

# A Brief History of the Secular Franciscan Order and its Rules

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Beatus fr̄ciscus d̄vol; ante mōis h̄i fecit quadr̄  
gesimā i loco d̄lueme ad honore beate v̄ginis m̄rie m̄ris d̄r̄beas  
i ḡchael archagl̄ i f̄cto d̄l̄p̄t̄ionis s̄e m̄rie v̄ḡis usq; ad fest̄ū s̄c̄i  
c̄p̄c̄ḡas̄i s̄ep̄s̄b; i facta est sup̄ eū man̄ d̄m̄ p̄r̄ visionē i All̄ocuti  
onē s̄eraph̄i i m̄p̄l̄t̄ionē s̄t̄igm̄at̄ū i c̄p̄e suo s̄c̄i h̄al̄ laud̄el̄ ex alio  
latere **B**en̄dicat tibi d̄n̄s i c̄uslo  
collato

**B**en̄dicat tibi d̄n̄s i c̄uslo  
d̄ratte. ostē d̄at faciem  
suā tibi i misere a t̄ tu.  
cōuertat uultu suū ad te  
i d̄et̄ n̄b̄i pacē

Beal̄ fr̄c̄i s̄c̄r̄pt̄i manu h̄a illā b̄d̄ic̄ionē i n̄fr̄i loōi



Simili modo fecit illud h̄ḡm̄ ih̄su eū capite manu sua

The Blessing of Brother Leo

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## History of the Secular Franciscan Order and its Rules

### Overview

St. Francis entered the penitential movement in the first decade of the thirteenth century. In 1209, at St. John Lateran in Rome, Pope Innocent III authorized Francis and his followers to live the life of a penitent and preach the Gospel. From this event sprang the three Franciscan Orders established by St. Francis that, over time, brought about a rebuilding of the Church, which at the time was falling into ruin. The rebuilding continues today.

This chapter presents a brief history of the Secular Franciscan Order. It is presented as indicated by the following topics.

- Penitential Movement – Pre Francis
- Francis of Assisi – 1181 - 1226
- Francis' Conversion Process - 1206
- Francis' Approval by Innocent III - 1209
- Francis' Exhortation to His Followers and the Rule of 1221
- 1228 - 1289
- The Rule of Nicholas IV - 1289
- The Rule of Leo XIII – 1883
- Declarations of Popes Succeeding Leo XIII
- The Pauline Rule of 1978
- The International Organization
- The Local Fraternity and Formation
- The History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States
- Epilogue

### Penitential Movement – Pre Francis

For the first five or six centuries of church history, members were required to avoid serious sin. The penalty for serious sin was excommunication from the community. However, one was allowed to rejoin the community on a “second chance” very restrictive basis. This reconciliation required severe penance such as lifelong fasting, abstinence from attending church functions and from reception of the Eucharist, external displays of self degradation: sack-cloths, and the like. In time, these strict rules became canon law, with the bishop authorizing and overseeing reconciliation.

Changes in restorative penance in Europe and Asia were influenced by Celtic monks who practiced “private” penance: the priest would assign a penance at his discretion, the severity in accordance with the gravity of the sin.

About the same time there were those who volunteered to become penitents, with the same obligations of the canonical penitents, in order to become holy – to live like Jesus and the Apostles. These volunteers were the precursor of the penitential movement, as embraced by St. Francis of Assisi.

“With the growth of private penance [given by a confessor], there was a clear distinction between the public penitents and the voluntary penitents. These first made expiation for their sins in the manner prescribed for days, months, and years as established by the Penitentials; the second group, the voluntary penitents, remained in *Ordo Poenitentium*<sup>1</sup> for the rest of their lives. These are the two aspects of the *Ordo Poenitentium* through the middle ages.

“The same concept of conversion, as the internal and external act by which the Christian, not weighed down by serious sin, and therefore not obliged to do so, publicly decided to abandon the way of life which he had formerly led and to devote himself to God in one of the various forms of penitential life, reveals that the ultimate goal of such a choice was to make God one’s point of reference and the very reason for life; this end was obviously very spiritual. This interior decision, however, was also externally visible by means of the penitential habit.”<sup>2</sup>

“...It seem legitimate to affirm that the dominant element always present in the various religious movements of the twelfth century was the continuation and diffusion of the desire – already present in the second half of the eleventh century – to return to the gospel life of the apostles, considered as the norm and model of poverty and of evangelization for the whole Church.

“...This is a fundamental point for an understanding of the ‘new penitential climate’ of the twelfth century. While in the past only monks had been considered followers of apostolic life, during the reform the conviction spread that this life was identified with the Christian life, and must be followed by all believers.

“At the same time, especially in the first fifth of the twelfth century, the concept of the apostolic life acquired a new element in addition to that of poverty, namely, preaching, especially in an itinerant lifestyle.

### It Was the Time of the Preacher

“The first itinerant preachers, canons regular, were the most significant examples of this. They left the canonical life first to become hermits and later to begin their itinerant preaching in strictest poverty, precisely because at that point they felt that these two

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<sup>1</sup> Order of Penitence

<sup>2</sup> Pazzelli, Raffaele, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, IL, 17. [It should be noted that private penance was not officially sanctioned by the church until the Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215.]

elements – a life of poverty and preaching – were the essential components of a truly apostolic life.

“It is most important to note that the itinerate preachers – who began their wandering at the beginning of the twelfth century, lived in poverty, preached as the apostles did, and gathered groups of followers – found themselves immediately faced with the problem of how to insert themselves and their followers into the structure of the Church, which did not envision groups whose members while aiming at the perfect evangelical life, did not at the same time live according to a rule and in a monastery. Thus there was no place for the groups who roamed about the countryside. This presented a threefold development.

“Many of the itinerant preachers and their followers entered the pre-existing religious orders or formed new ones. Many laymen and women who had followed the itinerant preachers joined the penitents, that is, they entered into the canonical penitential state established by the Church for repentant public sinners. Others were incautiously attracted by the growing poverty movement which rebelled against the ecclesiastical orders and which soon became heterodox.

“Unfortunately, what was lacking in the twelfth century was the foundation of a religious order which would have as its ideal not only the apostolic and poor life of the gospel, but also preaching in the midst of the people to encourage, support, and guide those who aspired to an apostolic and evangelical Christianity.”<sup>3</sup>

#### Other Penitential Groups

There were those groups who preceded Francis, whose penitential lives were approved by the Holy See. Among the more famous were the Waldensians, formed by Peter Waldo, the Humiliati that arose among wool workers and merchants, and the Cathari who adopted a Manichean dualism (the body was evil and the spirit was good). The Cathari were marked as heretical.

“Waldo [a rich merchant from Lyon] and some of his disciples went to Rome, where they presented themselves to Pope Alexander III and the Third Lateran Council, which was then in session (1179). [After his orthodoxy had been examined, the Pope admitted them and] was struck by what he saw – they were barefoot, dressed in rough wool, without baggage, having all things in common like the apostles; naked, following the naked Christ. The Pope approved their life of poverty but ruled that, in matter of preaching, Peter Waldo and his companions would have to submit to the decision of the local bishop.

The Waldensians continued to preach, some say without the permission of the local ordinaries - and they preached in dioceses that were not appreciative of their of preaching – and they were, in certain locales, associated with those of suspect orthodoxy. So, in 1184

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 44, 45, 49, 50

the Council of Verona included them in the same category as the Cathari in its condemnation.<sup>4</sup>

“The Humiliati arose sometime in the decade before the birth of Francis. “The first Humiliati lived with their families and took part in their work. They ‘humiliated themselves for God,’ adopting rough clothing and ‘untinted cloth’ in sharp contrast to the fine, colored fabrics of the time...[The Humiliati] developed three distinct, but not separate, groups. The clerical element...formed the ‘first order,’ constituted according to canonical norms; it also included nuns, solemnly consecrated to religious life as it was then understood, that is, ‘in choir.’ An associate of monastic life – lay brothers and sisters, living in adjoining houses – formed the second order. The religious-worker association of men and women remaining in the married state comprise a third order. Innocent III approved them in 1201.

“...Together with the Franciscans, they enjoyed the popular support of the people. ...In the fourteenth century their numbers began a slow decline, the order was suppressed by St. Pius V in 1569.”<sup>5</sup>

“The development of the penitential movement from a ‘state of life’ into a group or fraternity or non-monastic order did not happen without conflicts or difficulties before it became a reality accepted by the Church and later an institution recognized and approved by the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

“Was this, then, the atmosphere that Francis found when he entered the penitential movement immediately after the ‘vision’ at San Damiano? In addition to his desire to be a penitent-apostle, was there another element that motivated him – namely, did he begin his itinerant preaching to be a guide and master of ‘true penance’ to those who already belonged to the penitential movement? These are interesting questions that shall await reply.

“Nevertheless, it is a fact that, when Francis gave life to ‘his’ penitential movement, he imprinted on it new ideals, new aspirations and characteristics. It was ‘his’ movement that eventually provided the answer to the aspirations of the Christian people.”<sup>7</sup>

## Francis of Assisi

Francis was born in Assisi, in the region of Umbria in 1182, of a rich merchant family – that of Pietro di Bernadone and his wife, Lady Pica.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 58, 59

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 60, 61

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 64

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 66

Francis grew up during a time of political uncertainty as well as during a time of dramatic cultural change. The feudal system with lords and fiefdoms was the society that was diminishing and a mercantile society was emerging. Francis was not of noble birth, but his father, a cloth merchant, was rich. So Francis did associate with the sons of nobles and, it is said, partied with them.

It was also a time of chivalry, and Francis had heard stories of knights rescuing ladies fair. This environment influenced Francis to don the armor of a knight and go off to battle, which made his father proud.

At that time in history, there were city states overseen by nobles who had allegiance to the emperor or to the Holy See.

In 1160, “Frederick Barbarossa declared Assisi a free city under the protection of the empire...However, the presence of a handful of imperial soldiers did not impede the local political situation’s evolution towards autonomy...From 1162 to 1184 there was continuous growth and uprising of autonomous city-states, referred to as communes, throughout ...which the imperial authority was too weak and too far away to prevent.

“...The main reason, however that Assisi was ‘imperial’ was that its traditional rival, Perugia, was ‘papal.’”<sup>8</sup>

“The period from 1174 to 1210 marks the last and definitive collapse of the feudal structure in Assisi. In 1174 the city was destroyed by imperial forces. In 1198, when Francis was sixteen years old, Assisi was freed once and for all from imperial domination...”<sup>9</sup>

“In the period immediately preceding the birth of Francis, and even more during the years of his youth, a deep change took place in the social classes, even in Assisi...There were now two powers struggling, two groups whose pride was hurt. The vassals envied the wealth of the ‘nouveaux-riches,’ while the latter wanted to imitate their neighbors in high positions of honor, arms, and even knighthood.

“Another element played an important part in the psychological development and orientation the young Francis, the knightly element or ‘chivalry’ remained within the saint.”<sup>10</sup>

“It was November of 1202, and Francis was twenty years old. The Assisians, convinced they were able to win [the war against Perugia] prepared with all the means at their disposal and with great enthusiasm. Francis, young, rather rich, and a great belief in the cause of the weak against the mighty, was among the most enthusiastic of all. The skirmish took place at Collestrada, where from dawn to dusk the battle raged, waned, and gained momentum.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 69

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 70

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 72

The Perugians, stronger in the long run, won. Francis, wounded, found himself among the prisoners.”<sup>11</sup>

“In those days a prison was really a prison – for the most part caves dug in the basement of a large municipal palace. They were dark and damp, the prisoners had little more than bread and water.

“For Francis this was his first encounter with a reality far different from his youthful dreams of pleasure and glory, and the beginning of a long and profound crisis. If it had not been for the defeat at Collestrada, perhaps we would never have had a Francis of Assisi.

“Francis could keenly feel that something had betrayed him. Money, more and more money. Yet, what advantages had it given him? Beautiful clothes, the latest styles, friendship, affirmation in leading the youth of Assisi, organizing dinners and entertainment. Yet, what had he gained? Where were his friends now?”<sup>12</sup>

## Francis' Conversion Process

The steps of Francis' conversion leading up to the official approval by Pope Innocent III of his request to live, with his brothers, the life of a penitent, are listed here. The topics are addressed briefly in following paragraphs.

- Francis' “Servant or Master Dream” in Spoleto - 1205
- Pilgrimage to Rome – Changing Clothes with a Beggar – Spring 1206
- Embracing the Leper – Early 1206
- San Damiano – Giving Money to Priest – 1206
- Scene Before Mayor and Bishop Rejecting Money and Clothing – 1206
- Francis is Called to Rebuild San Damiano - 1206
- Francis left for Rome with His companions for Pope's Approval of His Way of Life. – 1209
- Francis Preached the Kingdom of God

## Francis' “Master or Servant” Dream in Spoleto

After Francis' return home from prison in Perugia, he still embraced his visions of winning glory by returning to the battlefield. Count Walter of Brienne, a “folk” hero in his time, was recruiting soldiers for a campaign in Sicily. On the way, Francis fell ill at the town of Spoleto. There he had a vision: a voice demanded of Francis where he intended to go: “Who do you think can best reward you, the Master or the servant?” Francis answered:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 80, 81

‘The Master.’ The voice questioned further, ‘Then why do you leave the Master for the servant, the rich Lord for the poor man?’ Francis replied in the same words of St. Paul on the road to Damascus: ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ He received the same answer that Saul did: ‘Return to your own place, and you will be told what to do.’ (Acts 9:6-7).”<sup>13</sup>

### Pilgrimage to Rome – Changing Clothes with a Beggar

“In the Spring of 1206, Francis joined a group of pilgrims for a visit to the basilica of the apostles. In front of St. Peter’s there was a multitude of poor people, clinging to the gates where the pilgrims passed. They implored, cried out, and held out their hands. The pilgrim from Assisi asked himself, ‘What is it like to be really poor?’ He traded clothes with the beggar and joined the others in front of the basilica, begging in the Provincial language...It left him with a vivid emotional impression and experience of fraternity, he took that impression with him back to Assisi.”<sup>14</sup>

### Embracing the Leper

“One day, as Francis rode along the plains of Assisi, caught up in his own thoughts, his horse suddenly reared. Francis looked up and was struck with terror. A leper stood before him, staring at him. Francis’ first impulse was to throw him a coin and flee, but this was impossible – what he now was, or was becoming, stopped him from doing this. He slowly dismounted; went toward the leper, and let some coins fall into that disfigured, out stretched hand. He felt in some mysterious way that he himself was alone transformed into that suffering mortal; and in that transformation he understood the essence of Christianity: God is in every person. Alms could never be enough.

“Francis reverently kissed the leper as one kisses a sacred object. Even on his deathbed he recalled the transforming effect of that encounter: ‘that which seemed bitter to me was changed to sweetness of the soul and body.’”<sup>15</sup>

### San Damiano – Giving Money to Priest

“The decision [to become a penitent] was actually put into practice on the way home from a business trip to Foligno where as usual he sold everything he had with him and, successful as a merchant, he left behind even the horse he was riding. He stopped at San Damiano and told the ‘poor priest’ of his decision. He offered him money he had with him, telling him what he proposed to do. The priest was astonished and, wondering over a conversion so incredibly sudden, refused to believe what he heard. And because he thought he was being deceived, he refused to keep the money offered him. For he had seen him just the day before, so to say, living in a riotous way among his relatives and acquaintances and showing greater foolishness than the rest. But Francis persisted obstinately and tried to gain credence

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 83, 84

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 83

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 96

for what he said asking earnestly and begging the priest to suffer him to remain with him for the sake of the Lord. In the end the priest acquiesced to his remaining there. Francis asked and obtained permission to be accepted at San Damiano as a conversus, thus becoming an oblatus or donatus or conversus, an official form of penitent...<sup>16</sup>

### Scene Before Mayor and Bishop - Rejecting Money and Clothing

“[Francis’ father, Pietro de Bernardone], exhausting all his efforts to convince his son to return home, turned to the civil authority [making use of his political position] accused his son of rebellion and dissipation. The statutes of the commune of Assisi punished any one found guilty of such an offence with banishment from the city...The civil authorities did not want to press the issue and said to Pietro that ‘as Francis had entered the service of almighty God, he was no longer their subject.’

“...Francis, resolute, bade farewell to all, publicly, before his father Pietro di Bernatone and Guido, the bishop of Assisi...the bishop before asking Francis to give back the money to his father, advised him to think about the fact that this was the condition necessary for him to become a conversus: ‘If you really want to consecrate yourself to the Lord, you must give back the money you have...Francis replied... ‘Since I have decided to dedicate myself to the service of the Lord...I shall give him back not only money...but also the clothes.’

“Francis left the scene of the renunciation, officially recognized as a penitent by the bishop of Assisi and, as a penitent, he will permanently reside at San Damiano.”<sup>17</sup>

### Francis is Called to Rebuild San Damiano

“One summer day, in 1206, Francis was walking in the vicinity of San Damiano when he felt an interior tug of the Spirit to go inside to pray. Obeying the inner voice, Francis entered and fell on his knees before the familiar icon [the San Damiano Crucifix], his own spirit alert to what the Lord might wish to convey.

“In eager anticipation, Francis looked up into the serene face of the crucified Lord, and prayed this prayer: ‘Most High, glorious God,’ he prayed, ‘cast your light into the darkness of my heart. Give me, Lord, right faith, firm hope, perfect charity, and profound humility, with wisdom and perception, so that I may carry out what is truly Your holy will. Amen.’ Ever more quietly he repeated the prayer, lost in devotion and wonder before the image of his crucified Lord.

“Then, in the quietness, Francis heard Jesus speaking to him from the Cross: ‘Go, Francis, and repair my house, which as you can see, is falling into ruin.’”<sup>18</sup> So, in obedience, Francis proceeded to follow Jesus’ word, literally.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 87, 88

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 88, 89

<sup>18</sup> Google: Rebuild My Church History and select site: [toalltheworld.blogspot.com/2009/06/rebuild-my-church.html](http://toalltheworld.blogspot.com/2009/06/rebuild-my-church.html)

“While restoring the church at San Damiano, Francis led an eremitical penitential life, for two years. Until the work of restoring the church at San Damiano was completed, blessed Francis still wore the garment of a hermit with a strap to serve as a belt, and he carried a staff and had sandals on his feet...Two years after his conversion, several men were drawn to follow his example of penance, and they left everything in order to join him.”<sup>19</sup>

After these two years, Francis was brought to the decision to not be not only a solitary-penitent, but also an apostle...A factor of primary importance in this period of Francis’ maturation and planning of future action was the closeness to Bishop Guido, who counseled him on the steps he should take.”<sup>20</sup>

“We believe that the closeness, guidance, and advice of Bishop Guido were essential elements of the success of Francis’ work with the penitential movement or ‘Third Order’ which took its name from him as well as the ‘Order of Friars Minor’ and that of the ‘Poor Ladies.’”<sup>21</sup>

### Francis’ Approval by Innocent III

#### Francis Left for Rome with His Companions for Pope’s Approval of His Way of Life

Pope Innocent III was wise to see the benefit to the Church of the penitential movement; he, of course, was harsh in dealing with those heterodoxy elements movement. Knowing this, Bishop Guido was easily able to guide Francis among the rocks which had destroyed many of his predecessors in the penitential movement. A good part of the success of the young man from Assisi can probably be attributed to the wise advice of the bishop of Assisi.

“When, only two years later, in the spring of 1210 [many historians believe it was 1209], Francis and his companions went to the Lateran, asking the pope for approval of their ‘fraternity of itinerant preachers,’ based on poverty, but also on the two pillars of a ‘complete adherence to the Church’ and ‘obedience to the hierarchy,’ Innocent III, assured of their ‘fidelity’ either directly or through Cardinal John of St. Paul, had little or no hesitation to give them permission to ‘preach penance to all.’”<sup>22</sup>

Pope Innocent’s Dream – “At his first meeting with Francis, Innocent III was perplexed at receiving the request to approve Francis’ way of life. In *Vita Seconda*,...Celano states that the following night the pope dreamed that the Lateran basilica was beginning to fall when a tiny, scraggly religious held it up with his shoulder so that it did not fall. He recognized in that ‘religious’ the man whom he had sent away the previous evening and, as a result of this dream, he immediately ‘granted the request’”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pazzelli, St. Francis.... 89

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 90

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 92

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 98

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 84

### Francis Preached the Kingdom of God

Francis “went about towns and villages announcing the Kingdom of God, preaching peace, teaching salvation and penance unto the remission of sins...He acted boldly in all things because of the apostolic authority granted to him, using no words of flattery nor seductive blandishments. Men and women, clerics and religious hastened to see and to hear the holy man of God who seemed to all to be a man of another world.”

“Unfortunately we do not possess the *forma vitae* which, according to the explicit affirmation of the biographers of St. Francis, the saint gave to those groups of penitents – old as well and new – who desired to follow him; or, at least, we do not have sufficient information to identify it positively from any of the documents that we do possess.

### Francis' Exhortation to His Followers and the Rule of 1221

“Nevertheless, we have irrefutable sources which enable us to know the directives, the new ideals and aspirations which Francis wanted to give to those groups of penitents. They are mainly two: the *Recensio prior* and the *Letter to All the Faithful*. In regard to the organization, even their externals, of these same groups of penitents we have a third document: the *Memoriale propositi* or *Regula antique Fratrum et Sororum de Poenitentia* of 1221 – 1228.”<sup>24</sup>

### Recensio Prior – Earlier Version of the Letter to All the Faithful

Francis first Letter to the Faithful, “contains Francis’ very first teachings that he set in writing. It is addressed, in letter form, to the penitents who, in ever greater numbers, turned to him for directions...”<sup>25</sup>

This is the “Earlier Exhortations To the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, the first version of the Letter to All the Faithful (1209 – 1215)...The earliest manuscript of this writing, located in the city of Volterra, introduces it with these words: ‘These are the words of life and salvation. Whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord Salvation.’ While Kajetan Esser entitled it ‘The first Version of the Letter to the Faithful,’ it has been more correctly seen as an exhortation given to those first penitents who came to Francis desiring to share in his Gospel way of life. [In] 1976,...Kajetan Esser brought the text into prominence...[It presently serves]as a Prologue to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 109

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 110

<sup>26</sup> Armstrong, Regis, O.F.M. Cap., Hellman, Wayne, O.F.M. Conv., Short, William, O.F.M., *THE SAINT – Volume I of: Francis of Assisi Early Documents*, New City Press, New York, 1999, 41

Robert Stewart, O.F.M., refers to David Flood's The Commonitorium published in Haversack in 1979. Flood uses the word to describe Francis' intentions in writing the First Version. "In Medieval Latin, the term commonitorium signified a letter which was both an exhortation and a reminder in order that a commitment be followed."<sup>27</sup>

### Letter to All the Faithful (Second Letter)

"The addresses of this work, as well as the relation between them, cannot refer to all Christians in general, but must be understood to have been individuals and communities united in a special way to Francis, who had given them a *forma vivendi* closely resembling the form of life of the Friars Minor...the most probable date for the composition of this work is around 1221."<sup>28</sup>

"The writing may have been written upon Francis' return from his journey to the Middle East in the Spring of 1220, for not only does it speak of his weakened condition but also suggests the post-conciliar concerns of Pope Honorius III. At the same time, it recalls Francis' earlier exhortations to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance and encourages its observance in light of many of the teachings of the Fourth Lateran Council."<sup>29</sup>

Robert Stewart writes, "The emphasis has shifted somewhat in the Later Exhortations [as compared with the Earlier Exhortations]. Francis describes in much greater detail the way of penance for his followers. Most of the development in the Later Exhortation concerns elements which characterize the penitential movement in the Middle Ages, among others: charity, humility, service, prayer, fasting and abstinence, and the restitution of goods unjustly acquired. In part, these emendations can be attributed to Francis' concern to keep the movement orthodox, that is, to avoid the heretical positions to which some of the other thirteenth century penitential movements had evolved. In fact, given that Francis uses the strong injunction 'we must' (*debemus*) in speaking of those obligations, Esser suggests that Francis must have been addressing abuses that had crept into the movement. But for whatever reason, in the later text Francis continues to exult and to exhort others to penance by becoming more specific concerning the life of penance."<sup>30</sup>

### Memoriale Propositi

"The increase in numbers of penitents following the preaching of Francis and his early companions in the period between 1210 and 1220 must have been enormous..."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Stewart, Robert M., O.F.M., *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order; Origins, Developments, Interpretation*, Instituto Storico Dei Capuccini, Roma 1991, 138

<sup>28</sup> Pazzelli, *St. Francis...*, 113

<sup>29</sup> Armstrong, Hellmann and Short, *The Saint...*, 45

<sup>30</sup> Stewart, *The Rule...*, 175, 176

<sup>31</sup> Pazzelli, *St. Francis...*, 128

It should also be noted that special privileges were granted to the penitents. “The fraternities were asserting their exemption from the obligation of pledging loyalty, bearing arms, and assuming civil positions. The first pontifical bulls, written between 1221 and 1228 in favor of the penitents, are indisputable proof...”<sup>32</sup> These privileges, in time, angered the civil authorities.

In 1221, an “official” rule, *Memoriale propositi*, was promoted by Cardinal Ugalino<sup>33</sup> and verbally approved by Pope Honorius III.

According to Robert Stewart, O.F.M., “While Francis presented an exhortation to penance, the *Memoriale propositi* presents juridical norms regulating the life of penance for those followers of Francis. Apparently the *Memoriale propositi* was the official Church’s response to the need for more organizational structure and control among these penitential groups. Prior to the approval of the *Memoriale propositi* for Franciscan penitents, other ‘rules’ or the ‘Way of Life’ of other penitential groups had received papal approval. In fact, the text of the *Memoriale propositi* for the Franciscan penitents evidences a dependence upon the *propositium* of the Humiliati (1201), of the Poor Catholics (1206) and their Penitents (1212) and of the Poor Lombards (1210, 1212)

“Thus, no serious scholar today would attribute the authorship of the *Memoriale propositi* to Francis. Most scholars assume the text comes from the hand of Cardinal Hugolino or a group of jurists connected with Hugolino.”<sup>34</sup>

“The *Memoriale propositi* of 1221, is no longer extant as it must have come from the hands of Francis, [Cardinal] Ugalino, and, perhaps, some of his jurists. The earliest extant copy is that of the final edition of 1228...”

“...A quick overview of the contents of the *Memoriale propositi* shows that: the organization of the Order of Penance and its insertion into society are based on an austere principle of personal sanctification.

“The rule is strict and demands vocation and dedication. The law of poverty, as we have seen, the foundation of the whole penitential movement of the eleventh-through thirteenth centuries, contradicts the ‘worldly’ life because conversion demands a renunciation ‘of the world.’ Humility in dress and abstention from entertainment and dancing, abstinence and fasting, prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments, examination of conscience and religious instruction of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance are fundamental characteristics of their identity.

“Like the other two Franciscan orders, the Third Order is ‘the school of the gospel’ and demands adherence to it of thought and action.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 130

<sup>33</sup> Some historians precede Ugalino with an H (Hugalino)

<sup>34</sup> Stewart, *The Rule*, 183, 184

“Most of all, it demands a life of prayer and more intense sacramental life than is asked of ‘plain Christians.’ Those who know how to read will say the canonical hours, as clerics do, and the others will say the office of the Paters and Aves. All will nourish spiritual growth through daily examination of conscience and monthly instruction.

“On those spiritual foundations the Brothers and Sisters of Penance will carry out in a very special way the main Christian virtues, beginning with justice and charity.”<sup>35</sup>

“There is no written proof that Pope Gregory IX gave written approval to the *Memoriale propositi*, (in 1228). However, there is circumstantial evidence that it was assumed to be a *forma vitae*, a rule for the brothers and sisters of Penance. The legislative text did include the word *tale est*, the usual formula the popes used to introduce a *Propositum* that they approved with a papal bull...It is also generally accepted that the extant *Memoriale propositi* is not identical to the original one of 1221...it obviously underwent modifications and additions from 1221 to 1228. It is, however, equally well known that, from 1228 on, the *Memoriale propositi* was considered an unchangeable rule, one that should not be touched in the same way as the rules of St. Augustine and St. Benedict.”<sup>36</sup>

#### Francis and His Followers Living the Rule

“The Rule or Way of Life of Francis and his early followers did have roots in the preceding religious experiences and expressions: eremitism and penance, solidarity with the lepers, and itinerant preaching. The novelty (author’s underline), that which made this way of penance ‘Franciscan,’ was Francis’ insistence on a radical metonoia combined with an absolute fidelity to the Church.”<sup>37</sup>

The term “*Novitas Franciscana*” is used by Benedetto Lino in his unpublished paper on the History of the Secular Franciscan Order. “Francis of Assisi introduced it into life of the Church and of the world something new and original...*Novitas* is a Latin word meaning novelty. By speaking of *Novitas*, we refer to the new and essential elements introduced by Saint Francis of Assisi in the Ecclesiology of his time and in religious life.”<sup>38</sup>

Prospero Rivi, O.F.M. Cap., writes, “...Francis himself was of the people. Although he was probably a deacon and greatly loved liturgical forms of prayer, he did not...present himself as a schooled cleric, but having long lived as a layman among the laity, and having retained many tastes and ways of expression of his original environment, he found himself in immediate accord with a people well known by him, who often perceived the learned culture and religion developed by the priests and monks of the time as being distant from them.

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<sup>35</sup> Pazzelli, *St. Francis*, 134, 135

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 136

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 200

<sup>38</sup> Lino, Benedetto, *Unpublished paper, The History of the Secular Franciscan Order*

“...The genius of Francis seems to be identified precisely in his fine capability of freeing and expressing within orthodoxy the fundamental demands of a popular sensibility, which for so long had been prevented from participating authentically in religious life and which increasingly risked straying towards heretical forms.”<sup>39</sup>

“[Francis’ preaching] generally made use of the vernacular language to give voice to the strong religious instinct of the people...It would come from physical contact with its listeners and would reach much more deeply and effectively into the popular circles and the new classes, who would immediately welcome a transition of the evangelical message no longer alien to their own culture.”<sup>40</sup>

1228 – 1289

“Since the fraternity was, for the most part, constituted of persons living in *domibus propriis* [in their own homes or locally] and therefore in various parts of the city, it met for its monthly meeting in a church chosen by its minister..., and they had the hour and place of the meeting announced by the nuntius of the fraternity, who notified all the members by visiting each one in his own home. When there was more than one fraternity of penitents in a larger city, it became normal for each one to meet in a neighborhood church of an area most convenient for the members of each fraternity. When the fraternities were in a parochial territory, they would meet in the parish church...When towards the middle of the [thirteenth] century, owing to the increasing clericalization of the Friars Minor, the Franciscans began to have their own churches, it became natural for the meetings of the fraternities to be held mainly in them.”<sup>41</sup>

“According to the norms of the *Memoriale propositi*, at their monthly meetings, the fraternities of the penitents, if it be convenient at the time...are to have some religious who is informed in the word of God to exhort them and strengthen them to persevere in their penance and in performing the works of mercy.”<sup>42</sup>

“Always keep in mind that the juridical and moral life of the fraternity was under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the bishop, we must suppose that the choice of the visitor must have been at the discretion of the bishop. This supposition, however, was not always followed by the penitents; there are cases where they elected their own visitors. This probably caused disagreement with the bishops and the Friars Minor. The problem was finally resolved in the Rule of Nicholas IV...Nicholas [specified] that the visitor should be

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<sup>39</sup> Rivi, Prospero, O.F.M. Cap. *Francis of Assisi and the Laity of His Time*, Greyfriars Revies, Volume 15, 2001, Padova: Edizioni Mesaggero, 1989, Translated by Heather Tolfree, 45

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 47, 48

<sup>41</sup> Pazzelli, *St. Francis...*, 141, 142

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 144

taken from the Order of Friars Minor because the present form of life (of the penitents) was instituted by blessed Francis.<sup>43</sup>

“Two contrasting elements (attraction to the Friars Minor, held in highest esteem by the Apostolic See and the natural possessors of the Franciscan ideal, contrasted with the desire for independence) help to explain the less than ideal relationship between the penitents and the friars... The independent spirit sometimes caused the penitents to elect their own visitor rather than ask the bishop for one, which seemed rather unorthodox and eventually put them in conflict with the bishops.

“The other important element involved the conflict between the penitents and civil authorities [regarding special privileges granted to Penitentials]. Taking the side of penitent or defending them would have involved the friars in the dispute as well.

“For this reason (and perhaps some others we cannot identify), after the Generalate of Brother Elias (1227 – 1239) the Friars Minor began to be less involved in the Fraternities of the penitents.”<sup>44</sup>

Most Penitents were independent of the First Order – until they were subsequently corralled by the bishops, then the popes, initially Pope Innocent IV in 1247 – the pope ordered the Ministers Provincial of the Friars Minor to take an interest in the Third Order.

## The Rule of Nicholas IV

“Nicholas IV became the first Franciscan Pope on February 15, 1288. Shortly after his election to the papacy, he received requests from some local communities of penitents that he grant his official approval to their Rule. Thus, on August 18, 1289 he issued the bull *Supra Montem* which contained the Rule for Franciscan penitents.”<sup>45</sup>

“What the pope had approved in fact, was the rule of Friar Caro,\* with some modifications. Metanić observed that the texts of both are almost identical; there are a few noteworthy differences. The Rule of Nicholas IV is, most of all, more ‘Franciscan’ because it affirms that the present way of life (of the penitents) had its beginning in blessed Francis.

“Consequently Nicolas IV, in contrast to the norm that the visitor could be ‘of any approved religious order’ and that, in the monthly meetings the penitents should receive exhortations of ‘a religious who is informed in the word of God’ advised that these persons, both visitors and instructors should be members of the Order of Friars Minor.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 145

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 147, 148

<sup>45</sup> Stewart, *The Rule*, 202

“It seems, however, that there were complaints and opposition against this fact...[but] Nicholas IV reasserts his desire that all the penitents belong to an order ‘begun by St. Francis’ should have visitators and directors of the Order of Friars Minor.

“Another ‘Franciscan’ detail included the Rule of Nicholas IV concerns the color of the habit. The *Memoriale* made no mention of it, but the Rule of 1289 stipulates that it be neither ‘all black nor all white.’ That is gray. The Rule of Nicholas IV, accepted universally, remained the ‘Magna Carta’ of the Franciscan movement of penance, which from that time on was commonly called ‘The Third Order of St. Francis.’ This rule, in fact, remained in effect for the Secular Franciscans until 1883.”<sup>46</sup>

“The promulgation of the Rule of the Third Order by Nicholas IV was an important factor for the development of the common life among Franciscan penitents. This rule, with its more orderly and organic organization, also gave greater emphasis to the religious nature of this order, gave it a partially new configuration in which the two pre-existing realities within it, namely, the life in *domibus propriis* and community life, could develop.

“...Around the turn of the century the practice of profession of religious vows developed among those penitents living in community. This was the decisive step in the complete ‘regularization’ of the order. Pope John XXII, with the Bull *Altissimo in divinis* of November 18, 1323, approved and praised this action which represented an approval of the ‘regular religious life’ within the Third Order.”<sup>47</sup>

## The Rule of Leo XIII

“The political situation in the 1700s and 1800s (suppression of Religious Orders and of the Third Order – the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, France, Italy, etc.) as well as the religious situation (Protestantism) played their part in the decline of the Third Order.

“...The friars of every family, as soon as they were able to recover from the suppression, undertook a lot of activity to put the Third Order back on its feet. However, this did not occur haphazardly. Two factors certainly played a decisive role in the rediscovery of interest in the Third Order; on the one hand there was the desire on the part of the religious to make a contribution to reconstructing the fabric of Christian society..., on the other there was the strong encouragement of Pope Pius IX (1846 – 1878), who was the first of a succession of seven Popes who were Secular Franciscans. Our brother the Pope said: ‘Promote, promote the Third Order. You cannot image the amount of good it is destined to produce.’”

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\* The contribution of Friar Caro is disputed by Benedetto Lino in his unpublished papers on the history of the Third Order, 13

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 151, 152

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 153

“Cardinal Giacchino Pecci, Archbishop of Perugia and the future Pope Leo XIII, was a convinced, enthusiastic and tenacious supporter of the necessary role of the Third Order for the society of his time.”<sup>48</sup>

Pope Leo XIII, in 1883, in an effort to recreate the Franciscan movement during his time, wrote a rule that was shorter and less rigorous than the Rule of Nicholas IV. “My Social Reform is the Third Order,” proclaimed the pope. His purpose for a new less rigorous rule was to make it more accessible, and more appealing, to more Catholics.

“The new Rule was promulgated in the apostolic constitution *Misericors Dei Filius*, of May 30, 1883. The text consisted of three chapters, followed by another three in the form of an appendix, setting out the indulgences and privileges of Tertiaries. Reduced to the bare essentials, it retained as much of the old Rule [Rule of Nicholas IV] as could be adapted to the life of any keen Christian, and modified or completed whatever parts of it seemed outdated or excessively harsh.

“...Having taken this momentous step, the Pope lost no opportunity during he next few years of involving the whole Catholic episcopate in the propagation of the Franciscan Third Order Secular, either by encyclicals or by exhortations and encouragement. The hierarchy responded obediently to the Pontiff’s wishes, ordinary Christians were fired with enthusiasm, and within a short time there were several million Tertiaries.”<sup>49</sup>

The ferment generated by the action of Pope Leo XIII was also marked by the celebration of regional, national and international congresses, both during and after his pontificate.

## International Congresses

“The idea of congresses was born...at a meeting of the First International Study Commission which was held at Val de Bois (France) from 18 – 20 July, 1893...

“...The most important of these was certainly the International Congress promoted by the Ministers General of th Friars Minor, the Conventuals, the Capuchins and the Third Order Regular. It took place in Rome from 22 to 26 October, 1900...seventeen thousand Tertiaries participated in this congress.

“[Out of the International Congress] two factions became clear:

- ‘the individualists’ who intended to preserve the Third Order’s character as an association for Christian perfection

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<sup>48</sup> Benedetto, Lino, O.F.S., Unpublished papers..., 18 – 20

<sup>49</sup> Shorrock, Christopher, O.F.M. Conv., *A Brief of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*, [www.franciscans.org.au/sfo/2sforule.htm](http://www.franciscans.org.au/sfo/2sforule.htm)

- ‘the socials’ who, without failing to assume the above fundamental point, wished to direct the activity of the Tertiaries towards social issues following the directive of the Pope.”<sup>50</sup>

“In the International Congress of 1921 [held in Rome], the following topics were treated:

- The sanctification of the Tertiaries
- The running of the fraternity
- The Franciscan reform of society
- Promotion and apostolate”<sup>51</sup>

The major output of the 1950 International Congress was the declaration: Votum 10. The Ministers General’s response to the request by the national fraternities to better define Votum 10 resulted in the following statement, as part of a larger response.

“In three parts of the letter we shall treat:

- 1) Of the importance of the Franciscan Third Order toward leading a perfect Christian life with all its demands, especially a these present times;
- 2) Of the religious and social activity of the Third Order;
- 3) Of our grave duty and responsibility with regard to providing for it and promoting collaboration and coordination of all or forces.

[Item 3 was welcomed by the Tertiaries: the Ministers General directed the friars to assist the Third Order. The Ministers General also provided their brief definition of the Third Order:]

“Though it is not a religious order in the strict sense of the word, the Tertiary nevertheless shares the basic advantages of the religious life. He enjoys in fact:

- 1) A profession, which consecrates him morally to God;
- 2) A rule, to serve as a discipline for him;
- 3) A special spirit to sustain and inspire him.”<sup>52</sup>

## Declarations of Popes succeeding Leo XIII

“In *Tertium Franciscalium*, Pope Pius X [who succeeded Pope Leo XIII] declared, on September 8, 1912, ‘The Third Order (Third Order Secular) does not differ from the other

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<sup>50</sup> Lino, Benedetto, Unpublished Papers....24

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 28

<sup>52</sup> Franciscan Herald and Forum, 1952, 34 - 41

two (The First Order and the Second Order of St. Francis) in nature, but only in so far as it pursues the same purpose in a way peculiar to itself.”<sup>53</sup>

“Pope Pius X saw involvement in social reform on the part of fraternities as a deviation from the Franciscan charism and prohibited such action. Personal sanctification, a movement inward, was seen as the duty of the Tertiary, and the Order was thought of in some circles as a ‘society for a happy death’”<sup>54</sup>

Benedetto Lino further states “Under his [Pius X] Pontificate the history of the SFO is marked by two noteworthy events of varying importance which cast their influence on the life of the Secular Fraternity even today.

“The First Fact is the plan to establish a Federation of the various fraternities. “The Second Fact, that had a profound effect on the life of the SFO and which conditioned its existence till the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century...the prohibition, without exception, of members of the Third Order as such, becoming involved in civil or purely economic matters.”<sup>55</sup>

“...The new Code of Canon Law promulgated on May 18, 1918, did not change the nature of the Third Order, for, in *Sacra propendiem*, January 6, 1921, Benedict XV clearly stated: ‘He (St. Francis) founded the Order of Tertiaries, an Order in the true sense of the word, not indeed bound like the other two by religious vows, but distinguished by the same simple life and practice of penance’

“A similar statement is found in *Rite expiates*, the encyclical issued by Pius XI on April 30, 1926: ‘The general restoration of peace and morals was advanced very much by the Third Order, which was a religious order indeed, yet something unexampled up to that time, in so far as it was not bound by vows, while it offered all men and women living in the world a means of both observing the commandments of God and of pursuing Christian perfection.’<sup>56</sup>

“In some audiences granted to various groups of Tertiaries he recalled that what constituted ‘the profession of life of a good Franciscan Tertiary: is not the rigor of vows, or life in common, or religious life according to the letter but according to the spirit. It is the spirit of life and of that perfection lived within the family, in daily living, in ordinary life within the world.’

“He, then, recalled the need to qualify the secular Franciscan vocation: ‘If they are to be faithful Christians like the rest there is no need for them to be Tertiaries...A Franciscan

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<sup>53</sup> Habig, Marion A., O.F.M. and Hegener, Mark, O.F.M., *A Short History of the Third Order*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1963, 43

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous Writing, 11 (It should be noted that during the time of the papacy of Pius X, there were many active social groups that were seen as anti-Catholic, such as the socialist and communist movements. The pope did encourage social action if it were under the auspices of the local ordinary.

<sup>55</sup> Lino, Benedetto, *Unpublished Papers...*, 26, 27

<sup>56</sup> Habig and Hegener, *A Short History...*, 43, 44

Tertiary calls for a special title... which cannot be usurped – and it would be usurped if it did not imply something special.”<sup>57</sup>

“And in the discourse to the Tertiaries of Italy on July 1, 1956, Pope Pius XII said: ‘You are an Order: a lay Order, but truly an Order ‘an Order in the true sense of the word,’ as our predecessor Benedict XV of holy memory called it.’

“...all the sovereign pontiffs since Leo XIII have again and again recommended the Third Order to the Catholic world. All of them, as well as the predecessor of Leo XXIII, Pope Pius IX, and the present Holy Father Pope John XXIII have also set an example by joining the ranks of the Franciscan Tertiaries themselves.”<sup>58</sup>

The Third Order remained basically a devotional society over the years. The phrase that defined the Third Order at the beginning of the twentieth century as the happy death society was an unfair judgment - that perceived identity was misleading, in a way, in that the Tertiaries performed many good works and supported the friars in their good works.

## The Pauline Rule of 1978

In March, 1966, shortly after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the Ministers General gave their blessings to begin work on the formulation of a new Rule for the Third Order. The letter included an invitation to the national fraternities to participate by making suggestions as to the content of a new Rule. Surveys were taken in the United States and forwarded to the rule project commission in Assisi. An international Obediential Council reviewed the input from the contributing national fraternities.<sup>59</sup>

A first draft of the new rule was completed in 1968 and sent to the national fraternities for critique. The response of the United States and other national fraternities to this first draft was very negative. A summary of the U. S. critique is given here:

- “Does not conceive people as they are now actually living in the world
- Lacking...the need to participate in the needs of the world
- The concept of Vatican II is absent
- The ecumenical spirit is lacking
- The eschatological view is blurred
- Not enough stress is put on the Third Order as essentially a lay order

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<sup>57</sup> Lino, Benedetto, Unpublished Papers...,29

<sup>58</sup> Habig and Hegener, *A Short History...*, 44

<sup>59</sup> It should be noted here that the starting point for the formulation of a new Rule was directed to be Rule of Leo XIII. Robert Stewart, O.F.M., and others, would have preferred that the starting point be the Early Exhortation (Recensior Prior)

- Chapter III deals too much with the rights and powers of the priests...not mentioned is the mutual responsibility of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Orders
- Nothing is mentioned about the Third Order message and mission to the world
- We reject Chapter III because it does not envision the order as a community, but as an institution and organization
- Francis' spirit is not expressed in the rule of life
- Chapter I mentions the Gospel as the Tertiary's rule of life. After that there are only moral regulations and invitations to devotional practices
- The rule is...presented without the spirit of seeking, of openness, and without giving any room for Mystery.
- Only benevolence is spoken of, but not brotherly sharing
- Nothing is said about the need for continuous conversion
- The text does not get across the spirit of renewal
- The draft of the rule is composed for a dying Third Order, not for tomorrow's Third Order"<sup>60</sup>

The rule project commission took these very perspicacious and revealing critiques into consideration. Many deliberations were conducted and redactions made during the twelve year process of formulating a new Rule for the Third Order.

The Rule Commission met again in January 1969. At that meeting they recognized that there were no Third Order people present. To correct this oversight, Tertiary leaders, both men and women, were invited to participate in the next gathering - the Assisi Congress held in October of that year.

Allowing laypersons to participate in the writing of their Rule was unprecedented. It would be proven that this inclusion made a world of difference. A special commission that included both friars and lay men and women was assigned the task of producing essential elements for a new rule. They came up with 17.

1. "To live the gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis
2. To be converted continually (metanoia)
3. To live as brothers of sisters to all people and all creation
4. To live in communion with Christ
5. To follow the poor and crucified Christ
6. To share in the life and mission of the Church
7. To share in the love of the Father
8. To be instruments of peace
9. To have a life of prayer that is personal, communal and liturgical
10. To live in joy
11. To have a spirituality of a secular character
12. To be pilgrims on the way to the father

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<sup>60</sup> *Franciscan Herald and Forum*, December 1968, 364, 365

13. To participate in the Apostolate of the Laity
14. To be at the service of the less fortunate
15. To be loyal to the Church in an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with her ministers
16. To be open to the action of the Spirit
17. To live in simplicity, humility, and minority”<sup>61</sup>

These elements were to become the essence of the new Rule. One of these elements, dear to the layman, was that the rule should have a spirituality of a secular character.

It should be noted that during process of developing a new rule, experimental rules were permitted. The North American Federation requested of Third Order Provinces that each submit an experimental rule. Five provinces participated and in 1969, the experimental rule from St. Joseph Capuchin Province was chosen. Third Order Provinces were invited to use the experimental rule, “Way of Life,” until a new rule was approved by the Holy See (in 1978). The experimental rule did not preempt the following of the Rule of Leo XIII, by which Tertiaries professed to live.

After seven or eight redactions, the new Rule was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in June of 1978, twelve years after the Rule Project was inaugurated. The rule called us to go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel. Paragraphs on Peace and Justice, Ecology, Work and Family were included as essential paragraphs in this Rule. The Rule challenged the Secular Franciscans to interface with the world in which they lived.

The Rule presents “the spirituality of the Secular Franciscans, at least as it had been defined within the Rule Project:

1. To Live the Gospel
2. Following Francis
3. Through Conversion/Metanoia
4. In Community
5. As Seculars
6. In Life Giving Union with All Franciscans”<sup>62</sup>

“The Rule of 1978 followed the guidelines initially set by the Assisi Congress in 1969. Essentially, the Rule of 1978 represents the results of several years of refining, organizing, and integrating the seventeen essential points of Franciscan spirituality outlined by the Congress. The only exception within the process was the insertion, by the Ministers General, of Francis’ Earlier Exhortation as a Prologue to the Rule.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Stewart, Robert, O.F.M., *The Rule*...250

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 307

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 312

The process of educating the Tertiaries in the content and spirit of the New Rule fell to the competence of the friars, and articles in the Franciscan Herald.

The transition from a “less devotional” Order to a “more apostolic” Order was helped by the National Fraternity Council of the United States with the creation of four Apostolic Commissions: Peace and Justice, Ecology, Work and Family.

## The International Organization

“...From 5 September 1946 an International Interobediential Council had been functioning although only experimentally, set up by the Ministers General of the First Order and the TOR and consisted of four religious who exercised the office of Commissaries General for the SFO.”<sup>64</sup>

An International Organization was officially formed (as the World Council) in October, 1973, with Manuela Mattiole from Brazil the appointed Minister General. Also, a presidency was appointed and a Council was formed. The United States was represented by four councilors. Ms. Mattiole was elected to continue as Minister General in 1978, along with a new presidency. International Councilors were elected by their national councils.

Emanuela DeNunzio, OFS from Rome and Encarnación del Pozo, OFS from Spain, the present Minister General, succeeded Manuela as elected Generals for the Third/Secular Franciscan Order. Presently, the International Council is called Consiglio Internazionale Ordine Francescano Secolare (CIOFS). It is composed of a Minister General and a Presidency and Councilors representing each member nation.

## The Local Fraternity and Formation

### The Local Fraternity

Local Fraternities, the basic unit of the Order, are canonically attached to friar provinces. In the early days, prior to the formation of a national fraternity, and for a while after, the local fraternity was “run” by a friar Director. The Director provided formation, and decided on the aspirants’ “readiness” for profession. During the time of renewal of the Order in the mid 1960s, Tertiaries began to take on more responsibility as directed by the 1957 International Constitutions. After that, local fraternities were represented at the provincial/regional gatherings by their fraternity minister and, it should be noted at this time that, provinces were represented at the national gatherings by a lay provincial/regional minister.

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<sup>64</sup> Lino, Benedetto, Unpublished Papers...,30

## Formation

In the first six decades of the twentieth century, formation was conducted by the fraternity friar Director. In 1985, a National Formation Commission was formed, and in July, 1986, Formation Guidelines were published. Tertiary Formation Directors existed for decades prior to the establishment of the Formation Commission, however, they took on a more significant role after that time. It should be noted that the fraternity Spiritual Assistant was a member of the Formation Commission. Today, a Formation Commission is active at all levels of fraternity.

## The History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States

Franciscan Immigration to the United States flowed from Europe beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first wave was from Germany. At the turn of the century there were more German speaking fraternities in the United States than there were English speaking fraternities.

Immigrants settled in existing parishes - and some built their own parish churches. They needed priests who could speak their language. Bishops begged for priests to pastor the local non-English speaking flock. This need was fulfilled over time. Also, friars from these European countries began to establish Third Order fraternities in their own parishes - and associated with their own provincial houses

Tertiary immigration from Europe reached its peak over the latter quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. A list of language based fraternities compiled in 1935 illustrates this.<sup>65</sup>

English Speaking Fraternities	400	Polish	250
German	35	Slovenian	35
Italian	30	Lithuanian	30
Spanish	10	Hungarian	5
Croatians	5	French	5
Bohemian	3		

It should be noted that today there is an increase in fraternities whose membership does not use English as their primary language. Among them are Spanish speaking fraternities, Vietnamese fraternities and Korean fraternities. Over 5 percent of fraternities in the United States are Korean.

In 1944, there were an estimated 100,000 Third Order Secular Members in the United States. Today, (2011) there are approximately 15,000 members, in approximately 700 fraternities.

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<sup>65</sup> Poppy, Maximus, O.F.M. and Martin, Paul, *Survey of a Decade*, R. Herder Book Co., St. Louis

## The Formation of a National Organization

“On November 28 and 29, 1917, a conference of the Third Order friar Directors and Tertiaries met at St. Joseph College in Teutopolis, Illinois. It was an epoch moment in the history of the Third Order in the United States. At this meeting, the first Third Order Province was formed under the auspices of Sacred Heart O.F.M. Province.”<sup>66</sup> Also, at that meeting the idea of a National Congress was proposed, to take place in 1921, the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first approved Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis.

Forty three hundred were present at this first national congress held in Chicago in October, 1921. At that congress, the delegates proposed that a national organization be formed. A year later, in 1922, a national constitution was approved thereby officially establishing a National Third Order Federation.

The Third Order of St. Francis was legally incorporated in the city of Cincinnati in September of 1976.

## Organizational Structure

In 1921, it was proposed that a “National Directive Board [be] composed of the Ministers Provincial of the First Order representatives of the Friars Minor, the Capuchins and the Conventual, likewise the Ministers Provincial of the Third Order Regular...[A] second...governing board was called the National Executive Board consisting of one member from each of the three branches of the First Order, together with the representative of the Third Order Regular; one of these to be appointed chairman, another vice-chairman and a third, secretary; these appointments to be made by the National Directive Board. Three consultants were likewise to be members of the National Executive Board, one a Tertiary priest and two Tertiary laymen.”<sup>67</sup>

It was written into the national constitutions that a national congress be held every five years – hence the title, Quinquennial Congress. By the time of the fifth Quinquennial Congress, held in Pittsburgh, PA, twenty-four provinces comprised a North American Federation – a positive indication of the success of the forming of a national organization. It should be noted that the North American Federation included Third Order Provinces in Canada. It should be noted that the early congresses were the venue for conducting the business of the national organization. Although some business continued at future Congresses, these events took on a thematic emphasis.

The early Congresses were the place where the official business of the national fraternity took place. The most recent Quinquennial Congresses were organized around a theme.

It should be noted that a Central Office operated by the Executive Secretary had a major role in the the successful operation of the national fraternity, especially in the early days. It

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<sup>66</sup> Wicks, William, SFO, A History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, Volume I, 1917 – 1942, Barbo-Carlson Enterprises, Lindsborg, KS, 2007, 29

<sup>67</sup> Poppy, and Martin, Survey..., 12

was a publishing house, a clearing house and a major player in the setting the direction for the national fraternity. That position was in place from 1928 – 1977.

Commissaries were delegated by the Ministers Provincial. They represented the various Third Order Provinces at the combined Executive Board and Commissary meetings. The Commissaries initially were a consulting entity at the annual meetings, but eventually were given a vote.

### Emergence of Lay Leadership

Lay leadership was officially directed by the 1957 International Constitutions which defined the External and Internal governance of the Third Order. The External was the domain of the Church, the hierarchy, whereas the Internal was the domain of the Tertiaries. The Internal governance paragraph authorized lay Tertiaries to serve in the principle positions of fraternity leadership.

This structure shift was evident at the 1967 Quinquennial Congress held in Philadelphia: Provincial Ministers represented their Third Order provinces along with the friar Commissaries. Lay Tertiaries held principal leadership positions in the Executive Council at all organizational levels of fraternity.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council advanced lay leadership in the Church in general, and catalyzed the move toward lay leadership in the Third Order.

In the late 1980s, the Commissaries, at that time called Spiritual Assistants, opted not to vote in the Third Order national elections. Restructuring called for a representative of each branch of the First Order and Third Order Regular (four in all) to serve with the Third Order Ministers Provincial as members of the National Council; the Executive Council included one friar representative – a president in turn, of the four members of Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA)

It should be noted that the International Constitutions were revised in 2000 to abolish the voting privilege of the friars at elections (Article 90.2).

With lay members in leadership positions, Regionalization was the next step towards embracing Third Order autonomy.

### Regionalization

The process of Regionalization, first called for by the 1957 General Constitutions and then by the new Rule, began in the United States in 1987 and was completed in 1997; the process divided the country into 31 geographic regions, thus doing away with the Provincial jurisdictional structure. This geographic restructuring helped bring to fruition this aspiration of Third Order autonomy. The argument was that the Secular Franciscans are one Order,

not made up as four branches, as are the friars, which virtually was the case for the Third Order when they were organized under a specific province umbrella.

This restructuring was not a complete separation from the friars, nor was it planned to be. Canon 303 ordained a connection to the Friar Provinces via *Altius Moderamen*, a Latin term used in Canon 303 to mean that the friars of the First Order and Third Order Regular are to guarantee the fidelity of the SFO to the Franciscan Charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan Family.

The changing of the structure of the organization from provincial attachment to geographic had this effect: lay leaders were elected to regional and national positions irrespective of their affiliation with a specific friar province.

#### Publications and Programs Promoted By Secular Franciscans

- Franciscan Herald (1913 – 1987)
- National Newsletter (1935 – 1973) (1992 – Present)
- Catholic Action (1940s and 1950s)
- Youth (1921 – Present)
- Three Point Economic Program (1934 – 1941)
- Modesty Campaign and Sanctification of the Sunday (1953 – 1955)
- Hour of St. Francis (1946 – 1970)
- Peace Award and Achievement Award (1950 – Present)
- Retirement Homes and Shelters (1934 – Present)
- Action for Racial Understanding (1961 – 1968)
- Ecumenism (1946 – Present)
- Apostolic Commissions
- Multicultural Sensitivity
- Franciscan Action Network (FAN)
- Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

The Franciscan Herald, a monthly publication that was inaugurated in 1913, became an information forum and a formation device for the members of the national fraternity. It was the official organ of the national fraternity. It ceased publication in 1987.

National Newsletter - The First National Newsletter was published out of the Central Office in 1935. The Central Office discontinued publication in 1973. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, much of the national news was included in the publication, Franciscan Herald. A national newsletter was resurrected in 1992 and continues to be published today as a quarterly newsletter. It is presently named TAU-USA.

Catholic Action - Catholic Action was a program promoted by Pope Pius XI. It was defined as *the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy*. The Third Order became, for a while beginning in 1942, an auxiliary to Catholic Action. A function of the Third Order, according to the National Catholic Welfare Conference, NCWC<sup>68</sup>, was to provide a spiritual base, especially in parishes, for the parishioners and others to become active in Catholic Action. A field agent was appointed to work out of the Central Office to travel to various Catholic Institutions and in parishes, to educate people about Catholic Action, and to provide a Franciscan spiritual base to the activities. The patron saint of Catholic Action was St. Francis of Assisi.

Youth - Youth fraternities have been a priority for the Third Order from the very beginning of the National Organization. Some youth fraternities were attached to existing adult fraternities; some were attached to Franciscan Institutions. Cordeliers were a group of youth, mostly of grade school age, formed in parishes or attached to friar provinces, with particular oversight of the Conventual friars. They were children groups that were formed in the ideals of Franciscanism.

It should be noted that the National Statutes of July, 1995 changed the age of profession from 14 to 21, thus changing the dynamic of the measure of a professed Third Order member. This preempted an avenue to profession for many youth.

The high point of the youth movement in the United States took place in the 1950s and the 1960s. Youth Congresses were held annually. Participating institutions were Notre Dame University, St. Francis College, Loretto, Pennsylvania, St. Bonaventure University, New York and Quincy University, Illinois. As many as 1000 youths attended these Congresses, most from Franciscan Institutes.

During the late 1970s the number of youth groups declined. In order to resurrect Franciscan youth involvement, a Youth Commission was formed in October, 1995.

Three Point Economic Program - The Three Point Economic Program began in the mid 1930s, in coincidence with the Great Depression. The three points called Tertiaries to: 1) commit no sin in heart or hand for the sake of goods of fortune, 2) to observe moderation in acquiring and enjoying goods of fortune and 3) to share their goods of fortune with God and neighbor.

Modesty Campaign and the Sanctification of the Sunday - These “self descriptive” programs were two campaigns promoted by the Third Order in the fifties and sixties. They were effective, mainly in the Midwest, for about ten years.

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<sup>68</sup> The National Catholic Welfare Conference was equivalent to today's United States Council of Catholic Bishops

Hour of St. Francis - The Hour of St. Francis was spearheaded, in its popular form, by Fr. Hugh Noonan, O.F.M. at St. Joseph Church in Los Angeles, with the help of The Heralds, a Franciscan youth group. The Hour was a radio program that presented Franciscan ideals in parable form – story telling. It was adopted as a National Fraternity apostolate in October, 1946. The Third Order financed this endeavor. Movie Stars volunteered participation in the programs. In 1951, The Hour had the largest audience of any of the Catholic radio programs in the country. The Hour of St. Francis transitioned to television in 1960 and continued to be supported financially by the Third Order. Hollywood actors and actresses participated and it was a grand success. In 1964, a new TV studio was completed and dedicated by Cardinal McIntyre, Archbishop of the Los Angeles Archdiocese. T.V. productions, including spiritually oriented commercials, were presented until the early 1970s.

Peace Awards and Achievement Awards = The Peace Award was first discussed at a meeting of the Executive Board and in 1949 and in 1950 the first award was presented. The nominees were men and women who made a significant contribution towards peace in the world. This award was, in the past, given to national and international dignitaries who were, for the most part, not Franciscan. As of late, the award has been presented to Franciscans: Seculars and friars.

Achievement Awards were presented during the 1950s, 1960's and 1970s to those, either friars or Tertiaries, who were outstanding contributors to the good of the Order.

Retirement Homes and Shelters - The Third Order, with the leadership of the friar Provinces, helped sponsor the building of retirement homes for Tertiaries. Those most prominent ones are: The Third Order Villa in Garrison, New York (no longer in existence), Mayslake Village in Oak Brook, Illinois and St. Francis Village in Crowley, Texas. The Third Order also supported, and “manned” bread lines and shelters. Some of the more prominent of these are: The Food Kitchen and the St. Francis House of Hospitality of Detroit, St. Anthony Dining Room in San Francisco, the St. Francis Center of Los Angeles and the St. Anthony Inn of Chicago, Illinois.

Action for Interracial Understanding - Action for Interracial Understanding (AIU) was born in 1961, a response to the need for the Third Order to address the civil rights of African Americans who were, at the time, in a struggle for equality. This concerted action was taken by the Third Order to help alleviate the injustices of racial discrimination that was prevalent during those days of racial unrest in the 1960's.

Ecumenism - Ecumenism was a part of the Franciscan mentality in the United States since the 1940s, although it was somewhere on the back burner until the time of the Second Vatican Council. Following that Council, Tertiary education and a Unity Movement were placed on the front burner. A Prayer for Christian Unity, promoted by the Friars of the Atonement of Graymoor, N.Y., was encouraged.

A Third Order Ecumenical Committee was formed following an invitation to join a gathering of the Third Order Society of St. Francis (Anglican Third Order) at their Quinquennial Congress in 1997.

Today (2011), an Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee addresses Secular Franciscan relations with people of all faiths.

Apostolic Commissions - The Apostolic Commissions: Peace and Justice, Work, Family and Ecology, were established at the national level in October 1984 and were dissolved in October, 2007. They were created to aid in the observance of paragraphs 15 through 18 of the Rule of 1978. The Commissions successfully helped members to transition from the “devotionally” oriented Rule of Leo XIII to the more “apostolically” oriented Rule of 1978. Commissions were established at all levels of fraternity.

Multicultural Sensitivity - A Multicultural Committee was established in 1995 with a directive to coordinate an effort directed to the understanding, and embracing, of the various ethnic cultures within the national fraternity and in the world, especially considering the cultures of the “language” fraternities existing, and growing, within the national organization. Multicultural sensitivity was the theme of the 2007 Quinquennial Congress held in Pittsburgh.

Quinquennial Congresses - Quinquennial Congresses are a national gathering of Secular Franciscans held every five years. Initially they were the venue for the conduction of the business of the national organization. Gradually, they became a teaching gathering with a theme, and a social event.

Franciscan Action Network (FAN) - The National Fraternity voted to join the Franciscan Action Network in October, 2007. “The Franciscan Action Network is designed to bring a coordinated and effective voice to matters of Justice, Peace and Care for Creation in our world. The particular focus of the Franciscan Action Network’s advocacy is the U.S. Government and related Washington, DC based institutions (e. g, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization of American States...)...The backbone of the

Network are the friars, sisters, Secular Franciscans, Ecumenical Franciscans and the men and women with whom they minister.”<sup>69</sup>

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) - The Justice, Peace and Integration of Creation Committee was established by a motion at the October, 2007 National Fraternity Council meeting. The motion was: “to accept the recommendations of the ad hoc committee on the Commissions to restructure the Apostolic Commissions to one Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Committee.”<sup>70</sup> JPIC encourages the living of Rule as related to the apostolic activities from the point of view of who we are; it is a departure from the structure of the Apostolic Commissions.

## Epilogue

To this date the “experiment” of lay leadership of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, as directed by the 1957 International Constitutions, has been a grand success, thanks to the continued improvement in the quality and commitment of lay leadership over the years, and the friars’ total support and assistance. Also, a success, and certainly a blessing, has been the embracing, by today’s Secular Franciscans, of the Rule of 1978 – a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, much gratitude is granted to those Friars, and Tertiaries too, who built, with energy and dedication, a national organization, and kept it very much alive.

*Those now engaged in Third Order work in this country are pioneers  
Those who will continue it have not been born,  
But the spirit of St. Francis is a spirit of optimism and of faith*

*Maximus Poppy, O.F.M. - (1888-1972)<sup>71</sup>*

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<sup>69</sup> TAU-USA, Winter 2007 issue, Frances Wicks, SFO Editor, 13

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>71</sup> Wicks, William, SFO, *A History*