



4. TOR Rule and Franciscan Spirituality of Rule

III. Spirit of Prayer

9. **E**verywhere and in all places, at all times and in all seasons the brothers and sisters are to have a true and humble faith. From the depths of their inner life let them love, honor, adore, serve, praise, bless and glorify the most high and sovereign God, eternal Father and Son and Holy Spirit (ER 23:11). With all that they are, let them adore God because we should pray always and not lose heart (Lk 18:1): this is what God desires (ER 22:29-30). In this same spirit let them also celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours in union with the universal Church.

Those who the Lord has called to the life of contemplation (Mk 6:31), with a daily renewed joy should manifest their dedication to God and celebrate the love that God has for the world, when God created us, redeemed us, and will save us by mercy alone (ER 23:8).

10. With all creation the brothers and sisters should praise God Ruler of heaven and earth (cf Mt 11:25), and give thanks because, by the holy will and through the only Son with the Holy Spirit, God created all things spiritual and material, and created us in God's image and likeness (ER 23:1; CtC 3; ER 23:1).

11. Since the brothers and sisters are to be totally conformed to the Holy Gospel, they should reflect upon and keep in their mind the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the word of the Father, as well as the words of the Holy Spirit which are spirit and life (Jn 6:63; 2LtF 3).

12. Let them participate in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and receive his Body and Blood with great humility and veneration remembering the words of the Lord: Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life (Jn 6:54; ER 20:5). Moreover, they are to show the greatest possible reverence and honor for the most sacred name, written words and most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things in heaven and on earth have been brought to peace and reconciliation with Almighty God (Col 1:20; LtOrd 12-13; 1LtCl 1; Test 12).

13. Whenever they commit sin the brothers and sisters, without delay, are to do penance interiorly by sincere sorrow and exteriorly by confession. They should also do worthy deeds that manifest their repentance (Adm 23:3; 2LtF 25). They should fast but always strive to be simple and humble (Adm 19:2; 2LtF 45). They should desire nothing else but our Savior, who offered himself in his own Blood as a sacrifice and victim on the altar of the Cross for our sins, giving us example so that we might follow in His footsteps (ER 23:9; 2LtF 11-14).

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TAB 4

Rule and Franciscan Spirituality



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Bernard Tickerhoof TOR

“Francis’ Volterra Letter: A Gospel Spirituality”

Thaddeus Horgan SA

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The Third Order Regular Rule and Franciscan Spirituality



THADDEUS HORGAN, S.A.

"Now that we have a new Rule, will that change our franciscan spirituality?" some are asking. The answer is "no." The Rule Text puts into sharper focus and clarifies just what our spirituality is in this post-Vatican II era. Yet it is written in Francis' own words, a definite mark that our spirituality, like all spirituality, is as it always has been: a way to God. That way, however, is distinctive. Spiritualities are not essentially different, only distinctive. Franciscan spirituality is the life-process of applying to ourselves Francis' way of encountering and experiencing God. For Francis God is known eminently in Christ, the Christ of the gospel who announces repentance and peace for all. To know God is a gift of the Spirit (hence "spirituality").

Because of our call by the Spirit to be franciscan, Francis' life, example and experience are most important. This is why, it seems, Francis went to such great pains in the **Testament** to tell us of them (Test. 1-23). Like Francis we are to embrace charism, God's gift of insight into the mystery of salvation and God's grace enabling us to appreciate and respond to it in a threefold way: personally, according to the spirit of our particular congregation, and in our current circumstances. For us in the Penitential,

As the height of intense interest and study on the TOR Rule, Sister Ann Carville OSF, as Executive Director of the Franciscan Federation, began a series of PROPOSITO'S for the NEWSLETTER of the Franciscan Federation. This one by Thaddeus Horgan S.A., co-author of the new Rule, was the very first one.

As a member of the Work Group of seven international franciscans, Thaddeus' zeal for presenting the Rule's values touched thousands of franciscans worldwide. His untimely death, April 19, 1990, left both an ache and a legacy in the telling of the Rule's story. It is a privilege to present this special contribution to that story from 1982.

*"To know God, to adore God, to serve God
in true conversion of heart."*

or Third Order Tradition this particularly means responding to the Lord's call to be turned totally and continuously to the Lord and to neighbor by following in Christ's footprints as Francis did **but** to do so in our way, today.

The prologue of the text focuses on the charism of **conversion** or **metanoia**. Its first two chapters further clarify it. And article two explicitly spells out the practical meaning of continuous conversion which is the very center of the gospel message. This is done in the words of Francis (RNB 23:4). Three expressions in that passage summarize the whole Rule as well as our franciscan spirituality. The new Rule then calls us to a renewed fidelity to the spirit of Francis. Unfortunately, neither time nor space allows for an extended exposition of that spirituality. Therefore, through a schema — using Francis' three expressions about our charism — let us begin to reflect and apply our spirituality as the Rule projects.

Francis' three expressions are: ". . . **eum cognoverunt et adoraverunt et ei servierunt in poenitentia . . .**" "To know God, to adore God, to serve God in true conversion of heart."

A) **TO KNOW GOD** for Francis is to be open to true faith and to our loving compassionate God (RNB 23:7; II Ep. Fid 63-71) who loves the world so much that He sent his only Son. And they sent their Spirit to make us perfectly one in God and with one another. (cf RNB 23:1-7) Being one with God is only possible in Christ (Ep. Fid II:48-53) So we must put on Christ. All franciscans do so by assimilating the values and attitudes (Phil. 2:5) of the Lord. We penitential franciscans literally and throughout life "Turn to God and believe the good news." (Mk. 1:15) We do what Christ did in His life of presence to God and neighbor. Like Francis, we make ourselves experience Christ and who Christ was because of his values and attitudes. This is all possible because Christ experienced our humanity totally through the Incarnation. For Francis we do this, as the Lord did, by adoring God and serving our neighbor.

B) **TO ADORE GOD** is more than a form of prayer for Franciscans. Following Christ's example, adoration for Francis was the total investment of self, the total handing over of self to God, and the total commitment of self to God's purposes. Francis recognized that God's greatest glory

is the obedience of Christ (Ph. 2:5-12). God's will is humanity's salvation. For this Christ emptied himself and became obedient. To do what is salvific, then, is God's greatest glory. According to Francis there is only one way to be salvific: the way of Christ in his humanity. In his humanity and through human experience, Jesus taught his followers how to be turned genuinely to God. This is discipleship: listening and learning from the Lord how we are enabled to be present to God and to be filled with God's life. Francis' scriptural reflections taught him that to adore the Lord is a total life-style, the life-style of Jesus in his humanity, a life-style characterized by prayer, poverty, minority and fraternity.

1) **Prayer** is consciously being with God so God can be fully with us in our experience, and with all humanity in theirs. (Mt. 10:37-42) Adoration and praise, the substance of prayer for Francis, is our thankful and loving response to the love, the care and the goodness of God for us (the pardon, provision and protection themes of the Lord's Prayer) which are expressed in the paschal mystery now Eucharistically celebrated, in all of salvation history, in creation, and in our relationships with God's people (II Ep. Fid. 61-62). To live this prayerfulness is a) to "recall Christ's words through persistent meditation and bring to mind his deeds through the most penetrating consideration" (ICel.84); b) to do all one can to transform our faith in the reality of our unity with the Father in Christ by the Spirit into an experience. This is done by devoted prayer in which one remains open to the surprises of God who continually reveals his wonders in Creation, the Church and in the circumstances of life! c) to join with Christ in the rhythm of his church's daily priestly intercessory prayer, (The Liturgy of the Hours) and to do these things with purity of heart and a sense of total consecration to God.

2) **Poverty** is the commitment to assimilate values revealed by God rather than those of this world (Col. 3:1-3). It requires as it did of Christ and Francis that we live as pilgrims here, emptied of worldly value systems, and captured by those proclaimed by the Lord in the beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-10). Status, manipulative self-seeking power, and wealth that is greed or depriving to God's people, we reject as the Lord did. We live simply (ITim 6:8) having "enough food and sufficient clothing; with these we are content." We are to use well this world's goods to fulfill our needs, the needs of one another and the other poor, especially the helpless (RNB 2:4).

3) **Minority**. Because prayer implies that we realistically accept and gratefully acknowledge God's plan for the world's salvation, and because poverty implies our acceptance of God's values for living salvifically and God's will that we use well the gifts in this world, Christian life is equated with dependence on God. The attitude necessary for a healthy dependence on God, Francis well knew, is minority. In one sense it is interiorized

prayerfulness and lived poverty because it is childlikeness. Biblical littleness is the one thing necessary for entrance into the Kingdom (Mk. 10:15, Lk. 18:17, Mt. 18:13, Jn. 3). An aspect of Francis' insight into the gospel was to note that the other qualities of gospel life are counsels. Childlikeness is an absolute (cf Mt. 19:14 vis-a-vis the rest of that chapter). The childlike spontaneously come to the Lord (Mt. 11:29, Jn. 6:44); remain with the Lord (Mk. 8:34) and experience what their destiny in the Lord is. (Eph. 5:1-2) The adult experience of childlikeness is the joyous awareness that one has been and is the object of the pure love and favor of God. Possessing this littleness is total conversion, the changed mind and heart that is the result of knowing the God who loves us in Christ and sees in us what Christ is to God, Child (Beloved Son).

Minority also is seeing in ourselves who Christ is "for us" because we are "in Christ." Jesus is the servant of God sent into the world showing us how to be gentle, meek, humble, compassionate, peaceable, patient and singlehearted. Like Christ the attitude of minority impels us to love the world, the "place where" of our redemption. It is where we work out our redemption and do God's redeeming will for and with our brothers and sisters. Minority also infers going into the world as efficacious servants of redemption bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom to captives, giving sight to the blind, setting the downtrodden free and announcing the Lord's year of favor (i.e. the self-conscious of Christ, cf. Lk. 4:17-19).

4) Fraternity for franciscans is life together, but lived in the consciousness that we are gathered in the Lord's name (Mt. 18:20) Jesus is in our midst as BROTHER (II Ep. Fid.56). Our fraternity is a sign of the Church, Christ's Body, within the Church for the world. Francis' notion of fraternity is identical to Vatican II's expectation that religious life itself should be a sign of Christ's presence among us. (Mt. 28:20). We are called also to live out the gospel with those called to share life with us (Jn. 15:12ff; RNB11,5). This must happen before we can bring Christ to others. Our fraternity then is itself a particular and special witness to the Church and a source of efficacious ministry. It ought to make credible what we proclaim and call people to, namely, to be the Church in the world. The Church is God's believing, praying, worshipping, and serving community in this world preparing the way for the Kingdom. Fidelity to fraternity as well as fidelity to intercessory prayer for the Church and world are the signs of our fidelity to the Church.

The Rule Text further points out in chapter 2 that fraternity is or should be an ongoing formation experience. **Metanoia** is ongoing. The presence of Christ among us is ongoing. Fraternity then must be the same. For Francis, fraternity is never ideal, but always concrete. His Admonitions

show how practical Francis views our gospel living together. Fraternity shows how down to earth franciscan spirituality ought to be.

C) **TO SERVE GOD** is to live continuously and concretely God's law of love (I Jn. 2:3 ff). In our tradition, this has meant doing the works of charity and living fraternal life. In both instances, it requires that we do justice and be instruments of peace, effecting reconciliation with God, with one another and among all God's people.

The gospel call to free men and women from every form of alienation (Lk. 4:16-22) so all can realize their God-willed destiny to be fully brothers and sisters to Jesus our Brother and to one another is our shared Franciscan service to God. This is seeking first the Kingdom of God and its justice. This is possessing the attitudes and doing the deeds of gospel life concretely (Mt. 5:10) (RNB 16:10-12). The Franciscan attitude toward establishing the justice of the Gospel requires deeds — or as one says today — involvement. Think of Francis' love of the Cross. Think of the meaning of the Cross on which Jesus embraces all the inhumanity and alienation men and women can muster. Think of Christ establishing our peace and reconciliation out of obedience to the Father. He overcame all inhumanity and poured our new life on humanity. Grasping and being this with our entire selves through repentance and lived gospel values along with doing what is renewing, reconciling and restoring among men and women is franciscan spirituality. It is integral gospel living.

While it is true that we each may not be graced to be and do all our franciscan penitential calling and charism summons us to, we are, by the fact of vocation, able to be committed totally and constantly to realize within and among ourselves the giftedness God gives us individually and communally. That we must do realizing that there is a variety of gifts but one Spirit. This is the basis of that mutuality and sharing that should characterize our lives. This is the basis of that joyful humility which recognizes God's gifts in self and one's brothers or sisters, gifts for upbuilding the Body of Christ, the Church, in our world. Holding fast to, clinging to and assimilating into the reality of our lives the words, the life, the teachings, the deeds and the holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ (RNB 22:41) is how Francis put it. The proposed Rule uses Francis' words throughout and attempts to present his inspired way to God through Christ in the Spirit faithfully yet briefly, thoroughly but reflectively. This is thoroughly franciscan for we are renewalists today in an age of renewal. We begin anew, as we should, with ourselves. □

FRANCIS' VOLTERRA LETTER: A Gospel Spirituality

Bernard Tickerhoof TOR

JUNE 1979

Francis of Assisi was in part a product of the medieval penitential movement. Upon recognizing the call of God to give over his life, Francis spent three years living as best he could around the neighborhood of Assisi, repairing churches and leading the life of a penitent hermit. On that eventful day in February of 1208 when Francis listened to the Gospel being read on the feast of St. Mathias, his penitential life took a decidedly different direction. He became a preacher of the gospel of conversion, and along with the men who soon gathered around him, he began to proclaim the need for repentance to all he met. The early biographers tell us that after some initial misunderstanding those who heard his words were deeply moved, and many men and women were led through Francis and his friars to embrace the penitential life.

Thus not only was Francis a product of the penitential movement, but in time he became the spearhead of it. So great was his influence on this Order of Penance, as the movement was recognized within the Church, that it completely adopted his values and spirit. Soon after his death it began to be recognized as the Third Order of Saint Francis, and down to our present day it continues to form the largest part of the Franciscan family. It consists of the Third Order (Third Order Secular — now known as Secular Franciscans) and of the various priests, brothers, and sisters communities that comprise the Third Order Regular.

In light of these times of renewal the Third Order, as much as any movement within the Church, recognizes the need to examine its roots. It looks for that elusive original charism that sparked its life and gave it a dynamism that so transformed society in the High Middle Ages. Those of us within the various branches of the Third Order have come to see that charism as the spirit of penance, that biblical *metanoia* that represents the process by which the Christian turns from a sinful state to an ever deeper life in Christ lived out in anticipation of God's Reign. In searching for this charism we have sought to rediscover the pre-Franciscan penitential movement and re-examine the conversion process of Francis. But part of this spirit of *metanoia* also lies in that early preaching of Francis that touched the depths of an already vibrant movement and gave it the strength to multiply its energies. In a general way that's what this article is about.

In 1975 Kajetan Esser published an article on a manuscript first published in 1900 by Paul Sabatier.¹ As Esser's title suggests, the Volterra manuscript appears to be an early edition of the Letter to the Faithful (*Omnibus*, p. 93). Until Esser's recent work it was considered important only insofar as it offered certain "variations" on the more complete piece.

Esser has theorized in his article, however, that the manuscript has significant value in its own right. "Vo is not only a copy of one of the oldest texts, but contains also a text which is independent in itself and at the same time older than the rest of the tradition of the 'Epistola ad

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¹ Kajetan Esser, "A Forerunner of the 'Epistola ad Fideles' of St. Francis of Assisi," first appeared in German in the *Collectanea Franciscana*. The English translation appeared in the *Analecta T.O.R.* 14 (n. 129). The article concerns itself with a Latin manuscript (Cod. 225 of the Biblioteca Guarnacci of Volterra), which Sabatier published in 1900 — hence the name "Volterra Letter."

fideles” (p. 33). As such the Volterra letter represents an early stratum of Francis’ writing. That it was added to and perhaps improved upon by Francis in later editions does not take away from its importance as an original work. Furthermore, as an independent text it offers a complete train of thought that, while not in conflict with the later Letter to the Faithful, presents us with a different intentionality that deserves to be studied.

Esser also offers some conclusions as to whom the letter is addressed. “It is quite clear therefore that we have before us a written instruction directed toward persons who have joined the penance movement of the later Middle Ages, a movement to which Francis and his brotherhood were deeply attached and obligated” (p. 38). Here, then, we have preserved for us, if Esser’s theories are correct, a simple and direct statement of Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, the grass roots movement of his age which not only helped to produce the Franciscan Order, but which in turn was radically renewed by it. The letter concerns itself with those who have taken up the penitential life, and also with those who have for various reasons not yet embraced a life of conversion. Such a letter is bound to be of great importance in the quest for the charismatic roots of the Third Order’s existence.

Thomas of Celano, in his First Life (n. 37), implies that in his early preaching Francis set forth some norms for penitential living for the many men and women who listened to him and were moved by his call to *metanoia*. There is, however, no way of determining in what these norms consisted. They have, like most of Francis’ preaching, been lost in antiquity. The Volterra manuscript is not anything like a rule; it is, however, a spiritual statement of the greatest importance. While in the form of a letter, it has the enthusiastic and imaginative preaching of Francis as its core. While directed to penitents of the thirteenth century, its scriptural sense of spirituality reaches out to all Christians of every era.

If we are to examine more closely the spirituality of the Volterra letter, we must of course make the text available. What follows is an English rendition offered, not as a critical translation, but as a means of bringing Francis’ letter into the proximity of the average reader.

Francis’ “Volterra Letter” (written probably ca. 1215)

In the name of the Lord.

Chapter One: Concerning those who do penance.

1. All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength, and who love their neighbors as themselves,
2. and have a hatred of their bodies with its faults and sins,
3. and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
4. and produce fruits worthy of penance:
5. O how blessed and praiseworthy are those men and women as long as they do this and persevere in such things,
6. because the Spirit of the Lord rests upon them and makes a dwelling place among them.
7. and they are children of their Father in heaven whose work they do, and they are the lovers, the brothers and the mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.
8. We are lovers when our faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.
9. We are brothers to him when we do the will of his Father who is in heaven.

10. Mothers when we carry him in our hearts and our body through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience, and we give birth to him through holy actions which should shine as an example to others.
11. O what a glorious, holy, and great thing it is to have a Father in heaven.
12. O how holy, fair, beautiful, and wonderful to have such a lover.
13. O how holy and beloved, gratifying and lowly, how peaceful, delightful, lovable, and above all desirable to have such a brother and son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave life for his sheep
14. and prayed to his Father saying: "Holy Father, in your name keep those whom you have given me in the world. They were yours and you gave them to me,
15. and the words you have given me, I have given to them. And they have received them and have truly believed that I have come forth from you and they know that you have sent me.
16. I pray for them and not for the world.
17. Bless and sanctify them and for them I sanctify myself.
18. Not for them do I pray, however, but for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may be sanctified in their unity as we are.
19. And I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me, that they may see my splendor in your kingdom." Amen.

Chapter Two: Concerning those who do not do penance.

1. However, all those men and women who are not repentant
2. and do not receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ
3. and commit vice and sin, and who follow evil appetites and the evil desires of the flesh,
4. and do not observe what they have promised the Lord,
5. and who bodily serve the world, the desires of the flesh, following the anxieties and cares of this life:
6. detained by the devil, they are his children and do his work.
7. They are blind, for they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ.
8. They have no spiritual wisdom for they do not have the Son of God, who is the true wisdom of the Father;
9. it is said of them: "Their wisdom has been swallowed up;" and "they speak evil who turn away from your commands."
10. They see and acknowledge, they know and yet they do evil, and they themselves knowingly lose their lives.
11. Look, you blind, deceived by your enemies, by the flesh, the world, and the devil; for to the body it is sweet to commit sin and it is bitter to serve God;
12. because all vice and sin come forth and proceed from the human heart as the Lord says in the Gospel.
13. And you have nothing to look forward to in this world nor in the next,
14. and you think you are going to keep possession of the vanities of this world. But you are deceived, because the day and the hour will come of which you neither think nor know and of which you are ignorant. One's body becomes sick, then death approaches, and thus he dies a bitter death.

15. And no matter where or when or how a person dies in guilt and sin without repentance or due satisfaction, if he can make satisfaction and does not do so, the devil snatches his life from his body amid such anguish and distress that no one could understand it if he has not experienced it.
16. And all the talent and power, all the knowledge and wisdom they believed they had will be taken from them.
17. And relatives and friends bear their property away and divide it among themselves, and afterwards they say: "Cursed be his soul, for he could have acquired more to give us but he did not."
18. The worms consume the body and thus they lose body and soul in their short life, and go into Hell where they will be tormented without end.
19. All those to whom this letter might reach, we ask in that love which is God that they favorably receive with a divine love these great and precious words of our Lord Jesus Christ,
20. and those who do not know how to read should have them read often,
21. and keep them with them, practising what is holy to the last, for they are spirit and life.
22. And those who do not act in this way will be held to account for it on the day of judgment before the seat of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Latin text: *Analecta T.O.R.*, Vol. XIV, No. 129, pp. 42–45.)

Modern biblical study has employed several tools by which to further our understanding of Scripture. It has been the genius of contemporary Franciscan research to apply these same tools to the body of the early Franciscan writings. Esser's article on the Volterra Letter is an example of such a tool, textual criticism. Through an examination of the various texts available to us he has not only reached some important conclusions as to the origin and purpose of the letter, but has also concerned himself with providing for us a critical Latin text. Yet it still remains for other methods of research to be utilized so that the richness of the text may be explored still further. One such method is form criticism, which seeks to move behind the written text and examine the preliterate and oral composition of a work. Another method is literary criticism, which explores the content of a text from the aspects of language, composition, and origin. Much of the remainder of this article will be concerned with briefly applying these tools to the Volterra Letter in order to draw out the penitent spirituality contained within it.

Here is not the place to examine at length the differences between the Volterra Letter and the Letter to the Faithful. First of all, Esser has already done that in sufficient detail in his article (pp. 34–37). But we pass over the Letter to the Faithful here more than simply to avoid redundancy. An examination of the longer text would be imperative if we were attempting to trace the development of Francis' thought in regard to the Order of Penance. An analysis of the additions that made their way into the longer text would then be essential. Instead we are moving in the other directions. What concerns us now is not tracing Francis' development, but rather discovering the roots of his spirituality. Only upon examination of the foundations of his penitent spirituality can we be free to observe its movement as Francis became more self-conscious of the role he played in the popular spirituality of his day.

We begin by asking the question, what do we have before us in the Volterra Letter? It is, as Esser maintains, a letter; II;19 clearly indicates this is so. But Esser is quick to point out (p. 34) that its form predates Francis' complete letter style. There is no real form of address, no admonition to make copies of the letter and circulate it, no exhortation that the letter be preserved. It is a letter only in the barest of structures. Yet the body of the letter possesses a deliberate and polished

format. There are clearly two trains of thought, one an affirmative statement on those who do penance, the other a double negative which arrives at the same conclusion. Both statements are not only salted with scripture texts, but scripture is intricately woven into their very fabric. Assuming Francis' extensive and often intuitive use of Scripture, there is still a purposefulness to its presence here (as will shortly be demonstrated) that could lead us to the conclusion that the letter is in some way a spiritual statement on Scripture itself.

This conclusion undoubtedly says something about the intention that lies beneath the letter. There is no direct addressee. There are no personal appeals or exhortations, as there would be if Francis were sure who would actually be the beneficiary of his letter. What we have instead is a didactic tool. The letter is the means Francis has chosen to reach a wider audience, to increase an original circulation. To commit to writing is an insurance measure. First of all, it insures that one's thoughts and beliefs will be preserved. Second, if this writing is published or circulated, it furthers the spread of these beliefs. But such beliefs and thoughts here pre-exist the form. The letter form has been imposed upon the material, which seems to have a more primitive oral form behind it.

The oral nature of the Volterra Letter is not difficult to notice. It can in fact be seen in many of Francis' writings. The letter does not seek to furnish rational proof. There are no complex arguments that would have to be logically set down and extensively explained. Rather, the content is light and repetitious. It is meant to create an emotional effect. Its style purposely tries to recall familiar phrases that will touch off a spark in the hearer. And the letter concludes with a story (II:14-18) designed to leave the hearer with something to remember long after the words have died away. An extensive use of Scripture makes sense here since it calls forth already existing phrases from the memory. In short there is present in the Volterra Letter sufficient evidence that the basic content of the piece existed first in oral form, and seems to have many of the characteristics of homiletic material. The bulk of the letter may well be a close example of Francis' preaching, and perhaps the purest example of it that we possess.

While a preacher's style often appears to be light and simple, preaching is itself a complex art form. Several things are going on at once in a good homily. First of all, there is a train of thought which more or less directly leads to a particular theme or point. But the homily or sermon does not embody only this type of linear development. The preacher is also presenting a snapshot of a complete world view with every homily. In theory if we had enough homilies from one preacher, assuming of course a congruence to his life experiences, we should begin to understand his world, for that world lies at the bottom of every homily he gives. Even the simplest, most direct statements are important, for they serve to validate this world view in the preacher's mind and clarify it for his congregation.

If we look at the Volterra Letter as a homily we observe that it presents us with a very simple and straightforward statement on Francis' part. In its purest form it runs something like this: It is highly beneficial for one to do penance, but on the other hand if one does not do penance he will not possess eternal life. But this statement is at the same time a snapshot of something deeper. It is, like all of Francis' writings, a picture of this holy man as he attempts to respond to God and his brothers and sisters from within his own life situation. It is a representation of his world view.



Thus the letter can be a key for us. By examining the text we can bring to light many of the beliefs and values which motivated Francis.

It should be no great surprise to us that Francis' primary source for the letter is Scripture, or more specifically the Gospels. We are used to thinking of Francis as the Imitator of Christ, as the one who sought to follow the Gospels perfectly, as the one who hoped to renew the Church through a renovation of the gospel spirit. Yet we too often settle for the belief that Francis' understanding of Scripture was by and large spontaneous, that it was for the most part undifferentiated. Francis used Scripture because it was so much a part of him that he could not *help* using it. It was as natural to him as if it were his very own vocabulary.

To an extent this is true and it speaks well of the holiness of Francis. But if we conclude from this that he "merely" used Scripture spontaneously, then any further examination of the text has little to offer us more than a testimony to one man's holiness. In fact, however, that is not the case. Francis' use of Scripture in the Volterra Letter is quite deliberate, and presents us with a coherent scriptural theology.²

The letter is influenced from two directions within the Gospels. There is clearly evident both an influence from the Synoptic Gospels and an extensive use of Johannine material. I do not state this merely as a convenient way of dividing the body of the canonical Gospels, for the Volterra Letter uses the two in decidedly different ways. The Synoptic influence, while still important, is recognizably secondary, and appeals more to our understanding of Francis' use of Scripture as spontaneous. There is, however, a primary use of Johannine material quite beyond mere Scripture quoting. Johannine theology has been intricately worked into the text itself, leaving us with the impression that the primitive oral form of the letter may well have been a sermon on some aspect of John's Gospel. We will briefly analyze the Synoptic influence on the letter for it does offer us a picture of Francis' world and thought patterns, but it is the influence of the Gospel of John which will most occupy our attention here.

Synoptic material is recognizable in the letter in I:1,4, 7b, 9, 19b; and II: 12, 14b, 16. There is however no coherent pattern to it. It is used as the situation seems to dictate. The reference, for instance in I:1 (Mk. 12:30–31; Mt. 22:37–39) sees those who do penance as being a part of (or really synonymous with) those who keep the two great commandments. This can be considered a more or less direct use of the Scripture. The same can be said for I:4 (Lk. 3:8 — the Baptist's preaching), I:7b (Mk. 3:33–35 and parallels — the true family of Jesus), and II:12 (Mk. 7:21 — the source of impurity). Other Synoptic references, however, simply help to form Francis' vocabulary, as in I:9 and 19b, where he speaks with a decidedly Matthean flavor (cf. Mt. 12:50 and 20:21).

Of special note are the Synoptic references in II:14b and 16. They reveal something of the ongoing understanding of revelation for Francis as well as for the medieval Church in general. The texts refer to several eschatological passages from the Synoptics (II:14b — Mt. 24:42, 50; 25:13; Lk. 12:46 and II:16 — Mt. 13:12; 25:29; Mk. 4:25; Lk. 8:18), but the eschatology present in the Gospels is quite different from that of Francis. In Scripture the passages are apocalyptic. They describe the final inbreaking of God, the definitive end of history, and the last judgment, whereas for Francis the judgment in question is specifically individual judgment. Francis does not expect an immediate cataclysmic end to creation. Rather the individual should first beware of his own end. Of course this does not mean that Francis would deny a final judgment (on the contrary, see II:22), but it simply implies that his eschatology is primarily salvational and not apocalyptic.

² It might here be advisable to mention that we speak of Francis as the author of the letter, but do not thereby preclude the contribution of others to its theology. Nor should this keep us from maintaining that the spirituality contained in it is indeed that of Francis. The same, in fact, can be said of much of the body of Francis' writings. Authorship is here understood in that wider sense familiar to anyone who has made even a basic study of the New Testament.

Francis has taken the Synoptics' penchant for apocalyptic imagery and has removed it from its metahistorical time frame. He has not been alone in this. The process was already underway in the first century. In fact it had already begun in the Synoptics themselves. Luke deapocalyp-ticizes much of his source material. What is of interest here is the extent to which Francis has taken this process for granted. Nor should we be too surprised if we did not pick up the change of sense in reading the letter; for the most part we automatically assume the process as well.

When we turn to the Johannine influence on the text we see a marked difference in the letter's use of Scripture. To begin with, over one third of the verses in the letter reflect Johannine vocabulary. One complete section (I:14–19) is an extensive paraphrase of the priestly prayer of Jesus in John's seventeenth chapter. When enumerated the Johannine references form an imposing list.

- I:6 — Jn. 1:32; 14:23
- I:7 — Jn. 8:41; 14:12
- I:14 — Jn. 10:15; 17:6, 11
- I:15 — Jn. 17:8
- I:16 — Jn. 17:9
- I:17 — Jn. 17:17, 19a
- I:18 — Jn. 17:20, 23
- I:19 — Jn. 17:24
- II:5 — Jn. 8:23, 34
- II:6 — Jn. 8:41, 44
- II:7 — Jn. 1:9; 8:12; 9:39; 12:46
- II:10 — Jn. 9:41
- II:11 — Jn. 9:39
- II:21 — Jn. 6:63

But it is not enough to point out the extensiveness of the Johannine vocabulary. We must also note that there is a definite pattern to its use. In the letter's first chapter the core of the John material is positive and is drawn from the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel. John here records a prayer of Jesus addressed to the Father summarizing Christ's mission and praying on behalf of his disciples, the true believers, and for those who will come to believe through their preaching. Francis has chosen material from this chapter specifically bringing out the nature of discipleship in the lives of the penitents. For Francis the penitent has been given by the Father to Christ, and has been instructed through the words of the Son. The penitent has received this teaching and has come to believe. The life of penance is tied to belief. But not only that, for by their example and perhaps by their preaching they will also lead others to believe, and thereby to do penance.

In the second chapter we see the flip side of the coin. The material is drawn extensively from the eighth and ninth chapters of John's Gospel, and is decidedly negative. The references are now no longer to the disciples of Jesus but to the Jews, representing for John those who are not true believers. The thrust of the Gospel is that while claiming to be begotten of God these non-believers are really children of the devil. Moreover they have gone beyond the point where they can truly see their own origin. They are spiritually blind, so that while claiming to have the light they show themselves to be unaffected by it. Francis has drawn from this image of the unbeliever and has applied it to those who refuse to take up the penitential life. While they claim to be Christians, their very actions show that they are self-deceived. They have lost true wisdom, and so they have created a bleak future for themselves.

This concept of true wisdom is indeed of great importance to us, for it shows the depth to which Francis has plumbed Johannine spirituality. Crucial to our understanding of this are verses 8 and 9 of Chapter Two in the Volterra Letter. The plight of the impenitent is here shown in a double reversal. On the one hand they possess no true wisdom (vs. 8), and on the other the worldly wisdom they do possess proves itself to be ineffective (vs. 9). The latter verse, a compos-

ite of psalmic material (Ps. 107:27; 119:21) shows a clear influence of Hebrew wisdom literature. The same is true of verse 8, but with a truly interesting twist. Jesus, the personified true wisdom of the Father, recalls the personification of Wisdom as it appears for instance in Proverbs 8 and 9 and in Sirach 24. But here wisdom is feminine. She springs forth from Yahweh himself, united to him but distinct. She has creative attributes, and offers unending nourishment to humanity.

The surprising element, however, is that the writer of John also developed a theology of Christ around personified Wisdom, transferring her qualities to the masculine *Logos*, the Word, and applying them to Jesus. Compare for instance the parallel thought patterns between Jn. 1:1–5 and Prov. 8:22–31, and between Jn. 4:13–14; 6:35 and Prov. 9:1–6 and Sir. 24:19–22. Francis does not use any of these Johannine passages directly, and yet he has intuited the sense that John wished to present. Francis does not portray Christ as the Word, but in speaking of Jesus as the Father's true wisdom, he has utilized a pre-Gospel Johannine thought pattern. Such a theological development is truly remarkable, given Francis' limited formal education, and points out most effectively how much he had absorbed the Scripture into his being.

It should here be noted in passing that Francis also uses the scriptural term "flesh" several times within the Volterra Letter (II:3, 5, 11). This term is likewise found in John's Gospel (Jn. 3:6; 6:63), but has not been cited by us as Johannine influence upon the letter, since the term is used quite differently by John. In the Fourth Gospel it is contrasted to the spirit, and represents the outward manifestation of human life, that which is mortal and passing. Francis' use of *flesh* is closer to that found in Pauline theology. Paul uses the term *flesh* in a holistic sense. The flesh is the whole human person as inherently weak and cut off from divine help. The flesh is isolated from God and therefore open to sin. Francis speaks in this vein, but he also shows himself to be highly influenced by a strong Medieval renunciation theology that links the flesh with the world and the devil to form a threefold united front in combat with God's truth and virtue.

The whole thrust of John's theology can be seen as faith-centered. Jesus is the eternal Word who comes that we may believe. He presents himself and the Father through a series of "signs" which call forth from within the observer a decision: Can you put your faith in the Son or not? This understanding of the Gospel is adequately stated in Jn. 3:17–18. "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him avoids condemnation, but whoever does not believe is already condemned for not believing in the name of God's only Son."

The importance of the Volterra Letter lies in the direct link that Francis sees between this understanding of faith and the penitential life. For Francis following Christ is not simply a matter of degrees. The penitent is not just a little farther along the road. In a sense there is for Francis no middle way; the issue at stake is too important. And the issue, simply stated, is one's belief in God. The penitent has shown himself willing to put his faith into practice by undergoing conversion of life. The one who does not undertake conversion shows himself to be no better than the unbeliever. The penitent through his or her life style demonstrates true discipleship. But the one who is so proud and so avaricious as to feel no need for repentance has already been cut off from God. Such an understanding of the penitential life is indeed radical, but no more radical than John's. "If you were blind there would be no sin in that. 'But we see,' you say, and your sin remains" (Jn. 9:41). No greater gift can be given to a person than the gift of faith, and for Francis it was the penitent who showed what it truly meant to believe.

The Volterra Letter:

The First Letter to All The Faithful

THADDEUS HORGAN, S.A.

Francis' highest intention, his chief desire, his uppermost purpose was to observe the holy Gospel in all things, and through all things and with perfect vigilance, with all zeal, with the longing of his mind and all the fervor of his heart, in order to follow the teaching and the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. He would recall Christ's words through persistent meditation and bring to mind his deeds through the most penetrating consideration [1Cel 84; *Omnibus*, 299].

THIS CITATION FROM Thomas of Celano is, I believe, significant to our purpose. Seeking to deepen our appreciation of the Volterra Letter¹ is for each of us the beginning of a persistent and ongoing reflection on the life-filled words of the new Rules of the Franciscan Third Order Regular and of the Secular Franciscan Order. The Volterra Letter centers the Gospel in Franciscan life. It makes us conscious of the efficacious *word* of God. Through it Francis shows us the way to incarnate the Gospel's basic reality into daily living. Further, it points out the sources Francis used to keep lively within himself, humanly speaking, the Good News who is Jesus Christ. These were reflection, memory, and ongoing meditation. Even a quick look at his other writings reveals Francis' clear perspective on the Gospel. It is always Jesus Christ. He is our way to the Father.

¹The *Volterra Letter* in English can be found in *The CORD* 29:6 (1979), 166-68; in Cajetan Esser, *The Rule and Testament of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 221-26; in AB 62-65; and of course in the new Third Order Regular and Secular Franciscan Rules.

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Again, as Celano puts it, Jesus "occupied" Francis. Francis carried the Lord in his heart, his mouth, his ears, his eyes, his hands, and all his members (1Cel 115; *Omnibus*, 329). He did so because God's unerring words of Spirit and Life state that no one comes to the Father except through Christ (Jn. 14:16). Jesus' life is the way God's love literally entered our world and touched the hearts of men and women. Such love must be responded to. This is the uncomplicated substance of Franciscan spirituality. This is why Francis preached penance, or conversion of heart, and directed that it was to be proclaimed and lived by his followers (RegNB 23:1). The matter was simple: whoever has received the gift of salvation must live as a new creation, alive in Christ (Rom. 6:11). This is the response God wants.

To be a penitent . . . means to be a
living vessel of God's transforming
presence and power in the world.

While there is a simple directness to Francis' awareness of salvation, let us not think that it was simplistic. On the contrary Francis' awareness was not only persistent but penetrating. We see this—as with all things concerning Francis—in his deeds. His followers had to proclaim repentance because Francis knew that all people *need* God. All people are intrinsically poor, or gospel poor, without Christ. All people also are the object of God's selfless love. All, then, should respond to God. Again, cumulatively looked at, Francis' writings show that he understood *metanoia* as a continuous process of abandoning the effects of sinfulness throughout life, especially that of being separated from God, and of embracing the life of union with God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. To use Francis' words, all men and women need to replace the "spirit of the flesh" (EpFidII 65; cf. AB 72) with the "Spirit of the Lord" (ibid., 48; AB 70).

The "spirit of the flesh" is a Pauline expression meaning that the person to whom it is applied is in the full range of his/her personality separated from God. As such, that person is the subject of sin and death. But God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying will has destined all people for

²Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary* (London: Herder and Herder, 1965), 60.

transformation to glory.² It is in this sense that Francis uses the term in his writings. This demonstrates theological insight, we might say, but it more likely means that Francis was inspired to understand the process of redemption as it is presented in the whole of Scripture (especially the New Testament). He apparently reflected on it, kept it in the forefront of his memory, and made it the subject of his ongoing meditation. It seems to me that if we want to know well the Prologue to the new Rules of the Franciscan Third Order Regular and Secular Franciscan Order, all of this should be borne in mind because these truths are what underlie the words of the text.

Implicit Content: Covenant and Cross

REDEMPTION UNFOLDS in Salvation History as a series of covenants between God and his People. The covenants were unique relationships between the Lord and his chosen—relationships based on God's choices. The fact that God chose us utterly fascinated Francis. The Lord made certain people his partners so that in and through them he would restore to humankind its original destiny of eternal life with him. God is always the initiator of covenant. Because he is God, his covenants are irrevocable. This fact awed Francis of Assisi especially in view of the fact that, as Genesis points out, humanity chose the way of "the flesh." Yet God pursued his people, establishing partnerships with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17), with Abraham (Gen. 15:9-12), with all of Israel (Ex. 20:34), and with the Davidic Dynasty (2 Sam. 7). It was God who established these partnerships, pushing his people (if you will) toward that moment when the Person of the Word established not only a partnership, but a relationship between God and humanity. In Christ we become the children of God. What Jesus is to the Father we now become: viz., children of God. Moreover, we receive God's life or the living relationship within the Godhead, the Spirit of the Lord. This relationship both draws us into the very inner life of God and bonds us together into the relationship of fraternity with the Lord. Jesus now is brother to all men and women who share his life. Behind the Volterra Letter's words is Francis' living consciousness of this most gracious choice and gift of God. These must be responded to and received. This is what Franciscan life is all about.

The call to turn from the spirit of the flesh to the spirit of the Lord meant for Francis to submit oneself totally to God's salvation *and* to become part of God's salvific activity in the world. This is why deeds are so essential, in Francis' view, for anyone committed to the life of evangelical conversion. Deeds are concrete responses to the goodness of God. God's love and goodness are expressed above all in the deed of his

only Son come into the world. He is near. He is concrete. In the Incarnate Son we know the way to the Father. To do the Gospel literally, Francis' charismatic insight into Scripture, became for him (and his followers) the path to eternal life because in Christ God becomes brother to us (EpFidII, 56; AB 70) and among us. This is the core of Gospel life.

The Redeemer on the Cross was Francis' perception of the Christ. This was so not only because salvation was effected there (Adm VI and EpFidII 11-14; AB 29, 68), but because there the Son totally gave himself to the Father out of love for us. One of the reasons Francis emphasized the Eucharist is that it makes present again to us our Redemption. It is a source of redeemed life constantly being renewed in us. Celano and Bonaventure, particularly, point out Francis' devotion to the Crucified Christ (2Cel 211; LM IX.2, XIV.4; *Omnibus*, 533, 699, 739), a devotion that led him to want totally to return in kind the selfless love of God for us expressed by Christ. Just as the Redeemer emptied himself for our sake, Francis wanted his followers to empty themselves of all selfishness and worldliness as their concrete response to God's Goodness. Nothing less than Jesus's poverty and humility is projected as the way to respond. Such a deed manifests both one's awareness of and one's reception of God's new and eternal covenant relationship into one's own life. Not to accept it is mere foolishness, as the story at the end of the Volterra Letter points out.

Explicit Content

THIS STORY and its style make one wonder if the Volterra Letter truly is a letter. There is much internal evidence to support the claim that it is actually a sermon. Bernard Tickerhoof states the case:

What we have . . . is a didactic tool. The letter is the means Francis has chosen to reach a wider audience. . . . The letter form has been imposed upon the material which seems to have a more primitive oral form behind it. . . . In short, there is present in the Volterra Letter sufficient evidence that the basic content of the piece existed first in oral form, and seems to have many of the characteristics of homiletic material. The bulk of the letter may well be an early example of Francis' preaching, and perhaps the purest example of it that we possess.³

Celano implies that in his preaching Francis gave norms to those who heeded his call to *metanoia* (1Cel 37). Could this be where he did so? It is very possible. The simple teaching style conveys a strong message:

³Bernard Tickerhoof, T.O.R., "A Gospel Spirituality," *The CORD* 29:6 (1979), 170.

“Choose God or perdition.” It is straightforward both in its positive and in its negative parts, and to the point. These are marks of Francis’ style. But this is in a decidedly oral style. Like most of Francis’ writings, it also is heavily biblical. Fr. Tickerhoof documents in his study (pp. 172–73) Francis’ extensive use of Scripture, especially the Johannine texts. He sees a pattern, moreover, in their use by Francis:

In the letter’s first chapter the core of the John material is positive and is drawn from the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel. John here records a prayer of Jesus addressed to the Father summarizing Christ’s mission and praying on behalf of his disciples, the true believers, and for those who will come to believe through their preaching. Francis has chosen material from this chapter specifically bringing out the nature of discipleship in the lives of the penitents. For Francis the penitent has been given by the Father to Christ, and has been instructed through the words of the Son. The penitent has received this teaching and has come to believe. The life of penance is tied to belief. But not only that, for by their example and perhaps by their preaching they will also lead others to believe, and thereby to do penance.

In the second chapter we see the flip side of the coin. The material is drawn extensively from the eighth and ninth chapters of John’s Gospel, and is decidedly negative. The references are now no longer to the disciples of Jesus but to the Jews, representing for John those who are not true believers. The thrust of the Gospel is that while claiming to be begotten of God these non-believers are really children of the devil. Moreover, they have gone beyond the point where they can truly see their own origin. They are spiritually blind, so that while claiming to have the light they show themselves to be unaffected by it. Francis has drawn from this image of the unbeliever and has applied it to those who refuse to take up the penitential life. While they claim to be Christians, their very actions show that they are self-deceived. They have lost true wisdom, and so they have created a black future for themselves.

In the Letter there are two key lines, it seems to me, that spell out its explicit teaching. These are Chapter I, line 1, and Chapter II, line 8. They summarize the pattern that Fr. Tickerhoof sees. Both call for faith. For Francis *true* faith is necessary for genuine conversion of heart. *That is the Letter’s explicit message.*

Comparing this text with Chapter 23 of the 1221 Rule, we see the same basic idea expressed. But there it is expanded. The orthodox faith-content, so dear to Francis, is stated (RegNB 23:1–11). His consistency regarding this is evidenced by the text of the Second Letter to all the Faithful. In that Letter Francis presents the content of faith and the deeds that manifest the efficaciousness of faith in a true penitent. Historically Francis’ concern was to distinguish his followers from the Waldensians,

Humiliati, and other penitential groups at odds with the Church. Francis wanted those who followed his direction to be “truly Catholic” because for him only in the Catholic Church is salvation assured. The emphasis he gives to this is so strong that, when it came to updating the religious tertiaries’ Rule, the writers declared in Ch. I, article 2, that the charism of this Order is not *metanoia* alone but “true faith and *metanoia*.” So fundamental is this to Gospel living after the example of Francis, that the writers of both the new Religious and the new Secular Franciscan Tertiary Rules chose this letter as the prologue to their respective texts. The historical reason is important; the obviously explicit relationship it gives to the two branches of the Third Order is important too; but both of these are secondary compared to the paramount place of faith in the life of all penitents.

The Spirit of the Lord

“TRUE FAITH and penance” are the constitutive elements in the Franciscan process of attaining holiness. Reflecting Scripture (Mt. 13:23), Francis would say that his true followers are those who hear God’s word and understand it (RegNB 22:9–25). Understanding for Francis means the assimilation of the word into one’s inner self. It then issues forth in deeds befitting repentance. One without the other is not authentic. In Chapter 22 of the *Regula non Bullata* Francis details the process pursued by the opening lines of the first chapter of the Volterra Letter. It is well to read the two texts together.



The first four lines of the Letter deal directly with the outward conduct of a true penitent. As always Francis has Jesus’ words in mind when asked to give guidelines to the penitents. He chooses the Lord’s response to the Pharisees, those self-deceived blind leaders of the blind. This is by design. In the second chapter of these guidelines Francis will once again allude to them. What is the word of the Lord that sets right their false example—and the false example of misguided, unorthodox penitents of his day? It is the *shema* (Deut. 6:4–9), the people’s remembrance creed and prayer of God’s loving covenant relationship with them. Nothing less than the total turning of self to God, because God has turned to us, will suffice or ever could suffice for an authentic penitential life. This response too must be concrete. The Lord points out how (Mt. 22:39–40), and Francis repeats his words, directing us to love our

neighbor as we love ourselves.

There is a certain rhythm to the first four lines of the Volterra Letter. Within yourself, Francis directs, love God, then manifest this by love of neighbor. Within yourself, be aware of the weakness of humanity, then fortify yourself with the strength of the Eucharist, the very presence of Christ alive among and within us. Thus fortified, go forth and do the deeds that originate from your converted heart. A converted heart for Francis is one that continually turns from the "spirit of the flesh" and opens itself to the "Spirit of the Lord." Certainly the tendency to sin and selfishness remains. But what becomes the conscious quest of one filled with the Spirit is to be concerned only with what pleases the Lord. A converted person, then, is one on whom the Spirit of the Lord rests, one in whom the Spirit of the Lord dwells. Francis is not content with the biblical citation from John (14:23) which speaks of God coming to us; rather he focuses on the graced individual in his or her relationship to God and neighbor. I believe he does so to stress that one who hears the word with an open and converted heart truly "understands" that word and is inwardly transformed. What comes forth, therefore, reflects this transformation (Mt. 15:15-19; 23:25-26; Mk. 7:18-23; Lk. 11:39-42). For Francis, this must always be concrete.

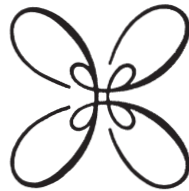
What could be more self-consciously concrete than to describe oneself as a spouse because of one's union with Christ? What could be more actual, biblically speaking, than to know oneself as a brother or sister to the Lord who, Jesus says (Mt. 12:50) does the Father's will? What is more graphic than to be a mother, one who carries life—in this case God's life—and who gives birth—in this case to Christlikeness—thanks to the workings of the Holy Spirit within the individual? This mystical language of Francis is far more down to earth than may first appear. Sister Kathleen Moffatt points out that the four fundamental values contained in the new Third Order Regular Rule are herein contained.⁴

Francis wants us always to be concrete because, as line 10 concludes, this God-giftedness must shine as an example for others. Once again we see how the life of penance is tied to belief and to its lived manifestation so that others might believe and be converted. The rest of the Chapter reinforces this notion. Lines 11 to 13 repeat, almost in rhapsody form, our faith in the indwelling of the Trinity, while lines 14 through 18 repeat Christ's High Priestly prayer (Jn. 17) for the sanctification of his disciples and for those who through them will come to believe.

⁴Kathleen Moffatt, O.S.F., "Of Penance and the Townspeople: The Language of Francis," *The CORD* 33:9 (1983), 288-89.

Chapter 2 not only speaks of the self-deception of persons who fail to do penance because of Satan's wiles, but also addresses the matter of those dominated by the spirit of the flesh (self-centeredness, selfishness, pride). These are totally opposite to those filled with the Spirit of the Lord. Self-centeredness causes spiritual blindness (line 7), which for Francis is thorough. In lines 11 through 18, given his turn of phrase, one can almost hear him say that the ultimate stupidity is spiritual blindness. It makes one feel that he or she has or should have everything! Therefore Francis mocks the tendency in our humanity to sin only to drive home his concluding point, which was his starting point: all should hear God's word and "understand" it because it is spirit and life (lines 19-21).

To be a penitent, then, means to be *happy in the Lord* and blessed by God. It means to be a living vessel of God's transforming presence and power in the world. It means this for all people and throughout life. That prophetic message needs to be heard today just as much as it did in Francis' day. Let us then bring forth worthy fruits of our conversion by proclaiming and living that message so that all may be one and that the world may believe. Ω



The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis

PROLOGUE

The words of St. Francis to his followers
Epistola ad fideles: RECENSIO PRIOR 1:1-19



Testimony of The Sources

*Many of the people, both noble and simple, cleric and lay, impelled by divine inspiration, began to come to St. Francis wanting to carry on the battle (of conversion) constantly under his discipline and leadership ... To all he gave a **norm of life** and showed in truth the way of salvation in every walk of life. (1 Celano 37)*

*Carried away by the force of his preaching, great numbers of people adopted the **new rule of penance** according to the form instituted by St. Francis which he called the "**Order of the Brothers of Penance.**" The way of penance is common to all those who are on the road to heaven and so this way of life includes members of both sexes, clerics and lay-folk, married or single. (Legenda Major of St. Bonaventure 4:6)*

Francis preached so fervently that all the men and women of the village in their great devotion wanted to follow him and abandon the village (near Rivo Torto). But St. Francis did not let them, saying to them:

*"Do not be in a hurry and do not leave, for I will arrange what you should do for the salvation of your souls."
And from that time he planned to organize the Third Order of the Continent for the salvation of all people everywhere." (Fioretti #16)*

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The origin of the ancient Third Order was in the *penitential* movement that predated St. Francis by six hundred years. God's call to enter the "Order of Penance" meant a *public* commitment to a life of continual conversion - following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, living gospel ideals often expressed in care of the poor, fasting, vigils, almsgiving and pilgrimage.
2. By the 9th Century (Carolingian period) membership in the ancient Order of Penance belonged to both penitent sinners as well as generous Christians committed to holiness while remaining "in the world."

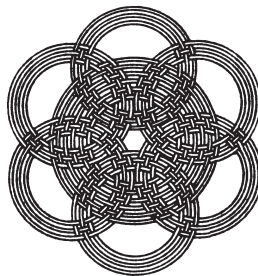
3. Soon persons described as “*conversi et conversae*” desiring to lead a chaste life of self-denial created yet another way of life: some living in solitude or associated with a monastery and a rule, calling themselves *fratres et sorores*. Their response to the gospel created a style of life which was relatively uniform according to fixed statutes called a “*Propositum*” or program.
4. The presence of *voluntary* penitents and voluntary “*conversi*” represents one of the distinct aspects of Christianity at the time of Francis of Assisi. It is actually through Francis’ *living* testimony and his preaching that the waning penitential movement was revived with a new outlook and a new mission as **The Order of Penitents of St. Francis**.
5. Francis and his first companions initially identified themselves as “*penitents from the city of Assisi*.”(L3C 37; A.P.211) His example encouraged other “*conversi*” to seek his direction.
6. In the Spring of 1209 the “Penitents of Assisi” walked to Rome to receive the approval of their gospel way of life from Pope Innocent III (L3C 49). They received the clerical tonsure (L3C 52, 2Cel 192, L.M.3:10), which signaled a moment of great importance: the “company of the poor” passes from the *state of penance* to the *clerical state*. From **Penitents to Minors - the First Order** is born. The new Franciscan penitential movement of the townspeople, inspired by Francis’ own life and teachings, will continue the original founding character of Francis’ gospel call. Francis and his companions have now entered the clerical state. (N.B.In the medieval Church this is not the same as “ordained.” but neither is it simply “baptized.”) This is the reason why Francis had recourse to Bishop Guido’s court and not a civil court when he renounced his patrimony.
7. It is a fact that St.Francis provided guidance as well as example for the Umbrian Valley townspeople who were inspired to live the gospel in the spirit he witnessed. The document that has been preserved as testimony to this direction is sometimes called ***The Volterra Letter***. Perhaps it was written around 1215, only 6 years after the beginning of the First Order, and three years after Clare left home. This Letter is now the Prologue of **both** the Secular Franciscan Order Rule (1978) and the Third Order Regular Rule (1982) thereby linking both in a dramatic way to the eight hundred year old communities of the **Order of Penitents of St. Francis**.
8. Initially much controversy surrounded the naming of the document now considered the **norm of life** for all who followed Christ in the spirit of St. Francis as *voluntary penitents*. The ***Recensio prior*** or **Earlier Version of The Letter To The Faithful** was discovered by Paul Sabatier in Codex 225 of the Guarnacci Library in Volterra, Italy (thus the name, “***Volterra Letter***”) Sabatier published it in 1900 under the title, “*These are the words of life and salvation: whoever reads them and puts them into practice will find life and salvation from the Lord.*” Kajetan Esser OFM, Germany, established a Latin critical text in 1975. The English translation was published by Raffaele Pazzelli TOR in 1978 in ANALECTA T.O.R.(14), Rome, Italy. This “almost certainly treats of that ***forma vitae*** (way of life) which, according to the first biographers, Francis drew up for his penitents.” (Leonard Lehmann OFM Cap., GREYFRIARS REVIEW, Vol 4;#2)

9. All the early documents, biographers and chroniclers of the Order affirm the significant influence Francis had on the three Orders. As of 1221 there exists over 60 *papal* documents from the *13th Century* dealing with the **Third Order**. In his encyclical letter *Sacra propediem*, January 6, 1921, Benedict XV affirmed, “*St. Francis was the true founder of the Third Order in the same way that he was of the First and the Second, and thus without doubt he was their wise legislator.*”

SIGNIFICANCE and CONSIDERATIONS

“This bright, joy-filled, horizon-opening description of the penitential life.”

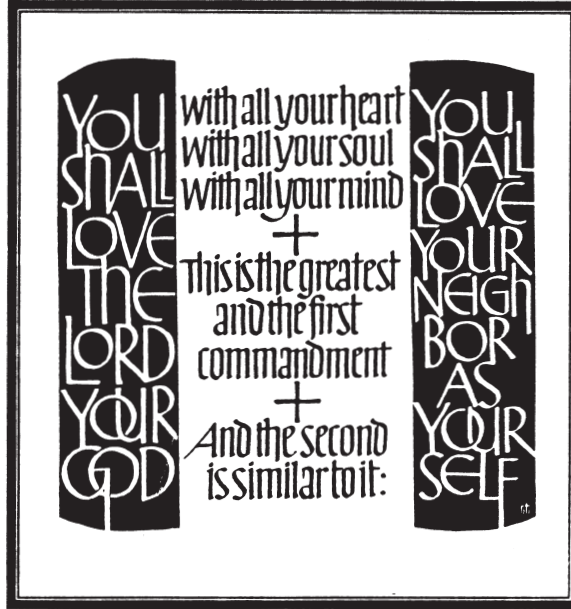
Regis Armstrong OFM Cap.



1. The *importance* of this *Recensio prior* is in the fact that it presents the **core ideas** by which Francis tried to shape the life of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance associated with him. (Esser)
2. In the Letter one finds evidence of Francis’ *new* consciousness of his authority, ability to inspire and his sense of mission. It demonstrates Francis’ enthusiastic and imaginative preaching.
3. Behind the message of this “Song of Exultation and Exhortation to Penance” is Francis’ *“living consciousness* of the most gracious choice and gift of God: Jesus is our brother ... To live this consciousness is to realize that in Jesus we have many brothers and sisters!” (Thaddeus Horgan S.A.)
4. This document points out the sources Francis used to keep lively within himself the Good News. It welcomes us to a humble and persevering contact with the **word of God**. (T.Horgan)

5. According to Kajetan Esser OFM, analysis of the text suggest that Francis had a greater knowledge of Scripture than modern Franciscan research in general is willing to acknowledge. There is genuine *theological depth* permeating the well-balanced division of the *Recensio prior*. (See accompanying article by Roland Faley T.O.R.)

CONTENT



1. **“The Shema”** - “Hear O Israel” - fixes the Covenant at the center of one’s life; presents the **character** of *metanoia*, a radical turning from self in an “over-flowing *gratitude* to our *all-good God*.” (Faley and Esser)

“When proposing the *guidelines of a life of penance* to his followers, Francis makes the **great commandment of LOVE** the foundation of his whole *spiritual edifice*.” Pope John Paul II. 6/15/89 to the 107th General Chapter of T.O.R.’s, Rome.

2. **“... bring forth from within themselves fruits worthy of true penance.”**

This represents a radical departure from the medieval notion of doing *deeds* of penance. It can be significantly linked to Francis’ insistence on a life of *faith and repentance*; faith that is demonstrated by a heart open to the generosity of God. These “fruits” show themselves by an attitude of :

- *sine proprio*: appropriating nothing to oneself! - “The seed that falls to the ground.”

Francis’ insightful guidance on the whole meaning of *kenosis* (Phil 2:6-11) is grounded in his **Admonitions**. Kajetan Esser O.F.M. calls these **Admonitions** - Francis’ *“Canticle of Inner Poverty.”*

- reconciliation: the practical expression of *repentance* is in forgiving and asking pardon

This is the *imperative* of the Franciscan life. (T.Horgan)

3. ***“How happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things ... because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them... They are the spouses, brothers and sisters, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

The images of *spouse, brother and sister, and mother* illustrate the ACTION OF THE SPIRIT in realizing Christian conversion. All are different aspects of the *same* reality. One can associate the **four** fundamental values the 1982 Third Order Regular Rule to these images as indicators of the profound “*working of the holy Spirit*” in the heart of the penitent.

“We are spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit with our Lord Jesus Christ.”

•CONTEMPLATION

“We are his brothers and sisters when we do the ‘will of the Father who is in heaven.’”

•CONVERSION - POVERTY

“We are mothers when we bear him in our hearts and bodies with divine love and with pure and sincere consciences, and when we give birth to him through a holy life which should enlighten others because of our example.”

•MINORITY - HUMILITY

In this, the most mystical of all Francis’ writings, given to the townspeople of Umbria (and to penitents of all time), we glimpse Francis’ remarkable reverence for the working of the Holy Spirit in all those who turn toward a merciful God in faith and repentance. Allowing one’s heart to be directed by the Spirit of the Lord - united, obedient, humbled and fruitful - as *spouse, brother and sister, mother* of the Lord, characterizes for Francis the living of the Covenant of the Great Commandment implanted in the hearts of all peoples everywhere open to hear God’s word. The profound *simplicity* and *clarity* of Francis’ *mission* can be heard in this imagery.

Raffaele Pazzelli T.O.R. writes, “In *no other work* of St.Francis is such a highpoint of spirituality reached, nor will the person’s insertion in trinitarian life be expressed in more precise terms. *This is the essence of the life of penance.*”

“Francis’ Directives for His Penitents”. **St.Francis and The Third Order.**111-112.

4. “... *How holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable and desirable over all things it is to have such a Brother and Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who gave up his life for his sheep and prayed to God, saying: “Holy Father, keep in your name those whom You gave me in the world; they are Yours and You gave them to me. (Jn 17 ...)*

The *Recensio prior* reveals a great influence on Francis of the Gospel of John. Johannine theology has been *intricately* worked into the text itself, leaving us with the impression that the primitive oral form of the letter may well have been a sermon on some aspect of John’s Gospel.

Francis has chosen material from Chapter 17 of John’s Gospel specifically bringing out the *nature of discipleship* in the lives of the penitents. It is through one’s *life-style* that one demonstrates true discipleship

- Bernard Tickerhoof T.O.R. - “Francis’ *Volterra Letter: A Gospel Spirituality*” -
The CORD, June 1979

The use of John 17 reveals the *intimate* mystical experience of Francis with his God which is the inspiration of Francis’ **universal mission**. Without the *internal “filial”* expression of *Fraternity with his brothers* called to name together their experience of God, the *external evangelical mission* would be silenced.

-Walter Viviani

CONCLUSION

For the sisters and brothers of the Third Order of Saint Francis

the the charism of penance is the particular way of

freeing oneself toward Love.

LOVE must be responded to! **This** is the uncomplicated substance of Franciscan spirituality.

This is why Francis preached penance.

“I believe the providential time has come for all Penitents of Saint Francis to *rediscover their proper specific vocation*, the particular characteristics of their own spirituality, the precise configuration of their proper mission in the world, in the Church and in the sphere of Franciscanism.

*To let this moment of grace pass fruitlessly,
this providential occasion of renewal and authenticity,
this conscious awareness that all the Penitents of Saint Francis
are by identity of vocation
associated in a rich penitential fraternity/ community.*

*this is, in truth, like closing one's eyes to the light of the Lord which passes in our midst and
knocks at the door of every congregation, male or female,
of the Franciscan Order of Penance.*

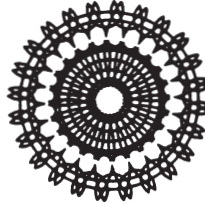
Lino Temperini T.O.R. "Penitential Spirituality in the Franciscan Sources"
The Assisi Congress on Formation, 1977



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“The Letter to All The Faithful - *Recensio prior*”
from A Biblical-Theological View of Penance
and Its Present Day Expression
- Roland J.Faley T.O.R.



Recent publication of an earlier recension of the Letter to the Faithful gives ample evidence that it was directed by Francis to the Penitents of his time. Whether or not this was seen by Francis as a *Rule of Life* for the Penitents remains a matter of dispute; there can be no doubt however that the document presents features of the penitential life which were important in Francis' eyes.

*There can be no doubt about the importance of the **Recensio prior** in understanding the beginnings of the Franciscan penitential tradition*

It was for this reason that it was included as a prologue to the new (1978) Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order (and later in 1982, of the Rule of the Third Order Regular).

Of particular note is the document's strong evangelical tone. This is one of the characteristic features of the *authentic* writings of Francis, who wanted the ideas he set forth to be those of the Scriptures and not his own. This clearly distinguishes, for example, the Rule of the Minors, so heavily accented with Scriptural references, from the *Memoriale Propositi* of the Penitents, which contains little which is distinctive of Francis, with its uninspiring juridical norms.

Of particular interest for us is the extent to which the *Recensio prior* reflects the *biblical* concept of conversion. Verses 2-5 give a description of "those who do penance." Both the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* are present. The penitents are those who "hate their bodies with their vices and sins." The expression is starkly medieval, but it expresses the reality of recognition of sinfulness and the need for divine mercy, the starting point for conversion. In terms of *new* direction taken, we are on open-ended Gospel terms.

Converts or real penitents are those who "*love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength, and love their neighbor as themselves.*" In producing "worthy fruits of penance," the *internal* character of conversion is given its *external* expression. But notice, Francis begins with the *theological reality* and only then speaks of its visible manifestation.

There is no question of simply adopting penitential norms and practices or beginning with the “fruits” rather than the inner “turning.”

In these opening verses, the Letter epitomizes the dynamics of *metanoia*, the radical turning from self to God.

But in Christian terms all of this is impossible apart from the *action of God*. It was the power of Yahweh that cleansed Isaiah’s sinful lips. In a New Testament context, *this is the Holy Spirit*. Verses 7-8 of the document draw on Isaiah (11:2), as well as the Gospel of John (14:23) and Matthew (5:45) to illustrate the *action of the Spirit* in realizing Christian conversion. It is the *Spirit* that binds the soul to Christ and effects that ever more intense union which is central to Christian *metanoia*. This concept of an ever stronger attachment to the Lord is brought out in figures of speech which are characteristic of Francis. Together with being daughters and sons of God we are also “*spouses, brothers and sisters, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (v8-9)

The image of the divine *spouse* is biblical, found in the prophets, the Gospels, and the Pauline literature. In the penitential context, it concretizes the idea of the Spirit-effected union with Christ. The Christians who detach themselves from sin and selves are not engaged in an essentially negative exercise. It is their total surrender to Christ that makes of *detachment* a necessary concomitant. In using the *spouse image*, Francis places the emphasis on this positive aspect. (v10). With Christ becoming ever more the center of the person’s existence, then death to self is essential if the spouse is to remain faithful.

The affirmation of our *brotherhood (sisterhood)* with Christ (v11), again the fruit of conversion, is found in the Gospel and in Paul. Francis draws directly on the Synoptic tradition in his reference to those who fulfill “the will of the Father who is in heaven.” (Mt12:50). It is the celebrated passage on the true relatives of Jesus, in the Synoptic tradition that specifies the kin of Christ, not in terms of blood, but in terms of obedience to a common Father. Paul carries this relationship concept forward on an ontological basis. In Galatians (4:4-7), it is the Spirit of God’s son, which we now share, that enables us to address our one Father, “Abba,” just as Christ himself does. By reason of our adoption we are made part of God’s family and, in the Spirit, a sister or brother of Jesus.

That we are “mothers” of Jesus (v12-13) is Scriptural only by implication and a very free use of imagery. The underlying reality, however, is important. This *motherhood* is related to the twofold idea: the presence of Christ within us and the birth of Christ in our life and example. Christ lives in us (Gal2:20), not in the flesh but in the spirit, with the result that Paul can speak alternately of Christ in us or the Spirit in us, the latter making of us God’s temple.(1Cor6:19-20) But as we have already noted, this life in Christ is not hidden; it is to be made manifest, with

the *Recensio* drawing on the Synoptic “light of the world” image. We *give birth* to Christ when by our fruits his presence within us is known.

Hence the image of Christ as spouse, brother, and son are different aspects of the single reality. Conversion is positive and dynamic, unifying and intense, both in the Gospel and in Francis.

The last part of the *Recensio prior* (v27-55) is addressed to those who have neglected their penitential calling, in yielding to the interests of “sinful flesh.” The strong and rather harsh tone of the exhortation should not blind us to the fact that it is a *summons to reconciliation*. One of the main concerns of the genuinely penitential spirit is that *love of neighbor* which expresses itself in seeking the lost sheep, in reconciling the unreconciled. It is the power of God’s word that is capable of effecting this transposition, and the penitents are to consider themselves *ministers of this saving word*. As we read in the document’s conclusion: “*All those into whose hands this letter shall have come we ask in the charity that is God to accept kindly and with divine love the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ quoted above.*” (v51-52)

It is my belief that an analysis of the *Recensio prior* of the Letter to All the Faithful , written for the penitents, clearly reflects the biblical understanding of *metanoia*. If the life of medieval penitents prior to Francis was regulated to a great extent by the type of juridical norms that we find in the *Memoriale Propositi*, it must be admitted that Francis strove to place the penitential tradition in a genuine evangelical spirit.

Francis speaks of penance in covenant terms, an engagement in the paschal mystery, which entails both a new life and a daily dying. The emphasis does not fall on penitential acts, though they unquestionably had their place in a medieval spirituality. In striking imagery, which accents our oneness with Christ, Francis places in bold relief the focal point of Christian and, we might add, FRANCISCAN penance.

Source: THE ASSISI CONGRESS ON FORMATION

Third Order Regular Franciscans, Loretto PA. US
Charles M. Henry Printing Company
Greensburg PA
Published - 1979

Also SOURCES FOR THE

STUDY of THE TOR RULE

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Roland J. Faley, T.O.R.**RECAPTURING A VISION: CONVERSION**

A quarter century has passed since the revised Rule of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis was approved and promulgated by Pope John Paul II. Over the course of these twenty-five years, many of the people involved in the work of revision have died. Fewer still are those who participated in that process from the beginning. As one of those few still with us, I welcome the opportunity to reflect on the Rule Project which, despite its modest and feeble beginnings, resulted in a true religious landmark.

The Second Vatican Council remains a starting point for this effort. In underscoring the importance of religious life in the Church, the Council called religious to a renewal in spirit and in structure to bring religious life into a contemporary setting. This call of the Council received a welcome and enthusiastic endorsement from the Church's religious. The Franciscan Third Order Regular was no exception.

It should be noted that the Third Order Regular has a very special meaning as applied to a very specific Order within the Franciscan family known as the TOR. But it has also come to include a diverse development of the Franciscan spirit through the centuries. The greater number of Franciscan institutes that have been founded over the last several centuries are part of the Tertiary tradition and follow the TOR Rule of Life.

The *Rule of Life* is the basic document in the life of any religious institute. If it was written by the founder himself or herself, it remains unchanged and stands as a fundamental statement of the founder's purpose, as is the case with the Dominicans, the Franciscan Friars Minor, and the Benedictines. When such was not the case, a rule could be subject to revisions and adaptations through the centuries. Such was the case with the Franciscan Third Order Regular.

When the Council called religious institutes to structural renewal, it looked principally to the constitutions or practical *norma* by which the life of the institute is regulated. The original Third Order Regular accomplished this in the general chapter of 1969; the renewed constitutions were approved in the early 1970s.

While this work of renewed constitutions was generally well received throughout the Order, it evidenced, at the same time, a notable and unfortunate *lacuna*. For Franciscan tertiaries the fundamental document, or *Rule of Life*, dating from 1927 was sadly out of date and lacked an authentic expression of the Order's spirit. More important than the constitutions was the need for a meticulous revision of the Rule. But such would require a special permission of the Holy See and the willingness

of the many TOR congregations within the church, all of whom would be affected by a revision of the Rule.

Since the revision of the Rule was seen to be of paramount importance, the machinery was quickly set in motion. Thaddeus Horgan of the Society of the Atonement and myself spearheaded the work within our own religious order. We were both stationed in Rome at the time and were thus offered a unique opportunity to collaborate.

Our initial work culminated in what became known as the Madrid Document, which was approved at a congress of the male Tertiary religious held in Madrid, Spain in 1974.¹ It was an early attempt at charism rediscovery. But it was in the wake of Madrid that we realized that any revision of the Rule would have to be a broad-based collaborative effort of men and women religious. There was a fairly universal agreement on the inadequacy of the Rule of 1927, but the problem lay in finding the way to engage the many Tertiary congregations.

An opening was discovered when we learned that the desire for a new Rule had led some areas of the world to begin the work of a provisional text, much as we had done at Madrid. The foremost among these efforts was that of the French-speaking tertiaries that had already produced a provisional text. We established contact with the French Federation in the interests of opening the door to collaboration. Through the French we were brought into contact with a German initiative as well. Rather than authoring competing documents, we were interested in drawing on the best of all efforts to develop one text that would then be satisfactory to all.²

We soon found out that this was to be no easy task. Each group worked out of a set of preconceptions in which there were both convergences and divergences. The joint meetings of the latter part of the 1970s at times led to impasses that were not easily resolved. But the desire of all participants was to arrive at a single unified text. The climactic moment came in 1982 when an International Franciscan Congress was held in Rome to review and refine the proposed Rule. The Congress marked an incredible moment in the history of Franciscan life, with the final approval of the new Rule, promulgated officially by John Paul II on December 8, 1982.

What is the distinctive mark or charism of Franciscan Tertiary life? The answer is to be found in the earliest designation of the Order: The Order of Penance of Francis of Assisi. The Order of penitents in the

¹P. McMullen, "Fourth Franciscan Tertiary Inter-Obediential Congress," *Analecta Tertiarii Ordinis Regularis Sancti Francisci* XIII:123 (1974): 141.

²For information on the development of the Third Order Rule including the French and German Rule see P. McMullen, "The Development of the New T.O.R. Rule," *Analecta Tertiarii Ordinis Regularis Sancti Francisci* XIX:143 (1987): 365-410.

church did not begin with Francis; it actually predated him by centuries. Initially instituted for sinners who were publicly alienated from the church and were seeking restoration, it eventually welcomed those who wished to enter upon a life of penitence, even though they were guilty of no serious public sins. This Order of Penance had its highs and its lows through the centuries, but received a renewed impetus in the middle ages, especially through the efforts of Francis who saw it as an avenue of holiness for people living outside the confines of the traditional religious life.

But of what did this penitential life consist? To a considerable extent the term “penance” had come to be identified with acts of mortification and self-denial. It was the external forms of penance such as fasting, abstinence, and self-denial that were in the forefront, and not the biblical notion of a basic change of life. One of the major contributions of the Madrid Document was a return to this biblical notion of penance as conversion of life, with the hope that this would be highlighted in any revision of the Rule.³

It was felt that any revision of the Rule had to see penance as a central value. This was seen primarily in the sense of a “turning around” in life. The Greek verb *metanoein* rendered the Hebrew *shub* that in its most concrete sense meant a “turning around” on the road. This meaning carries over into the New Testament’s call to conversion of life, which signified a change of direction in life or the Pauline assertion of setting aside the “old person” and walking now in a newness of life.⁴

The French proposed Rule text listed four fundamental values of Franciscan Tertiary life: conversion (penance), prayer, poverty and humility. In an earlier text these were seen to have equal value. However, studies of the Tertiary or penitential movement showed that such was not the case. All the values listed had great value but conversion was the overarching value. The other three had to be seen in the light of penance, which remains always the dominant value. This was explained and voted on by the entire assembly. This is very clear in the all-important article two of the Rule wherein conversion of life is highlighted and the other three values are seen as specifications of the way conversion is lived. The main thrust of the Rule is summarized in Article Six. “Led by God, let them begin a life of penance, conscious that all of us must be continuously

³For information on the Madrid Document see *The Statement of Understanding of Franciscan Penitential Life: Issued by the IV Franciscan TOR Penitential Congress*, R.M. Delaney and T. Horgan, eds. (Madrid, Spain, 1974).

⁴For a development of this concept see R. Faley, “Biblical Considerations of Metanoia,” *Analecta Tertii Ordinis Regularis Sancti Francisci XIII*:123 (1974): 13-33.

converted.”⁵ This identity of the basic charism of the Tertiary movement can be said to have been rediscovered in the revised Rule. This was very evident to the present writer who remembers well a chapter of his own order earlier in the latter part of the twentieth century wherein there was a consideration of the Order’s official title: “The Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Penance.” A well-intentioned chapter father found that title much too long and unwieldy and made the proposal of the “of Penance” be dropped. Such would have meant the elimination of the Order’s charism from its title.

LIVING THE CHARISM

The key to living this Gospel way of life is summarized for us in the *recensio prior* or early edition of Francis’s *Letter to the Faithful*, which good scholarship holds was written for the early penitents. Although prone to sin, the life of the penitent is centered on the Body and Blood of Christ and thus brings forth from within his or herself fruits worthy of true penance. We are the “spouses, brothers, and mothers of the Lord. Spouses when united by the Spirit with Christ; brothers when we do the will of the Father; mothers when we bear him in our hearts and give birth to him through a holy life...”⁶

In the troubled and in many ways unbelieving world in which we live, various ways suggest themselves as to how this charism of conversion may find expression. There is, first of all, a ministry to the unchurched and disaffected. So far has much of Europe drifted from its spiritual moorings and so de-Christianized has it become that any effort to insert a reference to the Christian faith as part of its legacy was rejected in drawing up a new European constitution. Countless baptized persons have a disconnect with the church throughout their lives. This is a fertile field for ministry on the part of Franciscan penitents. There are new and imaginative programs today that are geared to re-engage the faith life of those who have become separated from the church.

Much of what will and can be done depends on the number of possible personnel. Today we are living with diminishing numbers in western countries that impedes the adoption of new ministries. But the possibilities are almost limitless in terms of what might be undertaken. With the charism of penance and reconciliation, the times suggest many possibilities.

⁵*Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis: 25th Anniversary Edition*, J-F. Godet-Calogeras, trans. (Washington: Franciscan Federation, 2007), 15.

⁶LtF 51-53; FA:ED I, 49.

CENTERS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

A Spiritual Life center offers many possibilities for ministries connected with the charism of reconciliation. Retreats and days of reflection that highlight overcoming alienation from God with the re-emergence of a vital faith life flow easily from such a venue. Retreats geared especially toward alienated groups find a natural setting in such a center. Spiritual problems connected with divorce, gender identity, drug or alcoholic addiction needs to be addressed in very specific terms, but they often fall under the category of spiritual alienation. There are, in addition, those people who have simply wandered from their faith. In many instances they are not antagonistic just very much "at sea." Programs offered by religious Penitents are a natural fit for these people, who are all too numerous in our times.

There are also those persons who are interested in knowing more about Catholicism and may be moving toward it for the first time. Very often prospective converts carry the weight of difficult problems and serious issues that have never been addressed. A Spiritual Life center which is specifically geared toward reconciliation can be of inestimable value in this regard. What is important for Tertiary religious who undertake such ministries is to keep a clear focus on reconciling ministries. To return to generic ministries certainly is a help to souls but it clearly dulls the penitential charism.

A prison ministry offers distinct possibilities for Tertiary religious. Personal experience has shown this writer that prisoners are people who wallow in a well of rejection and isolation. Many show a desire for new beginnings and the cultivation of a spiritual life. Incarcerated people are far from public view but should not be overlooked. These people often believe that their return to God and the church will be long and tortuous. The Franciscan message of "peace and goodness" frequently receives a welcome reception.

AN AIDS MINISTRY

The Third Order Regular has a fledgling vice province in South Africa. They are in the process of planning a ministry for people afflicted with HIV/AIDS. South Africa is one of the countries that has been most devastated by this widespread disease, and there are many of the poorest who are in dire need of care and assistance. The most recent assembly of the friars in South Africa saw this ministry as most compelling and voted to begin the process of undertaking a new apostolate. It is a step such as this which not only brings hope to people's lives; it also energizes the religious community as well.

What remains true in this entire discussion is the importance of selecting ministries that are clearly linked with the basic charism. To opt

for ministries solely because of diocesan need or other factors will undoubtedly render a service but the distinctive charism of the Order will also be lost.

THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

Worthy of note in this time of recapturing a vision is the fact that the original Franciscan Order of Penance is historically rooted in what is today known as the Secular Franciscan Order. Initially a lay movement which, has been noted, preceded Francis by centuries, the Order embraced people of all walks of life who were experiencing a newfound conversion of life. These were principally people who lived a domestic life while following the *Rule of Life* for Franciscan penitents. In the course of time, groups of these lay penitents joined forces in living a community life and pursuing a particular ministry. Eventually they became recognized as an expression of active religious life in the Church and today are an integral part of the Third Order Regular.

This proved to be a time of historic proportions, especially for women religious. Through much of the Middle Ages, expressions of religious life for women were restricted to cloistered or enclosed life. Women religious of the active life had not yet appeared in the Church's life. The Penitents, however, never lost their active ministry, even though they lived in community.

Out of this development was born the Third Order Regular as distinguished from the seculars. They were eventually recognized as religious in the church but who were the heirs of the Franciscan penitential movement. This is but to say that the Franciscan tertiary religious find their origins in the original penitential movement. Even though the lay dimensions of the Secular Franciscans today has its own Rule of Life, the fact remains that the TOR and the SFO spring from the same soil and an identical guiding spirit.

Such being the case, an alliance in ministry is a natural consequence of this common origin. The promotion of the Secular Franciscan Order should be an integral part of the Tertiary religious life. In many parts of the world, Secular Franciscanism is in need of a true revitalization. It must be made relevant to the life of the young and not be left solely to those who after many years of service have now reached their senior years.

Today, team efforts bring religious and laity together in ministry. For the tertiaries such should be seen as a very logical step. Ministry to the poor and the alienated, the imprisoned and the addicted, as well as other forms of outreach are able to find common ground among Secular and Regular Franciscan tertiaries. To join hands, to the extent possible, in the apostolic life is another way for the penitential charism to be given fuller play.

POVERTY

Nothing has caused more discord and division within the Franciscan family. The “most high poverty,” *altissima paupertas* of the Friars Minor led not only to prolonged and heated discussion but even division within the Order. But it should be noted the Lady Poverty never attained such an exalted position in the Tertiary tradition. The reason is clear enough. The first Penitents were people living in their homes with normal financial responsibilities. They earned money and used it for themselves and the broader community.

Their life style was simple and ostentation was assiduously avoided. In the earliest rules of life we learn of the monthly distribution of excess funds for the needs of the poor. There is every reason to believe that this use of money extended to the time of community life among the Tertiaries. Eventually what has now become the traditional understanding of poverty became the norm for all religious, and the original concept was lost. Some tertiaries have returned to the idea of the common fund, monies collected monthly and dedicated to a needy cause.

This is a type of poverty that touches the life of each community member. While a modest and simple life style remains normative for all tertiaries, as is emphasized in the Rule’s chapter on poverty, there is the added feature of everybody’s contribution to the needs of others, which makes poverty a much more relevant feature of religious consecration.

There is a certain poverty of life that is part of religious consecration. In the Order of Penance it is part of that interior liberation which puts Christ as the center of life. But it is not in itself the driving force of the Franciscan Penitent’s life in God. This is clear from a history and study of the Order’s growth and development. Authenticity requires that this spirit be recaptured today.

AN ETHIC OF NON-VIOLENCE

Jesus preached an ethic of non-violence, which is eminently clear in reading the New Testament. In the face of hostility the Christian is advised to adopt a posture of love and forgiveness. That this was a keynote feature of Francis’s life is unquestionable. His constant salutation of “Peace and Good” was more than a pious greeting. Conflict resolution was at the heart of his intervention in any troubled situation.

Instead of participating in the crusades, Francis traveled by boat to dialogue with the Muslim Sultan and was accorded genuine respect. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn from the early Rule of the Penitents that they did not bear arms. There is no evidence that Francis was a vocal critic of the Church-sponsored crusades, but it was certainly not his preferred response. Nor is there any indication that the Penitents were prevailed upon to participate.

Unfortunately, today we live in an atmosphere of violence. Senseless violence and killing are part of the life in our major cities. Governments resort to war even when there is no direct provocation. Iraq is a prime example. It was a war undertaken preemptively allegedly to rid the world of a ruthless dictator. But it proved to be a war that unleashed suppressed enmities within a country and led to the dreadful loss of thousands of Iraqis and several thousand United States troops.

Voices that argue for peace are more necessary today than at any point in history. Military force may at times be necessary but only after every possible avenue of diplomacy has been exhausted when facing a serious threat. The penitential tradition has a long and favorable history in this regard. Its presence should not be lost today.

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Most people involved in pastoral ministry in the Church today would readily admit that the sacrament of Reconciliation does not enjoy a widespread appreciation. It is still within the realm of living memory that weekends within a parish saw many hours given over to the administration of this sacrament. Today it has fallen into widespread disuse. Part of this is due to the fact that for many people it was never a pleasant experience. Others fail to see its necessity, arguing that sin can be forgiven through a private and personal approach to God. Some people are simply indifferent to the issue.

Reconciliation stands at the very heart of the penitential tradition. Tertiaries can and should be among its foremost promoters, through preaching, through parish missions, and especially through the education of the young. Reconciliation can be shown to be experienced as a very peaceful and joy-filled experience. It serves as a mirror reflecting our soul and shared with another person whereby we can better see ourselves and open ourselves more readily to the infusion of God's love.

The ways in which this can be done are varied. The point is that it should be seen as a key feature of those who live by a charism of reconciliation and who seek to share it with others.

Admittedly we are only at the beginning of the realization of a recaptured charism. This writer has proposed a number of ways in which the charism can be brought to life in the church today. There are certainly other ways than those highlighted here. But the fact remains that the future requires some visioning if the charism is not to remain a "dead letter." The relevance of a penitential or converted life and ministry is perhaps more relevant today than at any time. Those whose efforts worked to recapture that vision are now prepared to hand the torch to a new generation. The penitents of the Franciscan Third Order have more than enough ways to bring their basic spirit to life.



ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
Fresco, Simone Martini, c 1317
Cappella di San Martino, Lower Church,
San Francesco, Assisi

Walking in the Footprints of Jesus

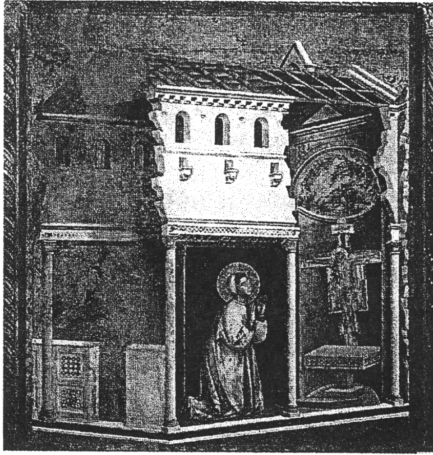
Sister Suzanne Marie Kush, CSSF

Walking in the footprints of Jesus is not something that is beyond us but rather it is an imprint of God's presence in our inmost being. As Christians and Franciscans we are called to reflect on this reality. There is an inner longing that will not rest until we know completion. Walking in the footprints of Jesus is a call to let go, be poor and obedient to the will of God. It is also a call to conversion, service and love.

When Jesus was present among us he provided a direction and invited us to live our life as disciples according to his teaching and example. Accepting this invitation, Francis and Clare committed themselves to answering the deep inner call of Christ. The heart of Franciscan spirituality is to follow in the footprints of Christ as closely as possible. Francis and Clare did this in a manner that Jesus lived, and that was to carry out the will of the Father; for them it was living the Gospel. The image of the footprint, and more importantly its meaning as reflected in the writings of Francis and Clare, is also found in the first letter of Peter.

In this letter we are reminded that, "Christ died for you and left an example for you to follow in his footprints" (*1 Peter 2:21*). This is a succinct summary of what is required of those who claim to follow or to be true disciples of Christ. And, as the example of the lives of Francis and Clare so wonderfully demonstrate, it is a call that is realized in the midst of ordinary, sometimes extraordinary lives that are always being touched by grace, by the Spirit's invitation to walk in the way of love. As their stories and others attest, it is not always easy or clear. Rather, it is a path to be pursued "as strive as best [we] can to serve, love, honor, and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind, for this is what the [Lord] desires above all things" (*ER XXII: 26; FA:ED 1, 80*).

Francis invites us in the Fifth Admonition to be conscious "... in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for [God] created and formed you in the image of the Son according to the body, and to [God's] likeness according to the spirit" (*FA:ED 1, 131*). Thus, in a few brief words he reminds us both of our fragile goodness as embodied creatures and of our amazing capacity for and inner orientation of our spirit to God if we use well our mind



(intellect), heart (affection) and freedom (power to choose) “to serve, love, honor . . .” by following in the footsteps of Jesus in this world, in this time, in these circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

Francis’ understanding of following in Jesus’ footsteps was to fulfill the will of the Father. In the Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance Francis clearly delineates this when he writes, “His father’s will was such that his blessed and glorious Son, Whom He gave us and Who was born for us, should offer Himself through His own blood as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross not for Himself through Whom all things were made but for our sins, leaving us an example that we might follow in his footsteps” (*FA:ED 1, 46*). The footprint that Jesus left us was that we give ourselves selflessly without holding anything back. When Francis speaks about the footprint he is making reference to obedience and the passion of Christ. For Francis the obedience of Christ was one of healing, for it restored our relationship with the Father and provided the way to be one with God. As Francis contemplated God’s love he was touched so deeply that it made an imprint on his very being.

The degree to which living obedience selflessly is possible is found in Francis’ letter to Leo. In this letter Francis gives a further insight into understanding obedience. He writes: “In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprint and poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience” (*FE:AD 1, 122*). Here Francis uses familial terms. Francis believed that there should be a fraternal relationship between God and those that serve and between the minister and members of the fraternity. The letter makes it clear that the primary motive for obedience is attentive listening and becoming as God intends, thereby, walking in his footsteps. The attitude in which one obeys is in poverty. Franciscan obedience is one of self-emptying. In assuming the mindset of Christ one is intent on fulfilling the will of God. In this total forgetfulness of self one then gives oneself totally in mutual service to others. This form of obedience is intended for all members of the fraternity to live.



The image of footprint is also found in the writings of Clare. In her letter to Agnes of Prague Clare encourages her to “walk more securely in the way of the commands of the Lord” (*Ps 118*). She also tells her to both “look upon” the poor Christ and “to follow Him,” that is, to gaze, consider, and contemplate the Lord even as she desires to “imitate” Christ (*2 LAg; CA:ED, 49*).

In a powerful and succinct way, Clare has summarized the essential vocation of those who desire to follow, to walk in the way of, to imitate Christ after the example of Francis and Clare and the great number of their followers who have gone before us in faith, most especially those who



have been a “mirror and example” (*TestCl; CA:ED,61*) for us and those who are living in the world of the many ways one might follow in the footprints of Jesus.

It is clear from these citations that Francis and Clare desired to follow in the footprints of the crucified Christ in poverty and humility. For it is in poverty that they experience the divine presence on earth. As Francis and Clare we are called to do the same.

This, therefore, leads to the second aspect of walking in the footprints of Christ. It suggests that a selfless obedience to God leads to a harmony with our brothers and sisters; that is, all of creation. “God walked in creation in the person of

Jesus and he[Francis] continued to follow God’s footprints” (*Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth, Delio, 12*). Therefore, the closer one is to God, the closer one is to one’s neighbor. This then leads us to change the injustices that others encounter. This calls us to live mercy. Francis shared with all of creation, his brothers and sisters, his most precious gift, the love of God. Bonaventure in the *Legenda Major* summarized the compassion and mercy of Francis:

Emptying himself through a wonderful tenderness of compassion for anyone with a bodily affliction, in the sweetness of his pious heart, he turned back to Christ any need, any lack he might notice in anyone. He certainly had an inborn kindness doubled by the piety of Christ poured out on him. Therefore, his soul melted for the poor and the Infirm; to those to whom he could not extend a hand he extended his affection. (*FA:ED II, 589*)

Francis did not assist the poor from a distance. He and his brothers lived among them and ministered to them. The Franciscan spirit is based upon the humanity of Christ and on the human condition. The incarnate Christ became poor and he became one with all of humanity. In walking in the footprints of Christ, we come to recognize our own fragility and that of our brothers and sisters. This realization is rooted in contemplation and living in God. It is in responding to the circumstances of daily life that calls us to reach out to the other in mercy without exception. It is then that the meaning of love in obedience is lived.



Finally, in the closing prayer found in the Letter to the Entire Order, Francis wrote, “inflamed by the fires of the Holy Spirit may you follow in the footprints of your beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ and by your grace alone may we make our way to you most high” (*FE:AD 1, 121*). Interiorly, we do know what God desires of us. Francis knew what was his to do may we know what is ours.



Clare in the conclusion to her Testament, encouraged her sisters, indeed all Franciscans, to set out on the “path of the Lord” and encouraged them to “take care that we too not turn away. . . .” (*Test Cl; CA:ED, 62*). Rather, as she had several times encouraged Agnes of Prague, we are to hold “fast to the footprints” (*1 Pt 2:21; 2LAg, 47*) and in a very real way, leave our own footprints on the hearts of those whom we have been blessed to live with and minister to as sisters and servants of the Lord. Each day is, therefore, filled with an abundance of opportunities to walk in the way of humility, to let go of the obstacles that hold us back (poverty), and choose freely to love our God, our neighbor, ourselves, and our fragile world in fulfillment of Jesus’ call to be His disciples and to “make all things new” (*2 Cor 5:17*) in Christ.

Legend of St. Francis: 4. Miracle of the Crucifix, c 1297-99; Legend of St. Francis: 5. Renunciation of Wordly Goods, c 1300; Legend of St. Francis: 19. Stigmatization of St Francis, c. 1297-1300; Legend of St. Francis: 2. St. Francis Giving his Mantle to a Poor Man, c 1297-99. Giotto di Bondone, Frescoes, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi, Italy. St. Clare and Nuns Meeting with St. Francis, Frescoe, Church of San Damiano, Assisi, Italy. (www.lib-art.com)