Mortification on Parade: Penitential Processions in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France

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In 1978 many newspapers in the West displayed photographs of devout Shiites flagellating themselves in the streets of Tehran, a sure sign, so journalists concluded, of the hopelessly mediaeval cast of the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic regime. Historians of Christianity knew better. Public flagellation, while always controversial and often condemned, has been an episodic feature in the repertoire of Christian ritual at least since the thirteenth century, and has persisted among groups of laymen in Spain and New Mexico well into recent times.¹ Perhaps the best known outbreak of this form of public penance occurred in the fourteenth century when, in the wake of the Black Death, bands of roving Flagellants, as they were called, paraded their gruesome spectacle throughout western and central Europe, proclaiming the virtues of a second baptism through blood. Though extraordinarily successful in attracting followers, the Flagellants met with resistance from the clergy, not the least because of their extreme anti-clericalism. They were banned by Pope Clement VI in 1349 and condemned by Jean Gerson in 1417.² But these interdictions did not put an end to mass exercises in public penance in Europe. In northern Italy and in Provence ritual flagellation never quite died; channeled into confraternities of *disciplinati*, it remained an important aspect of processional display throughout the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation.³ In the sixteenth century, this organized form of penitential ceremony swept much of France, where it flourished amidst the turmoil of the religious wars, becoming a highly effective means of stimulating Catholic militancy and fervor.

In this article I will focus on the penitential companies which sprang up in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, primarily in the Midi and also in such northern cities as Rouen and Paris. Their role in the Wars of Religion, their relationship to the Catholic League, their social

composition, are issues I will treat only in passing, not because they are unimportant but because my purpose, in keeping with the theme of this volume, is to explain the ritual aspect of public penitential devotion.⁴ Throughout, my goal is simply to comprehend behavior and practices which to us might seem bizarre, by placing them, in so far as it is possible, in their proper social and religious contexts.

The first context is that of the penitential displays themselves: the public procession. Although most penitents took the discipline of the whip in the seclusion of their confraternity's chapel, many, at least in the sixteenth century, flagellated themselves in public, in an orderly, perambulating spectacle that wound its way through the narrow, twisting streets of the early modern town or city. The procession was hardly unique to the penitents, nor of course was it new to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ceremonial life. In one form or another it is as old as Christianity, with roots in pagan fertility and mortuary rites. Every mediaeval town and city had its calendar of regular processions, such as those staged on Corpus Christi Day or during Rogations. The year was frequently punctuated with extraordinary processions, when clergymen, officials and guildsmen assembled in an *entrée solennelle* to welcome a visiting dignitary and momentarily transformed their city into a theatre of homage, or, in times of danger, when people spontaneously gathered in procession, bearing among them some cherished holy relic, a statue of the Virgin, or the Host itself, and brandished it before the threatening fire flood or even the unseen plague.⁵ In short, processions both large and small, planned and spontaneous, city-wide and parish-bound were as much a part of the rhythm of mediaeval and early modern urban life as festivals and Carnival. Indeed, they were daily occurrences, for every corpse carried to its resting place was borne in procession.

The procession was not newly discovered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it was put to new uses and used with increasing frequency. From recent work, especially by historians of Renaissance Italy, we have learned much about the plasticity of urban ceremony.⁶ France in the period of the Wars of Religion and Counter-Reformation was also the scene of ceremonial experimentation, some *sauvage* and popular, some orchestrated by Church officials, all involving the laity in increasing numbers.

Processions were the order of the day. When Catholics, outraged at the iconoclastic indecencies committed by Huguenots, undertook to purify their communities of the pollution of heresy, they staged massive processional displays, ceremonies which in many places were celebrated annually right down to the Revolution.⁷ When the Protestant challenge forced Catholic authorities to rethink the nature of the social hierarchy and the boundaries of their communities, some towns responded

by enlarging their processional ranks to include the poor or children.⁸ When militant Leaguers launched their campaign of terror against the Catholic politiqués, they did so with armed processions, which sometimes culminated in insurrection.⁹ When peasants, caught up in the religious fervor and fear of the times, journeyed *en masse* to rural shrines and urban cathedrals, their pilgrimages took the form of so-called 'white processions,' known as such for the white shrouds they wore and the candles they carried to light the way during their nocturnal outings.¹⁰ When Henri III, hoping to shake his image as a decadent, debauched, and confessionally irresolute monarch, sponsored several lay confraternities at court, the public was treated to an elaborate – many thought ridiculous as well as hypocritical – processional display of his courtiers and mignons turned penitents.¹¹ When the Counter-Reformation Church wanted to promote new devotions, such as those of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin or of the Rosary, the procession was the instrument of propaganda *par excellence*.¹² And when penitential piety became fashionable among a portion of the faithful, it was with processions, marked by the chanting of hymns, the marchers' bare-feet, their hooded shrouds, and whips hanging from their waists or applied to their backs, that this form of piety was made known to the community of on-lookers.

The procession was a great instrument for the Counter-Reformation, displaying a Church militant, unified, numerous and purified. It was also the Counter-Reformation's legacy to the Old Regime city, for when the battle against Protestantism had subsided and the Tridentine Church emerged triumphant, processions continued to dominate urban ceremonial life, becoming a symbolic expression of what Lewis Mumford has called the Baroque city.¹³ A stream of processions, those staged by religious orders, parishes, and the many lay confraternities old and new, served to mark urban space with signs of the sacred, for even the smallest processional display cast a spell of reverence over a city street or plaza, forcing by-standers to pause, doff their hats, genuflect and cross themselves as they acknowledged the passing cross, statue, relic or the Host itself.¹⁴ As for larger processions, in particular the general procession which assembled a community's civil and religious bodies, these were displays which entirely transformed the cityscape, creating an atmosphere of *fête* in their wake.

Indeed, during the seventeenth century the general procession had no rival in size and *éclat* from other forms of ceremony and celebration, either sacred or profane, except perhaps in the festivities of Carnival. And here the rivalry was real, for the religious and civil procession increasingly monopolized urban ceremonial life, and this challenged popular spectacles and celebrations. It might be said that in the seventeenth century the general procession, like other forms of official culture,

aimed to tame or transform the Rabelaisian city.

Like other confraternities, the penitential companies staged frequent processions; on their patron saint's day, on various holy days, or on the occasion of a member's funeral, when the penitents themselves would form his burial cortège. Two days, in particular, were marked by penitential processions, Holy Thursday and Corpus Christi Day. In most places these were times when a community's confraternities and other religious bodies would pour into the streets, when processions of crosses, banners, relics and statues of saints combined in a religious spectacle which created a fair-like atmosphere, attracting droves of peasant tourists from the countryside. Even amidst such spectacle the penitents stood out, not the least because of their distinctive garb.

Unlike other confraternities, the penitential companies provided their members with a costume which disguised them completely and separated them from others. Whenever the penitents appeared in public they were garbed in a hooded shroud, a sack covering the head, body, and limbs, belted with a cord and furnished with slited openings for the eyes and mouth. There was some variation from town to town in the penitential *cagoule*: in some places their hood was a capuchin; in others it towered nearly a meter into the air, coming to a fine point at the top. And in cities and towns where penitential piety flourished there were most always several companies, each distinguished by the colour of its robes – white, black, grey, blue, red and purple – which also provided the name by which they were popularly known: thus, Black Penitents, Blue Penitents, etc. The hooded shroud was something of a novelty in religious displays; in the public's eyes it elevated these pious lay persons to a position rivaling that of the clergy. And it also disturbed people. As Etienne Molinier, an early seventeenth-century apologist for the penitents (and a Black Penitent himself), acknowledged, it was indeed the hooded veil, or *cagoule*, which most irked onlookers, exciting 'more than anything else their indignation and hatred and . . . the slander of their insulting tongues.'¹⁵

How are we to understand this distinctive costume and its meaning for penitents and public alike? Molinier himself provides us with the penitent's own understanding of the *cagoule*: it is merely a sign of humility. Things of value, he argues, should be hidden from the eyes of the world, just as 'nature hides that which is most precious to her – pearls at the bottom of the sea, diamonds in the depths of the rocks, gold in the bowels of the earth.'¹⁶ Like ladies 'of quality' who only appear in public with their faces discreetly covered, or various creatures – porcupines, snakes, tortoises and oysters – who shield themselves when attacked, the penitent also seeks to protect himself from the gaze of the world and the distractions of his surroundings, so that he might march down the 'middle of the

street as if in his oratory, in a crowd as if on retreat.¹⁷ There is a hint, here, of the premium on isolation, so important for such sixteenth-century spiritualists as Loyola and Theresa of Avila. There was indeed an aspect of all processional ceremony which brought Church ritual into the streets, turning the Cathedrals inside out, so to speak, presenting to the faithful a Christianity that was both primitive and militant. One can easily see how the hooded shroud served to ensure a measure of concentration in public spaces for the penitent, thus preserving the solemnity of the occasion.

There are, however, other ways of thinking about the *cagoule*. We must recall that masking and facial disguise, though unusual in religious ceremony, were commonplace in more profane pastimes. At the French court in the sixteenth century the wearing of masks and the application of make-up to the face on the part of men and women alike were the rage.¹⁸ And the masque entertainment, though more popular in Jacobean England, also had its followers in French aristocratic circles. In popular rites, most notably during Carnival, masking had always been an essential part of the amusement, for it rendered participants anonymous and thus allowed them to share in the playfulness and licence of the moment.¹⁹ Clergymen and officials condemned such practices, whether at court or in the streets, and it is clear that one source of the Church's suspicion of the penitents was the latter's costume, which disguised and hid and thereby seemed to strike a note of kinship with secular forms of popular theatre.²⁰ Surely there was an element of play or pretend in the penitential costume, but the difference between the penitential hood and the courtier's mask or the reveller's disguise cannot be denied. The hood merely hid the face, it did not embellish it; and if it disguised the wearer it did so by effacing the human, personal regard.

Indeed, the penitents' *cagoule* represented a two-fold absence or negation. In one sense, it negated the wearer's social position and occupation, for it hid from view his normal attire. Now there was nothing haphazard or arbitrary about what one wore in the old regime. Precise sartorial distinctions were an explicit part of the code of the social hierarchy; and since mediaeval times sumptuary laws had presumed to dictate what people could and could not wear. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the courts issued additional sumptuary laws governing dress; those from the Parlement of Toulouse, for example, promulgated in the 1570's, decried 'the confusion of ranks of this disordered society whose diverse classes indiscriminantly wear robes of silk, *pourpoints*, and coats of different colours . . .'²¹ This 'confusion of ranks' was, in fact, the heart of the matter; questions of dress and appearance were merely its symptoms. Such a confusion was endemic to the sixteenth century, when inflation, new sources of wealth, the sale of offices, and

the opportunities for advancement created by war, both foreign and domestic, were continually priming the pumps of social mobility, and rearranging the social order.²² Nothing alarmed magistrates and moralists more than 'disorder,' yet disorder abounded, and precisely during those ceremonies when a display of order and decorum was paramount. Processions often remained stalled for hours in endless *disputes de préséance* or even degenerated into fisticuffs as competing corps jostled for rank.²³ Such spectacles were not only an embarrassment for authorities, and moments of comic relief to on-lookers, but also served notice to the public that the ruling hierarchy was in disarray.

To this problem, one of both comportment and shifting values, the penitents offered a solution. Their shroud and veil served as a uniform that disguised distinctions of rank and dress and allowed members to assemble as equals, while projecting to onlookers the image of a crusading gathering of a spiritual elite. Even more than with other confraternities, such a leveling strategy was particularly important for the penitents for their ranks nearly always included a generous mix of commoners, officers and noblemen.

Lest one conclude that the penitents were engaged in the sociology of conflict resolution, it should be stressed that the penitential veil was a religious symbol, a mark of humility as Molinier noted, and a sign of the penitents' rejection of the 'vanities' which, they were convinced, obsessed and preoccupied their contemporaries. Not only did they hide the emblems and trappings of their secular concerns and stations, they rejected them as well. This was part and parcel of their overall regime of mortification, for central to its purpose was to make one dead to the temptations of the world. But the hooded shroud also suggests that the penitents expressed symbolically what Pascal, for one, articulated in high moral and literary tones in the mid-seventeenth century, when he cast scorn on the essential falsehood that permeated society and criticized the charade, bombast and theatricality of public life.²⁴ Like the Jansenists, to whom they were historically and socially linked, and like Savonarola and the Puritans as well, they took aim at the paganism and impiety rampant in society, especially in elite circles, by attacking contemporary modes of the presentation of the self. The Franciscan, Christophe de Cheffontaines, a defender of Henri III's decision in 1583 to convert the court to penitential piety, saw the shroud in precisely these terms, that is, as symbolic of a salutary reform of the royal household and a rejection of the splendor and decadence of the Renaissance court. Penitential piety, he declared, promised to efface 'the great excess of accoutrements which was the ruin of France and the cause of an infinity of evils and sins.'²⁵

The place of the penitents and their uniform in this cultural counter-revolution is clearly illustrated by two contrasting royal entries at

Toulouse in the early seventeenth century. In 1621 Louis XIII and his entourage entered the capital of Languedoc in the manner of a Renaissance court: as the royal party, horsemen and carriages paraded through the city their route was bedecked with Roman *arc de triomphe*s, Latin devices, pagan statues and emblems, garlands, tapestries, fireworks and the like. The next year Louis returned to Toulouse, and his welcome could not have been more different. Gone were the arches, emblems and other marks of homage. Instead, penitential piety dominated the day. The king and his courtiers enrolled in the Company of Blue Penitents, and Louis himself donned the *cagoule* and marched bare-foot in the procession. The explanation for this processional transformation is linked to the fact that in 1622 the royal armies were having difficulty subduing the Huguenot stronghold of Montauban. The occasion thus called for a solemn expiatory ceremony rather than the triumph and frivolity of a Renaissance display. Penitential piety fit the bill, and the king's donning of the hooded shroud was emblematic of the court's rejection of Renaissance theatricality, at least in the face of renewed confessional strife.²⁶

The penitential shroud was thus a symbolic covering which could be employed to counter other symbolic displays considered decadent and inappropriate. These could include pagan pageants and court masques, outward expressions of the Renaissance, as well as aspects of popular culture. I have already suggested that the *cagoule* be seen in relationship to popular forms of masking, as an implicit critique of mischievous disguise. And in general, a concern for the excesses of popular pastimes figured prominently in the penitents' view of the world. They looked with suspicion upon profane festivities, especially those which took place during Carnival; these were 'disorders' and 'scandals' which smacked of idolatry, an opprobrium that was echoed by reformers in both confessional camps. But the penitential companies were virtually alone among lay confraternities in taking an active role in this campaign against popular culture. The Blue Penitents of Tulle, for example, specifically forbade members, upon pain of expulsion, from participating in 'mascarades'.²⁷ The White Penitents of Montpellier chose to confront revelers directly in a procession held on Mardi Gras in which the Holy Sacrament was paraded defiantly through the same streets which served as the stage for the popular *fête*.²⁸ Secluded in their chapel, the Whites of Toulouse maintained a round-the-clock vigil during Mardi Gras. The Company's twenty-first regulation reads:

and so as to be prepared to flee the orgies that take place that day, as well as other seductions and vanities of the world, they will all be assembled together and listen to the exhortations made after the meals in the chapel

by a learned preacher . . . Those who do not attend . . . will be punished.²⁹

It seems clear that the hooded shroud played a role in the penitents' campaign against Mardi Gras and other public 'seductions and vanities.' In one sense, it offered an alternative form of costuming to the masks and disguises worn by Carnival revelers, and in this manner could attract people to penitential piety. Is it cynical to see the penitents' robes as a recruiting device designed to appeal to the popular imagination? If so, Etienne Molinier was himself guilty of cynicism, for he endorsed the use of spectacle and admitted the penitent's role in 'attracting the people with the public exposition of the Holy Sacrament, with preaching, with psalm-singing, with music, with the *éclat* of beautiful ornaments, and with lures of devotion.' Surely the hooded shroud ranked among these 'lures.'³⁰ Peter Breugel the elder, a more neutral observer than Molinier, perceived the symmetry between the Carnival mask and the penitential *cagoule*; in his 'The Combat of Carnival and Lent' the revelers, disguised in a Carnavalesque manner, confront the partisans of Lent, among whom are two hooded penitents, their backs bowed from the whip.

The hooded shroud can be seen in yet another, though related sense. Recently, several historians have turned to anthropologist Mary Douglas' theory on the connection between the body and the social order as a guide to decoding public ceremony in the early modern period.³¹ How the body is treated and displayed and how people behave in public should reflect or predict their conception of the social order. Douglas' theory allows us to speculate on the deeper meaning of the penitents' hooded shroud as a possible indication of their view of society and its proper order. Above all, the penitential garb cuts off its wearer from his surroundings; it creates a virtually complete separation between him and the world and thus raises a boundary. I would suggest that the penitents valued social boundaries in two respects: first, as an outgrowth of their belief that they embodied a spiritual elite, a group of men (and some women) who had embraced a devotional regime of mortification and who were thus distinguished by a superior and more intense commitment to the Christian life. Second, the hooded shroud was both a boundary and a barrier; it separated and protected the penitent from a world that was seen as threatening, filled with temptations and abounding in impieties. Though the penitents only donned their *cagoules* for their processions, masses and meetings, their uniform nevertheless bespoke a fear of the world and a desire to be protected from its pollution.

The hooded shroud negated the penitent's social identity by hiding his normal attire and thus disguising his standing in society. It also symbolized the penitent's withdrawal from the profane world of popular *fête*. But this act of negation struck at another level, for in the penitential

ceremony the public was presented with figures that were not only unidentifiable but rendered virtually inhuman as well. That onlookers were terrified by the appearance of these hooded creatures is clear. It is reported that the first procession of the Blue Penitents of Toulouse in 1575 caused children to cry out in terror and flee its approach.³² There is something immediately and universally troubling about a shrouded face (something wonderfully conveyed in Hawthorne's short story, 'The Minister's Veil'). But in early modern times the hooded head and shroud suggested rather precise associations. In short, they meant bad news. Contrary to conventional depictions, executioners were not hooded, but their victims sometimes were, or at least wore a blind-fold and were dressed in a simple long shirt resembling a shroud.³³ The penitents themselves sometimes played a role in the executions as an escort for the victim as he made his way to the stake or scaffold.³⁴ Another type of hood was worn by the plague doctor or healer, who utilized it as a protective bonnet against the 'infected' air. As ministers to the sick, whose treatments hurt or even killed more than they cured, these enshrouded *médecines de la peste* were hardly a welcome sight to the besieged populace. A hooded figure was a funereal character – the 'plourants' depicted on the Burgundian tombs were thus attired.³⁵ In Provence testators frequently asked for hooded penitents to accompany their bodies during their funeral processions;³⁶ and in general, the hooded gown was considered a mourning robe.³⁷ One of the penitential companies established under the protection of Henri III in the 1580s was called, in fact, the *Confrérie de la Mort*.³⁸ Death himself, the grinning, beckoning skeleton so prevelant in late mediaeval imagery, was sometimes garbed in a hooded robe.

Here we approach the exact meaning of the robed *cagoule*: it was indeed a garment of death. 'To die under the frock' was an expression for the practice, popular in mediaeval and early modern times, of people taking a monastic vow during their last days in order to earn the right to be buried in a monk's cowl.³⁹ The penitents' robes were also their burial shrouds. The bare-foot penitents were figuratively marching to their graves; at least they were dressed for the occasion. Their regime of mortification produced the desired result in rather precise terms, for they presented to the public a mournful gathering of men manifestly prepared for death.

We must be careful of literal interpretations. Despite the extreme nature of the ceremony, there was an element of restraint to the penitents' regime, at least compared to the practices of the mediaeval Flagellants who, by all accounts, were quite uninhibited to the point of frenzy and even death in their bloody displays. The penitent did not abandon his family and community to take up a life of perpetual mortification, as the Flagellants had

done; rather, he remained among his townsmen, a member of his guild or corporation, only to return from time to time to put on the shroud and take up the whip. The penitent surely possessed a heightened awareness of the proximity of death, but his ritual encounters with it were episodic and circumscribed. In this sense we can understand the penitential ceremony as a rite of death and rebirth, a rite of passage, as Van Gennep himself noted for flagellation rituals in general.⁴⁰ In donning the hooded robe the penitents separated themselves from the world of the living by creating an ambience of death.

The ultimate separation, death, was only one of the messages conveyed by the hooded shroud; all, however, were linked to the idea of separation. The penitent was set apart from the rest of society by his garb, a uniform which disguised and hid him, abolished marks of his rank and status, removed him from courtly and aristocratic amusements, protected and isolated him from the profane world of popular *fête*, and enshrouded him in preparation for death. Although thus separated, the penitent did not withdraw from the world. He and his *confrères* remained active and public in their devotions, for their mission was to demonstrate the virtues and efficacy of penance through a regime of mortification or 'discipline.'

Here again, Etienne Molinier, the Black Penitent of Toulouse, is our guide. Molinier states that the purpose of discipline is to destroy the two kinds of love which pervert our love for God, that of the body and that for the world. By attacking the body directly the penitent acts efficiently and decisively because 'love of the world will not find life in those hearts where love of the flesh has died.'⁴¹ Molinier acknowledges the usefulness towards this end of simple privations ('Fasts, vigils and other things that affect the body') but his partiality for the discipline of the whip is evident. 'The insolence of the flesh can only be surmounted by rudeness,' he counsels, meaning flagellation:

. . . the flesh, which is the irrational part of man is of the nature of beasts who do not wish to follow the direction of their master except by force and rudeness; and he who fears to bridle and limit it will be reduced by a shameful necessity to follow, instead of ruling it, like a horse who masters he who dares not constrain it . . . ⁴²

Molinier, of course, is echoing the ancient motif which makes horse and rider analogous to the passions and reason. But ultimately, his argument is quite straight-forward: discipline, like Shakespeare's 'degree', is simply in the order of all things, particularly things social and domestic. 'If Scripture often orders fathers to employ discipline to reprimand the insolence of their children, and masters that of their servants,' he asks,

'why will a man not have the same power over himself as over others, to chastise by flagellation the contumaciousness and rebellion of his own flesh?'⁴³

Two reasons for the legitimacy of flagellation can be delineated from Molinier's apologia. The first is what we would recognize as self-improvement. The penitent, who voluntarily adopts a regime of discipline, gains mastery over himself and his body. He also develops his character and personality. 'Discipline is a rough plant and bitter in the juice of its stem but delicious in the savoring of its fruits,' writes Molinier. What are those fruits? 'None other than erudition and the instruction of the mind, for in collecting oneself thus, one is filled with wisdom and prudence once the flesh is reprimanded.'⁴⁴ The penitent is not only pious, he is superior – superior to the many who mock him, superior to those too weak to abide the regime of mortification, superior also to the run-of-the-mill Catholics who must have penance imposed upon them by their confessors. Heroism was central to the Counter-Reformation; witness the saints and martyrs, missionaries and lay *dévots*, who were exalted as exemplars of heightened devotion in an age of confessional strife and religious reform. The designation of a pious elite was also the tendency in the Protestant camp; witness Calvin's elect or the Puritan saints. In the scores of towns and cities where they flourished, the penitential confraternities too were responsible for assembling an elite, perhaps not of heroes and martyrs, but comprised nevertheless of men and women, high-born and common, who had chosen a path of rigorous devotion and singular commitment. They constituted a new elite, not a social elite based upon rank and privilege, but a moral or spiritual elite defined by the embrace of penitence as their central devotion. The regime of discipline was the school of this elite, the penitential procession its stage.⁴⁵

The second reason Molinier offers for the justification of flagellation is more properly religious in nature. He cites St. Paul, who preached of 'the shedding of blood' and God's rod of discipline in Hebrews 12, and notes the example of holy men and saints from King David to Francis Xavier who had assumed the burden of self-mortification.⁴⁴⁶ The theme of heroism and religious elitism is sounded again, but here its aim is other-worldly. To take up the whip, to punish the flesh, was a daily form of martyrdom; and just as martyrs are assured swift salvation, so the penitent, who punishes his body for the love of God, will find ultimate grace. The penitent will be met with scorn and mockery. 'In the eyes of the world made effeminate by its pleasures, [he] will appear to be possessed by a hatred for himself and seem to act as an executioner of his own life,' concedes Molinier, 'but though it be said that he is lost for the earth and damned in the opinion of men, he will grow in God's esteem.'⁴⁷

The public was well-aware of the penitents' predilection for mortification,

for they wore their whips hanging from their belts and often flagellated themselves as they marched. Their rites were not mere pantomines; the whip was applied with force and blood did flow. Thomas Platter, an itinerant Swiss medical student, watched with fascination a procession in Marseille in 1597 of the 'battus,' as he mistakenly called the penitents, and noted the holes in the backs of their robes for the application of the whip. He also remarked on their bloody flesh and the tears that stood in their eyes.⁴⁸ An article from the statutes of the White Penitents of Avignon advised members to repair to the 'infirmierie' in the company's chapel after their public procession.⁴⁹ The White Penitents of Toulouse, like other penitential companies, allowed for both public and private flagellation; for the latter their statutes stipulate that 'in order for aid to be given rapidly to the disciplined, two brethren will put themselves at their disposition to care for them if necessary.'⁵⁰ Clearly there were grounds for concern, and clearly the penitents took their devotions seriously. Those of Puy 'disciplined' themselves at every station of their long procession on Holy Thursday.⁵¹ Even some *confrères* of Henri III's penitential company used the whip during their nocturnal pilgrimage to Vincennes in 1583.⁵² Public displays of penance became rare in the seventeenth century, when most penitential companies reserved their mortifications for the privacy of their chapel.⁵³ In Provence, however, the spectacle was still mounted. An account of the procession staged in Nice in 1671 reads: 'At the head marched the noble ladies of the city, bare-foot, dressed in cloth sacks, crowned with thorns and cords around their necks; several lashed their flesh . . . The White Penitents, chained at the feet like slaves, flagellated themselves until blood flowed, while sobbing [. . . A preacher] had his arms and legs bound with bloody crowns of thorns which hardly allowed him to walk.'⁵⁴ In 1714 penitential piety was still strong in Nice. Here is the scene:

There were nearly 300 inhabitants dressed in sacks, their feet in chains and carrying large crosses to which their arms were tied with cords . . . They tore at their shoulders with the discipline of metal barbs and beat their breasts . . . the air reverberated with their cries and sighs, the pavement was covered with blood.⁵⁵

Given such scenes, the earnestness of the penitents cannot be doubted. Yet it does not detract from the seriousness of their public exercises to realize that these were forms of theatre – religious theatre, but theatre nevertheless. Edmund Auger, a Jesuit preacher instrumental in the founding of the penitential companies in France, and himself quite keen on harnessing theatrical forms for stimulating piety, once referred to a penitential procession as a 'mascarade.'⁵⁶ The hooded shrouds were

uniforms, signs of confessional militancy, but they were also costumes, for a magistrate would slip into his *cagoule* to assume the role of penitent, only to return later to his luxurious ermine robes, which, wrote Pascal, made him and his colleagues look like furry cats.

As actors in a new form of religious theatre, what were the penitents performing? On one level, of course, their rites were performances of public penance. In this sense the penitential procession took on the aura of a propaganda ceremony in which stalwart Catholics acted out their faith in penance – one of the ‘works’ whose efficacy the Reformers had denied. But the penitents were doing more than offering a riposte to the Protestants’ denial of a central sacrament. They were also recalling early mediaeval and even primitive rites of penance, when transgressors were called to atone for their sins through physical ordeals performed in public. The Reformers did not have a monopoly on the past. Catholics too could look to a by-gone era of Christianity, a time when Church devotion was reputedly both simple and more sincere, and offer this as a model for the present. The so-called primitive church was not exclusively that of the Reformers; it was also the ideal of such humanists as Erasmus and Thomas More. In this context it seems relevant to point out that the latter was given to a regime of mortification, including the wearing of a hair-shirt and self-flagellation.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the penitents were not alone or even unique in embracing what were monastic standards of penance. As Thomas Tentler has shown, church authorities on the eve of the Reformation were increasingly emphasizing the sacrament of penance and imposing harsh discipline, including mortification, on the laity.⁵⁹ A renewed interest in the Psalms, shared by Catholics and Protestants alike, also fostered penitential practices⁶⁰ and inspired many Catholic poets, such as La Ceppède, Antoine Favre and Philippe Desportes, to write penitential verses modeled on them.⁶¹ We find an emphasis on severe penance in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, probably the most influential devotional manual in the sixteenth century. ‘The third kind of penance,’ he counsels, ‘is to chastise the body, that is, to inflict sensible pain on it. This is done by wearing hairshirts, cords, or iron chains on the body, or by scourging or wounding oneself, and by other kinds of austerities.’⁶² In short, the penitents were among the many forces that promoted spiritual renewal through physical penance.

The fact is, however, that the penitents thought of their rituals as more than acts of penance. Although Molinier cites a long list of biblical and saintly models, his and the penitents’ true model was a much more elevated figure: Christ himself. The penitents were Christocentric in their devotion, and they made this orientation apparent in their rituals: several companies, for example, annually recreated scenes from the life

of Jesus, such as the washing of His disciples' feet.⁶³ The penitents strove to emulate the suffering of Christ – He who was scourged by Pilate's whip before the crucifixion. Simple penance was not their goal; rather, their processions were ritual re-enactments of the central sacrifice in Christian history. And their processional stage props – the raw wooden crosses they often carried, the crowns of thorns they sometimes wore – lent these performances an air of verisimilitude.

For many penitential companies the Passion was an explicit part of their public ceremony. The Grey Penitents of Toulouse, for example, made Christ's route to Calvary the theme of their annual procession on Holy Thursday. As the Company paraded through the city, each stop at a religious house of a parish church became another station of the cross. Toulouse became Jerusalem. The procession began at the Grey Penitents' own chapel: this was the Mount of Olives. It proceeded to the Church of Notre Dame du Taur: there Jesus was betrayed by Judas and seized by the Roman soldiers. The Cathedral of Saint Etienne served as the stage of the flagellation. And there, as at other stops on the processional route, the penitents recited prayers: 'Come my soul and see your Saviour and your Mate [*Epoux*] bound in all nakedness to a column, beaten by the whip . . . Consider his tender and delicate body completely torn, the blood which flows from all its parts . . . ' The procession continued its course, accompanied by more prayers: the crowning with thorns at the Augustines, *Ecce Homo* at the *Maison Professe*, the burden of the cross at the Carmes, Christ's crucifixion at the Church of the Dalbade, His death at the Cordeliers. Finally, the Grey returned to their chapel, there to meditate on the lancing of Christ's side: 'Approach, my soul, this wonderful wound, and suck the blood that flows hence; it is the door of eternal life: enter there to find the loving heart of Jesus and never depart. It is there that we should live and die.'⁶⁴

The penitents were not unique in bringing drama of a religious nature into the streets. Many craft and lay confraternities not only bore images of their patron saints in their processions; sometimes confreres would dress-up as saints and occasionally they would present *tableaux vivants* of religious episodes.⁶⁵ Nor were the penitents the first to present a drama featuring the flagellation of Christ. The Passion, in fact, was frequently the subject of religious theatre, especially of the mystery plays popular in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. While other scenes from the Bible and the lives of the saints were staged in these outdoor pageants, the most dramatic and compelling was the Passion play. Here indeed was a living Christ, who was mocked, crowned with thorns, whipped and hung on the cross. Thus was communicated to ordinary people, many of whom infrequently communed or attended Mass, the primordial scene of Christianity, Christ's death and resurrection.⁶⁶

The Passion was also a favorite subject of Christian art, and increasingly so in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Emile Mâle has argued that this iconographic interest in the Passion amounted to a revolution in Christian imagery, a revolution he ascribed to the influence of Franciscan piety. In the thirteenth century, he notes, religious art projected 'goodness, sweetness and love,' but by the fifteenth century had turned 'sombre and tragic,' focusing almost exclusively on the pain of Christ. 'Jesus no longer teaches; he suffers: or rather he seems to offer us his wounds and his blood as his supreme teaching.'⁶⁷ Mâle speculated that Passion iconography owed its form and content to the mystery plays and that artists were in large part simply reconstructing scenes they had observed in the streets, in the religious theatre of the day.⁶⁸ Whether or not Mâle was correct in his theory – and many art historians have contested it⁶³ – the essential point for us is to establish that images of Christ's agony were often before the public's eyes.

For all their apparent novelty, therefore, the penitents were not bringing something entirely new to the realm of Christian theatricality and imagery. In fact, we might take their popularity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as further indication that the sources of Catholic reform were primarily mediaeval in origin, that the piety associated with the Baroque derived from a tradition of Christocentric devotion and Passion meditation extending back in time to St. Francis. The image of the suffering Christ was the hallmark of late mediaeval piety. It was central in Christian iconography; it was a favorite object of meditation, prescribed by Thomas à Kempis in his *Imitation of Christ*, and by other leaders of the *Devotio Moderna*; and it was seen as a model for emulation by such mystics as Catherine of Siena, who yearned to kiss Christ's wounds, or Henry Suso, who nailed a cross to his own flesh. The flagellation, in particular, drew the devotional interest of spiritualists. Johann Tauler meditated upon the scene with such concentration that he had visions of Christ's back as one massive, bloody wound, while Oliver Maillard, a Franciscan preacher of the late fifteenth century, gave his obsession a mathematical turn and computed that Christ received exactly 5,475 lashes of the Roman whip.⁷⁰ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries interest in the flagellation mounted, at least if Christian art is any guide. Not only was the scourging of Jesus portrayed with particular poignancy and gruesomeness, more so than in previous centuries, but the pillar to which he was bound was depicted as being low to the ground, thus making the Christ figure look even more helpless under the blows of the whip.⁷¹

How do the penitents fit into this long tradition of devotion to the Passion and its representation in Christian art and theatre? In one sense they are clearly part of this tradition but in another, I would suggest, they were

a result of a break-down in it. It must be understood that in France the mystery plays, in which the Passion figured so prominently, did not survive long into the sixteenth century. While information on them is hard to come by, it is evident that by mid-century they were under attack. Originally intended as sacred spectacles designed to edify and educate the masses, the mystery plays were more often viewed and staged as popular entertainments in which elements of farce, anti-clericalism and even heresy were not uncommon. In a period of religious conflict such excesses, once tolerated as unavoidable in displays of popular devotion, were increasingly seen as tasteless and threatening. Elites began to withdraw their support for the pageants – the educated in disdain for their vulgarity; humanists in preference for theatre of a more classical and esoteric kind; clergymen for fear that the viewing of biblical tableaux might demystify the Bible. And in the mid-sixteenth century the courts turned their critical attention to the mystery plays. Granting the *Confrérie de la Passion* a monopoly over public theatre in 1548, the *Parlement* of Paris nevertheless forbade the group from performing ‘*mystères sacrés*.’ In 1556 the *Parlement* of Bordeaux banned spectacles concerning ‘the Christian faith, the veneration of the saints and the holy institutions of the Church.’ A decade later, the *Parlement* of Rennes issued an edict against ‘*mystères, farces and moralités*.’⁷² Though Corpus Christi Day and Pentecost continued to be a time of elaborate processional displays, most of the religious drama as embodied in the mystery plays was lost. Rather, the Host regained its place at the centre of the processions, and the laity was asked, in effect, to identify Christ’s sacrifice therein.

The loss of drama in a central religious spectacle in the course of the sixteenth century is what I want to emphasize, and it is in the context of this loss that I propose to place the penitents. Frances Yates has suggested that the processions of the Parisian penitential companies in the 1580s represented an effort to recover the dramatic aspect of devotional display, an aspect that had been absent in previous decades.⁷³ Her suggestion, it seems to me, is worth considering for the penitents in general. Religious theatre had been banished from the streets for the reasons just noted; but in addition the outbreak of the religious wars in the middle of the sixteenth century had disrupted Catholic ritual in general. In many towns and cities throughout France the shock of the Huguenot challenge and the military conflict which ensued created a hiatus or mutation in the tradition of Catholic ceremony: processions were suspended; segments of the population withdrew from public rites; long-standing rituals were militarized as weapons in the confessional struggle.⁷⁴ The dates of the founding of most of the penitential companies, between the decades of the 1570s or 1580s and the first years of the seventeenth century, suggest that they were part of an effort on the part of Catholic authorities – and in

some places the League – to refurbish Catholic ritual. Two criteria had to be met, however, in this refurbishing: religious spectacle had to maintain a tone of high seriousness and orthodox devotion, of which the Passion plays were judged lacking; and they also had to project an image of militancy, in keeping with the Church's task of quelling heresy. The penitents met these criteria, while satisfying the need for a new form of Christian theatre.

All of this is not to suggest that the penitents merely offered a spectacle that, with slight alterations, mirrored other religious displays that had long been a part of Christian public ritual. To be sure, the appearance of flagellant confraternities was not unprecedented; observers were well aware that such groups had flourished in the late middle ages, and though their defenders were at pains to dissociate the penitents from their mediaeval predecessors, the *parenté* between them was beyond denial. Moreover, it is clear that the penitents, like most reform-minded groups, both Catholic and Protestant, were imbued with a spirit of renewal, rather than innovation, and saw themselves returning to, not departing from, earlier traditions. Nevertheless, in the sixteenth century their processions were novel, and struck people as such.

What was the nature and meaning of their novelty? One way to answer this question is to compare their public rituals with those of other confraternities. The purpose of the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament, perhaps the most important lay brotherhood of the Counter-Reformation, was to promote eucharistic devotion. As with the penitents, the public procession was its *modus operandi*. The *confrères* of the Holy Sacrament had the honour of periodically bearing the Host through the streets, a charge they performed with the requisite pomp and solemnity. The Host was confined in a suitably splendid pyx, placed on a viaticum, covered with a canopy supported by four *confrères*, and escorted in procession by the confraternity, as observers knelt and genuflected. This procession was not very different from those of other confraternities, which bore images or statues of their patron saints, banners or relics, except that the Holy Sacrament's image was an abstract one, the Eucharist, and one which spoke to a particular sacramental obligation. The emphasis it placed on the Eucharist, the focus of the post-Tridentine ritual, is the reason why this confraternity, though in most places founded before the sixteenth century, was favored by the Counter-Reformation.⁷⁵

The penitents too championed a sacrament, as we have seen, that of penance; and in this sense both confraternities identified with a sacramental, Tridentine, aspect of Catholicism. But here we must note two differences between them. First, the penitents took up penance at a distance from the clergy, without its role as dispensors of a sacrament. Second, the Holy Sacrament, like other confraternities, merely presented

its devotions in its processions; the penitents, on the other hand, embodied theirs. In other words, while the *confrères* of the Holy Sacrament were pledged to a devotional regime which fixed the adoration of the Host as their central spiritual concern, and while such a regime, along with other confraternal duties (frequent attendance at Mass, frequent confession and communion; and acts of charity), was designed to yield better Christians, there was nothing in the Holy Sacrament's processions which indicated that its *confrères* were any different from other Christians, that they had been transformed in some fashion. The penitents, however, spoke of such transformation with every gesture. Their hooded shroud marked them as different; their regime of discipline marked them as different; they were, as I have suggested, members of a spiritual elite, or at least saw themselves as such. Herein lies the social significance of their Christocentrism, as an expression of their aspiration to spiritual heights. A prayer of the Purple Penitents of Limoges supplicates Christ to consider them 'worthy to be your disciple.'⁷⁶ Indeed, the penitents strove to *attain* Christ. 'To possess this Master,' reads the line of a chant of the Black Penitents of Toulouse, 'the heart need only love Him enough with bloody efforts.'⁷⁷

In most religions there are spiritual currents, often forms of mysticism, that target the few, offering them a singular experience that will transform them and distinguish them from the many. Such a current was surely present in Catholicism and served as an important source for spiritual renewal, from St. Francis and Thomas à Kempis to Bérullian mysticism and the Jansenist *solitaires*. Departing from this high road of Catholicism, recent historians of the Counter-Reformation, hoping to attain a sense of the behaviour and the *mentalité* of ordinary Catholics, have turned their attention to sociological aspects of religious experience in the early modern period.⁷⁸ The penitents serve as a lesson that the aspirations of the handful of mystics and *dévots*, the spiritual elite of the Counter-Reformation, were not totally alien to the experience of the many. The penitents were not unsung St. Johns of the Cross or Mme. Acaries, but they were motivated by a desire, flaunted in their processions, to transcend the norms of Catholic devotion. As much as they were cut-off and distinguished from the masses, however, the penitents nevertheless remained public in their devotions and presented themselves as a model for general emulation. Withdrawal and seclusion amounted to one strategy of the spiritual elite, but not the only one. Many devout Catholics and Protestants alike chose simultaneously to insist upon their superiority, their social and spiritual elitism, while remaining committed to the enterprise of religious reform. Most puritans fell into this category, and, I would suggest, so did the penitents.

This view contrasts with how the penitents are often portrayed. At the

conclusion of his *Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640. An Essay in Historical Psychology*, Robert Mandrou writes of the 'state of hypersensitivity' which seemed to characterize France at the end of the sixteenth century, 'a period of lachrymose and cruel sensibility,' when people were inclined to 'morbid sentimentality,' hatred, violence, and even, he suggests, sexual perversion. Mandrou ties this 'exacerbated, exasperated emotionalism' to the sensibility of the Baroque, citing as evidence the penitents (or the 'flagellants') and other participants in the mass rallies and processions associated with the Holy League.⁷⁹ Mandrou may be correct in his overall characterization of the period as emotionally charged and disposed to violence and other excesses, but were the penitents merely symptoms of this *mentalité*? I have tried to suggest that they maintained rather lofty religious goals for themselves, remained ceremonially apart from the masses, and embodied a sort of spiritual elite – hardly features of the 'mental conjuncture' Mandrou describes. That the penitents evoked strong feelings – fear, remorse, admiration or disgust – cannot be doubted. But this is not to conclude that they were responsible for, or even a part of, the emotional frenzy which supposedly possessed French men and women in a prolonged moment of religious conflict. There was purpose and meaning to the penitential processions, and, given their spiritual elitism and their insistence upon ceremonial order and decorum, it is likely that their 'baroque' displays represented efforts to orchestrate the emotions of the crowd, rather than unleash them in a reckless and dangerous fashion. As with the penitents, so with other rituals and practices, especially those of a religious nature: what appears inchoate, mindless and merely destructive to us, often has great meaning to the people involved.

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Notes

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- 1 On flagellant groups in New Mexico, see Marta Weigle *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood. The Penitentes of the Southwest* (Albuquerque 1976); Lorayne An Horka-Follick, *Los Hermanos Penitentes* (Los Angeles 1969); Alexander M. Darby *The Passionists of the Southwest, or, The Holy Brotherhood* (Pueblo, Colo. 1893); Alic Corbin Henderson *Brothers of Light: The Penitentes of the Southwest* (New York 1937); Dorothy Woodward 'The Penitentes of New Mexico' (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale U. 1935). The last three works are reprinted together in a volume entitled *The Penitentes of New Mexico* (New York 1976). For a full bibliographical treatment of this subject, see Marta Weigle *A Penitente Bibliography* (Albuquerque 1976). On contemporary Spanish flagellant rituals, see William A. Christian Jr *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton 1981) 190-1.

- 2 The literature on the medieval Flagellants is vast. General treatments can be found in Norman Cohn *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York 1970) 127-47; Gordon Leff *Heresy in the Late Middle Ages* 2 vols. (New York 1967) 2:485-93; and G. Székely 'Le Mouvement des Flagellants au 14^e siècle, son caractère et ses causes' in J. Le Goff *Hérésies et société dans l'Europe pré-industrielle, 11^e-18^e siècles* (Paris 1968) 229-43. See also the collection of articles in *Il Movimento dei Disciplinati nel Centenario dal suo inizio* (Perugia 1962).
- 3 On Italian flagellants, see Ronald F. E. Weissman *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York 1982); Gilles Meerseman 'Etudes sur les anciennes confréries Dominicaines' *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* vols. 20-4 (1949-1953); and Brian Pullan *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice. The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971) part I. The early Provençal confraternities are discussed by Maurice Agulho *Pénitents et Francs-Maçons de l'Ancienne Provence* (Paris 1968) 87-9; and Andrew Barnes 'De Poenitentibus Civitas Massaliae. The Counter-Reformation, Religious Change, and the Confraternity of Penitents of Marseille' (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton U. 1983) 27-9.
- 4 On the role of the penitential companies in the Wars of Religion, see Barnes 'Poenitentibus Civitas Massaliae' *passim*; Philip Benedict 'The Catholic Response to Protestantism, Church Activity and Popular Piety in Rouen, 1560-1600' in *Religion and the People, 800-1700* James Obelkevich ed (Chapel Hill 1979) 175-8; Marguerite Pecquet 'La Compagnie des Pénitents Blancs de Toulouse' *Annales du Midi* 84 (1972) 213-24; Robert A. Schneider 'Urban Sociability in the Old Regime: Religion and Culture in Early Modern Toulouse' (Ph.D. dissertation, U. of Michigan 1982) chapter VI; Robert Harding 'The Mobilization of Confraternities against the Reformation' *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 9 (1980) 85-107.
- 5 On processions in France see Natalie Z. Davis 'The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon' *Past and Present* no. 90 (1981) 40-70; Yves-Marie Bercé *Fête et Révolte: des mentalités populaires du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris 1976) 102-3, 132-3; Marc Venard 'Itinéraires de processions dans la ville d'Avignon' *Ethnologie française* 7 (1977) 55-62; Daniel Fabre 'La Fête Eclatée' *L'Arc* 65 (1976) 66-75; V.E. Graham and W.M. Johnson *The Royal Tour of France by Charles IX and Catherine de Medici. Festivals and Entries* (Toronto 1979); A.N. Galpern *The Religions of the People in Sixteenth-Century Champagne* (Cambridge, Mass. 1976) 16-17, 47-8, 85-7, 158-9; Denis Crouzet 'Recherches sur les processions blanches - 1583-1584' *Histoire, Economique et Sociale* (1983) 511-63. In England, several types of processions are analyzed by Charles Pythian-Adams 'Ceremony and the Citizen: the Communal year at Coventry, 1450-1550' in Peter Clark and Paul Slack eds *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500-1700* (London 1972) and Mervyn James 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body in Late Medieval English Town' *Past and Present* no. 98 (1983) 3-29.
- 6 Edward Muir *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton 1981); Richard Trexler *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York 1980); Weissman *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence*.
- 7 Natalie Z. Davis *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford 1976) chapter 6; Denis Richet 'Aspects socio-culturels des conflits religieux à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle' *Annales:ESC* 32 (1971) 764-89; Bercé *Fête et Révolte* 96.
- 8 Philip Benedict *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge 1982) 182; Crouzet 'Recherches sur les processions blanches' 514.
- 9 Benedict *Rouen during the Religious Wars* 179; C. Devic and J. Vaisette *Histoire générale de Languedoc* 13 vols. (Toulouse 1889-93) 11: 793; Schneider 'Urban Sociability in the Old Regime' chapter 3; Pierre Deyon 'Sur certaines formes de la propagande religieuse au XVI^e siècle' *Annales:EXC* 36 (1981) 16-25.
- 10 Crouzet 'Recherches sur les processions blanches.'
- 11 *Mémoires-Journaux de Pierre de L'Estoile*, G. Brunet et al eds (11 vols. (Paris 1874-1883) 2:113-21.
- 12 Crouzet 'Recherches sur les processions blanches' 512. For an example, see Jean Lestrade 'La

- première procession de l'Assomption à Toulouse (15 Août, 1638)' *Revue historique de Toulouse* (1914) 297-302.
- 13 Lewis Mumford *The City in History* (New York 1981) 280.
 - 14 On the theme of the sacred and the early modern city, see especially N.Z. Davis 'The Sacred and The Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon.'
 - 15 'Le voile qui couvre le visage des ces troupes, quands elles paroissent en public, excite plus que toute autre chose l'indignation de leurs haineux et attire la médisance de leurs langues injurieuses.' Etienne Molinier *Des Confrairies Pénitents, ou il est traicté de leur Institutions, Reigles et Exercices* (Toulouse 1625) 480.
 - 16 'la nature cache ce qu'elle a de plus précieux, les perles au fonds de la mère, les diamans au creux des roches, l'or dans les entrailles de la terre.' Molinier *Des Confrairies Pénitents* 486.
 - 17 'au milieu de la rue come dans son oratoire et parmy la foule comme dans la retraite' Molinier 490.
 - 18 W.L. Wiley *The Gentleman of Renaissance France* (Cambridge, Mass. 1954) 80; Jacques Ruppert *Le Costume* 5 vols. (Paris 1930-32) 2:6; *Mémoires-Journaux de Pierre de L'Estoile* 2:2, 22-3; Joycelene G. Russell *The Field of Cloth of Gold. Men and Manners in 1520* (London 1969) 164-8, 170.
 - 19 Bercé *Fête et Révolte* 63; N.Z. Davis *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (New York 1978) 202.
 - 20 Burke *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* 216; Jean Savaron *Traitté contre les masques* (Paris 1608). For Montaigne's criticism of masking see his 'De la Presumption' in *Oeuvres complètes* Thibaudet and Rat eds (Paris 1962) 614-46.
 - 21 M.E. Cibiel 'Les arrêts somptuaires du Parlement de Toulouse' *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences, Inscription et Belles-Lettres* 7th series, 2 (1878) 248-66. See also Henri Baudrillart *Histoire du Luxe*, 3 vols. (Paris 1880) 3:441-2. Le Roy Ladurie suggests that the increased popularity of silk was a result of a decrease in the price owing to the spread of mulberry cultivation in the countryside. (*The Peasants of Languedoc* J. Day trans [Urbana 1974] 71-3.)
 - 22 Roland Mousnier *La Vénalité des offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII* (Paris 1971 ed) 43; Jean-Pierre Labatut *Les Ducs et Pairs de France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1972) 57-61; Marc Venard *Bourgeois et paysans au XVII^e siècle* (Paris 1957) 21-31; J. Estèbe 'La Bourgeoisie marchande et la Terre à Toulouse au XVI^e siècle, 1519-1560' *Annales du Midi* 76 (1964) 457-67.
 - 23 For examples see Bercé *Fête et Révolte* 60-1.
 - 24 M. Pecquet 'Des Compagnies de Pénitents à la Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement' *XVII^e Siècle* 69 (1965): 1-38.
 - 25 'grand excès d'accoustremens qui gastoit le France et estoit cause d'une infinité de maux et de pechez.' Christophe de Cheffontaines *Apologie de la confrérie des pénitents, erigée et instituée en la ville de Paris, par le très chrestien Roy de France et de Pollogne Henry troisiemes de son nom* (Paris 1583) 31-2, cited by Crouzet 'Recherches sur les Procession Blanches' 532.
 - 26 Alard *Entrée due Roy à Tolose* (Tolose 1622); P.E. Ousset 'La Confrérie des Pénitents Bleus de Toulouse' *Revue historique de Toulouse* 9 (1924) 217.
 - 27 Rene Fage *Les confréries de pénitents de Tulle* (Tulle, 1905) 24.
 - 28 J. Delalain *Les pénitents de Montpellier* (Montpellier 1874) 35.
 - 29 'Afin d'être plus en état de fuir les orgies qui sont faites le jour-là et les autres seductions et vanités du monde, ils seront tous la ensemble reassemblés, et ecouteront une exhortation faite apres le repas, dans la chapelle par un savant predicateur, ceux qui n'y viendraient pas seront punis.' Pecquet 'La Compagnie des Pénitents Blancs de Toulouse' 221.
 - 30 '... les attirant par l'exposition publique du saint Sacrement, par le Prédication, par la Psalmodie, par la Musique, par l'esclat des beaux ornements, par l'appareil et célébrité du

- service, et par les autres allèchements de la dévotion.' Molinier 326.
- 31 Mary Douglas *Natural Symbols* (London 1972), especially 93-112. For the application of Douglas' theory in early modern context see N.Z. Davis 'The Sacred and The Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon' and Mervyn James 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town.'
 - 32 Jean-François Thouron *Histoire de la Royale Compagnie des Messieurs les Pénitents Bleus de Toulouse* (Toulouse 1688) 10-13.
 - 33 J. Huizinga *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Garden City 1954) 44, 72. Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr 'Maniera and the Mannaia: Decorum and Decapitation in the Sixteenth Century' in Franklin W. Robinson and Stephen G. Nichols Jr *The Meaning of Mannerism* (Hanover 1972) 67-193.
 - 34 L. Guibert *Les confréries de Pénitents en France et notamment dans le diocèse de Limoges* (Limoges 1874) 129.
 - 35 Huizinga *The Waning of the Middle Ages* 257; Emile Mâle *L'Art Religieux de la Fin du Moyen Age en France* (Paris 1949) 417.
 - 36 Michele Vovelle *Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris 1973) 497.
 - 37 Philippe Aries *The Hour of Our Death* Helen Weaver trans (New York 1982) 165.
 - 38 Frances Yates *French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London 1947) 175 n6. On the connection between the hooded *cagoule* and death see Grouzet 'Recherches sur les processions blanches.'
 - 39 Louis Gougaud *Dévotions et Pratiques Ascétiques du Moyen Age* (Paris 1925) 129-42.
 - 40 Arnold Van Gennep *The Rites of Passage* Vizedome and Caffee trans (Chicago 1960) 174-5. Two historian of ritual flagellation, Marta Weigle and Ronald Weissman, have applied van Gennep's theory, as elaborated upon by the anthropologists Max Glucksman and Victor Turner, to flagellant brotherhoods in twentieth-century New Mexico and Renaissance Florence. Both adopt Turner's concept of 'communitas' – a liminal experience in which social distinctions and conflicts are dissolved and eschewed in order to produce sentiments of harmony and unity – and both see the flagellants as functioning to ensure the peacefulness and stability of society by creating a context where, from time to time, a sense of community is affirmed. (See Weigle *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood* 187 and Weissman *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* 52-8) This analysis seems convincing to me, especially as detailed by Weissman in his excellent monograph. However, in this essay I am trying to emphasize the appearances and public ceremonies of the penitents, rather than the experiences they created for their members or their function in society at large.
 - 41 Molinier *Des Confrairies Pénitents* 238.
 - 42 'l'insolence de sa chair qui ne peut estre surmonté que par la rudesse . . . la chair, qui est la partie irraisonnable de l'homme est de la nature des bestes, qui ne veulent suivre la direction de leur maistre que par force et par rudesse et celui qui craint de la brider et la serrer, il se reduit a une honteuse necessité de la suivre, au lieu de la regler, comme un cheval qui maitrise celui qui n'oze le contraindre.' Molinier 250.
 - 43 'si l'Ecriture commande souvent aux Pères d'employer cette discipline pour reprimer l'insolence de leur enfans, et aux maistres celle de leurs serviteurs, pourquoy n'aura l'homme le même pouvoir sur soy-même que sur autrui, pour chastier par la flagellation le contumace et rebellion de sa chair.' Molinier 266. Molinier's reasoning suggests a link between corporal punishment and penitential discipline, a link which should be considered in light of the fact that punitive whipping became widespread only in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century. The whip was commonly applied to the backs of children, poor criminals and servants, and often in public. One notable case of collective public flogging, in fact, relates to the penitents. Pierre de L'Estoile reports that in 1583 the king had nearly 200 pages and lackeys – that is, courtiers' sons and their valets – whipped because they had mocked and imitated the procession of the royal penitential company (*Mémoires-Journaux de Pierre de L'Estoile* 2:112). On the

- corporal punishment of children in this period, see Phillip Aries *Centuries of Childhood* R. Baldick trans (New York 1962) 241-68. Erasmus also testifies to the harsh disciplinary regime at his *collège*, a regime which included frequent whippings. See J. Huizanga *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation* (New York 1957) 22.
- 44 'La discipline est une plante aspre, et rude au suc de sa tige, mais delicieuse en la saveur de ses fruits, dont le premier est celuy que son nom promet, qui n'est autre que l'érudition, et l'instruction de l'esprit, lequel se recollegeant, se remplit de sagesse et de prudence quand la chair est reprimée.' Molinier 283-4.
- 45 It would be a mistake, therefore, to see in the practice of discipline a device for social control. The penitents' attack on the body was not directed toward others but rather turned on themselves. The point that such repression was first practiced by the elite in early modern Europe is made by Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality I: An Introduction* Robert Hurley trans (New York 1980) 120 and *passim*.
- 46 Molinier *Des Confrairies Pénitents* 246.
- 47 'celuy qui reprimant, macerant, affligeant sa chair, semble exercer une haine contre soy-même et se rendre le bourreau de sa propre vie devant les yeux du mond effeminé par les délices, se garde sagement pour le Ciel, lors qu'on diroit qu'il se perd pour la terre, et perissant en l'opinion des hommes, il croist en l'estime de Dieu . . . ' Molinier 256-7.
- 48 *Felix et Thomas Platter à Montpellier, 1552-1559 - 1595-1599* (Montpellier 1892) 311; Robert Mandrou *Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640. An Essay in Historical Psychology* R.E. Hallmark trans (New York 1977) 252.
- 49 Guibert *Les confréries de Pénitents en France* 40-1.
- 50 Pecquet 'La Compagnie des Pénitents Blancs de Toulouse.' 220.
- 51 Guibert *Les confréries de Pénitents en France* 75.
- 52 *Mémoires-Journaux de Pierre de L'Etoile* 2:113.
- 53 In most places public penance, except for crimes which offended the entire community, was banned by the clergy by the seventeenth century. See, for example, *Les Anciens Statutz Synodaux de la Cité et Diocèse de Toulouse* (Toulouse 1597) 83.
- 54 'En tête, marchaient les dames nobles de la ville, pieds nus, vetues de toile de sac couronnées d'épines et la corde au cou; quelques-unes se labouraient les chairs à coups de lanières . . . Les pénitents blancs, des fers aux pieds comme des esclaves, se flagellaient au sang en poussant de profonds sanglots . . . le Père Poggi lui-meme . . . les bras et les jambes serrés dans de sanglantes couronnes d'épines qui leur permettaient à peine de marcher.' Maurice Bordes 'Contribution à l'Etude des Confréries de Pénitents à Nice aux XVII^e-XVIII^e Siècles' *Annales du Midi* 90 (1978) 386.
- 55 'Il y avait pres de 300 habitants vêtus de sacs, les fers aux pieds et portant des grosses croix auxquelles leurs bras étaient liés avec des cordes . . . Ils se déchiraient les épaules avec des disciplines aux pointes de fers et se frappaient la poitrine en criant . . . L'air retentissaient de cris et de gémissements, les pavés étaient pleins de sang.' Bordes 386.
- 56 E. Auger *Metanoecologie. Sur le suget de L'Archicongregation des Pénitent de l'Annonciation de Notre Dame et de toutes telles autres dévotieuses assemblées, en l'Eglise sainte* (Paris 1584) 189; cited by Frances Yates 'Dramatic Religious Procession in Paris in the Late Sixteenth Century' *Annales Musicologiques, Moyen Age et Renaissance* 2 (1954) 239.
- 57 See number 82 of Pascal's *Pensées*.
- 58 Fritz and Frank Manuel *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass. 1979) 141-4.
- 59 Thomas Tentler *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton 1977) 320.
- 60 Michel Jeanneret *Poésie et Traditions Biblique au XVI^e Siècle* (Paris 1969).
- 61 *Metamorphoses Spirituelle. Anthologie de la Poésie Religieuses Française, 1570-1630 M.* Jeanneret and T. Cave eds (Paris 1972) 10, 82-8.

- 62 *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* Louis J. Puhl ed and trans (Westminster 1953) 38.
- 63 Fage *Les confréries de Pénitents de Tulle* 21; Barnes, 'Poenitentibus Civitas Massaliae' 1-36.
- 64 'Venez mon âme et voyez vostre Sauveur et vostre Espoux attache tout nud à une colomne, accablé des coups de fouets . . . considerez son corps tendre et délicat tout déchiré: le sang qui en decoule de toutes parts. Approchons, mon âme, de cette playe adorable et succons ce sang qui en découle; elle est la porte de la vie éternelle: entrons y pour aller trouver le coeur amoureux de Jesus et n'en sortons jamais. C'est là où il nous faut vivre et mourir.' *Prières pour les Processions Annuelles et autres Exercices de la dévote Confrérie des Pénitents Gris de Toulouse sous l'invocation de S. Jean-Baptiste, avec le Sommaire des Indulgences, les Statuts et la Forme de reception des confrères* (Toulouse 1679) 1-36.
- 65 Yates 'Dramatic Religious Processions' 240-1; Emile Mâle *L'art religieux de la fin du moyen age en France* (Paris 1908) 172-3.
- 66 On the mystery plays in France see Petit de Julleville *Les Mystères* 2 vols. (Paris 1888); Raymond Lebègue *La Tragédie Religieuse en France, Les Débuts* (Paris 1929) 3-67; A.N. Galpern *The Religions of the People in Sixteenth-Century Champagne* 77-81. The plays in England are analyzed by V.A. Kolve *The Play called Corpus Christi* (Stanford 1966).
- 67 Mâle *L'art religieux de la fin du moyen age* 85-6.
- 68 Mâle 35-84.
- 69 F.P. Pickering *Literature and Art in the Middle Ages* (Coral Gables 1970) 161-7; Huizanga *The Waning of the Middle Ages* 145; James Marrow 'Circumdederunt me canes multi: Christ's Tormenters in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance' *Art Bulletin* 59 (June 1977) 167-81.
- 70 Mâle *L'art religieux de la fin du moyen age* 90.
- 71 Mâle *L'art religieux de la fin du XVI^e siècle, du XVII^e siècle, et du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris 1951) 262-7.
- 72 Lebègue *La Tragédie Religieuse en France* 48-65.
- 73 Yates 'Dramatic Religious Processions in Sixteenth-Century Paris' 245.
- 74 Crouzet 'Recherches sur les Procession Blanches' 515-16.
- 75 On the Holy Sacrament see M.H. Froeschlé-Chopard *La Religion Populaire en Provence Orientale au XVII^e Siècle* (Paris 1980) 158-68.
- 76 Guibert *Les confréries de Pénitents en France* 103.
- 77 'Pour posséder ce maistre il faut que ce coeur l'aime assez par des sanglants travaux' *Paraphrase du Motet chanté par la musique de Messieurs les Pénitents Noirs à la Procession de l'Octave du Saint Sacrement le 4 juin 1682* (Toulouse 1682) 11.
- 78 All historians of the 'sociology' of the Counter-Reformation are indebted to the work of Gabriel Le Bras *Etudes de sociologie religieuse* 2 vols. (Paris 1955-6). Subsequent notable studies in this field include Jeanne Ferte *La vie religieuse dans les campagnes parisiennes, 1622-1695* (Paris 1964); Jean-Francois Soulet *Traditions et réformes religieuses dans les Pyrénées centrales aux XVII^e siècle* (Paris 1974); Robert Sauzet *Les visities pastorales dans le diocèse de Chartres pendant la première moitié du XVII^e siècle* (Rome 1975); and Philip T. Hoffman 'Church and Community: The Parish Priests and the Counter Reformation in the Diocese of Lyon, 1500-1789' (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University 1979).
- 79 Mandrou *Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640. An Essay on Historial Psychology* 252-3.