



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 2: "HISTORY OF THE OFS"
sheet 1

I. The Essential Role of History in Formation &
'Novitas Franciscana'

What is 'history'?

- not the work of a mere analyst or compiler
- but a continuous study of growth; a methodical record of events—which involves both careful selection and analysis in the light of the significance it is deemed to possess
- [from the Greek: 'historeo' = to enquire; to visit for the purpose of coming to know]
- 'history' is not about everything that happened, but it is about those things regarded as significant; millions have crossed the Rubicon but historians tell us that only Caesar's crossing was important

Why should Secular Franciscans be interested in their history?

- there is a line of continuity connecting us with those before us in the same Family
- our history teaches us the errors of the past
- it is a source of self-knowledge enabling us to follow the example of our best predecessors
- It helps us reinterpret our vocation for modern life while remaining faithful to our roots

We're coming to that right now—
'Novitas Franciscana' [Latin:
'novitas' = novelty; something new,
something never done before]

Hope you don't mind
our asking—we've
just spotted some
more Latin...?



The 13th Century saw the regeneration and advance of the Church to meet the needs of the times—especially to deal with heresy and schism. 'Franciscanism' was entirely new—a novitas! [Ernest Renan—who had said in a famous epigram, in the equally famous attempt at a biography of Christ, the 'Life of Jesus' (1863), 'to write the history of a religion, it is necessary to have believed it—otherwise we should not understand'—went on in 1884 to pronounce: 'After Christianity itself, the Franciscan movement is the greatest popular achievement recorded in history.'] This great leap forward was not always appreciated, but with hindsight it is clear that Francis saved the Church in the 13th Century, and so rediscovering and reapplying that greatness is the duty of every Franciscan in the 21st Century when the Church's need is as great as ever it has been. And it is in this 'novitas' that we Secular Franciscans find our roots.

?

What happened?

A

From 1471-1978 'obediencia': Third Franciscan Order under governance of First Order & TOR.

Why? - The problems of the 'Conciliar Movement' in 15th Century led to a measure of clerical subjection and greater Roman centralisation of the Church as a whole—a tendency that did not really come to an end till the Second Vatican Council which called upon the Orders to rediscover and return to their roots. For OFS this meant 'autonomy' and rediscovery of vocation—and a new Rule!

Second Vatican Council (1962-65) remodelled the theology of the Church, bringing it back to its original purity and at the same time projecting it into the 3rd millennium. The watchword was 'aggiornamento' - updating [not modernising], bringing the past into the present in present day clothes. Gone was the tendency to clericalisation, and in came a [Scripturally rediscovered] doctrine of laity. And for Secular Franciscans, the chance once more to be arrayed in the robes of novitas Franciscana—true children of il Poverello—no longer in 'obedientiality', but true Franciscans in the world, bringing the gospel of Christ into every aspect of human life.

' Novitas Franciscana ' : new form of religious life is inaugurated

- restored to religious profession is personal individual spousal alliance with Christ rather than adherence to human institutions
- itinerancy is reborn in Francis who returns to earth like another Christ, with his apostles
- fraternity as essential evangelical value for all Christ ' s followers is given central role
- announcing gospel is confided to clerical and lay alike

Each of the Orders raised up by Francis shares the mission of Francis [repair my Church] and the charism to fulfil that mission, and the very reason for existence of any Franciscan lies in this mission, which is the ' vocation and mission of the great Franciscan family ' - as pope Paul VI reminded the friars at the General Chapter of 23 June 1967

The Franciscan penitents [Secular Franciscans] assumed the specific characteristics to become the secular and lay expression of the religious apostolic experience of St Francis—just as the Poor Clares represented its feminine monastic cloistered expression

St Francis, therefore, has given to his three Orders a single rule: a more perfect observance of the gospel, each according to their own condition in life –

