but hardly a heavyweight. Probably Elias was also there. Elias was very close to Francis by now, devoted to him personally and equally passionate about Crusading. He was also exceptionally energetic and able; from now on Francis came to rely on him more and more. Perhaps it was Elias who persuaded Francis to call off the Moorish part of the expedition. Thomas of Celano says God 'withstood him to his face' ... and 'recalled him from the journey he had begun by a prolonged illness'. Whatever the cause he lost his taste for martyrdom. The trip to Spain had become another abortive sortie and when the little party got back to the valley of Spoleto they went into a hermitage and spent much time in prayer.

Allowing for a slow journey back after the illness, we have now arrived at 1215. We know that Francis was in the woods below Assisi for the Pentecost chapter that year. On 15th July the young Emperor Frederick II, now 20, having defeated all rivals in a whirlwind campaign, was crowned on Charlemagne's throne at Aix-la-Chapelle and solemnly took the Cross. On 1st November the Lateran Council opened and the fifth crusade was under way. By now Francis was on his most successful preaching tour ever – to Narni and Rieti in the South, to Arezzo and 'his' mountain to the north and to Ancona in the east. He was met with huge

enthusiasm, while the heretics (i.e. the Cathars) 'slipped secretly away'. According to Masseo even the birds responded. It was around this time that Peter of Catania, a canon of the cathedral, joined the order, followed by Leonardo di Gislerio, one of the Lords of Sassorosso, whose castle had now been restored. His daughter Filippa joined Clare at San Damiano. This was the most renowned noble family of Assisi.

No one can have been more excited about the new crusade than Francis. This time he was determined not to fail. But things got off to a shaky start. In the spring of 1216 Innocent came to Perugia and there, quite unexpectedly, died so he never saw his last crusade. But the ones he had seen and launched probably killed more people than all the earlier ones put together. The difference was that not one of his crusaders entered Muslim territory and most of his victims had been Christian! The cardinals elected an other-worldly and pious old man, Cencio Savelli of Rome. He took the name Honorius III and was quick to proclaim that the crusade would go ahead just the same. In fact much of the enthusiasm for it had died.

Jacques de Vitry, learned canon of Oignies, had been appointed by Pope Innocent as bishop-elect of Acre and was present in Perugia while all this was going on. In October 1216 he wrote a notable letter, describing the Friars Minor and the Second Order in very flattering terms. It is the first extant eye-witness account by a non-member of the Order and therefore of great historical importance. The most interesting thing is that it makes no mention whatever of Francis himself. Giordano of Giano, who joined about this time, agrees that he only began to appreciate Francis after his death. Fra. Salimbene, a later chronicler, hardly refers to him at all. Chapter was all-important. There is a strange sense of semi-detachment about Francis from this time on. It reminds one of Br. Douglas in our own time.

The crusaders duly assembled, and set sail for the Holy Land on 1st June 1217. At the Pentecost Chapter that year it was decided to send groups of friars to four christian countries: France, Germany, Hungary and the Holy Land (Outremer.) It bears out what I have just said about Francis and the Order that it was Elias who was chosen to lead the party to Outremer. Francis, of all apparently useless places to go, chose France. Nor did he get there, or anywhere near it. Having reached Florence he had an inconclusive argument with Cardinal Ugolino and turned back, leaving Pacificus to lead the party. (Pacificus had been a *jongleur*, noted for bawdy songs, and was probably French - maybe the first non-Italian to join the order). The

Pentecost Chapter of 1218 was not a very happy one. Francis had to confront a proposal by cardinal Ugolino and S. Dominic that the Franciscans and Dominicans should merge. Probably it was a good idea, and subsequent history would have been very different if it had gone through. But Francis indignantly rejected it: 'God will confound you through your prudence and learning'. End of argument. Another sadness was the pitiful end of the expeditions to Germany and Hungary. Some of the friars had been stripped naked, some had been imprisoned, some were set upon with dogs and staves. One brother lost his breeches 15 times. Both missions were complete fiascos.

Nor had things gone much better in the Holy Land. Elias and the brothers probably sailed from Ancona to Spalato (on the Dalmatian coast) where galleys provided by the Doge of Venice had assembled. The host then sailed east and by the autumn sundry kings, princes, dukes, counts and barons were assembled in tents outside the walled city of Acre. The masters of the Hospitallers, Templars and Teutonic knights joined them. And on 3rd November, under the leadership of King Andrew of Hungary, they marched over the Bridge of the Daughters of Jacob across the Jordan, but not towards Jerusalem. They went up onto the Golan heights and across the vast plains towards Damascus, but the Saracens refused to meet them in pitched battle. A seige of the great Saracen fortress on Mount Tabor equally failed as did a raid up the Bekaa valley. Still the Saracens would not fight. The crusaders ran out of food and again turned back. After Christmas King Andrew got fed up and left for home, together with King Hugh of Cyprus. The latter fell ill at Tripoli and died. It was a very bad start to 1218. John of Brienne set about re-fortifying Caesarea on the coast and building a great fortress on Mount Carmel. In April, however, prospects brightened with the arrival of shiploads of crusaders from the Low Countries and from Germany. They now had a serviceable fleet. John of Brienne called a council of war and they decided to do exactly what Richard the Lion Heart had long ago proposed, to use their sea power and move against Egypt.

To begin with this plan worked well. During that summer the crusaders established themselves in Egypt, where the Sultan had not expected them. Rather than going for Alexandria they besieged Damietta, a heavily fortified city on the eastern limb of the Nile delta, and by August they had taken the port area. At this point another leader arrived, appointed directly by the pope, a Spanish cardinal, overbearing and tactless, Pelagius of Santa Lucia. There was continual squabbling with John of Brienne. But by

the spring of 1219 reinforcements had arrived from France and England. The Sultan of Egypt, Melek-al-Kamil, had been forced to leave the city and camp at Fariskur, six miles further up the Nile. He was by then making overtures of peace, offering to surrender Jerusalem and pay the crusaders tribute. At the Pentecost chapter of 1219 it was agreed to send groups of friars to Provence and Aquitaine, to Tunis, and to the Moors. Another group was to be sent to the Holy Land, this time led by Francis himself. A month later he was at Ancona, ready to embark. He had with him some of the most gifted friars, Peter of Catania, and two noblemen well versed in war - Leonardo, late lord of Sassorosso and Illuminatio of Rieti. They disembarked in mid-July at Acre and there on the quay to meet and brief them was Elias.

We do not know how Elias had spent the intervening two years. Certainly he had studied crusader architecture, to judge by the great Basilica at Assisi that he built immediately after Francis' death. He will have studied the Saracens closely, to judge from his later correspondence with such as the Caliph of Baghdad. Obviously he briefed Francis on the situation at Damietta. Acre was a highly successful settlement and a lovely city, but Francis did not linger. In late July or early August he sailed on to Damietta. Illuminato, went with him, probably Leonardo and Peter, possibly Elias. Before they arrived there had been two failed assaults on Damietta proper – on 20th July and 6th August – and many had been killed including some important commanders. Soon after that, in mid August, Francis arrived. It was the long awaited climax of his many crusading enterprises. He was now nearly 40.

High drama was to follow. On 29th August, with Pelagius and John of Brienne still at odds over strategy, the common soldiers, sick of waiting, made a more or less spontaneous attack. According to Thomas of Celano, Francis had a presentiment that this assault would also fail (as well he might) and tried to warn the soldiers off. But their own commanders could not restrain them and nor did Francis. The result was near disaster. The Italians fled. Only a rally led by the English earls (Chester, Derby, Winchester and Arundel) prevented complete collapse. Over 3,400 crusaders were killed. Francis could not bear to watch and sent his 'companion' to observe and report back. It was a far cry from his early relish of close combat.

The Sultan was equally off-balance. There was famine in Egypt, quarrelling in Syria and above all the threat that Frederick II would finally arrive. At the end of September he offered generous terms of settlement. Jerusalem, central Palestine

and Galilee would be restored. The Sultan would pay for the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt, a portion of the True Cross would be handed over, and twenty noble Saracens surrendered as hostages. In return the Sultan asked for a thirty-year truce. Of course this offer ought to have been accepted. But Pelagius, backed by the Pope, the Emperor, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Italians, refused. Less than a week later, on 5th November, he was proved right in immediate practice when Damietta fell. It had been under siege for eighteen months. Of its 80,000 inhabitants less than 3000 survived the siege and sack of whom only 100 were healthy. There was a winter truce. Frederick never arrived. Next summer Pelagius marched his army towards Cairo and camped in the flood plain of the Nile. Kamil breached the flood barriers and the crusader army was engulfed. Pelagius found a boat and escaped taking most of the food and medical supplies. The Sultan was generous. He told the wreck of the Crusade that they could have a five-year truce, their prisoners back and the True Cross if they would only go away. So the crusaders lost Damietta after all. And when Kamil sent for the True Cross to hand it over no one could find it!

Reverting to Francis: according to the *Estoire d'Eracles* he 'came to the army at Damietta and there did much good, and remained there until the city was taken. He saw the sin and evil that began to increase among the soldiers and was displeased by it. For this reason he left there, stayed for a while in Syria, and then returned to his own land'. It seems likely that he sailed from Egypt to Acre by the spring crossing of 1220 and on from Acre to Venice in the Autumn. What he did in the meantime no one knows. Visiting Jerusalem would have been pointless – the place was virtually a ghost town, while sporadic fighting was going on all over Galilee. In the *Earlier Rule* which Francis completed after his return from Egypt, Chapter 16 deals with 'Those going among the Saracens', he says that one way of conducting oneself is 'to avoid quarrels or disputes and be subject to every human creature for God's sake, so bearing witness to the fact that they are Christians'. Perhaps in the summer of 1220 Francis was living quietly in Syria trying to do exactly that – seeking some understanding between Christianity and Islam which still eludes us to this day.

We turn now to the *pièce de résistance*, Francis' encounter with Kamil. We do not know whether it took place before or after the fall of Damietta. It might have been during the winter truce that followed, even as late as early 1220. We know that Pelagius only reluctantly agreed to his going. We know that Francis, accompanied

only by Illuminatio, set out for the Sultan's camp at Fariskur. After some rough handling by the sentries they were finally brought into Kamil's presence. The Sultan thought at first that they were would-be deserters from the Christian army. There was a steady flow of such renegade Christians who were always well treated by the Sultan. But Francis announced bluntly that neither he nor Illuminatio would ever become Muslims. They were messengers sent from God to save the Sultan's soul. What was Francis really up to? He can hardly have taken seriously the thought that he would convert the Sultan. To go seeking martyrdom would have been regarded in those days as quite correct and indeed highly meritorious. But one cannot believe that Francis would have been so discourteous as to seek audience of the Sultan only to have the man commit deadly sin by killing him. The group of Friars Minor who had been sent to Morocco did in the end achieve martyrdom but only by shouting in public that Mohammed was an impostor and telling the Miramolin that the Koran was a pack of lies. There is no indication whatever that Francis ever did or would behave like that. Is it tempting to see Francis' programme in our own terms as an attempted 'Peace Process'. But, anachronism apart, Kamil had already offered peace.

There are of course various accounts in the biographies. One followed a familiar *topos* or standard story line which crops up again and again during the Middle Ages, beginning with the *Chanson de Roland*, one of Francis' favourites. A Christian envoy to a Muslim court tries to forge an alliance on the basis that the Muslim ruler converts with his whole people. The envoy, in turn, is tempted by rich gifts to betray his fellow Christians which he sometimes agrees to, sometimes refuses. Thomas of Celano, Julian of Speyer and Henry of Avranches all chose variants of this framework. There is the story of Kamil testing Francis by inviting him to walk over a carpet decorated with crosses - which Francis agreed to on the grounds that thieves were also crucified and it was only the True Cross that counted. He did not mind treading on the symbol of brigands. His sense of humour was plainly intact. There is the story of his temptation by a beautiful houri - only to have him ask her to join him in bed on the fire! There is the story that Francis proposed to the Sultan a trial by fire. The *Qadi* and the *Ulema* refused - not we may suppose through cowardice but simply because it was against Islamic Law. Then Francis is said to have proposed undergoing trial by fire by himself alone. This was extremely rash. One Peter Bartholomew, discoverer of the Holy Lance during the first crusade, having tried exactly that, came out horribly burned and died twelve days later. If Francis had done that, not only would he have incurred a hideous death but there

was the awful possibility that, to the Muslims at least, the truth of Islam would have been confirmed. Kamil did not want to be responsible, even indirectly, for Francis' immolation and tactfully refused, saying he feared a revolt among his own people.

Melek-el-Kamil was a notably civilised person. Nephew of Saladin and almost exactly the same age as Francis, he had been knighted as a boy by King Richard the Lion Heart. He was on excellent terms with the Venetians and allowed some 3000 Europeans to trade in Egypt. He loved the poetry of the great Sufi mystic Omar-ibn-al-Farid. He had welcomed Francis to his camp, enjoyed a series of amiable discussions and sent him back not only un-martyred but virtually unmarked. Francis, an honoured guest at the Sultan's court, charismatic exponent of the Christian faith, had been allowed to talk but was totally unable to convince. So there was really nothing for Francis and Illuminato to do but return to the crusaders' camp. Kamil may well have offered gold, silver and silken garments but Francis refused, accepting only a security guard. His last throw had ended again in anticlimax and failure.

What are we to make of this effort as a peacemaker? I do not think Francis was in any way opposed to the crusades as such. He was the Pope's man and crusades were the papal enterprise par excellence. In one seemingly authentic account, derived apparently by Bonaventure from Illuminato, Francis tells the Sultan:

“If your eye causes you scandal tear it out and throw it away’. Through this God wanted to teach us that no fellow human being ...could ever be so dear to us that we would not have to eradicate him if he tried to keep us away from the faith.... And because of this it is just that that the Christians invade you and the land you occupy because you blaspheme the name of Christ”.

This was quite an orthodox position. If Muslims hindered the practice and progress of the Christian faith in their own lands this constituted an insult to the Christian people and, according to canon law, allowed Christians to wage just war in order to punish the offence. I do not think that Francis was a pacifist, even at this stage of his life opposed to the use of military force in a good cause. Augustine of Hippo had allowed it as had the Decretals of Gratian. If the Pope decreed that the slaughter of Saracens was a good cause then be it so. I doubt if, in the latter half of his life, Francis seriously contemplated taking up the sword himself again. Like the early Christians he saw himself as having a higher calling: to pray for his enemies and the

conversion of the Sultan. But like most Christians in all ages, when something he held dear was threatened, then he would countenance force if necessary to prevent it.

Conclusion.

I will go further. I do not myself believe that peace-making was ever uppermost in Francis mind - except in one particular sense. He habitually gave 'God give you peace' as a blessing. And in the Middle Ages, peace surely was a blessing, as it is today. But what Francis fervently prayed for was peace among the brethren. And here again of course he failed. He was summoned back from Syria in the late summer of 1220 by Stephen, a lay friar, who came to report the outcome of that year's Pentecost Chapter. The news was bad. A new constitution had been introduced. It forbade the eating of meat on any occasion and of milk products at most. Trivial as this seems to us, it was anathema to Francis; a direct and unmistakable step towards Catharisation of the Order. Fra Filippo had obtained from Ugolino and the *Curia* privileges for the Poor Clares that Francis had explicitly opposed. Fra Giovanni of Campello had set up a splinter group. Someone had spread the rumour that Francis was dead. There had been a virtual *coup d'état*. He set off instantly for home only to resign the leadership as soon as he had been welcomed back. 'From today' he told the next chapter 'I am dead for you. But here is Peter of Catania whom you and I will obey'. He was disillusioned with crusading; with the Papacy in the person of Pelagius; with the Emperor who promised to lead the Crusade and never did; uncertain in his own mind (perhaps) of the need to convert the Muslims, whom he had grown to admire; and lost to the cause of martyrdom. Now his Order had moved away from him. He spent two years, with Caesar of Speyer, writing his *Second Rule* only to have it virtually rejected by Ugolino. Peter of Catania died. Elias became, till Francis' death in 1226, vicar-general and real ruler of the Order. Francis himself, like Bernard and Giles, became more and more reclusive, indeed became a saint. His role from then on was to pray for peace rather than to ensue it.

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