

ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS  
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 2: "HISTORY OF THE OFS"

sheet 6

6. From Leo to Paul

[I] The Pontificate of Leo XIII



The Constitution *Misericors Dei Filius* [30 May 1883] left the Rule of Nicholas IV intact and unchanged, but modified some chapters, better adapting old laws to modern times. This included—

- Third Order given youthful character [age of admission 14 years]
- no habit; scapular & cord under ordinary clothing
- Novitiate remained
- sometimes married women could be admitted without spouse's approval
- meat abstinence Fridays only
- fasting Fridays, Vigils of IC & St Francis
- Confession & Communion monthly
- no prohibition to carrying arms
- 12 Our Fathers, Hail Mary & Glory be replaced the canonical hours [Divine Office] etc
- Visitation no longer carried out at request of Fraternity but ex officio [became norm that Visitors came from First Order or TOR]

**Leo said** 18 Dec 1884: he was convinced that 'the power to regenerate Christian society resided within the Third Order. One becomes a Tertiary and thereby a true Christian.'

In encyclical *Quod Auctoritate* [1885]: renewed an invitation to bishops 'to promote and extend the Third Order of the Franciscan brothers who are known as Seculars.'

In Lyon [March 1886]: 'I am convinced that it will be through the Third Order and through the spread of the Franciscan spirit that we shall save the world.'

To the exceptional Tertiary, Leon Harmel: 'We are expecting much from the Third Order for the reform of society.'

To the International Study Commission [July 1893]: '...study the means by which the Franciscan Third Order might continue to flourish from day to day, expand widely and produce abundant fruit to the advantage of human society.'

Once again, an Order began to take shape that was no longer aimed at only achieving a spiritual perfection which sometimes was not anchored in real life, but which, by completely assuming its own secularity, would put itself at the service of the Church and the gospel within the context of society and the world of work and politics. The example of popes Pius and Leo encouraged clergy to join: in the fraternity of Ara Coeli [Rome], nine of the professed were cardinals! Secular Franciscan popes would shape the Church's commitment to social change through their encyclicals: *Rerum Novarum*—on the condition of the working classes [Leo XIII, 1891]; *Quadragesimo Anno*—the social order [Pius XI, 1931]; *Mater et Magistra*—Christianity and social progress [John XXIII, 1961].

## A Season of Congresses...

**First French National Congress [11-13 September 1894]** - had predominantly social slant reflecting discussions brought up by *Rerum Novarum*, capitalism, money and usury dealt with—a line of argument and social matters running through subsequent seven Congresses

**First Congress in Italy [24-27 September 1894]** - nature and objective of OFS, its modern social action following teachings of Leo XIII; ended by voting thirty five resolutions, greater part subsequently entered OFS legislation

**Congress in Assisi [10-13 October 1895]** - topics included spirituality of Third Order, discipline and organisation, collaboration with other groups of Catholic laity and of social influence

**International Congress [22-26 October 1900]** - Rome (occasion of Holy Year and start of the new century); was most important, promoted by Ministers General of Friars Minor, Conventuals, Capuchins, TOR; seventeen thousand Tertiaries participated. Beforehand, Leo XIII (now 90), addressed Congress in *Brief* (21 September) recalling his hopes for reform of the Third Order, stating Congress ‘was proof that his hopes and concerns had not been in vain’. In the *Apostolic Brief* (4 November 1900) to Tertiaries attending the congress expressing his pleasure at their ‘union of souls’ and recalling that ‘unity of law gives unity to the body and by its observance come strength of body and effectiveness of action’

Great. But was there any real (let alone lasting) value in this period of ‘Congresses’?



There was, however, opposition from ‘those who did not wish to see new directions applied to the Order of Penance’

**Giulio Salvadori** [1862-1928], however, said, ‘The Franciscan Third Order can and should assist in unravelling the social question, as it did in former times; but in addition to its being an institution of prayer as it is considered to be now, it should still eminently be an active and social institution’ - adding that the objective of the new Rule was to form ‘neither bigots nor theologians, but upright people animated by the spirit of truth and love’.

Yes, I think so. The OFS established fundamental topics for reflecting on its nature and position in the Church following the Leonine reform and for reflecting on its organisational structure. It also presented a concrete and dynamic picture of the multiplicity of its spiritual and apostolic commitments.

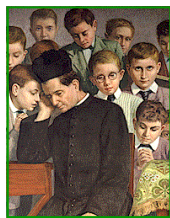
**The 19th Century**—not only one of renewal and social drive for OFS, but also of its spiritual reform which became evident in the numerous testimonies to sanctity



Joseph Benedict Cottolengo



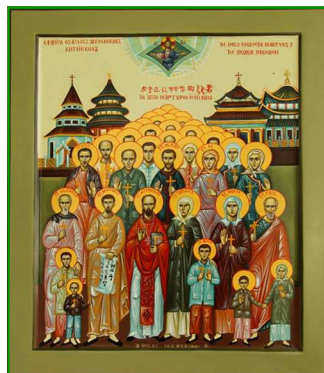
Joseph Cafasso



John Bosco



Contardo Ferrini



The eleven Chinese martyrs beheaded during the Boxer Rebellion