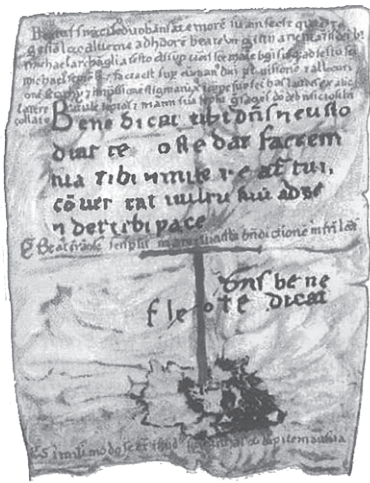


Bringing out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations . . .

The Prophetic Heart (1994) — Joseph P. Chinnici OFM



The TAU

From the time of Ezekiel the sign of the TAU, marked on the forehead of those turning to God in faith and repentance has long represented faithfulness and wholehearted love. It was used for healing and victory.

Pope Innocent III, evoked the sign of the TAU from Ezekiel when opening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1216 calling for the renewal of the Church, “Mercy will be granted to those to bear the TAU, a mark of a life of penance and renewal in Christ.”

And so Francis, who was present at the Council, wanted to sign himself with the TAU, and his brothers along with him. The TAU became the sign of the little Band’s mission: the preaching of faith and repentance (Rule of 1221:23).

Thomas of Celano, writing in 1252, notes, “The TAU symbol had, above all others, his preference. Francis used it as a signature for his letters, and he painted a drawing of it on the walls of all the cells.” One of these paintings, believed to be created by Francis, is found in the little chapel of Mary Magdalen at Fonte Columbo in the Rieti Valley where Francis wrote his Rule.

Another very precious document, housed in the Basilica of St. Francis, is Francis’ own handwritten blessing for Brother Leo — signed with the TAU.

Above all else, the TAU meant mission for Francis: a mission to proclaim the Goodness of God by a wholehearted following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ because of whom all life is sacred.



“We - all together - and each one of us - are the trustees of our Charism, its responsible bearers, accountable to God and the ecclesial community for it.”

Key Concepts of the Third Order Regular Rule

PROLOGUE

The words of St. Francis to his followers:
Epistola ad fideles: Recensio prior.



- This Volterra Letter points to the origins of our form of Franciscan gospel life in the ancient Order of Penance.
- It clearly reflects Francis’ BIBLICAL understanding of METANOIA.
- In striking imagery (SPOUSE, BROTHER, MOTHER) illustrating the action of the spirit in realizing Christian conversion, Francis places in bold relief the focal point of Christian and Franciscan penance.
- Chapter One of this letter is also the Prologue of the 1978 Rule for the Secular Franciscan Order.

CHAPTER I: OUR IDENTITY

The brothers and sisters of this order wish to live this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility. #2

- This Chapter summarizes the whole Rule and specifically identifies who we are in the Church.
- Article One expresses the unity of the whole Franciscan movement. Using Francis’ words to the religious of his day (Ep. Fid. II, 36-40) it also presents us with Vatican II’s teaching on religious life.
- Article Two notes the centrality of METANOIA in TOR spirituality and as such is the Charism Statement of the Order.

- Our fidelity to the Church, the Order, the Congregation and one another is one of obedience and reverence. Chapter One helps us grasp the all-embracing nature of OBEDIENCE in the thought of Francis.

CHAPTER II: ACCEPTANCE INTO THIS LIFE

Led by God, let them begin a life of penance conscious that all of us must be continuously and totally converted. #6

- Articles 4, 5, and 6 follow Francis' own conversion journey. For him, divesting self of all that could hinder total conversion is requisite for the journey in Christ's footprints.
- This Chapter presents the principle found in Francis' writings of mutual responsibility for our gospel life and for one another. In Article 6 it gives the first explicit references to the essentially formative character of Franciscan living of *ONGOING CONVERSION*.
- Articles 7 and 8 present a summary of Francis' understanding of continuous conversion through gospel living: *POSITIVE SURRENDER of one's whole being TO GOD AND GOD'S SERVICE*. (The Shema)
- Article 7 "to be received into obedience": instead of commitment to an enclosed life, one is bound to a familial relationship with others equally committed to total conversion and the observance of the holy gospel.



CHAPTER III. THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

From the depths of their inner life, let them love, honor, adore, serve, praise, bless and glorify our most high and eternal God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. #9

- This Chapter summarizes key elements of prayer in the Franciscan tradition: To give God CEASELESS praise and thanksgiving for all God has done and does in creation and in our re-creation in Jesus Christ.
- Francis calls his followers to prayer with a decidedly *contemplative* dimension.
- Praying the Liturgy of the Hours is a form of intercessory prayer for the Church and the world, as well as a sign of fidelity to the Church.
- Participation in the Eucharist should become the byword of renewed and reformed Eucharistic theology and practice among us.

- The respect for the holy Name and the sacred character of the words of the Gospels is, for Francis, a sign of CONVERSION and our readiness to put the God's Word into effect.
- Article 13 gives the SECOND meaning of POENITENTIA in the writings of Francis - the confession of one's sins. Our penitence must be honest and without affectation. Simplicity and humility are its signs. Conversion of heart is the FIRST meaning of METANOIA for Francis.
- This Chapter defines prayer as a fundamental value in our form of life. It is the marrow of our Franciscan spirituality.

CHAPTER IV: THE LIFE OF CHASTITY FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM.

Professing chastity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12), they are to care for the things of the Lord and "they seek nothing else except to follow the will of God and to please God (1 Co 7:32). #15

- This chapter reflects the influence of Vatican II's theology of religious life.
- The Franciscan life of gospel penance becomes a reality when we no longer place any obstacle to God's work within us.
- Francis always speaks of prayer with adoration in conjunction with purity of heart "to pray unceasingly with a heart free from self-interest." 1223:10



- Article 15 emphasizes that the love of neighbor is the norm for determining our grasp of the vow of chastity and whether in fact we are "giving birth to the Lord by our loving deeds." (The Shema)
- In article 17 special reference is made to MARY, LADY AND QUEEN. We honor her who "made the Lord of Majesty our brother." 2C 198; who opened her heart in total gift of faith to the action of the Holy Spirit.
- Profound devotion to Our Lady, Mother and Queen, is the logical consequence of the preeminence of Jesus Christ in the spirituality of Francis and of all Franciscans. L.M. 9:3; 2:8: 3:1; 2C 83.

CHAPTER V: THE WAY TO SERVE AND WORK

Let the sisters and brothers be gentle, peaceful, and unassuming, mild, and humble, speaking respectfully to all in accord with their vocation. #20



- The fundamental value of MINORITY is emphasized in this chapter. METANOIA and Christ's announcement of the nearness of the reign of God (Mk. 1:15) are inextricably linked because childlikeness, MINORITY, is the one thing necessary for entrance into the Kingdom. (Mt. 18:13; Mk 10:16; Lk 18:17; Jn 3)
- This Chapter considers those attitudes which Francis projects as necessary for us to be *MINORES practically*. The constant tradition of the Third Order and the continuing current teaching of the Church calls us to this value. The spirit of the Beatitudes is present here.
- Seeking to be little and humble we should never desire to possess material goods, authority or power. Because of the choice to be poor, we serve and work with a spirit of prayerfulness, conscientiousness and fidelity.
- Francis saw the ability to serve and work as a grace given by God. Through service and work we can give back to God all that was given to us.

CHAPTER VI: THE LIFE OF POVERTY

The truly poor in spirit, following the example of the Lord, live in this world as pilgrims and strangers (cf. Jn 2:5). They neither appropriate nor defend anything as their own. #22

- Poverty is both personal and social. It means not appropriating anything to ourselves, neither our wills or talents or any tasks. Evangelical poverty calls us to be totally open only to the riches of God.
- Self-emptying is the process involved in Franciscan poverty. It implies total dependence on Providence and is safeguarded by identification with the poor and "doing deeds befitting our conversion."
- MARY is mentioned in this chapter deliberately because it is in the context of Christ's saving activity that Franciscan Marian devotion is centered.
- As a community and as individuals we present ourselves as servants whom no one need fear because we seek to serve and not to dominate.

CHAPTER VII: FRATERNAL LOVE

Let them manifest their love for each other in deeds (cf. 1 Jn 3:18). With confidence let them make known their needs to one another so that each can find and offer to the other that which is necessary. #23



*"... as there was one faith
in them, so was there one spirit
in them, one will, one love."
Titans I*

- By the inspiration and power of the Spirit, our Gospel life means being ever open to a deeper relationship with God in Christ in whose footsteps we walk. Our loving service to each other and all creatures manifest this relationship.
- Our CONVERSION, PRAYER, POVERTY, and MINORITY are enfolded in the “fraternity” where we experience the Lord giving us the power to love one another.
- We are made aware of the need for personal and shared responsibility for our life together realistically expressed in RECONCILIATION.
- The practical expression of METANOIA is in forgiving and in asking pardon. This is the imperative of our Franciscan life.

CHAPTER VIII: THE OBEDIENCE OF LOVE

Let them neither dominate nor seek power over one another, but let them willingly serve and obey “one another with the mutual love which comes from the spirit” (cf. Ga 5:13). This is the true and holy obedience of Our Lord Jesus Christ. #25

- The fundamental attitude necessary for genuine conversion is OBEDIENCE and the framework of evangelical obedience is the brotherhood or sisterhood.
- Francis’ form of life is characterized by obedience as much as by poverty because it is based on METANOIA, the inspiration of the Lord given to each member to live the Gospel completely.
- Conforming our wills to God’s plan for humanity’s redemption involves witness and ministry for the sake of true justice. Our mission is to be messengers of God’s reconciliation.
- The Chapter, as an explicit structure enabling us repeatedly to renew our living and ministry, is described as the first vehicle for rendering obedience.

- While the limits of obedience are defined, Franciscan tradition clearly affirms the role of the minister whose personal authority is meant to be of service to unity, reconciliation, and fidelity within the fraternity.
- The relationship of poverty to obedience is clearly presented as not appropriating or possessing any office, ministry, assignment, or service.

CHAPTER IX: APOSTOLIC LIFE

In every place and circumstance let them acknowledge that all good belongs to the most high God, Ruler of all things. Let them always give thanks to the one from Whom all good proceeds. #31



- This chapter is a culmination of all that precedes it. The particular emphasis of this section is the description of the quality of mission, of service that flows from the inner dynamism of the Spirit.
- Since METANOIA is our basic charism, its relationship to apostolic action capsuled in the Great Commandment should be seen as the cornerstone of our Franciscan apostolic spirit. Francis projects the *Activity of Service* as an extension of prayer.
- Our works of Charity represent our shared charism because no matter now our constitutions specify our ministries, the works of Charity *ANNOUNCE GOD'S PEACE*. Basic to all our energies for peace is personal presence and a spirituality manifested by deeds.
- This Chapter, and article 30 in particular is our expression of the TOR response to the Church's call: "to be present in the heart of the world. . . action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a CONSTITUTIVE dimension of the preaching of the Gospel." This call to witness to justice in the world is central to the text concerning our apostolic lives.
SYNOD OF BISHOPS, 1971, JUSTICE IN THE WORLD
- The use of Legend of the Three Companions #58 in article 30 calls for an integration of personal presence and spirituality with external deeds. This is indeed a valuable criteria for discerning our apostolic effectiveness.
- In article 31, poverty is expressed in the humility and simplicity that refers all good to God. Our tasks of prayer, working, and serving others are not personal riches or talents that we may appropriate to ourselves. By our CONSTANT THANKFULNESS we witness to this very important aspect of our Third Order apostolic spirituality.

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