

«SO THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE»
THE LATER RULE OF SAINT FRANCIS

«PARA QUE TENGAN VIDA»
LA ÚLTIMA REGLA DE SAN FRANCISCO

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Abstract: This article is intended as a contribution to the celebration of the eighth centenary of the Later Rule of St. Francis (Nov. 29, 1223) and analyzes its inspirational force in our secularized society. This is one of the four great Rules of consecrated life. It is not only a juridical text, but also a spiritual document, a guide “to live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel” (part 1). Those in authority must be at the service of this vital process, acting as mothers who take care of life (part 2). The third part presents the Rule’s current relevance and the need of an inspiring leadership that promotes processes of transformation to address the present challenges of religious life.

Keywords: Francis of Assisi, Franciscans, Later Rule, Religious Life, Leadership.

Resumen: Este artículo responde a la celebración del octavo centenario de la Regla bulada de San Francisco (29.11.1223), que es una de las cuatro grandes Reglas de la vida consagrada, y analiza su fuerza inspiradora en la actual sociedad secularizada. No es sólo un texto jurídico, sino también un documento espiritual, una guía “para vivir según la forma del santo evangelio” (1ª parte). Quienes detentan la autoridad tienen que estar al servicio de ese proceso vital que la Regla propone, actuando como madres que cuidan la vida (2ª parte). La tercera parte presenta su actualidad y la importancia de un liderazgo inspirador que promueva procesos de transformación para afrontar los desafíos de la vida consagrada.

Palabras clave: Francisco de Asís, Franciscanos, Regla bulada, Vida consagrada, Liderazgo.

This article is intended as a contribution to the celebration of the eighth centenary of St. Francis' Later Rule (Nov. 29, 1223) and analyzes its inspirational force in our secularized society. This is one of the four great Rules of consecrated life, along with that of Saint Basil (eremital), Saint Augustine (canonical) and Saint Benedict (monastic). The Pope Honorius III confirmed it with the bull *Solet annuere*, which is a simple, stereotypical form,¹ also used in other occasions.² The Franciscan rule is embedded inside this bull, which serves as the introduction and conclusion of the entire official document. This apparent lack of official prominence may be due to the fact that Honorius III merely confirms the Rule³ that Innocent III had orally approved⁴ on April 16, 1209; that is, he gives his endorsement to a previous approval.⁵ The Pope thus circumvented the prohibition on founding new religious Orders which the Fourth Lateran Council had emanated in 1215. Besides, the Pope showed the continuity between those drafts of the Rule.⁶

Francis' intention in writing the Rule could be expressed with the biblical phrase: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). In fact, he writes it so that all his friars may have in abundance the life in Christ they have professed. The Rule is a juridical text, but it is

¹ The Dominican Order adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine and was confirmed with the bull "*Religiosam vitam*" (Dec. 22, 1216), which, in addition to the Pope, was signed by 19 cardinals. Cf. BONI Andrea, *La novitas franciscana nel suo essere e nel suo divenire* (cc. 578/631), Antonianum, Rome 1998, 224-225.

² That same form will be used to approve Saint Clare's "*Forma vitae*". It had already been used, for example, to grant some privileges to the Cistercians. ESSER Kajetan, *La Orden franciscana, orígenes e ideales*, Arantzazu, Oñate 1976, 144-145; URIBE Fernando, *La Regla de San Francisco. Letra y Espíritu*, Espigas, Murcia 2006, 28, footnote 44.

³ "Ordinis vestri regulam, a bone memorie Innocentio papa predecessore nostro approbatam, annotatam presentibus, auctoritate vobis apostolica confirmamus." POPE ONORIO III, «*Solet annuere*. Bull» (Nov. 29, 1223).

⁴ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «The Testament» [*Test*], 14-16, in ARMSTRONG Regis J. – HELLMANN J.A. Wayne – SHORT William (ed.), *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, 3 vol., New City Press, New York 2001, [*FAED*], I, 124-127. Pope Innocent III approves it, although he considers it "exceptionally hard and severe." ID., «The Legend of the Three Companions» [*L3C*], 49 (*FAED* II, 61-110); cf. THOMAS OF CELANO, «The Life of Saint Francis» [*ICel*], 33 (*FAED* I, 171-308); BARTOLI LANGELI Attilio, «La *Solet annuere* come documento», in MARANESI Pietro – ACCROCCA Felice (ed.), *La regola di frate Francesco. Eredità e sfida*, Ed. Francescane, Padova 2012, 57-94.

⁵ DESBONNETS Théophile, *De la intuición a la institución. Los franciscanos*, Ed. Franciscanas, Arantzazu 1991, 129.

⁶ "Firmiter prohibemus ne quis de cætero novam religionem inveniat." FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL, c. 13: *Ne nimia religionum diversitas*, (1215).

also a historical and spiritual document that must be framed in that context, considering the intentionality with which it was written.

For centuries, however, the Rule was seen as a predominantly juridical text with more than 24 mandates, 17 councils, etc.⁷ It was even claimed that Christ himself had dictated it to Saint Francis.⁸ In making the religious profession, the friars vow to observe it, along with the three evangelical counsels, and therefore it was considered a mortal sin to transgress any of the precepts that had been identified in it. The “*Werkbuch zur Regel des Heiligen Franciskus*,” published in Germany in 1955, “can be considered the first serious and organic attempt to explain the Rule from parameters other than the traditional legal schemes.”⁹

Following the Second Vatican Council, which had promoted a more fraternal style of religious life, the casuistic interpretation of the legislative texts gave way to a reading conducted in the light of the original charism that the founders had lived and the authentic life project they had wished to express. In this new context, the Franciscan Rule ceased to be seen primarily as a normative text, and was put in relation to the vital and fraternal dynamism it promoted.

The first part of this article presents the Rule as the vital path that leads Franciscans to “observe” the Gospel. Those in authority must be at the service of that vital process (2nd part) and, therefore, they must be witnesses of Christ the Servant and mothers who care for life. They must also help friars listen to the Holy Spirit, who is their true minister general. The third part studies the current relevance of the Rule in our secularized society and the importance of the inspiring leadership it proposes. We need to initiate

⁷ Pope Clemente V identifies 24 precepts in the *LR*. COUNCIL OF VIENNA, «*Exivi de Paradiso*. Constitution» (May 6, 1312), COD 392-401; cf. SEDDA Filippo, «*Exivi de Paradiso*: la conciliazione di una storia contrastata,» in *Frate Francesco* 83/1 (2017) 137-159; RACCA Giorgio, *La Regola dei frati minori*, Porziuncula, Assisi 1986, 15-16. In addition to the three vows, D. I. Velásquez distinguishes 25 precepts that bind under mortal sin (VELÁSQUEZ Daniel Ignacio, *La Regla de los Frailes Menores*, Cali 1949, 29 ss.). Others raise the number of precepts to 28, 39, and even to 61. URIBE F., *La Regla de San Francisco*, 36-37, footnote 57.

⁸ Around the year 1325, Angelo Clareno wrote: “Conforme a la revelación que le hizo Cristo, Francisco se retiró al eremitorio de Fonte Colombo... Allí es donde escribió la Regla que le reveló Cristo, no poniendo en ella nada de lo que se le ocurriera a él mismo, sino escribiendo solamente lo que Cristo Jesús le revelaba desde el cielo.” CLARENO Angel, «Book of tribulations» quoted in DESBONNETS T., *De la intuición a la institución*, 9 (cf. *FF* 2113-2199/8, here 2179); cf. BONAVENTURE, «The Major Legend» [*LMj*], 4,11 (*FAED* II, 525-683).

⁹ URIBE F., «Comentar hoy la Regla franciscana,» in *Collectanea Franciscana* 76 (2006) 119-160, here 120.