

THE ABSENCE OF WORK FROM PREVIOUS SFO RULES

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*Let them esteem work both as a gift
and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community. (Art. 16)*

Why "work"? No, not why do we have to work but rather why is work even included as part of the 1978 Secular Franciscan Rule? Is it because work was part of the Order's previous Rules? Search for any mention of work in the previous rules of 1221, 1289 or 1883 and the absence of any direct reference to work and its value is striking. Where work is referenced it is in relation to the obligation to fast. The **Memoriale Propositi** of 1221 relieved the burden of fasting on members of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance who worked doing strenuous labor stating that:

III.3. It is lawful for those who perform hard work to eat three times a day from Easter to the feast of St. Michael.

Exceptions were also made for those who received meals as part of their working conditions:

III.4. It shall be lawful for those who work for others to eat of all things set before them except on Fridays and fast days generally appointed by the Church.

In the Rule of 1289, the freedom from fasting of those who performed fatiguing work was extended from Easter until the feast of St. Francis. The 1883 Rule of POPE LEO XIII, which greatly decreased obligations to fast, is, not surprisingly, correspondingly silent with regards to work.

This silence with regard to work is understandable if we remember that membership in the Third Order was understood as membership in a religious order, which, at that time, included a commitment to withdraw from the world. From the Rule of 1289: "...after entering the fraternity, no one may leave it to return to the world; he may, however, freely transfer to another approved religious order." (II.4)

This silence about the role of work in the pursuit of the spiritual life was not peculiar to the Rules for lay Franciscans but was true of the Catholic Church for almost two millennia. "Theological reflection on the subject of work is virtually unknown in both formal theology and in pastoral practice" writes John C. Haughey, S.J. in **Converting 9 to 5 - A Spirituality of Daily Work**. Fr. Haughey traces this neglect back to influence on Western civilization of the ancient Greeks who esteemed the intellectual life but believed that manual labor made a man indistinguishable from the animals.

Greek thought heavily influenced early Christianity. Contemplation was prized as the zenith of human experience and everyday work was despised, being left to slaves and peasants. Work received scant attention from the early church fathers. In the Middle Ages, theology was restricted to reflection on Scripture and tradition, becoming very abstract and removed from

the concrete concerns of daily life. Theological reflection on lived experience like work was non-existent.

St. Francis and the early Franciscans played an immense role in beginning to change this situation. The human Jesus, incarnate, was recovered through Francis's meditation on Christ's crib and cross and shared with the world through Franciscan traditions like the Christmas creche and the Stations of the Cross. And the humble life of the friars echoed the hidden life of Jesus plying his trade as a carpenter in Nazareth. But while the Franciscan influence brought Christ's humanity more in balance with his divinity in the life of the medieval Church, the Church continued to neglect the spiritual or "divine" aspects of the way most men and women spent much of their human existence - working.

Why "work"? Why is work now a part of the Secular Franciscan way of life when it was neglected for the preceding 750 years? The answer will have to wait until the next column where we will "go behind the scenes" to learn about the ten year long effort to realize a new Rule for Secular Franciscans.

Dialogue Starters

1. Is work "beneath" man? In a perfect world (or in heaven) would there (will there) be work?
2. Does "work" belong in our 1978 Rule if it was absent in previous versions of the way of life for secular Franciscans?

Where then does article 16 in our present rule concerning work come from? "Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community." As noted in the previous article, article 16 is an abbreviated version of a section praising the dignity of work found in The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, one of the key documents of the Second Vatican Council.

The development of our 1978 Rule was precipitated by the Council and strove both to heed the Council's call to return to the charism of one's founder and to be faithful to the spirit of the Council. We see both these movements, to recover the old and embrace the new, present in the development of our present rule. Old: The call in our Rule and Constitutions to a life of "on-going conversion" was a return to the original meaning of "penance" and our roots as the "Brothers and Sisters of Penance." New: For us, as laypersons, the Council had some wonderful things to say. We no longer had to "leave the world" to become holy. In fact, a layperson's life in the world was no longer understood by the Church as an obstacle but rather as the very means to a holy, evangelical life. Lay persons were given a new understanding of their role in the Church and the world - theirs was a "secular spirituality."

Now this was a sea change in understanding. And it was not quickly incorporated into our new Rule. In *"De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam" The Rule of the Secular Franciscan*

Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation, Robert M. Stewart, OFM, observes that while the SFO "Rule Project" began in 1968, seven years later an International Commission "most strongly criticized the 1974 Basic Text for its failure to present adequately a specifically "secular" spirituality." (257) going on to say "...the 1974 Basic Text...contains little that would not also be appropriate within a rule for a canonical religious Franciscan group." (257)

This situation was addressed in 1975 through the addition of an entirely new section of the draft Rule called "In the Midst of the World. Here, we see the appearance of "work" for the first time in the new Rule along with the other elements of what we now refer to as our "apostolates" or commissions":

Like all members of the Franciscan Family, we are sent to the entire world. As seculars, we have our own vocation: living in the midst of the world, engaged in various duties and works of the world, it is our duty to enlighten and to direct all temporal realities to which we are closely united, in such a way that they may work and prosper constantly according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer. Also, as members of secular society, we will know how, according to the gifts given by the Lord, to take our share of responsibility, bringing to this management of temporal things the spirit of the Beatitudes. By our witness and our action, joined with that of other men and women, we will work in these different sectors towards the realization of the plan of God for the world. It is first of all in our family that we will live the Franciscan spirit, striving to make it a sign of the world already renewed in Christ. *We will make our work a participation in the development of creation, the redemption of men and women, and a service to the whole human community.* Finally, aware that it belongs to the whole Church to make people capable of building the temporal order well and of orienting it toward Christ, with a clear distinction of the rights and duties of ecclesial communities, the secular fraternities will assume their apostolic and social responsibilities and commit themselves to concrete evangelical choices. (Ibid. 270-271)

So, we have answered our question of how work became part of our new Secular Franciscan Rule. In the layperson's "secular spirituality, our work in the world is part of God's plan to return all things to Christ.