

Instruments of Christ

Chapters Three through Eight explore the six seeds that need to be sown if Easter peace is to blossom in this world. Chapters Nine through Eleven highlight the challenges and rewards of looking beyond “me” to “thee.” Chapter Twelve offers a brief summary of the book’s content.

Each chapter, with the exception of the final one, concludes with four reflection and discussion questions.

I wrote *Instruments of Christ: Reflections on the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi* for ordinary Christians like myself, who pray the Peace Prayer but do not always have the time to reflect upon its challenges and implications.

WHO WROTE THE PEACE PRAYER?

Most of us know this prayer by its popular title, “The Peace Prayer of Saint Francis.” And yet, Saint Francis did not write the prayer and no one quite knows how it became attributed to the saint. The French scholar Christian Renoux has done extensive research into the history of the prayer and aptly calls this “a riddle to be solved.”

Though a French prayer similar to the first part of the Peace Prayer can be traced back to the early eleventh century and thus, two hundred years before Francis of Assisi, according to Renoux, the prayer as we know it has its roots in the twentieth century.

In 1901, a French priest, Esther Bouquerel, founded La Ligue de la Sainte-Messe (“The Holy Mass League”) and began publishing a small magazine called *La Clochette*. The first appearance of the Peace Prayer was in 1912 when Bouquerel published it in his magazine under the title “Belle

priere a faire pendant la messe” (“A Beautiful Prayer to Say During Mass”). Though there was no author’s name attached to the prayer, Renoux leaves open the possibility that it might have been Father Bouquerel himself.

According to Renoux’s research in the Vatican Archives, the French Marquis Stanislas de La Rochethulon sent this French prayer to Pope Benedict XV in 1915. In January 1916, the Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, published it. As World War I raged in Europe, that week’s editions of the newspaper published certain prayers for peace addressed to the Sacred Heart and encouraged by the Pope.

Around 1920, a French Franciscan priest printed the prayer, now called “Priere pour la paix” (“Prayer for Peace”), on the back of an image of Saint Francis. However, he did not attribute the prayer to the saint. The oldest attribution to the saint appears to be in a French Protestant publication in 1927. During the two world wars, the prayer circulated in Europe and was translated into English.

According to Renoux, the first English translation—but not the most common version of the prayer as we know it—appeared in 1936 in *Living Courageously*, a book by Kirby Page, a Disciple of Christ minister. Page clearly attributes the prayer to Saint Francis.*

Francis Joseph Cardinal Spellman, archbishop of New York from 1939–1967, seems to have had a special devotion to the Peace Prayer. At the celebration of his installation as archbishop on May 23, 1939, he handed out copies of “The Peace Prayer of St. Francis.” And when Pope Paul VI visited the United Nations and New York in 1965, Spellman asked for

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the prayer to be sung during the Papal Mass in Yankee Stadium. After the Mass, Spellman offered a medallion to the Pope with the first sentence of the prayer engraved on it.

Though Saint Francis of Assisi did not write the Peace Prayer, it still encapsulates who Francis was and whom Jesus calls us all to be.

NOTE:

*Renoux, Dr. Christian, *La Prière de la Paix Attribuée à Saint François: Une Énigme à Résoudre* (Paris: Editions Franciscaines, 2001).