



NAFRA-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA

National Minister's Message

by Jan Parker, OFS

What Does It Mean to Rise from the Dead?

The apostles were spellbound! Jesus had just been transfigured before them! You can only imagine their wonder at this sight! As they descended the mountain their amazement turned to perplexity as Jesus said to them, "Do not tell anyone about this, until after I have risen from the dead." Risen from the dead? What is he saying?

Scripture confirms that the apostles truly grappled with this question. I can imagine their bewilderment as they continued to ask each other, "What does it mean to rise from the dead?"

In this Easter season, we might be tempted to dismiss this question too quickly. Of course, we know what it means to rise from the dead! But like the apostles, let's grapple with this question a bit more — and let's think about it in relation to our Rule. Why? Because our Rule

in its entirety is all about dying and rising. If we are living what we have professed, we die and rise every day.

Beginning with the prologue and continuing in each Article, the Rule calls us to ongoing daily conversion — to die to self and rise each day being conformed to Christ. As we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of our Rule during this Jubilee year, let us look again at what we have professed. Let us study our Rule and ask ourselves, "What does it mean to rise from the dead?"

Come, Holy Spirit, inspire us anew with all the Rule means in our lives. Give us the grace to rise from the dead each day!

I have asked our former National Historian Bill Wicks to share with us the history of how the Rule of 1978 came about. May his article help us all in our appreciation of this gift we treasure!



OUR RULE – FORTIETH YEAR ANNIVERSARY

by William Wicks, OFS



I was professed four years after Pope Paul VI approved the Rule of 1978. We called it the "new" Rule. Today, it is no longer "new." It has had 40 years of seasoning. But let us go back to the beginning – a time of the spirit of *aggiornamento*, a time of the emergence of the laity, and a time, as Pope John XXIII put it, to "Throw open the windows of the church and let the fresh air of the spirit blow through." In that setting, it was no surprise that there was a call for a new Rule of Life for the Third Order Secular.

The Call for a New Rule: Near the end of the Second Vatican Council, a letter from the Ministers General to the Commissaries General (General Spiritual Assistants of that day) directed them to create a New Rule for the Third Order Secular: a New Rule that would address the "changed conditions of the modern world."

On March 9, 1966, the process of the formulation of a new Rule was begun – a process that would take 12 years. It began with a survey: the Commissaries General requested input from all levels of fraternity. From their letter, Para. 6: "The Interobediential General Council earnestly requests that the Provinces and Fraternities and Directors, both religious and ecclesiastical *as well as lay*

[author's emphasis], freely and openly make known their own observations, recommendations and wishes as regards to the examination or readjustment of the Rule." Two things should be noted. First, lay [Third Order members] are invited to participate – a first in the writing of a Rule. Second, the words, "examination or readjustment of the [Leonine] Rule." In other words, the initial intention of the Ministers General was to work from the Rule in existence – the Leonine Rule, and modify that Rule as needed. However, it turns out that the Holy Spirit had other things in mind.

Survey of Fraternities Collated: Following the instructions in the letter, a survey was conducted of the fraternities. The results were analyzed and collated by the friar provinces, and the outcome was sent to the Commissaries General, who discussed the recommendations, and a consensus was agreed upon. "The essential elements of the Secular Franciscan Order are:

- ❖ An evangelical life
- ❖ In intimate union with Francis
- ❖ In reciprocal union with all members of the Franciscan family
- ❖ In the midst of the world in a secular way



Assisi Congress – October 1969

English Speaking Language Group

*Standing: Edward Chivers, England; Tom Ricard, U.S.A.
Sitting: Irene O’Sullivan, Australia; Wally Roebuck, U.S.A.
Pom Pefanis, Canada; Frank Kujawa, U.S.A.*

- ❖ With the support of a fraternity
- ❖ To which one has been called personally
- ❖ To which one has made a promise acknowledged by the church
- ❖ Putting one’s self at the disposition of the church and the world.”

First Draft of a New Rule: This all sounds great, but one must take into account that they were working to modify the Leonine Rule, not to start from scratch, not to develop a new Rule apart from the Leonine Rule. So making use of the letters and suggestions that were sent in from all over the world, they drew up the first draft of the Rule, in July, 1968. The Directive and Executive Council in the U.S. met in October to analyze and critique the Rule. One of the criticisms was: “Did not conceive people as they are now actually living in the world.” Another was: “Nothing is mentioned about the Third Order message and mission to the world....The vast majority of responses to this ‘First Draft’ expressed negative views ranging from disappointment to complete rejection of the Rule Project.”

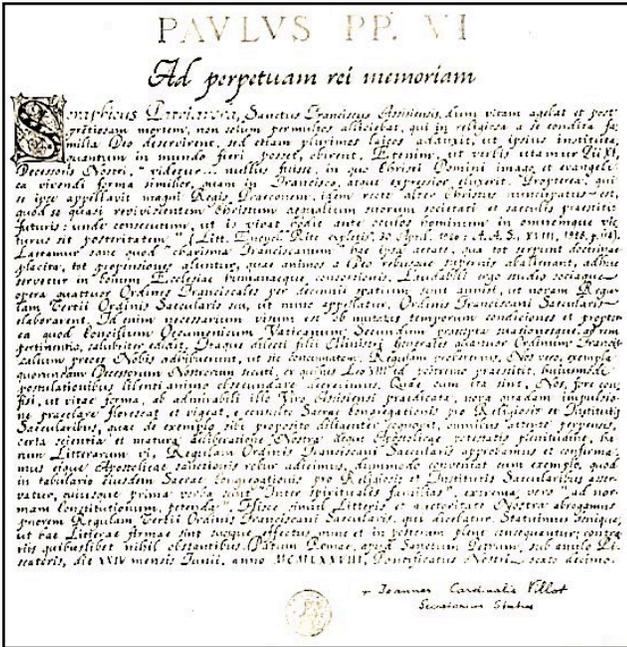
Need for Direct Lay Participation: Enter the Holy Spirit. A letter was sent from the General Commissaries to the Commissary Provincial. Paragraph 2 included the statement: “...we have decided to convoke a meeting of Lay Franciscans to study the schema of the rule. This meeting will be held in Assisi at the Portiuncola Shrine

from October 5 to 11, 1969.” This meeting came to be known as the Assisi Congress.

An Experimental Rule Tested: In the meantime, a modification of the First Draft was being used experimentally by some nations. The North American Federation, composed of Provinces from the United States and Canada, created an experimental Rule and was given permission by the Ministers General to use it in North America, which it did. The reviews were mixed. Some members were still attached to the Leonine Rule; their dissatisfaction was expressed in the following way: “Now comes the Way of Life of the Lay Franciscans, temporarily approved by Rome for the North American Federation. It is non-prescriptive, non-regulatory. It is an admirable statement for a theologian. It is embarrassing to give it to a simple hausfrau or the ordinary day worker who want something ‘to put their teeth into.’ It is even difficult for the experienced director to use as a format for instructing novices.” It is evident that the Holy Spirit had more work to do.

The Assisi Congress – 1969: “Secular Franciscans from all branches of the Franciscan Order from around the world, gathered in Assisi during the week of September 27 to October 3, at the invitation of the General Secretaries...Twenty-five Secular Franciscans representing the Third Order throughout the world. Five language groups emerged from the general delegates, (The English-Speaking Group is shown in the picture above).Three commissions were organized.” The second commission, tasked with producing the essential elements of Franciscan Spirituality, came up with seventeen. These essential elements had a major impact on the writing of the final version of a new Rule. These are:

1. To live the gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis
2. To be converted continuously
3. To live as brothers and sisters of all people and of all creation
4. To live in communion with Christ
5. To follow the poor and crucified Christ
6. To share in the life and mission of the Church
7. To share in the love of the Father
8. To be instruments of peace
9. To have a life of prayer that is personal, communal and liturgical
10. To live in joy
11. To have a spirituality of a secular nature
12. To be pilgrims on the way toward the Father
13. To participate in the Apostolate of the Laity
14. To be at service of the less fortunate
15. To be loyal to the Church in an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with her ministers
16. To be open to the actions of the Spirit



Letter approving the rule by Pope Paul VI

17. To live in simplicity, humility, and minority

These seventeen essential elements fit into the defining characteristics of the Secular Franciscan Order as described by the Rule Project. They are:

1. To Live the Gospel (1, 4, 5, 14)
2. Following Francis (1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 15, 17)
3. Through Conversion (2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 16)
4. In Community (3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 15)
5. As Seculars (3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14)
6. In Life-Giving Union with All Franciscans (3, 6)

Enter St. Francis' Letter to All of the Faithful:

Near the end of the Rule Project, Kajetan Esser *happened to find* some writing of St. Francis in the Guarnacci Library in Volterra, Italy. The writing began with these words: "These are words of life and salvation. Whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord salvation". While Kajetan Esser entitled it "The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful," it has been more correctly seen as an exhortation given to those first penitents who came to Francis desiring to share his

Gospel way of life. The Letter serves as the Prologue to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. Robert Stewart, O.F.M., who authored a Doctoral Dissertation on the Pauline Rule that was submitted to St. Bonaventure University, stated that the *Letter to the Faithful* is the lens through which the Rule should be viewed and understood.

Approval and Promulgation of a New Rule by Pope Paul VI:

There were quite a few redactions before the final version of the Rule was presented for approval to Sacred Congregation for Religious for their scrutiny. The Sacred Congregation recommended some modifications, which were made. The Sacred Congregation then handed the document over to the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Jean Villot, who placed it on the desk of the Holy Father. After twelve years of work by various Franciscan entities, the "new" Rule was approved and promulgated by Pope Paul VI, under the Ring of the Fisherman, on June 24, 1978.

I am sure that St. Francis approves of this "new" Rule. How can he help but like it? Paragraph four includes the sentence, "Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel." Francis of Assisi only wanted to live and preach the Gospel. And we, the spiritual descendants of the original Penitents of Assisi are asked, by this Rule, to do just that.

References:

Wicks, William, SFO, A History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, Volume IIA, 1943-1978, Smoky Valley Printing, Lindsborg, KS, 2010

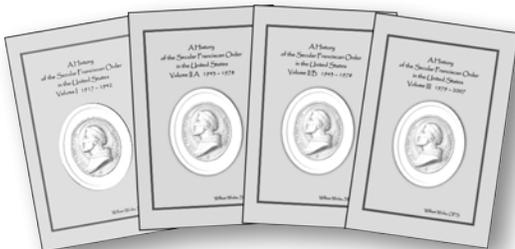
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The history of the development of the Rule is included in *A History OF the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, Volume IIA.*



A History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States

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by William Wicks, OFS



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