

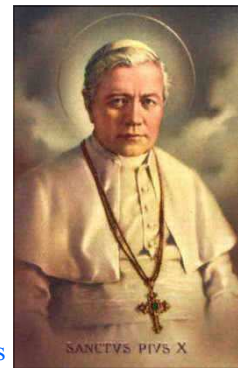
ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS  
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 2: "HISTORY OF THE OFS"  
sheet 7

6. From Leo to Paul  
[III] From St Pius X to Pius XI

St Pius X, Franciscan Tertiary—under his pontificate history of OFS marked by two noteworthy events:

1. *Federation of various fraternities*
2. *Letter to Ministers General of the First Order, Tertiam Franciscalium Ordinem [1909]*



The idea of 'Federation' was born in France—the 8th Congress stated that 'fraternities should tend towards forming a federation among themselves'—and encouragement was given by the pope with regard to Italy in 1909 'to build a fraternal federation among all Franciscan Tertiaries...' [Eventual & mature expression: Article 20 of the Pauline Rule]

Two principle topics are intertwined in the Letter of 8 September 1909: [1] pleasure for spread of Third Order 'not only because of the number of its membership but also because of their works...these two things are specific for Tertiaries: fraternal harmony and love of penance...' [2] to avoid less prudent ideas ("Modernism" ) he reaffirmed that 'the governance of the Third Order is specifically given to the Religious of the First Order' who are 'teachers and leaders' of the Tertiaries—members of the Third Order, as such, are prohibited without exception from becoming involved in civil or purely economic matters, but may join Catholic associations committed to social action!

{This letter must be seen in the context of the time: the condemnation of Modernism; inadequate formation with regard to fulfilling Leo's desire for reform. It has been said that the 'dream' of making the Third Order a great movement of spiritual and social renewal failed; or that the OFS was not ready to respond to the plans Leo XIII had for it. Secular Franciscan social action was drastically limited by the intervention of Pius X. They became increasingly **the projections of Religious in the world with the risk of an ever more pronounced "monastification" and underlying devotionalism.**}

Tertiaries

1915	2.437. 446
1925	2.892. 813
1935	3. 906. 366
1942	3. 101. 197
1952	2. 452. 673
1960	2. 021. 838

First period—Third Order one of the few associations of laity recognised by Code of Canon Law of 1917; brought to attention of faithful 1921 [7th Century of its establishment], and 1926—anniversary of Francis' death.



Benedict XV, Franciscan Tertiary—noted for:

1. *Sacra Propediem* [1921] - the only encyclical entirely dedicated to OFS by a modern pope
2. *Second International Congress* [Rome, 15-18 September 1921]

He expressed the hope that the Order would spread to every city, country, village, that the membership of ‘youth, women and workers’ would increase—even if they belonged to other catholic associations—since ‘this Order proposes...to guide its members to Christian perfection, however they might be involved in the world, since no state of life is incompatible with sanctity’. And what stood out in this encyclical was the definition of the OFS as a true order [ordo veri nominis].

The following topics were treated in the Congress:

- sanctification of Tertiaries
- running of the fraternity
- Franciscan reform of society
- promotion and apostolate

A final message was sent to the world, addressed to all people: ‘brothers near and far, of all tongues, of every honest political party, white collar and blue collar workers, who in the dignity of their daily work sanctify their daily bread’ calling on them to renew ‘the sweet greeting of St Francis: *pax et bonum*.’ Treating political matters not directly connected with the objectives of the third Order is still ‘absolutely forbidden’ at this stage, but an idea of the extreme clarity with which it dealt with matters is given by Father Gemelli when referring to experience with Milanese youth: ‘**Only when the Tertiaries broaden the sphere of their development, can we hope not to repeat what is too frequently said,...that the Third Order is simply a gathering of people only aiming at gaining a certain number of Indulgences**’.

Pius XI, Franciscan Tertiary—produced:

*Rite Expiatis* [1926] to remind the Catholic world of the passing of St Francis—dedicating a large amount of the document to speaking about the Third Order



This encyclical should be understood in the wider context of his initiative and support of **Catholic Action**. He formulated what is now regarded as the classical definition of ‘participation of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church’. He sought and obtained its protection in the context of civil society; he defended it in difficult times and confirmed the decision of Benedict XV to assign St Francis as its protector.

The often difficult and complex journey to give the laity an ecclesiastical *status*, that was in line with the baptismal dignity of all the faithful and with the need for an active and effective presence in the life of society, found a reference point in the action taken by Pius XI.

It was from this point that the first steps were taken in the *theology of the laity* and there was born a new, and more secure, approach to the activity and the structures of lay associations.

‘...the profession of life of a good Franciscan Tertiary: is not the rigour of vows, or life in common, or religious life according to the letter but according to the spirit. It is the spirit of that life and of that perfection lived within the family, in daily living, in ordinary life within the world.’