

## The Franciscan Movement in the Netherlands: Fifty Years in the Footsteps of Francis and Clare of Assisi

...but let them be meek,  
peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble  
speaking courteously to everyone,  
as is becoming.  
Francis, Rule 3:11

### Introduction: Apparent Dedication

The Franciscan Movement in the Netherlands (1967-) is an association of people who are moved by the evangelical ideal of Francis and Clare of Assisi. Its members are lay and religious people who aim to live a spiritual life characterized by solidarity and simplicity. In this article, I will describe the lively spirituality of the “Franciscaanse Beweging” (FB), a movement that started as a “Franciscan Cooperation” seeking to deepen Franciscan spirituality within religious communities in the 1950s but that changed its course and expanded rapidly after the Second Vatican Council.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The Franciscan Cooperation (Franciscaanse Samenwerking, 1967-) was a network of Franciscan brothers and sisters with their own spiritual Rule who participated in communal activities, social projects, and formation and study retreats. It became the Franciscan Movement in 1992, with members from all three Franciscan orders. On the history of the Franciscan Movement, see Krijn Pansters and Jan Sloom, *De Franciscaanse Beweging. Vijftig jaar in het spoor van Franciscus en Clara van Assisi* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2015). On the Rule of the Third Order, see Jean-François Godet-Calogeras, “The Rule of the Franciscan Third Order,” in *A Companion to Medieval Rules and Customaries*, ed. Krijn Pansters, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2020), forthcoming. On the history of the Third Order, see Gabriele Andreozzi, *Il terzo ordine regolare di san Francesco nella sua storia e nelle sue leggi*, 3 vols. (Rome: Ed. Franciscanum, 1993-1995); Maurice Carmody, *The Franciscan Story* (London: Athena Press, 2008); Mariano D’Alatri, “Origin of the Rule of Nicholas IV: Historical Aspects,” *Greyfriars Review* 4 (1990): 107-118; Kaspar Elm, “Die Entwicklung des Franziskanerordens zwischen dem ersten und letzten Zeugnis des Jakob von Vitry,” in Kaspar Elm, *Vitasfratrum. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Eremiten- und Mendikantenorden des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts. Festgabe zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Dieter Berg, Saxonia Franciscana 5 (Werl: Dietrich-Coelde Verlag, 1994), 173-193; Joseph

In 1987, Gerard Pieter Freeman, staff member of the Franciscan Cooperation, explained in an article on Franciscan spirituality and involvement what he considered to be the true nature of Franciscan spirituality:

One text of Francis, in particular, I find important [...], inspiring, and illuminating. It reads as follows: "As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness, and harmony through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring. In fact, many who seem to us to be members of the devil will yet be disciples of Christ." In this text I find all the elements that I find important for Franciscan spirituality in relation to involvement:

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A. Favazza, *The Order of Penitents: Historical Roots and Pastoral Future* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1988); Gerard Pieter Freeman, "Supra Montem. Die Regel für die Pönitenten von Papst Nikolaus IV (1289)," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 53 (1990): 142-156; *Il Movimento francescano della penitenza nella società medioevale. Atti del 3° Convegno di studi francescani, Padova, 25-26-27 settembre 1979*, ed. Mariano d'Alatri (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1980); *L'Ordine della Penitenza di San Francesco d'Assisi nel secolo XIII. Atti del 1° Convegno di studi francescani Assisi, 3-4-5 luglio 1972*, ed. Oktavian Schmucki (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1973); Atanasio Matanić, "I penitenti francescani dal 1221 (*Memoriale*) al 1289 (*Regola bollata*) principalmente attraverso i loro statuti e le regole," *Collectanea Franciscana* 43 (1973): 41-63; Gilles G. Meersseman, *Dossier de l'Ordre de la Pénitence au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2nd ed. (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1982); Gilles G. Meersseman, *Ordo Fraternalitatis: Confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo*, 3 vols. (Rome: Herder, 1977); Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Raffaele Pazzelli, *Saint Francis and the Third Order: The Franciscan and Pre-Franciscan Penitential Movement* (Quincy: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989); Ingrid Peterson, "The Third Order Tradition of Evangelical Life: A Prophetic Witness to the Whole of the Gospel," in "Vita Evangelica: Essays in Honor of Margaret Carney, OSF," ed. Michael Cusato and Jean-François Godet-Calogeras, *Franciscan Studies* 64 (2006): 435-473; *Prime manifestazioni di vita comunitaria, maschile e femminile, nel movimento francescano della penitenza (1215-1447)*, ed. Raoul Pazzelli and Lino Temperini (Rome: Commissione storica internazionale T.O.R., 1982); Darleen Pryds, *Enduring Presence: Diversity and Authenticity Among the First Generations of Franciscan Laity* (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2018); Prospero Rivi, "Francis of Assisi and the Laity of his Time," *Greyfriars Review* 15 (2001): Supplement; Robert M. Stewart, "De illis qui faciunt penitentiam," *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation*. Bibliotheca Seraphico-Capuccina 39 (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1991); Augustine Thompson, *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125-1325* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); Theodore A. Zaremba, *Franciscan Social Reform: A Study of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis as an Agency of Social Reform According to Certain Papal Documents* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1947).

the care for interiorization, which is necessary for your credibility and endurance. The “strategy” of seduction by friendliness and innocence. The great confidence in the goodness and the resilience of man. And the acknowledgement of your own limited possibilities: Franciscan people do not have to take over the good work of others.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, written in response to the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation,<sup>2</sup> Freeman interprets spirituality as “direction and interior organization of life” and as “life dedicated to the Lord in loving care of the world which needs salvation.”<sup>3</sup> Although Franciscan spirituality is a “one-piece spirituality,” it consists of several essential elements. Among these we find: conversion, modesty, credibility, experientiality, interiority, openness, fraternity, care of one’s tradition, and storytelling. Franciscan spirituality, Freeman concludes, is “a way of seeing and a way of being in the world” in which “nice words and deep thoughts become visible in concrete deeds, in apparent dedication.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gerard Pieter Freeman, “Franciskaanse spiritualiteit en engagement. Notities voor het MCKS-beraad van 11 april 1987,” in: Mady A. Thung *et al.*, *Spiritualiteit en werken aan de toekomst. M.c.k.s.-bijdragen aan het conciliair proces voor gerechtigheid, vrede en het behoud van de schepping* (Driebergen: Multidisciplinair Centrum voor Kerk en Samenleving, 1987), 22-31 (26): “Er is een tekst van Franciscus overgeleverd, die mij [...] van belang lijkt, die mij inspireert en richting geeft. De tekst luidt als volgt: ‘Jullie verkondigen de vrede met de mond; zorg dat die nog sterker leeft in je hart. Daag niemand uit tot boosheid of irritatie; daag iedereen zachtmoedig uit tot vredelievendheid, vriendelijkheid en eendracht. Het is immers onze roeping, wonden te genezen, breuken te helen en dwalenden naar het goede pad terug te roepen. Maar al te vaak denken we van mensen, dat ze bondgenoten van de duivel zijn, terwijl zij later toch leerlingen van Christus worden.’ In deze tekst tref ik bijna alle belangrijke elementen aan, die ik voor franciskaanse spiritualiteit in relatie tot engagement belangrijk vind: de zorg voor verinnerlijking, die nodig is voor je eigen geloofwaardigheid en uithoudingsvermogen. De “strategie” van de verleiding door vriendelijkheid en argeloosheid. Het grote vertrouwen in de goedheid en veerkracht van de mens. En de erkenning van je eigen beperkte mogelijkheden: franciskaanse mensen hoeven niet het goede werk van anderen over te nemen.” The quotation is taken from the *The Legend of the Three Companions*, 58 (<https://www.franciscantradition.org/> (1 July 2019)). On the social involvement of the Franciscan Cooperation, see also Bertulf van Leeuwen, *Armoede bij Franciscus als recht van de armen* (Utrecht: Nederlandse Franciscanen, [1977]); José A. Merino, *Franciskaans manifest voor een betere toekomst* (Haarlem: J.H. Göttemer, 1987); Plony van Veldhoven *et al.*, *Vrede en alle goeds. Vier jaar franciskaanse vredeswacht in Woensdrecht* (Utrecht: Franciskaanse Werkgroep K-750, [1988/1989]).

<sup>2</sup> Promoted by the Dutch Council of Churches (Raad van Kerken) after the Vancouver assembly of the World Council of Churches (1983).

<sup>3</sup> In Dutch: “levensrichting en levensinrichting”; “leven in overgave aan de Heer en tegelijk in liefdevolle zorg voor de wereld die verlossing behoeft.”

<sup>4</sup> Freeman, “Franciskaanse spiritualiteit,” 31. “Iedere spiritualiteit is tegelijk breder en smaller dan maatschappelijk engagement. Spiritualiteit is een wijze van zien, een wijze van

I will take these striking qualifications as a point of departure for my analysis of the spirituality and self-understanding of the Franciscan Movement in the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> How did this “living” spirituality, a spirituality of “direction and interior organization of life,” of “dedication to the Lord and the world,” of “seeing and being in the world,” develop in terms of self-formation and self-awareness, especially against the background of the institutional and spiritual renewal brought by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)?<sup>6</sup> In order to answer this question, I will study the contents of the movement’s monthly magazine *Franciscan Monthly* (*Franciscaans Maandblad*), which first appeared in 1971.<sup>7</sup> This internal communications medium offers a perfect reflection of the concerns, views, and sentiments of the members of this unique Franciscan association throughout these years. Like Freeman (above), the editors of the magazine – central figures in the world of Franciscan spirituality – are particularly dedicated to spiritual credibility, attentive to prevailing attitudes, and open to experiences and stories. Like their authors and readers, they too lead a life “in apparent dedication” that is colored by strong personal choices and experiences. Nevertheless, a closer look at *FM* over a timespan of four – quite different – decennia will offer a good overall impression of the “direction and interior organization of life” of thousands of Franciscan and Franciscan-inspired people. It will show which

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*in de wereld staan* die niet te meten is aan de hand van maatschappelijk nut. Eine Rose ist eine Blum ohne warum. Zou je spiritualiteit moeten meten, dan denk ik eerder aan een (vage?) term als authenticiteit, dan aan het resultaat, het profijt, het nut. Spiritualiteit kan een belangrijke drijfkracht en energiebron zijn om te werken aan maatschappelijke veranderingen. Welbepaalde inzet en engagement kunnen heel goed een testcase zijn voor de echtheid en een oefenschool voor de inzet. *Mooie woorden en diepe gedachten worden slechts zichtbaar in concrete daden, in aanwijsbare toelg.* Maar spiritualiteit put zich niet uit in het bewerken van veranderingen. Zij zijn een belangrijk effect van het verlangen naar een ongeschonden wereld, naar het paradijs, naar het koninkrijk van God op aarde. Maar juist deze grote woorden laten zien, dat een bepaalde maatschappelijke verandering nooit genoeg is. Het verlangen gaat steeds verder, hoger (of moet ik zeggen lager, dieper?) tot het zijn vervulling vindt in de Ene die nu nog ‘ver weg is en ongezien’” [italics KP].

<sup>5</sup> Like Freeman, I follow Theo Zweerman OFM in his definition of spirituality as “organization of life, orientation of life, elan of life” (“levensinrichting, levensoriëntatie, levenselan”). See Theo Zweerman, *Wondbaar en vrijmoedig. Verkenningen in het licht van de spiritualiteit van Franciscus van Assisi*. Annalen van het Thijmgenootschap 89 (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2001), 100-101. See also the definition by member Magdalena Berkens (below): “The experience of reality as being the place where God wants to meet us” (“de beleving van de werkelijkheid als zijnde de plek, waar God ons wil ontmoeten”).

<sup>6</sup> “Living attentively” (“leven met aandacht”) is another striking qualification, used by the Franciscan sisters of Oirschot: *Leven met aandacht. Erfgoed Congregatie Zusters Franciscanessen van Oirschot* (Oirschot: Franciscanessen, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> My analysis concerns *Franciscaans Maandblad* until 2010 as well as its predecessor *Mededelingen* (1967-1971).

practical obstacles had to be overcome and which spiritual experiments developed into enduring practices. It will also show to what extent the main Franciscan message of the 1960s and 1970s differed substantially from that of the newer, less institutionalized groups in the Franciscan Movement of more recent times. Finally, it will show how Franciscan living was considered to be a life of virtues and values, a life characterized by spiritual growth and by a real effort to hold on to ideals.<sup>8</sup>

Like the contents of the magazine itself, a spiritual examination of *Franciscan Monthly* will give a specific view on reality, an incomplete representation that will not always correspond with the concrete experiences of those involved in the movement. In order to give an insight into reality as represented in the monthly magazine, we will deal with four dimensions of Franciscan spirituality in the Franciscan Movement after Vatican II: 1) Francis and Clare as sources of spirituality; 2) Communal life as the place of spirituality; 3) Social themes and commitments; and 4) Individual spiritual progress. These four dimensions – an occasional quartet interpreting the movement's polyphonic song – will capture the spiritual life-in-movement and the shifting experience of spirituality which take shape both collectively and individually and both prospectively ("direction") and retrospectively ("organization").<sup>9</sup> The analysis of this dynamics will also illustrate how consistent and concrete Franciscan spirituality in the Netherlands remains – despite of, or rather because of, its continuing process of renewal.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On Franciscan virtues today, see Krijn Pansters, *Franciscan Virtue: Spiritual Growth and the Virtues in Franciscan Literature and Instruction of the Thirteenth Century*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 161 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 199-202.

<sup>9</sup> Spirituality is prospective when people try to realize a spiritual orientation or spiritual ideal in their own lives; it is retrospective when they try to shape their life (anew) on the basis of such an orientation or ideal. The distinction is made in Florent Cygler, "Pour une approche comparée des normes et de l'organisation de la vie régulière au Moyen Âge: quelques pistes," in *Mittelalterliche Orden und Klöster im Vergleich*, ed. Gert Melville and Anne Müller, Vita regularis. Abhandlungen 34 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), 165-188 (181).

<sup>10</sup> In order to accurately describe the *proprium* of the Dutch Franciscan Movement, a comparison with the post-Vatican developments in other orders and movements would be necessary. The Franciscan Movement in Germany, for example, is in many ways very different. See *Die Franziskanische Bewegung* vol. 2. *Weltweites Engagement heute*, ed. Horst von der Bey and Johannes-Baptist Freyer, Topos Taschenbücher 256 (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1996).

## Dimensions

### 1. *Francis and Clare as Sources of Spirituality*

Already in the 1950s, members of the first orders (Franciscan, Conventual, and Capuchin friars) developed a new interest in the life of Francis.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, they started a study and reflection program on the early Franciscan sources.<sup>12</sup> This raises some important questions with regard to the Franciscan Cooperation in the Netherlands: How did the Franciscan *ressourcement* take shape in broader Franciscan circles in the 1960s, and beyond? Which Franciscan ideals were brought to the attention of a growing public of Franciscan enthusiasts? And what kind of Francis of Assisi, perhaps a radically “new” one, did the brothers and sisters promote?

Undeniably, the attention to the original Franciscan spirituality grew rather slowly after World War II. In 1993, Birgitte Schäpe, one of the movement’s early participants, writes about the post-war Franciscan voyage of discovery:

From kindergarten to high school I went to school with the Franciscan sisters. There, I discovered a way of life, which *afterwards* appeared to correspond to Francis’ way of being in the world. [...] The fact that there had also been a Clare eluded us. Her feast was during the summer break, and I am not sure if it was celebrated at all. At school, they never talked about Francis or Clare. When I entered the same Franciscan congregation, it was not because I was interested in their founder. I chose a congregation that was dedicated to education.<sup>13</sup> [italics KP]

<sup>11</sup> Jan de Kok, *Acht eeuwen Minderbroeders in Nederland. Een oriëntatie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), 560-562. The same in other countries, especially in Germany at the initiative of Kajetan Esser OFM.

<sup>12</sup> De Kok, *Acht eeuwen*, 562-567.

<sup>13</sup> *Franciscaans Maandblad* (hereafter *FM*), Oct 1993, 3. “Vanaf de kleuterschool tot en met de Mulo heb ik onderwijs genoten bij zusters Franciscanessen. Bij hen ontmoette ik een stijl van leven, die *achteraf* overeen bleek te komen met de manier, waarop Franciscus van Assisi door het leven ging [...]. Dat er ook een heilige Clara bestond, ontging ons eigenlijk. Haar feest viel in de grote vakantie, en of het gevierd werd weet ik niet. Zowel over Franciscus als over Clara werd op school nooit gesproken. Toen ik intrad bij die zelfde Franciscanessen was dat beslist niet omdat hun stichter mij boeide. Ik koos voor een onderwijscongregatie” [italics KP]. Furthermore: “From 1977 to 1979, I participated in a course for staff members of the Franciscan Cooperation. Clare came off badly: in the timespan of three years, Hilarion Goossens taught five lessons (on her life, her Rule, her

The movement's spiritual origin was taken for granted and knowledge of the Franciscan sources, in particular the writings of Francis and Clare, was no requirement to enter the Franciscan life. Take, for example, the theological curriculum for "contemplatives of Franciscan spirituality" (*sic*) in 1967-1968, which consisted of: Old Testament exegesis, modern Church history, christology and pneumatology, protestant and ecumenical theology, psychology, the pastoral constitution of the Church, the Rules of the different religious orders and congregations, and public speaking. Another example is the meeting on "the Franciscan deepening of life" in September 1970 in Den Bosch, which concerns itself with liturgical guidance, coursework, formation and retreats, group coaching, inspiration, preaching, witnessing, leading discussion and expression, leisure formation (*sic*), and individual coaching and mental health. Again, the study of the Franciscan sources seems to have been nobody's concern. At the same time, the members of the evaluation meeting of the Franciscan Cooperation in 1970 discuss not only ways to live as a "fraternity in unity" but also ways to "familiarize" Francis and to "keep alive" his person, his legacy, and his spirituality. Fundamental requirements are fraternal mutuality, solidarity with others, peace, simplicity, availability, austerity, attention to the Gospel, and imitation of Christ. These things together constitute "service, sometimes critical," to the Church and to the world.<sup>14</sup>

On fourteen Friday evenings in 1973, about thirty members of the so-called "Comb Group" (*Jutgroep*) come together to read the *Admonitions* of Francis and to see "which experiences and feelings are packed into the text."<sup>15</sup> In 1975 and 1976, the Franciscan reflection days focus on the figure of Francis of Assisi.<sup>16</sup> In Eindhoven, a group starts to study the writings of Clare.<sup>17</sup> The commission K.750, founded with the aim of publishing the Franciscan source texts in Dutch, envisions a "Franciscan library" of twenty primary texts in translation, which will be "the impressive result of hard work."<sup>18</sup> The need for such texts is also apparent at

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testament, and her poverty). Two sisters got two hours each to talk about their personal experience of Clare" ("Van 1977 tot 1979 volgde ik de kadercursus bij de Franciscaanse Samenwerking. Clara kwam er heel bekaaid af: in die drie jaar gaf Hilarion Goossens vijf lessen over haar leven, haar regel, haar testament en over de armoede. Twee Clarissen kregen elk 2 uur om vanuit hun persoonlijke ervaring iets over Clara te vertellen").

<sup>14</sup> *Mededelingen* 18 (1970): 102-103.

<sup>15</sup> *FM* Jan 1974, 9. The "Jutgroep" was as a Franciscan community in the Willem Barendtsstraat in Utrecht (1967-).

<sup>16</sup> *FM* Jun 1975, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *FM* Jun 1975, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *FM* Oct 1976, 6. The commission K.750 was founded on the 750th anniversary of the death of Francis (1976).

the general meeting of 1976, where people ask for basic treatments of the spirituality of Francis. Specialists are needed to spread the knowledge of the foundational writings. According to one participant, “the idea of transmitting [the inspiration of Francis] is the only thing that should occupy our minds.” The question is, if spirituality is a matter of books and studying, or rather if it “starts in the experience of life itself.”<sup>19</sup> The work plan of the Franciscan Cooperation has as the very first new proposal (preceding even the proposal to intensify the meetings within the orders and congregations):

We observe that uncertainty prevails among many – both religious and lay – about Franciscan living, for example as a result of a life that is too active. [...] Would a simple course on “Franciscan spirituality,” possibly within the framework of the reflection activities mentioned under A5, be a convenient first step?<sup>20</sup>

In 1977, the Franciscan Cooperation and the Franciscan Academy offer a three-year management course on “Francis and Franciscan life,” which aims at “making people acquainted with the sources of our spirituality, learning texts, etc...”<sup>21</sup> An historical overview of the Franciscan Cooperation, which appears in September 1977, recounts that the interest in Francis of Assisi has revived in recent years because this saint is an inspiring example for an authentic, modern Franciscan life – for some “a true Franciscan renaissance.”<sup>22</sup> But, asks the reporter, “WHAT DOES FRANCIS MEAN TO YOU?”<sup>23</sup> In connection with the remembrance of the 800th birthday of Francis (in 1982), a new translation of his writ-

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<sup>19</sup> *FM* Jun 1976, 5. “Languid but full consensus that the spirituality should be kept alive” (“Matte maar volledige eenstemmigheid over levend houden van de spiritualiteit”).

<sup>20</sup> *FM* Nov 1976, 9. “We signaleren, dat er bij velen – in kringen van religieuzen maar zeker ook daarbuiten – onduidelijkheid omtrent het franciscaanse leven bestaat, als gevolg van bijvoorbeeld een te actief leven [...]. Is een eenvoudige cursus „franciscaanse spiritualiteit”, mogelijk in het kader van de onder A.5. genoemde bezinningsactiviteiten, hiervoor een eerste stap?” The work plan furthermore states that the starting point should be “the personal, concrete experience of the life – where we stand” (“van onze eigen konkrete levenservaring waar wij staan”; *FM* Nov 1976, 8).

<sup>21</sup> *FM* May 1977, 1. See on the ending of this course: *FM* Oct 1982, 11.

<sup>22</sup> *FM* Sep 1977, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *FM* Aug 1978, 13. See *FM* Aug 1982, 5: “Franciskus heeft mij een helder oog gegeven. Ik zie beter in het evangelie en in de maatschappij dat het om de minsten gaat. Ik zie dat het leuk is om bij de minsten te horen: van de ene kant hoe ik, bezitter, met hen verbonden ben, en van de andere kant hoe ik me ervan los kan maken, van dat bezit, en kan toebehoren aan de minsten.”



ings appears.<sup>24</sup> Based on the latest critical edition by Kajetan Esser OFM, this new translation gives “food for thoughts, dreams, and actions.”<sup>25</sup> The Franciscan sisters of Breda, for example, ask themselves “how we can live up to the fact that Francis undeniably crosses our paths daily.”<sup>26</sup> *Franciscan Monthly* covers the Francis-year extensively and even advertises a new comic book: *Francis of Assisi and the Story of Joyful Poverty*.<sup>27</sup>

On the way to a new Franciscan movement (in the words of the recently appointed staff members and community workers Hans Sevenhoven en Gerard Pieter Freeman), attention now (1982) goes to “the existing interest in Francis and to a new experience of Francis.”<sup>28</sup> In the course of the 1980s, however, the interest in Francis and Clare seems to dwindle and even disappear behind the many social themes and commitments (see below), although the founding figures keep popping up in the contributions. In 1990, the Franciscan Cooperation organizes introductions on five Saturdays to “the changing perception and meaning of Francis throughout the ages.”<sup>29</sup> A series of themes taken from the Clarissan life also starts, with a modern explanation of “apparently obsolete” concepts like seclusion, prayer, obedience, and poverty.<sup>30</sup> Does this series respond to a renewed interest in the contemplative life? And is it, perhaps, a reaction to the many active engagements of the former decade?<sup>31</sup> At any rate, Clare and the contemplative life shortly, sweetly and succinctly become the center of attention. Clare shaped the ideals that she shared with Francis in her own, distinctive way. The contemplative life in her tradition is concerned first and foremost with “finding God everywhere,” even in a monastery in the city center, and prayer means that one tries to relate everything that happens to God.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Henk Loeffen *et al.*, *De geschriften van Franciscus van Assisi* (Haarlem: Gottmer, 1982). Earlier translations of the *Writings* (*Geschriften*) appeared in 1967 and 1976.

<sup>25</sup> *FM* Sep 1981, 3.

<sup>26</sup> *FM* Feb 1982, 15.

<sup>27</sup> *FM* Jan 1982, 11.

<sup>28</sup> *FM* Aug 1982, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *FM* Oct 1990, 6-7. The so called “Five Saturdays” (“Vijf Zaterdagen”), offering further training in Franciscan spirituality, existed since 1980/1981.

<sup>30</sup> *FM* Feb 1990, 6-7. See also the retrospective in *FM* Feb 1991, 9.

<sup>31</sup> In 1994 the members ask themselves: “has the Franciscan involvement come to a dead end?” (*FM* May 1994, 3-5; *FM* Aug 1994, 6-7). 1989 is a pivotal year in this regard: “Because of the fall of the wall and the rise of neo-capitalism, the interest in social involvement disappeared but the interest in spirituality rose,” said Gerard Pieter Freeman in a recent interview. Furthermore: “Important is that women wanted their own voice to be heard, to no longer be the object of male care but to be the subject of their own spirituality.”

<sup>32</sup> *FM* Feb 1990, 6-7; *FM* Apr 1990, 6-7; *FM* Jun 1990, 3-5.

At the 800th birthday of Clare in 1993, *Franciscan Monthly* offers a series of reflections on the spirituality of Clare, written by ten Clarissan sisters.<sup>33</sup> Who is this Clare of Assisi, and how does she manage “to realize almost impossible things in heaven”? the sisters ask themselves.<sup>34</sup> Other activities, like the annual prayer walk and the annual symposium of the Franciscan Study Center, also focus on Clare of Assisi, and new books on Clare and her way of life appear in Dutch.<sup>35</sup> The thematic issue of October 1993 deals with Clare’s relationship with Francis and with Christ: Clare is connected with Francis in the love of the One and together they represent the unity of male and female power.<sup>36</sup> According to Gerard Pieter Freeman, Clare probably always felt that Francis was the one who gave her life purpose and meaning, making her realize her potential, but her dependence was equalled by her high-spiritedness. The crucial question remains: Can Clare be a model for modern people “in the world,” someone to learn from?<sup>37</sup> Francis, in the meantime, remains for many members the source to which to continually return. Time and time again, people want “to get to know him better,” as it is stated on the symposium in Breda in 1992.<sup>38</sup> Or, in the words of Ron Reijbergen in the rubric “Spirituality” in 1995, “to slander with Francis for a while, and anew.”<sup>39</sup>

## 2. *Communal Life as the Place of Spirituality*

The locus of Franciscan spirituality has always been the community, but to what extent has communality also been the focus of Franciscan people in the Netherlands after Vatican II? Are the members of the Franciscan Cooperation truly focused on fraternal living? Are they fully aware of a shared inspiration? The participants of a meeting in 1970 indicate that the goal of the Franciscan Cooperation should primarily be: to get along with each other, to create a home for each other, to give each other the space to become oneself, to value each other, to encourage each

<sup>33</sup> The themes are: sisterhood, prayer, fasting, seclusion, worldly commitment, the Eucharist, relation with the Church, relation with the brothers, spiritual leading, and Clare’s distinctive spirituality.

<sup>34</sup> *FM* Oct 1993, 13.

<sup>35</sup> *FM* Apr 1993, 13; *FM* Jun 1993, 12; *FM* Jan 1994, 13; *FM* Nov 1993, 15: Anton Rotzetter, *Clara van Assisi. De eerste franciscaanse vrouw* (Averbode: Altiora, 1993); Gerard Pieter Freeman, *Bij Clara. Een verhaal over Clara van Assisi en haar levenswijze* (Utrecht: Franciscaanse Samenwerking, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> *FM* Oct 1993, 10.

<sup>37</sup> *FM* Oct 1993, 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> *FM* Oct 1992, 15.

<sup>39</sup> *FM* Jan 1995, 9.

other, to criticize each other when necessary, and to reveal one's true self to each other. These are, after all, the special ingredients of the tradition started by Francis of Assisi.<sup>40</sup> A new Rule that contains these goals is approved by nineteen congregations, published in 1970, and revised in 1972.<sup>41</sup> The same goals also return on the "Rule of life"-days in 1971 ("to find out together what the Rule can mean and should mean in our lives"),<sup>42</sup> the Feast of Francis on October 4th, the travels to Rome and Assisi in 1973, and the annual prayer walk on Pentecost ("to walk together, to eat together, to talk together, to celebrate together, to enjoy nature together, to spend the day together").<sup>43</sup>

Every year, *Franciscan Monthly* offers biblical and other key texts for use on the annual prayer walk, as "thoughts for underway," like those on mercy in 1975, simplicity in 1976, fragility in 1982, calmness in 1985, joy in 1988, or, again, simplicity in 1999. These central themes return in the reports of the event, which aim to give an impression of the mood of the day ("Wow, great icecream in Singraven!"). Furthermore, there are the retreats for the Franciscan religious. In 1972-1973, the participants discuss signs of hope and living the gospel today, evangelical poverty in the texts of the Gospel and Francis, celibacy, community and loneliness, work, and prayer. With every subject, the same questions are asked: How did Jesus and Francis deal with these matters? How did they do it?<sup>44</sup> In 1976, the commission K.750 publishes the book *The Way to Perfect Joy*, intended for retreat leaders and dealing with themes like the Gospel and

<sup>40</sup> *Mededelingen* 18 (1970), 103.

<sup>41</sup> *Franciscaanse leefregel* ([Utrecht, Franciskaanse Samenwerking, ca. 1970]). Fragments are also published in *FM* (Dec 1971, 7; Oct 1972, 4). The first Rule for the Third Order is the *Memoriale propositi* of 1221; the second Rule the *Supra Montem* of 1289; the third Rule stems from the sixteenth century. The Rules of the regular and secular Third Orders were both renewed after the Second Vatican Council. The Dutch regular Third Order had its own Rule for a while; it was replaced with the papal Rule in 1983. The Franciscan Lay Order (Order of Franciscan Seculars) used the new general Rule of 1978. See Pansters and Sloot, *De Franciscaanse Beweging*, 26-31.

<sup>42</sup> *FM* Dec 1971, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Apart from these activities, there were many other days, weekends, and nights around the writings and the Rule. The program of the steering committee of the Franciscan Cooperation mentions as core activities: general meetings, prayer walks, *Franciscan Monthly*, board meetings, retreats, prayer services, cooperation with the lay order, external contacts, and a number of other activities (*FM* Nov 1976, 8-9).

<sup>44</sup> *FM* Aug 1972, 5. In 1973-1974, the themes are: calling, the parable of the weeds, asceticism, and death and resurrection (*FM* Sep 1973, 4); in 1975-1976 the themes are: the pain and joy of Francis' conversion, communicating with God, and going toward perfect joy (*FM* Jun 1975, 4; *FM* Dec 1975, 14-15).

poverty, work, and peace.<sup>45</sup> At the beginning of the 1980s, the weekends of the young “Orientation Movement” (Oriëntatiebeweging) of the Capuchins become very popular. These weekends attract young people who want to get to know Francis, Clare, and their spirituality. Striking is the emphasis on *communal* experience as well as on *doing* things:

FRANCIS OF ASSISI

If this name rings a bell,  
and if you are looking for the same way as his,  
not on your own, but with others,  
who are also seekers  
and who have sometimes found something already;

if you want to be inspired by the things  
that also inspired Francis;  
the Gospel, simplicity, fraternity,  
silence, prayer, simple work,  
doing it instead of talking about it;

if you are attracted  
to living in a religious group,  
here or in a developing country  
of men and women, people just like you,  
and you really want to get acquainted with it:  
Then that is possible!<sup>46</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, the question “What binds us together?” comes up repeatedly, for example at the chapter of St. Michael in the Franciscan monastery in Megen in 1991. Are we a “messy pack,” a “new we,” or rather “novices with a loose chaperon”?<sup>47</sup> Gradually, ques-

<sup>45</sup> FM Feb 1976, 8. *De weg naar de volmaakte vreugde: mogelijkheden voor bezinning ter voorbereiding op de 750e verjaardag van Franciscus' sterven* (Utrecht: Franciscaanse Samenwerking, 1976).

<sup>46</sup> FM Jan 1983, 10; FM Nov 1995, 11. “FRANCISCUS VAN ASSISI. Als die persoon je wat zegt, als je naar een zelfde weg zoekt als hij, niet in je eentje, maar met anderen, die ook zoeken en soms al wat gevonden hebben; als je je door dezelfde dingen wilt laten inspireren als Franciscus; het Evangelie, eenvoud, broederlijkheid, stilte, gebed, eenvoudige arbeid, meer gewoon maar doen, dan praten er over; als je je aangetrokken voelt tot het leven in een religieuze groep, hier of in een ontwikkelingsland van mannen of vrouwen, zomaar mensen zoals jij, en je wilt daar eens serieus mee kennis maken: Dan kan dat!”

<sup>47</sup> FM Nov 1991, 6-7 (in the words of Gerard Pieter Freeman). At the fifteenth birthday of the Orientation Movement, the reporter encounters a “little people” of “chic and socks, avant-garde and extremely modest, talkers and listeners” (FM Mar 1993, 13).

tions on communal awareness disappear into the background as people start to take the new togetherness for granted.<sup>48</sup> The Franciscan Movement simply is “a place for encounter.”<sup>49</sup> At the same time, the contemplative monasteries enjoy an increased interest. The Clarissan sisters of Megen, for example, regularly receive people who want to live with the community for a longer period of time. There is an evident need for contemplation and silence as well as for clarity regarding choice and way of life.<sup>50</sup> The latter is also what people within the Franciscan Movement are looking for: collectively, attentively, searchingly.

### 3. *Social Themes and Commitments*

The contents of *Franciscan Monthly* reveal that from the beginning of the 1970s, a clear shift takes place from an internal and organizational to an external and social orientation: spiritual interconnectedness is experienced more and more with groups and themes outside the Franciscan communities. At the beginning of 1973, when asked what should be the theme of the next general meeting, the members answer: being a church community together in the parish, in pastoral work, in society; work with others toward peace and justice; give shape to a Church-in-connectedness; strengthen faith and look for ways to fight polarization in Church and world; and participate in spiritual activities of lay people.<sup>51</sup> Social themes and reflections on worldly issues enter the stage. During the 1980s, the activities “outside” and “in the world” multiply. They give expression to a grown social commitment and, especially, the wish to translate Franciscan spirituality into relevant action. Peace vigils at military bases and companies, for example, unite contemplation with demonstration (whereby the contemplative often predominates the demonstrative element). Conversely, new people are also drawn to Franciscan spirituality thanks to these activities and actions. The old tradition gains relevance in a new context.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “The question of community has always been a topic, as I remember it, but it became a difficult question and went underground after the period of the Peace Vigil (Vredeswacht), probably because of the general individualization in our society,” said member Ron Reijdsbergen in a recent interview.

<sup>49</sup> *FM* Dec 1998, 13.

<sup>50</sup> *FM* Jan 1993, 6.

<sup>51</sup> *FM* Mar 1973, 7. In 1974, the members wish to make “the Franciscan face” more visible among younger people in Church and society.

<sup>52</sup> The social context was very important: “In hindsight, I think that we followed what was happening in society (peace, environment, ecumenism, dialogue with other

One of the arising issues is *ecology*, later “sustainability” but in 1973 still called “environmental hygiene.”<sup>53</sup> This theme is immediately associated with Francis’ *Canticle of the Creatures*: “When I read how Francis praises the Lord for Sister Mother Earth who takes care of us, I believe that Brother Francis worked and prayed for an equal distribution of the fruits of the earth,” says one member.<sup>54</sup> Such thoughts call for sobriety, in particular: we don’t need a citrus press, a knife sharpener, a mixer, a ladyshave, a hair dryer, a beautiset or electronic toothbrush and we’d better leave the car standing. In January 1975, *Franciscan Monthly* publishes a book review of Eloi Leclerc’s recently appeared *Symbols of Union*, a psycho-philosophical analysis of the *Canticle of the Creatures*.<sup>55</sup> In 1981, commission K.750 presents suggestions for the remembrance of the 800th birthday of Francis to the boards of all Franciscan communities, the central theme being “Francis, brother in a new world.” This theme is deemed fitting because it gives room for discussion of important social themes like environment, lifestyle, sobriety, and communal living.<sup>56</sup> The Franciscan retreat center Stoutenburg now organizes reflection weekends on the consumer society, fraternal living, and the earth, with the aim of “trying together to give concrete form to the model of life of Francis in today’s society.”<sup>57</sup> The “inn-weekend” in the Franciscan monastery in Megen in 1982, called “Brother Sun – Mother Earth,” is concerned with the environmental crisis and energy prices.<sup>58</sup>

In 1983, member Tini Brugge writes a practical spiritual guide to using water.<sup>59</sup> This article is typical of the change that has meanwhile happened from internal perspectives to the treatment of social themes in and of themselves. Water, according to Brugge, has special chemical properties, is the source of life, becomes contaminated (“never flush oil, paint or chemicals and neither pills!”), is much more than drinking water, and its use can be limited. Using (“dealing with”) water is first and foremost “standing still for a while in the rain, listening, feeling the

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religions). We gave it a Franciscan color, or discovered that our Franciscan scope was a perfect addition,” said member Ron Reijnsbergen in a recent interview.

<sup>53</sup> FM Oct 1973, 8.

<sup>54</sup> FM Dec 1973, 6.

<sup>55</sup> FM Jan 1975, 14-15. In Dutch: Eloi Leclerc, *Symbolen van de godservaring. Een analyse van het ‘Zonnelied’ van Franciscus* (Haarlem: Gottmer, 1974).

<sup>56</sup> FM Mar 1981, 15.

<sup>57</sup> FM Jan 1982, 12. The Franciscan retreat center Stoutenburg, a former friary (until 1953 for novitiate), exists since the early 1980s, but only since the early 1990s as a mixed community in the form of an “environmental monastery.”

<sup>58</sup> FM Feb 1982, 15. Later that year, an “inn-weekend” was held on the meaning of freedom (FM Sep 1982, 13).

<sup>59</sup> FM Mar 1983, 9-10.

drops fall on your skin, tasting, knowing the facts, understanding the consequences, and living in such a way that water is and will remain a precious source of life.” This is followed by similar articles on “treating the earth well” and “dealing/playing with fire.”<sup>60</sup> Despite the loving attention paid to Mother Earth, observes member Hans Sevenhoven in the Fall of 1984, the environment has more or less disappeared from view within the Franciscan Movement.<sup>61</sup> He is probably not the only one to observe this, because in 1987 the environmental project “Honoring the Earth” sees the light of day, consisting of a series of five Saturdays on “being a human on earth – the environment and spirituality” together with a presentation on World Environment Day (June 5th).<sup>62</sup> This is the concretization of the three-year Environmental Plan (60.000 guilders / ca. \$ 30.000,-) that the orders and congregations approved in 1986, and whose coordinator is Tini Brugge.<sup>63</sup> We see here a truly Franciscan dynamic at work: the editors of *Franciscan Monthly* want to know if there are environmental activities in the communities which are worth covering, “the board of the Franciscan sisters of Roosendaal has decided to give the environment a prominent place in their congregational activities in the coming years,” and so forth.<sup>64</sup>

The first action of the new environmental group is a silent walk with vigil at the most dangerous crossroads of the Netherlands, in The Hague.<sup>65</sup> This is followed by a new reflection on Francis’ *Canticle of the Creatures*, a garden week at Tiltenberg seminary, further environmental actions, an environmental bulletin, environmental action days, environmental inspirational days, and so called “wood-days” (a returning subject in the following years) as part of the environmental project at retreat center Stoutenburg.<sup>66</sup> An inspirational text in a report on the “wood-week” of 1990 shows that conservation of nature is a spiritual concern:

Earth:  
Working in the field, in the wood  
and digging in the *earth*  
is like clinging

<sup>60</sup> FM Apr 1983, 11-12; FM May 1983, 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> FM May 1985, 4.

<sup>62</sup> FM Jan 1987, 11; FM Feb 1987, 14; FM Apr 1987, 8; FM Jun 1987, 12; FM Sep 1989, 3.

<sup>63</sup> FM Jan 1987, 15. The goal is to “pay attention to Franciscan spirituality and the environment” for three years.

<sup>64</sup> FM Jan 1987, 16.

<sup>65</sup> FM Dec 1987, 3.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, FM Feb 1988, 5; FM Mar 1989, 6; FM Oct 1989, 12; FM Feb 1990, 9; FM Feb 1990, 11; FM Jan 1994, 10; FM Apr 1997, 14.

to mother's warm bosom.

The wind – breath of  
 mother earth  
 Sometimes tailwind  
 then headwind  
 as it goes in life<sup>67</sup>

For Francis of Assisi, such texts would probably have been too metaphorical and too light, but its spiritual inspiration is obvious. In 1991, Franciscan people are invited to adopt a piece of Mother Earth on Earth Day.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, they are called to “treat animals with respect, or else you’ll hurt yourself.”<sup>69</sup> An arbor day is held in Amsterdam (“Give Trees a Chance”) and trees are hugged in Amersfoort.<sup>70</sup> There is a discussion on the Third World and the environment, and a Garden of Praise (Hof van Lof) is opened in the Franciscan monastery in Megen (“every plant has its own story to tell”).<sup>71</sup> The first Stoutenburg environmental lecture takes place in 1999 (“Stoutenburg is no utopian alternative – it is really worth it”) and in 2002, finally, a review appears of *Being a Human on Earth in this Timeframe*, a dissertation by Koos Leemker on Francis and the environment.<sup>72</sup>

Another important, but less central, issue is *poverty*. In May 1974, *Franciscan Monthly* quotes the following words of Roger Schutz, the founding father of the fraternity of Taizé: “The community binds us in the first place with oppressed man,” and: “Contact with the poor saves faith from vagueness and unreality.”<sup>73</sup> According to the editors, this is also programmatic for the Franciscan community, although it is essentially a duty of all human beings “to open their eyes to all forms of “leprosy” from which society suffers today.”<sup>74</sup> In fact, at this very moment

<sup>67</sup> “Aarde: Werken op het land, in het bos en wroeten in de aarde is als je koesteren aan moeders warme schoot. De wind – ademhaling van moeder aarde. Soms de wind in de rug dan weer tegen, zo gaat dat in het leven.”

<sup>68</sup> FM Mar 1991, 12.

<sup>69</sup> FM May 1991, 3. Interview with a member of the commission “Church and animal.” See FM Oct 1998, 10-11 (at the occasion of World Animal Day).

<sup>70</sup> FM Jun 1991, 13; FM May 1992, 10.

<sup>71</sup> FM Oct 1992, 6-7; FM Jun 1998, 3-6.

<sup>72</sup> Koos Leemker, “Een mens te zijn op aarde in deze wereldtijd.” *Een lezing over de bijdrage van de franciscaanse spiritualiteit aan de oplossing van de bedendaagse milieucrisis* (Stoutenburg: Franciscans Milieuproject, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> FM May 1974, 8-9.

<sup>74</sup> FM Jun 1975, 5.



(according to *FM*) friars and sisters are working in colonies in Louisiana, Paraná, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Sapucay, Mogadiscio, Cumura and Sanchong. The theme of poverty returns in the second half of the 1980s, when liberation theology is introduced in various articles. For example, when Leonardo Boff is called to Rome to defend his latest book, people here ask themselves: What kind of theology is Latin-American theology, and what can Franciscan people learn from it?<sup>75</sup>

From 1989, several reflections and reports on Latin America are published: the Brazilian bishop Pedro Casaldáliga speaks about the power of love of Francis; the murdering continues in Brazil; Leonardo Boff puts his theology at the service of the liberating Church, and so forth. The interest in Boff continues and even in 1999, *Franciscan Monthly* reviews Boff's book *La opción-Tierra: la solución para la tierra no cae del cielo*, in which he advances the idea that God lives among men and that something of the lost paradise can be found in and among people, as a flame that can never be extinguished.<sup>76</sup> A small contribution on volunteer work with refugees (1989), a bigger one on the same subject regarding the Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam (1994), and a thematic issue on "Franciscan Spirituality and Refugees" (1995) draw attention to Franciscan volunteer work in the Netherlands.<sup>77</sup> Interviews like those with Jan Scheffers ("the weak die first"), Kees van Vliet ("service to the marginalized and powerless") and Jan Hoeberichts ("to learn from the poor") draw attention to the typically Franciscan contribution to "Europe 92," the program of the European Community to further European integration and overcome economic stagnation ("Maastricht Treaty").<sup>78</sup> Other persons interviewed about attention to the poor are the Indonesian professor Mangun Wijaya ("the religious have the money, but the poor are not welcomed by them"), the Wallonian Capuchin friar Germain Dufour ("as a religious, it is not difficult to stand up for the poor"), an employee of the homeless shelter Poverello in Brussels ("the need for company is as essential as the need for food"), and Dutch bishop Tiny Muskens ("there is more than the seventh commandment only").<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *FM* Jan 1985, 8.

<sup>76</sup> *FM* May 1989, 6-7; *FM* May 1989, 8-9; *FM* Oct 1989, 3; *FM* Jun 1997, 10; *FM* Feb 1999, 8-9. In Dutch: Leonardo Boff, *Aan de rand van de hemel. Verhalen over God en de wereld* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1998).

<sup>77</sup> *FM* Feb 1989, 13; *FM* Mar 1994, 8-9; *FM* Mar 1995.

<sup>78</sup> *FM* Dec 1991, 3-4; *FM* Dec 1991, 6-7.

<sup>79</sup> *FM* Nov 1993, 10-11; *FM* Feb 1994, 3-4; *FM* Aug 1996, 4-6; *FM* Dec 1996, 4-5.

A third important issue, closely connected with the first two, is *peace*.<sup>80</sup> Peace, according to the editors, is the outcome of justice and reconciliation. These, in turn, are achieved by simpleness and simplicity. The Clarissan sisters of Helmond write in 1974:

Thus, true justice will grow in and around us, the desire to do everyone justice in the acknowledgement and acceptance of everyone's uniqueness. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Mat. 5:6). Fulfilment, abundance of divine life will be their share. Without measure, they will receive the Spirit. From this fulness, peace will flourish. "Justice and peace have kissed" (Ps. 84,11). Do not judge others, be mild."<sup>81</sup>

In this meditation, justice and peace are brought into connection with real habits and virtues (justice and righteousness, acknowledgement and acceptance, open-mindedness and mildness). You have "a Christian duty to try to realize justice in your surroundings."<sup>82</sup> Without a doubt, the attention to justice and peace has everything to do with the initiatives of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (1967-) and the Episcopal Synod on "Justice in the World" (1974). Special attention goes to the emancipation of women, notably after the declaration of International Women's Year by the United Nations in 1975 and after the institution of a "National Advisory Committee Emancipation" in the Netherlands. In January 1975, the readers of *Franciscan Monthly* are called to "report what they observe in relation to male/female ratio."<sup>83</sup> In the following years, the theme of emancipation returns only sporadically: in 1986 a work group focuses on women and the female in Franciscan spirituality and the Franciscan Movement; in 1987 Anton Rotzetter publishes a piece on the women's movement; in 1994 the rubric "Spirituality" is devoted to

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<sup>80</sup> The themes of environment, poverty, and peace are regularly combined, for example in the contribution by Hans van Munster OFM on "The source of Francis' life:" Francis is a peacemaker; a man of the environment; and a father of the poor (*FM* Jan 1999, 8-9, rubric "Spirituality"). Another example is the project "Honoring the Earth," which is dedicated to the environment and justice (*FM* Jun 1993, 15).

<sup>81</sup> *FM* Jun 1974, 11. "Zo zal in en rondom ons de ware rechtvaardigheid groeien, het verlangen om ieder recht te laten wedervaren in de erkenning en aanvaard[ing] van zijn eigenheid. „Zalig allen die hongeren en dorsten naar deze gerechtigheid" (Matt. 5,6). Volle verzadiging, overvloed van Goddelijk leven zal hun deel zijn. Zonder mate zullen zij de Geest ontvangen. Uit deze volheid zal de vrede opbloeien. „Gerechtigheid en vrede omhelzen elkaar" (Psalm 84,11). Veroordeel anderen niet te snel, wees mild." See *FM* Dec 1974, 5: "Vrede... de vrucht van gerechtigheid en verzoening!"

<sup>82</sup> *FM* Aug 1974, 13.

<sup>83</sup> *FM* Jan 1975, 13.

female spirituality; in 1995 there are five Saturdays on female images in Franciscan spirituality; and in 1998 there is a course on the spirituality of women from Clare to the present.<sup>84</sup>

In 1978, *Franciscan Monthly* makes an appeal (under the header “Spirituality of Peace”) to participate in a study group that investigates the spiritual-theological backgrounds of the Catholic peace movement Pax Christi.<sup>85</sup> As a result of developments in Dutch politics, the theme of nuclear weapons is introduced on the general meeting of 1981. Here, in response to the questions that the Dutch bishops have asked the Dutch community of faith, the members formulate a declaration on nuclear disarmament.<sup>86</sup> It states (in a rather cryptical way) that nuclear weapons are a “double deadly sin:” they are meant to kill; and they are made with so much money, energy, and knowledge and skill, that millions of lives were lost. The inn-weekend in 1981, entitled “With a View to Peace,” is devoted to nuclear arms and the road to disarmament.<sup>87</sup> Many Franciscan people are present at the peace demonstration on November 21st, 1981, at the anti-nuclear protests organized by Women for Peace Against Nuclear Weapons, and at the walk of peace on October 29th, 1983, in The Hague.<sup>88</sup> The latter is intended not so much as a demonstration, but as a “meeting of people who live together in peace and who pray together for peace.”

In 1983, peace is also the theme of the annual prayer walk.<sup>89</sup> A meeting on peace is held by the International Council of Christians and Jews in Amersfoort, and the Franciscan Academy organizes a symposium on “Francis and Peace” in 1984.<sup>90</sup> Apart from these *ad hoc* peace activities, in 1984 the “Peace Vigil” (Vredeswacht) is founded. It aims to organize two silent walks and vigils per day for a whole year.<sup>91</sup> In August 1985,

<sup>84</sup> *FM* Mar 1986, 8; *FM* Jun 1987, 10-11; *FM* Nov 1995, 14; *FM* Mar 1998, 14. The rubric “Spirituality” deals with “female spirituality” in the vision of a number of individuals: grace as experience of knowledge, commitment, refugee work and living without hope, desire for God, the relationship with God, God as the essence, quality of life, being close to others, and dealing respectfully with reality.

<sup>85</sup> *FM* Feb 1978, 15.

<sup>86</sup> *FM* Dec 1981, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Pax Christi’s brochure on “Catholic Church, nuclear weapons and disarmament” serves as a guideline.

<sup>88</sup> *FM* Dec 1981, 10; *FM* May 1983, 3-5; *FM* Aug 1983, 9; *FM* Oct 1983, 14; *FM* Nov 1983, 3-6.

<sup>89</sup> *FM* Apr 1983, 6-7.

<sup>90</sup> *FM* Nov 1983, 15; *FM* May 1984, 12-13.

<sup>91</sup> *FM* Feb 1985, 10-11. The Franciscan Peace Vigil (Vredeswacht, 1984-1988) played a crucial role in the “new opening up to society” promoted by the general meeting at the end of the 1970s. See on the Peace Vigil Pansters and Sloot, *De Franciscaanse Beweging*, 42-45.

the editors of *Franciscan Monthly* write that “the Peace Vigil marches forward in Woensdrecht” [where nuclear weapons are kept]. They also look forward to the United Nations’ International Year of Peace (1986). A contribution on “spirituality” mentions the wolf of Gubbio as a powerful story of peace; a part of the course for staff members in 1987 deals with Francis and his spirituality of peace; and the Peace Vigil is continued.<sup>92</sup> In 1990, a group of peace activists goes to Iraq in order to build a peace camp.<sup>93</sup> During the Cold War, member Kees van Vliet calls for “even more vigil, fasting, and prayer [...] in the first place to get rid of your own war mentality and secondly to expose the war mentality in politics.”<sup>94</sup> Religious practice is presented here, in a traditional way, as a weapon against sin in both humans and society as a whole. In a Franciscan perspective, the inner and the outer domain are always interdependent. “Peace Should be Our Only Concern” is the title of the second contribution by member Piet Leenhouders to the rubric “Spirituality” in 1991; “We All Oppose War” that of the rubric “News” of March 1991. On October 14th, 1992, the 200th and final vigil of the Peace Vigil is a fact. Interest has become too small to continue the vigils.<sup>95</sup>

Alongside the commitment to a peaceful society, the members of the Franciscan Cooperation develop an interest in multicultural society – especially as a lens through which to view their own spirituality – in the 1980s. In 1985, under the header “Spirituality,” *Franciscan Monthly* publishes a contribution on nomad values, which discusses the lessons of wisdom of oral traditions next to the appreciation of migrant workers.<sup>96</sup> The first independent contribution on Islam is that of Fatma Célik on Ramadan, in the Lenten season of 1986.<sup>97</sup> The following year, there is a story on a shared prayer service of Muslims and Christians (“getting to know each other”; “singing together and praising God”) in Düsseldorf.<sup>98</sup> The dialogue with Muslims, “not taken for granted yet,” remains a recurring theme in the following years.<sup>99</sup> Did the Gulf War disturb the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and was there a

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<sup>92</sup> The Peace Vigil stopped in 1988, when it became clear that the medium-range missiles would not come. After that, a small group occasionally gathered to keep vigil.

<sup>93</sup> *FM* Dec 1987, 13; *FM* Jan 1989, 5; *FM* Dec 1990, 5.

<sup>94</sup> *FM* Mar 1991, 5.

<sup>95</sup> *FM* Nov 1992, 5.

<sup>96</sup> *FM* Feb 1985, 3-4.

<sup>97</sup> *FM* Mar 1986, 9.

<sup>98</sup> *FM* Nov 1987, 5.

<sup>99</sup> *FM* Mar 1997, 10-11. According to member Marieke Neuhaus, “Muslims in our society continue to defend themselves against an aggressive Western society and an aggressive Christianity” [sic].

dialogue between these two world religions in the first place?<sup>100</sup> And: now everything is well, but what if the Muslims reach a majority?<sup>101</sup> This reserve is not shared by Jan Hoeberichts, who publishes his book *Francis and the Islam* in 1994, and neither by a new dialogue group of Christians and Muslims (who fast together in the Muslim tradition), where “many Muslims are present.”<sup>102</sup> The Muslim engine behind this group is Hamzah Zeid Kailani, who says that he is hurt by the prejudices of the Dutch against Islam but also that dialogue has made him a freer man.<sup>103</sup> In 1997, the dialogue group stops “for the time being” as more and more Muslims stay away, but “something new has to be developed” and it is important “that the dialogue spreads.”<sup>104</sup> In 1999 – when the peace movement has dwindled significantly – a translation appears of the decalogue for a spirituality of Franciscan nonviolence by Rosemary Lynch OSF and Alain Richard OFM.<sup>105</sup> 2000 is also the start of the “Decade of Peace.”<sup>106</sup> Some contributions to the rubric “Spirituality” in 2001, finally, concern themselves with the meeting of Francis and the sultan and Francis’ mercy.<sup>107</sup>

#### 4. Individual Spiritual Progress

Franciscan spirituality is a communal spirituality, but it also supports individual growth. Sometimes, however, communal structures and norms obscure and obstruct personal faith and flourishing. The text provided for the annual prayer walk of 1970 raises exactly this point:

structure and institution  
prescribed norms

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<sup>100</sup> *FM* May 1991, 11.

<sup>101</sup> *FM* Mar 1996, 6-7.

<sup>102</sup> *FM* Mar 1994, 5; *FM* Mar 1996, 7; *FM* Sep 1995, 13; *FM* Jan 1999, 10-11. See Jan Hoeberichts, *Franciscus en de Islam* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1994).

<sup>103</sup> *FM* May 1997, 4-6.

<sup>104</sup> *FM* Dec 1997, 3.

<sup>105</sup> See “Decalogue for a Spirituality of Franciscan Nonviolence” ([http://www.fmm.org/pls/fmm/v3\\_s2ew\\_consultazione.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=2013](http://www.fmm.org/pls/fmm/v3_s2ew_consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=2013) (1 July 2019)).

<sup>106</sup> *FM* Jan 1999, 15; *FM* Jan 2000, 10-11. The official name is “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.”

<sup>107</sup> The other contributions concern Lady Poverty, the curse and the blessing of the father, the robbers in the wood, Francis and the sandwich, Clare and the angel of darkness, Francis and the birds, Clare and the multiplication of the loaves, and the Nativity scene at Greccio. There are also other contributions on mercy and Francis and the Islam (*FM* May 2001, 10-11; *FM* Feb 2002, 4-5).

forms, grown out of  
 years, ages of experience.  
 [...]
 we lose ourselves in them, our understanding of  
 our faith, our living toward and out of.  
 we do not find ourselves anymore,  
 [...]
 but where to then?  
 how then, with what, with whom?  
 how do I continue to grow, further.  
 how am I fully alive.  
 where do I look for salvation?  
 [...] <sup>108</sup>

This problem, obviously shared by many within the Franciscan Co-operation, is one of the main themes of 1971: “religious life does not exist [...] if *you* are not religious”; and: “*you* have to do it, yourself.” This automatically raises the question of the relationship between self and God: “You are allowed – all of a sudden? – to be yourself,” but “Has god [sic] something to do with you?,” and “Is god still involved?”<sup>109</sup> Over the next fifteen years, the attention to individual, inner, spiritual life seems to disappear more and more behind the horizon of communal, social, actual themes. Only in the second half of the 1980s does inner spirituality reappear alongside social involvement.<sup>110</sup> Considering that outer commitments are always more or less founded on inner habits of faith, the deeply personal expressions in these years remain deeply connected with personal attitudes toward these social themes. “The feeling that I had more space in myself” is one participant’s observation in a peace vigil in 1986. “Peace is rooted in your own heart,” declares another participant.<sup>111</sup> People now ask themselves how prayer, keeping vigil, and fasting have affected them and changed them profoundly, to what extent it was a silent call to conversion of the heart, and how “it lifts one up and makes one see the world with different eyes.”<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> *FM* Apr 1972, 6. “structuur en institutie / voorgegeven normen / vormen, gegroeid uit / jarenlang, eeuwenlang ervaren. [...] we verliezen onszelf erin, ons zicht op / ons geloven, ons leven naar en vanuit. / wij vinden onszelf niet meer, [...] maar waarheen dan? / hoe dan, met wat, met wie? / hoe groei ik door, verder. / hoe kom ik tot voluit leven. / waar zoek ik het heil? [...]”

<sup>109</sup> *FM* Apr 1972, 6.

<sup>110</sup> ... does social involvement reappear as inner spirituality?

<sup>111</sup> *FM* Mar 1986, 8.

<sup>112</sup> *FM* Mar 1986, 8.

This kind of self-reflection remains important in the following years. In the (short-lived) rubric "Touched," we find some very personal statements: the crying Francis "gives me a feeling of comfort"; "that was the first layer that I had to go through"; or "taking seriously means accepting a person in his/her most individual uniqueness: being a source of creativity, being oneself" (all 1988). These revelations, indeed, reveal the influence of developments in broader society, in particular the rise of New Age. Very interesting is the fast adoption of New Age themes: whereas Franciscan people in the 1970s just "lie down and meditate" ("there you lie, you feel the earth, you feel the beating of your heart"<sup>113</sup>), in the 1990s they go for a walk with the Indian Sun Bear and his medicine wheel, "to heal the earth and ourselves." They now practice Zen and yoga ("it breathes within me"); dedicate themselves to monotonous overstimulation ("the experience of being there, breathing, moving"); learn to meditate in the Far East ("it was a true discovery that one can release everything"); read Mansukh Patel ("never before did I meet a human being with such intense loving power"); practice sacred dance ("learning to pray with your body"); draw mandalas ("with a couple of pencils, I step into a space"); and see Francis from an anthroposophical perspective ("the spiritual power of Francis of Assisi").<sup>114</sup> Gestalt therapy and Zen meditation "lead me into my own center," says member Guy Dilweg in 1999.<sup>115</sup> According to Hans Baars and Hans Sevenhoven, New Age offers a "holistic way of thinking, with fascinating consequences."<sup>116</sup> But the question remains: what does this way of thinking mean for Christians?<sup>117</sup> Evidently, New Age also has an effect on "classical" Franciscan themes. We learn that, according to Hildegard of Bingen, God "works" in creation, and that the creational spirituality of Matthew Fox is very worthwhile as it "lets you see Francis with new eyes."<sup>118</sup> Francis, however, "is not New Age:" he was no animistic worshipper of Mother Earth, he did not feel connected with an all-perfusing energy, he was not a human being who felt himself "absorbed" in a greater something, and he did not let the energy of trees and animals flow into himself, warns Hans van Munster OFM.<sup>119</sup> Because God leads you into your inner self

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<sup>113</sup> *FM* Apr 1972, 11.

<sup>114</sup> *FM* Jun 1990, 17; *FM* May 1991, 6; *FM* Oct 1991, 6-8; *FM* Apr 1992, 3-4; *FM* Feb 1994, 6-7; *FM* Apr 1999, 8-9; *FM* Oct 1999, 8-9; *FM* Nov 1999, 8-9; *FM* Dec 1999, 8-9.

<sup>115</sup> *FM* Mar 1999, 8-9. However, "out of this stance [out of the center of environment and nature] one has an experience and an insight: 'I myself am not my center.'"

<sup>116</sup> *FM* Mar 1993, 6-7, 12.

<sup>117</sup> *FM* Nov 1993, 6-7.

<sup>118</sup> *FM* Jun 1999, 8-9; *FM* Aug 1999, 8-9.

<sup>119</sup> *FM* Jan 1999, 9. A bit of resistance by the Franciscans here?

but at the same time back to your surroundings (an idea absent in New Age), this new spiritual movement will ultimately be too individualistic for many in the Franciscan Movement.<sup>120</sup> But in the meantime, say some, even Leonardo Boff “has lifted off.”<sup>121</sup>

Less present is the theme of mysticism. In the 1970s, there are some courses on Franciscan mysticism, but throughout the decades people seem rather uninterested in the subject. To be more accurate: where mysticism appears, it is described in concrete, everyday terms. For example, when Otger Steggink OCarm, professor of Spirituality, speaks at the fifteenth birthday of the Orientation Movement about the mysticism of Francis as a “process of reflective interiorization,” people feel that their own mystical experiences “at the everyday level” are not being taken seriously.<sup>122</sup> The review of Steggink’s book on the *Canticle of the Creatures* by Ron Reijdsbergen is fairly critical: “... raises the question if the *Canticle of the Creatures* really is the result of self-reflection.”<sup>123</sup> Instead of a product of reflection and inwardness (“psychologization”), the *Canticle* must be seen as a peace wish to everything and all.<sup>124</sup> Very striking is also the interview with Kitty Bouwman, organizer of study groups around mystics “in combination with body language,” who hopes to write a dissertation on God as Mother in the conception of the great mystics but who is “still too busy for that.”<sup>125</sup> She is certainly not the only Franciscan person who experiences a certain divide between action and reflection, responsibility and release, living and learning.

Very tangible is the personal dimension of Franciscan spirituality in the definitions of spirituality given in a series of interviews on “female spirituality” (in the rubric “Spirituality” of 1994).<sup>126</sup> For Magdalena Berkers, spirituality is “the experience of reality as being the place where God wants to meet us.” For Ida Smeyers, spirituality is “getting really committed to meeting real people.” For Esther van de Vate, spirituality is “living prayer, asking God that He protects life and that people will not perish.” For François Schomaker, spirituality is “that from which and what I live, what keeps me going.” For Margreet Kemperman, spirituality

<sup>120</sup> FM Aug 1993, 5.

<sup>121</sup> According to the book review of 1999.

<sup>122</sup> FM Mar 1993, 13.

<sup>123</sup> FM Mar 1997, 14. See Otger Steggink, *Het Zonnelied van broeder Frans van Assisi*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1993).

<sup>124</sup> See the words of Luchesius Smits OFM Cap. on meditation and postmodernism: “You can find God by entering into the stillness of your heart” (FM Oct 1991, 6-8).

<sup>125</sup> FM Aug 1993, 3-5.

<sup>126</sup> FM Jan 1994, 9; FM Feb 1994, 9; FM Mar 1994, 8-9; FM Apr 1994, 8-9; FM May 1994, 8-9; FM Jun 1994, 8-9; FM Aug 1994, 8-9; FM Oct 1994, 10-11; FM Nov 1994, 8-9; FM Dec 1994, 8-9.



is “standing in a stream of people who are searching for God.” For Inge Herrebout, spirituality is “searching for the deeper values in life.” For Marijke Bonda, spirituality is “something personal: what drives a person, what keeps one on one’s path.” For Christa Nieuwboer, spirituality is “giving meaning to your life, in a conscious way.” For Annette van de Veen, spirituality is “letting life decide what is being given to you.” For Franciscan friar and scholar Sigismund Verheij, who responds to what these Franciscan women have said, spirituality is “dealing with reality respectfully.” Most of these people, who seem to experience Franciscan spirituality as a form of “really experiencing living reality” (a personal experience with personal accents), will have agreed with sister François Schomaker, who states that spirituality “has to do, very decisively, with everyday life and is time-bound and in motion, growing, and not static but dynamic.”

In 1997, the Center for Franciscan Spiritual Development, La Verna, opens in Amsterdam. According to chairman Jan van den Eijnden OFM, the activities of La Verna concentrate on spiritual and corporeal experience:

This center wants to support spiritual development in people, but not development of the spirit alone. We aim at the development of the whole person, whose body is not just an instrument of spiritual development but also an expression of how a person has gone his/her spiritual way.<sup>127</sup>

Four categories of activities (wholeness, creation, suffering, and incarnation) illustrate the mission of La Verna: to support people in finding their own spiritual path, with help of the Franciscan tradition. While La Verna introduces courses on such spiritual matters as meditation and the Enneagram, a method aimed at the psychology of human character, other members of the Franciscan Movement spend “spiritual weeks” in Umbria (“on the footpaths that Francis walked, you can feel the earth-energy”) in order to find “Francis in oneself.”<sup>128</sup> Clearly, this is quite another search than that of those who were previously looking “for the same path as that of Francis,” or “for clarity on one’s own path of life.”<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> *FM* Dec 1997, 6-7. “De geestelijke ontwikkeling die dit centrum in mensen mogelijk wil maken, is niet een ontwikkeling van de geest alleen. Hier wordt een ontwikkeling beoogd van héél de mens, van wie het lichaam niet alleen instrument van geestelijke ontwikkeling is maar ook uitdrukking van hoe de mens zijn geestelijke weg gegaan is.”

<sup>128</sup> *FM* Jun 1998, 12-13.

<sup>129</sup> See above: *FM* Jan 1983, 10; *FM* Jan 1993, 6.

## Developments and Perspectives

*Franciscan Monthly*, like its predecessor *Announcements* (*Mededelingen*) serving as a medium of information, communication, and inspiration, is typically Franciscan both in contents and in composition: the articles and the pages are generally characterized by a certain openness to diversity and inclusiveness, expressive of a certain mildness and open-mindedness, presented with a certain lightness and friendliness.<sup>130</sup> This does not mean that the editors avoid difficult matters. Reports of general meetings, for example, contain honest descriptions of problems and disagreements; articles address the wicked problems of the world; and interviews contain difficult personal dilemma's. Nevertheless, balance, optimism, and respect remain the central tenets of most contributions. This raises the question: what has changed throughout the years and what has remained the same, both in the reality and in the representation of Franciscan spirituality in the Franciscan Cooperation (1967-) and the Franciscan Movement (1992-)? What changed, slowly but surely, was the perspective of Franciscan practice, as is evident from the gradual shift – reflecting actual developments within the movement from the beginning of the 1980s – of reports on “new initiatives and activities”<sup>131</sup> in the Franciscan communities to a broader, more reflective presentation of social and spiritual themes. What also changed is the perspective on Franciscan practice, not only due to the said shift, but also due to the appreciation and specification of the notion of spirituality itself, for example in the new subtitle “News, Movement, Spirituality,” in the special pages under the header “Spirituality,” and in the new rubric “Spirituality” from the second half of the 1980s.<sup>132</sup> A changed perspective in practice and a changed perspective on practice do not necessarily mean a change in the nature of Franciscan spirituality, which remains both practical and concrete (everyday spirituality) and ideological and consistent (traditional

<sup>130</sup> With “typically Franciscan” I mean what I define below as “involvement, openness, sensitivity” and as “being faithful to the good with special attention to one’s neighbor.”

<sup>131</sup> *Mededelingen* 7 (1967), 1. Apart from these, there are also “important appointments in the communities, results of chapter elections, and foundations or closures of houses” (*Mededelingen* 7 (1967), 17).

<sup>132</sup> This subtitle is used from 1986 to 1989, the specific pages on spirituality appear from 1985. Here, too, 1989 is a pivotal year: “Being responsible for education, I saw that all courses with “spirituality” in the title drew participants, whereas courses without that title did not. So what did we do? We no longer talked about Francis’ dedication to peace, creation or the poor, but about his spirituality of peace, his ecological spirituality or... no, wait, with poverty it did not succeed anymore,” said member Gerard Pieter Freeman in a recent interview.

spirituality). Nevertheless, the new perspectives follow changes in directions as well as orientations of life.<sup>133</sup> Decisive are developments in the areas of 1) laity, 2) society, 3) praxis, and 4) identity.

### 1. *Laity*

Whereas the incidental contributions on Franciscan spirituality in earlier issues usually serve as material for use in the communities, spirituality becomes more and more the main focus of attention and serves more and more, in all its theological and social breadth, as material for private reflection by the movement's individual members. The rise of the Franciscan inspired lay person is documented in these pages in many, direct and indirect ways. Of the more direct instances we mention three. In 1982, the Franciscan Cooperation concludes at the general meeting that Francis and his way of life are no longer "stowed away" in orders and communities but have "revived in schools and parishes, in community centers and discos, in centers of minority groups and political parties, in retreat and formation centers, in hospitals and prisons." Has the main interest for a long time been in the weal and woe of the religious, now there is a growing concern for people who are not attached to an order or congregation.<sup>134</sup> In 1991 at the Chapter of St. Michael in Megen monastery, the members declare that "the 'old' live on the basis of an age-old religious tradition and the 'new' look for a way of life and a connection that has not yet been tested by experience."<sup>135</sup> In 1998, finally, the Orientation Movement "has in the meantime become far more than a weekend of living in a monastic community of Capuchin friars or Clarissan sisters." There are now follow-up weekends (spiritual retreats around themes like Church, poverty, peace, creation, and solidarity) and even advanced courses (annual programs around prayer, poverty, joy, obedience, brother/sisterhood, and mission) aimed at lay formation and the intensification of Franciscan lay spirituality.<sup>136</sup>

### 2. *Society*

Franciscan spirituality has always been, to a greater or lesser degree, an involved spirituality. The new, explicit attention to "spirituality" halfway

<sup>133</sup> Zweerman, *Wondbaar en vrijmoedig*, 100-101.

<sup>134</sup> *FM* Oct 1982, 3.

<sup>135</sup> *FM* Nov 1991, 6-7.

<sup>136</sup> *FM* May 1998, 6. The follow-up weekends and course years were held from the second half of the 1980s.

the 1980s is therefore somewhat ironic, as if before and in other areas the experience of spirituality (“direction, orientation, and elan of life”) had not been key. It shows, however, that within the Franciscan Movement it has not always been clear to people if spirituality *means* involvement, or rather *presupposes* it. The various perspectives within the movement, which all seem to have their legitimate place within Franciscan spirituality, are undeniably responsible for this.<sup>137</sup> A perfect illustration of this “accepted ambiguity” is the very first contribution to the rubric “Spirituality,” which consists of a – fairly long-winded – *political* commentary on the Gijs van Aardenne affair.<sup>138</sup> Following a short political analysis of the affair (“I think we are dealing here with a political bankruptcy”) is a spiritual explanation which promotes both social effort (“in the dark times in which we are living, we will have to work to build new local forms of community”) and individual awareness (“It is the calling of the Lord, which expresses itself in my desire, which gives my life purpose and direction”). Such interpretations, based on the everyday-actual character and the critical calling of Franciscan spirituality, show how current events – in the Church in the 1960s and 1970s, in global politics in the 1980s, in public spirituality in the 1990s – are always seen in a spiritual light, how people thus always “connect their Franciscan spirituality with a social or spiritual movement.”<sup>139</sup>

### 3. Praxis

Ultimately, the members of the Franciscan Movement want to achieve “a way of seeing and a way of being in the world” in which “nice words and deep thoughts become visible in concrete deeds, in apparent dedication.”<sup>140</sup> For a more intellectual approach of deep thoughts and concrete deeds in the Franciscan life we have to look at the journal *Franciscan Life* (*Franciscaans Leven*), which is also being read by many in the movement. The reason for its relatively low threshold (despite some theological and

<sup>137</sup> Do the possibilities of a Franciscan spiritual contribution to a better world lie, ideal-typically, in self-reflection and spiritual growth (“awareness”), or rather in proclamation and worldly works (“effort”) ? The discussion about the intention of the *Canticle of the Creatures* (above) shows that an answer is not easily, and often too easily, given. At the same time, personal growth and development of virtues seems to be essential to Francis and Clare.

<sup>138</sup> This politician misinformed parliament in 1980 about the losses of a division of shipbuilding company RSV.

<sup>139</sup> FM 1991, rubric “Spirituality.”

<sup>140</sup> See above. See also the invitation to the Orientation Weekend in 1983 (above): “Doing it instead of talking about it” (FM Jan 1983, 10).

philosophical depth) is probably that Franciscan reflection never departs from its essential focus and form: embodied spirituality.<sup>141</sup> In 1974, the members of a reading group study the *Admonitions* because these “deal with concrete, everyday attitudes and situations.”<sup>142</sup> Subsequently, reflections are made visible and tangible: through drawing, modelling, fingerpaint, and expression in motion. Likewise, in 1991, a “practical example of spirituality” is the distribution of rhubarb and a “possibility for spirituality in our days” the attention to “Franciscan contemplation and the practical experiences of everyday life.”<sup>143</sup> Again and again, *Franciscan Monthly* seems to voice the general agreement that spirituality “is an everyday thing” and that it “belongs to the now.”<sup>144</sup> Where spirituality is not grounded in a certain praxis of life, as it is in the case of the many Franciscan sisters who work as teachers and nurses, it is aimed at it. The concreteness of Franciscan spirituality has everything to do with its fundamental orientation on personal effort, evident in the practical commitment of the many who contribute day after day, in the spirit of Francis and Clare, to a better world. In the words of sister Fidelis van Kampen: “I meet God where there is life in me and around me.”<sup>145</sup> Maybe, the true objective (“doelstelling”) of the Franciscan Cooperation and the Franciscan Movement has always been a “dojective” (“doestelling”), as it is mistakenly written on the first page of the January 1972 issue.

#### 4. Identity

The Franciscan way of life as imagined in the Franciscan Movement takes as its starting point the practice of going in the footsteps of Francis and Clare and of the tradition of Franciscan living inspired by them. Whereas professed sisters and brothers in the 1960s and 1970s accomplish many things by working with their hands, from the beginning of the 1980s the wellbeing of human beings and society as a whole becomes the objective of more and more Franciscan lay people.<sup>146</sup> Their ever changing, true-to-life stories do not conceal a Franciscan core experience, a shared focus, a

<sup>141</sup> See Willem Marie Speelman, *God aan den lijve ondervinden. Lichamelijke spiritualiteit volgens Franciscus en Clara* (Leeuwarden: Discovery Books, 2012).

<sup>142</sup> *FM* Jan 1974, 9.

<sup>143</sup> *FM* Jun 1991, 3; *FM* Jan 1991, 14.

<sup>144</sup> *FM* Apr 2001, 12; “Spirituality Now” is the theme of the prayer walk in 1991 (*FM* Jun 1991, 8).

<sup>145</sup> *FM* May 1991, 6.

<sup>146</sup> After the phase of social commitments in the 1980s, which focused on proclamation, conversion, and brotherhood in the world, the 1990s appear to be more about a certain *view* of the world and taking a stance in it, day-to-day.

common denominator. The contributions to the rubric "Spirituality," for example, reveal how men and women, each and everyone in their own way, have this singular Franciscan spiritual commitment. The second contribution in the first series concerns nomad values, the third deals with the spirit of prayer and devotion, the fourth describes our "difficult" Mother Church. The following themes, which often correspond with the annual theme of the prayer walk, are the world as a soft skin, the place of the sisters and brothers in the Church, making peace, the gift of tears, household and housemates, the birth of the Son and giving birth to holy deeds, work, innocence as counterbalance, suffering and compassion, community, the Eight May movement, walking in Italy, and joy. Furthermore, there are interviews with a whole range of interesting members of the Franciscan Movement, monthly Franciscan lessons by author Anton Rotzetter OFM Cap. (1987),<sup>147</sup> series of contributions on Franciscan literature, art, and architecture (1987-1988, 1992, 1993, 2000, 2002), and reflections on Franciscan topics per year by Piet Leenhouders (1991), Sigismund Verheij (1992), Ron Reijdsbergen (1995), André Jansen (1996), and Simone Huisman (1998).<sup>148</sup>

Most words, values, and realities in this movement's monthly magazine, whether expressive of the innermost individual or of the broadest collective goals, are characterized in one way or the other by "a hunger for deeper things" and, especially, by hope.<sup>149</sup> Even the most actual and political pieces, like the following one in the rubric "Spirituality," represents an attempt to "remain true to our spirituality."<sup>150</sup>

<sup>147</sup> In 1986, Anton Rotzetter was one of the keynote speakers at the festive opening of the Franciscan Study Center (See Anton Rotzetter and Theo Zweerman, *Het juk van een erfgoed*. Franciscan studies 2 (Utrecht: Franciscans Studiecentrum, 1987)). In *Franciscans Maandblad*, he speaks (in a translation by Eugène Plouvier) about the themes of justice and conscience, solidarity with the disenfranchised, Franciscan communism as spiritual base, care for AIDS victims, environmental behavior, the women's movements, Christian politics, violence, and the pedagogy of love.

<sup>148</sup> Leenhouders: the power of private citizenship, peace, vigilance, resurrection-power, telling the story of Jesus, starting all over, Francis as singer, Leonardo Boff and the new materialism, and the human being Jesus. Verheij: vulnerability, wishing peace, watching and observing, witnessing, money, being an example to others, self-image, charity, the prayer before the cross of San Damiano, and being Catholic. Reijdsbergen: peacefulness, patience and humility, prophecy, the tension between then and now, listening and serving, visiting people, fragility, enduring insecurity, and being happy. Jansen: the Our Father, Your Kingdom Come (series), and the *Canticle of the Creatures*. Huisman: going the way, coming out of the dark, staying faithful to your goal, celebrating life, remaining with what is, bringing each other joy, everything that lives, being a human being on earth, being free, and a new heaven on earth.

<sup>149</sup> *FM* Jun 1984, 8-9 ("Words, values, and realities"); *FM* Mar 1993, 9.

<sup>150</sup> *FM* May 1993, 3-6; *FM* Jan 1997, 8 ("How can we remain ourselves?").

Things have happened that no one dared imagine: the Berlin wall came down; drastic political changes in the Eastern bloc; a revival of popular powers, awakened by the magical word “freedom.” It was thus possible after all? Dreams proved to be able to come true. This time, we have started the new year in fear of a new war. That, too, was possible after all? The dream of a politics of consultation, dialogue, listening: in pieces? [...] We, too, talk more about war than about peace at the moment [...]. A word [peace] without double-speak, within a hidden agenda, coming from the mouth of human beings who are wholeheartedly committed to the “however” of the unsurpassed value of peace. Such a human being was Francis, “clothed in weakness.” His message of peace worked, and can still work, “however,” when it continues to work in his way, not hindered by feelings of powerlessness, but carried by belief in the power of the word itself.<sup>151</sup>

Fortunately, many in this way, “with their own eyes,”<sup>152</sup> truly give substance to Franciscan power and peace. Fortunately, too, exclusivist remarks like this one from a book reviewer in 1999 remain the exception: “*the touchstone of true spirituality is compassion*” (italics KP).<sup>153</sup> Generally, but generally implicitly, people are ultimately looking for “what binds us”<sup>154</sup> – are thus socially and spiritually inclusive.<sup>155</sup> “It doesn’t matter if

<sup>151</sup> *FM* Feb 1991, 11 (Piet Leenhouders). “Er waren dingen gebeurd, die niemand voor mogelijk had gehouden: de Berlijnse muur doorbroken; ingrijpende politieke verschuivingen in de Oostbloklanden; opleving van volkskrachten, die uit een sluimertoe-stand gewekt werden door het magische woord ‘vrijheid’. Het was dus toch nog mogelijk? Dromen bleken werkelijkheid te kunnen worden. Dit keer zijn we het nieuwe jaar ingegaan met de angst voor een nieuwe oorlog. Ook dat was nog mogelijk? De droom over een politiek van overleg, dialoog, elkaar proberen te verstaan: aan flarden? [...] Zelf hebben we momenteel misschien ook het woord ‘oorlog’ meer in de mond dan ‘vrede’ [...]. Een woord [vrede] zonder dubbele bodem, zonder verborgen agenda, als het uit de mond komt van mensen, die met heel hun persoon het ‘en toch...’ van de onovertroffen waarde van de ‘vrede’ onderstrepen. Zo’n man was Franciscus, ‘met zwakheid bekleed’. ‘En toch...’ heeft zijn vredesboodschap gewerkt en kan zij blijven werken, als ze op zijn manier doorgaat, niet gehinderd door een gevoel van machteloosheid, maar gedragen door het geloof in de kracht van het woord zelf.”

<sup>152</sup> *FM* Dec 1997, 8-9.

<sup>153</sup> *FM* Feb 1999, 8-9. As if power or peace or faith are no touchstones. And who decides what is “true” spirituality?

<sup>154</sup> *FM* Oct 1991, 6-8.

<sup>155</sup> According to the idea of a “growing community” (Speelman, *Om de hele wereld*, 11).

a heart is Franciscan, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or “just” a religious hart, when it is warm and compassionate,” declare the participants of the fifteenth birthday of the Orientation Movement.<sup>156</sup> “The care and development of the Stoutenburg estate as a place where care for the environment is exemplified, celebrated, meditated upon, and practiced and, furthermore, all that is connected to and serving this purpose, everything in the broadest sense of the word,” say the organizers on the goal of the Franciscan environmental project.<sup>157</sup> This Franciscan inclusivism does not mean that people pay a lot of attention to other forms of religious life, other cultures, or other Franciscan persons besides Francis and Clare.<sup>158</sup> It does mean, however, that the Franciscan identity is imbued with involvement, with openness, with sensitivity.<sup>159</sup> Following Francis and Clare of Assisi, “warmed from the inside by love” and “not resting until in love,” it strives, in its own distinctive way, to make come true that “the glow of God’s goodness shines through in everything.”<sup>160</sup>

### Conclusion: Holding on While Going on

In the new millennium, the spirituality of the Franciscan Movement remains one of “apparent dedication,” of “being faithful to the good” with special attention to one’s neighbor. This is notably evident from the annual themes from 2003 (the year of the 750th anniversary of Clare’s death): *What You Hold, May You Hold. What You Do, May You Do and Not Stop* (2003); *Saying the Good and Doing the Good* (2004); *Doing the Good: Attentively, Faithfully, and With Dedication* (2005); *Living as Housemates* (2006); *Peace to this House* (2007); *Receiving Friendly* (2008); *Going in the Footsteps of...* (2009); and *Faithful and Dedicated: Franciscan Life and Work* (2010). These themes show how close the spirituality remains to the sources. Take these programmatic words of Clare, a true philosophy of life that undoubtedly resonates in the hearts of many:

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<sup>156</sup> *FM* Mar 1993, 13.

<sup>157</sup> *FM* Jan 1994, 10.

<sup>158</sup> Exceptions are the contributions on the Premonstratensians (*FM* Nov 1996, 3-4), nomads (*FM* Feb 1985, 3-4), Anthony (*FM* Jun 1995, 14); Bonaventure (*FM* Oct 1996, 3), Hildegard of Bingen (*FM* Jun 1999, 8-9), Saint Anthonis (*FM* Apr 2001, 15), and Saint Dominic (*FM* Apr 2002, 8-9).

<sup>159</sup> Very illustrative are the themes in the contributions of Ron Reijdsbergen and Gerard Pieter Freeman to the rubric “Spirituality” of 1997.

<sup>160</sup> *FM* Feb 1997, 8-9; *FM* Apr 1997, 8-9; *FM* Jan 1997, 8-9.



What you hold, may you hold,  
 What you do, may you do and not stop.  
 But with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet,  
 so that even your steps stir up no dust,  
 may you go forward

securely, joyfully, and swiftly,  
 on the path of prudent happiness.<sup>161</sup>

Indeed, the members of the Franciscan Movement strive to combine the secureness of holding on, unswervingly and prudently, with the lightness of going on, swiftly and joyfully. Thus, they hold what they hold and they do what they do, as their main spiritual concern.

*Holding on:* a new course for staff members is needed so that everyone finds inspiration in Franciscan spirituality and everyone can help others to do the same, so that “the spring keeps bubbling.”<sup>162</sup> The Franciscans “have lots of potential to live a meaningful life” but “it would be a shame if this way of life would disappear.”<sup>163</sup> Hold can be found in such Franciscan values as authenticity and connectedness, as well as in acts and virtues like “thanking, serving, and carrying,” or “being simple, involved, vulnerable, and peaceful.”<sup>164</sup> Social involvement is a necessity, because “involvement in the world is part of our Franciscan DNA.”<sup>165</sup> Images of Francis and Clare that are too simple or clichéd have to be verified against what we know from the sources.<sup>166</sup> And despite the modern sale of spirituality and the potentially weak organization of the Franciscan Movement, with Franciscan spirituality “we got gold in our hands.”<sup>167</sup>

<sup>161</sup> From Clare’s second letter to Agnes of Prague, in *FM* Jan 2003, 9 and *FM* Oct 2003, 7. “Wat je houvast is, blijf daaraan vasthouden. Wat je doet, blijf dat doen, en laat het niet los. Maar ga met snelle stap en lichte tred zonder je voeten te stoten. Zodat je stappen ook het stof niet opwervelen. Volg veilig, blij, opgewekt en waakzaam. Het pad van de intense vreugde.”

<sup>162</sup> *FM* Jan 2003, 12; *FM* Apr 2007, 11. The name of the course, Capodacqua, refers to the source of the river near Assisi.

<sup>163</sup> In the words of vice-provincial Jan van den Eijnden OFM (*FM* Jul 2003, 3-4).

<sup>164</sup> *FM* Oct 2003, 8; *FM* Nov 2005, 3-5 (Theo Zweerman: “In order to be meaningful, they have to be situated in our lives, here and now”); *FM* Jul 2010, 3; *FM* Nov 2010, 14; *FM* Dec 2010, 8.

<sup>165</sup> *FM* Feb 2006, 10.

<sup>166</sup> *FM* Jan 2007, 14. Series of reflections in 2007 and 2008, by Gerard Pieter Freeman.

<sup>167</sup> *FM* Nov 2007, 14-15. Also evident from the review of the book by Beatrijs Corveleyn and Herman de Vos, under the title “Your soul will live: a liturgical handbook for the search for your origins” (*FM* Jun 2008, 9).

*Going on:* the back page of *Franciscan Monthly* has been reserved for news from the Franciscan Peace Vigil, but now (2005) it is time for news from other organizations and initiatives like Pax Christi (“much more a calling than a job”<sup>168</sup>) and Cordaid. The Franciscan year for the deepening of faith “Step by Step” (Lieverlede) “creates the conditions to grow with a selected group into a habit of faith.”<sup>169</sup> There are so many Franciscan things to find when “walking the web”!<sup>170</sup> La Verna establishes itself with sacred dance and “meaningful aging” on the new spiritual market.<sup>171</sup> The “spirituality of the diaspora,” like Zen meditation and lectio divina, create lots of new opportunities.<sup>172</sup> The spiritual counsels of Francis catch on outside Franciscan circles.<sup>173</sup> And Francis’ influence on art takes ever new shape.<sup>174</sup>

*Holding on while going on:* The Orientation Movement celebrates its 25th birthday, and “we continue as long as there are Capuchin friars.”<sup>175</sup> The new one-day retreat “will become an annual tradition.”<sup>176</sup> The Franciscan environmental project at retreat center Stoutenburg (“to withdraw in order to advance”) celebrates its twelfth birthday.<sup>177</sup> The dialogue with Islam will be continued.<sup>178</sup> The wood and moor week continues to combine maintenance of wood and moor with maintenance of yourself (“immersing oneself in Franciscan spirituality”).<sup>179</sup> The Peace Vigil has been giving “a sign of the desire for peace” for twenty years already.<sup>180</sup> The “Companions of Saint Francis” (Tochtgenoten van Sint Frans) keep on aging ... and walking.<sup>181</sup> The “anarchist, self-conscious, and ecumenical” “Society of Brother Francis” (Vereniging van Broeder Frans) gets a new Rule, which is “more an adaptation of the old one.”<sup>182</sup> The peace be-

<sup>168</sup> *FM* Jan 2006, 16.

<sup>169</sup> *FM* May 2003, 8; *FM* May 2004, 10.

<sup>170</sup> *FM* May 2004, 15.

<sup>171</sup> *FM* Apr 2005, 12-14.

<sup>172</sup> *FM* Nov 2005, 13; *FM* Oct 2006, 14; *FM* Jul 2007, 11; *FM* Apr 2009, 7.

<sup>173</sup> *FM* Dec 2004, 12.

<sup>174</sup> See the series “Francis and art” in *FM* 2009.

<sup>175</sup> *FM* Mar 2003, 11.

<sup>176</sup> *FM* May 2003, 10; *FM* Dec 2004, 10.

<sup>177</sup> *FM* May 2003, 11.

<sup>178</sup> *FM* Jan 2004, 15; *FM* Apr 2006, 3; *FM* Aug 2007, 8; *FM* Nov 2010, 4-5.

<sup>179</sup> *FM* May 2004, 9.

<sup>180</sup> *FM* Oct 2004, 3.

<sup>181</sup> *FM* Jan 2006, 13.

<sup>182</sup> *FM* Jan 2007, 11. “The Rule is not so much an adaptation as it is a testing ground: an attempt to keep a Rule which is alive and therefore has to be reformulated over and over and changed when necessary, even when this means that good formulations have to go. Thus, the permanent dialogue between text and audience,” said member Ron Reijbergen in a recent interview.

tween human beings and animals has not ceased to be relevant.<sup>183</sup> The intensity of Franciscan celebrations and parties remains at the same level.<sup>184</sup> And it is important in this time as ever, to remain humble and involved.<sup>185</sup>

The special pages for spirituality in *Franciscan Monthly*, finally, become pages “for further reflection” in March 2003.<sup>186</sup> This change is significant: spirituality *as* spirituality has in the meantime become so self-evident that explicit attention to it is no longer necessary. Conversely, the question of “the future of Francis’ spirituality” and of the contribution to “living Franciscan spirituality” has now (2008) become a general question at the general meeting.<sup>187</sup> Simultaneously, people for the first time in forty years discuss bodily spirituality as a method on its own and penitence as a bodily way of dedicating oneself to God, while the subject of the mystical nature of Francis and Clare and “what we can learn from their experience of God” returns to the fore.<sup>188</sup> Two apparent extremes, the corporeal and the mystical, come together again in the spiritual experience of the Franciscan Movement.



In her latest book *Enduring Presence: Diversity and Authenticity among the First Generations of Franciscan Laity*, Darleen Pryds observes that “the lay Franciscans of the 13th century show us that it is possible to embrace the Franciscan path and express one’s self in a way that is authentic to one’s self and that quite possibly looks unique or at least different from one another – all while being “Franciscan.”<sup>189</sup> She also observes that “despite their enduring presence, the lay people who have lived according to

<sup>183</sup> *FM* Apr 2007, 6; *FM* Apr 2008, 8-10.

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, *FM* Oct 2008, 15.

<sup>185</sup> *FM* Jan 2009, 7; *FM* Jul 2009, 9.

<sup>186</sup> In the first year, Hans Sevenhoven writes on Clare’s contemplation: Clare as bride, mother, and sister; Clare’s poverty with joy; Clare’s cheerfulness; Clare’s mystical way and connection to the origins; Clare and the brothers; Clare’s life on the edge; Clare’s loving presence; and Clare’s destination.

<sup>187</sup> *FM* Oct 2008, 13.

<sup>188</sup> *FM* Nov 2003, 3-4 (Willem Marie Speelman: “Francis saw an opportunity to connect his corporeality with God”); *FM* Jan 2004, 3-4; *FM* Jun 2010, 7 (“Listening with your lips”); *FM* Oct 2008, 4-5 (Hubert Bisschops: “Jesus leads and looks back invitingly to Francis, his follower”); *FM* Apr 2010, 11-12 (Edith van den Goorbergh: “Mysticism of everyday life”). See for the two extremes, for example, the news page of *FM* Jul 2009, 14-15, which combines reports on the Garden of Praise and walks in nature, with notes on Francis as mystic and a reading group on Francis’ way to inner peace.

<sup>189</sup> Darleen Pryds, *Enduring Presence*, 7.

Franciscan values and tenets have largely been overlooked and ignored in both academic and church settings.”<sup>190</sup> In the case of the Netherlands, the possibility to embrace the Franciscan path and express one’s self in authentic and unique ways is shown by the *latest* generations of Franciscan laity, whose presence endures in a unique cooperation with Franciscan friars and sisters.

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<sup>190</sup> Pryds, *Enduring Presence*, 6.