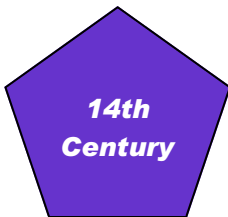




ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

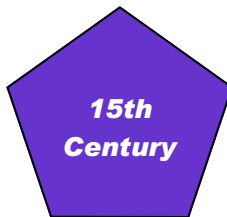
Module 2: "HISTORY OF THE OFS"
sheet 4

4. The End of Autonomy: 'Obedientiality', Urban & Innocent

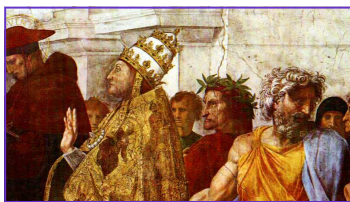


Popes living in exile in Avignon; highs and lows with respect to position popes took towards Penitents—who still aspired to recognition of their own rights and autonomy. Nonetheless, popes favourable to Franciscan Penitents, who remained free from subjection to Franciscan Religious, and able to choose Visitor they preferred and elect their own Ministers Provincial.

'...their love and compassion for the poor was recognised by all;...they lived a praiseworthy life, conducting themselves with humility and honesty, with fervour and the charity of the Christian faith; they distinguished themselves for their nobility of birth and the abundance of temporal goods from which they gave substantial alms to the poor and the servants of God; the brothers and sisters gave good example by means of their honest lives and their good works; they lived in peace...; they observed their Rule and lived in the Catholic faith and holiness...; they radiated the light of their holy virtues and sanctity like shining stars; they respected the **Friars Minor**; they dedicated themselves to prayer and almsgiving, they were a shining example of the Christian life.' [Gabriele Andreozzi, TOR]



Despite the end of the papal schism and the return to Rome, things were not good in Catholic Church life, where personal interests and a 'dominating spirit' prevailed—friars against bishops, and vice versa, friars against Penitents—everyone trying to protect their own interests. **How far away Francis seemed as well as the purity of his vocation!** As ever, there were exceptional individuals...



The end of autonomy > 'Obedientiality'

So we come to the bull of the Franciscan pope Sixtus IV, *Romani Pontificis Providentia*. This was a step backwards, an end to progress in the life of the Franciscan Penitents. **Third Order of St Francis under control of Friars Minor!**

This is awful! What did it mean?



The pope granted 'superiority, power and authority over the Ministers and brothers of the third Order of Penance', together with the prohibition of bishops to intervene in the affairs of the Tertiaries!

'At a stroke the bull cancelled the Penitents' ambitions of autonomy and rendered their long defence, from the time of the Chapter at Bologna onwards, vain...Instead it fulfilled the plan for "superiority, power and authority" which had been proposed all the time by the Minors, even though this was contrary to the origins, history and nature of the Order of Penance and of the Order of Minors above all, contrary to the will of St Francis, the father and founder of both Orders.' The relationship between the First and Third Orders was in practice regulated by this bull until the Pauline Rule of 1978!

This subjection—for that it was in effect—meant that the Penitents ceased to be the subject of rights and obligations, a juridical moral person within the Church, and became an object. The era of industrious autonomy came to a close with Sixtus IV and another opened during which the new title of 'Third Order' assumed the full weight of its meaning of being an accessory, of being dependent, a marginal appendage of the First Order.

I don't think I want to hear this...



It gets worse. Under Leo X, following the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17), they also lost their identity as 'Religious' and 'ecclesiastical persons' - along with its accompanying privileges! - (despite the fact that the Friar, and great canonist, St John Capistrano thought them more like 'Religious' than simple 'laity'; considering Tertiaries to be "Religious" in the broad sense. For in the time of Francis 'Religious' meant not a person adhering to the three Evangelical Counsels—poverty, chastity, obedience—but one who had made a *Profession* according to an approved Rule; an 'ecclesiastical person' one who was not subject to civic jurisdiction but was directly 'under the jurisdiction of the Church'.

By the end of the 16th Century the 'subjection' of the Penitents to the Religious was complete. The period of 'obedienciality' came into full swing and only ended with the Rule of Paul VI in 1978. Every attempt on the part of the Penitents to regain their autonomy was rejected by the Friars. This 16th Century was, truly, the low point in the fortunes of the Franciscan Penitents.



Urban VIII



Innocent XI

In this attempt to mould their 'own' Third Orders, the Conventuals [*Urbanian Constitutions*, 1682], and Observants [*Innocentian Constitutions*, 1686] issued their own statutes. But these statutes were not always in line with the Rule of Nicholas IV—which continued to apply! In these 'constitutions' certain aspects of devotion were intensified—and they sanctioned the complete dependence of the Third Order on the First:

The Third Order had been set on a path of sad decline. For some centuries it has been a lifeless trailer being towed, at the mercy of changeable moods and four tugs, which instead of towing it caused continuous collisions. Divided with regard to direction...devoid of its own head and any drive coming from within. It is no wonder that by the middle of the 19th Century 'in Umbria (the land of St Francis) the Third Order was almost forgotten.' [Fr Fredegando da Anversa] And the same could be said of other regions.

- fraternity meetings presided over by Guardian or Visitor
- decisions taken in their absence invalid
- no chapters
- no more contacts between fraternities
- elections reserved to the Guardian; no longer carried out by universal suffrage

These constitutions had the force of law until the new Rule of Leo XIII, and in part until the Constitution of 1957!

During this time, the characteristic of Secular Franciscans being persons of all classes—social, cultural, intellectual—was also partly eliminated. The Order began to become the place chiefly of princes and illustrious personages, while, to some extent there was discrimination against persons from the lowest social classes and above all those who were poor.

During this time, Tertiaries were primarily concerned with their religious practices and paid little attention to works of mercy.

During the period between 1600 & 1700 it became common not to wear an external habit, but a scapular and a cord—in line with the requirements of nobles who did not wear externally the habit of penance.