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# The CORD

## A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

### THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

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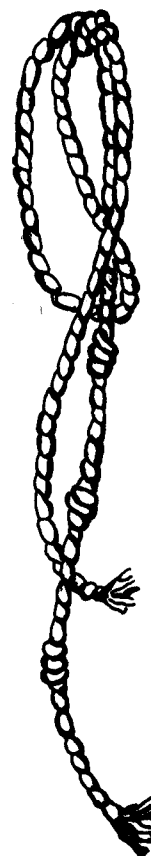
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## The CORD

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### Standard Abbreviations used in **The CORD** for Early Franciscan Sources

#### I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions

BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo

CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun

EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony

EpCler: Letter to Clerics<sup>1</sup>

EpCust: Letter to Superiors<sup>1</sup>

EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful<sup>1</sup>

EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo

EpMin: Letter to a Minister

EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order

EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of the People

ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God

ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father

Form Viv: Form of Life for St. Clare

Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221

LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God

LaudHor: Praises at all the Hours

OffPass: Office of the Passion

OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix

RegB: Rule of 1223

RegNB: Rule of 1221

RegEr: Rule for Hermits

SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady

SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues

Test: Testament of St. Francis

UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare

VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy

<sup>1</sup>I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

#### II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis

2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis

3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles

CL: Legend of Saint Clare

CP: Process of Saint Clare

Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis

LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis

LMin: Bonaventure Minor Life of Francis

LP: Legend of Perugia

L3S: Legend of the Three Companions

SC Sacrum Commernium

SP: Mirror of Perfection

Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

## The Promise of Gospel Life

EMANUELA DE NUNZIO, SFO

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT M. STEWART, OFM

"The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi." [*SFO Rule*, 4] For many people this precept represents the alpha and omega of the Secular Franciscan life and exhausts its meaning, contents, and objectives. Consequently, they feel part of the Secular Franciscan Order without further obligation or formality. Certainly the Secular Franciscan Order is *essentially* this, is *above all* this, but it is not *only* this. The Secular Franciscan Order is the unity of all the faithful who "led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own Secular state... [and who] by their profession... pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of Saint Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church." [*SFO Rule*, 2]

The identifying elements of a Secular Franciscan center, therefore, on *Profession*, which the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order define as "the solemn ecclesial act by which the candidate, remembering the call received from Christ, renews the baptismal promises and publicly affirms his or her personal commitment to live the Gospel in the world according to the example of St. Francis and following the Rule of the SFO." [42.1] Thus, the line of demarcation between a friend of St. Francis (one fascinated by his message of joy, of peace, of poverty, of fraternity) and a member of the Secular Franciscan Order is indicated by *Profession*, or the *Promise of Gospel life*.

We might well dwell on this distinction in order to grasp, more than the formal and juridical, the essential and spiritual elements. The formal and juridical aspect is that of an "ecclesial act": public and solemn. The essential, spiritual aspects of Profession are the renewal of baptismal promises, the specific vocation to live the Gospel within a Franciscan spirituality, and the commitment to observe the Rule approved by the Church.

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*Emanuela De Nunzio, an Italian by birth, made her profession in the Secular Franciscan Order in 1949. She served as a leader in the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in Italy, and became involved, on an international level, in the preparatory work for the General Constitutions of the SFO, which were approved in September 1990 by the Holy See. In October 1990, Emanuela was elected Minister General of the Secular Franciscan Order at the General Chapter held in Fatima, Portugal.*

## Renewal of Baptismal Promises

Baptismal promises are, in their content, a program for a whole new life: life in Christ. St. Paul constantly returns to the preciousness of the gift of Baptism. The steadfast promise of salvation which is tied to this gift is always accompanied by an exhortation to live our baptism and its grace, and not to squander this salvific event. In the Easter vigil liturgy we are reminded of the apostle's exhortation: "so we too might walk in newness of life." [Rm 6:4] Holiness is a journey, in simplicity amidst our normal daily life, from the *initial newness* of Baptism to a *definitive newness* of vision.

But we need acknowledge that most of us were baptized as infants and our baptismal promises were made for us by our godparents. Thus, the event of our own Baptism is not linked to a personal experience and as an existential event, it remains extraneous to us.

In a recent formation seminar I had asked: "Do you ever find yourself thinking about your baptism? What effects does it have in your own life?" The responses, or perhaps more the lack of responses, were significant. Someone did say, "I cannot imagine what my life would be like had I not been baptized"; but most were forced to defer to the Catechism.

This is why the post-conciliar teaching of the Magisterium continually insists upon the centrality of Baptism and calls us to a new baptismal awareness. It is also why some contemporary ecclesial movements dedicate particular attention to it: for Charismatics reborn in the Spirit a central place in the life of faith is given to this vitalization which one has in the so-called "Baptism in the Spirit," and the neo-catechumenates revive for those already baptized, the baptismal preparation which was practiced in the early Christian centuries.

The SFO Rule reminds Secular Franciscans of the centrality of Baptism: "Members of the Church through Baptism, and united more intimately with the Church by profession..." [Art. 6] "United more intimately" precisely because profession is first of all a renewal of baptismal promises, as affirmed in the Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order: "In such a way the inestimable gift of Baptism in them [Secular Franciscans] is manifested and, in an ever more full and fruitful way, realized. [Ritual, preliminary notes, n. 1]

Profession should, therefore, represent a growing awareness of having been baptized and, with the renewal of baptismal promises made in the context of this "public solemn ecclesial act," should express itself in a human and spiritual consciousness which the infant brought to the baptismal font could not have expressed. This also means that the time of formation (or novitiate) should represent an authentic catechumenate experience, a committed journey which does not end with profession, but which from Profession attains a renewed

appreciation of the preciousness of the gift received and a more profound gratitude in the awesome contemplation of the mystery.

## Vocation

All Christians need to grow in an awareness of their own Baptism as a salvific event and as a personal experience. Connected to this awareness is the lay vocation, indiscriminately addressed to all those who, baptized and confirmed, are asked by the Lord to give a response, a complete response to the seeds that he has sown in their lives, in their history, in their time, for each one individually. Among these "seeds" can also be the call of the Spirit to a Christian life nourished by a specific spirituality. "In the field of a 'commonly shared' lay vocation, 'special' lay vocations flourish." [Christifideles Laici 56] That is, God's plan for an individual person might mean not only doing well all those things the laity are called to do, but also doing them according to a specific spiritual vision and within a specific ecclesial community. This particular call illumines, by characterizing and unifying, all the moments, events, and situations in the individual Christian layperson's life: personal, familial, professional, etc.

"The vocation to the SFO is a specific vocation" [GC 2.1]; with Profession, Secular Franciscans commit themselves "to live the Gospel according to Franciscan spirituality in their secular condition." [GC 8.1] In what does responding to a specific lay vocation consist today? First, there is a great need in the Church that Christians be "incarnated," that Christians be not faint or inconsistent but "authentic" as persons and in every situation of their lives. Christologically speaking, to become incarnate is essentially to draw near to the events and people within our own history.

There is also a need that lay people be "*cruce signati*" ["signed with the cross"] - not as the crusaders, but as people *sealed* with the cross. Taking the fact of being Christian seriously does not make them crusaders with banners unfurled, but people who have been branded in their life with a sign, the sign of the cross, which is undoubtedly heavy.

In the end, a specific lay vocation cannot prescind from a spirit of service in the sense of dying to self to rise again in service to others, and to respond to the expectations of the world today. This becoming incarnate, this entering into suffering, this placing oneself in service is not only through personal contact with the Lord but is in and through the way of community, the Church.

## To Observe the Rule

As Profession, so too the Rule is a distinguishing element between a member of the Secular Franciscan Order and a lay person who simply loves St. Francis and is inspired by his spirituality.

Through time there has been a succession of four Rules of the Franciscan Third Order (today, the Secular Franciscan Order). The first, dating from 1221 and known as the *Memoriale propositi*, did not receive official approval by the Church. Having been recast and reorganized without substantial modification of its content, it was approved in 1289, becoming known as the Rule of Nicholas IV. In 1883, Leo XIII simplified and abbreviated the Rule that it could be followed by a greater number of Christians. Finally, in 1978 Paul VI approved the Rule presently in force.

The Pauline Rule contains as a Prologue the earlier version of Francis' *Letter to the Faithful* with the title "Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance." In reference to this text, Esser wrote: "What Francis and his brothers offer in this document constitutes the marrow of the Gospel, the kernel of a life according to the form of the holy Gospel"; and in 1912 Cuthbert had said that "it is precisely in this letter that one discovers the Third Order Rule."

Differing from the preceding, strictly prescriptive Rules, the new Rule has a predominantly inspirational character in the sense that it allows a lot of latitude for individual discernment in translating the Gospel and Franciscan spirit into act within the circumstances which present themselves in one's life. However, the Rule also has a normative character, which is evidenced by its use of the subjunctive in the Latin text. The Rule itself proposed that concrete application be made by the General Constitutions [art. 4], an instrument which more easily and quickly could be adjusted to variable or contingent situations. The General Constitutions, promulgated in 1990 following their approval by the Holy See, have fully responded to that goal: in 103 articles they apply the Rule to typical situations in the personal, familial, professional, social and ecclesial life of a contemporary lay Franciscan, deferring to the particular Statutes for greater adherence to specific national and local situations.

Thus, the Rule, the Constitutions, and the national and local Statutes represent a complex unity which the Secular Franciscan, with Profession, accepts and promises to observe, thereby becoming incorporated into the Secular Franciscan Order.

Pope John Paul II, in a discourse delivered on September 17, 1982 to members of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, said: "Love, learn and live the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order... it is an authentic treasure in your hands."

This invitation seems to me to be the most appropriate and meaningful conclusion to a reflection on the Promise of Gospel life, that must base itself upon the Secular Franciscans' trust in being guided and aided in their life by the Rule and by the Fraternity to which they belong. [*Ritual*, preliminary notes, n. 15].

## The Pauline Rule - Fifteen Years After

CARL SCHAFFER, OFM

In the Apostolic Letter, *Seraphicus Patriarca*, dated 24 June 1978, Pope Paul VI wrote: "We approve and confirm with our apostolic authority and sanction the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, ... By this Letter and our apostolic authority, we abrogate the previous Rule of what was formerly called the Franciscan Third Order. Finally, we decree that this letter remain in effect now and in the future, regardless of anything contrary."

Fifteen years later, what have we done about the Rule of Paul VI? I asked the same question five years ago, but much has happened since then that has enabled us to understand the Rule better.

It was difficult to put the Rule into practice until we had the corresponding General Constitutions approved and in our hands. They were approved on 8 September 1990. The implications of the Rule with regard to spiritual Assistance were spelt out in the Statutes for the Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order, which came into effect on 17 September 1992.

With the appearance and putting into effect of the General Constitutions and the Statutes for Assistance, it became obvious that the 1978 Rule was a time-bomb in the hands of those who had not paid enough attention to it. Burning issues, such as the unity of the Secular Franciscan Order and its restructuring into Regional and National Fraternities, the nature of the secular vocation, both contemplative and apostolic, the requirements of belonging to the Order,

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*Father Carl Schaffer, an Australian, is a member of the OFM Province of the Holy Spirit. In 1983, Fr. Carl was appointed Vice General Assistant and Secretary of the Office for the SFO at the General Curia of the OFM in Rome. In July 1985, he was appointed General Assistant and has since then, amidst his travel and work with Secular Franciscans throughout the world, edited the "Letter to the Assistants" in four languages. After serving as Secretary to the General Chapter of the OFM, Fr. Carl was reconfirmed as General Assistant to the SFO in August 1991.*

of formation and of "profession," the valid process of elections, the lay leadership of the Fraternity Councils, the collegial exercise of spiritual Assistance, the financial responsibilities of fraternities at all levels, are blowing up in our faces and demand immediate attention.

The approval of the Statutes of the International Fraternity SFO at the coming General Chapter in Mexico City, in October 1993, will bring to a head the official recognition of National Fraternities.

What has been done in fact about adopting the 1978 Rule? The pace of adoption has intensified in the past five years. Big efforts have been made, in those countries where it was necessary, to unify the Secular Franciscan Order, overcoming the divisions introduced by structuring the Order on the Provinces of the friars. Many National Fraternities have advanced a long way towards establishing Regional Fraternities. All Statutes are in the process of being rewritten, especially the National Statutes. The National Councils are identifying their particular problem and are seriously seeking the solution. The religious Ministers Provincial and the spiritual Assistants have generally welcomed the Statutes for Assistance and are trying to apply them.

It is obvious then, that in the light of the new General Constitutions, the Statutes for Assistance and other clarifying documents that have appeared in recent years, many Fraternities at all levels of the Secular Franciscan Order have adopted the new Rule with enthusiasm and that they want to go ahead with their secular Franciscan renewal.

I think it will still serve a good purpose to indicate some of the major differences between the 1883 Rule of the Franciscan Third Order Secular and the 1978 Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. It helps to understand where some of our most deeply-rooted ideas came from and why they are no longer viable. We will see more clearly what has been abrogated and what has been approved. We will also be able to measure to what extent we have adopted the Pauline Rule and have become no longer the Franciscan Third Order Secular but the Secular Franciscan Order. The Secular Franciscan Order is the direct and legitimate successor of the Franciscan Third Order Secular. It is the same - but different!

#### **STRUCTURES: From Local ...**

There are those who say that the Franciscan spirit is what matters and that we shouldn't waste our time replacing structures. These people are sick of hearing about Rule, Constitutions and Statutes. For them, the past fifteen years have been a sheer waste of time and effort - and money, in some cases. However, the spirit expresses itself in the structures that it builds. Structures embody a certain spirit: they either hinder the genuine spirit or they help it to express itself. Renewal of our spirit inevitably involves renewal of our structures.

The Leonine Rule of 1883 envisaged the Franciscan Third Order Secular only as local fraternities [I,3].

The Franciscan Third Order of Leo XIII was loosely a single Order insofar as his Rule was given to all the local fraternities, regardless of which Order of friars they were attached to. However, almost everywhere the local fraternities related little, if at all, to one another, even when they were directed by the same Order of friars. Rarely did they relate to other local fraternities directed by a different Order of friars, nor was it expected of them. In fact, the friars were rather possessive of "their" fraternities. In practice, the Franciscan Third Order was conducted in four separate branches, corresponding to the three branches of the First Order and to the Third Order Regular. The Leonine Rule did not legislate for T.O. provincial structures. The General Constitutions of 1957 stated that "regional, provincial, national, and general councils may be set up ... in accordance with the particular statutes of each Family" [Art. 121]. In those countries where the T.O. structures were developed above the local level, they were usually provincial structures based on the Provinces of the Orders of the friars who directed a number of local fraternities within their Provinces.

The friars entered the old Rule as Custodes (Provincials), Guardians and Visitors [III,2-3]. The Visitor had to investigate, at least once a year, whether the Rule was properly observed. The Visitors were to be chosen from the First Order or Third Order Regular, and were appointed by the provincial or local superiors when requested. Laymen could not hold the office of Visitor [III,3].

#### **... To International**

The Pauline Rule sees the Secular Franciscan Order as "an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world" [Art. 2] and "divided into fraternities of various levels - local, regional, national and international ... These various fraternities are coordinated and united ..." [Art. 20].

The Secular Franciscan Order of Paul VI is strictly a single Order with its own structures independent of the structures of the friars. The new Rule does not envisage an obediencial provincial structure for the SFO, but rather a regional fraternity comprising all the local fraternities in the territory, regardless of who assists them. This arrangement requires close cooperation between the various Orders and Provinces of the friars who assist the local fraternities in the territory. The collegial exercise of spiritual assistance has been codified in the Statutes for Assistance of 1992.

The friars enter the Pauline Rule as the Superiors of the four religious Franciscan Orders, also as pastoral Visitors and spiritual Assistants. The Rule envisages the fraternities on the various levels as assisted spiritually by "suit-

able and well prepared religious" who are requested from "the superiors of the four religious Franciscan families (sic)" [Art. 26]. The secular Minister asks also for the pastoral visit by the competent religious superiors, and for the fraternal visit from the Minister of the higher fraternity [Art. 26]. Here, the fraternal visitor is a lay person.

#### **LEADERS: From Clerical ...**

In the Rule of Leo XIII, the friar-priests appeared as the leaders of the Franciscan Third Order, although offices were to be conferred at a meeting of the secular members [III,1], and the monthly meetings were called by the secular Minister [II,11]. The confessor could judge whether a married woman might be received without her husband's consent [I,2]. The friar Visitor was charged with the supervision of the Order and summoned all the officers and members to a meeting [III,2]. He and the ordinary Superiors of the friars had full power to dispense a member from observing any provision of the Rule [III,6].

The former Rule did not mention the Spiritual Director and said only that the members would "duly make their profession" [I,4]. However, under that Rule, and according to the General Constitutions of 1957 [Art. 111-114], the friar-priest was the spiritual Director of the local fraternity who presided at the monthly meetings and at the sessions of the council, even when the fraternity had a secular Minister [II,11]. He often functioned also as Treasurer and Secretary, although there were supposed to be secular officers [III,1]. The Spiritual Director admitted postulants to the habit and novices to profession, in accord with the Ritual at the time.

#### **... To Lay**

In the Rule of Paul VI, "on the various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a Council and Minister (or President) who are elected by the professed ..." [Art. 21]. The Council of the local fraternity "decides upon the acceptance of new brothers and sisters" [Art. 23]. Members in difficulty "should discuss their problems with the Council in fraternal dialogue." Withdrawal or dismissal from the Order is "an act of the fraternity Council" [Art. 23]. "The Council should organize regular and frequent meetings" of the fraternity [Art. 24]. The Minister at each level of fraternity, with the consent of the Council, should ask for a regular pastoral visit and for a fraternal visit [Art. 26].

The new Rule has no place for a Spiritual Director. It stresses the co-responsibility of seculars and religious in the direction of the fraternities at all levels, so that the Councils "shall ask for suitable and well prepared religious for spiritual assistance" [Art. 26]. Under this Rule, and in accord with the 1984 Ritual, the Minister of the local fraternity admits new members and receives their profession, otherwise the profession is not valid.

#### **MEMBERS: From Devotional ...**

In the old Rule, the ideal Franciscan Tertiary was obedient and devout. Loyal submission to the Roman Church and to the Apostolic See was among the conditions for admission [I,1]. In their profession, they promised to obey the Church [I,4]. They were to "meekly accept the correction" of the Visitor, "and not refuse to perform the penance" [III,2]. Disobedient members, if they did not submit, were to be dismissed from the Order [III,4].

Half the Rule was given to prescribing the Tertiary's rule of life in devotional terms. The liturgy before the reforms of Vatican II allowed for public and active participation almost exclusively by the clergy. In that context, fasts and abstinence [II,4], monthly reception of the sacraments [II,5], daily recitation of a divine Office [II,6], attendance at daily Mass [II,11] and at funerals of deceased members [II,14], were mainly private exercises of piety on the part of the laity.

References to apostolic involvements were slight: in their family life, they were to lead others by good example and to promote good works [II,8]; they were to try to heal discord [II,9]; they were to aid their poorer members [II,12] and visit their sick members [II,13]. The Rule did not stretch their apostolic outreach beyond their own family and fraternity.

#### **... To Apostolic**

In the new Rule, the ideal Secular Franciscan is no less obedient and devout, but now Secular Franciscans are required to exercise more initiative in their obedience and to base their devotional life on the Scriptures and on actively participated liturgy.

The relationship of the Franciscan seculars to the friars is not one of submissive obedience but of "life-giving union with each other" [Art. 1]. They relate to the clergy by "living in full communion with the Pope, bishops and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity" [Art. 6]. They relate to the Saviour by "uniting themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed his will into the Father's hands ..." [Art. 10]

Scriptural spirituality is the soul of their devotional life. "By their profession, they pledge themselves to live the Gospel..." [Art. 2]. Their rule and life is this: to observe the Gospel... They should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the Gospel... [Art. 4]. They should "seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity" [Art. 5].

They have been "buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession" [Art. 6]. They are to participate in the sacramental life of the Church through the sacrament of recon-

ciliation [Art. 7], of matrimony for the married members [Art. 17], and above all the Eucharist [Art. 8]. They are not merely to recite a divine Office but to "join in liturgical prayer ... reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ" [Art. 8].

Apostolic activity is presented in scriptural terms as building "a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively ... in the Christian spirit of service" [Art. 14]. The Secular Franciscans are to promote peace and joy [Art. 19], and justice, "especially in the field of public life" [Art. 15]. Their work is an apostolate of "sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community" [Art. 16]. Their family is an apostolic field for cultivating "peace, fidelity, and respect for life" [Art. 17]. Ecology is a special field of Secular Franciscan apostolate [Art. 18], where they refuse to exploit creation and establish universal kinship instead.

#### **LANGUAGE: From Religious ...**

The language that we use is a sure indication of our way of thinking, of our deepest beliefs and of the values that we hold most dear.

The Leonine Rule was addressed to the "Franciscan Third Order" [I,1] whose members it described as "Tertiaries," who spent a year in the "Novitiate" and were admitted to "Profession" [I,4]. They "recited" the divine Office daily [II,6].

Under that rule, terms were taken directly from religious life to describe novices and postulants, novice master and novice mistress, also T.O. Provinces, with Ministers Provincial.

Practices followed language. Tertiaries took a religious name at their profession and continued to wear a religious habit, even though the Leonine Rule replaced the habit with a small scapular and a cord [I,3]. They called one another Brother and Sister in secular life. Men and women were separated into distinct fraternities or on opposite sides of the church during meetings.

#### **... To Secular**

The Pauline Rule is addressed to the "Secular Franciscan Order" [Art. 2] whose members it describes as "secular Franciscans" [Art. 4], who spend "a time of initiation," and "a period of formation of at least one year," before making "profession" [Art. 23]. They "join in liturgical prayer" [Art. 8]. The Rule speaks of the "spiritual assistance" given by religious [Art. 26].

Under this Rule, the terms from religious life are translated into terms appropriate for secular people. The candidates are formed by the officers in charge of formation (the "formators"). The SFO has regional fraternities directed by regional Ministers and their councils.

Practices follow language. The members retain their baptismal names and address one another as they would address other lay people. They wear "a distinctive Franciscan sign" [Art. 23], such as a badge, on their ordinary clothes. A husband and wife can belong to the same fraternity and it would be normal for them to sit next to each other at meetings.

#### **WHICH MODEL ARE YOU FOLLOWING?**

Clearly, the model of lay Franciscan life prescribed by the Rule of Leo XIII is very different from the model described by the Rule of Paul VI. "Obedience" [I,1] and "piety" [II,8] are key ideals in the abrogated Rule. As ideals, they are not dropped in the new Rule, but they are renewed. "Dialogue," and "apostolic effectiveness and creativity" [Art. 6] are key ideals in the approved Rule.

Fifteen years after the approval of the Pauline Rule, do the local fraternities follow the *Third Order* model or the *Secular Franciscan Order* model? Do the regional fraternities identify with Provinces of one of the Orders of friars or do they coordinate all the local fraternities in their territory, independently of who assists the individual fraternities? Are the national fraternities bringing their National Statutes into line with the General Constitutions? The answer to these questions is not always a resounding yes, but the greater part of the Secular Franciscan Order is responding positively.

The unity of the Secular Franciscan Order and its restructuring into Regional and National Fraternities is well on the way to achievement.

It is difficult for some to grasp the nature of the secular vocation, and there are those who want to imitate the externals of religious life. On the other hand, others have particular problems with the requirements of belonging to an "Order" and of "profession," which smacks too much of religious life. Most have adopted a valid process of elections, once it has been explained to them.

The Assistants generally are adapting to the lay leadership of the Fraternity Councils, but lay leaders are often lacking. The Assistants are also trying to cope with the collegial exercise of spiritual Assistance.

Perhaps, the biggest unresolved problem is how to cope with the financial responsibilities of the fraternities at all levels. The solution to this problem lies in a massive shift in the way of thinking. The Tertiaries faced modest financial demands in their local Fraternities. In fact, often the friars covered all expenses. The Secular Franciscans, after 1978, face the responsibility of financing not only their local Fraternities but also the regional, national and international fraternity as well.

# Great Expectations

RICHARD MORTON, SFO

The Secular Franciscans in the United States, as Secular Franciscans the world over, publicly profess a permanent commitment to "...observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis... [and] devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel." [SFO Rule 4] By virtue of their commitment, they participate in the evangelization of the world both as Franciscans and as individuals living in their own particular state of life.

The members of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) in this country are giving thoughtful consideration to their future. Questions are being asked, and a new enthusiasm is emerging. What are the aspirations of the members as the Order moves towards the year 2000? What preparations are being made for entry to the next century? How can it better meet the challenges it faces in trying to be a gospel leaven in contemporary society? To put the future in perspective, one needs to reflect on the heritage of the Order and review its present state.

Throughout the 800 years of its existence, the Secular Franciscan Order (formerly known as the Third Order of St. Francis) has been expected to have a pivotal impact on the society of the times. Popes have written extensively on the subject. Pope Leo XIII wrote:

The goal of the Third [Secular Franciscan] Order is to preserve society from worldly corruption by sanctifying the ordinary and smallest actions of human life with the true spirit of Jesus Christ.... it [the Rule of the Third Order Secular] intends to cure the evils of society by an exact imitation of the Gospel. [Theodore A. Zaremba OFM, *Franciscan Social Reform*, Pulaski: The Franciscan Printery 1947, 91.]

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History demonstrates that the early members of the Order, did indeed, profoundly influence their society. For example, it is generally agreed that the early lay followers of Francis were the prime instruments in bringing about the decline and fall of the feudal system. Throughout history, the sanctity of many of its members has been recognized by the Church through canonization. However, the great majority have been humble, anonymous, and pious individuals and couples, who have quietly, yet effectively, lived the gospel life in the secular world.

Today, in the more than 830 local fraternities in the United States, there are about twenty-two thousand Seculars who, in imitation of their predecessors, are leading holy lives and performing outstanding apostolic works. They are diligent in their service to the poor, the sick, the elderly, the imprisoned, and the otherwise disenfranchised. They are involved in the right-to-life movement, in faith formation, in peace and justice issues, and in a myriad of other activities. Every community where Secular Franciscans reside is a better place to live because of their presence. They are part of the fabric of society that has maintained and continually supported gospel values and perspectives.

The impact of Vatican II on the Secular Franciscan Order has been profound and has resulted in significant change. It has enabled and mandated the membership to mature in their Franciscan vocation. The Order, eager to attune itself to the spirit and directives of Vatican II, enthusiastically undertook the arduous task of revising its Rule and the associated governing documents. After much consideration and prayer, the Rule was revised to bring it into harmony with the post-Vatican II Church. The revision was presented to Pope Paul VI and approved in 1978. The Pauline Rule now gives the members of the Order the responsibility for their own administration and no longer burdens the friars with the entirety of the Order's destiny. This newly acquired responsibility is enabling fresh and inspired leadership to emerge.

The new Constitutions of the Order were approved in 1990 and are now in full effect. The National Statutes are in the initial stages of approval with full approval expected next year. As a result of these changes, the fraternal and evangelical life of the Order is at present almost entirely supported by contemporary governing documents.

Another exciting development is the organizational regrouping of local fraternities through a process called regionalization. Previously, fraternities were grouped at the local level on the basis of friar provinces to which they were attached. The new organization is based primarily on geography and more effectively promotes the reality that the Secular Franciscan Order is *one* Order. The new arrangement provides several advantages: the effectiveness of intra-fraternity communications will be enhanced as the distances involved for



travel will be significantly reduced; human, financial and time resources will be more economically utilized; more effective apostolic action will be possible through the use of the diverse talents of the members of the many fraternities in any one area; increased cooperation with the local bishops will be possible; and new opportunities for collaboration with other members of the Franciscan family will surface.

In summary, the Order is supported both by an 800 year old heritage of outstanding virtue and action and by a modern infrastructure. It is well poised to meet the challenges ahead.

In the past, others have set expectations for the Order:

The Popes Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, and Pius XI consider the Third Order Secular of St. Francis... a very important agency of social reform... to accomplish that moral reformation of society which is an integral part of the complete papal program of social reform. [Zaremba, 374]

Mario von Galli, SJ comments:

My feeling is that the Third [Secular Franciscan] Order could... impact today as it did in the twelfth and thirteenth century. [*Living our Future: Francis of Assisi and the Church Tomorrow*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press 1972, 193.]

These "great expectations" remain the ideal towards which Secular Franciscans must consistently direct their efforts.

With fidelity to its Rule and Constitutions, the SFO in the United States has already begun the process of developing expectations for its role in rebuilding the Church and society. It now needs to articulate, in understandable and realistic terms, how it expects to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The process will take several years to complete.

Some may call this process goal setting, renewal, or revitalization. However, the term *refounding* would seem to be the most appropriate term for the task at hand.

The action of refounding is a co-operative effort in which prophetically imaginative and creative persons unite with... others to build a new, or to revitalize existing communities, under the inspiration and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit, through which Christ is brought anew to the world. [Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Change, Grief, and Renewal in the Church: A Spirituality for a New Era*, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics 1991, 6.]

Through this process of refounding, Secular Franciscans will become an ever increasingly-important catalyst in promoting change and will be called to focus their efforts more sharply on the poor and suffering. Mario von Galli writes:

My feeling is that the Third Order could continue to have as strong an impact today as it did in the twelfth and thirteenth century, if it

took the story of the wolf of Gubbio as the guiding principle of its activity. To be sure, it would also have to have its founder's feel for justice, his courage and spirit and faith-inspired imagination. Once upon a time it did have those qualities, and they enabled the Third Order [SFO] to become a world force in ways that astounded both rulers and ecclesiastical authorities.

He continues:

It seems to me they [the expectations] were not fulfilled because attention was focused all too exclusively on one's personal life and the moderate use of worldly goods, and all too little on concern for other people. By concern for other people, I mean concern to establish ties of solidarity with those who are oppressed and whose human dignity is being violated. I mean concern to appeal to the conscience of others by one's own example and one's candid criticism, even as Francis appealed to the conscience of the wolf.

Such conduct from a broad spectrum of lay people could represent a revolution today, even more than it did in the twelfth century.

Deeply imbedded in the Franciscan charism is the need for the followers of Francis to have empathy for, and to give service to, the under-class of society. The poor, the dispossessed, the disenfranchised, and all who are the "lepers" of this day await the response of Secular Franciscans to their Rule.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ. [*SFO Rule 13*]

In conclusion, refounding is a faith journey. To pursue the journey is a must, for not to do so would be like the servant in Matthew's gospel who took his master's money and buried it instead of investing it.

On completion of the process of refounding and articulating a set of expectations, the SFO in the United States will reach a new state of maturity and self confidence, and it will be more fully prepared to carry the Franciscan charism to the market place, to the halls of justice, to the educational institutions, to the media, to the entertainment fields, and to anywhere else the message of peace, justice, and love are needed. Secular Franciscans are not of the world but are immersed in the world and are called to be instruments of great change.

For the Secular Franciscans, Francis' words, "Let us begin, for up to now we have done nothing," have as urgent a message today as they did for the followers of his time. United with the entire Franciscan family, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States will not fail in its efforts to live up to "great expectations."

# Secular Franciscan Formation and the Pauline Rule: The Journey to Conversion

RON PIHOKKER, SFO

With the advent of the Pauline Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order which was promulgated in June of 1978, the Secular Franciscan Order has begun a process directed towards a paradigmatic shift of potentially enormous proportions in terms of its vision and its identity within the Church and the Franciscan family. In its earliest form the Secular Franciscan Order had been a means for lay people to respond to the preaching of St. Francis, and to embrace a radical lifestyle of detachment from material possessions, of on-going conversion, and of commitment to God and one another in the supportive environment of fraternity. Over time, through a revisioning brought about by its subsequent Rules, the "Third Order" evolved into a devotional sodality requiring minimal commitment and little in the way of outward-looking apostolic activity. The Vatican Council II, with its subsequent call to renewal of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis into the Secular Franciscan Order as it is understood through the vision of the Pauline Rule, has redefined the Order. Necessarily, the demands on the initial formation process as a result of this renewal are equally radical and unprecedented.

This is not to claim that the renewal envisioned in the 1978 Rule has been accomplished among all of the local fraternities in the United States or elsewhere in the world. But while the movement toward renewal has not been completely realized, great strides have been made and continue to develop in a steady and deliberate fashion. However, there still remain many "deciduous" fraternities which continue to operate out of the outmoded models of fraternity life made obsolete by the Pauline Rule and which indicate the need for continued effort to bring about a transformation to the paradigm advanced by the

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Rule of 1978 - something which the leadership of the Order is struggling to effect. If the renewal foreseen in the Rule is calling the Secular Franciscan Order to embrace a completely new model, then the means to that end must necessarily be the formation process, both initial and on-going.

Until only as few years ago (as indicated in the results of surveys conducted by the National Formation Commission of the National Fraternity as well as various Secular Franciscan Provinces including my own, Holy Name Province), this new model had not yet affected the formation process. There appeared to be nearly as many formation programs as there were local fraternities; they used all manner of formational materials, and they were heavily dependent on the Friars/Spiritual Assistants for direction and, in many cases, leadership and control of the process. If Seculars themselves were involved in the formation process, they more often were not formally prepared for the ministry. Adult-focused methodology reflecting an understanding of the intended audience was seldom employed. Rather, a pedagogical approach of lecture and reading was most often used in "classes" which were built around an academic model, preparing candidates in an exclusively intellectual fashion. Life experience, the apostolate, prayerful sharing and reflection on scripture, retreat experiences, personal interviews and discernment of vocation in spiritual direction - none of these were a part of the process. Indeed, initial formation most often was not a process but a program which took place in isolation from the rest of fraternity life and which most often was limited to the acquisition of information about St. Francis' life and charism in the context of devotional spiritual practices.

The paradigm shift brought about by the promulgation of the Pauline Rule, however, demands a rethinking of the meaning of Secular Franciscan lifestyle and ministry, a complete renewal and restructuring of fraternity life, and consequently, a reshaping and rethinking of the formation process. To encourage this radically new rethinking of the very meaning of the Secular Franciscan identity and to make the vision of the Rule a reality, the International Presidency issued a paper on initial formation in the SFO in November of 1983. A parallel document meant to make application of the international text, the *Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States*, was developed and published by the National Formation Commission in 1986 (the Commission having been established by the National Fraternity for this purpose). Further, the Commission designed and has offered workshops throughout the country to train people in the implementation of these *Guidelines* and to assist participants in understanding the Pauline Rule for its implications for the formation process. The work of the Commission challenges Secular Franciscans to take a serious look at the way formation has been practiced, to

take up their responsibility as adult laity in the Church and in the Order, to look at their own skills and to survey their needs so they might more effectively minister as formators to their sisters and brothers entering the Order.

The recent promulgation of the International Constitutions has carried this renewal further. The General Constitutions, in the Chapter on "Life in Fraternity," deal specifically with the practice and process of formation. The Constitutions present a model of formation which is considerably more challenging and demanding. The General Constitutions reflect the fact that the SFO is, indeed, an Order of laity in the Church called to a specific living of the Franciscan charism in the context of their secular lives, their professions, their families, or in the words of *Lumen Gentium*, "in the very web of their existence." The process of formation has been envisioned as just that - a *process*, marked out by various stages. These include an *Orientation Phase* during which initial contact is made and the process of vocational discernment begins. The *Inquiry Phase*, the first formal phase of the process, serves as a more organized time of discernment and choice in the context of the local fraternity. The *Candidacy Phase* provides preparation for a lifetime commitment to the Rule. *On-Going Formation* serves to provide continuing nurture for professed Secular Franciscans. The entire process bears a strong resemblance to the insights and structure of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. In an analogous way, the initial formation process for Secular Franciscans is supported by prayer and ritual contained within the *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order* which was likewise redesigned in the wake of the Rule of 1978. Specific rituals - the rites of Welcoming, Admission, and Commitment - act as "gateways" to the various formal phrases of the process. Finally, for the first time, an option for Temporary Commitment, which is renewable for a period of three years, allows for a truly adult process which is open-ended and recognizes the fact that the formation process cannot be neatly programmed, must take time and necessarily will be "messy," in respecting each candidate's unique spiritual journey and in ensuring a level of readiness.

The *Guidelines*, building on the vision of the Rule, demand a new context and a new direction; they invite a new understanding and a much broader perspective from which to advance. It is no longer adequate for the formation process to be reduced to a program of instruction with a clear beginning and end. The formative process in the Secular Franciscan Order is now understood as a journey - a complex and fragile pilgrimage through the experience of personal conversion, to the acquisition of a new identity - to become a unique co-bearer of the Franciscan Charism with the rest of the Franciscan Family in the manner of Gospel discipleship, but as a *secular* person living in the world and striving to permeate and to transform culture and society so to build the Kingdom of God.

The process of formation, if it is to accomplish these bold and challenging objectives, must draw from and build upon the candidates' life experience. It must involve the entire fraternity as an agent in the process - no longer content to allow the formative process to occur external to or disconnected from fraternity life. It must be Gospel-centered, which is the object of the SFO spirituality, and no longer be limited to devotional, privatistic practices. It must be directed toward developing a vision of Church which is both dynamic and conciliar taking as its principle paradigm the *People of God*, a communion of disciples who are a sacrament of the presence of Christ in the world. Formation must continue to move from a monastic spirituality to one which embraces the secular as the context of the vocation and ministry of the SFO. In all of this, it must remain uniquely and completely Franciscan, that is, it must promote and make possible a penitential lifestyle of on-going conversion, inspire its members to the ministry of reconciliation, and call them to witness to peace and justice. It needs to encourage outreach to the marginalized and disadvantaged of our society. It must arouse and stimulate cutting-edge concern and action in the pursuit of justice in the workplace, for the environment, and in behalf of the family. In all this, the method and means by which this vision is acquired is the practice of *dialogue*, calling forth a deep sharing of personal insights and experiences of God's activity in the lives of those in formation, dialogue born of mutual respect, a listening heart, and a desire to experience the Truth of the Spirit present and active in each person.

Within the last year, the International Presidency issued a new set of *Guidelines for Formation* which are still being studied by the National leadership in the United States. Moving the formation process a step further, these new guidelines emphasize human development and reflect upon the various stages of the formation process relative to personal and spiritual growth; they present formation as a graced time of encounter with oneself and with others, a graced time of encountering and acquiring a new Franciscan identity. The guidelines reflect once again on the various agents involved in the formation process, marking out a special place for the Spiritual Assistant as brother, teacher and guide, and calling both the candidate and the fraternity to take up their respective roles in the process. The new guidelines suggest a model of the fraternity as a school of life and friendship where members may experience intimacy, experience church, and be offered an opportunity for dynamic missionary activity.

A metamorphosis in the formation process among local fraternities demands that the question of competence be addressed. More opportunities need to be made available for formation personnel to become adequately trained to accompany and to support candidates along their journey, as well as to minister

to the professed membership through on-going formation efforts. Presently, the National Formation Commission strives to address these needs by offering workshops throughout the country, a retreat experience on Franciscan Visionary Leadership, and by acting as a publications resource for formational materials as well as a formation newsletter which reaches every fraternity in the country. The Commission's current projects include involvement in a cooperative venture under the auspices of St. Francis College to develop a series of correspondence courses leading to a certificate in Franciscan Studies which it is hoped will enable Secular Franciscans engaged in the ministry of formation to acquire the requisite skills and knowledge so to bring both confidence and competence to their efforts.

As a result of the Pauline Rule, the process of formation has moved from a cursory pedagogical program of instruction in the life and ideas of St. Francis to a process intended to support the on-going conversion of the individual - a process which involves many ministries, which is prayerful and open-ended, which is tailored to meet the needs of each unique person. Formation demands competence on the part of its practitioners and is directed toward a new self-understanding of the Secular Franciscan, one which liberates and calls the adult Catholic Christian to a meaningful and challenging lifestyle of Gospel discipleship in the Franciscan tradition.

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#### NIGHT PSALM

Inside out you have gathered up the grains of me.  
The arid lifeless sands of longing,  
the smooth crystal remnants of my sufferings,  
Worn faceless, transparent as tears.  
You have showered upon your face  
the shapeless silken droplets of my soul.  
Finding me sweet like fruit plucked from the vine,  
You have drunk of me.  
Tasting, you have imbibed in my love  
And then, taking the dregs of me, you have spilled them out,  
Washing my feet to show me just how sweet you find me.  
Raise me to your lips again O Lord,  
Ebullient with kisses meant for only me.  
Seize me now! Your passion drenching all of me that is not whole.  
In rivulets seep down into the ashen desert of my bones  
and quench me with your mercy.  
That born again, my face will run with tears of living water,  
my lips thus moistened, praise your Holy Name.  
For you have cracked the tomb around my heart, O God,  
And raising it like sweet bread broken,  
Have found it to be true.

Mary Zablocki, SFO

## A Call To Apostolic Action

MARY K. MAZOTTI, SFO

They shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ. [SFO Rule 18]

"So, just what do you do as a Secular Franciscan?" Catholics and others ask quizzically. Most Seculars, I suspect, have often been asked this question. Braggarts we're not, but recent years of Fraternity Annual Reports show a wide array of apostolic works being accomplished, works never dreamed of fifteen years ago.

Within the past eight years, and formerly as Provincial Minister, I have seen apostolic activity accelerate to the point of making even the ordinarily-humble Secular Franciscan proud of being a follower of St. Francis. Through better understanding of the revised Rule approved by Pope Paul VI, especially the Apostolic Commissions, and with the encouragement of Fraternity Spiritual Assistants, we have consciously moved closer to becoming Servants of the Lord in the world.

For those of us professed under the Rule of Pope Leo XIII, it was the norm to live, almost solely, a devotional way of life; and we sincerely felt that this was sufficient to assure our sanctification. The Rule contained little reference to apostolic outreach, such as witnessing to social justice. Vatican II had not, as yet, burst upon the entire Church to direct us to serve heroically as other Christs in the social milieu. When it did, we learned that we were called to look critically at ourselves in the mirror of Christ's teachings to see how we measured up to them. As a result, like Abraham and Jacob of the Old Testament, we were given a new, spiritually significant name. It was deliberately changed from Franciscan Third Order (Secular) to Secular Franciscan Order.

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Secular Franciscans, together with all peoples of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. [SFO Rule 14]

For a long while, fraternity leaders gingerly held the revised Rule at bay. It seemed loose in writing style compared to the old prescriptive Rule with its exactness for daily living. Yes, the apostolic commissions were in the new Rule, but the *what, where, when* and *how* needed more elaboration before we would feel confident enough to be "at the forefront." All around us were the social injustices of poverty, housing discrimination, nuclear testings, abortions, farm labor abuses, and other serious abuses. Slowly, fraternities took to studying and discussing the Rule paragraph by paragraph. Few of us ventured outside our parish to march peacefully with members of other churches concerning social injustices.

The SFO National Executive Council exerted its leadership wisely and established four National Apostolic Commission Chairs to help give direction, vision, and support to the National Formation Commission in the area of apostolic formation. The Apostolic Commissions were considered so important a part of the Rule that a National Vice Minister was appointed to act as representative to them, and assist them in coordinating efforts.

Then came the writing of National Mission Statements and Goals for each Commission, substantiating their prophetic roots in the Scriptures and the Rule. The National Chairs were to encourage and challenge, to disseminate information about programs and projects, to compile and update resource materials, and to affirm and support all levels of fraternity. Copies of the Mission Statements and Goals were sent to all Ministers. Job descriptions were written for each Commission Chair, and the establishment of regional and local fraternity chairs was recommended. Impetus for living the commissions has been given at National Congresses. Dedicated, committed people who were experienced in the work and ministry relative to various social issues were invited to speak. Weeks of Community and Days of Recollection allowed time for reflection and insight. Provincial and Regional newsletters wrote about, and promoted, the Commissions. Follow-up guidance and encouragement now comes through the National Newsletter, National Formation Commission Bulletin (with Apostolic Commission inserts), and quarterly-mailed National Commissions Newsletters. Responses and input to the Chairs from Seculars are appreciated.

In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. [SFO Rule 17]

The most fruitful of the Apostolic Commissions, until now, has been the Family Commission. National Family Commission reports show an amazing range of apostolic ministries to the needy and poor, battered women, prison inmates, nursing homes, poverello houses, Francis houses, soup kitchens, Aids patients, unwed mother layettes... the list is endless. The National Chairman sent out 500 copies of the United States Bishops document on *Putting Children and Families First* together with a request that the documents be copied and distributed to all members of the local fraternities. Letter-writing to elected representatives has become a strong ministry for some. Others write constructive criticism to companies whose ads pay for violent and offensive TV programs.

I recall the joy of making Fraternity Visitations as Provincial Minister. It was on these visits I learned how caring Secular Franciscans are. It was not uncommon to find fraternities serving five to ten apostolates. Sometimes, it was only after gentle prodding that members revealed individual ministries for our records. These ministries had become such a habitual part of their lives, living "from gospel to life and life to gospel," that they had forgotten to list them.

Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. [SFO Rule 15]

For the more highly-spirited Secular Franciscans, age has been no barrier in championing needs for the helpless. An 82-year-old woman had the "gumption" and "initiative" to petition her city's Planning Commission to approve a city bus line to an isolated area of retired citizens. Needless to say, she succeeded. Another, closer to 90 years, was arrested several times for peacefully praying and picketing at the gates of a large chemical laboratory known for its Star Wars basic research and other military experimentation. Some have been jostled during peace vigils at nuclear testing sites, and during Right-to-Life marches. The National Peace and Justice Chair has kept Seculars informed on social justice issues, including health care. Lists of ecclesial resource materials have been sent in quarterly mailings. Recently, the Chair collaborated with Friars in a peace and justice concern in an area of Mexican poor. Further collaborations are desired by the Chairs.

Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High," and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship. [SFO Rule 18]

The Ecology Commission is gaining in enthusiasm among Seculars. Simple ecological efforts can take place right in one's home, backyard and neighborhood. Use of styrofoam cups has been on its way out at Fraternity gatherings.

The National Ecology Chair informs Seculars on the dangers of toxic waste, earth pollution, and other environmental exploitation through his award-winning videos and national newsletter. The National Executive Council has stepped to the forefront to begin using unbleached (non-chlorinated) 100% recycled paper for its letterhead stationery and newsletter; this, coupled with the use of ecologically correct soy ink, approved by the American Soybean Association. The Ecology Commission Chair, through its newsletter, *The Guardian*, informs Seculars on harmful products to avoid purchasing and using; how to care for, beautify, and show reverence for all creation. Some Regions have begun setting ecological goals for their areas.

Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community. [SFO Rule 18]

Finally, in the arena of the workplace, lists of recommended readings on work have been sent to Seculars which include: Papal Encyclicals, Bishops' Letters, and other pertinent resources. The National Work Commission Chair is now promoting a pilot project in his community to seek out local professional people who can privately coach the jobless and make known to them job openings. His quarterly newsletter gives advice and encouragement to those who work at home and outside the home. To spiritualize one's daily work in partnership with God's on-going creation is emphasized.

It is perceptible, to me, that apostolic action combined with prayer life is bringing new vigor to the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States. For this, we give praise and thanks to God! We have just begun to fathom the depths of our apostolic calling. Prayer life bordering the mystical should be encouraged to strengthen our backbone and heighten our oneness with Christ in our chosen calling. Yes, there are still Secular Franciscans who are lagging behind in apostolic challenge, who prefer living the less active, more devotional old Rule. It is unlikely that they will change, and we should not feel discouraged. The Church recognizes that Kingdom of God is still in the process of being built and, "*build* is an action word!"

Given leaders of vision at the forefront and efforts at world-wide coordination, over one million Secular Franciscans united in purpose can act as a potent movement for building up the Kingdom. Who but the Spirit knows, if in our running this particular spiritual race, we, as an Order, have not *already* become an instrument through which God plans, once again, to build up the Church and the world. As I see it, our Rule, ever old, ever new... ever prayerful, ever apostolic... has pointed the Secular Franciscan Order towards its prophetic destiny. Ever old, we have heard the call, "Go, rebuild my Church..."; we have begun. Ever new, let us again hear that call, "Go, rebuild my Church..."; let us begin again...

## Reflections on Spiritual Assistance

MATTHEW L. GASKIN, OFM

The relationship between the Secular Franciscans and the friars of the First Order is like a very old marriage. For almost eight hundred years the two have shared a bond that has known "good times and bad, sickness and health." Espoused to each other by the same charism they have shared a reciprocity that has remained faithful to each other throughout the centuries.

However, as happens with many spouses in marriage the reciprocity has not always been balanced. More often than not, the friars exercised a dominance over the Seculars failing to foster in them adulthood and autonomy. Instead the union was mainly symbiotic creating in the Seculars an over-reliance upon and a deference toward the friars.

An example of this situation can be found in the Constitutions of the Third Order of St. Francis approved in August, 1957. The Constitutions reenforced the friars' domination over the Seculars with this legislation: "The government of the Third Order is of a double kind, in conformity with its particular nature: external, which is exercised by the Church and by the four Regular Franciscan Families; and internal, which common law leaves in the hands of the tertiaries themselves." The external government subjected the tertiaries to the superiors of the three Families of the First Order and the Third Order Regular in all matters of spiritual direction and internal discipline.

In addition the friars were to receive and profess new members, and to preside at the monthly meetings of the fraternity and all sessions of the council. They were to act as directors of the fraternities and were admonished to be "...continually conscious that the well being of the fraternity depended principally on them."

Only five years after the promulgation of the 1957 Constitutions, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. The Council's most endur-

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ing contributions to the life of the Church were four companion constitutions, namely, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, and the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. These teachings of the Council were destined to affect profoundly the Church's understanding of itself as the People of God, a People "... reborn from an imperishable seed through the Word of the living God (*1 Pt* 1:23) not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit (*Jn* 3:5-6) and finally established as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people... who in times past were not a people, but, are now the People of God (*1 Pt* 2:9-10)."

Slowly but steadily many Secular Franciscans joined other lay persons in the Church in appropriating the Council's teachings on Baptism and Confirmation. They began to experience a new sense of identity, empowerment and responsibility flowing from these foundational sacraments of Christian life and ministry.

More and more they began to understand their Franciscan vocation in the light of the Council Bishops' call for universal holiness: "... all the faithful of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of their Christian life and the perfection of love. By this holiness a more human way of life is promoted even in secular society." [*Constitution on the Church*]

American Secular Franciscans heard their own bishops saying: "It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence, in and through the events of the world, the pluralism of modern living, the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with, the richness and fragility of sexual relationships, the delicate balance between activity and stillness, presence and privacy, love and loss." [*Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*]

On their part the international leaders of the Secular Franciscan Order initiated a process of renewal and refoundation of the Order which gave birth to a new name, a new Rule, a new Ritual and new Constitutions. At long last the Seculars themselves were given responsibility for the "guidance, coordination and animation" of their own Order. [*Constitutions*, 86.2]

No longer are the friars seen as directors. Instead they serve as fraternal collaborators who share with their secular sisters and brothers an interdependent bond which the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* [303] terms the "altius moderamen." This bond is meant "to guarantee the fidelity of the Secular Franciscan Order to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan Family, values which represent a vital commitment for the Secular Franciscans." [*Constitutions*, 85.2]

In June 1979, the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants described the role of the spiritual assistant in four dimensions, namely, fraternal, pastoral, canonical, and ecumenical.

Fraternally the spiritual assistant acts as one among brothers and sisters and as a sign of unity with the First Order.

Pastorally the assistant is expected to foster the spiritual growth of the members of the fraternity, and to collaborate in their initial and on-going formation programs. His goal is the development of a Christo-centric spirituality in the hearts and lives of his brothers and sisters based on the Gospel and the example of St. Francis.

Canonically the assistant acts as an official witness of the Church at receptions and professions since these are public ecclesial acts. It is also the task of the assistant to establish new fraternities.

Ecumenically the assistant strives to build up "a more fraternal and evangelical world" [*SFO Rule* 14] by initiating and promoting dialogue between the Secular Franciscans and other groups akin to the Secular Franciscan Order or who share a desire to build a better world.

To these four dimensions of the role of the spiritual assistant, I would add a fifth which I consider the most important of all, namely, the prophetic dimension.

The heart of the Rule and spirituality of the Secular Franciscans is contained in one simple sentence: "The Secular Franciscans should devote themselves to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel." [Art. 4] But what the Rule doesn't say is how the Seculars are to do this in their everyday lives. Certainly this is easier said than done.

Who is to show them the way? Who is to help them understand in the light of the Word of God the meaning of the past for the present, what it is that the Lord now calls for, how the present situation fits into God's overall plan and will for them?

This is the purpose of the ministry of the Spiritual Assistant, namely, to communicate to the members of the fraternity the meaning of God's Revelation and its relevance within their own lives. For this task the assistant must be, as the Rule states "suitable and well prepared." [Art. 26] The assistant himself must have first reflected upon the Word intelligently and prayerfully so that he is able to articulate it in understandable language. Moreover he needs to have confronted the human situation in its fullest dimension, analyzed its difficulties and demands, and be able to carry out his charismatic mission within the fraternity, breaking in upon the minds and hearts of the fraternal community by breaking open the bread of the Word and offering it for their nourishment and growth.



To say that the assistant communicates the meaning of Gospel Revelation is to say that he challenges the members to be prophets themselves just as he is prophet. As we know, in the Old Testament a prophet was not one who merely predicted events to come, nor who simply witnessed to abstract truth. He was also one who bore personal witness to the truth here and now. With word and work he assured the Jewish people that God was living and working among them.

In our day we too must deal with the problems of our existence, and, within the horizon of our experience, bear witness to the meaning of God's revelation in our lives. To do this we must become filled with the Word of God in order to interpret the signs of the time.

Franciscans need both Word and reality, so that the truth will become a living, revealing insight into contemporary culture and human affairs. Their specific vocation is to engage today's world as people filled with the living experience-grounded Word that is Christ in order both to grapple with and contribute to their confrontation with the dilemmas of modern existence, and from within that situation, to articulate and proclaim the meaning of the mystery of Christ in today's world. They must be present to the world - from within, not from outside. This is the meaning of the American Bishops' words quoted above.

The Seculars are not to escape from or avoid the turmoil of the times. Rather they have need for a penetrating knowledge of the values, catalysts and forces that exercise a dynamic role in molding contemporary society. They need to know what turns people on, what shapes the horizon of their existence, what speaks to them on a level of value and importance.

The spiritual assistant needs to be the voice of conscience among the Seculars constantly reminding them that the Rule calls them to "build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively." [Art. 14-19] He encourages them to take "courageous initiatives" in the realm of justice, to esteem working in the world, to respect all creatures and avoid exploitation of creation, to live their family lives as "a sign of a world already renewed in Christ," and, as "bearers of peace" to "seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue."

Only if the assistant has a prophetic imagination and a deep sensitivity to the needs of our age will he be able to show his Franciscan brothers and sisters how to be prophets themselves and how to meet each new day with the Scriptures in one hand and the New York Times in the other. Only then will he be the kind of prophet Flannery O'Connor describes as: "One who puts Christ into focus."

## Finding Identity as a Secular Franciscan

EDWARD M. ZABLOCKI, SFO

The operative phrase which keeps me focused as a Secular Franciscan is "conversion." I have come to understand that conversion represents the alpha and omega of my life as a Secular. Recent works by Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR and Robert Stewart, OFM have made it clear to me that *conversion* means today what *penance* meant at the time of Francis. So I feel connected in a very real way with the Seraphic Father's first lay followers, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance. Article 7 of the Rule now takes on special meaning:

United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance," and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls "conversion."

Conversion is also my future. I now understand my vocation as a Secular Franciscan as a call to on-going conversion in all aspects of my life. The new General Constitutions confirm this understanding: "Secular Franciscans... propose to live in a spirit of continual conversion." [Art. 13] It is a daily struggle: being converted to a more Christ-centered prayer life, to a more gospel-oriented lifestyle, to a more Francis-inspired apostolate by faithfulness in living out the Rule as a way of life. It is a daily struggle: being personally converted affectively, intellectually, morally, socio-politically, and religiously (to image conversion as suggested by Bernard Lonergan, SJ). But article 7 does go on to say that "human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily."

Since I've come to this understanding of the Rule, I've shared with others my concern about its implications. "We ought to tell people what they are getting into if they take the Rule seriously," I would say, "This is powerful stuff." It reminds me of a section in Nikos Kazantzakis' *Saint Francis*:

"Never Enough," Francis shouted. "It is not enough, Brother Leo.

That is what God has shouted at me during these three days and nights -

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'Never enough.' A poor man is made of clay and protests, 'I cannot take any more,' and God replies, 'You can.' And the man sighs, 'I am going to burst.' God replies, 'Burst'." [p. 119]

Of all the areas of my life in need of conversion, the most important for me personally at this time is conversion to a "secular spirituality." I believe it holds the key to helping us fully live out the Secular Franciscan way of life intended by the Rule. It is the key to living the kind of committed Christian life which the Church is imploring us to embrace as post-Vatican II lay Catholics.

What is a secular spirituality? It is the appreciation and incarnation of the reality that lay Catholics fulfill both their vocation and their mission (apostolate) *in and through their participation in the world.*

The vocation of the layperson is the same as that of other members of the Body of Christ — a call to grow in holiness, to become "fully mature with the fullness of Christ." [Eph 4:13] The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* states that "All in the Church, whether they belong to the hierarchy or are cared for by it, are called to holiness." [n. 36] Pope John Paul II in his post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation [*Christifideles Laici*] on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, says that the "world [is] the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation." [n. 36]

Where do I grow in holiness? In the world! By what means do I grow in holiness? Through participation in the world!

But we cannot speak about the secular orientation of the laity's vocation without also speaking about the laity's mission (=apostolate); the laity's vocation and mission are inseparably intertwined. As the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* states: "In fact, the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well." [*Apostolicum Actuositatem*, 2] And both lead to deepening engagement with the world:

The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their *involvement in temporal affairs* and in their *participation in earthly activities*.... At the same time the vocation to holiness is intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the Church and in the world.... Confident and steadfast through the power of God's grace, these [lay people] are the humble yet great builders of the Kingdom of God in history.... 'Upon all the lay faithful, then, rests the exalted duty of working to assure that each day the divine plan of salvation is further extended to every person, of every era, in every part of the earth.' [*Christifideles Laici*, 17]

The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* stresses that lay people "ought to

take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order." [*Apostolicum Actuositatem*, 7]

Efforts to develop a new Rule for Secular Franciscans attempted, from the beginning, to be faithful to the secular spirituality enunciated by the Second Vatican Council (the first ground breaking efforts in the history of the Church formally to address the question of the distinctive spirituality of persons in the lay state). In his book, "*De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam*" *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation*, Fr. Robert M. Stewart, OFM provides the fascinating account of the 12 year process resulting in the 1978 Rule. What is striking about this process is the expressed desire from the then-Third Order members the world over to give the new Rule a secular orientation.

But explicit references to the secular vocation and mission are notably absent from the 1978 Rule. (While, a secular spirituality is captured, to a degree, in the 1990 General Constitutions, Secular Franciscans are still becoming acquainted with this new document.)

As a consequence, there is resistance to embracing aspects of the 1978 Rule which are grounded in a secular spirituality, for example, the apostolates. On one hand, we have the apostolic ideal as described by Fr. John Vaughan, OFM while he was serving as Minister General:

What a contrast between your previous Third Order spirituality and the modern Church's expectations of you as Secular Franciscans! You are now expected to find God in modern culture, politics and economics, and to delight in his presence there. You have been thrust into the front line as leaders in public life and transformers of secular culture. [Letter to Holy Name SFO Province on the occasion of its 1986 Congress with the theme "Secular Franciscans: Evangelizers of the Culture"]

But on the other hand, we are at times confronted with a reality which differs from this ideal, as conveyed by Fr. Carl Schaefer, OFM Spiritual Assistant to the International SFO:

I find that it is difficult to guide many Secular Franciscans into an active apostolic way of life. They want prayer, even active participation in the liturgy; they want spiritual assistance of the friars. But to convince them that living the Gospel necessarily involves being sent out to the world, and to form them to be publicly apostolic has been my most difficult task. [Letter to SFO Holy Name Province on the occasion of their 1986 Congress with the theme "Secular Franciscans: Evangelizers of the Culture."]

We are called by the Church to find a spirituality in a place where, in our hearts, we doubt that God can be found. If we knew and believed what the Church teaches — that we can meet the living God in places like politics, then

we might more readily accept and carry out the Church's intended mission for us: to be salt, light and leaven for the world.

What would St. Francis do under these circumstances? He found God immanent in everything. Perhaps he would compose a Canticle of the Culture, helping us to see the good and Godly in Brother Boeing and Sister IBM, Brother Republican and Sister Democrat, Brother Michael and Sister Madonna. It's enough to make one want to burst. But wouldn't it be wonderful (and eminently Franciscan) to start finding God in every aspect of our lives in the world and to stop being spiritual schizophrenics.

Secular Franciscans must grow in an understanding of the secular spirituality articulated in the documents of Vatican II and intended but implicit in the SFO Rule. We need to be converted to the vision of the Church which has been telling us that we will grow in holiness by participating in that discordant, untidy, unpredictable place we call the "world"; that it is a primary school of holiness and arena for evangelical action. Certainly we know this already to an extent. We find the Lord active in our family life which is certainly a big part of our world. Seculars also find God's immanent presence deeply imprinted in nature. And we care for society's victims in countless ways, coming through this service to a deeper understanding of Christ's presence in the poor.

Once we more fully understand and learn to accept our proper vocation and mission — callings which are intensified and focused for us as Franciscans, Seculars can become leaders among the laity and for the Church in the world, "taking an active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church in this great moment in history." [Christefidelis Laici, 2] We will come to en flesh the ideal described by Secular Franciscan Fr. John Bertolucci:

You and I as disciples have a very special mission to be men and women of influence. God wants us to exert influence not only in our churches but also in our society and in our government; in the marketplace and the schools; in our place of employment and recreation; in medicine and law and other important professions. Wherever we happen to be as disciples of the Lord, we are to have influence.

We are not supposed to be men and women who are letting history happen to us. We are supposed to be happening to history. God wants to equip us and lead us forth in mighty ways that will actually make history happen.... We are to be aggressive, outgoing, and assertive in desiring to change things in accord with the principles we have learned in the Word of God. [The Disciplines of a Disciple, 120]

So burst!



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