

The Genesis of “The Rule of Ten Virtues of the B.V.M.”

Historical Brief

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The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Most B.V.M., or the Rule of the Ten Pleasures of the Most B.V.M. (Regula Decem Beneplacitorum Beatissimae Virginis Mariae), is one of the few religious rules approved in spite of the decree issued by the IV Lateran Council in 1215. This decree forbade the approval of the newly founded religious orders on any other than one of the previously approved rules.

The *Rule* was composed by a Franciscan, Fr. Gilbert Nicolas, better known as Gabriel Maria, the name he received from Pope Leo X by his brief (*breve*) of June 11, 1517. By this act, the Pope wished to emphasize the special devotion that Fr. Gilbert had for the mystery of the Annunciation of the B.V.M. Gilbert Nicolas, who also appears in history under the name of Johannes Molezius, was born around 1460 in Riom in the Province of Auvergne, France. Influenced as a 16-year old youth by a sermon by a certain Franciscan preacher on the topic of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M., he discerned his vocation to the religious life. In 1475, in Lafond, near La Rochelle, he joined the Franciscans of the Strict Observance. After completing his novitiate and pronouncing his religious vows, he was sent to the monastery in Amboise in order to continue his education that concluded at his priestly ordination and taking the post of a lector of theology. Father Gilbert fulfilled various functions in the Franciscan Order: he was the guardian of the Amboise monastery (1498-1502), the superior of the Province in Aquitaine, and thrice the general commissary of the Order. According to his biographers, Fr. Gilbert was distinguished for his great knowledge, however, out of humility, he never wanted to accept the Doctoral degree and rejected frequent proposals of being nominated a bishop. Within his Order he was known for his great holiness of life and fostering Franciscan poverty in a special way in the Order's legislation and life. He was also noted for his particular devotion to the Eucharist and the Passion of the Lord. Both the Franciscan and Annunciade traditions gave him the title of the Blessed. He died on August 27, 1532, at the convent of the Annunciade Sisters in Rodez (no longer existing) and he is buried there.

Joan de Valois and the Order of the Annunciades

From 1498, Bl. Gabriel Maria was the confessor and spiritual director of Joan de Valois, Queen of France and then the Duchess of Berry. Joan was born on April 23, 1464, at the castle Nogent-le-Roi, as the second daughter of King of France Louis XI and Queen Charlotte de Savoy. The newborn princess was badly received by her father who wished for a son. At the age of two months, according to the custom of the day, she was betrothed to her father's cousin Louis, the two-year old Duke of Orléan. She married him in 1476, at the castle of Montrichard, thus receiving the title of the Duchess of Orléan. In April of 1498, after the death of Charles VIII, Joan's brother, her husband succeeded to the French throne as Louis XII and Joan became the Queen. Shortly afterwards, because of political reasons, her husband asked the Apostolic See for an annulment of their marriage, which was granted.

After the annulment of marriage and the loss of queenship in 1498, Joan's former husband granted her the title of the Duchess of Berry. She never held any grudge against him, but instead she prayed for him until the end of her life. Free from her spousal duties, she gave herself to prayer and works of mercy. In her childhood Joan had a vision, in which the Blessed Mother allegedly announced to her that she would found a religious community in her honor. With the help from her spiritual director, Blessed Gabriel Maria, the Duchess of Berry and 11 other women started a contemplative order of the Virgin Mary. It was also known as the Order of the Ten Virtues or Ten Pleasures of the Mother of God, the Order of Annunciation of the B.V.M. or the Annunciade. The Blessed Virgin Mary was to be the model for the nuns and the virtues that she practiced, that are mentioned in the Gospels, became their rule of life. Thus *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* came into being, because the Scriptures directly speak of those virtues. Each of the ten chapters of the Rule refers to a concrete virtue of the Blessed Mother noted by the Gospels. Under Joan's direction Fr. Gabriel Maria prepared in 1501 the text of the *Rule*. Along with professing poverty, chastity, and obedience, the Annunciades also vowed to remain cloistered.

The approval of the *Rule* was granted when many adversities have been overcome. First, the Holy See was petitioned through the mediation of Fr. Wilhelm Morin, OFM, for approval of the newly created religious institute. Pope Alexander VI received the emissary very kindly and spoke of the piety and devotion of the daughter of Louis XI. However, the cardinals, assembled by the Holy Father for this occasion, at once brought forth the proscription of the IV Lateran Council concerning the installation of new orders and unanimously denied the approval of the submitted *Rule*. Some time later, Fr. Gabriel Maria personally traveled to Rome, but this time again the cardinals in attendance spoke against its

approval. As tradition would have it, an intervention from heaven eventually prevailed over their decision in this matter. That very same night, the chancellor of the Apostolic Dataria (one of the main pontifical offices, no longer in existence), Cardinal J. B. Ferraro, Bishop of Modena, who had great influence within the College of Cardinals, allegedly had a dream, in which the Lord God reproached him for refusing to approve the new Order. In this dream the cardinal saw St. Lawrence the Deacon and St. Francis of Assisi extending their arms over Gabriel Maria in a gesture of blessing. Their countenance seemed to say to the cardinal that this humble religious was an instrument of God. Then, still in his dream, the cardinal saw with new eyes the grandeur of Mary in her mystery of the Annunciation, which made him feel obliged to found a new Order dedicated to the honor of this mystery. He awoke with a very strong impression from this dream, reproving himself for resisting the Divine cause. After a prayer and a fresh consideration of the matter, he called Fr. Gabriel to himself and recounted his nighttime experience. He then went to the Pope, requesting his approval for the new Order. And indeed, he equally convinced Alexander VI and the cardinals.

On February 12, 1502, Pope Alexander VI ratified the new *Rule* and the new order. After giving the approval, the Pope nominated Fr. Gabriel Maria the General Visitor of the new community. On the Feast of Pentecost in 1504, Mother Joan made her profession upon the *Rule* of her Order. First novices of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary made their vows on November 9th of the same year. The Order of the Annunciade was ratified shortly before the death of its Foundress, which occurred on February 4, 1505. Death interrupted her efforts of founding a male branch of her Order. Although she made her religious vows, the Duchess of Berry resided in her castle at Bourges until her death. She was buried in a religious habit and a ducal crown on her head. Even though Joan was accorded a cult of reverence right after her death and was considered a saint, yet it was only in 1742 that Pope Benedict XIV celebrated her formal beatification, and she was proclaimed a saint by Pope Pius XII in 1950. Joan's earthly remains were desecrated and burned by Protestants on May 22, 1562.

On May 23, 1515, already after the death of Joan de Valois, Pope Leo X gave his approval to the second edition of the *Rule*. Just like its first edition, this *Rule* was also written by Fr. Gilbert Nicolas who did so with the goal of uniting the Order of the Annunciade with the Conceptionist Sisters – a contemplative community founded in Spain, in 1484, by St. Beatriz da Silva e Menezes (1424-1490). However, the Conceptionists did not agree to the union, in view of that Fr. Gilbert prepared a third edition of the *Rule* which was approved on July 25, 1517 by Pope Leo X. In 1528 and 1529, the Friars Minor of the Observance added supplements and statutes to *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Most B.V.M.*

Pope Julius II, and also popes Innocent XII and Innocent XIII, confirmed *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Most B.V.M.* Along with giving a certification to the *Rule*, Julius II, and the above-said Leo X, granted indulgences to the *Chaplet of the Ten Evangelical Virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, contained in that *Rule*. The Chaplet which was composed by St. Joan is an obligatory spiritual exercise for those who retain the *Rule*. In following of the instruction from the Apostolic See, *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the Most B.V.M.* was adopted for a male order, which was in agreement with the wish of the Foundress, as mentioned before. Throughout the centuries, the popes granted numerous spiritual graces, privileges, and indulgences to the Order of the Annunciade.

The Marians and “The Rule of the Ten Virtues”

The first legislator of the Congregation of Marian Fathers was its founder, Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński. Planning a new religious family, he prepared in 1671-1673 the first Marian laws entitled *The Rule of Life (Norma vitæ)*. On October 24, 1673, while visiting the Marian hermitage in Puszcza Korabiewska, Bishop Stanislaus Jacek Świącicki, Archdeacon and Warsaw Official, gave his approval to this *Rule* to be used by Fr. Stanislaus and his first companions.

In 1690, Saint Stanislaus, accompanied by Sub-deacon Joachim of St. Ann Kozłowski, went to Rome seeking the ratification of his Order upon the Constitutions of his authorship called *Norma vitæ*. The death of Pope Alexander VIII (1689-1891), and Fr. Papczyński's personal health problems forced the Marian Founder to return to Poland without attaining his goal. In 1691-1694, he made attempts to get for the Marians the *Rule* of the Conceptionist Sisters. His efforts failed because the *Rule* of the Spanish nuns was not adopted for a male order. At that point the Blessed Marian Founder went back to his original plans. In the summer of 1698 he convoked a General Chapter, which elected Fr. Joachim of St. Ann Kozłowski the Procurator General and decided to send him to Rome for seeking anew the ratification of the Marian Order upon the *Norma vitæ*. In the fall of the same year, Fr. Joachim went on a trip to the Eternal City, accompanied by Br. Anthony Ciński.

After the Marian petition was twice rejected by the Congregation for Bishops and Religious (certainly due to the decree issued by the IV Lateran Council in 1215, forbidding the approbation of newly created religious communities on a *Rule* other than one already approved), the Marian Procurator General was forced to seek a different road. There was a chance to have the Marian Order ratified upon an existing

Rule. Following the advice from Fr. Francis Diaz, OFM, Fr. Joachim decided to take for the Marian Order *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*. A permission was needed from the Superior General of the Friars Minor, which office was fulfilled then by Fr. Matthew of St. Stephan, OFM. Thus, Fr. Kozłowski petitioned him for granting the *Rule* and for incorporating the Marians into his Order. On September 21, 1699, the Franciscans' Superior issued the requested document at the monastery of *Ara Coeli*. Then, it was necessary to obtain the confirmation of all privileges granted to the Marians by Friars Minor. For this purpose, Fr. Kozłowski petitioned Pope Innocent XII (probably in October of 1699) and received in response a brief *Exponi nobis nuper* of November 24, 1699. This was a letter to the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland informing him that the Marians were granted the right to make solemn vows on *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* in fraternal unity with Seraphic Order. The document also mentioned graces, indulgences, and privileges obtained by the Marians, which the Apostolic See attached to *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*, including the privilege of exemption.

Saint Stanislaus responded positively but cautiously to the new yet unknown to him *Rule*. However, after getting himself acquainted with its contents, he became convinced that the new *Rule* did not contradict in any way his *Norma vitae* and was in perfect harmony with the spirit of his goals, especially the devotion to the Blessed Mother and imitation of her life and virtues. As a result, the Marian Founder recognized *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the B.V.M.* as the will of God and the Church in regard to his religious community and the condition of its existence.

In the General Chapter celebrated on April 14, 1701, where Fr. Stanislaus presided, in accordance with the law, the Marians expressed their agreement to accept *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the B.V.M.* and to make their solemn vows on this *Rule*. The Blessed Marian Founder was the first to make his religious profession on *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*. This act took place on June 6, 1701, in Warsaw, and Francis Pignatelli, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Polish Republic, received Fr. Stanislaus' vows. Subsequently, on July 5, 1701, in the Church of the Lord's Cenacle at Góra Kalwaria, other members of the community made their profession of vows on the hands of the Blessed Founder. This way the Marians became an Order of pontifical right with rights and privileges reserved for clerical orders with solemn vows. *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* had inscribed itself permanently into the history of the Marian Order and the Catholic Church in Poland.

Following the example of their Founder, successive generations of the Marians regarded with great reverence *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*, which, being present in the Marians legislation for centuries, was forming the Marian spirit of the Order. Probably, the person who understood it most profoundly and best expressed its spiritual significance, was the Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszyński (1700-1755), the Superior General of the Marians in 1737-41 and 1747-1750. He translated from Latin into Polish and published in Warsaw in 1749 *The Morning Star*, a book by a Spanish Jesuit, Fr. Francis Arias. The contents of this book, which its translator divided into ten parts, represent a practical commentary to *The Rule of the Ten Virtues*. In his introduction to the book, Fr. Wyszyński informed the Polish reader of the history of the *Rule* and the Orders of the Annunciade and the Marians. He also testified to the imitation of Mary's life and virtues as of an essential characteristic of Marian piety. He fervently encouraged all to recite the *Chaplet of the 10 Virtues*.

Until the time of the renewal and reform of the Marian Order, *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* was translated into Polish and Portuguese and underwent seven printings (Varsavií 1723, Warszawa 1750, twice Lisboa 1757, Lisboa 1759, Romí 1778, Wilno 1791). As a result of the endeavors of Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, on November 28, 1910, Pope Pius X ratified the renewed and reformed Congregation of Marian Fathers along with its new Constitutions. Subsequently the solemn vows were replaced with simple ones, thus *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* ceased to be obligatory for the Marians. However, the *Rule* did not pass into history, but continues to shape Marian spirituality in the renewed Congregation as a valuable spiritual heritage. In the past 100 years, many General Superiors of the reformed community gave witness to this fact. After the reform of 1909, the *Rule* was reprinted at least nine times in Portuguese, English, and Polish in addition to being added to the Constitutions (Romí 1930, Kraków 1933, Stockbridge 1955, Stockbridge 1980, Lublin 1984, Warszawa 1986, Curitiba 1988, Warszawa 2001, Rome-Stockbridge 2006).

For over three centuries *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* has been, and still is, for the Marians a matter for reflection and pondering, while the *Chaplet of the Ten Evangelical Virtues of the B.V.M.* contained therein, is a favored Marian prayer in the community. Also, the *Rule* had a significant influence on the interior decorations of Marian churches. For example, a ten-ray star with Mary's 10 virtues written in Polish on each ray, is painted on the ceiling of the main nave in the 1776 historic church in Goźlin – one of the Congregation's first posts. Another example is rendered in the Puszcza Mariańska parish church built in 2000, whose main altar contains an Italian-made icon of the B.V.M., that John Paul II personally blessed in 1996. The said icon displays the image of Mary Immaculate surrounded with the Latin names of the Mary's 10 virtues described by the *Rule*.

The spirit of *The Rule of the Ten Virtues* is also present in the Congregation's modern-day Constitutions. In paragraph 16 we read: "The titular Patroness of the Congregation is the Immaculately Conceived Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, to whom they shall show special veneration, filial love and devotion, as to their Queen and Lady, very powerful Helper and most loving Mother. Let them go through her to Jesus, invoke her frequently in suppliant entreaty, run to her with the greatest confidence in all their needs, imitate her virtues with all their strength."

The wish of St. Joan de Valois was to found a male branch of her Order. In a certain sense, this wish came true two centuries after her death, when the Marian Order, as the first and thus far the only one, accepted *The Rule of the Ten Virtues of the B.V.M.* adopted for male religious.

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