

***Franciscan Journey* chapter 7 notes**

History of OFS and Development of the Rule

Francis lived in a time of social upheaval and in a Church where power was often more important than the Gospel. Once Francis began gathering followers, the First Order blossomed quickly. By 1530 differences led to three branches of the first order: Order of Friars minor (OFM), Order of Friars Minor Conventual (OFM Conv), and Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap). The second order is the Poor Clares.

The Third Order Secular began with laity who wished to embrace the penitential spirit of Francis through their lives in the world. The focus of "penitential" is conversion -- moving from a self-centered way of life to a way of life that is focused upon doing God's will. Conversion takes time, effort, and prayer.

Several earlier penitential groups (e.g., the Waldensians and Humiliati) had become heretical or marginalized, causing more confusion than clarity. Francis was guided through the minefields of penitential groups by Bishop Guido of Assisi. When Francis and a group of followers approached Pope Innocent III for approval of their way of life, he initially leaned toward refusing their request. He approved their simple rule after he had a dream in which he saw Francis holding up the Lateran basilica, which seemed to be falling apart. Laity began to follow, and a new spirit was alive in the Church.

Relevant documents and rules:

- Earlier Exhortation (1215) - addressed to the first lay penitents.
- Later Admonition and Exhortation (1220) - incorporates teachings of Lateran Council IV,
- Earlier Rule of the First Order (1221) - developed as Francis and the friars gained experience, did not receive papal approval.
- Memoriale propositi - seems to be authored by Cardinal Hugolino, more juridically oriented than Francis's ordinary style.
- First Order Rule of 1223 ("Regular Bullata") - approved by Pope Honorius III met organizational and "vision" needs of the friars. Lateran IV required a period of "novitiate." Development of organizational structures followed a common pattern of growth for large groups.

Third Order secular grew out of the willingness of lay people to follow the spirit of Francis. Development of a specific rule took time. Earlier Exhortation provided guidance during the early days. Nicolas IV became the first Franciscan Pope in 1288. He approved the Rule for Franciscan Penitents in 1289 in a document named *Supra Montem*. Not an Order in the strict sense (neither life in community nor vows), but in the broader sense (Rule approved by Apostolic See, a novitiate period of formation, and an irreversible profession). The

document linked First Order and Third Order into one Franciscan family, closely related by common origin and heritage.

Francis envisioned an ideal of Christian life which was wide ranging and required great commitment -- to follow the Lord with ever increasing impetus, to let the spirit of the Lord and paradoxical logic of the Gospel permeate their minds, their hearts, and their lives. We are called to be leaven in our secular sphere and witnesses to poverty, love, joy, peace, marital fidelity, obedience to the Church, apostolic Christocentrism, and sincere devotion to the Virgin Mary.

In 1883, Pope Leo XIII promulgated a new rule. Some Third Order Franciscans had taken vows and begun to live in community. These became the Third Order Regular (TOR) and the Franciscan sisters. The new rule was initially successful in drawing many people into dedicated Christian life, it ultimately lost its ability to inspire and empower Secular Franciscans.

The process that resulted in the Rule of 1978 began in 1965 with a call to initiate a reform of the Rule of 1883, the Constitutions, and the Ritual. The leadership sought worldwide suggestions and ideas for this renewal. Most respondents called for a complete, radical reform of the Rule of 1883. Three committees were established to explore:

- The Secular Franciscan Order and its characteristic in the world today.
- The essential elements of a Franciscan spirituality for the laity.
- The fundamental laws of government of the Order.

A Praesidium and Commission were established to develop a rule. Several drafts and suggested changes followed, finally resulting into a draft of the Rule in 1974. In 1975 this draft was sent to the National Councils of the OFS throughout the world for study and comment. Responses were especially focused upon the failure of this rule to adequately present a "secular" spirituality. A new redaction followed, then a commission of five lay people and two religious to review and submit another redaction. It was then reviewed by experts in canon law, history, theology, and Franciscan spirituality. After further polishing, the Rule was submitted to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes for approval. After some dialogue, the Rule was approved by Pope Paul VI on June 24, 1978.