

THE PAULINE RULE OF THE ORDER OF FRANCISCAN PENITENTS

Summary of the historic journey that led to the new Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order approved by St. Paul VI on June 24, 1978

St. Francis did not deliberately want to *found* three Orders. In the process of *establishing* his three Orders, Francis allowed himself to be guided solely by the Spirit of the Lord and accepted this reality as it flourished in his hands, without any predetermined plan.¹

He was in search of God, eager to rely entirely on Him to serve and to praise Him.

“And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply, and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me.”

-- (*Testament of St. Francis*)

The Lord **gave** Francis **the brothers and sisters** who make up his entire family (1st, 2nd and 3rd Orders) and **revealed to them that their Form of Life was the Gospel**.

His main concern was therefore **to live the Gospel, to live Christ**, and not so much to codify rules. The rules would come later and would be the result of an experience of a life that was lived.

Ultimately, St. Francis **gave only one Rule to the three Orders born of him**, or rather, **a Form of Life** to follow: **a more perfect observance of the Gospel, by reason of their condition of life.**²

As he had done for the First Order, Francis drew up for his Penitents a Form of Life completely interwoven with the Gospel with simple words: the **First Letter to the Faithful** (*Recensio Prior*, 1215). This text, together with his second version (**Letter to all the Faithful**, 1221), has remained until today as the inspirational text for all Secular Franciscans, regardless of all the normative documents that have been developed since then.

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, in fact, developed over time between two extremes:

- The simple **Exhortation** or **Form of Life** written by St. Francis (1215-1221) and
- **The Rule approved by St. Paul VI** (Seraphicus Patriarcha, 1978).

In the middle there are three other rules:

- the *Memoriale Propositi* (1221), general framework of the rules for all penitents
- the *Supra Montem* Rule (1289) approved by Pope Nicholas IV
- the *Misericors Dei Filius* Rule (1883) approved by Pope Leo XIII.

These three middle "rules" are essentially **preceptive and normative**, while the first and the last have a **spiritual** and profoundly **evangelical** character. These reflect the spirit of St. Francis more authentically and have been happily welded into a single redaction in the Pauline Rule, the *Seraphicus Patriarcha*, uniting today's reality with the living source of St. Francis.

On October 4, 1978, the Ministers General of the First Order and of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, gave us the new Rule of St. Paul VI with these words:

“We have the joy of communicating to you that the Holy See, by means of the apostolic letter ‘*Seraphicus Patriarcha*’, dated June 24, 1978, *sub anulo piscatoris*, approved the renewed Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, which revokes and replaces the previous one by Pope Leo XIII.

¹ A. Boni OFM, *Tres ordines hic ordinat*, Ed Porziuncola, 1999, pg. 27

² Ibidem, pg.157

We owe this splendid gift to **Pope Paul VI** (who gave it to us) shortly before he left this earth. **He loved you.** In fact, he repeatedly expressed **his love for the Secular Franciscan Order** and he addressed you with unforgettable words, as he did in June 1968 and 1971, on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the '*Memoriale propositi*'...

The long and laborious process of updating the legislation of the Secular Franciscan Order began on March 7, 1966, when the Sacred Congregation for Religious granted permission.

This work was of paramount importance in finding the ways of the Spirit and it was very effective in perceiving the presence and vitality of the Franciscan charism in the people of God, in our day.

The Church entrusts it to you as a **norm of life.**

Your primary attention should be towards the **evangelical content**, embracing the Franciscan message that it brings and the guidance that it offers you **to live according to the Holy Gospel.**

One of the cornerstones of this desired renewal is the **return to the origins, to the spiritual experience of Francis of Assisi and of the brothers and sisters of penitence**, who received inspiration and guidance from him. This purpose is suggested by the insertion of the "**Letter to the Faithful**" as the prologue, as well as the repeated references to doctrine and to the example of St. Francis.

Another cornerstone is the **attention to the Spirit in the signs of the times.**

Supported by these two cornerstones, you must put into practice the invitation of the Rule to **creativity** and the exercise of **co-responsibility.**

We, Franciscan ministers, with all our friars, have our hearts ready and open to offer you every assistance to walk together with you in the ways of the Lord."

And holy Pope Paul VI, on June 24, 1978 shortly before his death, wrote to us thusly, in the Letter on the Approval of the Rule:

"The Seraphic Patriarch St. Francis of Assisi, while he was alive and even after his precious death, encouraged many within the religious family he founded to serve God, but he also attracted countless 'lay people' to enter into his communities while remaining in the world, as far as they could. ...

We are pleased that the 'Franciscan charism' continues to inspire even today for the good of the Church and the human community...

We, **trusting that the form of life of that admirable Man of Assisi will gain new impetus and will flourish vigorously** (*on the part of the Secular Franciscans*), ... approve and confirm, with our Apostolic authority, the Rule of the **Secular Franciscan Order**, and we add the strength of the apostolic approval."

Our deepest gratitude goes to this Holy Pope: **Thank you, beloved St. Paul VI!**

The Pauline Rule contains three fundamental elements that canonize the essential characteristics of the Order and its nature so that its mission can be realized:

1. The **AUTONOMY**, upon which the Order was established at the time of St. Francis, after five centuries under subjection to the First Order and the TOR.
2. The **UNITY** of the Order with the recognition of its centralized system, which had always been requested by the secular penitents and had never been granted because of the opposition of the Franciscan First Order.
3. The **COMMUNION OF VITAL RECIPROCITY** among the three Franciscan Orders.

Francis immediately realized that the three Orders were related to his apostolic mission of restoring the house of the Lord.³

Each of the three Orders is juridically autonomous but linked to the other two in a close communion of **vital reciprocity** with one another because they share the **same mission**, the **same charism**, each in its specific state of life, as stated in Article 1 of the Rule:

“Among the spiritual families which the Holy Spirit has raised up in the Church, the Franciscan family is open to all members of the people of God, **lay people, religious and priests**, who come to recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footprints of Saint Francis of Assisi. In a variety of ways but in **life-giving fellowship** (vital reciprocity) with each other, these men and women desire to make present the **charism** of their common Seraphic Father in the life and **mission** of the Church.”

The vital communal bond of the three Orders had already been canonized in 1261 by Pope Urban IV when, incontrovertibly, he proclaimed these words in the Bull "Spiritus Domini" about the relationship that binds the three families: *Eiusdem corporis membra existentes*: We exist as members of the same body!⁴

The mission entrusted to the three Franciscan Orders (evangelical animation of the People of God) needs the joint action of the *friars* of the First Order, the *penitents* of the Third Order and the contemplative sacrifice of the *sisters* of the Second Order.⁵

The three Franciscan Orders are autonomous and independent, and while their independent existence is not contingent on the existence of their whole, their spiritual vitality requires their mutual support, rejecting the illusion of easy self-sufficiency.⁶

These three elements -- **autonomy, unity** with the centralized governing body and **reciprocal life-giving communion** (vital reciprocity) – were then newly confirmed by St. Pope John Paul II in the speech given at the General Chapter of the OFS on November 22, 2002:

“The Church expects the Secular Franciscan Order, **one and only**, to be a great service to the cause of the Kingdom of God in today's world. It wants your Order to be a model of **organic, structural and charismatic union**, at all levels, so as to present itself to the world as a ‘community of love’.”

And again:

“The reflection, made at this Chapter, on ‘**Vital reciprocal communion in the Franciscan Family**’ encourages you to commit yourselves more and more to the promotion of encounter and understanding, above all within your Order, then towards the encounters toward the other Franciscan brothers and sisters, and finally, with the utmost care, as Saint Francis wanted, in the relationship with the hierarchical authority of the Church.”

A very noteworthy element in the drafting of the Pauline Rule was the **united involvement of the Franciscan tertiaries from all over the world and of many enlightened religious brothers** of the 1st Order and of the TOR who collaborated generously and with total commitment to the drafting of the new Rule. We mention only a few that contributed decisively to the construction of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order:

Fausta Casolini, Anna Cesari, Lucia Mattei, Vincent McAloon, Augusto Natali, Lidia Pedrolì, Riccardo Ricci, Stefano Ricciardi, Manuela Mattioli, Francesco Crescenti, Mariano Bigi, Nicolàs Dameto, Vincenzo Frezza, Clara d'Esposito, Francesco Vayreda, Georges Gaillard, Walburga Hack, Paulo Machado, Anneta Duveen, Jan van der Putten, Pomona Pefanis, Abbé Pierre Souche,

³ A. Boni, *Tres Ordines Hic ordinat*, pag. 27

⁴ Ibidem pag. 147 e segg.

⁵ Ibidem, pag. 179

⁶ Ibidem, pag. 40

Waldemar Roebuck, Max Dravet, Annelies Kammenhuber, Fernando de Trazegnies, etc ... **among the seculars.**

David Retana OFM, Leon Bedrune OFM, Jaime Zudaire OFMCap, Antonio Pedrelli OFMConv., Francesco Provenzano TOR, Ludovico Cava OFMConv., Lazaro Iriarte OFMCap., Atanasio Matanić OFM; the General Ministers of that time: Costantino Koser OFM, Vitale M. Bommarco OFMConv, Pasquale Rywalski OFMCap., Rolando Faley TOR; Andrea Boni OFM, Cristoforo Piacitelli OFM, etc... **among the religious.**

The Pauline Rule is the matured fruit of a historical and spiritual evolution of over a century that allowed the Secular Franciscans to regain full awareness of their original identity and mission within the Franciscan Family and, with it, in the Church and in the world.

The Second Vatican Council, then, was the decisive event that allowed for its joyful conclusion.

A fundamental role was played by the Apostolic See which, starting from the end of the 19th century, contributed decisively to the rebirth of the Third Order through a series of seven consecutive Popes who were all Secular Franciscans: Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII!

A time of fruitful reflections and recovery of the consciousness of the Third Order that, with St. Paul VI, resulted in the rebirth of the Order with its regained original integrity, sanctioned by the new Rule.

But, let's go in order. The 18th century, and a good part of the 19th, was characterized, in Europe and other parts of the world, by the suppression of religious orders. The Third Franciscan Order, closely linked and dependent on the First Order and TOR, followed suit and was also suppressed. The **tertiaries**, while remaining without the guidance of the friars, expelled by the various governments, **demonstrated an extraordinary vitality resisting isolation and leading an exemplary life** in conducting religious functions and works of charity.

Things start to change towards the end of the **19th century**. In fact, **the religious** of every family, as soon as they could recover from the reversal of suppression, worked hard **to get the Third Order back on its feet** with the aim of contributing to the reconstruction of the Christian fabric in society (essential role of the OFS). This was done with the support and strong encouragement of Pope **Pius IX** (1846-1878), the first in the uninterrupted series of seven Secular Franciscan popes. This is what our brother Pope said: *"Propagate, propagate the Third Order. You cannot imagine how much good it is destined to produce."*

From this moment, the Apostolic See assumed an essential and prophetic role, in the rediscovery of the nature, mission and charism of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The great **Leo XIII** followed Pius IX. Once he became supreme pontiff, Leo XIII would not let any opportunity pass without extolling and promoting the Third Order Franciscans. The Pope did nothing but repeat the invitation to the bishops to enter and to invite as many faithful as possible to enter the Third Order.

The task the Pope intended to entrust to the Third Order was enormous: **to be the fundamental stone of the great Christian social building.**

During his pontificate, an exceptional Franciscan tertiary figure emerged in France: **Leon Harmel**, an industrialist from Val-des-Bois, in the diocese of Reims. A **congress** of studies on the **social action of the Third Order** was held at his establishment in July 1893. Participants came from France, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Switzerland. Pope Leo XIII sent a message of good wishes and applause and praised Leon Harmel's generosity, piety, faith and close bond to the Holy See.

The establishment of provincial commissioners for the Third Order, directed by a national commissioner, elected by the Minister General of the Friars Minor, was the first fruit of the congress of Val-des-Bois.

Leon Harmel had a decisive influence in inaugurating a new and extremely fruitful **season of TOF** (Third Order Franciscan) **congresses** which proved to be essential for the recovery and redefinition of the nature and identity of the OFS and for the "unified" awareness of the Order.

THE PERIOD OF CONGRESSES

There were many congresses. We'll mention some of them:

The **National French Congress** (Paray-le-Monial) and the **Interregional Congress of Upper Italy** (Novara), both celebrated in September **1894**: Themes: **nature and purpose of TOF, its "modern social action"** based on the teachings of Leo XIII.

The **International Congress** promoted by the Ministers General of the Friars Minor, the Friars Minor Conventual, the Friars Minor Capuchin and the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. It took place in Rome from October 22 to 26, 1900. According to the chronicles of the time, **seventeen thousand tertiaries** participated!

Themes: the **purpose** of the Third Order, **its life** and means to **spread it**. Leo XIII, now ninety years old, sent his brief apostolic letter (4 October 1900), in which he welcomed the "*harmony of souls*" and reminded that "*Unity of the law gives unity to the body and by observing this, there will be vigor of the body and effectiveness in action.*"

Other Congresses were celebrated in France, Italy, Canada (Montreal **1900**) and in **Spain** (Santiago de Compostela, **1909**).

The idea of the project for the FEDERATION of different fraternities developed at the congress of Paray-le-Monial (France) of 1908.

The project of the Federation of Fraternities started with two fundamental observations:

1. All the fraternities of the Third Franciscan Order had always had a **substantial unity** of charism, legislation, spiritual traditions, hagiographic heritage, history.
2. **Plurality**, or rather fragmentation, of effective direction and organization, to the extent that the Order had been forced to follow the transitional or definitive segmentations into which the First Order had been divided, who had been entrusted with the care of the Order.

Faced with this situation and in the climate of enthusiasm and vitality created by the reform of Leo XIII, the project of *Federation* of the Fraternities appeared to be a necessary **first** step towards the unity of the OFS. The one who inspired and animated this was the Franciscan Cardinal **Vives y Tutó**. The project, however, did not progress right away and it took another forty years to start a concrete process of **interobedience**.

During the pontificate of Benedict XV, also a **Franciscan tertiary**, the **SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS** took place in **Rome** from **September 15 to 18, 1921** after the publication of the encyclical *Sacra propediem* (January 6, **1921**), the **only one entirely dedicated to the secular order** by a Pope in modern history, and in the context of the encyclical, the definition of the Third Order Franciscan as *Ordo veri nominis* is often cited in the subsequent literature on the OFS.

At the end of the Holy Year **1950**, from December 17 to 20 during the pontificate of **Pius XII** (also a Franciscan tertiary), the 3rd **International Congress of lay leaders of the Franciscan Third Order** was held in **Rome**.

Two thousand participants, among them many religious, came from **15 nations** and **seven linguistic areas**.

The Congress was born as an inter-obedience event. In fact, the **International Interobedience Council** had been functioning since September 5, 1946 and had been approved *ad experimentum*. It was commissioned by the General Ministers of the 1st Order and the TOR and was formed by the **four religious** who held the post of General Commissioners for the TOF.

It was an embryonic inter-obedience structure, born from above, that, however, actually gave the event a character of unity.

With Pope Pius XII, the General Constitutions of 1957 were approved. They gathered what had been previously elaborated on the Third Order, from the definition of the nature and the purpose of the government, to a spiritually profound, broad and precise program of life, to disciplinary norms, and, an absolute novelty, in Article 121, there was sanctioned the *possibility* of constituting councils at a higher level to that of the local level and the *opportunity* to extend them to the inter-obedience level, also contemplating the possibility of having national presidents and a “general president.” On the basis of this article, even before the 1978 Rule, it was possible to start the process of unity and international organization of the OFS.

The actual process of updating the Rule of 1883 officially began in **November 1965** with a letter sent by the four General Commissioners to the four General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR requesting a revision of the rule.

The Sacred Congregation for Religious granted the faculty to begin the renewal process on **March 7, 1966**.

On **March 9, 1966**, the General Commissioners sent a circular to the Provincial Ministers, the Provincial Commissioners, the Directors and Tertiaries from around the world, asking for suggestions and proposals for the revision of the Leonine Rule of 1883.

In **1967** the responses began to arrive.

The answers centered around the following essential themes:

- deeply reform the Rule of 1883
- the Gospel as a rule of life, in the footsteps of Saint Francis,
- to live in fraternity, emphasizing full secularity
- in the world for the world,
- at the service of the Church,
- reference to Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et spes, Apostolicam actuositatem*
- Profession as the fruit of Baptism and Confirmation
- in union with the whole Franciscan family.

Franciscans from 24 countries responded to this first request: France, Spain, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Holland, Germany, Italy, Peru, Colombia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Japan, Philippines, Belgium, Canada, United States, Mexico, Rhodesia, England, Ireland, Austria, Canada, Mexico.

The work for the development of the new Rule was a magnificent example of united collaboration of all the Secular Franciscans, supported by the brothers of the First Order and TOR. Participation was passionate and fervent from the beginning. The contributions received were vital and demanding, based on the real experience of the brothers and sisters and their assistants and was not so much a reflection made theoretically at the table.

The responses, which reached the General Curias of the four Franciscan religious orders, were collected and analyzed at an **inter-obedience meeting** in Assisi in **January 1968**. The meeting took place at Santa Maria degli Angeli, however.... **There wasn't even one Secular Franciscan present!** The 12 Franciscan religious (four General Commissioners and 8 experts) who were gathered there

emphasized this incongruity. However, the meeting did take place, but they promised themselves that it would be the last one without the decisive contribution of those directly involved, the Secular Franciscans.

The Order had been under complete submission to religious for over 500 years and had largely lost its ability to operate independently. Until the 1950s, the national governing bodies of the Third Order Franciscans were composed only of Franciscan religious. In pastoral visits to the Third Order National Councils, the visitor was a religious and the ones visited were also religious! Up to 1972 the friars who assisted the tertiaries were called directors and commissioners. It was only in 1972 that they started to be called “spiritual assistants.”

While all three Orders (1st, 2nd and 3rd) shared the same basic Franciscan spirituality, each one could only rightly speak about his own specific spirituality: only those who live a specific experience of religious life can talk about that personal religious experience and not the others.

The twelve religious agreed that the Rule should be set up in three sections:

1. **Nature and purpose** of the Third Order,
2. **Rules of life** of the Secular Franciscan,
3. Essential points about the **Organization** of the Order.

To this end they formed **3 subcommittees**, one per section.

In **July 1968, the FIRST DRAFT OF THE RULE**, prepared by the three subcommittees of religious, was sent to the tertiaries and directors around the world.

This first draft was not well received. The reactions were very critical:

- the text was entirely formulated by only religious,
- direct and responsible involvement of Secular Franciscans is necessary
- a complete reformulation of the text is needed that reflects:
 - the **secular and Franciscan character** of the Order
 - to **re-establish its ancient and original unity and autonomy**.

It was then decided to create an **INTER-OBEDIENCE SECRETARIAT** formed by the four General Commissioners and two Secular Franciscans for each of the obediences. Our brothers and sisters were: **Fausta Casolini, Anna Cesari, Lucia Mattei, Vincent McAloon, Augusto Natali, Lidia Pedroli, Riccardo Ricci, Stefano Ricciardi**.

The General Commissioners (religious) then decided to convene an **INTERNATIONAL INTER-OBEDIENCE CONGRESS** in Assisi from September 27 to October 3, 1969.

The Praesidium of the Congress was formed, consisting of: the General Secretary: Fr. David Retana OFM (Mex); the President: Jan van der Putten (NL); two Moderators: Pomona Pefanis (CDN) and Abbé Pierre Souche (F).

They worked with **three commissions**, one for each of the three sections foreseen in the Rule (Nature of the Order, Rule of Life, Organization of the Order) and **five language groups**.

The Congress produced 25 proposals whose fundamental points were:

- Commitment to live the Gospel, according to the spirit of St. Francis
- Permanent (daily) conversion
- Living in fraternal communion (Fraternity)
- Full secularity
- In communion of vital reciprocity with the whole Franciscan family
- One Order, one structure, with its own government
- In communion with the Family but not in hierarchical dependence
- According to the norms of the Church

Using these basic tenets (which will remain the cornerstones of the Final Redaction), a **new INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION** was set up including the **PRAESIDIUM** of the Congress and the **five chairpersons of the language groups**⁷, to collaborate with the **four General Commissioners** to draft a new text.

The Congress also formulated the request to create an **INTERNATIONAL INTER-OBEDIENCE COUNCIL** of of the Order.

Things, however, went very slowly and the **International Commission** was re-formed in **July 1972**. **Fr. Leon Bedrune OFM (F)** took the place of Fr. David Retana as General Secretary and, at the request of the General Assistants (the name had just changed from Commissioners to Assistants), **Manuela Mattioli** (Venezuelan of Italian origin, President of the International Discretorium of the Third Order Franciscans of the Capuchin obedience formed in 1969) became part of the **Praesidium** and of the **International Commission**.

On **October 4, 1973**, the four Ministers General of the First Order and TOR established the **INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE THIRD ORDER FRANCISCANS (CITOF)** with **Manuela Mattioli**, President, and four Vice Presidents, one for each *obedience*.

The **Praesidium** drafted various editions and finally, in **March 1974**, a **BASIC TEXT** (in French) was sent to the **International Commission**.

The Commission was now composed of 17 members (three of them women) representing 11 countries including a representative of Franciscan Youth.

The Commission, while appreciating many aspects of the new version, criticized the lack of an adequate “specifically *secular* spirituality.”

Based on the observations of the International Commission, the **Praesidium** produced a new draft of the Rule (**1975 REDACTION**) which on April 30, **1975** was sent to the Order's National Councils around the world for study and commentary.

The answers arrived and were numerous and also very different.

The **General Assistants** examined all the responses and in **September 1976**, the **PRESIDENCY OF THE INTERNATIONAL INTER-OBEDIENCE COUNCIL (CITOF)** decided to form a “**LOCAL COMMISSION**,” composed of five lay people and two religious, with the task of drafting a new text of the Rule.

The **TEXT FROM THE LOCAL COMMISSION** and the **1975 Edition** were then given to a group of four experts (Ludovico Cava OFM Conv., Lazaro Iriarte OFM Cap., Atanasio Matanić OFM, Francesco Provenzano TOR) to examine the texts from the point of view of canon law, of history, theology and Franciscan spirituality.

In a nutshell, the experts' comments were:

LOCAL COMMISSION TEXT: too monastic and not very secular; clerical; unbalanced on the role of the Minister; good the expansion on formation and the admission to the Order; good the juridical style of the text.

1975 REDACTION: theologically deeper and Franciscan; respected secularity; good response to the Second Vatican Council.

On the basis of the instructions of the experts, the General Assistants prepared another text: the “**TEXT OF THE GENERAL ASSISTANTS**.”

⁷ Waldemar Roebuck, (USA); Max Travet, (France); Annelies Kammenhuber, (Germany); Augusto Natali, (Italy); Fernando de Trazegnies, (Peru).

An **International Commission**, which met in Rome in April 1977, was given the task of evaluating the last two texts: the **Text of the Local Commission** and the **Text of the General Assistants**. The **Final Redaction** was born from this work.

The **International Commission** gave the task to its **members residing in Rome** to produce a text in good Italian⁸ that would be delivered to the General Assistants so that they could present it to the **Ministers General** for their approval and for transmission to the CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES.

The **Ministers General** introduced some minor modifications and added an Introductory Chapter, the **Prologue**, the *First Letter of St. Francis to the Faithful Penitents*.

This was a providential addition that perfected the Rule making it a document of the highest spiritual value that embraced the life and history of the Order from its beginnings to the present day. Finally, a Rule had been devised which, although updated for the present times, also had its roots visibly in the very origins of the OFS stemming from St. Francis own spirituality. The *Letter to the faithful of St. Francis* would have allowed the Secular Franciscans to read, understand and live the new Rule in the light of the authentic spirituality of St. Francis in his own spirit of evangelical radicalism.

The CONGREGATION suggested a series of small but significant corrections⁹ and above all introduced the essential article 3 which offers a synthesis of continuity with all the previous Rules and places the Rule under the direct responsibility of the Holy See.

As we all know, finally, our beloved **St. Paul VI gave us the new Rule on June 24, 1978.**

CONCLUSIONS

Over the centuries, the Franciscan Order of Secular Penitents has had a life as complex as that of the rest of the Family, with the aggravating circumstance that for five centuries the Order had not had the opportunity to express itself as such, because it was subject to the religious of the First Order and the TOR and suffered the consequences of the divisions of the religious of the First Order and the constant sense of superiority towards the laity.

From 1471, after a period of great effervescence and initial industriousness that lasted over two and a half centuries from its inception, the Order had been subjected to the Franciscan religious of the First Order, and later also of the Third Order Regular, due to Pope Sixtus IV with the Bull *Romani Pontificis Providentia*. For this reason, the Order has experienced a period of substantial stagnation with many ups and downs. The lack of recognition of its autonomy and structural unity, necessary to

⁸ Among other things, the verbs were put in the present subjunctive (exhortative) and in the third person plural.

⁹ Art. 1: *common Seraphic Father*; art. 2: *organic union of all Catholic fraternities*; art. 4: to observe the Gospel *after the example of Saint Francis*; art. 5 the living and *active* person of Christ, *in their brothers and sisters, in sacred Scripture, in the Church and by actively participating in the Liturgy. Let the inspiration and focus of their Eucharistic life be the faith of Saint Francis who said: In this world, I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God except his most holy Body and Blood*; art. 11: Christ, trusting in the Father, chose, together with his Mother, a poor and humble life, *whilst at the same time carefully showing loving appreciation for everything created*. Likewise, with regard to temporal goods and their use, let Secular Franciscans seek the right spirit of *detachment and fairness* by simplifying their own material needs. ... as the gospel says, they are stewards of the good things which they have *received* and who are bound to administer them for the good of the children of God.

assume and fully carry out its role, played a decisive role in the Order's inability to blossom as its own entity and to contributing significantly to the mission of the Family.

After the first Form of Life written by St. Francis for his Penitents (Letter to the Faithful Penitents, 1215-1221), the *Memoriale propositi* was introduced (1221-1228), a general framework law for all Penitents, not approved in specific form by the Holy See, inasmuch as it contained rules already codified in the Gratian's Decree of 1140.

This normative text was followed by the First Rule, specifically approved for the Franciscan Penitents by Pope Nicholas IV in 1289 with the Bull *Supra Montem*.

In 1883, although the *Supra Montem* had not been repealed, the second Rule approved by Leo XIII, with the Bull *Misericors Dei Filius*, went into effect.

At the end of the 19th century, after the end of the suppression of religious orders and the providential intervention of the Holy See, of some enlightened Secular Franciscans and Franciscan religious, a fruitful period of reflection and re-awakening of consciousness by the Secular Franciscans began which laid the ground for the revision of the previous Rules in light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and of the original, primitive spirituality.

The process of drafting the Pauline Rule lasted 12 years and Secular Franciscans from all over the world and many enlightened Franciscan religious contributed in a united and constructive way to draw up this splendid and inspired.

The Holy See contributed in a special way to the achievement of this objective and Saint Pope Paul VI gave it as a precious gift to the Secular Franciscan Order and to the entire Franciscan Family. In this Rule, besides the eminently evangelical and Franciscan contents, four extremely important elements stand out: the unity of the Order, its centralized form of government, its autonomy and the affirmation of the vital reciprocal communion that must exist between the three Franciscan Orders.

Now, it is important for us Secular Franciscans, with the help of the new Rule, to fully re-claim the meaning of our existence and specific vocation to faithfully serve the original plan aimed at restoring the Church, to be carried out with all its components, according to the God's plan which was entrusted to Francis. For a long time, the First Order and the Second Order were burdened with this task alone, lacking the stability that the third "leg" should have furnished, that of a mature and adult OFS, capable of carrying out its part of the mission. A rope with only one or two strands has not always been able to support the weight that it had to hold. "*Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*" (Qo 4, 12). Scripture reminds us: It is difficult for a three-stranded rope to break! We must therefore, in re-claiming our unity and autonomy, contribute to restoring strength to this triple Franciscan "cord", so that it is able to fully play its role in the Church.¹⁰

Secular Franciscans are the vast majority of Franciscans; they live immersed in the things of the world, and without their contribution it is not possible to convert and restore the world to Christ, in its most intimate and vital ways.

The laity and the seculars are therefore essential.

For this reason, the First, Second and Third Orders of St. Francis must rediscover the meaning of the common mission, each coordinating with the other two Franciscan Orders. It is an essential mission in God's plan for Franciscans.

Benedetto Lino, OFS

¹⁰ A. Boni, *Tres Ordines Hic Ordinatus*, pag. 169-180

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **Robert M. Stuart**, “*De illis qui faciunt paenitentiam*”. The Rules of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation. Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1991
 2. **Gabriele Andreozzi**, Storia delle Regole e delle Costituzioni Generali dell’Ordine Franciscano Secolare. (Story of the Rule and the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order) Ed. Guerra – Perugia, 1988
 3. **Mariano Bigi**, L’Universale salute. Profilo storico dell’Ordine Franciscano Secolare. Testi e studi di formazione ad uso interno OFS-GiFra (Universal health. Historical profile of the Secular Franciscan Order. Texts and formation studies for internal OFS-YouFra use), 1990
 4. **Andrea Boni**, *Tres Ordines hic ordinat*, Ed. Porziuncola, Collectio Assiensis 26, 1999
 5. **Andrea Boni**, *La Novitas Franciscana nel suo essere e nel suo divenire* (The *Novitas Franciscana* in its being and in its becoming). Spicilegium Pontificii Athenaei Antoniani, n. 33, Roma 1998
 6. **Jaime Zudaire**, Con Francesco alla sequela di Cristo. Introduzione alla Spiritualità e all’organizzazione dell’Ordine Franciscano Secolare. Testi e studi di formazione ad uso interno OFS-GiFra (With Francis following Christ. Introduction to the Spirituality and to the Organization of the Secular Franciscan Order. Texts and formation studies for internal OFS-YouFra use), 1996
-