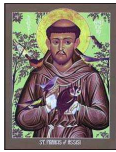


ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 2: "HISTORY OF THE OFS"
sheet 3

3. Rule: 'First Letter...', Regular Bullata, Supra Montem



but he gave law due respect, accepting guidance while keeping firmly to his own principles. All the time his central pre-occupation was to live according to the gospel, not to codify rules. Religious experience came first; rules followed as a result of lived experience. Francis was first and foremost a Churchman— 'all things should be done decently and in order.' [I Cor 14.40]

Francis was no lawyer,

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism' [Eph 4.5], and Francis ultimately gave his Orders only—

One Rule: a more perfect following of the gospel as suited to their own condition in life

Obligation—to be continually converted to the gospel [do penance] was central to the life of all three Orders., with a view to fulfilling Christ's command [to preach conversion]. Not to grasp this is not to grasp what it is to be Franciscan. This was what the pope approved in 1209 when Francis went to Rome. The document does not survive; but its spirit lives on in the three Orders.

The very foundation of the First and Second Orders required further implementation by successive popes...All the more so this must have been the case for the "Third Order" which was a more vast and complicated undertaking, involving men and women of all ages and different social backgrounds.

The First Letter to the Faithful *1—recommendations of Francis for whoever wishes to walk with him on the way to permanent conversion. It contains 5 fundamental elements for a truly penitential life:

1. to love God
2. to love neighbour
3. to resist sinful tendencies
4. to receive Holy Communion
5. to act and live in conformity with conversion

Francis assures us that implementation of this simple way of life will immerse us deeply in the divine life of the Trinity itself—

- Holy Spirit will come to rest on his penitents and dwell in them
- We are children of the heavenly Father when we do his will
- In the Holy Spirit we are united to Jesus
- We become spouses, brothers and mothers to the Lord Jesus
- We carry him in our hearts and show him to the world by our holy works

No more intimate union with God is possible!

Rules, like laws, must evolve to reflect the new situations we encounter. But such evolution takes place within its 'kind'. As the movement grew, the Primitive Rule evolved on the basis of the experience of Francis and his penitents—which is appropriately called **The Letter to All the Faithful** *2 [2nd Edit] of around 1221 [called by scholars 'Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance'] - an attempt by Francis to stabilise the movement with full orthodoxy in order to avoid heretical developments. It acted against certain abuses that had evidently taken place. As the movement grew apace it became important to give the penitents a rule to keep them from straying out of control.



Memoriale Propositi from Cardinal Ugolino, later pope Gregory IX gives us the basic way of life for the Order of Penitents, drawn up following the principles laid out by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), but which the Franciscan Penitents were able to personalise for themselves and adapt for their own fraternities. This was never actually approved by the popes—because neither popes nor penitents considered it necessary. [The voluntary state of penance had long been recognised and Gratian, the great canon lawyer, had already codified obligations as long ago as 1140]. In contrast to the Primitive Rule, however, there are few Scriptural references, 'The memoriale Propositi expresses the Franciscan way of penance only insofar as it is read and understood in the light and through the lens of the Primitive Rule...' [Robert Stewart, *The Rule of the SFO*] - and it is evident how the juridical process of codification causes the loss, to some extent, of the Franciscan vision and the radical nature of Francis' call to conversion. Things went along like this until 1274...

Regula Bullata, the approved Rule of the Franciscan Penitents. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 had forbidden the introduction of any new Orders. Orders not founded before then, and which had not yet received papal approval, were to be suppressed. The Franciscan Penitents had not so far received a Regula Bullata (by a papal bull) - and there was trouble brewing. They needed a 'confirmed Rule' like all other approved Orders.

The Rule 'Supra Montem' of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St Francis is the fruit of the work and initiative of the Franciscan Penitents themselves—says Gabriele Andreozzi, TOR



Supra Montem, the approved Rule of the Order of Penitents of St Francis, 18 August 1289, was promulgated by the first Franciscan pope, Nicholas IV. With few exceptions it embodied the spirit and the letter of Memoriale Propositi—but had more Franciscan character. Approved by the pope, this Rule could not be changed or adapted by Penitents. It did not envisage a centralised structure under one Minister General, and only a year later in the bull 'Unigenitus Dei Filius' the same pope clearly required Penitents to be directed and regulated by the Friars Minor—withdrawing all privileges granted, and destroying all hope of obtaining a centralised structure with their own Ministers Provincial and a Minister General. But the desire for autonomy on the part of the Penitents remained strong—and quietly they began to elect their own Ministers Provincial!

1295—Boniface VIII first recognised a congregation of penitents living together [a prelude to what would become the Third Order Regular].

By the end of the 13th Century "Third Order" was commonly used to describe the Franciscan penitents—which they disliked and resisted as long as they could. Supra Montem in fact officially designated the Order as the 'Order of Continents or of Penance instituted by blessed Francis'; St Bonaventure called it the 'Order of the Brothers of Penance'. [Complete text in English of *Supra Montem*, Cf. Additional Resources folder]

* **1** see *Francis & Clare: the complete works*, 62-65 {& see PREAMBLE...}

* **2** *ibid*, 66-73