

**POTCHEFSTROOMSE UNIVERSITEIT VIR CHRISTELIKE HOËR
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**in association with
Greenwich School of Theology U.K.**

**A spirituality of the heart in the context of the Franciscan eremitical
tradition.**

**A scriptural understanding of “heart”, “desert”, and “conversion” as the
basis of this, both historically and in the present day.**

by

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Dedication

To Our Lady of the Angels of The Portiuncula

ABSTRACT

To speak of the heart is to speak a universal language. After a brief examination of poetry, prose, art and music, we discuss and analyse the word heart in its universal applicability within different religions, eras, cultures and creeds. Our particular focus is then centred in Sacred Scripture where we find the most comprehensive understanding of the word heart. Tracing the depth and richness of its meaning throughout the Scripture texts, we are faced with the human paradox of good and evil, both of which proceed from the mysterious realm of the heart where freedom and grace engage us in ways that are at times beyond our comprehension.

Examining the place of the desert in the process of forming the heart - which we understand to be the vital, inner core of a person - we highlight the struggle involved in this process, suggesting as the desert Fathers have before us, that the heart itself is at times a battlefield. Rooting ourselves in the Sacred Scriptures and in continuity with the Christian tradition, we introduce St. Francis of Assisi.

Analysing and interpreting St. Francis' journey into his own heart and to the heart of others, leads us to a consideration of the part the desert plays in this journey. This analysis is directly related to the active-contemplative question that has been the subject of debate ever since the time of Jesus in his encounter with Martha and Mary. Dualistic language and thinking suggests that the different dimensions of life stand in opposition, leading to an either/or situation rather than an acceptance of a more integrated both/and approach.

In an effort to avoid dualism and embrace paradox, we facilitate the journey of the heart towards wholeness and integration, combining theory and practice by bringing the fruit of this research to completion in The Portiuncula, a centre for Franciscan prayer and solitude, a new expression of our Third Order Regular Franciscan *charism*. Developing an innovative approach to St. Francis Rule for Hermitages, we discuss the significance of this, not only for members of the Franciscan family but for every person on the spiritual quest and the journey of the heart.

After the example of St. Francis of Assisi, we have tried to capture the spirit of his following in the footsteps of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. In grappling with the implications of a literal following of Jesus Christ, and the challenges this poses for

every individual in his or her uniqueness, we enter the realm of mystery, paradox, freedom and grace: the heart.

Presenting a spirituality of the heart in the context of the biblical understanding of "heart", "desert", and "conversion", in the context of the Franciscan eremitical tradition, we continue the universal quest for the fullness of love which is mysteriously contained in the twofold but unified experience of contemplation and compassion.

PREFACE

St. Francis left each of his followers a perennial challenge:

I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!
(2C.214)

This thesis and the new building project and ministry involved are both personal and Congregational responses to this challenge. The research, in its written and architectural expression, emerged as a reflection on the active-contemplative tension that seems to surface in the lives of individuals, communities and societies, regardless of age, creed or culture. Rooting my study within the Biblical and Franciscan eremitical tradition led me to focus particularly on the "heart" which is central to our Third Order Regular *charism*. For me, this research had an added dimension because of my responsibility and ministry as Formation Director within my Congregation.

I am deeply indebted to a great number of people for contributing to this venture of faith and the completion of this research. Without the inspiration and empowerment of the Holy Spirit of God, and the prayer, help, encouragement, skill and expertise of so many people, the faith-filled vision could not have become the reality it has become today.

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INTRODUCTION: Chapter 1

A Spirituality Of The Heart Within The Franciscan Eremitical Tradition

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

The Third Order Regular (abbreviated as TOR) branch of the Franciscan family is rediscovering its roots in the eremitical tradition. The recent research of Higgins (1999: 241) states that if members of the Third Order Regular take seriously the call of the Church to return to their roots they would be remiss if they did not in some way account for and incorporate the ideal and example of the hermitage into their present reality. Within the wider Franciscan family the work of Cirino & Raischl (1995: 287-344) gives details of several models that have emerged to meet this need, particularly in the United States. Unaware of any Third Order Regular congregation in Europe that offers both the active/apostolic and contemplative/eremitical communities within the one congregation, we propose the relevance of this study and its envisaged practical outcome which emerged from the shared deliberations of the Franciscan Minoress Sisters in 1997.

1.1.2 The Franciscan Minoress General Chapter 1997

A general chapter, when in session, is the highest authority within a religious congregation. Its authority is legislative. All its members have equal votes for its decisions. The chapter receives its mandate from the Church and it represents the whole congregation, consequently it is responsible to both. One of the decisions of the 1997 general chapter was to research the contemplative/eremitical dimension of the Franciscan tradition and establish a community to reflect this research and to plan and erect, if necessary, a completely new type of building. In this way, the theoretical and the experiential will be explored in an effort to bring to birth an entirely new expression of the TOR charism in the United Kingdom.

1.1.3 The Charism of the Third Order Regular

Conversion of heart, the shared *charism* of the 400 or more TOR congregations of both men and women religious, has been widely researched since the Second Vatican Council. (On-going conversion of heart is the specific gift of the Holy Spirit, which identifies the TOR group - henceforth referred to as *charism*.) Roland Faley (1974), Thaddeus Horgan (1974 and 1987), Linus Temperini (1974, 1983 and 1989), Raffaele

Pazzelli (1989 and 1993), Robert Stewart (1991) have centred much of their research on the aspect of conversion. To date research has not focused specifically on the heart as a universal symbol and the implications for a deeper understanding of the process of conversion of heart within the context of the desert experience in the Franciscan tradition.

1.1.4 Contemplation and Action

To speak of a spirituality of the heart within the context of the eremitical tradition evokes the possibility of dualistic thinking: contemplation or action. Within Christianity and in religious congregations in particular there is often a problem with the integration of action and contemplation in daily living. This dichotomy between ministry and prayer goes back to the time of Jesus, as recorded in the Mary and Martha story (Luke 10:38-42), but it remains a contemporary problem (McCole, 1996). My interest in this problem is rooted in my life as a religious sister with responsibility for initial and on-going formation within the congregation and beyond it.

Within our congregation and within the Franciscan family as a whole there is increasing interest in the active-contemplative synthesis of our Christian lives in the Franciscan tradition. (Cirino & Raischl, 1995.) There is an acute and growing awareness of the tensions and questions relating to the active-contemplative dimensions of life not only within religious life but within society where, as Rohr (1999:15) maintains, there is a tendency to live on the circumference with little access to the centre. By focusing on the heart, understood as the centre or core of the person, we hope to present a spirituality that has the potential to return to the centre where true identity is discovered in the raw material of what is discovered there. The consequences of exploring the depths of the heart present the challenge of acknowledging the heart's need for conversion.

Focusing on the heart presents further questions: understanding heart as a 'primordial' word (Rahner, 1967 (b):322) and within the realm of the sacred and the secular as a powerful symbol speaking a universal language; the biblical meaning of conversion of heart and the way in which the desert experience affects this process. The renewed interest in the active-contemplative tension and the way in which contemplation and compassion interact, presents a need to explore the place of the desert/solitude in the experience of conversion of heart. In the context of this study we will use the words

desert and solitude interchangeably because St. Francis sought places of solitude, which we equate with desert experiences.

1.1.5 The heart as a universal symbol

The research will focus on the meaning of the heart in sacred and secular literature. Particular emphasis will be given to biblical references in both the Old and New Testament, with particular reference to the work of Wolff (1974) and Bovenmars (1991). In the Christian tradition we will research the Early Fathers of the Church with special reference to the work of Luckman & Kulzer (1999). This will pave the way for a more thorough understanding of the way in which St. Francis used and understood the concept of the heart in his writings and lived experience.

1.1.6 St. Francis and the heart

There will be an examination of the extent to which Francis was imbued and influenced by the biblical and Christian tradition and an exploration of the way in which he presented his own original insights culminating in a uniquely Franciscan spirituality in the Church. In evaluating the present challenge to incorporate the eremitical dimension within the TOR tradition, we will analyse the effects of the desert/solitude on conversion of heart; in so doing, this research will seek a new expression of an active-contemplative rhythm and lifestyle yet deeply embedded in the original *charism* of Francis. It is as Scripture says in Matthew's gospel:

Every scribe who becomes a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings from his storeroom new things as well as old. (13:52)

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim is to contribute to a better understanding of the symbol of the heart as a pathway to the apprehension of the transcendent and to create a *both/and* (emphasising both contemplation/prayer and compassion/action), rather than an *either/or* situation that will facilitate the process of on-going conversion of heart in an active-contemplative rhythm leading to personal integration and wholeness.

We will research the words 'heart' and 'conversion' within the biblical and Catholic tradition and explore ways in which these concepts may differ from and be similar to other interpretations. Following the historical development of the Christian and

Franciscan understanding of both words we will evaluate the extent to which there is an emerging rediscovery of the biblical understanding.

In tracing the way in which the desert experience has unfolded in the biblical tradition and been lived within the Christian and Franciscan tradition, we will evaluate its place within the process of conversion of heart. Special emphasis will be given to the current rediscovery of the eremitical dimension of Franciscan spirituality with particular emphasis on the TOR tradition. This will be examined and assessed in order to establish a sound foundation in the biblical/Christian/Franciscan tradition for a relevant eremitical expression today within the congregation of Franciscan Minor Sisters. Central to this foundation in both theory and practice is the evaluation of the way in which the biblical understanding of heart is fundamental for achieving an active-contemplative synthesis.

1.3 Central Theoretical Argument

Seeking the integration of an active-contemplative rhythm in contrast to an *either/or* situation in both personal and communal circumstances, we will argue that the biblical understanding of heart has universal relevance for arriving at a synthesis in a new expression of the TOR *charism* based on the writings and lived experience of St. Francis of Assisi. We will further argue that it is too restrictive to interpret the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10: 38-42) in such a way that it may be concluded that one type of life is superior to another.

We also want to show that while recent Franciscan research states that Francis succeeded in absorbing some of the rules and customs of the traditional eremitical life, he also made a unique and original contribution, especially in the alternation of roles of Martha and Mary, expressing the unity of action and contemplation. (Raymundo, 1995:96.) This study seeks to present the heart and its conversion, especially in the experiences of desert, as the basis for a true integration of action and contemplation as symbolised in the Gospel story of Martha and Mary.

1.4 Methodology

We will work within the Catholic Tradition with special emphasis on Franciscan spirituality. An analytical and interpretative method will be used to examine the words 'heart' 'desert' and 'conversion' in their historical context. We will explore these concepts in both sacred and secular literature to investigate and evaluate the extent to

which the heart speaks a universal language and the way in which it is affected by 'desert' experiences in the journey of conversion and transformation.

Visits to existing hermitage locations and a forty-day hermitage experience - symbolic of the biblical forty days of Jesus in the desert and the many forty-day desert experiences of St. Francis - will form part of the exploration and evaluation to establish the originality of the Franciscan expression of the eremitical life. There is a challenge to rediscover and adapt the insights of Francis for a twenty-first century expression within the TOR tradition.

The Bible and the Writings of St. Francis will be primary sources. Events and consequences will be studied to locate the centrality of the heart and the effects of solitude/desert experiences in shaping Francis and the spirituality that is his legacy. The biographies for Francis' life and other secondary sources from sacred and secular literature will be studied. Recent research into the eremitical expression of Franciscan spirituality will be examined and taken into account in developing a new expression and ministry within the Franciscan Minor Sisters. It is hoped that in researching and developing a biblical/Franciscan spirituality of the heart, a practical strategy can be framed which will help to establish the desired active-contemplative synthesis.

1.5 Classification of Chapters

This thesis explores and develops a spirituality of the heart in the context of the Franciscan eremitical tradition. Beginning with an overview of the heart as a universal symbol, chapter two analyses the place of the heart in different creeds, cultures and ages. In so doing, art, music, poetry and prose are examined but a thorough investigation of each is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, general themes relating to the whole are chosen and presented in the light of the spirituality of St. Francis.

The third chapter explores the biblical understanding of the heart and the way in which this word embraces the totality of the person within the mystery of freedom and grace. The emphasis on relationships, in the context of the covenant and *chesed* reveals not only the heart of the human person but also the heart of God. We also analyse the way in which the desert influences the process of conversion of heart to understand more fully the meaning and purpose of conversion in the life of Francis and his followers. Chapter four continues the exploration of these same themes as revealed in

the life of Jesus, the Word made flesh, thus emphasising the place of the word which is sown in the soil of the heart, culminating in the possibility and invitation to every person to become a unique word of God, created in His image and likeness and destined to enjoy the fullness of life and love in him.

The Fathers of the Church, deeply rooted in Scripture, preserve and develop the living tradition, emphasising the truth stated in Genesis 1: 26, that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Bunge (2002:12) states that the human person "is designed with a view to becoming". It is in the journey of the heart that a person becomes, or fails to become, the person one is called to become in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the Fathers give a prominent place in their teaching to the heart and its whereabouts. This is our concern in chapter five as we analyse the various teachings on the heart as they relate to the focus of our study on heart, desert and conversion and the ways in which these are inter-related. This prepares the way to study in depth the way in which St. Francis built his life on a sound biblical and patristic foundation in a way that was, and continues to be, a unique and original spirituality within the Church.

In chapter six the life and writings of St. Francis take us on a journey of the heart that embraces the whole of life. Here we explore what the word heart meant for Francis and how his understanding of this word changed and developed in relation to his experience of himself, other people, the world and God. From his writings and the biographies and other early sources for his life, we try to determine some of the factors that shaped the journey of his own heart and its formation. Particular attention is given to the eremitical dimension in the life of Francis and the way in which this experience developed an original form within Franciscan spirituality, integrating in a special way the Martha-Mary dimension in a synthesis of contemplation and compassion.

Chapter seven briefly spans the history and development of the TOR *charism*, especially since the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church. This research falls within this continuing development of the *charism* in our focus on a spirituality of the heart in the context of the Franciscan eremitical tradition. In bringing the research to a practical outcome, we present the rationale for the new expression of the *charism* in the new building called The Portiuncula. The rhythm and lifestyle envisaged is rooted in the life experience and example of Jesus and in the spirit of St. Francis who followed so closely in the footprints of Jesus.

1.6 Conclusion and Findings

Our findings and conclusion suggest that this is a timely piece of research both theoretically and practically, responding to the most recent documents on Consecrated Life. In *Vita Consecrata*, addressed to Religious, Pope John Paul II (1996) emphasises not only fidelity to the founding *charism*, but also creativity in interpreting it for present day needs. In this way, the Pope says;

Through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery of the Church shine forth, and in so doing have contributed to the renewal of society. (No.1)

In a more recent document, *Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium. Starting Afresh from Christ*, Pope John Paul II (2002:8-9), once again confirms the giftedness of Religious Life and specific *charisms*. He maintains that this way of life in its Gospel proclamation of an alternative way of living is “a spiritual therapy for the evils of our time”. An alternative way of living by way of the beatitudes is dependent upon conversion of heart; hence the urgent need to enter the heart and the journey through the desert experiences of life involved in its formation and transformation. We believe that one Gospel way to facilitate this turning to God and Gospel values is a deeper understanding and undertaking of the journey of the heart within an active-contemplative rhythm and lifestyle.

In making this journey of the heart there is a call to discover one's true identity and uniqueness in the realm of mystery, freedom and grace, leading to greater wholeness and integration in a life of love. Our Conclusion will summarize our findings and at the beginning of this new millennium, point the way forward to a new initiative within one branch of the Franciscan family. Included as Appendices are a list of Scripture and Franciscan abbreviations used in our text, a complete text of St. Francis' Rule for Hermitages, a brief explanation of specific symbols, and a plan and photograph of the new building, concomitant with this research: The Portiuncula.

Chapter 2: The Heart As A Universal Symbol

2.1 Introduction

To speak of the heart is to speak a universal language. Here we are in the realm of symbol and of mystery, and of freedom and grace. Godwin (2002:13) says that “in the chronicle of our species, ever since we acquired speech and symbols, the imaginative place accorded to the heart can tell you a great deal about how a people defines itself and what it holds sacred”. Our exploration in this study centres on the biblical understanding of the heart and the part played by the desert in its conversion, formation and transformation.

The symbol of the heart is an all-embracing one and is foundational in Franciscan spirituality. To enter the depths of the biblical understanding and the challenge it proposes for the twenty first century we will try, first of all, to present the symbol of the heart in its universal appeal and the way in which the desert theme is intricately connected to it. Beginning with a definition of symbol and symbolism, we will examine briefly some relevant examples from poetry, prose, art and music, demonstrating the universality of the symbol of the heart in the wider context of humanity as a whole.

2.2 Symbol and Symbolism

The word symbol derives from the Greek *sym*, meaning with or together, and *bollein*, meaning to throw or to draw. Recognising the implications of this definition, (May 1979:267) states that the symbol “draws together and unites an experience. It bridges inescapable antinomies of life - conscious and unconscious, reason and emotion, individual and society, history and the present”, and he argues that individual and community values are rooted in symbol and myth. Bridging the “inescapable antinomies of life” in the context of this study, typified in the biblical story of Martha and Mary in Luke's Gospel 10:38-42, we present the heart as the place where apparent contradictions are held together in an attitude of both/and rather than either/or. This is where the symbol is pivotal, especially the symbol of the heart in its universal application and relevance. Nguyen Van Si (1995: 232) makes the following point:

Contrary to what Freud thought, the meaning of the symbol does not consist in a simple evocation of the past but must be sought instead in the expression of a spiritual connection. A symbol anticipates the purpose for which it is intended and expresses in some way the yearnings that inspire the soul in its spiritual quest.

The anticipation, the expectation, the yearning and the challenge involved in the process of making the desired spiritual connection is summed up by Nguyen Van Si (1995:232) in his quotation from the work of Jung:

A symbol is living only when, for the spectator, it is the supreme expression of what is presented but not yet recognized. It urges the unconscious to participate. It begets life and stimulates its development.

May (1982:111) maintains that "symbols are not only helpful but absolutely necessary for human functioning", yet he also gives the warning that a symbol may be taken as the reality it represents, instead of the mystery to which it connects. When this happens, a symbol may become a "psychic landmine that the ego generates to protect its territory". The consequences of embarking on the journey of the heart through the language of symbol and persevering in it, is the challenge to live with the mystery and the paradox and at the same time to have "Martha and Mary work together" (Smith 1978: 147), that is the integration of the active and contemplative dimensions within each person. This is seen most clearly in the life of Christ and his followers, notably the Fathers of the Church and St. Francis in particular.

Emphasising the importance of the symbol, Rohr (2000) in a series of taped lectures entitled *Spirit, Soul and Society* maintains that many of the religious symbols of the Christian churches no longer speak to the majority. At the beginning of this new millennium we propose that the word heart carries the promise of an awakening at a personal and communal level in a spirituality that has the potential to lead to wholeness and integration. Such a journey to the centre, which we understand to be the very core of the person, holds the potential of discovering both oneself and God.

The language of symbolism has always been seen as a pathway to the divine, having the power to give access to mystery and transcendence. St. John (1979:193) claims, "the heart embraces the divine in and through the symbol". Such an exploration will involve what Fischer (1983: 1) describes as "the struggle to return to a new yet ancient way of experiencing and knowing". There is, therefore, a challenge to present the heart as a universal symbol that evokes a response and engagement at the level of individual, of community and of society, potentially making present a divine-human encounter that is potentially transformative.

2.3 The symbol of the heart

Heart is a word with tremendous potential to carry the weight of symbolic consciousness. Godwin (2002: 81) speaks of the heart as “a pure protean marvel”. She elaborates by saying:

The heart is mouth and ears and eyes. It is a dwelling with a door of its own, on which truth can knock, enter, illumine with the light of certainty, and rain down gentleness within. A heart can be tested, crushed, darkened, broken, hurled hither and thither, taken hold of, pegged down, made to stand still, inebriated, and impregnated by the Spirit. It can pant with anxiety and seethe with feverish, corruptive thoughts, or be the starting place for our climb of the upward paths, singing our songs of ascent.

This description illustrates that heart is a word that captures the imagination in all spheres of life - the sensual, the emotional, the rational, the spiritual. It is a symbol understood in all creeds and cultures. It is through this universal language of the heart that we present the possibility of holding together the many and varied dimensions of life and human development.

The sacred and secular, music and art, poetry and prose, all choose the heart as the symbol of communication and revelation. Yet Finley (1978: 124) quotes Merton as saying that the main function of the symbol is not communication but communion. “The function of the symbol is to manifest a union that already exists but it is not fully realized. The symbol awakens or restores it”. The symbol of the heart, therefore, is recognised as the hidden centre that determines every aspect of life and love and of death and destruction. Rahner (1967 (b):323) describes heart as a primordial word “one of the words in which man, knowing himself, expresses the mystery of his existence without solving that mystery”. Our study will take us deeper into this mystery as we explore the unique place the heart has held and continues to hold in the story of human civilisation.

Heart defies all boundaries and spans all ages. Godwin (2002: 13) reminds us of the Aztecs, the alchemists and the Tantrics in the connections they make between the heart and sun-enlightenment. The former believed that “the heart was the body’s sun”, the alchemists of the Middle Ages believed “the heart represented the image of the sun within a human being” and for the practitioner of Buddhist Tantric yoga “the heart level represents that advanced achievement of consciousness, where, for the first time,

a light is lit in the heart". The search for understanding and enlightenment is an ongoing quest, the fulfilment of which is located in the heart, the seat of consciousness. Rohr (1999:49) maintains:

Great religion seeks utter awareness and full consciousness, so that I can, in fact, receive all. Everything belongs and everything can be received. I don't have to deny, I don't have to dismiss, defy or ignore. What is, is okay. *What is, is the great teacher.*

Doino (1994:146) says that "consciousness as a word and as a dynamic reality has entered our Christian lexicon in new and unusual ways". Providing and facilitating a place for solitude and reflection may be one way to invite people to embark on the journey of the heart, evoking a heightened and perhaps alternative consciousness, leading to wholeness and integration, based on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II, a prolific writer on philosophical, theological and literary themes, develops his insights about the human person in terms of a philosophy of consciousness that is captured in the symbol of the heart. In his encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (8), he says:

In its penetrating analysis of "the modern world", the Second Vatican Council reached that most important point of the visible world that is man, by penetrating like Christ the depth of human consciousness and by making contact with the inward mystery of man, which in Biblical and non-Biblical language is expressed by the word "heart". Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his "heart".

This accords with the observation of McGinn (2000:xvii-xviii) when speaking of attempts to analyse mystical experience "...we can welcome the suggestions of some recent investigations to have found the term 'consciousness' a more precise and fruitful category than 'experience'. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the implications of the many types of religious experience and religious language. We limit our study to the symbolic language of the heart and its relationship to the desert and conversion in the mystery of freedom and grace in the context of the Franciscan eremiticism in fraternity.

Delio's (1999:300) observation about the shift in consciousness from the first to the second axial period is relevant in this context. "In the first axial period, the human person as a rational, individual, and autonomous being emerged; in the second axial period, the person as one who is relational and interconnected is becoming more evident". Delio emphasizes that people of the second axial period are "characterized ultimately by relationship". This research endeavours to reach a new depth of understanding of the tremendous challenges that emerge in the shift of consciousness in a global perspective. Delio says:

The follower of Christ must seek the path of salvation that touches upon the whole of humanity, nurtures sensitivity to nature and a relation to the cosmos, and is dialogical with other religions and cultures. In this respect, to speak of Franciscan life in the second axial period is to speak of a new way of living the gospel life and of following Christ... It is here, I believe, that Francis's Christ mysticism has much to offer.

Franciscan life is Gospel life; therefore, there is a challenge to develop what the biblical authors understood as the knowledge of the heart. Godwin (2000:15) refers to the necessity of developing "a new consciousness of the heart". This supports our thesis that the heart is a symbol of universal relevance and is timeless in its power to communicate and reveal every aspect of experience, as we know it. Touching reality in all its dimensions and structures, the heart is a possible pathway to global consciousness where each person is open to relationship with him/herself, with others, with the universe and God.

2.4 Symbolic heart language in art

According to the research of Godwin (2000:16-18) there are four theories supporting the symbolic heart shape, as we now know it. The first relates to the theory of some mythologists who claim that the shape evolves from the ivy leaf that was a symbol of friendship, fidelity and immortality in ancient times. This is a significant observation for our study because of the positive qualities of the heart, especially those inherent in the biblical notion of *chesed*.

The second theory derives from a prehistoric cave drawing of an elephant's heart dating back to 10,000 B.C. the shape of which would have been familiar to the hunter who killed, dissected and ate the animal and then painted the heart in red at the spot

where presumably the heart had been. Godwin (2002:17) links this oldest painting of the symbolic heart to the "timeless creativity" within the human being. This accords with our premise that there is a sense of mystery and awe when we approach the symbol of the heart, understood as the unrepeatability uniqueness of each human being, created in the image and likeness of God. This uniqueness invites a free and creative response from every person thus created.

The third theory derives from the Pythagorean philosopher, Philolaus (b.circa 470 B.C.) quoted by Godwin (2002:18). Philolaus made an interesting association between the shape of the human heart and the human face. A modern author, Obbard (1996:81) makes a similar observation saying: "While the symbol of the heart is universal, the face is always particular. The heart is the 'eternal face' ". The Bible in the Book of Ecclesiasticus (13:25-26) links the heart and the face saying: "A person's heart moulds his expression whether for better or worse. Happy heart, cheerful expression". (Bible, 1994:1096.) A similar observation is made by Mr. Pecksniff in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (Dickens, 1994:385): "Features are the index to the heart"; and Shakespeare gives a similar message in *The Winter's Tale* when Polixenes in a convincing conversation with Camillo about the jealousy of Leontes says: "I saw his heart in's face" (Act 1: 11). In *Macbeth* (Act 1: 7), we glimpse the reality of face and heart in collusion with falsehood. "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" and in *Romeo and Juliet* also we read that the face may conceal a devious heart. Juliet speaks these words (Act 111:11): "O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!" In *Hamlet* the poignant question is asked of Laertes: "Laertes, was your father dear to you? Or are you like the painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart?" (Act IV: VII.) This confirms our belief that God alone knows the heart and its outward manifestation is not always in accord with its inner motivations and reality.

Godwin (2002: 252-259) devotes a special section in her book to the heart pictures of the artist, Paul Klee, who lived 1879-1940. She mentions two of Klee's heart-face paintings entitled: "The Puppet Theatre" and the "Arab Song", and she describes Klee as "the living embodiment of a Person of Heart". Referring to his realization "that the heart was his vital principle" and referring to his painting style Godwin quotes him as saying:

Some will not recognize the truthfulness of my mirror.
Let them remember that I am not here to reflect the surface (this
can be done on photographic plate), but must penetrate inside. My
mirror probes down to the heart.

On the one hand this supports our view that the heart represents the inner, vital core of the person and, in probing the depths, mirrors the truth in all its beauty and ugliness. On the other hand is the view that the artist cannot capture what is deep within the person. Shakespeare for example in *Sonnet Twenty-four* implies that the artist can work only from what is seen with the physical eye, while the heart remains hidden from view:

Mine eye hath play'd the painter and hath stell'd
Thy beauty's form in table of my heart;
My body is the frame wherein 'tis held,
And perspective it is best painter's art.
For through the painter must you see his skill,
To find where your true image pictured lies;
Which in my bosom's shop is hanging still,
That hath his windows glazed with thine eyes.
Now see what good turns eyes for eyes have done:
Mine eyes have drawn thy shape, and thine for me
Are windows to my breast, where-through the sun
Delights to peep, to gaze thereon on thee;
Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art;
They draw but what they see, know not the heart.

The positive and negative aspects, whether visible or hidden within the heart, when discovered, have to be faced, owned and where necessary, converted and transformed. The desert has a significant part to play in this revelation and transformation because as Eliot (1988:74) points out in *Choruses from The "Rock"*, the world may change but the struggle is perennial.

The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil. (Eliot: 1988:74)

Commenting on one of Klee's last great paintings, *Hibernation*, Godwin (2002:258) remarks on the contrasts found in this work encompassing a single, red, shaped heart in the womb. She suggests that it would make a fitting cover for Teilhard de Chardin's book, *Heart of Matter* (1978). In the context of this study, this is significant because Teilhard was greatly influenced by the symbol of the heart. He, too, tried to show the power of this symbol in a universal and cosmic sense. King (1999: 468) points out that at the beginning, Teilhard's devotion to the heart was focused primarily on the humanity of Jesus but it extended and developed into an all-encompassing symbol for the love of God, revealed and communicated through the heart of the God-man, Jesus Christ, and bringing unity not only to the human person but to the whole of created reality.

Initially, devotion to the heart expressed Teilhard's attachment to the concrete reality of Jesus' humanity, but this heart soon became a universal, cosmic heart, the heart of God at the centre of all things, the divine presence understood as the universal, cosmic Christ who, without losing any of his human particularity, is Christ-Omega in whom all realities will be gathered together in an immense process of final unification and completion. Thus the Sacred Heart is for Teilhard the human heart of Jesus, the heart of the risen Christ radiating with the fire of love, the centre of the cosmic Christ as 'the heart of matter', but also a heart that communicates itself through its presence in the Eucharist. All these are different aspects of the same dynamic, loving centre, the Heart of the Lord, which is what is deepest in Him.

The implication of this universal understanding and application is far-reaching for every human being and for the whole of creation, reflecting as it does the biblical and Franciscan approach to reality. Something of this inclusiveness is depicted in a unique mural in a chapel in California. The artist is Michael Dvortsak who in this mural places emphasis on the heart as a symbol of harmony and wholeness. Maloney (1974:141-142) describes it thus:

The whole life cycle is shown to come forth from Christ, through Him and in Him, starting with the individual unicell of life, to the union of sperm and ovum, to the formation of the foetus. From the mountains and valleys making up man's complicated inner, physical world, to the planets and galaxies of outer space, all things sweep out and down in the shape of a human heart from

the head of Christ, back up from the bottom through the figure of Christ.

An artistic representation, whether simple or complex, may be the means of perceiving an underlying theological reality leading to a mystical experience. This in turn may be the means of a shift in consciousness leading to greater wholeness and maturity.

The fourth theory Godwin (2002:18) mentions relates to the symbolic shape of the heart as a "figurative symbol for male and female. It represents the yang and the yin, the bisexual nature of the heart, as mentioned by Aristotle". The reality of holding together apparent opposites within the heart, contributes to our thesis of a *both/and* approach to the active-contemplative synthesis rather than an *either/or* approach. In developing the full potential of the human person.

McBride (1991:190), quoting from a letter written by the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh to his brother, Theo, focuses on the heart as the place of revelation, communication and love.

"What I want to aim at is this. I want to do drawings which touch people. I want to progress so far that people will say of my work: he feels deeply, he feels tenderly. What am I in most people's eyes? A nonentity, somebody who has no position in society and never will have. Very well then, I should want my work to show what is in the heart of such a nobody. This is my ambition which, in spite of everything is founded less on anger than on love".

It is interesting that Klee resonated with Van Gogh stating that he had "more and more confidence in him... he was able to reach deep, very deep, into his own heart" (Godwin 2001:254). If Van Gogh had lived to hear those words of a fellow artist, he would have had the satisfaction of a mission fulfilled - something that did not happen in his lifetime. We leave it to others to develop the theme of the heart through art; we merely wish to point to the medium of art as having universal significance, reflecting the divine and the human in symbolic form. Such representations may give deep insight into life and relationships but in the divine-human encounter all efforts to adequately describe the experience fall short.

2.5 The heart and music

While art makes demands on the eye, music makes demands on the ear and both modes of perception are closely linked to the heart as the seat of emotion. In the context of this study we are interested in music and the heart because of the obvious link between music, rhythm and harmony, and at times lack of harmony - all of which are expressed in music. Often in the works of the great composers we can sense the inner battle within the heart being expressed in musical terms. We have only to listen to Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* to sense the intensity of his inner struggles.

In Mozart's *Arias Mentre ti lascio* we are told of heartache and heartbreak - aspects of both the physical, located "in my bosom", and the symbolic heart, capable of "breaking".

As I leave you, my dear daughter,
my heart aches in my bosom,
my heart aches, aches in my bosom.....
Oh, God, what bitter sorrow!
Oh, my heart is breaking...

The physical heart with its felt heartbeat is the theme of Irving Berlin's *Heaven*: "Heaven - I'm in heaven -And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak". But it is not only the ecstasy of joy that music speaks of, weariness of heart is captured in Emily Dickinson's poem *Heart Not So Heavy As Mine* which has been put to music by Elliott Cook Carter (Lieder's Index).

Heart, wending late home, as it passed my window, whistled itself a tune,
Not so heavy as mine, whistled itself a tune,
Yet to my ear an anodyne so sweet,
It was as if a bobolink, carolled and mused and carolled, then bubbled slowly away.
It was as if, as if a chirping brook up on a toilsome way,
Up on a toilsome way was set bleeding feet to minuets, to minuets,
Set bleeding feet to minuets without the knowing, without the knowing why.
Heart not so heavy, tomorrow, night will come again, weary perhaps and sore.
Ah, bugle, bugle by my window, I pray you stroll, stroll once more!

The power of music to affect and express the inner dispositions of the heart is well recognized. Examples abound from both secular and sacred music. Here we can only briefly point not only to great composers like Beethoven and Mozart, but also to

composers of modern times like Carter already referred to, and Vaughan Williams who composed music for *With Rue my Heart is Laden* and who also set to music the text by Thomas Campion (Lieder's Composers) entitled *Heart's Music*, emphasising the effect of music on the changing emotions of the human heart, culminating in the primacy of love.

Tune thy music to thy heart;
Sing thy joy with thanks, and so thy sorrow.
Though devotion needs not art,
Sometime of the poor the rich may borrow.

Strive not yet for curious ways;
Concord pleaseth more the less 'tis strained.
Zeal affects not outward praise,
Only strives to show a love unfeigned.

Love can wondrous things effect,
Sweetest sacrifice all wrath appeasing.
Love the highest doth respect,
Love alone to Him is ever pleasing.

The works of the great composers were often of a religious nature. We think of St. Matthew's Passion by Bach and revived by Mendelssohn, Handel's Messiah, Haydn's Creation - all retelling in and through music the greatest passion in the heart of God, creator, redeemer and lover of all that He has created. Popular sacred hymns take up this theme, as any hymnbook will illustrate.

From the great composers to the popular and passing songs of different eras, words and titles of songs give an indication of the central place the heart holds. Often it is the emotional aspects that are stressed in music and song but the consequences of decisions made within the heart reveal the human condition as it is. The religious, political, social and economic situations are often reflected in the music of a given time but there is a sense in which the heart, as a universal symbol, has always been the place to hold all these experiences together. Even in music, there is emphasis on the necessity of solitude, of the hermitage experience. John Ireland (Lieder Index) has a series of six Songs entitled *Hermit Songs*. The final song speaks of the need and the desire of the heart to be alone and to experience the reality of one's own innate aloneness, which we carry within us through the journey of life.

The Desire for Hermitage

Ah! To be all alone in a little cell
with nobody near me;
beloved that pilgrimage before the last pilgrimage to death.
Singing the passing hours to cloudy Heaven;
Feeding upon dry bread and water from the cold spring.
That will be an end to evil when I am alone
in a lovely little corner among tombs
far from the houses of the great.
Ah! To be all alone in a little cell, to be alone, all alone:
Alone I came into the world
alone I shall go from it.

It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate further our theme of the heart in musical language or to analyse it in depth; we simply point to the heart as an enduring symbol, understood in every age and in every language, and the place of the desert experience in the heart's journey. Having seen poetic texts set to music, we glimpse the close connection there is between the two as we seek to understand the all-embracing and universal language of the heart.

2.6 The heart and literature and poetry

In reviewing books on the heart, Godwin (2002:119-121) sums up what these books on the heart have in common and she concludes that theirs is a "call for a coherent culture in which mind and heart are partners, not competitors in perception". She draws our attention to Nager's conviction about the future task of medicine being the combining of cardiology and cordiology in "the symbolic language of the heart".

Describing the cardiological heart she says:

The *cardiological* heart pumps, fails, depolarises and repolarizes, fibrillates, is palpated, auscultated, electrocardiographed and echocardiographed, catheterised, biopsied, digitalized, computer tomographed, fibrinolysed, compensated and transplanted.

She contrasts this with the cardiological heart, which she describes as follows:

The *cardiological* heart sings, laughs, rejoices, cries, awakes,
flourishes, complains, trembles, shatters, bleeds, languishes,
breaks...

Making room for myth and symbol can enable us to see how one
thing depends on another... Cordiology could show us that
cardiology is part of a network of correspondences, analogies and
deeper relationships of which, up to now, too little account has
been taken.

It is hoped that in researching the symbolic language of the heart we will analyse, interpret and present some of these deeper relationships showing the universality of its appeal throughout the ages with renewed relevance for today. Beer (1978: 6-10) in comparing and contrasting some of the well known literary artists in their references to the heart, states:

In Burns, as in Rousseau or Sterne, acknowledgement of the
heart's claims is a touchstone of one's humanity... In Burns, it is
the badge of a common humanity; in Cowper it is the focus of a
quietist religious position, combining love of liberty, love of order
and cultivation of the domestic virtues. Wordsworth, who came to
see how a rage for liberty might threaten order and the domestic
virtues, was thrown more sharply upon his own individual
experiences in order to find a mode of mediation between forces
which he had seen raging at large, in nature and human nature
alike, and which he also recognised as warring energies in his own
self.

Our general overview will concentrate more particularly on the biblical and patristic themes found in the writings of St. Francis and pertinent to our present enquiry. These themes, in general, include the many faceted descriptions of the heart not only as a physical organ but as thinking, feeling and willing in realms both positive and negative. Our exploration through literature and poetry will lead us in a special way to the desert and its impact and consequences in the journey of the heart.

2.7 Heart as a physical organ

As a physical organ, the heart is presented in the “oldest known story in the world” (Godwin 2002:19-24): the Sumnerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* which dates from 1850 B.C. According to Godwin, the heart is presented in this epic both as a physical organ and as the seat of the emotions. Our interest in this sub-section is the heart as a physical organ and as such, a life-giving centre, located though hidden, capable of feeling not only the beat and throb of the heart's rhythm but the physical suffering of disease or disorder.

In Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (Act 111:11), Troilus says: “My heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse”. In *Titus Andronicus* (Act 111:11), Titus describes the sheer physicality of the experience within saying: “my poor heart beats with outrageous beating”. According to Beer (1978:6) the poet Burns had “a strong sense of the heart's actual physical working” and he supports this statement by quoting Burns thus: “The life-blood streaming thro' my heart”.

Absence of the normal physical health of the heart is averted to in *King Richard 11*, on the lips of King Edward: “A pleasing cordial, princely Buckingham, is this thy vow unto my sickly heart”; and in *The Third Part of King Henry VI* (Act V:11), Warwick says: “My blood, my want of strength, my sick heart shows that I must yield my body to the earth”. Without doubt, Shakespeare highlights the physical heart as the life force within the body, which is vulnerable to human weakness, sickness and physical acts of violence. When the heart stops beating, life ceases to be. As Godwin observes, quoting from the *Epic*: “He touched Enkidu's heart but it did not beat, nor did Enkidu lift his eyes again. So Gilgamesh laid a veil, as one veils a bride, over his friend”.

In *Macbeth* (Act 1: 3), Shakespeare locates the place of the heart within the rib cage. “And make my seated heart knock at my ribs”, similar to Titus in *Titus Andronicus*, (Act 111.Scene11), referring to his beating heart within “this hollow prison of my flesh”. Yet location in itself does not imply physical sight of the physical organ of the heart.

Literary artists more often refer to the hiddenness of the heart. Hopkins (1963:30), in the poem *Windhover*, speaks of “my heart in hiding stirred”, and In *Evening Solace*, (Kaplan: 1992) Charlotte Bronte says: “The human heart has hidden treasures, in secret kept, in silence sealed”. Yet not all the treasures hidden in the heart are precious and positive in nature. In Dickens' novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1994: 464) Mrs. Gamp says: “We never knows wot's hidden in each other's hearts; and if we had glass

winders there, we'd need keep the shutters up, some of us, I do assure you!" There is ambiguity and paradox relating to the revelatory nature of the heart. The Jewish poet and philosopher, Ha-Levi Judah, expresses this well in *The Kuzari*, (Knowles: 1999) "Israel amidst the nations is like the heart amidst the organs; it is more sick and most healthy of them all".

Godwin (2002:23-28) also visits the Egyptian *The Book of the Dead*, dating from 4500 B.C. In this work, the heart as a physical organ is associated not only with life in the here and now but also with life hereafter; therefore, the Egyptians ensured that the physical organ was greatly cared for after death. It is only if the heart "the source of his being" survives the final trial of justice that the person may enter the company of the gods. Godwin speaks of this "trial of the heart" thus:

The dead man's heart, represented by an urn, was placed on the left-hand scale; an ostrich feather, symbol of truth and justice, was placed on the right-hand scale. The jackal-headed Anubis, judge of the dead, kneels ready to weigh the heart. The monster Ammit, 'eater of the dead', part hippopotamus, part lion, and part crocodile, stands by, ready to devour the deceased's heart if it 'found to be wanting'.

When the heart is "found to be wanting" there is imbalance with far-reaching consequences. But when the heart is balanced and integrated, justice reigns in right relationships with God, with other people, oneself and the whole of created reality. The hiddenness and inaccessibility of the human heart as a physical organ thus reveals itself in living qualities that spring from the heart and manifest it in life and relationships - the outward expression of the inward reality. Therefore, literary artists often speak in terms that reflect the biblical understanding in its all-embracing understanding of the heart, not only as a physical organ but most often the seat of emotion, thinking and willing.

2.8 The heart as the seat of the emotions

Great works of literature and poetry give vivid expression to the height and depth of emotional intensity experienced within the heart. Examples abound which speak eloquently the language of the heart. Each work we cite could form a study on its own, suffice it here to focus on the heart in general terms dictated by the themes in our chosen biblical and Franciscan writings. These will show the universality of the

language of the heart in its universal and symbolic sense as the seat of the emotional life.

The heart is spoken of not only as a physical organ - beating, throbbing, stopping, hidden and inaccessible but also, symbolically, it is capable of being emotionally broken, battered, bruised, pierced, aching and torn. The force of emotion may cause the heart to be dark, blind, hard, heavy, mean, murderous, deceitful, envious, twisted, anguished, fearful, and faithless. It can also be joyful, glad, dancing, large, heroic, repenting, consenting, desiring, merciful, sad, strong, courageous, pure and adoring.

Concentrating first on the positive emotions of the heart, we single out the emotion of love and the manifold way a heart filled with love expresses itself. Johnston (1981:171) describes love as "the deepest reality of the human heart", therefore, identifying the heart with love seems the most natural thing in the world, yet in that very statement we are in the realm of mystery, paradox, freedom and grace. It is worth quoting in length from the psychiatrist, Jung (1971:387).

In my medical experience as well as in my own life I have again and again been faced with the mystery of love, and have never been able to explain what it is. Like Job, I had to "lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer." (Job 40:4f) Here is the greatest and smallest, the remotest and nearest, the highest and lowest, and we cannot discuss one side of it without also discussing the other. No language is adequate to this paradox. Whatever one can say, no words express the whole. To speak of partial aspects is always too much or too little, for only the whole is meaningful. Love "bears all things" and "endures all things" (1Cor.13: 7). These words say all there is to be said; nothing can be added to them. For we are in the deepest sense the victims and the instruments of cosmogonic "love". I put the word in quotation marks to indicate that I do not use it in its connotations of desiring, preferring, favouring, wishing, and similar feelings, but as something superior to the individual, a unified and undivided whole. Being a part, man cannot grasp the whole. He is at its mercy. He may assent to it, or rebel against it; but he is always caught up by it and enclosed within it. He is dependent upon it and is sustained by it. Love is his light and his darkness, whose end he cannot see. "Love ceases not" - whether he speaks with the "tongues of angels", or with scientific exactitude traces the life of the cell down to its utmost source. Man can try to name love, showering upon it all the names at his command, and

still he will involve himself in endless self-deceptions. If he possesses a grain of wisdom, he will lay down his arms and name the unknown by the name unknown, *ignotum per ignotius* - that is, by the name of God.

In attempting to enter the mystery of the heart through the emotion of love we begin with that master of the heart, William Shakespeare, whose plays and poetry capture all the nuances of the heart's journey through agony and ecstasy from birth to death. Truly the dwelling place of love, in *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare has Imogen describe her heart as "the innocent mansion of my love" (Act111. Scene IV), reminiscent of the great St. Teresa of Avila (Burrows, 1982) and her image of the human person as an interior castle where many mansions are explored until one reaches the innermost mansion where love is experienced as union. This love is all-embracing and the cause of both pain and promise, suffering and joy, "by, in and without", in the words of Moth in *Love's Labour Lost*; "by heart you love her, because your heart cannot come to her; in heart you love her, because your heart is in love with her; and out of heart you love her, being out of heart that you cannot enjoy her". (Act111. Scene 1.)

At times the heart expresses itself in an ecstasy of joy and gladness. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Julia says, "Inward joy enforc'd my heart to smile!" (Act 1 Scene11.) And in *Julius Caesar* (Act V Scene V) we hear Brutus reflecting on the cause of his heart's joy: "My heart doth joy that yet in all my life I found no man but he was true to me". The intensity of joy may even cause the heart to ache as Keats so ardently states in *Ode to a Nightingale* (Albery, 2001:134).

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness -
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beeches green, and shadows numberless,
Singer of Summer in full-throated ease.

In this poem Keats reveals his heart as the place where joy and pain are inextricably mixed. This he conveys not in philosophical or theological language but in the language of the heart as the seat of the emotions. His aching heart and drowsy

numbness are caused not by the absence of emotion but by the excess of it. We are reminded of the experience of St. Francis on Mount La Verna when he received the stigmata. Such excess of emotion is also spoken of in the negative experience of an evil heart where love is absent or selfish and misguided.

The forces and energies of evil, deep within the heart, manifest themselves in excesses of evil attitudes and behaviour. Shakespeare, in *Measure for Measure* (Act 11 Scene IV), has Angelo describe the “strong and swelling evil” in his heart. In *As You Like It*, Silvius rationalizes a hardened heart: “The common executioner, whose heart the accustom'd sight of death makes hard”. A heart full of selfish ambition and intrigue will go to any lengths to achieve the desired goal. In highlighting Henry James' novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Godwin (2002:152-160) enumerates the signs of heartlessness in the character of Gilbert Osmond. The drive for power is masked under the pretension of qualities of heart. The temptation to the inordinate drive for power and its effects on the heart is a perennial problem which Jesus himself faced in the desert. It is a challenge that presents itself in a myriad of forms within the human person's heart, evidenced in the course of human history and not restricted to any time or place.

The effects of inordinate power-seeking and intrigue is clearly stated by the physician, Cornelius, addressing the wicked Queen in *Cymbeline*, (Act 1 Scene V) : “Your highness shall from this practice but make hard your heart”. Dromio S. in *The Comedy of Errors* (Act IV Scene 11), when asked about his master's whereabouts and dispositions says: “ A devil in an everlasting garment hath him, One whose hard heart is button'd up with steel”. Such a cold, hard heart is one without feeling, sensitivity and mercy. It is quite the opposite of Blake's assertion in his poem *The Divine Image* (Hayward, 1987:240) that “mercy has a human heart”. A heart without love and mercy is a heart in darkness.

Godwin (2002:168) points out that the term “heart of darkness” commonly used by travellers in the nineteenth century, eventually developed a psychological meaning after the publication of Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* in 1899, (1973) which Godwin describes as “man's descent into his darkest possibilities”. Linking this novel with the emergence of twentieth century depth psychology, Godwin says “the term began to be used to refer to the dark place in you or me where the light of consciousness has yet to shine”. This is an important observation in the context of this study because of our emphasis on the stages and development of consciousness in the process of the

heart's conversion and transformation, which we will explore more extensively in chapter seven.

At the end of William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies* (1976:223), we read the heart-rending words: "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy". The progression into deeper darkness is vividly portrayed in Golding's novel, leaving us in no doubt about the mystery of iniquity within the human heart. Such darkness is equivalent to blindness, a theme that many of the great literary artists link to the heart as the seat of thinking and willing where plans, plots and decisions are conceived.

2.9 The heart as the seat of thinking and willing

Speaking of the heart through time, Godwin (2002:14) quotes the Swiss psychiatrist Jung and his conversation with a Pueblo Indian chief. This conversation is recorded in Jung's biography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1971:276). Chief Ochwiay Biano in his conversation with Jung observed:

How cruel the whites look. Their lips are thin, their noses sharp, their faces furrowed and distorted by folds. Their eyes have a staring expression; they are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something; they are always uneasy and restless. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think they are mad.

Jung records that he furthered this conversation by asking why chief Ochwiay Biano thought all the whites were mad. " 'They say that they think with their heads,' he replied. 'Why of course. What do you think with?' I asked him in surprise. 'We think here,' he said, indicating his heart.' " The chief's answer aptly illustrates the biblical meaning of heart in its capacity to think and as Jung reflected, "This Indian had struck our vulnerable spot, unveiled a truth to which we are blind". We have grown used to associating thinking with the mind or intellect and love and decision with the will; but the human capacity to know truth and to love the good it perceives, is united in the heart-knowledge that Jung recognised in the Indian chief. In the absence of heart-knowledge, the heart becomes blind and results in harsh and merciless thought and behaviour.

Beer (1978:8) develops the moral aspect of the heart in Cowper's poem, *The Task*. In this poem, Cowper speaks of blindness of heart and emphasizes the necessity of purification in order to see differently and experience the reality of heart-knowledge and its consequences. Like Jesus in his teaching on the Beatitudes and St. Francis in his *Canticle of the Creatures*, Cowper reveals the meaning of the contemplative vision which is linked to the pure in heart and the reward they enjoy. Such a vision sees the creator in all things created; in Cowper's words, it is recognising the "unambiguous footsteps" of God and relishing that reality.

Acquaint thyself with God, if thou would'st taste
His works. Admitted once to his embrace,
Thou shalt perceive that thou wast blind before.
Thine eye shall be instructed, and thine heart
Made pure, shall relish with divine delight
Till then unfelt what hands divine have wrought.

In our research we explore the relationship between the eye and the heart. Even before we discuss the biblical and Franciscan understanding, we highlight the connection in literature and poetry. In one of his sonnets, Wordsworth [Web: Date of Access 20.08.03] says:

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frown'd
Mindless of its honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlock'd his heart'.

To these sonnets of Shakespeare we now turn as we explore the relationship between the eye and the heart. Though Godwin (2002: 212-216) focuses attention on the "evolving interior quarrel between the eye and the heart", emphasising the physical eye, we feel it is a preparatory step for understanding the biblical concept of the eye of the heart that we develop in chapter three and four. Godwin chooses Sonnets Forty-six and Forty-seven to present the tension between the eye and the heart.

Sonnet 46

Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war,
How to divide the conquest of thy sight:
Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight would bar,
My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.
My heart doth plead that thou in him dost lie
(A closet never pierced with crystal eyes),

But the defendant doth that plea deny,
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
To [de]cide this title is impanelled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart,
And by their verdict is determined
To clear eye's moiety and the dear heart's part,
And thus: mine eye's due is thy outward part,
And my heart's right thy inward love of heart.

This is an interesting "quarrel" or dispute in terms of the development of this study when we explore the "eyes of the heart". Perception and affection each have a part to play but the process of purification is crucial in achieving harmony and integration. Godwin (2002:214) speaks of a "compromise" which she sees in Sonnet Forty-seven. The interaction and co-operation between the eye and the heart suggests a certain harmony and integration - a *both/and* in preference to an *either/or* situation- which in the context of our study might involve the desert experience of accepting what is.

Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took,
And each doth good turns now unto the other:
When that mine eye is famished for a look,
Or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother,
With my love's picture then my eye doth feast,
And to the painted banquet bids my heart;
Another time mine eye is my heart's guest
And in his thoughts of love doth share a part.
So, either by thy picture or my love,
Thyself away art present still with me;
For thou not farther than my thoughts canst move,
And I am still with them and they with thee.
Or, if they sleep, thy picture in my sight
Awakes my heart to heart's and eye's delight.

Reconciliation of opposites, or in Shakespeare's case "between two anguished aspects of his love" is resolved for the artist "through the discipline of his art" (Godwin 2002:215) but for the Christian it is resolved not only through the discipline of art, but the resolution takes place especially in the realm of mystery and grace.

There is not only a vital link between the head and the heart but there is a union between the two that is a peak moment in the heart's journey to wholeness. Godwin (2002:203) cites three poets- Rilke, Yeats and Herbert- who move from what she describes as "changeovers from head work and 'seeing' to heart work and loving". This is significant in the context of our study from the point of view of conversion and the part the desert plays in this movement from head to heart in the journey of uniting both in love. This theme will be further developed in chapter seven.

In his poem *Turning Point*, Rilke [Web: Date of Access 4.2.03.] perceives the necessity of moving to a new place that in the context of this study we would call a deeper or higher level of consciousness. He says:

Work of the eyes is done, now
Go and do heart work
On all the images imprisoned within you.

The act of seeing with the physical eye was the starting point for a deeper level of seeing with the heart. In the words of Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1978: 70): "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye". There is a mystery of personal identity here, the unlocking of which, in Christian terms, leads to the thrilling awareness of seeing oneself as a reflection of God. This is essentially a mystery, which is entered into but never fully understood. Even to arrive at this awareness requires a lot of heart work. The insight and understanding of Yeats (Roberts, 1973:68) in *The Circus Animals' Desertion*:

I must lie down where all the ladders start
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart,

reminds us of the earthiness and costly grace of God becoming man in Christ (cf.Phil.2); and St. Francis at the end of his life entrusting his naked body to the earth. Poverty, humility and patient suffering mark the process of becoming truly human and for most people it is as Eliot (Roberts: 1973:114) reflected in *Little Gidding*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

The exploration, described by the poet, Herbert, as a pilgrimage - and we would add, it is often a desert pilgrimage - is fraught with the inner struggles that the knowledge of the heart evokes. The work of Herbert in *The Temple* takes us through the stages of painful growth and development. Godwin (2002:207) notes:

What is remarkable about Herbert's autobiography of heart work is that you can follow along the pilgrimage as he writes his way out of self-involved flagellation into the enjoyment of God dwelling in his heart. (God at last goes so far as to finish the poet's poem for him!)

We feel it is appropriate to quote in full the selections from Herbert's poem that Godwin (2002:206-207) chose in order to trace the journey of the heart through this painful process, which we equate with the desert.

A broken altar, Lord, thy servant rears,
Made of a heart and cemented with tears.

My God, what is a heart
That thou shouldst it so eye and woo
Pouring upon it all thy art
As if thou hadst nothing else to do ?
- 'Matins'

Take a bad lodging in my heart;
For thou canst make a debtor,
And make it better.
-'The Star'

I felt a sug'red strange delight
Passing all cordials made by any art
Bedew, embalm, and overrun my heart
And take it in.
-The Glance'
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage....
'Prayer'
Happy is he, whose heart
Hath found the art
To turn his double pains to double praise.
-Man's Medley'

Whereas if th' heart be moved,
Although the verse be somewhat scant,
God doth supply the want,
As when th' heart says (sighing to be approved)
Oh, could I love! and stops: God writeth, Loved.
- 'A True Hymn'

The journey of the heart reveals the anguish involved in freedom of choice. The poetry of William Cowper portrays the heart as the centre of freedom and choice and while he "strongly felt the appeal of sensibility... references to the heart are automatically disciplined" (Beer, 1978:8-10). The reason for this, Beer says, is Cowper's concern "to bring the cultivation of sensibility into the service of a traditional religious orthodoxy". Here we are in the realm of the will, the capacity in the human person to freely choose good or evil, in the depths of the heart.

In this realm of the will, the moral sphere is revealed. If the heart is sound, then words and deeds are sound too. If the heart is not sound, neither will words and deeds be. Shakespeare, in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Act 111 Scene 11), puts the following words on the lips of Don Pedro: "He hath a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue is the clapper; for what his heart thinks his tongue speaks". Likewise, deeds whether good or evil, before they are accomplished, are first conceived within the heart. In the villainous Aaron in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* we read in Act 11 Scene 111: "Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand".

Having stated that the outward expression of inward motivation and intent reveals the heart as the seat of moral choices expressed in word and deed, Christian literature, especially the Bible and the writings of the Fathers of the Church, stresses the importance of the thoughts of the heart, where good and evil are conceived. The heart, therefore, is presented as the place where reason, emotion and will reside, hence the necessity to strive for a synthesis where head and heart sit comfortably together.

In the presence of this desired heart-knowledge there is "the combination of the cool mind and the warm heart" which Godwin (2002:48) describes as the desired achievement of the Buddha, and quoting Huston Smith she says that the Buddha was remarkably balanced by "a Franciscan tenderness so strong as to have caused his message to be subtitled "a religion of infinite compassion" - a point we will return to in chapter seven, when we explore the particular charism of the Third Order Regular Religious Congregation of Franciscan Minoress Sisters.

We affirm that for many people in our world today, there is a division between the head and the heart. Cowper, in his poem *The Winter Walk at Noon* (McGowan, 1989:467) has this to say:

Pleased with his solitude...
Here the heart
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give an useful lesson to the head,
And learning wiser grow without his books.
Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.

The duality causing an *either/or* mentality often results in the experience of the heart as a battlefield, most intensely felt in what is often described as a desert experience.

2.10 The heart and the desert.

The image of the desert is a familiar one in sacred and secular poetry and prose. As Godwin (2002:96) points out: "We are image-making creatures, and we form our images out of the materials of our experience". Whether depicted as desert, forest, wood, wild or wasteland, within or without, real or symbolic, the theme of the desert weaves its way through poetry and prose throughout the ages. Invariably, it is a place of change and transformation. It could be described as a metamorphosis as often happens, especially in the plays of Shakespeare.

In the process of change, the plays of Shakespeare often make us aware of the contradictions existing in the individual heart, contradictions which the desert tends to highlight. In *As You Like it*, the desert, which is also referred to as the forest and the woods, is significant throughout. In Act 11 Scene 1, from within the desert scene, Jaques says:

Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we but the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference; as, the icy fang
And churlish chidings of the winter's wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,

Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say
'This is no flattery; these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade me what I am'.
Sweet are the uses of adversity.

To enter the desert and remain there for a considerable time leads to tasting the sweet uses of adversity, similar perhaps to the Christian experience of the desert and conversion of heart. A new level of consciousness emerges leading to a transformation of heart, such as we see at the end of the play in Act V Scene IV.

Duke Frederick, hearing how that every day
Men of great worth resorted to this forest,
Address'd a mighty power, which were on foot
In his own conduct, purposely to take
His brother here and put him to the sword:
And to the skirts of this wild wood he came;
Where, meeting with an old religious man,
After some question with him, was converted
Both from his enterprise and from the world;
His crown bequeathing to his banish'd brother,
And all their lands restored...

The desert experience seems to bring a person face to face with both the negative and the positive in the human heart. In the words of Jaques: "Out of these convertites, there is much matter to be heard and learn'd". Sometimes though, it is difficult even to perceive what has to be learned and this makes the moment of suffering the more mysterious. The poet, Hopkins (1963:63) in his desert of desolation and doubt, emptiness and pain cried out:

My own heart let me more have pity on; let
Me live to my sad self hereafter kind,
Charitable; not live this tormented mind
With this tormented mind tormenting yet.

I cast for comfort I can no more get
By groping round my comfortless, than blind
Eyes in their dark can day or thirst can find
Thirst's all-in-all in all a world of wet.

The desert is a process that is harrowing in its purification and frightening in its relentless hold to bring a person to greater awareness of the landscape of the heart. Hopkins (1963:61) speaks of this frightening landscape thus:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man -fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there.

To hang there in the desert experiences of the heart in whatever form they take is a daunting task. But remaining there too long may be counter-productive. As Yeats points out in his poem *Easter, 1916* (Roberts, 1973:57)

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.

Whether real or symbolic, the desert experience is described by Cummings (1978:112) as:

a stripping process until every covering is removed and the self
that is being smothered inside is uncovered and brought to light.
Then I can step forth like the resurrected Lazarus, in the emptiness
and terror of my freedom, in the exposure of my inner openness,
and in the vulnerability of my total trust.

The potential to restore harmony, leading to integration and wholeness is a costly endeavour in the human heart. In describing the heart itself as a desert, Auden, (Roberts 1973: 239) in his poem *In Memory of W.B. Yeats* emphasises that if healing is to take place, a person must traverse this desert.

In the deserts of the heart,
Let the healing fountain start...

Not to do so may have very destructible consequences. Godwin (2002:173) suggests that perhaps the person who cannot remain in the crucible of the desert experience may have a hard or hollow heart. Speaking of Kurtz in Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* she says:

The wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a
terrible vengeance for this fantastic invasion. I think it had
whispered to Kurtz things about himself which he did not know,

things of which he had no conception til he took counsel with this great solitude - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core.

There is no victory without a battle and that is why in poetry and literature, the heart is sometimes referred to as a battlefield. Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1997:97), bewildered by the contradictions within the human person, says: "Here the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart". Throughout the novel we can follow the wanderings of the human heart and the mystery of its contradictory ways. In one of the conversations of the elder and Ivan Fyodorovich, Dostoevsky (1997:70) we grasp something of the torment involved.

"The idea is not yet resolved in your heart and torments it. But a martyr, too, sometimes like to toy with his despair, also from despair, as it were. For the time being you, too, are toying, out of despair, with your magazine articles and drawing-room discussions, without believing in your own dialectics and smirking at them with your heart aching inside you... The question is not resolved in you, and there lies your great grief, for it urgently demands resolution... "

"But can it be resolved in myself? Resolved in a positive way? "

Ivan Fyodorovich continued asking strangely, still looking at the elder with a certain inexplicable smile.

"Even if it cannot be resolved in a positive way, it will never be resolved in a negative way either - you yourself know this property of your heart, and therein lies the whole of its torment. But thank the Creator that he has given you a lofty heart, capable of being tormented by such a torment".

Complexities and paradoxes experienced within the human heart are highlighted by Blake [Web: Date of Access 20.08.03] in his poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. While we acknowledge the existence of evil, we cannot agree with Blake's idea that evil is a necessity for good to exist, but his conviction of the need for awareness links to our emphasis on the perceptive faculties affecting the heart.

The purification of the perceptive faculties, particularly seeing and hearing, is a prerequisite for the human heart to enter deeper realms of conscious awareness of what is. "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is". This is a point made by Rohr (1999:81) where he discusses the way in which all the

great religions have in some way created problems by presenting themselves as a competing ideology rather than as a way of seeing. Rohr (1999:83) maintains:

"... the great spiritual teachers teach us how to see clearly and keep our hearts open in hell. The moments of hell come when everything militates against the open heart". The ability to remain openhearted to the whole of reality is often a consequence of embracing the desert experiences of our lives and in Blake's words, though not quite in the context he used them, we realise "Without Contraries is no progression".

The authentic desert experience, far from removing a person from reality, immerses him or her more deeply in it. Coleridge [Web:Date of Access 4.2.03] captures this in his poem *Fears in Solitude*. He says:

My God! it is a melancholy thing
For such a man, who would full fain preserve
His soul in calmness, yet perforce must feel
For all his human brethren -O my God!
It weighs upon the heart...

Yet at the end of the poem, the desert experience gives way to more positive musings as he returns to home and family:

And grateful, that by nature's quietness
And solitary musings, all my heart
Is softened, and made worthy to indulge
Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind

The encounter with good and evil struggling for supremacy within the heart is aptly portrayed in Parnell's poem *The Hermit*. (Rhys, 1979: 103) In this instance what begins as a struggle in the heart of the hermit in solitude, takes him away from solitude that he may resolve his doubts within ordinary life and relationships with other people. Only then is he free to return to his solitude with greater peace and integrity. Solitude and people; the desert and the city; these provide the place and the rhythm for growing in deeper understanding of the human heart and the heart of God.

Far in a wild, unknown to public view,
From youth to age a reverend Hermit grew,
The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,
His food the fruits, his drink the crystal well,
Remote from man, with God he pass'd his days,

Prayer all his business, all his pleasure praise.
A life so sacred, such serene repose,
Seem'd heaven itself, till one suggestion rose-
That vice should triumph, virtue vice obey;

The poem tells of the suffering the hermit endured to reach a new level of consciousness, understanding of the human condition and the way in which God is present within it. Eventually the hermit is led to prayer, saying:

Lord! as in heaven, on earth thy will be done.
Then, gladly turning, sought his ancient place,
And pass'd a life of piety and peace.

Oftentimes, it is the ordinary human happenings in life and relationships that serve to purify the heart. Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1997:50) makes this point in the poignant grief of a mother lamenting the loss of her baby son, and the elder said to her: "You will be filled with this great mother's weeping for a long time, but in the end it will turn into quiet joy for you, and your bitter tears will become tears of quiet tenderness and the heart's purification, which saves from sin". It is as Eliot (1988: 74-75) says in *Choruses From the "Rock"*:

The desert is not remote in the southern tropics,
The desert is not only around the corner,
The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
The desert is in the heart of your brother.

It may also be the experience of one's own radical solitariness and the loneliness involved in the acceptance. Louth (1991:147) points out that in Eliot's play *The Family Reunion* "the imagery of the desert is used both to express the darkness and lack of communication of the ordinary life of 'living and partly living' and to express the way of sanctity that leads beyond it".

The sudden solitude in a crowded desert
In a thick smoke, many creatures moving
Without direction, for no direction
Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapour -
... One thinks to escape
By violence, but one is still alone
In an over-crowded desert, jostled by ghosts.

The human condition of the ordinary person “ living and partly living” and the life of the saint, for example, St. Francis, whose whole life was “given and taken, in a lifetime's death in love” (*The Dry Salvages*) reaches a state which we associate with the positive aspect of the desert experience: “A condition of complete simplicity (Costing not less than everything)”. (*Little Gidding* in Roberts:1973:114)

At times, the literary artists give us entry into the heart's reasons not only for the total surrender in love and to love but also the reasons for iniquity as they perceive it; at other times we are left with the mystery, part of which is that no matter how great the evil or iniquity, in the words of Anne Frank (1954: 218): “In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart”. Beer (1978:37) quotes from a note that Wordsworth attached to his play *The Borderers*. The note aptly portrays the mystery and paradox of the good and evil residing in the human heart.

The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves.

When we speak of the heart we are in the realm of mystery. God alone knows the heart in its entirety. Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1997:121) has one of his characters say: “God knows my heart, he sees all my despair. He sees the whole picture”. Freedom and grace struggle within the human heart, a struggle well documented by Anne Frank in her own inimitable way when she describes herself as “a little bundle of contradictions”. (1954:220.) This “little bundle of contradictions” she defines as “contradictions from without and contradictions from within”... “I try terribly hard to change myself, but I'm always fighting against a more powerful enemy... finally I twist my heart round again, so that the bad is on the outside, and the good is on the inside, and keep on trying to find a way of becoming what I would so like to be, and what I could be if...” (1954:220-222).

Depending on the moral choices made within the heart, a person becomes more free or less free to become and to experience both the agony and the ecstasy of personal uniqueness. If heart means the deepest core of a human person and if the deepest expression of the heart is love, then we are in the realm of mystery where “the most courageous thing we will ever do is to bear humbly the mystery of our own reality”

(Rohr, 1999:84). The choice of Rohr's word "bear" is interesting, suggesting in Christian terms, the cross, bearing the cross of our own humanity in the process of becoming what we are called to be.

According to the research of Godwin (2002: 66) with the coming of the Greeks, particularly in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, "we are set off and running into the era of left-brain glories". This is a reference to the "major ways we think and perceive" with emphasis on reason, abstraction, deduction and investigation. Godwin maintains that in this new millennium, "we have some catching up to do if we are to balance 'head work' with 'heart work,' and bring the heart and head back together again at a higher level of consciousness". The experience of solitude/desert is one way to facilitate this process and perhaps this is the invitation that Kavanagh (1972: 149) puts before us in his poem *Having Confessed*.

Having confessed he feels
That he should go down on his knees and pray
For forgiveness for his pride, for having
Dared to view his soul from the outside.
Lie at the heart of the emotion, time
Has its own work to do. We must not anticipate
Or awaken for a moment. God cannot catch us
Unless we stay in the unconscious room
Of our hearts.

To bear the mystery of our own reality in the journey of the heart to deeper levels of consciousness is the challenge of both action and contemplation. We propose that a return to the biblical understanding of the heart and the desert will facilitate this movement in the journey towards wholeness and integration.

2.11 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have introduced the heart as a universal symbol with a universal language that spans all ages, cultures and creeds. In giving examples from sacred and secular poetry, prose, art and music, we have demonstrated the timelessness and relevance of the symbol of the heart with its potential to bring healing, wholeness, conversion and transformation. In this process we emphasised the primacy of love as the vital link in the embrace of both the agony and the ecstasy entailed in the journey.

We indicated the costly nature of this journey in terms of personal challenge and change, a process often equated with the desert, and the experience of one's radical solitude where reality is faced in the mystery of personal freedom, sin and grace.

We maintain that the human condition as expressed in the arts has been most fully revealed in the biblical understanding of the heart, which is the theme of our next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: A Study Of Heart And Desert In The Old Testament

3.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to examine the biblical concepts of heart and desert and analyse the way in which the desert affects the heart's conversion. These biblical concepts formed Francis and had a profound influence on his spirituality, especially the Franciscan eremitical tradition. Francis gave his own particular and unique stamp to these concepts, so much so that a branch of the Franciscan family, the Third Order Regular, has preserved the charism of 'conversion of heart' as their distinctive characteristic within both active and contemplative communities.

In the previous chapter we referred to a spirituality of the heart as an universal language. There is a richness and depth in this word heart, which encompasses the core of our being, the centre where we are in God. Each of us is caught up in the journey of the heart in discovering the truth of our existence. The heart as the centre of our human life in all its dimensions is our call to perfection and maturity as human beings. Made in God's image and likeness we have an innate capacity for knowing and loving. Sheed (1979:74) points out that it is "in the heart's direct union of knowledge with supreme truth, of loving with supreme goodness, we shall at last be complete men and women."

Our salvation history is the continuing story of our acceptance and rejection of our own reality, the refusal to accept the love that created us and sustains us in being and the struggle involved to return to our source of love. The possibility and reality of the rejection of love means that the heart is not only a symbol of love, but it is also the place where love may be absent. In the absence or presence of love in our lives the word heart embraces the totality of human experience from the heights to the depths in the mystery of what it means to be a human being.

3.2 Heart In The Bible

Wolff (1974:40) states that the word heart is the most important and commonest of all anthropological terms in the Old Testament. Of the 858 times it can be found 814 "deal exclusively with the human heart". Eichrodt (1967:143) points out "every survey of the linguistic evidence has shown that there is hardly a spiritual process which could not be brought into some connection with the heart. It is made the organ equally of feelings, intellectual activities and the workings of the will." He further observes that Accadian

has "an exactly corresponding usage" which he claims makes the word heart axiomatic for primitive man. Understood in this broad sense as the inner life of a person, the bible sees all aspects of life and behaviour rooted in the heart. From that source springs all that is good and evil. It is the core of our being where we enter the mystery of ourselves, of our world and God.

In life and relationships what is most important is the inner attitude and motivation which like the heart itself, is hidden from view. Here we are speaking of what is deepest in a human person. It follows that we are seeing the heart as the conscious, intelligent, affective life of a person where choices are made and love is accepted or rejected. Yet there is a sense in which the word heart defies definition because it is signifying a mystery. It avoids the dichotomy between body and soul, mind and heart, flesh and spirit. Rather it includes thinking and feeling, planning and deciding, loving and unloving, insight and integration - the totality of what it means to be a person. Taken as a whole these form the nucleus of what it means to be a person. This is the biblical understanding of the word heart and in this chapter we will examine the richness of this concept and the consequences for human maturity and wholeness.

3.3 The Hidden Aspect Of The Heart

In general the heart is vital and hidden in both its physical and symbolic sense. Physiologically, the heart pumps the blood around the body to convey nutrients and sustain life; symbolically the heart is the life-giving centre of our personhood and our call to love. The anatomy of the heart was unknown to the ancient Israelites and Wolff (1974:42) observes that there are few texts referring to the anatomy and physiology of the heart and those related to the latter are connected to some malfunction of the heart. But the perception of the ancient Israelites of the location of the heart as a vital and hidden organ, deep within the body, is evidenced in several biblical texts:

And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot". (2K.9:24) The prophet Hosea seems to suggest the rib cage as the enclosure of the heart: "Like a bear robbed of her cubs I shall meet them and rend the membrane of their heart". (Ho.13:8) and the prophet Jeremiah cries out; "My heart is broken within my breast". (Jr.23:9) Regarding the disorders connected to the heart, the biblical texts describe these very dramatically. Jeremiah in referring to the intense pain in 'the walls of my heart' is probably

describing a heart attack: "In the pit of my stomach how great my agony! Walls of my heart! My heart is throbbing! (Jr.4: 13.)

Wolff (1974:42) states that it was through the experience of sickness that the people of Israel recognised how central, hidden and vitally important the heart was within the body. It is a place of deep mystery. The biblical authors compare it to the heights of the mountains and the depths of the ocean, both unexplorable and inaccessible. Moses takes us to the heights and Jonah to the depths. In Deuteronomy 4:11 we read: "So you came and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain flamed to the very sky, a sky darkened by cloud, murky and thunderous. Yahweh then spoke to you from the heart of the fire." (Bible, 1994:229.) The prophet Jonah, 2:4, (quoted by Jesus in Luke 11: 29) is an example of the rich symbolism embodied in this story of being in the heart of the sea, accepting and entering the realm of mystery. "For you threw me into the deep, into the heart of the seas".

The biblical authors from personal experience and observation, together with the awareness of the heart as central, hidden and inaccessible, acknowledged its many functions. These essential functions are crucial to our understanding of the heart in its all-embracing explanation of human attitudes, motivations and behaviour. Wolff gives the example of Nabal's death: "His heart died within him and he became like a stone. About ten days later Yahweh struck Nabal, and he died." (1 S. 25:38.) The Hebraic understanding of heart includes functions we would associate with the brain.

3.4 God Alone Knows The Heart

There is the recognition that while we would expect our outward behaviour to reflect what is in our hearts, the mysterious fact is that our thoughts, words and deeds may actually hide what is deepest in our hearts. The Lord alone knows the heart. As the psalmist says in Ps. 44:21: "He knows the secrets of the heart". (Bible, 1994:858.) "He has fathomed both the abyss and the human heart and seen into their devious ways; for the Most High knows all there is to know" (Si.42: 18): "God does not see as human beings see; they look at appearances but Yahweh looks at the heart". (1S.16: 7.) There is the suggestion here that appearances do not always match what is in the heart. We may deceive one another and ourselves but God cannot be deceived. He alone searches the heart and its reasons: " I, Yahweh, search the heart, test the motives". (Jr.17: 10.)

3.5 Ancient And Modern Interpretations

While ancient and modern interpretations of the word heart would agree on the basic physical level, perhaps the heart and the affective life are associated in the modern mind in a more restricted way than in the biblical usage. Examples do abound in the bible where the heart is the chief bodily focus of emotional activity and psychological well - being. The complexity and range of feelings both positive and negative are enumerated as the following examples show: joy, gladness, religious exultation, desire, pity, courage, sickness, sadness, grief, anguish, fear, worry and anxiety - the list goes on and on throughout the bible.

"Your instructions are my eternal heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart."
(Ps.119: 111.)

"And the Priest's heart was glad."(Jg.18: 20.)

"You have granted him his heart's desire."(Ps.21: 3.)

"My heart within me is overwhelmed." (Ho.11:8.)

"Put your hope in Yahweh, be strong, let your heart be bold." (Ps.27: 14.)

"Incurable sorrow overtakes me, my heart fails me". (Jr.8: 18.)

"Even in laughter the heart finds sadness, and makes way for sorrow." (Pr.14: 13.)

"And Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, Why is your heart sad?" (1S.1: 8.)

"My heart is broken within me."(Jr.23: 9.)

"Is anyone frightened or faint-hearted." (Dt. 20: 8.)

"Worry makes a heart heavy." (Pr.12: 25.)

Biblically, the heart is accepted as the seat of the emotions, passions and changing moods within a person. As suggested above, this is often an acceptable meaning of the word heart in our modern understanding and use of the word. The bible, however, also sees the heart as the seat of the intellectual life. Where other cultures use the word mind, the bible uses heart. This gives a depth and a breadth of meaning far beyond the realm of the affective life only. Eichrodt (1967:143) claims that the majority of texts in the bible refer to the intellectual and volitional life of a person and it is this, which gives it its "distinctive stamp in Hebrew thought". The heart is now seen as the place where feelings, thoughts, ideas, plans, choices, desires, decisions and memories emerge and are stored. It is the centre of human life in all its dimensions. The Psalmist even speaks of the thoughts of the heart of God Himself: "Yahweh's own plan stands firm forever, his heart's counsel from age to age." (Ps.33: 11.)

3.5.1 The Heart Is The Centre Of The Person

The heart, that deepest inner core of our being may rise to heroic heights or it may fall into deceitful and cunning ways. Herein lies our freedom and the mystery of God's grace. Accepting that the heart is the centre of religious awareness, the secret place of encounter where each person is called into question by the word, we are faced with our response to the word in our perceptions, seeking, attentiveness, praise, love and adoration. In this rich, all-embracing biblical symbol we find ourselves in dialogue with ourselves in our responsibilities and decisions, and in our openness to the mystery of existence.

3.5.2 The Heart And The Intellect

In the realm of the intellectual life, examples are abundant which refer to the place of the heart in the thinking person who knows, understands, discerns, remembers, considers, plans etc. "Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord disciplines you." (Dt.8: 5.) "So give your servant a heart to understand how to govern your people, how to discern." (1K.3: 9.) "Remember this and stand firm; rebels, look into your hearts and remember" (Is.46:8). "Your heart will meditate on past terrors" (Is.33: 18). If the heart is understood in terms of the perceiving self, then the senses, especially the functions of seeing and hearing which are the powerful channels of perception, must in some ways be associated with the heart and its activities. The example of King Solomon asking God for "an understanding heart" emphasises the importance of attentive listening and keen observation since both usually precede the understanding which brought such fame to Solomon. The Book of Kings suggests that Solomon knew how to engage wisely in the world around him. He was renowned for his ability, his power and his wisdom. "God gave Solomon immense wisdom and understanding, and a heart as vast as the sand on the sea shore." (1 K. 4: 29.) As Wolff points out, the heart of Solomon "acquires the breadth to grasp the fullness of all world phenomena" (1974:47).

Solomon prayed for "an understanding heart" which enabled him to discern the ways of God in the world and the answer to his prayer, for practical wisdom was essentially God's gift to him. The gratuitousness of God in gifting a person with such ability is evident in Deuteronomy: "But until today, Yahweh has not given you a heart to understand, eyes to see, ears to hear" (29:4). And again in Proverbs we have several instances of this gift of God to the person who seeks. "My child, if you take my words to heart... turning your ear to wisdom, turning your heart to understanding... you will

understand...and discover the knowledge of God (2:1-5). In contrast to Solomon and the good king mentioned by Isaiah whose eyes are open and whose ears are alert and whose heart learns "to think things over" (32: 3) there are those who never perceive the ways of the Lord, their heart is far from Him. They "listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive." Isaiah goes on to give the reason: "their hearts are course" and the consequences are deafness and blindness to the ways of the Lord, "ears dull...eyes shut tight" (Is.6: 9).

3.5.3 The Heart And Memory

Effective seeing and attentive hearing produce knowledge of God and his ways: "The heart of the intelligent acquires learning, the ears of the wise search for knowledge" (Pr.18: 15). But this knowledge must not be forgotten; it must be stored and treasured in the heart. As the Psalmist says: "In my heart I treasure your promises" (119:11). This means keeping the promises of God in the memory, writing them on the tablet of the heart. In Deuteronomy the famous Shema text sums up the process of insightful understanding by saying:

Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh.
You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your
soul, with all your strength. Let the words I enjoin on you today
stay in your heart. You shall tell them to your children, and keep
on telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out
and about, when you are lying down and when you are
standing up; you must fasten them on your hand as a sign and
on your forehead as a headband; you must write them on the
doorposts of your house and on your gates. (6-11)

For the words of Yahweh to stay in the heart means to remain in the conscious memory and the biblical language of the heart emphasises the function of memory, which is essential for true seeing and attentive listening. Directly related to memory as a function of the heart, is the process of thinking, considering and reflecting. In Deuteronomy we read: "Do not allow this mean thought in your heart." (15: 9.) Isaiah, in speaking of the People returning to Jerusalem, says: "Your heart will meditate on past errors" (33:18) and it is the Book of Proverbs that tells us of the careful consideration which goes on in the heart before a word is spoken: "The heart of the upright reflects before answering." (15:28.) McCreesch (1996: 423) says: "It is just a small step to move from the heart as the setting for human intelligence and thought to

the heart as the place for the will, the source of decisions, plans, attitudes, and therefore the centre for the moral life." But Wolff points out that this was not necessarily an easy transition for the ancient Israelite who found it "difficult to distinguish linguistically between 'perceiving' and 'choosing', between 'hearing' and 'obeying' " (1974:51). Part of the difficulty arises from the concreteness of Hebrew expression, which did not categorize as we now tend to do. For them thought and action, theory and practice were one and the same. We read in Isaiah: "But this was not his intention nor did his heart plan it so" (10: 7). What was important was the intention within the heart and it was this aspect that gave rise to the moral question, or conscience. King David is a prime example of this: "But afterwards David's heart misgave him for having taken a census of the people" (2S. 24: 10).

It follows that the heart as the place of decisive choices is the centre of the moral life in its potential for good and evil. For this reason, Scripture advises vigilance regarding the heart: "More than all else, keep watch over your heart, since here are the wellsprings of life". (Pr.4: 23.) Where vigilance is absent the heart's potential for evil becomes apparent. Some examples would be the heart that is faithless, stubborn, hardened, deceitful, twisted, blind, deaf, hypocritical and godless - all of which lead to destruction and death, the opposite of the "wellspring of life". To follow the dictates of a good conscience is to consciously will to do so with the freedom of choice that is humanity's gift. This is a dominating characteristic of the heart in biblical terms of unconditional love and obedience to Yahweh and to one another.

3.6 Chesed: The Heart And The Covenant

We will now proceed to examine the heart within the context of the covenant where it comes into sharper focus because here we have the revelation of the heart of the individual, the heart of the community and the heart of God in a unique, graced and mysterious relationship. While there are many concepts that portray the God-man relationship and the consequences for all personal and communal relationships, the covenant is the most expressive and pre-eminent among them. Eichrodt (1967:10) points out: "Every Old Testament writer, even the ones who never mention the covenant, is unable to escape from the kind of God of whose dealing with the world and men, the covenant is the archetypal symbol."

Recognising that the covenant is the foundation of relationship in the Old Testament, there are difficulties, which Balthasar (1991 (b):152) treats at length and concludes "the relationship of life between Yahweh and Israel is based on something that lacks analogies." The covenant between Yahweh and Israel is unique. The unprecedented choice by Yahweh is not dependent upon any obvious principle inherent in other covenant models. Yahweh simply "set his heart" on this people.

Yahweh set his heart on you and chose you not because you
were the most numerous of all peoples - for indeed you were the
smallest of all - but because he loved you. (Dt. 7: 7-8)

Covenant love - *chesed* - is the distinguishing characteristic governing the attitudes and behaviour within the covenant relationship. It belonged first and foremost to Yahweh Himself and it expressed his unconditional, gratuitous, benevolent, grace-filled love. Entering into the covenant relationship based on *chesed* had far-reaching consequences.

If you are really prepared to obey me and keep my covenant,
you, out of all peoples, shall be my personal possession, for the
whole world is mine. For you shall be a kingdom of priests, a
holy nation. (Ex.19: 5.)

In the secular use of the word Balthasar (1991 (b):160) quotes Stoebe in emphasising the kind of attitude and behaviour *chesed* presupposed. "In the historical books from Judges to 2 Kings, *chesed* in secular use indicates a kind of conduct between human persons with a goodness and kindness that exceeds what one can expect or has deserved, a conduct that rather reveals generous, open readiness. And it is this that first makes fellowship possible.

Throughout the Old Testament there is development and various levels of intensity in the way in which *chesed* is understood and expressed. The far-reaching consequences of *chesed* as a response to and a reflection of covenant love meant that every aspect of a person's life was affected by this relationship and if "heart" means that totality, then the only possible and adequate response is the gift of one's heart. "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways." (Pr.23: 26.) Considering that the covenant relationship covered every aspect of life and behaviour- religious, social, political and personal- the lived experience of this relationship and its effects were directly dependent upon the state of a person's heart. When we look at the covenant

within the history of the people of Israel, we see clearly the pivotal place the heart holds in this journey and development.

It is therefore impossible to think of covenant without the relationship that *chesed* creates. Balthasar (1991 (b):160) points out that covenant and *chesed* "condition each other mutually". Deepening the understanding of the one affected the growth and development of the other concerning relationship with God and with others. Central in this relationship is the heart and its whereabouts or condition. "The sage's heart leads him aright, but a fool's heart leads him astray." (Si.10: 2.) Although the covenant covered all aspects of life both personally and communally the covenant people received this reproach: "This people approaches me only in words, honours me only with lip-service while their hearts are far from me." (Is.29:13.)

3.6.1 The covenant with Noah

Covenant history begins with God speaking to Noah.

I am now establishing my covenant with you and with your descendants to come, and with every living creature that was with you: birds, cattle and every wild animal with you; everything that came out of the ark, every living thing on earth. And I shall maintain my covenant with you: that never again shall all living things be destroyed by the waters of a flood, nor shall there ever again be a flood to devastate the earth. (Gn.9: 9.)

The New Jerusalem Bible (1994:27. Footnote d) makes the point that this covenant, the sign of which is the rainbow, involves the whole creation. (When God chose Abraham and established a personal relationship with him, Abraham became the free and responsive recipient of the initiative of God.)

3.6.2 The Covenant With Abraham

Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country I shall show you; and I shall make you a great nation, I shall bless you and make your name famous; you are to be a blessing!
I shall bless those who bless you, and I shall curse those who curse you, And all clans on earth will bless themselves by you.
(Gn.12: 1-3.)

The covenant God made with Abraham was to be limited to his descendants only and the sign was circumcision.

I am El Shaddai. Live in my presence, be perfect, and I shall grant a covenant between myself and you, and make you very numerous. And Abram bowed to the ground. God spoke to him as follows, For my part, this is my covenant with you: you will become the father of many nations.....You for your part must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. This is my covenant which you must keep between myself and you, and your descendants after you: every one of your males must be circumcised. (Gn.17: 1-5; 9-10.)

In the covenant relationship with Abraham it is God who takes the initiative and the only response required of him is to believe the word of Yahweh and live according to the way of Yahweh. Brueggemann (1982:102) points out that "trust and obedience" is a full summary of Israel's part in this relationship and he quotes Abraham Heschel regarding obedience as the core of biblical faith. "Do I exist as a human being? My answer is: *I am commanded - therefore I am*. There is a built-in *sense of indebtedness* in the consciousness of man, an awareness of *owing gratitude*, of being *called upon* at certain moments to reciprocate, to answer, to live in a way that is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living."

3.6.3 The Covenant With Moses

There are many instances of the ungrateful, disobedient, unresponsive heart - all of which are contrary to the faith and willing response of Abraham in the covenant relationship. This becomes more evident when the personal covenant with Abraham is succeeded by a covenant with the people, the nation. In solitude the story of Moses and the incident at the burning bush sets the scene for the awesome encounter with the Absolute and establishes continuity with the divine act of God through the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses then said to God, 'Look, if I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you," and they say to me, "What is his name?" what am I to tell them?' God said to Moses, "I am has sent me to you," God further said to Moses, 'You are to tell the Israelites, "Yahweh, the God of your

ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name for all time, and thus I am to be invoked for all generations to come. (Ex.3: 13-15.)

The impact of the Exodus-Sinai event cannot be overestimated because this religious experience penetrated every aspect of Hebrew life. This was the covenant par excellence and in the day-to-day response the quality of heart was tested. All other covenants either prepared the way for Sinai or grew out of it as a result of changing circumstances and deepened understanding. In the course of their history the people of Israel discovered anew the significance of the covenant relationship as it revealed the mystery of their hearts and the heart of God. As the privileged of Yahweh, "You of all nations shall be my very own." (Ex.19: 5.) Israel experienced "A God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in steadfast love and faithfulness; For a thousand generations he maintains his steadfast love (*chesed*)." (Ex.34: 6.) It was a living and loving relationship that was established at Sinai.

That which is living is subject to change and transformation, and where the relationship is between the infinite and the finite, depth in love and knowledge is bound to be a gradual process. So it was with Israel. We can pinpoint turning points in this development, occasioned by the historical situation within the Hebrew community because for them there was no clear demarcation between the sacred and the secular. Religion and life were one and their religious experience was woven of the very fabric of life. With the prophetic tradition, Deuteronomy and the Song of Songs, we begin to see the crucial role of the heart in the development of this relationship, which is presented in parental and bridal imagery.

3.7 Hosea: A Religion Of The Heart

The Jerusalem Bible (1994:1181) states in its Introduction to the Prophets that the prophet Hosea is the initiator of "a religion of the heart" and he had a profound influence on both the Old and New Testament writers in revealing the depth of love in the heart of God. It was Hosea who daringly reinterpreted the Yahweh-Israel relationship in the imagery of a bridal-marital relationship. From within his innermost depths, Hosea experienced heart-breaking infidelity on the part of his wife, Gomer. It was out of this anguish of thwarted love that Hosea came to a new realisation about the heart of God and his love for his people.

The later reflections on the heart of God, which we find in the book of Genesis, poignantly depict the anguish of God, which is not dissimilar to that of Hosea. "Yahweh regretted having made human beings on earth and was grieved at heart." (Gn.6: 6.) The cause of the anguish and grief was the rejection of love. Hosea was painfully sensitive to the way in which the nation had turned to false gods and prostituted itself to the baals of Canaan. They forgot Yahweh (Ho.2: 15). The heart was the source of infidelity, apostasy, fickleness and forgetfulness. "Their heart is false." (Ho.10: 2.) The New Jerusalem translation is "Theirs is a divided heart." Yet the enduring quality of the divine *chesed* in the heart of God makes him appeal in the language of spousal intimacy.

"I am going to seduce her and lead her into the desert and speak to her heart." (Ho.2: 16.) In the desert experience Hosea believed that Israel, the betrothed of Yahweh, would come to know him from within in a deep, interior, affective knowing. In the context of our study the ideas conveyed in Hosea (2:16-21) are very significant as we explore the theme of the desert and the heart in the context of love and intimacy, purification and transformation.

The period of the desert captured the imagination of Hosea as it did the later prophets and preachers. Such a pivotal experience left a lasting impression on the Hebrew mind and it continued to be a formative influence in successive generations. McKenzie (1968:12) states that the Israelites "could never forget that they were a desert people" and he recognises that the desert is a vital biblical concept which brings us face to face with the awareness of evil. In developing his line of thought McKenzie (1968:12) says "the God of Israel was not a reflection of the desert; yet the desert was the scene where man in the Old Testament encountered God. " The God of steadfast love and mercy did not derive his character from the desert; if he had, the people of Israel would not have returned time and time again to the renewal of the covenant which was formed in the desert and which was grounded on the *chesed* of God. McKenzie (1968:16) clearly evaluates the concept of the desert with its hard choices and fundamental values; the desert is the atmosphere in which fundamental values are put to the test: "Yahweh is a desert God in the sense that Israel must accept him on his own terms if he is to live".

Maher (1978:101) points out that "different authors evaluated the desert experience in different ways " highlighting both love and intimacy and sin and rejection. In our study of the heart in the context of the desert experience we will refer to each viewpoint: the positive and the negative. The heart as Hosea says "is divided" therefore it is necessary to explore the image of the desert experience in both its graced and sinful aspects. For Hosea, the desert period represented the ideal time of faithful love and surrender to God. It was a honeymoon period in the life of the people and the prophet looked nostalgically to the desert in an effort to recover a lost love.

3.7.1 The Return To The Desert

Eichrodt (1967:251) observes that Hosea brought out overwhelmingly "the quite irrational power of love as the ultimate basis of the covenant relationship." The only way to bring the heart back to love was a return to the desert. "There she will respond as when she was young, as on the day when she came up from Egypt. When that day comes - declares Yahweh - she will call me 'My Husband'." (Ho.2: 16-18.) But in the meantime Yahweh laments the ingratitude of Israel who "do not cry to me from the heart " (Ho.7: 14) because their "heart is false," (Ho.10: 2) and when Yahweh cared for them and satisfied their every need "their hearts grew proud." (Ho.13: 6.) Hosea repeatedly uses marital language not only to depict the positive but also the negative in the God-Israel covenant relationship. He likens Israel's defection to prostitution and adultery. "For she is no longer my wife nor am I her husband. She must either remove her whoring ways from my face and her adulteries from between her breasts." (Ho. 2: 4-5.) Similar language can be found in Hosea 4: 12-14; and 9:1.

The second close family bond used by Hosea is the parent-child relationship and once again it is the heart of God that is poignantly revealed.

I myself taught Ephraim to walk,
I myself took them by the arm,
but they did not know that I was the one caring for them,
that I was leading them with human ties,
with leading strings of love,
that, with them, I was like someone lifting an infant to his cheek,
and that I bent down to feed him.

Ephraim, how could I part with you?
Israel, how could I give you up?
My heart within me is overwhelmed,
fever grips my inmost being. (Ho.11: 1-4; 7-9)

The tender father God is also the transcendent other who has to "strip Israel and expose her naked as the day she was born; I shall make her as bare as the desert." (Ho.2: 5.) This divine-human encounter is described by Balthasar (1991 (b):154-5) as "a dizzying, terrifying adventure for the finite person, something that can be answered only by stripping one's own 'I' down to the naked kernel." This is the purifying furnace of the desert experience. It is redemptive, merciful love at work in the human heart to restore true justice in the beauty of right relationships.

3.7.2 Deuteronomy and the desert experience

The Book of Deuteronomy accentuates the importance of the desert experience. By concentrating on the motivation of love in the intimate relationship of the parent-child relationship and the special bond of love created with Israel through Yahweh's special election of her, the desert experience is portrayed in idyllic terms. "Yahweh your God goes ahead of you and will be fighting on your side, just as you saw him act in Egypt. You have seen him in the desert too: Yahweh your God continued to support you, as a man supports his son." (Dt.1: 30-31.) In a later verse Deuteronomy makes the appeal to remember and keep in the heart the love and kindness of this father God: "But take care, as you value your lives! Do not forget the things you yourselves have seen, or let them slip from your heart as long as you live, teach them, rather, to your children and to your children's children." (Dt.4: 9.)

Presenting the heart as loving, remembering and observing the commands of the Lord focuses on the heart not only as the seat of the affective life, but also as the mainspring of the volitional life of the person. Eichrodt (1961: 296) states "the Deuteronomist knows how to give his preaching of the law, by means of the command to love, both inner unity, and at the same time that direct impact in pastoral exhortation and education which continually brings men back from all the various forms of externalism to the most inward decision of conscience."

The heart's need for learning, conversion and testing is recognised. "Remember the long road by which Yahweh your God led you for forty years in the desert, to humble you, to test you and to know your inmost heart - whether you would keep his commandments or not." (Dt 8:2.) This act of remembering in the heart is central so that the word of the Lord is really internalised and lived out in daily life and relationships. "Take all these words to heart." (Dt.32: 45.) We have already mentioned the central place of the *Shema* text with its emphasis on the motivation and totality of love towards

God and one another. When love is forgotten or neglected, then God treats the person and community as a father would treat his son. "Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you." (Dt.8: 5.)

3.7.3 Circumcision Of Heart

The need for testing, discipline and conversion implies the waywardness of the human heart despite the infinite love bestowed upon it. Such is the mystery of the human heart. The Deuteronomist would go so far as to say that the heart needs circumcision. "Circumcise therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and no longer be stubborn." (Dt. 10:16.) Von Rad (1962: 225) points out that the appeal is to the inner disposition because "It is in the heart and the understanding that Israel's belonging to Yahweh comes about." Other texts in the Book of Deuteronomy emphasise the power of the word and the need for conversion of heart if the word is to be effective and fruitful. "The word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to put into practice." (Dt.30: 14.) In this way the Book of Deuteronomy managed to express the vitality of legislation because love is presented as the fulfilment of the law. The external observance of the law is worthless without the interior disposition of love. This was an ingenious method to bring daily life in all its mundane details under the sovereignty of the all-holy Yahweh before whom all are equal, from the greatest to the least.

3.8 Jeremiah And A New Heart

The prophet Jeremiah also looked at the desert period as the golden age in Israel's history. Like his predecessor Hosea, Jeremiah also used the two intimate relationships of marriage and parenthood to express the unique relationship between the heart of God and the heart of Israel and each person within it. In bridal imagery Jeremiah recalled the youthful freshness of first love. "Yahweh says this: I remember your faithful love, the affection of your bridal days, when you followed me through the desert. " (Jr.2: 1-2.) In stark contrast to that honeymoon period the realities Jeremiah had to deal with were a people whose hearts were wicked. Consequently they had forgotten the God who led them through the desert with steadfast love and faithfulness to the Promised Land. "But this people has a rebellious, unruly heart; they have rebelled and gone!" (Jr. 5:23.)

His appeal was:

Wash your heart clean of wickedness, Jerusalem,
and so be saved.
How long will you go on harbouring
your pernicious thoughts?
Your own behaviour and actions
have brought this on yourself.
Your wickedness, how bitter,
has stabbed you to the heart! (Jr.4: 14-18)

Jeremiah (Jr.16: 12) detected in the nation and consequently in each person's heart an irresistible proclivity to evil. "Each of you follows the dictates of his hardened, wicked heart and will not listen to me." The hard heart is the heart that refuses to listen and obey. This is reiterated in another text (Jr.18: 12) where the prophet says: "We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart." Having located the root of rebellion, stubbornness, disobedience and sin in the "uncircumcised heart," (Jr.9: 26) Jeremiah pinpoints a most disturbing fact. It is not merely the external reality of evil and sin that is his concern; rather it is the reality of a mysterious inclination deep within the person - in the heart, where it is indelibly engraved. "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart." (Jr.17: 1.)

Like Hosea, his predecessor, Jeremiah looks to the desert experience as the only answer to the heart's conversion. In this privileged environment, intimacy and love would be renewed and restored in the marriage between Israel and her God. This relationship of love affected not only the community but also each individual within the community. "Turn back, each one of you, from your evil behaviour and your evil actions." (Jr.25: 5.) Jeremiah never advocated individuality detached from the community.

In no less intimate terms Jeremiah portrays the parent-child relationship that reveals not so much the heart of the child as the heart of God. "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him." (Jr.31: 20.) The fact that the heart of God yearns for his child/children even though their hearts have forsaken him reveals the power and depth of the love in the heart of God. "Come back, disloyal children, Yahweh declares." (Jr.3:

14.) Eichrodt (1967:235) comments: "... such love is aware of its own behaviour only as an inner but incomprehensible imperative."

Aware that "The heart is more devious than any other thing, and is depraved" (Jr.17: 9), Jeremiah realised that, while the desert is the privileged environment for conversion of heart, it is not an automatic process and no external reform can effect lasting change. The prophet in great disillusionment which is rooted in his own personal experience, realised the incapacity within his own heart and consequently within the heart of every other person to respond wholeheartedly to God. His writings reveal the depth to which he probed this enigmatic situation. Only God can heal the human heart with the free co-operation of the person. "If you repent, I will restore you." The same conviction is expressed in another text: "Heal me, Yahweh, and I shall be healed." (Jr.17: 14.) Jeremiah came to realise the need for the intervention of God fulfilling his promise to "... give them a heart to acknowledge that I am Yahweh; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with all their heart" (Jr.24:6-7). This will usher in the new era of grace from God in the wonderful mighty act, comparable to the Exodus event and the Sinai covenant, in the creation of a new covenant empowering a response from within the heart. "Within them I will plant my law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they shall be my people." (Jr.31: 33.) Humanity is incapable of renouncing sin and wickedness. Eichrodt (1967:468-9) states "the deepest mystery of true conversion is revealed in the fact that it is solely the work of God, who makes the new heart, in which inward obstinacy is overcome by obedient receptiveness."

The insight of Jeremiah in recognising the mystery of the human heart and its need of a new creation is a high peak of development in the spirituality of the heart. Without an inward change, a circumcision of the heart, there could be no true and lasting renewal of a person or a community. The new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah was a creative intervention of the part of God and consequently, as Rhymer (1964:177) says, the revelation is "fundamentally an insight into the heart not of the people but of God." Dodd (1960:103) describes the creative intervention by God as divine spontaneity that brings into effect new factors to alter the present situation.

The new act of God was seen as grace or pure gift. It was most clearly perceived when all the traditional props, thought of as the guarantee of Yahweh's presence, were removed. The false foundations have to be removed: God can build and plant anew. "My eyes will watch over them for their good, to bring them back to this country, to build

them up and not to break them down, to plant them and not to uproot them.” (Jr. 24: 6.) The desert is symbolic of such stripping. This was the shattering experience that revealed the helplessness of the human heart. Interior alienation required interior conversion and Jeremiah, following in the footsteps of Hosea, linked the desert experience - in whatever form it takes - with conversion of heart.

3.8.1 The Heart And The Divine *Chesed*

The spiritual depth and insight of Hosea and Jeremiah into the human heart and the heart of God necessitated interior conversion. Theirs was an experience of a love tenderly and mercifully seeking love in return. The eternal quality of the divine *chesed* in the covenant relationship is brought out in a striking manner by Jeremiah. “I have loved you with an everlasting love and so I still maintain my faithful love for you.” (Jr.31: 3.) And as the prophet pointed out in a previous verse, the tender, merciful love of the heart of God pardoned the people in the desert (Jr.31: 2). Balthasar (1991 (b):160-1), writing on the covenant relationship states:

To appeal to God's *chesed* does not mean merely to cry out to his grace, but also to remind him of his covenant fidelity by giving signs of repentance and conversion which allow God to see that one still stands by this covenant and faithfulness. One dares to remind God of his fidelity to the covenant and to depend on this as something that is already present by grace; naturally it is not far to the idea that the entire mutuality of the alliance rests on the originally one-sided initiative of God's grace by which Israel was chosen, especially when the man who has sinned has once seen that he has no right to God's mercy, but that a new and free bestowal of God's grace is necessary in order for the relationship of *chesed* and truthfulness to be restored.

The restoration was dependent upon the action of God internalised in the heart. The other covenants up to this point in the history of the Israelites tended to have external forms of ratification and renewal. There was continuity of course with the models of previous covenants in evoking an obedient response but Jeremiah grasped the fundamental incapacity of the human heart, a poverty that totally relied on being the recipient of God's grace, even for making a response. A totally loving and utterly obedient response in trust and freedom required nothing less than a new heart and a new spirit.

The Jerusalem Bible (NJB.1171), in the introduction to the prophets, says of Jeremiah: "His doctrine of a new covenant written in the heart made him father of all that was best in Judaism. His influence may be seen in Ezekiel, in Deutero-Isaiah and in several of the Psalms."

3.9 Ezekiel: A New Heart And A New Spirit

We will now turn to the prophet Ezekiel and trace some of these influences and also the way in which he developed his own inimitable style of speaking about the heart.

Echoing Jeremiah, Ezekiel realised that a profound change was needed in the human heart. If perfect union between God and humankind was to be established it required the miraculous intervention of God. "I shall remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, so that they can keep my laws and respect my judgments and put them into practice." (Ezk.11: 19-20.) Ezekiel recognised the gift of God but this gift required acceptance, the willing response of repentance on the part of the individual and the person in community. The change would not be an automatic one, independent of human co-operation. In this aspect too, Ezekiel built upon the insights of Jeremiah in recognising the need for conversion of heart in the act of personal repentance and turning to Yahweh. "I shall judge each one of you by what that person does - declares the Lord Yahweh. Repent, renounce all your crimes, avoid all occasions for guilt. Shake off the crimes you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!" (Ezk.18: 30-31.)

Unlike Jeremiah and Hosea, Ezekiel did not look back to the desert as the golden age of perfect communion where God and humankind had heart to heart intimacy in steadfast love and fidelity. In his dramatic and allegorical style, Ezekiel paints a rather stark picture of an unattractive Israel:

" You were exposed in the open fields in your own dirt on the day you were born" (Ezk.16: 5), following a path of sin and disobedience from the very beginning. "They played the whore in Egypt." (Ezk.23: 3.) Eichrodt (1970: 495) points out that "... here something more is at stake than the mere misfortunes of man, who is so inclined to put himself at the central point of world events." The necessity of cleansing, repentance and the gift of a new heart and a new spirit is emphasised by Ezekiel, and his visions of God, present in power, occur in the desert. The new heart and the new spirit is the work of Yahweh but human co-operation is required. Heart in this context is used as a function of the will; choosing and putting into practice the ways of Yahweh. While Wolff

(1989:111) interprets the heart in this context as “the pure guidings of the conscience” and the spirit to “the steadfast power of the will to act accordingly” Joyce (1989:111) sees heart and spirit as essentially the same in conveying both these aspects in the promised renewal in this prophecy.

I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed;
I shall cleanse you of all your filth and of all your foul idols.
I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you;
I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give
you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you, and
make you keep my laws, and respect and practise my
judgements.
(Ezk.36: 26-28)

Ezekiel breaks new ground in this prophecy. Hosea and Jeremiah believed that in the desert experience God would speak to the heart and in this way move Israel to decision and choice in the way of love. Ezekiel does not emphasise love and affection though he recognises the heart as the place of the will; he realises that this is not enough. The new covenant involving a new heart and a new spirit is not the result of conversion of heart but prior to it. “Israel for her part needs to learn that she is not God's spoilt darling to whose complaints God is always ready to give an indulgent hearing; she must realise that there are other and higher objects than her own feelings of well-being.” (Eichrodt, 1970: 495.) The transcendent God will act and in that act is the recognition that he alone is the Lord God, the holy one. It is his power and grace alone that effects a new heart and a new spirit.

3.10 The Book Of Isaiah And The New Creation

With the later chapters of the Book of Isaiah we return to the theme of the heart and the desert with the emphasis on love and creating anew. The prophet believed that through a new journey of the heart and its re-creation in the desert experience, there would be a new heavens and a new earth. He describes the marvellous transformation of the heart and sees this mirrored in the whole drama of history in the form of world-embracing goodness, which binds the Creator to the creature. Such a vision is possible because “God is already known as the One whose creative word called nature into existence as a totality adapted to include personal life, and who in this natural order gives himself to be known by men for the same as he claims to be in history, namely the Sovereign Lord.” (Eichrodt, 1967: 494.)

The Good News of the creative power of Yahweh to re-create the human heart is expressed with great tenderness in the now familiar images of parenthood and marriage. "Can a woman forget the baby at the breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you." (Is.49: 15.) "Shall I open the womb and not bring to birth?" (Is.66: 9.) "You will be suckled, carried on her hip and fondled in her lap. As a mother comforts a child, so shall I comfort you; and you will be comforted in Jerusalem. At the sight your heart will rejoice." (Is.66: 13-14.) God Himself stoops down to heal and soothe the human heart. "He has sent me to bring the news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken-hearted" (Is.61: 1). The tenderness of God reveals itself in this parent-child relationship in the healing and re-creating of the human heart. It is interesting that the experience of weakness is not taken away but loving trust in the comforting arms of God rejoices the heart. O'Shea (1978:76) says: "positive trust and the avowal of weakness become one thing. It is at this point that poverty is praise, littleness is love, and the child and the Father are one."

Presenting the new creation, which we understand in terms of the new heart, in spousal imagery, we read: "Your creator is your husband," (Is.54: 4). "Yes, Yahweh has called you back like a forsaken, grief-stricken wife, like the repudiated wife of his youth" (Is.54: 6). The gratuitous, everlasting *chesed* of God transforms the unfaithful spouse into "a bride adorned." (Is. 61:10.) The new heart is the delight of God. "As the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you" (Is.62: 5). Even the desert is presented in a positive, renewed, life-giving light. It is part of the journey, not the totality of the journey or the resting place.

When the desert of the heart is recreated by the power of God, it becomes a place of love and intimacy in the eternal now. "Look, I am doing something new... Yes, I am making a road in the desert." (Is.43: 18-19.) The psalmist echoes the same thought saying: "Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion." (Ps.84: 5. RSV.) In these texts there is a sense of journey and the desert is part of that road to be traversed within the heart. Whatever purification is necessary is seen as the redemptive and merciful work of love so that what seemed "a vast and terrible desert" (Dt.1: 19) in the process of conversion became a highway to God revealing his splendour and glory. "Let the desert and the dry lands be glad, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom.... let it burst into flower." (Is 35: 1-2.)

In Deutero-Isaiah, which is sometimes called the Book of the Consolation of Israel, the long established covenant relationship is the basis for speaking to the heart and liberating it through the desert experience of purification and transformation. Expressed in the tender words "My people" and "your God" of a personal relationship, a broken, disconsolate and exiled people are invited to believe and trust in the steadfastness of an eternal love, rooted in the word, God's own word. Stuhlmueeller (1965: 22) says that the Israelites in Babylon to whom these words are addressed are "broken in spirit, deaf to the words of God, blind to the thought of a compassionate God." The word of God is a creative word, which speaks tenderly to the heart and its re-creation will be a consequence of traversing the desert once again in humble obedience to the way of the Lord.

Console my people, console them,
says your God.
Speak to the heart of Jerusalem
and cry to her
that her period of service is ended,
that her guilt has been atoned for,
that, from the hand of Yahweh, she has received
double punishment for all her sins.

A voice cries, 'Prepare in the desert
a way for Yahweh.
Make a straight highway for our God
across the wastelands.
Let every valley be filled in,
every mountain and hill be levelled,
every cliff become a plateau,
every escarpment a plain. (Is. 40: 1-4.)

The demands made and the obstacles to be confronted are not minimised. In richly symbolic language, the desert is presented as a spiritual landscape for the re-creation of the human heart. The challenge involved in making a straight highway for our God across the wastelands involving both mountains and valleys is a reminder of the heights and the depths experienced on the journey of transformation. The process of "levelling" such a landscape within the heart is beyond human powers. "All humanity is grass," (Is.40: 6) is the recognition of human impotence standing in need of the gracious intervention of the spirit of God, awaiting the "new heart" and the "new spirit" prophesied earlier by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

3.11 Parental And Spousal Imagery

Embedded in the covenant language of personal relationship we see once again parental and spousal imagery revealing the heart of God. In the midst of the purifying desert process when abandonment and forgetfulness by God seem very real in human experience, tenderness and compassion, love and mercy burst forth. "Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you." (Is. 49: 15.) This touching image, revealing the feminine heart of God, exceeds the limits of the most tender parental human love. With the same sensitive imagery the love of the heart of God is portrayed in spousal relationship as a bride radiant and adorned with many jewels. "By my life, declares Yahweh, you will put them all on like jewels, like a bride, you will fasten them on." (Is. 49: 18.)

The challenge to admit complete human inadequacy to renew and transform the human heart is part of the desert experience. Then and only then can God reach out with arm outstretched and speak heart to heart with his beloved and child. God alone can change the human heart and accomplish the conversion required for healing and wholeness. The process of conversion, however, is never easy either in the community or in the individual heart. Stuhlmueller (1965: 83) speaks of the "tortured heart" where "sin and grace, sorrow and peace are constantly grappling with one another; God's victory does not result from passivity but from struggle". It is from the desert experience that the beloved of God emerges transformed and wounded by the depth of the encounter with God, which is revealed in the Song of Songs: "What is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke" (Sg.3: 6).

3.12 The Song of Songs and the heart

According to Arminjon (1983:201-202) the question asked here is steeped in the mystery of the presence and revelation of the God of covenant love.

"What is this?" This is a striking opening to this second poem. Coming from the depth of the desert, a long column as yet distinct shows up on the horizon. But it is not so much the distance, the remoteness, of the column that causes the chorus of the nations to ask the question; it is rather the very nature of the column and the mystery surrounding it. The chorus of the nations is confronted with the very mystery of Yahweh. He leads them, visible and

invisible at the same time in the column of smoke (Ex.13: 21) "A column of smoke" the Song says, like the one that rose from the mountain before the Covenant was made. Indeed, everything suggests that this is He; the question itself, always rising from the heart of man when God reveals himself, is already that of the Hebrews in the desert when faced with the mystery of the manna - What is that? they too had asked (Ex.16:15) - or of Moses confronted with the mystery of the burning bush (Ex.3:3). Indeed Yahweh Himself is coming today, as in the days of the Exodus, before His people with his people toward the Promised Land.

Later in the Song we read in striking spousal imagery of the bride gently leaning on her beloved as she emerges from the desert experience. "Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?" (Sg. 8: 5.) Yet the image of the bride "leaning on her lover" is open to different interpretations. It may be Arminjon's (1983:339), view of the "...bride softly surrendering to her husband, leaning on him, united and identified with him in the unity of the couple", or it may be reminiscent of Jacob wrestling with God until daybreak until he recognised the face of God and was forever "wounded" and consequently changed by the encounter (Gn.32: 23-33). In the final stage of transformation and union, the bride, wholly converted and surrendered says: "Set me like a seal on your heart" (Sg 8: 6). Made in God's image and likeness, the bride now bears His image in the innermost being, sealed in a heart to heart likeness, but there is the humble recognition that this is indeed the work of God in the realm of mystery and grace.

Throughout the texts we have studied we have seen the manifest love of God in the covenant relationship in terms of parental and spousal love, but love is always the most challenging, fundamental and life-changing revelation. In this Song the love offered seems to have been recognised, received and accepted and the biblical concepts of heart, conversion and desert merge in a unified image. The heart, the innermost being of the person has been transformed in the desert, the "biblical locus of betrothal, where the bridegroom spoke at length to his beloved, to her heart, waking her up little by little to the absolute majesty of his love, preparing her for perfect union with him." (Arminjon 1983:340) The desert is the preliminary long Noviciate in the school of love, endlessly renewed, therefore temporary but necessary in the journey of ongoing transformation of the heart.

3.13 Chapter Conclusion

Scripture points to the enigma of the heart and asks, "Who can understand it?" (Jr.17: 9.) In attempting to penetrate the mystery of the heart we are dealing with the mystery of the human person. Made in the image and likeness of God, the human heart is challenged and perplexed by personal freedom in the journey to wholeness. In this process of transformation, the heart needs the experience of conversion in which the desert has a central part to play. For the Israelites of old it was the Exodus journey through the desert that played an important part in transforming individuals into a covenant community. This was a key moment in the history of Israel. In the context of this study, the temporary, provisional and privileged nature of the desert is most significant because of the transformation and transition, which the desert experience envisions and invites. We have already seen this in the language and imagery of Hosea and Jeremiah. It is the language of love, surrender, warmth and intimacy. (Ho.2: 16; Jr. 2: 1-2.)

Primarily, the desert is this call to love but because of the duplicity in our hearts, the desert is relentless in the purification and perfecting of that love which is likened to parental discipline (Dt.8: 5.) The biblical concept of desert has much to teach us about the heart and the depth of transformation which is invited in that experience. "You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." (Dt.6: 5.) God asks for a total and unrestricted love but in our human nature, which is marked by perversity and paradox, the call to wholeness is not easily embraced. It is only when we have accepted and responded to the God who loved us first that we desire metanoia, that true conversion of heart in the totality of our personhood. It is the "new heart" and the "new spirit" envisioned by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. (Jr. 31: 31-34; Ez.36: 24-27.)

As we meditate on the Word of God we begin to realise that, in the original plan of God, all that He created was good, and man, made in his own image and likeness, was very good. The revealed word begins with a theology of goodness. "God saw all that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gn.1: 31). There was a unity and wholeness at the beginning that did not include sin and separation. The need to convert our hearts arises from our sin, which is that turning away from God, the source and ground of our being. Hiding from God and attempting to escape from Him is part of the human drama. "The man and his wife heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from Yahweh" (Gn.3:8). That our hearts are in need

of conversion belongs to history, not to man's nature (Cantalamessa, 1981:856). For this reason the biblical and Christian tradition emphasises the notion of conversion of heart, because it is only in the Bible that the mystery of our wayward hearts is revealed.

Our focus in this chapter has been the heart of God and the human heart as revealed in the Old Testament. We have had to restrict our references for the purposes of this study, focusing on the meaning of the heart in the context of affection, reason and will and the way in which heart is understood in the writings of St. Francis. Placing love as the foundation for conversion and transformation of the heart, the emphasis has been on the *chesed* of God in the covenant relationship revealed especially in the imagery of parenthood and marriage. The desert experience was seen as crucial in the journey of the heart, enabling us to recognise the call to love - to accept love and to allow all that separates or prevents us from receiving and giving love, to be purified. This is the basis of biblical covenant love - *chesed*, which is at the heart of *metanoia*. "Indeed, the covenantal love found in *metanoia* penetrates all human relationships- love of husband and wife, love of parents and children, love between friends, love in community, love for the Church, love for country, love for the world. All these loves are caught up in the mystical love of the covenant. They share in the Christian mystical experience." (Johnston, 1984:77.) We will now turn our attention to the Christian experience as it is revealed in the New Testament.

CHAPTER 4: A Study Of 'Heart' And 'Desert' In The New Testament

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we examined a number of texts in the Old Testament referring to heart. We concluded that the biblical understanding of this word embraces the totality of the person within the mystery of freedom and grace. Our analysis of the place of the desert in the journey of the heart emphasised the crucial role the desert plays not only in the conversion and transformation of the heart but in revealing the very heart of God. We will now continue our exploration of the biblical concept of the heart in the New Testament and the relationship of the desert in the conversion process as the heart journeys through transformation.

4.2. Brief overview

The word heart is found 176 times in the New Testament. The Greek translation has the same range of meaning as the Hebrew meaning for heart in the Old Testament. Unlike the Old Testament where the heart is occasionally referred to as a physical organ, the New Testament never mentions the heart as a physical organ but emphasises heart as the life giving centre of the person. "He did not leave you without evidence of himself in the good things he does for you: he sends you rain from heaven and seasons of fruitfulness; he fills you with food and your heart with merriment". (Ac.14: 17.) Consistent with the Old Testament teaching, the heart is especially referred to in the New Testament as the inner core of a person's feelings, intellect and will. As such it remains the place of symbol and mystery and of freedom and grace.

Present in the teaching of Jesus is the fundamental importance of the Old Testament conviction that despite appearances God alone knows the heart. As Jeremiah (Jr.17: 9) had noted: "The heart is more devious than any other thing". Yet the mysterious fact is that the heart does not always reveal or reflect what is hidden there. Jesus said (Lk.16: 15): "You are the very ones who pass yourselves off as upright in people's sight, but God knows your hearts". He really knows what is within a person in the deepest recesses of his /her being. The first followers of Jesus realised this when they prayed: "Lord, you can read everyone's heart; show us therefore which one of these you have chosen?" (Ac. 1: 24.)

Recognising the heart as central and hidden within the life of a person, St. Peter (1P.3: 3-4) states: "Your adornment should not be an exterior one, consisting of braided hair or gold jewellery or fine clothing, but the interior dispositions of the heart". It is from within a person that secret motivations and desires abide. "For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too". (Mt. 6: 21; Lk.12: 34.) The consequences of these secret desires within the heart produce either good or evil. In the New Testament in continuity with Hebrew Scriptures, the word heart refers to the all-embracing understanding of the person in his or her totality as a feeling, thinking and willing human being.

4.2.1 The Heart And The Emotions

The emotions, both positive and negative, are rooted in this mysterious and hidden centre of the human person, as the following examples illustrate: love, joy, anguish, sorrow, and rest. "Love each other intensely from the heart". (1P.1: 22.) "So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy" (Jn.16: 22); Paul asks the question of the people of Caesarea who lamented his leaving them: "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?" (Ac. 21:15.) On another occasion, when writing to the Romans (Rm.9: 2), Paul said: "There is great sorrow and unremitting agony in my heart". "You have set the hearts of God's holy people at rest" (Ph.7). As stated in the previous chapter we arrive at only a partial understanding of heart if we limit our understanding to the emotional life.

4.2.2 The Heart And The Intellect

The New Testament, therefore, supports the Hebraic understanding of the heart, which includes functions we would associate with the mind and intellectual life. Peter makes the connection between the Old and the New when he says: "So we have confirmation of the words of the prophets; and you will be right to pay attention to it as to a lamp for lighting a way through the dark, until the dawn comes and the morning star rises in your minds". (RSV: hearts.) (2P.1: 19.) When Jesus had cured the paralytic, the Scribes and Pharisees were inwardly criticising Jesus and he said: "Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts?" (Mk.2: 9) On another occasion after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to the Apostles in the upper room he said to them: "Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts stirring in your hearts?" (Lk.24: 39.) There is also the prayer of Paul for the "eyes of the mind (RSV: heart) to be enlightened". (Ep.1: 18.) It is this same God, Paul points out "that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory". (2Co.4: 6.)

4.2.3 The Heart And The Will

Concerning the will, where each person is accountable in the exercise of his/her freedom, we are once again in the realm of mystery and grace where the deepest human encounters take place. Metz (1968:6) speaks of the exercise of freedom as the law of being for the human person. Fulfilment and the quality of life and relationships are dependent upon the choices made in the heart.

Both Old and New Testaments lament the hard, closed, unbelieving, disobedient, unforgiving and faithless heart. Answering the Pharisees concerning divorce, Jesus said (Mt.19: 8; Mk.10: 5): "It was because you were so hard-hearted, that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives". Having cured the man with the withered hand, Jesus was "grieved at the hardness of heart" of the Pharisees. (RSV: Mk. 3: 5.) In the Acts of the Apostles we read of Stephen, the first martyr, accusing his enemies of being a "stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears". (Ac.7: 51) When Simon offered to buy the gifts of God for money, Peter (Ac. 8:21) told him: "God can see that your heart is warped". The story of Ananias and Sapphira shows clearly that the intention is first of all contrived in the heart: "What put this scheme into your mind (RSV: heart) (Ac.5: 4) Jesus summed it up when he said: "For from the heart come evil intentions: murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury, slander", (Mt.15: 19) and evil speech: "For words flow out of what fills the heart". (Mt.12: 34.) Raasch (1966:18) points out that "the whole list of evils which follows is nothing but a series of specific examples of the first generic term, evil thoughts".

4.3 Jesus: The Human Heart And The Heart Of God

The choice to have an open, loving, forgiving, believing, persevering, faithful, obedient and pure heart is beyond the power of a human being. This was the lament of the prophets and psalmist in the Old Testament and in the face of such a mystery, we understand the cry of St. Paul in the New Testament (Rm.7: 24-5): " What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? God - thanks be to him - through Jesus Christ our Lord". It is to Jesus Christ, therefore, that we must turn our attention because he alone allows us entry into the mystery of the heart both human and divine. Our starting point is the Gospel of St. John with which St. Francis had a special affinity.

No one has ever seen God;
It is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart,
Who has made him known. (Jn.1: 18)

Jesus reveals to us the mystery of our own hearts and the mystery of the heart of God; therefore in him we will explore the biblical concepts of 'heart', 'desert', and 'conversion', within the covenant relationship of parental, filial and spousal love.

Because of the complexity of the human order, it has always been a special task of the Semitic religious traditions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam, to point out the workings of the divine within the historical order. Francis makes a unique contribution to this tradition by virtue of the fact that he combines the mythic-poetic sense with the historical-critical sense... He is able to do this because of his Christocentrism.
(Donald St.John 1979: 193.)

If, as Donald St. John asserts (1979:192-205): "The heart embraces the divine in and through the symbol" then the entry of Jesus Christ into our world gifts us with the most perfect symbol of the love and goodness of the heart of God enfleshed in our world. These two aspects of the love and goodness of God are the special way or emphasis associated with St. Francis and Franciscan spirituality (Foley et al, 2000: 17). Later we shall look at the heart of God in the revelation of Jesus, the Son of God, through the prism of goodness and love and the consequences for the life of Jesus and those who desire to be like him.

The Scriptures tell us that God entered human history and took to himself our human flesh. "We say this all too casually, because inadvertently we are accustomed to consider only the biological event, the external process. But the assumption of man's type of Being is primarily a spiritual venture pulsing through the free activity of our heart. It is an unfolding story, an inner journey" (Metz, 1968:9). As the ancient church of the Nativity shows, there is a very ancient tradition that the birth of Jesus took place in a cave or grotto; it then becomes significant that the unfolding story of the heart of God in the flesh and blood of Jesus should be disclosed in the richly symbolic cave or grotto of Bethlehem.

All caves speak to the human soul. They conjure up images of an entrance into the world of Mystery - maternal images of gestation, spiritual images of centreing, images which touch the heart. They are the space of the deep and hidden heart. Caves as places of origin, caves as places of burrowing

and burying, can be found in the Christian Tradition, for instance, at the birth and death of Jesus. (Brunette 1997:31)

Brunette points out that a significant factor about a natural cave - which is symbolic of the human heart - is the necessity of "descending into an intimate and buried space". Intimacy and emptiness in the dark and hidden recesses of the earth evoke both fear and trembling, wonder and awe. In the cave at Bethlehem the Word made flesh- Jesus Christ- evoked the same reactions when He came to dwell among us and revealed to us the depths of our own hearts and the heart of God. Later in His teaching on the human heart and its need for conversion leading to transformation, Jesus will use the richly symbolic language of the treasure, the sign of Jonah, and the seed, to reveal to us the landscape of the inner journey and its underground experiences in becoming the home and dwelling place of God.

In the Gospels we find the word heart on the lips of Jesus forty-eight times. When we analyse these texts we see that in presenting the heart in symbolic language he heightens our awareness of particular characteristics and attitudes associated with it. We will examine briefly the symbols for heart used by Jesus and then we will concentrate on the attitudes and characteristics to which he draws our attention. Within this context we will explore the relationships envisaged and the ways in which obstacles may be recognised and faced, particularly in the desert experience, in the process of conversion and transformation.

4.3.1 The Condition Of The Heart

Matthew's Gospel (Mt.6: 21) places these words on the lips of Jesus: "Wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too." This richly symbolic language of the treasure evokes the cave image where treasure is often hidden. In literature, great adventures of heroic struggle and challenge are involved in journeying and finding the hidden treasure. The process of conversion of heart is no less adventurous and challenging as one enters the cave of the heart to find the treasure that is hidden deep within. To embark on such an arduous journey of descent involves a solitary experience into hitherto unknown regions. The desert evokes such a challenge and experience. There, in the desert of the individual heart, conversion takes place slowly, providing that we do not run away from the trials and tribulations which beset a person on the inner journey (Beumer, 1997: 85).

On another occasion when Jesus (Mt.12: 40) was speaking of the evil that springs from a wicked heart, the Scribes and Pharisees asked him for a sign and he said:

It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

This is a most insightful image of depth and darkness, loss of control, unknown regions and new horizons. This is desert language and the image evoked is both positive and negative; it is the symbolic language of conversion of heart and transformation deeply rooted in the paschal mystery of the Son of Man. Jesus does not underestimate the process involved in the journey of descent into the heart. While the "sign of Jonah" emphasises the descent into the unknown and is symbolic of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and indeed of each person in him, the parable of the sower emphasises the condition of the heart where the seed, the Word of God is sown. (cf. Mk.4:1-20; Lk.4:4-8.) Dependent upon the state of the heart is the birth, growth and fruitfulness of the word, the life of God that is sown there. In the text from St. Luke's Gospel (Lk.6: 45 RSV) the treasure and the soil are brought together and three times Jesus emphasised the good.

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good,
and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil.

In the parable of the sower Jesus is at pains to help us to understand the relationship that exists between the Word and the heart. We consider it so important in the context of this study that we will quote it in full. Jesus began to teach and he said:

A sower went out to sow his seed.
Now as he sowed, some fell on the edge of the path and was trampled on;
and the birds ate it up.
Some seed fell on rock, and when it sprang up it withered away,
having no moisture.
Some seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns grew up with it
and choked it.
And some seed fell into good soil and grew
and produced its crop a hundredfold. (Lk.8: 4-8)

The disciples of Jesus asked him to explain this parable. He said:

The seed is the word of God
Those on the edge of the path are people who have heard it,
and then the devil comes and carries away the word from their hearts
in case they should believe and be saved.
Those on the rock are people who, when first they hear it,
welcome the word with joy.
but these have no root;
they believe for a while, and in time of trial they give up.
As for the part that fell in thorns,
this is people who have heard, but as they go on their way
they are choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of life
and never produce any crops.
As for the part in the rich soil,
This is people with a noble and generous heart
who have heard the word and take it to themselves
and yield a harvest through their perseverance. (Lk.8:11-15)

4.3.2 The heart as the dwelling place of God

The heart, created to receive the Word of God is totally dependent upon grace to become his dwelling place. The Johannine image of the heart as the home or dwelling place of God is central in the teaching of Jesus and in the writings of Francis. This image also suggests the hidden nature of the divine reality rooted in the word and abiding in love.

Anyone who loves me will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we shall come to him
and make a home in him. (Jn.14: 23.)

We will interpret this parable in more detail in a later chapter to emphasise the depth of biblical insight with which St. Francis understood and presented it in the context of the heart. Louf (1975:39) emphasises the importance of allowing the Word of God to be in truth what it is: a power of God because he emphasises that the heart was made to receive the Word, and the Word adapts itself to the dimensions of our human heart. To bring the Word to life each day and nurture and treasure it for the gift that it is, requires a radical response in co-operating and persevering with the process of conversion and transformation.

In the symbolic language used by Jesus to reveal to us the mystery of our hearts and the heart of God, we have powerful images. Coming to life in Christ is not a past event but a present reality: "You are my son, today I have fathered you". (Ps.2: 7.) This truth of divine filiation in the continuing act of God is reiterated by St. John (1Jn.3: 9): "No one who is a child of God sins because God's seed remains in him". In another text (1Jn.4: 9) he goes as far as saying that this is the reason Christ came into the world: "This is the revelation of God's love for us, that God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him." And Jesus Himself states (Jn.10: 10): "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full".

In the images of the heart used by Jesus we have the suggestion of a journey into the depths. If the journey is not made, the treasure cannot be found. That the treasure is there is a given. It is gift. It is grace. What happens to the gift depends on the state of the soil of the heart in which the gift is received. Therefore, prior to finding this treasure within, which is the life of God and our own life in him, there is the recognition, acceptance and co-operation with the new birth that is achieved through the Word. "Your new birth was not from any perishable seed but from imperishable seed, the living and enduring Word of God". (1P.1: 23.) "The locus of that birth, the place where the Word comes to fruition in us, is the heart". (Louf, 1975: 38.)

4.4 The heart and the Word

In the parable Jesus draws attention to specific characteristics that prevent the growth and fulfilment of the relationship between the Word and the heart. This can only become reality in and through Christ, the image of the invisible God and the first-born of all creation (Col.1: 15-17). He is the perfect revelation of the heart of God and the perfect revelation of the heart of a child of God. As the "eternal masterpiece" of God's creation, Christ is the "First Adorer" and "Perfect Child". (Foley et al, 2000:23.) To become an adorer presupposes a pure heart and to become a perfect child presupposes a humble heart that recognizes its innate poverty and dependence on the Father and source of all being. Jesus said (Mt.5: 3, 8): "Blessed are the poor in spirit: theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven and blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God." On another occasion he said: "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." (Mt. 12:29.) These texts are central to understanding the relationship between God and ourselves in the continuing formation of our hearts. We will return to these texts later in this chapter.

As stated previously, the heart is the place of symbol and mystery and of freedom and grace where both good and evil reside. In the course of his preaching and teaching Jesus would refer many times to this mysterious reality with which he wrestled in his own desert experience. There his heart was tested and we reverence this story because it must have come from Jesus himself in the sharing of the agonising struggle within his own heart. "Anyone called to penetrate the Spirit in his heart is inevitably and inexorably confronted with evil and with the Evil One in person". (Louf: 1975: 44.)

At his Baptism, Jesus received the Spirit in the form of a dove that confirmed him in his identity as the beloved of the Father. "You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you." (Mk.1: 11.) Significantly, especially in the context of this study, it was the Spirit who drove Jesus into the desert immediately after this peak experience in his relationship with his Father in the presence and power of the Spirit. Within the heart of the Word made flesh, in one event and one sentence we have the revelation of the intimate relationships within the Trinity. Bovenmars (1991:78) claims that in the experiential knowledge of himself as a son, Jesus had in that experience "the heart of a son". This is evidenced throughout the Gospels, in ministry and in prayer and in joy and sorrow. (Jn.11: 1-44; Jn.17: 1-26; Lk.10: 21-22; Mt.26: 36-46.) His identity as the son who is nearest to the Father's heart was the "secret" of his life and mission. It is no less the secret of our life and mission in him.

When we look to this heart that is the Lord's, we are looking at the sign of that mystery which dominates and encompasses our whole life. There would be no heart if the heart of the Lord were not already there as that which is prior to all others, that which remains for ever mysterious, if it were not for this mystery that lies at the very roots of reality as such. And to that extent this heart points us on to the mystery of God himself. It is not only the human heart of God's eternal Logos, who is the inconceivable mystery of God himself precisely because God is the mystery par excellence. It is a symbol of mystery as such, and therefore, too of the mystery of the eternal Godhead. (Rahner, 1971:242.)

The gospels draw us into the mystery of freedom and grace in revealing the impelling power of the Spirit, confirming Jesus in his identity and mission and driving him into the desert experience. Cummings (1978: 92) points out: "The memory of the original desert experience of the people of God was part of the historical heritage of Jesus and helped him as a man to live the mystery of his own desert experience". The Old Testament Israel failed in loving obedience, ever resisting the will of God during the

symbolic forty years of travelling through the desert. Now, Jesus, the New Israel, entered the struggle and the confrontation between good, personified in Jesus, and evil personified in Satan, is waged in the heart of the God-man. Every battle begins in the human heart before it finds expression in external reality. Satan works on our thoughts and desires before they are externalised in behaviour and action. "For from the heart come evil intentions: murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury, slander". (Mt.15: 20.)

The heart is the source that determines the quality of living and loving and as such is tested and capable of being formed, deformed, reformed and transformed. The desert was for Jesus, as for Israel of old, the place of testing and when Jesus emerged triumphant over temptation from his desert experience, he demonstrated that he fulfilled the promise of God in being the new Israel. He would inaugurate a new covenant making possible a new heart and a new spirit in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, his Passover gift. Dufour (1973: 229) points out: "According to John, it could even be said that Jesus *is the heart* of the new Israel, the heart that brings a close relation with the Father and establishes unity among all". In him we have the heart of God revealed in the parent-child relationship, which the Old Testament established so firmly in the covenant relationship. The New Testament is the revelation of the mysterious and gratuitous gift of God in Jesus and the unimaginable consequences for us.

As you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his
Son crying,
"Abba, Father", and so you are no longer a slave, but a son; and
if a son,
then an heir by God's own act'. (Ga.4: 6-7)

Emerging from his desert experience as the new Israel, the first words of Jesus (Mk 1:15) were: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Gospel." On the lips of Jesus, repentance and conversion of heart took on a completely new meaning because in him and through him God's promise of a new heart and a new spirit would be fulfilled in the new covenant between God and man. The *chesed* relationship of the old covenant becomes the *agape* of the new covenant in the person of Jesus Christ. And in this fulfilment right relationships are established in the reign of justice and peace.

In his own humanity, the heart of Jesus Christ symbolized the place where the total surrender of his being would be made in a free act of love and obedience. Thinking, feeling, willing, and choosing the Father's will at every moment of his life made Jesus the true Servant of Yahweh standing in direct line between the Old and New Testaments and shaped in the desert experiences of his earthly life. Servant yes, but also child and perfect lover in human flesh. On the lips of Jesus, therefore, in the word heart, we enter the unique mystery of our very existence in all its aspects of paradox and ambiguity.

4.5 The heart and conversion

To enter the depths of the heart and there embrace our innate poverty, facing both the good and the evil that reside within, is the challenge of conversion. The necessity of *metanoia* was the first message in the proclamation of the Good News by Jesus. In this process the desert has a crucial part to play - but only a part. As Louth (1991:26) points out: "... the desert is not an ultimate symbol: the desert is encountered in the course of the (bible) story many times, but the story neither begins there, nor ends there." The link between conversion and the desert is central in the journey of the heart. If Jesus himself entered the desert experience then his followers have no other choice than to do the same because to reach the beatitude of seeing God requires a pure heart. The journey of conversion involves entering the realm of darkness and light in confronting the unfolding mystery of our hearts. Often the desert experiences in life intensify the awareness and realisation of what lies deep within our hearts.

Of the forty-eight times he speaks of the heart, Jesus emphasises both the positive and the negative characteristics and attitudes which have to be faced in the experience of conversion. He speaks (Mt.5: 8) of a heart that is pure, good, forgiving, loving, gentle and lowly.

Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God.

And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word,
hold it fast in an honest and good heart. (Lk.8: 15)

Forgive your brother from your heart. (Mt.18: 35)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart. (Mt.22: 37; Mk.12: 30; Lk.10:27)

Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. (Mt.11: 29)

He also speaks of a heart that is evil, troubled, dull, hard, slow, coarse, adulterous, doubting and questioning.

Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened. (Lk.21: 34)

If a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Mt.5: 28)

In truth I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, "Be pulled up and thrown into the sea," with no doubt in his heart...(Mk.11:23)

Why do you question thus in your hearts? (RSV. Mk.2:8)

In biblical language, the painful journey of the heart towards integration involves the process of *metanoia*, or conversion. Much has been written on conversion and we will deal with the wider range of meaning and interpretation in chapter 7 when we discuss the TOR *charism* of "conversion of heart". Here we are limiting ourselves to the biblical emphasis of receiving and accepting the gift of God's love and responding to that with a loving and obedient surrender in every sphere of life - which is inherent in the gift of one's heart in the biblical sense, and the place the desert plays in this process.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5: 8) we read: "Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God." Such purity presupposes a heart where the affections, intellect and will are integrated in a love that is a participation in the life of God himself. Muto (1982:118) states that this beatitude touches upon "foundational longings in the human spirit: one is singleness and the other seeing." She suggests that the first addresses the human desire to move from fragmentation to integration and the second addresses the human desire to let go of illusion and live in reality.

No one reaches this stage of beatitude without the suffering which purification entails, the process we call conversion and which is intimately linked to the desert experience. Van Kaam (1986:145) states: "The release of the Christ form in our whole being and world is only possible to the degree that our hearts have been formed and reformed in his likeness and transformed by his grace." We cannot avoid those two human experiences, which touch every life: love and suffering. Therefore, accepting that the biblical understanding of heart encompasses the whole person "... so purity of heart expresses the all-encompassing intention to let God's love suffuse one's entire being and allow his holy will to direct one's entire life" (Muto, 1982: 120). Jesus has given us the example of his own life and calls us to follow him.

4.6 A new heart

Jesus directs our attention to the cost of discipleship by emphasising specific characteristics and attitudes associated with the creation of the new heart. We will see that the hidden mystery of the heart is manifested in outward behaviour and actions. Most striking is the text from Matthew (11:29) in which Jesus identifies himself with particular qualities of heart and asks us to follow his example: "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." In Scripture, especially in the beatitudes (Mt.5: 1-11), poverty, gentleness and humility are associated with the poor of Yahweh, the *anawim*.

How blessed are the poor in spirit: the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as their inheritance.
Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: they shall have their fill.
Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.
Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognised as children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness:
The Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. (Mt.5: 3-10.)

Jesus identifies himself and his followers with the *anawim* because of the qualities of their hearts. But as Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians (2:6-11): "He was humbler yet".

Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus:
who, being in the form of God,
did not count equality with God
something to be grasped.

But He emptied himself
taking the form of a slave,
becoming as human being are;
and being in every way like a human being,
he was humbler yet,
even to accepting death, death on a cross.
And for this God raised him high,
and gave him the name
Which is above all other names;
So that all beings
In the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,

should bend the knee at the name of Jesus
and that every tongue should acknowledge
Jesus Christ as Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This is the ground plan and blueprint for Christian living: the heart of a son, obedient to death, even death on a cross, giving his life in selfless love, taking upon himself the totality of suffering and love, good and evil, within the limitations of a human life. All Christians are called to share in the *kenosis* of Christ but some individuals, like Francis of Assisi, emulate the self-emptying love of Christ as a special *charism* in the Church. Francis in his espousal of 'Lady Poverty' realised that "The poverty which is blessed is not merely any kind of trusting poverty, but the poverty which results from a total generosity. It is the poverty which reproduces the generosity of God himself: which gives for the sake of giving". (Bouyer, 1968: 43.) In the New Testament it is in Christ, especially Christ crucified, that *chased* becomes *agape*. In the heart of Jesus, the Son of God "... is that reality which on the one hand belongs to God as the ultimate and absolute upholder of all things, and on the other has 'externalised' itself and indeed emptied itself in order to enter into the 'otherness' of non-divine being". (Rahner, 1971: 236.) Only by entering into the mystery of Christ can we hope to journey into the realm of the heart, both of God and our own hearts as potentially transformative in him.

In Jesus "gentle and humble in heart" (Mt.11: 28) we have the revelation of the humility of heart in God himself. Gerken (1993:75) states: "... humility is nothing else but love bending low, reaching out to the poor, becoming one with them and sharing their lot". Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh makes known to us the heart of the Father and the nature of the humble love that belongs to the very life of the Trinity. The embrace of poverty from Bethlehem to Calvary reveals the mysterious process involved in the revelation of the heart of God in Christ. Such condescending love becomes vulnerable in the crib, the cross and the Eucharist. "God's revelation of himself is a paradigmatic and universal action. Otherwise it would not be divine." (Gerken, 1993: 76.)

4.6.1 Embracing the human condition

Christ embraced the will of God in the ordinariness of human life from birth to death in obedience even to death on a cross. In Philippians we are drawn into the powerful image of the cross, whereby our lost dignity is restored and we become what Christ is, the child and beloved of the Father and servant of all that is created. Made in his image and likeness, we too share in his glory if we too embrace the human condition in

all its beauty and ugliness, its pain and suffering, its love and joy. In the human condition, "everything belongs" (Rohr, 1999: 18). To see reality in this way requires a heart purified of all forms of selfishness that imprisons human beings in the narrow confines of the ego-self. This is the Gospel embrace of the cross in the daily experiences of poverty and limitation.

The journey from the idyllic Garden of Eden (Gn.2: 8-10) to the fulfilment in the city of God (Rv.21: 2-4) involves some experiences of the desert. In the "desert" all the normal props are taken away and "a person stands naked and defenceless before God, that is to say, in that poverty and weakness which are his only asset. Before solitude brings him to the encounter with God, it first teaches him his limitations, his 'abysmal insignificance' " (Louf, 1975: 72-3). The refining of our human capacities will usually be intensified in the "desert" experiences of our lives, not only the literal desert but also the symbolic "deserts" that open us to face our innate poverty and allow the mystery of grace to transform us. In this context, Metz (1968: 14, 8) presents the temptations of Christ as three assaults on the poverty he has chosen in the radical and uncompromising step of becoming human. He also refers to the daily acceptance of humanness in the "painful experiment of living". The gift of a new heart will open us to accept with humility the experience of our poverty and lovingly and patiently surrender to the suffering that this involves.

4.6.2 The purpose of the desert

The life of Jesus reveals that the desert is not only the trysting place but also the testing place. In the wilderness of Judea during his forty days there, Jesus was put to the test. In fact Luke (4:13) tells us that: "Having exhausted every way of putting him to the test, the devil left him, until the opportune moment". Opportune moments are the daily deserts in which the quality of our hearts are tested and proved, formed and transformed. One author (Cummings, 1978) identifies desert experiences with daily routine, loneliness, senselessness, doubt, middle age and death.

When desert experiences are creatively embraced as part of the process of conversion of heart, contemplative seeing results. "Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God" (Mt.5:8). Muto (1982:120) argues that this 'seeing' is not grasped by human reason alone because God remains a mystery. It can only be with 'eyes of love' that the sight of God is glimpsed. She says: "Perhaps what this promise means is that we shall comprehend fully for the first time in ecstatic adoration the utter

incomprehensibility of God". Perhaps all we can do is 'rest' in the awareness of his love and like St. Francis, praise and adore him for who he is in himself.

All-powerful, most holy, most high and supreme God

Holy and just Father

Lord, King of Heaven and earth

We thank You for Yourself. (ER.XX111: 1.)

4.7 Martha and Mary

Jesus said (Mt.11: 28): "Come to Me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest." The 'rest' promised by Jesus requires a humble and lowly heart that acknowledges its poverty and is open to the revelation of who God is and who we are. The story of Martha and Mary highlight both the resting and the labour and overburdened aspects of daily living. What seems to be at stake here is the condition and whereabouts of the heart, which is manifested in the words and actions of both Mary and Martha. Because this text is central to this study we will quote it in full here.

In the course of their journey they came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all my myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her. ' (Lk.10: 38-42)

This well known text has been the subject of much reflection, interpretation and controversy throughout the history of Christian spirituality. We will return to it later in this study but at this point we wish to make the following observations. Contemplative seeing, which Mary symbolizes, reveals the necessity of taking time to "be with" the Lord. It cuts through any attachment to being busy and rationalising such activity to the exclusion of simply being. If we are to live in that purity of heart that sees God, then "... reasoning must be humbled by love" (Muto, 1982:125). Love will lead us into mystery. It is the mystery of God being "the heart of our heart" in such a way that our hearts are beings created anew at every moment by the newness of the life of God. (Tugwell, 1980:97.)

If our hearts are being created anew by the Spirit within us, then we learn to see differently, with the eyes of the heart but that means actually giving time to sit at the feet of the Lord. Martha who was worried and busy about many things had to learn that "purity of heart is to will one thing" (Kierkegaard, 1956). Kierkegaard compares this purity of heart to the sea. The depth of the sea determines its purity, and its purity determines its transparency. (Muto, 1982: 126.) Speaking of this beatitude with the symbolism of water, Tugwell (1980: 94), in his reflections on the Beatitudes, put it this way: "Blessed are those whose inner principle is pure, unmuddied." As scripture says: "From his heart shall flow streams of living water" (Jn.7: 38). In truth, only the God-man, Jesus Christ is the perfect transparent reflection of God. Created in his image and likeness, we in our turn mirror his reflection when our hearts are pure and we seek the one thing necessary. This is the work of the Spirit, the gift of the risen Jesus.

Therefore, the importance of Jesus' words (Mt.11: 28) cannot be over emphasised when he said: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are overburdened". The first condition is to come to Jesus and, like Mary, to sit at his feet and learn that a new way of being necessitates leaving aside everything else for a time. Jesus himself gave the example to be followed. The Gospels record the many instances when Jesus, under the impulse of the Spirit, sought the desert experience in the solitude of both dawn and darkness. Besides the forty days and nights in the desert, Jesus got up very early in the morning to listen to the Father. Mark (1: 35) says of Jesus: "In the morning, long before dawn, he (Jesus) got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there." Luke (4: 42) tells us: "When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place." On other occasions Jesus spent whole nights in solitude: "He spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Lk.6: 12). At other times Jesus spent himself in the service of others, teaching, healing and proclaiming the Good News.

The implication is not to remain at his feet and never get involved in 'worldly' activities. McCole (1996:38) does not limit her study of Martha and Mary to the account given in Luke's Gospel. She draws attention also to John's Gospel to the raising of Lazarus (Jn.11: 1-44) and to the anointing at Bethany (Jn.12: 1-11). In taking these three Gospel episodes, McCole presents a "more complete portrait of these gospel women". In the combined texts our attention is drawn to the reversal of roles of Martha and Mary, highlighting the relational aspect. These stories clearly illustrate the learning process of holding together the paradox of activity and contemplation in the loving attentiveness of a vigilant and obedient heart.

4.7.1 Identifying the 'one thing necessary'

Once we have identified 'the one thing necessary' as the need to be in a relationship of love that at times means active ministry and at other times a heart-to-heart listening at the feet of Jesus, we are in the process of transformation. A text in Matthew's gospel also highlights the active-contemplative aspect of relationship. Jesus said, "Come to Me", but he also said, "Shoulder my yoke and learn from me" (Mt.11: 28). Learning from Jesus involves the embrace of the cross, the acceptance of daily living with human weakness, limitation, failure and suffering. Whether Jeremiah, Paul of Tarsus, Francis of Assisi or Jesus of Nazareth, the mystery of human limitation and suffering is integral to the journey of the heart in the struggle to grow into the fullness of love. One modern author (Taylor, 1999: 65) who lives the solitary life describes the journey as requiring "a profound sense of inner integration into the pain and horror - and awe and beauty- of being human". Learning to live with the mystery of our own hearts brings us face to face with infinite desires and finite limitations.

4.8 Infinite possibilities and human limitations

Our thirst for the infinite and our experience of human limitation are brought together in the mystery of Christ suffering and crucified. "In the power of the Holy Spirit he endures his pain in human darkness, yet still believes in the light. He dispels the human evil all round him with the divine goodness that shines within him." (Rohr & Martos, 1987: 80.) It is what Paul (2 Co.12: 9) experienced in Christ in the triumph of grace in his weakness: "My grace is enough for you: for power is at full stretch in weakness." It is what Francis of Assisi taught his followers, especially in his Admonitions and in his story of True and Perfect Joy. This teaching and identification with Christ suffering and crucified was sealed in Francis' experience of receiving the stigmata on mount La Verna.

Accepting our broken humanity and the ability to love unconditionally, even to the point of suffering and death, is the work of God. In our human poverty and weakness, grace triumphs through the power of the Spirit because we are in Christ. Poverty, humility and patient suffering are part and parcel of the human condition but to embrace them in faith and endure in love requires a new heart and a new spirit. This new creation is God's act and his gift to us in Christ. "For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives; so too does the encouragement we receive through Christ." (2Co.1: 6.)

4.8.1 A new creation

Jesus describes this act of God as a new birth. It is always someone else who gives birth; it is not our own doing. We are simply the recipients of life and God is the life-giver. Dufour (1973:389) points out that: "In the New Testament, the 'new birth' is no longer a metaphor, but a profound reality." We place the moment of new birth within the context of the suffering and glorification of Jesus, highlighting for the purposes of this study, the moment when "One of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water" (Jn.19: 34). In the shedding of his blood, Christ the paschal lamb of the new covenant pours forth the gift of the living water of the Spirit and forever establishes kinship with every person and with the whole of created reality. "Look, I am making the whole of creation new" (Rv.21: 5).

In this newness, established by Christ, with him we enter into the intimate covenant relationships of kinship - child, brother, sister, mother and spouse. "Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1Jn.1: 3). The footnote in the New Jerusalem Bible (p.2010) states: "This union and sharing of life is the idea most central to John's mysticism." "Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him, and make a home in him" (Jn.14: 23). To become the home and dwelling place of the Trinity has far-reaching consequences. St. John (6: 56) tells us that Jesus is personally living within the heart of the believer: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person." The Jerusalem Bible notes (Footnote q: 1759): "The relationship of interior presence thus expressed clearly depends on the nature of the persons or things at issue: one is always greater than the other, especially when it is a divine person. It is particularly remarkable if the relationship is reciprocal, as here".

Christ deep within a person's heart changes the heart of stone to a heart of flesh and brings about loving relationships. Perhaps the greatest challenge in this process is to believe and accept the gift that is offered in Christ Jesus. The heart of God is opened for us and offered to us in Christ Jesus as a gift to be accepted in faith. This is how Paul (Rm.1: 16) presents the good news of the Gospel: "I see no reason to be ashamed of the Gospel; it is God's power for the salvation of everyone who has faith."

This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him (Mk.9: 8). The Father asks us to listen to his beloved son because it is "Through the crucified and glorified Jesus, the Spirit is sent and empowers the believer to cry: 'Abba, Father' " (Ga.4: 6). This empowerment by the Spirit is the gift and mystery of grace in the heart of the believer but for that gift to

become operative in our hearts we need an obedient heart, a listening heart. Raymundo (1994: 45) points out that in the biblical tradition, silence is a real and dynamic entering into mystery. "It is a mysterious moment when every other activity is suspended in order to be totally open and available to the experience of the encounter with God." Listening requires silence and silence requires solitude.

4.8.2 Desert experiences in human life

Whether it was the wilderness of Judea, the garden of Gethsemane, the mount of Tabor, lonely places or on the wood of the Cross, Jesus entered into desert experiences in his human life. In these experiences of solitude, Jesus encountered both good and evil. Like the Israel of old, Jesus the new Israel entered the intimacy of the lover and the beloved in the trysting place of the desert, the place of divine intervention "and suddenly angels appeared and looked after him" (Mt.4: 11).

4.9 Chesed: the heart and the covenant

The desert as the trysting place evokes the spousal language of the covenant. "But look, I am going to seduce her and lead her into the desert and speak to her heart" (Ho.2: 16). Jesus saw himself as the bridegroom. "Surely you cannot make the bridegroom's attendants fast while the bridegroom is still with them?" (Lk.5: 34-35.) In many of his parables Jesus spoke in the spousal language of the wedding banquet. In the Book of Revelation, we have the Heavenly Jerusalem presented in the evocative language of the Song of Songs of the Old Testament. "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband" (Rv.21: 2). Rahner (1967 (b): 321) states: "Only a lover is able to pronounce the word 'heart' with understanding".

This text also speaks of the covenant relationship of sonship: "I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rv.21: 7). Jesus in his unique relationship with the Father is son as no one else is son. Yet the amazing truth He came to share with us is the reality of the re-creation of our own hearts. "For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2Co.5: 17). Bouyer (1968: 43) states that Jesus "... announced the unheard of possibility" of a new creation "... and this consists in replacing man's heart of stone with a real heart of flesh, the metamorphosis in which Ezekiel placed his hope of the new and eternal covenant promised by Jeremiah."

This "unheard of possibility" is made visible in Jesus Christ and it inaugurates "... a radical change in the relationship, not so much of man with God, as of God with man."

The good news of the Fatherhood of God becomes a reality in the God-man, Jesus Christ.

You must see what great love the Father has lavished on us
by letting us be called God's children -
which is what we are! (1Jn.3: 1.)

Loved with unlimited and unconditional love in the relationship of parent-child, bride-bridegroom culminates in the mysterious reality of God making his home within our hearts. Fulfilled in Jesus, scripture tells us: "Look, here God lives among human beings. He will make his home among them" (Rv.21: 4), a reality already found in the Gospel of John. "Make your home in me, as I make mine in you" (Jn.15: 4). For these relationships to become reality requires a heart that is purified and made ready not once but many times because the challenge of *metanoia* is not a once for all event. It is rather a process that is deeply embedded in the pattern of the covenant with its many renewals and new beginnings. This is so not because God changes but because the human heart stands in need of ever deepening purification as it journeys into the heart of God.

The acceptance of ourselves as loved sinners is a first step in the conversion process. "When we were still helpless, at the appointed time, Christ died for the godless. So it is proof of God's own love for us, that Christ died for us while we were still sinners" (Rm.5: 6-7). In Christ, we are the beloved children of a God who loved us first. "This is the revelation of God's love for us, that God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him. Love consists in this: it is not we who loved God, but God loved us and sent His Son to expiate our sins"(1 Jn.4: 10).

The ability to respond to love with love is a gift of God. "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk.10: 27-28). "If God loved us so much we too should love each other" (1Jn.4: 11). There is the need to recognise and admit our innate poverty and dependence on the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness" (Rm.8: 26) because the layers of selfishness that have to be faced and surrendered is beyond human capacity. The creation of a new heart and a new spirit is the mysterious work of grace, of the Holy Spirit within our hearts. In biblical and

Franciscan literature, the desert plays a central role in this journey of the heart in the process of on-going conversion and new beginnings.

We have already referred to the times and places of Jesus' desert experiences. We also assert that in his free and total self-giving love, Jesus becomes the new 'desert' experience for the believer. Conti states (Cirino & Raischl, 1995:4): "What the 'desert' was for the Hebrews, Christ is for Christians." Everything we have emphasised in the previous chapter relating to the desert as the place of choice and challenge, love and intimacy, sin and suffering, we now find in Christ, who took the sin of the world upon himself and with unlimited love made us a new creation. "So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2Co. 5: 17).

In Christ, each person becomes a work of art. "We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus" (Ep.2: 10). It is being "in Christ" that makes all the difference. This insight enabled Paul (Rm.5: 3-4) not only to enter the deep mystery of communion which being "in Christ" entails but it also helped him to make sense of his own "desert" experiences of weakness, failure and suffering of all kinds. "Let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character."

In and through Christ the Spirit dwells in our hearts to reveal to us our origin, identity and destiny. In his letter to the Romans, Paul actually uses the word 'poured' to express the lavishness, the gratuitousness and the dynamic of the power of the Spirit in our hearts. This power and drenching he identifies with love. "The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rm.5: 5). It is the only Son, who is closest to the Father's heart who bestows on us the Spirit.

4.10 Being 'in Christ': love and suffering

Being in communion with Christ, one body with him, means that when we suffer we are sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Rohr (2000: 178) writes: "It helps to remember that our suffering is not just for ourselves and not just about ourselves. Redemptive suffering is, I believe, a radical call to deeper life and deeper faith." He goes on to speak of being "crucified with Christ" and quotes St. Paul: "It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col.1: 24). Poverty, humility and patient suffering are the consequences of loving with the same love with

which God loves us. Armstrong (1985: 430) points out: "The all powerful God takes the initiative in coming to us in ways that speak of lowliness, poverty and a willingness to submit to the frailty of human care." To live this way, in relationship, is the consequence of having a new heart and a new spirit.

Both John's Gospel and Paul's Letters stress the union that we have in common, a union we can ignore but cannot undo because it has been definitively established in and through Christ. This gives meaning to Matthew's account of the Last Judgement: "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me. In so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me" (Mt.25: 40,46). This union in Christ also makes sense of Paul's experience on the Damascus Road: "Who are you, Lord?" he asked, and the answer came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Ac. 9: 4-5).

In recognising the shared experience of this union in Christ, Christians emphasise *Koinonia*, what it means to be Church and in every era God raises up individuals to remind us of eternal truths. Our union in Christ, and the fraternity existing in all created reality, is highlighted by St. Francis of Assisi: a point we will return to in chapter 6. Suffice it to mention here the importance of fraternal relationships and compassionate living, both of which are learned at the feet of Jesus. Contemplation and compassion are dimensions of the *chesed-agape* relationship, which Jesus fulfilled in his own life and summed up in the command to love. "My command to you is to love one another" (Jn.15: 17). Beumer (1997: 109) quotes Nouwen as saying: "There is a unity and diversity in the relationship - covenant - between God and neighbour. The second commandment is certainly like the first, but still remains the second commandment and not the first." Nouwen (1986:55-81) states that there is no rivalry in these relationships; rather there is the challenge to "incorporate people into the immense space of love".

The consequence of establishing right relationships is biblical justice and is the foundation of the *chesed-agape* revelation of both the Old and the New Testaments. Only the pure in heart see God and everyone and everything in Him, hence the importance of the process that leads to this vision. "The drama of Christ's life became archetypal both for the drama of human history and the biography of each person. One 'becomes symbol' through the power and by the example of Jesus Christ" (Donald St.John, 1979: 194).

4.11 Chapter conclusion

In our analysis of the word heart we found the New Testament definition to be consistent with the Old Testament. Examining the symbols used by Jesus in his teaching on the heart and its journey through conversion, we highlighted the hidden nature of the heart and its positive and negative characteristics and attitudes.

The mystery and ambiguity within the human heart is revealed in Jesus. All the promises of the Old Testament are brought to fulfilment in him. The new heart and the new spirit spoken of by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel are now made visible in the God-man, Jesus Christ, and un-heard of possibilities are opened for the believer. It is grace, pure gift of God and act of God in Jesus Christ that we receive a new heart and a new spirit.

In becoming human, Christ revealed the tender, humble heart of God in the concrete form of poverty and suffering love. The cross in particular is the most intense revelation of the humble love of God and the piercing of the human heart of Christ opened to all humanity the depth of the divine love.

In lovingly accepting his humanity in its weakness and limitation, even to the point of death, Jesus embraced the human condition and taught us how to do the same. Willingly he encountered the heights and depths, the light and darkness of the human heart. In its infinite desires for goodness and love, and in the temptations to settle for less, the heart has to journey the way of the cross. This journey we call conversion and we examined ways in which the experience of the desert clarifies and intensifies the hard choices that lead to life and wholeness. As such, we consider it a very important part of the process of transformation and integration.

The heart in its exercise of freedom is aided by grace and this grace is the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts by God, empowering us to live the same kind of life that Jesus lived. Such love and goodness requires the response of the total and loving embrace of one's own humanity in its blessedness and brokenness. The humble and patient acceptance of the poverty and pain, the beauty and awe of the human condition is an act of God. This is the Good News since it makes us a new creation, giving us new birth as sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters to each other and to all creation in Christ, the first-born, and spouses of the Lamb of God in the wedding feast of the Kingdom.

The revelation of these relationships in Christ, the New Covenant, requires a pure and transparent heart, making each a transparent symbol of Christ, the most perfect symbol of the heart of God. Thus, in Christian tradition, there has always been an emphasis on the centrality of the heart and the lure of the desert in its call to enter the mystery of God's purifying and passionate love in the heart of Christ.

CHAPTER 5: A Study Of Heart And Desert In The Christian Tradition

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the heart and the desert experience in the Christian tradition leading up to the time of St. Francis. We will concentrate particularly on those aspects that Francis stressed in his understanding of the journey of the heart through conversion and transformation. The biblical foundation concerning the heart in the writings of the fathers of the church of both East and West will be presented in thematic and generalised form. Themes will be limited to those found in the writings of Francis, recognizing the uniqueness of his interpretation that shaped his spirituality and continues to shape the spirituality of Franciscans today.

The biblical foundation of the spirituality of St. Francis and his followers is epitomised in Jesus, the Word made flesh, who reveals to us the mystery of the heart of God and the mystery of our own hearts. To begin the journey of discovery as to what lies hidden in our hearts requires willingness to enter the depths of the unknown and to face both the darkness and the light as the process unfolds. In the biblical tradition, the fathers of the church locate this inner struggle in the heart and often equate it with the experience of the desert.

5.2 The early church and the desert

In the early Church the most notable advocate of the desert experience in the formation of the heart is St. Antony (251-356 A.D). According to Burton-Christie (quoted by Luckman, 1999: 46), Antony notes the identification of the desert as “the place of the heart”. Antony states: “For the one who wishes to live in the solitude of the desert there is only one conflict and that is with the heart”. As Burton-Christie further points out “place, in other words, is not incidental to the spiritual quest but informs it profoundly”.

St. Francis, in recognising the importance of place, was also aware of the relationship between the inner landscape of the heart and the exterior landscape of the world. Studies of the canticle of creatures, particularly the work of Leclerc (1977) reveal the depth of the relationship between the two landscapes but it is beyond the scope of this study to develop them here. We wish only to stress the importance of space and rhythm in the relationship

within the heart and all that lies outside it; a relationship that Francis cherished, protected and developed in his own life and in the lives of his followers.

True to the biblical tradition, Francis not only concentrated on the conflict within the heart which the desert evokes, but he also resonates with the prophet Hosea (2:16-21) in highlighting the “secrets of solitude” which is at the heart of the covenant language about the *chesed* of God. (Bible, 1994.) We will strive to integrate both aspects as essential to the Franciscan understanding of the spirituality of the heart in the context of the desert experience.

Luckman & Kulzer (1999:49-65), quoting Burton-Christie, maintain that Athanasius' *Life of Antony* emphasises the importance and significance of space and rhythm. “Antony ‘enters into’ and ‘goes out from’ the Lord's house twice, each time deepening his sense of what he is being called to do and where he is being called to go”. Likewise, Francis entered into the Church of San Damiano and emerged from it with a universal mission. Throughout his life, this pattern would continue as Francis entered into places of solitude and emerged from them with a renewed sense of purpose and mission.

Like Antony, Francis also went further out and further in - into solitude and into his own self, travelling the “shape and texture of his own heart”. Bouyer (1968:313) recognized that “solitude alone allows a man to discover, and so to face, all the obscure forces that he bears within himself. The man who does not know how to be alone, does not know either (and secretly does not wish to know) what conflicts there are in the depths of his heart, conflicts which he feels that he is incapable of untangling, even of touching”. Antony and those who follow him in the desert tradition will face the challenge of exploring the terrain of the heart and embracing the totality of what is found there. To do so requires both courage and discipline but most of all the grace of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

If, as Burton-Christie (1999:49) points out, “discipline is itself a kind of space... then to occupy this new space is to reorient oneself, psychologically, around a different center”. The process involved is often linked to conversion of heart. Many times in his journey Francis experienced disorientation, orientation and disorientation again. From merchant to soldier, from would-be knight to hermit, from itinerant preacher to universal brother, all of which led Francis deeper into the regions of his own heart. In pursuing the ideals of those

who went before him, Francis walked the road of virtue by exploring this mysterious region of his own heart involving the relationship with God, others, self and the whole of creation. The reconciliation called forth and celebrated is often intentionally explored and intensely attended to in the solitude of the desert, real or symbolic.

5.3 The heart as a battleground

We have already noted Antony's link between the desert and the conflict within the heart. In the third century Origen (185-254 A.D.) made the same connection when he elaborated on the notion of the desert in a symbolic way in his commentaries on Joshua (1960) and the Book of Numbers (1999 & 2001) making the point that the battleground is in the heart. This theme is elaborated by Squire (1973:106-107) where he quotes a text from the beginning of Origen's Twelfth Homily: "We shall not fight, as men of former times fought, nor will our battles be against men on earth, but against principalities and authorities, against the cosmic powers of this dark world. So now you know where you have to fight battles like this". As Squire points out, Origen returns to the theme of the battleground of the heart throughout these homilies, saying that we must "bestir ourselves to do battle, but against those enemies which come forth from our own hearts, evil thoughts, thefts, lies about other people, blasphemies, and all the other enemies of our soul that are like them".

Raasch (1970: 308) says that St. Basil (330-379 A.D) also was very much aware of the interior battleground of the heart and the deceit and illusion found there. Basil saw ascetics led astray by irrational enthusiasms and by the illusions of their own opinions; the radicalism of their poverty and continence could easily eclipse in their eyes other less dramatic and more essential renunciations. In these battle tactics, the aim is to lead astray, to trap and ensnare and finally enslave and destroy. Aphraates (280-367 A.D) (1989:679-682) likewise highlights the same deceit and destruction in his *Demonstrations* 14. 23. He shows the ways in which the heart is led on the wrong paths without realizing the strategies used by the evil one, who takes a person by the arm, promising fulfilment of heart, all the while removing the remembrance of God from the heart and laughing at the person thus deceived.

Francis has a heightened awareness of these tactics of the devil, even under the guise of some good, as we shall see in our analysis of his teaching in chapter six. The desert experience pierces the depths, revealing the most hidden motivations in the human heart. McGinn (1994: 395-398) points out that the desert motif began to acquire a new significance in the 12th century. It was particularly the Cistercian authors such as Isaac of Stella, Hugh of Saint-Victor, and Achard of Saint-Victor who developed this theme. Francis was heir to this tradition and his life and writings reveal an affinity with the process of entering the desert as part of the heart's journey to healing and wholeness. Whether or not Francis had accessed Achard's *The Treatise on the Seven Deserts*, (2001: 298-351) he seems to have grasped the meaning of "the desert of the heart" and the battle involved in its conversion and transformation.

In the exposition of the sufferings of each of the "desert" experiences delineated by Achard (1100-1172 A.D), we glimpse the costly endeavour of conversion and transformation as it touches every aspect of the human person. McGinn (1995:395-398), briefly lists Achard's "deserts" as follows: "The first desert is the deserting of mortal sin, that region of unlikeness to God. The second desert means leaving the world and entering a religious life. The third desert means taking on ascetical practices in the warfare between the spirit and the flesh. The fourth desert consists in leaving aside one's own will. The fifth desert concerns the surrendering of the reason in an act of faith. The sixth desert leads to an abandonment - at least exteriorly - of oneself and one's neighbour for contemplation and the journey into God. Finally, there is the seventh desert in which we "desert God" in a certain way for the neighbour's sake".

The process of conversion and transformation is rooted in Achard's development of the Scripture text from Matthew's Gospel (4:1) which tells of Jesus being led into the desert. (Bible, 1994: 1613.) This is pivotal within our study where we see the drama of the human heart lived out in the flesh and blood struggle of the human Jesus in the temptations he faced and the choices he made. Francis faced the same battle within his heart, therefore, we highlight the pertinent themes as they are reflected in his life and teaching, recognising the perennial relevance for every person who embarks on the journey of the heart.

In the life of Christ, in the life of Francis and in the life of every human being, love is central. The human journey of the heart is the movement from selfish love to selfless and unconditional love. The desert experience highlights the many stages and confrontations that are essential in this movement and transformation. A modern author, Keating, (2002: 205) representing the essence of the spiritual journey in contemporary terms refers to the transformation of the heart as a “restructuring of consciousness”, a point we will return to in chapter 7.

Whatever terms we use for the process of conversion and transformation of heart, in the Christian tradition, the emphasis is on the initiative of God in loving and reaching out to humanity. This initiative is rooted in the *chesed* of God in the covenant relationship. Achard (2001: 298-299) stresses this in the first “desert” and makes a direct link with the desert and the heart, saying:

The desert into which Jesus was led by the Spirit, although it is humble and lowly, is itself deep. 'The heart of a human being is perverse and unsearchable, and who can understand it', if not the one who searches the reins and the heart? Jesus was led into this desert when God came to humanity, which was both deserted and deserting, deserted by him and deserting him. It was not deserting because it was first deserted, but it was deserted because first it was deserting, yet later more deserting because now deserted. Humanity first deserted God, not God humanity. God is always first to approach, last to go away.

Achard reminds his readers of the love and humility of God in becoming man and entering into the human condition, which the fathers of the Church often referred to as the region of unlikeness. In and through Christ and his desert experience, which would culminate in his “desert” experience on Calvary, the Spirit sought to restore in the human heart the image and likeness to God, lost by sin and the refusal to love. The primacy of grace and the action of the Holy Spirit is central to both Achard's explanation of the seven deserts and our understanding of the process of conversion and transformation.

According to the teaching of Achard, the journey through the different “deserts” of life restores the image and likeness of God within the human heart. Just as St. Francis was concerned with darkness and light, blindness and sight within the heart, so too Achard (2001: 318-319) draws our attention to this in the fifth desert.

A human being is blind from birth; if you follow one you fall into a ditch. Let your leader be the one who enlightens the blind. You are blind from birth and you will remain blind as long as you are in yourself, for 'the light that is in you', your reason, 'is darkness'. Pass over to the light that is within, that shines in the darkness, so that it not only shines in the darkness but also enlightens your darkness.

Achard links this desert of reason to the totality of love as it is found in the *Shema* text of Dt. 6 in the Old Testament and St. Matthew Gospel 22: 7 in the New Testament. This passage from scripture was dear to the heart of Francis and quoted and developed in his writings. The centrality of love is emphasised where Achard (2001:318) says:

Hence you were not told simply that you must love God but how much you must love him - that is, with your whole self - so that you do not keep back any of yourself from him, but offer him your whole self, expending your whole self in a spiritual holocaust. You shall love him with your whole heart.

In a similar fashion Francis in his *Letter to the Entire Order* summed up the totality of love saying: “Therefore, hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves so that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally”. For Achard, this totality reaches a climax in the sixth and seventh deserts which are explicitly related to love of God and love of neighbour. In the context of the Martha and Mary controversy, the comment in the introduction to the sixth and seventh deserts is pertinent:

In his descriptions of the last two deserts, Achard reaches a rhetorical and mystical climax. These two should be taken together: it is only for those who have deserted their neighbour for God that the seventh desert, the desertion of God for neighbour, pertains. An infinite distance separates Christians who are chronically too busy with good works (which they enjoy)

to pray (which is difficult for them) and Achard's contemplatives, who have experienced the joys of contemplative union with God and freely give them up because they share Christ's ecstatic compassion for their brothers and sisters.

Bouyer (1968: 315) makes the point that in the life of Antony, his experience in the desert freed him from clinging to solitude as an end in itself and empowered him to return to the service of his brothers and sisters in the freedom of the Spirit. "Anchoritism did not make Antony a contemplative unconcerned with the fate of his brothers: it made him a spiritual father beyond all others". This theme will be explored and developed more fully later in this chapter.

Our emphasis here is love summed up in the words of Hugh of Saint-Victor (1962:39): "The life of the heart is love, and therefore it is quite impossible that there should be a heart that desires to live without love". However, the journey of the heart towards growth and maturity entails the unmasking and dismantling of false notions of love and wholeness, often intensified in the experience of the desert. For the sake of love which Cassian (140-215 A.D) in his *Conferences* (1.vii.i.) equates with a pure heart "solitude is to be pursued; for its sake we know that we must undertake fasts, vigils, bodily deprivation, readings, and other virtuous things, so that by them we may be able to acquire and keep a heart untouched by any harmful passion, and so that by taking these steps we may be able to ascend to the perfecting of love". Richard of Saint-Victor (1957:224-225) also emphasises the inward struggle in his writing on the *Four Degrees of Passionate Charity*.

The soul is led into the wilderness where it is fed with milk so that it may be inebriated with inward sweetness. Hearken what is said of this state when the Lord speaks by the prophet: 'Therefore, he saith, 'I will feed her with milk and will lead her into the wilderness and will speak to her heart'. But first we must leave Egypt behind us, first we must cross the Red Sea.

In the light of the mystical experience of St. Francis on La Verna, which we will develop in the next chapter, it is significant that even at the end of the journey, the human condition is a mixture of suffering and love. Writing of the journey through the seventh desert, Achard (2001: 350) makes the same point, emphasising that "They not only spent and still spend days in virtues and divine consolations, but they also suffered and perhaps still suffer

some nights in their weaknesses and various tribulations". Suffering and love are inextricably mixed within the human condition but to enter into the mystery and meaning requires a different way of perceiving reality. It requires a movement to a different level of consciousness and involves a refining of the spiritual senses, particularly the eyes and ears of the heart.

5.4 The eyes and ears of the heart

Persevering in the battle within the heart requires a radical conversion that enables a person to see life differently: from God's point of view. Scripture uses the term the "eyes and the ears of the heart" to underscore attentive listening and effective seeing. The development of our spiritual senses, especially our ability to see and to hear, to look and to listen is a rich biblical theme and Jesus himself quoted the prophet Isaiah in this respect. "There are those who never perceive the ways of the Lord, their heart is far from Him". They "listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive". Isaiah goes on to give the reason "their hearts are course" and the consequences are deafness and blindness to the ways of the Lord "ears dull, eyes shut tight". (Bible, 1994 cf. Is.6: 9; Mk.4:12; Mt.13: 14-15; Lk.8: 10; Jn.12: 39-41)

We pointed out in chapter 3 that if the heart is understood in terms of the perceiving self, then the senses, especially the functions of seeing and hearing which are the powerful channels of perception, must in some ways be associated with the heart and its activities. Origen, writing *On God* (Bk.19), says that "it may be said to see with the eyes of the heart is to perform an intellectual act by means of the power of intelligence". Luckman & Kulzer (1999:176), quoting Gillette, point out that "eye" for Augustine (354-430 A.D) means "that faculty which has the power to focus on and ultimately to pierce into the mysteries of God" and she says that "this is the incredible potential which lies within human nature created and recreated by God". The same point is made by Cassian (360- 430 A.D) in his *Conferences* (14.7) where he says:

It is one thing to speak with ease and beauty and another to enter deeply into heavenly sayings and to contemplate profound and hidden mysteries with the most pure eye of the heart, because certainly neither human teaching nor worldly learning but only purity of mind will possess this, through the enlightenment of the Spirit.

Augustine (*Tractate* 1.19) commenting on the blind man who is unable to see the sun that is shining upon him likens him to “the foolish man, every unjust man, every irreligious man, who is blind in heart”. In his *Sermon* 23 (1990:178-179) Augustine links faith and sight saying: “So, why do you go for the riches that wheedle our human eyes of flesh? Gold may glitter, but faith gleams more brightly. Choose what you ought to have in your heart. Invest your capital inside you, where God can see. And just because man cannot see, that’s no reason for disregarding what you have inside”.

This new and faith-filled way of seeing requires time and training. Basil in *De Spiritus Sancto* (XIV.33) draws attention to the need to “train the eyes of the heart” so that the transition to the wisdom hidden in mystery will be made easy. Such training of the eyes of the heart requires a process of purification leading to conversion or, as Augustine (*Sermon* 136) would say, “a change of life”. Luckman & Kulzer (1999:176), quoting Gillette, develop this thought further saying that for Augustine nearly everything else is given for the healing and purification of the eye of the heart.

Brothers and sisters, what calls for all our efforts in this life is the healing of the eyes of our hearts, with which God is to be seen. It is for this that the holy mysteries are celebrated, for this that the word of God is preached, to this that the church’s moral exhortations are directed., those, that is, that are concerned with the correction of our carnal desires, the improvement of our habits, the renunciation of this world, not only in words but in a change of life. Whatever points are made by God’s holy scriptures, this is their ultimate point, to help us purge that inner faculty of ours from that thing that prevented us beholding God.

For such a beholding of God and a penetration of the mystery of God, the fathers of the church emphasised the heart’s need to be pure in order to arrive at the vision of God promised in Matthew 5: 8: “Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God”. Martyrius (Brock, 1987:225) writing his *Book of Perfection* (56) towards the end of the 6th century said:

When the heart is purified and eye of its awareness is illumined, the light of its vision being commingled with the essential radiance of the Spirit of God, then, by means of the radiance of the grace from the spiritual brightness provided from above, the heart

begins to behold, in a spiritual way, the great Sun of
Righteousness and to enjoy his beauty.

The same sentiment is reflected in Augustine's *Sermon* 22A. 4 where he emphasizes the goal of purity of heart in the beholding of the face of God: "He wants to show His face to those who have purified, not their eyes of flesh but the eyes of their hearts".

Likewise, regarding the ear of the heart, Origen in his treatise *On God* (Bk.19) says: "So also it may be said that to hear with the ears of the heart when it perceives the deeper meaning of a statement". But to hear the truth and perceive this deeper meaning, Augustine in his *Confessions* (Bk.IV.5) speaks of the necessity of going to the source of truth with the ear of his heart. "Let me learn from thee, who art Truth, and put the ear of my heart to thy mouth". Reflecting on Truth, Augustine (Bk. 7: XXI) heard within himself the words: "I am that I am" and he said (Bk. 1: 5): "I heard this, as things are heard in the heart, and there is no room for doubt". He pleads for the Lord to open the ears of his heart: "Behold the ears of my heart are before you, Lord; open them and say to my soul, I am your salvation".

Augustine (Tractate 1.15) knew from experience that "sensory images clamoured in the ears of my heart" and he advises us (Bk. 4: V; XI; XV) to "Shut the ears of your hearts against the wiles of the enemy" bidding us to turn from foolishness and be attentive to the Bridegroom's voice. "Be not foolish, O my soul, and do not let the tumult of your vanity deafen the ear of your heart. Be attentive, rejoice greatly at the Bridegroom's voice".

Commenting on St. John's Gospel, Augustine (*Tractate* 18) invites us to "See how all the senses of the body bring intelligence to the heart within of what they have perceived abroad". We feel the text though lengthy bears quoting in full.

In the inner man dwelleth Christ, in the inner man art thou
renewed after the image of God, in His own image recognize its
Author. See how all the senses of the body bring intelligence to
the heart within of what they have perceived abroad; see how
many ministers the one commander within has and what it can do
by itself even without these ministers. The eyes report to the heart
things black and white; the ears report to the same heart pleasant

and harsh sounds; to the same heart the nostrils announce sweet odors and stench; to the same heart the taste announces things bitter and sweet; to the same heart the touch announces things smooth and rough; and the heart declares to itself things just and unjust. Thy heart sees and hears and judges all other things perceived by the senses; and, what the senses do not aspire to, discerns things just and unjust, things evil and good. Show me the eyes, ears, nostrils, of thy heart. Diverse are the things that are referred to thy heart, yet are there not diverse members there. In thy flesh, thou hearest in one place, seest in another; in thy heart, where thou seest, there thou hearest. If this be the image, how much more mightily He whose the image is! Therefore the Son both heareth and seeth; the Son is both the hearing itself and the seeing: to hear is to Him the same thing as "to be;" and to see is to Him the same thing as "to be." To see is not the same thing to thee as to be; for if thou lose thy sight, thou canst be; and if thou lose thy hearing, thou canst be.

A modern theologian (Rahner, 1979:113), commenting on the spiritual senses, states "spiritual sight and hearing are closely associated to the intellect". He further develops the idea of the spiritual senses as acts and he states that spiritual sight arises from faith and when faith is active, the effect is the gift of understanding and this results in the blessing of purity of heart. As Martyrius (Brock, 1987: 224) in the *Book of Perfection* 54 said so many years before: "Above all, we bring close to ourselves the grace of the Spirit, and the eye of our soul is made to shine by the understanding we receive from him".

Just as the physical senses are strengthened by regular practice, so too with the spiritual senses and this is where the desert is significant. The process of conversion entails the purification of all that hinders the heart in this journey towards wholeness and integration. Origen emphasizes that the battle lies within the heart and in order to see and to hear with the heart, the powers within stand in need of purification and transformation. Squire (1973:107), quoting Origen, says: "The battle you are to fight is within you; within you is that wicked city that must be overthrown; your enemy comes out of your own heart. It is not I who say it, but Christ". He points out that there is no question here of Origen attempting to eliminate a person's natural powers in this holy warfare. "Consistently with the tradition it is a question of transforming those powers".

The specific task and challenge of the desert experience is the conversion and transformation of the heart. Though the tradition refers to the holy warfare involved in this battleground of the heart, the struggle though very real is not an end in itself. The goal is to see differently and to hear differently. This spiritual seeing and hearing leads to tasting the sweetness of the Lord in greater intimacy, union, integration and wholeness in ordered relationships with God, with others, with oneself and the whole of created reality. This was the emphasis of Hosea in the covenant language of chapter 2 already referred to in a previous chapter on the Old Testament. Origen writing *On God* (Bk.1.Ch.1.) says:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" and from that very passage, in my opinion, will our position derive additional strength; for what else is seeing God in heart, but, according to our exposition as above, understanding and knowing Him with the mind? For the names of the organs of the senses are applied frequently to the soul so that it may be said to see with the power of intelligence. So also it is said to hear with the ears when it perceives the deeper meaning of a statement.

Theophilus of Antioch (385-412 A.D) (Book 1, 2.7) in his *Address to Autolytus* writes:

If you say, 'Show me your God', I reply, 'Show me the man that you are and I will show you my God.' You must show me that the eyes of your soul can see and that the ears of your heart can hear.

Theophilus (Book 1,2,7) goes on to compare the functions of human eyes and human ears with those of the eyes and ears of the heart, saying, "In the same way the ears of the heart and the eyes of the soul are capable of perceiving God". Yet Hugh of Saint-Victor (1962:158) points to the superiority of the eye of the heart over the eye of the flesh when he says:

You have another eye within, much clearer than that one, an eye that looks at the past, the present, and the future all at once, which sheds the light and keenness of its vision over all things hidden and searches into complexities, needing no other light by which to see all this, but seeing by the light that it possesses of itself. So, because the eye of the flesh is unable to see all at once the things that I am going to show, it is not that eye but the heart's eye that will be needed for this sight.

What Bovenmars (1991:144) says of Augustine, we could extend to all the fathers we have included in our exposition. Consistent with the biblical authors "the heart is not a distinct faculty but it is that deepest centre of the person which is the source and term of sensory knowledge, and in which the spiritual faculties are still one". Thus, Augustine pleads for a return to the heart. Quoting Isaiah 46: 8 Augustine (*Tractate* 18.11 on John XVII: 36) says:

Return to the heart! Why are you running away from yourselves and do you get lost away from yourselves? Why are you entering deserted ways? You are roaming around, come back! To where? To the Lord. That is too quick; first return to your heart; exiled from your own self you wander around outside; you do not know yourself, and you want to know by whom you are made! Come back, return to your heart; turn away from your body. The body is your dwelling place; the heart perceives also by means of your body, but your body does not perceive what your heart perceives. Leave your body too; return to your heart. In the body you found in one place the eyes, in another, the ears; do you find these too in your heart? But then, why does the Lord say: "He who has ears, let him hear"? Or do you not have eyes in your heart? Does not the apostle say: "May he enlighten the eyes of your heart" (Ep. 1:18)? Return to the heart; see there what you can learn about God, for the image of God is there; renewed after God's image; in his image come to know its maker.

The emphasis on the spiritual senses highlights the importance of the word, tuning the heart to hear, see, touch and taste the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. St. John says in the first chapter of his first letter:

Something which has existed since the beginning,
which we have heard,
which we have seen with our own eyes,
which we have watched
and touched with our own hands,
the Word of life –
This is our theme. (Bible, 1994:2011)

The centrality of Christ is often presented when comparing the functions of the bodily eyes and the spiritual eyes. Pope St. Clement 1 in his *Letter to the Corinthians* (36: 1-2) writes that it is “through him [Christ] that the eyes of our hearts are opened”. Augustine in his commentary on the first letter of St. John, (*Tractate* 18.11 on *John* XVII: 36) says:

So the life that was made manifest in the flesh, because it depended on 'manifestation', that a reality only perceptible to the heart might also be visible to our eyes, and thus heal our hearts. For the Word is seen only by the heart, but the flesh is seen also by bodily eyes. There was in fact a way in which we could see the Word: the Word became flesh which we could see, in order to heal the heart, the means by which we could see the Word.
(*Tractate* 1,1.3)

Ephrem (306-379 A.D) writing in the 4th century in his *Hymns on the Nativity* (XIX: 3) speaks of the birth of Christ, the word made flesh, as the event that “came in to sunder the darkness that was on the heart.” For Francis, the word was extremely important. His heart was enlightened as he discovered his vocation in the word of God. Consequently, his whole life was lived in imitation of the Incarnate Word. In the tradition of the fathers, Francis was well aware of the necessity of preparing the soil of the heart to receive the word and bring forth fruit in patience.

5.5 Sowing the seed in the soil of the heart

For the desert fathers and the monks and for Francis, the word of God in scripture and the Word Incarnate are pivotal to knowing the heart of God and our own hearts in that encounter. Magrassi (1998:126) emphasizes this in quoting from St. Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D) in his Fourth Epistle: “Learn to know the heart of God in the words of God”. Firstly in this process there is attention to the state of the soil of the heart in which the word is planted. St. John Chrysostom (344-407 A.D) (Toal, 1957:393), commenting on the parable of the sower asks why the greater part of the seed is lost? He answers, saying that it is lost “because of the earth that receives it, not because of the sower”. The earth or soil of our hearts needs preparation. Toal (1957:75) quotes Origen in Homily 21 saying: “The way of the Lord must be prepared within our heart”. Cassian makes the same observation in his *Conferences* (1.xxii.i.) reminding us of the constant need to cultivate the earth of the heart.

Thus at every moment we should cultivate the earth of our heart with the Gospel plough - that is, with the continual remembering of the Lord's cross - and we shall be able to root out from ourselves the nests of harmful animals and the hiding places of venomous animals.

Augustine also uses the image of the earth of the heart to show the enduring quality of the *chesed* of God in seeking the heart of the one he loves. In his *Confessions* (Cf. 1Co. 3: 9.) (Bk.11.3) he says to God: "No matter how barren I was to thy tillage, O God, who art the one true and good Lord of my heart, which is thy field". Augustine (*Confessions*: Bk. V.1) is aware of the touch of God despite the adverse condition of the heart of the recipient. "Man's heart may be hard, but it cannot resist the touch of your hand. Whenever you will, your mercy or your punishment can make it relent, and just as none can hide away from the sun, none can escape your burning heat". These words of Augustine are reminiscent of the biblical understanding of the desert as the place of purification and intimacy.

That purification is necessary is emphasized repeatedly in the writings of the fathers of the Church. Achard (2001: 75-82), in his *Sermon On Cultivating the Lord's Vineyard* speaks of the soil of the heart that must be dug, turned, pruned, cultivated and watered by tears of repentance in order that the vine - which for him is the heart - will grow and bear fruit. He maintains that the vine - the heart - must be propagated. "To propagate a vine is to extend it, and by planting to increase and multiply it. Our vine is propagated by an increase of virtues and by extending them to where they never were before". This increase is the result of love, which expands the heart the more it is given away.

In *Sermon 13* (2001: 232) Achard says: "We are commanded to love God with all our heart - that is, fervently; with all our mind - that is, wisely; with all our soul, which means life - that, perseveringly; and with all our strength - that is, abundantly". Love is central and always it is the work of grace and the gift of God in Christ that makes love grow in the soil of the heart but it also requires human co-operation, response and receptivity.

In his *Hymns on the Nativity* (VI), Ephrem presents Christ as the farmer who works the soil of the heart. "Blessed be the Husbandman, by Whom the ground of the heart is tilled". According to St. Hesychius of Sinai (8th/9th century A.D) quoted by Behr-Sigel (1989:170),

the fruitfulness of this softening of the earth of the heart results in joy. "The more the rain falls on the earth, the softer it makes it; similarly, the more we call upon Christ's Holy Name, the greater the rejoicing and exultation it brings to the earth of our heart". The seventh century Martyrius (Brock 1987: 224) in his *Book of Perfection* (53) also stresses the word and the soil of the heart when he says:

Truly great and mighty is the power of God's word. For the word of God has changed the offspring of vipers into children of God. So let us constantly sow it within the hard soil of our heart, waiting for it to soften it so that the wheat-ear of life may sprout up in it. For the word of God is at the same time the seed and the water; and even though we have a heart like stone, it will be softened and split up by the water of the spirit, so that it can bring forth holy fruit that is pleasing to God.

In this passage from Martyrius we are made aware of the transforming power of the word on the soil of the heart, the fruits of which are brought forth by patient perseverance and the power of the Spirit of God. In these insights from the fathers we are made aware of the tender steadfast *chesed* of God, but the mystery of human freedom remains a crucial factor in the heart's response.

Receiving the word and keeping the word are dependent on the soil of the heart into which the seed falls. The emergence of good and evil is a mysterious process often referred to as wheat and weeds. Both Aphraates and Pachomius (286-346 A.D) use the New Testament image of the weeds sown in the soil of the heart by the enemy, (Bible, 1994 cf. Mt. 13: 24-30; 36-43) and both use this image in the sense of begetting children, either of God or the devil stressing the centrality of thoughts. In his *The Demonstrations* (14:43) Aphraates writes:

In those who love contention evil thoughts are infixed; in them the ancient ferment works and grows old. If a good thought comes along and enters his heart, the Evil One disturbs it and expels it from his mind. He inserts his roots into the recesses of his heart and fastens his nails among the thoughts of his soul. He gathers many thoughts together and brings them to him, and they enter and settle down. What the Evil One begets are sown in him...the

good seed in him is crushed, as wheat is smothered by
thorns...The thoughts of deceit is fixed fast in him, and his heart
fluctuates as in the waters of a deep lake.

The weeds or cockle in the soil of the heart denote kinship with the devil. Augustine (*Tractate 1.9*) admonishes us to turn our attention to the word because “you can have a word in your heart, as it were a design born in your mind, so that your mind brings forth the design; and the design is, so to speak, the offspring of your mind, the child of your heart”. The person in whom the Holy Spirit of God dwells is free from weeds and cockle. Raasch (1970:301), quoting Pachomius, writes:

Since there is no place for us in him, undoubtedly it is because
the Spirit of God will dwell in him; like a field purged of cockle,
which the passers-by see and say, Such a field, purged of cockle,
will be sown with good grain'. It is thus that there are two spirits in
man, one from God and the other from the devil; and the spirit
towards which a man inclines and which he adopts in his actions
dwells within him.

Yet in the whole area of discernment of spirits we cannot be too simplistic. One modern author Rohr (2000:168-171) points out that the process of discerning the weeds is not an easy task because “the only way the enemy succeeds is by disguising himself”. Rohr is convinced that the parable of the dandel referred to above is one of the most important and also the most neglected parables in the Christian tradition. We cannot develop the whole area of discernment here but wish to emphasize the struggle that is involved in recognizing the weeds and the wheat, the good and the evil within our hearts. Rohr would advise us to “go gently on the weeds” because subtlety and paradox are not easy for us to grasp and it is easy to mistake the wheat for the weeds and *vice versa*, hence the necessity of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as the one who forms our hearts.

Our task is to be receptive to the gift of God. In his *Letter to Proba*, (Ep.130), Augustine (1974: 661) says it is God who makes us able to receive what He is preparing to give. “That is something very great indeed; but we are small and limited vessels for the receiving of it. So we are told: Widen your hearts”. In *Sermon 10* (2001:76) Achard's teaching on the primacy of love makes the same point. “Inebriated by this wine, as though

rejoicing and exulting in the wealth of God's house, unencumbered and happy, we run with our hearts enlarged on the way of God's commandments". Gregory of Nyssa (331-395 A.D) speaks of this receptivity, re-creation and fruitfulness in his *Address on the Resurrection* (Address 1) he says:

This day is the beginning of another creation, for on this day God made a new heaven and a new earth as the prophet says. 'What heaven? The firmament of the faith we have in Christ. What earth? The good heart which is like earth, that drinks the rain that descends on it and brings forth varied fruit'.

Achard in *Sermon 15* (2001: 306) speaks of this new creation within the heart as a new birth. "What is spiritual is not first, but what is physical, and then what is spiritual. We are all by nature children of wrath; the old self is born before the new self is reborn. This land of promise exists in us; it is the dwelling place of our heart - that is, our inner self - which must dwell with itself in itself - or rather, it must dwell there with Christ who dwells there through faith".

In 1 John 3: 9 *sperma*, the seed of God is God's Spirit in his children and it is brotherly and sisterly love that characterises the child of God. Absence of this love is a sure sign of being a child of the devil. Francis saw this with great clarity and the quality of fraternal life was the measure of love both of God and one's brother or sister. "And let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for, if a mother has such care and love for her son born according to the flesh (Bible, 1994 cf. 1Th.2: 7), should not someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit even more diligently?" (LR. VI: 8.) St. Francis in his realism emphasizes the quality and demands of fraternal living, even in the context of the hermitage where he again stresses the mother-son relationship. Love is central in the heart's journey but it is always a love in action, the authenticity of which is known by its fruits.

5.6 Developing a heart for God

The heart, then, is indeed a mysterious reality affecting not only the whole of a person's life, attitudes and behaviour but also the life of the world in its personal, communal and cosmic dimensions. The purpose of the desert experience in whatever form it may take is a "crucible of purification" in developing "a heart for God". (Raymundo, 1994:22.) When referring to the desert, we have deliberately qualified it by the words "whatever form it may take", because we believe that the scriptural and patristic tradition roots the purification of the heart within the context of everyday living and experiences. Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141 A.D) (1962:24) emphasized this saying that a person needs "to detect all the movements that arise in the heart, and see whence they come and whither they are going". It is usually in the course of such struggles within everyday experience that attitudes and values are disclosed, "the true inclinations of the heart are tested and decisive human choices are made". (Squire, 1973: 106.)

These "true inclinations" are rooted in the biblical understanding of the heart as the seat of reason where the thoughts of the heart are conceived. Depending on the thought or inclination the subsequent word or action will result in either good or evil. Raasch (1966:15-16) points out that "behind the thoughts, which are located in the heart, are the basic dispositions or inclinations which direct them, often presented as two opposing moral inclinations". The good inclination and the evil inclination "are two impulses of propensities given to every man and are sometimes portrayed as spirits".

We have already stressed the teaching of Jesus (cf. chapter 4) on the importance of the inner dispositions of the heart from which proceed all kinds of evils developing from the generic term, evil thoughts. Following in this biblical tradition, the fathers of the church paid great attention to the "thoughts of the heart". Relying heavily on the work done by Raasch (1966: 23) on the concept of purity of heart, we note her emphasis on the importance of "the inner thoughts and purposes of the heart". Cassian in his *Conferences* (1.xxii.i) draws our attention to the need for constant examination and vigilance regarding the thoughts of our hearts.

All the secret places of our heart, therefore, must be constantly
scrutinized and the prints of whatever enters them must be
investigated in the most careful way, lest perchance some

spiritual beast, a lion or a dragon, pass through and secretly leave its dangerous traces; then, once our thoughts were neglected, access to the sanctuary of our heart would be offered to still others.

In the *Ad Monachos*, (58) (Driscoll: 1993: 361) Evagrius (345-399 A.D) makes the same point by stressing the importance of the thoughts of the heart. First of all he warns of "lingering" with such thoughts. "Evil thoughts should never be allowed to linger in the heart". Again highlighting the struggle involved he says: "He who completely destroys evil thoughts in his heart, he is like the one who dashes his children against the rock". (AM 45.) This teaching is also found in Origen's *Fifteenth Homily on Josue* where he says: "Blessed is he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock" and he comments that the "little ones" are "nothing but evil thoughts" which Origen maintains "should be dashed against the rock which is Christ". In *Sermon 177.11* Augustine (1992: 287) gives this advice: "Don't let the moth of evil thoughts get into the closet of your heart".

The teaching of the inner motivation manifesting itself in word and deed is consistent in the biblical and monastic spirituality of the heart. This teaching nurtured and influenced St. Francis as he faced the challenge and tension of identifying the motivating forces within his own heart that he refers to as the Spirit of the Lord and the spirit of the flesh.

5.7 Spirit and flesh

In his letter to the *Romans* (Bible, 1994: 1866-1890) St. Paul identified the opposing forces within the heart as the Spirit of the Lord and the spirit of the flesh. Augustine in his *Confessions* (Book 11.8) speaks of this paradox within his own heart and the need for God's grace in the process of conversion. "What is this paradox? Who is it that can explain it to me but God, who illumines my heart and searches out the dark corners thereof?" This is a theme prominent in the teachings of Francis, whose first prayer before the crucifix was for God to enlighten the darkness of his heart, which prevented him from discerning the workings of the spirit of the flesh and the Spirit of God. Especially in the *Admonitions*, Francis identifies the characteristics of the person who is led by the spirit of the flesh and the person led by the Spirit of the Lord. Everything depends on the inner dispositions and thoughts of the heart out of which is revealed the spirit that is motivating, energizing and forming a person. In the context of the conversion and transformation of the heart, it is

worth quoting a lengthy section from the words of Francis in the *Later Rule*.

I admonish and exhort the brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ that they beware of all pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, cares and worries of this world, detraction and complaint....Instead let them pursue what they must desire above all things: to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy manner of working, to pray always to Him with a pure heart and to have humility, patience in persecution and weakness and to love those who persecute us, find fault with us, or rebuke us. (X: 7-10)

When we analyse the list of vices to be overcome and avoided and the desired virtues to be developed, we get some indication of the arduous journey involved in the heart's conversion. In this Francis reflects the teaching of those who preceded him where the emphasis is placed on motivations that are not easily discernible and can even appear under the guise of good. Hence the importance and centrality of the activity of the Spirit "whom we must desire above all things", even in the purifying experience of the desert experience.

Raasch (1969: 284) points out there are divergent opinions in the early Church regarding the presence of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand there is the tradition of striving to "obtain the Holy Spirit", which is the monk's whole purpose in overcoming sin. There is also the generally accepted Christian teaching of receiving the Holy Spirit at baptism, purifying the heart in that encounter. Yet another tradition placed the expectation of the Spirit in the future age of promise, purification and fulfilment. Regardless of the interpretation or school of thought there is no doubt as to the central place and importance of the Spirit of God in the formation of the heart.

5.8 The Holy Spirit as the formator of the heart

Poverty, humility and patient suffering are inescapable experiences in the journey of the heart. Rooted in daily life and relationships, these aspects of the heart's journey are highlighted in the writings of the Fathers and in the writings of Francis. As one modern author (Rohr, 1999: 48-49) expresses it: "Reality converts us, not ideas. What is, is the great teacher". But it is only in and through the action of the Spirit of God that the heart perseveres in the engagement with reality in the conversion journey.

In his *Letter to the Entire Order* (51) Francis says it is the Holy Spirit that “cleanses, enlightens and inflames the heart” and we should desire this “holy activity” above all else. He is heir to a tradition in which the Holy Spirit is central in the teaching on the heart. Raasch (1970:269) writes about the “favourable conditions” for attaining purity of heart among which is solitude but she states, “the Holy Spirit is the true agent of purification”. All other aspects - even the desert experience itself - are but means towards the conversion and transformation of the heart. Bouyer (1968: 315) commenting on the goal of the spiritual combat within the heart in the desert experience says: “It is in the man whom the Divine Spirit has permeated without meeting any obstacles that human nature finds itself again as God had willed it to be”.

Recognising that solitude is a means towards transforming the heart, Basil writes at length on the activity of the Holy Spirit in this process. In *De Spiritus Sancto*, (Ch. XXI.52) Basil clearly states that transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit enlightening the heart and in that enlightenment changing it from within.

For just as objects which lie near brilliant colours are themselves tinted by the brightness which is shed around, so is he who fixes his gaze firmly on the Spirit by the Spirit's glory somehow transfigured into greater splendour, having his heart lighted up, as it were, by some light streaming from the truth of the Spirit.

Interesting from the point of view of Franciscan spirituality, and in particular the emphasis of this study, is Basil's linking of conversion of heart with the Holy Spirit and with the community. This conversion is based on interior renunciations made in the heart in the experience of day-to-day living with the brothers. In *The Longer Rule VII* (1925: 163-165) Basil says: “I recognize that the life of a number lived in common is more useful in many ways”. Both humility and compassion are everyday virtues where people live in close proximity. He goes on to ask: “For wherewith shall a man show humility, if he has none in comparison with whom to show himself humble? Wherewith shall he show compassion, when he is cut off from the communion of the many? How can he practise himself in longsuffering, when there is none to withstand his wishes?” Basil also recognizes the dangers of solitude saying: “In such separation the man will not recognize his defects readily, not having anyone to reprove him and to set him right with kindness and compassion”.

The test of the genuineness of conversion of heart is known by the fruits. Basil clearly sees that true transformation of heart is a means of grace for others as well as oneself. Luckman, quoting Basil (1999: 93), refers to the "building up of the body of Christ (the Church) by sharing the gifts of the Spirit with one another and so helping one another to attain salvation".

Through His [the Holy Spirit] aid hearts are lifted up, the weak are held by the hand, and they who are advancing are brought to perfection. Shining upon those that are cleansed from every spot, He makes them spiritual by fellowship with Himself. Just as when a sunbeam falls on bright and transparent bodies, they themselves become brilliant too, and shed forth a fresh brightness from themselves, so souls wherein the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the spirit, themselves become spiritual, and send forth their grace to others. (*De Spiritu Sancto*: 9:23)

In Benedictine spirituality, the experience of living together in community was the school for preparing a person for a life of solitude, which was considered a higher stage of perfection. An aspect of the originality of Francis and Franciscan spirituality lies in the union of solitude and fraternity for even in solitude, for Franciscans, the fraternal life is crucial. Scholars, Franciscan and non-Franciscan alike, agree that this is one of the unique characteristics of the Franciscan expression of the eremitical life. "The mother-son relationship gives to the traditional eremiticism a new dimension of relationship, uniquely Franciscan. It smoothens and refreshes what seems to be a rough and violent nature of eremitical lifestyle". (Raymundo, 1994: 96.)

The Cistercian author, Thomas Merton (2000: 25) says: "the genius of sanctity is notable for the way in which it easily reconciles things that at first seem irreconcilable". Merton goes on to explain that St. Francis "completely reconciled the life of solitary prayer with warm and open fraternal love". This warm and open fraternal love is reflected in the way in which Francis deals with the active-contemplative stance symbolized in the Martha and Mary story found in Luke 10: 38-42 (Bible 1994:1707). It is beyond the scope of this study to deal in detail with this topic but in so far as it touches our argument, we refer to the way in which Francis was consistent with the tradition he inherited and also to point to the way in which he brought his own uniqueness to the interpretation of the Martha and Mary story

as it forms the heart in lived experience, especially in his *Rule for Hermitages*.

5.9 Martha and Mary

The Gospel story of Martha and Mary is a theme that was developed by the Fathers of the Church to denote the active and contemplative dimensions of living the Christian life. Higgins (1999: 160) remarks that there are not many references to Martha and Mary in the earlier patristic period. Tertullian (160-220 A.D) observes that they were the companions of Jesus. Clement (140-215 A.D) refers to Martha and Mary in relation to the goal of true knowledge resulting from contemplation and action. Higgins states that Clement [Web:][Date of Access: 27.08.02] does not discuss Martha and Mary directly but only in relation to the rich young man who was challenged by Jesus to leave his busy life to cling to the One who offered eternal life. In his writing *Who is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* Clement says:

Such also was what the Lord said to Martha, who was occupied with many things, and distracted and troubled with serving; while she blamed her sister, because, leaving serving, she set herself at His feet, devoting her time to learning: "Thou art troubled about many things, but Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." So also He bade him leave his busy life, and cleave to One and adhere to the grace of Him who offered everlasting life. (Ch.X)

It was Origen who first presented Martha and Mary as prototypes of the active and contemplative ways of living the Christian life, giving superiority to the latter. McGinn (2000:126) notes the influence of Greek philosophical thought. "If the original state of the unfallen intellects was one of perfect contemplation of the Father, the very structure of creation confirmed the superiority of the contemplative over the active life that the Greek philosophical tradition had maintained". This interpretation and separation was developed by a number of Origen's successors and influenced the whole of western spirituality. Our concentration on the journey of the heart places both Augustine and Cassian in a prominent position.

Stewart (1998: 40-41) has described Cassian's *Conferences* as maps for the spiritual life. "They are not a scientific atlas, but a collection of pilgrim's maps: everything on them is oriented to a destination. In these maps one sees Cassian, that great traveller, charting various ways to travel across the temporal and spiritual vastness between heaven and earth." The biblical story of Martha and Mary explores the tension between temporal activity and heavenly contemplation in the heart's journey. Stewart develops Cassian's theology in detail and maintains that "the philosophical influences on his thought are certainly profound, but it is more accurate to characterize his approach as consistently eschatological rather than 'spiritualising' ". Our interest here is limited to his treatment of the Martha and Mary story, rooted as it is in the things of time and eternity and the way in which these impinge upon the human heart.

In his first *Conference*, Cassian, writing in praise of the contemplative life represented by Mary, also acknowledges the part played by Martha:

Martha and Mary are very beautifully portrayed in the gospel as examples of this attitude and manner of behaviour. For although Martha was indeed devoting herself to a holy service while Mary was intent only on spiritual teaching and was clinging to Jesus' feet, which she was kissing and anointing with the ointment of a good confession, yet it was she whom the Lord preferred, because she chose the better part and one which could not be taken from her. For as Martha was toiling with devout concern and was distracted with her work, she saw that she could not accomplish so large a task by herself, and she asked the Lord for her sister's help: "Does it not concern you that my sister has left me to serve by myself? Tell her to help me, then." She was calling her not to a disreputable task, to be sure, but to a praiseworthy service. Yet what did she hear from the Lord? "Martha, Martha, you are concerned and troubled about many things, but few are necessary, or even one. Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her. You see, then, that the Lord considered the chief good to reside in *theoria* alone - that is, in divine contemplation. (1.viii.i).

For Cassian the part chosen by Mary is the better part because of her concentration on "the few, even the one". As Stewart (1998: 53-54) points out "The 'few' and the 'one' become markers for a progressive *theoria* that moves from contemplation of the lives and deeds of the saints (the few) to 'regarding God alone' and 'feeding on the beauty and knowledge of God alone' (the 'one')". Yet Stewart maintains that it is "only on the eschatological level can we resolve the apparent contradiction between Cassian's exaltation of contemplation and his insistence on love for others. Practical charity and contemplation are not mutually exclusive". Time and again we return to the secret motivation of the heart, which places love as the central focus and unifying force. "The central claim is that perfect love means attaining the 'image and likeness of God', whether in active love of one's brothers and sisters or directed to God alone as He is in Himself".

One after the other, in different centuries, the fathers of the Church have expounded on the Martha and Mary story as they developed their understanding of the mystical life. Our concern is to highlight the way in which this Gospel story has been the basis of an ongoing tension between the life of action and contemplation. We now turn to Augustine, a contemporary of Cassian, of whom Nichols (2001: 9) writes:

Unlike both Greek and Roman traditions of history, which reach their highpoint, perhaps, in history as epic heroism, Augustine believed there was only one perspective in which an account of the past could be usefully drawn up. This was not the perspective of the victorious, which has often been the case. Nor was it the perspective of the oppressed, which is becoming more fashionable. The perspective offered by Augustine is the one he employed in his most famous attempt at historical writing, the confessions. True history, he maintained, was the story of the struggle, by person or community, to journey towards God.

In his *Sermon* 169.17, aware of the active-contemplative struggle within the heart, Augustine writes:

You have chosen a good part, but she a better one. You a good one - it is good, after all, to spend one's time in attending to the saints - but she a better one. And then, what you have chosen comes to an end. You are serving the hungry, serving the thirsty,

making beds for people to sleep on, offering your house to those who wish to stay there. All these things will come to an end. The time will come when nobody's hungry, nobody's thirsty, nobody sleeps. So your concern will then be taken away from you. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her. She has chosen to contemplate, to live on the Word.

In *Sermon 179* and *Sermon 255* Augustine explains in greater detail the implications of both Martha and Mary in their respective roles of serving and listening. He recognises that Martha's work of serving is "a great work, a really great work", one which we may wish had been our privilege as Augustine says:

Don't all of you who practice this excellent virtue of hospitality, when you hear what Martha was doing, don't you all say to yourselves, "O blessed, O lucky woman, to have the honour of receiving the Lord; whose guests turned out to be the apostles, walking about in the flesh!" And you mustn't lose heart either, just because you can't do what Martha did, welcome Christ into your house with his apostles; he himself reassures you: When you did it for one of these least of mine, you did it for me. (Mt.25: 40) So it's a great work, a really great work, which the apostle enjoins on us so it's a great service, a great gift...(Sermon 179.3)

Yet Augustine also reminds us of the temporal nature of Martha's service. It will pass eventually, but the reward will not.

Plainly, it will be taken away from all people who minister to the bodily needs of the saints; what they will do will be taken away from them. After all, they are not always going to be ministering to the saints. I mean, what do they minister to, but infirmity? What do they minister to but mortality? Who do they minister to, but the hungry and the thirsty? All these things will have ceased to be, when this perishable thing has put on imperishability, and this mortal thing has put on immortality? When the need has disappeared, there will be no more ministering to the need. The hard work will be taken away, but the reward will be paid. (Sermon 179)

Mary in sitting at the Lord's feet, listening, and feeding on the Word, the bread of Life, "has chosen the better part" because it does not pass away.

So what Mary chose was growing, not passing along the way.
The human heart's delight, you see, in the light of truth, in the
wealth of wisdom, the delight of the human heart, a faithful heart,
a holy heart - no pleasure can be found to compare with it in any
respect at all. (*Sermon 179.6*)

St. Augustine developed the understanding of Mary as a symbol of the contemplative life and Martha as a symbol of the active life of service clearly stating that the life of Mary was superior to that of Martha. We feel the text from *Sermon 255.2* bears quoting at length.

That is the delightful part that Mary chose for herself, as she sat doing nothing but learning and praising, while Martha her sister was busy with all sorts of things. Oh, indeed, what she was doing was necessary, but it wasn't going to last, she was engaged in journey business, not home business; what she was doing was the business of the exile, not of the home owner. She had, after all, received the Lord and those who were with him. The Lord too had flesh and blood; and just as he had been prepared to take flesh for our sakes, so he was prepared to be hungry and thirsty. And as a result of his being prepared to feel hunger and thirst, he was also prepared to be fed by those whom he had himself enriched; prepared to be received, not out of need, but out of grace.

So Martha, was doing what was required by the needs of hungry and thirsty men; she was preparing, with all the trouble she was taking, something for the saints, and for the Saint of saints (Dn. 9: 24) himself, to eat and drink in her house. A great work but a passing one. Will there always be eating and drinking? When we cleave to that most pure and perfect goodness, there will be no needs requiring attention. We shall be blessed, lacking nothing, having much, requiring nothing.

While recognising the necessity of both lives, separation and superiority became the traditional interpretation in the West. Gregory the Great in his *Homily on Ezekiel* (Butler, 1966:172-173) defined the two lives thus:

The active life is: to give bread to the hungry, to teach the ignorant the word of wisdom, to correct the erring, to recall to the path of humility our neighbour when he waxes proud, to tend the sick, to dispense to all what they need, and to provide those entrusted to us the means of subsistence. The contemplative life is: to retain indeed with all one's mind the love of God and neighbour, but to rest from exterior action, and cleave only to the desire of the Maker, that our mind may now take no pleasure in doing anything, but having spurned all cares, may be aglow to see the face of its creator; so that it already knows how to bear with sorrow the burden of the corruptible flesh.

The separation of contemplation and loving service, without understanding their complementary nature, can lead to a false notion of the superiority of the contemplative over the active mode of life. Higgins, (1999:161), quoting McGinn, points out that while Origen stressed the superiority of the contemplative life symbolised by Mary, he "does insist, however, that both modes must work together in the soul's pedagogy". Augustine defines the purpose of each in the formation and conversion of the heart saying that the life of Martha is "the one whereby we toil that our heart may be cleansed for the vision of God". The life of Mary is a life listening and contemplating the Word in such a way that "we repose and see God". (Butler 1966:158.) Augustine puts it this way in *Sermon 169*.

Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her. She has chosen to contemplate, chosen to live on the Word. What will life on the Word be like without any word? Right now she is living on the Word but on the word that makes a sound. There is going to be a life on the Word, with no word making a sound. The Word itself is life. We shall be like him, since we shall see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2). That was the one and only life, to contemplate the life of the Lord (Ps.27: 4) This we cannot do, though, in the dark night of this world. In the morning I will stand before you and contemplate (Ps.5: 3) Therefore, I, he

says, do not consider myself to have grasped. One thing, though
(Ph.3: 13)

Augustine's understanding of the "one thing" leads him to recognize that human needs require attention but it is the preoccupation with them that diverts and divides the heart. Here Augustine quotes the same text that Francis uses in his *Rule for Hermitages*. It is the verse from Matthew's Gospel, (6: 33): "Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well". (Bible, 1994:1619.) In commenting on this verse in Augustine's writings, Luckman (1999:180), quoting Gillette, states that "one must have a single, ultimate purpose or vision focused on the Lord - even while attending to the things of the world". This is Augustine's understanding of purity or singleness of heart, without which there is no vision of God.

In the Gospel story, Martha was obviously distracted, diverted from her purpose and, in so doing, her heart was divided as her attention was given to the many things that claimed her attention. "Whether the diversion is total or partial it produces duplicity of heart". (Luckman 1999:178.) Love alone unifies and Augustine underscores this in *Sermon 103* where he states "Martha and Mary were two sisters, sisters in piety as well as by blood. Both of them were attached to the Lord, both happily served the Lord together while he was present in the flesh". Augustine develops his theme of "the one thing necessary" saying:

Martha, making arrangements to feed the Lord, was busy with many preparations and services; Mary her sister chose rather to be fed by the Lord. She did, after a fashion, desert her sister toiling away at the manifold business of waiting on them, and sat at the Lord's feet keeping still, listening to his talk. With a very true ear she had heard *Be still, and see that I am the Lord* (Ps. 46: 10). Martha was getting hot and bothered, Mary was tucking into the feast. The one was busy with many things, this one was gazing on one thing.

Augustine speaks of the importance of this unity of heart saying: "Think about this notion of 'one', my dear brothers and sisters, and see if the only thing in a multitude that delights us isn't some kind of 'one' ". (*Sermon 103*: 4.) Whether the work of Martha or the prayer of Mary, the goal is the same: love. If this is missing, then both work and prayer are ends in themselves and neither further the reign of God or bring fulfillment to the human heart as

the well known maxim of Augustine (*Confessions* Bk.1.1) states that "our hearts are restless unless they rest in Thee".

Augustine (*Sermon* 103.5) in recognizing the roles of both Martha and Mary, underscores the relationship of love that is nurtured and increased in this life, and will be perfected in the world to come. "Some time or other the burden of need will be taken away from you; the sweetness of truth is eternal". Not just Martha and Mary but the life of Christ Himself exemplifies the complementarity within the relationship of love. St. Gregory writing in the *Morals*, (Butler, 1966:176) draws our attention to the central place of the example of Christ.

Christ set forth in Himself patterns of both lives, that is the active and the contemplative, united together. For the contemplative life differs very much from the active. But our Redeemer by coming incarnate, while He gave a pattern of both, united both in Himself. For when he wrought miracles in the city, and yet continued all night in prayer on the mountain, He gave His faithful ones an example not to neglect, through love of contemplation, the care of their neighbour; nor again to abandon contemplative pursuits through being too immoderately engaged in the care of their neighbours: but so to keep together their mind, in applying it to the two cases, that the love of their neighbour may not interfere with the love of God; nor again the love of God cast out, because it transcends, the love of their neighbour. (*Mor.xxviii.33*).

Like Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) writing many years later speaks of Martha and Mary as sisters. Bernard believes that no person can enjoy contemplation for a lengthy period in this life; therefore, a life alternating between action and contemplation is a necessity. In his *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, (51.2) Bernard says:

As often as she falls from the contemplative life she is received into the active life, from which she will surely return to her former state from nearby into a more intimate way, since these two modes of life are closely related and live together - Martha is Mary's sister.

The writings of the fathers of the Church on the two lives of action and contemplation, symbolised by Martha and Mary, point to the effects of both on the heart. The active life is seen as a school of purification preparing the heart to enjoy the intimacy of love in the state of contemplation. The encounter in secret enlarges the heart in loving compassion and thrusts a person into activity on behalf of one's brothers and sisters.

Speaking of the love of God which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Achard (2001:76) in *Sermon 10* refers to this enlargement of the heart: "We run with our hearts enlarged on the way of God's commandments". And we know that the commandments are summed up in love of God and love of one's brothers and sisters. Gregory the Great (Butler 1966:181) makes the same point saying: "Each soul the broader it is in the love of its neighbour, the higher also will it be in the knowledge of God. For while by love it enlarges itself alongside itself, by knowledge it bears itself aloft; and it becomes higher above itself in proportion as it stretches itself out alongside itself to love of neighbour".

St. Francis, after his ecstatic experience of the stigmata on Mount La Verna eagerly sought to return to the service of lepers. When love is the energising force, contemplation and compassion go hand in hand integrating both after the example of Jesus crucified. The heart has to journey through the way of the cross; the experience of the desert, before such maturity and integration is possible.

Gregory the Great (Butler, 1966:181-183) emphasises the need to "withdraw to the secrets of their heart in order to engage in outward employments without injury to themselves". (*Morals*.xxiii.38.) At the same time, he advises us to love our neighbour "from the bottom of our heart". (*Homily on Ezekiel* 11.ii.15.) Gregory also refers to this alternation in the *Morals* (xxx.8), saying: "I adapt My preachers, when I will, after the grace of contemplation to the ministry of the active life".

Augustine and Gregory point out that a person rises to God by contemplation and returns back to the service of the neighbour. This language of ascent to union with God was also used by St. Bruno (1974: 526) in his commentary on Ps. 83: "That man is blessed (that is, he alone comes to this blessedness) whom you help to climb the ladder to blessedness which he has set up in his heart". This language of ascent could be read as Neoplatonic but it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the influence of Neoplatonic beliefs on the writers we have discussed. We simply draw attention to the presence of this type of

language, which is characteristic of Augustine, the monastic tradition in general, through to the last of the fathers, St. Bernard.

The Franciscan author, Ilia Delio (1996:132), quoting Leclercq, says that Bernard's "focus lay on the Jerusalem above and the hope of sharing the life of the risen and glorified Christ". She states that this language is principally Neoplatonic. "Neoplatonism is a metaphysical structure of relationships, arising in the third century (A.D.) among both pagan and Christian thinkers. In this type of ascent, prayer enables the soul to rise above the material world to attain to an intellectual transforming vision of God". While recognising the way in which Bernard stressed the humanity of Christ, Delio (1996:133) points out that Bernard "does not place the primary emphasis on the earthly life of Christ but rather on the ascended and glorified Christ". In contrast to this language of ascent, Delio speaks of "a mysticism of the historical event", which is the distinct way of the Francis and Franciscan spirituality.

The mysticism of the historical event makes no obvious distinction between "action" and "contemplation" since the overarching goal is union with the Father through conformity to the Son. In union with the Father one is, like the Son, willing to lay down one's life for one's neighbour, whether it be the preaching of the Gospel, the ministering to lepers, or the prayer of solitude.

This understanding of the complementarity of action and contemplation was profoundly understood and practised by St. Francis. Not only within the Church as separate lifestyles but also within each person: "Martha and Mary are sisters" in a relationship that permeates the whole of life. While Francis was influenced by the Christian tradition of the centuries preceding him and there are points of similarity with those who lived the eremitical life before him, (cf. Raymundo, 1994 and Higgins 1999) he was not a slave of a rigid interpretation and this has led to an originality which exists to this day within the Franciscan eremitical tradition

Pope John Paul II in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002: 26) says: "In Christ, God has truly assumed a 'heart of flesh'. Not only does God have a divine heart, rich in mercy and in forgiveness, but also a human heart, capable of all the stirrings of affection". Rooted in his

experience of the heart of the God-man, Jesus Christ, Francis's imitation of Christ and his devotion to the humanity of Christ climaxed in his union with the crucified. In this union Francis understood that "the piercing of the human heart of Christ is the opening to the human person of the depth of divine love embodied in the love of the Son of God". (Delio. 1996:136.) In this love, it matters not whether the role is that of Martha or of Mary. What matters is the compassion and love "which moves the entire created world to its destiny in Christ". (Delio, 1996: 139.) This truth is stated in another way by Peterson (1999: 4): "Although solitude was so important to Francis that he drew up a rule to guarantee it, he does not establish a preference for the role of Mary over Martha". What matters, is love - a compassionate love that heals, purifies, transforms, unites and leads to adoration. We agree that we should distinguish between a legitimate dichotomy and an illegitimate dualism, yet the language of separation and superiority remain and form part of the tension of human life.

Dualistic thinking is an ongoing phenomenon. In the second century Tertullian (Behr-Sigel 1989:35) asked: "What do Athens and Jerusalem, the Academy and the Church, have in common?" In the following century the scholar and doctor of the Church St. Jerome asked: "What do light and darkness have in common? What agreement is there between Christ and Belial? What is Horace doing with the Psalter, Virgil with the Gospel, or Cicero with the Apostles?" A modern author, Radcliffe, (2001: 92) writing about the tendency to divide life into segments thus discouraging us to think of our lives as a whole, quotes Alasdair McIntyre saying:

Modernity partitions each human life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms and modes of behaviour. So work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal. So both childhood and old age have been wrenched away from the rest of human life and made over into distinct realms. And all these separations have been achieved so that it is the distinctiveness of each and not the unity of the life of the individual who passes through those parts in terms of which we are taught to think.

The Franciscan historian, Joseph Chinnici, (1994: 295) in posing the challenge to all followers of St. Francis to reread and reclaim our tradition, reminds us of the way in which our society begs for dualistic categorizations. "Male or female, person or foetus, fundamentalist or liberal, lay or religious, the priesthood or the ministerial priesthood, apostolic or monastic, active or contemplative". What is the alternative? How might we reclaim our tradition in a way that is a universal call to each and every person?

Peterson (1999:3) states, "... our tendency to separate reality into categories creates ongoing tension that Francis did not face. His intent was to harmonize the monastic tradition of prayer and service in the midst of his society". As Peterson questions the origins of the dichotomy, she concludes "...we may be heirs of a perception of the religious life in which its public and private dimensions seem bifurcated and pitted against one another, making it difficult to see a balance of action and contemplation as essential aspects of every religious call".

Chinnici (1994:296) argues that St. Francis and St. Clare and their companions probably found themselves in a similar situation to ourselves: "caught as they were in the confluence of a Gospel grace, the pastoral project of the Church, the categorizations of the society, and the religious wilderness of the time. They discovered that it was the ability, under the inspiration of the Spirit, to hold all of the parts in tension that created their significant evangelical option". We will see this unfold in the next chapter as we look closely at the life of Francis in the context of the evangelical option and the consequences for the integration of prayer and service forged in the sufferings and struggles of his own experience.

Whether love is expressed in service or in prayer, modelled on the life of Martha or of Mary, the dispositions of the heart and the place of the desert in its conversion and transformation are central to our understanding of a spirituality of the heart in the Franciscan tradition.

5.10 Conversion of heart in poverty and adoration

Francis lived a spirituality of the heart that is deeply rooted in the biblical and patristic and monastic understanding of the heart. The little poor man of Assisi was ever intent upon “making Love loved” and beginning afresh for “up till now we have done nothing”. Such awareness of the greatness of God and his own nothingness led Francis to a radical stance in poverty and adoration.

Raasch (1970: 293) says that the biblical theme of the remembrance of God is directly linked to the purification of the heart because of the way in which the heart is intent upon God with singleness of purpose. This knowledge must be stored and treasured in the heart. As the Psalmist says: “In my heart I treasure your promises” (119:11). This means keeping the promises of God in the memory, writing them on the tablet of the heart. In Deuteronomy chapter 6 the famous *Shema* text sums up the process of insightful understanding by saying:

Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh. You must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart. You shall tell them to your children, and keep on telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are standing up; you must fasten them on your hand as a sign and on your forehead as a headband; you must write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Bible, 1994)

This remembrance is only possible because of the initiative of God in bringing us to God's remembrance, enabling us to share in his saving acts of redemption: the exodus for the Old Testament, Calvary for the New Testament. Speaking of the importance and significance of the act of remembering, Pope John Paul II in his recent document *Virginis Mariae* (2002: 13) says: “We need to understand this word in the biblical sense of remembrance (*zakar*) as a making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation. The Bible is an account of saving events culminating in Christ himself. These events not only belong to ‘yesterday’; *they are also part of the ‘today’ of salvation.*”

The responsive and conscious act of remembering and carrying that word in our hearts, persevering in sorrow and joy, in darkness and light, in the day-to-day experience of human living is dependent upon the grace of God. In his *Confessions*, (Bk.IX.2) Augustine says: "You had pierced our hearts with the arrows of your love, and we carried your words with us as though they were staked to our living bodies".

Remembering and responding to the grace of God means growth and transformation in a love that becomes adoration in and through life as it really is. John Chrysostom (1974: 346-347) emphasizes the centrality of love in his *Homily on the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (13:1-2): "Just as what brings heat makes things expand, so it is the gift of love to stretch hearts wide open; it is a warm and glowing virtue".

St. Francis (*ER*. XX11: 26) desired that we should "strive as best we can to serve, love, honour, and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind, for this is what He desires above all things". However, none of this is possible without the intense purification of the heart that is often equated with the desert experience in the myriad forms it may take in the course of human life. Gregory the Great in his writing *Pastoral Care* (1950: 26) reminds us "It is a common experience that in the school of adversity the heart is forced to discipline itself". Augustine (*Confessions* Bk.VIII.1) too, understood that such purification of the heart demands discipline, effort and persevering hard work. On the brink of his own conversion he realized that his "heart had to be purged of the old leaven".

According to Gillette, quoted by Luckman (1999:181), Augustine presents the steps necessary for purging or purification of the heart: Acknowledgement of sin, faith, suffering and forgiveness. First of all, there is recognition and condemnation of one's sin. "Crush iniquity and purify it; drive it from your heart". Eradication of sin and its tendencies is not enough. Augustine says that when the heart has been directed away from sin, it has to be directed to God through faith.

Faith not only points to God; it also purifies the heart and the foundation for this statement is Acts 15: 9, where Peter speaks of God sending the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles whose hearts He had purified by faith. But as Gillette points out, faith for Augustine "means more than a mere belief that God exists for the devils believe and tremble" (James 2:19) and it does them no good, as Scripture testifies". (1999:183.) The disposition of the heart is the defining quality of faith. Augustine reminds us that both St. Peter and the

devils proclaimed Christ to be the Son of God. This proclamation resulted in commendation for St. Peter and condemnation for the devils because "the heart was different, though the voices were the same". (*Sermon* 53:11.) Without love, there is no change of heart. Augustine follows Paul in professing the importance of love over every other gift. (cf. 1Corinthians 12.)

Gillette (1999:183) summarises Augustine's teaching in *Sermon* 162 as follows:

Augustine clearly states that even if one has prophecy or one of the other gifts of the Spirit, these are not guarantees that the person is changed for the better. All they indicate for certain is that the Holy Spirit is working through a person, as happened with both Saul (1 Sam. 19:20) and Caiaphas (John 11:50), who prophesied without it benefiting them. Only the highest gift, charity, promises that the Holy spirit is actively dwelling within a person in a purifying and therefore sanctifying way.

The path of purification is not easy. The psalmist (*Ps.84*) reminds us that true blessedness lies in following the road to God, which is within our hearts. However, experience teaches us that the heart is divided. When selfish motivation and selfish desires cause division then, as Augustine (*Sermon* 4. 9) says, such desires and temptations deflect the faithful "from the road of their hearts". In a similar vein, Ephrem in *Hymns on Faith* stated that the feet never divide themselves along two paths but the heart is divided, hurrying along two roads at the same time, along two paths of darkness and light. The cause of this division lies in the mystery of the heart's freedom. But the path to true freedom involves suffering.

The pain of bearing the human condition is suffering indeed. Augustine sums it up in his *Confessions* (Bk.VIII.II): "This struggle raging in my heart was nothing but the contest of self against self". This is a significant insight relating to the age-old recognition that within each person there is a fabricated or false self and a true self made in the image and likeness of God. Augustine recognizes that the conversion of his heart required both reflection and solitude.

Now when deep reflection had drawn up out of the secret depths
of my soul and all my misery and had heaped it up before the
sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm accompanied by a
mighty rain of tears. That I might give way fully to my tears and
lamentations, I stole away from Alypius, for it seemed to me that
solitude was more appropriate for the business of weeping.
(Bk.VIII.12)

As St. Bonaventure (1217-1274 A.D) (1978: 54) would later say in reflecting on the life of St. Francis in *The Soul's Journey into God. Prologue 3*: "There is no other path but through the burning love of the crucified". It is through the mystery and paradox of suffering love that unity is achieved just as it was in Christ crucified, who reconciled the world to himself in his passionate, forgiving and unconditional love. Burning love in the footsteps of Christ crucified is the path marked out in the Christian tradition. It is love alone that integrates the human heart in the process of transformation leading to union and the vision of God.

The experience of the desert is a powerful means of purifying the heart thus enabling it to recognize the Lord in the person of the Son of God and in all his creatures of whom he is the first-born. Such a stance requires a radical self-emptying in the embrace of poverty. The Franciscan understanding of the desert experience is the true meaning of radical poverty. We shall return to this theme in a later chapter when we speak of the Third Order Regular in particular. Here we merely wish to state that radical poverty is the essence of a life of love and adoration.

Francis discovered what his predecessors had discovered before him that "solitude is costly. It elicits ferocious resistance from the demons. What Antony discovers is that it is a terrifying, liminal space, open to a withering array of competing forces... but also open to his own heart and to God". (Burton-Christie in Luckman1999: 54.) When the desert is allowed to purify the heart, then like John the evangelist we will receive the "special and peculiar gift from the Lord on whose breast he reclined at the feast, hereby to signify that he was drinking deeper secrets from His inmost heart". (*Augustine, Tractate: 18.*)

6.11 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to show that in continuity with the biblical understanding of the heart and the desert, the fathers of the Church have developed these themes which are preserved as part of the Christian tradition leading up to the time of St. Francis. When relevant to our analysis and interpretation, we have mentioned the influence of Greek philosophy in the development of the Martha/Mary debate and in the language of ascent leading to union with God. Our focus has been on the continuity with the biblical understanding in the concepts studied consistent with the experience and teaching of St. Francis.

Beginning with St. Antony of Egypt through to Achard and the Victorine School, we analysed the place of the desert in the journey of the heart and its conversion and transformation, the examination of which showed consistency with the biblical desert tradition and the experience of Francis. Recognizing that there is a relationship between the inner world and the outer world involving both space and rhythm which has to be cherished, protected and developed if the heart is to be converted and transformed, we showed that the desert, though not an end in itself, is crucial in sharpening the spiritual senses to prepare the soil of the heart to recognize, receive and respond to the word. This development of the spiritual senses, especially the eyes and the ears of the heart, is central in attending to the working of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit in forming the heart. In this process the fathers of both East and West likened the heart to a battleground, wherein the spirit of the flesh and the Holy Spirit struggle for supremacy.

In the Gospel story of Martha and Mary we have focused our attention on the way in which this text has been interpreted in the light of the active-contemplative debate leading up to the time of Francis. In our study of this text we have stressed the aspects of the heart's formation in both the contemplative stance of Mary's attentiveness to the Word and Martha's loving service to her brothers and sisters. Our aim was to understand the relationship of the one to the other and determine the effects of each on the purification and transformation of the heart. We intimated that Francis faced the active-contemplative tension within himself, a topic that we will develop in our next chapter.

While recognizing aspects of continuity, we have also pointed to ways in which Francis will break with some aspects of the traditional teaching. Francis in his *Rule for Hermitages*

uses the traditional typology of Martha and Mary but he develops and interprets his theme in terms that are more akin to *chesed* within the covenant relationship. Mary, attentive to the Word, is symbolic of spousal intimacy. Martha, active in loving service is symbolic of spiritual fecundity or spiritual motherhood. Francis seems to have grasped their unity, presenting an original expression even within the eremitical tradition itself.

Love of God and love of neighbour lie at the heart of the *Shema*, which embraces the biblical concept of *chesed* and covenant. Love is central and love alone lasts forever. Francis understood the necessity of seeing the relationship of Martha and Mary within a personal and communal context in purifying the heart and making it ready for union with God, not by flight from the world or one's brothers and sisters, but by discovering them in Christ, the *chesed* of God, the perfect covenant and the heart and centre of the world. This we referred to as the Franciscan mysticism of the historical event.

In Francis the journey to God unfolds with a freshness and originality that has stamped him and his movement with an uniqueness in which the heart is central. The uniqueness of the Franciscan understanding of the heart is the foundation not only of both solitude and fraternity but it is the foundation of Franciscan evangelical spirituality in its active and contemplative expression. We now turn to the life of St. Francis and study his experience as his heart is formed, reformed and transformed in the rhythm of a life steeped in the biblical and Christian understanding of the human heart and the heart of God.

CHAPTER 6: St. Francis Of Assisi And The Journey Of The Heart.

6.1 Introduction

The life and writings of St. Francis take us on a journey of the heart. This chapter will explore what the word heart meant for Francis and how his understanding of this word changed and developed. We will look at each of the writings of Francis where he refers to the heart and from these primary sources we will evaluate his use of the word. From the biographies and other early sources for his life we will try to determine some of the factors that shaped the development in his understanding especially relating to the heart's conversion and the place of the desert in that process. In this way we will evaluate the extent to which Francis was imbued with the biblical understanding of the concepts of heart and conversion and desert and their influence on his spirituality. We will also study the secondary sources to see whether the concept of heart is captured in the context mentioned and whether it is a consistent characteristic in Franciscan spirituality

Our starting point is the significance of the symbolic in the experience of St. Francis as this aspect permeates all other considerations and is particularly relevant when speaking of heart and desert. Donald P. St. John (1979:192) states that the spirituality of St. Francis is essentially symbolic in nature.

This type of spirituality is characterized by its sacramental, mediatory view of the cosmic and human orders. The uniqueness of Francis lay in the extent to which he was personally, fervently, totally involved in this symbolic universe

The symbol of the heart is the key for unlocking the symbolic universe of Francis. Within ten of his writings, Francis refers to the heart forty-eight times and he associates activities and characteristics both positively and negatively with it. (Armstrong et al, 2000.) It is a word that he uses more than all others to describe the reality of our relationship with God and the consequences for all other relationships. In our study of heart in the life and experience of Francis we will concentrate on three main stages, the first of which dates from the significant years prior to and immediately after his prayer before the crucifix in the church of San Damiano.

6.2 The Period 1202-1209

6.2.1 Prayer before the Crucifix

The first time heart is used in the writings of Francis is in his prayer before the crucifix at San Damiano. In the most recent critical edition of the writings of Francis (2000), Armstrong, Hellmann and Short following the German scholar, Esser, date the prayer before the crucifix 1205-6. Francis is struggling to know God's will for him and his only awareness of the state of his heart at this time is darkness. The journey of conversion is beginning in Francis and he focuses on the heart as the place where the process is rooted.

Most High, glorious God
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me correct faith,
certain hope
and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge
Lord,
that I may carry out
Your holy and true command. (PrCr)

We will not examine all aspects of this prayer. Our concentration will be on the symbolic "darkness of heart", which Francis experienced. Awareness of "darkness" is Francis' first step in the direction of light and this awareness of darkness of heart will remain with him until the end of his life. With each successive step towards the enlightenment he seeks on his journey, Francis will face hitherto unknown depths within himself as his heart is formed and transformed in relationship with God, with others, with himself and with the whole of creation.

The prayer suggests that the heart has to journey through the darkness towards the light and glory of God. We will rely on the work already done by Matura (1997 & 1999) for insights into the meaning of the heart for Francis in this prayer and at this stage of his journey. Matura (1999:1) states: "This is the first encounter between Glory and Obscurity: The radiance of the One reveals the darkneses of the other".

Immediately we are faced with that inner, vital core within a person, which holds together darkness and light, goodness and evil - the heart. Matura (1999: 2) says it is "the unifying centre from which springs forth and in which converges all the desires and forces that constitute a person; it is the identity and the truth of everyone in their most personal and incommunicable aspect". In this mysterious core the conversion process begins and Francis provides the means for making this symbolic journey: faith, hope, charity, sense and knowledge of God's will.

We feel two points are worthy of special mention at this stage: the prayer form and the image of the crucified. Armstrong (1991:11) gives an example of a similar though not identical prayer found in a breviary dating from the Middle Ages.

Lord Jesus Christ Who are the light of the world,
Who enlightens the darkness of my mind,
give me correct faith and certain hope,
the observance of thinking, speaking and doing
always your will. Amen.

The formative power of the word in liturgical prayer is important and continues to play a prominent part in the conversion journey of Francis until the end of his life. That it should begin thus is in our view important and the significance will unfold as the journey continues. Iglesias (1988:63) draws our attention to both these aspects of Francis' conversion journey. "The Lord came to meet him (Francis) and transformed him by means of the experience of the cross and of his Word". As we trace the journey of Francis we will see the continuing impact of the crucified on his heart where he will learn to hold and integrate seeming contradictions. It is a move from what Fox (1979:82) calls "dualistic consciousness to dialectical consciousness". Gallant and Cirino (2001: 25-6) point out that we must beware of misinterpreting Francis regarding the cross. "Francis' method of contemplation first focuses on the goal of gospel living and then on the road - which road included the cross - leading to the fullness of life." Eventually Francis will understand the cost of discipleship in true conversion of heart.

In this first prayer of Francis before the image of the crucified Christ we are not aware of the specific areas of his darkness of heart other than his uncertainty about God's will for him and his felt need for correct faith, certain hope and perfect charity which will give him the sense and knowledge of God's will. This is a prayer for heart knowledge since Matura (1999: 5) asserts that when Francis speaks of the journey of the heart to

God “he usually couples the word heart with that of *mens*, which indicates the human spirit in its intellectual dimension or, more simply put, the light of knowledge”. This is consistent with the biblical understanding of the heart. Francis prays for an enlightened heart, which will have a real sense of what God is asking. At the onset of his conversion journey he is aware of the state of his heart, a darkness that is comparable to blindness regarding the will of God in his personal regard. All he can do is place himself in the presence of God and ask for enlightenment.

Matura (1999: 2) refers to “three concentric zones” within a person’s heart. The first relates to a person’s ignorance or blindness regarding the self that is created in the image and likeness of God. The second relates to moral blindness and the third relates to ignorance regarding one’s personal vocation. Francis had to face these areas of blindness within his own heart and, in time, he seemed to understand what Merton refers to as the call to “create from within”. Merton (1973: 84) asks the question: “Does God impose a meaning on my life from outside, through event, custom, routine, law, system, impact with others in society? Or am I called to *create from within*, with him, with his grace, a meaning which reflects his truth and makes me his ‘word’ spoken freely in my personal situation?” Francis responded to this challenge and at the end of his life could say: “I have done what was mine to do, may Christ teach you what is yours to do.” (2C 214) But before he reached this stage of maturity, he embarked on a long journey into his own heart.

There is a sense in which all three areas of “darkness” are part of the on-going conversion of Francis’ heart and his gradual enlightenment regarding all three areas are evident as he continues to write his own personal prayers, admonitions, letters and forms of life. Let us now look at the context out of which Francis experienced the need for God to enlighten his darkened heart and the place that the desert played in this process.

6.2.2 Desert and conversion of heart 1202 - 1209

Francis was immersed in the symbolic world of the Assisi of his day. By this symbolic world we mean the values that were espoused by the society of his time, namely, wealth, status, power and prestige. Donald P. St. John (1979:196) tells us that Francis lived at a time when “... various symbol systems were emerging. As a result, the religious symbol system did not adequately reflect the worldview and belief system of everyone in society”. As a rich merchant aspiring to knighthood, the controlling

symbols of wealth, power and freedom exerted a lasting influence on Francis. In a society that called itself Christian, he saw alternative symbol systems arising, which revealed disharmony between Gospel values and lived experience. "He saw man building alternative symbol systems. For him this was primarily the result of pride and spiritual blindness". (D.P. St.John, 1979:196.) Eventually Francis experienced great inner pain and distress as he struggled with the collapse of his own value system. The philosopher of religion, Max Scheler (1972:267), states that every finite spirit believes either in God or in idols. He says:

There is no third course open! But it follows that if a man's faith in his idol is shaken, if he is disillusioned about the place it ought to occupy in his system of ideals, if the false god for which he felt such inordinate love hope and faith is sent toppling, then all about him should look on that man with love and awe, arrested with emotion. Now is the time when something great may take place within him. '

What happens in the heart of Francis at this moment is crucial in the life and destiny not only of Francis but in the life of the Church and society.

If we look at Francis prior to his prayer for enlightenment, we will see that his life was in turmoil. Following the battle of Ponte San Giovanni in 1202 between Assisi and Perugia, Francis experienced imprisonment for one year during which his health deteriorated. (Fortini, 1985:165.) Returning home for a long period of convalescence and deprived of all the external stimuli he was so used to in Assisi, life became very different for Francis. The old symbols of wealth, power and prestige lost their meaning for Francis and he was radically challenged to open his heart and allow life to question him. Was this his first experience of "desert"? Symbolically, the word "desert" may be any life experience that plunges a person into a space or place devoid of the usual and the familiar. Therefore, we are not speaking of desert as a specific location but rather as an experience in the depths of a person's heart. "To go there is to be shaken out of ordinary humdrum acceptance of things and to reflect on their deeper meaning- a meaning only conveyed in solitude and silence."(Cummings, 1978:16.)

The biographical sources (1C 111.6; LJS 1:2,4; LMj 1:5) confirm that Francis experienced a period of solitude and silence after the collapse of his worldly ambitions. It was a time of deep and personal reflection. This pattern of collapse, reflection and

new insights will become familiar as we look at his writings and the early sources for his life. His long illness provides the first opportunity for Francis to reflect.

Thus worn down by his long illness, as human obstinacy deserves since it is rarely remedied except through punishment, he began to mull over within himself things that were not usual for him. (1C 11.3)

Later in the same chapter, Thomas of Celano (1C 11:3), the first biographer of Francis, tells us that Francis "wondered at the sudden change within himself". Even the best and most cherished symbols can lose their value and effectiveness; they lack immediacy and meaning. This seems to reflect the experience of Francis at this time. In his being stripped of the familiar and coming face to face with suffering and confinement both in prison and in his own home, Francis was exposed to other values and realities. The *heart* of Francis had been touched. Deep within him was the awareness of change - a change even he "wondered at".

From that day he began to regard himself as worthless and to hold in some contempt what he had previously held as admirable and lovable, though not completely or genuinely. (1C 11.4)

Reflection in itself does not bring about the desired change. The possible relationship between a *desert* experience and preparation for conversion of heart is apparent in Francis' life at this period, but it is not definitive. Solitude, chosen or imposed, may be the occasion for enlightenment in which the deeper meaning of life is revealed and previous perceptions challenged but that is only the beginning of a lengthy process. Time and rhythm are important factors of the desert experience in the heart of Francis as he journeys to God.

And because affliction can enlighten spiritual awareness, the hand of the Lord was upon him, and a change of the Most High, afflicting his body with prolonged illness in order to prepare his soul for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.
(LMj 1.2)

Face to face with his own limitations, Francis at first experienced these limits physically. His frail body becomes the symbol through which God will convert his heart. Brunette (1997:4-5) develops the theme of the body as the symbol which epitomizes the trial by sickness and convalescence. God works on Francis through

what is most precious to him, his body and what is associated with his body: his health, sumptuous garments, fancy foods, the pleasures of the company of his friends, the world of nature, and so forth.

Throughout his writings Francis uses the word body (*corpus*) eighty-five times, which shows his consciousness of both the positive and negative aspects of the body as a symbol. This is particularly significant in terms of Francis' eremitical and symbolic spirituality. His companions quote Francis as teaching:

Although you are travelling, your conduct must be as upright as if you were in a hermitage or in your cell. Wherever we are, wherever we go, we have our cell with us. Brother Body is our cell, and our soul is the hermit who dwells within it, to pray to God and to meditate. If the soul does not live in peace and solitude in its cell, a cell made by hands profits a religious little. (AC 108.)

We will see how the inner process of change becomes visible in the body of Francis, culminating in the stigmata. At this stage, however, the inner experience and the outward behaviour are not yet integrated in Francis. The sources tell us that he is still struggling to come to terms with feelings of apparent loss of identity that he associated with worldly power, prestige, honour and glory. He had sought meaning and purpose in his life by investing deeply into these symbols. What would replace them?

It is difficult to leave familiar things behind, and things once instilled in the spirit are not easily weakened.
(1C 11.3)

Again Francis went in search of glory and honour. He joined Walter of Brienne, a nobleman from Assisi, and dreamed of worldly success in fighting for the Papal cause against Markwald of Anweiler. The sources tell us that Francis never reached Apulia with Walter of Brienne because once again God took the initiative, in the form of the symbolic, this time in dreams. In referring to the importance of these dreams Brunette (1997:20) says: "The biographies of the saint consider the two dream experiences as the first manifestation of the will of God in his consciousness. Already he is beginning to listen to his imaginal side, which leads him to make commitments".

The consequences of these dreams lead Francis back to Assisi and once again we find him seeking silence and solitude. We are told (1C 3.6) that he sought out a quiet place away from the tumult of the business of the world and was anxious to keep Jesus Christ in his inmost self. There, in the cave, Francis prayed with all his heart that God would reveal His purpose. Again it is the rhythm of involvement and withdrawal in Francis. It seems he recognised the need to gain insight into the everyday events of his life and this he did in the experience of solitude.

New symbols replace old ones and so Francis entered the silence and solitude of the cave to reconstruct his life. This aspect of the desert experience can be a form of crucifixion. Transformation in conversion of heart is a paradigmatic change: a sudden shift that is cataclysmic, calling forth new form, structure and perspective. In the presence of God, Francis is conscious of his heart and his inability to respond in the freedom of his whole person, which heart signifies. The emphasis on totality in loving and giving is very evident in his life and writings, but the human inability to effect change is also a very real experience of his heart and its mysterious ways. Francis is consistent with the biblical understanding and teaching of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the Old Testament (cf. Jr.31; Ezk.36); and Jesus and Paul in the New Testament. (cf. Jn.3; Rm.8.) This will become clearer as Francis opens himself more radically to God with the growing realisation that everything is gift, even the ability to respond to the gift.

Francis draws our attention to the ambiguities and paradoxes we encounter on the road as we journey into the deeper regions of the heart. The symbolic aspect is again indicated by Brunette (1997:20): "The story of the second dream presents Francis on the road, a symbol of the movement taking place within himself". What happened in the life of Francis during those years to deepen his understanding of the human heart and its journey to wholeness? The time spent in solitude seems to be extremely important in processing his experiences and converting or transforming his heart. In describing the search of Francis at this time, Bonaventure (LMj 2.5), a later biographer of Francis, uses the beautiful phrase "secret of solitude", and he gives us some insight into these "secrets" which he couches in the relational language of covenant love.

Now he entreated the Father; now he played with the Spouse;
now he conversed with the Friend. (LMn IV 2)

This is what Francis sought in the “desert” places. Thomas of Celano draws our attention to a passage from St. Matthew's Gospel, which deeply moved the heart of Francis, and it is particularly significant in our study because of the consequences in the journey of the heart.

The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it. (Mt. 13:44-46)

Thomas of Celano (IV.8) tells us that the fruit of this reflection resulted in Francis taking literally the word of the Gospel and selling his goods - or more accurately - his father's goods - at Foligno. Perhaps the totality of his sacrifice in eventually espousing Lady Poverty is closely linked to this newfound treasure, which in turn is a matter of the heart. In this Francis reflects the teaching of Jesus.

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasure for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too. (Mt.6: 19-21)

The upheavals in his life gave Francis the opportunity to stand back from his usual way of behaving and thinking. However, the external circumstances though formative were not the catalyst for an entirely new way of life according to the Gospel. Rout (1996:12) draws our attention to the conviction of God's call from within the heart of Francis.

It is tempting to try to explain Francis' conversion experience as the result of the context in which he lived - to argue that the particular social and religious pressures which had been part of his background created within his mind the feeling that God had called him. This is not the way, however, that even at the end of his life, Francis understood his call from God.

The experience of solitude during which Francis "mulled over" the events of his life prepared him to hear the personal call of God, the moment Francis decisively calls his conversion of heart (conversion understood in the Biblical context of *metanoia* - turning one's heart to God). It is interesting that Francis does not refer to either his imprisonment or long illness and convalescence when he recalls the exact turning point in his life. The turning point or radical conversion was his experience of God in his encounter with lepers. Stewart (1992:309) observes that Francis "reduces the essential moment of his conversion to two critical components: God and lepers". Yet we wonder whether he would have been so receptive to the touch of God if his desert experience had not preceded his encounter with God in the person of the leper. Had his desert experience heightened his ability to "see" differently - with the eyes of the heart, a biblical term he himself will use in later writings.

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance
in this way: while I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see
lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had
mercy upon them. (Test 1)

With insight and understanding Francis recalls the gratuitous gift of God in this memorable beginning. Like the chosen people of the covenant, Francis roots his conversion in an act of God. The words he uses in his Testament (Test 1,2,4) reveal his awareness of the initiative of God in his life. "The Lord gave me brothers... The Lord gave me faith... The Lord led me...". Prior to this encounter with the lepers, Francis had struggled in caves and dungeons, secluded spots and solitary places, all the while his heart a battleground.

He prayed with all his heart that the eternal and true God guide his
way and teach him to do His will. He endured great suffering in his
soul, and he was not able to rest until he accomplished in action
what he had conceived in his heart. Different thoughts followed one
another, and their relentlessness severely disturbed him. (1C 6)

In symbolic language, Bonaventure (LMj 1.5), speaks of him in a solitary place absorbed in contemplation of Christ crucified whose memory is "impressed on the innermost recesses of his heart". His very first prayer for and from his heart was prayed before the crucified. This image would remain with Francis until the final identification on La Verna in the form of the stigmata, the wounds of the crucified in his own flesh.

It seems that the inner cave of the heart and the outer cave made with human hands speak to each other in moments of silence and solitude. The exterior events in the life of Francis require time apart for him to process what is happening. Everything does not become clear for Francis all at once. Brunette (1997:32) states that the actual experience of solitude in the initial stages increased the spiritual deafness and blindness in Francis. The reason for this increased struggle is the desire for God and the many obstacles that prevented Francis from being free to respond. The inner battle is fought in the silence and solitude of the heart of which the cave is a symbol.

The heart, its conversion and the place of solitude - the desert experience, are linked dramatically in the life of Francis. This will be an enduring characteristic for the rest of his life and for the movement with which he is associated. During these formative years, Francis alternates times of prayer in solitude with service to lepers. In other words, contemplation and compassion go hand in hand in preparing a dwelling place for God in the heart. From his first very personal prayer for enlightenment in his darkness, the heart of Francis was formed and transformed again and again as he responded to the call of God in the people and events of his life. His family, particularly his father, his peers, his God-given gift of brothers, lepers, Clare, and the church and society of his time deeply affected his heart and conversion as he reflected on all these things in the quiet of solitude.

6.3 The Period 1209 - 1221

The dated writings from this period in which Francis speaks of heart include the *Earlier Exhortation (The First Letter to the Faithful)* (before 1219), the *Later Admonition and Exhortation (The Second Letter to the Faithful)* (1220) and the *Earlier Rule* (1221). We will look at the development in Francis' thought and understanding of the heart revealed in these writings, which are all related to a wider community and not just to himself and his personal relationship with God. We will also trace the circumstances of his life that may have affected this development as they are revealed in the primary sources for his life. There are also four undated writings of Francis which mention heart - the *Admonitions*, the *Office of the Passion*, the *Prayer inspired by the Our Father* and *A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* - we will refer to these where appropriate.

6.3.1 The Earlier Exhortation

The *Earlier Exhortation* (1209-1215) was addressed by Francis to the first penitents who wished to share his Gospel way of life. In this writing he speaks very specifically of the heart in intense relational terms rooted in the scriptural language of covenant love. Speaking of *this Earlier Exhortation*, Faley (1979:1) states: "Of particular note for us 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." Yet as pointed out by Van Asseldonk (1989:289): "... we have to avoid giving too much importance to lists of biblical citations. It is much more important to look for the actual impact and the real influence of biblical thought on the saint, particularly on the fundamental aspects of his spirit".

According to Matura (1997:16-17), Scripture is certainly the "backdrop" to Francis' writings. His vision of God is based on St. John's Gospel, his vision of the human person is from St. Paul and his understanding of the daily demands of Gospel living is based upon the Synoptics. The thread running through the *Earlier Exhortation* is the totality of loving and giving expressed in the word heart. A study of the form and content of this Letter can be found elsewhere (Lehmann, 1990: 1-33). Our focus is the specific use Francis makes of the word "heart" in an effort to see the pattern of development in his understanding of its activities and characteristics.

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their
whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their
neighbours as themselves. (1LtF 1-2)

In the first two verses Francis stresses love as the activity of the heart but wholeness or totality qualifies the activity towards God and one's neighbour. The link between contemplation and compassion is presented at the outset of the Franciscan form of life for all. Already we see that Francis did not see prayer and ministry as distinct in his following of the Gospel way of life. The inner life of a person, signified by the biblical meaning of heart, is manifested in outward expressions of love towards all our brothers and sisters. This first reference to heart, which Francis uses in the *Earlier Exhortation*, is based on the *Shema* text of the Old Testament.

Listen, Israel: Yahweh your God is the one, the only Yahweh. You
must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
and with all your strength. (Dt.6: 4-5.)

Just as the Exodus-Covenant event was the foundation of the love relationship between Yahweh and the People of Israel, formed, reformed and transformed in the desert experience, the relationship of covenant love is central to Francis' Gospel way of life. Throughout Scripture the covenant relationship is the basis for the revelation of the heart of God. Here we are in the realm of total grace, fidelity and love - often referred to as the *chesed* of God. God always initiates the covenant relationship and such a total gift of self invites a total response.

It is significant that this first reference to heart in the Gospel way of life proposed by Francis is expressed in the *Shema* text. It is a call to total love. This is the way Francis invites people to a life of conversion of heart. Thomas of Celano (2C 196) tells us that Francis "... could not hear 'the love of God' without a change in himself. As soon as he heard 'the love of God' he was excited, moved, and on fire, as if these words from the outside were a pick strumming the strings of his heart on the inside". Love is the reason and motivation for Gospel living and in choosing the *Shema* text as a starting point, Francis sets out to walk in the footprints of Jesus who used the same text to sum up life and relationship with God and our brothers and sisters. We cannot separate these two aspects of love in living life as Jesus Himself stated so clearly. When asked "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the law?" Jesus replied: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself". (Mt. 22: 35-39.)

Lehmann (1990:17) believes that "... the thought that God is love is central to his [Francis] spirituality, and he bequeathed it as a precious heritage to the Franciscan family". The biblical understanding of the word "heart" in this context of the language of love means literally love in action. This embrace of the totality of the person in an act of love towards God and one's neighbour is captured for us particularly in the process of conversion of heart through living relationships, life experiences and reflections on both in silence and solitude. The biblical roots of his message and the way he presents the literal following of Christ is part of the attraction, originality and authenticity of Francis.

In his *Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, Francis fleshes out this scriptural text in his own inimitable way, saying:

Your Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven:
that we may love You with our whole heart, by always
thinking of You, with our whole soul by always desiring
You and with our whole mind by directing all our intentions
to You and by seeking Your glory in everything and with
our whole strength by spending all our energies and affections
of soul and body in the service of Your love and of nothing
else and may we love our neighbours as ourselves by
drawing them all with our whole strength to Your love by
rejoicing in the good fortunes of others as well as our own
and by sympathizing with the misfortunes of others and by
giving offence to no one. (PrOF 5.)

We feel this reflection on the *Our Father* expands on Francis' understanding of the command to love in the unity he presents between love of God and neighbour. The emphasis on a compassionate heart that both rejoices and sympathizes is a striking example of his ability to be truly one with God and with everyone else in God. Fox (1979:32) identifies biblical compassion as the experience of oneness with God and with others in both pain and celebration.

The second instance in the *Earlier Exhortation* where Francis uses the term heart is verse 10:

We are mothers, when we carry Him in our heart and body
(cf.1Cor.6: 20) through divine love and a pure and sincere
conscience and when we give birth to Him through His holy
manner of working which should shine before others as an
example. (cf. Mt. 5:16.) (1LtF 1.)

Assuming that the *Earlier Exhortation* was written sometime between 1209 -1215, it is possible to detect not only the influence of Johannine and Pauline theology but also the influence of Clare who was at this time a most faithful follower of Francis. *Carrying the Lord in our heart* is a feminine, maternal image reminiscent of Clare in her *Letter to Agnes*.

Therefore, as the glorious Virgin of virgins carried Christ materially in her body, you too, by following in His footprints (cf.Pet.2: 21), especially those of poverty and humility, can, without any doubt,

always carry Him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body. (Third Letter 24-26.)

There are several biblical associations in Francis' choice of the words *carry in your heart*. As mentioned already in Chapter 3, Wolff (1974:49) states that "the heart becomes the treasury of knowledge and of memory". This is the language of covenant love and the heart is the Ark of the Covenant. The *Shema* text previously quoted by Francis continues with the words (Dt. 6: 5): "Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart".

"Stay in your heart" and "carry in your heart" have the same meaning when linked to "treasury of knowledge and memory". Being mindful of God and his loving ways with us, especially in the initiative of the covenant is the constant message of the Old Testament. Such consciousness presents the heart as carrying the words and in the New Testament as carrying the Word. Francis captures both nuances in this *Earlier Exhortation*.

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbours as themselves. (1LtF 1-2.)

We are mothers, when we carry Him in our heart and body (cf. 1Cor.6: 20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and when we give birth to Him through His holy manner of working, which should shine before others as an example. (cf. Mt.5: 16.) (1LtF 10.)

The third reference is in contrast to the first two and focuses our attention on the negative characteristics and activities of the heart. From our reading of Francis' own words in this *Earlier Exhortation* it seems he did receive the enlightenment he had prayed for in 1205 -6. This Exhortation reveals both the heights and the depths of the human heart in its mystical ascent and its proclivity towards evil. The first references stress the love that is in the person, in the heart and the enormous possibilities it offers for relationship, whereas the third text emphasises the negative:

See, you blind ones, you who are deceived by your enemies: by the flesh, the world, and the devil; because it is sweet to the body to commit sin and it is bitter for it to serve God;

and because all vices and sins come forth and proceed from
the heart of man as the Lord says in the Gospel (cf. Mk.7: 21.)
(1LtF 2:11-13.)

In his very personal prayer before the crucifix, Francis had prayed for the darkness of his own heart to be enlightened. Relating now to a wider group of people awakens Francis to the realisation of the extent of this darkness or blindness. This reflects the thought processes of St. John's Gospel where blindness and sin are equated. (Ch. 8 & 9.) Such blindness makes people whose hearts are not converted, the children of the devil whose works they do. Ever mindful of the need to cleanse the eyes of his heart, his biographer, Bonaventure (LMn 111.3), tells us:

Truly, even though he had attained purity of heart and body,
and in some manner was approaching the height of sanctification,
he did not cease to cleanse the eyes of his soul with a continuous
flood of tears.

When Francis was advised to cease from such weeping for fear of losing his physical sight, he said:

He preferred to lose sight than repress the devotion of the
spirit and impede the tears that cleansed his interior vision
so that he could see God. (LMn 111.3.)

Therefore, it is within the depths of the person, in the heart that identity is expressed and revealed. The heart is the focus for understanding motivation, behaviour and action. In true biblical fashion, and in the words of Jesus, Francis presents the heart as the centre from which flows all "vices and sins". This conviction of Francis will be repeated in the *Later Exhortation* and will be developed still further in the *Earlier Rule*.

The "bitter sweet" image is peculiar to Francis and reflects his understanding not only of the spiritual senses of hearing and seeing with the eyes and ears of the heart but also the spiritual sense of taste in relation to the heart. This bittersweet image refers particularly to the special grace of conversion of heart, which Francis never forgot. Writing his *Testament* at the very end of his life, Francis recalls that special grace of bitterness being changed into sweetness for him.

While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers
and the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy
upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter
to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body.
(Test 1-3.)

Thus conversion and the cost of it at the human level cannot be overestimated. To live life centred on God and not on the ego lies at the heart of the Christian message and remains a special *charism* of the Franciscan family called as they are to live "in penance" understood as true conversion of heart in the biblical sense. Doino (1994: 144) describes Francis masterfully conducting the brothers into the deep reaches of consciousness bringing them to an awareness of the depth and dynamics of their inner lives. "His own pre-conversion years had revealed to him how concerns for the self can subtly but forcefully take control of our desires and limit our perception of reality".

6.3.2 The Later Exhortation c.1220

In the *Later Exhortation* 1220 there are six references to the heart, some of which are similar to the *First Exhortation* but there are new dimensions as well. The similar texts refer to the positive aspect of loving with all one's heart and the negative aspects relate to the sins and vices that proceed from the heart. The additional nuances concern persevering prayer and adoration in purity of heart.

And He wishes all of us to be saved through Him and receive Him
with our heart pure and our body chaste.
(2LtF 14.)

Let us love God, therefore, and adore Him with a pure heart and a
pure mind because He who seeks this above all else has said: *The
true worshippers will adore the Father in Spirit and in Truth.* (John
4: 23.) (2LtF 19.)

And let us praise Him and pray to Him *day and night* (Ps.31: 4)
saying: *Our Father who art in Heaven* (Mt. 6:9) *since we should
pray always and not lose heart.* (Lk.18: 1.)(2LtF 21.)

This new emphasis on being pure in heart highlights Francis' awareness of the need for conversion if we are to adore as befits the Trinity. It is a theme he will take up again in later writings. Conversion, purity of heart and adoration are linked in an on-going

process that requires persevering effort and spiritual sight, seeing with the eye of the heart. As Armstrong (1996:196) points out: "We can more easily understand his encouragement of the spiritually blind, those who have not embraced a life of penance, to open their spiritual eyes and see". What is at stake is intimacy with the triune God but without a clean heart the penetration of the divine mysteries is impossible.

The scriptural "backdrop" already referred to above is again evident. The Old Testament is replete with references to purity of heart. Bovenmars (1991:11) (Pr.20: 9) refers to purity of heart as the requirement for intimacy with God and suggests the need for penance and conversion in acquiring it: "What man can say, 'I have purified my heart, and I am purified of my sin?' " And he also focuses on the ethical implications found in many of the Psalms. "Who has the right to climb the mountain of Yahweh, and the right to stand in His holy place? He whose hands are clean, whose heart is pure, whose soul does not pay homage to worthless things". (Ps.24: 3-4.).

Francis' advice to *pray and not to lose heart* is reminiscent of the question of the psalmist in Ps.73: 13 quoted by Bovenmars (1991:11): "After all, why should I keep my own heart pure, and wash my hands in innocence, if you plague me all day long and discipline me every morning?" And Francis gives the answer: This is what the Father seeks. We are back to love and adoration as the motivation for penance and purification in striving for a pure heart with which to love totally. Love is the essence but to love totally in purity of heart requires the ability to see and to see differently. It is the ability to pass from the visible to the invisible. Again we are in the realm of biblical spirituality where each is called to "see" with the eyes of the heart the mystery of God in the whole of created reality and to reflect some part of that great mystery of our own uniqueness in Him.

6.3.3 The Earlier Rule: 1209 - 1221

Francis wrote a form of life for the brothers based on a few Gospel texts and submitted it to the Pope in Rome in 1209. Growth and development necessitated a more detailed Rule of Life and this scholars have dated 1209 -1221, the final stage of presentation being the Chapter of 1221. In this text Francis uses the word "heart" sixteen times, more frequently than in any of his other writings. There is a very interesting development in his thought and understanding of heart in this text. The language is symbolic, the images are biblical taken from the Synoptic tradition but the thought processes are those of John's Gospel.

According to Armstrong (1991) Chapter 22 of the *Earlier Rule* is a parable according to Francis. His use of the parable of the Sower from Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8 results in a composition that is unique to Francis. In this parable various Synoptic phrases are pieced together in the light of the three traditions but the theological insights of Francis are rooted in the discipleship of John's Gospel. I also rely on the work of Vollot (1992: 279-319) for insights into this parable of the seed as it is found in this text.

Significantly twelve of the sixteen references to heart in the *Earlier Rule* are found in chapter 22 in the parable of the heart. Armstrong (1991) states that Francis substitutes "earth" for "heart" in an almost unobservable manner in this chapter. This interchanging of "soil" and "heart" is a most interesting observation because we can discern a movement in the developing consciousness of Francis. It is the movement from a dualistic consciousness to a more dialectical consciousness. The Word is the Divine Life implanted in the earthiness of the human person. Holding the two together in a dialectic consciousness is the challenge Francis puts before us.

This Chapter in the *Earlier Rule* is perhaps Francis' most insightful teaching about the heart. At the very outset he tells us to "be very careful" about our heart and the kind of soil it is but he always keeps before us the fact that it *is* soil. Armstrong (1994: 33) states that "by focusing on our heart, Francis encourages us to probe, to concentrate on, and to direct its mysterious ways". He is very concerned about the soil of the heart because it is within the soil of the heart that God plants his word, and Francis has profound reverence for the word. The parable refers to the word of God as a seed and Vollot (1992: 293) claims that this is a key for understanding the parable. Luke (8:11) tells us that the seed is the word of God and Francis repeats this in Verse 11 of chapter 22. The context for this statement is the experience of conversion where the will and good pleasure of God is presupposed. Francis states:

And now that we have left the world, however, we have nothing else to do but to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him. Let us be careful that we are not earth along the wayside, or that which is rocky or full of thorns, in keeping with what the Lord says in the Gospel: The word of God is a seed.
(ER XXII: 9-11.)

There is a theology of the word in Francis that we mention to enable us to grasp the importance and typically symbolic nature of Francis' understanding of the word. Following St. John's Gospel, Francis was imbued with the realisation of a twofold symbolism: discipleship and indwelling. The former means living *in* the word of God and our Gospel living in the ordinariness of our everyday experiences is the outward expression of the *indwelling* Trinity. John 6: 63 is a foundational text upon which the other influential verses build in the Divine-human relationship within the heart.

It is the spirit that gives life,
the flesh has nothing to offer.
The words I have spoken to you are spirit
and they are life. (Jn 6:63)

To understand Francis and his insights regarding the formation of the heart in the way of the flesh or the way of the Spirit, it is helpful to look at his own life experiences at the time of writing this text. We know that he spent lengthy periods in solitude as he processed the experiences of life within his own heart by looking deeply and listening attentively. Lennon (2000: 54) states "our looking and listening are rooted in the life of the indwelling Holy Spirit of revelation". Francis goes on to quote Paul's reference to this mysterious work of the Spirit in our hearts.

What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the mind of
man cannot visualise; all that God has prepared for those who love
him; to us, though, God has given revelation through the Spirit, for
the Spirit explores the depths of everything. (1Co.2: 9)

Francis was convinced of the necessity for living in the word as a basic step in becoming a disciple. This is quite different from the idea of discipleship presented in the Synoptics where the basic stance is one of following. Again we see the influence of John's Gospel.

If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples;
you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (Jn
8: 32.)

Francis' expression and understanding of discipleship consists primarily in living in the word, keeping it and cherishing it within, making the heart the dwelling place of the Spirit. Again it is Johannine theology shining through in Francis' teaching:

In all truth I tell you whoever keeps my word will never see death.
(Jn 6: 51.)

Then we reach a highpoint in the love relationship. In the depths of the heart where a person keeps and cherishes the word, there is mutual love, intimacy and indwelling.

Anyone who loves me will keep my word,
and my Father will love him
and we shall come to him
and make a home in him. (Jn 14: 23.)

For this to become a living reality within the heart of the person, Francis tells us of the struggles, the pitfalls, the obstacles, the challenges and the upheaval involved in the process that we call conversion of heart. Even before he relates his parable of the heart, Francis reiterates a teaching already found in his earlier writings, namely, that it is from within, from the heart of a person that all evils flow. Verses 7-8 spell it out very clearly.

From the heart of man come forth and flow evil thoughts,
adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, avarice, wantonness,
deceit, lewdness, evil looks, false testimonies, blasphemy,
foolishness. (cf. Mk.7:21-22; Mt.15:19.)

All these evil things flow from within, from the heart of a person
(cf.Mk.7: 23) and these are the things that make a person unclean.
Mt.15: 20.)(ER XXII:7-8.)

The way of the Spirit is the way of and towards freedom but the process of conversion of heart is a battleground and the responsibility is awesome. God is constantly sowing his word, his seeds in our hearts, but the growth of the seed is dependent upon the soil of the heart. "The heart is the true laboratory where all that is good or bad in a human being, seen as a moral entity, is prepared. Left to itself the human heart is a foul cesspool, the pit of all vices". (Vollot, 1992: 285.) Francis challenges us to be attentive. He says in verse 12:

But that which fell along the wayside and was trampled underfoot
(cf.Lk.8: 5) are those who hear (Lk.8: 12) the word and do not
understand it (cf.Mt.13: 19). And immediately (Mk.4: 15) the devil
comes (Lk.8: 12) and snatches up ((Mt.13: 19) what was planted

in their hearts (Mk.4: 15) and takes the word out of their hearts,
otherwise believing they might be saved. (Lk.8: 12.)(ER XXII:
12.)

The symbolism is dramatic and immediate. Francis accentuates the welcoming of the word of God and in common with the Biblical tradition he stresses both listening and understanding. To listen one needs silence. To have silence one needs solitude.

But look, I am going to seduce her
And lead her into the desert and speak to her heart.
(Ho.2: 14-16.)

If a person does not have a listening heart, then there is no insight or understanding of the word that is received. This is the message of Francis reflected in the insight of Wolff (1974: 47) when he states that "it is positively by definition that Deuteronomy presupposes that the heart is destined for understanding, in the same way that the eyes are destined for seeing and the ears for hearing".

But until today Yahweh has not given you a heart to understand,
eyes to see, or ears to hear. (Dt.29: 3.)

While Francis stresses the welcoming of the word in the act of hearing, he points out the consequences of a lack of understanding. There is a loss of the word because it has not had time to take root. Francis uses the word immediately to accentuate the way in which Satan works in the heart and "snatches" the word from the heart. There is immediacy and violence implied here. The emphasis is always within. It is the interiorization of the word that is important and this is why Francis speaks of what is planted *in* our hearts and that which the devil takes *from* our hearts. Vollot (1992: 296) describes the heart in this context as "a closed field where the combat is waged". He goes on to establish that Francis' understanding of the heart in this text is based on the biblical understanding of the heart as the seat of both the intellectual and moral life. The textual analysis of Vollot (1992: 301) highlights the choices, which Francis made from the Synoptic accounts of the Parable of the seed and this in turn highlights his understanding of the heart and its condition.

Francis then turns his attention to another type of earth or soil by which he understands the heart. This person hears and receives the word with joy, but the soil of the heart makes it impossible for the seed to grow and bear fruit. This is of paramount

importance for Francis. Like Jesus, Francis is convinced that it is by their fruits that hearts are transparent. If the fruits of repentance or conversion are not apparent then the soil of the heart is hard and barren. Many times in Scripture there are references to the hard or stony heart and Francis reflects this understanding in his recognition of the need for a change of heart, which only the Spirit of God can achieve. The promise of God is that *He* will remove the heart of stone.

I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies. (Ezk 36: 26.)

Seeds do not take root in hard, stony earth. The seed that is the word of God cannot take root in a hard, stony heart and if there are no roots, there is no perseverance. In the thought of Francis, the earth of the heart needs to be able to deal with suffering, temptations, trials and persecutions. If the heart cannot hold together both the positive and the negative aspects of life, then the person will stumble and fall away. In the figurative language of Scripture "stone" is sometimes referred to in a negative sense, as temptation, as a stumbling-stone. Paul, quoting the prophet Isaiah (8:14) says:

Israel, looking for saving justice by law-keeping, did not succeed in fulfilling the Law. And why? Because they were trying to find it in actions and not in faith and so they stumbled over the *stumbling stone* - as it says in Scripture: *Now I am laying in Zion a stumbling - stone, a rock to trip people up; but he who relies on this will not be brought into disgrace.* (Rm.8: 31-33.)

"Fall away" is an interesting term in the context of fraternity because this text of Francis is a form of life, a Rule, and Armstrong (1991: 34) believes that in the teaching of Francis, it is the word that brings a person into fraternity. If the heart is not good soil where the word can take root, then there will be a "falling away" presumably from the fraternity. Again, the thought processes of the Johannine school are reflected where the "falling away" or apostasy is a consequence of darkness - a theme familiar in the writings of Francis.

Whoever claims to be in light but hates his brother is still in darkness. Anyone who loves his brother remains in light and there is nothing to make him fall away. (1Jn 2: 9.)

Vollot also points out that Francis' choice of "tribulation and persecution" which are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, does not take away from the meaning given by Luke in his choice of the word temptation. Each of these words could be associated with the desert experiences of the Chosen People and ultimately with the desert experience of Francis in the battleground of his own heart. This is aptly spelled out in the seed that fell among thorns. Vollot (1992: 304) refers to this part of the text as "quite thought-provoking" in that the impression is given of an intense assault on the heart. The link between the battle that takes place in the heart and the temptations of Christ in the desert are obvious and in the life and experience of Francis the relationship of the one with the other is often referred to in the sources.

He went to a place of prayer as he often did. He remained there a long time with fear and trembling before the Ruler of the whole earth. He recalled in the bitterness of his soul the years he spent badly, frequently repeating this phrase: Lord, be merciful to me a sinner. (1C XI: 26.)

He would spend the night alone praying in abandoned churches and in deserted places where, with the protection of divine grace, he overcame his soul's many fears and anxieties.(1C XXVII: 71.)

Solitude, symbolic of the desert experience was the training ground for the heart of Francis where he faced his inner depths with all the positive and negative aspects this challenge entails. Perhaps this is why Francis is able to recognise characteristics and activities of the heart, which he equates with good soil.

But what was sown in good soil are those who hear the word with a good and excellent heart, understand and preserve it and bear fruit in patience. (ER XXII.17.)

Both Armstrong (1991: 35) and Vollot (1992: 305) refer to five steps or stages involved in receiving the word in a heart that is well disposed:

1. Hearing the word.
2. Understanding the word.
3. Preserving or holding on to the word.
4. Bearing the fruit of the word.
5. Enduring and persevering in patience.

These are the characteristics of the good and excellent heart of which Francis speaks. Each characteristic is soundly based in the Scriptural texts of both Old and New Testaments that refer to the heart. Their biblical foundation may be found in chapters 3 and 4. Later we will see how these same aspects have relevance for contemporary living.

Having developed the parable of the seed in his own original way, Francis proceeds to give further teaching on the heart. From verses 19-29 he mentions the heart seven times. Firstly, he draws our attention to the care and vigilance that is needed against the ways of Satan.

And let us be very careful of the malice and subtlety of Satan, who wishes that a man not raise his mind and heart to God.
And as he roams about he wishes to ensnare the heart of a person under the guise of some reward or help, and to snuff out our memory of the word and the precepts of the Lord, and wishes to blind the heart of a person through worldly affairs and concerns, and to live there. (ER XXII: 19-20.)

These words of Francis reflect the advice given by St. Peter in his first letter.

Keep sober and alert, because your enemy the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.
(1 P 5: 8.)

There is a development in Francis' understanding of the ways of the evil one. His first prayer before the crucifix was prayed out of his experience of darkness or blindness. His awareness of blindness was again stressed in the *Earlier Exhortation*. Now he is more explicit in stating that this is the work of Satan to "blind the heart".

Prior to this statement Francis makes the link with memory that is equivalent to "keeping or holding in the heart". (Admonition.XXI.2; Earlier Rule XXIII.11.) Satan wishes to "snuff out of our memory" the word of the Lord in our regard. Lennon (2000: 82-83): makes the direct connection between sight and memory saying "memory is essential for true sightedness" and he quotes Rose "Memory defines who we are and shapes the way we act more closely than any other single aspect of our personhood".

If memory and true sightedness are essential for realising who we are, then the prayer of Francis before the crucifix was gradually being answered in his realisation of his identity and extraordinary dignity as a child of God. In *Admonition V* he says:

Consider, O human being, in what great excellence the Lord God
has placed you, for He created and formed you to the image of
His beloved Son according to the body and to His likeness
according to the Spirit.

The story of humankind in Scripture reveals that when the memory of the Lord and his covenant of love fades into the background, the people lose their way and turn to idolatry. Desert, exile, sin and oppression are woven into the human story when memory is “snuffed out”. In his final hours, Jesus himself made the plea to remember. He said: “Do this in memory of me.” (Lk. 22:20.)

Francis seems to have grasped this truth and is at pains to impress it upon the brothers, pointing out the ways in which the heart is blinded, ensnared and fails to remember the words and deeds of the Lord. He presents Satan as an angel of light - one who appears under the guise of doing good. Misguided helpfulness and the promise of reward, worldly concerns and affairs, cares and anxieties are specifically mentioned as the snares of the devil in gaining entrance to the heart and taking up his abode there. Armstrong (1991: 47) suggests that the “promise of reward or some help or some work” may be a significant addition relating to the tension between prayer and work. If this is true we understand even more clearly the active-contemplative synthesis, which Francis lives and advocates. Here he invites and cautions, saying:

But in the holy love which is God (cf. 1 John 4:16)) I beg all my
brothers, both the ministers and the others, as they overcome
every obstacle and put aside every care and anxiety, to strive
as best they can to serve, love, honour, and adore the Lord God
with a clean heart and a pure mind, for this is what He desires
above all things. (ER XXII: 26.)

Francis uses the term “clean heart”. There is an obvious connection here with the whole process of conversion because *to clean* implies dealing with the many obstacles that Francis mentions. The reason for facing them and dealing with them is to be pure in heart, but the cleaning precedes the state of being pure. Consistent with biblical teaching, Francis also advocated cleanness of heart in *Admonition XVI*.

Blessed are the clean in heart, for they will see God.

The truly clean of heart are those who look down upon earthly things, seek those of heaven, and, with a clean heart and spirit, never cease adoring and seeing the Lord God living and true.

In his reflections on this Admonition Esser (1992: 93) links "clean of heart" to interior cleaning which we understand as the process of conversion of heart. He says:

To say it in present day terms, we may express it as the person who is interiorly uncluttered. Whatever has nothing to do with God or does not lead to him is thrown out. He who wishes to be pure of heart must do a thorough interior house cleaning; that is, he must dispose of all egocentric attitudes, of all attachment to things, persons, and especially self, of all attachment to position, status, honour and importance. We can see that this despoliation concerns our inner nature and all that serves our ego and thus keeps us from God. We must unconditionally say "no" to ourselves. In the sense of St. Francis, purity of heart is integrity, sincerity, transparency, or emptiness, detachment from all earthly goods, total self-conquest.

The necessity of entering freely into the conversion process is obvious. If the seed is to bear fruit in the earth of the heart, co-operation with the invitation of God is essential. The journey of the heart takes us ever more deeply into our inner attitudes and motivations where the real purification takes place in the most hidden manner in the earth of our heart. In Francis' teaching there is a direct relationship between purity of heart and adoration. Esser (1992: 94) states: "the pure person is the adoring person". Francis has linked purity of heart with adoration in previous writings, but in this text there is a development in his understanding of the heart and the process that leads to transformation.

Love of God makes us adorers and co-lovers with Christ; love of each other makes us sisters and brothers and servants of each other. To make our hearts receptive to God's love and sensitive to the needs of others necessarily involves the cross and suffering because conversion involves self-forgetfulness. It is in reality a death to the false sense of self and a rebirth as a new creation in Christ. Reminiscent of Francis and his very practical writing in the *Admonitions*, Merton (1973: 83) outlines the personal cost

of conversion and transformation as we journey towards purity of heart. He describes purity of heart as follows:

An unconditional and totally humble surrender to God, a total acceptance of ourselves and of our situation as willed by him. It means the renunciation of all deluded images of ourselves, all exaggerated estimates of our own capacities, in order to obey God's will as it comes to us in the difficult demands of life in its exacting truth. Purity of heart is then correlative to a new spiritual identity - the "self" as recognized in the context of realities willed by God - Purity of heart is the enlightened awareness of the new man, as opposed to the complex and perhaps rather disreputable fantasies of the 'old man'.

Another contemporary writer (Rohr, 1999: 55) puts it this way;

The religious version of egocentricity is wanting to be right and wanting to be in control.. To give that up is major surgery. Religion might call it major conversion: "unless the grain of wheat dies, it remains just a grain of wheat," Jesus says. (Jn.12: 24.)

The long journey to purity of heart is essentially the work of the Holy Spirit. Francis did not underestimate either the gift of God or the response required.

6.3.4. Solitude and conversion of heart: 1209 - 1221

Between the years 1209 and 1221 the heights and the depths of the human heart in its mystical ascent and its inclination to evil were the focus for Francis. The events of this time and his relationships with the brothers, Clare and the community at San Damiano, the lay followers of his penitential life were formative and directly related to his experiences of solitude. His writings, especially the Rule for Hermitages, and the biographical sources reveal how important solitude was for Francis as he constantly tried to direct his heart in the Gospel path.

The years between 1209-1221 were years of tremendous change, growth and development for Francis. No longer was he the lone hermit or penitent. He was now the leader of a movement within church and society and the effects of both impinge on this new group and *vice versa*.

To all he gave a norm of life and to those of every rank
he sincerely pointed out the way of perfection. Many people,
well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine
inspiration, began to come to St. Francis, for they desired
to serve under his constant training and leadership. All of
these the holy one of God, like a fertile stream of heavenly
grace, watered with shower of gifts and he adorned the
field of their hearts with the flowers of perfection.
(1C 37)

Not surprisingly it is during this period that places of solitude become prominent in the life of Francis and the brothers. The mountain of La Verna was acquired in 1213 and this was a place of special retreat for Francis. It is interesting that La Verna itself is described (Fortini, 1985:551) as "an altar in the heart of holy Italy... This mountain is truly a fortress destined for terrible battles of body and soul". By 1215, the Carceri was also recognised as a place of prayer and solitude. Shortly afterwards four other hermitages - Greccio, La Forresta, Fonte Columbo and Poggio Bustoni - were established in the valley of Rieti and at the same time, or perhaps a little later, a small hermitage was established at Sarteano near Lake Trasimene.

From Moorman's account (1968:63) we are given to understand that these hermitage type of dwellings were the only ones available and desired by Francis for himself and his brothers at this time. The interesting factor for our present study is the emphasis given by the historian and preacher, Jacques de Vitry in 1216.

During the day they go into the cities and villages giving
themselves over to the active life in order to gain others;
at night, however, they return to their hermitage or solitary
places to devote themselves to contemplation.
(Jacques de Vitry, Letter 1 (1216.))

In 1209 returning from Rome with the verbal approval of the Pope for their Gospel way of life, Francis and the brothers are undecided whether their call is to pray or to preach. The above letter of Jacques de Vitry shows how this initial question was answered but the Sources tell us that the question was not resolved definitively for Francis because in 1213 the question of action and contemplation again resurged in his heart.

What do you think, brothers, what do you judge better?
That I should spend my time in prayer, or that I should
travel about preaching? (LMj XII.1-2.)

According to Brunette (1997.xvi) Francis was always aware of the need for conversion and in this process, the brothers and solitude played an important part transforming and purifying his heart. Fraternity - the daily experience of living with the brothers in their strengths and their weaknesses, seeking their advice and being obedient to it, and relating to a wider fraternity of disciples - made heavy demands on Francis. To enable him to centre his attention on the need for conversion and to see more clearly the deeper recesses of his own heart and the hearts of others requires the experience of solitude.

Iglesias (1988:64) points out:

The God of St. Francis is not detached from life, nor does he lead to a formally contemplative or eremitical life. It is completely the reverse. He brings one to a better recognition, from the point of view of God, of the grace and concrete requisites of Gospel brotherhood.

Though Francis does not lead a "formally contemplative or eremitical life" solitude becomes increasingly important in his life.

Moorman (1968: 64) quotes Wadding in establishing that Francis visited La Verna in 1215 where he needed to meditate and reflect on the failure of his missionary endeavours and his increasing problems with his rapidly expanding Order. The sources confirm that Francis visited La Verna again in 1216, 1218 and 1220. Francis needed longer and more secluded periods for prayer in imitation of Christ who spent forty days in the desert where God tested his heart. These periods of forty days become an increasing expression of Francis' following in the footsteps of Christ until his final transformation on La Verna. Raymundo (1994:199) would go so far as to say that the hermitages "reveal the true heart of Francis in a unique way which no other grandiose buildings or magnificent monuments erected to his name and honour can fittingly express".

During this period Francis wrote his *Rule for Hermitages*, a document that dates from 1217-1221. We will not examine the Rule in detail here except to mention that it is unique in its exposition of the eremitical life. Scholars (Brady, Cirino & Raischl, Esser, Higgins, Raymundo) have drawn attention to a number of distinctive features in Francis' understanding of eremiticism as proposed in this Rule: the changing role of Martha/Mary within the hermitage and the temporary nature of the hermitage experience itself; the mother/son relationship is stressed by Francis and is unique to him; the fraternal aspect of living together in solitude in small numbers is emphasized by Francis to preserve holy poverty in a spirit of simplicity, freedom of heart and openness to the Spirit of the Lord. This uniqueness continues to challenge the Franciscan movement in every age as it struggles to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice". (RH 3.)

6.4 The Period 1221 - 1226

During the final years of Francis' life when his health began to deteriorate rapidly, Armstrong (1994:224) notes that "a certain panic started to develop among them. They [the brothers] turned repeatedly to him for advice, guidance, and insights". Of the eight dated writings of this period, two of them mention the heart: in the *Later Rule* and the *Letter to the Entire Order*. The remaining writings of this period, especially the *Praises of God* and *The Canticle*, reveal a man whose heart has already been formed, reformed and transformed into the image and likeness of the heart of God.

6.4.1 The Later Rule

Dated 1223 this Rule is the final and approved way of life for the followers of Francis and the brothers. There is only one reference to heart in this text and it refers to a pure heart. It seems appropriate to include in this section a reference to one of Francis' undated writings, *Admonition XVI* and treat it together with our reflection on the *Later Rule*.

Let them pursue what they must desire above all things: to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working, to pray always to Him with a pure heart and to have humility, patience in persecution and weakness, and to love those who persecute us, find fault with us, or rebuke us...(LR VIII: 8-10.)

Central in this reference to the heart is the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working, through which purity of heart is possible. Francis is acutely aware of the activity of the Spirit in the transformation of the heart and its empowerment both to pray and to endure patiently the hardships and sufferings within the fraternity and the apostolate. Not only is the biblical “backdrop” of the new heart and the new spirit of Ezekiel and Jeremiah present here but also the Pauline and Johannine teaching on the Spirit, uniting in a unique way both prayer and action. In a previous chapter of this same rule Francis says (LR V.1):

Those brothers whom the Lord has given the grace of working should do their work faithfully and devotedly so that, avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all other things of our earthly existence must contribute.

There is the intimation here that there may be a tension between prayer and work unless and until the heart is purified and transformed by the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring about the desired unity and integration within the person.

Van Asseldonk (1991:106) quotes the work of several leading scholars who assert the importance of the theme of the Spirit in the life and experience of Francis. Esser states:

With St. Francis it is not simply a question of an external following of the life of Christ, but rather first of all that the Spirit of Christ must become alive and active in the would-be follower. This doctrine of the Spirit of the Lord (*spiritus Domini*) may be called the very centre of St. Francis's thinking and Christian behaviour. He constantly speaks of the Spirit in his *Rules* and *Letters* and in his *Admonitions* to his brothers'

Van Asseldonk (1991:106) also quotes Omaechevarria: “For St. Francis, the notion of the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit in the soul is almost an obsession”.

Francis' understanding of the activities of the heart is inseparable from his teaching on the Spirit of the Lord. The reason why we must desire the Spirit of the Lord and its activity above everything is simply because the ability for the heart to persevere in a loving relationship in prayer amidst weakness and persecution is the work of the Spirit

within and a sign of His presence. Francis locates us in the lived reality of our heart's journey amidst the trials and tribulations of our personal history.

He links a pure heart with humility, patience in persecution and weakness. This is tremendously important in the overall teaching of Francis and the heart. We have only to look at the *Admonitions* of Francis to see how this works out on a day-to-day basis in the lives of the brothers and ultimately in the life of every believer. There are seven references to the heart in the *Admonitions* and as a whole they reflect the converted heart and the unconverted heart. Francis presents this discernment in terms of the spirit, which energizes the heart: either the spirit of the flesh or the Spirit of the Lord. We have already referred to Francis emphasis on the state of the heart being a significant factor in both the ability to pray and the patience to suffer. (ER VIII: 8-10.) He seems convinced that it is the Holy Spirit who guides and directs the heart in its journey to the Father in the footprints of his Son, Jesus, who was "meek and humble in heart" and called his followers to be the same.

Reminiscent of the Servant Songs in Isaiah, (cf.Is.42: 1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) and of the teaching of Jesus Himself (cf.Mt.5-7; 11: 29) Francis captures "meekness and humility of heart" in a number of his writings, particularly the *Later Exhortation*, the *Admonitions*, *The Later Rule* and the *Office of the Passion*, which "is nothing other than the expression of sentiments that the mountain of La Verna will bring to realization in his heart" (Fortini, 1988:545 n.o.) Like Jesus, the true disciple is empowered by the Spirit of the Lord to make the journey of the heart, enter the darkness, confront the obstacles, suffer patiently, die to selfishness and in conversion of heart be receptive to an infusion of the virtues as Francis says:

There is surely no one in the entire world who can possess any one of you unless he dies first. Whoever possesses one of you and does not offend the others, possesses all.
(SalV 5-6.)

The penitential heart is the pre-requisite for receiving the fullness of the life of God and becoming the home and dwelling-place of the Trinity.

6.4.2 Solitude and conversion of heart: 1221 -1226

The final years of Francis' life were years of growing tension within himself and within the Order. During the years 1221 - 1226 we know Francis spent lengthy times in solitude and these are associated with major events in his personal life and in the Order. His heart would pass through the crucible of suffering leading him to a total identification with his crucified Lord.

In 1222, at the Pentecost Chapter, there were 5,000 brothers present. Francis was asked to revise the Earlier Rule in which we find some of his dearest wishes and Gospel quotations. "It is said that the last touches in the redaction of the rule were completed by Francis in the hermitage of the Carceri, the scene of the anguished struggle of his youth, where he searched in despair for his dream." (Fortini, 1985: 473.) The request to revise the Rule and even to adopt a Rule from one of the already existing Orders indicates the dissatisfaction within the fraternity. Francis was adamant:

My brothers! My brothers! God has called me by the way of simplicity and humility, and has truly shown me this way for me for those who want to trust and imitate me. Therefore I do not want you to mention to me any *Rule*, whether of Saint Augustine, or of St. Bernard, or of St. Benedict, or any other way or form of life except the one that the Lord in His mercy has shown and given to me. (The Beginning of A Mirror of Perfection 68.)

Moorman (1968: 55) says:

... the division in the Order was a source of great distress to Francis; and we find in the early documents, a number of incidents which reveal something of the agony through which he was passing, as well as the tension which existed among the friars. 'Who are these', he once cried, 'who snatch my Order and my brethren out of my hands?'

In the Autumn of 1222 Francis once again sought the solitude of the hermitage at Fonte Colombo. There in prayer and reflection, he revised the Rule and submitted it to Brother Elias, his superior. The heart of Francis was being purified and stripped, even to leadership and ownership of the Order he had founded. The brothers "lost" the revised Rule and Francis had to start all over again. To do so, he went back to the

hermitage of Fonte Colombo and there in prayerful solitude, he composed his revised Rule, which was approved in 1223.

The *Assisi Compilation* (AC 112) recalls a moment of near despair in the life of Francis when he was "moved inwardly with sorrow of heart" over the bad example of some of the friars. In this situation, the sources relate an experience in which Francis is asked by God to surrender his Order and his anxiety to God. The Lord answered him: "Tell me, why are you so upset when one of the brothers leaves religion and when others do not walk the way I showed you? Also tell me: Who planted the religion of the brothers? (AC 112.) Francis had to experience ever-greater depths of purification of heart in his sufferings of body and soul.

November 1223 finds Francis again in the solitude of the Rieti Valley, this time in the hermitage of Poggio Bustone and later in Greccio where he re-enacted the Bethlehem scene in memory of the incarnation of his Lord. (cf. 1C 130-131.) Francis remained in prayerful solitude until Easter. Moorman (1968:59) states that there was "a note of austerity and even of awe which we do not hear in the early days." True to his rhythm of action and contemplation, Francis went on a preaching tour and acts of mercy after his sojourn in Greccio and then it was back again to solitude, this time to Mount La Verna.

In August 1224, Francis made his way to La Verna. His biographers, Celano and St. Bonaventure, both draw our attention to the consistent way in which Francis expressed his enduring love of the word of God and of the crucified, a pattern in his relationship with God since that first prayer before the crucifix at San Damiano in 1205-6. Now, almost twenty years later, Francis is again transfixed by the Word and by the Crucified. (1C 95; LMj XIII: 2.) Seeking God's will in the Scriptures, three times the book opened at the passion. For years Francis had prayed the *Office of the Passion*, which he composed from various psalms and Scripture passages in a collage original to Francis. Armstrong (1994:177-178) remarks that "as we pray these psalms through we wonder who is really praying these words: Is it Jesus as he endures betrayal, abandonment, and suffering, or Francis, who struggles to identify himself ever more deeply with the suffering Son of a loving Father?" The identification as son with Son of a tender, holy and loving Father was complete when Francis made his final trip to Mount La Verna in 1224.

At first Francis spent time on La Verna with a few companions but as time went on, he wished to be more alone with God. Francis' absorption in God reached a climax on 14 September 1224. In the *Omnibus of Sources* we read that in the early morning, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, Francis prayed:

O my Lord Jesus Christ, two graces do I pray thee to grant
unto me before I die: the first, that while I live I may feel in my
body and in my soul, so far as is possible, that sorrow, sweet
Lord, that thou didst suffer in the hour of thy most bitter passion;
the second, that I may feel in my heart, as far as may be possible,
that exceeding love wherewith, O Son of God, thou wast enkindled
to endure willingly for us sinners agony so great. (Little Flowers:
Third Consideration on the Stigmata.)

The Lord answered the prayer of Francis in an extraordinary way. He was totally transformed into Christ Crucified, bearing in his body the very wounds of his crucified Saviour. The heart of Francis and the heart of Christ were one. Solitude had produced in Francis that total conversion of heart whereby his whole person was one with Christ. Francis is the first person recorded in history to have received the wounds of the Crucified Christ in his body. This is the culmination. Almost immediately after this momentous and mystical encounter Francis, moved with compassion, burned with zeal to preach and show mercy. Bonaventure (LMj XIV: 1) tells us that after the stigmata, Francis "longed with all his heart to return to the humble beginning he had made at first and to nurse the lepers once more." It is this consistent rhythm of contemplation and compassion that we see in Francis throughout his entire life and it is this rhythm that is the ongoing and living *charism* of his movement.

Before leaving the mountain to return to works of preaching and mercy, Francis wrote his 'Praises of God'.

Bring me paper and ink, because I want to write down the words of
the Lord and his praises upon which I have meditated on in my
heart. (2C XX.49.)

This prayer of Francis is a direct response of his experience on La Verna. The divine and the human are interwoven in this prayer in such a way that seeming opposites are reconciled and Francis is lost in profound wonder and love.

You are holy Lord God Who does wonderful things.
You are strong. You are great. You are the most high.
You are the almighty king. You holy Father.
King of heaven and earth.

You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;
You are good, all good, the highest good,
Lord God living and true.

You are love, charity; You are wisdom, You are humility,
You are security, You are rest,
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope, You are justice,
You are moderation, You are all our riches to sufficiency.

You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender,
You are strength, You are refreshment. You are our hope,
You are our faith, You are our charity,
You are all our sweetness, You are our charity,
You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:
Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Saviour.

Is the "scriptural backdrop" of this prayer of praise the great early Christian hymn of praise which we find in Philippians 2: 6-11? There is certainly the same profound awareness of the great mystery of the *kenosis* of God in Christ opening his heart to all in humility, mercy and meekness and assuming the human condition in its fullness.

Frances Teresa (1993:99-100) describes this prayer of Francis as "words of someone who cannot express his overflowing heart, of someone who has come to the great simplicity of wonder. We realize that what we have here are not words of a man who has seen Christ, but the words of a man who sees as Christ sees." Rooted in his daily praying of the *Office of the Passion* during which Francis entered into the very heart of Christ, he is now one with Christ in the totality of his being. It is also significant that Francis praises the Lord as "our faith", and as "our hope" and as "our charity", reminiscent of his first prayer before the crucifix. No longer is he praying for the theological gifts. He has received the Gift - God himself. He also refers to the Lord as "our sweetness and eternal life". It would seem that his conversion process is complete: the bitter has become sweet yet the sources reveal ever-deepening purification and transformation in the heart of Francis.

Six months after the experience of the stigmata on La Verna Francis was once again plunged into a great darkness of heart. It was out of this experience of darkness and subsequent enlightenment that he wrote the *Canticle of the Creatures*. It is a further indication of the depth of the transformation that had taken place in the heart of Francis. Similar to the *Praises*, which he wrote on La Verna, the *Canticle* is rooted in the revelation of God in Christ and the salvation that comes in and through Christ. The *Canticle* reaches out in a total embrace of the whole of creation in Christ and Francis experiences the restoration of "justice", the beauty of recognizing everyone and everything as brother and sister. This is indeed an experience of the cosmic Christ.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honour, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
And no human is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
Especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
And bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In Heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
And through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
Through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
Who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
Through whom You light the night,
And he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
Who sustains and governs us,
And who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
And bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
For by You alone Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
From whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
For the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
And serve Him with great humility. (CtC)

Are we seeing here another “scriptural backdrop” from the Prologue to the Gospel of John (Jn. 1: 1-18) and Paul's Letter to the Colossians (Col.1: 15-20)? Tomkinson (1994:30) connects the Pauline Letters of Philippians and Colossians with Francis' insights in the *Praises* and the *Canticle*.

If the Praises of God might be called Francis's version of the kenosis hymn of Paul's letter to the Philippians, The Canticle of Brother Sun might justly be compared to Colossians' hymn of the cosmic Christ.

The Franciscan mystic and theologian, St. Bonaventure, writing on La Verna, captures the significance of the total journey of the heart in his Itinerarium: *The Soul's Journey into God*. Significantly, he begins by describing this work as “*The reflection of the Poor Man in the Desert*”. Reflecting in the desert, in solitude, leads Bonaventure to an understanding of the journey of the heart in the conversion process, culminating in the embrace and identification with Christ crucified. This process, rooted in the biblical understanding of heart, conversion and desert, forms the basis of a spirituality of the heart within the eremitical context of the Franciscan movement historically and to the present day.

6.4.3 Letter to the Entire Order 1225 - 1226

This letter was written during the final months of Francis' life in which he mentions the heart six times. He traces for us the journey of the heart that he and the brothers have been walking since the early days of the fraternity, allowing us a glimpse of the way in which he and the brothers experienced the shaping and moulding of the heart. Doyno (1989:10) says that this text is the theology of Francis in a prayer since it enables us to see his relationship to the Trinitarian God. He describes it as a prayer of life, for life and from life. This is Francis, spiritually mature and in touch with his heart within the heart of God, and with the way in which the heart is converted and transformed. To appreciate the depth of Francis' understanding of heart in this text, we must first

examine his concluding prayer. Only then can we understand the journey of the heart and what is involved in its formation and transformation.

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, give us miserable ones
the grace to do for You alone what we know You want us to do and
always to desire what pleases You. Inwardly cleansed, interiorly
enlightened and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,
may we be able to 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, Who live and rule in perfect Trinity,
and simple Unity, and are glorified, God almighty, forever and ever.
Amen. (Lt Ord 50—52.)

We have here the simple but profound theology of Francis: We come from the Father; we return to Him through our imitation of the Son in the power and love of the Holy Spirit. This is the journey of the heart to God. The process will involve a personal “making our way” which is the unique vocation and call to each person. In a general way this is clearly outlined for us in the words of Scripture and the example of Jesus. As Francis says: “we know what You want us to do”. Francis further stresses the unique and personal vocation of each person in the words “ always desire what pleases You”. This leaves room for personal awareness, imagination, creativity and co-operation with the activity of the Holy Spirit within. Twice Francis emphasises interiority, the inner core by which we understand the heart. Only then can we be “inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened and inflamed by the fire of the Spirit”. This is the experience of conversion and transformation. There is no doubt about the depth and intensity of this process. To respond requires “paying attention with the ears of the heart” to the gift of the personal vocation offered to each one. In his *Testament* (Test 14) Francis confidently asserted, “... no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel”. Not to respond would imply spiritual deafness, which is a figurative way of speaking of moral insensitivity, that darkness of heart which we referred to in the implications of the prayer before the crucifix.

Listen, sons of the Lord and my brothers, pay attention to my
words. Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son
of God. Observe his commands with your whole heart
and fulfil his counsels with a perfect mind. Give praise to Him
because He is good; exalt Him by your deeds; for this reason

He has sent you into the world: that you may bear witness to
His voice in word and deed and bring everyone to know that
there is no-one who is all powerful except Him.
(LtOrd 5-10.)

This is Francis concentrating on the heart as that core of the person, which reaches into the very heart of a Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He emphasises both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions in such a way that the daily experiences of life and relationships have to be explored, listened to, discerned and faced in order to form and transform the heart with a totality which alone constitutes “pleasing the Lord” in the uniqueness of each life and calling. Therefore this text with its heart references is a very challenging one in its intense “listening with the ear of the heart” to the promptings of the Spirit without whom the journey would be impossible. Repeating the message of the *Later Rule*, Francis presents a radical dependency on the Holy Spirit and its activity within.

The integration of contemplation and compassion is evident here. Francis (LtOrd 28), having exhorted us to contemplate, that is to “look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him” is insistent on seeing the fruits of a transformed heart. “Exalt Him by your deeds”. Our lives lead us in the transforming journey through our relationships, decisions, desires and will “to please Him”. This incarnational approach, rooted in life and relationships is further emphasised when Francis says:

Listen, my brothers: If the Blessed Virgin is so honoured, as is becoming, because she carried Him in her most holy womb; if the Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of God; if the tomb in which He lay for some time is held in veneration, how holy, just and fitting must be he who touches with his hands, receives in his heart and mouth, and offers to others to be received the One Who is not about to die but Who is to conquer and be glorified, upon whom the angels longed to gaze. (LtOrd 21-22.)

Though obviously a Eucharistic Exhortation, the “receiving in his heart” is significant. We have again Francis’ emphasis on interiorization and the process of receptivity that he has already spelled out in his parable of the sower in the *Earlier Rule*. Here though there is the additional nuance of minority. Gazing at the wonderful and awesome humility of the Son of God to descend each day into the hands of the priests and the

hearts of the faithful, minority has to be the hallmark of the friar minor and all who share in the *charism* of Francis. Schumucki (1989: 11) refers to minority as “the very foundation of evangelical fraternity”. We sense here the intensity of feeling in Francis for the humility of God Who daily embraces human weakness for love of us. We can now make a further connection in Francis' understanding between the Eucharist and the pure heart, patience in suffering and human weakness. It is imitation of Jesus, meek and humble in heart, daily present in the humility of the Eucharist, that inspires the total response in Francis and his call to his followers:

Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts
before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him!
Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives
Himself totally to you may receive you totally! (LtOrd 28-29.)

Later in the same Letter, Francis again gets to the inner motivating force that moves a person. This time it is the simple act of singing the Office.

Let them do this that they may be able to please God by their purity
of heart and not just charm the ears of people by their sweetness
of voice. (LtOrd 42.)

Even in the good things, if a person is not motivated by the Spirit of the Lord, the heart can be deceitful, devious and self-serving. The emphasis is again on the word and this time it is the spoken word. Doino (1994:145) says, “... it became his ongoing and feverish desire never to allow an empty or heedless word to fall from his lips. Every word he thinks and speaks comes from a heart totally absorbed by its content”. Francis has a keen awareness of the heart and its ways and it is part of his genius to move us into an awareness of the dynamics from within, from the heart, which shape our lives and in that awareness he invites us to radical transformation. His own journey to God led him deeper into conversion of heart until his total transformation took place in solitude, on Mount La Verna - the Franciscan Calvary.

6.5 Chapter conclusion

We have looked at the references to the heart in the writings of Francis and have linked these with conversion and solitude as they are related in the sources for his life. It now seems appropriate to return to Francis' *Rule for Hermitages* which is the document written for those who wish to spend time in solitude. This is of crucial importance

because the only text from scripture, which Francis included in the Rule for Hermitages, relates to seeking the Kingdom and its justice. We believe this single passage encompasses the whole message we have been trying to convey in the journey of the heart, its geography, its need for daily conversion and the place and purpose of solitude in this process. Francis, describing the life of those who go to the hermitage, says: "And let them seek *first* of all the Kingdom of God and His *justice*". (Mt.6: 33.) (RH 3.)

In the Franciscan school of theology, St. Bonaventure (1970:17) refers to justice as the restoration of beauty. In the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* we read:

Justice makes beautiful what had been deformed,
It makes more beautiful what was already beautiful,
And most beautiful what had been improved.

The absence of justice is the absence of beauty. In biblical language "doing justice" is essential to the living of the covenant relationship that is characterised by "*chesed*", that steadfast, merciful love which is named compassion. Such compassionate living restores right relationships with oneself, others, creation and God. This is the insight of Francis in proclaiming the centrality of justice in his *Rule for Hermitages*. Fox (1979: 17) points out people "tend to ignore the mystery and riches of solitude where so much compassion is learned and developed". The experience of Francis on La Verna confirms this insight. There Francis beheld Christ, the God-man and as he *contemplated* he was filled with *compassion* and love was the motivation. It is this dynamic of contemplation and compassion motivated by love that transforms, integrates and makes whole our frail humanity in its identification with Christ.

Rapt in divine contemplation, blessed Francis was absorbed
in seraphic love and desire; and through the tenderness of his
compassion he was transformed into a living crucifix. Thus the
inmost desire of his burning love was fulfilled. (L3C 69.)

Fox (1979: 23) would go so far as to say that "compassion is the biblical word for contemplation". If "doing justice" is the restoration of beauty through compassionate living then the example of Francis in his active-contemplative rhythm points us in the direction of wholeness and integration. This is captured in the symbol of the heart, which is both revelatory and transformative. It reveals the love of God who is most dear Father, humble brother and loving spouse. In the experience of covenant love,

Francis is drawn into this love, transforming him into a co-lover for the transformation of the world.

The journey of the heart and its conversion was a gradual process for Francis. We can recall that early vision in 1205-6 before the crucifix in San Damiano.

From that time on, compassion for the crucified was impressed into his holy soul. And we honestly believe the wounds of the sacred Passion were impressed deep in his heart, though not yet on his flesh. (1C VI.10.)

From that hour, therefore, his heart was wounded and it melted when remembering the Lord's passion. While he lived, he always carried the wounds of the Lord Jesus in his heart. This was brilliantly shown afterwards in the renewal of those wounds that were miraculously impressed on and most clearly revealed in his body. (L3C 14.)

La Verna was the climax in this journey of the heart and Francis saw ever more clearly the truth and beauty of the human condition. He recognized himself as creature and child, beloved of God and called to share in his divine life and love. The awesome statement in *Admonition V* reveals the extent to which his "darkness of heart" regarding his true identity had been removed.

Consider, O human being, in what great excellence the Lord has placed you, for He created you and formed you to the image of His beloved Son according to the body and to His likeness according to the Spirit. (Adm. V.1.)

Yet, the mystery of who he is in God and Who God is in Himself is a continuing discovery as he enters more deeply into the loving and suffering heart of God on La Verna. In the Little Flowers we hear Francis praying: "Who are You, my dearest God? and What am I? (Third Consideration on the Stigmata.)

In the history of spirituality there has been an emphasis on the negative regarding the things of earth. In positive terms Francis is concerned about right relationships and in negative terms he is concerned about appropriation. The observation of Blastic (1997: 169) regarding *Admonition XVI: 2* is relevant here.

The truly pure of heart are those who look down upon the things of earth and seek the things of heaven, and who never cease to adore and behold the Lord God living and true with a pure heart and soul.

He maintains that the words "look down upon" the things of earth must be seen in the context of the way in which Francis interprets his following of Christ. Francis desired to follow in the footprints of Christ. According to Blastic this requires "looking down" and it is "this focus on Christ's footprints in this world that gives to Franciscan contemplation its own unique and particular dynamic". This is clearly illustrated in Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures*.

Nowhere is this truth more poignant than in Francis' dying moments. Fox (1979:98) claims that St. Francis of Assisi had one regret as he lay dying "that he had treated his body too harshly". Having taken his dualistic thinking too seriously, "it is no small thing that Francis insisted, when dying, to be placed naked on the earth, who he knew as his sister and mother". Francis does not use abstract words. Whether he is speaking of God, or his human brothers and sisters, or the animal creation or the earth itself, his language is relational because Francis knew who he was in Christ. The incarnation overwhelmed his consciousness. Throughout his writings, Francis allows us to share his struggle and pain, his ecstasy and joy in the experience of his frail and vulnerable humanity discovering in it the mystery of an incarnate God. Having emphasised that the soil of the heart is the place where God implants His seed, this divine-human dialectic is brought to its fulfilment when Francis surrenders his body to the earth that nurtured and sustained him.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with
coloured flowers and herbs.
(CtC 9.)

Just as the earth is fruitful, so too is Francis adamant about the "fruits" of a penitential heart. In his *Rules* and *Admonitions* this becomes very apparent especially when he describes the difference between a person who is led by the spirit of the flesh and the person led by the Spirit of the Lord.

And let us keep ourselves from the wisdom of this world and the prudence of the flesh (Rom.8:6) For the spirit of the flesh desires and is most eager to have words, but cares little to carry them out. (ER XVII:10)

Perhaps we see once again the influence of St. John's Gospel.

You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last. (Jn 15:16)

Thomas of Celano (2C 194) captures the link between the necessity of solitude for true conversion of heart which manifests itself in a fruitful apostolate. The reference is to the learned cleric whom Francis advises to retreat from "the noise of the world" to repent and "gather the scattered bits of my heart" so that when he does eventually return to the apostolate he may "pour out what bubbles up in his heart."

The fruits of penance will be seen in the tender love of God and works of mercy flowing from a compassionate heart. As Bonaventure (LMj XI: 4) says:

Since the piety of his heart had made him a brother to other creatures, no wonder the charity of Christ made him even more a brother to those who are marked in the image of their Creator.

Thus Francis (1LtF1:8-10; CtC) captures totally the biblical image of the restoration of beauty in the establishment of a paternal/maternal, filial and spousal life within the Trinity, which overflows in being a brother and a sister to each other and to the whole of creation. There is no dichotomy between sacred and secular, action and contemplation, heaven and earth, sorrow and joy, death and life. This integration, rooted in the biblical notion of the heart and its conversion, forged in the experience of solitude, requires a radical response to life. Only God in Christ could make the total yes.

For in him is found the Yes to all God's promises and therefore it is 'through him' that we answer 'Amen' to give praise to God. It is God who gives us, with you, a sure place in Christ and both anointed us and marked us with his seal, giving us as pledge the Spirit in our hearts. (2Co.1: 20-22).

The implications are awesome.

CHAPTER 7: The Third Order Regular And On-Going Conversion Of Heart

7.1 Introduction

"This is what I want, this is what I seek, and this is what I desire with all my heart". (1C.22) These words of St. Francis, spoken in the little church of the Portiuncula, echo down the centuries and stir in the heart of every follower of Francis who embarks on the Gospel journey into the heart of God. It is the *charism* of the Third Order Regular branch of the Franciscan family to keep alive the Gospel call to daily conversion of heart. To want, to seek, to desire with all one's heart to walk in the footprints of Jesus Christ, involves a daily conversion of one's heart in a process that is deeply rooted in the living Word of God, mediated to us in our own experience, in the bible and within the Christian tradition.

In previous chapters we have presented the heart as a universal symbol, captured most fully in the biblical understanding and expressed most fully in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the revelation of the heart of God. In our progression to this point we have situated ourselves in the long tradition in which the landscape of the human heart has been explored and presented as the most mysterious and inner core of the human person. Its formation and transformation requires a radical conversion which is often most affected and effected by the desert experience. This awareness has been heightened for the followers of St. Francis by the way in which religious congregations have responded to the leading of the Holy Spirit in soul-searching challenges. These challenges, especially those initiated by the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church, prompted a deeper understanding of the founding *charism* of particular institutes of religious life.

The Council was held from 1962-1965. One of the concerns of the fourth and final session was the renewal of religious life. Since then, members of religious orders have grappled with deep questions concerning their gift and uniqueness within the church and the world. It is in this context that we use the word *charism*. In a keynote address to the Franciscan family Zachary Hayes (1987:1) maintains "the language of *charism* is the language with which we refer to the work of the Spirit in begetting the life of faith, love, and mission in the heart of the Christian community". The post-conciliar document, *Mutuae Relationes* (Flannery 1982 (b): 217) confirms "Every authentic *charism* brings an element of real originality in the spiritual life of the church along with fresh initiatives for action". The initiatives continue to this present day. These are

dependent upon a process of identification of the *charism*, development of it, and originality in giving it a lived expression.

Response to the conciliar and post-conciliar call for identifying and developing the *charism* of religious congregations, has led our Franciscan family as a whole and our Third Order Regular in particular, into exciting journeys of discoveries within which there is "a mixture of new creativity and interior suffering". (*Mutuae Relationes* in Flannery 1982 (b): 218) This 'mixture' was felt more intensely by the Franciscan family with the publication in 1983 of two documents in particular: the new *Code of Canon Law* and *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*. Neither of these documents addressed the evangelical foundation of the Franciscan family, which could not be categorized as either monastic or apostolic. Such categorization has the potential to exacerbate the tension between contemplation and action since the former is usually associated with monastic Orders and the latter with apostolic Congregations. The search continues to identify, develop and live the Franciscan *charism*, and questions remain. This research is one attempt to explore the question, and add to the on-going discovery, especially in the context of the Franciscan family of Third Order Regular religious in general and the Franciscan Minoress sisters in particular.

7.2 Brief overview

With the publication of *Perfectae Caritatis*, (Flannery 1982 (a): 611) religious congregations accepted the challenge to constantly "return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of their institutes". (No.2.) In a post-conciliar document *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, (Flannery 1982 (a): 591) Pope Paul VI reiterated the need to rediscover the original *charism* saying: "For the good of the Church, institutes must seek after a genuine understanding of their original spirit". (No.15.3.) This return to the spirit of the founder/s opened doors to further study and exploration.

Within a decade, the Franciscan family had an English translation of the writings of St. Francis and we were confirmed in our evangelical life-style. The Vatican Council in *Perfectae Caritatae* (No.2a) reminded all Orders and Congregations about their Gospel foundation: "Since the final norm of the religious life is the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel, this must be taken by all institutes as the supreme rule". This was but a beginning.

Franciscans began to look at what is common to the whole family of Francis and what is distinctive within each group. The Rule of Life of each of the four families of Francis: The First Order of Friars Minor, the Second Order of Poor Clares, the Third Order Regular and the Secular Order begins with these words: "This is the form of life to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ". The challenge remained for self-understanding as to the distinctiveness of the particular congregational *charism*. The family of St. Francis is diverse. We know from the previous chapter that Francis attracted people from every walk of life and each group received Gospel inspiration to live accordingly and walk in the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a sense in which the Gospel base was taken for granted, or at least overshadowed, by the search for the distinctive *charism* of each group within the wider family - until new documentation called forth further questions.

7.3 The evangelical option

If every family of religious, and indeed every Christian, has the Gospel as the Rule of life, what is distinctive to the family of St. Francis as a whole and the Third Order Regular in particular? This question has been explored from different vantage points within the Franciscan family. Following the publication of the 1983 documents already referred to above, the life and writings of Francis were studied in depth in an effort to articulate the evangelical thrust within which he lived his life and communicated it to his followers. This exploration is on-going. For the purposes of this study, we limit ourselves to the search within the Third Order Regular.

7.4 The Third Order Regular of St. Francis

It was the insight of the TOR scholar, Thaddeus Horgan that the *charism* of all the followers of Francis is to live the Gospel literally. In his taped lectures on the TOR rule (1985) Horgan makes the point that the Gospel belongs to the Church but Francis' insight and originality was the literal living of the Gospel. Therefore, the *charism* lies in the understanding of the word literal, not in the sense of fundamental or fundamentalism but more in the sense of having the actual motivations and attitudes of Christ. We think this is a very important insight in connection with our present study because motivations and attitudes are first conceived in the heart where the seed, which is the Word of God, is sown. Therefore, if the *charism* is to live the Gospel literally, then the universal symbol of the heart is universally applicable in the uniqueness of each person who becomes a word of God, made flesh once again in the unique experiences and circumstances of each person's life.

The “mixture of new creativity and interior suffering” referred to in *Mutuae Relationes* (Flannery 1982(b): 218) is the experience of every person who enters the journey of the heart and embraces the challenge to become that unique and new creation in Christ which literal Gospel living calls forth. No one else can make this journey for another. No one else can be a carbon copy of another and Francis understood this clearly. At the end of his life he said: “I have done what was mine to do, now you must do what is yours to do”. (2C: 214.) Each person is a unique and unrepeatable creation – a word of God, a word that begins in the soil of the heart, hence the vital link between the heart and the word.

As Third Order Regular followers of Francis, we will deepen our understanding of our *charism* and articulate our self-understanding more clearly by exploring the symbol of the heart and the unique way in which Francis emphasised the word that is sown there and the soil in which it is sown. In chapter five we have already referred to the implication of this in terms of discipleship and indwelling. Here we wish to develop further this insight by focusing on the soil of heart, which has to be tilled, watered, fashioned and fruitful. The implications for the soil of the heart are self-evident in terms of desert experiences facilitating conversion. Herein lies the challenge to be attentive to the soil of the heart so that we may become the word in a way that is unique to each person’s following of Christ. In the years following the Second Vatican Council, scholarship within the Third Order Regular was centred particularly on conversion of heart, with the emphasis on conversion.

7.5 Conversion of heart

The rediscovery of the penitential *charism* of the Third Order led to many scholarly publications, notably those by Roland Faley (1974), Thaddeus Horgan (1974 and 1987), Linus Temperini (1974, 1983 and 1989), Raffaele Pazzelli (1989 and 1993), Robert Stewart (1991) and many others within the Third Order Regular Federation of the United States of America, all of which concentrated on presenting a statement of understanding of Franciscan penitential life. These in-depth studies have spanned fruitful years of research culminating in a new Rule based on the writings of Francis and Clare, presented and approved by Rome in 1982 and awakening fresh new insights with each new generation of Franciscans who live this way of life.

In these studies there has been a concentration on biblical conversion, identified as the foundational *charism* of the Third Order Regular branch of the Franciscan family.

These studies have greatly aided many Third Order Congregations to rediscover - or in some cases - to discover for the first time the true meaning of the biblical understanding of penance expressed by St. Francis.

The word conversion is open to a variety of interpretations. The most generally understood meaning usually refers to a dramatic and life-changing event in a person's journey. This may or may not be connected to a faith experience, but often when there is a religious experience it is understood as 'religious conversion'. The example of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-20) is well known. Another generally understood meaning refers to a choice made in adulthood to accept beliefs of a particular tradition, hence the term 'convert'. Though valid, these are a somewhat narrow interpretation of the term conversion.

7.6 The biblical understanding of conversion

The work of the TOR scholar, Pazzelli (1989) was monumental in helping the TOR branch of the Franciscan family to rediscover their biblical roots in the penitential movement. His presentation of the meaning and development of biblical penance resulted in new initiatives to explore our shared *charism* of biblical conversion of heart. Tracing the development of conversion through the prophets and post-exilic period to the time of Christ and the teaching in the Gospels, Pazzelli's emphasis was on the process of conversion, deeply rooted in the biblical understanding of that word. Faley (1974: 13-33) had already noted the importance of clarifying the terms we use since the same word is open to many nuances. His development of the biblical reality of 'turning to God' is developed against the backdrop of law, ritual and covenant.

Later, another Franciscan, Robert Stewart, (1991:92-95) explored the richness and depth of biblical conversion and its implications for members of the Third Order of St. Francis. Stewart summarizes the biblical notion of conversion and its development through the Old and New Testaments, yet he maintains "no single term is used consistently in the Scriptures to designate this reality, nor is the biblical notion of conversion completely contained within one term". In the struggle to define the *charism* more precisely, members of the TOR family are familiar with the many studies on conversion that are available. An important insight for our present research is the particular nuance within the biblical notion expounded by Stewart (1991:92):

The biblical notion of penance involves an interior attitude. Although it does necessarily involve an external manifestation, in the Scriptures penance does not consist merely of external practices. Rather, penance essentially and more profoundly signifies a “change of heart” or a new way of living.

While the change of heart was rightly recognised and acknowledged, it was the notion of conversion and its process that was most emphasised and developed. Stewart (1991:338-358) presents an analysis of conversion according to the thought of Bernard Lonergan, and he expressly states that his “primary concern is to present a critical analysis of conversion”. Linking the process of conversion with the unfolding of human consciousness and touching as it does, every level of human existence – affective, intellectual, religious, moral and socio-political, Stewart (1991: 339) shows how Lonergan’s thought and analysis of conversion has been studied and further developed, linking it to theories and stages of personal human development.

Stewart (1991:358-359) describes the nature of authentic conversion, repeating with St. Francis: “Oh how blessed are those who do penance”. Oh how blessed are those who:

- responsibly face their own disordered affectivity
and strive to cultivate a healthy emotional life
- commit themselves to examining critically
their values and beliefs in dialogue with others
- commit themselves to living by ethical norms and ideals
that make an ultimate claim upon them
- accept God’s self-revelation of love given in Jesus
and the consequences of following Jesus’ teaching
- commit themselves to collaborate with others
in the reform of unjust social institutions.

Building on the valuable insights of those who have presented a critical analysis of the process of conversion, we wish to focus on the heart, the embodiment of the interior attitudes and values, the place where it all begins, heightening awareness of the need to attend to the soil of the heart and the word that is sown there. We acknowledge the

depth of insight into the language, history, meaning and purpose of penance and conversion already embraced in the lives and written documents of many Third Order Regular Congregations, including our own, but we feel it is timely to present conversion through the prism of the heart, and in the context of the desert experience, with special reference to the Franciscan eremitical tradition. In addressing the question through the universal language of the heart, which is at once both deeply personal and fully universal, we believe that we challenge every human being in his or her depths. Highlighting the place of the heart will give an even deeper understanding of the process of conversion and the part played by the desert in this experience.

7.7 The TOR and the centrality of the heart

In the TOR periodical, *Propositum*, (2001:5) we note that the mission of the TOR is defined as “a pilgrimage to the hearts of others”. But before we can reach out to others, “we must stop before our own heart”. In the most recent Presidential Address to the Franciscan Federation of the Third Order Regular, Ellen Lamberjack (2002:235) focuses on the “need to sink ourselves into the heart of God and into the human heart” if we are to read the signs of the times and provide an alternative answer to those who are losing, not only their sense of meaning, but who are “losing their sense of relationships to one another and losing touch with their heart”. This focus on the heart is very significant in the light of this study and the way in which the Spirit seems to be leading the Third Order Regular and their mission to the world. The return to the heart is one of the greatest challenges facing us in the twenty-first century as we move into the second axial period of consciousness, characterized ultimately by relationship.

Cousins (1992:5) acknowledges the significance of the work of Karl Jaspers, the German philosopher who claimed that a major shift in consciousness took place between 800 and 200 B.C.E. Jaspers called this the Axial period because it “gave birth to everything which, since then, the human person has been able to be”. Cousins (1992) explores and examines three major shifts in consciousness: the pre-axial, characterized by myth and ritual in a close harmony with nature; the axial period characterized by self-awareness and rationality that moved from the collective to the individual; and the present period, which he designates as the second axial period, which he describes as global consciousness, characterized by relationship and interconnectedness. Significantly, in the light of our present research, Cousins (1992:132) offers St. Francis and St. Bonaventure as spiritual guides because: “With a penetrating

spiritual insight, Francis saw an organic relationship between nature, the human, and God".

In our concentration on the heart we focus on a holistic spirituality, characterized by relationship and interconnectedness. However, by rooting the heart within the desert experience we are also highlighting an essential characteristic of the human being: the loneliness of one's uniqueness, which in itself is an experience of solitude. The process of becoming the person one is called to be, and embracing the human condition as it is, with its limitation and potential, leads to the experience of being integrated in and through relationship with God, with others, with oneself and the whole of created reality. It is the journey towards an integrated self in relationship. This presupposes on-going conversion in the desert of the individual heart.

Concentrating on the process of conversion through the prism of the heart, will involve examining the heart in the light of the beatitudes with reference to the emphasis on relationships. Keating (2002: 215) understands the beatitudes as a movement through different levels of consciousness. "The beatitudes are wisdom sayings that express the disposition appropriate to each level of consciousness". Therefore our exploration of the heart in the process of conversion will focus on the beatitudes and their relation to the heart as the seat of consciousness.

7.8 The heart as the seat of consciousness

In previous chapters on the biblical and patristic understanding of the heart, we have referred to the heart as the seat of consciousness. In that context we explored ways of reaching a deeper and fuller consciousness by making contact with the inward mystery of the heart, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Believing that "the beatitudes are the quintessence of the teaching of Jesus" (Keating 2002: 215) we will now explore how we can till the soil of our hearts to receive the word of God and show forth in our lives the blessedness and blessings of a heart turned towards the Lord. In so doing we hope to show that when the heart, the seat of consciousness, lives by the beatitudes, consciousness shifts and as Delio (1999: 300) remarks, the Gospel-centred person, schooled in Franciscan spirituality, has much to offer to the world in the second axial period.

The real struggle within the heart is the battle between the false self and the true self. We feel the need to qualify what we mean by these terms and we follow the traditional Christian teaching. The true self is our unique creation in the image and likeness of God and is realized in relationship with him, who is recognised as the source of our being, the purpose of our lives and the goal of our journey. The false self is constructed and developed without reference to God as our origin, purpose and destiny.

Based and built on illusion and unreality, the false self makes itself the centre and endeavours to mask the illusion with symbols of pleasure, power and possession. This innate selfishness is manifested in a heart that is closed to God; a heart whose spiritual eyes are blind and whose spiritual ears are deaf to the overwhelming love, beauty and goodness of the heart of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The tyranny of the basic thrusts of temptation faced by Jesus in the desert of his own heart is the continuing battle within every human heart.

Recognizing the complexity of the term postmodernism, Delio (2001: 82) says:

Coined in the 1930's, the term *postmodern* is used to describe the historical transition from modernity to a period beyond modernity, namely postmodernity. Whereas modernity emphasized objective, logical thinking, as well as a universal morality and law, postmodernism indicates there is no transcendence in reality; rather, all knowledge is derived from the self who interprets reality. Thus, there is no single, universal worldview. Postmodernism celebrates the local and particular at the expense of the universal and emphasizes a respect for difference.

Delio (2001: 76) suggests

Whatever is motivating the postmodern person to seek, discover and achieve, it seems to be deeply embedded in the structure of the human person. We might say that such restless seeking is bound up with the search for true identity. Yet such frantic seeking apart from God can only lead to the illusion of the self.

The journey from the false self to the true self is the slow journey of conversion. It is worked out in the soil of the heart as it is more and more exposed to the light. Such exposure involves greater awareness and deeper levels of consciousness.

7.8.1 The beatitudes and corresponding levels of consciousness

Our analysis will lean heavily on the insights of Keating (2002: 244-246) and his description of the human condition moving through the different levels of consciousness. He mentions seven levels through which a person may move through life – though not all do. Our emphasis on the heart as the seat of consciousness makes Keating's comparison of the spiritual journey and the evolutionary model of consciousness, an invaluable tool for understanding and interpreting what proceeds from the heart and its need for conversion if the word of God is to become flesh in the soil of the heart.

According to the Keating's model (2002: 244) every person awakens to life in this world in a state of consciousness where the focus centres on the fulfilment of the physical needs to ensure survival. He maintains that if these needs have been thwarted they may later give rise to inordinate needs for the security symbols of a given culture. When this happens a person constructs a false self, developed and defended on false premises of happiness, supported by emotional programmes to keep them in place. This is why the first teaching of Jesus centres on repentance or conversion: the invitation to change the direction in which we seek happiness.

The beatitudes address our false symbols of security and establish us within that realm of innate poverty that is truly ours. It means trusting God and accepting the human condition as it really is. Jesus, in the temptation to turn stones into bread to fulfil his physical needs, struggled within his heart to accept and embrace the limitations of his humanity. Heart work, which involves the integration of apparent opposites and the embrace of poverty and paradox, is rooted in the radical acceptance of what it means to be truly human. As the seat of consciousness, the heart has to face the uncompromising challenge of radical poverty – so aptly portrayed by the desert.

As consciousness develops, the emotional life and the satisfaction of needs for affection, esteem and pleasure become apparent and intensify. When the satisfaction of these needs are withheld or frustrated, inordinate desires increase and try to find fulfilment in the possessiveness of people and pleasures. The teaching of Jesus in the

call to mourn, addresses inordinate desires for emotional satisfaction. From his personal confrontation in the desert, Jesus wrestled with the poverty inherent in the recognition of the aloneness that is part of the uniqueness of every created being. Letting go of exaggerated demands for esteem and pleasure from other created beings is part of the purification of the desert experience. The heart, as the seat of the emotional life is invited to accept the challenge of conversion in the interiorisation of the word of God. Keating (2002:216) points out, there is mourning in the act of letting go but blessedness in the freedom that results from it.

Within this stage of developing consciousness, there is also a focus on the desire to have power and control. This desire permeates life in our relationships with people, events, circumstances and even our own life. Keating (2000: 216) is speaking about inordinate desire for power and control, which is addressed by the beatitude of meekness. This is a gospel invitation to accept and allow the human condition to simply be. In the Christian and Franciscan tradition – even in solitude – the emphasis on living with others and accepting and loving them as brothers and sisters is part of the discipline and purification of the heart. Jesus, in his own desert experience was uncompromising in the temptation to take control of his situation by appealing to his divinity. He entered fully into the weakness, frailty and vulnerability, which are part of the poverty of a human being.

Entering the stage of mythic consciousness highlights social development and the emotional programmes that develop to ensure identity with the group. Keating (2000: 217) says that the beatitude relating to those who hunger and thirst for justice, addresses the need to overidentify with the social group. Again, he stresses that it is overidentification, not the legitimate honour and respect to family, community or society which is addressed.

The beatitudes show us the way Jesus, the Word made flesh, faced his own desert of the heart and accepted his humanity in its innate poverty from conception to death. The story of the temptations of Jesus and the summary of his kenosis in Paul's letter to the Phillipians (2: 6-11) confirm the reality of the poverty of being human and Jesus' total acceptance of such a stance before God. In and through his relationship with God in the acceptance of the struggles involved, Jesus shows us the way to integration and wholeness.

Within the realm of mystery and grace, the word of God, sown in the soil of the heart has the potential to take a person to greater depths of inner freedom leading to greater love. But for the word to be interiorised and nurtured, the soil has to be prepared. This is part of the process of conversion associated with the blessedness of thirsting for truth and justice in the acceptance of poverty, meekness and mourning which often happen most intensely, in the purification experience of the desert.

7.8.2 The beatitudes and advanced levels of consciousness

There is a difference between the command to love our brothers and sisters as ourselves and the command of Jesus to love as he has loved us. Keating (2002: 219) points out that the latter is much more demanding than the former.

To love one's neighbour as oneself is to respect the image of God in our neighbour with all the rights, which that dignity confers. To love one another as Jesus loves us is to love one another in our humanness – in our individuality and opinionatedness, in personality conflicts and in unbearable situations. It is to continue to show love, no matter what the provocation may be to act otherwise.

The beatitudes operative at this level of maturity are the blessedness of being merciful, pure in heart, makers of peace and sufferers for truth and justice. Consistent with these Gospel lived values are the corresponding levels of developing consciousness: Mental Egoic, Intuitive, Unitive (holiness) and Unity (wisdom). Let us deal briefly with each of these in relation to the second axial period of consciousness and the formation of the heart as the seat of consciousness. Herein lies a challenge for every person but especially for TOR Franciscans as we develop our charism for the 21st. century.

With each developing level of consciousness there is a change of heart, since the heart is the seat of consciousness. Therefore, when we speak of moving from a self-centred existence associated with a closed, dark, heedless and hard heart, to an Other-centred existence, we are moving towards God and in that act towards every other person and to the whole created world. "The ultimate goal of Jesus is to engage us in the redemption of the world" and Keating (2002: 219) goes on to say that the beatitudes impart the *chesed* of God, a love that is all-inclusive and all embracing. Such merciful love is the hallmark of the person moving into higher levels of consciousness as the

word sinks ever more deeply into the soil of the heart and takes flesh there as compassion.

Such merciful, compassionate love is dependent upon a heart that is pure and transparent, a heart able to see with the eyes of God. Correspondingly, such a person moves into a stage of intuitive consciousness and when this happens, Keating (2002: 220) remarks, "all our relationships change – towards ourselves, God, other people, and the cosmos". It is summed up in Delio's (2001:67) definition of St. Bonaventure's understanding of perfection which she describes in terms of relationship: "the power to reconcile, the wisdom to see, and the capacity to love".

The focus on relationships is crucial in our understanding of the place of the heart and the process of change, as consciousness develops in widening circles of relationships. In this process and development, the desert is central and at different times the focus changes. In the initial stages the desert is often the place of purification but it gradually becomes the place of intimacy - both important biblical aspects of the desert experience.

A consequence of this change of heart and experience of intimacy is the reality of peace and the challenge to be a peacemaker. According to the teaching of Augustine in *The City of God* (Book XIX: 13), peace is the tranquillity of order. This presupposes an integration within the human person whose heart rests in God in the surrender of love and the experience of union. The true self is centred in God in and through Christ to the extent that there is a willingness even to suffer for love's sake to the extent of persecution. This is the stage of perfect wisdom and the highest level of consciousness within the human heart.

7.8.3 St. Francis and the beatitudes

The Admonitions of St. Francis have been described as the Franciscan beatitudes. Matura (1997:142-145) emphasizes the demands involved in the spiritual journey, lived in the spirit of the beatitudes. He notes that St. Francis mentions four beatitudes specifically in his Admonitions:

- poverty of spirit
- peace-making
- purity of heart and
- suffering persecution for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

These are linked to that stage of development described by Keating (2002:219) as higher levels of consciousness. Recognizing the heart as the seat of consciousness sharpens our awareness of the implications involved in its ongoing development and formation and transformation.

According to Cousins (1992:132), the second axial period in which we are now living, "faces a major challenge of discovering a new holistic spirituality that integrates in an organic way matter, the human, and the divine". He presents both St. Francis and St. Bonaventure as trustworthy guides in this quest and as apt teachers of this new spiritual wisdom. We cannot develop further the thought of Cousins here, but we recognise the content of the challenge for the followers of St. Francis. In particular, members of the TOR branch of the Franciscan family, as heirs to a *charism* focused on conversion of life through the prism of the heart, are in a unique position to accept this challenge.

Developing a spirituality of the heart is one way of accessing the richness of the new discovery envisaged by Cousins because the heart is the place where we see rightly, and when we see rightly we love perfectly, and when love reigns, opposites are reconciled. Seeing rightly and loving perfectly involve both the purification and the intimacy we associate with the desert experience. As mentioned already, the heart as a symbol is deeply personal and fully universal. A spirituality of the heart is of its nature, holistic, relational and perennially relevant. In a recent book on icons, Collins (2002:27) reiterates the same message about the central place of the heart.

The "place" where God manifests his presence is the heart, the temple of the self. It is the location of the inner senses where the deepest roots of one's interiority lie, where the light of the consciousness emerges out of the thick darkness of insensibility. Here, in this metaphysical matrix of the personality, body and soul is one in a unity greater than any dualism. Here too, the deepest unity between God and the human beings is grounded. This is the temple, the meeting-point between God and human beings, into which he pours his Spirit in baptismal grace.

Our concentration on the heart is a timely and creative re-interpretation of our charism “giving birth to a deeper integration of spirituality and mission”. (*Instrumentum Laboris*: 23.) In the most recent document *Consecrated life in the Third Millennium*, Pope John Paul II (2002: 26) underscores the importance of reaching a new depth of understanding of the Congregational *charism*.

We must therefore allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit to a constantly renewed discovery of God and of his Word, to a burning love for God and for humanity and to a new understanding of the charism which has been given. It calls for a concentration on an intense spirituality in the strongest sense of the word, that is, *life according to the Spirit*.

7.9 The Franciscan Minoress Sisters and The Portiuncula

Margaret Carney, one member of the original team responsible for the new TOR rule and for the first commentary on the rule, in her foreword to a recent publication by Mary Elizabeth Imler (2002), states:

Each new cultural matrix into which this text is inserted must authorize new commentaries. The words, the metaphors, the pedagogical tools and rituals that will unveil its riches must be adapted continually even as Francis himself once rebuilt old structures with new stone and fresh mortar.

This research into the theoretical and practical implications of responding to the challenge to initiate, adapt, renew, unveil and rebuild has resulted in a journey of the heart through the labyrinthine ways the heart travels. The construction of a new building called The Portiuncula embodies the symbolic spirituality of St. Francis and is designed to facilitate an active-contemplative rhythm to aid the heart’s journey towards wholeness and integration.

Having investigated the heart as a universal symbol, with special emphasis on the biblical interpretation and the lived experience of St. Francis, our response in creative fidelity to our TOR charism, has led us to “rebuild old structures with new stone and fresh mortar”. This research is one instance of the on-going quest and desire to preserve, develop and give ever fuller expression to the gift of the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church and the world. Believing that a *charism* is open to new interpretation opens infinite possibilities, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,

each person gifted with a congregational *charism*, has responsibility to give the gospel a human face in becoming a word within the Word. Developing a spirituality of the heart, expressly focused at the Portiuncula, is one answer of one TOR congregation to the invitation to unveil the riches of the TOR *charism* for the 21st. century.

7.9.1 The Portiuncula in Assisi

The Portiuncula in Assisi is the inspiration for the Portiuncula at St. Clare's Convent. According to the most recent scholarship (Armstrong 1999: 201) the first mention of the little church of the Portiuncula in Assisi in the archives occurs in 1045, although it is not listed until 1150 as among the churches of the area. There is a legend that it was built at the direction of Pope Liberius (352-366) by some hermits who upon their arrival in Assisi from the Holy Land placed a "little piece" of stone there from the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin. The name, Portiuncula, means little portion or little piece. At the time of St. Francis the church was dependent on the Benedictine Abbey of Mount Subasio but it had fallen into disrepair.

In the history of the Franciscan Order, Moorman (1968: 21) recalls the beginnings of the Order with a special mention of the church of the Portiuncula.

Francis now felt that what they needed was some old church which would become the centre of their life, and around which they could build some simple huts. So he made various inquiries and was eventually offered by the Benedictine monks of Subasio the Portiuncula as the poorest church which they had. Francis was delighted since it was, of all places, the one which he would most like to have. He agreed to give the monks each year a basket of fish, and the monks in return gave him a vessel of oil.

The church of the Portiuncula was especially dear to the heart of St. Francis and continues to be held in special esteem by Franciscans throughout the world. St. Bonaventure, one of the biographers of St. Francis, puts it this way:

He came to a place called the Portiuncula where there stood a church of the most Blessed Virgin Mother of God, built in ancient times but now deserted and no one was taking care of it. When the man of God saw it so abandoned, he began to stay there regularly in order to repair it, moved by the warm devotion he had toward the Lady of the world. Sensing the angels often visited

there, according to the name of that church, which from ancient times was called Saint Mary of the Angels, he stayed there out of his reverence for the angels and his special love for the Mother of Christ.

This place

The holy man loved more than other places in the world;

For here he began humbly,

Here he progressed virtuously,

Here he ended happily.

This place

He entrusted to the brothers at his death

As the most beloved of the Virgin. (LMj.11.8)

The sources for the life of Francis tell us much about the Portiuncula – its repair (1C.21), rebuilding (L3C.14), and acquisition (1C.106; 2C18-20; L3C.56; LP.8-10;). Our particular interest is the spirituality of the place and the events with which it was and still is associated with Francis and his followers to this day. In presenting a spirituality of the heart, we wish to highlight five areas in the life of St. Francis in the Portiuncula of Assisi that will also be embraced and cherished in the new Portiuncula at St. Clare's Convent. These relate directly to the emphasis we have placed throughout this study on the biblical foundation of the heart, conversion and desert in the Franciscan eremitical tradition, which the Portiuncula embodies.

- The Word made flesh in the heart of Mary;
- The Word of God in Scripture sown in the soil of the heart;
- Becoming the word in an active- contemplative synthesis;
- Forming the heart for mission through contemplation and compassion;
- A reconciled and integrated heart.

7.9.2 The Word made flesh in the heart of Mary.

We have already intimated above that in rebuilding and repairing the church of the Portiuncula, dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels, Francis acted out of his extraordinary devotion to Mary. Thomas of Celano tells us that Francis

Embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the *Lord of Majesty* a brother to us. He honoured her with his own *Praises*, poured out prayers to her, and offered her his

love in a way that no human tongue can express. But what gives us greatest joy is that he appointed her the Advocate of the Order. (2C.198.)

This advocacy of the Mother of God for the family of Francis is especially associated with the Portiuncula. St. Bonaventure tells us:

In the church of the Virgin Mother of God,
her servant Francis *lingered*
and, with continuing cries,
insistently begged her
Who had conceived and brought to birth
the Word full of grace and truth,
to become his advocate.
Through the merits of the Mother of mercy,
he conceived and brought to birth
the spirit of the Gospel truth. (LMj.111.1)

Linking the Portiuncula to Mary and to the Word is very significant for us in the context of this study because in a number of his writings Francis draws our attention to the role of Mary, as mother of the Word. In the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Francis emphasizes the lavish love of the Father in choosing Mary for the special privilege of being the mother of the Word.

Hail, O Lady,
Holy Queen,
Mary, holy Mother of God,
Who are the Virgin made Church,
Chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven
Whom he consecrated with His most holy beloved Son
And with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,
In whom there was and is
All fullness of grace and every good. (1-3)

In his *Earlier Rule*, Francis again emphasises the love of the Father and the role of Mary in giving us Jesus, the Word made flesh.

We thank You
For as through Your Son You created us,
So through Your holy love
With which You loved us
You brought about His birth
As true God and true man
By the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary. (XXIII: 3)

In his Second Letter to the Faithful, Francis, in an outpouring of praise and thanksgiving to the Father says:

The most high Father made known from heaven through His holy angel Gabriel this Word of the Father – so worthy, so holy and glorious – in the womb of the holy and glorious Virgin Mary, from whose womb He received the flesh of our humanity and frailty.
(2L.4)

Here we see the *kenosis* of the Son who, in becoming the Word made flesh, became poor, limited, frail and vulnerable for our sake. But it was from Mary that he received “the flesh of our humanity and frailty”. This is why Francis was so devoted to Mary. It was she who gave us Christ our brother. In him we are each called to become a word in the Word. With this in mind, we have expressed our spirituality of the heart in relation to the Virgin Mary and the Word by building a Portiuncula dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels, where the Word of God will be enthroned and Mary, Mother of the Word, will be invoked as our advocate in bringing forth the word in each person’s heart. The challenge of St. Francis to do what is ours to do lies in accepting the truth of our own humanity in its uniqueness by becoming a word in the Word, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

7.9.3 The word in the bible and the word in the heart

The process of becoming a word in Jesus Christ the Word, involves pondering and treasuring the word of God in our hearts. When this word is received in good soil, the mystery of our identity is realised and comes to fulfilment in Christ, the revelation of the heart of God. To enter more fully into our identity as word, in the Word, requires exposure to the word of God in order to learn “the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ”. (Phil.3: 8.) Delio (2001:72) says:

The capacity of the human person to be an image of God, therefore, is grounded in the Word as image of the Father, the human person is created to be an expressed "image" of the Word. We might say that God utters each of us like a word containing a partial thought of himself. And when that Word is spoken in and through our lives, God is made visible in the world... As image of God, therefore, Christ not only reveals God to us but he reveals who we are in relation to God, that is, the truth of our humanity.

Within a spirituality of the heart in the context of the Franciscan eremitical tradition the cross is central in the challenge presented by the word of God. Sin, having destroyed the original harmony of justice and peace, results in darkness of heart that prevents the light of truth, beauty and goodness to shine through the individual heart with consequences for the whole of created reality.

And with the disordering of the human person is the disordering of the entire universe, for only in the human can the sensible world return to its origin in God. (Delio: 2001: 77.)

Both the word and the cross are inextricably linked in our understanding of the inter-relatedness of the heart, the desert, and conversion in the Franciscan TOR tradition. It is in the process of conversion and transformation that the cross becomes central. There is no transformation without bearing the cross of our frail humanity and recognising our innate poverty before God our creator, redeemer and sanctifier. The cross, borne within the desert of our heart, is the place where love reaches its climax and we see the relationship of transforming love in the call to contemplation and compassion, the rhythm and synthesis of life within the TOR tradition.

7.10 Becoming the word in an active- contemplative synthesis

We have already referred to the Martha-Mary story in the bible. We have traced ways in which this story has been interpreted and understood within the Christian tradition leading up to the time of St. Francis. We have shown the way in which Francis embraced the Martha-Mary synthesis in his own life, even to the extent of writing a *Rule for Hermitages*. Acknowledging that this Rule has been well researched and interpreted since the time of Francis, we now place ourselves within this long tradition as we seek to "allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit to a new understanding of the *charis*". (*Starting Afresh from Christ*. 2002: 26.) Inspired by this document, we desire

To re-read in life and in daily experiences the spiritual riches of one's own charism, through a renewed contact with the same sources which, inspired by the founders' and foundress' experience of the Spirit, gave rise to the spark of new life and new works. (2002: 30-31)

In striving to preserve an active-contemplative synthesis within the TOR tradition, we emphasize a spirituality of the heart, the development of which we hope to facilitate in the new, innovative and purpose-built Portiuncula. In previous chapters, we have referred to the mutual relationship between a person and a particular place in facilitating a deeper relationship with God. Jesus went into the desert, St. Antony and the early Fathers of the Church sought out solitary places, and the hermitages of St. Francis are still revered as sacred places, especially the Portiuncula.

7.11 The Portiuncula and the desert of the heart

St. Bonaventure locates the beginning of the journey of the heart in the desert. In the context of this study we present the Portiuncula as an example of a sacred place and desert space for developing a heart for God. Hellmann (1974: 339) states: "To be in the desert, in the words of St. Bonaventure, is to be in perfect poverty: it is here man must begin if he is to find his way to God".

This is the beginning but as Sr. Frances Teresa (1995:110) reminds us, the desert "is both a beginner's place and an expert's". It is the way to that most sacred of all places – the heart, the dwelling place of God. In the Portiuncula, St. Francis "conceived and brought to birth the spirit of the Gospel truth". (LMj.111.1) This conceiving and bringing to birth the word of God in our hearts, is the way in which St. Bonaventure understands the imitation of Christ, the perfect Word of God. A word, whether written or spoken, requires the eye and ear of the recipient. The word of God requires no less: the eyes and ears of the heart.

Boulding (1982:83) in speaking about the word says:

The word within you is your own centre, your deepest reality and your freedom. It is God's utterance of your new name, the name that reveals to you your destiny and meaning and all that you can become.

We have already referred to the heart as the deepest centre of a person, the place of mystery, grace and freedom. Boulding's insights accord with our understanding of the call to become the word in and through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. The process of becoming involves profound attentiveness to the word, and St. Francis is our example and model in this respect.

In the Portiuncula, Francis was receptive and attentive to the word within his heart, and he brought it to birth in his life. It is the stance of Mary. It is the contemplative acceptance of the word of God as a pre-requisite for following in the footsteps of Christ and becoming like him. To become like him means embracing the cross which is a call to the fullness of love through contemplation and compassion, the hallmarks of the TOR charism of conversion of heart. Therefore, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and crucified, is our centre and focus in our active-contemplative journey. This will inevitably lead us into the experience of the heart of God in the self-emptying of Christ in poverty, humility, and compassionate love. The heart is both the beginning and the end of the journey. This is the dwelling place of God. A man-made structure only reveals what is already an ever-present reality. Beha (2001:33) states: "Discovering God at this centre of ourselves makes it more possible for us to find God everywhere and anywhere".

Yet, to journey to the centre sometimes requires a conscious turning to a specific 'desert' space. In his article *Desert, Desert Fathers*, Williams (1983: 110-111) says:

Thomas Merton has written extensively about the contemporary need for a critical contemplative perspective on the illusions of 'advanced' consumer society, and suggested that such a society will only recognise its desolation and its vulnerability to self-deceit so long as there are those ready to confront the emptiness and the temptation to consoling projections with commitment and honesty – to create a 'desert' of solitude in which the desert of society can clearly see both the extent of its sickness and privation and the hope of living through it in faithful candour and compassion. And this is a task not restricted to those who are 'institutionally' contemplatives: as more than one of the desert Fathers recognised, certain aspects of the desert vocation belong to the calling of all Christians.

Perhaps that is why St. Francis preserved a delicate balance of Martha and Mary, not only in life as a whole, but even within the hermitage experience itself, where the roles of Martha and Mary alternate. In this way, superiority is given neither to Martha nor Mary because it is love that gives meaning to both prayer and activity. Love is the unifying force, energising the person to live creatively the contemplative-active rhythm in imitation of the incarnate Christ, who is God's word of love to us and the revelation of his heart. Such love and revelation cannot be separated from the challenge of conversion, deep conversion of heart that can accept the reality of an unconditional love. It is the mystery of the heart of God and the mystery of each human heart.

7.12 Contemplation and compassion.

The rhythm of life at the Portiuncula is contemplation and compassion; the centre is love lived out in relationship with God, others, oneself and the whole of created reality in God. Time is needed to discover and to savour the harmony and integration that is envisaged by St. Francis in the eremitical experience. Drawing together work and prayer, silence and sharing, solitude and fraternity, Francis invites us to "Seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice".

Actually constructing a new building, The Portiuncula, emphasizes the Kingdom of God and witnesses to the primacy of God. The person who visits the Portiuncula and embraces the "desert" experience, continues the journey of the heart in seeking the kingdom of God and its justice. This in turn is a witness to the on-going reality of the primacy of God within each individual heart and the recognition of the need to nurture this relationship in freedom and grace, under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit who forms and reforms the heart. In this encounter, a person opens him/herself to the experience of the goodness of God and of all relationships of inter-dependence in God, through Christ. DeMello (1995: 142) says:

It is a sobering thought that the finest act of love you can perform is not an act of service but an act of contemplation, of seeing. When you serve people you help, support, comfort, alleviate pain. When you see them in their inner beauty and goodness you transform and create.

Unless contemplation is grounded in action and *vice versa*, then dualistic conceptions remain, and both action and contemplation are devoid of their intrinsic potential to transform the human heart. Schindler (1996:234) explains and clarifies.

The action that is now without the inner dimension of (depth-giving) receptivity tends to take the form of extraverted and superficial (*super-facies*) doing and making; and the contemplation that is now without ("fruit-bearing") generosity tends to take the form of a barren "theorizing" or "looking at".

Time to contemplate the Christ of the beatitudes leads naturally to the contemplation of the open heart of the crucified because to live the Gospel life of the beatitudes means embracing the cross. There, infinite mystery and concrete existence meet in Christ and it is the cross that reveals to us the heart of God and our own individual heart. Through conversion of our deepest centre, our heart, we are re-created in Christ in his own image and likeness.

The heart becomes the crucible where the new creation is conceived and formed. It is the path of crucified love. Like Francis, those who embark on the journey of the heart, experience the passion of God first within the heart before it is enfleshed and brought to birth in daily life in compassionate love. It is a sharing in the *chesed* of God in covenant love and relationships. It is the response to the Gospel call to conversion and discipleship, embodied in the TOR Rule (11:8) to make a home and dwelling place for God with far-reaching consequences in all other relationships.

Let them always make a home and dwelling place in themselves
for him who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Thus, with undivided hearts, they may grow in all-embracing love,
as they turn without ceasing towards God and their neighbour.

In the final message to all TOR brothers and sisters, the 2001 Assisi Conference proclaimed a timely message in the following words:

Today like Francis, we long to discover God who is Love. Francis encountered God on the streets, in creation, in the embrace of the leper, and the encounter with the Sultan. Like Francis' pilgrimage, ours also must be to the hearts of others. We go forth with a fundamental attitude of respect and reverence. Even if we cannot proclaim Christ in words, we can witness Christ by our lives of compassion and love. In this way, we invite others to listen to God in their own hearts. The virtues of humility, mercy and service to others are found not only in our own Christian tradition but also in other religious traditions.

7.12.1 Forming the heart for mission through contemplation and compassion

Having discovered the God who is love, “like Francis’ pilgrimage, ours also must be to the hearts of others”. That is the sentence most pertinent to this research and a reality we embrace with “the spark of new life and new works”. (*Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* 2002: 31.)

The Portiuncula has always been associated with mission – a mission to the hearts of others. Francis met with the brothers twice a year at the Portiuncula. During his time with his brothers, Francis nurtured the Word of God in the hearts of all, after which he sent them throughout the world to be instruments of peace and compassionate love to all. In *The Anonymous of Perugia* (Armstrong et al, 2000:42) we read of Francis’ exhortation to the brothers at the Portiuncula:

My dear brothers, let us consider our calling because God has mercifully called us not only for our own good but also for the salvation of many. Therefore, let us go through the world, encouraging and teaching men and women by word and example.

In *The Legend of the Three Companions* (Armstrong et al, 2000: 102) we read in greater detail the content of this example and teaching.

For his great desire was that he, as well as his brothers, would abound in such good deeds for which the Lord would be praised. He used to tell them: “As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness and harmony through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring.

The journey of the heart into God and the pilgrimage to the hearts of others aptly expresses the active-contemplative synthesis of the TOR *charism*. The heart, as the seat of consciousness and deepest centre of the human person, is the place where the synthesis takes place. Keating (2002: 65) maintains that:

The contemplative state is established when contemplative prayer moves from being an experience or series of experiences to an abiding state of consciousness. The contemplative state enables

one to rest and act at the same time because one is rooted in the source of both rest and action.

This brings us back to the underlying reality of *chesed*, because it combines love of God and love of our brothers and sisters and the whole of creation, in God. *Chesed* is the source of both rest and action, contemplation and compassion. The Portiuncula embodies this vision. The alternation of the Martha-Mary roles within the alternating mother-son relationship, spelt out by St. Francis in his *Rule for Hermitages*, ensures that active love and compassion are first lived within the fraternity. This is what it means to give birth to Christ by bringing forth the fruits of conversion of heart, by a holy manner of working. In the Prologue to the TOR Rule we read these words of Francis to his followers: "We give birth to Him by our good works which should shine out as an example to others".

In this same letter, Francis clearly indicates the costly nature of this change of heart. Giving the example of Jesus, our brother, Francis says:

How holy and delightful, well pleasing, humble and peaceful,
sweet, lovable and desirable above everything it is to have such a
Brother and Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who laid down His life for
His sheep!

The example of Jesus leads to the cross, to laying down one's life. The "abiding state of consciousness" rooted in self-giving love reaches out in compassion to others in works of mercy. Mercy is one translation of the word *chesed*. According to McKenzie (1966: 565) scholars are not agreed on the proper translation of *chesed*, because no one word adequately describes or translates the Hebrew understanding. In the context of our study, mercy is very significant because not only is it associated with the TOR *charism*, but there is a definite link with covenant love which is self-giving, unconditional, active love reaching out to others. This self-giving, compassionate love springs from a heart that is turned away from selfishness in all its forms, and turned towards God and everyone, and everything in God. It is the living of the Gospel precept to lay down one's life.

Dufour (1973: 351) speaks of the richness of the Hebrew word mercy, emphasising the two streams of Hebrew thought: compassion and fidelity, the latter closely linked to *chesed*. Dufour specifically mentions the heart as the place of mercy and compassion, stressing the soundly based revelation of God's tenderness in reaching out to human misery. McKenzie (1966: 567) notes the corresponding use of the words mercy and *chesed* in the New Testament. This strong link and similarity – like two sides of the one coin – is very significant in the context of the TOR *charism*, because a converted heart is a compassionate heart, involved in doing deeds of mercy. This is clearly evident in Jesus, whose heart was moved by the misery he saw around him. We have only to page through the Gospels to see love and mercy in action in the person of Jesus.

Consciousness of the misery of others is dependent upon the conversion of the seat of consciousness: the heart. Fox (1979: 88) says:

Compassion takes place at a level of consciousness wherein we recognize that "what happens to another happens to us" – it is about shared existence, the inter-relating of all energies, those of joy as well as those of sorrow. This is why competition, compulsion and dualism wreck such havoc in the compassionate development of the individual.

The journey of the heart in moving from the "false self" to the "true self" is a life-long process, celebrating the gift and mystery of life in the embrace of paradox and in the union of opposites: human and divine, heaven and earth, prayer and action, contemplation and compassion, joy and sorrow, life and death, night and day, desert and city, solitude and fraternity – the list is endless, but the heart is the place where everything belongs. The challenge is to facilitate the release of the unifying energy of love that enables wholeness and integration to develop.

7.13 A reconciled and integrated heart

The little church of the Portiuncula in Assisi is associated with what is internationally known as "The Great Pardon of Assisi". This is another way of speaking about "The Portiuncula Indulgence". (Armstrong et al, 2001:806-811.) We do not wish to expound on the teaching of the Catholic Church relating to indulgences, but we do wish to emphasise the significance of the Indulgence in the context of this study. According to Franciscan tradition St. Francis is said to have received a very special privilege for all

those who would visit the Portiuncula on its anniversary date of dedication, which is the 2nd. August.

The privilege relates to the gift of God's grace in restoring healing and wholeness through the gift of unconditional forgiveness of all that separates a person from God. The consequence of restoring a person to his/her right relationship with God implies the restoration of right relationships with everyone else and oneself in God. This is not an automatic procedure. We forgive and reconcile as we ourselves have been forgiven and reconciled in Christ. This presupposes that a person consciously accepts the way of the Gospel in imitation of Christ – in other words, a person repents of living according to the illusory ideals of the false self, and in believing, accepting and sharing the Good News of God's love and forgiveness, lives in the joy and discovery of the true self, made in the image and likeness of God.

Fox (1979: 101-102) speaks of Jesus linking pardon and compassion and he does so in a way that emphasizes the freedom it brings. He quotes Luke 6:36 and goes on to say:

In Biblical teaching, forgiveness is a work of God's compassion and it is especially the prophets who preach the freedom that forgiveness brings with it. The freedom that forgiveness brings is both a personal and a social freedom.

This is the way of the Kingdom of God and his justice – that one text from Scripture that St. Francis singled out in his *Rule for Hermitages*. It is doing justice, which is love in action in the restoration of beauty, which is God's gift. A new heart, a heart of flesh is the dwelling place of God, in whose image we are made and in whose heart we find one another and the whole of created reality. The *TOR Rule* in Article 8 states:

Let them always make a home and dwelling place in themselves for him who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, with undivided hearts, they may grow in all-embracing love, as they turn without ceasing towards God and their neighbour.

These words of St. Francis, so obviously based on St. John's Gospel 14:23, highlight the importance of love – a compassionate, forgiving love - as the foundation for unifying the heart in its relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters. For this love to be a unifying energy presupposes that the heart has been emptied and

purified through conversion, of all that does not lead to love in order to be filled with the gift of love, overflowing to others. The desert is one way of entering the process of purification of heart, leading to intimacy and union. A specific desert place may facilitate the journey – Francis considered the Portiuncula within this context, saying:

See to it, my sons, that you never abandon this place.
If you are driven out from one side, go back in the other,
For this is truly a holy place and the dwelling place of God.
Therefore, my sons, hold this place, God's dwelling,
As worthy of all honour and here praise God with your whole heart.
(1C: 106)

In freedom and grace, in the union of contemplation and compassion, there is a call to respond with our own efforts, in making the heart the dwelling place. Just as a physical building requires time, effort and labour, so too with the dwelling place of the heart. Francis realised that the exterior building and the interior dwelling place of the heart are meant to be a reflection one of the other; hence the symbolic nature of The Portiuncula.

Brother Body is our cell, and our soul is the hermit who dwells
within it, to pray to God and to meditate. If the soul does not live
in peace and solitude in its cell, a cell made by hands profits a
religious little.

While there is a sense in which the desired intimacy and union reaches beyond any given place, space, or designated experience, there is symbolic meaning in the physical building, seen with the eyes of the heart, which point to the wonder and mystery in which we are immersed. Chase (2003: 73) says:

In many religious traditions temples, churches, cities, castles, arks,
and edifices of many kinds are allegorical figures used to describe
the spiritual edifice of men and women: they are equated with the
soul. As with models of the spiritual journey, edifices map the
journey of the soul into God.

The person who has plumbed the secrets of solitude with Christ, in the heights and depths of the desert of the heart, is drawn into the mystery of the life and love of the Trinity. Delio (2001: 87) speaks of the profound reality of the whole Trinity expressed in Christ, the Word.

As eternal Word, Christ is centre of the Trinity; as incarnate Word he is centre of creation; as inspired Word, he is centre of the human heart.

Union with the Word as centre of the human heart continues and deepens the rhythm of giving and receiving. It is at one and the same time a sharing in the self-emptying of God in Christ and the receiving of the fullness of life in Christ: the paradox of being poor and rich at the same time. The desert experience of conversion of heart highlights in a specific way, the aspect of poverty – a poverty that is empty, open and receptive to receive the fullness of life and love. The fruit of this experience is the synthesis of contemplation and compassion in the harmony, wholeness and integration of an active-contemplative rhythm of self-giving love which the Trinity images.

It is a community of personal love marked by fecundity, overflowing goodness and creativity. Because the Trinity manifests an eternal, dynamic creativity it is outward-moving. It cannot remain self-enclosed or self-sufficient. (Delio. 2001: 50.)

And neither can we!

7.14 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to focus on the *charism* of the TOR branch of the Franciscan family, giving particular emphasis to the heart. Tracing the challenges and responses since the Second Vatican Council, we have acknowledged the depth and breadth of research which has focused on conversion of heart in developing a self-understanding of the *charism* for TOR congregations. Aware that much of the research has centred on aspects of conversion, in particular the biblical understanding, we have turned attention to the heart.

Understanding the heart as the seat of consciousness, we have developed this theme within the biblical setting of the beatitudes. Understanding the spiritual journey of the heart in relation to evolutionary stages of consciousness, led us to examine briefly some relevant aspects of the second axial period of consciousness.

Proposing St. Francis and St. Bonaventure as guides for the journey of the heart into the second axial period of consciousness, led us to consider the centrality of the Word. In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, we examined the consequences of the call of

each person to become a word within the Word, interpreting the place the desert experience plays in this process of becoming.

In exploring the centrality of the Word, we concluded that the search for true identity, - the true self as opposed to the false self – can only be found in and through Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of the heart of God, who is Father, Son, and Spirit. In sharing the life of the Trinity, we are drawn into a life of self-emptying and self-giving; of contemplation and compassion.

To facilitate the journey of the heart, we have proposed St. Francis' model of eremitical life, based on the TOR Rule and the Rule for Hermitages. For this purpose we have examined aspects of Franciscan spirituality in relation to the heart and the Portiuncula, the model of the active-contemplative life. Convinced that this is a model that is relevant for the 21st.century we have planned a new building, called The Portiuncula, which will embody the ideals of St. Francis in his literal following of Christ, but which will be adapted creatively in response to present day needs and Spirit directed initiatives. Responding to the most recent documentation from Pope Paul II on Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (2002: 26) we take to heart the words:

We must therefore allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit to a constantly renewed discovery of God and his Word, to a burning love for God and for humanity and to a new understanding of the charism which has been given.

CONCLUSION

The Franciscan family as a whole and the TOR in particular, is indebted to the many scholars who have helped us on our journey of exploring our charism. Many existing scholarly texts, notably the works of Chinnici on the evangelical quest within the wider Franciscan family, and to Faley (1974), Pazzelli (1989 & 1993), Stewart (1991), Peano (1996), and the many publications of the Franciscan Federation of the Brothers and Sisters of the United States in addressing the TOR charism of conversion. The more recent works of Cirino & Raischl (1995), Raymundo (1994) and Higgins (1999), in developing insights into the eremitical dimension of the Franciscan evangelical ideal, have opened new avenues of exploration upon which we base our foundation for a spirituality of the heart. Rooting this research in the biblical symbols of heart, desert and conversion, we hope to add to the ongoing conversation of our evangelical foundation and our developing TOR charism of conversion of heart.

By choosing the universally understood symbol of the heart as the prism for understanding afresh our challenge of conversion, we underscore the necessity of embracing the totality of our personhood in this process. Facing the tensions and paradoxes inherent in an *either/or* mentality that emphasises dualism rather than unity in diversity, interconnectedness and interdependence, we maintain that the symbol of the heart has the ability to address the tension that often exists between being and doing and between union and separateness.

The response of the Franciscan Minoress sisters, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to discover anew the depth and richness of the TOR charism through the prism of the heart, has taken us on an investigation centred mainly on the revealed Word of God in Scripture and in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. In following the footprints of Jesus Christ, the challenge to accept the gift of life and relationships in the raw material and earthiness of our broken humanity, has been centred in the heart, the seat of consciousness.

In Scripture and the Christian tradition, the desert, real or symbolic, has been presented as one of the most likely places where the challenge is accepted, confronted and resolved. There, the heart is exposed to the positive and negative aspects that integrates or disintegrates a person on the road to maturity in Christ. Engaging in the struggle within the heart highlights not only the Gospel-centred, incarnational basis of Franciscan spirituality but also the eremitical aspect of our legacy from Saint Francis.

The formative dimension of the desert experience in changing a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, has been rooted in the ordinariness of daily life and relationships, which are often seen most clearly and understood most deeply, in the time and place set apart for solitude.

To facilitate the rhythm of contemplation and compassion, which we understand to be related to the Scriptural typology of Martha and Mary, consistent with this research, we have constructed a new building : The Portiuncula. The building itself speaks symbolically of the depth of the reality it embodies. The design, the building materials, the furnishings, the location – all speak of the journey of the heart, through the desert of purification to the intimacies of the secrets of solitude in the rhythm of contemplation and compassion. A heart in which the word has taken flesh in the soil of the heart, is a heart in the on-going process of conversion and transformation. In this process, contemplation and compassion become a way of life in the sharing of the overflowing love and goodness of God.

A spirituality of the heart is one response to the hunger within the depths of people who seek meaning, purpose and wholeness in the human situation in which they find themselves. It is a rediscovery of the interconnectedness and sacredness of the whole of reality. It is the experience of joy in the beauty of being in relationship. It is an ever deepening entry into the realm of mystery, wonder, freedom and grace in the chesed of God in covenant love. It is the perception of the gift of life and love, received from God, shared in God, and returning to God. It is the heart's journey into the heart God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Presenting my findings within the limits set by this present research, I realise that there is a rich field still to be explored by analysing in depth the themes of heart, desert and conversion, through music, art, poetry and prose in other cultures, religions and eras. There is also the ongoing challenge to work with the Martha-Mary, active-contemplative dimension of life which is so often presented in dualistic terms. Our present research has tried to bring together theory and practice, interior and exterior, spiritual and physical in presenting a thesis, the fruits of which are embodied in a physical building which in turn facilitates the inner journey. The thread weaving together the theory and the practice, the contemplation and compassion is love, held and integrated in the all-embracing symbol of the heart.

APPENDIX 1: List of Scripture Abbreviations in Alphabetical Order

Ac	Acts	Lk	Luke
Am	Amos	Lm	Lamentations
Ba	Baruch	Lv	Leviticus
1 Ch	1 Chronicles	1 M	1 Maccabees
2 Ch	2 Chronicles	2 M	2 Maccabees
1 Co	1 Corinthians	Mi	Micah
2 Co	2 Corinthians	Mk	Mark
Col	Colossians	MI	Malachi
Dn	Daniel	Mt	Matthew
Dt	Deuteronomy	Na	Nahum
Ep	Ephesians	Nb	Numbers
Est.	Esther	Ne	Nehemiah
Ex	Exodus	Ob	Obadiah
Ezk	Ezekiel	1 P	1 Peter
Ezr	Ezra	2 P	2 Peter
Ga	Galatians	Ph	Philippians
Gn	Genesis	Phm	Philemon
Hab	Habakkuk	Pr	Proverbs
Heb	Hebrews	Ps	Psalms
Hg	Haggai	Qo	Ecclesiastes/ Qoheleth
Ho	Hosea	Rm	Romans
Is	Isaiah	Rt	Ruth
Jb	Job	Rv	Revelation
Jdt	Judith	1 S	1 Samuel
Jg	Judges	2 S	2 Samuel
Jl	Joel	Sg	Son of Songs
Jm	James	Si	Ecclesiasticus/ Ben Sira
Jn	John	Tb	Tobit
1 Jn	1 John	1 Th	1 Thessalonians
2 Jn	2 John	2 Th	2 Thessalonians
3 Jn	3 John	1 Tm	1 Timothy
Jon	Jonah	2 Tm	2 Timothy
Jos	Joshua	Tt	Titus

Jr	Jeremiah	Ws	Wisdom
Jude	Jude	Zc	Zechariah
1 K	1 Kings	Zp	Zephaniah
2 K	2 Kings		

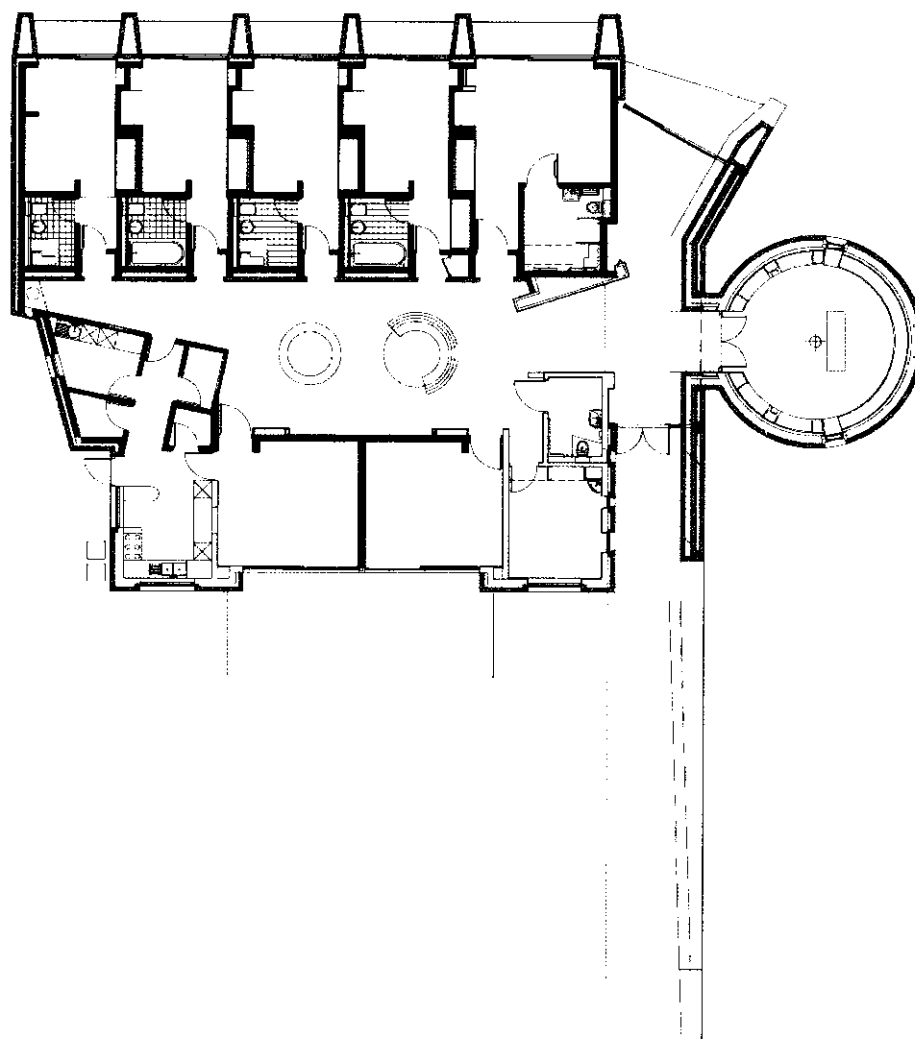
APPENDIX 2: List of Franciscan Abbreviations

Writings of Saint Francis

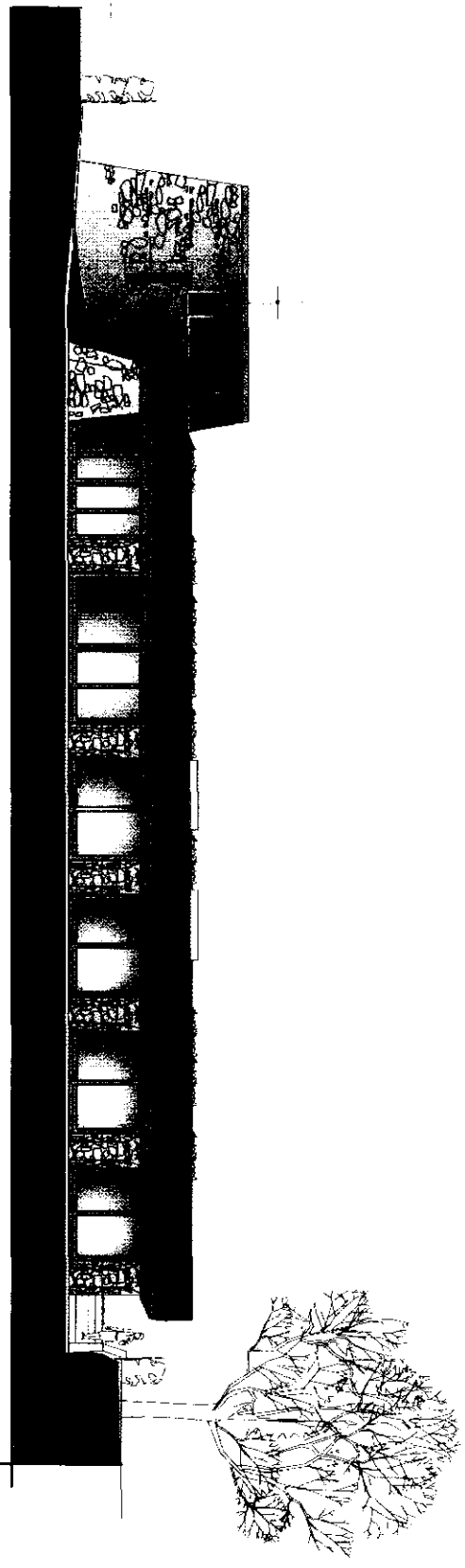
Adm	The Admonitions
BIL	A Blessing for Brother Leo
CtC	The Canticle of the Creatures
LtAnt	A Letter to Brother Anthony
PrOF	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father
1LtCl	First Letter to the Clergy
PrCr	The Prayer before the Crucifix
2LtCl	Second Letter to the Clergy
1LtCus	The First Letter to the Custodians
2LtCus	The Second Letter to the Custodians
1LtF	The First Letter to the Faithful
2LtF	The Second Letter to the Faithful
SalBV	A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
TPJ	True and Perfect Joy
LtL	A Letter to Brother Leo
LtMin	A Letter to a Minister
LtOrd	A Letter to the Entire Order
CtExh	The Canticle of Exhortation
LtR	A Letter to Rulers of the Peoples
ExhP	Exhortation to the Praise of God
PrsG	The Praises of God
OfP	The Office of the Passion
RH	A Rule for Hermitages
ER	The Earlier Rule
LR	The Later Rule
SalV	A Salutation of Virtues
Test	The Testament

Franciscan Sources

1C	The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano
2C	The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul
3C	The Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
LCh	The Legend for Use in the Choir
Off	The Divine Office of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer
LJS	The Life of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer
VL	The Versified Life of St. Francis by Henri d'Avranches
1MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Smaller Version
2MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Larger Version
ScEx	The Sacred Exchange between St. Francis and Lady Poverty
AP	The Anonymous of Perugia
L3C	The Legend of the Three Companions
LP	The Legend of Perugia
AC	The Assisi Compilation
UchL	The Umbrian Choir Legend
1-4Srm	The Sermons of Bonaventure
Lmj	The Major Legend by Bonaventure
LMn	The Minor Legend by Bonaventure



Appendix 3a: The Portiuncula – interior plan



Appendix 3b: The Portiuncula – rear elevation

APPENDIX 4

4.1 The Prayer Garden

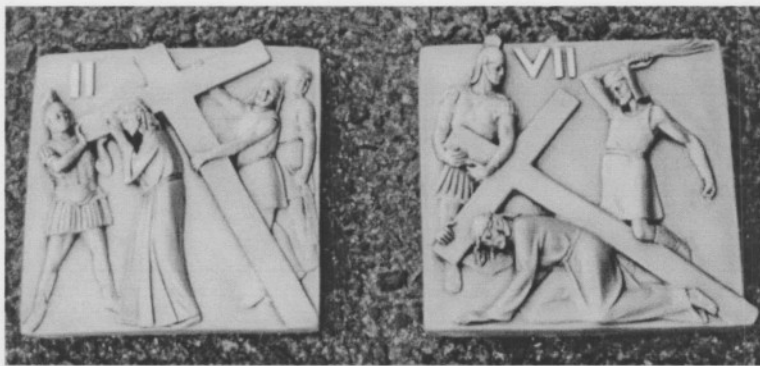
The prayer garden is part of the overall plan of the Portiuncula. Expressing the theme of the journey of the heart, two forms of sacred walks or "journeys" are included in this outdoor prayer space: The Franciscan devotional Way of the Cross and the early Christian walking meditation: the labyrinth

4.2 The Way of the Cross

In chapter 6 we have already referred to St. Francis' love of the crucified Christ and his identification with Him on Mount La Verna. We have also emphasised in chapter 3 the way in which a past event is re-presented and actualised in the mystery it celebrates. In visual form the various "stations" or stopping places represent Jesus on his journey from the Praetorium of Pilate, where Jesus was condemned to death, through fourteen "stations" culminating in the crucifixion on Mount Calvary.

The importance of erecting outdoor Stations of the Cross is to journey with Jesus, through contemplation and compassion, facilitating a faith experience in the ever-present mystery of suffering and love.

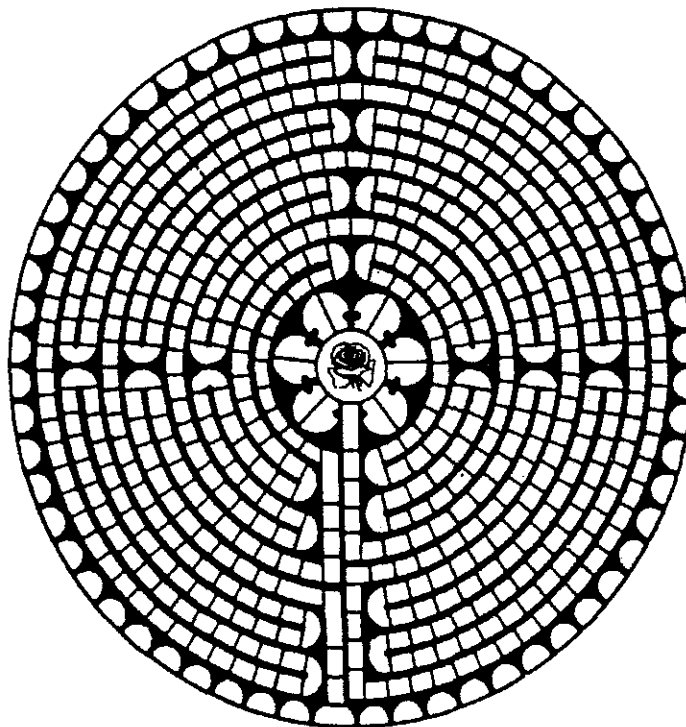
4.3 An example of outdoor Stations of the Cross:



4.4 The Labyrinth

In our thesis we have referred to 'the labyrinthine ways of the heart'. Building a labyrinth in our Prayer garden associated with the Portiuncula, gives the opportunity to actually experience the winding journey of life, with its twists and turns, yet in keeping to the path, one arrives at the centre – one's own centre: the heart. In discovering and exploring one's own centre, one discovers also the heart of God in Christ, Who is the centre of the Trinity, the centre of every person and the centre of creation. This sacred symbol of the labyrinth is a focus for prayer, meditation and contemplation, leading to wholeness, healing and integration. There are many ways of walking the labyrinth and these guidelines will be available at the Portiuncula.

The Chartres Model of the Labyrinth:



APPENDIX 5: The Portiuncula Building: Symbolic Spirituality and representations.

1. The name and location

The Portiuncula means Little Portion and it symbolizes littleness and simplicity. Like the original Portiuncula in Assisi, it is built of stone, representative of God, Christ, and each person who is re-born in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

Yahweh is my rock and my fortress,
My deliverer is my God.
I take refuge in Him, my rock,
My shield, my saving strength,
My stronghold, my place of refuge. (Ps.18: 2.)

He is the living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen by God
and precious to Him; set yourselves close to him so that you, too,
may be living stones making a spiritual house. (1P.2: 4.)

To those who prove victorious I will give some hidden manna
and a white stone, with a new name written on it, known only to
the person who receives it. (Rev.2: 17.)

The green sedum roof is symbolic of the Christian and Franciscan awareness of the relationship that exists between nature, humanity and God. St. Francis...

Aroused by everything to divine love,
He rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands
And through their delightful display
He rose into their life-giving reason and cause.
In beautiful things he contuited Beauty itself
And through the footprints impressed in things
He followed his Beloved everywhere,
Out of them all making for himself a ladder
Through which he could climb up to lay hold of him
Who is utterly desirable. (LMj.IX: 1.)

The roof's seasonal changes symbolize the seasons of the heart, especially the paschal pattern of death and resurrection inherent in the conversion and transformation processes leading to intimacy and union.

From the main road, there is a long walk to the building. This is symbolic of the journey into the depths of the heart. There is a gate at the entrance in the centre of which there is a circle in gold representing the Godhead. Within the circle there is an ancient Christian symbol of the Trinity, which dates back to Bishop Theophile of Antioch who died in 186 A.D. This symbol is now usually referred to as the Celtic symbol of the Trinity. The three interlocking shapes within the circle represent the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Placed within the circle, this symbol represents the mystery of the unity and the trinity of God. Opening the gate and entering the path, symbolizes the choice to embark on the journey of the heart into the life of the Trinity.

Inside the gate the path to The Portiuncula is dotted with circular lights in the earth, a reminder that the light of Christ dwells within the earthiness of our broken humanity; a reminder too that like St. Francis, we are 'led by the Lord', and He is "The true Light, our Lord Jesus Christ (1lt F: 2: 6) in Whose Light we see light."

There is a large cross on top of the chapel, an invitation to remember and pray in the words of St. Francis whenever he approached a Church:

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The Portiuncula, built at a lower level than the surrounding garden, gives the experience of the descent, or entry in, symbolic of the entering into the depths of one's heart. Once inside the building, the first and most impressive room is the chapel.

2.1 The chapel

This is a circular prayer room, representative of the eternity of God, without beginning or end, and of the centrality of Christ, the Word made flesh. In Franciscan theology, Christ is seen as the centre of the Trinity, the centre of the human person and the centre of all created reality.

In Franciscan spirituality, because of Christ our brother, all are children of the Father in relationship as equals. A circle, in its all-embracing shape, lends itself to express this equality of relationship.

O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven!
O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse!
O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love, and, above all things, desirable: to have such a brother and such a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who laid down His life for His sheep.
(1LtF 11-13.)

The colour in the chapel is predominantly gold which in iconography symbolizes the transcendence of God, divinity, eternal life and Light itself.

2.2 The Tabernacle

The Tabernacle, which is the receptacle for the Real Presence of Jesus Christ under the form of bread, is circular in shape, again emphasizing the centrality of Christ, as the Word made flesh, living and present among us, revealing to us the heart of God and inviting us into relationship in the here and now of our life's journey.

O sublime humility!
O humble sublimity!
The Lord of the universe,
God and the Son of God,
So humbles Himself
That for our salvation
He hides Himself
Under an ordinary piece of bread! (Lt Ord: 27.)

His presence in the Tabernacle calls us to a literal following in His footprints in a loving expression of contemplation and compassion.

Brothers, look at the humility of God,
And pour out your hearts before Him!
Humble yourselves
That you may be exalted by Him. (LtOrd:28)

The colour of the Tabernacle is gold and red. The symbolism of gold has already been explained. Red in iconography is the colour representing humanity and love, thus revealing the totality of love in the Real Presence of the

divine and human Christ. The sanctuary lamp, in the shape of a flame, is close to the tabernacle and highlights the Real Presence of Christ. It is also a mark of honour and a symbol of prayer. Connaughton and Silcock (1997:135) point out: 'Since the 16th century it has been prescribed that a lamp shall hang or stand before the Blessed Sacrament'.

2.3 The stained glass windows

The stained-glass windows are modelled on the Cantic of Creation composed by St. Francis, reflecting Christ as the centre of creation, in and through whom our relationship with creation is that of sister and brother. Such relational spirituality depicts the second axial period of consciousness, which St. Francis represents, especially in his penetrating understanding of the way in which each specific created reality reflects God and invites a response of praise and thanksgiving.

Praised be You, my lord, with all Your creatures (CtC: 3).

The way in which the windows depict the different stanzas of the Cantic freely flowing one into the other, without the metal separation characteristic of some stained glass windows, reflects the overall theme of wholeness and integration.

2.4 The Seven Small Windows

The number of small windows is symbolic. According to McKenzie (1965:794) the number 7 is significant in every culture. Our focus is the Scriptural significance. In Genesis (2:1-3) the 7th Day of rest represents the complete and perfect work of creation. The New Testament (Lk.17: 4) understanding of 7 represents totality and perfection. In keeping with the spirituality of the Portiuncula, 7 windows within the Chapel speak of the perfection of God and the perfection of love to which we are all called in our life with God.

Biblical References to the Number Seven: Gn. 2:1-3, 10, 41:2, 46:27; Ex. 1:5, 12:15,19; Lv.12-15; Jg.16: 13; Is.4: 1; Nb. 23:1; Rt. 4:15; 2 K 4:35, 5:10; Jos. 6:1; Dt. 7:1; Lk.8: 2, 10:1, 11:26, 17:4, 20:29; Mt.12: 45, 15:34, 37; 18:21, 22:25; Mk.8: 5,8; 12:20; Ac. 6:2; Rv. 1:4, 1:13, 1:16; 4:5, 5:1, 8:2, 12:3, 15:1.

2.5 The Crucifix

The crucifix in the chapel is a constant reminder of the *chesed* of God, that infinite and compassionate love of God in Christ, who embraced our brokenness and vulnerability by becoming one of us.

Let every creature
In heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths,
Give praise, glory, honour and blessing
To Him who suffered so much. (2LtF: 61.)

The Crucifix reflects the suffering and love which is the raw material of every person's life, and invites a response, as the heart is formed and transformed in bearing the mystery of one's own uniqueness.

I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!
(2C.214.)

2.6 The statue of Our Lady

The statue of Mary, Mother of God, is a reminder of the awesome reality of God becoming a human person in and through the *Fiat* of Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

He (Francis) embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible
love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us.
(1C.198)

The chapel opens onto the rest of the building, which is symbolic of our Gospel call to be both Martha and Mary through contemplation and compassion.

3.1 Interior Design

The interior design is a creative interpretation of the original Portiuncula, separating yet uniting the Martha and Mary dimensions within the Franciscan experience of solitude and fraternity.

3.2 The Hermitages – all named after those sacred places set apart by St. Francis and representative of special graces and experiences associated with them - are all located on the right side of the building – the right side representative of

the right brain, which is the imaginative, creative, receptive, contemplative, "Mary", side which will be nurtured in the hermitage experience of solitude.

In accordance with St. Francis Rule for Hermitages, each person has his/her own hermitage, specifically designated as a sacred and personal space for prayer and sleep. "Let one have one enclosure in which he/she may pray and sleep. And they may not permit anyone to enter or eat in the enclosure where they dwell". (RH.2 & 7.) As Imler (2002:17) points out: "They are not walled in but rather distractions are 'hedged out'. This place is blessed initially and consecrated as holy. It is not a place to flee from or escape the world but simply a sacred place to be alone with God". The walls of stone protect the sacred space of each person's hermitage and are designed to open outwards in the spirit in which St. Francis envisaged solitude. In this context, Fusarelli (1999: 40) points out:

Monastic tradition holds the cloister to be the centre of the monastery, connecting the various settings for common activities and serving as a clearly defined and protected space for the monk's lives. It is like a favoured observation point from which to gaze exclusively towards heaven. In the Franciscan tradition the cloister opens to the entire world, through the contemplation of creation and in preparation for the proclamation of the Gospel.

3.2.1 Greccio Hermitage

The hermitage of Greccio is associated with Christmas and the Eucharist. It is often referred to as the Franciscan Bethlehem. It recalls God's loving, humble presence among us in the form of a child and in the humble bread of the Eucharist. As Fusarelli (1999: 45) observes:

We can approach this child without being afraid: God, defenceless child; God, a piece of bread. How much trust God has in his creatures! It is for this that Francis unites in one gaze of faith and love the Nativity of Jesus and the Eucharist. He who one day came down to the womb of the Virgin and from her was born on some straw, is now present on the altar as food for all. Humble by birth, humble in his eternal presence among us. Of a God like this, with the face and the words of a child and a man, Jesus Christ, who would be afraid?

Imler (2002: 6) draws our attention to *The Tree of Life* in which St. Bonaventure writes "On the Mystery of His Origin".

Oh, if you could feel in some way the quality and intensity of that fire sent from heaven, the refreshing coolness that accompanied it, the consolation it imparted; if you could realize the great exaltation of the Virgin Mother, the ennobling of the human race, the condescension of the divine majesty; if you could hear the Virgin singing with joy; if you could go with your Lady into the mountainous region; if you could see the sweet embrace of the Virgin and the woman who had been sterile and hear the greeting in which the tiny servant recognized his Lord, the herald his Judge and the voice his Word, then I am sure you would sing in sweet tones with the Blessed Virgin that sacred hymn: My soul magnifies the Lord....; and with the tiny prophet you would exalt, rejoice and adore the marvellous virginal conception!

Imler (2002:6) poses the question: Consider what is the Christmas song you would be singing from on high? What song would God sing in you, as you are the word made flesh?

The colour of the Greccio hermitage is blue. In iconography blue symbolizes the heavens and divinity and the mystery of divine life. It also symbolizes silent humility. The awareness of the divinity that lies hidden within the humble humanity of the Christ Child invites us to embrace the beauty, goodness and dignity of our own creation in his image and likeness.

References to Franciscan Readings connected to Greccio can be found in the series Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (abbreviated FA: ED)

1 253-55, 307, 397, 405-06, 492, 526; 11 174-75, 177, 227-28, 237, 269-70, 277, 287, 289, 355, 410, 412, 414, 592, 594, 610, 619, 706, 783, 793; 111 104, 151, 232, 345, 558.

3.2.2 Poggio Bustone Hermitage

The hermitage of Poggio Bustone is associated with reconciliation and the tender mercy of God. It was here that St. Francis and his followers were first called penitents from Assisi. It was here that Francis used the much-loved Franciscan greeting: "Good morning, good people!" It was here that Francis

experienced the tender mercy of the good God who liberated him from his burden of sin with its attendant guilt, anxiety and interior sorrow and clothed him with mercy, love and forgiveness. Describing Francis' experience at Poggio Bustone, Celano (1C XI: 26) tells us that Francis:

Began to lose himself;
His feelings were pressed together;
And that darkness disappeared
Which fear of sin had gathered in his heart.
Certainty of the forgiveness of all his sins poured in,
And the assurance of being revived in grace was given to him.
Then he was caught up above himself and totally engulfed in light,
And, with his inmost soul opened wide,
He clearly saw the future.

A contemporary author, Fusarelli (1999:17-18) reflecting on the relevance Francis' experience at Poggio Bustone for today, states:

Each person bears his own anxieties. Francis of Assisi's were those of a man searching ceaselessly, aware that there is no escaping one's personal history. It needs to be accepted, not pushed aside... Francis appears very contemporary. A worried man. A believer before the Mystery of a God who reveals himself in secret. A man weighed down by the memory of a life in which he had cared for himself and nothing else, yet still faithful enough to look ahead... The Lord had mercy on Francis. He clothed him with his love, created in him a pure heart and launched him towards the future. Francis went back to his brothers, liberated, enlightened and full of peace.

The colour of the Poggio Bustone hermitage is purple. In iconography it symbolizes supreme power. In the Liturgy, purple represents the season of repentance and conversion of heart. The invitation is to open one's heart to the supreme power of the Holy Spirit of God and celebrate the loving and tender mercy of God in the experience of forgiveness and peace.

References to Franciscan Readings connected to Poggio Bustoni can be found in the series Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (abbreviated FA: ED) 1 205- 207: 11 333.

3.2.3 The Carceri Hermitage

Based on the information of Cirino and Raischl (1995:129-132) Carceri is a generic term for a place apart to facilitate a “desert” experience in the biblical understanding of that word.

We can assume that even before the time of St. Francis the word “carceri” somehow referred to the “locus” of a hermitage on Mount Subasio.

Local usage already shows the precise meaning of the term, which would eventually pass from a generic designation to become the name of the Franciscan hermitage on Subasio. In the language of the time it indicated the eremitical life's external aspect of breaking away and separation from the world, that which is most obvious in the popular mentality... If today's Carceri is the only one to have lasted and even won out over all the others, it can be attributed to an obvious reason: it was the “desert” or hermitage of St. Francis.

According to Debonnets (1971:16) the word ‘Carceri’ literally means prison but he qualifies this as a place of seclusion rather than a jail. We feel this literal meaning of the word is significant in our context of the desert experience, in the sense that the invitation is to allow God to liberate our hearts from whatever imprisons us from within. The invitation is to freedom – the freedom of the child of God in the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit.

The colour of The Carceri of St. Francis is yellow, which in iconography symbolizes truth. The Truth sets us free and the colour yellow, represents the light, happiness and joy associated with being freed from the darkness and slavery of sin and selfishness.

References to Franciscan Readings connected to The Carceri of St. Francis can be found in the series Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (abbreviated FA: ED) 11 67, 286; 111 505.

3.2.4. Fonte Columbo Hermitage

The name Fonte Columbo means Fountain of the Doves. Tradition says St. Francis himself gave it this name. The hermitage is associated with the Gospel, lived and expressed in the Form of Life composed by Francis and passed on to

his followers. It is also referred to as the Franciscan Mount Sinai. Fonte Columbo presents the invitation to allow the Gospel to become the word made flesh in the uniqueness of each individual. It is also associated with the way in which suffering may be embraced in the heart's journey towards healing, wholeness and integration, hence the emphasis on fire and water: spirit and life.

The colour of the Fonte Columbo hermitage is green, which in iconography is symbolic of life, growth and hope, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life". (Jn.6: 63.)

References to Franciscan Readings connected to Fonte Columbo can be found in the series Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (abbreviated FA: ED) 11 131, 171, 189, 196-97, 226, 276, 410-1, 416, 558, 583, 634, 711; 111 197, 232, 313, 359, 363, 416.

3.2.5 La Verna Hermitage

The hermitage of La Verna is associated with the culmination of the identification of St. Francis with his Crucified and Risen Lord. La Verna is often referred to as The Franciscan Calvary. Here St. Francis received the sacred Stigmata, the wounds of Christ in his hands, feet and side. This is almost the point of completion in the transformation process in St. Francis. Reflecting on this experience of St. Francis, Sister Frances Teresa (1993: 96,101,104) makes the startling statement:

The experience of Francis is only a visual expression of something to which we are all called, for every Christian is invited to be an incarnation of the incarnation, every Christian effects a physical expression of Christ in the world.....we slowly realize that God has great hopes and desires for us. Most overturning of all is the realisation that, even though we are invited into a sharing of the divine, we are never summoned out of our original humanity.

Indeed, the image of Christ as love in pain, spells out for us that our suffering is greatly honoured by God, that our pain is received with reverence and taken right into the being of the Godhead and somehow made a part of that divine life.

In our journey to God, every aspect of human living will be brought into play. One clear message from the stigmata of Francis is that God takes our flesh as seriously as that of Christ.

The colour of the La Verna hermitage is Terracotta. The meaning of the word is baked earth, a reminder of the soil of the heart, burned by the fire of a transforming love. Terracotta, a shade of earthen-red, is also symbolic of the passion of suffering and love that is part of the process in the heart's journey towards healing, wholeness integration and transformation.

La Verna invites us to embrace our humanity in the path of both suffering and joy, held in the embrace of a love that impels us towards contemplation and compassion.

References to Franciscan Readings connected to La Verna can be found in the series Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (abbreviated FA: ED)

1 36, 39, 108, 176-77, 238, 242, 262-63, 404, 409-10, 526; 11 108, 191, 226, 280, 402, 472-73, 498, 530, 593, 618, 630, 634, 701, 709, 711; 111 141, 193, 318, 346, 365, 433- 34, 452-55, 529, 560- 61, 649, 652- 53, 655- 56, 667, 687, 801-03, 866, 874, 855.

- 4.1.** On the left side of the Portiuncula building, the office, kitchen, utility, dining and meeting/community rooms are located. This is where the functional, practical, active, "Martha" side is nurtured in the experience of solitude in fraternal service.

4.1.2. The Kitchen

The opportunity to experience the rhythm of Martha/Mary involves serving one's brothers and sisters by providing for their practical daily needs. Francis (RH.10) reminds us that "taking turns for a time as they have mutually decided" is part of the shared experience of Franciscan solitude in fraternity.

4.1.3 The Dining Room

The fraternal aspect provides the opportunity – if desired – to meet together for an evening meal. This is one interpretation of Francis' words in Verse 4 of his Rule for hermitages: "They may be free from silence, and they may speak and

go to their mothers". Imler (2002:18) states "The main meal will be designated as a time to gather and to speak with one another in an atmosphere of shared wisdom".

4.1.4 The Community Room

Those who enter the experience of Franciscan solitude travel in the company of their sisters and brothers. Francis reminds us that ideally there should be three or four journeying together. This community room makes available a sacred space where in the words of St. Francis (RH.9), those making the journey of the heart may converse with the person designated as a spiritual companion, "when it pleases them to visit with the blessing of the Lord God".

5.1 The Contemplation Space

Linking both the left and right sides of the Portiuncula is the central area, which we call The Contemplation Space. This space is located between the solitary hermitages and the rooms where hermits may meet and share. It is representative of the capability of holding together the apparent active-contemplative tension in a rhythm that embraces being and doing, action and contemplation, in the one act of loving attentiveness.

Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way...keep the life of Martha... and the life of Mary... taking turns for a time as they have mutually decided. (RH.1, 10.)

5.1.2 The Fountain

In the centre of the Contemplation Space, the circular fountain represents the Trinity. In Franciscan theology, especially that developed by St. Bonaventure, the Trinity is described as a circle, which overflows with the fountain-fullness of love and goodness. The water flowing in the fountain also represents the universality of the Gospel in its life-giving and healing mission to all people.

5.1.3 The San Damiano Crucifix

Close to the 'Trinity Fountain' is a large representation of the original San Damiano crucifix that spoke to St. Francis. The Christ of Glory is depicted here as the recipient of the fullness of love and goodness received from the Father

and poured out upon every person and on all creation. Through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we make our way back to the Father.

Because of the richness and depth of this icon as a tool for understanding the journey of the heart, first of all in the life of St. Francis, and then as it might speak to every person's journey of the heart, a separate booklet of explanation is available for prayer and reflection.

The crucifix, painted by Sr. Anthony, a member of our own Congregation, is dedicated to the memory of our Foundress, Mother Francis and all our deceased sisters who have shared and passed on a spiritual legacy in our Franciscan Minoress *charism*.

5.1.4 Saint Francis

At the end of the Contemplation Space is a statue of St. Francis - our brother, example, and inspiration as we walk in the footsteps of Christ - and a reminder that the human person is the greatest symbol of the self-communicative love and goodness of God.

For Francis, man is a symbol of God. With his whole being he should express and convey the goodness and fullness of the divine. That is why he was created and is the secret of his destiny.
(St. John 1979:194.)

As one who sought first the Kingdom of God and His justice, St. Francis stands facing the Trinity Fountain and the San Damiano Icon and we are reminded of the words of his biographer, Celano:

He [Francis] preached to the Sultan
The triune God and the one Saviour of all, Jesus Christ,
With such great firmness,
Such strength of soul,
And such fervour of spirit
That the words of the gospel appeared
To be truly fulfilled in him. (LMj.IX: 8.)

In the Contemplation Space with the symbols which enfold us there, we are invited to enter the embrace of the Trinity, sharing in the fullness of life and love, through the power of the Holy Spirit in and through the person of Jesus Christ. St. Francis appears there as:

An outstanding demonstration of something, which we tend to doubt, namely that God loves the person we already are and has no desire to turn us into stereotyped saints to adorn his heavenly niches. The saints God likes and seeks are robust human beings in all our original quirkiness. To become holy is to become our dearest selves...(Teresa Francis 1993: 110.)

And let us give St. Francis the final word:

I have done what was mine to do, may Christ teach you what is yours to do. (2C 214)

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