

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.



Presentation of the Text of The Rule

given in Rome, 1982, for the vote of over 190 Superiors General representing the entire world of over 180,000 Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular

By Thaddeus Horgan S.A, one of seven members of the international “Work Group.”

I. Genesis of the Text

FEW CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN AS OPEN AND AWARE OF THE EVENT OF JESUS CHRIST IN THEIR LIVES AS FRANCIS OF ASSISI.

Francis’ radical fidelity to the Gospel made this consciousness a *continuous* experience. This awareness is part of the Franciscan charism. It is not surprising that the followers of Francis became particularly conscious of the Second Vatican Council’s call to all religious. For Franciscans the Council primarily was a renewing event in the life of Christ’s body, the Church. Through the Council the Holy Spirit called all the faithful to renewal. For Franciscans *this* was a modern call to live anew their ancient vocation to

“REBUILD MY CHURCH”

The majority of Franciscan religious looked to their communities’ constitutions to formulate their expression of renewal for our present era. But many also looked to the Rule of 1927.

A RULE is a statement of shared identity, fundamental values and basic guidelines for religious living.

We had the Church’s criteria (*Ecclesiae Sanctae* #15) to guide us. After Vatican II the 1927 Rule seemed to be a “timed” document. Somehow it seemed unable to state our identity or shared values *inspiringly*. Further it did not reflect the Church’s *new directives* nor project our Gospel life in a biblical fashion or in a style that reflected clearly the spirit of our founder. For some also it did not address the signs of the times.

Prompted by the Church’s guidelines, serious study of the Rule began. In many places, the purpose of this study was “**trying to recapture again the spirit of the founder.**” Many communities rediscovered the “Franciscanism” of their founders. Other congregations were concerned with

- the origin of our shared charism;
- Francis’ **influence** on it and its *lived historic expression* in the Third Order Congregations; Still others concentrated on
- Francis’ inspiration as this is set forth in his authenticated writings,

Because the Franciscan movement is eight hundred years old. It is only natural that different approaches to the same purpose were taken. Histories, experiences, perceptions are different. Yet, it seems safe to say, these have been all part of God’s providence enriching the Franciscan movement in our day.

Ecclesiae Sanctae

III, #15 – Pope Paul VI

#15. The norms and spirit to which adaptation and renewal must correspond should be gathered not only from the “Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* but also from other documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially from chapters 5 & 6 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*.

The differing approaches to the matter of the “**spirit of the founder**” resulted in several documents:

1. “The French Document” placed emphasis on poverty, minority and the bonds that unite TOR congregations to Orders of Friars Minors.
 2. “The Madrid Document” with its emphasis on biblical “*metanoia*” and Francis’ conversion experiences and how these speak to the meaning of the vows, fraternal life and ministry.
 3. “The Dutch Rule” which emphasized Vatican II’s renewal program and related to Franciscan living.
- * It even resulted in a renewed appreciation for the Rule of 1927 which, despite its language, does contain the values *historically* associated with the Third Order Regular.

At first these four paths did not lead to a shared experience of renewal. They caused tension! But by 1980 the Work Group of the International Franciscan Commission was able to come together, to learn from these documents and to be enriched by them and by those who worked so hard to produce them. None of the values presented in these documents contradicted the others. *Rather, they represent various aspects of the same inspiration which the Lord gave to St. Francis.* All were important, even essential, to the renewal process. **The Brussels Text** which you have received, we believe, is faithful to Francis’ inspiration, to the historic expressions of that inspiration in Third Order Regular Congregations existing throughout the world today, and to its more recent antecedents: The Rule of 1927, the “French Document,” and the “Madrid Statement” and the “Dutch Rule”. II.



II. An Inspirational Text

FRANCIS wanted his followers to be authentic GOSPEL PEOPLE.

What comes from the hearts of people makes them what they are. (cf. Mt. 15, 10-20). Inspired by the Lord, Francis proposed to us, his followers, basic Gospel values and attitudes so that we could be truly disciples and radical followers of Jesus Christ.

Only when we have truly assimilated and made these values and attitudes part of ourselves can it be said that we will “do the Gospel literally.”

The Brussels Text’s intent is singular: to state Francis’ vision of our life of total and continuous conversion to God and neighbor through the literal living of the Gospel.

In doing this it presents us with those with those basic values and attitudes which Francis indicated are necessary for radical evangelical living. The text challenges us to grasp these values to experience their dynamism, and to be truly a Gospel people within the Church and for the world.

What the text does not do is set forth regulations or laws. Each congregation has a Constitution for that. According to Church norms, Constitutions are to apply Canon law, the particular charism of individual founders, cultural circumstances, particular customs, and the Rule to each congregation. With reference to the Rule, Constitutions apply its values, attitudes and principles to a particular congregation. *The inspiration of each particular founder is important in this process.*

The difference between what goes into the Rule and Constitutions can be shown by an example. There is *nothing* in this Rule

text **about vows** except the *first* sentence. In fact apart from mentioning chastity *once* in each of the Rules of 1221 and 1223, Francis never quotes it directly again. Francis does speak several times of the evangelical values that chastity could represent — as does this text — in much the same way as Vatican II did.

The Canonical *objectives* of poverty and obedience are material enunciation and doing the legitimate commands of a superior.



When Francis speaks of *poverty and obedience* he does not give us regulations, but the example of the life and deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the incarnation of the attitudes and values that the vows represent. Francis would have us live poverty and obedience maximally.

From the Franciscan perspective the Canonical vows only express the minimum. For the people dedicated to the total surrender self to God through radical fidelity to the Gospel much more needs to be projected. Francis does this by noting the motive and style of the life of the Lord. This is why the **Brussels text** quoting Francis directs us to

“ . . . hold fast to the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Reg. NB 22, s41)

It is a statement of fundamental Gospel living which highlights the supreme and the only Rule — Our Lord Jesus Christ — as Francis was inspired to know, follow and love Him.



THERE IS NO EXCLUSIVE WAY TO LIVE THE GOSPEL. THE MULTIPLICITY OF CONGREGATIONS AND THE ORDERS IN THE CHURCH DEMONSTRATE THIS.

Inspired by the Lord and influenced by the circumstances of his time, Francis pointed out three ways to live the Gospel. Thus, there are three orders. This is why

we say that the Franciscan charism is always inclusive and never exclusive. In the **Third Order Regular** there are several hundred Congregations, some of apostolic life, others contemplative, still others are active-contemplatives. Historically, we all have the one Rule even though we are in masculine and feminine congregations. This attests to the universality of Gospel life even within our tradition of Franciscanism. This is part of our heritage. Each of our congregations has its own proper characteristics (*propria indolis*). Often we are localized and reflect particular cultures. These factors show the richness of our diversity. Yet we are one because we have shared with all these points in mind. This was possible because we followed the Church's directives and **turned to the actual sources of Francis' original inspiration, in his own words.**

Spirit, Inspiration and Charism

are all gifts of the Holy Spirit and not dependent on words. Yet the Spirit moves people to express these gifts in words as all sacred Scripture manifests. The words of Francis, therefore, have a special significance. They capture his experience of Gospel values and attitudes which the Lord inspired him to live. We felt that we could more faithfully project Francis' Gospel way of life if we used his own words in the Rule. . . . Moreover, his words could make our text "classic" not time bound as the present Rule of 1927 is.

If this text is adopted, the *Rule of the Third Order Regular* would be in Francis' words for the **first time in history**. Consultation indicated clearly that this would be welcomed by all of our Brothers and our Sisters.

Using Francis' words could make the text a source for life-long reflection and on-going formation. To appreciate fully the content of the text, a knowledge of Franciscan sources and history is necessary. Just as Scripture should be studied constantly, so should our Rule text. This would help us to embrace our heritage more. The words of Francis, we hope, will make this text not just a document, but an inspiration to share and to hand on to future Franciscans.

III. A Text of Fundamental Values

With an order as large and diverse as our **Third Order Regular** it can be legitimately asked:

How does one determine what the FUNDAMENTAL VALUES of our Franciscan life are?

The Church in General Council has given us the criteria to ascertain these. They are

1. **Return to the spirit of the founder**
2. **Rediscover history because charisms are relived and**
3. **Consult all in the congregation to learn the living convictions about charism**

This in fact is what we did. Much resource work had already been compiled when the Work Group convened because of the studies done in preparing the "French Document," the "Madrid Statement," and the "Dutch Rule." The Work Group itself experienced a gradual coming to one mind through a process of study, prayer, reflection and sharing. Small, significant discoveries were made. For example,

- Those among us who are especially sensitive to our heritage from the Order of Penance came to realize that for Francis, total and continuous conversion meant living the Gospel literally.
- Those of us more oriented to Francis' plan for evangelical life with emphasis on poverty and minority realized that the beginning of all evangelical life is *metanoia*.
- Our study of the writings of Francis and the history and the spirituality of the **Third Order Regular** further led us to the shared conclusion that in all there are four fundamental values involved in our Franciscan Gospel living. These must be interiorized before all the manifestations of Gospel life associated with Franciscan living can be called authentic.

We learned that simplicity, joy, fraternity and the ministries of charity and of justice for peace are all manifestations of more fundamental values. Interestingly our studies were done separately. But our discoveries were shared experiences!

We prepared a copy of the Rule Text (**Reute Draft**) which was circulated to the congregations.

The consultation was the greatest and widest ever undertaken within our Order.

What was truly historic about it were the results. The conclusions were the same as those of the Work Group affirming our findings and reflections.

- **Therefore,**
 - * **From the writings of Francis,**
 - * **from a study of the Third Order Regular history, and**
 - * **from the current existential awareness of our brothers and sisters, we can say that**
 - **METANOIA, PRAYER, POVERTY AND MINORITY are the four FUNDAMENTAL VALUES of our THIRD ORDER REGULAR FRANCISCAN LIFE.**
- The value of this Rule text make it a spiritual document. In the past these values were interpreted and will be in the future. We received an authentic call to renewal. For Franciscans this is the call to the Gospel life that we call "Franciscan." Under Holy Spirit's the guidance **here and now** you have come to affirm or deny authoritatively what we propose as our way of life. This is far more important than merely approving a document or not.

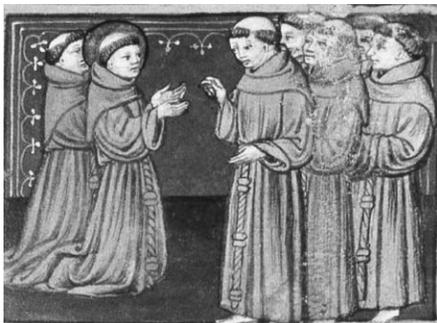
IV. The Document Itself

Nevertheless, a word about the document itself must be said.

As the vehicle you commissioned, you should know that it was developed as you requested: namely, to express briefly, clearly and explicitly **the fundamental values of our Franciscan Gospel.**

We developed a sequence of values that generally follows Francis' **Rule of 1221**. This Rule, along with other writings, **but especially this Rule**, guided us in giving expression to how Francis reflectively unfolded the implications of Gospel life based on the four fundamental values.

This sequence, we feel, helped us to be faithful to Francis' spirit. This Rule will not be confused with those of the *minorite* (OFM, OFM Conv., and OFM Cap.) or *clarissan* (Poor Clares) traditions.



Nevertheless, our *proposed* text still preserves the unity of the Franciscan family by recognizing the inclusiveness of the overall Franciscan charism (literal Gospel living) with its explicit reference (article 3) to mutual communion with all branches of the Franciscan Movement. **No other Franciscan Rule does this.**

And wherever they are, or in whatever situation they are in, they should diligently and fervently show reverence and honor to one another. They should also foster unity and communion with all the members of the Franciscan family. TOR Rule, chapter 1, article 3

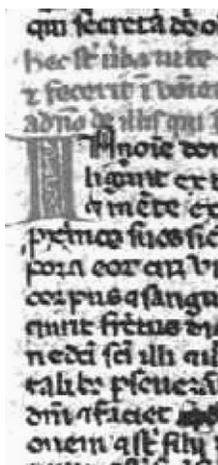
The original **Reute Text** had twelve chapters which after consultation was brought to eight Chapters. We achieved this by combining four chapters into two, eliminating one chapter and, guided us in giving expression choosing shorter texts from Francis words. The eliminated chapter was the one on chastity, since

Francis did not write directly about it. The evangelical values that a chaste life represent are stated in articles 7 and 8 on chastity in the **Reute Text**.

Ruete Text, article 7

When the period of probation is complete, let them be received to obedience as they promised to observe this life and rule always. For according to the holy Gospel no one putting a hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. (Lk 9:62).

Finally, permit me to point out that the proposed text has a **Prologue** and an **Epilogue**.



The **Epilogue** was requested by many congregations. Because it was the conclusion to the **1927 Rule**, it is a link to that document serves to show the continuity of our Order's efforts for its own ongoing renewal.

A **Prologue** is offered to show its historical linkages also. It contains such things as Francis' first **LETTER TO THE BROTHERS OF PENANCE**. (The *Volterra Letter*) * SEE *Tau Series #1*.

As such it points to the *origins* of our form of Franciscan Gospel life in the ancient order of Penance. Moreover, it is a prologue to the already approved 1978 **Rule for the Secular Franciscan Order**. Our modern brothers and sisters in the Secular Franciscan Order share with us the *centrality of conversion* in our way of Gospel living. The Work Group suggests that it be chosen for inclusion by those congregations which find it particularly significant to their own histories and spirit.

We have tried to be faithful to our own mandate, to the Spirit of St Francis and to our brothers and sisters in the Third Order Regular.

We present you with the results of our work. During these days we will share our reflections on this text's content with you. We will pray with you. We will serve you in your service to all our brothers and sisters in our Franciscan congregations.

May the Spirit be with us all so that we may be enlivened by

THE SPIRIT OF FRANCIS!

SOURCE: *History of The Third Order Regular Rule – A Source Book*. ED. Margaret Carney OSF, Suzanne M. Kush CSSF, Jean François Godet-Calogeras. Published by Franciscan Institute Publication, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778. 2008. Pp.242-247.



Thaddeus Horgan, Atonement Friar, Graymoor, NY, was one of the seven member "Work Group" on the TOR Rule, representing the USA with Margaret Carney OSF. Thaddeus, theologian and Franciscan scholar, ministered in Jamaica, Washington, DC, Graymoor, NY and Rome, Italy. His *Turned to the Lord* publication for the Franciscan Federation USA, 1987 was Thaddeus' signature piece faithfully recognizing the total and continuous giving of self; reconciliation as the imperative of Franciscan life, and response to the Love of God in Jesus as the uncomplicated substance of Franciscan spirituality. Thaddeus died at age 54 in 1990.

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ART: *Legenda Maior* di S.Bonaventura: miniature dal codice pergameneo del 1457. *Roma Museo Francescano, inv.nr 1266.*