



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS  
- Initial Formation for Enquirers -

Chapter 6: A Secular Calling

They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in Baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words. [Rule 6]



Why is the word 'secular' used to describe a religious Order? Surely 'secular' is entirely the wrong word—doesn't 'secular' mean 'concerned with the affairs of this world, worldly, not sacred'?

New Testament use of the word world:

- **Mortal existence** in distinction from spiritual life—so, 'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.' [1 John 2.15]
- **Morality**, 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.' [1 John 2.16]
- **Transience**, 'And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.' [1 John 2.17]

However, we have to remember also the famous verse from John's Gospel, '...God so loved the world...' [John 3.16]

So, it would seem that for St John while God loves the world and wants to save it, we shouldn't be so enamoured by it! Rather, as 1 John 3.16 says, it is by loving our brethren that we know love.

We are, rather, in the world [yes], but we do not belong to it; we belong to God and he manifests his love in us, so 'Let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.' [1 John 3.18]. As Christians '...this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us.' [1 John 3.23—Cf. John 6.29; 13.34; 15.17]

An Order, yes—but a secular Order. We are **ORDO**  
**FRANCISCANUS**  
**SAECULARIS**, that is:

1. Called by God to an **Order** of the Catholic Church
2. Sharing a particular "**charism**" with the rest of the Franciscan family
3. Living not in 'community' but in the world \*1

\*1 Latin: 'saeculum' = generation, age; 'saecularis' [adjective] = worldly [i.e. concerned with the affairs of the world/the age]. Under the influence of the NT it tended to be contrasted to 'sacred'. But in Canon Law it signifies the place of activity. So, 'regular clergy' = under a Rule & 'monastic' in contrast to 'secular clergy' = not under a Rule & 'living in the world'.

So, [something optional] you might like to consider the following.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity stresses that lay people “ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order.” [*Apostolicum Actuositatem*, 7]

Efforts to develop a new Rule for the Secular Franciscans attempted, from the beginning, to be faithful to the secular spirituality enunciated by the Second Vatican Council [the first ground breaking efforts in the history of the Church formally to address the question of the distinctive spirituality of the persons in the lay state...] Robert M Stewart OFM \*2 provides the fascinating account of the twelve year process resulting in the 1978 Rule. What is striking about this process is the expressed desire from the then—Third Order—members of the world over to give the new Rule a secular orientation.

But explicit references to the secular vocation and mission are notably absent from the 1978 Rule. [While, a secular spirituality is captured, to a degree, in the 1990 General Constitutions, Secular Franciscans are still becoming acquainted with this new document.]

As a consequence, there is resistance to embracing aspects of the 1978 Rule which are grounded in a secular spirituality, for example, the apostolates. On the one hand, we have the apostolic ideal as described by Fr John Vaughan OFM while he was serving as Minister General:

- What a contrast between your previous Third Order spirituality and the modern Church’s expectations of you as Secular Franciscans! You are now expected to find God in modern culture, politics and economics, and to delight in his presence there. You have been thrust into the front line as leaders in public life and transformers of secular culture...

But on the other hand, we are at times confronted with a reality which differs from this ideal, as conveyed by Fr Carl Schaefer OFM, Spiritual assistant to the International OFS:

- I find it is difficult to guide many Secular Franciscans into an active apostolic way of life. They want prayer, even active participation in the liturgy; they want spiritual assistance from the friars. But to convince them that living the gospel necessarily involves being sent out into the world, and to form them to be publicly apostolic has been my most difficult task...

We are called by the Church to find a spirituality in a place where, in our hearts, we doubt that God can be found. If we knew and believed what the Church teaches—that we can meet the living God in places like politics, then we might more readily accept and carry out the Church’s intended mission for us: to be salt, light and leaven for the world.

What would St Francis do under these circumstances? He found God immanent in everything. ...wouldn’t it be wonderful [and eminently Franciscan] to start finding God in every aspect of our lives in the world \*3 and stop being spiritual schizophrenics.

Secular Franciscans must grow in an understanding of the secular spirituality articulated in the documents of Vatican II and intended but implicit in the OFS Rule. We need to be converted to the vision of the Church which has been telling us that we will grow in holiness by participating in that discordant, untidy, unpredictable place we call the “world”, that it is a primary school of holiness and arena for evangelical action. \*4

\*2 Robert M Stewart OFM *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*

\*3 Cf. Phil 4.11

\*4 Edward M Zablocki OFS *Finding Identity as a Secular Franciscan* [complete article in folder ‘Additional Resources’]

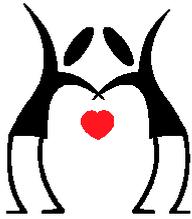


## ACTIVE PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

### - For a Just and Fraternal Society



As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son,...Secular Franciscans...place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ. [Rule, 13]



Secular Franciscans are called to make their own contribution...towards a civilisation in which the dignity of the human person, shared responsibility, and love may be living realities.

They should oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion... they should actively put forward initiatives that care for creation...put a stop to polluting and degrading nature...establish circumstances of living and environment which would not be a threat to the human person. [Constitutions, art 18]



Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called upon to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the Kingdom of god may be brought about more effectively...let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service. [Rule, 14]



Secular Franciscans should always act as leaven in the environment in which they live and witness of their fraternal love and clear Christian motivations.

In the spirit of minority, they should opt for relationships which give preference to the poor and to those on the fringe of society, whether these be individuals or categories of persons or an entire people; they should collaborate in overcoming the exclusions of others and those forms of poverty that are the fruit of inefficiency and injustice....They should commit themselves to the generous fulfilment of their occupation [and] with the same spirit of service, they should assume their social and civil responsibilities. [Constitutions, art 19, 20]



Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront of promoting justice... [Rule, 15]



They should collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws...They should take clear positions wherever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression or indifference...[but] take care that their interventions are always inspired by Christian love. [Constitutions, art 22]



Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue... [Rule, 19]



Peace is the work of justice and the fruit of reconciliation and fraternal love. Secular Franciscans are called to be bearers of peace in their families and in society...spreading of peaceful ideas and attitudes...they should collaborate with those movements and institutions which promote peace... [Constitutions, art 23]



## - In the Family



In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. [Rule, 17]



Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death.

Married couples find in the Rule...an effective aid to their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other...is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world. [Constitutions, art 24]