

love, lest they degenerate into meaningless and oppressive rituals.

The conclusions are obvious. Meaningful renewal does not rest on restructuring our life but on a reform of the mind and heart, an internal conversion by which the very depths of our being are more and more animated, inspired and renovated by the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation. This renewal of our spirit of charity, prayer and penance depends on our personal and corporate response.

If our experience, perhaps bitter experience, compels us to admit that we have up to now made little or insufficient progress in the process of renewal, then, as true penitents of Assisi, we should examine our conscience and look deep into the recesses of our hearts where a carnal and egoistic spirit, frustrating the workings of the Spirit of God, may be lurking. As St. Francis so ardently desired, the Holy Spirit Himself must be "the minister general of the entire Order."⁴⁵

May the spouse of the Holy Spirit, the patroness of our Order, the Mother of Christ, and our Mother (Const. no. 40) obtain this grace for us, for "she shows the way to acquire the spirit of the poor and crucified Christ." (Taize. no. 15)

⁴⁵In the Italian text: *La nostra vita di penitenza.*, op. cit., 30-33. Cf. also *Habere Spiritum Domini*, op. cit., no. 12: "There can be no doubt that it was the Holy Spirit that made St. Francis conformed to Jesus crucified and raised him to an intimate union with the persons of the Most Blessed Trinity. For the Spirit is the source of all gifts and virtues. And so the Seraphic Father admonished his sons: The brothers should take care to desire above all things to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation. (*Rule* ch. X, 8). The one and the same spirit operates in the entire Franciscan family and bestows the gift of prayer, charity, poverty, penance and ministry; he vivifies and unifies the whole life of the disciples."

Prayer and Contemplation in the Legislation and Life of the First Capuchins

Octavian Schmucki, O.F.M. Cap.

The topic I am to discuss is not one that is in harmony with contemporary trends in our order. Preferences of the majority of modern friars favor a growing involvement with current social issues, with pastoral, and even secular services implying an ever-widening range of activities and commitments.

There are, on the other hand, certain indications of a change. If it be true that the establishment of houses of recollection was more talked about than acted upon in the general chapter of 1968, and in subsequent provincial chapters, we can now discern many signs of a genuine concern for such projects. The "acta" of a meeting on "houses of prayer in Franciscan history and spirituality" held in Pesto were published in 1978. A second congress on the same topic was held scarcely a year after the first.¹ The text of the Constitutions of "The Friars Minor of the Eremitical Life" (The Statutes of Albacina) has been republished in *Italia Francescana* at the request of some of the friars, especially the younger ones.² We may assume that a like interest is very much alive among the friars, young and not so young, of the

¹Cf. Toppi — Schmucki — Di Monda — Calloni. *Le "case di preghiera" nella storia e spiritualità francescana (studi scelti de francescanesimo 7.)* Naples. Edizioni Dehoniane, 1978. The second session discussed the topic: *Struttura e contemplazione*, and was held at Seiano di Vico Equense, April 25-28, 1978.

²*Constitutioni delli frati minori detti della vita eremitica in Italia Francescana*, 53 (1978) 9-21. Cf. 9, note 1.

Province of the Marches, which was the birthplace of the Capuchin reform³

In all honesty I must admit that for years I entertained, and openly expressed, some reservations about the Franciscan inspiration of the founding fathers of our reform. It seemed to me that they overstressed the contemplative dimension of our life to the detriment of the apostolate. In the special chapter of 1968 I had a dramatic experience which "converted" me to the Capuchin ideal of contemplation. During the sessions I embarked on a deeper study of the prayer life of St. Francis.⁴ I was soon convinced that the Capuchins, in the second stage of their development when they had overcome their exclusively eremitical preoccupation (with the Constitutions of 1536) achieved a perfect synthesis of the two great Franciscan charisms, though rightly according priority to the contemplative life.

After these introductory remarks, I would like to outline the points I mean to discuss, providing an overall documented perspective, without pretending to exhaust a subject of such complexity. It would take a whole book to do it justice. After a survey of the eremitical-contemplative phase of the early Capuchin reform in the light of the statutes of Albacina and other sources, I shall discuss the second period, when, with the Constitutions of 1536, a balanced harmony between the apostolic ministry and contemplative prayer was finally realized. To conclude I shall propose certain questions which may be of help in comparing the present life style of the friars with the ideal of perfection presented by the first Constitutions and the special role of our order.

³We gave this conference in Italian at Loreto in the course of a seminar on Franciscan and Capuchin spirituality, April 19, 1978. We are most grateful to Fr. Hilary Phfferoen who translated it into Latin. The Italian text was published in the acts of the historical congress held at Camerino.

⁴Cf. Schmucki, "Secretum solitudinis," *De circumstantiis externis orandi penes sanctum Franciscum Assisiensem*, in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 39 (1969) 5-58; "Mentis silentium." *Il programma contemplativo nell'Ordine francescano primitivo*, in *Laurentianum*, 14 (1973) 177-222; *Luogo di preghiera, eremo, solitudine. Concetti e realizzazioni in san Francesco d'Assisi*, in Toppi (and others), *Le "case di preghiera"*, 29-53, where other studies are mentioned.

I. The Eremitical-Contemplative Phase of the Early Capuchin Reform

1. Studying the evidence offered by historians, I am convinced that the powerful eremitical thrust of the first years of the reform was due in large measure to the personality of Louis Tenaglia of Fossombrone, and to a lesser degree to the conditions of the times. Like a live current, the appeal to the eremitical life criss-crosses all documents dealing with Louis. In 1528 he sent a petition to Pope Clement VII which evidences his predilection for this life style. Louis and his brother Raphael ardently longed to lead a life of solitude, far removed from human contacts. "That they might find peace in the sweetness of contemplation." They asked that they and their followers be permitted to wear the garb of mendicant hermits, "with a poor little pointed hood," that both clerics and lay brothers be allowed to wear long beards, to accept, through the generosity of the owners, "some hermitages in the woods and mountains" where they would be able to live "as pilgrims and strangers" and devote themselves to prayer.⁵ The whole text of the petition is impregnated with an eremitical-contemplative flavor, from the basic goals of their life to such specific details as wearing the beard and living in the wilderness.⁶

If it be true that style reveals the man, then all the force of his nature, including the whole complex of inherited, familiar and environmental factors, drew Louis to a life of solitude. Historians will have to decide whether this natural impulse was reinforced by the presence of the many hermits scattered throughout the Marches.⁷ Certainly an indelible stamp was

⁵Cf. Edouard d'Alençon O.F.M. Cap., *De primordiis Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum 1525-1534 commentarium historicum.*, Rome 1921, 44 b and 45 ab.

⁶Cf. J. Gribomont — Marian d'Alatri, *Barba*, in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione I*, (Rome, 1974) 1037 ff; F. Ferrero, *Eremitismo individuale in Occidente*, *ibid.*, III (1976) 1245-1258 (Bibliog.)

⁷From a bibliography appended to an article by various authors: *Eremitismo* (*ibid.*, 1224-1244, esp. 1242-1244, and for Italy: 1252ff.). There seems to be a lack of specific sources for the times and places that concern us here.

left in the mind of Louis as a result of his stay in the Camaldolese hermitage of Cupramontana, where, in 1526, he even applied for admission to the community.⁸ Perhaps this was only a strategic ploy, since, as Father Edouard d'Alencon points out, a number of religious at that time, finding it impossible to live within their own convents, had no difficulty in obtaining permission from the Sacred Penitentiary to lead an eremitical life.⁹ Finally we must not overlook the predilection of the Spirituals, at one time quite numerous in the Marches, for hermitages, nor the contemporary growth of houses of recollection among the Observants.¹⁰

It is not hard to see how such a marked attraction for solitude could lead some friars to extremes. Historians relate that after the Pope approved the reform and while Louis was vicar general, some Capuchins "maintaining that contemplation is the goal of the Rule and that monastic conversation is distracting"¹¹ began to withdraw from obedience. They deemed it inappropriate to return once more to "ritual, conversation, manual tasks and other useless occupations" once having attained the summit of contemplation and union with God.¹² The spectacle of friars dying of excessive fasting outside the "holy brotherhood"¹³ and the direct intervention of Louis helped the new reform survive such excesses. The vicar general, reflecting on the history of religious orders, came up

⁸Cf. Melchior of Poblatura O.F.M. Cap., (ed.) *Bernardine of Colpetrazzo O.F.M. Cap.: Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum (1525-1593) (Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum, 2)* Assisi 1939, 164 ff. Note 1. (Bibliog.)

⁹E. d'Alencon. *De Primordiis*, 29 ff.

¹⁰C. Cagnoni O.F.M. Cap. *Le case di preghiera nella storia dell'Ordine Franciscano*, in Toppi (and others), *Le "case di preghiera."* 71-73, 82 ff.

¹¹Paul of Goligno O.F.M. Cap. *Origo et progressus Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum*, ed. Melchior a Poblatura, (*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, 7), Rome 1955, 173 (n. 186).

¹²Bernardine of Colpetrazzo *Historia*, (*Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, 2), 216 (n. 196).

¹³Paul of Goligno: *Ibid.*, 174 ("...from experience and spurred on by their conscience they knew the danger of such liberty and the excellence of real subjection to obedience and of living in holy fraternity.") Cf. *Ibid.*, 174, adn. 1, a critical note by Melchior of Poblatura.

with the idea of "monastic solitude," pointing out that "one is not deprived of the benefits of solitude when he practices it at home, going about his tasks in silence, to the extent that it is not contrary to obedience and charity, which embrace all the other virtues, and devoting oneself to continual prayer either alone or in the church at night, or in the dormitory where perpetual silence must be observed."¹⁴ Bernardine of Colpetrazzo says that Louis had this experience in mind when he inserted the rules for Capuchin hermits in the statutes of Albacina.¹⁵ We shall return to them later on. For the time being it is safe to say that the vicar general took his cue from the semi-cenobitic model of the Camaldolese to meet the crisis as is clear from the term "monastic solitude."

How deep rooted in Louis' mind was the eremitical concept of the Franciscan ideal became evident in a dramatic moment in the history of the reform. When the general chapter, after being postponed, was finally convoked by direct order of the Pope, and Louis was still smarting over the rebuff of not being re-elected vicar general, he asked the capitulars "that the friars lead an eremitical life, exercising themselves in contemplation,...that they choose sites far from inhabited places lest they become involved in worldly affairs, and devote themselves to austerity and contemplation...that the friars not return to the condition of other religious institutes, to studies and hearing confessions, to living in large friaries, to the practice of elaborate chants and solemn pomp."¹⁶

2. In addition to other historical data, we must examine the references to the contemplative life in the *Statutes of Albacina*. The title itself is very significant — "The Constitutions of the Friars Minor of the Eremitical Life." The text — not too well organized — is essentially the work of the twelve capitulars who in April 1529 met in the hermitage of S. Maria

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 176 (no. 187).

¹⁵*Historia*, 219 ff. (no. 199) "this was the motive that Father Louis placed in the first Constitutions, that anyone who wished to lead a solitary and eremitical life should be given every encouragement when he is judged fit for it, so that there should never be wanting in our congregation holy men who, freed from all distractions, might give themselves to holy contemplation."

¹⁶Paul of Foligno: *Origo*, 212 ff. (no. 222).

dell' Aquarella at Albacina.¹⁷ Other ordinances seem to have been added later by Louis in response to certain difficulties in administration.¹⁸ The addition of the words "of the Eremitical Life" to the title was meant to differentiate their way of life from that of the Friars Minor.

The Constitutions go on to stress the importance and frequency to be accorded the practice of mental prayer. To the two periods of meditation after Compline and Matins, already in vogue among the Observants,¹⁹ the Constitutions add "two other periods..., one after Vespers and the other before Tierce."²⁰ And to ensure that contemplative atmosphere which the fathers of the reform wished to permeate their entire life, they add that there not be "public prayer, accompanied by ringing of bells, but secret prayer."²¹ The picture of a religious life style predominantly eremitic is further enhanced by the motivation added to the precepts: "And observe that this time is set aside and mandated for good order and devotion, and for the benefit of the lukewarm and slothful friars. The fervent and devout will not be content with these two periods; they will spend all the time they can spare from

¹⁷Cf. *supra*, note a. Albacina, in *Lexicon Capuccinum. Promptuarium historico-bibliographicum Ordinis fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum* (1525-1950) Rome 1951, 28 (Bibliog.); *Commemoratio primi Capituli Ordinis anno 1529 Alvacinae congregati*, in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.* 45 (1929) 282-b-284 a; G. Del Colle, *Rilievi linguistico-stilistici sulle Costituzioni d'Albacina*, in *Italia Franciscana*, 53 (1978) 22-28.

¹⁸Cf. E. d'Alencon, *De Primordiis*, 63 ff. For what follows I have consulted principally the learned dissertation of Remigius of Alosto O.F.M. Cap., *De oratione mentali in Ordine Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum*, in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 3 (1933) 40-66. Further bibliography can be found in our short commentary: *L'indirizzo contemplativo dell' ordine capuccino primitivo*, in *Picenum Seraphicum* (Falconara M/ Ancona 12) (1975, 1977) 296-303.

¹⁹Cf. Remigius of Alosto, *De oratione mentali*, 42-45.

²⁰*Constitutioni*, n. 8 in *Italia Franciscana*, 53 (1978) 12, or Matthias of Salo O.F.M. Cap. *Historia Capuccina*, pars secunda ed. Melchior of Pobladora, (*Monumenta Historia Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum*, 5), Rome 1946. 161. The Latin version of Boverius is less accurately entitled: *Constitutiones editae in prima Generali Congregatione Alvacinae coacta, anno 1529 in Anallecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 13-21, 14b.

²¹"...non pero oratione publica et con suono di campana, ma secreta." (*ibid.*, but lacking in the Latin text.)

the works undertaken in obedience in mental prayer, and as true men of prayer they will pray everywhere and adore the Father in spirit and truth. We earnestly exhort all the friars to the practice of prayer for this is the meaning of all our activities, to adhere to God with perfect charity."²² All the time not taken up with the divine office, manual labor or rest was to be spent either in personal prayer, meditation or mystical contemplation.²³ There is no clearer or more emphatic way of emphasizing the subordination of the entire life of the Capuchin to contemplative prayer than to call it the very reason for the Order's existence.

This eremitical orientation is very definitely stressed in the regulations for the recitation of the divine office. In marked contrast to the formalism and estheticism which had crept into the liturgy during the Renaissance, the constitutions of Albacina ban any singing of the liturgical hours. They are to be recited in choir "with proper pauses, without repetitions or frills." The Camaldolese influence can be clearly detected in these rules.²⁴

The contemplative goal of the statutes is even more apparent in the following number which forbids the addition of any votive offices except that of Our Lady. Whenever the friars, out of personal devotion, desire to recite the Seven Penitential Psalms, the Office of the Dead,²⁵ or other vocal

²²*Ibid.* and according to the Latin text in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5, (1889) 15 a. But for the last sentence of the exhortation cf. "Et a questo studio essorto li fraterlli perche questo e il fine per il quale sono fatti Religiosi." (n. 8, in *Italia Franciscana*, 12, Matthias of Salo, 161).

²³"Ma li fratelli devoti et ferventi non si contentano di una, ne di due o tre hore, ma tutto il tempo loro spendono in orare, meditare, et contemplare." (*ibid.* 12 or 161) By the word "orandi" is meant vocal prayer, "meditandi", affective mental prayer, "contemplandi" the quiet of active and passive union.

²⁴*Constitutioni*, no. 2 in *Italia Franciscana*, 11 or Matthias of Salo, 159: "Circa l'Officio Divino essorto et ordino che si dica devotamente, con le pause, senza coda o biscanti et voce femminile." The incomplete text is found in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 13 f.

²⁵The original text here makes mention of the prayer called the "Benedicta", attributed to B. John Buralli of Parma. Cf. E. Clop O.F.M. *Office de la Benedicta*, in *Etudes Franciscaines* 30 (1913) 482-492.

prayers, "they should be content to say them privately, or with a companion, but not in the choir nor at a time which conflicts with the choir office, so that they do not distract those who may be praying quietly or mentally in the church or choir."²⁶ The legislator adduces a twofold reason, "so that all the friars may together say the office prescribed by the Rule and the Church with greater devotion and observance of the prescribed pauses, and so that the brethren may have more time to spend in quiet and mental prayer, which is far more fruitful than any vocal prayer."²⁷ The importance of interior prayer is so great that the entire horarium of conventual life is completely determined by it. This "interiorization" finds its counterpart in the religious currents of our own time which are strongly influenced by the "*devotio moderna*."²⁸ It was left to the second Vatican Council to rediscover the contemplative values to be found in the celebration of the liturgical hours.²⁹

The better to protect the friars from the influx of outsiders, the Constitutions state that their dwellings be remote from urban centers. "Let all their places be at least a mile outside the cities."³⁰ As a further guarantee of prayerful seclusion, the porter was obliged to observe very strict norms about admitting strangers, whether religious or seculars.³¹

²⁶Constitutioni, no. 3 in *Italia Franciscana*, 11, or Matthias of Salo, 159: "Ancora ordiniamo che non si aggiunga altro officio di gratia in choro, eccetto quello della Madonna. Et se ad alcuno delli frati piacesse et li rendesse piu devotione dire li sette salmi, l'officio de morti, Benedicta, o altre orationi vocali, si contentara dirle da per se, overo con un altro compagno fuora di chora, a tempo che no si dice l'officio in choro, accio non dia molestia ad alcun frate che stesse in chiesa overo in choro ad essercitarsi in oratione secreta overo mentale." I have followed the Latin text as given in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 14 a.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 11, or 159 ff, and for the Latin text, 14 a.

²⁸Cf. an evaluation and bibliog. C. Egger, *Devozione Moderna*, in *Diz. Ist. Perf.*, III (1976) 456-463.

²⁹Cf. M. Magrassi, *Per un Breviario autenticamente pregato*, in E. Baccetti: *Chiesa che prega. Collana "Opus Divinum"* 1 Milan (1970) 177-199, esp 192-196 ("Un ritmo piu contemplativo.")

³⁰The Latin version is found in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 18 b. The Italian text in no. 50, in *Italia Franciscana*, 18, or in Matthias of Salo, 168.

³¹Constitutioni, no. 10 in *Italia Franciscana*, 13. Matthias of Salo, 161 ff.

The quest for solitude found additional support through the establishment of *isolated cells* which were used by St. Francis himself in certain circumstances.³² There was a special reason for putting this text into the Constitutions. Some friars, in an exaggerated zeal to identify the reform with the contemplative life were withdrawing to absolute solitude. Louis of Fossombrone countered their "individual solitude" with his "monastic solitude." He wrote: "We ordain that wherever possible one or two isolated cells be prepared some distance from the friary, so that if anyone has the grace of the Lord to live in silence after the manner of hermits and is judged suitable for this by his superiors, he may be accommodated in all charity. And we exhort superiors and prelates that when they find those who are suitable, they do not deny them this charity. The friars living in solitude should observe silence, and no one should disturb them. They are not to speak, except to the spiritual father. They may not talk with others without permission of the superiors. Simple provisions shall be brought to their cells in silence, so that they may always remain united with Jesus Christ."³³

In my opinion, two factors combined to influence this text: the teaching and example of St. Francis, and the practice of the Camaldolese hermits of Monte Corona di Cupramontana.³⁴ The isolated cell is as old as monasticism itself. It represented an attempt to reduce the external environment and furnishings to a bare minimum thereby providing ideal conditions for uninterrupted recollection.^{34a} The constant and deep association of the Capuchin hermits with nature — they frequently betook themselves to the mountains and woods, as

³²Cf. Schmucki: *Secretum solitudinis*, 51-54, or *Luogo di preghiera*, 50-52 (*Il significato di 'carcer'*).

³³Constitutioni, no. 47 in *Italia Franciscana*, 17; Matthias of Salo 167; the Latin text is in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 19 a.

³⁴Burchardt (Mathias) of Wolfenschiessen, O.F.M. Cap. *De influxu legislationis Camaldulensium in Ordinem Capuccinorum*, in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 1 (1931) 59-78. For other bibliog. cf. J. Leclercq, *Giustiniani Paul*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* VI (1967) 414-417; G. Cacciamani, *Camaldolesi*, in *Diz. Ist. Perf.*, I (1974) 1718-1725.

^{34a}Cf. Schmucki *Secretum solitudinis*, 45-54; or *Luogo di preghiera*, 45-48.

shown by numerous instances cited by Servus Gieban³⁵ — gave rise to a mystique of creation and a friendship with animals which were typically Franciscan. The Italian text underscores the Christocentric and espousal motifs of the mystical experience sought by the voluntary recluses.³⁶ Noteworthy, too, is the recurrent insistence on silence, broken only when necessary and with the permission of the superior, or when speaking with one's spiritual director.³⁷

3. So far we have not come across any mention of the *soteriological* (salvific) aspect of the eremitical life either in the biographical literature or in the Constitutions of Albacina. Paul of Foligno, referring to the few months spent by Matthew of Bascio in visiting his little flock as vicar general, provides clear proof that the first friars were not embarked on a pious ego trip. On the contrary "they longed to conform themselves to Christ crucified, after the example of their Seraphic Father. They grieved at the thought of the many offenses committed by sinners and the infinite sufferings of sister souls. Hence, with much light and fervor, they sought out occasions to suffer both interiorly and exteriorly for the love of God. No matter how great their sufferings might be, they considered them insignificant, rejoicing to do penance for past sins, to experience some little part of the sufferings endured by Christ for their sake, to be made living members of Christ, for the glory of the heavenly Father and the satisfaction it gave Christ when they offered the Father their own sufferings as the fruit of His...."³⁸

This theology of the cross echoes perfectly the Pauline concept of the mystical body and the soteriological significance of filling up in their own bodies "those things that

³⁵*Il richiamo della foresta: la funzione del bosco presso i primi Capuchini, Picenum Seraphicum*, 12 (1975, 1977) 290-295.

³⁶*Constitutioni*, no. 47, in *Italia Franciscana*, 18; Matthias of Salo 167: "Et li sia portato il suo povero vivere sino alla celluccia con silentio et senza strepito accioche sia sempre unito col suo amoroso Gesu Christo, sposo dell'anima sua." Here too Boverius' text departs from the original.

³⁷Cf. *Constitutioni*, no. 9, 58, in *Italia Franciscana*, 12, 19 ff; Matthias of Salo, 161, 169; on Boverius' text, n. 9, 52, in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 15a, 20a.

³⁸Paul of Foligno, *Origo et progressus*, 81.

are wanting of the sufferings of Christ for His body, which is the Church" (*Col.* 1, 24), and for the benefit of the "sister souls" of sinners as our chronicler writes, with characteristic Franciscan terminology.

II. The Harmonious Balance Between Contemplation and the Apostolic Ministry in the Light of the Constitutions of 1536.

The ordinances of Albacina regarding prayer and the witness of the chroniclers make it clear that the fathers of the reform looked upon interior prayer as the reason for the Order's existence. As they saw it, their task within the Church and the Franciscan family was to carry out, habitually and perfectly, the gospel counsel: "We ought always to pray" (*Lk.* 18, 1); and St. Paul's Admonition: "to pray without ceasing" (1 *Thess.* 5, 17). This one-sided preoccupation with the contemplative dimension of religious life seemed to stem from the somewhat eccentric personality of Louis of Fossombrone on the one hand, and from a certain contamination of the Franciscan charism by elements found in the Camaldolese reform on the other. And yet the Albacina Constitutions expressly envisaged the preaching apostolate.³⁹

1. The *providential task of the 1536 revision* was to correct the earlier, narrow concept of the Order. The Constitutions were the fruit of bitter conflicts between Louis of Fossombrone and a number of Capuchins who had lately come from the ranks of the Observants, like Bernardine of Asti. This "*Magna Carta*" of the Capuchin reform is an admirable compendium of Franciscan spirituality. In opposition to Louis' obstinate preoccupation with the eremitical vocation, the capitulars assembled in November 1535 in the monastery of St. Euphemia at St. Mary Major's in Rome, produced a Franciscan synthesis of the contemplative life and the apostolic

³⁹*Constitutioni*, no. 24 in *Italia Franciscana*, 15; Matthias of Salo, 164: "Et si ordina anchora alli prelati, che li predicatori alli quali il Signore dara la gratia non lascino star otiosi, ma li faccino essercitar la vigna del Signore in predicare, non solamente la Quaresima, ma infra l'anno anchora nelle feste occorrenti et altri giorni espedienti..." The Latin text is in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 16 f (no. 22).

ministry. Unfortunately we lack precise historical details about the way the chapter did its work.⁴⁰ It appears certain that Bernardine Pallio of Asti (1484-1554) played a prominent role in wording the text, which remained substantially intact until the special general chapter of 1968. In his capacity of vicar general to which post he was unanimously elected he continually appealed to the mind of St. Francis in founding his Order. The same touchstone can be seen in the division of the new Constitutions into twelve chapters, corresponding to the twelve chapters of the Rule. In short, the statutes had no other objectives than to provide the friars with a clear and practical commentary on the Rule.

2. It is not possible within the scope of this paper to treat all the important relationships between contemplation and the active ministry. We will limit ourselves to the concept of contemplation as expressed in *Chapter III* of the Constitutions of 1536. In no. 41 we read: "And because prayer is the spiritual mistress of the friars, and so that the spirit of devotion may not grow lukewarm in the friars but burning continuously on the altar of their hearts, may be more and more inflamed, as our Seraphic Father desired, we prescribe at least two hours of prayer, for the benefit of the lukewarm and tepid, for truly spiritual friars will pray at all times."⁴¹

The legislator is obviously making reference to Chapter V of the Rule. The times assigned to meditation are for the purpose of keeping alive "the spirit of prayer and devotion to which all temporal things ought to be subservient." Recalling the fire that consumes the sacrifice laid on the altar of the heart (cf. *Lev.* 6, 1 ff) he points out the necessity of continual-

⁴⁰E. d'Alencon, *De Capitulo generali O.F.M. Cap., mense novembri a.d. 1535 celebrato et mense septembri anni subsequentis renovato; nova et vetera*, in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 43 (1927) 282-288; Luigi Maria da Genova O.F.M. Cap., *Dottrina spirituale della primitiva legislazione cappuccina*, Genoa, 1963; Mariano d'Alatri, *Bernardino d'Asti*, in *Diz. Ist. Perf.*, I (1974), 1390 ff. (Bibliog.) There can be no doubt that the men mentioned by d'Alencon had an important role in drawing up the Constitutions.

⁴¹E. d'Alencon, *Primigeniae legislationis Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum textus originales seu Constitutiones anno 1536 ordinatae et anno 1552 recognitae, cum historica introductione copiosisque adnotationibus*, Rome, 1928, 42 ff (C 1536, n. 41, 42 ff).

ly adding fuel.⁴² Harking back to the related prescriptions of the Statutes of Albacina⁴³ the text makes it clear that the two hours of meditation are to be considered the barest minimum. The friar minor who is open to the workings of the Holy Spirit will strive to realize the gospel ideal of "praying always."

Reducing the four hours of meditation found in the earlier draft to two obligatory periods was an effort to bring the eremitical-contemplative direction into line with a balanced Franciscanism. Faithfully following the intentions of the Seraphic Father, the text achieves a new orientation insofar as it accords prayer its correct priority, a loving union with God, which constitutes the ultimate destiny of all Christian life. Viewed in this way prayer indeed becomes the great mistress and teacher of the spiritual life. When sincerely practiced it leads on to an experience of sanctifying intimacy with God and teaches us how to act so as to fulfill the obligations of our religious calling.

3. Life and legislation are interdependent. If proof were needed, the *subsequent history of this number* of the Constitutions would provide it. In the chapter of 1552 the capitulars set about revising the wording of the text. The work was done under the guidance of Angelus of Savona (d.1556)⁴⁴ and the reader will easily discern a certain stylistic redundancy and multiplication of adjectival and appositional clauses. This is quite evident in the introduction to the number on mental prayer: "And because holy prayer is without doubt our principal teacher and the nurse of all true virtue, so that the spirit of prayer and devotion, to be desired above all things, may not diminish..."⁴⁵

⁴²Thomas of Celano, *Vita secunda S. Francisci*, no. 201 in *Analecta Franciscana*, X, Quaracchi, 1926-41, 245. "Saepe communicabat (S. Franciscus) et tam devote, ut alios devotos afficeret. Reverendum enim illud omni reverentia prosequens, membrorum omnium sacrificium offerebat, et agnum immolatum recipiens, illo igne qui in altari cordis semper ardebat, spiritum immolabat."

⁴³*Constitutioni*, no. 8 in *Italia Francescana*, 12. Matthias of Salo, 161.

⁴⁴Cf. E. d'Alencon, *Textus originales*, 22-25; *Lexicon Capuccinum*, 77.

⁴⁵*Le Constitutione deli Frati minori detti Capuccini*, (1536) no. 41: E. d'Alencon, *Textus originales*, 42 a "Et perche la oratione e la spiritual

Apart from the baroque verbiage, we can detect a certain theological regression insofar as prayer is described in terms similar to the theological virtue of charity, as a kind of second "*forma virtutum*." No one would dare deny that prayer, especially interior prayer, possesses a vital power to shape a man's spirituality. But it achieves this only because it helps develop and intensify charity, which permeates all the virtues, uniting and nourishing them.

The changes not only involve a new literary style but must be viewed against the historical backdrop of the apostasy of the fourth vicar general, Bernardine Ochino of Siena in 1542. The magnitude of the scandal was in proportion to the extraordinary and worldwide esteem he had won for himself as preacher and counselor. His flight and defection to the Calvinists convulsed the young reform so tragically that its very survival hung in the balance.⁴⁶ Among other symptoms which aroused suspicion even at the height of his fame, historians point to his lack of the spirit of prayer. "He became so engrossed in these activities (preaching and counseling) that he no longer attended choir or was seen at prayer."⁴⁷

Paul of Foligno continues: "With this error, the wretched man fell into such blindness that he could not find time to

*maestra de Frati, accio lo spirito de la devotione non si tepidisca ne Frati, ma ardendo continuamente nel altare del core sempre piu s'accenda si come desiderava el seraphyco Padre, etiam che'l vero spiritual Frate minore sempre ori, niente dimeno si ordina, che a questo siano deputate per li tepidi due hore particolare...: Le Constitutioni de Minori detti Cappuccini (1552) no. 41: ibid., 42 b: "Et perche la santa oratione senza dubbio e la principal maestra nostra, et madre et nutrice d'ogni vera vertu, per fare che il spirito della divotione, sopra ogni cosa desiderabile, non venga meno, ma continuamente ardendo sopra il sacro altare del cor nostro sempre piu si accenda, si come bramava il buon Padre nostro, quantunque il buon Frate divoto da ogni tempo interiormente ori, nondimeno si ordina che a questo fine siene deputate almeno due hore particolari..." Cf. for this and the following: Remigius of Alosto *De Oratione mentali*, 58-60.*

⁴⁶Cf. Melchior of Poblatura, *Historia generalis Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum*, Pars prima: 1525-1619. (Bibliotheca-Capuccina 7) Rome 1947, 47-50. with bibliog. *Lexicon Capuccinum*, 1234-1236; *Collectanea Franciscana Bibliographia Franciscana 1931-1970. Index Cl.* van de Laar (O.F.M. Cap) Roma (1972) 443 b.

⁴⁷Paul of Foligno, *Origo et progressus*, 264.

recite the divine office even privately. The Pope released him from an obligation from which good friars refuse to seek a dispensation not even on the advice of doctors or the permission of prelates; not even on their death bed, as long as they are able to breathe."⁴⁸

Interesting is the dialogue between the two Bernardines, the one of Asti and the other of Ochino. The chroniclers report the essentials. Bernardine of Asti said to the vicar general: "'Father, you are entrapped in this situation because of secular business and studies. We never see you at prayer anymore. Watch what you are doing. Persevere in humility. Take care of your own soul too. Otherwise God will abandon you and you will end up emptyhanded, a soldier of God without weapons.' To which Ochino replied: 'He does not cease to pray, who does not cease doing good.' Many others offer the same excuse for their involvement in scholastic and distracting occupations which are the curse of religious."⁴⁹

Matthias Bellitani of Salo in his description of "the virtue of prayer in this reform"⁵⁰ appears to be refuting Ochino's sophistry when he writes: "If it be true that he does not cease to pray who does not cease to do good, it is equally true that he who ceases to pray, ceases to do good. Because he who abandons prayer on the pretext of doing good works, ends up by abandoning the good works as well."

Bernardine of Ochino stood out as a monumental warning for the first generation of Capuchins. His fall had repercussions up to the time the text on meditation was reworded.⁵¹ Any number of other instances prove that activism, even carried out in the pastoral ministry, is inevitably doomed to spiritual sterility if not rooted in the rich soil of prayer.

4. After describing the central place allotted to prayer in the

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 265.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 264.

⁵⁰Matthias of Salo, *Historia*, 287: "Et se ben e vero che non cessa d'orare chi non cessa di far bene, e vero anchora che chi cessa d'orare cessa di far bene; perche chi sotto pretesto di far altri beni lascia l'oratione, alla fine lascia quei beni anchora."

⁵¹Remigius of Alosto also mentions this influence: *De Oratione mentali*, 59.

Constitutions of 1536, we must now attempt to clarify the *sources and principal charisms of Capuchin-Franciscan meditation*. Clinging to the spirit of the Rule, the first number of the Constitutions urges that the "friars always keep before the eyes of their mind the doctrine and life of our Saviour Jesus Christ," and that "they always carry in the depths of their hearts the holy gospel."⁵² Consistent with this admonition, it is ordered that there be a public reading of the four gospels "three times a year, that is, one of the gospels each month."⁵³ And since "the flames of divine love are kindled from the light of what is divine, it is ordained that there be some reading of the Holy Scriptures with an explanation by holy and devout doctors." "Infinite wisdom" has made Himself accessible to us, descending to us "in Christ our Saviour," so that "without any other means, but with the pure eye of faith, the simple and unlearned can understand it." Biblical studies should be entirely concentrated on "the most holy Christ Jesus, in whom, as Paul says, are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."⁵⁴

These quotations, among others with the same idea, show how the Bible, especially the New Testament with Christ as its heart and climax, provided the Capuchins with an inexhaustible font and principal object of study and contemplation. We know that they came to accord the mystery of the passion a somewhat exaggerated role, but this was due not so much to the Constitutions themselves as to the spiritual writings of later Capuchins. Already the Albacina statutes had said that according to the teaching of St. Francis, "the beginning, the center, and the end of our conversion should consist in our embracing the Cross of the Lord and glorying in it."⁵⁵

5. There remains the task of describing the *method of Capuchin meditation*. Anyone looking for a succinct formula in which to express the Capuchin approach to mental prayer

⁵²*Constitutione*, (1536) no. 1 Eduardus, 27 a.

⁵³*Ibid.*,

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, no. 4: 28 a; Col. 2, 3.

⁵⁵*Constitutioni delli Frati Minori detti della vita heremitica*, no. 67. in *Italia Francescana*, 21; Matthias of Salo, 171. Latin text in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 5 (1889) 21 (no. 59).

will find it in a contemplative and affective attitude of knowledge through love. It is defined in an incomparable manner in the prayer composed by Ruggero of Provenza (d. 1287) for the friar students. It was brought to the attention of the fathers of the Capuchin reform through the famous "*Liber Conformitatum*" of Bartholomew of Pisa: "Grant to your lowly servant in these words and holy reading to love You as much as to know You, for I have no wish to know You except to love You, Lord God, my Creator."⁵⁶

To get a deeper grasp of the subject, we must turn to the following number on meditation which reads: "Let the friars remember that prayer is nothing else but speaking to God from the heart. Consequently, he does not pray who speaks to God only with the lips. Therefore, let each one endeavor to practice mental prayer, and according to the doctrine of Christ, our best Teacher, to adore the eternal Father in spirit and truth, taking diligent care to enlighten the mind and inflame the heart rather than to frame words."⁵⁷

The best insights of the Albacina ordinances⁵⁸ are to be found in this text, which, to my mind, is a jewel of spiritual literature. Interior prayer is defined as a colloquy of the heart with God during which a man, with all the love of which he is capable, bares to his Creator the inmost recesses of his being, striving to communicate with the Divine Being without recourse to words; it is an adoration of God the Father "in spirit and in truth," that is, after the manner of a son, with all the intensity of one's mind and purity of intention; it is a confident expectation because faith is enlightened and charity enkindled by the grace of prayer.

With a sort of instinctive sureness, meditation is here defined according to the mind of St. Francis. Instead of

⁵⁶*Constitutione*, (1536) no. 125. Eduardus, 77 a, also 98 no. 125 adn. 1. Cf. also *Coll. Franc. Bibliog. Franc. Index*, 518 a (under Rogero)

⁵⁷*Constitutione*, (1536) no. 42: Eduardus, 43 a: "Et ricordinse li Frati che orare non e altro seno uno parlare a Dio col core; perho non ora chi a Dio parla solo con la bocca. Perho ciaschuno si sforzara di fare oratione mentale, et secundo la doctrina di Christo, optimo Maestro, adorare lo eterno Padre in spirito et verita, havendo diligente cura di illuminar la mente et inflammar l'affecto, piu che di formar parole."

⁵⁸No. 8 in *Italia Francescana*, 12. Matthias of Salo, 161.

burdening the friars with some methodical system with numerous "points," the fathers of the reform went right to the heart of the affective-dialogical encounter with God. We certainly find here the genuine Franciscan heritage of prayer of the heart, in which man, by way of recollection, endeavors to return to the center of his soul where he finally abandons himself completely to the guidance of the Holy Spirit" who "makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in speech" (*Rom.* 8, 26).

Speaking to God without conceptual language is carried out in different ways depending on the temperament of the individual, the charisms freely bestowed by God, the extent of one's spiritual maturity and actual circumstances of time and place in which the friar is living here and now. The structure as well as the starting point of such a loving communion with God the sweet Guest of the soul, may be a meditation on the words of Holy Scripture, or religious images and symbols, or, following the example of the Poverello, the world of nature. The gamut of religious expression encompasses the entire range of human communication. Prayerful colloquy with God may include the enormous sense of wonder found in every human being, or account of the greatness of the divine mysteries, or guilt feelings stirred up by the remembrance of past sins viewed in the light of divine holiness, or a sense of gratitude for benefits received, or simple adoration of the Most High God. These sentiments recur frequently in genuine affective prayer without engendering monotony or boredom.

Prayer of the heart belongs to spiritual patrimony that dates back to early Christian times, as can be seen by the habitual invocation of the name of Jesus.⁵⁹ Certainly the prayer life of Francis was profoundly influenced by it. The Capuchins took over this tradition either by direct contact with Franciscan sources or by way of the meditations of St. Bonaventure and of the Observant mystic Henry van Herp (Harphius). They learned and adopted ejaculatory prayer from the latter.⁶⁰ An incredible number of Capuchin writers, begin-

⁵⁹For the history of this pious custom with a bibliography cf. P. Adnes, *Jesus (priore a)*, in *Dict. Spir.* VIII (1974) 1126-1150.

⁶⁰Cf. Henry Harphius, *Theologiae mysticae libri tres*, Brixen 1601, 494

ning with John of Fano's (d. 1539) *Operetta devotissima: Chiamata Arte de la Unione*, have tried to spread the practice of affective-meditative prayer even among simple folk.⁶¹

Worthy of note, too, are certain external customs observed by the early Capuchins during meditation. From the Constitutions of Albacina we can deduce that the two hours of mental prayer inherited from the Observants were to be performed in choir. The Constitutions of 1536 add the recitation of the Litany of the Saints before the morning meditation "calling on all the saints to adore God with us and for us."⁶² According to the Constitutions of 1609 the Litany of Loreto was to be said before the second period.⁶³ The 1536 Constitutions speak of "two hours" of prayer⁶⁴ and the ordinances of the general chapter of 1733 insist on two complete hours without any break.⁶⁵

In the beginning an hourglass was used to mark the time. Later on an alarm clock signaled the close of the meditation.⁶⁶

and 568; E. Gullick — Optatus de Veghel O.F.M. Cap. *Herp*, in *Dict. Spir.*, VII/1 (1969) 346-366.

⁶¹*Lexicon Capuccinum*, 833 ff; Metodio of Nembro (O.F.M. Cap.), *Quattrocento scrittori spirituali* (Collana "Dimensioni Spirituali", 1). Rome 1972, 34-36; *Coll. Franc. Bibliog. Franc. Index*, 309 a; *Bibliog. Franc.* XII, no. 2171-2174. Esp. Remigius of Alosto, *De Oratione Mentali in Ordine Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum*, in *Collectanea Franciscana*, 9 (1939) 164-192 and Optatus of Veghel, *Jean de Fano*, in *Dict. Spir.*, VIII (1974, 506-509.)

⁶²*Constitutione*, (1536) no. 42: Eduardus, 43 a: "Et avanti la oratione dopo Nona o Matutino, o vero in di de digiuno, dopo Sexta, sempre si dicano le Letanie, invocando tutti li Sancti ad orare Dio con noi et per noi."

⁶³*Litaniae Lauretanae B.M.V.* in *Lexicon Capuccinum*, 963, ff.

⁶⁴*Constitutione*, (1536) no. 41: 42 a "che a questo siano deputate per li tepidi due hore particolare..."

⁶⁵Cf. *Collectio authentica ordinationum ac decisionum Capitulum Generalium. Capituli XLVII* (1733) no. 1 in *Analecta O.F.M. Cap.*, 8 (1892) 117a: "...S'ordina espressamente a RR. PP. Provinciali...che le ore dell' Orazione mentale siano d'un'ora compiuta, e non meno."

⁶⁶(Zacharias Boverius de Saluzzo) *De Sacris ritibus juxta Romanam Regulam usui Fratrum Minorum S. Francisci, quo vulgo Capuccini nuncupantur accomodatis Libri tres. Quibus accessit appendix, de externis quibusdam Ritibus, ad Religionis politiam pertinentibus*. By order of Most. Rev. John Maria de Noto, Minister General, Naples, Typis Scoriginais M. DC.

According to Zachary Boverius' ritual, the friars closed and darkened all windows and bolted the church door before beginning mental prayer.⁶⁷ By means of such isolation and semi-darkness (one candle was kept lighted), the Capuchins tried to safeguard and foster recollection. Bonito Combasson, "Conventual," who was in fact a Capuchin who tried to get prestige for his works by using a pen name, states that these two hours of meditation made in the mysterious obscurity of the choir or church was unique among the religious orders of the time.⁶⁸ The friars, especially the younger ones, took their places in the choir, keeping a distance apart so as not to disturb one another in their devotions. They had a choice of posture — standing erect, kneeling at a bench, or kneeling on the floor without any support. Only the elderly or sick were permitted to sit down. The Boverian ritual says that it was not proper for a friar who knelt during the long prayer to recline on his heels.⁶⁹

XXVI p. 193: "*Sacrista horologium puluerarium, quod in legili paratum esse debet, vertat.*" An illustration of such an hourglass is reproduced in: *Le Celle di Cortona, eremo Franciscano del 1211*, Cortona (1977). An alarm clock used for meditation is on exhibit in the Franciscan Museum of the Capuchin Historical Institute in Rome. Cf. *Il Museo Franciscano. Catalogo*, by P. Gerlach S. Gieben and M. d'Alatri. Roma, 1973, 48. (n. 42).

⁶⁷*De Sacris ritibus*, 193 ff.

⁶⁸*Vera et dilucida explicatio presentis status totius Seraphicae Fratrum Minorum Religionis, a Sancto et Magno Francisco, Patriarcha inclyto, Alumine divino inspirante fundatae. Per R. P. F. Bonitum Combasson Sabaudum, Minoritam Conventualem, S. Theologiae Doctorem, Superiorum permissu, cum approbatione Doctorum. Prius Coloniae Agrippinae, apud Constantinum Muenich, 1640, Nunc vero cum permissu Superiorum, Vienne, Austriae, typis, Joannis Jacobi Kurner Statuum Inferioris Austriae Typographi, A. 1710, 56: "frequens oratio, cui pene sine intermissione diu noctuque incumbunt isti Seraphici Minoritae, sed maxime mentali, duarum horarum spatio in communi... simul omnes in Choro congregati, fenestris et januis clausis, ut arceatur lumen ob occasionem distractionis." "Hunc in communi orandi modum, in nullo alio ordine religioso usitatum (quod sciam) audivi nec legi..." (57) That there is question of a *nom de plume* is attested in a letter of Bonaventura Theubis O.F.M. Conv. published in *Speculum apologeticum* of Jacobus de Riddere O.F.M. Obs. Antwerp 1653, 306 as my confrere Servus Gieben kindly informed me.*

⁶⁹Boverius, *De Sacris Ritibus*, 193 ff.

6. This account of certain contemplative practices as prompted by the general chapters of 1535 and 1536 has by no means exhausted the subject. I would have had to include other pertinent legislation and biographical material on matters such as silence, the divine office, theological studies as well as the establishment of isolated foundations and the cells of Capuchin hermits. What has been presented, however, proves conclusively the important place that prayer occupied in the thoughts and life of the first Capuchins.

To conclude, I could not find a more beautiful or meaningful text to demonstrate the balance achieved between the contemplative life and the apostolic ministry than the admonition directed to preachers by the Constitutions of 1536: "Hence the preachers are exhorted to imprint the Blessed Jesus on their own hearts and give Him peaceful possession so that it may be He who prompts them to speak out of the abundance of love, not only in words, but much more by their actions...."⁷⁰ Every Franciscan ministry is nothing else but the overflowing of Christlike love of others. It means giving Christ to one's brother, that same Christ by whom the preacher has allowed himself to be completely dominated. It is the witness of an evangelical life which wins acceptance for his words.

* * *

Our past calls out to us, the more so since it speaks of a spiritual patrimony which has been revived in our own times. Our life today is authentic only to the extent that it measures up, at least in essentials, to the historic charism of the Capuchin reform. This is not the place to review all the contemporary problems faced by our Capuchin way of life. The following are just a few questions presented for personal and communal reflection:

1. Have we really succeeded in keeping intact the contemplative dimension of the Capuchin Franciscan charism in the light of the renewal effected by the special general chapters and implemented it on the provincial level?

⁷⁰*Constitutione*, (1536) no. 112. Eduardus, 72 a.