

ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS


- Initial Formation for Candidates -

PREAMBLE—[Rule, Constitutions & Statutes](#)

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: To observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and people.

Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to the careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to Life, and Life to the Gospel. [Rule, 4]

Penance was part of the Church's tradition from earliest times. [Cf. Mk 1.14; Matt 28.19-20] 'Penance' [repentance/transformation] was, after all, part and parcel of what it was to be a Christian. The trouble was 'post baptismal sin', and passages like Matt 18.15-18 and Acts 26.20 provided a foundation for the Church's 'penitential tradition'. However, the severity of a penitential life was to trouble many would be Christians.

- The lives of Penitents were often an encouraging witness to the transforming power of grace in the life of the believer, evidence of a real growth in holiness [Gal 5.22-26], and in consequence they enjoyed an officially recognised status in the Church.
- They were known by different names—'converted ones', 'virgins', 'voluntary penitents' etc.
- Some were hermits, some helped in monasteries, some lived at home. In Francis' time, even crusaders were regarded as penitents. Penitents were a growing sight in towns and cities in the 11th, 12th and 13th Centuries.
- 'Doing penance' was a popular response in the 13th Century to the challenge of living in towns and cities. Responding to the spiritual needs of a growing urban population, many were dedicated to the welfare of others—especially the poor and marginalised of society, mindful of the Scriptures—Matt 19.16-26; Acts 4.32-35.
- Penitents were often recognised by their rough or simple clothing— even the use of the 'tau' affixed to their outer clothing as an additional sign showing their repentance and determination to live by Gospel values. This sign, used by Christians from earliest times, was, according to Celano, the sign favoured above all others by St Francis. The tau—was used as the sign of the medics helping the lepers.
- Francis, therefore, was not the first Christian to preach penance. For example, towards the end of the 12th Century the 'Humiliati' had emerged in Italy. Their way of life received papal approval by Alexander III in 1179, but some refused to accept the ban on lay preaching and all suffered on account of the disobedient. Finally, they presented Innocent III with a rule of 17 statutes and asked for his blessing. In 1201 he gave them what they wanted—incorporating the legislation into a bull of approval—but with an emphasis on humility and ecclesiastical obedience; and an important compromise on the thorny matter of preaching! ('The speakers should admonish and lead [people] to an upright life of works and piety, and do this in such a manner that they should not speak about the *articles of faith and the sacraments of the Church.*' !!)
- Other similar groups were approved: Poor Catholics [1208], Poor Lombards [1210], but it was the success of heretical groups like the Waldensians and Albigensians who queered the pitch

for everyone and forced the Fourth Lateran Council to introduce strict statutes on religious life.

- As was the case with the First and Second Orders, social and political and ecclesiastical factors influenced both the origin and the development of the Third Order. Celano's reference to a 'norm of life for the Brothers and Sisters of Penance' should be seen in the same light as what happened with the first friars—that is, a way of life that was simple, consisting almost certainly of broad Gospel-based principles. The brothers accompanied Francis to Rome in 1209 armed possibly with little more than a few Gospel texts that had hitherto inspired the brothers [propositum vitae]. To this request the pope gave oral approval, which developed in time to the Later Rule [Regula bullata] of 1223—developments of which can be seen even in the Earlier Rule [Regula non bullata].



Many people, well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine inspiration began to come to St Francis, for they desired to serve under his constant training and leadership. All of these the holy man of God, like a plenteous river of heavenly grace, watered the streams of gifts; he enriched the field of their hearts with flowers of virtue, for he was an excellent craftsman; and, according to his plan, proclaimed before all, the Church is of those being renewed in both sexes, and the three-fold army of those to be served is triumphing. To all he gave a norm of life and to those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way of salvation.

[Thomas of Celano *First Life of St Francis*, 37]

Studies have given new importance, therefore, to a document previously over looked, which has primary importance for those first Brothers and Sisters of Penance—namely:

The first version of the Letter to the Faithful, Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance

[Translation p. 3-4 below is from Volume I of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, p. 41-44]

Discovered in 1900, it has come to be seen as holding a special place in understanding the development of the Order of Penitents.

No longer regarded as the earlier version of the later Admonition and Exhortation but as a response to a request for some regulation for the followers of St Francis—

- who would remain in their homes
- who, even if they made radical changes such as selling their possessions and focusing on service to those of greatest need such that their own family became impoverished, chose not to join the early brothers

The suggested date is 1209-1215

THE FIRST VERSION OF THE LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL *1
(Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance)

(CHAPTER ONE) THOSE WHO DO PENANCE

1. All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, and their whole strength [Cf. Mk 12.30] and love their neighbours as themselves [Cf. Matt 22.39] 2. who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, 3. and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, 4. and produce worthy fruits of penance:

5. Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, 6. because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them [Cf. Isa 11.2] and make its home and dwelling place among them [Cf. Jn 14.23]. 7. And they are children of the heavenly Father [Cf. Matt 5.45] whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ [Cf. Matt 12.50].

8. We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. 9. We are brothers to him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven [Cf. Matt 12.50]. 10. We are mothers when we carry him in our heart and body [Cf. I Cor 6.20] through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others. [Cf. Matt 5.16].

11. O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven! 12. O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse! 13. O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love, and, above all things desirable: to have such a Brother and such a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for his sheep [Cf. Jn 10.15] and prayed to the Father, saying:

14. Holy Father, in your name, save those [Jn 17.11] whom you have given me in the world; they were yours and you gave them to me [Jn 17.6]. 15. The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and have believed in truth that I have come from you and they have known that you have sent me [Jn 17.8]. 16. I pray for them and not for the world [Cf. Jn 17.9]. 17. Bless and sanctify them; [Jn 17.17] as I sanctify myself for them [Jn 17.19]. 18. I pray not only for them, but for those who will believe in me through their word [Jn 17.20], that they may be sanctified in being one [Jn 17.23] as we are one [Jn 17.11]. 19. And I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me that they may see my glory [Jn 17.24] in your kingdom [Matt 20.21]. Amen.

(CHAPTER TWO) THOSE WHO DO NOT DO PENANCE

1. All those men and women who are not living in penance, 2. who do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, 3. who practice vice and sin and walk after the evil of concupiscence [Col 3.5] and the evil desires of the flesh [Gal 5.16], 4. who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, 5. and who in their body serve the world through the desires of the flesh [I Pet 2.11], the concerns of the world and the cares of this life. 6. They are held captive by the devil, whose children they are, and whose works they do [Cf. Jn 8.41]. 7. They are blind because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ. 8. They do not possess spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God, the true wisdom of the Father. 9. It is said of them: Their wisdom has been swallowed up [Ps 106.27], and: Cursed are those who turn away from your commands [Ps 118.21]. 10. They see and acknowledge, know how to do evil, and knowingly lose their souls.

11. See, you blind ones, deceived by your enemies: by the flesh, the world, and the devil, because it is sweet for the body to sin and it is bitter to serve God, 12. for every vice and sin flow and proceed from the human heart as the Lord says in the Gospel [Cf. Matt 7.21]. 13. And you have nothing in this world or in that to come. 14. And you think that you will possess this world's vanities for a long time, but you are deceived because a day and an hour will come of which you give no thought, which you do not know, and of which you are unaware [Cf. Matt 25.13] when the body becomes weak and death approaches, and it dies a bitter death.

15. And no matter where, when, or how a person dies in the guilt of sin without penance and satisfaction, if he can perform an act of satisfaction and does not do so, the devil snatches his soul from its body with such anguish and distress that no one can know [what it is like] except the one receiving it.

16. And every talent, ability, knowledge and wisdom [II Chron 1.12], they think they have will be taken away from them [Cf. Lk 8.18; Mk 4.25]. 17. And they leave their wealth to their relatives and friends who take and divide it and afterwards say: 'May his soul be cursed because he could have given us more and acquired more than what he distributed to us!' 18. Worms eat his body and so body and soul perish in this brief world and they will go to hell where they will be tortured forever.

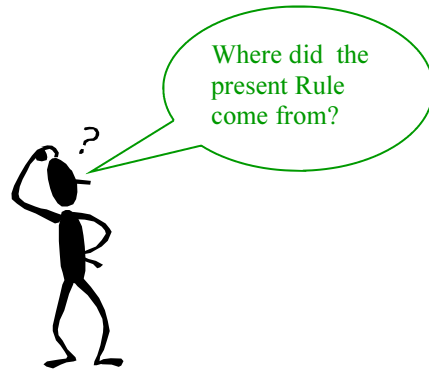
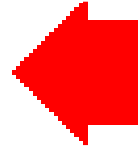
19. In the love which is God [Cf. I Jn 4.16] we beg all those whom these words reach to receive those fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ written above with divine love and kindness. 20. And let whoever does not know how to read have them read to them frequently. 21. Because they are spirit and life [Jn 6.64], they should preserve them together with a holy activity to the end.

22. And whoever has not done these things will be held accountable before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ [Cf. Rom 14.10] on the day of judgment [Cf. Matt 12.36].

*1 'The text in the Volterra codex 225, which was identified by Pazzelli as the primitive rule, and which had earlier been designated by Esser as the *Epistola ad Fideles (Recensio prior): Exhortatio ad fratres et sorores de poenitentia*, has come to be known generally (following the original publication of Esser's study in 1975) as the *Recensio prior* or the *First Version of the Letter to All the Faithful*.... Thus, the Volterra text, the text which has now been identified as the primitive Rule, has generally been designated as the earlier version (*Recensio prior*) of the *Letter to All the Faithful*.'...The letter is not addressed to all Christians, that is, to 'all the faithful', but rather, to 'all *Christian religious*: clergy and laity, men and women, and to all who live in the whole world'. The recipients are not 'all the faithful', but rather, those Christians living in the world who have committed themselves to living more intensely their baptismal commitment through a life of penance...This commonly accepted title implies that Francis intended his message for all Christians in general, rather than the specific group to which it was directed. Francis addressed his words to the brothers and sisters of penance who, within the medieval understanding of states within the Church, were considered "religious"... While this...title might suggest a general exhortation to traditional Christian morality, in fact, the letter represents the "discernment and precisions of the movement's way and purpose" for the women and men who became voluntary penitents under the guidance of Francis and the friars.'

[Robert M Stewart *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*..., 135-7]

Sometime around 1220 Francis formulated another, more detailed, letter [Later Exhortation]. Clearly with the Cathar heretics in mind [who denied Christ's true humanity], Francis now insists on full acceptance of Jesus humanity as a starting point for living as a penitent, and that his followers consent to the Lateran IV's profession of faith. [IV Lat § 1] Further adaptations took place between 1221-1228. Then, Hugolino stepped in to help the situation. Concerned with bringing uniform order to the various religious groups in Umbria 'he saw to the formulation of a number of statutes designed to complement what Francis had written. In 1228,...as pope Gregory IX, he officially approved this legislation in a document entitled *Memorial of the manner of life of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance living in their own homes begun in the year of Our Lord 1221.*' [Maurice Carmody *The Franciscan Story*, 189-90] These statutes are clearly not specifically Franciscan—but while some statutes were similar to those already observed by the Humilati and other penitential groups, others were based directly on decisions of Lateran IV. More familiar as *Memoriale propositi*, it gave the legal guidelines for Franciscan Penitents until the first Rule in 1289.



Well, we've already mentioned 'Memoriale propositi' of 1228. The next thing we hear about is the Rule approved by pope Nicholas IV (1289) - the first Franciscan friar to become pope; then that of the Secular Franciscan, pope Leo XIII (1883).

Each adapts the OFS to the needs and expectations of the Church in the conditions of changing times. After the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), pope Paul VI (1978) gave us our present Rule.

The interpretation of the Rule always belongs to the Holy See, its application by the General Constitutions, and National Statutes.



The exact text of *Memoriale propositi* as it existed in 1221 cannot be definitely reconstructed—but versions of it have been preserved in other manuscripts as it evolved up to 1228 [when the text was considered 'unchangeable']. It was this version which remained officially in force as the Rule of the penitents from 1228-1289 when pope Nicholas IV gave them *Supra Montem*.



Scholars agree that the text of the First Version of the Letter... represents the primitive Rule of the 'Brothers and Sisters of Penance'; and that comparisons with the *Regula non bullata* [the 1221 Rule of the Friars Minor] likewise proclaims the blessedness of those who do penance.



The key to understanding the Way of Penance in the primitive Rule must be understood from the perspective of Francis' own understanding of penance:

1. The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers.
2. And the Lord himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them.
3. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterwards I lingered a little while and left the world. [*Testament 1-3*]

In the primitive Rule Francis exhorts his followers to a life of penance, but with a focused clarity:

1. to love God [1a]
2. to love our neighbour [1b]
3. to resist the sinful tendencies of our fallen nature[2]
4. to partake of the Body of Christ [3]
5. to act or to live in conformity with our conversion [4].

The 'conversion' or life of penance expresses itself externally. The conversion is first an internal even which manifests itself in an external manifestation: 'worthy fruits of penance'. That is, Francis clearly places the action of God and the interior attitude or change within the person before the manifestation of penance. This recognition, at the heart of Francis' understanding of penance, remains crucial for any articulation of a Franciscan penitential spirituality.

Francis does not simply suggest adopting various norms and practices of penance—we do not begin with the fruits—for Francis a life of penance [conversion/transformation] begins with God's action.



'The beginning of both the *Testament* and the *Earlier Exhortation* [i.e. First Version of the Letter to the Faithful] reveal the central dynamic of conversion of "metanoia": the radical turning from self to God.' [Robert M Stewart *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*, 170]

- Way of penance is a means to freedom—mystical union with God
- For Francis, penance is the only possible response to a loving God
- For Francis, penance is radical choosing of God's love
- Penance begins with an experience of God that radically changes the person
- The impossible [for Francis embracing lepers] becomes the possible in Christ—who remains the focus of the penitential life
- Identification with Christ is **the way of penance**

'We must not, therefore, lose sight of the key to understanding the way of penance, that is, the basis for performing the works of penance. Francis exhorted people to penance and they embraced the penitential life as a way to deepen their experience of God, as a means to a deeper intimacy with God. This motivation for doing penance becomes more obvious in Francis' use of the Gospel of John in the primitive Rule.' [Stewart, 171]

In 1221 this early Rule for the penitents took a very different form in the *Memoriale propositi*.



So why not leave things as they were? Why this *Memoriale propositi*?

Francis presented an **exhortation to penance**; *Memoriale propositi* presents **juridical norms** regulating the life of penance for these followers of Francis. Prior to this there were other penitential groups who had received papal approval with similar 'rules'. *2 This was not the work of Francis—but most likely the hand of Cardinal Hugolino, or his jurists. However, what is certain is that *Memoriale propositi* became firmly established as a Rule for the Franciscan penitents during the early years of the pontificate of Gregory IX [previously Hugolino, the powerful, influential papal legate of pope Honorius III and imperial representative to Frederick II; former Cardinal Protector of the Friars Minor]; who played a large part in the development of various Franciscan Rules. *3

By 1227—when Hugolino became pope, the 'penitential movements' were huge everywhere and the pope was well aware of their political importance—as one who wished to settle Italian inter-city rivalry and focus military potential against other forces by calling a crusade. Regulation and control of communities of Franciscan penitents was to bring them clearly under the auspices of the official Church by approving a specific Rule. The attempt to regulate the spontaneous Franciscan penitential movement appears to have changed its earlier form—a change which becomes even more apparent in the much more specific Rule of 1289. Thus, *Memoriale propositi* [unlike the Letter to the Faithful] presents the life of penance in terms of 'juridical prescriptions' concerning:

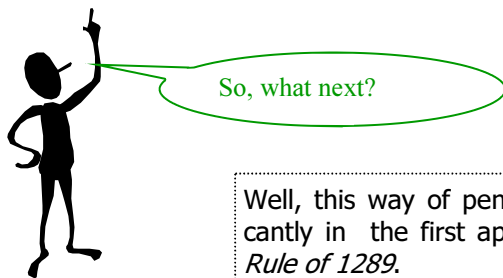
- modesty in dress and appropriate entertainment
- abstinence and fasts
- life of prayer, including confessions and communion
- reconciliation with others
- prohibition against bearing arms, taking oaths
- care of the sick and the dead
- role of minister
- admission and perseverance in the fraternity
- avoidance of heresy and dissension
- election of officers
- obligation of the norms



*2 For example: Humiliati [1201], Poor Catholics [1206], Poor Lombards [1210, 1212]

*3 Some have argued the later Rules—*Regula bullata* of the Friars Minor and *Memoriale propositi* do not reflect Francis' thought, but the mind and wishes of Hugolino. Most, however, see both Rules as definitely having Francis' inspiration and influence.

'The Rule or Way of Life of Francis and his early followers did have roots in preceding religious experiences and expressions: eremitism and penance, solidarity with the lepers, and itinerant preaching. The novelty, that which made this way of penance "Franciscan", was Francis' insistence on a radical *metanoia* [conversion] combined with an absolute fidelity to the Church...the later legislation of the Order of Penitents did not lose all traces of its original matrix...Much of the life which Francis exhorted the penitents can be found in the *Memoriale propositi*. His exhortations to be simple, to love and praise God, to fast and abstain, and to love one's neighbour have been translated into prescriptions concerning modesty in dress, times and manners of prayer, fasting and abstinence, restitution of goods and the prohibition against bearing arms. These prescriptions reflected the regime of the canonical Order of Penance as it had evolved in the thirteenth century. Unfortunately, codification of religious experience and its expression often brings the loss of its true spirit...The *Memoriale propositi* presents the Franciscan way of penance only insofar as it is read and understood through the lens of the primitive Rule..., only insofar as the life of penance begins with the experience of God which leads the person to a true sense of repentance which leads to self-denial, to humility and simplicity, to service and love of others.' [Stewart, 200]



Well, this way of penance changed even more significantly in the first approved Rule, *Supra Montem*, the Rule of 1289.

Nicholas IV became the first Franciscan pope in 1288 and almost at once was requested by some local communities of penitents to grant official approval to their Rule. On 18 August 1289 he issued *Supra Montem*, containing the Rule for Franciscan penitents. The Rule of 1289 was universally accepted, and effectively remained the official Rule of the OFS until 1883. *4



- This first formally approved Rule contains most of the material found in *Memoriale propositi*; some paragraphs are verbatim
- The contents are rearranged to reflect the general order of prescriptions in other religious Rules
- Rule of 1289 attempts to legislate the life of Franciscan penitents in general, not reflecting more local customs sometimes present in *Memoriale*...
- Mention of feast of St Francis here in 1289 post-dates his canonization [1228]: but Nicholas IV introduces 'Francis' into this Rule—which had profound influence on the Order in terms of both its structure and its function: e.g. Francis is explicitly named as the 'Founder of this Order'. This was important in that while the 'visitor' in *Memoriale*...might be designated by the local bishop, or even elected by the penitents themselves, the Rule of 1289 demands that the visitor be taken from the **Order of Minors**:

XVI. 2 Because this present form of life took its origin from the aforementioned Blessed Francis, we counsel that the visitors and instructors should be taken from the Order of Friars Minor, whom the custodies or guardians of the same Order shall appoint, when they have been requested in the matter. However, we do not want a congregation of this

*4 *Supra Montem*—complete text in English—see folder 'Additional Resources'. Complete text in English is to be found [compared with that of *Memoriale propositi*] in Stewart, 373-388.

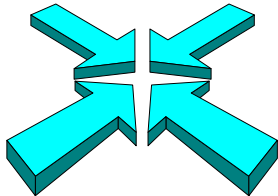
kind to be visited by a lay person.

- Previously, penitents welcomed the prestige of claiming their origin from Francis himself, but here the pope, while acknowledging this phenomenon, legislates a closer bond with the Friars Minor. Some, however, did not welcome being placed under a clerical Order! [The penitents of Lombardy refused to accept this, continuing to elect a lay person as visitor!]
- The pope, in addition, defined the identity of the penitents—perhaps giving the Order of Penance a function and particular finality within society that was new. Specific devotion to the Church, Sacraments, and Ministry—while definitely present in Francis and expected by him of the penitents—is here stated unequivocally: ‘...in the *Rule of 1289* Nicholas IV brought a very different emphasis to Francis’ exhortation that the penitents “be Catholics”.’ [Stewart, 208] In other words, *Supra Montem* presents the Order of Penitents primarily as “orthodox” and “at the service of orthodoxy in the Roman Church”. This is evidenced by the significant change made by this *Rule of 1289*—

the document names the visitor rather than the bishop as guardian of orthodoxy
the text demands more severity in confronting heresy and heretics than did
Memoriale...

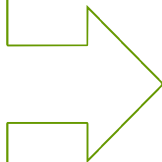
the penitents are given an active role in the repression of heresy which becomes
more obvious in the exceptions concerning the use of arms: for the defence
of the Church and the faith

- Thus, the *Rule of 1289* did introduce some very significant changes; heretics were treated more severely; penitents themselves were engaged in the struggle with heresy; bearing arms—prohibited by *Memoriale...*—is mitigated in *Supra Montem*. Here, the charism of penance has been transformed to the service of orthodoxy. In the primitive Rule, for Francis ‘doing penance’ was the way and means to God—not as the means to, and at the service of, orthodoxy. We could put it like this: for Francis ‘doing penance’ meant and implied, most of all, loving God [penance = ‘metanoia’; transformation/conversion as an inner experience giving rise to the ‘fruits of penance’]; for the Rule of 1289 it meant loving orthodoxy, and demonstrating it by [the fruits of] defending it!



Elsewhere, in the Candidacy Module 2 ‘History of the OFS’, we will see how this misrepresentation of the Way of Life of the Franciscan penitents developed through the centuries, and the place of the *Rule of 1978* in restoring it in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council’s call to go ‘ad fontes’ [back to the source].

This Rule was left in tact and changes or additions were made in the form of statutes or constitutions until it was finally succeeded by the —



1883 Rule
of the
Secular
Franciscan
pope
Leo XIII



Of this new Rule—promulgated by a pope who saw the Secular Franciscans as the means par excellence of bringing among the faithful a perfect reformation of Christian life, Stewart says: 'Leo claimed that the Way of Life proposed by Francis for the laity was indeed appropriate for all Catholics in the nineteenth century.' [Stewart, 219] Sketching the evils of the 13th Century,

- unbridled desire for wealth and luxury
- oppression of the poor
- decadence of clergy
- spread of heresy
- divisions and conflicts which lead to war,

Leo moved on to present Francis as a model of the Gospel response to those evils —

- simplicity and poverty
- Francis' total identification with the life-style and service of the Man Christ Jesus [Cf. Phil 2.5-11]

and concluded that 'no one can doubt that the Franciscan institutions will be exceedingly profitable in our own age, the more so as the nature of our times seems for many reasons to be like that of those days.' [Auspicato, 11] He encouraged all Catholics to become Secular Franciscans—endorsing it as he did all associations which promoted Christian values—encouraging all its members to live the Gospel in the world. All well and good, but the trouble was that his understanding, and consequent Rule, transformed the nature of the Order—

- something for everyone [what of call, discernment, acceptance/rejection/lifetime formation?]
- something comparable with other Catholic groups [place of Rule & Constitutions?]
- something very different from its 13th Century identity—an Order like the others.

Thus, Leo modified the Rule so that people would no longer experience obstacles in being members; greatly simplifying of the *Rule of 1289* precisely in order to make it acceptable to the greatest possible number. The new Rule eliminated/greatly abbreviated many of the previous prescriptions of 1289, reducing twenty chapters to three. The demands of 1289 are greatly reduced—removing obligations which could 'not be fulfilled without excessive trouble and difficulty':

- wear small concealed scapular as a habit
- observe the commandments
- avoid extremes of cost and style
- be temperate in eating and drinking
- fast only two extra days each year
- daily minimally say daily 12 Our Fathers, Hail Marys, Glories

—and thereby radically transforming the identity of the Order of Penitents as given in the *Rule of 1289*.

'Leo did not intend to change the nature of the Order. In promulgating the new Rule...Leo wrote that it should "not be thought, however, that thereby the nature of the Order has been altered; for we wish it to remain altogether unchanged and intact." In the introduction to the Rule Leo stated that "the Order of St Francis based entirely on the observance of the precepts of Jesus Christ. The holy founder had no other object in view than that the Order should be a kind of training ground for a more intensive practice of the Christian rule of life."...However, if the Rule of 1883 did initially empower Franciscans to social action, with the passage of time that same Rule no longer was able to inspire and empower Secular Franciscans, as evidenced by the demands for revision of Rule and Constitutions after Vatican II.' [Stewart, 238]

We should note this: for Francis, the life of penance entailed an absolute commitment to peace, reconciliation, and service.

- One of the ways *Memoriale propositi* translated this commitment to conversion through a life of penance was the prohibition against bearing arms [‘Let them not take up lethal arms against anyone or carry them with themselves.’ VI, 4]
- The *Rule of 1289* mitigated the absolute nature of this demand by including exceptions [‘Let the brothers not carry offensive weapons with themselves, unless in defence of the Roman Church, the Christian faith, or their country...’ VII]
- But the *Rule of 1883* completely omits this prescription.

The Way of Penance proposed in the *Later Exhortation*, the exhortation to a radical conversion, becomes obvious by its absence in the *Rule of 1883*. In presenting the ‘discipline’ of penance in chapter II, the Rule places upon the members who must be ‘peace-loving’ only the demands that they:

‘strive to lead others by good example and to promote practices of piety and good works...maintain the spirit of charity among themselves and towards others...strive to heal discord wherever they can.’ [II, 8-9]

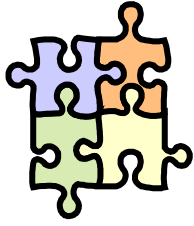
‘Whereas Francis challenged people to the true spirit of penance, whereas Francis exhorted his followers to a radically different wisdom, struggle, and sense of power in response to God’s love, here the *Rule of 1883* merely exhorts these same followers to the simple and “not too burdensome” praxis of Catholicism.’ [Stewart, 240]

This dilution of the demands of the earlier Rules has drained the *Rule of 1883* of the unique spirit or contribution of Francis. In attempting to remedy the evils of secular society by calling people to live their Catholic faith, Leo has reduced the radical demands of Gospel ‘*metanoia*’ [conversion] as understood by Francis to little more than ‘practices of piety and good works’.

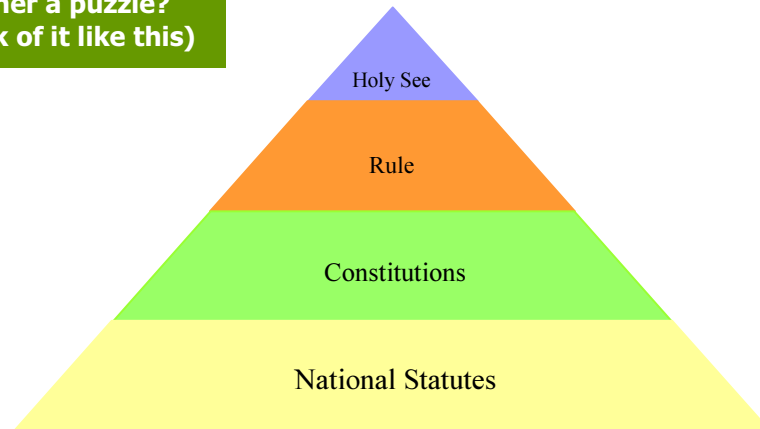
Thus, ‘rather than preserving the Way of Life preached by Francis “altogether unchanged and intact”, the *Rule of 1883* allowed for the evolution from a Franciscan Order of Penitents to a Franciscan sodality.’ [Stewart, 241]



And so it was that, in response to the will of Vatican II to go ‘ad fontes’, pope Paul VI eventually promulgated a new Rule in 1978. This Rule ‘followed the guidelines initially set out by the Assisi Congress in 1969. Essentially the *Rule of 1978* represents the result of several years of refining, organising, and integrating the seventeen points of Franciscan spirituality outlined in 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. This **incorporation of the primitive Rule within the new Rule represents...the most critical decision in the whole redactional process and provides the key for all future interpretation of the Rule...**’ [Stewart, 313]



Rather a puzzle?
(Think of it like this)



The relationship between the various tiers goes like this:

Holy See—the pope—promulgates [that is, proclaims through a decree] the Rule [*Rule of 1978*—promulgated by pope Paul VI]

Using an example from the Rule itself, we note what the **Rule** states, how the Holy See defines its meaning for the whole Order in **Constitutions**, then how the National Fraternity further clarifies it for local usage in its **Statutes**

Rule 23 ...Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year and profession of the Rule...

ADMISSION TO THE ORDER

Article 39 1. *Rule 23* The request of admission to the Order is presented by the aspirant to the minister of a local or personal fraternity by a formal act, in writing if possible.

2. Conditions for admission are: to profess the Catholic faith, to live in communion with the Church, to be of good moral standing, and to show clear sign of a vocation.

3. The council of the fraternity decides collegially on the request, gives formal answer to the aspirant, and communicates this to the fraternity.

4. The rite of admission is performed according to the Ritual. The act is to be Registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

THE TIME OF FORMATION

Article 40 1. *Rule 23* The time of formation lasts at least one year. The national statutes can establish a longer period. The purpose of this period is the maturation of the vocation, the experience of evangelical life in fraternity, and a better knowledge of the Order. This formation should be carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with concrete experiences of service and of apostolate. These meetings

should be held, as far as possible and opportune, in common with the candidates of other fraternities.

2. The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of Francis, of Franciscan spirituality, and to study the Rule and Constitutions. They are trained in a love for the Church and acceptance of her teaching. The laity practice living the secular commitment in the world in an evangelical way.

3. Participation in the meetings of the local fraternity is indispensable for initiation in community prayer and into fraternity life.

4. A style of teaching which is Franciscan in character and which fits the mentality of the persons concerned should be adopted.

Title 3

PROVISION FOR LIFE IN FRATERNITY

Article 7

The time of initiation

All those in Initiation/Initial Formation will be expected to attend and participate in the regular meetings of the local fraternity.

1. A person who is interested in the Secular Franciscan way of life shall attend at least six monthly meetings as a VISITOR before requesting, in writing, to enter Initiation as an ENQUIRER. The period as Visitor will enable the Council, and the Visitor, to discern whether he/she has both the interest and disposition to proceed towards Profession in the OFS. The fraternity will have made sure that the member is eligible to enter the Order (GC Art 37.3). If the Council of the Fraternity agrees that the Visitor may have a vocation to the OFS, the period of Enquiry will begin with the Ceremony of Introduction to the Period of Enquiry.
2. The period of Enquiry shall last at least one year, during which time, under the guidance of the formation minister, the Enquirer shall complete the course of initiation approved by the National Council of the OFS of Great Britain. The Local Fraternity Council must be satisfied that the Enquirer shows a clear sign of vocation to the way of life of a Secular Franciscan.
3. A person who has recently been received into the Catholic Church must normally spend a minimum of two years in full communion with the Church before proceeding to Initiation. The time as Visitor may run concurrently. At the discretion of the Local Fraternity this time may be reduced by a year for former members of the Anglican Franciscan family.

Article 8

Admission to the Order

1. A person who has completed the period of Initiation as an Enquirer, and been admitted to the Order as a Candidate, shall spend a minimum of two years in Initial Formation, under the guidance of the formation minister, completing the course of formation approved by the National Council of the OFS of Great Britain, before Profession takes place.
2. The minimum age for admission into the OFS of Great Britain shall be eighteen years.