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TANGAZA COLLEGE
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AFRICA

FRANCISCAN PENITENTIAL SPIRITUALITY



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1998
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This is a long paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a diploma in the Institute of spirituality and Religious Formation

4th APRIL 1998

Nairobi, Kenya

Student's Declaration

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic Credit or any other Institution. All sources have been cited in full.

Benjamin

BR. BEN FACCO FTA'0

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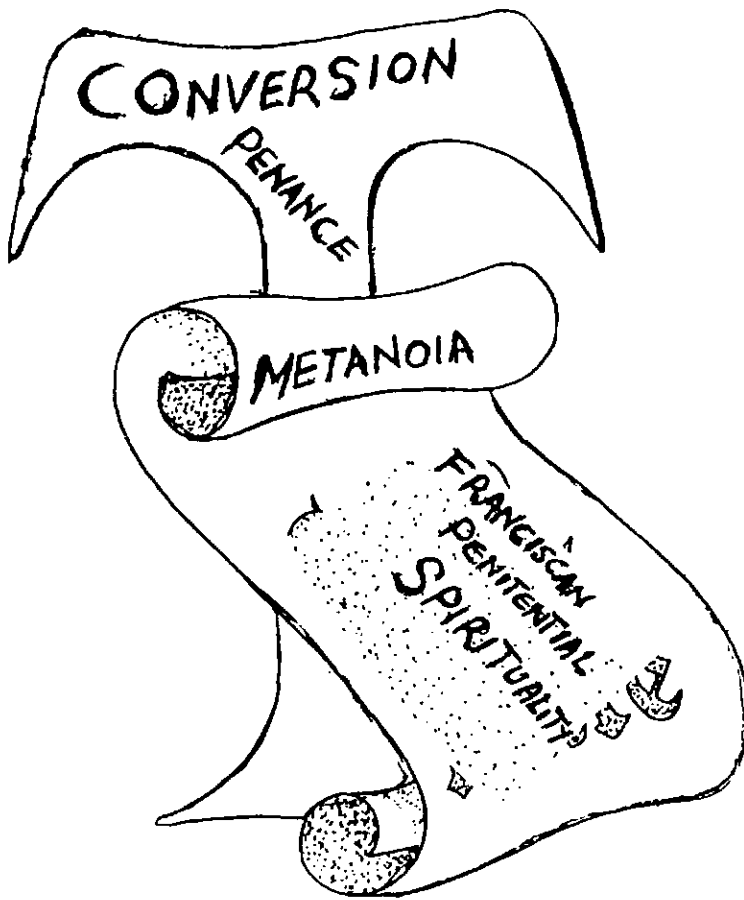
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who have made this work possible: my own brothers who availed me the opportunity to participate in this course on Spirituality and Religious Formation. The teachers of Tangaza college and all who contributed to the well being of Spirituality and Religious Formation programme; my classmates who despite their commitment persevered up to the end, their encouragement and support, and above all, their sense of being one people on the same journey has been a great source of encouragement. This work would not have been possible without the careful reading correction and direction given by my Tutor, Fr. David Costello OCD. Many thanks goes to Fr. Tom Curran SMA who played a very important role in shaping this essay into a readable document. For all who have helped me to make it possible, may the risen Lord walk with you on the road to Emmaus.



INTRODUCTION

Penance for most people today can mean a variety of things: it is looked at as sacramental rite, acts of mortification and flagellations, as reparation for sins committed, as prayers for satisfaction or as a complete change of life. It comes as a result of one's consciousness of one's sinful tendencies and inability to do everything as one would like to, and turning to God for forgiveness and healing. Penance is a requirement for all Christians. It is an integral part of Christian life. Its purpose is to express and develop the ongoing conversion to which all the faithful are called.

The term penance in Franciscan tradition is equivalent to the Biblical *metanoia*, which in its proper understanding stands for an intimate conversion of the heart to God. It is not so much a question of doing penance but of being a penitent. It is at the same time a state of continuous being, an attitude and orientation of one's whole life. It is an answer to the evangelical call and a way of seeking evangelical perfection. It is, therefore, not seen as a simple purification for sin. It, rather, goes beyond mere purification from sin to a more profound insertion into the paschal mystery of Christ. It is a commitment. Its foundation is God, from whom, through whom, and in whom is found all pardon, all grace, all glory, for all penitents. In this long essay I am looking at penance as a way of life and not so much as a practice. I am following the biblical understanding of the term Penance as *Metanoia*. I have chosen this topic in order to explore this very important element in my Franciscan spirituality.

PART I
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 1
BIBLICAL TIMES

1.1 IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Penance is a dimension of the call to conversion. It is an ever present dynamic of a Christian life, not a one time or occasional reality. As we know it today, it comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word *metanoia* as *poenitentia*. The root of this is in the Exodus experience of the Israelites. They experienced God as their personal God, loving them and caring for them despite their shortcomings. They developed a deep sense of belonging to him.

The kind of life Yahweh expected them to lead was simply to behave as his people and he would act as their God. Yahweh made a covenant with them to seal this relationship. It was a covenant of relationship and not of subordination. In any covenant there are stipulations, promises and response. The stipulations for this covenant were: for the Israelites to listen to Yahweh's voice, keep the covenant, and then, its promises would be fulfilled as a consequence. The promise was as follows:

You shall be my people, my special possession, dearer to me than all other people by becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" - Ex. 19:5-6

Yahweh also promised to lead his people to conquer and possess the land of Canaan.

Moses, his spokesman gave them more stipulations on what Yahweh expected from them.

If you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you shall live in the land you are entering to occupy. If however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you, you will certainly perish: you will not have a long life on the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and occupy.

- Dt. 30:11-18.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 they are to love the Lord with their whole selves, not only themselves but also those who will come after them and wherever they go. In short, the whole covenant relationship is based on the love of God which is to be passed over from one generation to the next.

Yet we see the Israelites turning away from this covenant relationship at a very early stage, even before the promises are fully fulfilled. On the way to the land of the promise they grumbled and murmured against the Lord, their God. By so doing they failed to honour the covenant in losing faith in Yahweh, their God. It was a sign of rebellion on the part of the people; therefore, they sinned against God. This turning away and making of golden calf is the clearest away of breaking the covenant. *They preferred other gods.* Moses tells them that they have been rebellious since the time he knew them (Dt. 9:24; Num. 14:1-4).

Rebellion in Hebrew is *rib*, meaning to murmur or to grumble or to complain. People murmured because they had lost faith in God. They had lost the sense of Yahweh as a caring,

loving and providential God. They forgot the very act of liberation from Egypt. The consequences of this rebellion were: the worship of idols, making pacts with the gentiles, demanding for a king and oppressing the poor.

Whenever the people left Yahweh, he often punished them or threatened punishment. The prophets were there calling the people to *sub* (Hebrew word used in scriptures to express repentance/*metanoia*/conversion). In its context it refers to turning back. "It is a physical turning, a turn about or change of direction from one locale to another"¹. It is a complete turn. A return from the present locale to the former or a completely new locale. In its religious sense it is a call to turn away from sin(s). A turn from evil ways and tendencies to the life of grace. It can also have a moral connotation of amending one's behaviour and behaving in the expected manner. The word *sub* is used 1056 times in the Hebrew scriptures referring to many different realities. In the moral- religious field it is used 118 times. In Samuel we have expressions like lifting up one's eyes to heaven in contrast to the earth where people are accustomed to looking, turning away one's face from God (1 Sam. 7,3), or in Sirach, to turn one's back on sin. (Sir. 17, 21-23).

1.2 PENANCE IN THE TEACHING OF THE PROPHETS

The prophets are very much preoccupied with this call to *sub*. The call for the Israelites to turn back to God is at the heart of their prophetic ministry. They are called to

¹ Falley, Roland, Biblical Considerations on Metanoia, Pittsburgh: Franciscan federation, 1990. p.2

remind the people to turn back to Yahweh. It is often accompanied by threats of God's wrath and punishment if they refuse to *sub*. Punishment, is not because he wants to break the covenant but because he wants to bring them back. God's justice is exemplified through punishment of the people, cf. Ezek 33:17-19.

The prophet Hosea's marriage relationship with Gomer vividly portrays God's call for the people to return to him. Despite the fact that Gomer is unfaithful (she has turned away from Hosea), he remains faithful to her. This is God's relationship with the sinful Israel. Hosea reflecting on this, says, that Israel shall turn back and seek the Lord, their God (3:5). Yahweh does not treat them as their sins deserve. He treats them with love and care and keeps calling on them to *sub* to him.

Isaiah brings out the physical condition of the penitents and asks them to wash, purify and make themselves clean, behaving in a new manner as well as doing good deeds. (Is. 1:16-17). God is ready to receive them back once they have fulfilled these conditions. He goes on to tell them that repentance should be accompanied by remorseful actions of fasting, wearing of sack cloths and applying ashes on their body. Other signs of repentance, according to the prophet Jonah, are rending the garments, weeping and walking with slow steps (Jon 3:5-9, 1 Kings 21: 27-29), as well as brotherly concern(Is 58:5-7). However these deeds are meaningless without the interior conversion. Both the outward and the inward change make one's repentance complete. Turning back to God and charitable deeds are intertwined; they are the two elements leading to true penance according to Isaiah. "Its effects are to be lasting;

dynamic and ongoing, not a static state... There is to be a complete regeneration of the people, which will involve a purification from sinfulness, a new heart and a new spirit and a resultant observance of the Lord's will². Jeremiah uses the symbolism of circumcision of heart. Circumcision makes one new physically and socially, moreover one is supposed to behave like a mature person. This is what the prophet is calling for (4:4). Like Isaiah, he does not only call for external change but an internal one as well (9:25). Repentance to Jeremiah is a profound rerouting of one's internal values.

Rebellion (*rib*) is looked at as adultery. The Israelites are preferring other gods to Yahweh who led them through the Exodus experience. Yet Yahweh sits waiting for them to leave their sinfulness and turn back to him (Ho. 3:5). They are called to break away from ungodly behaviour and choose Yahweh in place of these other gods. Turning to the Lord is the first step one takes. It is not the end by itself but a means to God's unconditional forgiveness. Once we have turned back to him, then, we experience his total forgiving love.

Metanoia conversion or penance in this case can be used interchangeably to indicate an attitude which corrects the former one in relation to God. To do penance is Latin's translation of *metanoia* as *paenitentiam agere*. To do penance cannot be sincere without a change of habit or orientation and desiring to remain in the present state of life, thus leaving behind the adulterous way one is accustomed to. The Prophet Daniel uses expressions like, to *lift up one's heart to heaven, to turn one's face to God* (4:34; 9:3). *Metanoia* is used in the

² Ibid.,

prophetic writings indicating a twofold action: turning away from and turning towards. Without a turn towards *metanoia* cannot be complete.

1.3 PENANCE IN THE QUMRAN COMMUNITY

Qumran was a community of devout Essenes on the Dead Sea shores. The Essenes of this community were purists who devoted their life to prayer and good living. They were very conscious of the imminent coming of the Messiah. It was an eschatological community which considered itself as the community of the 'Remnants'. They had separated themselves from the rest of the Jews.

The fact that they saw themselves as the holy ones made them equate penance with entrance into the community. It was a big thing for one to be accepted in this community. Conversion was essential to becoming an Essene. One had first of all to stop sinning, leave the world of perversity to live this life full of hope. Entrance to the new life was accompanied by purification rites and cleansing from the stains of the former sinful life.

There was heavy emphasis on abiding by the law of Moses. This made them legalistic and exclusive. They lived a monastic kind of life, doing penance in terms of strict adherence of the letter of the law.

1.4 PENANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1.4a JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist brings the notion of penance into the New Testament by calling the people to a change of heart by change of behaviour accompanied by bearing worthy fruits (Lk. 3:10-14). His preaching slightly differs from that of the Old Testament prophets in that the prophets called the people to return to the Lord by going back to the covenant relationship while John's is more fundamental call for urgent reaction. "There is a demand for interior change as well as the action that both gives witness to that change and enforces it with new pattern of behaviour".³

John's preaching of conversion is a call for urgent action. The time has come already, therefore, there is no time for preparations; it is now because already the axe is laid at the root of the tree:

every tree therefore, which is not yielding good fruits will be cut and thrown into a fire - Mt. 3:10.

This kind of penance entails baptism in water for change of heart (Mt. 3:11) but it goes beyond mere baptism to complete detachment with one's sinful past and demands a change of practice. In Luke's Gospel there is a hint of what these "fruits are". John gives a moral answer. What is required is basic justice and sharing one's personal goods with the needy, showing justice and love (Lk.3,10-14). John's preaching here, resembles Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 58,5-7)...sharing your bread with the hungry... Greed is one of the enemies of bearing

³ Celaschi, Nancy, Resource for the Study of the Third Order Regular Rule, Washington DC: Franciscan Federation, 1994. p.264

worthy fruits. Therefore, those who want to embark on this conversion must be satisfied with what they have. They should not exploit the poor any longer, should give back what they have obtained through unlawful means; then come and be baptised.

John's baptism is of water but the one who comes after him who is mighty will not only baptise with water but with spirit and fire. His baptism will be superior to that of his forerunner, John. This baptism is actualised on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples experienced complete transformation. Fire in the Bible is a symbol of purification.

1.4b JESUS CHRIST AND THE CALL FOR PENANCE

The Synoptics, Matthew and Mark present Jesus' preaching on *Metanoia* immediately after his baptism and testing in the desert. His message is quite simple

The expected time has come and the Kingdom of God has drawn near: change your minds and believe in the gospel. - Mt. 4,17 ; Mk. 1:15

This message does not differ so much from the one of John the Baptist although there is an additional mark of "believe in the gospel". Also there is no mention of Jesus baptising like his forerunner; he simply preaches the message and then goes ahead recruiting the first people to break with their past, e.g. the fishermen *straightaway, leaving their nets, they followed him.* (Mk. 4:20). His call to conversion was a radical one involving not only breaking with the past but also embracing a new occupation. i.e. becoming his followers. Its only yardstick is the law of love embracing in its ambit both God and man. Sin is an obstacle to the reign of God on earth. Therefore, our breaking away from sin paves way for the kingdom to come down on the earth. When this happens, God's reign is abundant. Conversion is the first step to

salvation. External ritualisms are not enough by themselves, they must rather, be followed by interior cleansing which shows itself in actions of love.

*Metanoia*s, therefore, a total gift of oneself to the kingdom. It is the “call to a life of engagement in God and his interests, which calls for a undivided response and radical separation”⁴.

Jesus gives severe demands for this life. He says if any one wants to be his follower he must deny his very self, take up the cross everyday and follow him. (Mt. 16:25: Mk. 8:34-35.) He also makes it very clear that unless a grain of wheat falls and dies it cannot have life (John 12:24-25); unless there is this complete detachment and re-orientation, there cannot be true conversion. Pazelli, sums this up saying that, “for Christ, conversion is not purely ethical; it will be complete only if one belongs totally to God. Concretely one must become a disciple of Christ, believing in the gospel (Mk. 16,16). This adherence to the Father through Christ fundamentally demands that the individual recognises his sinfulness, feels remorse about his/her condition, and desires pardon”⁵.

John and Jesus proclaim the change of heart. It is a message needed more today than ever before, when people have grown so stubborn in themselves, so adverse to religious and moral teachings of today’s prophets. There is a great need for continuous call to conversion

⁴ Falley, op. cit., 88.

⁵ Pazelli Rafaele, St. Francis and the Third order, The Franciscan and Pre-franciscan Movement, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989. p. 15.

and living models who can challenge the world with all its values and bring them to a change of heart. Some might pay heed and be converted to the Lord. The Kingdom of God is for those who embark on this journey to true conversion. It is a process with a beginning and pointing towards the New Life which will be the end of this conversion journey.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY CHURCH

2.1 PENANCE DURING THE FIRST FIVE CENTURIES

Penance continued to be practised in the early church. However, the practice changed from century to century. In the early church “there was a gradual development of penitential *discipline* as a means of reconciliation within the community and, at the same time, as an ascetical path of spirituality”⁶.

During the first five centuries penance was referred to as confession. It took place usually during the Eucharistic celebration. Forgiveness was only administered by the bishop. The one who confessed was enrolled in the order of penitents, meaning that he contracted civil and ecclesiastical disabilities and was to do penance in public.

The penitents usually sat at low places in the temple and kept on advancing closer to the altar until forgiveness was finally administered. They were not allowed to join the rest of the assembly, no offerings accepted from them and no communion. The sinner was to do strict penance as imposed by the only legitimate instrument of God’s forgiveness i.e., the bishop. The form of penance varied e.g., fasting, wearing dirty and torn clothing, praying for many hours prostrated on the ground, wearing a hair shirt, prolonged tears, making

⁶ Seraphim J. Conley, Ed., Third Order of St. Francis. Resource Manual, Rome: Via dei Fori Imperiali, 1994. p.5

pilgrimages to the tombs of the apostles, and almsgiving. In many churches the sinner was forbidden to marry or, if he was married, he was enjoined not to use his marital rights. (Ladislas Orsy p.32).

These were times of great persecution in the church. It was also a great period of heroism in which Christians showed themselves willing to sacrifice their own lives to affirm their faith and fidelity to Christ. When this era came to an end, “there arose new forms of witness (*martirio*) and voluntary heroism. One of these forms was the choice of entrance into the *Ordo Poenitentiae* or the acceptance of the public penitential discipline”⁷

We find a number of Christians willingly embracing the programme of penance which the church had prepared for public sinners. They did this as their way of striving towards personal perfection.

In the following pages I will briefly look at these different forms of penance embraced by Christians during this era.

2.2 PENANCE UNDERSTOOD AS SEEKING PERFECTION

Around the same period, the monastic penitential influence comes into the church in the East. Penance here was a desire for perfection. This was very much spearheaded by the conversion of Constantine and his religious toleration. People had become so much used to

⁷ Conley, op. cit.

“carrying their own crosses” through persecutions. There was no more persecutions, Therefore, some decided to go into the desert and there struggle with the demons. They took flight from the world. The monasteries were seen as an expression of the Kingdom, it was a place of perfection and a good way of becoming a good follower of Christ. It was the perfect alternative to persecutions and living in the challengeless “world”.

Towards the end of the fifth century, other people looked for a way of living this perfection but not through living in monasteries. They voluntarily entered the order of penitents as a way of perfection: they did this by fasting, wearing poor dresses, alms giving, by relinquishing military service; commerce, public or clerical office, in continence (those who were married), and celibacy for the unmarried. A widow who joined this order could not re-marry, etc. In this aspect, penance became a way of life. Note that, there were abuses associated to this: instead of giving the alms to the poor some people gave them to the church or to their confessor; also, if one was unable to do penance, one could get a pious person and pay him to do penance on his behalf.

With the so many penitents entering this order of penitents it started to be structured in the form of religious life. Some started to live a regular life in communities. These were often referred to as *Fratres paenitentiales* or *conversi* to distinguish them from *fratres* who were monks and from the canons, also from the ‘secular’ penitents. They used to live a fixed style of life with a statute called *Propositum* or program, e.g. the Sisters of penance in Italy, France and Germany called the Beguines.

2.3 IRISH PENANCE

There was another form of penance in Europe from around the fifth century onwards which had a lasting influence in the church up to today. It came from the Celtic missionaries monks under St. Columbanus. Their penance, the so called tariff penance, was private and easy to do because there wasn't much public discipline and humiliation, like in the Mediterranean world. It was not just administered by the bishops but by priests as well. Satisfaction was also done in secret. The sinners were never known to the public. The Irish monks crossed to the European (Mediterranean) continent with penitential books detailing different kinds of sins and the appropriate penance. Their understanding of penance spread very fast with many people adapting it. "They must have been longing to know about God's forgiveness and to obtain it through visible and sacred signs. The Irish filled this need".⁸

However, this reduced the communitarian notion of sin and forgiveness to being a personal affair with God. For them, all sins were forgivable provided there was enough satisfaction. As a result, there were two conflicting understanding of penance in the church: i.e. Irish penitential orientation, and the Mediterranean one.

To overcome this conflict a council of bishops was held at Toledo in 589. 62 bishops at the council condemned the Irish penance. They said, "we have learned that, throughout some churches of Spain, the faithful are not doing penance according to the canonical rule but in another detestable way. That is, as many times as it pleases them to sin, they ask a presbyter

⁸ Orsy, Ladislav, The Evolving Church and the Sacrament of Penance, New York: Dimension Books, 1978. p.37

to grant them pardon. We want to put an end such an abominable presumption. This council orders that penance be given according to the rite...the person who repents of his evil deeds be excluded temporarily from Eucharistic communion and, along with other penitents, ask often for the imposition of hands...Those who relapse into sins, either while doing penance or after they have been reconciled, must be condemned according to the severity of the ancient canons".⁹

Another council held at Lyons 647-653 highly recommended the Irish penance as follows: "We judge that penance for sins is a medicine for the soul; it is good for all. All priests agree that once the penitent has confessed his sins to the priest, he should be given penance".¹⁰

Three centuries later another council at Lyons wanted to go back to the old canon. They condemned the penitential books and said that they were written by unworthy authors and were full of errors. This was a failure because the Irish penance and penitential books had become popular and wide spread throughout Europe. To reconcile this a new rule was issued saying that public penance should be done for public and notorious sins; private penance was allowed for secret sins.

The fourth Lateran council (1215) would later on bring reconciliation between the

⁹ Orsy, op. cit., p. 38-39

¹⁰ ibid. p. 40

Mediterranean and Irish penitential practices.

2.4 PENANCE IN THE SEVENTH TO ELEVENTH CENTURIES

The seventh to eleventh centuries brought on a new way of living penance, e.g. going for long pilgrimages to places like the Holy Land and to the tombs of the Apostles. It meant going on foot for years, many of them never expected to return. The externals were more expressed than with the original penitents who mainly looked for interior perfection. As time went on, they developed a particular way of living their conversion.

1. Monasticism coming from the East influenced them by urging that they live like monks.
2. Hermits - they started to live by themselves in remote places, living in austerity, e.g. in the desert.
3. *Conversi* in seclusion - they began to live their lives in seclusion either for life or temporarily after which they would rejoin their families. These were the *Recluses* who took the vow of virginity.
4. *Oblates Donatus* - they would give themselves to a specific monastery or bishop or, even, church to do whatever needed to be done in order to free the monks... to do other works, e.g. to pray.

The early church followed very closely the Latin translation of *metanoia* into a noun

poenitentia, the verb of this is *agere poenitentiam*. When understood in this way as it seems to have been the case here, the whole notion of *metanoia* is changed into 'doing penance'. It is no longer "I change" but "I engage in exterior works of penance". This understanding was different from what it was meant to be by Jesus and John the Baptist. It was watered down and became an object of performance, e.g. I go to the priest, he gives me penance to do and then I am well.

CHAPTER III

MIDDLE AGES

In order to understand Francis' contribution to the church's penitential movement, it is good at this point to look at the background preceding him.

3.1 PENITENTIAL PILGRIMAGES 1000-1200 AD

During this time there were numerous voluntary pilgrimages to the Holy Land and to the tombs of the Apostles as a form of penance. Above all, it was a way of expressing the mystery and uncertainty in one's search for grace and pardon and a desire to do the works of charity. It was really a penitential movement extending beyond St. Francis's time, until the end of the Middle Ages where it took up a different form altogether. In these pilgrimages, one became almost a wandering pilgrim: he left home with all his belongings in fear of losing them and also because it took so long a time that most of them never saw their homes again.

Later, these pilgrimages turned into Crusades to the Holy Land with the purpose of freeing it from the Muslims. There were mixed motivations behind this; for some it was a way of furthering their trade, while for the majority it was an adventure. For the penitents it was a way of following the call of Christ to take up one's cross and follow him. It also cancelled all other penance's which might have been imposed on them. For them, pilgrimage was a perfect penance to be cherished. Some of this penance was imposed by the priest for the sins committed, but for many it was a way of life. At around the same time, ca. 950, another

form of penance known as flagellation was being practised in Italy. It was a form of corporal punishment observed by the monks since they did not have anything to give in payment for their penance.

As a result of the growth of the penitential pilgrimages, various charitable institutions were established: hospices, hostels, hospitals e.g. the hospitals of the Brothers of Jacopa D'Altopascio, hospitals of the Brothers of St. Anthony and hospitals of the Brothers of St. Joseph of Jerusalem, the Knights Hospitaller of St. John 1099 and the Knights Templar 1188.

3.2 GREGORIAN REFORM 1073-1085

This reform brought about the desire to return to the evangelical life of the apostles; to be freed from interference by civil government and to establish regular life among monks and diocesan clergy.

Gregorian reforms aimed at the removal of investiture and restructuring of monastic life as well as canonical foundations. During this time the penitents were the main agents of these reforms, especially the itinerant ones who went from place to place preaching the need to live the gospel life.

The problems were many. They arose because many of them did not receive ecclesiastical approval as well as proper guidance. As a result many of them became victims of unorthodox preaching.

The Gregorian reform had the effects of spreading the ideas of the evangelical life of the apostles called the *vita apostolica*. The life of the apostles was considered the model of Christian life, therefore, the model for all. This is a fundamental point for an understanding of the new penitential climate of the twelfth century. While in the past only monks were considered the followers of the apostolic life, the reforms brought the idea that apostolic life was for all Christians and must be followed by all believers.

Towards the end of the twelfth century the itinerant preachers brought in the ideal of poverty as a perfect expression of the apostolic life. The first itinerant preachers: the canons regular, were the most significant of these. They left the canonical life to become hermits and later became itinerant preachers in the strictest sense, preaching the poverty of Jesus and the Apostles as the model for the church and its members to follow.

These preachers ranged from authorised to non-authorised ones. We will see that the latter became heretics. Some of these preachers were monks, others, lay-men. They were filled with fervour and ardour for they believed that they were filled with the Holy Spirit to preach repentance to all.

3.3 ORTHODOX PREACHERS

Some of the orthodox preachers of this time (1090-1150) who were mainly canons regular and monks had an immense following among many Christians, who abandoned their houses and possessions to follow these preachers in poverty like the apostles. They were true

followers of Christ and his apostles. They went from place to place preaching the Kingdom of God. Some of the principle preachers were:

ROBERT OF ARBRIESEL (1060-1117)

He was one of the first itinerant preachers to receive pontifical authorisation. He was a diocesan priest and a counsellor to a bishop in France. Robert was at first a hermit and a penitent then later on became superior of a group of canons regular when he began going around barefooted and in poor clothes preaching in the neighbouring dioceses. He left this group and became an itinerant preacher. He was authorised in 1096 by Pope Urban II. His preaching was more moral than theological, directed to the people of all classes who listened to him and many of them became his followers. He soon established monasteries for men and women.

BERNARD OF THIRON (1117)

Bernard was a companion of Robert. He gave himself to itinerancy preaching. In 1101 his way of life was approved by Pope Paschal II. He and his followers embarked on strict poverty. They wore habits made of coarse materials.

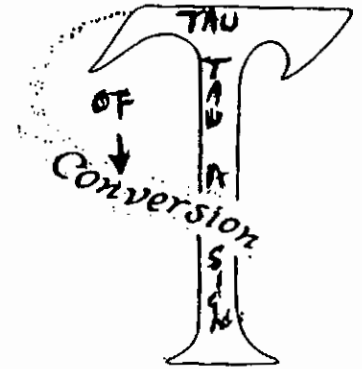
VITALIS OF SAVIGNY (1122)

Was a contemporary and companion of Robert of Arbrissel and of Bernard of Thiron. He became a penitent hermit. He lived strict poverty and walked barefooted, never shaved and dressed in poor clothing. He helped in the erection of shelters for lepers. He too had many followers.

Others on the same line were: Gerald of Sales (1120), and Nibert of Xanten (1082-1134)

3.4 ELEMENTS OF SPIRITUALITY OF THESE PENITENTS

- Profound devotion to the humanity of Christ especially his birth and passion
- Special devotion to the maternity of the Virgin Mary
- Search for renewed living of the gospel after the manner of the apostles, i.e., poor, mobile, self-emptying, believed to be guided by the Holy Spirit, commissioned to preach
- Constant desire to seek the will of the Lord, to change one's heart and to do penance
- Wore simple garb
- Carried with them a staff and knapsack as a sign of being pilgrims
- Wore a Tau cross
- Were dedicated to charitable work
- Were spontaneous and close to the people
- Accepted the prohibition from carrying arms
- Were reorganised as a special class in the church
- Lived obligation of perpetual or at least periodic continence... (cf. Guidelines for Instruction of the Third Order Regular, p.7)



3.5 HETERODOX PREACHERS

These were non-authorised, anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical preachers. "They emerged mainly because of the loss of the authorised preaching of the itinerants and the persistent hunger for the word of God and spiritual direction"¹¹. Most of them were laymen

¹¹ Orsy, op. cit., p. 51

though a few were monks.

They refused to accept church legislation that only clerics or those with explicit permission could preach the gospel. They went against this teaching and started preaching freely. This made them come at loggerheads with the ecclesiastical authorities. They believed that the validity of the sacrament and the right to preach do not come from sacerdotal ordination, but from the moral and apostolic life of the one who administers them (cf. Resource Book p. 9).

Some of these principal preachers of this time were:

PETER DE BRUYS (1112-1120)

Beginning from Toulouse, he incited the people against priests whom he called impostors. He attracted many followers whom he formed into a troupe to mistreat priests and monks, forcing them sometimes to marry. "He preached the invalidity of infant baptism, uselessness of church buildings and a repudiation of the cross because it recalled the ignominy to which Christ was subjected"¹². He also condemned prayers and good deeds saying that they could not help the dead, denied the sacrifice of the Mass and the Eucharist, rejected Scripture keeping only the Gospels and the Pauline letters. One Good Friday, 1120, when he urged the people to burn the crosses which they had lit, they turned on him and threw him in the fire instead.

¹² Pazelli, op. cit., p. 53

ARNOLD OF BRESCIA (1155)

He often lectured to people on themes pertaining to church reforms. He was not strictly speaking an itinerant preacher. He lectured on the poverty of the church. He claimed that the clergy and monks should not possess earthly goods for they were meant for the laity and princes. After his death the Arnoldists continued to teach that the clergy who did not lead poor lives were liars and deprived of authority. They refused to receive sacraments from any priest they considered unworthy.

THE CATHARI (THE PURE)

The first Cathari missionary appeared in Cologne in 1140. They emphasised the need for the church to be poor. They claimed that they were the church because they alone faithfully followed the footsteps of Christ, not seeking earthly things. They claimed that the rich church could not be the church of the apostles. They taught that there is a good God and a bad God, and that Christ only appeared to be man. They lived an austere life to contrast the laxity of the priests. They grew rapidly among the lower class.

PETER WALDO AND THE WALDENSIANS.

They wanted to defend the orthodoxy of the faith. Waldo was a rich merchant of Lyons, a layman. He and the Waldensians wanted to preach against the Cathari. They were in reality not heretics but because they lived among the humiliati and the Arnoldists they were suspected of heresy and condemned.

Others on the same line were: the humiliati who lived a life of humiliating themselves for God, the Poor Catholics, Bernard Primus and the Lombards etc.

It was at this point that the itinerant penitents, Francis and Dominic appeared on the scene with new ideas and new inspirations and new characteristics to living the penitential spirituality. At this period the penitential movement reached its climax. Penitents were greatly influenced by the preaching of Francis and Dominic. Most of them were absorbed into the third orders of the Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites.



PART II
THE FRANCISCAN MOVEMENT

CHAPTER IV

ST. FRANCIS AND THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR FRANCISCANS

4.1 FRANCIS OF ASSISI (1182-1226)

I do not wish to give the biography of St. Francis in detail. I would like to just situate him in the context of this important penitential milieu.

Francis was born to Pietro Bernadone and Pica in the second half of the 12th century (1182) when Assisi was experiencing political turmoil and at war with neighbouring cities. Francis' vocation was born and developed in this political environment. Later I will look at how this affected his life. He was also born in a penitential environment which flourished in 13th century Italy. During his early adulthood, he lived as a penitent. But at a certain moment he felt called by God to begin an itinerant life, living a radical form of poverty. With his first companions, he founded the Order of Friars. It is more than likely that Francis continued his association with the penitents (cf. Resource Book - T.O.R. of St. Francis)

4.2 CONVERSION OF ST. FRANCIS

The war with Perugia in 1202 saw the Perugians winning. Francis was wounded,

captured and thrown into prison. Prison life was quite tough and challenging. Prisons were made from caves dug in the basement of large municipal palaces. They were dark and damp. The prisoners had little more than bread and water for their meals. For Francis this was the first experience to encounter the reality of life different from his youthful dreams of pleasure and glory. It must have been very difficult for him. He stayed imprisoned for a year until peace was restored. He, then, returned to Assisi to his father's business. The experience he had in prison seems to have changed his life completely; nothing now seemed to please him. During this year there was famine in Assisi so many people came to the shop knocking at the door and begging for food; besides, there were so many problems and much turmoil. Francis noticed all of these. It was these situations which began to speak to him in a very deep way.

Soon, Francis dream to become a knight began to take shape once more. In 1205, Francis joined Walter of Brienne and went to Sicily. On the way he noticed the installation of knights at Lecca. He prepared magnificently to join knighthood on expedition to Apulia. On the way, we are told, they stopped at Spoleto to learn more particulars necessary for their expedition. Here Francis fell ill and had a dream which dissuaded him forever from the path of human adventure (cf. Pazelli p. 83)

According to the early biographer Celano, and The Second Life of Bonaventure, the voice, having asked him and learned where Francis wanted to go, demanded: "Who do you think can best reward you, the master or the servant?" To which Francis answered "the Master". The voice continued: "Then why do you serve the servant?" It is said that Francis

answered like St. Paul “Lord, what do you want me to do?” The response was “Return to your own town and there you will be told what to do”. (There are other possible interpretations of this experience).

Francis returned to Assisi, deeply dejected, aware that he would face the wrath of his father who had spent so much in preparation for this expedition; not only his father, but, also, his friends. Francis spent few a months in depression, walking along the streets of Assisi aimlessly bearing the taunts of the Assisians. Yet this time was important for him, for it gave him enough time to ponder on his hearts desire.

In 1206, he joined a group of pilgrims to visit the Basilica of the Apostles. In front of the Basilica of St. Peter, there was a multitude of poor people clinging to the gates where pilgrims were to pass. They implored, cried out and held out their hands. Francis was deeply moved by their situation. He traded clothes with the beggars and joined them in front of the Basilica, begging for alms. He joined them for meals every day. This gave him a deep impression of what it meant to be poor. He went back to Assisi with this impression.

One day as he rode across the plains of Assisi, a leper stood before him, staring at him. Francis wanted to throw him a coin and then leave but a second thought came into his mind. His dismounted the horse, went towards the leper and gave him the coins. “He felt in some mysterious way that he himself was almost transformed into that suffering mortal; and in that transformation he understood the essence of Christianity: God is in every person. Alms could

never be enough. Francis reverently kissed that leper as one kisses a sacred object. Even on his deathbed he recalled the transforming effect of that encounter: That which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of the soul and body. Now Francis was ready to hear the voice of the crucified..."¹³

4.3 FRANCIS BECOMES A PENITENT

According to Celano, "One day when he had begged for the mercy of God most earnestly, it was shown to him by God what he was to do..."¹⁴

On his way home from a business trip to Foligno where he had sold everything including his horse, Francis stopped at San Darmiano and told a poor priest of his decision. He offered him money. The priest refused the offer doubting such a sudden conversion of this well known young man and a son of Pietro Bernadone the famous merchant. After earnest insistence from Francis, the priest finally accepted the offer and accepted Francis' request to stay there. He asked to be received as a *Conversi*. It is said that he later became a *Donatus* or *oblato* or *conversi*.

His father was so indignant with his son. He called him before a civil court to be punished for such a behaviour. Francis was summoned for prosecution, he refused to appear before the civil authority saying that he had nothing to do with worldly authorities since by

¹³ Pazelli, op. cit., p. 86

¹⁴ Harbig A. Marion, St. Francis of Assisi, Omnibus of Sources, London: Franciscan Herald press, 1972, p. 845

‘Divine grace he had obtained freedom, he was the servant of God and therefore he no longer owed obedience to civil authority for he was outside their jurisdiction’¹⁵.

This clearly indicates that he had become a true penitent, thus abandoning the world. This would exempt him from civil jurisdiction.

Because Francis could not be judged in the civil court, his father appealed to Bishop Guido, the bishop of Assisi. Before the bishop Francis declared: “Since I have decided to dedicate myself to the service of God, the Lord...I shall give him back not only money...but also all his clothes”...and Francis left the scene of renunciation, officially recognised as a penitent by the bishop of Assisi: as a penitent, he will permanently reside at San Damiano”.¹⁶

The guidelines for instruction to the Third Order Franciscans, lists some characteristics of Francis' life as a penitent as follows:

- he embraced the form of true religion as his bride
- he withdrew from the pursuit of earthly things and prayed in secret with his heart full of unaccustomed fervour
- he helped to adorn poor churches
- with his whole heart he entirely went on seeing, learning, and attending to the poor, and giving them generous alms in the name of God

¹⁵ Pazelli, op. cit., 88

¹⁶ ibid. p. 89

- he went to Rome on pilgrimages
- he shed abundant tears and fasted in memory of our Lord's passion
- he wore a hair shirt
- he was clothed in hermit's garments
- he praised God loudly in the streets and public places
- he begged for stones with which to restore churches
- he lived the life of the poor, begging from door to door
- he spoke in public very simply of penance and the life of evangelical perfection
- he inspired others to follow after his conversion (cf. Resource Book, Section 1)

Celano, one of his popular biographers, tells us that "Francis wore a habit of penance: a kind of hermit's dress, with a leather girdle around his waist...he carried a staff in his hands and wore sandals on his feet".¹⁷

4.4 THE BIRTH OF THE FRANCISCAN MOVEMENT

With the coming of the first brothers and the confirmation of their gospel call, with their walk to Rome, Francis and his companions received the tonsure in 1209/10 and an oral approval of their way of life by Pope Innocent III. This marked the beginning of a new movement in the church founded and inspired by the life and preaching of Francis.

After receiving the tonsure, Celano tells us that Francis went about the towns and

¹⁷ Harbig, op. cit., p. 845

villages preaching, teaching salvation and penance for remission of sins. Many men and women, clerics, monks and religious as well as lay people were attracted by his preaching which was different from what had been preached by other penitents, His preaching Celano tells us was not by flattery, nor seductive brandishments. Meersseman notes: “The primitive theme of his preaching was penance and conversion. From the beginning his companions lived as simple *Viri poenitentiales*...anyone who asked them ‘where they came from’, the brothers simply replied that they were the penitents of Assisi”.¹⁸

Two of the early biographies, the so called ‘Legend of the Three Companions’ and the ‘Fioretti’, tells us of the following: “The blessed Francis, going round among cities and villages, began everywhere to preach more fully and perfectly proclaiming the kingdom of God and many people, nobles and commoners alike, were touched by divine inspiration and began to imitate Francis’ way of life, and to follow in his steps. They abandoned the cares and pomps of the world, desiring to live under his direction, guidance and discipline”, and the Fioretti; “Francis preached so fervently that all the men and women of the village in their great devotion wanted to follow him and abandon the village. But St. Francis did not let them, saying to them: Do not be in hurry and do not leave, for I will arrange what you should do for the salvation of your souls. And from that time he planned to organise the Third Order of the Contingents for the salvation of all people everywhere.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Pazelli, op. cit., 100

¹⁹ Harbig, op. cit., 937,1335

By about 1215 we have biographers who say that there were many Franciscan penitents in the urban centres of Italy. These penitents are said to have observed the rudimentary and archaic religious life, recognised by the church. They were grouped into local fraternities. 1221 is the year attributed to the birth of the Franciscan order of penance but there is a strong evidence to indicate that it goes back to the primitive preaching of Francis and his early followers.

4.5 SOURCES OF FRANCISCAN PENITENTIAL SPIRITUALITY

There are three undisputed sources of this penitential movement and spirituality:

- (a) His writings
- (b) Early Biographers
- (c) Rule of 1221/28

4.5a HIS WRITINGS

His writings present us with simple words repeatedly expressed throughout. Of his writings, the so called 'Letter to the Faithful' is the most important regarding penance. This letter is an exhortation written by the saint to penitents who followed his spiritual guidance, that is. to the members of the movement which later became the Third Order of penance. This document was probably written during his early years of itinerant preaching. It contains only a few but essential ideas which form the basis for later development of his teaching. It is considered the prototype of Francis' Third Order Rule. It is addressed to: "All Christians, religious, clerics and laypeople, men and women, to everyone in the world, Brother Francis, your servant and subject sends his humble respects, imploring for true penance from heaven

and sincere love from God”.²⁰

4.5b THE EARLY BIOGRAPHERS

The ancient Biographies contain the legends. These are in three forms:

- 1) by Celano(A lay man who was a contemporary of St. Francis)
- 2) by diverse anonymous writers,
- 3) by the influence of Francis’ companions, called “The Legend of the Three Companions, Mirror of Perfection, Acts of St. Francis, Fioretti and the Recollections of Br. Leo and the Writings of St. Bonaventure”.

4.5c THE RULE OF 1221

The rule of 1221/28 is the most important of the documents dealing with penance. It is probably an edition of the consorted effort of Francis, Cardinal Ugolino and some canonists. It begins like this: “Here begins the rule and life of the continent brothers and sisters. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

This Rule outlines different elements of penance. It strictly requires those belonging to the brotherhood to dress simply; use undyed cloth, coats without open throat, sewed shut or uncut, not open as secular people wear them. The sisters shall wear an outer garment and tunic made of cloth of the same piece and humble quality, not to wear silken or dyed veils and ribbons.

²⁰ Moffatt Marie Kathleen, Guidelines for Instructions of the Third Order Regular Franciscans on the Origins, Development, and Spirituality of the Penitential Life and Rule, Philadelphia: Franciscan Federation, 1981. p. 10

Both brothers and sisters shall have their full garment of lambs wool only. They are not to go to parties, dances etc. They are to abstain and fast from meat except on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from Easter to the Feast of All Saints. They are to pray always following the canonical hours. They are to receive the sacraments at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost and make confession of their sins.

This rule was finally approved on 18 August 1228 by Pope Nicholas IV in a bull *Supra Montem*. It remained the rule of the Third Order Franciscans until 1521 for the *Regulars* and 1883 for the *Seculars*. (*Regular is a religious word used to refer to those living religious life in a community of either Brothers, Sisters, or Priests, living a public vowed life. Secular refers to those not living in community and do not live public vowed life*).

From the year 1228, the Order of Penance was fully recognised by the church as a religious order. Its approval was very important for the Franciscan Order of Penance because it gave greater emphasis to its religious nature and formal organisation. From this time, “The penitential movement brought about by the preaching of Francis grew and spread as a movement in which there was room for a greater diversity of expression in the spiritual life: common life in hermitages, hospitals, religious houses, small units centred around the churches, thus the charisma was not bridled and manifested limitless possibilities”.²¹

²¹ Temperini Lino, TOR., Analecta TOR of St. Francis, Rome: 1974. Vol. 16. p. 86

PART III
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT

CHAPTER V

THE THIRD ORDER RULE FROM 1221 to TODAY

5.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THIRD ORDER RULE.

The 'Third Order Regular' is a part of a large Franciscan family comprising of three Orders. Each of these Orders has its own way of living the Gospel of Christ after the example of St. Francis of Assisi: First Order- The Order of *Friars Minor*, is an Order of men who follow a clerical rule with a specific charism of fraternity, minority and preaching the gospel. Second order an order of women both cloistered and active. Their specific charism is Fraternity, poverty and contemplation. Third Order an order of men and women, active, hermits, lay, some of whom are *regular* and *secular*. Their specific charism is based on continual conversion, living and doing the gospel. The names: first, second or third Orders does not indicate the order of foundation, of quality or hierarchy, it is the name chosen.

In this section I would like to look at the development of the rule of the Third Order from the time of Francis to today.

The Third Order is as old as St. Francis and even much older according to some scholars like Rafaele Pazelli. The roots of this Order keep on bringing up new shoots all the

time. Some dry up while others remain and thrive. Most of these shoots seems not to be connected but they have the same roots. Whether connected or not, they all follow the rule of the Third Order Franciscans as given by Francis himself. The rule developed as chronologically, follows:

1209: Francis of Assisi and his first companions constituted the penitents of Assisi. When they went to Rome to have their rule approved they identified themselves as “The penitents of Assisi” This penitential movement brought about by the preaching of Francis grew and spread as a movement in which there was room for a greater diversity of expression in the Religious life: common life in hermitages, hospitals, religious houses...

1211: We have mention of those who wanted to follow St. Francis as penitents.

1215: There are groups living in communities, doing apostolic work. They included the hermits.

1289: The *Supra Montem* was issued at Rieti by Pope Nicholas . This document canonically, juridically recognised the existence of the Third Order as Third Order Secular and Third Order Regular. The Third Order Seculars continued to observe this rule until 1883 when Pope Leo XIII gave them a new rule used until 1978, when Pope Paul VI approved their present rule “From Gospel to Life.”

1397: The first approval is granted to TOR nuns founded by Blessed Angelino of Marsiano.

1415: Pope John XXIII in *Personas Vacantes* approved the statutes for the TOR of Flanders.

1447: Pope Nicholas in *Pastoralis Officii* gave recognition to the more communitarian

and explicitly religious form of life officiated called TOR.

1521: Pope Leo X in *Inter Cetera Nostris* gave the OFM provincial the mandate to provide visitator for all TOR houses. However, this rule was rejected by the TOR members.

1553: General chapter of OFM, this chapter issued a rule for all TOR nuns to be cloistered. It was confirmed by Pope Pius V in 1566 in *Circa Pastoralis Officii* using the following words: "The cloister is to be observed by all nuns even those who at the time of their foundation had not foreseen this prescription or who from all time had never observed it." Not all the communities accepted this decree.

1614 and 1623: There were two foundations of the 'Capuchins of Penance' and the 'Recollectines' respectively. Both of these were contemplatives with the exception of the Recollectines who had a boarding school for girls in the convent and also cared for the sick. This century marked remarkable expansion of the TOR Franciscans. Both the contemplative and active Franciscan life was greatly enriched.

18th Century: The Order was greatly affected by the French revolution and Napoleonic suppressions. Many communities were not allowed to receive new postulants. But at the same time there were surges of life, and many Franciscans revived local Third Order Secular fraternities.

19th Century: This was an era of great expansion and apostolic fervour. Many Franciscans were involved in education, and other works of mercy. There was also many foundations and many separations from Motherhouses that became Diocesan Congregations.

The Franciscan Brothers of the Third Order Regular of Mountbellew were revived around this time 1818/1820 in Ireland. It was a slow and gradual development of the Secular

Franciscans into Regulars. The first three men were secular Franciscans attached to Merchants Quay Friary, Dublin. They came together in 1818 and took religious vows under the OFMs. They later on established a school for poor boys of mill workers. They remained under the OFMs until late during the century when they changed their jurisdiction and became a diocesan congregation under Bishop McHale of Tuam.

20th Century: Pope Pius XI (1927) in *Rerum Conditio* provided the basic text of TOR rule. This rule was heavily under the influence of the members of the first Order. There was minimal voice from TOR superiors. This was rejected because it lacked inspiration by St. Francis, and was not clear for new members. There was a felt need for a new Rule which will include Franciscan elements specific for the Third Order members. Due to this, a new rule project was began. It took a long time to be completed because of the diversification of the members of this Order. It was finally approved by Pope John Paul II in 1982 in a document signed as a "Perpetual Memoria." It read: "Much as in the past centuries, the Franciscan ideal of life even in our times continually draws many men and women desirous of evangelical perfection and thirsting for the Kingdom of God...The members of TOR set forth to follow Jesus Christ by living in fraternal communion, professing the observance of evangelical counsels...in public vows, and by giving themselves to innumerable apostolic activities...they dedicate themselves unreservedly to prayer, strive to grow in fraternal love, live true penance and cultivate Christian self denial..." (Rule 1982) Thus was the present rule of the brothers and sisters of this order formally approved.

5.2 THE FRANCISCAN PENITENTIAL SPIRITUALITY TODAY

Penance today is understood as metanoia which has its origin in the saving work of Christ. It is a religious practice as well as a sacrament of the church. It comes as a result of one's consciousness of sinful ways or tendencies to sin and a desire for turning to God for forgiveness and healing. "It is the opening of the human heart to ask for, trust in and receive the mercy which God freely gives".²²

For Franciscans of this order, penance is a way of life which helps us to deepen the joy of our Christian calling and shows our recognition of God's great goodness and love at all times and in all seasons. This in turn becomes our own mission, God calls us to a life of continuous conversion and then sends us simply with joy as messengers of peace and proclaimers of his kingdom. It is also, "a journey that leads to God. The life of penance can no longer be regarded as something unavoidable and unnatural for man, a logical consequence of the human condition...It is spontaneous, the result of our response to the love of God...it is not something I take, but dynamic in the fullest sense of the word...it is a road of ascent and a means for this ascent. This is a fundamental point of spirituality for Franciscan penitents, those of yesterday as well as of today".²³

Franciscan penitential spirituality is not based on a simple preoccupation towards eternal salvation, it is seen as a means to freedom and mystical practice. In penance we

²² Frnk. Peter E, s.j. Ed., The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship, Collegeville, Minnesota,: Liturgical Press, 1980. p. 934

²³ Pazelli, op. cit., 120-121

radically choose God's love and begin a continuous journey towards him through Christ, our brother. The life of penance sometimes indicates external works of corporal mortification. However, this is not the primary meaning for us Franciscan penitents. The primary meaning is biblical *sub* (Hebrew), *Metanoia* (Septuagint) and *poenitentia* in New Testament Vulgate. It is based on the Biblical true understanding of *metanoia* which indicates an interior attitude, psycho-spiritual, which turns the interests and wants of the whole person towards God, subordinating everything else and preferring God above all. Naturally from this attitude one gathers worthy fruits that are both internally and externally visible.

It concretely refers to the radical change in the sense that the one who embarks on this process sees and judges all in a different manner than before. In his conversion experience, St. Francis would say that what seemed bitter to him before now tasted sweet and what was sweet bitter. St. Augustine too admits that everything in him changed from darkness into light and from light into darkness, in the same way, St. Paul sees all he believed and lived by as sheer nonsense. For him it is Christ who counts.

“Putting the accent on *metanoia*, the Franciscan penitent has his own style of life, his own way of evaluating things, of responding to happy or tragic events, of harmonising his life in a human way, of orienting himself before the eternal, of finding meaning for his hope. In other words, he has his own view of earthly realities which he admires without attachment”.²⁴

²⁴ Temperini , op. cit., p. 5

In this life of penance we try to concretely commit ourselves to the realisation that we as human beings are continuously in need of being converted to God by means of our identification to Christ.

5.3 PENANCE AS PRACTISED BY THE THIRD ORDER FRANCISCANS

“With all in the holy catholic and apostolic church who wish to serve the Lord, the brothers and sisters of this order are to persevere in true faith and penance”. They wish to serve the Lord in this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty and of humility...the Son will come and say to all who acknowledge, adore, and serve him in sincere repentance...” (Rule art. 1 “our Identity). Chapter one begins by identifying our form of life as a penitential life, lived in evangelical consecration and expressed in acknowledgment of God as Omnipotent creator of all creatures. Adoration, for Franciscans is more than saying prayers. It is that deep union with Christ, the spouse, which is carried on “every where and in each place, and in every season and each day;” it is a life of contemplation in action. The Franciscans of this Order “live in the world” meaning that they live in the Divine presence wherever they may be or do. The third element is service in sincere repentance. Our service is governed by our awareness of not being the masters but *minores* God for us is the *Majore* and we are servants of Him.(*Minores* is a word used during Francis time in Assisi to refer to the working class of the Assisians, while the *Majore* referred to the ruling class. The two words are used in Franciscan writings. Franciscan took their title of “Friars Minor” from this). Therefore, in our work/service we work as strangers and pilgrims. Our service is a grace from God. It is not something we choose to do through our own efforts but a life given and

aided by God. “Led by the Lord, let him begin a life of penance conscious that all of us must be continually and totally converted to the Lord. As a sign of this conversion and consecration to the gospel life they are to clothe themselves plainly and live in simplicity” (Rule. Chap. 2). It is the Lord who leads us to conversion, without him we cannot successfully embrace the penitential lifestyle. We are converted to the gospel life and not to some selfish ideas or motives; it is not because we are good or we want to be good but, simply because it is a gospel call for all of us to be always converted to the Lord. If our penance is for the gospel cause, then, it will be shown in our simple way of living-hence, ‘let them clothe themselves plainly and live in simplicity’. Thus, we are called to be ‘minors’

In penance we agree to live a life of being certain and content with what the Lord gives us. Whatever comes on our way we will not grumble but we will strive to overcome. This is what the life of poverty for us means. It is also an expression of our obedience in whatever way (s) the Lord speaks to us: in our ministers, situations and events and in the gospel.

In this attitude we learn to acknowledge God’s Omnipotence and our frailness. “Lord who are you and who am I.” (St. Francis). We admit that there is so much we do not understand or that we cannot do by our own efforts no matter how well trained we may be. He is so mighty, we are so small, weak, frail... This acknowledgment marks the beginning of our conversion journey as it did for Francis. It starts with what Lino Temperini calls “a sense of uneasiness, a deep unquietness, an existential dissatisfaction which calls for change”.²⁵

²⁵ Temperini, op. cit., p. 14

Once we have become aware of this reality then we are in a position to call/cry out for help. We can do this only after realising our disability. God comes to our aid. The more the help he gives to us the more conscious of our sinfulness and fragility we become. In this, we are being called to respond to his greatness in gratitude which we express through celebration of the Eucharist because the call to fundamental conversion is ecclesial and is expressed in fidelity to the sacramental life of the church and in a generous service to our neighbour. This is, however, possible if one has placed himself in a spirit of docility and openness. "The penitent places himself in the situation of listening, ready to perceive the mysterious and disquieting inspirations which solicit something new. Like the prophet Samuel he exclaims: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."²⁶ (1 Sam. 3:10) Even the more we participate in this the more we realise that we cannot celebrate as well as we would and that our service to our neighbour has so many shortcomings. In this we feel called to acknowledge God's might once more and cry for help once again and the journey begins anew. However, this time we have already learned and grown a step forward towards perfection. The sign of penance is gift of self, time, talents. One must be ready to acknowledge sin and see its seriousness in the light of the holiness and graciousness of God.

(The diagram below explains this better) FIGURE 1.

²⁶ Ibid.

LORD WHO ARE YOU
AND
WHO AM I ?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CRY

HELP

ACTION

“UP TO NOW WE
HAVE DONE NOTHING
LET US BEGIN AGAIN”

True conversion should be:

1. Theocentric,
2. Ethical
3. Affective.

1. Theocentric: It is God who draws us to do penance. We do not do penance or embrace the life of penance because we like it, or because it is attractive but because we are called to it. It is a vocation as Francis himself would say , “The Lord himself led me to do

penance...²⁷ For Francis, penance means a gift and a grace of a generous God who gives the call to this life and makes it possible. The gospel message so much illumined this man of God. The life of penance is at the Lord's invitation. It is rooted in faith and continues through the graciousness and mercy of the Most High Lord. The emphasis is on God and not my good deeds, otherwise this can lead to a pharisaical attitude.

2. Ethical: It must help the penitent to change. It must have an effect on the penitent's way of looking at the reality, talking, speaking, thinking, interacting with others, etc. In other words it should affect the behaviour of the person. Like Francis 'what seemed bitter should be changed into sweetness and what seemed sweet into bitterness' (cf. Testament 3, 1 Celano. 17.)

3. Affective: It must have an effect on the penitent's emotional faculties because we are not only head people but heart people as well. The life of penance has to increase the love of the penitent for self, God and neighbour.

Franciscan penitential life if well understood in its evangelical sense demands, "a spirit of unconditional docility to the charism of *metanoia* which places (one) in the effort of continually overcoming (the self) and opening to the love of God which invests him (her) with sweetness and delight. The consequences are obvious: to free oneself from all that is pleasing to one's ego and from all that become an obstacle in aspiring towards God upon whom we

²⁷ Armstrong J. Regis, Brady Ignatius, Francis And Clare. The Complete Work, New York: Paulist Press, 1982. p. 154

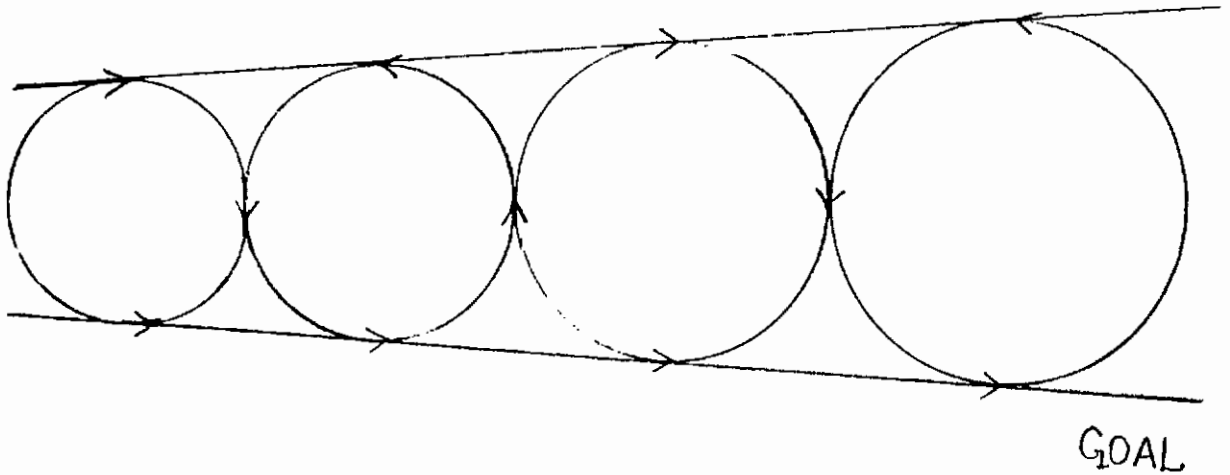
must centre all interests of the heart and of existence. In other words to remove the obstacles which impede or slow down progress on the way to evangelical perfection.”²⁸

This process demands:

1. Knowledge of Christ’s life and ministry and above all his call and expectations of discipleship. This can come through scripture, events, others etc.
2. Understanding, going deeper into the knowledge already acquired. This involves a constant question, Why?
3. Appreciation of Jesus’ attitudes and values and all that he means to the penitent. We can only follow Christ if we appreciate and are comfortable with him no matter how challenging his message may be at times.
4. Assimilation. “Within themselves let them always make a dwelling place and home for the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that with undivided hearts, they may increase in universal love by continually turning to God and neighbour”. (Rule Chap. 1:2).
5. Manifestation: show what we believe in action. “As poor people, the brothers and sisters whom the Lord has given the grace of serving or working with their hands, should do so faithfully and conscientiously”. (ibid Chap. 5:18)

I would like to sum up this chapter by illustrating the journey of penance using the diagram in FIGURE 2.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 15



In this I keep on wheeling forward. Anytime the wheel moves forward I am a different/changed person. It is a movement to change and to wholeness. As I wheel forward I realise that sin blocks my effort, I stop and acknowledge my vulnerability and disability and call for help and power to continue. The more I move forward the more I realise how difficult it is. It is a vocation. Because, ahead are insecurities, obstacles, discouragements because it is a movement into the unknown and to "bitterness" which must be changed into "sweetness". Behind are some insecurities and limitations but there is comfort because it is a known area and we have learned to cope with some of the issues. The process to realising this penitential journey fully involves a lot of pain, self-giving, letting go, and readiness to face the unknown

for the sake of the gospel. This is what makes it difficult, but we can either choose to progress or to regress, the choice is ours. If we are called to this life, the Lord will give us all the necessary graces to conquer the ups and downs of the life. It will thus involve the penitent letting himself (herself) be guided by the Spirit in every situation.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have attempted to look at the Franciscan penitential spirituality from a historical point of view. As mentioned, penance is a cornerstone of Franciscan spirituality. It is a way of life not a matter of doing, a way of getting to know and follow Christ. It is a constant in-depth and total turning of the Franciscan Christian towards the Father, in the light of Christ through the grace and power brought by the Holy Spirit. It is not simply external works of fasting and mortification, not formalistic behaviour, not wisdom to try to adhere to the norms of external life, but of radical involvement and enthusiasm toward God in Christ. This means precisely *Metanoia*, or penance as an ongoing conversion. The flight from evil and from the works of sin is nothing but a logical consequence. (cf. Lino Temperini: *Penitential Spirituality*)

The main reason for me to choose this topic despite the fact that so many people who have treated it, is to make me appreciate what seems to be the core of our Franciscan charism. I believe that to appreciate this kind of spirituality today demands knowledge. As a trainee formator I need to understand this important element of Franciscan spirituality before I can present it to others. For many people when penance is mentioned they think of external attitudes and behaviour or mortification. For many Franciscans, who have not understood their spirituality this can be the case. My study of this element, will help me to understand penance in its biblical sense, i.e., as *Metanoia*. This understanding will help me and those whom I will be forming to become better Christians and better Franciscans.

Penance/conversion/metanoia, whichever word is used is an expression of our rich heritage and our way of being in the world. It is the filter that is going to influence our view of the reality. The church has taught us that penance is a good thing. The most important service we can do to our brothers and sisters is to help them to come to an understanding of what it means. Penance is our vocation.

(All Scripture quotations are taken from The New Jerusalem Bible, Standard Edition, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985).

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