

doi:10.29285/actapinteriana.2018.4.27

„Do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion” Work and Prayer: Relation and Tension¹

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Schneider, J. (2018): „Do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion”. *Work and Prayer: Relation and Tension*. „Az ima és az áhítat szellemét ki ne oltásatok”. *Munka és imádság: kapcsolat és feszültség*. *Acta Pintériana*, 4, 27-38.

Összegzés: A tanulmány Szent Ferenc megerősített regulájának ötödik fejezetét veszi alapul, amely a munka vonatkozásában ad iránymutatást a testvéreknek. A regula összekapcsolja a munkához fűződő viszony lelki, testi és társadalmi dimenzióit (vö. a tétlenségnek mint a lélek ellenségének távoltartása, illetve a dolgozni nem tudó testvérek testi szükségleteiről való gondoskodás), miközben a pénz elfogadásának tilalmával elszakítja a tevékenységet annak közgazdasági aspektusaitól. Mivel a munkálkodás képessége egyben Istentől származó kegyelem is, így a jóra törekvő, hasznos tevékenység gyakorlása egy olyan dinamizmusba illeszkedik, melynek révén az ember Istent is szolgálhatja munkája gyümölcseivel. Mindez a szellemi munkára is vonatkozik, amennyiben a testvérek ennek során sem oltják ki „a szent imádság és az áhítat szellemét”, és kerülnek az öncélú, a szent szövegek spirituális lényege iránt tiszteletlen intellektuális aktivizmust. Így a hűséggel és odaadással végzett munka az Istennel való kapcsolat részévé válhat. Az emberi tevékenység legmélyebb értelme a Megfeszített jelenlétének megtapasztalása lehet csakúgy, ahogy Szent Ferenc a San Damiano-i kereszt előtt élte át ezt a számára meghatározó tapasztalatot.

Within the general topic of our meeting: „Lord, teach us how to pray!” (Lc 11,1), the following working title was given to me: *Work and Prayer: Relation and Tension*. In order to address this topic, the fifth chapter of our Rule presents itself as useful, especially the first part of it (LR 5).²

“Fratres illi, quibus gratiam dedit Dominus laborandi, laborent fideliter et devote, ita quod, excluso otio animae inimico, sanctae orationis spiritum non extinguant, cui debent cetera temporalia deservire. De mercede autem laboris pro se et suis fratribus corporis necessaria recipiant praeter denarios vel pecuniam et hoc humiliter, sicut decet servos Dei et pauperatis sanctissimae sectatores.”

„Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working may work faithfully and devotedly so that, while avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute. In payment for their work they may receive whatever is necessary for the bodily support of themselves and their brothers,

¹ This article was developed from a lecture originally given at the meeting of Franciscan formators of the COTAF held from October 16th to 20th 2017 at Mátraverebély-Szentkút, Hungary

² ESSER & GRAU 1989, p. 368; PAOLAZZI 2009, pp. 328f.; FRANZISKUS von Assisi 2014, pp. 76f. English text and abbreviations of the Writings of St. Francis and other Franciscan sources: ARMSTRONG; WAYNE HELLMANN & SHORT 1999, p. 102; see also: *The Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi* 1995. LR = Later Rule (1223); ER = Earlier Rule (1221) (as explained in VII. References, p. 11)

excepting coin or money,⁴ and let them do this humbly as is becoming for servants of God and followers of most holy poverty.”

I. Title and Context

Chapter five bears the heading: *De modo laborandi* – „The Manner of Working”. The issue of prayer does not occur in the heading. It is the third chapter which deals explicitly with liturgical prayer (LR 3), whereas in the tenth chapter, St. Francis calls the brothers to continuous prayer: „to pray always to Him [God] with a pure heart” (LR 10,9).

1. Prayer and Recompense

The fifth chapter of the Rule speaks about work, more precisely about a certain way and manner of working, a *modus laborandi*. This *modus* of working is described here by two coordinates, to which the brothers are asked to be in an adequate relation. The first coordinate is „the Spirit of Prayer”, commonly called „the spiritual life”. The second coordinate is the „payment for work”, which is the material and economical aspect of work.

2. Soul and Body: the anthropological dimension

This twofold relation in which work is embedded is marked by two anthropological concepts, namely „soul” (*anima*) and „body” (*corpus*). The specific „manner of working” (*modus laborandi*) described in this chapter serves man in his holistic corporal and spiritual condition. First of all work serves the soul by excluding idleness, the vain and senseless *otium*, which is „the enemy of the soul” (*animae inimicus*). Secondly work or „payment for their work” (*mercedes laboris*) serves in order to receive „whatever is necessary for the body” (*corporis necessaria*) for those who work and for their brothers.

This context offers therefore a holistic view of work. Work is an expression of the integral human being in his condition of body and soul, serving him in his spiritual and material needs (*necessaria*).

3. Of themselves and their brothers: sociological dimension

The description of the manner of working also implies a sociological dimension. Firstly those brothers are mentioned „to whom the Lord has given the grace of working”. Not all brothers are meant here. The brothers who work may then receive the recompense for their work, to be precise, „for themselves and their brothers” – *pro se et suis fratribus*. The working brothers do not work only for themselves, even though the individual aspect is expressed since work helps the brothers who work to avoid idleness which is harmful to the soul. The other brothers who for different reasons are not able to work do not partake of this benefit of work. The payment for work, however, will be shared with them.

Receiving payment also shows a certain manner which is characteristic of the friars minor. This manner of receiving payment says: *et hoc humiliter* – „and let them do this humbly”. The reason for this manner of receiving (*recipere*) in a humble way is again a theological and spiritual one: „as is becoming for servants of God and followers of most holy poverty”. While naturally accepting material recompense for work, Francis separates work from monetary economy. The brothers are allowed to

and they should work for payment and recompense for themselves and for their brothers, but they are not to work for money.

The theological frame of the chapter on the manner of working is shown by the respective mentioning of the name of God; at the beginning: „to whom the LORD (*Dominus*) has given the grace of working”; at the end: „as is becoming for servants of GOD (*Dei*)”.

II. Work as Grace

1. Not all are able to work

The chapter is addressed to „Those brothers – *fratres illi*”. This is a restriction compared to other chapters where it simply says: „the brothers” (*fratres*: LR 2,7; 6,1.7), or „all the brothers” (*fratres omnes*: 2,16), „the brothers altogether” (*fratres universi*: 4,1; 8,1; 11,1). The indication „those brothers” means that this does not refer to all brothers. Although in his Testament Francis expresses his earnest desire that „all brothers give themselves to work” (Test 20), not all of them are able to work. One reason for not being able to work is „when a brother falls sick” (LR 6,9). Further reasons are that they might not find work which is honest (Test 20) and compatible with their way of life. Also the brothers are not able to work „wherever they have not been received” or if they suffer persecution (Test 25.26; LR 10,1-12).

2. To whom the Lord has given the grace of working

Not all are capable of working. Francis sees those brothers who are able to work as endowed with a special grace from the Lord: „to whom the Lord has given the grace of working” – *quibus gratiam dedit Dominus*. Here a fundamental verb is used with which Francis also begins his Testament: „The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way” – *Dominus ita dedit mihi fratri Francisco faciendi poenitentiam* (Test 1). The formula: *Dominus dedit* – „the Lord has given to me” follows with variations: The Lord led me, the Lord revealed to me, the Lord gave to me (Test 2.4-5.14.23). It is always the Lord who says, does and fulfills every good thing in someone (Adm 2,3; 8,3: *qui dicit et facit omne bonum*; 12,2; 17,1), from whom every good thing comes, to whom every good belongs (*cuius est omne bonum*: Adm 7,4), who Himself is the Good One.

3. Work as giving back every good

Thus it is the main task of man to give back the good which the Lord gives to him: „Blessed ist the servant who returns every good to the Lord God” – *Beatus servus, qui omnia bona reddit Domino Deo* (Adm 18,2). To be able to work is a grace which the Lord has given to some brothers. It is thus a good (thing) – *bonum* – which the Lord grants and which the brother in question is to return to the Lord in word and deed (*reddere*). The ability to work belongs to the circulation of all good (*omnia bona*) that God bestows on the human person, which he says, works and is fulfilled through him. Accepting the ability to work is already a returning of the good to the One who has given it and continues giving it again and again. To be able to work is a good which comes from God, the giver of all good (things). As a grace given by the Lord, the ability to work becomes in itself a spiritual deed, and therefore in its very essence is not contradictory to the Spirit of prayer and devotion.

III. Work and Studies

1. The letter of St. Francis to St. Anthony

Along with the ability to work as a grace given to some brothers by the Lord there is also the intellectual work, especially the work of a theologian. This is shown by the letter of St. Francis to St. Anthony. The introductory words or rubrics to this letter tell that the brothers themselves had asked the learned Portuguese to give them theological lectures. St. Anthony, however, did not want to do this presumptuously without having first asked the founder for personal permission to do so.³ The doubts of Anthony were probably caused by the tenth chapter of the Rule: „Let those who are illiterate not be anxious to learn” – *non curent nescientes litteras litteras discere* (LR 10,7).

Francis responds to the request of Antony with a *Placet mihi* – „I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers” (LtAnt 2a). Then he adds the following condition:

“ ... *dummodo inter huius studium sanctae orationis et devotionis spiritum non extinguas, sicut in regula continetur.*

„... *providing that, as is contained in the Rule, you ‘do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion’ during study of this kind.*” (LtAnt 2b).

In the question about the permission to teach and study, Francis applies the same principle as for the manner of working (*modus laborandi*) of those brothers, to whom the Lord had given the grace to do so. These ought to fulfill their job in such a way, „that they do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion”. By this Francis makes a twofold statement about the studies of theology:

2. Studies are Work

Firstly he gives his *Placet* for teaching theology with explicit reference to the fifth chapter of the Rule, that is, not to extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion, „as is contained in the Rule” – *sicut in regula continetur*. Therefore Francis addresses the activity of Anthony, which is teaching sacred theology (*sacram theologiam legere*), within the title: *De modo laborandi* – „On the manner of working”. Teaching and studying theology has to be considered as a work of the Friars Minor. For those brothers who are entrusted with this task, their ability to work is a grace given to them by the Lord. Intellectual and theological work is no less and no more valuable than any other work of the brothers. It is subjected to the same criterias as the *laboritium* of manual work which Francis demands from each brother who is capable to do so.

3. Dead by the letter

With this, a second issue is stated: the intellectual work of teaching and studying of sacred theology (*sacra theologia*) is not of itself more sacred or more spiritual than any other work or handicraft (*ars*) which the brothers are allowed to exercise, „provided it is not contrary to the good of their souls and can be performed honestly” (ER 7,3). By warning his highly esteemed „bishop Anthony”, that „amid such study” – *inter huius studium* – he does „not extinguish the Spirit of prayer

³ ESSER & GRAU 1989, p. 150; cfr. PAOLAZZI 2009, pp. 168-171. The (same?) brothers had asked St. Anthony to make available to them the texts of his sermons, as he mentions in the prologue of the *Sermones: precibus et caritate fratrum, qui me ad hoc compellebant* (ANTONII 1979, n. 5, p. 3) – „I was conquered by the prayers and love of brothers who have constrained me to it” (ANTHONY 2007, p. 4).

and devotion”, St. Francis makes clear that this could indeed happen. Especially the work of the theologians who teach the Word of God can on the one hand be of great use as a ministry of spirit and life (cfr. Test 13) to those who receive it, on the other hand it may also have a contrary effect for the ones who teach. Such a case is drawn up by Francis in the seventh Admonition:

„Those are put to death by the letter [of scripture] who only wish to know the words alone, that they might be esteemed wiser than others and be able to acquire great riches [...] And those religious are put to death by the letter who are not willing to follow the spirit of the divine letter but, instead, wish only to know the words and to interpret them for others.” (Adm 7,2-3)

Especially in dealing with sacred scripture (*divina littera*), Francis warns of a wrong use of this materia (the letter of Scripture), which in itself is spiritual, even divine, but nevertheless can lead to death for the one who concentrates exclusively on the material aspect of the letter, that is: who extinguishes the spirit of prayer and devotion, which is precisely the goal of sacred scripture, namely to administer spirit and life. This is followed by a fatal employment of the teaching of the Word of God, „in order to acquire great riches”, which is the economical and monetary misuse of theological work. Thus the principles for a proper attitude towards theological work are just the same as for any other work of the brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace to work.

IV. To work faithfully and devotedly

Because the ability to work is a grace which the Lord has given to the brothers, the manner of working here is described as such: that they „may work faithfully and devotedly” – *laborent fideliter et devote*.

1. That they should work (*laborent*)

Firstly the verb „to work” finds repetition: Those to whom the grace was given „to be able to work, ought to work” – *laborandi laborent*. This is not to be taken for granted. Therefore Francis stresses regarding himself: „and I want to work” – *et volo laborare*; and then adds: „and I earnestly desire” – *firmiter volo* – „all brothers to give themselves to honest work” – *quod laborent* (Test 20). Those to whom the grace is given to be capable of working should also be willing to work. An extra decision is required to engage in working along with the talent of being able to work which some have received from the Lord (cfr. Mt 25,16). Francis alludes to the parable of the talents in his eighteenth Admonition:

„Blessed is the servant who returns every good to the Lord God – qui omnia bona reddit Domino Deo – because whoever holds onto something hides the money of his Lord.” (Adm 18,2)

If the ability to work is a grace which the Lord „has given” (*dedit*) to a brother, then putting this grace to practise means to „give back” (*reddere*) this talent. Francis talks about „giving back” in the seventh Admonition where it deals with the intellectual work of studying and teaching holy scripture:

„And those are brought into life by the spirit of the divine letter who do not attribute every letter they know, or wish to know, to the body but, by word and example, return them to the most high Lord God to Whom every good belongs – reddunt [eam] altissimo Domino Deo cuius est omne bonum.” (Adm 7,4)

In this case the spirit will not be extinguished, on the contrary, the spirit of scripture (of the letter) brings to life those who are teaching and learning the Holy Scripture.

2. Faithfully and devotedly (*fideliter et devote*)

The manner of working ought to be *fideliter et devote* – „faithfully and devotedly”. Both notions can be understood in a twofold sense. By the double meaning already relation and tension between the two fundamental coordinates are expressed, of which one is more related to the body (*corpus*), the other one more to the soul (*anima*).

A first meaning of the adverb *fideliter* can be called „secular”, which is: faithfully, honestly, trustworthily, reliably, firmly, steadfastly, etc.⁴ The „faithful servant” (*fidelis servus*) is the one who reliably and with responsibility fulfills the task which has been endowed to him (cfr. Mt 24,45). The same can be said about the adverb *devote* which first of all means „devoting oneself to”; to fulfill a work or a task with devotion and commitment.⁵ Both qualities of this *modus laborandi* are also valid for a secular ethos of working. The brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working must not fall back below this common working morale.

Both adverbs also have a spiritual meaning. The adverb *fideliter* is derived from *fidelis* which in the way of speaking of St. Francis is being used as a noun as well as an adjective in the religious sense of „faithful”, meaning „a believer” or „believing”. The „faithful soul (*fidelis anima*) is united by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ” (2LrF 51). The parable of the „faithful and prudent servant” (*fidelis et prudens servus*) in the 23rd Admonition is applied to the repentant sinner (Adm 23,3). He is faithful and wise regarding his responsibility which he has towards his Lord, that is, before God.

3. Work becomes Prayer

As Francis judges ordinary and hard manual work (*laboritium*) as a grace which the Lord gives to a brother, the adverb *fideliter* takes on by itself a religious meaning, in a similar way as St. Paul defines manual work: „Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being; do it for the Lord rather than for men” (Col 3,23). Thus any work, whatever it may be, is performed in the presence of the Lord who has given the grace of doing exactly this work. Exercised with faithfulness, work becomes – as it were – by itself spiritual and religious. Within this condition, the proverb is valid: „My work is my prayer.” This, however, is only the case when work – through interior motivation and exterior intention – is done faithfully, looking upon the Lord who has given this grace.

Accomplished in the attitude of the „faithful soul” (*fidelis anima*), united to Christ by the Holy Spirit, work does not extinguish the Spirit of prayer but rather fosters it and becomes an expression of it. It is obvious though that the art of performing work in this sense of *fideliter*, that is, „faithfully” and „believing”, presupposes the practise of explicit and constant interior prayer. This attitude of faith while doing one’s work is the fruit of the working of the Spirit of the Lord whom the brothers always must desire, so that „his holy activity” (*sancta eius operatio*) works within themselves so that they pray always to Him [God]” – *orare semper ad eum* (LR 10,8-9). With this intention and desire, „above all else to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy activity”, every kind of work – be it manual or

⁴ GEORGES & GEORGES 1918a, sp. 2749.

⁵ GEORGES & GEORGES 1918a, sp. 2121; cfr. FQ 87 n. 20: *Devotio*: „Hingabe, Andacht, Aufmerksamkeit [...]. Ganz bei dem sein, was man tut”.

intellectual, secular or spiritual – will be liberated from being purely self-centred „care and solicitude for the things of this world” (*cura et sollicitudo huius saeculi*: LR 10,7).

4. Work as Consecration of Man to God

Even more than *fideliter* the adverb *devote* bears an original spiritual meaning: being dedicated to God, consecrated, pious, devout. This spiritual meaning is underlined through the concept of *devotionis spiritus* occurring in the same sentence. The noun *devotio* is derived from the verb *devoveo* which has the meaning of consecrate, vow, sacrifice o.s. or s.thing. In the Christian use of language *devotio* takes upon the meaning of devoutness, faithfulness, piety, religiousness.⁶ If the brothers really try to work „devotedly” (*devote*) they not only do not extinguish the spirit of devotion (*devotio*) but rather work in this spirit and favour it. By this the work of human person becomes a consecration of man with all of his doing to God.

V. Avoiding Idleness

Two negative clauses are opposed to the positive ones of *fideliter et devote*. Both of them are introduced by the final conjunction: *ita quod* – „so that”. They also sound somewhat similar to each other: to exclude idleness (*ex-cludere*), and not to extinguish the spirit (*non ex-tinguere*). The Latin expression *otium* in ancient Roman urban culture has the meaning of leisure, spare time, holiday, ease, rest, peace and quiet.⁷ The opposite of which is *negotium*, work, business, activity. Whereas in Roman culture *otium* is the long awaited leisure time from everyday’s business, in monastic understanding, the same notion means an evil that has to be avoided.

When dealing with the topic of work and prayer the seventh chapter of the Earlier Rule relies on the fundamental principles of patristic-monastic tradition with which Francis became acquainted through liturgy, the reading of the *Vitae sanctorum patrum*⁸ or through oral tradition:

„Let all the brothers always strive to exert themselves in doing good works, for it is written: ‘Always do something good that the devil may find you occupied’. And again: ‘Idleness is an enemy of the soul.’ Servants of God, therefore, must always apply themselves to prayer or some good work.” (ER 7,10-12)⁹

1. Exert themselves in doing good works

The first sentence is a reference to Gregory the Great: „Let all the brothers always strive to exert themselves in doing good works” – *Omnes fratres studeant bonis operibus insudare*.¹⁰ The verb *insudare* literally means: to sweat on (doing something). It reminds us of Genesis 3,19: „By the sweat

⁶ Cfr. GEORGES & GEORGES 1918a, 2121ff.; Glossar (FQ 1716).

⁷ Cfr. GEORGES & GEORGES 1918b, 1423.

⁸ Cfr. AP 39,6: FQ 596; *The Founder* 2000, p. 53; MENESTÒ & BRUFANI et al. 1995, p. 1342.

⁹ FQ 76; FS 28f.; *The Saint* 1999, p. 69.

¹⁰ GREGORIUS: *Homiliae in Evangelia*. I, XIII: Gregory comments on Lc 11,35-40, dealing, however, not about work but about overcoming temptation of the flesh and the good example for others. The sentence to which ER 7,10a refers in Gregory’s text says: *quia minus est mala non agere, nisi etiam quisque studeat bonis operibus insudare*. The first part of the homilies was adapted in the Ordinary of Pope Innocenz III for the Office of a Confessor from where it found its way into liturgy.

(*in sudore*) of your face shall you get bread to eat.” Every work which is done with faithfulness and devotion can cause one to sweat while doing it. Brother Roger, the first spiritual guide of Saint Elisabeth of Hungary / Thuringia, counseled her, „to work hard in doing the works of mercy” – *operibus misericordiae insudare*.¹¹ This implies that the expression *bonis operibus insudare* is not only applied to manual work but means every whole-hearted commitment to any form of ministry and labour.

2. Always do something good

The second sentence is a quotation by St. Jerome: „Always do something good that the devil may find you occupied” – *Semper facito aliquid boni*.¹² In order to avoid „idleness” (*otium*), the servant of God must be attentive to never doing nothing; positively said: he must always do something; not just anything, however, but something which shows the quality of goodness: *aliquid boni*. This goes in accordance to St. Francis’ teaching of threefold obedience in his third Admonition:

„And whatever – *quidquid* – he does and says which he knows is not contrary to his will is true obedience, provided that what he does is good – *dum bonum sit quod facit*.” (Adm 3,4)¹³

This first form of obedience St. Francis calls „true obedience” – *vera obedientia*. It is defined through a rather wide range of creativity: *quidquid facit et dicit* – „whatever he does and says”. The only limits of which are that they are not contrary to the superior’s explicit will and „that what he does is good” – *dum bonum sit quod facit*. The admonition aims at the same goal: „Always do something good” – *aliquid boni*. The noun „something” (*aliquid*) opens a space of creativity for any kind of work for which the Lord has given his grace to a brother. The “good” (*boni*) bears in itself the seal of the One who does, says and fulfills every good in the human person (Adm 2,3; 8,3: *qui dicit et facit omne bonum*). Thus striving always to do something good becomes in itself a spiritual activity because – firstly – good always has to do with God himself and – secondly – by this doing, the evil of idleness is driven out so that “there the enemy cannot have a place to enter” (Adm 27,5). The house of the Lord, the heart of the human person, does not remain empty (cfr. ER 22,23; Mt 12,44), but is guarded through continuous occupation with any good thing.

3. Always at prayer or some occupation

The third sentence is taken from the Rule of St. Benedict: „Idleness is an enemy of the soul.” In the chapter on daily work this Rule says: *Otiositas inimica est animae* – „Idleness is an enemy of the soul. Therefore the brothers should be occupied at certain times in manual labor, and again at fixed hours in sacred reading.”¹⁴

The Earlier Rule of St. Francis (and in a more concise way also the Later Rule) adopts the monastic principle of balance between work and spiritual occupation: „Servants of God, therefore, must always

¹¹ Jord 25,4. in FQ 988; JORDAN 2012, p. 78f.

¹² HIERONYMUS: *Epistola CXXV*,11 (CSEL 56/1, 130): *Fac et aliquid operis, ut semper te diabolus inveniat occupatum*. This word of St. Jerome was cited by Pope Innocent III in one of his sermons which again is found in the Breviary of Saint Francis (fol. 185va) for the feast of a Confessor: *Semper igitur aliquid operis facito, ut diabolus occupatum te inveni*.

¹³ FQ 47; FS 178-181; *The Saint* 1999, p. 130.

¹⁴ Cfr. BENEDIKT: *Regula XLVIII*, 1: *Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina*. (*Die Benediktusregel* 1992, pp. 184f.)

apply themselves to prayer or some good work.” By adding the word „devotion” *devotioni* to „prayer” *orationi* one manuscript draws a direct line to the Later Rule.¹⁵ So already in the Earlier Rule, everlasting prayer – *semper orationi* – and deliberate occupation with any good is highly recommended: *alicui bonae operationi insistere debent*.

VI. Not extinguishing the Spirit of Devotion

The second negative clause by which working *fideliter et devote* is defined, says: „so that they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion” – *sanctae orationis spiritum non extinguant*. If *fideliter* can be related to avoiding idleness through occupation with the good then *devote* refers even more clearly to the second clause, not to extinguish the spirit of the *devotio*.

1. Do not extinguish the Spirit

The biblical inspiration for the formulation „do not extinguish the spirit” is found in the first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians: „Do not quench the Spirit” – *Spiritum nolite extinguere* (1Thess 5,19). Immediately before that the apostle admonishes to „never cease praying” – *sine intermissione orate* (v. 17). In connection with this call for unceasing prayer St. Francis takes up the admonition not to quench the Spirit. To do so, e.g. „not to extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion” but rather to kindle it (cfr. Rom 12,11) is neither a method of prayer nor some particular technique of devotion. „The Spirit of prayer” is at the same time „the Spirit of the Lord”, the presence (*habere*) and working (*operatio*) of which the brothers must desire (*desiderare debent*) above all else, as it is said in the tenth chapter of the Rule:

„but let them pay attention to what they must desire above all else: to have the Spirit of the Lord and its holy activity, to pray always to Him with a pure heart” (LR 10,8-9).¹⁶

2. Longing for the Spirit of the Lord

Longing for the Spirit of the Lord of which the first activity is constant prayer (*orare semper*), transcends any method, technique or practical know-how; it means, rather, the interior desire for a personal relationship. This desire is for the Spirit of the Lord who for its part seeks the relationship with the Triune God, as Francis writes:

„Above all, it desires the divine fear, the divine wisdom and the divine love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (ER 17,16)¹⁷

The Spirit of the Lord is in itself the personification of seeking God. It realizes in itself all that which prayer and devotion contains, being the act of relating to the Triune God. The Spirit of prayer and devotion is – so to speak – in itself prayer and devotion. Its holy activity (*sancta eius operatio*) realizes itself in this: „to pray always to Him – that is: to the Triune God – with a pure heart” – *orare semper ad eum puro corde* (LR 10,9). Francis does not say that the brothers should practice constant prayer and exercise perfect devotion, but they should strive above all else (*super omnia*) to desire the

¹⁵ *Opuscula* 1989, p. 37: W3: Wien, Nationalbibliothek, cod 4724, ca. 1447, fol. 95f.

¹⁶ FQ 101; FS 82f.; *The Saint* 1999, p. 105.

¹⁷ FQ 83f.; FS 46f.; *The Saint* 1999, p. 76.

Spirit of the Lord who is the Spirit of prayer and devotion and who will accomplish in them its holy work.

As in the vocabulary of St. Francis, where contemplation (*contemplatio*) means the faithful beholding of Jesus Christ (cfr. Adm 1,20),¹⁸ so devotion (*devotio*) represents the longing for the Spirit of the Lord. It is by using these four verbs and auxiliary verbs that Francis tries to express that absolute priority regarding the Spirit of the Lord: *attendant, quod desiderare debent habere* – „let them pay attention to what they must desire ... to have ...” The auxiliary „must” does not refer to „have” but to „desire”. This „must desire” is intensified to a superlative by *super omnia* – „above all”. The superlative „above all” corresponds in the chapter on the manner of working to another „must” relating to the Spirit of prayer and devotion: „to which all temporal things must contribute” – *cui debent cetera temporalia deservire* (LR 5,2). Therefore – positively said – the longing for the Spirit of the Lord and – negatively put – not extinguishing the same Spirit, make up one and the same primary goal, to which all other things must contribute, such as: the concrete practice of prayer, meditation, reciting the Office as well as any manual or intellectual work.¹⁹

3. Beholding the Pierced One

Where might St. Francis have drawn this concept of „the Spirit of prayer and devotion” from? If it is not to be found somewhere in liturgy, with the church fathers or in monastic literature, it could as well be an original creation by the Saint himself. An expression, however, which to some extent corresponds to the concept of *spiritus orationis et devotionis* can be found in the prophet Zechariah:

„I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication (spiritum gratiae et precum); and they shall look on me whom they have pierced.” (Zech 12,10)

The pouring out of this Spirit upon those who receive it has the effect of a certain direction of sight: „they shall look on me”. The evangelist John sees the fulfilment of this prophecy by the death of Jesus on the Cross. After the opening of the side of Jesus so that „immediately blood and water flowed out” (John 19,34), the evangelist adds – with a slight alteration of the text:

„These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: [...] They will look on the one they have pierced (videbunt in quem transfixerunt).” (John 19,36-37)

By this the disciple himself has become one of those upon whom the „Spirit of grace and supplication” had been poured out. He saw how Jesus had been pierced, how he gave up His Spirit (John 19,30) and how blood and water flowed out of his opened side. So the disciple standing by the Cross of Jesus became someone „beholding the Pierced One”.

This disciple is depicted on the picture of the Cross, right below the pierced side of the Lord, the painted Cross of San Damiano in front of which St. Francis had prayed: „Enlighten the darkness of my heart” (PrCr).²⁰ This enlightenment happened, as the three companions report, because the allocution of the Crucified One had filled him up with such a light, „that he sensed the real presence of Christ

¹⁸ Cfr. to this my reflections (2016): *Unsere Hingabe im Gebet – contemplatio*.

¹⁹ Cfr. *Gespräch des hl. Seraphim von Sarov über das Ziel des christlichen Lebens* 1981, pp. 30f.: „Das wahrhaftige Ziel unseres christlichen Lebens besteht jedoch in der ERLANGUNG DES HEILIGEN GEISTES GOTTES. Fasten aber und Nachtwachen, Gebet oder Wohltätigkeit, alle um Christi willen verrichteten guten Werke sind Mittel zur Erlangung des Heiligen Geistes Gottes”.

²⁰ FQ 13; FS 208f.; *The Saint* 1999, p. 40.

Crucified in his soul”; and from that hour „he always carried the wounds of Jesus Christ in his heart” (L3C V,13,10; V,14,1).²¹ By this the Spirit of grace and prayer was poured out upon Francis so that he himself turned into someone beholding the Pierced One. This could possibly be the deepest reason why Francis so highly admonishes the brothers to never „extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion” in order not to lose sight of Jesus Christ and the beholding of the Pierced One.

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²¹ Cfr. FQ 619f.; *The Founder* 2000, p. 76.

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