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"Daoist" Saint Francis and the Daoist Sage: The Practice of Humility in Peacemaking

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Abstract
This article presents both Saint Francis and the Daoist Sage as models for contemporary challenges for peacemaking. Their practice of humility is proposed not only as a focal factor in the peacemaker's mindset, but also as instrumental in the operational process of peacemaking itself. While not exploring the Israel-Palestine war in depth, nor providing practical studies of conflicts in Asia, the underlying, causal, and ongoing patterns of binarities are addressed. It is here that each "front" sees its own cause as righteous, justified by each one's sacred narratives, and sustained by force.

Keywords
peace-making, Daoism, Saint Francis, binarity

Introduction

Globally, almost daily, we are confronted with wars and escalating conflicts, nationally as well as internationally. Conflicting parties, in a classical, binary model of alterity and conflict,[1] are each looking for allies to provide them with ever more soldiers, money, and weapons in order that their cause, which always is the right *cause,* might *win*. If peacemaking initiatives are ventured at all, maybe even to reach a cease-fire, let alone

1 For a profound and detailed discussion cf.: B. Scherer, "Atypical Bodies: Queer Feminist and Buddhist Perspectives," in D. Bolt and R. McRuer, eds., *A Cultural History of Disability* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); B. Scherer, "For the benefit of all…: Towards Reading the Dharma for Practices of Diversity and Celebration," in Juewei Shi, Stephen Hill, and Suzanne Franzway, *Cultivating Compassion: Going beyond Crises* (New York: Peter Lang, 2023).

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peace, they are usually made from a superior position of strength and power, dictating conditions in a vertical sense.

Geographically, in the West the seemingly never-ending wars of Israel/Palestine and Ukraine/Russia are raging. In the East we see conflicts in Myanmar and potential wars between China and Taiwan, while East and West themselves are competing for military, technological, and economic dominance, with a dangerous potential for future global warfare.

While we see ever more of the same, ever more self-repeating binarities of "us" as good and "them"[2] as bad, ever more attempts to manipulate parties into short-lived ceasefires or fragile peace, it is precisely the East and the West themselves[3] that have been offering constructive solutions and alternatives to classical conflict management—for centuries. These alternatives are to be found within Eastern and Western theological and religious traditions, Christianity on the one hand, and classical Daoism on the other. Both offer clear and well-defined models of peacemaking, characterized by the practice of humility as it is personalized in the Christian monk Saint Francis, and in the classical Daoist concept of The Sage.

This article presents both Saint Francis and the Daoist Sage as models for contemporary challenges for peacemaking. Their practice of humility will be proposed not only as a focal factor in the peacemaker's mindset, but also as instrumental in the operational process of peacemaking itself. While neither exploring the Israel-Palestine war in depth nor providing practical studies of conflicts in Asia, I wish to address the underlying causal and ongoing patterns of binarities. It is here that each "front" sees its own cause as righteous, justified by each one's sacred narratives, and sustained by force.

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2 Already the white infant discriminates between "familiar" and "strange" colored faces; cf. A.S. Baron and M.R. Banaji, "The Development of Implicit Attitudes: Evidence ofRace Evaluations from Ages 6 to 10 and Adulthood," *Psychological Science* 17, no. 1 (2006); J. Kubota, M. Banaji, and E. Phelps, "The Neuroscience of Race," *Nature Neuroscience* 15 (2012); N.A. Sugden and A.R. Marquis, "Meta-analytic Review of the Development of Face Discrimination in Infancy: Face Race, Face Gender, Infant Age, and Methodology Moderate Face Discrimination," *Psychological Bulletin* 143, no. 11 (2017).

3 For a discussion of hermeneutical *caveats* cf. L. Komjathy, *The Daoist Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); M. Tophoff, *Harmony and Reconciliation in Christianity and Daoism: Alleviating Identity-based Suffering* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2025).

Saint Francis: A Way of Humility

Francis of Assisi was born as Giovanni di Pietro di Bernadone in 1181, the son of a noble and rich silk merchant, educated in affluence. A lover of pleasure and adventure, he joined an army against the neighboring city of Perugia. Disillusioned, however, after the experience of killings and suffering, he retired in solitude, started to care for the ill, and began preaching on humility, poverty, peace, and love as the way of an *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ). Supported by Pope Innocent III, he established the Franciscan order. He joined the Fifth Crusade in 1212 and went to the Holy Land, where he was received by the Muslim Sultan al-Kamil. The Franciscan monks stayed in Egypt within the Muslim community without interruption. Francis died in 1226.

Pope Gregory IX canonized him in 1228. Pope John Paul II declared him the patron saint of ecology in 1979. In 2015 Pope Francis, in *Laudato sí* (Praise Be to You), presented him as the example par excellence of care of the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.

Brother Thomas of Celano (1185-1260) and three Franciscan monks, "The Three Companions" (around 1246), were Saint Francis's earliest biographers. They knew him personally and wrote highly idealized hagiographies. This, of course, was no coincidence. Their work, after all, was commissioned by Pope Gregory IX and by prominent, highly placed ministers of the church, to be used for ecclesiastical, promotional purposes. Francis was instrumentalized as "an outstanding example of holy deeds,"[4] "to promote spiritual renewal within the life of the Church"[5] (Armstrong, 15), and "to increase the joy amongst the Christians of his day over Francis's canonization."[6]

These biographies, designed to elevate Francis to a powerful and influential saint, certainly did not fail to impress their readers, as they abound with miracles and wondrous deeds. So it seems necessary in a way to deconstruct Francis's biography, clearing away magic and miracle, since his deeds per se speak a powerful enough language and certainly are

4 R. Armstrong et al., eds., *The Francis Trilogy of Thomas of Celano* (New York: New City Press, 2004), 13.

5 Armstrong, *The Francis Trilogy,* 15.

6 Armstrong, *The Francis Trilogy,* 16.

not in need of supernatural extras. These hagiographies of Francis do, in fact, resemble those hagiographies written a millennium earlier about the Jewish rabbi Jesus of Nazareth by the four evangelists. Their narratives, too, had been designed to impress readers by a multitude of miracles performed by a supernatural authority figure, the Son of God. In reality, the life and deeds of Jesus, and of Francis of Assisi as well, as they focus on humility and *caritas* (charity), have continued to inspire people of all walks of life. Perceiving and appreciating Jesus as a moral and behavioral role model does not require miracles or faith in God.[7]

Meanwhile, in this respect it is interesting to note that neo-Platonic faith in a transcendental higher being was a guiding principle of Francis's renowned biographer Thomas of Celano in his presentation of Saint Francis. He describes the life and work of Saint Francis through a neo-Platonic lens.[8] Within the neo-Platonic tradition, Plotinus (205-270) refers to "The One" as the very first principle, characterized by neither intellect nor form.[9] It is the source of the multitudes of things. Plotinus himself is described by his pupil Porphyry as "an ideal Sage, possessing every virtue, a paradigm of philosophical perfection, living the divine life."[10] The One, according to Plotinus, is not an object of knowledge, "it is beyond even the highest form of knowledge – it is ineffable." However, "The One manifests and is present *in us* (my italics) to the extent that its causal power affects us."[11] It is the source of all tthings andcould be interpreted as an alternative for the Christian notion of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing). From this source derive Soul and Intellect. Soul, according to Plotinus, refers to all that vitalizes the material world. Intellect, as a unity of thinking, provides the knowledge of Soul.

Saint Francis was a man "without knowledge," certainly without knowledge of neo-Platonism, which stretches from Plotinus to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and far beyond. In the neo-Platonic, hagiographic view

7 Tophoff, *Harmony and Reconciliation*, passim.

8 W.J. Speelman et al., *Om de hele wereld, inleiding in de franciscaanse spiritualiteit* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2010), 151.

9 D.J. O'Meara, "Plotinus," in L. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 309.

10 O'Meara, "Plotinus," 202.

11 O'Meara, "Plotinus," 318. As I will show later in this article, "The One" has definite similarities with what is called in classical Daoism "The Dao."

of Thomas of Celano, however, Francis's love for creation is interpreted as love for the almighty Creator. According to him, Saint Francis praises God in every creature.

Saint Francis, in contrast, focuses not primarily on a creator, but on creation as such. Speelman[12] clearly shows how Francis uses his *senses* and "dares to love nature such as it presents itself to him." Francis represents a holistic vision of an intimate and horizontal connection with human and nonhuman beings. According to Speelman[13] all living beings, including animals, elements, and plants, are not *pointers* toward a divine reality, which would be somewhere else; rather, "they are in themselves the token of this divine reality."[14]

According to Francis, paradise is right here. It is exemplified in whatever surrounds us, trees, animals, humans. All these are called brothers and sisters. Here, love is reciprocal: "Even irrational creatures recognized his feeling of piety towards them, and sensed the sweetness of his love."[15] Francis expresses his profound sense of connection with other beings in his lyrical Canticle of Brother Sun[16] as *one* family of brothers and sisters: "Sister Water, she is very beautiful and humble, and precious, and pure," and "Sister Mother Earth feeds us and rules us." It is the earth which is the provider, not an almighty transcendence. A radical horizontality, the very basis for contact, is proposed here. Living beings, as Speelman[17] shows, speak to Francis "by being that which they are originally...and perceive him as he is." Without academic knowledge, without being aware of a neo-Platonic tradition, Francis profoundly and intuitively understands the essence of The One as a fundamental connectedness with all beings.

Hebrew Scriptures[18] depict a paradise that is forever lost. Paradise *ends* because of Adam and Eve's desire for the apple of wisdom. Even though

12 Speelman, *Om de hele wereld*, 150.

13 Speelman, *Om de hele wereld*, 121.

14 Speelman, *Om de hele wereld*, 127.

15 Armstrong, *The Francis Trilogy*, 75.

16 "The Canticle of the Sun (Canticle of the Creatures)," in M. Faloci Pulignani, ed., *Il Cantico del Sole di San Francisco di Assisi*, trans. B. Barret (Foligna: Tipografia di Pieter Sgariglia, 1888).

17 Speelman, *Om de hele wereld*, 127.

18 *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

an authoritarian, anthropocentric God has explicitly prohibited this, Adam and Eve do taste the apple. Consequently, they are punished for their rebellion and driven out of paradise. Francis, in stark contrast to Genesis, reintroduces paradise in the actuality of the present. He accomplishes this not by a supersessionist Christian position, looking down on other beings, nor by elevating humans and lowering nonhuman species, but instead by taking a position of equality and hospitality. From a position of humility, appreciation of other beings becomes possible. Francis, however, does not identify with them. He appreciates all beings as different in their singularities, and yet as equal. This position of humility and appreciation can be operationally illustrated by Francis's peacemaking efforts during the Crusades in the Holy Land.

Saint Francis: A Practice of Peacemaking

Already by the end of the eleventh century, a long time before Francis's involvement in Christian colonialist warfare, Pope Urbanus II (1035-1099) started a first crusade against the Muslims and likewise against the Jews who had over centuries settled in Europe and were accused of having crucified Jesus. The pope acted traditionally within a classical model of binarity, the dichotomy of "our" right and "their" wrong, a model, indeed, which has been embraced by conflicting parties worldwide until today. The triad "I-me-mine" is familiar, the "other" is unfamiliar, different, and, as such, potentially threatening. Exemplified in Christian supersessionism, in othering, the Christian empire looked down on "the heathen." In the holy cause against Muslims and Jews it was completely justified to use violence and bloodshed. Soldiers and weapons were blessed by the Church of Rome. The first crusade, as well as the succeeding endless wars and socio-economic conflicts during the next two hundred years, had as an exalted goal to recapture and to free the Holy Land, the land of Israel and Palestine, where the Jewish rabbi Jesus was born. Freeing, in this context, included ethnic cleansing of the local populace. That land was located between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river, and it was - and today still is - claimed by Muslims and Jews alike. Both founded their claims on the narratives of the Hebrew Bible on the one hand, and on the Quoran on the other. According the the Jews, the land was promised and given to them

by the God of Abraham, the same one, indeed, who was the foundation for the Islamic and Christian creed alike.

It was in 1213 that Pope Innocent III (1161-1216) called for a new crusade against the Saracens, the Arab Muslims. Like nearly all of his predecessors, and identical with the strategies of religious and military leaders of present times, his was a strategy of power and violence built on alterity, on the paradigm "us" versus "them," where the others are "wolves" and we are "sheep." The wolves had to be eradicated by military force. Innocent's stance reflects the atonement model of *Christus Victor (Christ the Victor)*. Here, Christ is present as a triumphing Winner. Christus Victor "is triumphing over the evil powers of the world."[19] Francis joined the crusade with a number of his brothers. Their motivation to join, however, was diametrically opposed to that of Innocent III. While the latter's goal was to recapture and possess the Holy Land through military means, Francis stood for peace, for personal poverty and humility. His message to the brothers in the Franciscan order who accompanied him, was crystal clear: Saint Francis "exhorted the brethren that they should judge no man, nor think scorn of them. They should reverence them as 'brothers,'[20] and he expressed the wish that 'all men be stirred up through your gentleness unto peace, goodwill, and mercy.'" [21] Without either publicly or officially announcing their goal of peacemaking with the nonbelievers, Francis and his brothers, without any property of their own, started quietly to live in humility and gentleness amid the Palestine community, sharing their lives with them. Placing himself on the same level as the Muslim "others," Francis celebrates "The One" as the source of *all* beings. The awareness of a fundamental equality defines his peacemaking, not from a vertical, dominating perspective, but from a perspective of humility.

Francis and his brothers never engaged in confrontation or anger. They did not officially oppose the might of the church. Undoubtedly, they met with hostility and suspicion, but they offered no resistance against those who wished them evil, giving what was asked of them. Possibly, Francis earned criticism from the pope and his dignitaries because of his

19 V.-M. Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). 299.

20 E.G. Salter, *The Legend of Saint Francis, by The Three Companions* (support.creativemedia.io.1905). 90.

21 Salter, *The Legend*, 91.

stance vis-à-vis violence and bloodshed for "a just cause." Francis himself, however, abstained from potential confrontation; instead he practiced not supersessionism but empathic participation in the life of Muslims, not as others but as equals. The basis for Francis's peacemaking is the awareness that we all share paradise without binary discrimination, not from a basis of power or supremacy but from a basic stance of humility, appreciation, and tolerance, as expressed in the Christian Scriptures by the apostle John: "In my father's house there are many dwelling places" (John 14:2). Francis does not even try to convince the Muslims of *his* truth. Instead, he and his brothers are able to tolerate and to appreciate difference, without wanting to change the other party.

As Francis of Assisi as a role model, the Daoist Sage will be presented here likewise in his endeavors for peacemaking.

The Sage's Way of Humility

Chinese teachings of classical, religious Daoism, first transferred orally, were compiled by such legendary authors as Laozi (sixth century BCE?) and Zhuangzi (369-286 BCE) during the Zhou dynasty (around 1028-221 BCE), which was marked by a long period of wars within the Chinese empire: the Warring States (475-221 BCE). The pseudohistorical Laozi allegedly wrote the *Daode jing*[22] ("Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power"), while the *Zhuangzi*[23] ("The Book of Master Zhuang") was authored by Zhuangzi. These scriptures were mainly destined for the emperor and for high-placed military and court officials. They were presented as advice for the social, economic, and military ruling of the state. The Sage (Chin. *Sheng jen*, translated "the Wise" or "the Holy" person) is a focal concept in classical Daoism. Interpreted by Thomas,[24] the Sage might be conceived as an archetype. Rather than defining him in a Jungian, prescientific way however, the Sage is presented in this article as a role model for

22 In this article, this Chinese text is used in the translation of M. Lafargue, *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). Hereafter cited in the text as *Dao*.

23 For the *Zhuangzi*, the classical translation of B.Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), is used. Hereafter cited in the text as *Zhu*.

24 M. Thomas, *In the Shadows of the Dao: Laozi, the Sage, and the Daodejing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).139.

peacemaking. "A Sage," in Komjathy's[25] beautiful definition, "is one who listens to the sonorous patterns of the universe, and whose spiritual insights may be listened to by others."

In sharp contrast to the Abrahamic religions, classical Daoism does not refer to an almighty God as a *creator mundi* (the world's creator). It does not know a hierarchical structure as expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures (Gn 1:1–2:10). The central concept in Daoism is the *Dao*. Its literal meaning is "road" or "way." In fact it is ineffable and nameless. Laozi defines it as "The Tao that can be told is not the invariant Tao. Nameless, it is the source of the ten thousands of things."[26] Mythologically, Daoist cosmogony refers mysteriously to the "abode of all the hidden essences" (*Dao*, 94), to the Dao, the nameless source, the Mother of all of existence.

It is interesting to note the correspondence between the Daoist concept of the Dao and the neo-Platonic concept of The One. Both are defined as the source of the multitudes or the ten thousands of things. Both can not be known. Only the person "without knowledge" can grasp it (*Dao*, 94): "The Dao that can be told is not the invariant Tao (...) nameless (...) mysterious."[27] Out of the Source, everything emerges within an eveever-changingiverse. The universe indeed is in constant flux while it operates in a harmony of interrelated forces, *yin* and *yang,* without hierarchies. Here, the individual person is without any privileges. As with the other "ten thousands of things," the human is intimately connected with everything of which he is nothing more than a part. As in the peacemaking processes of Saint Francis, the concept of a foundational "The One" as an awareness of a profound interconnectedness of all beings allows for a mindset not of dominance or violent interfering, but rather of an attitude of humility, wonder, and appreciation of difference.

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25 L. Komjathy, *Daoism, a Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 81.

26 Lafargue, *The Tao*, 94. The nameless Dao appears likewise in the *Treasure Store Treatise*, an early fifth-century Chinese Buddhist text, as "the One" or "Buddha nature" which permeates all of existence: "[Buddha-nature] fills everything: it completely suffuses the grass and the trees and fully pervades even the ants...there is nothing that exists that does not embody the One," in R.H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 246.

27 Lafargue, *The Tao*, 94.

According to Komjathy,[28] the Dao is ultimately unknowable, but "it may be experienced, because Dao pervades the world of being." The Dao is transcendent and immanent at the same time, as Schipper[29] points out. The neo-Platonic concept of The One, which is beyond being and nonbeing, may be likened to the Dao, the creative source of the universe. Both refer to a circular model in which everything returns to the source from which it emanates. As a form of self-cultivation, The One and the Dao may be profoundly experienced during the stillness of apophatic meditation.[30] The *Daodejing* (*Dao*, 14) asks: "Who is able, as muddy water, by stilling to slowly become clear?"

Harmony is achieved by noninterference in the dynamic nature of the ten thousands of things, and by following the natural course of whatever presents itself.[31] Interfering by teleological action, however, directed toward deliberately changing the flow of events, might produce unfavorable results, even disaster. Daoist action is presented in the paradoxical concept of *wu-wei*, which refers to action by non-acting, by not forcing. The preferred Daoist metaphor is water, which, humbly and obeying gravity, always looks for the lowest place. While water is soft and gentle, it is able to overcome the hardest of resistances.

Within the *wu-wei* paradigm, the sage person acts from a position of lowness and humility, as water flowing *with* the course of events, or as the carpenter who follows the grain of the wood. In contrast, the military person goes *against* the other party, ready to confront the enemy. Here, the *Daodejing* is outspoken: "Fine weapons are ill-omened instruments" (*Dao*, 146); "Where troops camp, thorns and brambles grow" (*Dao*, 150). Taking a superior stance of might and of power is strongly advised against. Even the "winning" general has no reason whatsoever to triumph and to boast, since that may set off revenge and further escalation:

28 Komjathy, *Daoism*, 2.

29 K. Schipper, *Taoist Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1993), 3.

30 As experienced by the Christian Desert Fathers during the second and third centuries CE.

31 For an extensive discussion of Daoist "action," cf. L. Komjathy, *The Daoist Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2013); E. Slingerland, *Effortless Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003); Tophoff, *Harmony and Reconciliation*.

"When victorious, he does not think this is a fine thing
Because to think it fine is to delight in slaughtering people (...)
At the slaughter of such masses of men,
He weeps for them, mourning and lamenting.
When victorious in the battle –
He takes his stand as at amourning ceremony" (*Dao*, 146).

The Sage takes a position of humility and puts himself in the last place. Instead of boasting, he observes stillness, and "in stillness [he] takes the low place" (*Dao*, 122). The Sage exerts his constructive influence not by goal-oriented, confrontational behavior but by humility: "The one best at managing people puts himself below them" (*Dao*, 124). The Sage, indeed, lives fully in the world, participating in the marketplace, as he does not consider his position unique. According to the Zhuangzi (*Zhu*, 47), the Sage "merges himself with things... he takes part in the ten thousand things and achieves simplicity in oneness." The Sage does not deliberately aim to produce change. Waiting for the right moment, he allows change to happen. Change is realized not by producing, but by allowing it to happen. Acting by being rather than doing, not telling people what to do, the Sage cherishes stillness and humility. In transcending binarities, he embraces whatever presents itself without a preplanned desire to change the natural cause of the "ten thousands of things," who change of themselves. Whatever the transformation, the Sage "shares his virtue with others...; humbling himself before others, he will never fail to win their support."[32]

The Sage: A Mindset of Peacemaking

Notwithstanding appreciating and not denying difference, The Sage "does not allow likes and dislikes to get in" (*Zhu*, 75). Without judgment, he does not discriminate between good and bad. "He does not ponder or scheme, does not plot for the future. He does not shine" (*Zhu*, 168). The Sage is depicted with a mindset of emptiness, as a "man without a mind" (*Dao*, 130), as a man without knowledge.[33] The sage cultivates a mindset of absence of preset opinions or preconceived judgments. He is good toward those persons who are good, but to those who are not good, he is also

32 Thomas, *In the Shadows*, 270.

33 This runs contrary to the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BCE), where knowledge of rules and rituals stands in high regard.

good, as the *Daodejing* describes (*Dao*, 130), and to those who are honest, he is honest; to those who are not honest, he is also honest.

His mindset for peacemaking is not one of confrontation or competition nor of power and dominance. His actions, empathically, are tailored in ways to benefit others. The Sage cares for others, be it materially or spiritually: "The Sage empties (people's) minds, fills their bellies, weakens their ambitions, strengthens their bones" (*Dao*, 172). The Sage's mindset and behavior correspond to Francis's peacemaking actions. Both share a mistrust of authoritarian, violence-oriented actions, be it by emperors, popes, or high-placed military. Both of their mindsets reflect a profound transcendence of binarities in peacemaking. Both celebrate humility by taking the low place, allowing for what is, within the underlying principle of change.

Where a mindset of discrimination, binarity, and alterity are at the roots of conflict, creating rigid trenches between persons, parties or countries, the Sage transcends but does not deny identities as primal ingredients of peacemaking. He is able to do so since he does not cling to self or to personal fame. The *Zhuangzi* (32) is rather explicit: "The Sage, too, recognizes a 'this,' but a 'this' which is also a 'that.'" Likewise, "a state in which 'this' and 'that' no longer find their opposites, is called the hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly" (*Zhu*, 40).

Allowing and acknowledging differences and singularities, the separateness of identities, and yet, from a different mindset, transcending them, the *Zhuangzi* is explicit and clear: "If you look at things from the point of view of their differences, then there is a liver and a gall. But if you look at them from the point of view of their sameness, then the ten thousand things are all one" (*Zhu*, 69).

Within a mindset of non-action, the Sage responds rather than initiates. Not going against the grain, not using any force at all, he responds in a spirit of harmony, of caring and empathy. The other, though different, is equal in a joint fellowship, where the Sage shares his virtue. He "humbles himself before others, and thus he never fails to win their support" (*Zhu*, 270). By truly being with the other(s), and by doing nothing except standing "alongside others, he can cause them to change" (*Zhu*, 281). Here, likewise, the essence of Saint Francis's peacemaking is perfectly described

as noninterfering, as nonconfrontational, and as responsive instead of initiating.

Conclusion

Built on the foundation of perceived binarities—the split between "me" and "you" or "us" versus "them"—conflicting parties take opposing positions, frequently in the form of rigid trenches. A trench seems to offer safety; it may, however, also become a prison. Once a party decides to leave the trench, that party risks getting killed.

The main reason for building trenches is fear. From a neuropsychological perspective,[34] fear triggers aggression, flight, or panic-stricken rigidity. Fear pertains to being threatened, to the realization that one's needs are not met at all. These needs include the need for personal safety and integrity, the need for freedom, the need for acceptance and acknowledgement. Whenever these needs are seriously threatened, parties look for shelter and thus for pseudosafety.

As an important first step in conflict resolution, the peacemaker/mediator may start with a fine tuning of his own mindset, allowing potential emotions to quiet down, in order to open the way for clear thinking, for letting go of preconceived concepts, and to foster an attitude of openness without judging. Second, the peacemaker creates a connection with each of the parties and, eventually, between both parties involved. This connection must be built on communalities, on shared needs. A receptive and empathic attitude is required in order to understand fully the content of these needs. This becomes possible on a basis of modesty and humility, of "not knowing," which enables the mediator to transcend binarities and to let the awareness of shared needs evolve.

Differences between the positions of parties are welcomed in their validity and respectfully acknowledged. In this way, on both sides safety is generated—the essential ingredient necessary to leave trenches. In reverencing differences, the peacemaker does not confront. Practicing a stance of *non-action*, instead of implementing change from a vertical

34 For a discussion of underlying neuropsychological processes, cf. M. Tophoff, "Quieting the Mind: Aspects of Neuroscience in Reconciliation," *Journal of Mediation and Applied Conflict Analysis* 6, no.1 (2019).

position, he allows changes to happen, flowing with instead of against potential resistances.

It is only when safety is felt by all of the involved, when levels of emotional arousal are low, and when communal needs are shared, only then does a more constructive process of negotiation and problem solving get a chance to develop.

About author

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