



FORMATION COMMISSION

THE PROLOGUE: LENS OF THE RULE

by Justin Carisio, OFS

When we speak of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, we tend to mean the 26 articles of the Rule of 1978 that describe the nature of the order, the way of life a Secular Franciscan commits to, and life in fraternity. Seldom do we have in mind the stunning document that precedes those articles, what we know as the “Prologue: Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance.”¹ Yet careful consideration suggests that the Prologue should be the starting point for any study, discussion, or meditation on the Rule.

The Prologue is an original document written by St. Francis sometime between 1209 and 1215. The translation that accompanies English publications of the Rule is that of Marion A. Habig, OFM.² A translation more reflective of contemporary scholarship can be found in *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents, Vol. I*, where it is called the *Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*.³ (Historically, different titles have been assigned to the document, including the *First Version of the Letter to All the Faithful* and the “Volterra text.”)

The *Earlier Exhortation* has been referred to as the “primitive Rule.” Inasmuch as it is fundamentally an exhortation, it represents a “form of life” that Francis intended for the lay penitents associated with his movement.⁴ These men and women were living “more intensely their baptismal commitment through a life of penance.”⁵ How the *Earlier Exhortation* became the Prologue is a bit of a mystery. In his classic study of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, Robert Stewart, OFM, said it was inserted into our Rule without comment by the four Ministers General of the friar orders late in the process of approving the Rule, adding that, “the *Earlier Exhortation* remains the lens through which the Rule of 1978 must be understood and interpreted.”⁶

Physically, a lens is something that “forms an image by focusing rays of light.” Figuratively, it “facilitates and influences perception, comprehension, or evaluation.”⁷ The Prologue works both ways with respect to our Rule. It helps form an image of Secular Franciscan identity: We are to be “spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It reminds us that our way of life is Trinitarian, Christocentric, and Catholic. It also facilitates our self-perception as Franciscans by representing to us the founding charism of our order, which is *penance*. In another Franciscan early document, *The Legend of the Three Companions*, we read that Francis

and the first friars, when asked where they were from, “said simply that they were *penitents* [emphasis added] originally from the city of Assisi.”⁸ In his history of the Third Order, Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR, underscores that as time went on, “‘penance’ remained the primary characteristic of only the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance.”⁹

That image is projected in Article 7 of the Rule, which describes our vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance.” In the modern Church, we are used to thinking of penance as something that occurs within our hearts. Indeed, Article 7 adds, “let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls ‘conversion.’” Lino Tempervi, TOR, emphasizes that, “the term ‘penance’ in Franciscan spirituality is equivalent to the biblical meaning of *metanoia*, understood as an intimate conversion of the heart to God, as a continuous state of being. It is not a question of doing penance but of being penitent.”¹⁰ Or to refine further, “penance is not a state, but a journey that leads to God.”¹¹

In the *Earlier Exhortation*, Francis is indeed concerned with being penitent. Yet he is also committed to *doing* penance. He exhorts us to no fewer than five actions: love God totally; love our neighbor as ourselves; hate our sinful tendencies; receive the Body and Blood of Christ in a worthy manner; produce good fruits of penance.¹² That he intends something visible and concrete about being a penitent is unmistakable, because our lives “must give life to others by example.” Thus, when we view our Rule through the lens of the Prologue, we experience Francis teaching us “that the embrace of penance brings about a profound change in our relationships with God, a change that we can understand only in light of the revelation of Jesus.”¹³

With the passage of more than 40 years, it appears that the inclusion of the *Earlier Exhortation* as the Prologue to the Secular Franciscan Rule of 1978 was providential. The Prologue enables us to reach across the centuries to touch our earliest brother and sister secular Franciscans. It announces our call to conversion and holiness. It warns us that a refusal to do penance “makes us slaves to the world” and has consequences in this life and the next. Above all, it makes manifest in our present-day fraternities the authentic voice and mind of Francis, penitent from Assisi.

¹All citations from the Rule of 1978 are from <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/the-rule-of-the-secular-franciscan-order> (accessed February 28, 2019).

²Robert M. Stewart, OFM, *“De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam” The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation*, Istituto Storico Dei Cappuccini, 1991, 31.

³Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., et al., editors, *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents, Volume I, The Saint*, New City Press, 1999, 41.

⁴Stewart, 85

⁵Ibid., 137.

⁶Ibid., 311.

⁷<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lens> (accessed February 23, 2019).

⁸Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., et al., editors, *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents, Volume II, The Founder*, New City Press, 1999, 90

⁹Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR, *St. Francis and the Third Order, The Franciscan and pre-Franciscan Penitential Movement*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1989, 125, 127.

¹⁰Lino Temperini, TOR, *Penitential Spirituality in the Franciscan Sources*, Franciscan Publications, 1983, 41.

¹¹Pazzelli, 120.

¹²For a Secular Franciscan perspective on these exhortations see Ed Zablocki, SFO, “Our Work as a Means of Doing Penance,” https://www.nafra-sfo.org/work_commission_resources/Work%20Commission%20Manual/Sec_C_No.16%20work%20as%20penance.pdf (accessed February 27, 2019).

¹³Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings for a Gospel Life*, Crossroad Publishing, 1994, 40.



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS Concilium Internationale (CIOFS) Initiatives

by Awilda Guadalupe, OFS, International Councilor

Family Commission

On February 11, 2019, the International Family Commission sent a letter to all OFS and Franciscan Youth International Councilors that addressed the annual theme for the year 2019 of the Family Commission. They continue to focus on what was assumed as a priority in the 2014 General Chapter, which invites us "to include the meaning of sexuality and the sacrament of marriage in all formation programs of the OFS and YouFra."

The theme for the 2019 Family Commission, which is meant as a guide is:

“The family in the different encyclicals and the Catechism of the Catholic Church”

Each fraternity should evaluate and reflect on the material found on <http://ciofs.org/portal/index.php/en/>. The Family Commission is inviting fraternities that would like to share their training materials with other national fraternities to send them to the Family Commission through the CIOFS Secretariat.

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Presidency Meeting (March 16-23, 2019)

“The members of the CIOFS Presidency, meeting in Rome in November, discussed the progress of work on implementing the decisions of the 2017 General Chapter, particularly establishing permanent offices; namely, a Formation Office, a Communications Office,

and a Secretariat for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). Several considerations arose, such as physical vs. virtual offices, and the challenge of people from different parts of the globe working together on the various teams. They worked on guidelines and job descriptions, and they noted that some countries have submitted names of qualified and interested Secular Franciscans for the various areas. They gave approvals to moving ahead with strategic planning and organizing of each of the permanent offices. In addition to continuing to develop and refine formation materials, the Formation Commission was encouraged to flesh out and develop a program on Franciscans and their finances.”

This year CIOFS Presidency meeting took place from 16-23 March in San Giovanni Rotondo. The 7-day work began with the celebration of the Eucharist and the discussion of different issues regarding the Fraternal life of our Order. The Presidency members, in addition to tackling a host of business items and topical issues, scheduled a robust series of visits to national fraternities around the globe for 2019.

A Franciscan life well lived

On March 18, 2019, brother Paulo Machado da Costa and Silva passed away at the aged 101, his life marked by his fraternal presence and a dedication to the Franciscan charism in a special way to the OFS, with consistency and love. He was the National Minister of the OFS Brazil and the international councilor. He was a collaborator in the drafting of the Rule of the OFS, approved by Pope Paul VI in June 1978, and in the drafting of the General Constitutions *ad experimentum*.

“Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape. (...) Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.” (The Canticle of the Creatures)