

THROUGH A PERSISTENT FAITH

Edited by

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On April 11, 2010, Cardinal Franc Rodé, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, published an article with this title in *L'Osservatore Romano*, on the current status of the Constitutions of the institutions that are under his purview. Among these, as we all know, is the Secular Franciscan Order. Therefore, it seems useful to present to our brothers and sisters around the world some excerpts of this article that is so influential and so helpful for the strengthening and growth of our Fraternities.

In view of a process of revitalizing and redeveloping the Institutions that should remain faithful to the original inspiration, Cardinal Rodé considers it necessary to have a renewed emphasis on the Rules and Constitutions. They represent the surest standard for witnessing to the needs of the day, because, in them, lies the authentic charism recognized by the Church.

In the Constitutions, we will find inspiration and the means to encourage, both individually and communally, spiritual maturity and apostolic service, following our own tradition and in communion with the Church. This faithfulness happens through the acceptance of the constitutional rules in their entirety: we can not “interpret them” taking what we like and rejecting what may be less to our liking!

The Cardinal writes,

“The worm of individualism and a misconstrued freedom present in our society so strongly as to diminish, not only the consciences of individuals, but the very communities and institutions, now make it even more urgent to understand the true meaning and the fundamental value of the Constitutions for the life of an Institution. In today’s Western or postmodern culture, there is almost a religious pluralism. Everyone has his or her own way to live, his/her own way of thinking, personal guidance/orientation systems, different modes of acting.”

Even the Rules and Constitutions are victims of a similar mentality, through which common rules/standards or requirements are viewed with suspicion, if not completely rejected, because they crush or bring humiliation to personal individualism.

Cardinal Rodé recommends focusing in on on-going formation with regular reading and a more detailed study of the Constitutions. And he adds: “The Constitutions are not just any book that, while important, always ends up forgotten on library shelves. Constitutions are a book to keep with us, to continue reading, because in them, we don’t find just a story that we already know, but a life plan, a divine call, which is begun each morning and whose fulfillment requires a journey of faithfulness to God and to men throughout the day.”

I believe that these insights and these recommendations are very important for us, Secular Franciscans, especially since the Cardinal concludes his article mentioning specifically St. Francis and relating the words he gave to the Order:

“Listen, My children of the Lord and my brothers (and sisters), And listen to my words. /
Incline the ear of your heart / and obey the voice of the Son of God /
Observe with all your heart his rules and carry out his recommendations completely. /
Praise Him because He is good, /
and exalt Him in your works, because it was for this He sent you into this whole world, /
so that you may bear witness to His voice / by word and by deed /
and that you may make known to all / that there is no one who is Almighty except Him. /
Persevere in discipline and in holy obedience / and carry out with a good and firm intention /
those things that you have promised.