# Exultation and Exhortation to Penance: A Study of the Form and Content of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful

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"Exultatio et exhortatio de poenitentia. Zu Form und Inhalt der *Epistola ad fideles*" Laurentianum 29 (1988): 564–608

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At present we have two so-called *Letters to the Faithful* among the published writings of St. Francis of Assisi. The one that Kajetan Esser entitled *Epistola ad Fideles I* has only recently been the subject of special attention. Paul Sabatier discovered the little work back in 1900 in a codex at Volterra and soon after published it, and Walter Goetz could find no serious reason to doubt its authenticity. Nevertheless, neither Leonhard Lemmens nor Heinrich Boehmer included it in their critical editions of the writings of St. Francis.

When Kajetan Esser was preparing a new edition of the works of St. Francis, he once more raised the question of the authenticity of the text discovered by Sabatier. It soon became evident that the letter from the

 Under the title Verba vitae et salutis in Collection d'études et de documents sur l'histoire religieuse et littéraire du Moyen Age (Paris, 1900), pp. 132-36. See nn. 83-84

W. Goetz, Die Quellen zur Geschichte des hl. Franz von Assisi (Gotha, 1904),
 pp. 24-25; Leonardus Lemmens, O.F.M., Opuscula s. Patris Francisci Assisiensis,
 Bibl. Franc. Asc. Medii Aevi, I (Quaracchi ad Claras Aquas, 1904, 1949),
 pp. 182-85; H. Boehmer, Analekten zur Geschichte des Franziscus von Assisi (Tübingen-Leipzig, 1904), p. 57.

4. Kajetan Esser, "Ein Vorläufer der Epistola ad fideles' des hl. Franziskus von Assisi (cod. 225 der Biblioteca Guarnacci zu Volterra)," in Coll. Franc. 45 (1975): 5–37. Because of the importance of this study, see also the Italian translation: "Un (Documento) precursore della 'Epistola ad Fideles' di san Francesco d'Assisi," in AnalTOR 12 (1978): 11–47.

<sup>1.</sup> Die Opuscula des hl. Franziskus von Assisi. A new critical edition of the text, by Kajetan Esser. Specilegium Bonaventurianum, XIII (Grottaferrata, 1976), pp. 176-215; Opuscula S. Patris Francisci, re-edited by Kajetan Esser according to the manuscript-codices, Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevii, XII (Grottaferrata, 1978), pp. 107-128. We shall quote from this edition and cite it as Op. Die Schriften des hl. Franziskus von Assisi. Einführung, Übersetzung, Erläuterungen von L. Hardick und E. Grau. Franziskanische Quellenschriften, 1 (Werl in Westphalia, 1984), pp. 53-67, hereafter cited as Die Schriften. The text of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful should be read in this work. To save space we shall not quote it in its entirety in this study.

Volterra Codex (cod. Vo) was quite unusual. It was not just another of the many, often discrepant, versions of the well-know Letter to the Faithful, which now bears the title Second Letter to the Faithful. While the authenticity of the latter is supported by a number of texts, so far no further corroboration has been found for the Volterra document. Esser explains this from the fact that the longer Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful supplanted the shorter First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. This theory supposes of course that the latter from the Guarnacci Library at Volterra antedates Francis's Letter to the Faithful. The paucity of biblical quotations, the rudimentary (sometimes Italianized) Latin and the prevalence of theological concepts without specific application, lead us to conclude that the Volterra Codex is older than the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful. Moreover, parallel passages in the two texts indicate that the Letter to the Faithful is an expanded version of the shorter one discovered in the Volterra Codex.

Esser arrived at this conclusion through a careful analysis and comparison of the two texts, as well as by a look at the history of the period in which they were written. He asks what themes are present in the longer version that are absent in the shorter one. First of all, a profession of faith in the true birth of the Son of God from the womb of the Virgin Mary, and the affirmation of the necessity of confession and Communion for salvation—teachings that clearly set the friars apart from the Cathari and Waldenses. The need to combat the errors of the heretics and uphold orthodox doctrine was the occasion for rewriting and expanding the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful is this revision and was the product of years of experience. It resembles some parts of the Earlier Rule, which in turn retains traces of the primitive statutes and the struggle to overcome the results of some unhappy experiences.

One big problem is whether Francis himself is the author of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. It cannot be settled by the letter itself, which lacks any greeting. Hence the problem of authorship can be solved only indirectly and without absolute certainty. If the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is accepted as the nucleus and the forerunner of the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, in which Francis identifies himself by name, it is possible to conclude from affinity of word and thought that Francis also wrote the first letter. Agreement of language with other of the saint's writings, especially

<sup>5.</sup> Esser, Vorläufer, p. 27.

See David Flood, Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder, Franziskan. Forschungen, 19 (Werl in Westphalia, 1967), pp. 105-40.

Esser, Ein Vorläufer, pp. 31-32; idem, "Un documento dell'inizio del Duecento sui Penitenti," in I Frati Penitenti di San Francesco nella società del Due e Trecento, ed. Mariano d'Alatri (Rome, 1977), pp. 87-99, esp. pp. 94-95.

chapter twenty-one of the *Earlier Rule*, support this argument. The Volterra Codex itself furnishes additional evidence of Francis's authorship, inasmuch as it transmits the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* bound together with other certainly authentic writings of the saint. Yet despite strong internal and external indications of his authorship, a puzzle persists: Why did Francis express his petitions in the first person plural ("We") in the closing sentences of the letter? Is he speaking in the name of all the friars, or with his secretary? We don't know. One thing is certain, however, the "We" form is consistent with the data of biographical sources that state that Francis was not alone in his solicitude for the "penitents." All the friars were to be concerned about the brothers and sisters of penance.<sup>8</sup>

The time of composition is also uncertain. We know that it was written before the definitive draft of the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful. And since there is much similarity of word and concept with the Earlier Rule, parts of which were written before 1221, and since Francis's concern for "penitents" is not to be confused with the founding of the Third Order, we can assume that the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful was written before this date.

Early biographers state that the founder of the Friars Minor and the Poor Clares also drew up a rule of life for men and women of the penitential movement, 10 just as he had done previously done for the first two orders. To what extent this rule of life resembles the letter now known as the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful cannot be ascertained. Unfortunately the biographies provide little information about the content of the rule of life, limiting themselves to the bare statement that Francis founded three orders. This much, however, is certain: the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful contains the marrow of a "life after the manner of the holy Gospel" and is an eloquent witness to the fact that Francis and his friars were concerned about some groups of male and female penitents and served as their spiritual directors. For this reason, the Volterra document is of the greatest importance for an understanding of the origins of the Third Order of St. Francis. As such it can also provide a powerful and

<sup>8.</sup> Esser, Un documento, pp. 94-95.

<sup>9.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 37; idem, Op, p. 181. In Un Documento, p. 96, Esser explains "before this date": "This document was written before that date (1221), perhaps several years before." For the possibility of establishing a more precise date, see L. Temperini, "La Spiritualità Penitenziale nelle Fonti Francscane," in AnalTOR 14 (1980): 543-88. He believes that the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful was written in 1215, and the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful in

Cf. O. Schmucki, "Il T.O.F. nelle biografie di san Francesco," in CF 43 (1973): 117-32, esp. pp. 124-27.

welcome stimulus for a revitalization of the Franciscan movement in our own times.

So much for our presentation of the data compiled by Esser. For the most part, other experts agree with him. As far as we know, only David Flood does not accept the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful as the predecessor of the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful. Like Lemmens and Boehmer before him, he looks upon it merely as a compendium of the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, which Flood labels a commonitorium. Théophile Desbonnets, too, in his edition of the "writings" in the well-known series Sources Chrétiennes, is critical of Esser and chooses to ignore the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. But he fails to adduce any good arguments for his position. 12

Gerard Pieter Freeman goes further in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, in which he compares the two letters and offers a commentary on each. He examines their literary genre more thoroughly than Esser did. Esser relied on historical methodology. He published a critical edition of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, compared it with the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, and located it within the historical framework of Francis's life. Esser relied on his reading of early Franciscan history. This approach carries with it the danger of seeing in the text elements that are not really there, to interpret the text in terms of one's own preconceived image of Francis, and to classify it as just another letter of the Poverello.

Esser was not greatly interested in a semantic analysis of the text or its structure or literary style. These are areas that will receive attention in our study, since the present text and previous editions suggest that its inclusion among the letters is questionable.

First of all, we shall indicate how the text ought to be divided; we shall support our view with internal and external evidence; and then we shall describe the salient features of each part. Thereupon we shall address the problem of the unity of the text; we shall show how the various parts are articulated and stylistically related, and what special message each conveys. In the limited space available we shall try to show how the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is a song of

David Flood, "The Commonitorium," in *The Haversack* 3, no. 1 (1980): 20-23. See also Th. Horgan, "The First Letter to All the Faithful," in *The Cord* 35 (1985): 303-10.

<sup>12.</sup> Théophile Desbonnets, O.F.M., in *François d'Assise: Ecrits*, Sources Chrétiennes, 285 (Paris, 1981), p. 34: "We do not find Esser's argument convincing, and we would rather forget about that *redactor prior*."

<sup>13.</sup> Freeman, Gelukkig wie in jezus' voetspoor gaat. Een historisch kommentaar op de twee redakties van de "Brief aan de gelovigen" van Franciskus van Assisi (Utrecht, 1981).

exultation and admonition, and why its recipients were not the ones Esser supposed. We shall accord a secondary role to external criteria, such as the history of the order, parallel Franciscan texts and historical analysis, though of course these are important for supporting and complementing textual analysis. Each has its legitimate role and supplement one another.<sup>14</sup>

## 1. A Tripartite Division

The Volterra Codex has the text divided into two parts: "Of those who do penance," and "Of those who do not do penance."

It is no longer possible to ascertain whether these titles are original. <sup>15</sup> At any rate they encompass the content of the respective chapters and reflect the parallel structuring of the document.

It is our opinion that this twofold division should be expanded. The second chapter really closes with the eighteenth sentence. Sentence 19 introduces a new theme, that is, a discussion of the purpose of the text. Here the author suddenly switches to the first person plural ("We"). Now for the first time we are informed that the preceding parts constitute a letter: istae litterae. Its purpose is clearly expressed: It is to be read, indeed read aloud, and above all observed. Consequently sentences 19 to 22 are in fact a postscript that refer back not just to chapter 1 but to the entire document, and therefore they are not a part of chapter 2. The Volterra text utilized by Esser for his edition presents it as a new paragraph "which though it bears no title, its initial letter is capitalized like those of the other two parts." It seems strange that Esser placed such little emphasis on this third paragraph and made it part of chapter 2.

Here is the division we propose:

- I. 1-19: "Of those who do penance."
- II. 1-18: "Of those who do not do penance."
  - 19-22: A postscript: "We beseech all..."

G.P. Freeman agrees with this tripartite division. He accepts I,1 to II,18 as the body of the letter. This is preceded by the invocation of God, and at the end is the postscript that refers to the entire letter.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14.</sup> Cf. Willi Egger, Nachfolge als Weg zum Leben. Chancen neuerer exegetischer Methoden dargelegt an Mk 10,17-31 (Österreichische Biblische Studien, 1 (Klosterneuburg, 1979); idem, Methodienlehre zum Neuen Testament. Einfürung in linguistische und historisch-kritische Methoden (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 1987).

<sup>15.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 30.

<sup>16.</sup> Ibid., p. 12, n. 33.

<sup>17.</sup> Freeman, Gelukkig, p. 53.

# 2. Subdivisions and Explanation of the Three Parts

Chapter 1, Numbers 1–19
Exultation over Those Who Do Penance
a) Division according to Meaning

1-7: Happy are those who do penance.

The text as given by Esser consists of a single sentence with two parts: a description of the ways of penance, followed by an outburst of joy and the reasons for such rejoicing.

1-4: The road of penance.

The subject of the sentence (omnes) is modified by five relative clauses. The various ways of practicing penance are enumerated: through love of God and neighbor, self-denial, communion, and the fruits of penance.<sup>18</sup>

5-7: The blessings of penance.

Sentence 5 is an outburst of joy and a hymn of praise: "Oh, how happy are those men and women..." *Omnes*: Includes both sexes. *Talia* and *talibus* ("such"): refer back to the practices of penance mentioned above. Their effects are so marvelous that he can express them only in cries of wonder. Description has given way to utter rejoicing.

Sentences 6–7 give us the reasons for this outburst. Anyone who lives as a Christian, that is, who does penance, belongs to the family of God.

8-13: Joy over our relationship with God.

Sentences 1 to 7 are written in the third person. The change to the first person plural in sentence 8 signals the beginning of a new section, which extends to sentence 13. "We" precedes the verb five times. "Our" occurs four times. This part achieves a thematic consistency through its use of such words as spouses, brothers, and mothers, in reference to human beings; and father and son with reference to God. On this basis we can further subdivide the section.

8–10: Clarification of our relationship with God. Concepts derived from family ties, like spouses, brothers, and mothers, now appear to describe our relationship with God. There is a parallelism in the sentence structure. First of all there is the terminus (spouse, for example) followed by a threefold *quando* ("when"). There is a crescendo from the first to the third proclamation.

<sup>18.</sup> Although both Matt. 22:39 and Mark 12:30 give the commandment of love in the second person singular, the writer of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful uses the third person plural. It would have been more appropriate to retain the more familiar form in a letter, as he does in the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful.

11–13. This is an exclamation of wonder over our good fortune to have a father, a bridegroom, a brother and a son in heaven. He explains the conditions for our relationship with God. How he fixes his gaze on the most blessed Trinity, His wonder leads to the threefold cry of exultation, each preceded by an "Oh" of amazement: "Oh, how glorious, holy and great to have a father in heaven! Oh, how holy, consoling, beautiful and admirable to have such a spouse! Oh, how holy, loving, pleasing, wonderful, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable and desirable above all things to have a brother and such a son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who lay down His life for His sheep and prayed to the Father,

saving: Holy Father..."19

This joyful outburst consists of three paragraphs, each with progressively longer cries of wonder, all beginning with the words: "Oh how..." They move from three adjectives and one object, to four adjectives and one object, to eight adjectives and two objects. The ecstatic crescendo is achieved by a repetition of *O quam ... talem ... super omnia* ("Oh, how ... such ... above all"). The overpowering joy "in which a moment of pure mysticism blazes forth" culminates in Jesus Christ as its goal. In language charged with deepest emotion Francis celebrates the privilege of having Jesus Christ as brother and son. The word 'son' conjures up the thought of 'mother' (V 7, 10) and 'holy Father' (V 14). Like Mary, we too have Jesus as our son, since we "give birth to Him through holy deeds." Above all, we see Him as the Son of God Who delivered Himself up for me and prayed to the 'holy Father'. Since Jesus sacrificed His life for us and prayed for us to the Father, Francis sees in Him a brother par excellence.

14-19: Prayer to the Father.

In terms of style and content, sentences 14 to 19 are quite different from the preceding part of the text. Finally we encounter something we look for in a letter: a greeting and I-to-you-form of address. Yet they do not necessarily prove that it is really a letter. It is a prayer. Five petitions follow his appeal to the Father. Some are in the imperative mood: "preserve, bless, make holy." Some are definitely petitions: "I pray for them.... I pray not only for them but for those who..." His prayer expresses a union of will with the Father: "I wish, Father, that where I am..." (V 19) and concludes with the usual "Amen."

Even though sentences 14 to 19 differ stylistically from what went before, they cannot be understood apart from it. His appropriation of the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus must be seen in relation to the joyful outcry of sentences 11 to 13 directed to "our Lord Jesus Christ." Francis

<sup>19.</sup> See Op., p. 109, where, however, the text is not arranged according to verses. 20. Esser,  $Ein\ Vorläufer$ , p. 31.

has contemplated Jesus Christ, Who laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:15) and interceded with His Father for His disciples (V 13). In his prayerful union with Christ, at the point where all human speech fails him, Francis breaks out now in stammering sounds or in joyful exclamations. <sup>21</sup> Then the saint takes over the very words of Jesus as his own personal prayer. When he is no longer able to express his feelings, the words of one to Whom he is closely united flow into him. Their prayers become as one.

## b) Characteristics of Chapter 1 of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful

## 1) There are no admonitions in this chapter.

We can say right off that so far we find no signs of a typical letter. Neither the writer nor the addressees are named. The "I- You" form is used in passages that are really prayers. Except in the words borrowed from the farewell address of Jesus, his prayer uses neither the imperative nor subjunctive moods, but only the indicative. There are no warnings. We cannot agree that "it is an instruction for the brothers and sisters of penance to whom Francis is giving advice and encouragement for their way of life."

# 2) It is a contemplative prayer of praise and rejoicing.

The writer's prayer is at times low key; at times it is charged with feeling and imagination. He celebrates the life of a group of people of which he himself is a member ("We are"). With his enthusiasm for a life of penance, he breaks out in paeans of praise for the blessed union of man with the triune God. His rejoicing over man's God-given dignity permeates the entire first chapter. It rings out in festive tones in the long periods and invocations. They reach a climax in the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. Francis's prayer in the name of Jesus grows out of his previous contemplation and rejoicing over a life of penance. Consequently not only the last part (V 14–19) but the entire first chapter must be reckoned a prayer. It is a prayer of exultation over the life of penance.

# 3) The beginning and the end of the prayer.

What we have discovered through textual analysis finds a surprising confirmation in Sabatier's discovery itself. The Volterra Codex has the words "In the name of the Lord" after the title of the first chapter. In his edition Esser places these words at the beginning of the entire text, that is, before the title.<sup>23</sup> Is this justified by the context? Perhaps he

<sup>21.</sup> Celano's eyewitness-account is in accord with this: "The whole ecstasy of joy would often end in tears, and his song of gladness would be dissolved in compassion for the sufferings of Christ" (2Cel 127).

<sup>22.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 34.23. Ibid., pp. 8, 34–35, esp. n. 110.

thought of giving the whole letter a certain legalistic character.<sup>24</sup> Obviously he overlooked the "Amen" at the conclusion! The "In the name of the Lord" at the beginning and "Amen" at the end of the chapter definitely categorize it as a prayer.<sup>25</sup>

Chapter 2, Numbers 1-18

A Warning and a Call to Awaken for Those Who Do Not Do Penance

a) Division according to Concepts

1-10: Those who do not penance are misled and blind.

1–5: A study in contrasts. The sentence structure replicates that of the beginning of chapter 1. *Omnes* is followed by a relative clause with predicates linked by six "and's"—one more than we find in chapter 1. The tone here is negative: "...and those who walk in the way of evil concupiscence and the wicked desires of their flesh." Throughout the passage, persons are described who manifest a life-style the exact opposite of those mentioned in chapter 1: "Men who do not do penance," as we are told in the first sentence.

6-10: The reason? They have been struck blind. Here we find no celebration of the happiness that we find in chapter 1, number 5. On the one hand, we witness the bliss of those who do penance: "They are the children of the heavenly Father, Whose works they do; they are the spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I 7). Now, however, on the contrary we hear the sad words: "Bound fast by the devil whose children they are and whose works they do, they are blind, because they do not see the true light that is our Lord Jesus Christ" (II 6-7). The two contrasting groups of persons are described in much the same words. The parallelism is so striking that the rather lengthy opening sentences of chapters 1 and 2 both terminate in "our Lord Jesus Christ." Just as in I 8-10 we find family ties serving as a model for our relationship with God, in II 7-10 we find the impenitent called the children of the devil. Both passages are based on biblical passages, one from the Book of Psalms, the other from the Gospel.26 The picture in chapter 2 is finished off in somber colors: "They see and are not aware. They know and yet perform evil deeds and knowingly lose their souls."

<sup>24.</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>25.</sup> The Earlier Rule XXIV also begins with "In the name of the Lord" and closes with "Amen."

<sup>26.</sup> Ps. 106:27. Francis is quoting from the Roman Psalter (degluttitia). See R. Weber, Le Psautier Romain et les autres anciens Psautier Latins, edition critique (Rome, 1953), p. 272. Later on he used the Gallican Psalter. This would indicate an early date for the composition of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. Psalm 118:21 is also quoted in Francis's Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples 3 and in the Earlier Rule V 16 – further proof for the authenticity of the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, a point overlooked by Esser (see Op. pp. 152, 252).

11-18. Call to repentence.

11–14. This is an appeal to the persons just mentioned. Sentences 1 to 10 form a tightly knit unit as can be seen in the consistent use of the third person plural. In paragraph 11 the writer goes over to the second person plural and calls for attention through the use of the imperative: "Look, you blind ones, deceived by your enemies, the flesh, the world and the devil." He tells the reason without mincing words or flattering the ears of his listeners: "To commit sin is sweet. To serve God is bitter" (V 11). He goes on to quote another passage quite freely from the Gospel as further proof: "Because all vices and sins proceed from the heart of men" (V 12. See Mark 7:21). In terse sentences (six verbs in the second person plural) he appeals to the impenitent and warns them that they will be empty-handed in this world and in the next. With a reference to Matthew 25:13 and 24:44 he reminds his hearers that they do not know the day or hour that they are to die. His powerful appeal closes with words that fall like hammer strokes: "The body falls ill, death draws near, so he dies a bitter death" (V 14c).

15–18. A warning to all. Following his appeal and threats, the writer sums up all that went before with a warning to everybody. The universality of his message is seen in his use of 'wherever', or 'whenever', 'in whatever way', and the generic 'man'. Wherever, whenever, and in whatever way a man dies "in the state of sin, without penance and atonement" (V 15). The fate of such a man is held up as a warning to his hearers. The chilling example is linked with the preceding passage<sup>27</sup> through the thought of penance and death.

## b) Characteristics of Chapter 2 of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful

We have described the first chapter as a prayer, or better, as a contemplative hymn. What impresses us about chapter 2 is its contrast to chapter 1. We list here the salient points of difference:

#### Chapter 1

- 5. Oh, how happy and blessed.
- 7. Children of the heavenly Father and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 11/19. In heaven, in Your kingdom.
- 11-13. Oh, how glorious ... to have a father ... spouse ... brother and son.

14ff. Prayer in the name of Jesus.

#### Chapter 2

- 9. Accursed.
- Bound by the devil, whose children they are ... blind because they do not see our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 18. In hell
- 13-14. And you have nothing ... and you think you will possess the vanities of this world for a long time.
- 15ff. Terrifying example.

<sup>27.</sup> In this respect the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful manifests greater coherence than the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful. In the latter, the word "penance" in the parallel verse 82 has disappeared, and in the story of the rich man only his duty of restitution is stressed, and the connection with "those who are not doing penance" is missed. See Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 24.

In the first chapter we find an outburst of joy; in the second a stern warning. In the first there is a crescendo of prayer and celebration. In the second, one of reproach, threats and condemnation. In the first, the imperative mood is directed to God; in the second to his hearers. The tone of the first is positive; that of the second, negative. There are only two no's in the first, compared to thirteen in the second. The contrast is most evident in the fact that the first says nothing at all about the devil, death, or hell, whereas the second mentions the devil and death three times, and hell once.

The first chapter depicts a prayerful union of the soul with Jesus; the second the terrifying picture of death, the gnawing worm and the eternal fire of hell. We can hardly imagine a more vivid contrast between the fate of those who do penance and those who do not. Despite the parallelism in sentence structure and wording, there is a marked difference between the two chapters. The speaker hopes that such a juxtaposition of life-styles will capture the attention of his audience. He ascribes the lamentable condition of the unrepentant to the wiles of the devil and calls them blind and ignorant because they do not possess Christ, Who is the true light and the wisdom of the Father. The whole theme of the sermon and the purpose of penance is to attain to the possession of the Son of God. The listeners are aroused to an awareness of their own self-deception in preferring the vanities of this world to eternity (V 14). A sermon is expected to sum up its message as forcefully and impressively as possible. Francis does this with the words: "And wherever, whenever, and in whatever way a man dies..." (V 15). It is the passionate voice of one making a final plea to his hearers.28

Anyone who comprehends the spoken nature of chapter 2, and notes its incisive tone and the urgency of its demands, must see it as much more than advice and counsel to the brothers and sisters of penance for their way of life.<sup>29</sup> Chapter 2 is a resounding summons to penance with a clear warning for those who fail to do penance.

#### Chapter 2, Numbers 19-22

A Postscript about the Meaning and Purpose of the Letter
As we have already pointed out, Esser attached this third part of the
First Version of the Letter to the Faithful to the second chapter, al-

though it is distinct from it in many respects:

<sup>28.</sup> The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful 82 has "in whatever way," but not "whenever," further evidence that the original "sermon" evolved into a letter. Three adverbs might seem too many in a letter. In a spoken address, however, they indicte a crescendo, not just padding. For Esser's views on the omission of "wherever," see Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 24.

<sup>29.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 34.

a) by reason of the typical *omnes* ("all") with which the postscript, like the two chapters preceding it, begins;

b) by reason of the switch from the third person singular to the first person plural, and from generalized moral instructions to personal pleading;

c) by reason of the et ("and") that links all the sentences of the postscript. Significantly there is no et between chapter 2, numbers 18 and 19—a clear sign of a transition to a new part;

d) especially by reason of its content. Here the accent is not on penance but on *istae litterae* ("this letter"). The recipients are urged to receive the letter in a good spirit, read it, or have it read aloud to them, keep it with them, and above all observe it. Whoever fails to do this must answer for it on the last day before the judgment seat of Christ (see Matt. 12:36; Rom. 14:10). The postscript is syntactically consistent (the sentences are linked by et). It is of a piece and needs no further subdivision. It clarifies the meaning and purpose of the writing and stresses its importance for the spiritual welfare of the recipients.

We are now in a position to outline the total structure of the letter.

Exultation over the Way of Penance

I 1-7. Happy are they who do penance.

1-4. The way of penance.

5-7. The blessings of penance.

I 8-13. Joy over our relationship with God.

8-10. The reasons.

11-13. Exclamations of wonder.

I 14-19. A prayer to the Father.

19. Glory in the kingdom of God.

Warning to Those Who Walk in the Way of Sin.

II 1-10. Those who do not do penance are misled and blind.

1-5. The way without penance.

6-10. The evil consequence.

II 11-18. A call to conversion.

11-14. A direct appeal.

II 15-18. A message for everyone 18. Punishment in hell.

II 19-22. The postscript 31

# 3. Unity of the Text

With a division of the text of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful through literary analysis, one question remains to be answered. What constitutes it in a unified whole? The question is all the more significant because the three parts we have listed are so different.

<sup>30.</sup> This biblical reference to the final judgment occurs not only in the Earlier Rule IV 6, as Esser claims (Op. p. 112, n. 10), but also in his Letter to the Clergy 14 and his Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples 8 – strong evidence for the authenticity of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful.

<sup>31.</sup> Our division differs from that proposed by G.P. Freeman. He finds a tripartite division in sentences 5 to 13a and sees it as a reflection of the blessed Trinity (Gelukkig, p. 101). His comments are interesting from the viewpoint of the content, but he takes no note of grammatical and syntactical factors, such as the change of case between 7 and 8, and the fact that the sentence begun in 1 is finished in 7.

The first is a contemplative hymn ringing with cries of exultation; the second is a warning; and the third is a postscript.

External and internal evidence provides us with an answer. through it we can uncover the stylistic similarities of the various parts and the most important thread of thought that runs through them. Cues are found whenever certain words reoccur in the text or are replaced with words of like meaning, <sup>32</sup> for example, 'to look', 'observe', 'notice', which are all synonyms for 'to see'. Rereading the letter in this light will make it easier for us to find an appropriate title for the latter as a whole.

#### a) Bonds of Unity

'Autem' ("however") in chapter 2, no. 1 links the second chapter with the first, and at the same time it signals a contrast. The pronouns *illi et illae* ("they") at the beginning of chapter 2 take up the thread of thought from chapter 1, no. 5, where we also find the writer explicitly addressing men and women with the words *illi et illae*. It may be of no great significance, but it is worth nothing that *illae* does not occur in the concluding words of the postscript. The words *cum divino amore* ("with divine love") and *cum sancta operatione* ("His holy operation") links the postscript with chapter 1, especially verse 10, in style and content.

## b) Recurrence of Similar Wording.

The conjunction *quia* ("because") is repeated frequently. It lends the text an unusual, almost awkward style, since the writer does not vary it with synonyms like *quod* or *nam*. We also find the following words recurring in the text: penance, word, light, life, death, to see. The words 'to do' and 'to be' are of special importance, since they are the key for understanding the basic theme of penance.

# c) The Concept of Doing.

The internal structure of the three parts is bound together mainly through the verb *facere* ("to do") and its synonyms. Even the headings speak of 'doing'. The fivefold *facere* in 1–9 sets the tone and leads up to "through His holy operation." 'Doing' is the essential message of the writer. It is meant for all times.

The avowed purpose of the writer is to stimulate holy works.<sup>33</sup> He stresses holy activity inspired by God. He views our entire life as pulled in two opposite directions: doing the works of God (I 5, 10), or the works

<sup>32.</sup> See Egger, Nachfolge, pp. 95-96.

<sup>33.</sup> We find this purpose expressed in his Testament 39: "Since the Lord inspired me to write the Rule and these words plainly, you too must understand them plainly and simply and without gloss and live by them, doing good to the last." Together with the tenth chapter of the Later Rule, this passage from the Testament is a strong indication that Francis is the author of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. Furthermore, we see from this passage how Francis understood God's word, and his own: as an incentive to action.

of the devil (II 6). Francis develops the two ideas. He enumerates both good and evil works, and he shows how they can be distinguished. He describes those who do penance and those who do not (II 1–5). He sees the latter behavior-pattern brought about by self-deception and the wiles of the devil, so that "committing sin is something sweet, and the service of God something bitter." This on-going struggle within the human soul is a source of temptation, and he points to the road of penance as the way to reach God. It means loving God and one's neighbor, self-denial, the reception of the Sacrament, and performing works of penance (I 1–4). These liberate us from the disastrous propensity to seek happiness in sinning.

The path trod by Francis himself, and described here, contradicts the common assumption that sin is sweet and the service of God bitter. On the contrary, the service of God leads to happiness. It makes us sing: "Oh, how holy and dear it is to have such a pleasant, humble, peaceable, sweet, loving and most desirable brother, and such a son – our Lord Jesus Christ, Who laid down His life for His sheep and prayed to the Father" (I 13).

The *dulcis* ("sweet") of his song of exultation is applied to Jesus Christ. For the unrepentant, it is sin that is sweet, and the service of God is bitter (II 11). This is a reversal of true value judgments, something that Francis experienced in his own person, as he recalls: "When I was in sin, it seemed to me too bitter a thing to see lepers, but the Lord Himself led me among them, and I showed mercy to them. And what before seemed bitter, was changed into sweetness of soul and body." <sup>34</sup>

This account throws light on the sweet-bitter dichotomy. It shows too why in the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* Francis put such extraordinary emphasis on 'doing'. Embracing a leper cost him a tremendous effort to overcome his natural feelings. It marked the first step in his life of penance. He is not offering anything easy to his audience. But with all his rigorous demands for self-denial and rejection of pleasure, he reveals his joy, because the renunciation of self leads to happiness. All this will become clearer when we discuss the concept of 'being'.

#### d) Being.

It is quite possible to misunderstand the many active verbs in the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, with all their emphasis on 'doing' as a call to activism, to the prejudice of esse ('being'). This can happen especially whenever we find the verb facere ('to do'). The most

<sup>34.</sup> Test 1b-3.

significant juxtapositions of 'being' and 'doing' occur in the following passages:

I 1–5: All who ... love ... and do works worthy of penance: Oh, how happy and blessed they are who do them;

I 7: And they are the children of the heavenly Father, whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers and mothers;

I 9: We are his brothers when we do the will of the Father Who is in heaven:

II 6: Bound by the devil whose children they are and whose works they do; II 21: And they should preserve them with a holy manner of working ... for they are spirit and life.

As the last two sentences show, Francis's train of thought leads him inevitably to God. What he prays for does not flow from his own will but from his conviction that God is love, that He shares Himself with us, comes to us in His revealed word and in the person of Christ. Jesus is the Son of God, and our brother Who gave His life for us and prayed to the Father to keep us in His name, that we might remain His children in our struggle with the world. Jesus is the Son of the Father in the strict sense of the word. But since He gave His life for us and prayed for us, He became our brother. Through Him we are the children of the Father. What we have become in the depths of our being is modeled on the relationship of Jesus to the Father. It is our duty to lead external and internal lies in harmony with what we are in our being. The in fact we shall possess "the Son of God and the wisdom of the Father" (II 8) within us, and we shall see His glory (see I 19).

Such a coupling of the two concepts: being and doing, underlies the theology of the text. It is through the practice of penance that man experiences his divine sonship and grows ever more profoundly in his relationship with God (I 7–13). The ultimate goal is being with Jesus in the Father. Penance must free us from all that turns us away from this goal and disrupts or destroys our living relationship with the triune God. This is a lifelong task.

The interplay of being and doing involves the interaction of human activity and divine grace. The lofty spiritual goals that Francis sets forth cannot be attained by one's own efforts, but only through the gift of God that has redeemed and sanctified us in Christ Jesus (I 13–19). Penance does not cease to be painful, but it opens to man even here below greater union with God and with it a happiness that cannot be taken from him. Glory is not something promised for life after death. Penance glorifies human life in the present (I 5–7, 12–13). Doing penance transforms our being. The frequent juxtaposition of the verbs faciunt and sunt, both in the present tense, best expresses this reciprocal influence.

e) The Johannine Influence on the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful

The theological concepts we have just discussed are found in the writings of John, especially in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel. The whole of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is so saturated with Johannine thought that it confers a continuity and unity to the text. We do not have the space here to undertake an exhaustive study of the many-sided influence of John's Gospel and epistles on the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. We can only indicate the highlights.

1) First of all, there is the typical Johannine concept of the triune God's indwelling in man<sup>35</sup>, expressed in quotations from Isaiah and John (Isaiah 11:2, and John 14:23). The union of true penitents with the triune God is expressed in Johannine terms, like 'holy' (four times), 'beloved', 'paraclete', and 'glorious'. John alone among the New Testament writers uses the word 'paraclete' for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1).

2) The image of the Good Shepherd, who gives His life for His sheep, is borrowed from John  $10:11-16.^{37}$ 

3) The unrepentant are called children of the devil, whose works they do – blind, because they do not see the true light, Jesus Christ, the wisdom of the Father and the Holy Spirit (II 6–9). All these expressions are found in John 8. The phrase "children of the devil" occurs also in 1 John 3:10.<sup>38</sup> Penitents, on the other hand, perform the works of the Father (I 7. See John 10:25,37).

4) Francis threatens those who do not live in penance: "The devil will snatch his soul from his body" (II 15). However, we are reminded of Jesus' assurance to His disciples: "No one shall snatch them from My hand," and: "No one can snatch them from the hand of My Father" (John 10:28–29).

 See D. Mollat, in Dict. Spirit., s.v. "Jean Evangéliste; W. Viviani, L'ermeneutica di Francesco d'Assisi. Indagine alla luce di Gv 13-17 nei suoi scritti (Rome, 1983), pp. 178-90; Franz. Stud. 68 (1986): 280-82.

36. O. van Asseldonk, "San Giovanni Evangelista negli scritti di S. Francesco," in Lau 18 (1977): 225-55. See also idem, "Insegnamenti biblici 'privilegiati' negli scritti di S. Francesco," G. Cardaropoli and M. Conti (edd.), Lettura biblico-teologica delle Fonti Francescane (Rome, 1979), pp. 83-116; English trans. "Favored' Biblical Teachings...", Greyfriars Review 3:3 (1989): 287-314. Both articles were published by Optatus (of Veghel) van Asseldonk, La Letter e lo Spirito. Tensione vitale nel Francescanesimo ieri e oggi, Dimensioni Spirituali, 6-7 (Rome, 1985), vol. 7, pp. 321-88.

37. Besides IEpFid and 2EpFid 56, this theme is developed more fully in the Earlier Rule XXII 32, and in Fragm I 19. See van Asseldonk, Insegnamenti, p. 99, cited in n. 36 above; Viviani, L'ermeneutica, pp. 233-34.

38. For a more precise analysis see N. Nguyen-van-Khanh, Le Christ dans la pensée de Saint François d'Assise d'après ses Ecrits (Paris, 1973), pp. 123–25.

- 5) Finally, words that play a key role in the Gospel of St. John, like to see, to acknowledge, to know, and the hour, are also prominent in the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful (I 15, 19; II 7, 10, 14, 15, 20).<sup>39</sup>
- 6) Its style resembles that of St. John's Gospel. John is fond of contrasts, like light vs darkness, truth vs untruth, the Apostles vs the world, life vs death. Francis does the same. He speaks about children of the Father, children of the devil, the difference between this world (II 5, 6, 11, 13, 14, 18) and the world to come (I 19, 13, 18, 22), and between false and true wisdom (I 8). The antithesis between sweet and bitter appears to be original with Francis.

7) John's thinking exercised its greatest influence on the way Francis prayed and spoke. He prayed "in the love that is God" (II 19). He often quotes John's words: "God is love" (1 John 4:8–16)<sup>40</sup> or incorporates them in prayer: "You are love, charity." When he was deeply moved, Francis<sup>42</sup> prayed "in the love that is God." The thought that God is love is central to his spirituality, and he bequeathed it as a precious heritage to the Franciscan family.<sup>43</sup>

8) The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is replete with biblical references and quotations. Francis was skilled in applying the words of the sacred writers, as when he urged that his written words "be fully carried out in holy works" because "they are spirit and life" (II 21). Jesus told His disciples that the words He spoke were spirit and life (John 6:64), and Francis did, too. Francis, of course, did not mean to put his words on a par with those of his Lord. He did not consider them his own words but those of Jesus Christ. This is clear from number 19, where he indicates that he was not speaking his own words but only "the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ." He looked upon himself as the spokesman and advocate of a message given long ago but

<sup>39.</sup> For John and Francis, see Mollat and Viviani respectively, cited in n. 35 above.

<sup>40.</sup> Also quoted in 2EpFid 87; RegNB XVII 5; XXII 26; Fragm I 15, 43.

<sup>41.</sup> LaudDei 4. See ExpPat 2; D. Barsotti, Le Lodi di Dio Altissimo (Miln, 1982); L. Lehmann, Tiefe und Weite. Der universale Grundzug in den Gebeten des Franziskus von Assisi. Franziskan. Forschungen, 29 (Werl in Westphalia, 1984), pp. 249–67.

<sup>42.</sup> van Asseldonk, Insegnamenti, p. 107, cited in n. 36 above. See Lehmann, "Der Mensch Franziskus im Licht seiner Briefe," in Wissenschaft und Weisheit 46 (1983): 108-38, esp. p. 134; Spanish in Selecciones de Franciscanismo 15, no. 43 (1986): 31-65, esp. p. 60. See also A. Blasucci, "In caritate quae Deus est'. Dio-Amore negli scritti di S. Francesco d'Assisi," in Lau 23 (1982): 404-13.

<sup>43.</sup> L. Temperini, in Dizionario Francescano, s.v. "Amore di Dio."

<sup>44.</sup> Also quoted in IEpFid; 2EpFid II 3; Fragm I 25; RegNB XXII 39; Test 13. See van Asseldonk, "Giovanni Evangelista," pp. 236-38; Viviani, L'ermeneutica, pp. 374-75; M. Conti, "La Parola di Dio 'spirito e vita' negli scritti di S. Francesco," in Ant 57 (1982): 15-59; R. Bartolini, Lo Spirito del signore. Francesco d'Assisi guidi all'esperienza dello Spirito Santo (Assisi, 1982), pp. 23-64; O. van Asseldonk, "Lo spirito del Signore e la sua santa operazione negli scritti di Francesco," in Lau 23 (1982): 133-195.

all too little heeded. He longed to win listeners for this message that it might once more become spirit and life for them. It was not poetic fancy but faith in the living word that led him to describe his discourse as "fragrant words." Echoing St. Paul (2 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 5:2) he proclaims: The words of God are the bearers of life, still able to captivate the mind. Hence the Poverello's reverence for the spoken or written word. <sup>45</sup> According to the Bible, fragrance is a sign of life, even of God Himself. <sup>46</sup>

Francis was the advocate of the divine word and preached it with all his might. If we seek the motivation of his actions, we shall find it in the words of Jesus in the High Priestly Prayer: "The words you have given Me, I have given to them" (John 17:8). He found in this passage his authorization and encouragement – even a mandate. At all events, he appealed in this letter (I 15) in the words of Jesus as found in John 17. They put their stamp on the whole letter, as we shall see.

9) The very marrow of the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* is John 17. We encounter passages from the High Priestly Prayer in the first part of the letter. They constitute the longest biblical quotation in the letter. Francis adapts it in a shorter, somewhat freer form.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to understand the place of John 17 in the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful*. After describing our relationship with the triune God in concepts drawn from family ties (I 7–10), he breaks out in cries of joy. Before this, he had been awed and restrained in expressing his happiness in having a father and spouse in heaven. His joy, however, in having a son and brother in Jesus knows no bounds. At the peak of his hymn he sees Jesus' total dedication and prayer to His Father (I 13), which he looks upon as the embodiment of the love of Jesus for us. As the Good Shepherd, He not only gave His life for us; He also prays to the Father with all the intensity of an only Son Who offers Himself for us. Francis does not conceive Jesus' dedication and prayer on a theological level, but in terms of the actualization, assimilation and realization of Jesus' prayer in his personal spiritual life.

<sup>45.</sup> E.g. EpCler 6, 12; Test 12; 1Cel 82.

<sup>46.</sup> Hardick and Grau observe (Schriften, p. 57, n. 14) that Clare of Assisi in her Fourth Letter to St. Agnes of Prague says of Christ: "Through whose fragrance the dead are revived," and: "We will run in the fragrance of your perfumes, O heavenly Spouse!" (nos. 13, 24).

<sup>47.</sup> In the Earlier Rule XXII he also quotes John 17, though with some variations. Here we are concerned only with the relationship of John 17 with the rest of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. For its place in the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful and the Earlier Rule, see Viviani, L'ermeneutica, pp. 226-256, cited in n. 35 above. See also W. Egger, "Verbum in corde - cor ad Deum', Analyse und Interpretation von RegNB XXII," in Lau 23 (1982): 286-311.

<sup>48.</sup> See n. 19 above. See also Freeman, Gelukkig, pp. 100-13.

<sup>49.</sup> Freeman, Gelukkig, pp. 113-23; Viviani, L'ermeneutica, pp. 400-2: "L'immedesi-

Verses 11 to 13 already show that Francis did not meditate on Jesus in any detached manner, but with deep feeling and a sense of participation. This is particularly true in his appropriation of the prayer of the Savior. His joyful hymn over our relationship with God is expressed in the words of the trustful prayer of the Son to His Father. He puts himself in Jesus' place and shares His thoughts and feelings at the prospect of His coming passion. Jesus' concerns become his own. He looks upon his followers as Jesus looked upon His disciples and prayed for them. <sup>50</sup>

John 17 provides the concluding words for his contemplative hymn in the indwelling of the triune God-the climax, the highest stage of the Christian penitential life.

The impact of John 17 is also found in the second part of the letter. This is an earnest admonition directed to those men and women "who do not do penance." They do not belong to the family of God but cling to what is earthly and to the devil. He paints their fate in dismal colors. Where did Francis get the right and duty to utter such bitter words of warning, and play the prophet of God's judgment? They flow from his contemplation and prayerful identification with Christ praying to His Father. The more profoundly he contemplated and lived out his relationship with God, the more he felt obliged to reach out to those who refuse to see the Lord Jesus as the true light, because they are blind and misled by the devil (I 19 and II 6–7). His sermon (second chapter) is the outgrowth of prayer (first chapter).

The influence of John is evident also in the word sequence: a proclamation before, and a burning appeal after his prayer in the name of Jesus. We find here a pause in which the man of prayer recollects himself in the presence of God and concentrates on his mission for others.

The fact that John 17 is the theological inspiration of the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* and that it provides the climax of the first part and the introduction to the second, can also be established by the writer's choice of words. Let us take a look at the key Johannine words that come before and after the quotations from John 17. The Johannine structure of the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* then looks like this:

First Version I, 1-13	Jn. 17 in the 1st Ver. I, 14-19	First Version II, 1-22
Children of the Father will of the Father	Father (twice)	
father holy (4 times)	holily	holy operation

mazione in Cristo."

<sup>50.</sup> The analogy of the situation corresponds to the analogy of ideas, as Viviani points out in L'ermeneutica, pp. 402–4.

holy operation happy and blessed in the name of the Lord

because quia (once)

sanctify (3 times) bless and sanctify in your name the world (twice) words, through your word

accursed (twice)

the world (twice)
the fragrant words of the
Lord
true light

truly

because (twice) they knew true wisdom because (7 times) they acknowledge, they know, you think, you know not, you ignore

I beseech (twice) let them see

twice) we beseech.
they see (twice), see

As can be seen from this outline, the whole letter, especially the second part, shows the influence of the vocabulary of John 17. After his prayer in the name of and with the very words of Jesus, Francis expresses his warning to a great extent in the words of Jesus as found in John 17.

#### f) Parallels

As can be seen from the above juxtaposition of words, the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* is structured on the pattern of biblical parallelism. We have already indicated some of the contrasts used in the structuring of the letter. They also show the unity of the text. It is a matter of antithetical parallelism, which means that while the sentences have the same structure, they express contrasting thoughts. This is clear from the titles of the two chapters. It would almost appear that chapter 2 slavishly copies chapter 1, often employing identical words, except that they are preceded by a negative. If we compare the opening words of the two chapters, we can readily see the parallelism:

Happy and blessed are those who

- a) love the Lord with all their heart,
- b) and love their neighbors
- c) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins
- d) and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ
- e) and perform works worthy of penance

Bound by the devil and blind are those who

- e) do not do penance,
- d) do not receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ
- c) live in vice and sins
- b) walk after evil concupiscence and the evil desires of their flesh
- a) and in their bodies serve the world with evil desires.

This is a chiastic arrangement, so-called after the Greek letter X (chi),<sup>52</sup> although the crisscrossing of the sentences is not perfect. For a true chiasm "the words must stand in reverse order in each part." In

H. Bühlmann and K. Scherer, Stilfiguren der Bibel, Bibl. Beiträge, 10 (Freiburg/ Schweiz, 1973), pp. 37-38.

<sup>52.</sup> Freeman, Gelukkig, p. 53.

the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful we find that this is the case only from "e" to "c". The phrases indicted by "a" do not fit literally into the chiasm, but they do in meaning, since "to serve the world with carnal desires and in the feverish activities of the world and in the cares of this life" (II 5) stand in direct opposition to "love the Lord with their whole heart, whole soul and with all their strength" (I 1). The same might be said of "b". Over against the love of neighbor, we have "they walk after evil concupiscence and the evil desires of their flesh," that is, they are filled with love for self. Thus we find a balanced sentence structure "a" to "e" that is partly based on the wording but in each instance on the content. Moreover, the parallel structure of the two chapters is such that it appears at the beginning and end of each:

I, 1. All who ... II, 1. But all ... who do not ...

I, 19. In your kingdom II, 18. and they will go to hell. Thus the essential unity of the text is preserved through its parallel structure.<sup>54</sup>

## 4. Who Wrote the Letter, and for Whom Was It Intended?

The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful does not give the name of the sender or of those to whom it was sent. Something we would look for in a letter is missing. As we mentioned previously, on the basis of indirect but reliable evidence we can be sure that Francis wrote it. Likewise, on the basis of clues from the time and circumstances of the early thirteenth century, Kajetan Esser concludes that the recipients were "the brothers and sisters of penance." Perhaps these deductions can be confirmed or modified if we look at the text itself to tell us who is speaking to whom.

Whoever wrote the first chapter is convinced, even enthusiastic, about the necessity of penance. He obviously speaks from his own experience in practicing penance and intones a hymn of praise for those who do likewise. He includes himself when he talks about the conditions for membership in the family of Jesus Christ. His use of the first person plural ("We") shows that he counts himself among those who have embraced a life of penance. All this definitely points to Francis, for we read in his *Testament*: "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, the grace to begin to do penance."

His enthusiasm over the union of penitents with God finds expression in a number of attributes that apply par excellence to his "brother and son" Jesus Christ. In his prayer to the Father borrowed from John

<sup>53.</sup> Bühlmann and Scherer, Stilfiguren der Bible, p. 40.

<sup>54.</sup> As if he deliberately intended to present a parallel to in inferno, he quotes from Matthew—the only departure from John 17.

<sup>55.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 31; idem, Un documento, pp. 93-97.

<sup>56.</sup> Test 1.

17, he makes frequent use of the Savior's trustful address "holy Father" (II 14). While praying the psalms of the Office of the Passion, he associates himself with Jesus' total commitment and obedience to the will of the Father. 57 Also in the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful he unites himself with Jesus pleading with the Father. In the Earlier Rule he prays with Jesus to the Father for those who had been given him from the world. 58 Francis could make this prayer his own because he was convinced that it was God Who gave him his brothers. 59 But it was only his first close companions whom he looked upon as entrusted to him by God. He reached out to a wider group in his Letter to the Faithful. His concept of a divine call underlies his prayer and shows why he prayed in the name of Jesus for both the Friars Minor and all the people of God: "Holy Father, in Your name keep those whom You have given me. Father, all those whom You gave me in the world were Yours and You gave them to me. And the words You have given me I have given to them. And they have received them and have known truly that I have come forth from You, and they have believed that You have sent me. I am praying for them, not for the world. Bless and sanctify them. And for them I sanctify myself, that they may be sanctified in unity, just as we are. And Father, I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory in Your kingdom."60

The close similarity of the First and Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful allows us to conclude that it is Francis who is praying to the Francis in the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful too, although he does not identify himself by name.

Even though the speaker includes himself when he enumerates the conditions for union with God, he assumes the role of intercessor. We get the impression that after his prayer to the Father, his role as leader is more pronounced. He now utters warnings. He emerges from his intimate converse with God to appear before men, whose vices and sins he exposes in the light that comes from God.

His awareness of this calling that comes to him in prayer led him to take on the role of the ancient prophets and utter those lofty pronouncements we find especially in the postscript. They manifest the extreme urgency of the letter and stamp it as one that conveys the words that are spirit and life (John 6:64). In view of his very personal message, we might expect him to use the first person singular ("I").

58. RegNB XXII 45-55.

59. Test 14: "And after the Lord gave me brothers."

<sup>57.</sup> The most frequently used form of address is Pater sancte (sanctus, sanctissimus). It occurs 22 times in the writings; 13 times in the OffPass.

<sup>60.</sup> IEpFid, I 14-19; Viviani, L'ermeneutica, p. 230. For Francis, the prayer of Jesus is "an expression of his love as he was about to lay down his life.... The saint understood that Jesus' prayer for us was the culmination of His love for us."

Instead, we have *rogamus* ("we beseech"). We cannot jump to the conclusion that Francis had a secretary, or that the letter was a joint enterprise of Francis and a group of friars.<sup>61</sup> When we see it in the context of the whole letter, the use of *rogamus* does not come as a surprise. It is in line with his frequent use of the plural in the first chapter. There the writer associates himself with those who do penance. Now he turns attention to the unrepentant, and we can look at the *rogamus* as a plea from those who do penance.

If we wish to identify further the group speaking in the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, we might say that they are a number of Friars Minor with Francis as spokesman. That Francis was the principal author is proven by a comparison of the wording and style of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful with the saint's other writings.

The recipients of the letter are clearly divided into two groups: those who do penance (chapter 1) and those who do not (chapter 2). Both consist of men and women, including religious, like the Friars Minor who have vowed to live according to a rule of life. Extra We cannot agree, however, that the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful was obviously addressed to religious in the sense understood at the time. Unfaithful religious are rather included among those who do not do penance. It is also questionable that the recipients are the brothers and sisters of penance. The writer does not address them as such — a significant omission, since in his other letters Francis clearly specifies the addressees. Why should he make an exception here and omit the significant words brother and sister? If we insist that the brothers and sisters of penance are the recipients, we must accept a narrower circle of speaker and addressees than warranted by the text.

It is only in the second, longer *Letter to the Faithful* that Francis clearly expresses his feeling of responsibility for those to whom he is speaking. <sup>65</sup> And it is only in the second letter that we find detailed directions that lead us to believe that the letter was meant for a dedicated group of people who had assumed definite religious obligations. (Note the *debemus* ["We ought to"] sentences.) We cannot say the

<sup>61.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 32.

<sup>62.</sup> IEpFid II 4: "and they do not observe what they promised to the Lord." That this has reference to a profession like that made by the Friars Minor is made clear from Earlier Rule (V 17), Later Rule (X 3), Test 24, 34, and EpOrd 39. For contemporary sources see G.G. Meersseman, Dossier de l'ordre de la Pénitence au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Fribourg, 1961), pp. 8-9, 21, 109, 129, 141, 146-47, 286, 294, 297, etc.

<sup>63.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 22; idem, Un documento, pp. 92-93.

<sup>64.</sup> As in n. 55 above.

<sup>65. 2</sup>EpFid 2-3: "I am the servant of all, and so I am bound to wait upon everyone and make known to them the fragrant words of my Lord. Realizing, however, that because of my sickness and ill health I cannot personally visit each one individually, I decided to send you a letter bringing a message...."

same for the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. He designates his readers as illi et illae ("those people") and seems to leave his circle of recipients wide open. He has a heterogeneous audience in mind to whom he unfolds his message first in positive and then negative terms. Since in the second chapter Francis devotes considerably more space to those who do not do penance, and castigates their vices and sins unmercifully, we might ask: To whom is such language addressed? Could it possibly be the "brothers and sisters of penance" who were already pledged to leading a strict Christian life? We are forced to conclude that he had a wider audience in mind. 66

The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is directed to all men and women—those who do penance, and more especially, to those who do not, among them religious who are not observing what they promised the Lord. Presumably the Friars Minor themselves could see themselves in one or the other category. In the first case, the "we" of chapter 1 is a reminder that the conditions for being mother, brothers and spouse of Jesus Christ are applicable to them, too. In the second case, the reference to those who are not faithful to their profession might be aimed at some in their own ranks. The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is an example of the Franciscan preaching-style: an admonition to others to do penance, and at the same time an occasion for some soul-searching on the part of the preachers themselves.<sup>67</sup>

## 5. The Letter is an Exultation and Exhortation to Penance

The varied literary character of the letter can be seen from a study of its structure. Passionate cries succeed rather bald statements. A joyful song of praise follows some simple proclamations. The designation of those who are the brothers, mothers and spouses of Christ terminates in cries of jubilation, and these in turn give way to prayer. The motif of the first chapter is one of contemplation and praise.

67. We notice this especially in chapters 22 and 23 of the Earlier Rule, with its repeated exhortations in the first person plural. See L. Lehmann, "Gratias agimus tibi'. Structure and Content of Chapter 23 of the Regula non bullata," in Lau 23 (1982):

<sup>66.</sup> See A. Blasucci, Ritorno di San Francesco (Rome, 1978), p. 77, n. 17. He sees the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful as "an address to all." Raoul Manselli concurrs in his San Francesco d'Assisi, Biblioteca di Cultura, 182 (Rome, 1980), p. 302. He regards the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful and the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful as "an admonition addressed to all the faithful, which points out the way of salvation.... We must not confuse the practice of penance that involves an individual and personal way of life with being a member of a penitential order, which connotes specific juridical status. What Francis is asking in his two letters is the practice of penance, living according to the standards of a Christian life – not becoming a member of an order of penance. That these two letters later served as a 'rule' for the laity is quite probable."

Instead of the joyful outbursts of the first chapter, the second is full of warnings. But here too we find a statement of fact followed by a judgment. Instead of a song of exultation, we now hear a curse, albeit expressed in words of the psalmist (Ps. 118:21). Stronger still are the soul-piercing words: "See now you blind ones..." (II 11). He speaks directly to the unrepentant. Admonition and warnings climax as his closing words ring out like a refrain: "And whenever, and wherever, and in whatever way a man dies in mortal sin without doing penance or making atonement..." (II 15). The tone of the second chapter is unutterably grave and menacing.

The bond that unites the two contrasting chapters is the theme of penance. If chapter 1 is a contemplative hymn about penance, chapter 2 is a resounding call to penance. The fact that so many varied moods pervade one and the same writing makes it difficult to give it a title that will do justice to both parts. Such a title must include both the jubilant and the monitory parts. Therefore, it seems to us that the overall title *Exultation and Exhortation to Penance* would be most appropriate.

When Esser entitled the letter *Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*, he was preoccupied with the laudatory character of the first chapter. And his designation of the brothers and sisters of penance as the recipients narrows the circle of his audience too much, restricting it to a group of people who do not figure very prominently in the writing. The title we propose tries to take into account the content, the mood of this very expressive letter, and the kind of people to whom it was directed.

#### 6. An Evolution from Sermon to Letter

We have described the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful as a song of exultation and an exhortation to penance. We arrived at this title solely on the basis of textual analysis, through internal criteria. However, our conclusion was reinforced by external criteria, that is, by comparing the text with other authentic writings of the saint. The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful has an affinity above all with chapter 21 ("praise and exhortation") of the Earlier Rule, which all the friars were bound to observe. This exhortation to the friars greatly influenced the style of their preaching. To understand the affinity of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful with the exhortation and

<sup>68.</sup> RegNB XXI: "Whenever they see fit, all my friars may exhort the people to praise God with words like these: Fear Him and honor Him...."

<sup>69.</sup> A. Rotzetter, "Gott in der Verkündigung des Franz von Assisi," in Lau 23 (1982): 40-76, esp. pp. 50-61. See also Freeman, Gelukkig, pp. 53-56. He sees the key for understanding the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful in RegNB XXI.

praise of the Earlier Rule, we need only examine some of the key sentences in each document.

#### Earlier Rule, Chapter 21

- Do penance ... Bring forth worthy fruits of penance, because we shall soon die...
- 4. Give and it shall be given to you.
- Blessed are those who die in penance for they will be in the kingdom of heaven.
- Woe to those who do not do penance, because they will be the children of the devil whose works they do, and they will go into eternal fire.
- 9. Persevere to the end in doing good.

# First Version of the Letter to the Faithful

- I 4: and they produce worthy fruits of penance.
- II 15: man is going to die
- II 15: man ... without atonement
- I 5: Happy and blessed...
- I 19: In Your kingdom
- II 6: Bound by the devil whose children they are and whose works they do.
- II 18: they will go to hell
- I 5: while they do such things and continue in them
- II 21: with holy deeds to the end.

The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful resembles the "praise and exhortation" of the Earlier Rule even in its wording. Both celebrate the happiness of those who do penance. In the Earlier Rule the "woe" is explicit (vae); in the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful it is implicit in Francis's description of the fate of the wicked and his warnings. While the Earlier Rule covers more topics, the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful concentrates on the theme of penance and expands it. For example, it takes the words of the Earlier Rule "We shall soon die" and embellishes them with realistic imagery. In both Letters to the Faithful the description of the fate of the unrepentant is much more dramatic than in the Earlier Rule."

What we have is a progression from chapter 21 of the Earlier Rule to the two Letters to the Faithful. The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful forms a logical bridge. Seen in its entirety, it is simply an unfolding of the passage from chapter 21 of the Earlier Rule: "Happy those who die repentant; they shall have a place in the kingdom of heaven. Woe to those who die unrepentant; they shall be the children of the devil whose works they do, and they will go into everlasting fire."

<sup>70. 2</sup>EpFid 72-81. In Op., p.184, Esser replies afrirmatively to the question whether the homiletic style of the letter originated with Francis. C. Delcorno sees the example of the sick man who did not fulfill his obligation to make restitution a carryover from one of Francis's sermons. See his "Origini della predicazione francescana," in Francesco d'Assisi e Francescanesimo dal 1216 al 1226 (Assisi, 1977), pp 125-60, esp. p. 155: "It is licit to suppose that Francis first told the story in one of his sermons, and then incorporated the 'example' in the final draft of his letter." Delcorno, though he obviously has wide expertise in Franciscan sources and literature, does not delve deeply into the homiletic style of the saint's individual writings. Consequently he has no answer to our question whether the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful in its basic structure is an outgrowth and development of the sermon passage of RegNB XXI.

As in the Earlier Rule, the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful preserves the sequence of contrasts. First there is praise (laus), then exhortation (exhortatio). Of course the laus et exhortatio of the Earlier Rule does not culminate in an outburst of jubilation as it does in the first chapter of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. Taking note of this difference, we can change the title from "Praise" to "Exultation." But like the Earlier Rule, the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful should have a double heading, since it is both an exultation and a warning.

Something else follows. If the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is rooted in the praise and exhortation of the Earlier Rule, it must originally have been spoken; in other words, a sermon. The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful does not have the appearance of a letter. It omits the name of the sender and the addressees. But though it cannot be strictly categorized as such, it bears some resemblance to a letter, since the writer speaks of istae litterae ("this letter"). Yet the sender is never mentioned; neither are the addressees. Where is such an omission usually found? In a speech—a sermon. The audience already knows the speaker or soon gets to know him when he starts to talk. Which is just what happens in our text. The speaker is enthusiastic about a life of penance and is eager to win others to it. He uses the first person plural; he is speaking on behalf of a group that is given to the practice of penance. The audience can see Francis and his companions in their mind's eye. Speaker and listeners fill the same roles that they did in the passage from the Earlier Rule. 73

If the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful stems from the praise and exhortation passage of the Earlier Rule, it really flows from the itinerant preaching ministry of these "men of penance from the City of Assisi." They were not yet known as a religious order. The centrality of the penance-theme points to an early date for the composition of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, even if it cannot be accurately traced back to the springtime of the order as described by the Three Companions. This is in accord with the views of W. Viviani, who also assigns the composition of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful to a date between February and May 1212. Although he approaches

<sup>71.</sup> RegNB XXI 7-8.

<sup>72.</sup> RegNB XXI speaks first of the praise of God and then of the call to penance, although the opening sentence reverses the sequence: "Et hanc vel talem exhortationem et laudem." The title, however, has "De laude et exhortatione."

<sup>73.</sup> RegNB XXIII 7: "All of us Friars Minor, useless servants though we be (Luke 17:10), humbly beg and implore everyone to persevere in the true faith and in penance."

<sup>74.</sup> L3S 37. See Clasen and Grau, ed. Th. Desbonnets, in AFH 67 (1974): 117: "They simply called themselves penitents from the City of Assisi. Their group was not yet known as a religious order."

the question from a different angle, he sees in both the *First* and *Second Versions of the Letter to the Faithful* the passage from the *Earlier Rule* as a kind of farewell from Francis to his beloved penitents, when he first attempted to go to the Orient in the hope of suffering martyrdom.

Another argument for an early date is the absence of any allusion to that manner of prayer which the *Letter to the Custodians* urges the friars to propagate. We also miss the urgent plea found in the other writings 'to adore God with a pure heart and pure mind, for this is what He looks for above all else.... And we should offer Him praise and prayers day and night, as we say: 'Our Father who art in heaven' (Matt. 6:9), for we must pray always and not grow weary" (Luke 18:1). Moreover, the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* contains few doctrinal passages, so it is surprising to hear it called "a didactic writing." The warnings it issues have to do with the moral and practical problems of everyday life. Unlike the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*, it does not discuss points of dogma – an important point for establishing the date of its composition, which is still uncertain. However, our study indicates an earlier rather than a later date.

We mentioned above that the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* was not directed to the brothers and sisters of penance but to all people. This viewpoint is further strengthened by a comparison with the praise and exhortation chapter of the *Earlier Rule*: "Whenever they see fit, all my friars may exhort the people to praise God with words like these: Fear Him and honor Him."

Hence our conclusion: The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is basically a message of exultation and a call to penance in which the penitents of Assisi have a place, but which is an invitation to all men and women of all times to enter upon the way of penance. The more adherents the writer could win over to this way, the fewer would be left to follow the day of the world. His spoken words were put in writing, a sermon evolved into a letter. The postscript does nothing to change the

<sup>75.</sup> Viviani, L'ermeneutica, pp. 321-23.

<sup>76. 1</sup>EpCust 8: "And you must announce and preach His praise to all peoples..." See L. Lehmann, "Die beiden Briefe des hl. Franziskus an die Kustoden. Ansätze für eine christlich-islamische Ökumene," in FSien 69 (1987): 3-33.

<sup>77. 2</sup>EpFid 19-21.

<sup>78.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, p. 31: "From which it should be clear that it is a quesiton of didactic writing."

<sup>79.</sup> Authorities vary between 1213 and 1221. See n. 75 above, and Freeman's study Gelukkig, pp. 77-79. His final conclusion: "The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful was composed around 1219."

<sup>80.</sup> RegNB XXI 1. It cannot be denied that the right of all the friars to preach praise and exhortations is guaranteed, though it is left to the free choice of the individual.

spoken character of the document. Only secondarily can it be considered a letter. As a circular letter it achieved its purpose of reminding those of like mind about the way they have undertaken, and at the same time gaining new followers. Even in the postscript we find the idea of recruitment. We cannot be sure if and when the letter became a rule of life for tertiaries. On the other hand, it is easy to see how the principal themes of the sermon were expanded into the longer, more didactic Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful. 2

## 7. Summary and Recapitulation

Our essay was finished and ready for publication when we came across the recent study by Raffaele Pazzelli, T.O.R. Short as it is, what it says about finding an appropriate title for the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* is startling. What were we to do? Throw our pages into the wastebasket? Just ignore Pazzelli's work? Neither of the above. New discoveries always mean fresh viewpoints that can supplant material already published. Instead of changing the title of our own essay and starting again from scratch, we decided to make suitable reference to Pazzelli's study and incorporate his findings in our summary.

#### a) Our Own Conclusions

1. Taking off from Esser's critical edition of the so-called First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, which presents the text in only two chapters, we tried to divide it further and determine the content and style of each part. We found that it embodied a variety of literary styles, from blessing to cursing, from ecstatic jubilation to fire and brimstone. The whole letter is filled with contrasts and antithetical parallelisms. The style is descriptive, narrative, and at times contemplative. It alternates between emotional outbursts and serious appeals. All of which makes for a lively and dynamic text.

2. Structural analysis not only helps us understand how the letter was put together, but also shows that Esser's title *Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance* is too restrictive, for two reasons:

(a) Francis's rejoicing over a penitential life that unites us to God (chapter 1) is so overwhelming that it cannot be compressed in the term "exhortation." The word "exhortation" corresponds only to the style and content of chapter 2. Penance, on the other hand, is a theme of both chapters. For this reason we enlarged the title to read: Exultation and Exhortation to Penance. While this conclusion can be based exclusively

<sup>81.</sup> Esser, Ein Vorläufer, pp. 31, 37; Freeman, Gelukkig, p. 87.

<sup>82.</sup> The analysis of the development by Freeman, Gelukkig, pp. 50-72.

<sup>83.</sup> Raffaele Pazzelli, T.O.R., "Il titolo della 'Prima recensione della Lettera ai Fedeli'. Precisazioni sul Codice 225 di Volterra (cod Vo)," in AnalTOR 19 (1987): 233-40. English: idem, pp. 241-48.

on a study of the text itself and its literary style, it is reinforced by external criteria. If we compare the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* with the Praise and Exhortation passage of the *Earlier Rule* (chapter 21), we realize that the letter was originally a typical Franciscan sermon. It was such before it evolved into a letter. Since the writing lacks the typical signs of a letter, we believe that we should simply discard the designation "letter" and rather speak of Exultation and Exhortation.

- (b) Esser thought that the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful was intended for the brothers and sisters of penance. He was led to this conclusion by historical reasons and from the undoubted close association of Francis with the medieval penitential movement. Nowhere in the text, however, are the brothers and sisters of penance mentioned. He directs chapter 2 rather to those who want to hear nothing about penance and have abandoned it. His audience is broader. It comprises all Christians, including religious who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord (see II 4). The Friars Minor, with Francis as their spokesman, are senders of the exultation and exhortation to penance. The recipients form a heterogeneous audience, among them those who ignore the church, do not receive its sacraments, and who love vices and sins more than the law of God (II 1–12).
- 3. Since we have shown that the first chapter of the Exultation and Exhortation is of the nature of a prayer especially in its closing words, it is clear that *In nomine Domini* belongs after the title of the first chapter. Unlike the Volterra document, Esser puts this invocation over the entire letter, perhaps to give it the appearance of a *forma vitae* ("way of life"). It should be left at the beginning of the first chapter. With *Amen* at the close, it identifies it as a prayer. Chapter 1 is a prayer of praise and contemplation, then a prayer of petition.
- 4. The style and content of chapter 2 stamp it as a rousing penitential sermon whose closing words carry its fundamental message: Anyone who dies in the state of mortal sin unrepentant and without making atonement is lost forever.
- 5. Sentences 19 to 22 of chapter 2 are really a postscript; they form a distinct section. The fact that we find the first mention of "letter" here only confirms our view that all the preceding is in effect a sermon. There is a progression in the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* from the homiletic style to that of a written admonition and finally to a real letter. It is inspired by the Praise and Exhortation of the *Earlier Rule* that was addressed to all the friars.
- 6. These data show what surprising results can be obtained through a syntactical, stylistic and literary analysis of a text. It can shed light on its structure and style and make an important contribution toward

an understanding of its content and formulation of an appropriate letter.

b)Pazzelli's Discovery

Then came Raffaele Pazzelli's bombshell. He discovered the original title of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful in the Volterra Codex, the same document that Esser had used as the source for his critical edition. Esser wrote in 1978 that Paul Sabatier, who discovered and edited the test of the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful, "erroneously gave it the title 'Words of Life and Salvation', which he borrowed from the title of an earlier exhortatory work." Pazzelli advances compelling arguments that show very clearly that the title of the so-called First Version of the Letter to the Faithful is indeed "These are the words of life and salvation," and that all signs indicate that "it almost certainly treats of that forma vitae ('way of life') which, according to the first biographers, Francis drew up for his penitents."

Pazzelli personally examined the codex and concluded:

1. Esser's edition departs from the wording of the manuscript.

#### Volterra Codex

these are the words of life and salvation which if anyone reads and observes will find life and salvation from the Lord with all those who do penance [de illis qui faciunt poenitentiam]...

In the name of the Lord. All who love the Lord...

#### Esser's Edition

(An exhortation to the brothers and sisters of penance)

In the name of the Lord! [Chapter 1]: Of those who do penance [de illis qui faciunt poenitentiam].

All who love the Lord...

- 2. The words of the Volterra Codex, which Esser takes for the closing part of the *Admonitions*, instead of the beginning of the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful*, and consequently relegates to the status of a variant reading, are not "Haec sunt verba ... salutem a Domino. Amen." Haec sunt verba ... salutem a domino de illis qui faciunt poenitentiam."
  - 3. The above words are written in red ink in the Volterra Codex.
- 4. In the other writings contained in the Volterra Codex, the titles as well as the initial letters of the chapters and the conclusions are also written in red. The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful has the following in red:

——the title,

——the heading of chapter 2: "Of those who do not do penance,"

85. Pazzelli, "Il titolo," p. 235.

<sup>84.</sup> Op., p. 107. See Sabatier, cited in n. 2 above.

<sup>86.</sup> Esser, Op., p. 103; also p. 82, n. 6.

——and three initial letters: The "T" in in nomini Domini, the "O" in omnes at the beginning of chapter 2, and the "O" of the omnes at the beginning of the postscript.

5. The punctuation differs from Esser's. Pazzelli cites additional, but less important arguments, and asks: How was it possible for a renowned and conscientious scholar like Esser to commit such an error? Perhaps because no one after Sabatier had personally inspected the codex, and even Esser had to rely on photocopies and microfilm that did not reproduce the red coloration. This is not the place to try to explain why Esser judged the closing words of the admonitions to be a variant reading and come up with a new title for the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful. We can only say that Pazzelli's reasoning appears to be airtight, and his conclusions must be assessed in the light of the codex itself.

# c) Agreements and Differences

As we see it, Pazzelli's investigation in part supports and in part complements our own study.

- 1. The fact that the three initial letters are written in red confirms our tripartite division of the text.
- 2. We too placed the words In nomine Domini at the heading of Chapter 1, not over the whole letter.
- 3. The newly-discovered and presumably original title confirms our reservations about the title used by Esser that we expanded to include exultation on the one hand, and shortened to "brothers and sisters" on the other. While it is true that the title Pazzelli suggests for the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful differs from our's, there is no essential disagreement. The title we arrived at through internal criticism and comparison with other writings of the saint cannot of course be the same one that Francis gave the writing or the one imposed by later copiests.
- 4. The Recensio prior of the Letter to the Faithful will hereafter bear the title: "These are the words of life and salvation." But this introduction tells us little about the literary genre of the writing. It omits the key word "penance," which dominates the entire letter and sets its tone. The title we suggest: Exultation and Exhortation about Penance is in full accord with the new Rule for the Order of Secular Franciscans approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978. And the new Rule for the Third Order Regular, approved by Pope John Paul II in 1982, is introduced with this writing of St. Francis. However, only the first, joyful part—

<sup>87.</sup> For more about history and tradition, see Pazzelli, "Il titolo," pp. 237-40.

<sup>88.</sup> AAS 70 (1978): 454-55; Acta O.F.M. 97 (1978): 362-71; Tertius Ordo 49 (1978): 109-11; Regel der Franziskanischen Gemeinschaft, Deutsche Franziskanische Gemeinschaft (TOF) (Kevalaer, 1979).

the exultation over penance—is used. The warning part was considered a bit too strong and was omitted. 89 At any rate, this writing is assured of a permanent place in Franciscan literature.

89. AAS 75 (1983): 544; "Regula et vita Fratrum Sororumque Tertii Ordinis Regularis Sancti Francisci," in AnalOFMCap 99 (1983): 159-66. See L. Hardick, Unsere Regel-unser Leben. Kommentar zu Regel und Leben der Brüder und Schwestern vom Regulierten Dritten Ordens des hl. Franziskus (Werl in Westphalia, 1987).



## Francis's Peace with All of Creation

Pope John Paul II

[An excerpt from the message of the Holy Father on December 8, 1989, for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990. Reprinted with permission of L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly English Edition, nos. 5152 (1120), December 1826, 1989, pg. 3, no. 16.]

In 1979, I proclaimed St. Francis of Assisi as the heavenly patron of those who promote ecology (see Apostolic Letter "Inter Sanctos," AAS 71 [1979]: 150910). He offers Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation. As a friend of the poor who was loved by God's creatures, St. Francis invited all of creation—animals, plants, natural forces, even Brother Sun and Sister Moon—to give honor and praise to the Lord. The Poor Man of Assisi gives us striking witness that when we are at peace with God, we are better able to devote ourselves to building up that peace with all creation which in inseparable from peace among all peoples.

It is my hope that the inspiration of St. Francis will help us to keep ever alive a sense of fraternity with all those good and beautiful things that almighty God has created. And may He remind us of our serious obligation to respect and watch over them with care, in light of that greater and higher fraternity that exists within the human family.

#### Errata

Please make the following corrections for this article ("Francis's Peace with All of Creation," vol. 4, no. 2, p. 33):

Line 3: Change 5152 to 51-52 Line 4: Change 1826 to 18-26 Line 7: Change 150910 to 1509-10