

Pope Pius XI

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION

RERUM CONDICIO

**ON THE APPROBATION OF THE RULE
OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF THE
SERAPHIC FATHER ST. FRANCIS**

Translated from the Latin text found in the *Acta Apostolic Sedis*,

A. XIX—Vol. XIX, n. 11: November 3, 1927

PIUS, BISHOP

SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD

FOR A PERPETUAL REMEMBRANCE

The condition of things, especially in Italy, was, at the close of the twelfth century and for a little while so serious, that, although society stood firm universally in the Christian Faith, exceedingly many men, nevertheless, distracted by cupidity for fleeting things and elated by the pride of life, rushed forth into every moral depravity [*morum pravitatem*]; and, with the charity of Christ already growing weak, they fostered hatreds at all times and impelled city-states to calamitous internal wars. Nothing therefore could be more wished at that time than that a singular man be raised up by God, who, distinguished by the praise of all the virtues, both brought opportune remedies to these evils and called the peoples back to a Christian spirit. Now, indeed, no one is ignorant that the duty of emending the society of those times had been divinely committed to Francis of Assisi, who countering [*opponens*] unbridled vices with the study of Christian humility and poverty, strove to conjoin all in mutual charity. And so when very many disciples flowed together from all sides towards such a man, there grew up an indeed immense Franciscan Family, since from the members [*sodalibus*] of the three Orders which Francis himself established, then successively from those tertiaries who, desirous of a more perfect life, (and) observing [*agents*] a common life, were named *Members of the Third Order Regular*. Therefore deservedly [*merito*] these have celebrated the memory of the Seraphic Father throughout this year, in the seventh centenary [*septimo exeunte saeculo*] of his most holy death [*obiti*], not only with the holding of pious supplications and sacred solemnities in public, but also with more active

resolutions of piety in a glad spirit [*animo*]. For indeed all know how diligently, from the beginning of their institute, the Tertiaries Regular contended to put on the holy spirit of Francis, and accustomed themselves to the same (spirit) in displaying [*traducere*] many works of religion and charity. Wherefore it happened that Our Predecessor Pope Leo X, after having promulgated [*data*] the Constitution Inter cetera, fully approved their Rule. But in fact, as it happens in human affairs, very many things indeed, with the passage of time [*decursa temporum*], which had been decreed by Pope Leo X, either entirely became obsolete [*prorsus obsolevere*] or did not agree entirely [*omnino*] with the certain prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law. For which reason it was necessary that that law of Leo X be accommodated to these Our times and likewise to the more recent decrees of the Church, so that the Tertiaries Regular, and the many other religious families of simple vows which, since they have put on the spirit of Francis in the establishment of the same and use the Franciscan name, have Francis as (their) Father is a certain manner, seizing from this [*inde*] a new increment, may proceed with alacrity or even better [*maiore optima*] to merit it from the Christian and civil republic. And since the task [*munus*] of emending this kind of law, having been placed before the business of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, had resulted in [*confecisset*] (a law) more fully imbued and congruent with the law of the Church today, it submitted the same to be approved by Us *pro officio*; of which Law indeed are these chapters which are here reported:

THE RULE OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF THE SERAPHIC FATHER ST. FRANCIS

CHAPTER I

A SUMMARY OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

1.

The form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, chastity, and poverty.

2.

The Brothers and Sisters, following the example of their Seraphic Father, promise obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope and to the Roman Church. They are bound also to obey their canonically established Superiors in all things that pertain to the general and particular aim of their respective Institute (from the Rules of the I and II Orders, ch. I).

CHAPTER II

ON THE NOVITIATE AND

PROFESSION

3.

The Brothers and Sisters to be received into this Third Order must be faithful Catholics, not suspect of heresy, firm in obedience to the Roman Church, unmarried, free of debts, sound of body, ready of mind, of clean reputation, and at peace with their neighbors. On all these matters they shall be carefully examined before reception by him who has the faculty to receive them. (Rule of the III Order, approved by Leo X, ch. I), with due observance of the sacred canons and the Constitutions of their Institute.

4.

The year of novitiate must, under the discipline of a Master, have as its purpose to train the mind of the novice in the study of the Rule and Constitutions, in pious meditation and the love of prayer, in mastering all that pertains to the vows and the virtues, in suitable exercises calculated to root out the germs of vice, to curb the passions and to acquire the virtues. Lay novices should moreover be carefully instructed in the Christian doctrine, a special conference being given to them at least once a week (can. 565, 1 and 2).

5.

At the end of the time of probation, those who are found fit, should be admitted to profession.

CHAPTER III

ON CHARITY TOWARDS GOD AND NEIGHBOR

6.

The obstacles to sanctity being removed by the three sacred vows, the Brothers and Sisters should strive to fulfill the Divine Law, which depends wholly on the love of God and neighbor. Charity is the soul of all virtues and the bond of perfection. Nothing is better, nothing more effective than charity to mortify the vices, to advance in grace, and to attain the height of all virtues.

A great sign and aid of the love Christ is the frequent, and even daily approach to the Holy Eucharist, which is at once a sacred banquet and a memorial of His passion. It should also be the endeavor of religious souls frequently to visit and devoutly to venerate our Lord Jesus, abiding with us in this admirable mystery; for this is the greatest Sacrament of the Church and an inexhaustible fountain of all blessings.

8.

But the test of the love of God is the practice of charity toward our neighbor. Wherefore charity toward others should appear above all in the true follower of Christ. All his conversation should be guarded, useful and proper; that charity may abound in deed, it must first abound in the heart.

CHAPTER IV

THE DIVINE OFFICE, PRAYER AND FASTING

9.

The Brothers and Sisters should perform the Divine Office worthily, according to their Constitutions. Lay members, however, shall say twelve Our Fathers for Matins and Lauds, and five for each of the remaining canonical hours.

10.

They must attend Mass every day, unless legitimately prevented; and they must see to it that they have a pious priest approved by the Ordinary to preach the word of God to them on certain days and instruct them in penance and virtue (cit. Rule of the III Order, ch. IV).

11.

They should also daily examine themselves before God on what they have done, said and thought, that is examine their conscience; humbly seeking pardon for their faults and commending to God their purpose of amendment.

12.

All should try by frequent meditation on the Passion of Christ to nourish and increase day by day the fervor of their devotion; to follow and imitate their Seraphic Father, so that also they can say with St. Paul, "With Christ I am nailed to the cross." "I live, not now I but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2:19-20)

13.

Besides the fasts and abstinences to which all the faithful are obliged, they should observe those which are prescribed in their respective Constitutions, notably on the vigils of the Immaculate Conception and of their Seraphic Father Francis.

CHAPTER V

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR CONDUCT

14.

Since the Brothers and Sisters of this Fraternity are called the Order of Penance, they should daily carry the cross of mortification, as becomes true penitents.

15.

It behooves them likewise to refrain from all that is choice in apparel as well as in everything else. And according to the salutary advice of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, they should after laying aside the other vain ornaments of this world, wear no other bodily ornament but their religious garb (cit. Rule, ch VI). They are furthermore bound to observe the enclosure according to the sacred Canons and their respective Constitutions.

16.

They must also be sparing of words and conversations, which cannot be indulged in freely without sin. Let the conduct of the Brothers and Sisters be such that they may edify all by word and example, remembering that Our Lord has said: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven" (Mt. 5, 16). Let them approach everybody with the humble and pious greeting of peace, and bear peace with them not only on their lips but also in their heart (cit. Rule, ch. VI).

CHAPTER VI CARE OF THE SICK

17.

If a Brother or Sister falls ill, no one should refuse to offer his services; but it shall be the duty of the Superiors to provide for the proper care of the patient. The others who are not assigned to this duty, should not hesitate to visit the patient and comfort him with consoling words.

Not only to the sick, however, but also to the aged and the otherwise needy should all gladly tender the offices of charity, as becomes the children of the Seraphic Father.

18.

The Superiors especially are bound to admonish the sick Brother or Sister to accept the penance of illness and to be truly reconciled with God, reminding the patient also of the nearness of death, and of the severity of Divine Judgment, as well as of the Divine Mercy (cit. Rule, ch. VI).

19.

When a Brother or Sister has departed this life, the Superiors shall see to it that the obsequies are held with great piety (cit. Rule, ch. IX). The prescribed suffrages should be faithfully performed for every deceased member.

CHAPTER VII

NATURE AND MANNER OF WORK

20.

Those who, inspired by the grace of the Holy Ghost, have dedicated themselves to the service of God, should avoid idleness, and give their efforts faithfully and devoutly to the divine praises or the various works of piety and charity (cf. Rule of the II Order, ch. VII).

21.

The religious should, therefore, comply with their duties for the love of God, and perform what their Superiors require of them, to the best of their ability, devoutly and faithfully, as has been said. Nor should they refuse to perform the humbler tasks imposed on them; on the contrary, following the footsteps of their Seraphic Father, they should perform them more willingly than other tasks.

22.

Let all things be done in charity, and let the holy love of God so animate the sentiments of the religious in doing their work that they may labor only for His honor and glory, and fulfill the admonition of St. Paul the Apostle: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God” (I Cor. 10, 31).

CHAPTER VIII

OBLIGATION OF THE RULE

23.

Each and all the articles contained in the present Rule are counsels to help the wayfarers save their souls the more easily; none of them oblige under sin, either mortal or venial, except where one were otherwise obliged to them by human or Divine Law (cit. Rule, ch. X).

24.

The Brothers and Sisters are, however, obliged to perform the penances imposed on them by their Superiors when required to do so. They are also obliged to keep the three essential vows: Poverty, within the limits of their respective Constitution; Chastity, binding themselves to observe celibacy and to refrain under an additional title, namely, that of the vow itself, from every act whatsoever, be it external or

internal, that is opposed to chastity; and Obedience, assuming the obligation to obey the command of their lawful Superior according to the tenor of their respective Constitutions. (cit. Rule, ch. X)

25.

All, both Brothers and Sisters, should guide and govern their life according to the law of the religious state which they have professed, and above all faithfully observe what pertains to the perfect fulfillment of their vows. They should have the highest regard especially for those points which direct them to follow the charity and poverty of their Seraphic Father, for it becomes the child most of all to reproduce in itself the image and virtues of its parent.

CONCLUSION

BLESSING OF OUR HOLY FATHER ST. FRANCIS

26.

And whosoever will observe these things, may they be filled in Heaven with the blessing of the Most High Heavenly Father, and may they be filled on earth with the blessing of His beloved Son, together with the Most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and all the Virtues of the Heavens and all the Saints. And I, Brother Francis, your little one and servant, as far as I am able, confirm unto you within and without this most holy blessing, which may you enjoy with all the Virtues of the Heavens and all the Saints now and forevermore. Amen. (From the Testament of the Seraphic Father.