

St FRANCIS TODAY

2. THE NEW MILLENNIUM PEACE MISSION

The spirit that filled St Francis with a passion
and a mission eight centuries ago
has something to say to us today,
given the threats to world peace
and the desperate conditions of poverty,
hunger, HIV/AIDS, unemployment
and the appalling conditions of unlimited urban sprawl
that is destroying family and community life,
plus rural sprawl that is gradually destroying the natural environment, which he loved.

A singular opportunity is before the followers
of St Francis for making a contribution
to resolving these issues, given that
the circumstances in Africa at this time
closely resemble those in Europe
at the close of the first Millennium, from which
essential lessons can and should be learned.

Following the fall of the Roman Empire,
the scientific and engineering skills that had been highly developed were neglected and fell into
disrepair

Artistic expression declined and literacy was rare.
The administrative inefficiency of the towns
led to their downfall, which was accelerated
by a breakdown in law and order
- all of which undermined the economies
of both Rome and their colonies on which they depended for their revenues.

The capacity of the King and his courts
to enforce order collapsed
resulting in a period of fighting and plunder
that the authorities were powerless to stop.
The victims of this pillage were the poor,
the elderly and physically weak,
while the ill-prepared among the larger landowners
became attractive targets for robbery.
- all of which resulted in a society turning upon itself.
It all sounds very familiar.

Many people were convinced that the end of the world
or the Second Coming was at hand.

In this desperate situation the rural populations
had no alternative but to seek their own solutions.

It was then that the Church responded to the collapse of law and order with the movement known as
'The Peace of God'

With the formation of *'Councils of Peace'*

a truce was negotiated in the violent countryside.
From then on, the local churches played
an increasingly important social and economic role,
which stimulated a culture of self-reliance,
in which they provided basic education
and reproduced books and manuscripts,
including information about farming and industry.

Thereby the churches contributed significantly
to improving the state of the farming economy
and the improvement in the quality of
grains, fruits and breeding stock.
They cleared lands, built dams drained swamps,
rebuilt roads, fallen bridges and Roman aqueducts.

Ultimately they went on to construct cathedrals
that helped develop many artisan
and engineering skills, and by sponsoring literacy, higher education and universities,
future populations were prepared with the skills needed for the coming of the industrial revolution.

It is known that the Third Order of St Francis
played a seminal role in that emergence
from the then 'Dark Ages'

There is every reason to believe
that we face a similar challenge today.
in that 'world hunger' and 'world peace' has to start with the individual,
for as Jesus stated in his Sermon on the Mount,
"Blessed are the peace-makers"
because peace is not something that is just wished or prayed for - it has to be *made*.

Finding peace in this troubled world
is not an absence of troubles
- but of transcending them - as St Francis declared .

"You must teach only by persuasion and example— never by coercion or punishment. You cannot teach peace through war' You cannot teach gentleness by violence, nor love and forgiveness by retribution and wrath. The Citadel you have to capture is the heart"

By taking St Francis' example of practicality,
the creation of new *"Peace Councils"*
in every community would create
a positive climate and outlet working as true
Peace-makers and Citizen Diplomats of Christ
for finding creative resolution of real problems
where they exist.

