The Title of the "Recensio Prior of the Letter to the Faithful": Clarifications Regarding Codex 225 of Volterra (cod. Vo)

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It is a well-known fact that it was the illustrious Franciscanist, Paul Sabatier, who in 1900 first brought to modern attention Codex 225 of the Guarnacci Library of Volterra, and the writing of St. Francis known today as the First Letter to the Faithful, or the Recensio Prior of the Letter to the Faithful [or the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful—Editor]. In that same year he published it as an appendix to the second volume of his Collection d'études et de documents sûr l'histoire religieuse et litteraire du Moyen Age, with the title which the document bore in that codex: "Haec sunt verba vitae et salutis quae si quis legerit et fecerit inveniet vitam et auriet salutem a domino" ("These are the words of life and salvation, which, if anyone reads them and puts them into practice, he will find life and attain the salvation of the Lord").

Walter Goetz, in 1904, was the first to express the doubt that this was truly the title of the new Opusculum of St. Francis published by Sabatier, because these words were included by Luke Wadding as the conclusion of the Admonitions of St. Francis in his Opuscula B.P. Francisci. Unfortunately, this doubt was accepted by most scholars as a conclusion. After a few brief interventions and observations by Leonhard Lemmens and Heinrich Boehmer, this text of the Letter to the Faithful contained in the Volterra Codex was largely ignored and not included in any further editions of the Opuscula or writings of St. Francis.

However, when the extant manuscripts of the Letter to the Faithful were assembled by the scholars of the Collegio San Bonaventura of Quaracchi-Grottaferrata for a new critical edition of the writings of St. Francis, they stated that the text of the Volterra Codex stood by itself in the whole textual tradition. It was then that Kajetan Esser compiled an exhaustive critical study, first published in German in Collectanea Franciscana in 1975, and later in English and Italian in

¹The title of the volume is *Fratris Bartholi de Assisio tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, Fischbacher (Paris, 1900). Our *Opusculum*, "Haec sunt verba vitae et salutis..." is found on pages 132–35.

the Analecta Tertii Ordinis Regularis sancti Francisci.² In this study the author demonstrates that we are dealing with a first and shorter draft of the Letter to the Faithful, and which was probably written many years prior to it. From this conclusion he referred to the text as the Recensio Prior of the Letter to the Faithful. It is Esser's lasting credit that he gave this document the important recognition which it enjoys today with all scholars. However, regarding the words which Sabatier included, Esser never agreed to recognize "Haec sunt verba vitae et salutis..." as the title of the Letter to the Faithful in the Volterra Codex, which he named the Recensio Prior. In his 1974 critical study he wrote that "what Paul Sabatier used as title to the Letter is actually the conclusion of the Admonitions; not only in the Volterra Codex (folio 148r) but also in many other instances of the text up to and including the Editio princeps of the Opuscula by Luke Wadding. Here Paul Sabatier was definitely in error."

Up until 1972 Esser had considered the Letter to the Faithful in the Volterra Codex as an extract of the Letter to the Faithful. He had, in fact, written in his La tradition manuscrite: "It is simply a matter of an extract of the Letter": and again: "In the Volterra Codex the Admonitions are followed by an extract of the Letter to the Faithful." A few years later he modified his position about the Recensio Prior, as we have seen, and no longer accepted the words "Haec sunt verba vitae et salutis..." as the conclusion of the Admonitions. In fact, in his critical edition of the Opuscula he did not include them as such, because at that time he considered these words as merely a later addition to the Admonitions.

Nevertheless, Esser remained convinced that the words in question did not constitute the title of the Letter to the Faithful in the Volterra Codex.⁷

Following a thorough examination of the Volterra Codex and the textual tradition connected with it, we defend the position that the

² Kajetan Esser, "A Forerunner of the 'Epistola ad Fideles' of St. Francis of Assisi (cod. 225 of the Biblioteca Guarnacci of Volterra," in Analecta Tertii Ordinis Regularis sancti Francisci 14 (1978): 11–47.

³ Ibid., pp. 12–13.

⁴ K. Esser and R. Oliger, La tradition manuscrite des Opuscules de saint François d'Assise (Rome, 1972), p. 93, n. 355.

⁵ Ibid., p. 92, n. 346.

⁶Esser, Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis. Ed. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Ad Claras Aquas- Grottaferrata [Rome], 1978), p. 82 and n. 6 and p. 107. See Francis and Clare: The Complete Works, eds. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap. and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., Paulist Press (New York, 1982), pp. 62–65.

⁷ In the same edition of 1978 Esser put this annotation: "Textum huius epistulae cl. Sabatier primum edidit, sed ei erronee titulum Verba vitae et salutis imposuit, quem a verbis praecedenti Opuscolo Admonitionum subscriptis accepit" (Opuscula, p. 107).

words "Haec sunt verba vitae et salutis..." are the correct original title of the Recensio Prior of the Letter to the Faithful. We also claim that the same formulation shows that the Opusculum is addressed to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, and that consequently we are dealing with the form of life given by St. Francis to his penitents, according to the testimony of his first biographers.

First of all, we can formulate the following observations:

1. Esser, probably based on his convictions, created his own interpretation in presenting the introduction to the *Recensio Prior* in his critical edition of the *Opuscula*. This can be easily seen in the following exact reproduction of the two texts:

The Volterra Codex

haec sunt verba vitae et salutis quae si quis legerit et fecerit inveniet vitam et auriet salutem a domino de illis qui faciunt penitentiam.

In nomine domini. Omnes qui dominum diligunt...8

Esser

(Exhortatio ad fratres et sorores de poenitentia) In nomine Domini! (Cap. I) De illis qui faciunt poenitentiam. Omnes qui Dominum diligunt...9

2. The Volterra Codex does not read: "Haec sunt verba vitae et salutis quae si quis legerit et fecerit inveniet vitam et hauriet salutem a Domino. Amen.", as Esser wrote in another work. On the contrary it reads: "haec sunt verba vitae et salutis quae si quis legerit et fecerit inveniet vitam et auriet salutem a domino de illis qui faciunt poenitentiam."

3. All of the above ("haec sunt...faciunt poenitentiam") is written in red ink.

4. In the Volterra Codex, which contains the Opuscula of St. Francis (folia 141r—155r), the only things written in red ink are the titles of the works and the first letter of each chapter and conclusions. In particular, in the Recensio Prior, that is, in the work under consideration here, the only things written in red are (a) the title of the work, (b) the "De illis qui non agunt poenitentiam" of the second part, and (c) the three initial letters, namely, the I (In nomine domini), the O beginning the second section (Omnes autem illi et illae...), and the O of the conclusion (Omnes illos quibus...).

5. Following the "a domino", there is neither a period nor an "Amen."
The text continues on the same line, with no other separation than that

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 82, n. 6.

⁸See folio 148r of the Volterra Codex, attached here. A complete photographic reproduction in color of the text of Recensio Prior of Cod. Vo can now be seen in Frate Francesco a tutti i suoi fedeli, ed. Lino Temperini, Franciscanum (Rome, 1987), pp. 11–15.

⁹ Esser, Opuscula, pp. 107-8. See Francis and Clare, p. 63.

which is usually left between the words, with "de illis qui..." Furthermore, the "de illis" has a lower case "d".

6. On the other hand, the "d" of the second part of the Recensio Prior (De illis qui non agunt poenitentiam) is in the upper case.

7. Throughout the *Recensio Prior* in the *Volterra Codex*, a period is always followed by an upper case letter in black ink with some decorative stroke in red.

8. Throughout the Volterra Codex, the five Opuscula of St. Francis¹¹ all end with a period. The Admonitions, which in the Volterra Codex immediately precede the Recensio Prior, also end with a period after the final words: "Beatus servus qui secreta domini observabit in corde suo." The words "haec sunt verba vitae...", which follow immediately, begin with a lower case "h" in red ink and do not have a period. Logically they cannot be considered either as a continuation or as the closing words of the Admonitions.

Conclusions

1. Since the phrase "haec sunt verba vitae..." has neither a period after the words "a domino" nor an "Amen", as has been erroneously claimed, nor an upper case "d" in "de illis" which follows, it must be read and understood as a single sentence.

2. Omitting the internal part of the title under consideration, that is, the part in the conditional mood, the sentence reads as follows: "haec sunt verba vitae et salutis...de illis qui faciunt poenitentiam" ("these are the words of life and salvation...concerning those who do penance").

3. In the conclusion of the *Recensio Prior* there is a conceptual, structural and phonetic correspondence with the beginning. Let us compare the two:

(Beginning): haec sunt verba vitae et salutis quae si quis fecerit... (Conclusion): ista...verba...spiritus et vita sunt. Et qui non fecerint...

- 4. All of this leads us to believe that the entire section in red ink, placed at the beginning of the Recensio Prior of the Volterra Codex, constitutes the title or introduction to the same document. It also indicates that the writing which follows, and the instructions or norma vitae which it contains, are addressed to penitents.
- 5. The words "haec sunt verba vitae et salutis" remind us of the formulation of the initial words of the Earlier Rule: "Haec est vita Evangelii."
- 6. The Recensio Prior can be identified with the form of life given by St. Francis to the penitents, "according to the testimony of the earliest

¹¹The writings of St. Francis contained in the Volterra Codex are: Admonitions, folios 141r–148r; Recensio Prior, folios 148r–150r; Epistola ad Custodes, folios 150r–151r; Epistola ad capitulum, folios 151r–155r; Oratio Omnipotens, aeterne, fol. 155r. See Esser and Oliger, La tradition, p. 93.

biographers." This is no longer merely a hypothesis, as has been commonly admitted up to this point because of Esser's study, but almost a precluded certainty.

7. Then we can better understand why, in mentioning the form of life which Francis gave to his penitents, "the biographers...do report that it was a way of salvation," precisely because they must have known that the form of life had as its title: "haec sunt verba vitae et salutis."

Corollaries

1. How can we explain Esser's position, which is usually so accurate? His conviction, as we have seen, must have been based on the fact that in the Wadding edition the words "haec sunt verba vitae et salutis" appear as the conclusion of the Admonitions. Furthermore, it is our opinion that among the five authoritative scholars who wrote about the Volterra Codex (namely, Sabatier, Goetz, Lemmens, Boehmer and Esser), only Sabatier examined the manuscript personally. The others dealt either with transcripts made by their collaborators, or, more probably, with black and white photocopies or microfilms. This could explain the mistake. It is mainly because of the red ink and the parts written in red in the Volterra Codex that the deductions we now present are apparent.

2. What can we say about the "many other instances of the text up and including the 'Editio princeps'...by Wadding," which include the words "haec sunt verba vitae et salutis" as the conclusion of the Admonitions?

First of all, the written testimony is not very great. Esser's edition of the Opuscula cites only four texts other than the Volterra Codex, namely, a Vatican manuscript (Ross. Lat. 23), a London manuscript (Gray's Inn Library 2), a Madrid manuscript (Archivo Histórico Nacional cod 8° Comm 3) and an Oxford manuscript (Corpus Christi College cod. 315). The London manuscript is of the same group as the Vatican manuscript and dependent on it. The Madrid manuscript is considered to be from the sixteenth century, and the Oxford manuscript from the seventeenth. These two latter texts, therefore, are of relatively little value in the textual evidence. 16

The oldest and most important of these codices is the Vatican manuscript, which is nonetheless later than the *Volterra Codex*, from the same group as it, and most probably dependent upon it. ¹⁷ We can

¹² Esser, Forerunner, p. 38.

¹³ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵ Esser, Opuscula, p. 82, n. 6. See Esser and Oliger, La tradition, p. 69, nn. 240.

¹⁶See Esser and Oliger, La tradition, p. 69.

probably attribute the error to the Vatican manuscript. We must bear in mind that "the part (of the Volterra Codex) that contains the Opuscula, according to the opinion of experts, was written around the middle of the thirteenth century.... Hence the Volterra Codex must be accorded a special position in the textual history of the Opuscula."18 The copyist or amanuensis of the Vatican manuscript decided to copy the Admonitions from the Volterra Codex, but not what followed them, that is, the Recensio Prior. At the end of the Admonitions, the copyist of Vatican manuscript copied the title (written in red ink) of the Recensio Prior, placing it as a conclusion or adjunct to the Admonitions. Was this an error? Highly unlikely. More probably, the copyist was attracted by the beauty of the phrase "haec sunt verba vitae et salutis..." This second supposition is further supported by the fact that he eliminated the "de illis qui faciunt poenitentiam" and substituted it with an "Amen." He thereby created a sentence which is a suitable commendation for any religious writing. Esser hinted at the same idea when he wrote: "Perhaps...the addition (to the Admonitions) later arose because of the intention to give the body of the Admonitions a proper conclusion."19 Once it entered into the Vatican manuscript as a part of the Admonitions, the phrase was naturally copied into the codices which depend on it. Most probably Wadding used one of these codices for his text of the Admonitions.20

In his critical edition of the *Opuscula*, Esser made the important decision not to accept the words "haec sunt verba vitae..." as the conclusion of the *Admonitions*. He did not have the time, however, to make the next consequential step and recognize the phrase as the title of the *Recensio Prior*. If, in fact, these words are obviously and eminently placed between the *Admonitions* and the *Recensio Prior*, yet do not constitute a part of the former, it would seem obvious that they are a part of the latter.

We can only hope that future editions of the writings of St. Francis and translations dependent upon them may bear the title and the beginning of the *Recensio Prior* as it is given to us in the only codex which has transmitted the work to us, namely, the *Volterra Codex 225*.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 92 and n. 347.

¹⁸ Esser, Forerunner, p. 12, n. 1.

¹⁹ Esser, *Gli scritti di S. Francesco d'Assisi*. Nuova edizione critica e versione italiana. Ed. Messaggero (Padua, 1982), p. 121.

Wadding ended his text of the Admonitions as follows: "Haec igitur sunt verba vitae et salutis, quae si quis elegerit, et fecerit, inveniet vitam, et hauriet salutem a Domino. Amen" (B.P. Francisci Assisiatis Opuscula (Antwerp, 1623), p. 80.

spe mercevie no cupit maiseltale le munde qui se alussimme maiseltalut opa eme quiscique placuit. Briosui qui sécreta do obstitabit i corre sue te becst iba unte e salutis qui plageit e secrit i boiet bua e auriet salutie

adno della qui facilit pinam-

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