

The Rule of Ten Virtues of The Blessed Virgin Mary in the history and spirituality of the Congregation of Marian Fathers

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On November 24, 1699, with his bull *Exponi nobis nuper*, Pope Innocent XII ratified the Order of Marians of the Immaculate Conception of the MBVM recently founded in the Republic of the Two Nations. Along with papal approval, the Marians received the right to profess perpetual religious vows on the "*Regula Decem Beneplacitorum Beatissimae Virginis Mariae*" written by Blessed Gilbert Maria upon the request of Saint Jeanne, Foundress of the Order of Sisters of the Annunciation. "The Rule" was approved by Pope Alexander VI and was then adapted for male religious Orders. How did this event come about and what were its consequences for the newly founded male religious community?

Acceptance of "The Rule"

When, on October 24, 1673, Bishop Stanislaw Jacek Swiecicki, the Visitor, on behalf of the Bishop of Poznan, ratified the first Marian monastery with Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski as its superior, the basic rules of the new Order were already laid out. *Norma Vitae*, inspired by the rule of St. Augustine and written by our Founder (probably in the year 1672), was approved by the Visitor. It then had to play the dual role of both rule and constitution (*constitutiones pro regula*). At that time, a legal practice such as this was used in the Church even though the famous decree of Lateran IV of 1215 was well known. This decree demanded that all newly founded Orders accept one of the already existing rules. Basic features of the charism, though still in embryonic form, were already established either as definite formulations of the *Norma Vitae* or as reflections of the attitude of our Founder who was in search of an ever fuller response to the question of what this Order, the founding of which he was called by the Holy Spirit, should be. In the opinion of our Legislator, papal approval for the Order based upon the *Norma Vitae*, had to secure the stability and individuality of the founded community. **[1]**

However, it soon became clear that obtaining approval for the Marian Order, based only on the *Norma Vitae*, would be impossible in spite of St. Stanislaus Papczynski's personal intervention in Rome in 1691. He decided at that time to seek a different rule that would be more in conformity to the character and spirituality of his Institute. The best one seemed to be the rule of the Order of Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the MBVM, founded in Toledo, Spain, by Bl. Beatrix de Silva and ratified by Pope Innocent VIII in 1498 and Pope Julius II in 1511. This Order seemed to be similar to the Marian community not only in its name, but also in the white habits and daily recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Immaculate Conception. However, the Holy See was opposed to this request because the rule was not adapted to a male Order. Because of this, as well as a continuing vacancy in the Holy See and his own failing health, the Founder decided to go back to Poland. A few years later, he tried once again to obtain papal approval for his Order, based only on its own Constitutions, *Norma Vitae*. This time he did not go to Rome. Instead, he sent his representative, Fr. Joachim of St. Anne Kozlowski, who was also the Procurator of the Order. However, the latter did not succeed in completing the Founder's plan because he failed to support the case with precedents. (In spite of Lateran IV's decree, some new Orders did receive approval based only on their constitutions. The Piarist Fathers, who were well known to the Founder, were an example). Trying to understand the spirit and intention of the Holy Founder and follow the advice of Fr. Francis Diaz, OFM, he chose the *Regulam Decem Beneplacitorum BMV*, which, at that time, was also adapted for male congregations. Thus, on November 24, 1699, 26 years after its inception, the Marian Order was placed under the jurisdiction of the Order of Minor Brothers Reformati and obtained papal approval. Among other things, this gave them, permission to pronounce perpetual vows and to consolidate the new religious community, which was a concern of the Founder. **[2]** Prior to gaining approval, the first Marians were very uncertain about the future of their Order and experienced serious growth problems. This was manifested either in the departure of some members from the Order (a result also of the great strictness of the new Order and the lack of perpetual vows) or by the necessity of refusing new endowments.

The Holy Founder took a favorable but cautious attitude toward "The Rule" which was new and unknown to him at the time. He found it greatly resembling spiritually [his own community's charism], particularly regarding the devotion to Our Lady and the imitation of her life and virtues. He was deeply devoted to her. In the most difficult moments of his life, he entrusted himself to her and fled to her motherly patronage. As he tells us in *Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*, the congregation that he was called to establish (the vision of which "was imprinted in his soul by God"), had to be dedicated primarily to promoting the cult of the Immaculate Conception of the MBVM. **[3]** He had solemnly declared this intention previously on December 11, 1670, the same day he left the Piarists at his own request and with a papal dispensation. At that time, he also completed the so-called *Oblatio*, or the act of offering himself to the service of God and Mary Immaculate, promising to solemnly preserve the religious vows in the "Association of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception" which he wished to establish "with God's favor". This congregation was supposed to have a particularly Marian character, which was already

characterized by its very name. Also, in *Oblatio*, The Holy Founder called himself Mary's servant, professed the faith in the privilege of her Immaculate Conception, and made a blood vow, which meant that he promised to promote and defend the honor of Mary Immaculate, even with his life. At the same time, he defined the goal of the future Order whose first assignment was to promote the cult of the Most Blessed Virgin Immaculately Conceived and follow the example of her life. It is worthwhile to mention here that in his *Oblatio* there is no other particular goal given, nor is there mention of other works that the congregation might take up in the future.^[4] That same outlook was present also in *Norma Vitae*, when the Marians' Holy Founder said: "But lest you remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord, to the utmost of your strength you will promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God." In time, however, he responded to the signs of the times and the most urgent needs of the Church in the area of the above-mentioned goal. To the original assignment he added, the need to help "the souls of the faithful departed subjected to expiatory pains - especially the souls of soldiers and those who died of pestilence" and the need to "humbly help pastors in their church work."^[5] We should mention here that in some regions of Poland, in the second half of the 17th century, as much as 50 percent of the population died from the interminable wars and pestilence. Those people were often not prepared for death. Knowing that the medieval *ars bene moriendi* was still very much alive and being possessed of great pastoral sensitivity, St. Stanislaus Papczynski, responded to this problem by striving for a communal remedy. The Marian spirituality of the Founder did not cause any problems even in terms of his belief in the Immaculate Conception. In fact, the piety of the entire population, among which St. Stanislaus Papczynski grew up, was similar. The seventeenth century in Poland was noted for its devotion to Mary and for its strong tendency to bond with her and defend the belief in her Immaculate Conception. This century's characteristic feature bore fruit and was manifested in the famous Marian vows made by King John Casimir in 1655 when he dedicated all the lands over which he ruled to Mary and proclaimed her the Queen of the Republic of Poland.^[6] Having grown up in a particular epoch, the Founder of the Marians was also its child and spokesman. For his newly founded Order, he accepted everything that conformed to the signs of the times and to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However, "*Regula Decem Beneplicitorum BVM*" was unknown to him. It came as a sort of unexpected gift from Heaven. In it, he recognized God's will and the Church's will as a *sine qua non* of the new religious community's existence. That is why he accepted it. At the same time, he wanted to express what was most important for his Order and its particular charism. Therefore, while pronouncing perpetual vows on June 6, 1701, he stated: "I solemnly promise to preserve The Rule of following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary as much as it is not in contradiction with our Institute." On the same day, after the solemn vows of the Founder, other Marians made their professions.^[7] In this way, "*Regula*", that was called either "The Rule of Ten Virtues" or "The Rule of Ten Pleasures of the Blessed Virgin Mary", entered into the history not only of the Marian Order, but of the Church in Poland.

Annals of Regula in the History of the Congregation of Marian Fathers

After the death of Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński, in 1701, the first difficulties in the history of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers began. This was a time of the so-called "Rostkowski Dispersion" which threatened the existence of the community. Luckily, the Order rode the tide of troubles and, as a result, gained new inner strength and another papal approval. On September 3, 1723, Pope Innocent XIII ratified the Statutes, which were based on *Norma Vitae* and which contained a new chapter about the apostolic activity of the Marians. "Statutes of the Marian Fathers of the Order of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of the Immaculate Conception", which had the same characteristics as the community's constitutions and which had previously been approved, were a sort of supplement and detailed explanation of "The Rule of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M." At the beginning of those Statutes, there was a very definite presentation of the goal and character of the religious community: "Above everything else, may each of you ponder everyday attentively and piously the goal of your vocation, namely further promotion of the glory of God and the devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother of God, and follow in any possible way the example of her virtues described in 'The Rule'..." The Constitutions of 1723 contained the command to faithfully introduce the novices to "The Rule of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M." and to remind all of the religious of the obligation of scrupulously following them. In addition, they imposed a range of pious practices for honoring the Immaculate Conception (among others, the recitation of the "Office of the Immaculate Conception" and the renewal of vows on the feast of the Immaculate Conception), and encouraged the promotion of the Marian cult by founding Fraternities of the Immaculate Conception at the Marian churches.^[8] The daily recital of the Chaplet of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M. was also instrumental in molding the Marian spirituality of the religious and encouraging them to promote this form of devotion. We see this particularly in the life and work of the Servant of God, Fr. Casimir Wyszynski (General Superior in 1737-1741 and 1747-1750), during a time when the Congregation had become more stable and was growing quickly. New monasteries rose in Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and in Portugal.

Fr. Wyszynski zealously incorporated the goals of the Marian Order into his life. First and foremost, he strove to promote the cult of the Blessed Mother Immaculately Conceived. In addition, he reedited and translated, from Latin to Polish, the book of Francis Arias entitled "Morning Star" (*Gwiazda zaranna*) [Warsaw, 1749]. This book was published as a sort of commentary to "The Rule of Ten Virtues of the

M.B.V.M". Fr. Wyszynski divided the whole book into ten chapters, each representing one particular pleasure of Mary taken from "The Rule." To this reedited book, he wrote a foreword in which he gave a short history of "The Rule of Ten Virtues" and of the Order of the Annunciation, presented the Marian community, and encouraged the recitation of the Chaplet: "This Order, wanting to give an outside sign of its devotion to the cult of the Immaculate Conception, has accepted white habits under which its members wear a blue-trimmed white scapular with the image of the Immaculate Conception being either embroidered or embossed. At their belt they have attached the decima or ten black rosary beads symbolizing ten evangelical virtues of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To all who will recite this chaplet before the image of Our Lady, the Holy See will give an indulgence equivalent to visiting seven Roman churches. The way of saying the chaplet was also provided in the book. I maintain that this chaplet is very successful in decreasing the devil's powers and temptations. When we remember these virtues of the Blessed Virgin, by which she crushed the head of the infernal dragon, we fill all of Hell with fear. The faithful who follow and practice these virtues will never leave the way of salvation because they have the help and protection of their Lady."^[9]

In the second half of the 17th century, the Marian Congregation was developed and strengthened to such a degree - both in regard to the number of its members and monasteries and to its apostolic works - that its dependency on the Franciscan Brothers Reformati had become a handicap to further growth. Thus, out of care for their charism and specific work, the Marians attempted to free themselves from any ties of dependency or reliance on custom. For this reason, the "Constitutions of the Marian Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary" were prepared, along with "The Rule of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M.", and then presented to the Holy See for ratification. On March 27, 1787 Pope Pius VI ratified the new Statutes and ultimately separated the Marians from the Order of Minor Brothers.^[10]

Like the Constitutions of 1723, those of 1787 reflected the Congregation's charism, which was based on the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the M.B.V.M. and on following Mary's example according to "The Rule of Ten Virtues". It was expressed in the following manner: "A special devotion and promotion of the said devotion to the Immaculate Conception, the Most Elect Mother of God, Virgin Mary, as well as the imitation of her virtues described by this Rule [were expected]."^[11] The statutes required religious educators to teach "The Rule of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M." well to candidates and novices. Everyone else was to imitate Mary's example and to ask for her help frequently that they might perfectly fulfill their religious vows. Another means of honoring Mary was the Marian habit, made out of "plain woolen cloth of white color", "symbol of purity" and evangelical poverty. In addition to other pious practices, the daily recitation of the chaplet of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M. after compline was considered an additional help.^[12]

During the next century, the acts of state authorities, both in Portugal (by royal decrees in 1833-1834) and in the Republic of the Two Nations (particularly after the Tsar's decree of 1864) caused the downfall of the Marian Order. Three Portuguese monasteries (in Algosos, Lisbon, and on Monte Balsamão) were closed down. Out of 11 monasteries in Poland, only one was left - a permanent monastery in Mariampole, in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Congregation had slowly decreased to such a critical state that, in 1908, there was just one living Marian who had full religious rights - Fr. Vincent Sekowski (Senkus), the Superior General at the time.

In this state of affairs, the lay authorities were unwilling to make any kind of compromise to save the dying Congregation. Therefore, Fr. W. Sekowski, along with George Matulaitis-Matulewicz and his friend, Fr. F. Buczys (both of whom were professors at the Spiritual Academy in St. Petersburg, Russia and who wanted to join the Marian Order), secretly prepared a plan for rescuing the Order and making some necessary changes. Fearful of the last Marian's imminent death (Fr. Sekowski was 68 at the time and seriously ill), the Holy See gave his consent. On August 29, 1909, Fr. G. Matulaitis-Matulewicz secretly made his profession of religious vows without first undergoing the novitiate stage, and Fr. F. Buczys began his novitiate period. In consequence, Bl. George Matulaitis-Matulewicz, along with the Superior General, prepared plans for a reform and renewal of the Marian Order as well as new Constitutions adapted to the Holy See's norms of 1901. In April of 1910, they were presented to the Holy Father for ratification. That very same year, two more candidates were secretly accepted into the Order. On August 29th, Fr. Matulewicz renewed his one-year vows while Fr. Buczys made his first profession of vows^[13] on September 15th and became the last religious who did so upon "The Rule of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M." On November 28, 1910, Pope Pius X, by means of a decree, ratified the renewed and reformed Congregation along with its new Constitutions. The decree stated: "the Order of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the M.B.V.M., founded in the Kingdom of Poland in the 17th century, was ratified by Popes Innocent XII and Innocent XIII (...)". The Congregation's goal was to promote, with particular zeal, devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the M.B.V.M.; to strive for the salvation of one's neighbor particularly by teaching the truths of the faith to the illiterate; and to help the souls of the faithful departed, held in the fire of purgatory, through works of mercy. The Congregation spread throughout Poland and Portugal and gained great merit for its work for the holy faith. But, in the 19th century, during a time of raging persecutions, it had slowly come to such a critical state that only

one member of the Congregation, its Superior General, was still alive. Some priests, pained to see the once prosperous work being destroyed, honorably consecrated themselves to the resuscitation of the cause. With the consent and encouragement of the Most Venerable Shepherds of Mohylov, Warsaw, and Sejny as well as from the Superior General (still living at that time), they successfully completed the task according to the regulations of the Holy Congregation for the Religious. However, because of new conditions, they found it necessary to change some of the Congregation's Constitutions so that in the future, simple, not solemn, vows could be made. In addition, the Office for the Dead (which had to be recited daily according to the old Constitutions), was replaced with a particular devotion of the entire Congregation to help the Poor Souls in Purgatory, so as not to impose upon the Congregation's members certain practices."^[14] Since the solemn vows were replaced with the simple vows, "*Regula Decem Beneplacitorum BVM*" became non-obligatory. Additionally, the white cassock that was worn to honor the Immaculate Conception of the M.B.V.M. was replaced by the regular clothing of the diocesan clergy. Nonetheless, the entire heritage of the Marian Order, as well as "The Rule" itself, did not fade into history, but was and still is shaping the spirituality of the Congregation of Marian Fathers.

Conclusion

"*Regula Decem Beneplacitorum BVM*" quickly gained recognition among Marians as a distinct paradigm of the Marian spirituality. Incorporated into Marian legislation, it has shaped the spirituality of the religious. Since the day of the Marian Congregation's renewal and reform, it has survived through seven editions - in Latin, Portuguese, and Polish (Varsaviae 1723, Warszawa 1750, Lisboa 1757, Lisboa 1757(2-nd), Lisboa 1759, Romae 1778, Wilno 1791); after the reform, at least another eight editions appeared in Portuguese, English, and Polish. "The Rule" was also included in the Marian Constitutions (Romae 1930, Kraków 1933, Stockbridge 1954, Stockbridge 1980, Lublin 1984, Warszawa 1986, Curitiba 1988, Warszawa 2001). It has also become the topic for reflection and meditation, and the encouragement for prayer - particularly, the Chaplet of Ten Virtues of the M.B.V.M. which is closely connected to it. "The Rule" also influenced the interior decoration of shrines. For example, one of the first Marian churches, the church in Gozlin, has a definite connection to "The Rule" and the chaplet of Ten Virtues with the placement of a ten-ray star with the Ten Virtues of Mary in the main nave. Within the context of the precious spiritual heritage of the renovated Congregation of Marian Fathers, "*Regula Decem Beneplacitorum BMV*" was, and still is, shaping a specific type of spirituality reflective of the Marian community founded over three centuries ago. The spirit of "The Rule" is still distinctly present in the modern-day Constitutions of the Marians. It is manifested in the wording of certain formulas which are typical of, and greatly appreciated by, the Marians such as: "The titular patroness of the Congregation is the Immaculately Conceived Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, whom they shall consider with special veneration, filial love and devotion as their Queen and Lady, very Powerful Helper and Most Loving Mother. Let them go through her to Jesus; invoke her frequently in suppliant prayer: run to her with the greatest confidence in all their needs; imitate her virtues with all their strength."^[15]

^[11] C. Krzyzanowski, MIC, "Powstanie i rozwój Zakonu za życia Założyciela", in: *Marianie*, ed. J. Bukowicz, MIC, T. Gorski, MIC, Rome 1975, pp. 18-31.

^[2] W. Makos, MIC, *O. Stanisław od Jezusa Maryi Papczyński*. Badania i refleksje, Warsaw, 1998, pp. 173-176.

^[3] "Stanislaus a Iesu Maria Papczyński, Fundatio Domus Recollectionis Clericorum V.V.M. sine macula concepta", in *S. Papczyński, Scripta historica*, edited by C. Krzyzanowski, Varsaviae 1999, p. 84.

^[4] "Stanislaus a Iesu Maria Papczyński, Oblatio", in *S. Papczyński, Scripta historica*, edited by C. Krzyzanowski, Varsaviae 1999, pp. 25-26.

^[5] "Stanislaus a Iesu Maria Papczyński, "Norma Vitae" I 2", in "Stanislaus Papczyński, "Norma Vitae et alia scripta", edited by C. Krzyzanowski, Varsaviae 1999.

^[6] J. Misiurek, *Historia i teologia polskiej duchowości katolickiej*, t. I, (w. X-XVII), Lublin, 1994, pp. 76-69, 407-418.

^[7] T. Rogalewski, *Stanisław Papczyński (1631-1701), Założyciel Zgromadzenia Księży Marianów; inspirator marińskiej szkoły duchowości*, Lublin-Warsaw 2001, pp. 303-308.

^[8] *Statuta Patrum Marianorum Ordinis B.V.M. sub titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis*, Varsaviae 1750, I, 1, 4, 7.

[9] "Casimirus a S. Joseph Wyszynski", Wstep (Foreword), in: F. Arias *Gwiazda zaranna, czyli o nasladowaniu dziesieciu cnot Najswietszej Maryi Panny*, z laciny przetlum. Casimirus a S. Joseph Wyszynski, jezyk polski uwspolczesnil J. Drob, Warsaw 2001, pp. 28-29.

[10] B. Jakimowicz, MIC, "Stabilizacja i rozwój Zakonu w XVII wieku", in *Marianie*, op.cit, pp. 39-49.

[11] *Constitutiones Apostolicae pro Ordine Immaculatae Conceptionis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae Clericorum Regularium Marianorum*, Romae, 1787, I, 1.

[12] Ibid.

[13] S. Matulis MIC, T. Gorski MIC, "Odnowienie Marianow", in: *Marianie*, op. cit., pp. 100-109.

[14] Cit. after: J. Bukowicz MIC, "Wstep", in: *Konstytucje i Dyrektorium Zgromadzenia Ksiezy Marianow Niepokalanego Poczecia NMP*, Warsaw, pp. 34-35.

[15] *Constitutions and Directory of the Marian Fathers and Brothers*, Chicago, 1991, p. 16.