Peace of Francis of Assisi

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I. Introduction

Since the beginning of human history, there has been no ceasing of conflict, dispute, and war. Humans have sought after peace and reconciliation, but the establishment of this vision has seemed far away. In particular, transitional periods of history have been marked by the eruption of a great deal of change and conflict. The Italian society of the early 13th century where St. Francis of Assisi lived was filled with lots of social mutations and disagreements. Enormous changes in society such as population growth, increasing numbers of cities, the development of a money economy, and social bipolarization of wealth occurred, which increased social competition and conflict through power struggles.

The 20th century was called the age of the extremes with conflict and violence in the abundance. The 21st century in which we live is also an era of more change, conflict, and violence than ever before. The real situation of 21st century Korea where we live gives us a lens to look at the problems of conflicts and violence. Increasing conflicts and violence between the South and the North, economic bipolarization between the rich and the poor, the conflict of generations, and religious conflicts between Protestantism and other religions reflect the present reality of Korea. Human suffering exists in the midst of the reality of these conflicts and violence. In this regard, I am convinced of the need for peace and reconciliation.

In times of social disorder and conflicts, Francis showed the religious way of peace and reconciliation. Francis in his life demonstrated peace and reconciliation as an alternative to conflict and violence. Despite human aspirations, the actualization of peace in intra-human and inter-human dimensions is not easy. Social peace starts from human inner peace. If we

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do not possess the heart of peace, it is very difficult to establish peaceful relationships with others and nonviolent communities. Francis himself emphasized this great peace within individual hearts before he proclaimed peace for people. However, the problem is that the struggle between the symbolic and the diabolic continues within human hearts. If human aggressive instincts, fears, and destructive desires are not dissolved within human minds, human beings cannot co-exist in peace and solve the problems of conflicts and violence. If we assume that Francis was a person who had peace and joy, then, we can ask that how he could convert his negative mind of aggression and destruction into positive mind of love and peace? From this perspective of peace, I will explore the meaning and formative process of Francis’s peace in this article. This article will deal with his efforts for peace in society, but, in particular, it will concentrate on his formation of peace: how did he become a person of peace? That is, how did his religious experiences or his penitential suffering effect his formation of peace? Methodologically, I will search for the meaning of Francis’s peace from the perspective of word study based on the materials which combines Francis’ own writings with the biographical tradition, and partly from the psychological perspective. Finally, I will articulate the pastoral implications of Francis’ peace in the contemporary context: how can we retrieve Francis’ peace to individual lives and communities in the present context? Francis’s life and spirit of peace in a society filled with conflict and violence will show significant spiritual wisdom for many Christians who currently seek peace and reconciliation.

II. Examining the Tradition

1. Francis’ Own Writing

Francis addresses who true peacemakers are in The Admonition XV. True peacemakers are those “who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace of spirit and body out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Francis figures out peace from the two perspectives of love of

1) The need of the hierarchy of various texts has been raised in the study of Francis of Assisi. Because many biographies have the nature of hagiography, Francis’s own writings have the central place and establish the important criteria evaluating various texts. Francis’s own writings play a role of the parameter of interpreting Francis’s religious experiences. See Giovanni Miccoli, “Francis of Assisi’s Christian Proposal,” Greyfriars Review 3 (1989), 125-172.