

Celebrating life:

**The Rule and Christmas at Greccio
(1223-2023)**



Martín Carbajo-Núñez

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To the Franciscan family,
which joyfully celebrates its own charism.

Abbreviations

1. Books of the Bible

1Cor	1 Corinthians
1Kgs	1 Kings
2Tim	2 Timothy
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Col	Colossians
Ex	Exodus
Is	Isaiah
Jn	John
Lk	Luke
Mt	Matthew
Ps	Psalms
Rm	Romans
Tit	Titus
Wis	Wisdom

2. Magisterium sources

AdS	FRANCIS, <i>Admirabile signum</i> . Apostolic Letter
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
COD	<i>Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta</i>
DC	BENEDICT XVI, <i>Deus caritas est</i> . Encyclical Letter.
EG	FRANCIS, <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> . Exhortation
FT	FRANCIS, <i>Fratelli tutti</i> . Encyclical Letter
GE	FRANCIS, <i>Gaudete et Exsultate</i> . Apost. Exhortation
GS	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, <i>Gaudium et spes</i>

LG	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, <i>Lumen Gentium</i>
LS	FRANCIS, <i>Laudato si'</i> . Encyclical Letter
PC	SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, <i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
PL	MIGNE J.-P. (ed.), <i>Patrologia Latina</i>
S19df	AMAZON SYNOD, Final document
VC	JOHN PAUL II, <i>Vita consecrata</i> . Apost. Exhortation

3. Writings of St. Francis

2LtF	The second version of the Letter to the Faithful
Adm	The Admonitions
CtC	The Canticle of the Creatures
ER	The Earlier Rule (<i>Regula non bullata</i>)
LR	The Later Rule (<i>Regula bullata</i>)
LtL	A Letter to Brother Leo
LtMin	A Letter to a Minister
LtO	A Letter to the Entire Order
OfP	The Office of the Passion
RE	A Rule for Hermitages
SalV	A Salutation to Virtues
Test	The Testament
TestS	The Testament made at Siena

4. Franciscan sources and authors

1Cel	CELANO, The Life of St. Francis (<i>Vita Prima</i>)
2Cel	CELANO, The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul (<i>Vita Secunda</i>)
CAED	ARMSTRONG R.J., Clare of Assisi: Early Docs.
CAss	The Assisi Compilation (The legend of Perugia)
CCGG	GENERAL CURIA OFM, General Constitutions
CFF	Conference of the Franciscan Family
FAED	AMSTRONG R.J – HERMANN J.A.W. – SHORT W.J. (ed.), Francis of Assisi: Early Documents
FF	Fonti Francescane, Padova ³ 2011

L3C	The Legend of the Three Companions
Lect	DUNS ESCOTO, Lectura
LMj	BONAVENTURE, The Major Legend
OFM	Ordo Fratrum Minorum
Ord	DUNS ESCOTO, Ordinatio (Opus Oxoniense)
Quarac chi	BONAVENTURE, <i>Opera omnia</i> , Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Quaracchi 1882-1902
SC	Sacrum commercium
SpecP	The Mirror of Perfection
Vat	DUNS SCOTUS, <i>Opera omnia</i>

5. Bibliographical and common

a.	Articulus
AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
BAC	Biblioteca de autores cristianos
c.	Chapter
cf.	Confer, see, compare
d.	Distinctio, distinctiones
ed.	Editor, publisher, coordinator, editorial
Ibid	Ibidem
Id	Idem, the same
imp.	Reprint
LEV	Libreria Editrice Vaticana
n.	Number, numbers
OR	L'Osservatore Romano
p.	Pars, page, pages
q.	Quaestio, quaestiones
S.Th	THOMAS AQUINAS, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
Selfran	Selecciones de Franciscanismo
Univ.	University
UP	University Press
Vol.	Volume, volumes

Introduction

This book is intended as a contribution to the celebration, in 2023, of the eighth centenary of two important events for the Franciscan family: the confirmation of the Later Rule (*Regula bullata*) by Pope Honorius III, on Nov. 29, 1223, and the celebration of Christmas at Greccio, just a month later. This centenary is a moment of grace and a propitious occasion to renew our consecration to the Lord.

The vital flame that has inspired Francis of Assisi and his followers for these eight hundred years needs to be continually rekindled. We too are invited to assume it today in a creative and dynamic manner, avoiding useless nostalgia. This publication aims to achieve this.

Consecrated life “is not about survival, but new life.”¹ The Lord who granted Francis “to begin doing penance” (*Test 1*) now gives us this opportunity to remember the past with gratitude, to strengthen joyfully our charismatic identity in the present and to open ourselves with hope to the future.

As we celebrate these centenaries, we must listen again to Francis's invitation: “Let us begin, brothers” (*ICel 103*). The Franciscan Order, like any other group of religious life, is a living organism that needs to be open to vital processes of transformation. We must also strive to ensure that the celebration of these centenaries positively impacts our

¹ FRANCIS, «Homily» (Feb. 2, 2019), in *OR 29* (Feb. 4-5, 2019) 11.

society and the cultural environments in which we are immersed.

We celebrate the centenary of “the Later Rule (*Regula bullata*),” which is the one officially and formally recognized by the Church at a canonical level. However, we could simply say that we celebrate the centenary of “the Rule,” without further specifications. Francis wrote three versions of it: Proto-Rule (1209), The Earlier Rule (*Regula non bullata*) (1221), and The Later Rule (*Regula bullata*) (1223). For him, what truly matters is “to observe the Holy Gospel” (*LR 1*) which goes beyond the scope of any legislative text.

Pope Honorius also recognizes the continuity between them, since he merely confirms the Rule that Innocent III had approved orally. In fact, the Pope could not have approved a new Rule without contradicting the decree issued by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which banned the foundation of new religious orders.

In the first chapter, we study the Later Rule (*Regula bullata*), which is one of the four great Rules of consecrated life, and analyzes its inspirational force in today’s secularized society. 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.

In the second chapter, we focus on Francis’ celebration of Christmas at Greccio in 1223. It is generally considered that this event gave rise to “the enchanting image of the Christmas crèche” and to the “intense spiritual atmosphere that surrounds Christmas.” In addition to offering some historical notes, the chapter relates it to salient themes of the

Franciscan theological tradition and reflects on its relevance for today's society.

On January 1, 2022, the *CFF* published a document with the Guidelines for the celebration of the Franciscan Centenary (2023-2026), which regards the Easter of Francis and the main events of his last years. More specifically, the *CFF* has articulated that centenary in four more specific centenaries: The Later Rule (*Regula bullata*) and Christmas at Greccio (2023), the gift of the Stigmata (2024), the Canticle of the Creatures (2025) and, as the culmination, the Easter of Francis (2026). At the end of this book, in an appendix, it is reproduced the part of that document that directly refers to the two centenaries which are the object of our study: the Later Rule (*Regula bullata*) and the Nativity at Greccio.

For the celebrations of the year 2023, the *CFF* has chosen the title “You are joy,” taken from the “Praises to God Most High” of St. Francisco. Our study also invites all to joyfully celebrate the life that God has given us through our religious profession in the Franciscan Order.

The *CFF* document and the successive guidelines, published on August 31, 2022, are organized around four dimensions: theological, anthropological, ecclesiological, and sociological. We will now continue to present the contents of our book following the outline of those four dimensions.

Theological dimension

The *CFF* affirms that the celebration of the centenary of the Later Rule (*Regula bullata*) is an opportunity to discern the centrality of the Gospel in our life. In this sense, our study underlines that, for Francis, the Rule is life, a guide to “live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel” (*Test* 14). The religious profession means to receive (“*accipere*”) this life

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Current Day Hermitage Shrine in Greccio, Italy

This book is intended as a contribution to the celebration, in 2023, of the eighth centenary of two important events for the Franciscan family: the confirmation of the Later Rule (Regula bullata) by Pope Honorius III, on Nov. 29, 1223, and the celebration of Christmas at Greccio, just a month later. This centenary is a moment of grace and a propitious occasion to renew our consecration to the Lord.



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