



+ THE APOSTOLIC LETTER OF APPROVAL
THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

In perpetual remembrance -

The Seraphic Father Saint Francis of Assisi, during his life and after his remarkable death, drew many people to serve God in the religious family he founded. He also inspired the establishment of fraternities that attracted many lay people to commit themselves as far as was possible while living in the world. In fact, to use the words of Pius XI, our Predecessor,

.....it seems that there has never been anyone in whom the image of Jesus Christ and the evangelical way of life shone forth in a manner more alive and striking than in St Francis. He who called himself the "Herald of the Great King" was also rightly spoken of as another Jesus Christ, appearing to his contemporaries and to future generations almost as if he were Christ come again. He has always lived as such in the eyes of mankind and so will continue to live for all future time. (*Rite expiates*, 30 April 1926, AAS, [18] 1926, p 154)

We rejoice that in our own time, the Franciscan charism should still be at the service of the good of the Church and humanity in spite of the influence of the many insidious tendencies and doctrines spreading their tentacles abroad that alienate souls from God and the things that are of God.

With laudable perseverance that four Franciscan families have worked together assiduously for ten years to draw up a new Rule for the Third Order of Secular Franciscans, or—as they are now called—the Secular Franciscan Order. This work was necessary because of the changing conditions of the times and because of the directives and encouragement given by the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council. Accordingly what is being given is something both apposite and beneficial.

Therefore, our beloved sons, the four Ministers General of the Franciscan Order, have requested that we approve this carefully prepared Rule. Following the example of some of our Predecessors, the most recent being Leo XIII, we have been pleased to grant their request. In so doing, we are confident that the form of life preached by that wonderful man of Assisi, will receive a new impulse and flourish vigorously.

After consultation with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, which has considered most carefully, with certain knowledge and mature deliberation, all aspects of the text, certain in the knowledge that the Congregation examined it with due diligence, minutely considering each detail, we approve and confirm this text, namely the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. It is approved and confirmed with all the authority attached to the Apostolic See provided that it conforms with the text which kept in the archives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, of which the first words are *Inter spirituales familias*, and the last are *ad Norman Constitutionum, petenda*.

By signing these Letters and by Our Apostolic Authority, we abrogate the previous Rule

of what was formerly known as the Third Order of Saint Francis, we decree therefore that this Rule takes full effect, now and in the future, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given in Rome at St Peter's under the seal of the Fisherman on XXIV of the month of June, in the year MCMLXXVIII, the sixteenth of our pontificate.

Johannes Card. Villot
Secretary of State

(AAS, [70] 1978, p 454-5)

ENDNOTES

Apostolic Letter of Approval

'Seraphicus Patriarcha' - sometimes translated 'The Seraphic Patriarch'. We have opted for 'Father' rather than 'Patriarch' - the latter more commonly refers to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob; or usual title accorded to senior bishops in the Eastern Churches [Cf. 'The Patriarch of Constantinople']. For the use of 'Seraphic' Cf. 2 FA:ED Bonaventure: Major Legend of St Francis cap 13:2-5 (p 631-634)- and for the biblical origin of 'seraphs' Cf. Isa 6.2-7.

'laicos' - 'lay people' or 'laity' does not exclude those in Holy Orders but means those who are not designated by the Church as 'religious' [those who have taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience]. 'Secular' in ecclesiastical language refers to those who live in the world [rather than a religious house], whose vocation is served out in the world—hence, 'secular clergy'; 'Secular Franciscans'. 'Saecularis' - lit. 'worldly' is better rendered 'secular' to avoid the suggestion that we belong to the world, rather than to Christ [Cf. 1 John 2.15]; in the world, but not of it. God loves the world [John 3.16]; we love each other [1 John 3.23].

'oculos hominum' - 'in the eyes of mankind' is preferred to 'men' to avoid the suggestion of gender limitation

'the four ministers General of the Franciscan Order—i.e. OFM, OFM (conv), OFM (cap) & male clerics of TOR

'ab admirabili ille Viro' - translating not as 'admirable' but 'wonderful' [Cf. following the Italian translation which has 'mirabilis']

'with certain knowledge', 'certain in the knowledge' - 'certain' is repeated to underline its certainty

'Apostolicae potestatis plenitudine' & 'Apostolicae sanctionis' - where the former refers to the authority of the Holy See to require a new Rule while the latter is the authority of the Holy See approving the new Rule itself which is the result.