
In the Footsteps of Francis & Clare

*Historical Perspective of the SFO
Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Region*



by Edward S. Czapla, SFO

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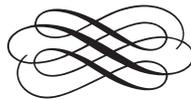


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Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Region
The Secular Franciscan Order

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I. A Look Into the 13th Century...

The Secular Franciscan Order, flourishing early in the third millenium, was founded in the 13th century and was originally known as the Order of Penitents, and later on, as the Third Order (Secular) of St. Francis. The designation, “third”, referred to the chronology of its founding, and not, as some may have supposed, to its importance or prevalence within the Franciscan Family. (The Friars were established first, the Poor Clares second.)

As an itinerant preacher, Francis of Assisi had been attracting many followers by his radical way of living the Gospel, especially by his literal observance of Gospel poverty. Within a relatively short time after his metanoia, or conversion, the Chapter of Mats brought approximately a thousand Friars to Assisi for the first plenary conference. Not all who asked for admittance into this new, dynamic movement could be accepted, however, by reason of commitment to family, or to secular responsibility, and for other valid reasons. Francis provided for the zeal of these by establishing the third category of followers. Soon, this new third Order was to admit

numerous people from various walks of life. As one writer put it, they came “from peasants and princes, bishops and kings, artists and poets, adventurers and scholars, married and single,” all bound together by their common devotion to the gospel ideals of the universally revered and esteemed Poverello.

There is very little available for study, of the early Rule of the Tertiaries or of their lifestyle. Blessed Lucchesio and his wife, Buona Donna, are usually mentioned as the first Tertiaries of note. It is entirely possible that Francis, who characteristically was disinclined to write a formal first Rule for his Brothers, was likewise content with offering a few simple passages from

the Gospels for the Penitents' particular observance. In due time, Cardinal Hugolin, in consultation with Francis, did prepare in legal format, a rule for the Penitents. This Rule was formally approved by Pope Honorius III (1216-1227).

In that time period of Europe's emergence, when the Roman Legions were already gone with the past, and national groupings were taking form, wars and incursions between these ethnic entities were commonplace, as each contended for power and influence. The relative calm between wars appears to have been little more than preparation for the next campaign. In their efforts to preserve peace between warring factions, to promote justice, as well as to protect the Faithful and Church property, the Popes often found themselves embroiled in political maneuvering, and wielding political power -- even to the extent of crowning the ruling heads of Europe. It was a turbulent, sometimes chaotic time for all parties.

When, at one juncture, the Pope exempted Penitents from bearing arms -- as might have been anticipated, since by virtue of their public Profession as

“peace-makers,” they were technically under the protection of the local bishop -- this exemption left its permanent mark upon the political complexion of Europe. The feudal system, which depended heavily upon force of arms to sustain the ruthless chain of dependency in the stratified social and political systems in most of Europe, began to show its first signs of decay. Scholars today generally credit the peace-making of the Penitents for the ultimate collapse of the feudal system.

(Next: The Industrial Revolution)



II. The Industrial Revolution

Toward the end of the 19th century, sweeping changes were taking place in society, as new technology was in the process of development. Immigration, primarily to the Americas, was on the increase. The masses of immigrants, arriving in new lands, found themselves in need of employment, which they could usually find in shops and factories, on the growing networks of the railroads that were spanning the U.S. from coast to coast. Horseless carriages, though a novelty, were becoming more numerous on the existing roads. Mass-produced automobiles were expected to be available to the general public in the not-too-distant future. Systems of communication were being improved. For all this, there was a general sense of unlimited freedom and well-being that served to fuel a trend toward spiritual complacency and secularity. All this, to some degree, was making it more difficult for new arrivals in new lands to raise families in relative calm and a minimum of distraction.

Sensing an urgent need to counteract the adverse effects of the so-called “industrial revolution,” Pope Leo XIII, in due time, announced his plan. His program for social reform would be the Third Order of St. Francis. In essence Pope Leo believed that a means of reform was already available within the Third Order -- that it remained for him to open its doors to **all** Catholic people who had made a solemn retreat and sincerely promised to live a pious and holy life. This he proceeded

to do by rewriting the Rule, or causing it to be rewritten. Accordingly, he placed all Third Order Fraternities under the direction of friars, giving them full spiritual and managerial responsibilities. As an incentive for new postulants to seek admittance, he lavished privileges upon the tertiaries. Plenary indulgences could be readily gained by them, by the normal participation in fraternity life: on the occasion of profession, attending a regular gathering of the

fraternity, for each recitation of the Franciscan Crown Rosary, etc. Pope Leo's plan was to encourage sincere Catholic people to enroll in the Order and to persevere in its spiritual life, the *school of perfection*, and thus, ultimately, reform society at large.

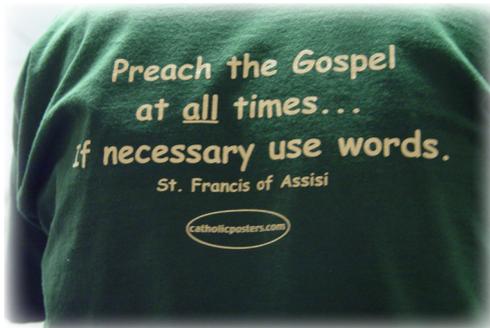
It isn't the purpose of this writing to critique the Pope's program, but to present the facts and principal features. Ultimately, it would be counter-productive to attempt to make a judgement regarding the success or failure of an issue, so sensitive and complex.

By the latter half of the 20th century it had become increasingly apparent to those closely monitoring Franciscan spirituality, that the Leonine Rule was not contributing to the welfare of the Third Order. While the fraternity registers were inked with long lists of the professed, relatively few were actively involved in

fraternity life. Furthermore, an alarming trend was discerned wherein applicants often chose to delay joining the Order until reaching relative old age. As a result the Order had come to be regarded as a "sleeping giant" and a "happy death society"! It was clear that something went awry, and that a total revision of the rule was the only feasible solution to the dilemma.

While the problem was being addressed in the North American Federation -- an association of friars and tertiary leaders of the many provinces affiliated with the First Order Obediences -- other spiritual families in the Church were also scrutinizing their lifestyles for similar reasons. In time, Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council to address his program of *aggiornamento*, or renewal.

(Next: Vatican II: A Time of Change)



III. Vatican II: A Time of Change

One of the early effects of the Second Vatican Council on the Orders and Institutes of the Church was its program of “updating” and renewal or, *aggiornamento*, as it was also called. It was a time when the various spiritual families of the Church were devoting much time and energy to meditation and self-scrutiny for the purpose of re-discovering the spirit and purpose of their founders. Having done so, they were expected to initiate programs of renewal within their communities and thus invigorate the founding spirit proper to each. The process of updating called for discernment of the manner in which that specific spirituality could address the attitudes, moods and cultures in today’s world. To the discerning mind it was, therefore, a two-part program.

The work of renewing the Third Order of St. Francis ushered in a period of intense activity for this purpose, within the North American Federation (NAF). (The latter was a loosely structured association of responsible friars and tertiary leaders representing all Provinces and Obediences of the First Order in the United States and Canada. The Canadian contingent, however, found it expedient and beneficial, at one juncture, to separate from the American body and to establish a separate Canadian association.)

The primary focus of the

NAF, at this time, continued to be on the need to produce a new or revised Rule that would replace the Leonine Rule, which was, by this time, generally deemed inadequate. Although the prospect of reaching this objective seemed to be a project of monumental proportions, it was soon realized that, in the case of the Third Order of St. Francis, renewal work might be somewhat less than that of the other Orders. If the revision of the Rule were faithfully and meticulously completed, the end-result would, of necessity, accomplish both objectives prescribed by the Vatican

Council. It would not only reflect the spirit of the Founder, but also address the needs of the age in which we live -- an opportunity without precedent!

In order to facilitate matters, the various tertiary provinces of the NAF were invited to prepare model rules of their own. It was an excellent opportunity for input regarding substance, tone and form, that might be incorporated into the final product. The response of the provinces was positive. Each model rule, thus produced, was studied for the quality of its spirit and life. This process eliminated some models and brought modifications to others, as lines were re-phrased and articles rewritten. Progress was slow but productive. Finally,

one model -- that of St. Joseph Province -- stood out as the one most acceptable to all. Approval was received from the Commission in Rome allowing this American model rule to be observed on a trial basis in the NAF. In ordinary conversation this provisional Rule was also referred to as the "experimental" or "interim" rule. It is to be assumed that other provisional rules were also being prepared and observed experimentally, in the interim, elsewhere in the world community. From these provisional rules the new universal Rule would eventually emerge.

(Next: The Provisional Rule)



IV. The Provisional Rule

It was definitely a step forward, when the provisional rule, prepared through the efforts of the NAF, finally became, for a period of several years, the Rule observed in the United States. On first reading, it was plainly evident that the legalisms of the Leonine Rule were gone, and a pastoral tone was discerned throughout. Fraternity management was now a joint operation of the lay leader and the friar, who worked as a team within a given geographical area. Terminology changes reflected the prominence now given to the lay officer. Canonical Visitations were conducted jointly by the lay Director and the friar Moderator -- and the lay member of the team was considered the principal Visitor. The daily office, which in this time period was usually 12 Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glories, now became **“any prayer or group of prayers”**.

There were two fundamental reasons for these changes:

1) to mark the emergence of responsible lay management within the Order and, 2) to depart from the usage and style of the past -- the period prior to Vatican. It should be noted, however, that this lay management, a feature totally non--existent in the Leonine Rule, was in no way a complete emergence, but only partial, since it was shared with the friar. So at best, it was perhaps only a hint of things to come.

It was neither chance, nor disrespect for religious, nor a

lack of manners, that letters and other official communications showed the layman's signature ahead or above that of the friar. Seen in context, the practice was in direct harmony with the spirit of renewal and, in a larger sense, with the spirit of the Vatican Council in its Document on the Laity.

It should likewise be noted that, from the very beginning of the implementation of the provisional rule, it had been clearly understood by all parties, that this was an opportunity for learning by experimentation for both,

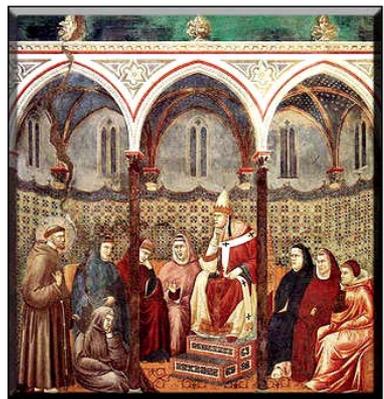
lay and religious. But above all else, it was meant to be observed for a limited time period; i.e., in the interim, until the final product became available. It was, in the final analysis, only a means to that Rule so long awaited by lay Franciscans around the globe. Needless to say, this historic opportunity was not wasted; valuable lessons were learned, that ultimately assured the success of a lengthy and tedious process.

Someone has said that a time of trial and crucial need draws out the best of the human spirit. Obviously, this truism has been adequately demonstrated in the saga of the lay Franciscans' search for a new Rule. In it was gathered the admirable, good-natured spirit of collaboration, faith and dedication of both lay

and religious. Their unflagging efforts during a trying time that had the potential for drudge and discouragement, but remained instead, a time of accomplishment, had earned for each one, the blessing of the Gospel. *Well done, good and faithful servant!*

It was, then, with a thrill of joy and prayerful gratitude that fraternities everywhere received the good news that Pope Paul VI, on June 24, 1978, had approved and promulgated the revised *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* -- after ten years in the process of its preparation! By the same action he had also abrogated the previous rule of what used to be called the Third Order of St. Francis.

(Next: The Rule of Paul VI: An Overview)



V. The Rule of Paul VI: An Overview

Since the Pauline Rule had become a reality, a number of adaptations and changes would be made, but most of these would be delayed until the General Constitutions were available. While the Rule set the principle and tone, the Constitutions specified the method or means to be employed in their implementation. The Constitutions would be in the process of development for several years, however, while the particular statutes, mentioned in #3 of the Rule, would be delayed until the Constitutions were completed.

In principle, the statutes must harmonize with the constitutions -- which take precedence. For these reasons, observance of the new provisions of the Rule had a slow beginning, particularly on the local level. A fundamental change that took effect immediately, was the name of the order, itself from the Third Order of St. Francis to the *Secular Franciscan Order*. (We would no longer call ourselves “tertiaries” or “lay Franciscans”.)

Article 20 of the Rule provides for fraternity on four levels: local, regional, national and international. The first category needed no definition. Regional was assumed by many -- though erroneously -- to be

a novel way to describe the Province, a concept already familiar and functioning. The *national* and *international* were new concepts without precedent.

On studying the provision of #20 of the Rule, the North American Federation realized that the NAF was, in essence, the fraternity on the national level, since it represented all the Provinces in the Nation, and proceeded to comply by changing its name. The NAF became the *National Fraternity* or NAFRA, for short. It seems reasonable to assume that the international fraternity came into existence through the collaborative work of NAFRA and its counterparts elsewhere in the world, since they alone,

perhaps, could be expected to visualize realistically what was forthcoming in this endeavor .

To understand more fully the concept of fraternity on four levels, it must be realized that, according to established form, *all* fraternities are guided by a council composed of a minister, vice-minister, secretary, treasurer and formation director. Others may be added to these, as needed. It is this council, working as a unit, that has the authority to guide the fraternity and manage its affairs. The minister serves the council and fraternity as facilitator in a spirit of servant leadership. The spiritual assistant provides assistance in matters of a spiritual nature. Although he is a member of the council by appointment, he has both voice and vote. In financial matters, however, he abstains from voting.

An especially noteworthy provision of the Pauline Rule is article #7. It states, in part: *United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance “, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior*

change which the gospel itself calls conversion. It will be remembered that the previous Rule took the opposite stance by opening the fraternity to all Catholic penitents. Without the vocation stipulation, the rosters grew, but the anticipated conversion was lagging behind.

The Rule, therefore, envisions that the Secular Franciscan will staunchly persevere in the Profession promises and, frequently nourished by the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, will in due course become Christ-like at heart. This is the essential goal of the Secular Franciscan vocation, now required for admittance.

(Next: The General Constitutions)



VI. The General Constitutions

The time period following the promulgation of the Pauline Rule was a period of slow, implementation for a number of reasons, but primarily so because, without a working copy of the General Constitutions, it was unclear how the Rule might be interpreted in particular instances. When finally in 1990, approval of this crucial document was announced, this difficulty was removed, and the various stipulations of the Rule took on new meaning. As the trial-and-error attempts to comply passed, it was a revelation for many to learn that, where the Pauline Rule mentions “fraternity on various levels” (#20), the regional level is not a reference to the provinces already existing, as assumed previously, but definitely, to geographical regions.

It should be understood that, hitherto, no geographical entities existed. Provinces had no designated boundaries. A tertiary province was merely a grouping of fraternities affiliated with a First Order province, by reason of its having been established through the ministry of its friars. Consequently, it was little more than dots on the map, wherever the friars had established fraternities. Among these dots might be -- and frequently were -- other similar dots affiliated with friars of another Obedience. There was an “overlap,” of sorts, in which

there was little awareness or collaboration between fraternities of unlike affiliation.

In contrast with this, the geographical region prescribed by the Pauline Rule was a new organic entity composed of *all* fraternities within a geographical area, regardless of their affiliation. In this arrangement the local fraternity retains its affiliation with the friar Obedience for the purpose of maintaining the *altius moderamen* (spiritual ties), to which it is entitled by virtue of its original relationship. Its governance is the function of its own elected fraternity

council according to the norm of the constitutions and the national statutes. Seen in proper perspective, each level of fraternity is regulated by the next higher one. In this way unity is achieved without harm to a desirable diversity. In the ideal situation every regional fraternity should have a Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (CRSA), patterned after that of the National Fraternity. This conference is composed of one friar from each of the Obediences whose fraternities are located within the boundaries of that region.

When NAFRA set out to implement this provision of the Rule; i.e., regionalization, it observed the principle of subsidiarity, which had been adopted at an earlier time. Simply stated, when a fraternity was faced with a problem situation that it could not resolve, its recourse would be to the next higher level for guidance.

Accordingly, NAFRA proceeded to develop a process whereby regional fraternities could be systematically and efficiently organized throughout the United States, even going

to the extent of preparing tentative boundaries for the future regional fraternities, and outlines of the various tasks required in the process of their preparation. Steering committees were appointed for each fledgling region, for the purpose of preparing the way for the fraternity that it would accommodate. These committees met on a regular schedule and work assignments were completed as they were received from NAFRA. Clearly, NAFRA was well prepared for this endeavor.

(Next: On the Road to BKTR)



VII. On the Road to BKTR

After the promulgation of the Pauline Rule, when its provision #20 was fully understood, regionalization became an endeavor of major proportions. Simply stated, #20 mandated fraternities on each of four levels: local, regional, national and international. Where fraternity did not exist, it would be established, complete with its governing council.

The local fraternity level required no change. The regional level, however, called for the formation of a higher-level fraternity with fixed geographical boundaries. It was to include all local fraternities within those boundaries, regardless of their Obediential affiliations, (OFM, Conventual, Capuchin or TOR). In essence, these new regional fraternities would replace the loosely-structured SFO Provinces. In the case of the national level, the newly created national fraternity would include all regional fraternities in the nation. (In the United States, fortunately, the North American Federation [NAF], already in existence, was readily adaptable to accept this ministry, and so, it became the National Fraternity [NAFRA]). In principle, each higher-level fraternity ministers

to those immediately lower and is supported by them, in return. In this way, the Rule established one, unified, cohesive global Order -- for the first time in its history!

In preparing for regionalization, NAFRA determined the number and location of approximately thirty-three regions in the U.S., and with the collaboration of the Provincial Ministers, it proceeded to appoint individuals who would lead in the work of organizing the implementation of the Pauline mandate. Having prepared a handbook of guidelines for the endeavor, and having set up a supervisory National Regionalization Commission, NAFRA proceeded with the implementation of provision #20. To assure continuous progress in observing the

guidelines and the completion of necessary tasks, deadlines were set by Geraldine Rome, SFO, who had been designated the National Regionalization Chair.

If the process that was followed in the development of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Regional Fraternity (BKTR) can be considered typical of most other regions, a review would illustrate not only the typical procedure, but also show the magnitude of NAFRA's accomplishment within the United States. Most processes would be similar to this one, and the differences found, should present no problem.

The geographical boundaries originally suggested by NAFRA for the region in northern New York State were basically the same as the political boundaries of the State, with minor exceptions. Most of the Catskill Mountains area, as well as the New York City metropolitan area, was not included, so that, in effect, the existing south boundary (along the Pennsylvania border) was simply extended on a straight line eastward to Massachusetts. Added, however, was the Erie, PA area and a small portion of

Vermont, touching on the New York State line. In subsequent modifications approved by the National Regionalization Chair, however, the fraternities in Vermont were transferred to the adjoining emerging region in New England, as were the fraternities in the Adirondacks at Ellenburg Center, Saranac Lake and Plattsburg.

In preliminary discussions, some differences of opinion surfaced regarding the feasibility of establishing one large region as opposed to two smaller ones. Some preferred small regions in order to reduce travel time and distance to meetings and to ease the difficulty this would pose for elderly members. Others favored one large region, citing a perceived inability of small regions to support themselves, especially in economically depressed western New York. In a subsequent meeting, when a vote was taken, the preference of one large region prevailed.

When preliminary issues were resolved, a *steering committee* was given official status and authorized to proceed with its assignment. This pro tempore committee functioned in the same manner as the executive

council would in due course. Appointed were the following Secular Franciscans: Russell Borthwick, minister; Bill Geary, vice minister; Leonard Dudinyak, secretary; Hildegard Kurzdorfer, treasurer; Sharon Lowery, formation director; Ed Czaplá, Ed Zablocki, Rosemary Slavin, Marie Diehl, and Mary Smith. Fr. Germain Williams, OFM Conv., was spiritual assistant.

The first meeting of the steering committee was held on January 15, 1994 at St. Mary's Parish Center in Minoa. Its basic agenda included: details of the regionalization process, determining the region's name, and financial matters.

In the quest for a proper name for the region, the fraternities were polled. Their responses showed three names predominant. Of these, the *steering committee* favored Lily of the Mohawks. But since most fraternities preferred Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, NAFRA approved the latter.

The *steering committee* met as frequently as work assignments would permit. It utilized the official handbook, held meetings in various locations within the region,

communicated with the fraternities on a number of issues, and still found time for Liturgy and reflection throughout the assignment.

Since the regional fraternity was to have component local fraternities from six participating SFO Provinces, and since these fraternities had little or no history of collaboration with each other, it was obvious that a degree of "bonding" was essential, if a unified regional fraternity were to result. To provide for this need, two gatherings were initially planned. One would be held in Fonda for fraternity members east of Syracuse. Following this, a second gathering in Buffalo would accommodate members west of Syracuse. Learning from these, the committee scheduled a third gathering in Maine, near Syracuse, for *all* who could attend. Various programs were creatively staged for the purpose of encouraging fellowship, mutual understanding, appreciation and especially respect for the "other" person. Invariably some time was devoted to progress reports and open discussions.

When a Mission Statement

was on the agenda, the committee members prepared individual sample statements, then read and critiqued them in a subsequent meeting. During this exercise all were asked to be aware of basic things: *Who we are as Franciscans, and how we perceive ourselves...What our goals are and how we plan to achieve them...* Eventually, this produced a final statement for the record -- one composed of parts of two original samples!

When Hildegard was asked to prepare appeals for operating funds to the participating SFO Provinces (a minimum of \$100/Province), she informed the committee that Holy Name Province had already forwarded a check for \$500. (The steering committee was not yet authorized to collect *fair share*; whereas the SFO Provinces would be phased out when BKTR was canonically established.)

Regional Guidelines are an essential item in the governance of the regional fraternity. When this appeared on the agenda, a committee was appointed with Bill Geary as chair. He would report on progress in a subsequent meeting. A regional newsletter was proposed and

given to committee for study. A proper name for it would be proposed at a later time.

The subject of a budget for the year following the canonical establishment of BKTR (1995) came under study and discussion; costs and expenses were estimated and a *fair share* amount was projected at \$25. As expected, this figure was received coldly by the fraternity ministers who, until this time, had been accustomed to minimal amounts in all SFO Provinces. It was then realized in the steering committee, that cost documentation was urgently needed, to validate any budgetary estimate. (It should be noted that this questioning of costs was not unusual. Wherever regionalization was being implemented, similar reactions were experienced. It would require considerable time for Seculars to understand and to appreciate both the cost and the benefits of the four-level fraternity concept of the Order.)

Having completed all pertinent tasks and paperwork required in the regionalization process, the emerging Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Regional Fraternity was approved for canonical establishment by the

National Fraternity. This formal action took place on October 20, 1994. Congratulations were in order to the members of the steering committee, for their unflagging spirit of servant leadership and dedication. In a period of nine months they had assembled and animated a new regional fraternity!

According to established form, they would now continue to serve BKTR as its Executive Council, pro tempore, for a period of six months. At that time a Chapter of Elections was mandatory.

The first Chapter of Elections, convened on April 21-23, 1995, was presided over by Richard Morton, SFO, National Minister, and Fr. Matthew Gaskin, OFM (CNSA), Spiritual Assistant. The chapter installed

the first elected Regional Executive Council, composed of the following members: Edward Czapla, minister; Bill Geary, vice-minister; Leonard Dudinyak, secretary; Hildegard Kurzdorfer, treasurer; Sharon Lowery, formation director; and Russell Borthwick, Karen Szczesniak and David McHenry, councilors to represent Eastern, Central and Western Areas, respectively. Fr. Leon Dicks, OFM Conv., continued to serve as Spiritual Assistant.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Regional Fraternity, canonically empowered, was now fully operational.

(Next: Concluding Reflection)



VIII. Concluding Reflection

Having completed this series of essays on the historical roots of the Secular Franciscan Order, and hopefully, brought about for all a keener understanding of our identity as Franciscans, we might ask ourselves some pertinent questions. If the Penitents of the 13th century were able to bring about such a dramatic change in the politics and the policies of feudal Europe, as to bring the feudal system to its final end, why is it that, in our time, the world is barely aware of the Secular Franciscans? Our mission today is identical to that of the Penitents. Surely, the world of our time displays at least as many moral and social faults as the world of Francis did... The mission of the whole Franciscan Family is the same: Francis, rebuild My House... Collectively, we are Francis!

While it is true that the political influence of the Church in that time made this reform possible, whereas, in the contemporary world that influence is missing, it is also true that, in our time, we have dramatic advantages. Under the Pauline Rule we have a unified, cohesive global Order, rapid mass transportation, and instant electronic communication. Is it not, then, somehow our failure?

By prescribing fraternity on four levels, including the *international* level, the Pauline Rule gives us the ultimate tool for success in this instance. Our

Order is there -- in the world! If the cost of maintaining this intricate interdependent fraternal structure is a burden to some, let us find new ways to lessen the burden. But let us also find ways to preserve and perfect the tool that has the potential for the maximum good. Then, let us put it to proper use.

In the years just prior to the Second Vatican Council -- in a time frame during which this tool was not available - - fair-minded but perceptive observers often referred to the (then) Third Order as the

“sleeping giant”. (There were long lists of members’ names, but relatively meager evidence of accomplishment.) Our efforts in leadership since that time have been, perhaps unwittingly, attempts to awaken the giant and shepherd him into charity and servanthood, even at the cost of creature comfort.

No evaluation of the Franciscan life, especially that of Francis himself and his first Lesser Brothers at Rivo Torto, could overlook or ignore the outstanding virtues that marked their lives: Gospel poverty, humility, meekness, obedience, self-less ministry,

peace-making and a Gospel love for each other. These are the enduring guidelines given to the followers of the Poverello through the centuries. They are basically our guidelines in the 21st century. If we Franciscans are experiencing some difficulty in projecting our founder’s image -- which is itself a reflection of Christ’s image -- to the world, is it possible that, by this same challenge, the Holy Spirit is gently nudging us all to come up higher?

May the Lord bless us all, and draw us nearer to himself!



Notes and Updates



Pax et bonum...