

**A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE
'PRIMITIVE' RULE OF SAINT FRANCIS
(1209/1210)
from the Regula non Bullata (1221)**

***The First Rule (The Primitive Rule)*, the simple form of life which Francis brought to Pope Innocent III for his approval in 1209 or 1210, no longer exists. Any such text is a reconstruction, but it is believed that *The Earlier Rule [Regula non Bullata, (RnB)]* of 1221 was developed from this First Rule.**

This reconstruction is by John R. H. Moorman, whose rationale is set out in his book *The Sources for the Life of St Francis of Assisi*, Manchester University Press, 1940, pp. 38-54.

***The Primitive Rule* is regarded as one of the source documents of the First Order and has been included in *The Manual of the First Order of the Society of Saint Francis* since its first edition. It has had a profound influence upon the Society's understanding of the authentic vision and witness of Saint Francis.**

- 1** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Brother Francis - and whoever is head of this religion - promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his successors.¹
- 2** The rule and life of these brothers is this, namely: "to live in obedience, in chastity and without anything of their own" and to follow the teaching and the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ, who says: *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.* And: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.* Again: *Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.* And, *Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.*²
- 3** If anyone, wishing by divine inspiration to accept this life, comes to our brothers, let him be received by them with kindness. Let him sell all his belongings and be conscientious in giving

everything to the poor.

Let all the brothers wear poor clothes and, with the blessing of God, they can patch them with sackcloth and other pieces, for our Lord says in the Gospel: *Those who put on fine clothing and live in*

Lk 7.25

*luxury are in royal palaces.*³

In accordance with the Gospel, it may be lawful for them to eat of all the food that is placed before them.⁴

Lk 10.8

4 Let all the brothers not have power or control especially among themselves; for, as the Lord says in the Gospel. *The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among the brothers. Whoever wishes to be great among them must be their minister and servant.*¹² *Whoever wishes to be first among them must be their slave.*⁵

Mt 20.26

Mt 20.27

Mt 20.27

Mt 23.8

Let no one be called 'prior', but let everyone in general be called a lesser brother. Let one wash the feet of the other.⁶

5 None of the brothers may be treasurers or overseers in any of those places where they are staying to serve or work among others. They may not be in charge in the houses in which they serve nor accept any office which would generate scandal or *forfeit their life*; let them, instead, be the lesser ones and be subject to all in the same house.

Mk 8.36

Lk 22.26

Let the brothers who know how to work do so and exercise that trade they have learned, provided it is not contrary to the good of their souls and can be performed honestly.

And for their work they can receive whatever is necessary excepting money. And when it is necessary, they may seek alms like other poor people.⁷

6 Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and let them remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the Apostle says:

1Tm 6.8

If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

They must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.

When it is necessary, they may go for alms. Let them not be ashamed.⁸

7 Let all the brothers be careful not to slander or engage in disputes; let them strive, instead, to keep silence whenever God gives them the grace. Let them not quarrel among themselves or with others but strive to respond humbly, saying: *We are worthless slaves.*

- Lk 17.10* Let them love one another, as the Lord says: *This is my*
Jn 15.12 *commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*⁹
- 8** When the brothers go through the world, let them *take nothing for the journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money. Whatever house they enter, let them first say, 'Peace to this house!' They may eat and drink whatever is provided for as long as they remain in that house.*
Lk 9.3
Lk 10.5
Mt 5.39 Let them *not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes them on the*
Mt 5.40 *right cheek, let them turn the other also. If anyone wants to take their coat, let them give their cloak as well. Let them give to everyone who begs from them; and if anyone takes away their goods, let them not ask for them again.*¹⁰
- 9** Wherever they may be, let all my brothers remember that they have given themselves and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. For love of him they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies, both visible and invisible, because the Lord says: *Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it in eternal life.*¹¹
Lk 9.24
- 10** Let all the brothers be, live and speak as Catholics.
If someone has strayed in word or in deed from catholic faith and life and has not amended his ways, let him be expelled from our brotherhood.
Let us consider all clerics and religious as our masters in all that pertains to the salvation of our soul and does not deviate from our religion, and let us respect their order, office and administration in the Lord.¹²
- 11** Whenever it pleases them, all my brothers can announce this or similar exhortation and praise among all peoples with the blessing of God:
Fear and honour,
praise and bless,
1Thess 5.18 *give thanks* and adore
the Lord God Almighty in Trinity and in Unity,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
the Creator of all.
Mt 3.2 Do penance,
performing worthy fruits of penance
because we shall soon die.
Lk 6.38 *Give, and it will be given to you.*
Lk 6.37b *Forgive and you will be forgiven.*

*If you do not forgive others,
neither will the Lord forgive your trespasses.*
Confess your sins.
Blessèd are they who die in penance,
for they shall be in the kingdom of heaven.
Woe to those who do not die in penance,
for they shall be *children of the devil*
whose works they do
and they shall go *into the eternal fire*.
Beware of and abstain from every evil
and persevere in good till the end.¹³

12 *In the name of the Lord Jesus!*
I ask all my brothers to learn and frequently call to mind the tenor
and sense of what has been written in this life for the salvation of
our souls. I beg God, who is All-powerful, Three and One, to bless
all who teach, learn, retain, remember and put into practice these
things, each time they repeat and do what has been written there
for the salvation of our soul, and, kissing their feet, I implore
everyone to love, keep and treasure them greatly.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it
was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.¹⁴

¹ RnB Prologue v.1,3
² RnB Chapter 1 v.1-5
³ RnB Chapter 2 v.1,4,14
⁴ RnB Chapter 3 v.13
⁵ RnB Chapter 5 v.9-12
⁶ RnB Chapter 6 v.3-4
⁷ RnB Chapter 7 v.1-3,7-8
⁸ RnB Chapter 9 v.1-4
⁹ RnB Chapter 11 v.1-3,5
¹⁰ RnB Chapter 14 v.1-6
¹¹ RnB Chapter 16 v.10-11
¹² RnB Chapter 19 v.1-3
¹³ RnB Chapter 21 v.1-9
¹⁴ RnB Chapter 24 v.1-3,5