

Gospel Love Concerning the Rule of Saint Francis

This is a real, authentic spiritual commentary on the Rule of Saint Francis, indeed, I would call it mystical, pneumatic, Christ-centred, aligned with the Cross. It is a commentary that does not have much in common with other commentaries on the Rule, not even the one by John of Fano, also contains pages of lofty spirituality. The reason for this is that it demonstrates in the clearest possible manner what the early Capuchins meant by the spiritual interpretation and observance of the Rule of Saint Francis.

Indeed, it makes no reference to Papal declarations, to official or private explanations of the Rule, such as those of the Four Masters or of Saint Bonaventure or John of Pecham, nor even of those by Hugh of Digne, Peter John Olivi or Angelo Clareno. The only reference is to the Gospel and the evangelical goals of Saint Francis. The explanation of words shuns any legal interpretation and is based on the deeds of Christ by means of which even the words of the Gospel are interpreted.

It is continuous rejection of the letter or “carnal” interpretation in order to take to heart the Spirit of Christ which is hidden within the letter of the naked words and it portrays a totally spiritual hermeneutic that guides and enlightens the journey of this sapiential reading of the Rule according to “the loving and spiritual relish and emotion of Christ” which was proclaimed by “the humble and poor Francis as another Christ.”

Finally, this is a commentary where the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit is at work. Only someone who possesses the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Christ and the “spiritual virtues” of the Gospel can grasp the brief words of the Rule of the Poverello.

Its author is unknown, but taking everything into consideration we may presume that the work was composed in an environment of deep spirituality and zeal for reform, and, if it did not actually come from the pen of a Capuchin, it was probably adapted by a Capuchin, or at least it perfectly expresses the ideal of conformity to Christ and Saint Francis that was longed for in the earliest days of the reform.

5. 1. *[The Rule and life of the Friars is this to observe the holy Gospel of our lord Jesus Christ]*¹

462 [...] Thus it is impossible for human reason to explain or interpret the secret virtues of the spirit of Christ, which consist in the observance of the Gospel. It is given only to those who practice these spiritual virtues to recognise and eat this bread and not to someone who talks about them and who is content with only wearing the habit while not practicing them.

¹ The anonymous author explains the opening words of the Rule, but the text lacks a heading and is incomplete. Nevertheless in the large Assisi codex, the one who put it together and compiled it took care to divide the text into paragraphs with numbers in the margin and preceded them with summary headings for every chapter in order. This is the first title and it carries the following heading: “This interprets the words of the Rule which say: the Rule and life of the Friars Minor is to observe the holy Gospel according to the real intent of Saint Francis and it shows how by means of this our Father invites all people to observe the holy Gospel and taste the living water, that the Lord offered to the Samaritan woman.” (Cod. Cit. p. 1199).

Gospel Love Concerning the Rule of Saint Francis

Saint Francis speaks to those who practice these virtues as if he were a second Christ: “O you, who for love of Him who died for our salvation, have separated your hearts from the love of the world and of yourselves, and have taken up your cross; O, you, I say, humble apostolic people, come, because your life and rule is to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom, by His grace, I already carry in my heart. Come, O you who love higher things from the heart, for whom it is no burden to observe the Gospel, but rather an incomparable sweetness.” Indeed, it is called *Rule of the friars minor*² in order to show that only lesser, humble and spiritual men are called to such observance, knowing very well that those who are proud and sensual would harm and damage it, since, as Saint Paul says, *no one can say Jesus Christ, unless in the Holy Spirit*³ Thus no one should despise its humility or poverty unless moved by the spirit of darkness. Therefore this most pious sacrament can only be believed when understood in the Holy Spirit, because whoever opposes this Rule already knows that he is talking in the dark.

He spoke to those for whom he thought this message was intended in the words which he addressed to the Samaritan woman, inviting them to the love of the observance of the Gospel and inviting them to ask for the water which the Lord was offering to them without payment:⁴ “If you only knew who it was that was asking you for a drink, you would have asked him to give it to you and he would have given you water in your heart that was springing up to eternal life.”⁵ The spiritual meaning of this is: “If it were possible for you to know the spiritual virtues of the Gospel as I know them; you who are a Samaritan, that is a teacher, who knows many things about nature and philosophy, but only according to the letter, with this spiritual understand you would humble yourself to ask me to give you my spiritual water to drink, that is the love of the Gospel, and with that you would receive a spring in your heart, that would reach up to eternal life.”

Thus the humble and poor Francis, like a second Christ, cries out in a loud voice in order to be heard by all men who wish to live and die spiritually, saying: “Whoever wants to or is thirsty for the sweet water of the Gospel of Christ which issues and flows from his most holy side⁶ come and enter into the Rule of the Lesser Brothers to serve the holy Gospel”. In this way he answered, as if responding to a question being put to him by someone as to what he should do, with the following words [1203] saying:

6. *[Living in obedience, without anything of one's own and in chastity]*⁷

² In the manuscript there is a bracket and it adds: “that apprehension in people does not come from the Rule or the way of life, rather it is a torment to those who are proud or who love their body to hear this and thus it continues” and there follows in another hand: “reader note that what is written between these brackets is wrong, and so begin to read outside them and leave what they enclose”. We have followed this injunction.

³ Cf. 1 Cor 12, 3.

⁴ Cf. Rev 21,6

⁵ Cf. Jn 4, 10, 14.

⁶ Cf. Jn 19, 34; Ez 47, 1.

⁷ The second paragraph begins here with the words: “The other [words]: Living in obedience, without anything of one's own and in chastity”, are explained here according to his real thoughts, and it is shown how to observe the Gospel one must accept the likeness of Christ crucified’ (Cod. Cit. p. 1199).

463. As if to say: By imitating the same spiritual virtues that the Gospel preaches, which are the things that we know that the Lord observed and demonstrated by his deeds on earth and which he left as an example for us, this lays down that it is fitting for anyone who wants to enter into the observance of the Gospel virtues to become like Christ in obedience, poverty and chastity and that he become a lesser brother to Christ, as Christ was himself when he bore all our iniquities.⁸ Through his obedience let us observe the precepts and counsels and thus become his sons.

Francis bears witness to this by saying; “Whoever does the will of my Father is my brother, sister and mother.”⁹ Thus the voice of Francis which invites us to eternal salvation by observing the Gospel implies nothing short of changing carnal men into spiritual men, earthly into heavenly, those who are proud to becoming humble, and turning men into gods and raising them from death to life, from darkness to light, as the Psalm says: *This is the change of the right hand of the most High*;¹⁰ and speaking to truly evangelical men says: *You indeed are the body of Christ*, member for member, *be zealous for the better gifts*;¹¹ and at one in spirit with Francis Paul says; “You are the body of Christ and members of its head; search with the fervour of its love and devotion for a higher gift of God rather than living only by human reason and the plain wisdom of the letter: that is seek the Holy Spirit and his love.”

To advertise all the good that is in the practice of the main virtues of the Gospel, like the town crier, Francis proclaims: “let the brothers live in obedience, poverty and chastity”. No one can possess these things without being like Christ. Because of this he was the original one to profess and observe this trilogy and to demonstrate by word and example once and for all that these three were the substance and perfection of his Gospel; and thus so that after his passing no one need have doubts or enquire whether Gospel perfection consisted in something else he quoted the words of the Gospel: *everything that I heard from my Father I have made known to you*¹² as if to say (*quasi dicat*): “As you can see, everything that I heard from my Father concerning obedience, poverty and chastity is contained in this brief treatment”. However in saying this he was speaking as a man, since, as God, he had no need to say this. Had he explained or demonstrated the whole of divine wisdom we would not have been able to comprehend it.

However he said this to us to generate within us the respect and love to follow these virtues since there is no other way to perfection but the practice of these three heroic virtues which he places at the beginning of the Rule of the Lesser Brothers. This is how Saint Francis intended to make his brothers evangelical men only by observing these three things, because if they observed all the rest of the Rule, but transgressed in one of these whether out of sensuality or malice, they would be guilty of transgressing the whole Rule. Thus this short and simple command includes complete victory over hell and triumph over all the falls which have occurred from the beginning of the world until now. This victory is constituted by and consists in this sought-after observance. It is precisely

⁸ Cf. Is 53, 4; Mt 8, 17; 1Pt 2, 14.

⁹ Cf. Mt 12, 50.

¹⁰ Ps 77, 11 (Douay-Rhiems and King James 76, 11).

¹¹ 1 Cor 12, 27, 31.

¹² Jn 15, 15.

about those who only wear the habit of this victory and triumph and are not concerned with its [1204] virtues that the Saviour says: *My sheep hear my voice and follow me*¹³ to show that it does not take much to appear meek and kind in the religious habit, but at the end without following Christ in holy virtue they will end up in eternal and mortal damnation, as if the Lord wanted to say: “My sheep follow me, but have the appearance and show of humility, without the practice. *Amen, I say unto you that I do not know you.*”¹⁴

464. Yet the entire basis of the Gospel life is contained in the first words of the Rule, words which are of such exaltedness and dignity that it is a wonder that not only rational men, but even animals and minerals are not moved on hearing their dignity and reverential content. After such a gift and grace, which the most kind God had bestowed on mankind in the Gospel of His Son and His teaching, by calling all creatures to the knowledge of the truth in few and simple words which are intelligible and attainable, it is a wonder how people imitating Lucifer, the prince of death, remain in their inflexibility and obstinacy.. Whoever seeks something other than the fruit of Gospel love, which consists in obedience, poverty and chastity has neither the taste for truth nor puts it into practice, and is more accurately called a Pharisee than a Christian, because, while wearing the habit of the humility of Christ, he does not recognise what it should produce.

We have only said this so that the words of the humble and poor Francis can be understood in a spiritual manner, and although they are short, nevertheless they are of great value and dignity, to the degree that they contain and embrace the whole of Sacred Scripture. What the doctors have said about them was to allow men to understand them correctly, in the face of human malice, which is not satisfied with what is simple and pure, since in themselves these words have no need of explanation other than putting them into practice and love. Because of this, carrying on the work which he had already begun, and had preached to others inviting them to evangelical perfection, Francis, following in the footsteps of the Saviour imitated Him who *began to do and teach*¹⁵ and added other words from the Gospel.

7. *Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected and to the Roma Church.*¹⁶

465. We should note in these words that Saint Francis intended to promise obedience and reverence from the heart and in spirit mainly to Christ; and in his stead to the Lord Pope, his Vicar canonically elected, since if he were not canonically elected he would not be the vicar of Christ. He says obedience and reverence demonstrating by these words that obedience is voluntary and that obedience without reverence is nothing and is lacking in any merit. In this he sets out the structure of true and perfect obedience and

¹³ Cf. Jn 10, 3, 4.

¹⁴ Mt 25, 12.

¹⁵ Acts 1,1.

¹⁶ The third paragraph begins: “How our father Saint Francis in the other words which follow understood mainly to promise obedience to Christ and then to His Vicar and it shows how obedience without reverence is nothing and of no merit.” (Cod. Cit. p. 1199).

how it must be performed only out of the love and reverence which is proper to God and to put into effect what was said above. Namely, that the life of the Lesser Brothers is to observe the holy Gospel [1250] of Christ, living in obedience, without anything of one's own and in chastity. Thus to be like Christ in what he did starts from obedience, as Christ obeyed his Father, and said: *I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me, my Father.*¹⁷ With this in mind and to observe this, out of a desire to imitate the Saviour, of whom it has been said that *he was made obedient unto death,*¹⁸ Saint Francis promised obedience and reverence to his canonical Vicar, wishing and desiring that they also who would be called to this Order would be bound forever. Other words then follow saying:

8. *And the other brothers are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.*¹⁹

466. With regard to his successors it is sufficient for us to obey the one appointed and approved for us by the Apostolic See. However as was said above it is impossible to rule and continue to be spiritual without the love of God.

Thus without savouring the obedience of Christ towards his Father, and having a grasp of the spiritual force behind his humanity which was designed for emptying himself to condescend to our mortality, freeing it from eternal death, without such sensitivity, we cannot be obedient to the death. Just as it would not be possible without bodily nourishment to live a human and mortal life or maintain it, so it would not be possible to maintain a spiritual perspective in our souls without spiritual and conscious nourishment, which is the active and continual recollection of the divine and conscious life of Christ, which we have promised. Therefore whoever wishes to observe the first chapter, and to know what was Francis' intent with regard to it, should gaze, as he did, on the conscious and physical obedience of Christ to find there all exposition or explanation and true perseverance to the end. Christ himself says: *Whoever does not gather with me, scatters.*²⁰

Therefore whoever wishes to observe true obedience and does not focus all his thoughts and desires on Christ, can only squander and dissipate his own self. Thus an understanding of this chapter is totally based on spiritual sensitivity and heartfelt humility. There can be no precise explanation if we move away from spiritual considerations and wish to explain it in terms of well-ordered words and writings. Thus it is first necessary to savour this self-emptying of ourselves, if we wish to truly imitate

¹⁷ Jn 6, 38.

¹⁸ Phil 2, 8.

¹⁹ The fourth paragraph carries the title: "That they endeavour to continually persevere in a pure understanding and observance of the Rule and holy obedience and that they show what constitutes an understanding of the first chapter and how the observance and transgression of the whole Rule depend on its transgression and observance". (Cod. Cit. p. 1199).

²⁰ Lk 11, 25. Note the mystical and spiritual inspiration of this page which is evocative and modern in its theological concepts.

Christ. There is so much divine wisdom and charity in this approach that if all who have lived on earth wanted to explain it in words they would say nothing.²¹

In this chapter Saint Francis gives a short sermon, so that he can direct everyone's attention towards the spiritual love and continual recollection of the humility of God in which his true sons may find a model for the obedience which they should observe. In fact he knew that anyone who did not possess this image of the charity of the Redeemer would not be able to have perfect obedience, as the Lord says; "Whoever loses his soul will find it,"²² where he is referring to those who are truly obedient, to whom this sensitivity of soul belongs since, if it were otherwise, there would not be perfect obedience. Thus the outcome of this circumstance is that one has to deny oneself for the sake of him who emptied himself for us.²³[1206] The whole thing consists in a consideration and heartfelt reflection and continuous sensitivity of soul and that savouring which overcomes all mortal weariness, so that what appears to be bitter turns into sweetness of soul and body, which those who have tried it know for certain.²⁴

467. Saint Francis intends to invite the brothers to this savouring and heartfelt love and to nothing less. Having established the model of true obedience, he also gives in chapter two a representation of how men may engage in such obedience, in which, following this spiritual interpretation, the brothers who come to this Order will come to a spiritual knowledge and savouring of the life and death of Christ, on which the love and knowledge of their obedience poverty and chastity are based and rooted. Since the first chapter is the foundation and driving force of this life and Rule, the intention of Saint Francis in the first chapter is that the presence of God as human and humble, suffering and poor, virginal and immaculate, be continually contemplated with heartfelt and deep love, the exceedingly sweet recollection of which provides every faithful heart with a model and example through which to know and be capable of observing the Rule that he has promised without the need of further explanations.²⁵ Thus from the lips of Jesus Christ, his Saviour, he says: "The life of the lesser brothers is to observe the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ living in obedience, poverty and chastity." With these words he shows that they should submit themselves to and become lesser than all other Christians in imitation of Christ, who made himself a worm and no man for love of us, *a reproach of men, despised by the people.*²⁶

Whoever looks closely and wishes to consciously taste the explanation of the words of the Rule, words filled with such ardour, virtue and humility, will see that it is

²¹ This sounds like an expression taken from the mystical language of Angela of Foligno. Indeed, it is the mystical experience of one's own emptying in Christ which leads to true comprehension and explanation of the Rule. Here there flourishes a certain mistrust and opposition to any juridical or doctrinal exposition, even with respect to verbal analysis.

²² Cf. Mt 10, 39.

²³ Cf Mt 16, 24; Lk 9, 23; Phil 2, 7; 2 Cor 5, 14.

²⁴ Therefore, he is speaking of spirituality which has been experienced not taught which characterises sapiential spirituality, which Saint Francis, whose *Testament* is quoted here, was involved in. *Test.* 3 (FA:ED I, p. 124).

²⁵ Here too he emphasises by means of beautiful concepts that the true exposition, comprehension and observance of the Rule consists in conformity to and imitation of Christ.

²⁶ PS 22, 7.

nothing else than a voice from the heart of Francis in the person of Christ, against human starkness, avarice and sensuality which proclaims as did John the Baptist: “The Kingdom of God is at hand, produce fruits that are worthy of penance. Behold the Saviour comes after me.”²⁷ Thus, just as following John the Baptist’s preaching Christ’s presence was not able to be restrained from imparting authenticity to his preaching by his coming to save the world and give it light and life, so following the observance of the Gospel Rule and life which Francis proclaimed and preached, there comes the loving and spiritual savour of and sensitivity to Christ and His humility. However it speaks, in the person of Christ, through the spirit not the letter²⁸ inviting us to that sweetness which is to be found in obedience, poverty and chastity and in truth speaking as one would speak who, in the name of the humble God, was proclaiming it to all who wished to listen.²⁹

468. 5. “O all of you who have your hearts set on piety and heartfelt love of the Only Begotten Son of God and who wish to savour his boundless love and want to know how great was the Divine charity in humbling His own Son for us³⁰, come and embrace this Rule, where you will find all charity perfectly and understand what divine charity is, if perhaps you have not known it up to the present. Come you blessed by my Eternal Father, have no fear, because the love of this cross surpasses and goes beyond all gentleness and sweetness. Embrace this obedience. Imitate the Incarnate Humble God in divine virtues so that you become rich beyond all measure in Him, and you will receive angelic spotlessness in him, both physical and mental. Come most pious lovers of God to God who was stripped and executed in a most bitter and painful death. Be not fearful of approaching Him or of denying your desires and leave your earthly affairs, which are transitory and corruptible because, for out of love for us and to set us an example, our most pious Jesus, gave up earthly things and the whole world and although He was God of all, left and abandoned even His own self.³¹ [1207] Come, I say, great lovers and behold Him, our God Jesus enclosed and bound in this Gospel Rule and life, as if once again in the Virgin Mary, spiritually generated by the working of the Holy Spirit, who desires your hearts and spirits where he wishes to hide and show himself to you.³²

²⁷ Cf. Mt 3,2; Mk 1, 7; Lk 3, 16; Jn 1, 27, 30.

²⁸ Compare this passage with *Const. 1536*, 123. (See *Le prime costituzioni dei Frati Minori Cappuccini*, a cura di F.A. Catalano, C. Cagnoni, G. Santarelli, Roma, L’Italia Francescana, 1982, pp. 67-68; *The Capuchin Constitutions of 1536: A New Translation in English*, trans. Paul Hanbridge, Collegio San Lorenzo da Brindisi, Rome 2007, revised 2009, p. 43, 6-15).

²⁹ Paragraph five begins here with the heading: “The voice of our father Saint Francis who invites us to the knowledge and savour of the divine charity, which had been shown to us in Christ, who became man and died for us.” (Cod. Cit. p. 1199).

³⁰ These are Biblical recollections of, for example, Jn 3, 16; 1 Jn 3, 9, 10; Rom 8, 32; Gal 2, 20.

³¹ This is a concept of spiritual poverty that recalls intimately expressions of Blessed Angela of Foligno. Cf. Cagnoni. *La povertà nella beata Angela da Foligno*, in *Vita e spiritualità della beata Angela da Foligno*, a cura di O. Clément Schmidt, Perugia, 1987, 341-354.

³² A splendid image: Jesus is hidden in the Franciscan Rule by the work of the Holy Spirit as he was in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Through our observance of the Rule Jesus comes to be born within us. The concept was inspired by Clareno. Cf. HTrb I, 8 (ed. Ghinato, p. 32; Burr and Daniel, pp. 27-28). See also *La leggenda antica*, ed. S. Minocchi, c. 12, p. 33; *Vita del povero et humile Servo de Dio Francesco*, ed. M. Bigaroni, p. 49.

Gospel Love Concerning the Rule of Saint Francis

Therefore prepare your intellects and your love for his birth within you by doing worthy works of penance³³. Cut yourselves off from all of your own desires connected to malice or cunning and abandon the love of and desire for earthly things and reprobate love for gluttony and all sensuality and immodesty and embrace the new grace and Gospel life. Because the time for giving birth to the spiritual child has arrived³⁴ it only remains that you now have a faithful spirit and really appreciate the value and the dignity to which God through his mercy has deigned to call you now, by wanting your hearts to be humble, obedient, poor and chaste and stripped of transitory love. Come and have no fear of what you have promised. Because through small things you have been prepared not only for great things but have prepared yourself and this includes all that is good.³⁵ Therefore all you who wish to know about these things know that the path and gate is to observe the Gospel of Christ, living in obedience, poverty and chastity and to be lesser brothers to all men. These things will carry you to that wellbeing and joy which cannot be spoken about here.”

As has been said this is how Saint Francis intended to invite, in a few words, all the brothers who would come to the Order to experience insight and divine charity. Therefore if such loves does not spur persons on and motivate them and if within the Order they do not continually try to increase this conviction from good to better the result will be futile and empty as Saint John says: *because you are neither hot nor cold*.³⁶ Therefore, having shown in this first chapter how men are called in a spiritual manner to the spiritual life and Rule, the second chapter follows indicating that those whom God has called and placed in this Order are to be spiritually and carefully received.

HERE BEGINS THE SECOND CHAPTER OF GOSPEL LOVE CONCERNING THE RULE OF SAINT FRANCIS

1. *If there are any who wish to accept this life and come to our brothers, let them send them to their provincial ministers*³⁷

469. We need take nothing more from these words than the letter, because the intention of Saint Francis was nothing else than that the brothers be aware that the number of men would join the Order had been revealed and shown to him by Christ and how indiscriminate reception would be the cause of great ruin since many would not be called except by malicious spirits to enlarge and contaminate the purity of the Order³⁸ and not to observe the austerity and rigour which is required of those who wish to persevere. Indeed

³³ Cf. Lk 3, 8.

³⁴ This image is also used by Ubertino da Casale and Angelo Clareno, but here it seems to be applied to the Capuchin reform which has just been born.

³⁵ Cf. Rom 8, 32; *Exhortation to the Praise of God* and the prayer which begins *Almighty* (FA:ED I, p.138 and p. 116)

³⁶ Rev 3, 15.

³⁷ This is paragraph 1 of the second chapter with the heading: “Why in the Rule Saint Francis commanded that only the ministers were to receive to the Order and what was his intention in doing so.” (cod. Cit. p. 1290).

³⁸ This fact is also noted by John of Fano. For his sources see note 234 in his amended *Dialogue*.

he wished that this be carried out with great fear and maturity. Further he wished that this be assigned to the ministers alone so that persons would not be recruited into the Order indiscriminately on some occasions for some reason that appeared to be spiritual and for the edification of the people. Thus to be more careful he wanted the ministers alone to take care of this. Having investigated the basis of their faith and all canonical impediments as set down by law he wanted the ministers to address to them the words of the Gospel just as it is written that Christ had done in similar [1212] circumstances. It should be noted that the intention of Saint Francis was that attention should be paid not only to the words of Christ but also to his actions in order to make our profession complete, because Christ set us greater example by his actions than by his words.³⁹

When it says: “Let the brothers provide Gospel advice to those who wish to undertake this life”, it means this that the brothers do as Christ did who said to the one who wanted to walk the path of perfection: “Go sell everything that is yours and come follow me.” This is simple advice. However, when the young man said “Let me go and bury my Father and settle the things in my household,” Jesus replied saying: “Leave the dead to bury the dead.”⁴⁰ Even though Christ could have given him some advice or assistance as to what he should have done to deal with his affairs, since he is the source of goodness, he did not want to do this, not even to give advice about his affairs, but left worldly matters to the world and did not become involved in anything in order to show us and provide us with an example of how we ought to act with hostility and contempt towards the world not wanting us to become implicated in the concerns of the world on the occasion of the reception of brothers. Thus having been enlightened Francis correctly followed this idea and his desire to imitate the Saviour saying those other words of the Rule:

2. Let the brothers and the ministers be careful not to be concerned about their temporal goods⁴¹

470. These words are like a command and have the deepest meaning, because here the heartfelt desire of the Founder is that the brothers be aware above everything that is commanded in the Rule that they do not set an example of avarice by holding this world dear or by being concerned about the world or anything earthly in front of the men who come to take up the Gospel love.

First impressions with respect to things and desires that they recognise in those who induct them are so strong and powerful on those who come from the world that they will abandon the lifestyle or way of devotion sooner than change the good or bad impression which have been to them by those who first received them and set them an example. If by doing this the brothers think that they are making spiritual sons and

³⁹ This is an interesting principle of interpretation which the Capuchins attributed to Francis. Indeed the early Capuchins were not content to observe the Rule, but strove to imitate Saint Francis in his other sayings and deeds.

⁴⁰ Cf. Mt 8, 21-22; 19-21; Lk 9, 55-61; 18, 22 etc.

⁴¹ The second paragraph begins here with the heading: “Our Father Saint Francis did not want the brothers to set an example of avarice to those who came to the Order, and how they should appear to them to be poor not only materially, but also spiritually, and how they should never receive them if they did not want to practice this virtue and love it.” (Cod. Cit. p. 1209).

religious men they will indeed be creating venomous snakes, so that the former will poison the latter and this will be the greatest error.⁴²

Therefore the former will be held to account for the negligence of the others and what they have occasioned because of their bad example. It is preferable to do like the Saviour who when dying repudiated all earthly things. Thus the brothers should not show to those who wish to enter the Order any desire or wish either in word or action concerning their affairs whether large or small, even if, at first sight, this appears to be rigid and harsh to those who join. They will receive greater edification from our renunciation in the way we approach their affairs and our contempt for the world than they would have received peace and enjoyment from our advice. We should not only avoid⁴³ and be on our guards not to set them bad example by avarice and appearing to be false men of the Gospel only preoccupied with avarice and the cares of this world, but it was the wish of Christ and of his Francis (if we wish to escape their anger and curse)⁴⁴ that we set an example of being a model of every virtue for those who enter the Order and mainly that we make them [1213] enter the Order through the gate which is Christ, that is through deep obedience and humility and the continuous mortification of their expectations and activity.⁴⁵

In as much as they are all novices or unproductive, by continually impressing with heartfelt⁴⁶ charity, so that in some way, whether it be through wisdom or spirituality we make them taste the sufferings of the cross, so that then by means of this, the most kind Redeemer will give them to drink of the love of the cross, as is usually done at the outset for someone who submits to it out of love and patience. Anyone who embraces the first tenets of this knowledge, which resides in the secret parts of the soul, being completely in love with the Crucified and already knowing the dignity of the cross out of love, through this experience loses human fear which men bring in from the world and which is the manner in which the foolish practice obedience and the other virtues and begin to live not out of fear as the seculars do but out of the love and sweetness of the cross.⁴⁷

471. Understanding the expression *let the brothers be careful* according to what Christ meant involves that they make themselves materially and spiritually poor through the clearest example of their works and use of necessary things and by the appearance of their dwellings and cells where the brothers could be found in prayer and where they had nothing except what promoted rising above earthly things. In this way both by means of this sustained example and the sight of virtues they will be impelled to raise their hearts beyond this worldly love and fear, which they had when they arrived. It would be reprehensible and embarrassing if we proclaimed to them something that we did not carry out.

⁴² Note the wise teaching in this observation.

⁴³ *Guardare* had been written here and then crossed out.

⁴⁴ This is a reference for example to what we read in 2 C 156-157; LMj 7,3 (FA:ED II, pp. 348-9; p. 579).

⁴⁵ The method of a Franciscan and Capuchin noviciate is hinted at here.

⁴⁶ The text reads *viserora*.

⁴⁷ Note how in this spiritual knowledge of the Rule the centrality of Christ's Passion is stressed as the substance and driving force of conversion.

Gospel Love Concerning the Rule of Saint Francis

Let us firstly carry out what we ask them to do in imitation of Christ who acted first and then preached.⁴⁸ Christ and Francis desired above all else that we make them grasp a love of and taste for poverty, so that this would be the main basis of their Gospel life, and see that negligence in this matter was the cause of all the relaxations that would ever happen in the Order.⁴⁹ Like the Founder, that is Christ who composed the Rule, let them see that this consists mainly in love and reverence above all the other virtues.

Let the brothers take care with all vigilance that they never receive anyone into the Order whom they perceive to have no love or reverence for this virtue even when he has a high degree of the qualities and wisdom of this world. These things introduce death, tepidity and relaxation into a life which is following in the footsteps of Christ and his cross, and prepare deadly poison amongst fragrant and most sweet scented spices.⁵⁰ Let them test them not only in matters of external holy poverty, but investigate their heartfelt desire and love more thoroughly, because of the cunning of the evil spirits to cooperate with them and to arouse men who love themselves and not the cross or penance to embrace this Rule based on the cross in order to bring down this incomprehensible light and voluntary poverty and penance.⁵¹

472. It was not for nothing that Saint Francis laid down this virtue above all others and wanted us to love and respect it.⁵² As a logical consequence he laid down that it was most necessary for us to exercise utmost vigilance not to induct men into the Order if they did not want to wear this livery, since when we find something in the Rule that is laid down so strictly all the more does the will of Christ bind us to observe and reverence it and to demonstrate it with greater effectiveness and faultless conduct as an example to those who come to the Order. In other words by being the cause and source of relaxation, we would then be like murderers and people who cause the damnation of souls when we admitted [1214] beastly men and those who love themselves to the love and service of the queen of all excellence and be comparable to what is said in Matthew chapter four: “*Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest the trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*”⁵³ In these words Christ shows very clearly that the virtues of Gospel life are not to be extravagantly placed before those who love their bodies, who are opposed to holy poverty and the Gospel cross in their desires and feelings.

⁴⁸ Cf. Acta 1, 1.

⁴⁹ This is a principle much emphasised in the first Capuchin Constitutions. Cf. *Const. 1536* n. 59 (Handridge p. 21). It comes from LMj 7,2 (FA:ED II, p. 578); HTrb I, 8 (Burr and Daniel p. 27).

⁵⁰ Reminiscent of Saint Bonaventure, LMj 8, 3 (FA:ED II, pp. 587-588).

⁵¹ This sounds like the language of A. Clareno and Ubertino da Casale with a reference also to 2 Tim 3, 4; see also note 38 above.

⁵² Here one might quote the opening words of the *Sacrum Commercium*: “Among the virtues holy Poverty stands out by privilege and grace, since it is the foundation and protector of all the virtues. Poverty is rightly listed and named first among the evangelical virtues.” (Campion Murray, *Reflections on the Sacrum Commercium with a New English Translation*, The Franciscan Institute of Oceania, Plumpton, Australia, p. 4. See also FA:ED I, p.529). This almost summarises all the praises of this virtue that were spoken by Saint Francis. (See FA:ED IV, INDEX, Index of Subjects pp. 98-99).

⁵³ The passage is from Mat 7, 3. This application is very strong, but very true.

He laid this down when showing them the path of virtue, and how they offered precious stones to swine. He said: “Be careful not to offer spiritual and lofty virtues to gluttonous and sensual men, bringing them into the Order, so that once they have entered, they may trample them with their feet and despise them saying that penance is crafty and poverty is meanness of soul and humility is contempt for life, sloth and negligence, and then when we want to recall them to recognition of the truth, they return to their natural sensuality and false spirit, which they brought with them from the world in opposition to poverty, despising and destroying all the spiritual basis of poverty that you had established.” This is why Christ, being aware of the great damage the Orders would suffer through admitting men who had a sensual spirit and a fear of doing penance, warned and strengthened the hearts of superiors to admit to Orders only those who had a hatred for their own bodies and of the world. The experience of all the falls since the beginning of the world demonstrates that this is true, as has been well illustrated in such situations.

Thus *in the spirit and authority* of the heart of Jesus Christ, Saint Francis says that the brothers should be careful that they do not set an example to those who come to the Order of any kind of feeling of avarice. And that they not be indiscriminately received, but accepted with great maturity and fear, so that once received they do not make the Order suffer.⁵⁴

473. Thus to our way of thinking it is appalling if we allow ourselves to lapse into negligence in such matters through accepting men and wishing to increase numbers. Because he was enlightened and saw the great damage that would overtake the Order in receiving brothers he spoke about this at the beginning of the Rule. Admitting brothers launches them and disposes them towards either observance or relaxation and perdition. Because those who are accepted will necessarily receive others and if they were not tested and did not enter through the gate and be good themselves their children will be worse and so the mistake will be very serious when by imagining that we form religious men we form men who are enemies of religion. All this comes down upon our heads particularly when it is through our bad example they receive the culture of relaxation and laziness instead of what is contained in the Rule and when this happens I have no doubt that our judgement will be greater than that of all sinners, and those souls will be damned because of our actions and in his own time God will call us to answer for this.⁵⁵

Because of this we should not be afraid to test them in every kind of penance, since as Saint Jerome says: *in hoc casu omne genus crudelitatis pietas est.*⁵⁶ When these men, by having their resolve tested in many things that they had not thought of, have seen what they have come to, when they have come to accept spiritually what we are doing to them and have come to consider those things to which they are inclined naturally and freely and from which avarice arises in them, let them become concerned to break with and

⁵⁴ Paragraph 3 is marked here with the heading: “How our father Saint Francis wished that those who came to the Order ought to be received with great maturity and should be examined and tested by the ministers in the first place concerning the things which they had to observe.” (Cod. Cit. p. 1209).

⁵⁵ It is striking how the author insists on the responsibility to set good example in the formation of the young.

⁵⁶ The expression “to test them in all kinds of penance” is a characteristic of the Capuchin noviciate. Cf. *Const. 1536* n. 14. (Catalano, op. cit., p. 27; Hanbridge, Op. Cit., p. 5, 17-23).

move away from [1215] all their inclinations and become always aware of their frailty and never allowed to mull over human wisdom and the recollection of worldly things by implanting holy anxiety in their minds.⁵⁷

In this way they will come to know and taste what no human person could teach them and so we will turn them into spiritual men who are not deceived by their desires and by that for which they have abandoned the world and come to the Order.⁵⁸

474. 4. Woe to us if we do not grasp this and become like those of whom Christ said: *Si cecus ceco ducatum prestat, ambo in foveam cadunt.*⁵⁹ On the contrary in these words of the Rule Christ's wish is that those who come to the Order be formed and instructed by example and teaching, that is in being religious and upright in their exterior and interior comportment,⁶⁰ and that they never observe or see in us any tendency contrary to such comportment at any time since this is reprimanded in Gospel teaching. Rather let them receive exterior comportment or great mortification through our example and behaviour, and within their soul heartfelt spotlessness and unstained love of chastity. I do not intend to speak expressly about the interior light of spotlessness no to go into an exposition since the Spirit of Christ which clasps them under his yoke will instruct them spotlessly by means of his strength better than any one of us knows how to. Because of this it is more necessary that they pray to God than that they be given clichés about this.

This is even more so when the sensitivity towards mortification that they receive from us and the interior impulses abate. However, what the Spirit of Christ and genuine and caring people desire in all this is that, if we want to have religious men and true observers of the Rule that we set an example of the highest abstinence and animosity towards everything that delights in gluttony and sensuality for those who come from the world, because it was through these things that death and the ruin of all religion, from the first to the last man, entered in, because this did not seem to be a sin, but appeared to be charity when it was the gateway to all evil and falls. Thus it is necessary if we want to observe the Gospel Rule and life that we take care with great vigilance that, firstly within ourselves and then in those who come to the order, everything which is delightful and sweet to the taste is regarded as detrimental to making progress, and more so for those who are beginners since they have mortified their senses much less. If we are honest about this the same rule will apply to all. I say this for those who are teachers.

474. All food which can be left aside without doing damage to the body should be avoided for the sake of the Gospel. If it is possible at least at the beginning make them

⁵⁷ Here we have a description of the work of the Master of Novices, who, as the *Const 1536* n. 17 states, should be a man who is mature, sober-minded and enlightened or expert in the spiritual life. (Catalano, p. 28; Hanbridge p. 6, 13-23)

⁵⁸ The insistence on the "spirit" correlates perfectly with the outlook of the early Capuchin Constitutions, for example, *Const 1536* nn. 17-18. (Catalano, 28; Hanbridge p. 6, 13-26). Paragraph four begins here with the summary heading: "How our father Saint Francis wanted the brothers to set the best example of every virtue to those who came to the Order and especially regarding contempt for all sensuality and fault of gluttony, as the gateway to and path to all vices."

⁵⁹ Mt 15, 14.

⁶⁰ This criterion is mentioned in *Regula novitiorum* by Saint Bonaventure and in *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione* by David of Augsburg. This principle appears in the Ordinances of Albacina and the Constitutions of 1536, and is systematically applied in the Ceremonials of the Order.

refrain from eating without implying threats or fear by having them eat bread and plain food and watered down wine, so that sensuality is not allowed to settle and they are given a love and desire for the plain things which the poor eat,⁶¹ even when they are physically very tired. By eating similar food and quantities of food from the beginning the brothers themselves should become aware that penitential men do not become sensual men, and if this did not happen through our example there would be no one on earth more culpable than us and it would be serious hypocrisy before God. The Saviour would address to us in spirit what he said to the Pharisees in Matthew 23: *Vae vobis hypocritae Scribae et Pharisaei, qui mare et aridam.*⁶² In these matters we have to be very careful not to make those who come to the Order worse, that is if they ate their bread in the world through labour and sweat and [1216] experienced hardship in temporal things and then when they come to the Order discover that we have a super abundance of everything, forgetting all love or taste for poverty, it is certain that they will become worse than we are. Because as we have said the last are always worse than the first, among those who drag their feet in the Order. When this happens it is certainly a kind of pharisaic error. Therefore the first commandment is to be noted above all others, namely, that those who come are to be introduced to the life of penance in a spiritual manner. All the good and perseverance or relaxation and laziness in the Order comes from the example that we set and all this will be demanded of us.

So let the brothers, because they consider these things from a spiritual point of view, set a good example by not becoming involved in their affairs, Although there are countless things concerning which those who come are to be instructed especially external things, it is not necessary to state them here. It suffices to state the teaching and conduct of the early fathers.⁶³ As a logical consequence of the prohibition of one thing, namely becoming involved in their affairs, as the Rule states, that there be a statement concerning what we are obliged to do, To achieve this another phrase says:

5. *If, however, counsel is sought, the ministers may send them to some God-fearing persons, according to whose advice their goods may be distributed to the poor.*⁶⁴

476. These words, according to the wish of Saint Francis, mean that we may not send them to a poor person even if we know one. He wishes us to send them for advice as to what they ought to do. It is always forbidden to us to nominate a poor person to be the beneficiary of their goods, nor even ourselves, our places, buildings, or any other need which we might have, because in doing so we would be acting against the Rule and wish

⁶¹ Such formation for austerity and simplicity at table was characteristic of the early Capuchin practices based on imitation and sharing with the poor. It is strongly emphasised in the Constitutions of 1536.

⁶² Mt 23, 15.

⁶³ This reference to the “early fathers”, as well as reference to the early times in the Order, shows that the anonymous author is preoccupied with the restoration of the primitive spirit which sits well with the zeal for reform among the Capuchins.

⁶⁴ The editor marked the beginning of paragraph five here. “How our Father Saint Francis did not wish that the brothers become involved in any way in the distribution of the things of those who came to the Order, not even to a poor person.” (Cod. Cit., p. 1290).

of Christ that, no matter what wishes they might express, we do not deal with the affairs of those who come, since this would always be contrary to the purity of the Gospel Rule.

If we need something at the time let us confidently approach other people as the Rule says. It is a fact that he who cherishes and feeds the birds will take care of us more than he does of them and will not deceive us by his promises.⁶⁵ Although out of kindness the Apostolic See declared that we are allowed to accept some of the things belonging to those who come, it did so because it had been petitioned by the brothers and it kindly bowed to their individual consciences, following the reasoning each one put forward.⁶⁶

Nevertheless the preference was that the brothers should observe the Rule to the letter. As had happened in many other cases it allowed procurators. Some Supreme Pontiffs allowed granaries and cellars at the request of the brothers themselves,⁶⁷ and made demands on those who entered with respect to their things. However, to those, who according to the wishes of Saint Francis, loved to observe pure observance and follow the spiritual interpretation, we know that such things were strictly forbidden. Indeed the letter dictates and shows this where it says: “They are permitted to send them to some God-fearing persons for advice”. In this Saint Francis showed that he intended to bind and constrain the brothers to have no right to do otherwise than to send them to some God-fearing persons for advice. He gave them permission for this and denied it and withheld any permission or liberty with respect to any other requests concerning their things, because Christ [1217] saw that many rich men would come to the Order and there would be a great danger that the brothers *sub specie* (under the pretext) of building large houses and churches, that seemed to be giving great honour to God and catering for necessity would fall into avarice in receiving their things which would be a great scandal to men in the world and set a bad example.

Indeed there are two explicit commands concerning this. The first says that the brothers should abstain perpetually from any concern about their temporal things. This not only forbids us to accept their things but also that men should know that we have no care or concern about them. The second says that we have no authority to offer any advice about what they are to do with their things, neither by way of our intervention or control over someone. It only allows us to send them to some God-fearing persons who can give them advice. Then there follows the manner in which they should be received by us, saying:

6. *Then they may be given the clothes of probation, namely two tunics without a hood, a cord and short trousers and a little cape reaching to the*

⁶⁵ Cf. Lk 12, 24; Mt 6, 26.

⁶⁶ This is a veiled reference to *Quo elongati* by Gregory IX (FA:ED I, pp. 570-575) and *Exivi* by Clement V (FA:ED III pp. 767-783).

⁶⁷ Especially Innocent IV in 1245 and 1247 ((FA:ED II, pp. 774-779; BF I, 400, 487), and then Martin V with the Bull *Exultantes* of 18 January 1285 (BF III, 501). For a summary of these mitigations of Innocent IV and Martin V see *Introduzione alla Regola francescana. Contributi e studi sulla Regola di san Francesco a cura dei frati minori tedeschi*, ed. Italiana, Milano 1969, 68-71.

Gospel Love Concerning the Rule of Saint Francis

*cord, unless, at times, it seems good to these same ministers, before God, to act otherwise.*⁶⁸

477. From these words we should conclude that the habit of those who were professed should not be indiscriminately given to those who are received, but rather that they be given a habit for men who are on probation. This is because Christ's intention⁶⁹ in this section was that those who came to the Order without the right outlook, namely heart felt love and the intention of becoming holy should not be received. Therefore they should be severely and diligently tested inside and out and be issued with the above mentioned clothing made of plain material, unless because of serious illness or some other necessity it appears to the ministers that they cannot support such a burden. After this we read the following words:

7. *When the year of probation had come to an end, they may be received to obedience promising always to observe this Rule and life.*⁷⁰

478. This means nothing else than that when the year of probation is finished they should be received into the Order if they appear to have the right outlook. Let them take a solemn vow and promise to God in the hands of the minister or someone else as seems appropriate to him, as Saint Francis did in the hands of the Vicar of Christ. In the first place, when someone is received, he should be informed about the perfection of the Rule and the intention of Saint Francis in this regard, so that he will know what he is promising,⁷¹ and will keep it in mind for his whole life, not seeking other explanations, or expositions except those which Christ gave to Saint Francis, and he preserved and the Apostolic See confirmed. Because all the other privileges and concessions that the Apostolic See has given in respect of the Rule were conceded at the request of the brothers and it was not the intention of the Apostolic See to do anything but what was asked of it or to allow the reception of bequests, wills, the conducting of funerals, procurators and countless possessions. Because of this it became a matter of necessity that the Apostolic See fully grant all their requests regarding the Rule, Yet in spite of all this it never denied the wishes of those who wanted the pure observance of the Rule.⁷²

It laid down that if we wanted to observe and fulfil the wishes of the founder according to the text of the Rule in this passage, that we show those who come [1218]

⁶⁸ Paragraph six begins here: "Concerning the habit that is to be given to the novices, which demonstrates how the intention of Jesus Christ was that those who did not have the right outlook, namely heart felt love and the intention of becoming holy should not be received." (cod. Cit., p. 1209).

⁶⁹ This means that Saint Francis spoke in the Spirit of Christ.

⁷⁰ Heading of paragraph seven: "Concerning the profession which these novices should make when the year of probation is finished and how the brothers should first explain to them what they have to promise according to the mind of Jesus Christ and our father Saint Francis and show how all the privileges, concessions and dispensations that have been given by the Supreme Pontiffs concerning the Rule at the request of the brothers are against the purity of its observance." (cod. Cit., p. 1209s).

⁷¹ Compare this to *Const 1536*, n. 17. (Catalano, p. 28; Hanbridge p. 6, 13-23)

⁷² Thus the author is of the same mind as Ubertino and Angelo Clareno, that is, that "other declarations indeed are kindly concessions to those who are ill made by kindly physicians, and are declarations" motivated by compromise etc. Htrb. II, 14, (Burr and Daniel p. 61). He deals with this thought at greater length below.

and make them understand clearly what they profess since ignorance is no excuse for transgression. Since Christ explained to Saint Francis from His own lips how he wanted the Rule to be understood then following his example we should give the same explanation to those who come so that they know what they are promising. This is what Brother Leo and the other companions say that Saint Francis did when he was at Fonte Colombo where he wrote the second Rule,⁷³ which we observe today.

When Saint Francis felt that Brother Elias, while he was Vicar General of the Order, made certain ordinances against the purity of the Rule, Saint Francis called some novices and told them in public that those ordinances were against the will of Christ and the purity of the Rule. He did not want them to be accepted, until the truth had come out as to how the Rule was to be observed. When the companions mentioned this Brother Elias and the Ministers of the day laid down that no young brother was to approach him, since to quell his conscience he stated clearly what Christ felt and wanted in the Rule and life.⁷⁴

479. The other expositions which the Supreme Pontiffs composed and issued were a response to what the brothers asked of them. Since they were Vicars of Christ and stood in His place, they followed His example and teaching, giving to each individual what he sought in conscience so that he might not offend against his conscience. Canon law demands that an individual be trusted according to the example set by Christ when he gave Judas his body⁷⁵ because he asked for it, although it was painful for him since he knew that this would put him in a worse situation and bring about his condemnation. Still he wanted to go along with what Judas considered to be of merit and something of which he was worthy, rather than confront the external evidence of what was really on his conscience.

The Vicar of Christ accepted that what was asked of him was spiritual and in good conscience, as in many instances the requests seemed to have the complete semblance of truth, in the same way as his superior and rector Christ conceded and dispensed because this appeared to be preferable to him as the lesser evil. Indeed it is certain that the desire of the Apostolic See could not have been more lofty and it would have wished that all the Orders that have existed since the beginning would have remained in the same state that their founders had conferred upon them since they were saints and God had spoken to them and shown them the way and the narrow path that each one had to observe in their Order. Nevertheless since the Supreme Pontiffs were important and busy with great menaces, worries and so when other needs were placed before them they gave in like Christ, always out of concern, believing that each individual who asked something of them was in good conscience saying: "If it is so let

⁷³ This is the usual story about Fonte Colombo which is related in 2MP 1 (FA:ED p. 253) concerning which see note 33 in the amended *Dialogue* of John of Fano and also in the *Dechiarazione* by John M. de Tusa.

⁷⁴ This event is also recorded by John of Fano and vaguely mentioned by Angelo Clareno in HTrb II, 11, ed. A. Ghinato p. 57s (Burr and Daniel p. 50).

⁷⁵ Cf. Jn, 13, 26-27. It is not certain that Judas received the Eucharist during the Last Supper, but what is indicated here is the link between receiving the Eucharist unworthily and betrayal which results in condemnation in the sense mentioned in Paul 1 Cor 11, 27-29.

what you ask be granted”, and this is what they did in every case.⁷⁶ Because the Lesser Brothers demanded⁷⁷ to have and receive large quantities of money which they needed for themselves they were able to carry on any kind of business seculars performed through the hands of their procurators who had the opportunity and the jurisdiction to act in this manner.

480. The Pope knew well that this was most contrary to the Rule, the same as having money in safes. The Rule states and definitively commands that neither they nor others who act on their account should never receive or hold coin or money.⁷⁸ However, by insisting [1219] and pointing to the great dangers to the consciences of the brothers if they did not have someone who could accept money, the Apostolic See gave the benefit of the doubt to their consciences which wanted to have money and not to live simply through questing. Certainly it was better for them to have procurators than for them to buy what they wanted with them accepting the money themselves. Because of its position the Apostolic See could grant this and it meant that they did not sin mortally in everything and thus the Apostolic See allowed this to them as well as other things such as having large dwellings, accepting legacies and possessions and the right to litigate before courts and went along with all kinds of things which are expressly against the Rule and every Gospel counsel which we have promised and sworn to observe. In the beginning the Apostolic See approved and confirmed the Rule. We should demonstrate the high purity of the Rule to those who come to join, being always submissive at the feet of the Apostolic See which can disband and annul the Order.

This has been stated so that they know what they have promised to God and what was the wish of Saint Francis concerning the Rule.⁷⁹ Thus so that such perfection may not be hidden and trampled under foot by those who join, obscuring one thing with another, we should not hide the height of perfection and abnegation of the things of the world from those who join the Order, so that their intent and desire be to promote and observe the Rule which Saint Francis promised and understand it as he understood it. Doing things in this way we will not rob them of the good intentions.

Let us not bring this unforgivable sin down on ourselves, so that when men come from the world to observe the Gospel of Christ, we would place them in the middle of the cares of the world, and then, following our example they would become twice as bad as we are.⁸⁰ Indeed this chapter contains almost the whole substance of the Rule and it cannot be explained in a few words, since Saint Francis being inspired by Christ, saw and knew that the first step must be taken with great and lofty spiritual and bodily vigilance and so he placed many things in this chapter which should be carried out and preserved

⁷⁶ In the Italian the word “saying” is in the singular even though “Supreme Pontiffs” are plural. Evidently the author intended to put these words on the lips of Christ.

⁷⁷ In the manuscript the word is *dimandano* but since this would break the syntax of the sentence the editor of the Italian printed edition chose to use the present indicative.

⁷⁸ Cf. LR 4, 2. 4 (FA:ED I, p. 102).

⁷⁹ Note how the author insists on the concept that the young novices should know well what they promise to God in as much as this is an observance without privileges and dispensations. All this is strongly stressed in the first Capuchin Constitutions. Cf. *Const 1536* n. 8, 17, 57. See Hanbridge p. 3, 27ff; p. 6, 13ff; p. 20, 5ff.

⁸⁰ A reference to Mat 23, 15.

more by spiritual love than can be demonstrated in writing.⁸¹ There follow the following words:

8. *On no account shall it be lawful for them to leave this Order, according to the decree of our Lord the Pope, for according to the Gospel: no one who puts a hand to the plough and looks to what is left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.*⁸²

481. This passage is enough to understand what the words state according to the gifts which are common to everyone. Because not only in the world but also where the Gospel Rule is observed in conformity to Christ,⁸³ no other Order has such perfection and exaltation because all have Rules given to them by men whereas this Rule was given by the God-man and it serves Him even though He knows, acknowledges and has inspired them all. Thus it is not permitted for the true observers of this Rule to turn to any other because it is more correct to follow the Master than the servant.⁸⁴ Thus other words follow:

Those who have already promised obedience may have one tunic [1220] with a hood and another, if they wish, without a hood.

As Brother Leo and the other companions⁸⁵ bear witness what is shown and declared in these words is that the wish of Saint Francis was that the brothers should wear one tunic during summer which means the habit. During winter they could wear a mantle made of plain material with a simple opening in front as was customary among the brothers. Those who wore two tunics should not wear a mantle. This is what he did, wearing it when it was very cold including when he went outside the house.⁸⁶ This is what Brother Bernard and Brother Caesar did as well as Brother Simon of the Countess

⁸¹ This means that spiritual love causes us to understand better than a written treatise what we should do in these circumstances when forming the young in the Franciscan life. This is the basic outlook of Franciscan spirituality which prefers to emphasise, even in practice, the feelings of the heart with respect to life, the intuition of love and the emotional aspect of specific exercises above the intellectual element and exclusively rational. In other words, since love is effective and fruitful, the early Capuchins were convinced that only somebody who lived the Rule and the Gospel could also understand them intellectually.

⁸² Following this passage in chapter two of the Rule paragraph 8 begins with the heading: "It is demonstrated how it is not lawful for someone who has promised to observe this rule to go to another Order leaving this one since this would be going to from one state to a lower one, since this is the highest and most perfect of all. How it was the intention of our father Saint Francis concerning clothing that the brothers wear a habit, or two in winter or the habit with a mantle." (Cod. Cit. p. 1210).

⁸³ This expression is characteristic of Angelo Clareno.

⁸⁴ This sounds like passages in L3C 6 or 2C. 6; LMj 1, 3 etc. (FA:ED II, pp. 77ff; II, p245; II, pp. 532-533).

⁸⁵ The quote is not identified.

⁸⁶ For the example set by saint Francis see 2C 130: he wore only one tunic (FA:ED, II, p. 332); with regard to a mantle see 2MP 29 (FA:ED III. p. 280). It seems more likely that the source is Angelo Clareno's *Expositio regulae* where we read: "He used to wear a shabby and short mantle made of sackcloth or some other rough material. However after Saint Francis departed from this life Brother Elias forbade that he be removed from the place, when Brother Bernard and Brother Caesar and Brother Simon of the Countess (also known as Simon of Collazzone, see Burr and Daniel p. 73 note 4: Translator's note) and their companions, who were content with a little tunic for a habit and who abided by the other wishes and conduct of the founder etc..." (Cf. ed. L. Oligier, p. 64; ed Boccali 2, 115 p. 275; Burr and Daniel p. 218;)

and his companions: “The professed who wish to do so wear two tunics” as they may or one tunic and a mantle during winter, which they do following the example of Christ and his apostles as they say Saint Francis, inspired by Christ, did to set an example for his disciples.⁸⁷ Thus the following says:

9. *and those who are compelled by necessity may wear shoes*⁸⁸

482. By *compelled* we should understand that they should not be worn except when strictly necessary and then under obedience. Even though it was the wish of Saint Francis that healthy brothers did not wear sandals or any other footwear in summer, or any type of shoes in winter they could wear open footwear always presenting bare feet.⁸⁹ No other kind of footwear was allowed to the brothers of whatever material it may have been made. When something had to be worn out of necessity it was to be done with the permission and obedience of the superior and not otherwise.

Why an exterior sign of poverty would bring about joy and a sweet fragrance in the sight of Christ, beyond all others who had been chosen appears in what Saint Francis says next:

Let all the brothers wear poor clothes and they may mend them with pieces of sackcloth or other material with the blessing of God.

With these words Saint Francis expresses the greatest happiness by giving his blessing to those who even give an external example of poverty, always clothing themselves in a poor manner and when this tears mending it with sackcloth since thus they would more easily find pieces to repair and patch their tunics with the blessing of the Lord. This is his manner of speaking, adopting the spiritual meaning, exaltation and rejoicing in contempt for this world as if to say: “Why are you frightened, my most beloved brothers, to appear to be poor and plainly dressed? Behold the most kind Only Begotten of God your Redeemer who for love of you and to set you an example went about on this earth for his whole life poorly dressed and barefoot, poor and despised by everyone. Therefore I beg of you my most beloved and exhort you in memory of the Lord, that for all the days that you spend on earth that you wear plain clothing and while you can patch this with sackcloth or other pieces that you never seek any other clothing or money. Since if he was who God deigned to make himself poor to set us an example and considered this a great dignity, how can we follow him having abundance and ease and wearing new clothing, ashamed about it being patched when we are sinners [1221] and mortals? Therefore with heartfelt emotion and deep desire I beg all those who are inflamed by the love and recollection of such kindness to have continuous affection for

⁸⁷ This passage is practically the substance of what appears in the “Declarazione del P. fra Bernardino d’Asti circa il vestire” reported by the early Capuchin chroniclers and copied in various manuscripts of the day. Cf. for example MHOC I, 251-254; III, 183ss; VI, 32-34; VII, 361-364 etc.; see also Ch XXIV Gen., in AF III, 263.

⁸⁸ This is where paragraph 9 starts: “The brothers are not allowed to wear shoes without necessity. That they are to wear plain clothes patched with sackcloth and other pieces, with God’s blessing, shows what Saint Francis wanted with regard to the shabby quality and the shape of the habit.” (cod. Cit. 1210).

⁸⁹ A concept which is also mentioned in the *Dialogue* by John of Fano as can be seen in note 257 in the English translation in capdox.com.

this external habit of contempt for this life in the sight of the world. Indeed the Lord designed our habit and the love of roughness not only as external clothing but in his most sacred bruised, pale and worn out body when he died on the cross.

As Isaiah said of him: *From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it.*⁹⁰ This is not all, let us look at how all the saints from the beginning of the world who have pleased God have been poorly dressed, such as John the Baptist and all the anchorites as Saint Paul says: *Saints who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword, wandered around in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy.*⁹¹ Who could ever tell the penance, roughness and pain which the saints suffered because of their love of the Gospel? Therefore let the brothers know that if they wish to observe the purity of the Rule that while they are able to patch the habit in this way so that it retains its appearance and is derided by others, it is not lawful for them to ask for money for material. While the clothing that they are wearing is sufficient with patching they should be satisfied with it and it should suffice.⁹²

483. Saint Francis also wanted the habit to be a length of two fingers above the ankle so that the bare foot could be seen. The sleeves were to reach to the finger tips and be wide enough not to brush against the cord. The width of the habit should suit the build of the person up to 13 palms. The bottom of the sleeve should be wide enough to allow two hands to freely enter the sleeve. The hood should be square and long enough to cover the face. The colour should always be something like the earth or ashes in memory of the dead body of our Lord on the cross.⁹³ It should be so plain that the world may be moved to devotion because of this and be reminded of the Passion of the Saviour and not make fun of it. Let the world recognise by this external sign that we desire nothing on this earth and our conversation is in heaven.⁹⁴ Now it follows logically after the shape of the external habit has been discussed and contempt for clothing that something be said about interior doctrine and wisdom saying:

10. *I admonish and exhort them not to look down upon or judge those whom they see dressed in soft and fine clothes and enjoying the choicest food and drink.*⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Is. 1, 6.

⁹¹ Heb. 11, 33; 36-38. – This passage from the Letter to the Hebrews is also quoted by Angelo Clareno in his *Expositio* ed. Oliger c 2, p. 72; ed Boccali, 2, 171, p. 297.

⁹² Cf. *Dialogue* by John of Fano note 270.

⁹³ This passage is also inspired by Angelo Clareno HTrb VII, 3; ed A. Ghinato p. 221s (Burr and Daniel p. 218). Cf. *Const 1536* n. 23 (Hanbridge p. 8, note iii discusses palm as a unit of measurement).

⁹⁴ Cf. Phil. 3, 20.

⁹⁵ This is where the tenth and last paragraph of the second chapter begins under the heading: “How our father Saint Francis did not want his brothers to judge people who wore fine clothes and who used choice food and drink; and how the brothers themselves should wear plain clothes and use poor food and despise and judge themselves regarding themselves as useless servants.” (Cod. Cit. p. 1210).

484. With respect to these words one should note according to the feelings and wishes of Saint Francis that as the brothers were most strictly bound to wear plain clothes they were also bound to eat poor quality food like poor people and unlike elite people. In this admonition and exhortation he explains that those who do this should not judge the fine eating of seculars, nor their soft and ornate clothes, because no one should judge others in matters in which he may be effectively deficient himself. Thus if we eat their food, such as meat and other things that they like, we should not judge them. Thus Saint Francis gives us to understand that when he wrote this [1222] it was what Christ intended and so as with plain and poor clothing so it should be with food and dwellings and everything that we use. Indeed it will cost more and set worse example to the world if we habitually want to eat meat than if we dress in fine clothes. Thus to remove this great scandal and bad example it was his intention that our eating and everything else that we use should be like our plain clothing. Indeed it would be an abomination if those who profess the Gospel and those whom Christ has called to follow him and his holy apostles ate the same food as seculars and did not undertake some continual abstinence.

Our Father also wished that this external form of poverty did not make the brothers proud, despising and vilifying others, since this would be like the devil and all their efforts would be fruitless. Rather he wished and demonstrated by these words that he desired that the brothers always see as God sees and that they always live and operate in spirit and truth. Here he demonstrates clearly that the Gospel life is lived in such meekness and humility so that there is nothing reprehensible in those who observe it. It is up to us to observe rather than to judge others. He also firmly intended by these words to state that everything which delights seculars and which they seek very carefully are expressly forbidden to us by his will since we cannot use such things without great scandal and bad example. We should recognise the things that our nature can do without and which other poor people do not use.

485. In this matter the brothers have to be very much on guard and be vigilant even though the Gospel says in some place *eat such things as are set before you*;⁹⁶ this is to be understood in the same way as it applies to clothing when if we are given something which appears to be costly or ornate it is not lawful for us to wear it, let alone accept it or even worse buy it. What Saint Francis wanted and intended was that when, specifically in the case of food, we are given food on any occasion that is contrary to most holy poverty or chastity, we should in no way accept it, especially when it is something which the important people in this world usually donate. This applies all the more when this happens frequently. Much less should we go in search of such things or procure them with money. This would not only be contrary to the Rule and holy poverty but an irreparable scandal to seculars. According to Francis' wishes we ought to be just as much on our guard in this matter as if it were death and continuously keep it in mind if we wish to avoid the curse of Christ and Saint Francis. This applies especially to meat and spices⁹⁷ and other things that delight sensuality from which our nature can abstain without any danger as is evident in all Orders in which there have been saints since the beginning. Let the brothers know that to nominate what we may eat is given to us alone, out of love for

⁹⁶ Lk 10, 8.

⁹⁷ That is food seasoned with spices or herbs.

poverty, for no poor person is given the food which he demands but rather he has to accept what is given to him at the discretion of the one who is giving the alms. It is not right that we have an abundance of food in addition to that which provides nourishment to poor people so that under the guise of it being necessary for religious we seek and accept things that are the food of those who are rich in the world because God will provide and nourish what is necessary. It was the right intention of Saint Francis that when we eat with seculars out of necessity, that we eat [1233] what is set before us, as is fitting for religious. Out of humility and conformity to Christ's mortification let us not dare to demand anything but humbly accept what we have been given as poor people do.⁹⁸

486. Let the brother be continually careful not to think that they can have meat as their ordinary food, if instead they can have bread and what goes with it⁹⁹ and watered wine or that they understand the wish of Saint Francis or the apostolic life where nothing is assured or can be planned to the same degree as those who have annual incomes or rents. We shall not appear to be poor people but lords and give great scandal to seculars because of this. We should be careful not to appear like this.

Let us listen to Saint Paul who says; "if food makes my brother stumble I will never again eat meat".¹⁰⁰ If Saint Paul said that if he gave scandal to an individual he would never eat meat again, how can we eat it when giving scandal to so many? As Saint Clement says, Saint Peter wrote him a letter explaining what was the apostolic way of life saying; "I sustained my life on bread and olives with water and sometimes something to go with the bread content to clothe my body with a tunic".¹⁰¹ Therefore let Gospel men know that meat as food is ordinarily forbidden to them according to Gospel life and holy decorum. All the more, as had been said, since we see by experience that seculars who are able to spend more, buy more and eat more food. In this we are able to see how much scandal and bad example is given when we ordinarily procure meat. By not going along with the way seculars live,¹⁰² Saint Francis has shown us that this is our way of life and perfection, and shown that it is the will of Christ, so that we may not fall into greater error by judging with pride.

The last words of this chapter follow:

⁹⁸ Note the insistence on conformity to the poor which is repeated three times in this context.

⁹⁹ *Cucina* or *companatico* that is "what goes with bread".

¹⁰⁰ Cf. 1 Cor 8, 13.

¹⁰¹ The passage appears in a letter attributed to Clement. *Hom.* 12, n. 6 (PG 2, 306). However it is copied by Angelo Clareno in *Expositio*, cit. c 6: "Refert sanctus Clemens, quod aliquando cum se sancto Petro ad serviendum humiliter obtulisset, Petrum ei tale dedisse responsum: In quo mihi, o Clements, inquit, officio servire? In preparandis cibariis vel camere et lecti stramentis? Cibus, inquit, meus panis et aqua et olive, et raro olera, et indu,mentum tunica er pallium, et contentus hiis nichil aliud require, quia mens mea non ad presentia, set solum ad ea que eterna sunt, respicis". (ed L. Olier, p. 152; Boccali 6, 304-5 s p. 517) *Saint Clement reports that one time having humbly offered to be of service to Peter, Peter give him this response: "O Clement in what way do your want to be of service to me? In preparing my food, or my room or the covers on my bed? My food, he said, consists of bread, water, olives and rarely herbs; for clothing I have one tunic and a mantle; content with this, I seek nothing else, because my mind is not fixed on present things but only on eternal things".*(English translation is mine).

¹⁰² In the manuscript *vevere*.

But rather let everyone judge and look down upon himself.

The words of the Saviour set us the norm where it says: “when you have done all those things which I have told you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants’”.¹⁰³ In most profound humility he gave us a path of humility for all our activities, good as they might be. Thus just as there cannot be a natural fire without heat, and when the heart is gone there is no more fire, thus Gospel life is as much the life of Christ and his apostles as when humility and poverty are found there. When we depart from humility and poverty we depart from the very life of Christ and his Gospel; because it is all piety, humility and poverty, praise of the things that are from above. Thus having set out the way to enter and persevere in the Order in the second chapter, the third begins as follows setting out the way to praise God continuously, showing us how to perform and recite the Divine Office.¹⁰⁴

THE TWELFTH AND LAST CHAPTER FOLLOWS

1. *Whoever by divine inspiration wishes to go among the Saracens etc.*¹⁰⁵

488. [1226] Saint Francis speaks with a very deep and spiritual purpose because he is a tabernacle that has been setup and divine light, designed to bear the marks and stigmata of human redemption which God wished to place on him in this final hour by means of the observance of this life and Rule that was fashioned like the crucifixion and given to him to observe. Francis speaks in spirit himself to the brothers not in a human manner when he invites and awakens them to martyrdom after they have observed the Rule. This is the spiritual meaning in line in what he said to them in the flesh:

“Behold, O my most beloved brothers, I have given you the life and point of view of our Lord Jesus Christ, as he commanded me to observe it, which because of its incomparable exaltedness and dignity there is no man alive who could observe it purely and completely in exterior habit and virtue, if he did not receive within from God its signs, namely his only-begotten Son’s feelings of sorrow and suffering, together with his apostles almost all of whom departed from the world marked mentally and physically with such sorrow and pain. Therefore we too, who are dear to and loved by the most high Father and Lord, if we are to be true observers of this Rule that is modelled on the crucifixion, should recognise this. I promise you in his name that you will experience this and though this great dignity you will be allowed either mentally or physically to experience the loving and sweet suffering of the Son in your hearts, to give you, above all

¹⁰³ Cf. Lk 17, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately the text of the manuscript stops here, bypassing the commentary on chapters four to eleven inclusive and starting again with the last chapter of the Rule. This is very strange because in the large Assisi codex we note no displacement of pages and folios. All are consecutively bound. This might mean that the binding took place after the completion of the composition of the text and that the pages went missing before that.

¹⁰⁵ This is the title which the editor placed on the first paragraph: “The voice of our father Saint Francis which invited his sons to physical and spiritual martyrdom and the suffering of the Passion of the Son of God, in which he displays his real intention in the chapter”. (Cod. Cit., p. 1225).

men called to this state, the dignity of being united to him, not only externally but in the depths of your heart and within. Thus standing beside the Son on the cross to appease the Father for the sins that have been committed in the world or will be committed Saint Francis repeatedly raised his eyes to heaven, showing the Father the wounds and sufferings which he endured for sinners, and his prayers and sufferings were accepted.¹⁰⁶ Thus you too if you are true imitators of the Son in the observance of the Rule and raise your arms to the Father in memory of the Son, will display to him another Christ on the cross, who has his stigmata spiritually and mentally in your hearts and all your prayers will be accepted as spiritual and physical appeasement, according to the image which the Eternal Father will see in you.¹⁰⁷ Indeed the gift and grace which God has given you in these last times bears a certain similarity to a mystery of faith and a reminder of God's inestimable love, similar to the Sacrament of his most holy Body and Blood, by which he communicates with us in a memorial of his love under the appearances of bread and wine, which the priest consecrates at the altar. The Lord himself ordered this memorial and reception,¹⁰⁸ so that men would remember the heartfelt love of his passion. This has been given to you in these last days when it seems that the world has no recollection or remembrance of his inestimable love.

The giving of this gift and assurance produced his Son spiritually who has become incarnate by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds in a spiritual way, born in you by means of his charity and remembrance, so that when he sees you raising your arms in the shape of a cross, he always sees his only Son and you become his immaculate sacrifice and the most sweet fragrance of his heart.¹⁰⁹ Therefore my most pious hearts move my soul through surrender and love of the great dignity which you have received, and through the incomparable sorrow which you have endured for love of him who called and chose you to belong to this state, so that you desired to observe [1227] the Rule to the letter, to the letter, to the letter as the Lord revealed and explained and which I understood in his presence”¹¹⁰

489. 2. “Do not be¹¹¹ ungrateful and negligent about your vocation. You cannot remain in this state. It is fitting for you that if you have promised something that you observe it by means of continuous prayer and pleading for not even Angels could teach you something better.¹¹²

Our activity is spiritual and it is fitting that it is sustained, promoted and observed by spirit and devotion. May your heart never cease to beg this of God who will grant this

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Heb. 5, 7.

¹⁰⁷ This splendid concept can also be found in the *Dialogue* by John of Fano. See there notes 307-309.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Lk 22,19; 1 Cor 11, 24-26.

¹⁰⁹ Note the deep spirituality of this concept filled with biblical meaning in respect of many passages in John and Paul, for example, Rom 12, 1; Eph 5, 2 etc.

¹¹⁰ This is a reference to the incident at Fonte Colombo. See above note 73.

¹¹¹ Here begins paragraph 2: “How the Rule of our father Saint Francis cannot be understood in any other way than continuous prayer and beseeching because which the brothers are exhorted not to seek other expositions or interpretations or privileges beyond this, but understand it to the letter according the intentions of Jesus Christ and Saint Francis”. (cod. Cit., p. 1225).

¹¹² The expression is slightly obscure but it means that only continuous prayer can teach the brothers how to observe the Rule. The angels themselves could not do better.

to your soul because of your prayers Note, my most beloved, that because of the deficiency of this prayer and unwillingness to accept the sacred chalice of suffering, many will be called and few chosen. There are many who will paint numerous and very large paintings and make very large crucifixes with blood that will inspire sorrow over the passion, but only a few rare ones will taste its inexplicable¹¹³ pain or make the effort to do this. However if you wish to be true sons, give to God, O my most beloved, the true praise of your spiritual vocation, displaying your heart sorrowful, marked with the wounds of the Redeemer with tears in your eyes. Make this your contribution to your children and make your children sons of the Most High in this heartfelt crucifixion, yourselves experiencing the immeasurable pain in burning love Because of this you will be true Lesser Brothers and observe the Rule without effort and will need no explanations no concessions or declarations. Rather it will be the Spirit who will love you and interpret it for you.¹¹⁴ And the strength of the only Son of God will carry you safely in his arms to the place of your rest, for which you have been called and truly chosen by this crucified-like and Gospel Rule. Because of this I beg of you, O my most beloved, to desire to possess this gift and grace. May you have it forever and may others have it through you. Do not seek any privilege, nor other concession or declaration in order to have anything but this Rule which has been given to you in the nakedness and poverty of Christ and his bodily and spiritual image”.

490. “Indeed those who seek declarations), will never be satisfied and much less will they experience this spiritual relish for their vocation and the more that they ask dispensations and privileges from the Apostolic See the less they will put into effect the spiritual and mental adoration of the Crucified to which they have been called. Christ has not put anything into the Rule that is against his Church or the Gospel, but all that it contains is most faithful testimony and support of the faith of the Church. One cannot demand an exposition of it except in the case of a deficiency. I beseech and beg you in the Lord, to whom this spiritual savour had been granted, not to desire anything else than the mental image and remembrance of the Crucified, nor at any time to demand to change the simplicity of this letter, as Christ revealed and taught it, and I have shown it to you. Thus the faith of the Gospel life will remain in you. Desire this and observe this and never depart from it, just as the glorious Virgin Mary’s faith stayed on at the time of the Passion and death of her Son. Just as the Gospel and the holy teaching of the [1228] Church is understood in a few words and then from these follow on all the books that have been written in the Church of God, with all their authors writing about this teaching and how to put the text into practice, and the letter then became superfluous so putting aside all the expositions which have been constructed or will be concerning this which I have set down on behalf of Christ in these few words, it will be the Spirit who will teach you what to do at the foot of the Cross and all else will be superfluous.”¹¹⁵

Because Saint Francis was enlightened by the Holy Spirit and the humility of Christ he saw everything that pertained to the conservation, strengthening and

¹¹³ Excocitabil = inescogitabile, inesplicabile.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Rom. 8, 26-27.

¹¹⁵ Note the mystical fervour of the author and the deep significance of the spiritual observance of the Rule, without declarations or privileges, in docility to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, faithful to the cross, like Mary was.

perseverance of the Order and placed it in the Rule. Although it appeared to be composed of few and simple words he did not omit the last words of the Rule in order to demonstrate that although the brothers had been called to such a great and supreme state of life that it made them almost into another person who had been Crucified, they should not become imprudent because of this even if they were carried up to live among the angels every day through their prayer and contemplation and had the grace of perfection and could raise the dead. They should not depart on account of this from the slightest ordinance of the Church.¹¹⁶ Nor let any of them ever have the impudence to say: “You can do this but not this.” He not only wished them to stand at the feet of the Supreme Pontiff, but he decreed and desired that the brothers should have a Cardinal who would be their lord, corrector and protector. Thus the text goes on saying:

3. *For this reason I command the ministers through obedience to petition from our Lord the Pope for one of the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, who would be the governor, protector and corrector of this fraternity.*¹¹⁷

491. These words contain a great mystery and deep meaning. It is as if Saint Francis was speaking in a prophetic spirit. Because he saw that the perfection of the Rule was so exalted and on a par with the highest virtues and intellectual endowments, he knew through the Spirit of Christ, which controlled and governed him in everything, that an evil spirit would also be assigned to this Order to plant within it the love of and desire for study that would detract from prayer and all the spirituality of the Order, and place mortal animosity between it and penance and all asceticism of mind and body. Thus he saw clearly also that a spirit of arrogance¹¹⁸ regarding one’s own virtue would be produced to plant error within the minds of many imprudent brothers who would believe that not even the Church could lay down or had the authority to alter a point, nor comment about the Rule, and finding many reasons that appeared to be spiritual, under the pretext of zeal for the Rule, would fall into the worst, reprobate heresy which would cause great ruin and mortal damage.¹¹⁹

Thus the most pious father, not being ignorant of anything in this regard but seeing it as if it were present, and providing the best remedy for everything, in order that the brothers would not go in search of more declarations, devised a remedy in these words and a light against such deception saying: “With regard to everything that I have said in the Rule, I command on behalf of Christ under the strictest obedience that the brothers should have a Cardinal in the Roman Court who would be the governor, corrector and protector of this fraternity, so that they would always be subject and submissive at the feet of the Holy Church, and be unwavering in its doctrine and ordinances and strong in the Catholic faith, so as to live humbly and poorly under its

¹¹⁶ Note the emphasis which is placed on submission to the magisterium and teaching of the Church which protects these pages from any spiritualistic fantasies!

¹¹⁷ The beginning of paragraph 3: “What was the intention of our father Saint Francis when he commanded the brothers to have a Cardinal as protector of the Order”. (Cod. Cit., p. 1225).

¹¹⁸ *Allazione = orgoglio, esaltazione, vanagloria.*

¹¹⁹ From this it is evident that the author does not subscribe to the ideology of the Fraticelli.

command [1229] and observe the holy Gospel of our lord Jesus Christ, which we have firmly promised.”¹²⁰

492. These are the final words that Saint Francis uttered and they are surrounded with great mystery. Indeed he saw many things, so that his speech has a prophetic spirit or the tone of an admonition about things that were to come or on other occasions a correction, or had a providential tone, or that of a command, or a sense of pleading, similar in what was said to the words of the prophet David.

This was his manner of speaking in many places in the Rule. Therefore it would be almost impossible for a person who had no spiritual understanding to investigate the meaning of his words. Indeed his words in this section command the brothers to be humble at the feet of the Holy Church and through this humility he says that they should observe the Holy Gospel in humility and poverty. The depth of meaning in his words should be noted, because they convey perfect teaching to all, especially to those who through relaxation or by building large residences seek privileges or favours in having procurators and other things which are completely against the wishes of Christ and Saint Francis.

He says in these words that they are to be subject and submissive at the feet of the Holy Church and not that they ask for something every day and incessantly bother someone to have favours to expand and use all those things that rich people use in the world. He says; “let them be subject and submissive at the feet of the Holy Church”, so that we may observe strongly and resolutely the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in poverty. Indeed the Saint knew, was certain and was informed by Christ that the Holy Church would never appoint procurators, or bursars, nor families with money, nor construct large residences, nor use an abundance of delicate food, nor relax prayer and devotion and neglect the poverty and humility of Christ. Indeed it was in virtue of the commandment of the Spirit of Christ he wholeheartedly decreed the doctrine of being at the feet and teaching of the Church as stated above. In virtue of the same command whereby the brothers are subject and submissive at the feet of the holy Church, steadfast in the Catholic faith, the Spirit will send enlightenment and instruction, so that by the words which he said before in praise of the exaltedness and dignity of this vocation and the spiritual grace of their vocation they will never move away from the feet of the Holy Church. With this subjection and humility they are able to resolutely observe the holy Gospel and not fall into damnable heresy through pride. If they are always subject and submissive to the Holy Church they will always be resolute in the Catholic faith, living in humility and poverty. This most loving mother will not only see to it that they do not accept money, but she will be backed up by Christ, according to one who heard from his lips,¹²¹ that the Holy Church is always greatly saddened at the slightest relaxation and fall committed by the brothers with respect to the Rule, even when at their request to avoid a greater evil it accedes to them in matters involving their consciences, with respect to very necessary things that they must have. Indeed no matter how much zeal or fervour a brother or brothers had, if they were not subject and submissive at the feet of the Holy Church, Saint Francis could not see how they could observe the [1230] the Rule or any

¹²⁰ Cf. LR, 12, 4, 5 (FA:ED I, p. 106).

¹²¹ That is Brother Leo. This concept is contained in 2 C, 24 and 2MP 78; (FA:ED II, pp. 260-261; p. 324).

other perfection in life. Even if they were continually talking to angels and were not submissive to every canonical ordinance or command, this would be damnable heresy. Indeed the Pope himself by his decree or following his inspiration which it is not up to us to judge, could if he wished, annul and disband the Order and whoever say the opposite is a heretic.¹²²

493. Once again Saint Francis states in these concluding words of the Rule that the brothers should have a Cardinal as corrector, protector and lord of the fraternity so that by means of such submissiveness they may observe the Holy Gospel better in humility and poverty, and so that being under to the Holy Church they would be led towards and undergo very potent and unflinching healing so that the Rule could always be observed, without error or offence, by those who in humility sought its pure observance, and so that the above mentioned errors and deceptions would not arise, and the brothers would have no other option than to live the life of the holy Gospel in humility and poverty, searching for how this was to be achieved and to whom they should have recourse once they knew that the Rule was not being observed.

In the first place they should go to the ministers, who should comfort them kindly and charitably. In the closing words it states that above all a Cardinal should be the ranking protector. This shows clearly that if they do not find in the ministers a cure that promotes observance of the Rule, this person is indicated as outranking all others, so that they could have recourse to him requesting that he give them his assistance and advice in this delicate matter, submitting themselves to all his decrees, advice and instructions and thus becoming subject and submissive at the feet of the Holy Church, they would observe the holy Gospel in humility and poverty as they have firmly promised. Thus as far as the meaning of these final words of Saint Francis are concerned the pious souls among the brothers may know clearly and distinctly that when they see that the Rule is not being lived that they should and must approach the protector who is in charge of the Order in these important matters. This is so that the Rule may be observed better and in a more Catholic manner in poverty and humility. They do not need to approach or bother him for other things because no other protection or correction is required other than that the brothers have a Cardinal appointed by the Pope, according to the letter, so that they may observe the Gospel which they have firmly promised in a more Catholic manner and so that they are subject and submissive to the Apostolic See and steadfast in the Catholic faith.

494. One can clearly recognise the very strong healing agent that Saint Francis laid down in these final words of the Rule to cover all the requirements of his Order, against and circumstances or whim of the brothers contrary to its observance, as was stated above, by providing through the Holy Spirit for all future eventualities as they might occur under one statement in which the true lovers of the Rule and its spiritual interpretation could see clearly and recognise, without anything being omitted. Christ, who composed the Rule, did not let it say anything or commit anything imperfectly to writing, since the Lord Himself knew everything knew that if it was observed there

¹²² Here begins paragraph 4: “Our father Saint Francis explains in this chapter how we should act when the Rule is not observed, which is firstly to have recourse to the Ministers, and if they do not act, to have recourse to the Cardinal Protector”. (Cod. Cit., p. 1225).

would be no need for procurators, or privileges, or other declarations or constitutions. Yet every Pope since the Order was founded saw the need to explain something. Because of this it has always been the case that with all these declarations no one understood [1231] how the Rule was to be observed. Thus from this initial scandal came the mistake of not believing that Christ and Saint Francis wrote the Rule and put the necessary things in it. Next it turned out that the more explanations that were given the less the way to observe it and understand it spiritually became evident, and although the Supreme Pontiffs did this and had the right to do it, they did so more at the request of the brothers and their factions that of their own accord (*motu proprio*).¹²³ The Holy Church never or will ever wish to instigate to change even a single point of the Gospel life of Christ. Rather it gives in and trusts the consciences of individuals in these matters as Christ her spouse had done as mentioned above. Rather its wish was and always will be that all Orders remain in the rigour and virtue that most of their members accepted as their basis and principle. In order for the Apostolic See to demonstrate that this its most heart felt intention, namely that no person in the world or any other state whatever, could add or subtract from the Rule, but that its most resolute intention was it should remain this way for all time and be observed in this way, it issued, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, following all the words of the Rule, a very strong statement:

5. *It is forbidden, therefore, for anyone to tamper with this decree which we have confirmed, or rashly dare to oppose it. If anyone presumes to attempt this, let him know that he shall incur the anger of Almighty God and of His blessed Apostles Peter and Paul. Given at the Lateran.*¹²⁴

495. These words according to their spirit mean nothing else but that the Holy Church clearly proclaims that the Rule is confirmed for ever by the Apostolic See and is to be observed and kept as it is written. Where it says “that it is not lawful for any person in this to contradict a word of this decree” it means this document, that the Rule be contradicted in any way, that anything was left out or is superfluous or is be maliciously contradicted in it. However if anyone dared to do this let him know that he incurred and has fallen under the curse of God and of his Apostles Peter and Paul. No brother or any other person who attempts to try to contradict the Rule is exempted from this, and thus the Church is exonerated.

The Church carries out what has been shown to her in the upright life of Christ. Not even a point should be altered in this since it is completely immaculate and capable of being observed and there is no need of further interpretation. Thus the Holy Church herself, without fear of doubt or error or offence, threatens all those who undermine it falsely with an eternal curse. The first of these are the Lesser Brothers if they tell the Pope, using cunning, lies or laxity, that it cannot be observed, or claim that there is something in it that is not properly written. Thus they force the Apostolic Sees because of its kindness towards their consciences to expand the interpretation of the Rule as a lesser

¹²³ In fact the Franciscan Order multiplied the declarations and comments in a striking manner. Note how the author insists on the pure and simple observance of the Rule, without declarations.

¹²⁴ This is the beginning of paragraph 5, which is the last “How by the words of the Bull which follow there is the threat of eternal curse on whomsoever, whether brother or lay person, contradicts or repudiates in any way the Rule given to us by Jesus Christ and Saint Francis.” (Cod. Cit., p. 1225).

evil with respect to matters that the brothers have requested and pleaded for. Only the evidence of the person who by the will of God entered the deepest hell and stayed there for twenty hours and saw what [1232] need not be written down, because God does not want this,¹²⁵ can say how great an offence and sin this is for those who seek such things. However he knows the benefits and costs of observing the Rule in poverty and humility, as Christ showed Saint Francis in subjection at the feet of the Holy Church. He knows where those who have transgressed it are and where those are who seek to expand its interpretation out of sensuality, and who try to have money and a splendid life, and who want to have recourse to families, bursars and all the things that belong to the mighty in this world and who persecute those who love observance of the Rule, are.

496. Thus the Gospel Rule began to be given a broader interpretation and appeared to be completely obscured in clarity and regarded as not observable in the eyes of those who had professed it as well as other people. Someone saw the truth of this in the severe pain and suffering and the great persecution as the Will of God. He knew what a great sin this was and was convinced of the truth of this, which he cannot write here. Only this can be stated, that the person who is writing this asked God for a long time whether the Rule could be observed to the letter or not. He was shown the truth and that no one sins here except those who are bound to observe it. The Apostolic See kindly trusts the consciences of those who make requests of it for healing, as is proper to its dignity. Indeed we have written these things briefly to demonstrate how conscience prescribes and teaches how the Rule and life are capable of being observed to the letter (*ad literam*), and that this is God's will, and the desire of Saint Francis both with regard to what he literally wrote and that those who wish to live it purely in accord with his will be afforded the opportunity to understand and know it. In its kindness and following holy inspiration the Apostolic See had never shut the door on those who wished to observe it. This was its highest desire and wish as has been demonstrated above.

497 We have demonstrated this and stated this because some who see this exposition consider themselves to be free from everything that the Holy Church wished to lay down or change for the brothers. Let the brother note and recognise that Saint Paul said *propter transgressors facta est lex* (the law was made because of transgressors).¹²⁶ Thus everything that was laid down in the Rule by the Holy Church was done because of transgressors in order to correct and direct them along the path of the Rule. Indeed for the true observers there is no need of any of these explanations. Indeed if all the punishments and rigours of the Papal constitutions which were proclaimed at Chapters were gathered in one volume it would be thicker than the Bible. This is not because those who fall in these matters which are reprehensible in every way should not be severely rebuked, since all are against the Rule, but because the true observers of the Rule to whom this is addressed do not need to have this stated here.¹²⁷ The Constitutions mention that those who wear night gowns, develop land, or accept money ought to be incarcerated and other countless things like this for those who wish to commit all kinds of evil and are there to frighten them. As has been said whoever seeks to observe these things in prayer and

¹²⁵ This testimony, which is anonymous and is mentioned again later, may be autobiographical

¹²⁶ Cf. Gal 3, 17; Rom 4, 15.

¹²⁷ He repeats a thought which has already been stated many times to say once again that Gospel love needs no law.

Gospel Love Concerning the Rule of Saint Francis

devotion, even if the angels should write books about what man needed, they would not explain things as clearly to the mind, nor form them as much as prayer would show them how such things are to be approached and how they could be preserved from falling. So I shall conclude writing about those who seek to broaden the interpretation of the Rule and who do not pray.¹²⁸ Much has been written and laid down for the like of these.

498 This is enough with respect to the Rule and those who day and night consider how they can observe it. In tears I ask this of God. For them a few words suffice, like in the Holy Gospel and the Rule. Not only how to interpret the Rule is to be found in prayer and fasting but also in virtue of this Christ and Francis his most faithful servant will be found,¹²⁹ to whom be honour, praise and glory for ever and ever.

AMEN

¹²⁸ Orrare = fare orazione.

¹²⁹ These words explain the spiritual outlook of the early Capuchins well.