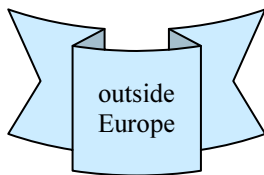
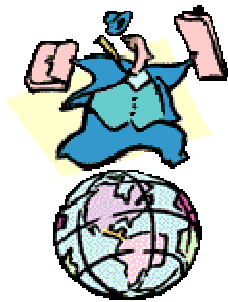




ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 2: "HISTORY OF THE OFS"
sheet 5

5. Expansion Outside Europe & the 'Modern World'



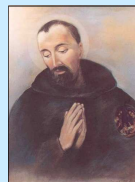
While shrinking and undergoing substantial decline in Europe in the 15th Century, Secular Franciscanism began to grow elsewhere—in the Americas, discovered in 1492 by the Tertiary Christopher Columbus



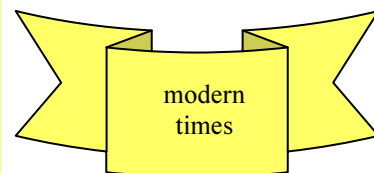
as well as Asia [in Japan 17 Tertiary martyrs, 1597]. Earliest foundation was in Olinda Pernambuco in Brazil [1589]; then Puebla de Los Angeles, Mexico [1614]; Guatemala 1615; Rio de Janeiro [1619]; Mexico City [1625]; Santa Fè de Bogotà, Colombia [1621]...

Some fraternities had large numbers too—Mexico City had 2000 in 1649!

What is more, in these countries members were varied and quite representative of all the social classes. In many cases no distinction was made with respect to colour or race. Furthermore, documents attest to intense spiritual life; works of charity; commitment to teaching and the care of the sick. Proof of this can be seen in two saintly Franciscan Seculars—Marianna Jesus de Paredes [Quito, 1645], and Pedro Betancur [Guatemala, 1667]



The political situation in 1700 & 1800—suppression of Religious Orders and of the Third Order in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, France, Italy etc—as well as Protestantism, played their part in the decline of Secular Franciscanism in Europe. The world, and most especially the educated, developed world, was tending to turn away from God and was moving towards the secularisation of society so familiar to us in the 21st Century. The Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, the October Revolution—all played their part. Laplace had no need of the “God hypothesis”; Nietzsche proclaimed, “Gott ist tot”; Pius IX became a prisoner of the Vatican. And alas, while on the one hand the world more and more rejected the Church, the Church increasingly appeared to reject a world she found it hard to comprehend...



Here's some of the history—

The first concrete sign of aversion by the modern world towards the Church came with the ecclesiastical suppression which was enforced by the “enlightened despotism” of princes and kings in the second half of the 18th Century. The Third Order was also involved to the extent that this was intimately connected with the first Order: a decree from the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria (15 June 1776), which had effects that reached beyond the borders of the Empire, forbade the admission of new members. During the reign of Emperor Joseph II, the Third Order was suppressed (23 September 1782). The same thing happened in all the regions politically connected with Austria—Spain, Portugal, within Italy. In France (following the Revolution & during the Napoleonic period) the provisions were even more stringent—and extended well beyond French borders. Secular Fraternities were not spared the civil regulations specifically against clerics, and in most cases they were dispersed. During the “Reign of Terror” (1792-94), Secular and Regular Tertiaries suffered: Nichola Peck—’rector’ of the Strasburg fraternity—was sentenced to 79 years; Rosa Jessée was guillotined in Cambrai; numerous Tertiaries were drowned in the river Loire. In France, Tertiaries went into hiding, while in Spain and Italy the fraternities found a way to meet in private societies...



About the end of the 19th Century things began to change. The Friars, as soon as they recovered from the suppression, undertook to put the Third Order back on its feet. **But two factors played a decisive role in the rediscovery of interest in the Third Order—**

- there was a desire on the part of Religious to make a contribution to reconstructing the fabric of Christian society [an essential task for the OFS]
- the strong encouragement given by Pius IX, the first of a succession of seven popes who were Secular Franciscans, who said “Promote, promote the third Order. You cannot imagine the amount of good it is destined to produce”

From this time on the Holy See assumed an essential and prophetic role in the rediscovery of the nature, mission and charism of the OFS

There was certainly something of a return to St Francis in the early years of the 19th Century. Francis’ tomb had been rediscovered in November 1818; there was the restoration and reorganisation of the First and Second Orders after the battle of Waterloo (1815); together with the contribution made by the scholarly work of Papino, von Goerres, Ozanam and, in a special way, Paul Sabatier. But most important of all was the recognition of the novelty and essential qualities of the gospel experience of Francis and of his significance for modern times, of the need to express and renew the spirit of minority, of fraternity, of peace-making.



In front of the tomb of St Francis,

on 8 March 1857, Pius IX formulated the prayer which so well expresses this revival in asking the Saint

“to intercede for the world in this age which is so forgetful of the supernatural and lost in the material...Your example already succeeded at other times to inspire people, and by prompting noble and sublime thoughts in them, produced a turn around, a renewal and a true reform”

But Pius IX was essentially a prophet of doom, backward looking rather than a reformer, whose *Syllabus of Errors* [1864] appeared as a Canute-like attempt to stem the tide of change in the world around him, rather than respond to it. He did call the First Vatican Council to reform the Church, but the arrival of Garibaldi in Rome, and the temporal problems for the papacy that ensued, meant Pius ended his days as a prisoner of the Vatican. Remembered as the pope who declared papal infallibility—upsetting the Eastern Churches, and producing the ‘Old Catholics’ in the process—he could not accept that the Church was seeing the end of her temporal power, making it even less likely that Catholic governments would back the Church.

Modern times were indeed upon us—soon cars, planes, broadcasting, film, and unparalleled technological advance; democracy in the work place; the welfare state, the totalitarian state; universal education, universal suffrage, the universe itself...would challenge the Church in a variety of ways, in a world far removed from that of the 13th Century when Franciscanism was born. To the pessimist change and decay in all around was seen; but to the optimist in all around—

Giacchino Pecci OFS,

saw the necessary role of the Third Order for the society of his
time

and as **pope Leo XIII** [1878-1903]

his social teaching would make a radical break with the past
and catapult the Church into the 20th Century

