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**RECONCILIATION AND RELATIONSHIP FROM A FRANCISCAN
PERSPECTIVE**

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**A Long Essay Submitted in the Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology.**

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NAIROBI

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my parents Paul and Alice
who introduced me to the Catholic faith
and those who change the world by changing themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

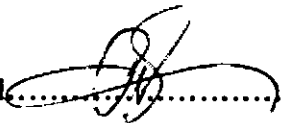
First of all I would like to express my gratitude to God for my vocation as a Christian and as a Franciscan Capuchin missionary. I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the Franciscan Capuchin Friars of Langata Friary for their continuous support and encouragement. Their support and encouragement gave a real boost to my intellectual enquiry.

I am particularly grateful to Fr. Giles Zakowicz, O.F.M. Conv. for having accepted my request of assisting me in writing this essay. He has spared his precious time to go through all the chapters and offered me his valuable corrections, suggestions and guidelines. I also thank Br. Augustine Mwape for having accepted to proof-read the essay.

I also place a debt of gratitude to my teachers, classmates and non-teaching staff of Tangaza College for their friendship, assistance and care. Their timely interventions added colour and vitality to my life in the campus.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

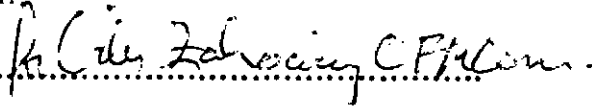
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed.....

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the College Supervisor.

Signed.....

Name of the Supervisor: Fr. Giles Zakowicz, OFM Conv.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Books of the Bible

| | |
|------------|----------------------|
| <i>Cor</i> | <i>Corinthians</i> |
| <i>Col</i> | <i>Colossians</i> |
| <i>Eph</i> | <i>Ephesians</i> |
| <i>Gen</i> | <i>Genesis</i> |
| <i>Isa</i> | <i>Isaiah</i> |
| <i>Jn</i> | <i>John</i> |
| <i>Lk</i> | <i>Luke</i> |
| <i>Mt</i> | <i>Matthew</i> |
| <i>Ps</i> | <i>Psalms</i> |
| <i>Rev</i> | <i>Revelation</i> |
| <i>The</i> | <i>Thessalonians</i> |

Franciscan Sources

| | |
|------------|--|
| <i>ER</i> | <i>The Earlier Rule</i> |
| <i>CtC</i> | <i>The Canticle of Creatures</i> |
| <i>IC</i> | <i>The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano</i> |
| <i>L3C</i> | <i>Legend of the Three Companions</i> |
| <i>LP</i> | <i>The Legend of Perugia</i> |

Other Sources

| | |
|-------------|---|
| <i>GIRM</i> | <i>General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2002)</i> |
| <i>GE</i> | <i>Gaudium et spes</i> |

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation means repairing the damaged or broken bonds of unity and friendship between God and man and between man and man on a personal and also on a communal basis. It is our conviction that man cannot be at peace with God unless he first be at peace with his fellow human being.

The very concept of reconciliation presupposes the reality expression of broken communion. Reconciliation, in the biblical as well as common language, is understood as the effort towards mending this broken and distorted relationship and building up community and relationships afresh. "It is an invitation to return to one another. Reconciliation is necessary especially when there has been a breach in relationships for example, through alienation, violence, disruption or disordering of human relations and God."¹

The foundational value of penitential spirituality is integral and to be continued. The penitential matter of penance is the openness to grow, to be shaped. Metanoia is not something we do, it is Gods generous gift. The administration of sacrament of reconciliation is the major part of the mission of the church.

Church is needed to offer healing and reconciliation to the victims. She has to stand up and begin to listen, encourage, comfort and journey with the abused. Through their total healing and reconciliation, the church will be realizing her mission of reconciliation to the wounded society .The church can help by offering love and support. "The church has an unassailable competence to help people

¹ K. OBIEKWE, "Synod of Bishops: Church in Africa in Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace." 12.

transcend their selfishness and anxieties by repenting, and forgiving each other in order to manage conflict for the good of all.”²

The role of religion as an agent of peace and reconciliation is undermined when it is implicated in the acts of terror. The Church as the custodian of human rights, therefore, is called upon to demonstrate that the Christian religion is committed to peace and reconciliation, by nurturing the spirit of ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and tolerance in its response to acts of violence and terror.

The whole world is in need of reconciliation and brotherly love; renewal and reconciliation: a renewal that comes from a new listening to God’s word with open minds and hearts; a renewal that leads to reconciliation with God and with human beings, to the healing of the wounds of hate and fear which poison and destroy human communities whether family, village, city, tribe, nation or whole world.

The Franciscan tradition calls for true reconciliation and true relationship as Christ the healer who came to gather the scattered children of God. He wants all Christians to transform a sick environment by the new law of love that extends to all enemies.

As I am writing this essay in the context “Second Synod of African churches” which was planned by Pope John Paul II and convoked by Pope Benedict XVI held from 4 to 25 October 2009. Its theme was “The Church in Africa Promoting Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.(Mt 5:13-14) As a member of the Church and a Franciscan missionary my intention is to contribute to the change of mind and heart that is being called for to promote reconciliation and good relationship. This assumes, though, that we are able to direct our theology toward

² K. OBIKWE, “Synod of Bishops: Church in Africa in Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.” 112.

the public forum rather than see it as just personal or an affair internal to the church and Franciscan Charism.

This work is organized in three chapters. Chapter one deals with experiencing reconciling and relating effect of the reconciliation, it high lights the individual, social and Ecclesiastical dimensions. I also made an effort to explain the reconciliation effect of sacrament of Eucharist and made reference to The Second Special Assembly for Africa.

Chapter two examines an aspect of Franciscan reconciliation the struggle to embrace joy. Francis understood and experienced reconciliation as something one did to complete the sacrament, Reconciliation for him was to be experienced as the conversion process itself which extended from the moment of the awareness of one's *sin in* to the sacramental moment and then beyond it in to the flow of one's daily life thereafter. It is a renewed way of life continued to be lived for the entirety of one's life, one's way of life in Christ. I tried to explain how Francis experienced the reconciliation through penance, poverty and the crucifix, and how these factors helped Francis a wide rage to good relationships.

In the third chapter I analyzed the idea of reconciliation and tried to explore relations from the individual person to the whole cosmos. This chapter begins by briefly describing broken relations, both living and nonliving beings of the cosmos. "The reality that we are in a planetary crisis raises essential questions about the relationship between humans, nature and God, and how these relationships are understood as a matter of faith."³ The environmental crisis is a fundamental element of our lives on the Globe today and we cannot conceive of life in the next generation without at the same time engaging with and responding to that crisis.

³ M. KIRKPATRICK, "An Incarnational Ecology", 212

The central part of this chapter is about restoring relationship with creation using Franciscan theological method as the tool to guide this analysis. This chapter ends with the optimistic thought of new creation which is possible in Christ. Whereby there are no differences that divide among all creatures. As Paul says, “We are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 8).

Reconciliation is not something that belongs the “now and forever.” It is a process in which we are called to recognize ourselves as weak people who need the constant assistance of the Holy Spirit to grow and mature in our faith. It is a process; we need to go through different steps that are like stairs by which we ascend.

CHAPTER I

THE RECONCILING AND RELATING CHURCH

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the Reconciliation aspect of Church. This will be discussed specifically from the point of an individual who is walking in sin, apart from the covenantal community of God's people. We will analyze Church's role in the process of Reconciliation; to assist the individual to take more seriously personal relationship with the Lord and to help him or her to develop a conscience informed by Gods revelation in Scripture and in the teachings of the church.

We shall also look at the social setting of Reconciliation. We shall consider the possibilities of Eucharist as a sacrament of reconciliation and unity. Finally, we shall look at the role the Church in Africa in service to Reconciliation. The sacramental sign of reconciliation bridges and restores broken relationship so that true communication, harmony, peace, freedom, justice and development can prevail in the society.

1.1 The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

The sacrament of reconciliation is always an experience of reconciliation and conversion. To be reconciled with someone is not easy, especially when we knew that we were wrong and that we were responsible for this broken relationship. The sacrament of reconciliation is a sacrament of conversion and forgiveness since it sacramentally enacts and realizes conversion and impacts sanctifying grace to the repentant sinner. "The church is the instrument and sign of reconciliation of the

human person with God. It is called a sacrament of reconciliation because the sinner is reconciled to God and ones brothers and sisters through it.”⁴

Reconciliation is the most theologically correct way of naming this sacrament, since it describes God’s initiative, through Christ and in the spirit, to restore harmony or friendship, between God and us, and among ourselves. “Without an inner personal relationship between the penitent and God in his church, the body of Christ there can be no authentic sacramental encounter with Christ who is the primordial reconciler of sinners to the Father through the Holy Spirit.”⁵

The church possesses a ministry of reconciliation as the continuing expression of Christ the reconciler among us in a visible way. The sacrament of reconciliation is one way that the church concretely proclaims this message of pardon and peace.

To walk together again is a powerful image of what we are about in the process of reconciliation in life and in its celebration in sacrament. The unity or harmony of walking together becomes a living witness of our commitment to conversion and reconciliation. “Reconciliation must never become an isolated religious phenomenon or sacramental practice apart from the daily life of each of us, just as sin involves multiple relationships, so does reconciliation.”⁶

We must not so stress our relationship with God that we forget our relationship with one another. And we must not so stress our relationship with one another that we have no need to look to God for forgiveness. “Reconciliation involves both God

⁴ Cf. C.A. MAJAWA, *African Christian Reconciliation*, 337.

⁵ Cf. G.A. MALONEY, *Your Sins are Forgiven*, 7.

⁶ Cf. M. GULASS, *To Walk Together Again*, 16.

and neighbours. Anyone committed to living a life of reconciliation must attend to the dynamics of love in relationship with God, others, self and the world.”⁷

1.2 Personal Longing for Reconciliation

To define our nature in terms of our being in the world is to understand it as the point of intersection of many relations. It includes the relation between people and nature, not just in the sense that nature is something outside us that we urbanize or destroy industrially in our civilizations but also in the sense that we are part of nature so far as concerns our bodies, our biological existence. “Our primary anthropological task then is to illumine this web of relations at whose point of intersection our human existence stands.”⁸The desire among people of good will and true Christians is to mend the divisions, to heal the wounds and to re-establish, at all levels an essential unity. This desire arouses in many people a real longing for reconciliation, even in cases where there is no actual use of this word.

True reconciliation comes from recognizing our own limitations as a first step; then trying to discover the value of life from an objective point of view as someone created by God from whom everyone comes, thus discovering our equality in rights and duties. A person is never completely developed, but is somebody looking for perfection that can be attained only by fixing our eyes on the one who created out of love, and in communion with other people, so that being a human being is always a call to perfection(Cf. Mt 5:48).

Some consider reconciliation as an impossible dream which ideally might become the lever for a true transformation of society. For others, it is to be gained by arduous efforts and therefore a goal to be reached through serious reflection, decision and action. Reconciliation cannot be less profound than the division itself.

⁷ Cf. M. GULASS, *To Walk Together Again*, 17

⁸ Cf. H. THIELCKE, *Being Human Becoming Human*, 118

“The longing for reconciliation, and reconciliation itself, will be complete and effective only to the extent that they reach-in order to heal it; that original wound which is the root of all other wounds: namely, sin.”⁹

As a rupture with God, sin is an act of disobedience by a creature who rejects, at least implicitly, the very one from whom he came and who sustains him in life. Since by sinning man refuses to submit to God, his internal balance is also destroyed and it is precisely within himself that contradictions and conflicts arise. Wounded in this way, man almost inevitably causes damage to the fabric of his relationship with others and with the created world.

1.3 Social Setting of Reconciliation

The social setting of reconciliation is distinct; it relates to the restoration of relationships, the end of hostility and enmity and the overcoming of alienation. Reconciliation is at the heart of life’s business. “If the most important single factor about any of our lives is God’s having reconciled us to God’s very self, then the proper celebration of our reconciliation is to share it with others fostering reconciliation and atonement wherever and whenever we can.”¹⁰

Salvation is not purely individual affair repentance is communitarian. It is an ecclesial reality. Just as when one is reconciled to the Church, one is reconciled to Christ, so when one repents in the church, one finds forgiveness in Christ. Thus, the whole liturgy of reconciliation and certainly the formula of absolution should reflect the communal nature of conversion. This sacrament is not primarily concerned with a Jesus and me spirituality. But it articulates that in ones commitment to community and in the communities communal repentance the reconciling Christ is present. ¹¹

Paul writes of reconciliation in two aspects one treating of the relation to God and the other detailing relations between human beings. Reconciliation is Paul’s term for describing that relationship with God. It is equally important to Paul, and a consequence of the divine reconciliation, the reconciliation of people with each

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 7.

¹⁰ Cf. H. THIELICKE, *Being Human Becoming Human*, 120.

¹¹ Cf. L.E. JAMES - G.K. CHRISTOPHER, *The Liturgy that Does Justice*, 143.

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other in Christ. "As a body is one through it has many parts and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ, for in one spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1Cor12:12-13). Because God has properly re-established relations with people they can no longer carry animosity or grudges or resentments towards one another.

To speak of *social sin* means in the first place to recognize that, by virtue of a human solidarity, which is as mysterious and intangible as it is real and concrete, each individual's sin in some way affects others. "Consequently one can speak of a *communion* of sin, whereby a soul that lowers itself through sin drags down with itself the church and, in some way, the whole world."¹² Since every sin is against the supreme freedom to believe in God and adore him, *social sin* is every sin against the dignity and honour of one's neighbour. Also *social* is every sin against the common good and its exigencies in relation to the whole broad spectrum of the rights and duties of citizens.

Whenever the Church speaks of situations of sin, or when she condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behaviour of certain social groups, big or small, or even of whole nations and blocs of nations, "she knows and she proclaims that such cases of *social sin* are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins."¹³

1.4 Eucharist as the Sacrament of Unity and Reconciliation

In the sacrament of Eucharist, we recall and celebrate the mighty deeds of God and the mysteries of God still at work in also being of all and in that we do, celebrating the sacred space that has been created in our lives by God's loving action accepting us in Christ and through the spirit. Because we know we have been

¹² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 5.

¹³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 6

accepted and can feel at home with God, we have room to accept one another. In the Eucharist we celebrate that communion we share as well as the hope we have that there might be more.

Being Catholic means living a Eucharistic life. All Brothers and Sisters are called together and shaped by the word of God, They offer themselves along with the gifts in a spirit of peace and thanksgiving and in communion with Christ and one another, going forth to love and serve the Lord. Reconciling is a part of Eucharistic life and catholic identity .Our experience of God brings responsibility to deal with sin and brokenness.¹⁴

In the Church sinners find a welcome and wisdom that leads to a break through to new life in Christ. The call to holiness will not allow the church to ignore the alienated Catholic. To do so is to forget who we are as Church. The challenge is for the Church to communicate to alienate Catholics the great need the church as to be reconciled with them.

Eucharist is called the sacrament of unity because it has a communitarian dimension; all who participate in the Eucharist will become one heart and one soul. “Eucharist is the sacrament of love and the supreme act of Christian worship, which unifies and animates the Christian community.”¹⁵ It is the source and school of all the virtues, since in it we encounter Christ and are empowered to live in him. Sharing the same Christ should unite us in one community.

The Introductory Rites gives an important place to the Eucharist as a sacrament of reconciliation. In the first section of the introductory part, the Eucharist is seen as the great sign of Christ’s love for sinners. From the perspective of the Introduction, the Eucharist is the supreme sacramental expression of Christ’s will to reconcile the human race to the Father.

¹⁴ Cf. J. KENNEDY, *Reconciling Embrace*, 26

¹⁵ Cf. G. CASAGRANDE, “Penance and Penitent in Thirteenth Century”, 158.

It is in the Penitential Rite where we personally recognize who we are before God and our need (personally) of God's mercy. We have offended God in many ways and as we approach him once more we ask his forgiveness.

Through the whole liturgy of the Word hearts should be stirred by love and it is perhaps the function of the homily principally to do this and further, to draw people onto commitment. "The liturgy of word promises us the possibility of reconciliation and what it calls us to a deeper experience of repentance."¹⁶ God's word is the essential nourishment; we will come to an ever deeper understanding of God and his saving actions and gradually enter into a closer union with him.

Breaking of Bread: this gesture of Christ at the Last Supper gave the entire Eucharistic action its name in apostolic times. In addition to its practical aspect, it signifies that in communion we who are many are made one body in the one bread of life which is Christ (1Cor10:17).

The surprise factor of the last supper was that Jesus was not only host and servant but the food as well." Bread broken and eaten; blood poured out and consumed; in the paschal act of total self giving, the reconciliation between God and humankind was effected.¹⁷

The sign –act of the Eucharist is vivid and dramatic. By eating the body of Christ and drinking of the cup, believers share in the dynamism of Jesus' self –gift and are nourished through that communion to extend reconciliation to their brothers and sisters.

Communion Rite, since the Eucharist celebration is the paschal meal, in accord with his command; "the body and blood of the Lord should be received as spiritual food by the faithful who are properly disposed."¹⁸ This is the purpose of the

¹⁶ Cf. L.E. JAMES - G.K CHISTOPHER, *The Liturgy That Does Justice*, 136.

¹⁷ Cf. P.E. Fink, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, 391.

¹⁸ Cf. KENYA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 42.

breaking of the bread and the other preparatory rites which lead directly to the communion of the people.

Lord's Prayer: this is a petition both for daily food which for Christians means also the Eucharistic bread and for forgiveness from sin, so that what is holy may be given to those who are holy. The addition to the Lord's Prayer develops the last petition and begs in the name of the community deliverance from the power of evil.

Rite of Peace: before sharing in the one bread and one cup the people express their love for one another and beg for peace and unity in the church and with all mankind. "The church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the sacrament."¹⁹

Virtually everything in the order of Mass points to reconciliation. For all our preoccupation with words, we sometimes do not seem to hear Christ's words as though they were addressed to us "this is my body, given for you; this is the cup of my blood ...shed for you and for allso that sins may be forgiven."

One of the striking features of the Order of Mass is the pervasiveness of the theme of reconciliation. Paradoxically, it is probably the presence of the penitential rite at the beginning of mass that deflects attention from this aspect of the Eucharist. Because the penitential rite is a preliminary rite, it conveys the impression that, rather than being part of the very substance of the Eucharist as a whole, repentance and reconciliation are gotten over and done with become getting on to other things.

The expression of reconciliation does not begin and end with the words of institution, central as these are. The sense of reconciliation pervades the whole rite

¹⁹ Cf. KENYA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 43.

of Mass. The greeting at the beginning is a strong expression of God's mercy revealed in the Holy Spirit. Also, the "Lord, have mercy" affirms God's reconciling love; "you were sent to heal the contrite... you came to call sinners..." This section of the Mass rite is intended to set the pace and tone for the whole Mass.

During the Eucharistic celebration we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. He nourishes us with his Body. His Blood runs through our veins. "The Eucharistic community is built up in a way closer than that our natural family bonds, or links of clan or tribe. There is no other Family quite like this one built on Baptism and nourished by Christ with his Body and Blood."²⁰ These theological and liturgical considerations should be allowed to influence our life in Church and society.

The Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of reconciliation. "The relationship between the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation reminds us that sin is never a purely individual affair; it always damages the ecclesial communion that we have entered through baptism."²¹

Catholics should be in the front line among promoters of justice, forgiveness reconciliation, peace and harmony in society. As Pope Benedict XVI puts it., the he Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled to Christ, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility, which divided them (Eph 2:14).

The sacramental table is a place of reconciliation, unity and equality where Christians achieve a closer communion with God and with each other. Speaking about reconciliation Edward Schillebeeckx says that, while the Roman Catholic Church has a separate sacrament of reconciliation, "the Eucharist is the great sacrament of reconciliation." He is speaking primarily about reconciliation with

²⁰ Cf. F. ARINZE, "Reflecting on the Liturgy", 28.

²¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *The Sacrament of Charity*, 23.

God, but when he says “the Eucharist being a common, social act, eliminates the self centeredness of sin he understands reconciliation with God and with others to be intimately connected.”²²

In the Eucharist, Christ remains with the Church and dwells in each Christian individually. Particular Churches attest to the fact that in his gift of self, Christ gathers his disciples and makes them a people, the sons and daughters of God, who are reconciled and at peace with the Father and one another, so that they, in turn, can be the means of reconciliation and workers of peace and justice.²³

The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Love. Since love itself abides here; there is no room for hate, vengeance and injustice, indeed, an ecclesial community built. “On the Eucharist becomes a genuine sacrament of unity, fellowship and reconciliation in the midst of humanity. In this sacrament, the Lord wishes to crown with success every effort to make the world a place of Glory for his Father.”²⁴

The same sacrament reconciles Christ’s disciples to the Father and provides the healing of divisions through a penitential preparation, the exchange of the peace of Christ and the sharing of the Bread of life, where Jesus himself nourishes the Church’s members with his body and his Word.

Taken up in the offering of Christ to his Father, Christ’s disciples are able, in him, to engage in activity on behalf of peace and reconciliation and make themselves a gift of self sacrifice, for “he Jesus laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1Jn 3:16). So as to spread the kingdom of the Father, the spiritual experience provided at Eucharistic celebrations where Christ’s paschal mystery is renewed, inspires the disciple’s involvement in the work of peace and reconciliation and provides them with the strength to go out to others in faith and love in witness to the Gospel.

²² Cf. C. GRUNDY, “The possibilities for Reconciliation in Holy Communion”, 29.

²³ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 40.

²⁴ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 41.

The grace of the Eucharist pierces, revivifies, and cleanses the old self. It calls for transformation so that we might put on Christ and become new persons. Only then can the reconciliation within our own dividedness take place. Only then can the Eucharist effect the healing of our own hearts that prepares us for reconciliations in our relationships with others.²⁵

The Holy Eucharist, understood as the saving action event for redemption can be a place where barriers are broken down, where the healing of relationships can occur and where greater unity can be achieved. The Holy Eucharist continues to be a place where those present can find greater communion with God and each other, and even be formed for reconciling work with others who are not physically present.

Holy Eucharist will not accomplish all the work of reconciliation by itself. "The sacrament is but one aspect of the churches reconciling ministries, and left to stand alone, the meal's influence will remain quite limited."²⁶ Still God remains steadfast; God continues to nourish us for the sake of Jesus ministry, in spite of all the damage that has been done.

1.5 Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation

Africa has become a theatre of dangerous conflicts hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions are displaced. In fact every nation, tribe or individual is a political victim of conflicts. There are intense human emotional, psychological and physical sufferings, the loss of human life and destruction of property. Poverty, disease, starvation, corruption and displacement is the reality of so many of Africa's children.

Jesus Christ is the source of reconciliation to humanity as a whole and to each person individually. He is also the means leading to Reconciliation among peoples. (Mt 6:12; Rom 5:10-11)

²⁵ Cf. P.E. Fink. *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, 391.

²⁶ Cf. C. GRUNDY, "The Possibilities for Reconciliation in Holy Communion", 31.

This is the basis for the church's mission. The church as Family of God in Africa feels entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. (2Cor 5:18) She is the messenger of the gospel of Peace (Eph 6:15) which makes her one body and temple of the Holy Spirit. Following Christ's example, she is the worker of reconciliation in her earthly body, as builders of communion; Christians are to call African society to a union of hearts and to set an example for them through the witness of their lives. Reconciliation in life comes about by making room for forgiveness.²⁷ (Mt 5:23; Eph 2:14, 15)

In effect, Jesus said "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:35). Since that time, "being" takes precedence over "acting," "being" in love with one another is the manner in which each cell in the mystical body, the Church, will make an appeal to the brethren in Africa to be reconciled to God and one another (Mt 5:23; 2Cor 5:20). The church will then display her sacramental aspect as an efficacious sign which makes present in Africa the grace of reconciliation between God and humanity and among people themselves wrought by Jesus Christ, who became our justice and our peace.

The second synod of African churches held from 4 to 25 October 2009 had its theme "The Church in Africa: Promoting Reconciliation, Justice and Peace" This topic defines one aspect of the African church's mission and offers an up-to-date understanding of the current crisis in Africa.

Its theme takes note of the specific missionary commitments of the African Church. An affirmative response to the challenges of justice, peace and reconciliation is also a call for the committed development of these churches, which lay claim to profound knowledge of humanity and wish to share the joys and disappointments and suffering of the people of this age (GS.1).

What makes the place and role of the Church critical in the restorative justice and relationship paradigm of conflict transformation and peace building in Africa's types of conflict? "Simply it is an environment of proactive encounter in which the

²⁷ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 27.

conflict parties see and approach their conflict issue as a problem to be solved and not a problem to be won.”²⁸ The church has an unassailable competence to help people transcend their selfishness and anxieties by repenting and forgiving each other in order to manage conflict for the goal of all.

The Church as family of God has to look up to the Lord and come to the rescue of Africa by supporting the drastic changes in conduct which must come about to change Africa’s destiny, so that reconciliation will come in the midst of so much hatred and divisions, and peace and justice will finally reign in Africa.

Among the major commissions that Jesus Christ gave His disciples is to promote peace. Given that the root cause of terrorism is social injustice whether real or imagined the church has to proactively work towards social justice. While the church role in promoting social justice now and in the past is commendable there is more to be done. “The creation of justice and peace desks in the Roman Catholic Church and in National Councils of the churches in Africa indicates a move in the right direction however; it may be observed that on many occasions the church has been more commendatory than active and more reactive than proactive.”²⁹ That is to say that the church has responded to situations of terrorism by merely condemning social injustice instead of working towards the strategies of achieving social justice as an ultimate means of preventing terrorism.

The church has a pivotal role in overcoming prejudicial stereotypes that fuel the politicization of victimhood. “The churches have a contribution to make based on their tradition they can help deconstruct myths, stereotypes and prejudices that

²⁸Cf. K. OBIKWE, “Synod of Bishops: Church in Africa in Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, 113.

²⁹ Cf. E. WAIRAGU, “Terrorism and the Contemporary Church”, 28.

impede the appreciation and of others in their irreducible otherness.”³⁰ The state is ill equipped to solve certain disputes because of the mistrust that exists between the state machinery and the citizens. It was argued that “a lasting peace cannot be achieved by building more police stations in all conflict prone areas, but can be achieved by dialogue and building structures to address societal grievances.”³¹

Churches must project a national and international image to avoid being seen as an institution that represents certain communities and their interests at the expense of others. It has shown that the church has enjoyed good will from the people and should never accept to be compromised by the political elite.

The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the synod of Bishops was an important moment for the church –Family of God in Africa. “Reconciliation will bring about justice and peace.”³² Just as Jesus accomplished his mission through bearing his cross, all Christ’s disciples in Africa, who have received the word in much affliction, which joy inspired by the Holy Spirit (1Thes 1:6) must likewise in their flesh break down dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:14). In effect Christ is the one who guides our feet into the way of peace (Lk 1:19) and entrusts to the Church the ministry of reconciliation” (2Cor 5:18). Additionally, it was argued that conflicts cannot always be settled through legal means. Forgiveness is a sure way of beginning a healing process in a society.

Conclusion

In intimate connection with Christ’s mission, one can therefore sum up the Church’s mission, rich and complex as it is, as being her central task of reconciling

³⁰ Cf. A. RAYMOND, “The Mission of the Church in Africa Today: Reconciliation?” , 218-265.

³¹ Cf. J.M. MAWARUVIE, “ Mission of the Church In Africa: Peacemaking and Restoring Justice”, 269.

³² Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 63.

people: with God, with themselves, with neighbour, with the whole of creation, and this in a permanent manner, the Church is also by her nature always reconciling.

The time is overdue for fostering attitudes of peace and reconciliation. Interdependence rather than independence; communion rather than mystery; justice rather than exploitation; stewardship rather than manipulation; co-operation rather than competition; compassion rather than indifference.

In this first chapter we were looking at the theme Reconciliation and Relationship from personal, social and ecclesial point of view. In the following chapter we are going to give a Franciscan touch to this complex notion of Reconciliation. When Francis tells us that he began to do penance, he means that he embraced upon a wholly new way of seeing reality, a new way of seeing himself, others the world and God himself, which would hence forth manifest itself in a different set of attitudes, values and dialogue.

The Church has to stand up and begin to listen, encourage, comfort and journey with the abused. Through their total healing and reconciliation, the church will be realizing her mission of reconciliation to the wounded society.

CHAPTER 2

FRANCISCAN RECONCILIATION: THE STRUGGLE TO EMBRACE JOY

2.0. Introduction

What is meant by Franciscan Reconciliation? How did Francis live this reconciliation? Is Francis truly a model of Christian Reconciliation? These shall be the guiding questions of this chapter. In the first section we shall look at Francis' own experience of reconciliation; then we shall look at different dimensions of that reconciliation in following aspects like penance, poverty, fellowship and how these elements work as means to embrace peace and joy.

Franciscan joy is a choice. It is a mature choice offered to those who have risked embracing hardship for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. It is not a choice simply to embrace hardship for the sake of hardship. "Rather, it is the choice to see differently --to speak and to announce the reconciling vision of the kingdom to others. It is the Choice to suffer and to rejoice knowing that the reconciliation of joy and sorrow within the heart of a saint is the truest source and sign of reconciliation on earth."³³

Francis of Assisi understood the importance of the sacrament of Reconciliation. He encouraged his brothers and those who were inspired by his life, to make their confessions. Francis considered the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation as an ordinary part of Christian life. He did not speak at length about

³³ Cf. J. MUELLER, "The Struggle to Embrace Joy", 118.

the sacrament. He presumed that people would frequent the sacrament. He understood that the sacrament was a special moment in the ongoing conversion. He came to discover that the sacrament was special moment of the entire process of the conversion. For Francis reconciliation, conversions, which he refers to as penance in his writings, are two essential aspects of the same mystery of people becoming free.

2.1 Francis's Experience of Reconciliation

Francis literally embodied the spirit and teaching of Jesus. He has made Christ present not only in his own person, but also through those of other faiths, thousands of men and women, religious and laity, who, over the past eight hundred years, have striven to follow his evangelical way of life.

Francis embracing of an upside-down world where the bitter becomes sweet and the sweet becomes better gives him a vision of life that makes him appear mad. It was a leper who initiated Francis into this upside-down world. The legend of Three Companions gives an interesting account of the exchange that takes place during meeting. The merchant Francis dismounts his horse gives the leper a coin and kisses his hand. The leper in return gives Francis the kiss of peace. In later years Francis claimed that it was the Lord who taught him to greet people with "The Lord gives your peace "*Pax et bonum*, " Peace and All Good!"³⁴

The desire for reconciliation between brothers and sisters in communities and societies, between ideologies and religions, united Francis to God's desire to love humankind. "Francis' sorrow was that the spirit of love was not loved by human kind. Desiring to be an instrument of reconciliation, Francis did all he could to promote unity and peace and then simply joined God's heart in waiting and longing."³⁵

Francis understood that the price of being a reconciler was to become a faithful lover. The fidelity to love includes doing all one can to encourage dialogue and respect between persons and, when this is not possible, implies joining the heart

³⁴ Cf. J. MUELLER, "The Struggle to Embrace Joy", 116.

³⁵ Cf. J. MUELLER, "The Struggle to Embrace Joy", 118.

of God in weeping, longing and praying for the day when love will be lived and accepted by all.

Francis suggests that the embrace of the kingdom of God already present requires even more courage and grace. Perhaps this is true because “every embrace of joy is an embrace of Calvary. Reconciliation is discovered in the midst of the joy which flows from the depths of Calvary’s pain and sorrow.”³⁶ Reconciliation is the Spirit’s gift of believing hoping and loving even as a brother or sister offends one, knowing that if one perseveres in love, God will create community from the depths of one’s tears.

Before his death, Francis struggled to reconcile within himself the embrace of joy in the midst of sickness and emptiness. Brother Elias came to him with the suggestion that perhaps he might lay aside his joyful singing. Francis tells Elias that indeed there was a time in his life when he did contemplate death day and night, now however, was not the time to think of death, this was the moment of reconciliation. Francis finds that his journey with Lady Poverty is ending in joy. Stripped of all to her loves and lovers he can rejoice in nothing other than the Most high. Francis was joyful because God alone is Joy.

Francis engages in the work of peacemaking and reconciliation. “He embraces the leper, risks his life to meet the sultan, mediates between the Podesta and Bishop, etc. Dialogue, non violent intervention and common sense are core to a spirituality of peacemaking and reconciliation.”³⁷ Followers of Francis understand that contemplative union with the crucified Christ in waiting and prayer is core to effective reconciliation; knowing that the glory of reconciliation flows from seeming failure of Calvary.

³⁶ Cf. J. MUELLER, “The Struggle to Embrace Joy”, 123.

³⁷ Cf. J. MUELLER, “The Struggle to Embrace Joy”, 124.

2.2 The Crucifix Sigh of Reconciliation

Francis' reconciliation began with the San Damiano, the call to restore a Church, to rebuild a house. This same cross became the centre of prayer for Clare of Assisi and her sisters, and Jesus crucified was the focal point of her mirror imagery. "This is the Christ we reflect to others. This the ultimate experience of a pilgrim longing to be embraced and forgiven by a merciful God, who assures us that this irrevocable deed of forgiveness has already been accomplished in the word made flesh, Jesus Christ."³⁸

Reconciliation to a specific way of life, this manner of fraternal living, came to be symbolized for Francis in the sigh of the Tau: the cross of the Christ of Gospels. The crisis for Francis, the sign of salvation and healing of the human fraternity, is not merely in the sense of something rewarded to us in the afterlife but rather, and more significantly, the healing of human existence, the healing of human relationships – by concrete, life affirming actions, done by us, for each other, in here and now.

The Tau thus exemplifies for Francis the fundamental values of love, mercy, forgiveness, relationship and peace which Jesus himself lived on this earth in definitively showing us the right way to live as intended by God. "This way of life, the way of life of penance –brings the life of the kingdom of God here on earth. And yet paradoxically, the same way of life and values is what led Jesus to his death."³⁹

The Tau, in other words, is not just the sign of conversion; "it is the sign of the life of penance; the penitential life style and those actions that produce fruits worthy of penance that flow from concrete human decisions not to harm by any

³⁸ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, "To do penance", 19.

³⁹ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, "To do penance", 23.

form of violence any creature who is a brother or sister.”⁴⁰ For Francis, the Tau was the pre-eminent sign of the non-violent Jesus whose way of life was the only way to bring about healing in the human fraternity.

The Tau is thus far more than a nice wooden symbol that hangs around the necks of good and well meaning Franciscans. It is rather the most profound sign of the life of penance of non violent living for the sake of the healing of the human family.

2.3 Penance as means of Reconciliation

Contrary to the early medieval and modern understandings of penance as a thing that one does to complete the ritual act of sacramental confession, Francis understood penance as an action that is to say a verb, not noun. Penance is not something, it is something one does.

In order to understand what he means by sin is to understand, what Francis means when he says in his Testament that he then began to do penance; the doing of penance to undo the consequences of their sin, in the Franciscan family. “It is quite simply the distancing of oneself from everything that threatens to break the relations uniting the human fraternity setting human beings over each other and against each other.”⁴¹

Francis did not understand penance as something one did to complete the sacrament of the forgiveness of sins, rather, penance for him was to be understood as the conversion process itself which extended from the moment of the awareness of ones sin into the sacramental moment and then beyond it into the flow of ones daily life thereafter.

⁴⁰ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, *“The Tau: The Meaning of the Cross for Francis of Assisi”*, 295.

⁴¹ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, *“To do penance”*, 24.

When Francis tells us that he began to do penance, he means much more than the fact that he availed himself of the sacrament and went to confession or that he did a penance in repentance for past sins, rather Francis means that “he embarked upon a wholly new way of seeing reality, a new way of seeing himself others, the world and himself, which would hence forth manifest itself in a different set of attitudes, values and behaviours as a result. This is the essence of authentic conversion.”⁴²

If we link penance with the *metanoia* which the synoptic Gospels refer to, it means the inmost change of heart under the influence of the word of God and in the perspective of the kingdom (Mt 4:17). But penance also means changing one’s life in harmony with the change of heart, and in this sense doing penance is completed by bringing forth fruits worthy of penance (Lk3:8). It is one’s whole existence that becomes penitential that is to say directed towards a continuous striving for what is better. The concrete daily effort of a person, supported by God’s grace, to lose his or her own life for Christ, as the only means of gaining it (Mt16:24-26). An effort to put off the old man and put on the new (Eph 4:23f) “Penance is therefore a conversion that passes from the heart to deeds and then to Christian whole life.”⁴³

The word penance is closely connected with reconciliation, for reconciliation with God, with oneself and with others implies overcoming that radical break which is sin. And this is achieved only through interior transformation. Francis’ spirituality is founded on the understanding of penance as conversion or *metanoia*. It is a process more than an event; a process that is on-going. To become a penitent for him was to accept that *metanoia* is fundamentally a way of life, oriented toward God more than an orientation away from sin.

⁴² Cf. M.F. CUSATO, “To do penance”, 7.

⁴³ Cf. J. BRAZINSKI, “Reconciliation and Penance”, 9.

To do penance means, more than simply going to confession, having ones faults erased by the sacrament, and then resuming one's life trying to do better than before. No, to do penance means "to begin to consciously distance oneself from and reject all those attitudes, values, behaviours and actions that further fragment the human fraternity of creatures, setting oneself over and against another."⁴⁴ This is authentic conversion; this is the root of a penitential spirituality.

2.4 Poverty Instrument for Reconciled Relationship.

The journey of discipleship implies that one accepts the consequences of choosing to follow Jesus. While hiding from his father, Francis finally finds courage to embrace the hardships of his choice. He renounces his father, forever giving up the luxury of living into two worlds. He is now dead to his father and also dead to the option of using his father's resources. He no longer is a generous benefactor of the poor rather; he becomes poor like the crucified Christ he has contemplated. "Francis conversion to poverty is authentic not because it is perfectly ordered, but because it truly is a call."⁴⁵

Francis viewed all of creation, most especially the land itself, as owned by God. "Faithful to the psalmist that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps 24:1). Francis encouraged his friars pledged themselves to live in this manner not claiming ownership of anything that was not, in fact, theirs to own. Hence, it is not a rejection of ownership in order to be poor; rather, refusing to claim what was not theirs in the first place. To live in accord with this reality made them inevitably part of the poor.

By claiming ownership of the earth to the exclusion of allowing it to fulfil the basic human needs of others is an offence to the creator and serves to divide the

⁴⁴ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, "To do penance", 19.

⁴⁵ Cf. J. MUELLER, "The Struggle to Embrace Joy", 117.

human family into the satisfied and the needy, the wealthy and the poor. It is the Gospel work to bring the wealthy and powerful of the world to ensure that the resources of creation under their control are used in order to feed and clothe the human fraternity.

Poverty enabled Francis became a peace maker and reconciler because “it freed his heart to embrace the Word of God. He came to realize his utter dependence on the goodness of God, thus he could enter into the centre of evil unafraid because he had nothing to defend and could destroy evil at its root.”⁴⁶

For Francis poverty means “to live without anything of one’s own without anything to defend, without rights to claim, without power, without judging others, submissive and subject to all – this creates room to receive God himself, who gives himself totally to us.”⁴⁷

In the writings of Francis the relational significance of poverty is clear, any discussion of poverty must always be accompanied by minority, of which it is an expression. But the process is complete only if those who choose to live truly as brothers and sisters whether among themselves or with all people do so in an ever more complete manner. Francis’s poverty goes well beyond the renunciation of material goods alone. It is a more essential poverty, more creaturely more relate not only to things but also people relations with God and others.

Poverty proposed by Francis is hard and demanding. “It is a poverty that requires us to give up not only all external and material things, but also our own will and our pride. It requires us to give up as well every right to our own will and our

⁴⁶ Cf. I. DELIO, “The Franciscan Path to Peace”, 286.

⁴⁷ Cf. D. DOZZI, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”, 47.

pride.”⁴⁸ It even requires us to give up every good in order to return it to its sole owner, who is God.

For Francis poverty is the renunciation of everything, outside and within oneself. It is a poverty that includes the external but even more the internal; it is a relationship with things, but even more with persons: we are poor and lesser ones so that we might be brothers.

Francis of Assisi shows us some concrete steps we can all begin to take. There are many people he writes who spend all their time at their prayers and other religious exercises and mortify themselves by long fasts and so on, but if anyone says as much as a word that implies a reflection on their self-esteem or takes something from them, they are immediately up in arms and annoyed. These people are not really poor in spirit. A person is really poor in spirit when he takes no more pride in the good that God says and does through him, than in that which he says and does through someone else. (Adm XIV)

2.5 Franciscan Ecumenism an Invitation to Dialogue

Francis was an ecumenical and universal man, because of his love for the Church, his work of reconciliation and peacemaking, the type of relationship, he established with all people and with the whole of creation: all this made Francis the new man, who struck the right balance in his relations with God, his fellow humans and Creation and the man to whom every one can look with hope. This approach of Francis lays the basis for a Franciscan ecumenical approach “Ecumenism is the

⁴⁸ Cf. D. DOZZI, “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”, 47.

effective commitment of Christians to restore our visible unity as the Body of Christ.”⁴⁹

In a word, ecumenism is our “Amen” to the prayer with which our Lord concluded his Last Supper “I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me. Father you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us that the world may believe that you sent me” (Jn17:20-21).

Furthermore, because Christ had commanded his Apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations, Francis could not limit his apostolate to Christian lands alone. His desire to be witness to the kingdom proclaimed by Christ made him look beyond the Church to non-believers and led him to go among them, offering to share his faith with them. Very significant, however, is the methodology he encouraged his brothers to embrace as they went on mission: “Instead of becoming embroiled in disputes and controversy, they were to remain peacefully among the non believers to show them the faith which was the rule and sole aim of the Fraternity.”⁵⁰

The simple truth was that he believed that a new kind of relationship could be established between Islam and Christianity. Francis proposed two ways of being present among non believers. The first was by giving Gospel witness, not engaging in disputes or controversies but submitting themselves, instead, to every human creature in the name of God. (ER, XVI, 5-7) The other way to evangelize is to preach Gods message by word. “This means proclaiming the fundamentals of our faith that God, unity and Trinity has come to us to announce His love for us and to enable us to share in His own life.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Cf. R. MURRAY, “Franciscan Ecumenism an Invitation to Dialogue”, 243

⁵⁰ Cf. J. MICO, “Going Among Non-Believers”, 121.

⁵¹ Cf. J. MICO, “Going Among Non-Believers”, 121.

In his lifetime Francis was to witness two crusades initiated by the popes to eradicate Islam and recover Jerusalem from the Muslims. Francis not only heard the Pope's call but he also wanted to be a knight battling for the sake of the Kingdom of God and he wanted to be a martyr, to give his life for his love of Christ.

The fifth Crusade took place from 1217 to 1221; it was during these years that Francis went to the East. The guiding light for Francis came from the Gospel of Mathew; "love your enemies and do good to those who hate you" (Mt5: 44) His life was informed by these words of Jesus which he so took to heart that he considered Muslims, not only to be friends but brothers. Dorothy Buck writes of this encounter;

The Christian Crusaders capture the city of Damietta Egypt in November of the year 1219. His greatest desire was to visit the sultan. Encamped just south of the city, His weapon was a message of peace and his hope was for the conversion of hearts. In June 1219, Francis and a few of his brothers went to the camp of the crusading army and stayed with them for some weeks hoping to dissuade them from attacking the Muslim sultan, Malikel-ka-mil who was encamped in a place called Al-massurra . Francis enters in dialogue with the sultan. He spoke as a brother rather than as an enemy, true to his spiritual experience of God in Christ that even an enemy is a brother.⁵²

Legend has it that in his effort to convince the sultan of the truth of his words Francis offered to throw himself into the fire in order that the Sultan and all his people would recognize Francis' sincerity the whole truth of Christ's life crucifixion and resurrection. In fact Francis was not only willing to risk his life as proof of the truth of his faith but also in order to save the sons of these Muslim brothers out of love for them.

Although Francis' efforts did not bear the fruit he had sought, his methodology remains a true testament to authentic evangelisation. Today we live in challenging times, "we are being challenged, individually and as a people, to consider ways to move beyond the fixed, mental constructs of God which divide and destroy us and to enter areas of relationship and mystery which could potentially,

⁵² Cf. D. BUCK, "St. Francis and His Dialogue of Hearts", 156.

unite and heal us.”⁵³ Given our history of violence as a Church and as a people, we can only presume to offer God our willingness to enter those new realms of understanding, and to trust that God will lead us into peaceful communion with one another.

2.6 Living as Peacemakers

Francis of Assisi’s commitment to peacemaking is recognized universally. On four occasions (October 1986, January 1993, October 1999 and January 2002) Pope John Paul II invited representatives from more than a dozen world religions to come together in Assisi to pray for peace. In June 2007, to commemorate the 800th Anniversary of conversion of Francis, Pope, Benedict XVI recalled Francis witness to peace. In the spirit of Francis, the Holy Father implored world leaders, “to reject hatred and violence and to embrace sincere dialogue and Justice that lead to Peace.”⁵⁴

Francis continually connected peace with patience and humility, forgiveness and reconciliation. The Franciscan call to live as peacemakers and to pray and work for peace is clear. At the same time the path to peace through compassionate love, pardon and reconciliation is difficult in a culture characterized by autonomy and individualism.

Francis lived and preached a Gospel of peace. But his life was not always so. The early biographies of Francis describe him as a violent young man. “He looked for war and found it. It was perhaps in his encounter with the leper that Francis became aware of the violence within himself. His sense of horror made him realize that he had first to conquer himself if he was to overcome his fear of

⁵³ Cf. C. JULIAN, “Reconciling our Relationship with Islam”, 54.

⁵⁴ Cf. P. HUTCHISON, “Living as Peace Makers”, 441.

lepers.”⁵⁵ Francis had to undergo an inward liberation through purification of self. That is, the peace that Francis sought required a change of heart.

Peace is born in the human heart, first by overcoming the violence within oneself and acquiring harmony of being and then working toward just relationships by learning to love, through self gift.

We learn by examining the Franciscan tradition of peace that one who desires peace must be on the spiritual journey to God. Peace is the fullness of love. It is the love of God revealed to us in the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross who invites us into his embrace of peace. Because the nature of God is peace and we are called to image that peace, we are called into relationships of love.

The Franciscan path of peace is indeed a counter cultural one. It calls forth the total gift of one’s life for the sake of the greater whole; the unity of humankind and creation founded on the love of God. All this requires an inward journey of conversion from all the blindly accepted values and approaches that are not of the gospel and a journey towards the burning love of the crucified Christ who is our peace.

“God, to whom we were reconciled through Christ....has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation.”(2Cor5:18) Francis’ vision of God and the world impelled him to become an apostle of peace and reconciliation. The service of peace was so fundamental a characteristic of the Order that Thomas of Celano described the vocation of Bernard as taking up the mission of peace (1Cel 24) Peace was a message, indeed a crusade, which Francis believed was revealed to him personally by God. In his Testament, Francis declared, the Lord revealed to me a greeting that he should say “May the Lord give you Peace” (Test 23).

⁵⁵ Cf. I. DELIO, “The Franciscan Path to Peace”, 287.

Francis even used this characteristic greeting when he addressed a great flock of birds gathered in a field near Bevagna. (1Cel 58) After remanding the brothers: “you talk about peace, all the more so must you have it in your heart” He insisted: “we have been called to heal wounds, unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost the way.” (L3C 58)

The mission of peace by its very nature includes justice. In fact, peace without justice cannot be authentic peace. The social doctrine of the church has been articulated in hundreds of ecclesiastical documents leaving no doubt that a conscious awareness of the demands of justice in our world, as well as a conscientious response, is an essential test of Christian faith and spirituality. Our Franciscan heritage roots our work for justice in images and in the language of peace and reconciliation and this greatly influences and determines our characteristic contribution.⁵⁶

To have world peace we must first have peace within ourselves. The idea of world peace is attractive but impossible to attain unless each person strives for inner peace. This means opening ourselves to the transforming action of God’s Spirit within us. Francis became a man of peace because “he sought an inner peace through purity of heart. He believed that peace begins in the heart.”⁵⁷ As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts; let everyone be drawn to peace and kindness through your peace and gentleness. Peacemaking is an inner attitude of the heart turned toward God and one’s neighbour.

Conclusion

Reconciliation in Francis does not have an intrinsically negative character, i.e., only a moment away from sin. We are called to fellowship, with God and with one another. In order to live in human fellowship we must abandon our understanding and approach to life as a separate individual existence. We must live for the common interest. In human fellowship we become ourselves. “This is simply the sensing, self

⁵⁶ Cf. J. CORRIVEAU, “On Compassion”, Circular Letter, 6.

⁵⁷ Cf. I. DELIO, “The Franciscan Path to Peace”, 287.

realisation, experiencing of value. We receive as much as we give, for in human fellowship not only does the other person become himself, but so do we.”⁵⁸ In the last chapter we shall explore our relationship to the cosmos, God’s creation. Today more than ever the arena where genuine reconciliation is required even in view of the survival of the human race.

⁵⁸ Cf. F.J. HEGGEN, “Confession and Service of Penance”, 55.

CHAPTER 3

RESTORING RELATIONSHIP WITH COSMOS

3.0. Introduction

Francis of Assisi is the one of the most universally recognized Christian figures. He has been seen as a forerunner to the Italian Renaissance and the patron of the environmental movement, He is perhaps the most appealing Roman Catholic figure to people beyond the Catholic Christian community.

A fundamental insight of Francis is, “his discovery of the universal fraternity of all creation, whereby Francis came to recognize the fundamental sacredness and inviolable dignity of the human person- of every human creature-simply because each one of us has been made by God and loved by God.”⁵⁹

In this last chapter we will look at the Cosmos, with which, Francis endeavoured his effort to establish covenantal relationship that included entire creation. We shall see how this relationship grew through a spirit of Brotherhood and Sisterhood. In the last part deals with the new reconciled order made possible by Christ. God’s presence gives a new form to the present created order, a form that takes existence beyond all threat of evil and suffering. The speciality of the new order is “To be alive or to let live, in harmonious relationships amongst created beings and non created beings, concretely, a paradigm shift from individualistic and imperialistic approach to wholeness and integration of all Cosmos”.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, “To do penance”, 5.

⁶⁰ Cf. W. JOHN, “Responsible Stewardship of the Environment”, 133.

3.1 Francis and Creation

Francis looked beyond the others of his time to envision a world in which humankind could share a concern for the whole community of creatures and he expressed his concern and love in such original and moving ways that they may still give us inspiration today. Francis himself said “every creature says and proclaims God made me for thee man.” (LP, 51) It is then human kind’s reciprocal duty to be grateful for creations services and appreciate the beauty and benefits the material world gives to them.

Only after his conversion, Celano tells us, did Francis truly delight in Creation. Falling in love with Christ drastically shifted Francis capacity to see and to know. “The deep connection Francis experienced with the land and all of creation is best expressed in his canticle of Brother Sun.”⁶¹ Francis calls the earth “mother.” Here Francis real point is to establish the deeper relationship between God, humanity, and the earth. However, it does convey that the earth stands among the creatures, and she is not the ultimate singular source of life.

Opening his arms to the world around him, Francis exhibited a natural tendency to value God’s creation. Rejecting the norms of the medieval society which surrounded him, Francis sought to imitate as closely as possible the life of Christ. Leaving the old world of sin behind, he embraced his new found spirituality and entered a world of obedience and grace. And furthermore, as Cunningham powerfully asserts that through looking for the traces of God in the natural world, “Francis found a way of contacting the cosmic Christ through whom the world was made.”⁶²

⁶¹ Cf. M. NOTHWEHR, “Called to Ecological Conversion”, 85.

⁶² Cf. K. WRISLEY, “St. Francis Optimistically Embracing Creation”, 61.

Francis claimed that creation shouted the Good News of the Gospel and should thus be viewed optimistically. Stories of harmonious interactions with animals and nature alike permeate the accounts of Francis' biographers, indicating that this understanding of creation was a necessary aspect of his Gospel view. Even on his death bed Francis recognized the beauty of creation where he asked to be placed "naked on the bare earth" for a short while serving as a reminder that it is from the clay of the earth that we come and it is to the earth we return.

3.2 Covenantal Relationship with Creation

The covenantal emphasis focuses on scripture as the primary source of ecological theology. A common approach is to reject an anthropocentric focus to biblical theology where humans stand at the centre and the rest of the world is seen as a back drop. Instead, covenantal approaches note that if one picks up the bible and simply reads it, it is hard to get far without encountering rich, vivid nature imagery. This involves a broader view of biblical history. "Seeing it not in terms of God and humanity over and against nature, but in terms of God and humanity with nature."⁶³

Biblically the Covenant is the model for the relationship between God and the Israelites, and is later understood by Christians in the context of the incarnation of God in Christ. This covenant expresses the constancy of Gods love for and commitment to all life, human and non-human alike. For our part humans are called to live into our covenantal responsibility on behalf of all flesh.⁶⁴

The vision of restoration of the coming kingdom for all creation defines and shapes our present tasks and sets our priorities. This vision guides and motivates our responsibilities in and for all creation. We are called to order our lives in terms of the values and shape of the coming kingdom. We are reminded that the ecological destruction that threatens all life is the result of human "us-first-ness", our harmful industrial processes and our individualized life styles and habits. It is a grave

⁶³ Cf. M. KIRKPATRICK, "An Incarnational Ecology", 209.

⁶⁴ Cf. M. KIRKPATRICK, "An Incarnational Ecology", 211.

theological and moral error to think we can go on violating our covenantal relationship with impunity and that all will ultimately be rescued.

Church teaching is clear about the immorality of damaging the environment and destroying the earth's ecosystems. Indeed on March 10, 2008, Archbishop Girotti of the Vatican office of the apostolic penitentiary listed "Ecological" offences among the "new forms of social sin."

Earlier the late Pope John Paul II called us to "ecological conversion." He admonished that what is at stake is not only a physical ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of the various living beings, but also a human ecology which makes the existence of creatures more dignified by protecting the fundamental good of life in all its manifestations, and by preparing for future generations, an environment more in conformity, with the creators plan.

At the root of our environmental crisis we find the inability or unwillingness to situate human life within a broadly conceived ecological context. Modern life bespeaks the refusal to acknowledge and live out the relational interdependent character of all human life. "Our temptation, whether that be in the name of progress, success, or liberation, has been to sever ourselves as much as possible from the communal condition that contribute to a complete life."⁶⁵

Having denied our necessary dependence on others, human and non-human, we now find ourselves a drift and alone, worried about the viability or worth of the lives we have chosen and are continuing to choose for ourselves. "Many of us have little appreciation for where we come from, what we depend upon, where we are going, or how our personal dramas fit into a larger whole. We are in short, bereft of

⁶⁵ Cf. N. WIRZBA, *The Paradise of God*, 192.

a sense of the cosmos, the sense of an ordered whole that envelops and enables life."⁶⁶

Our moral imperative is not erased, but rather enabled and compelled by what God is able to do and is doing, through our inseparable connection to all of creation, under the embrace of the redemption of Christ. These understanding calls upon us to recognize the divine will in creations transformation and renewal, and the necessity of our participation in this transformation. We are called to work toward the vision of life renewed, to a vision that honours all of creation.

With our inter-connectedness and inter-dependence comes the truth that, along with the rest of the created world, we are individually chosen, created and loved by God .Working through the lenses of light and love to better appreciate the created world and the creation act, it is marvellous to consider Gods over –flowing love and divine freedom that is at the core of creation.

The incarnational-ecological harmonizes with the previous compound image of communal-accessible, reminding us that engagement with the things of this world are for the sake of the common good. Thus Francis' incarnational-ecological vision, filtered through the lens of poverty, eschews profiteering and exploitation, critiques the petitionary "give me" mentality all too prevalent today and instead, "calls us to the most profound gratitude for God's unbounded goodness that encourages a spirituality of detached thanks giving."⁶⁷

Our existence in the modern world demands an acute awareness of the choices we make repentance we make regarding our covenantal relationship with God. Drawing on the rich Franciscan view of creation found in the work of Robert

⁶⁶ Cf. N. WIRZBA, *The Paradise of God*, 192.

⁶⁷ Cf. E. FOLEY, "The Contribution of Francis Prayer to the Church's Communion and Mission", 267.

Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus, “we are aided in the deepening of our relationship with Jesus Christ and can therefore enter more deeply into our relationship with the created world.”⁶⁸

Francis experience of relationship was not limited to human beings but extended to even the smallest elements of creation .As his life depended in the life of Christ, he came to recognize that the meaning of Christ extended beyond human persons to include No-human creation.

In relation to creation theological sense that it has been endowed with certain subjectivity by virtue of the fact that God in the pact mad with Noah explicitly enters in to a covenantal relationship with all of creation (Gen 8:21-22). In a very real way, this makes creation a covenantal partner of god. This idea finds clear correspondence in Francis notion that “in all creatures, no matter how mighty or lowly, is to be regarded as brother and sister.”⁶⁹ The dignity that creation has in serving the needs of other creatures should always be associated with the dignity of Christ who like wise came to serve and not be served. (Mk10:15)

3.3 The Canticle of the Creatures-Symbolic language of Profound Reconciliation

In this canticle Francis invites all creation to join him in a cosmic liturgy of praise and thanks giving to God who created this marvellous array of beauty and splendour “Praised be you, my lord with all your creatures Praise be you, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth.”

The Canticle is the song of a man totally reconciled in every aspect of his life; with God with fellow human beings and all creation. This is the fruit of the twenty years he had been living a life of continual conversion, “with the good God

⁶⁸ Cf. S. MULHOLLAND, “Franciscan Environmental Theology”, 248.

⁶⁹ Cf. E. FOLEY, “The Relevance of the Franciscan Tradition for a World in Ecological Crisis”, 299.

becoming ever more the centre of his life; now as he approaches the end of his journey he finds himself to totally reconciled with God and with all God's creation."⁷⁰ The canticle is a song of universal brother and sister hood witnessing to the universal Fatherhood of God.

In this Canticle Francis acknowledges his connectedness to all of creation; Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and Brother Fire etc. But there is something that Francis understood with his heart and tried to convey in the Canticle that is more than simply respect for all creatures. "It calls all of us to take our rightful place in creation. It challenges us to respect, reverence and connectedness to every creature that lives. It reveals the mystery that each one of us has the power to love all creation."⁷¹ In beautiful things he saw beauty itself, and through God's vestiges imprinted on creation, he followed his beloved everywhere, making from all things embrace him who utterly desirable.

Francis the patron saint of ecologists has an alternative paradigm, a paradigm of cosmic piety, in which he showed kinship with the least. In his cosmic fraternity there is neither superior nor inferior but all are as sons and daughters of the earth the mother of all. Thus he becomes an archetype of ecological concern for the collective of humankind.

The Canticle of the Creatures in today's circumstance offers a hopeful way to live a true relationship with our brothers and sisters in all creation. "True relationships will help make the world a little closer to the vision of our creator and in creating a sacred dwelling place of God."⁷²

⁷⁰ Cf. C. FINNEGAN, "Caring for our Mother Earth", 178.

⁷¹ Cf. M.E. IMIER, "Relationships: A Sacred Dwelling Place", 172.

⁷² Cf. M.E. IMIER, Relationships: "A Sacred Dwelling Place", 173.

For Francis all creatures are the words of a canticle of joy, which is a prelude to the liberation from the corruption of sin and death. Since all creation proclaims the glory of God, Francis also wanted to sing of the love of the Most High, the Good Lord with and through all his creatures: “Praise, be you my Lord, with all your creatures.”(CtC, 3)

For Francis all creation testified to God’s love. He was intuited that his own survival was dependent on all other creatures. He accepted this fact with gratitude and thankfulness. “He did not feel that he was the king of the universe but rather a poor brother who needed other creatures in order to live. He approached all creation with respect and courtesy.”⁷³

In the Canticle, Francis adopts the attitude of a courtly lover. There is in every true sense an archetypalization happening. “The cosmos is idealized in the world. ‘All’ the other is acknowledge in yours ‘My Lord’; the physical provides the locus for praising the transcendent sun, moon, stars, earth, water, and courtesies is the relationship that binds them as Brothers and Sisters.”⁷⁴

The Canticle is the symbolic language of profound reconciliation of Francis with the totality of his psyche. Seen thus, the final verses on pardon and death are in no way merely an addition, as maintained by the Assisi Compilation and even more clearly by the Mirror of Perfection, but rather the celebration of a man fully reconciled.

3.4 Reconciliation Presumes a Call to Fellowship

Francis’ spirituality is not fully comprehensible without an appreciation of why he put so much emphasis on fraternal life. Among other things; “he saw in his brothers a divine sign about how he was called to live his faith. In fact, it appears

⁷³ Cf. J. MUELLER, “The Struggle to Embrace Joy”, 119.

⁷⁴ Cf. S. MULHOLLAND “The Canticle of the Creatures”, 237.

that the arrival of brothers struck Francis, who seemed inclined to a more solitary form of penance, as an unexpected manifestation of his true vocation.”⁷⁵ Soon brotherhood became his hermeneutical lens and the horizon in which he understood the gospel and applied its teachings to his own life.

Brotherhood was an eye-opening experience for Francis, transforming his vision of the world. Because fraternity embraced all creation, Francis was caught up in what might be called the “Cosmic Fraternity.” Thomas of Celano described how Francis gazing in wonder upon the humblest realities –light, water, fire, wind and flowers, was able to discern the hidden reality of God in nature. Not content with praising God for creatures, Francis came to know them as brothers and sisters, fraternized with them, speaking to God’s creatures with great inner and exterior joy, as if they had been endowed by God with feeling intelligence and speech. (LP 49)

Further evidence of the centrality of brotherhood in Francis’s spirituality and self understanding can be found in his perhaps in most original work, the *Canticle of the Creatures*, written near the end of his life. In it, he identifies all of creation as one large family, in union with the Holy Trinity, the ultimate form and meaning of relationship. Francis—therefore understood himself as a brother: a brother to Jesus, a brother to all creation.⁷⁶

Message of penance is indeed characteristic of Francis; it is addressed to all without distinction to anyone who wishes to be saved. That cannot mean that “all must necessarily become brothers or sisters of the order of penance in order to be saved. Rather all must become penitents in that sense that all must change their lives, convert, and adopt a different attitude.”⁷⁷

To speak of reconciliation and penance is, for the men and women of our time, an invitation to rediscover and translate into their own way of speaking, the very words with which our savior and teacher. Jesus Christ began his preaching Repent

⁷⁵ Cf. C. WILLIAM, *Francis of Assisi*, 53.

⁷⁶ Cf. C. WILLIAM, *Francis of Assisi*, 53.

⁷⁷ Cf. C. GIOVANNA, “Penance and Penitents in Thirteenth Century”, 131.

and believe in the Gospel, that is to say, “accept the good news of love, of adoption as children of God and, hence, of brotherhood.”⁷⁸

In the lepers Francis had come face-to-face with the poor: those nameless faceless, voiceless of every time and generation who all deemed the *minores*: those who do not count. But the lepers were not empty ciphers; they were mere vehicles through whom Francis encountered what really mattered: Christ! Each person, no matter whom, was the privileged and sacred place, God was to be encountered.

In that encounter, therefore, Francis came to the cardinal insight of his life: namely: “that all men and women without exception have been endowed with the same inestimable dignity and worth are our brothers and sisters; one another spring from of the same life-giving God.”⁷⁹

Francis speaks of another way of being in relationship. He calls us to be “brothers” and “sisters” to every human being. Francis’ words in his Testament, “the Lord gave me brothers”, indicate the Lord showed him how to be in relationship to all. In pondering the Word of God, Francis realized that Jesus Christ found himself in the midst of sinners, lepers, tax collectors and Pharisees. He responded to each of them as one in relationship to the other. Literal gospel living invites all to live lovingly those relationships that Christ’s fraternity effects.

Francis adds the familial reference to being children of the Creator God. When we do the will of the Father who is in heaven is my brother and sister and mother (Mt 12:50). Francis takes this to a new level, being one of the first to articulate the implication that Jesus is the first born of all Creation (Col 1:15). He applies this same sense of relatedness in the canticle of Creatures.

⁷⁸ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, “To do penance”, 18.

⁷⁹ Cf. M.F. CUSATO, “To do penance”, 21.

Francis, Patron of Ecology, suggests a dramatic shift to include all of the Cosmos in this love relationship of fraternities and claims all earthlings of land, sea and sky as sisters and brothers. The human race is asked precisely to reflect fidelity to the will of God by the simple act of forgiveness, forgiving for all our brothers and sisters so that God will reconcile all things (Col 1:20). As brothers and sisters of Jesus we participate in sacred exchange honouring the particular gift and grace of every creature of every race, gender, species and era.

3.5 Fallen Creation: Cosmic Reconciliation in Christ

Reconciliation, in its double aspect of peace restored between God and men and men and men is the first fruit of the redemption. Like the redemption it has dimensions that are universal both in extent and in intensity. The whole of creation therefore is involved in reconciliation till the universal restoration comes (Acts 3:12). When all creatures will again meet Christ, the first to be born from the dead (Col 1:18). "Christological explication shows that Jesus Christ is our redemptive reconciliation. God through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of Reconciliation."⁸⁰

Peace and reconciliation is made possible, firstly between God and man, and secondly between man and man, and lastly between humanity and God's creation. The third aspect of reconciliation refers to the redemption or the re-creation of the fallen creation (Col. 1:19-22; 2Cor. 5:19; Rom. 8:18-22). Even the fallen creation has been reconciled in the cross of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 11:6-9 describes this state of reconciliation in which both humanity and the rest of creation will live in peace and harmony in the messianic kingdom.

⁸⁰ Cf. C.A. MAJAWA, *African Christian Reconciliation*, 247.

Francis suggests that the embrace of the joy of resurrection, the embrace of the kingdom of God already present, requires even more courage and grace. Perhaps this is true because every embrace of joy is an embrace of Calvary. “Followers of St Francis understand that contemplative union with the crucified Christ in waiting and prayer is core to effective reconciliation, knowing that the glory of reconciliation flows from victory of Calvary.”⁸¹

Christ is the savior of the whole world. Therefore, his Spirit of love and reconciliation is for everybody. “No one is excluded from this redemptive free offer of the Spirit. The divine Spirit is unbounded, breathes freely and everywhere and respects no barriers of race, tradition, religion of habitat.”⁸² The Spirit knows every language, every people and makes home in every culture. Therefore, the Franciscan spirit of reconciliation is known, purified and transformed by the activities of the same Spirit of Christ. Thus, the Franciscan way of reconciliation can enrich the spirituality of reconciliation, love justice and peace in families, in parishes in countries and the whole creation.

More than ever before reconciliation between human beings and the physical environment needs strong emphasis. It is only when this relationship is restored and realized that the whole created order will experience harmony, order, meaning purpose and significance.

When the early Christians proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord, it was clear that his Lordship extended over the whole of creation. The appearance of this man, though limited to a specific time and place, redefined the meaning of all time and all places. “The clear implication of Christ’s cosmic Lordship was that the Church, the continuing representative of Christ on earth, was to serve as the medium and

⁸¹ Cf. M. JOHN, “Franciscan Reconciliation: The Struggle to Embrace Joy”, 129.

⁸² Cf. C.A. MAJAWA, *African Christian Reconciliation*, 380.

manifestation of Christ's Creation and reconciling work to the whole creation."⁸³

To be sure, we do not have the power and wisdom to effect this reconciliation by our own right. But as called to be "members of Christ's body and thus custodians and agents of the grace of God, we are implicated in and responsible for the restoration of creation."⁸⁴

Indeed, a new world is possible; world where justice and peace reign, a world where people acknowledge God and our only Father and all peoples, irrespective of their language, ethnic group, religion and culture, live as brothers and sisters in love. "It is on this positive not that we look to the future with confidence as we welcome the reconciling action of God in the world, and the challenge to be ambassadors of justice, forgiveness healing and reconciliation in our society."⁸⁵

According to Paul, Christ renewed the whole created order (Rom 8:18-25). He is proclaiming the apocalyptic message that through the cross God has nullified the *kosmos* of sin and death and brought a new *kosmos* into being.

The new order made possible by Christ, however, will be an order in which hierarchies are broken down so that peace and reconciliation might reign. In this new order there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free male or female, not because those distinct realities cease to exist, but because the differences that divide the cease to matter as Paul says, "we are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28)

In speaking of a new creation, Paul is clearly drawing our attention to the creation of the cosmos by God. Whereas Adam led creation into a disordering of the creation, Christ is the new Adam who reverses the consequences of sin, a reordering of creation, in terms of the ministry of reconciliation.

⁸³ Cf. N. WIRZBA, *The Paradise of God*, 49.

⁸⁴ Cf. N. WIRZBA, *The Paradise of God*, 49.

⁸⁵ Cf. R. RONZANI, *Conversion and Reconciliation*, 187.

The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom: 5: 19-21).

This is a creation that groans with labour pains. A creation that feels itself to be suffering under the weight of an alien or foreign power. "Creation, just as we ourselves is not what it ought or was intended to be. And so it awaits liberation from the forces of destruction and injustice."⁸⁶

Echoing the words of the prophet Isaiah, God's creative action be understood in terms of joy and delight rather than pain and suffering. For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind but be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy.....no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it or the cry of distress. (Isa 65:17-19)

The new heaven and the new earth does not mean that the first creation turned out to be no good at all and thus needed to be replaced. Rather it signifies "God's radical intervening and transforming presence so that creation can be what God most wants it to be with the presence of God, destruction and morality will cease."⁸⁷ God's presence gives a new form to the present created order, from that takes existence beyond all threat of evil and suffering.

Conclusion

In this last chapter we tried to look the theme of reconciliation and relationship in a universal manner. We started it with St. Francis the Patron saint of ecologists,

⁸⁶ Cf. N. WIRZBA, *The Paradise of God*, 57.

⁸⁷ Cf. N. WIRZBA, *The Paradise of God*, 58.

with his notion of cosmic fraternity which is highlighted in his Canticum the Creatures – symbolic language for profound reconciliation extending up to his Universal Brotherhood. We, then, to move to a border realm of the new creation made possible in Christ by reordering of creation in terms of the ministry of reconciliation. In that new order all the differences that divide will cease and we all will become one in Christ.

It is not something we can accomplish on our own effort. For good reason, then the vision of the new heaven and the new earth concludes with the plea “Amen, come Lord Jesus”(Rev 22:20). “We need the presence of Christ, as mirrored in the community of followers who continue his ministry to take us out of self –focused and self-absorbed ways.”⁸⁸ As we are freed from the destructive potential of fallen life, we are at the same time freed to participate in the joyous celebration of God’s paradise. All of creation now becomes what it was meant to be from the beginning.

The flourishing of the whole creation will depend on the patient, attentive, compassionate, and convivial integration of human ways with physical, chemical, and biological process. Our most urgent and important task is to recover a sense of ourselves as creatures before God. The work before us is to wed our future with the future of “all the living” and find in that bond our hope and our Joy.

⁸⁸ Cf. N. WIRZBA, *The Paradise of God*, 192.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

When asked to identify a saint known for peacemaking and reconciliation Christians respond with the name of Saint Francis of Assisi. Those who are called to develop a spirituality of peacemaking and reconciliation in the midst of violence often look to St. Francis for guidance. This research paper has attempted to analyze the role of reconciliation and relationship from a Franciscan perspective. We now would like to underline the main aspects highlighted in the course of the research.

Firstly, with the Eucharist, as the sacrament of unity with its communitarian dimension, we tried to analyze the reconciling aspects through the different rites of the same Eucharist. As a part of contextualization and relevance of this research we made an effort to evaluate the Second Synod of African Bishops with the theme "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace". Its theme takes note of the specific missionary commitments of the African church and affirmative responses to the challenges of justice, peace and reconciliation.

Secondly, we dealt with the Francis' experience regarding reconciliation. He did not understand reconciliation as something one did to complete the sacrament of forgiveness of sins; rather, reconciliation for him was to be understood as the conversion process itself which extended from the moment of the awareness of one's sin into the sacramental moment and then beyond it into the flow of one's daily life thereafter: it was not simply a renewed way of life. We also analyzed how Francis used crucifix, penance, and poverty as means of reconciliation to build peaceful and loving relationships. This calls us for the renewal of all creation in metaphysical

unity involving the spiritual and the physical, the personal and the social, and cosmic.

Thirdly, we looked into the possibilities of restoration of broken relationships from a universal fraternal manner. Starting from Francis with his love for creation we are taken back to a Covenantal understanding of relationship and linked with his border realm of fellowship to be with Christ whereby He is presented as the “great reconciler of the new order”; in which order differences that divide will cease and we will all be reconciled and become one in Christ.

From the Franciscan understanding of social justice in the community and from the theological analysis of the church it is clear that our work for justice and peace in Africa means that we have to understand the situation of the marginalized, the suffering and the conflict in people. We have to break through socio-psychological barriers and accommodate reconciliatory and harmonious attitudes and values that are at variance with our own. Only then, shall our hope, efforts and call for genuine justice and peace materialize.

The reconciliation which Christ continues to accomplish through the church for the unity of the entire human race is a deliberate, enduring process of healing, which demands that all Christians work with the faith of Moses who endured because he saw him who is invisible (Heb 11:27). Healed through the anointing of the spirit of Christ, the Church’s members are able to make openings to repair relations between people and reestablish peace in people’s hearts and in society.

We cannot speak of God in the face of the poverty, ignorance, suffering, disease and death of the innocent. First we have to live the Christian life and then reflect; first develop a life style, then speak about God.

The church as the continuation and representation of new creation lives a tenuous existence since it is caught between the time of Christ's initiation and Christ's fulfillment. Even though its existence at times seems tenuous, its mission is clear: in Christ is the reconciliation and the healing of all of creation.

Reconciliation must never become an isolated religious phenomenon, or sacramental practice, apart from the daily life; just as sin involves multiple relationships, so do's reconciliation. Reconciliation involves both God and neighbors. Anyone committed to living a life of reconciliation must attend to the dynamics of love in relationship with God, others, self and the world. Reconciliation means above all a change of heart and mind. From that deep change follows changed conduct. In facing the ecological crisis, we must work on ourselves as stewards of God's creation.

As co-creatures with our sister, mother earth, we are called to live together with her, with one another, all earth-creatures, the entire cosmos, and God in a relationship of cosmic mutuality. Such relationships are precisely the challenge for Franciscan theology and ethics for our day.

Social injustice and conflicting situations in the community are increasingly coming up in the world and in Africa in particular, because of the diminishing sense relatedness compounded by the gravity of sin and guilt. People seem to accommodate immorality and extreme materialism with the absence of transcendental conscience. Injustices, exploitation and conflicts are experienced from family level to the community level. Thus, there is need for a well researched and theological study of the significance of the African phenomenon of reconciliation in the context of Christian and Franciscan values. It is hoped that this work is a modest contribution towards that goal.

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