



The Principles *Of the* *First Order SSF*

[Alternative Version for Experimental Use 2003-2005]

Historical Note

The Principles are in large measure derived from the documents of the Christa Seva Sangha, a brotherhood established in 1922 in Poona, India.

They were revised in 1930 for the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ, St Ives, Huntingdonshire, England and again in 1937, when the Brotherhood of Saint Francis of Assisi, Hilfield, Dorset, England amalgamated with them to form the Society of Saint Francis.

In 1967, the Order of Saint Francis, at Mount Sinai, New York, United States of America, united with the Society of Saint Francis and *The Principles* were adopted as part of the Rule of the brothers of the First Order. The Community of Saint Francis, a sisterhood founded in 1905 in England, became a part of the Society of Saint Francis in 1964 and adopted *The Principles* as part of its Rule. In 1973, they were recognised as the sisters of the First Order.

The text used is that generally in use prior to 1966, but now with inclusive language and biblical quotations from *The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, © 1989.

The Principles are arranged for daily reading over the month.

AUTHORISATION

This alternative first person plural version of *The Principles* 1996, which also replaces the use of 'must', 'ought' and 'should' by 'will' and also adapts Day 15 to present day practice, was authorised for experimental use by the Joint Meeting of the Ministers of the First Order, 2003 until the First Order Chapters in 2005

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THE OBJECT OF THE ORDER

DAY 1 Jesus the Master speaks, *Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.*

Jn 12.24-26

The Master sets before us in the example of his own sacrifice the secret of fruit-bearing. He surrenders himself to death, and lo! he becomes the source of new life to myriads. Lifted up from the earth in sacrifice, he draws unto him all those multitudes of which the Greeks, whose coming kindled his vision, are the foretaste and prophecy. The life that is cherished perishes: the life that is renounced is eternal.

cf Jn 12.20-21

DAY 2 This law of renunciation and sacrifice, which is the law of the Master's own life and fruit-bearing, he lays also upon his servants, bidding us follow him in the same path. To those who thus follow he promises the ineffable reward of union with himself and acceptance by the Father.

The object, therefore, of the First Order, is to build up a body of men and women who, accepting Christ as their Lord and Master, will seek to follow him in the way of renunciation and sacrifice as an act of witness and for the loving service of his brothers and sisters in the world.

THE THREE CONDITIONS OF LIFE

DAY 3 God has at all times called certain of his children to embrace a state of celibacy for the kingdom of heaven's sake, that we may be free to give ourselves without distraction to his service. Recognising this we set before ourselves the aim of building up a Community which shall be completely dedicated to God alone both in body and spirit. We, in response to God's call, after a sufficient period of probation, voluntarily dedicate ourselves to a life of devotion to our Lord under the conditions of poverty, chastity and obedience.

DAY 4 It is not without reason that these three conditions have ever been embraced by those desiring to live the life of religious detachment; for they stand for the ideal of perfect renunciation of the world, the flesh and the devil, which are the three great enemies of the spiritual life.

POVERTY

DAY 5 The Master willingly embraced a life of poverty in this world. *He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.* He chose a stable for his birthplace and for his upbringing the house of a village carpenter. Even that home he left in early manhood and became a wayfarer, with *nowhere to lay his head.* Us also he calls to poverty. *Whoever serves me must follow me. None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.*

2 Cor 8.9

Matt 8.20

Jn 12.26

Luke 14.33

Therefore, we seek to be poor in spirit. We desire to escape from the love of the world and the things that are in the world and rather, like our patron Saint Francis, to be in love with poverty. We covet only the unsearchable riches of Christ. We recognise, indeed, that while some of our members may be called to a literal following of Saint Francis in a life of actual penury and extreme simplicity, for most of us so high an ideal will not be possible.

DAY 6 We desire to possess nothing which cannot be shared by those around us and such things as will help to satisfy our needs.

We receive no pay and own no personal possessions. We live as a family having all things in common. We receive for our use the simple necessities of life. Yet what we receive we regard not as our own but rather as lent to us for a season. Nor will we, while excluding the snare of the world from our individual lives, allow it to return in the corporate community, where it may work a wider and more fatal destruction. It would be small gain were we to surrender our personal possessions only to live in luxury through the abundance of the common stock. Therefore the community will turn away from excess. The buildings it erects and the style and manner of life which it permits will be the simplest that are consistent with good health and efficient work. If there is money beyond what such simple needs require, let it be spent in works of mercy and service, or else be used for the house of God, which it is right and seemly with proper moderation to adorn, or for the purchase of books which are necessary to the work of study.

DAY 7 In all things let us exhibit the simplicity of true Franciscans who, caring little for the world where we are but strangers and pilgrims, have our hearts set on that spiritual home *where (our) treasure is*.

Matt 6.21

CHASTITY

DAY 8 We are bound, like all Christians, to resist and by God's grace to conquer the temptations of the flesh and to live lives of purity and self-control. We will ever strive through faithful self-discipline and prayer to be chaste both in mind and body.

1 Cor 7.35

Furthermore, that we may *promote unhindered devotion to the Lord*, and give ourselves wholly to his work, being wedded only to Christ, our true spouse, we embrace of our own will the vocation of celibacy.

We do this not because we believe that the unmarried state is in itself higher than the married, but because we believe that for us the unmarried state is that in which God wishes us to serve him. Therefore we look to him with confidence to give

us the grace needed for this life which, if we should undertake it contrary to his will, would be to us a state of greater rather than less distraction than that of marriage.

DAY 9 In thus accepting the state of chastity, we will ever be on our guard against the temptation to self-centeredness, coldness or a lack of sympathy with the interests of others. Our espousal to Christ will not weaken or mar our human affections. Rather will our union with him enable us to love more richly with his love all with whom we are brought in contact.

OBEDIENCE

DAY 10 The Master, who, coming into the world not to do his own will but the will of him that sent him, *became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross*, says to those who follow him, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*. We desire, therefore, to surrender our wills to the will of God, in the spirit of perfect obedience, that being delivered from self-will and pride we may find true freedom and peace and be ready instruments which he can use for his purposes.

Phil 2.8

Matt 11.29

DAY 11 Further, by voluntarily accepting the Rule as binding upon us, we pledge ourselves to abide by this Rule and to obey the decisions of the Chapter, by which the common mind of the community is expressed and interpreted. It is the work of the Ministers to administer the Rule and to see that the decisions of the Chapter are observed. Their directions, therefore, unless they order something contrary to the Rule or in itself sinful, will be promptly and cheerfully carried out. In their absence obedience is due to their Assistants. Brothers or sisters put in charge of a department of work are also to be obeyed in that department. But none of us may on any authority act contrary to the guiding of our own consciences. The Ministers are, like the other members, under obedience to the Rule and Chapter and are bound to exercise their authority, not in a spirit of partiality or pride or selfishness, but with equal consideration and love and with humble prayer for the divine wisdom.

DAY 12 The obligation of particular obedience within the

community is gladly accepted by the members, not as something different from the obedience which we owe to God, but rather as part of that obedience. We are confident that, if God has called us to a life under Rule, we will, in fulfilling the obligations of that life, be most truly obeying him and that whatever limitations or humiliations our obedience may involve will, if cheerfully accepted, be a means by which pride is vanquished and a more perfect consecration achieved. When working away from the community, we will put ourselves under the discipline of the parish or society in which we are staying.

THE THREE WAYS OF SERVICE

DAY 13 We seek to serve our Master by the life of devotion, by sacred study and by works. In the life of the community as a whole all these three ways will find full and balanced expression. It is not, indeed to be expected that we will all devote ourselves equally to each of these three tasks. It is right that our several employments should vary according to the particular ability which God has given us, as that some of us will, with the approval of our Minister, give ourselves in large measure to prayer and contemplation, others of us to the pursuit of learning and the writing of books and others of us mainly to the ministry of active service. Yet will room be found in the lives of us all for at least some measure of each of these three employments.

PRAYER

DAY 14 Praise and prayer constitute the atmosphere in which we will strive to live. We will endeavour to maintain a constant recollection of the presence of God and of the unseen world. An ever-deepening devotion to Christ is the hidden source of all our strength and joy. He is for us the One all-lovely and adorable, God incarnate, crucified and risen, whose love is the inspiration of service and the reward of sacrifice.

DAY 15 That our union with this Lord and Master may be ever renewed and strengthened, we unite in offering daily before God the memorial of his death and passion and feeding often upon his sacrificial life. The Holy Eucharist is the centre round which our life revolves. It is above all the heart of our prayer life.

The time of Morning Prayer is the preparation of mind and spirit for entrance within the sanctuary. The time of meditation is the opportunity for quiet tryst with him who, through the sacrament, is present inwardly, and for feeding on him in the heart by faith with thanksgiving.

Services of intercession and thanksgiving are times when we who have been thus joined with God in communion and meditation may plead with him in sure reliance on his promise: *if you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*, and also thank him for continuous experience of its fulfilment.

John 15.7

Evening Prayer is the renewed offering of praise and prayer to the same Lord at the end of the day's work. Night Prayer is the Master's blessing of protection and peace, and, in its closing silence the hearts of all are together steeped afresh in the peace of that inward uncreated light which, as the shadows of life deepen, abides unchanged.

DAY 16 We will strive ever to remember how essential is the work of prayer to every department of our lives. Without the constant renewal of divine grace the spirit flags, the will is weakened, the conscience grows dull, the mind loses its freshness and even the bodily vigour is impaired. We will, therefore, always be on our guard against the constant temptation to let other work encroach upon the hours of prayer, remembering that if we seek in this way to increase the bulk of our activity it can only be at the cost of its true quality

and value.

We will be regular and punctual in our attendance at corporate prayer. We will also bear in mind that it is of little value to be present at the common devotions in a formal or careless spirit. We will seek to make of each office an offering of true devotion from the heart. The reverent, ordered and earnest offering of the corporate worship is the very heart of our community life.

DAY 17 So too we will guard with jealous watchfulness the times of private prayer. We will remember that corporate worship is not a substitute for the quiet communion of the individual soul with God, and we will strive to go forward to ever fuller enjoyment of such communion, till we are living in so constant a remembrance of God's presence that we do indeed *pray without ceasing*.

1 Thess 5.17

DAY 18 It is to assist such an attitude and practice of recollection that the rules of silence have been laid down and we will welcome and use such silence, regarding it not as the imposition of an artificial restraint, nor merely as an external rule to be observed by refraining from speech, but as the opportunity for growing in the sense of the divine presence. We will welcome in a like spirit the retreats and days of quiet which the community's Rule provides as times when, in the withdrawal from all external distractions, the life of the spirit may be renewed and deepened.

In these and suchlike ways, We will seek to keep ever fresh and living our devotion to Christ our Lord; and when through human frailty we fail in our high endeavour, we will yet return again to Christ with humble contrition and earnest purpose of amendment; and we will hold in special esteem that sacrament of penance and absolution whereby we are cleansed from sin and renewed in the life of grace.

STUDY

DAY 19 The true knowledge is the knowledge of God. The highest wisdom is that holy wisdom whereby the soul is made one with God. The first place, therefore, in our work of study will always be given to the study and practice of the way of the soul's ascent to God and the devotional study of the scriptures as one of the chief aids to that end. We will study

also the teaching of the Christian saints concerning the spiritual life.

It is the hope of the community that some of its houses may be not only homes of prayer but also homes of learning. It is out of this recognition of the value and importance of study that some of the hours each day are set apart for this purpose under the Rule; and it is mainly for the uninterrupted securing of these hours that the rule of the lesser silence is laid down whenever possible.

WORKS

DAY 20 Jesus the Master took on himself the form of a servant. *He came not to be served but to serve. He went about doing good; curing all who were sick; bringing good news to the poor; binding up the broken-hearted.* Those of us who would claim to be his servants and follow him will be diligent in ministry to others.

Mark 10.45

Acts 10.38

Matt 8.16

Luke 4.18

Isa 61.1

The active works by which we seek to serve our Master begin within the house and garden. The sweeping, dusting and other menial offices, as well as certain forms of manual work, are apportioned among us so that we all may contribute our share to the work of the household and the cost of our own living. All of us will be capable of engaging in some form of manual work. All of us will consider the interests of the community in its work for God and study strict economy. We will do our own work as far as possible. Saint Francis said that *the idle (member) has no place in the community*.

DAY 21 Outside the special works of service to the community itself there are many opportunities of ministry, particularly to the uncared-for, the sick, the suffering and needy. The community sets before it, as the special programme of service which it would like to be able to carry out, those acts of mercy the doing of which even to the humblest the Master declares that he will accept as done unto himself. By helping in the relief of poverty we may give him food and drink. By hospitality to strangers we may take him in. By relieving those homeless and naked we may clothe him. By caring for the sick we may relieve him. By visiting the prisoners we may cheer him.

cf Matt 25.35-36

We do not, indeed, expect ever to have at our disposal many funds for the administration of charitable relief, but we will

gladly lend ourselves in the work of such relief and co-operate with others who are doing it. In all such work, we will seek to serve all irrespective of creed, offering our services not as a bribe but as a reflection of the love of Christ himself.

DAY 22 But chiefest of all forms of service that we can offer will ever be the effort to show others in his beauty and power the Christ who is the inspiration and joy of our lives. We will seek to do this, not in a spirit of aggression, nor with contempt for the beliefs of others, but rather because, knowing in our own experience the power of Christ to save from sin and to give newness of life, we must needs seek to share our own supreme treasure. Out of the fullness, therefore, of devoted love we would seek to give our beloved Master to all. We will remember that, in this task of showing Christ to others the witness of life is more eloquent than that of words. Therefore, we will seek rather to be living lives through which Christ can manifest himself than to preach much in public. Nevertheless, there will be some amongst us called more particularly to the ministry of the Word, and all of us will be ready at all times to give an answer for the faith that is in us, and particularly to guide all who are sincerely seeking after truth. We will also be ready by instruction and prayer and spiritual direction to strengthen the faith of Christians and lead them forward in the spiritual life.

cf 1 Pet 3.15

DAY 23 We will be glad at all times to relieve those who come to us for help or counsel. We will never give the impression that we have no time for such ministry. Rather will we be ready to lay aside all other work, including even the work of prayer, where such service is immediately required, confident that such a negligence will surely be well-pleasing to the Servant of all.

THE THREE NOTES OF THE ORDER

DAY 24 The three notes which will ever in special degree mark our lives are humility, love and joy. If these prevail within us the object of the community will be fulfilled and its work fruitful. If they are lacking, it will be unprofitable and barren.

HUMILITY

DAY 25 We will strive to keep ever before us the example of him who *emptied himself, taking the form of a slave* and who, on the last night of his life, humbly in the guise of a slave washed his disciples' feet. We will ever seek after his pattern to *clothe ourselves with humility in our dealings with one another*.

Phil 2.7

cf Jn 13.4-5

1 Pet 5.5

Humility is the recognition of the truth about God and ourselves, the recognition of our own insufficiency and dependence, seeing that we have nothing which we have not received. It is the mother of all Christian virtues. As Saint Bernard of Clairvaux has said, *No spiritual house can stand for a moment save on the foundation of humility*. It is the first condition of a happy life within the family. Thus we will remember that those of us who are always confident that we are right and eager to impose our opinion on others, will be unhappy as chafing under the discipline of subordination and correction and will also make the life of the family unhappy by marring that distinctive atmosphere of harmony and order which depends on each of us doing our allotted task with cheerfulness. The glad acceptance of the rule of obedience, and the loyal fulfilment of orders that are distasteful or difficult, will be one sure means of growing in this grace.

DAY 26 We will also refrain from all contemptuous thoughts one of another, and not seeking for pre-eminence will *regard others as better than ourselves*. The faults that we see in others will be subjects for prayer rather than criticism and we will be more diligent to *take the log out of our own eye than the speck out of our neighbour's eye*. We will be ready not only gladly, *when invited, to go and sit down at the lowest place*, but rather of our own accord take it. Nevertheless, if entrusted with a work of which we feel incapable or unworthy, we will not shrink from accepting it on the plea of humility, but

Phil 2.3

Matt 7.5

Luke 14.10

2 Cor 12.9 attempt it confidently through *the power (of Christ) made perfect in weakness.*

In our relations also with those outside, we will strive to show our Master's humility. We will welcome gladly all opportunities of humble service that come to us and never desire pre-eminence or praise. In particular we will resist the temptation to consider ourselves superior to others because dedicated to a life of religion, realising how much greater often are the sacrifices and difficulties of those engaged in the ordinary professions of life and how much more nobly they face them.

LOVE

John 13.35 **DAY 27** The Master says, *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* Love is thus the distinguishing feature of all true disciples of Christ. It will be specially an outstanding note in our lives, as we seek to be specially consecrated to Christ as his servants. *God is love* and, for those whose lives are *hidden with Christ in God*, love will be the very atmosphere which surrounds all that they do.

1 John 4.8
Col 3.3 This love we will show towards all to whom we are united by natural ties of relationship or friendship. We will love them not less but more as our love for Christ grows deeper.

We will love also with a special affection those to whom we are united within the family of the community, praying for each individually and seeking to grow in love for each. We will be on our guard against all that injures this love: the bitter thought, the hasty retort, the angry gesture; and never fail to ask forgiveness of any against whom we have sinned. We will seek to love equally with others those with whom we have least natural affinity. For this love of one another is not simply the welling up of natural affection but a supernatural love which God gives us through our common union with Christ. As such it bears testimony to its divine origin. Our Lord intended the unity of those who believe in him to be a special witness to the world of his divine mission. The community will show the spectacle of a Christian family whose members, even though we be of varied race and education and character, are bound into a living fellowship by this supernatural love. Lastly, in all our relationships with those, whether Christians or not, with whom our work brings us in contact we will seek

to show forth this same supernatural Christ-like love; and, remembering that love is measured by sacrifice, we will seek gladly to spend whatever gifts we may possess of body, mind and spirit in the service of those to whom God calls us to minister.

JOY

Phil 4.4 **DAY 28** *Rejoicing in the Lord always*, we will show forth in our lives the grace and beauty of divine joy. We will remember that we follow the Son of Man, *who came eating and drinking*, who loved the birds and the flowers, who blessed little children, who was a *friend of tax collectors and sinners*, who sat at the tables alike of the rich and the poor. We will, therefore, put aside all gloom and moroseness, all undue aloofness from the common interests of people and delight in laughter and good fellowship. We will rejoice in God's world and all its beauty and its living creatures, *calling (nothing) profane or unclean*. We will mingle freely with all kinds of people, seeking to banish sorrow and to bring good cheer into other lives. We will carry with us an inner secret of happiness and peace which all will feel, if they may not know its source.

Acts 10.28 **DAY 29** This joy, likewise, is a divine gift and comes only from union with God in Christ. As such it can abide even in days of darkness and difficulty, giving cheerful courage in the face of disappointment and an inward serenity and confidence in sickness and suffering. Those who possess it can be *content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever they are weak, then they are strong.*

2 Cor 12.10

DAY 30 These three notes of humility, love and joy, which should mark our lives are all supernatural graces which can be won only from the divine bounty. They can never be attained through our own unaided exertions. They are miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. But it is the purpose of Christ our Master to work miracles through his servants; and, if we will but be emptied of self and utterly surrendered to him, we will become chosen vessels of his Spirit and effective instruments of his mighty working, *who is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.*

Eph 3.20

