

# Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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## CELEBRATING 40 YEARS THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (Part 2)

In his very first encyclical, "Saint" Pope Paul VI<sup>1</sup> proposed that **DIALOGUE** was a recognised method of the Church's apostolate in the modern world. In this, he laid down the rules of dialogue necessary for the Mission of the Church. He understood that dialogue is **the way** of achieving a universal fraternity and peace.

These rules for a universal dialogue must also be practised in each of our local fraternities. It is in our local fraternity that we live and nourish our Franciscan Spirit through dialogue. Secular Franciscans tend to be somewhat conservative and far too many times, members of our fraternities take a self-righteous tone of voice in putting across their point of view and speak with an unnecessary dogmatic attitude that does not allow for any dialogue at all. We may do well then, in our fraternities to look at what Pope Paul VI has to say about dialogue:

### [Dialogue] Its Proper Characteristics

**81.** Dialogue, therefore, is a recognized method of the apostolate. It is a way of making spiritual contact. It should however have the following characteristics:

1) **Clarity** before all else; the dialogue demands that what is said should be intelligible. We can think of it as a kind of thought transfusion. It is an invitation to the exercise and development of the highest spiritual and mental powers humanity possesses. This fact alone would suffice to make such dialogue rank among the greatest manifestations of human activity and culture. In order to satisfy this first requirement, all of us who feel the spur of the apostolate should examine closely the kind of speech we use. Is it easy to understand? Can it be grasped by ordinary people? Is it current idiom?

2) Our dialogue must be accompanied by that **meekness** which Christ bade us learn from Himself: "*Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.*" (Mt 11:29) It would indeed be a disgrace if our dialogue were marked by arrogance, the use of **bared**<sup>2</sup> words or offensive bitterness. What gives it, its authority is the fact that it affirms the truth, shares with others the gifts of charity, is itself an example of virtue, avoids peremptory language, makes no demands. It is peaceful, has no use for extreme methods, is patient under contradiction and inclines towards generosity.

3) **Confidence** is also necessary; confidence not only in the power of one's own words, but also in the goodwill of both parties to the dialogue. Hence dialogue promotes intimacy and friendship on both sides. It unites them in a mutual adherence to the Good, and thus excludes all self-seeking.

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<sup>1</sup> Bl. Pope Paul VI on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1964 in his first encyclical "*Ecclesiam Suam*" on the Church, takes as his theme, "Dialogue with the World"

<sup>2</sup> "bared words": "Bared" means exposed or uncovered. The opposite would be "covered words" or careful words. So he means words which expose an attitude. Often we hear people say, "Well, whether you like it or not, I am going to speak my mind forthrightly and tell you the truth!" They then go right ahead and use language which is very offensive in tone and meaning and feel quite justified having **bared** their self-righteous attitude and having offended the other person so badly that reconciliation is almost impossible, but they still feel justified. This type of person is quite destructive of fraternity and harmony in the group.

4) Finally, the **prudence** of a teacher who is most careful to make allowances for the psychological and moral circumstances of his hearer, particularly if he/she is a child, unprepared, suspicious or hostile. The person who speaks is always at pains to learn the sensitivities of his audience, and if reason demands it, he adapts himself and the manner of his presentation to the susceptibilities and the degree of intelligence of his hearers.

**82.** In a dialogue conducted with this kind of foresight, **truth is wedded to charity and understanding to love.**

### **Deeper Knowledge Through Wider Exposure**

**83.** And that is not all. For it becomes obvious in a dialogue that there are various ways of coming to the light of faith and it is possible to make them all converge on the same goal. However divergent these ways may be, they can often serve to complete each other. They encourage us to think on different lines. They force us to go more deeply into the subject of our investigations and to find better ways of expressing ourselves. It will be a slow process of thought, but it will result in the discovery of elements of truth in the opinion of others and make us want to express our teaching with great fairness. It will be set to our credit that we expound our doctrine in such a way that others can respond to it, if they will, and assimilate it gradually. It will make us wise; it will make us teachers.

These words of “Saint” Pope Paul VI are perhaps one of the most important elements in his teaching us how to achieve a **Civilization of Love** and yet this teaching is all but lost. However, it is not surprising that the word **dialogue** occurs 19 times in the legislation of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The very first time it occurs in the OFS Rule is in Chapter II: “The Way of life” No.6. It is almost a direct quote from Pope Paul VI:

They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as **witnesses and instruments of her mission** among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words. Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops and priests, fostering an open and **trusting dialogue** of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.<sup>3</sup>

The Commentary on the Rule No. 6. reinforces this **Mission in the World**, of the Secular Franciscan and its method as **dialogue**:

Sharing Christ’s mission through life in the Church is the third point developed on the meaning of gospel living. By word and example the Secular Franciscans bring to those around them the living Christ they have experienced. As it were, they become a living gospel for all to read. This evangelisation is based on obedience to the Holy Spirit who inspires and forms the Church, the body of Christ. So, the Secular Franciscans foster an openness to the Spirit and creatively exercise their mission. Furthermore, they hear the call of the Spirit through loyalty, **frank dialogue** and cooperation with the legitimate Church authority. This obedience makes ministry authentic and consistent without stifling their creativity.

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PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all MEMBERS of your FRATERNITY including Spiritual Assistants and isolated members.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, Allocution to Tertiaries (*Salutiamo volentieri*), #3 (May 19, 1971); AAS, vol. 63, pp. 545-546;