



THE ASSIS TANTS' LINK

Official Newsletter of Spiritual Assistants; OFS - YouFra

OFS OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS INTRODUCTION



*Tibor Kauser, OFS
General Minister*

A Decree on the indulgence of the Porziuncola from Theobaldus, bishop of Assisi, details something that says a lot about Saint Francis's simple approach to life. The moment the Pope agreed to the request of Francis for an indulgence, he started leaving not caring to receive any written document. As he was leaving, the Pope asked him what he would take as proof for such an indulgence. Francis responded saying: *"Holy Father, your word is sufficient for me. If that is God's work, He will make it known. I do not desire any other instrument for such an indulgence except that the Blessed Virgin Mary should be the paper, Christ the notary and the Angels be the witnesses."*

The Franciscan movement began in 1209 solely with the verbal approval of Pope Innocent III. The Rule of the Friars Minor received the Papal seal only in 1223, less than three years before the death of Saint Francis. Saint Clare received Papal approval for her Rule on August 9, 1253, barely two days before her death. The first Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis with Papal approval came later in 1289, with the Rule, Supra Montem of Pope Nicholas IV. Taking all these into consideration, it can be said the Franciscan movement was founded on the spoken word. However, we see that written documents always followed, because they are essential; for as Théophile Desbonnets puts it, *"an intuition that does not become an institution cannot last"*. Official documents guarantee the legality, and continuity of the Order.

What qualifies a document as "official"? Where do we find these documents? And, what do we need to know about them? Tibor Kauser, OFS General Minister, answered these and similar questions during the course of last November. We offer you the first part of his presentation in this edition of our Newsletter. The bullet form of the presentation touches on the essential and leaves much space for application in specific contexts.



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OFS OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

By Tibor Kauser, OFS - General Minister



Tibor Kauser and Spiritual Assistants from Spain, participants at the Course

An official document is

- A legal document, issued by an authority
- A document that states some contractual relationship or grants some right and duty
- Guaranteed to be correct

What is a legal document for the OFS?

- it is an instrument
- spirituality first: legal documents always have to reflect on and include spirituality
- it has always a purpose

Three basic universal official documents

- The Rule
- The General Constitutions
- The Ritual
- The Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS and YouFra
- The Manual for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS and YouFra

Other official documents: national , regional, local

- Statutes
- Decrees
- Delegations
- Registers, Etc.



The dual nature of OFS Official documents

Charisma and Institution; Legislation has to be the link between the two, to:

- Reflect on the charisma on one hand and give spiritual guidance,
- Reflect on the structure, on the institution on the other hand,
- give clear indications on the practice of the daily life.

The Rule of the OFS

Apart from the proto-rule, *Memoriale Propositi* of 1221, the OFS has had three Rules:

- *Supra Montem* (Nicholas IV.) Aug. 18, 1289

- *Misericors Dei Filius* (Leo XIII) May 30, 1883
- *Seraphicus Patriarcha* (Paul VI) June 24, 1978

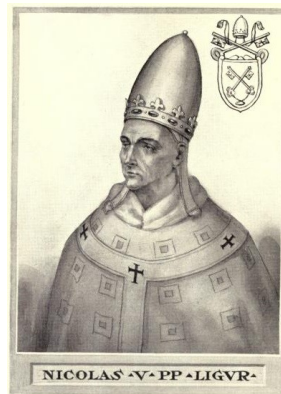
Two aspects to watch: Timeline and differences in the nature of the Rules.

Timeline

1221 – 1289 – 1883 – 1978

Although it looks as if there were a long continuity for six centuries, the story of the TOF/OFS is more adventurous.

Together with the above dates, 1426 is also a date to remember. By the bull *Licet Inter Cetera* of November 27, 1426, Pope Martin V, put and end to a certain autonomy of the TOF, and cast it absolutely under the jurisdiction of the Franciscan First Orders. This was to last until 1978.



In 1447, by order of Pope Nicholas V, the first General Chapter of what we now call the Third Order Regular was convoked, for which, in 1521, Pope Leo X approved a special Rule.

1500—1700

The divisions within the First Order and the birth of new branches caused a rather difficult situation in the TOF/OFS, particularly in the relationship to the different branches.

1725—1729

In order to resolve a situation that had become much more complex within the Franciscan family, Pope Benedict XIII issued four apostolic constitutions between 1725 and 1729 to put an end to the situation. He addressed them to each of the four families and gave equal rights to admit to the Third Order and to exercise the office of "Visitors and Instructors". This has divided the one TOF into different branches according to the branches of the Franciscan First Order

“Let all the brothers be, live, and speak as Catholics”

St. Francis of Assisi, First Rule. 19

1883

In line with the new social doctrine of the Church, The Rule of Leo XIII brought a significantly novel aspect, strengthening the role of the laity in the Church and thus emphasizing the importance of the TOF.

1978

After Vatican II, the OFS, together with all religious orders, was called to discover its spiritual roots and renew its self-identity, and thus its legislation. This resulted in a long work which bore fruit in 1978 with the new Rule of the OFS.

Nature of the Rules

The first two seem to be strictly regulations, legal documents, the second two look more spiritual. Why?



St. Stephen of MURET († 1124), the founder of the Order of Grandmont, in the prologue of his Rule; referring to the variety of the different Rules written by the great Fathers - Basil, Augustine, Benedict - defines them as "branches" of a single root: *"There is only one main rule of the rules of faith and salvation, from which all the others derive, like streams from a*

single source: this is the holy Gospel "

"Non est alia Regula, nisi Evangelium Christi"

This comes back in 1978 in the current Rule *"The brothers and sisters of this Order ... commit themselves by their Profession to live the gospel in the way of St. Francis ..."* (Rule 2)

Seraphicus Patriarcha (1978)

Then Editio typica is in Latin

Prologue - Exhortation of St. Francis to the brothers and sisters of penance.

It contains 3 chapters with 26 articles

First chapter: The Secular Franciscan Order (art. 1 - 3)

Second chapter: Form of life (art. 4 - 19)

Third chapter: Life in the Fraternity (art. 20 - 26)

The Prologue - It consists of the exhortation of St. Francis to the brothers and sisters of penance. It is a sort of return to the roots as it contains a description of secular spirituality according to Saint Francis.

The first chapter

in its 3 articles inserts the OFS into the Church and into the Franciscan family, thus finding its proper place.

1. Among the spiritual families which the Holy Spirit has raised up in the Church ...

2. ...an organic union incorporating all the Catholic fraternities spread throughout the world and it is open to all the faithful ...

3. ... adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Church in the constantly changing conditions of our time ...

**The second chapter**

in its 16 articles speaks about the way of life

- It is more a project of life than strict regulations.
- Those mentioned in this chapter are real evangelical and Franciscan values.
- It is rather a more spiritual than a juridical document
- Drafts the vocation and the mission in harmony
- observe the gospel
- seek out the person of Christ
- restore the Church
- conversion
- sacramental life and liturgical prayer
- the Blessed Virgin Mary
- faithfully carry out the tasks
- spirit of detachment
- free to love (everyone)
- sense of fraternity

"If a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the spirit" (S.F. Rb 3)

FROM THE WRITINGS OF SAINT FRANCIS

"Let all my blessed brothers, both clerics and lay, confess their sins to priests of our religion. If they cannot, let them confess to other discerning and Catholic priests, knowing with certainty that, when they have received penance and absolution from any Catholic priest, they are without doubt absolved from their sins, provided they have humbly and faithfully fulfilled the penance imposed on them.

If they have not been able to find a priest, however, let them confess to their brother, as the Apostle James says: Confess your sins to one another. Nevertheless, because of this, let them not fail to have recourse to a priest because the power of binding and loosing is granted only to priests." (First Rule, 20:1-4)

- Building a more fraternal and evangelical world
- promotion of justice
- esteem work as a gift
- make their family a sign of a world already renewed
- respect all other created beings
- unity and fraternal consensus, bring joy and hope



The third chapter

its 7 articles speak about life in fraternity.

The importance of this chapter is not so much its establishment of councils and definition of the structures in the Order, but rather the provision that:

- the Order is not only a spiritual reality but is an organization as well
- Fraternal life is essential
- the members of the Order live their secular Franciscan vocation in the local fraternities
- they belong to a well-organized international fraternity.



The conclusion

The OFS Rule closes with the blessing of Saint Francis: *"And whoever observes these things let him be blessed in Heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father, and on earth with the blessing of His Beloved Son with the Most Holy Spirit the Paraclete"*.

All official documents are available online in all four official languages: English, Spanish, French and Italian at the CIOFS website: www.ciofs.info.

PRAYER INTENTIONS FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

Pope Francis — For respect for the planet's resources: We pray that the planet's resources will not be plundered, but shared in a just and respectful manner.

OFS — We pray for OFS and YouFra initiatives of charity and evangelization in favour of people in the peripheries



ON GIVING

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow?

And tomorrow, what shall to-morrow bring to the overprudent dog burying bones in the trackless sand as he follows the pilgrims to the holy city?

(Kahlil Gibran)

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