



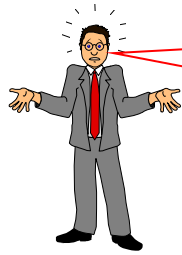
ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 5: "The Nature of the OFS"
sheet 4

4. 'Third Order' versus Secular Franciscan Order

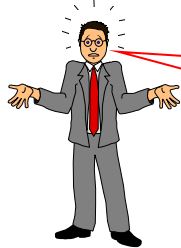
Do you realise that neither in the Rule, nor in the Constitutions, is there ever any reference to a 'third order', less so is it said that the OFS is a third order. CIC, 303 refers strictly to those associations of the faithful living, if you like, 'under the shadow' of an established Order [not being themselves an Order—though commonly referred to as a 'third order']. In such cases, the Orders 'they shadow' are 'over' these lay faithful. In the case of the OFS, the task of spiritual care has been entrusted by the Church to our brothers of the First Order, and the TOR. They have not seized it, taken it unto themselves, but have been granted it to guarantee fidelity to the Franciscan charism and unity within the Franciscan family. So we can say: the spirit of Canon 303 applies to the OFS; the specificity of the Canon only refers to other associations that are not Orders. This 'spirit' is what we have in common with other associations; the specificity is what distinguishes us. The friars, for example, have a spiritual care [they 'assist us spiritually'] - they are not, and they don't want to be, our rulers! We have our own 'Rule', and they have theirs.

THIRD ORDERS	SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
Secular associations affiliated, associated to a religious institute	Not associated or affiliated to First Order or TOR. The OFS was born completely autonomous and complementary to the other two Orders of the Franciscan Family
They participate in the spirit of the Institute to which they are affiliated	The OFS is part of the religious family founded by St Francis, is his threefold expression. It participates in the entire family , and not of a single part of it. It has received the same charism and mission directly from the seraphic Father just like the First and the Second Order
Depends on a religious Institute	The OFS was born independent of the other two Orders of the Family
A religious member of an Institute can become a member of the Third Order of another Institute, without any incompatibility	There is a marked difference with out law which dictates exactly the opposite [Constitutions, 2.1]
The same person can be a member of Third Orders of different religious Institutes without any special authorisation	This possibility is in contradiction with Constitutions 2.1 [<i>The vocation to the OFS is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and the apostolic activity of its members</i>]
Any religious Institute may have its own Third Order, without requiring any special permission from the Apostolic See	The OFS is a Public Association of the Christian Faithful erected by the Supreme Pontiff and not a religious Institute . None of the three First Orders, or the TOR, holds the OFS as 'its own Third Order'. The OFS has the privilege of being assisted collegially by its religious brothers rather than by bishops



Could you just summarise for me? I think I've got it...

Of course. We 'resemble' a third order—without, however, being one. We'll always be **the** Third Franciscan Order—but not like 1st, 2nd, 3rd class [on the railways], but like 1st, 2nd, 3rd Centuries—coming one after the other, but not inferior by being 'third' rather than 'first'.



Okay. But what about all these 'Canon Law' definitions?

OFS is placed under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Society of Apostolic Life [for the internal life of the OFS], and under the Pontifical Council for the Laity [for apostolic life on world level]



- as John Paul II said: the OFS is 'one and unique', exhorting us to be a 'model' to other secular and lay ecclesiastical entities that could take inspiration from us and follow our example

THE OLD RULE: [*Supra Montem* (1289) chapter 2] "We ordain and lay down that no one, after they have entered the fraternity, may leave, to return to the world. They may, however, freely pass to another religious Order."

A few very important conclusions can be drawn from this:

- entering into the Order and making profession meant, and still means, a commitment which marks and embraces our whole life
- Profession puts us in a state which recalls what Francis describes in his *Testament*— 'left the world'; or, with John 17.11 'they are in the world', and with 17.14 'they are not of the world'
- our status is similar to that of Religious [as 'ecclesiastical subjects'], we may pass from one Order to another. [This passing was from one Order to a higher one—was usually defined in terms of 'moving up higher' in terms of strictness of life: say, Benedictine > Carthusian. The point here being that having once committed oneself to an Order, the only (acceptable) way out (of one Order) was up (to another, more difficult Order)!]

Over the centuries history has seen Secular Franciscans becoming almost a pale reflection of what St Francis intended when he founded the third of his Orders. It was the Council of Trent that finally sought to sweep away the concept of Religious in the broad sense and reduced the Third Order to a purely lay association without excessive pretences in the sphere of holiness. But it could not sweep away the spiritual experience Secular Franciscans had achieved, and which *Supra Montem* had canonised. After so many centuries of psychological and juridical oppression, the pre-Tridentine historical past of the Franciscan Third Order comes to life again today—encouraged by the mandate of Vatican II 'ad fontes!', and in the context of the universal vocation to holiness of all the baptised and the return to their roots of all religious movements requested by the Council in *Perfectae Caritatis*.