

Rule of Saint Clare of Assisi (1770)

which establishes the general guidelines for life in the monasteries of the Claretians and the activities of the nuns

[*Regla de la gloriosa santa Clara: con las constituciones de las monjas Capuchinas del santissimo crucifijo de Roma, reconocidas, y reformadas por el Padre General de los Capuchinos y con las adiciones a los estatutos de dicha regla.* Mexico: Reimprensa en la Imprenta del Lic. Don Joseph de Jauregui, Calle de San Bernardo, sine data.]

[A complete volume in excellent state of conservation, written in Spanish, that contains a rare edition of the *Regla de la gloriosa santa Clara*; 8 unnumbered + 234 pages; 15 cm (8vo); binding in contemporary parchment: no manuscript notes or underlining throughout the text, except for the title page, where a modern note in faint pencil along the right margin indicates possible range of publication dates. Printing privileges signed by Francisco de Miranda y Paz, Pedro de Zamora Hurtado, Pedro Martinez, Pedro de Toledo y Guzman, Juan de Gomara y Mexia, and Juan Perogila. Error in pagination: p. 6 misnumbered as 9. No extant copies of this work seem to be available in public libraries of the USA.]

In 2015, some 1,462 Mexican Capuchin Poor Clare sisters, from 72 convents, celebrated [350 years of presence in Mexico](#). The congregation's rich history dates back to the arrival of just 6 Capuchin nuns, from the nunnery in Toledo (Spain), who settled in Mexico City in 1665, after a brief stay in the port of Veracruz. The occasion was graced by the presence of the then General Minister of the Capuchins, Br. Mauro Jöhri, who celebrated various services in gratitude for the three and a half centuries of Poor Clare presence in Mexico (**Images 1-2**).

The long and rich path followed by the sisterhood in the Americas, still on road today, left traces in Mexican architecture and culture. Along that path, the Book has always been instrumental in passing on the Congregation's legacy. The Literate Culture, dominant in the convents, was at the core of a) novice training, b) religious practices, and c) the cult of the founding father and mother, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare of Assisi (**Images 3-6**). Ideologically, the *corpus* of Catholic literature that accompanied the Spanish conquest had common features: though being prescriptive, repressive and dominant, it reserved a tangential place for women, following the pedagogical and social policies of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which guided Mesoamerican evangelization.

The *Rule* presented here constitutes a relevant link in the cultural chain that made the current Poor Clare presence in Mexico possible. The order, more precisely called the Sisters Minor of

Francis, was founded by Saint Clare, a young woman of noble extraction who followed the *poverello Francesco* against the will of her family, finally managing to establish a thriving female community inspired by the ideals of Francis, in San Damiano (**Image 7**).

It was precisely in the ruins of the 8th-9th-century monastery of San Damiano, on the outskirts of Assisi, where Francis wrote the *Canticle of the Creatures*, and heard for the first time the voice of Christ, who ordered him “to repair His House in ruins”, thus tasking him to reform the Church. Francis and his brothers, however, also took that request literally and rebuilt the actual San Damiano temple. Shortly after, in 1212, on that very site, Francis welcomed Clare and her companions, who lived in some rooms attached to the under-construction building. They continued to reside there until seven years after Clara’s death, in 1253. Clare herself lived in San Damiano for 42 years, and wrote there in Umbrian dialect, shortly before her death, the *Regola*, or *Forma di vita dell’Ordine delle Sorelle Povere*. Since Clare’s death, the site has been considered a holy place, with hundreds of people visiting daily.

Clara’s conviction and strength, like Francis’, were magnetic, so thanks to her leadership many women in the region (including two sisters and her mother) joined the community. From San Damiano, the congregation expanded to the world since the early 13th century, and after landing in the Americas, the order enjoyed a new period of splendour until at least mid-20th century.

For a start, this piece by Saint Clare is the first monastic *Rule* ever written by a woman in the entire History of the Church. Inspired by Francis’ *Rule* for her brothers, Clare wrote her own for the female branch of the congregation, characterized by its severity, and its emphasis on poverty and obedience. The text also reveals a) an intense zeal for bodily and sexual control, b) a marked collective panopticism, through which each sister exercises control over the rest, and c) a constant emphasis on material detachment (its pages even ban the possession of daily life objects).

This particular volume constitutes, on the other hand, a significant milestone for Mexican printing, which during the 18th century struggled with paper collection, ink supply, and the shortage of blocks and types, whose manufacture the Spanish Crown used to forbid during certain periods. Its editor, Joseph de Jáuregui, a clergyman and theologian, managed to acquire the machinery owned by two previous establishments, the *Imprenta de la Biblioteca Mexicana* and the *Imprenta de los herederos de doña María de Ribera*. He set up both printing presses (making them remarkably productive) in some warehouses on San Bernardo Street, Mexico City, as it appears in the imprint of virtually all of his editions. Especially active as a printer between 1766 and 1778, Jáuregui ordered the manufacture in Mexico of the types he used for many of his works, which he always supervised with great care, in search of quality standards. There are, however, no reliable sources to establish a precise date for its publication, which, therefore, must be placed between a *terminus post quem* (1766) and a *terminus ante quem* (1778), corresponding to the beginning of Jáuregui’s publishing activities and his death, respectively.

While reading the work, present-day readers will be surprised page by page, in many respects: the ideological bureaucracy of printing privileges and authorizations; the great length of certain rites and prayers, which could take long hours; the absolute rigor in the control of the body and human relationships laid down, ordered and typified by the *Regla*; the severity of punishments; the tenacity of those women to pursue in the afterlife the happiness they undoubtedly sought in

the present one, etc. It is very probable that the reader of the present will also object to the zeal for confinement; the seemingly uncritical attachment to tradition; the demand for silence; the rejection of any form of property; the sought-after identification with saints and biblical figures, all general features that permeate the work. What's more, the reader will be able to appreciate how certain elements of that world about to become extinct still hold their place in today's Christian societies.

This edition of the *Regla de la gloriosa santa Clara* is made up of the following sections:

- p. 1 Printing privileges
- p. 3 Bull of confirmation by Pope Innocent IV for the first *Rule of Saint Clare*, dated August 9th, 1253
- p. 4 Confirmation of the order by Reynaldo, bishop of Ostia and Vetrelli, contemporary to Saint Clare and her sisters
- p. 4 Initiation ceremony with which Idelfonso Coloma, bishop of Barcelona, received the Capuchin community in his diocese in 1603
- p. 12 Text of *La regla que hizo nuestro padre San Francisco para la madre Santa Clara y sus monjas*
- p. 38 Testament of Saint Clare
- p. 47 Blessings left by Saint Clare to all the nuns
- p. 52 *Estatutos y constituciones*, made at Gebena, Province of Burgundy, on 29th September 1434 by Pope Eugene IV, and reformed in Rome on 20th November 1610 by Pope Paul V
- p. 67 Ceremony to welcome a novice
- p. 223 Imprimatur
- p. 224 Evangelical counsels, which in the *Rule* of the Capuchins are observed as precepts
- p. 234 Prayer said at the end of the Divine Office for the Hebdomadaria. Laus Deo.

Thus, this work constitutes a unique material for the preparation of master's or doctoral theses and, in a broader sense, for the preparation of studies on gender issues that intersect with religious and historical dimensions. Furthermore, it has an additional virtue: it has been barely studied or interpreted on a systematic basis. Finally, it is an essential work to understand the role of the regular female clergy in the process of evangelization of Mexico, and also to capture the importance of religion in the subjection of women in the 18th century. Any library dedicated to cultural history, social and religious studies, gender issues or devoted to *rare & unique* collections will appreciate this extraordinary volume, which is at the same time a rare book and a historical document.



Image 1
Mexican Capuchin Poor Clares today



Image 2
Former Poor Clare convent of Mexico City



Image 3

Saint Clare of Assisi, with
her sisters.
Fresco from the Church of
San Damiano, in Assisi.

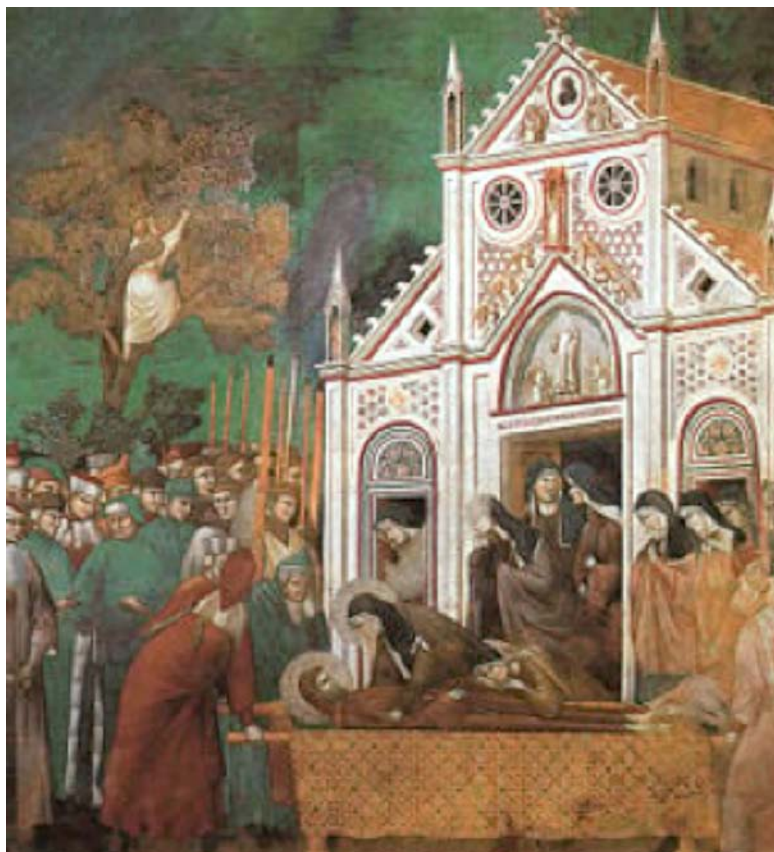


Image 4

Section of the legends of San Francis:
Clare mourning Francis.
Fresco, 270 x 230 cm, ca. 1300
Upper Church, Basilica of San
Francesco, Assisi



Image 5

Saint Clare (detail), in a *fresco* by Simone Martini (ca. 1312-1320). Lower Church, Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi.



Image 6

Clare and Francis, in a famous scene from *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, a film by Franco Zeffirelli (1972)



Image 7

Monastery of San Damiano, in Assisi.

The first Poor Clare community grew on its site since 1212,
following the *Rule of Saint Clare*.