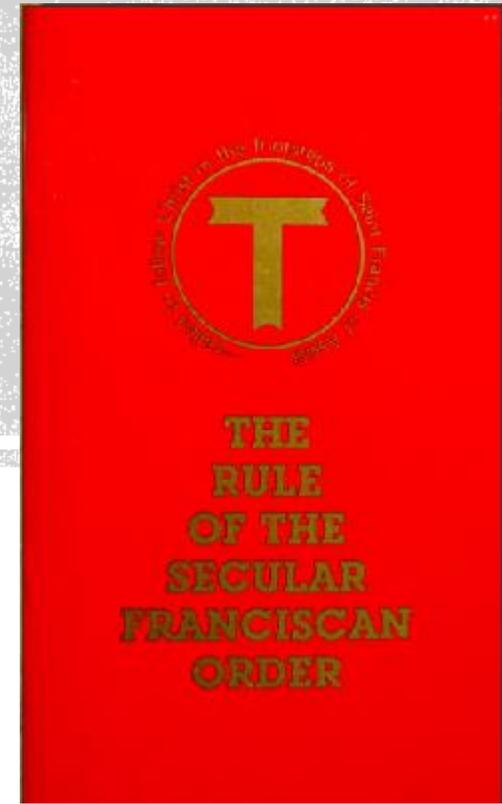


HISTORY OF THE RULE

The Secular Franciscan Order

Jan Kaeding OFS



**Think to yourself how you'd define
the word "clue."**

(Archaic English Spelling = "clew")



But did the word “clue” (“clew”) always mean that in English?

No. The original meaning was:



Can you see the connection between the old meaning and the new?



The old literal definition of the word “clue” or “clew” was a ball of yarn, string or the cord to tie down a sail, rolled in a ball.

The figurative usage of a ball of string or yarn to find one’s way is also very old, dating back to ancient Greece, at least. The Greek hero Theseus is said to have used a ball of string to escape the Labyrinth after killing the Minotaur.

The figurative meaning of “clue” or “clew” was referred to so often in literature that it came to supplant the literal definition, along about the 16th century, and new words were coined to speak of yarn, balls of string and tie-downs for sailing.

This explanation appears in a number of places including:

<https://www.grammarphobia.com/blog/2012/08/clue-clew.html>

Words can (and often do!) change meaning over time.

The changes can be dramatic – like this example.

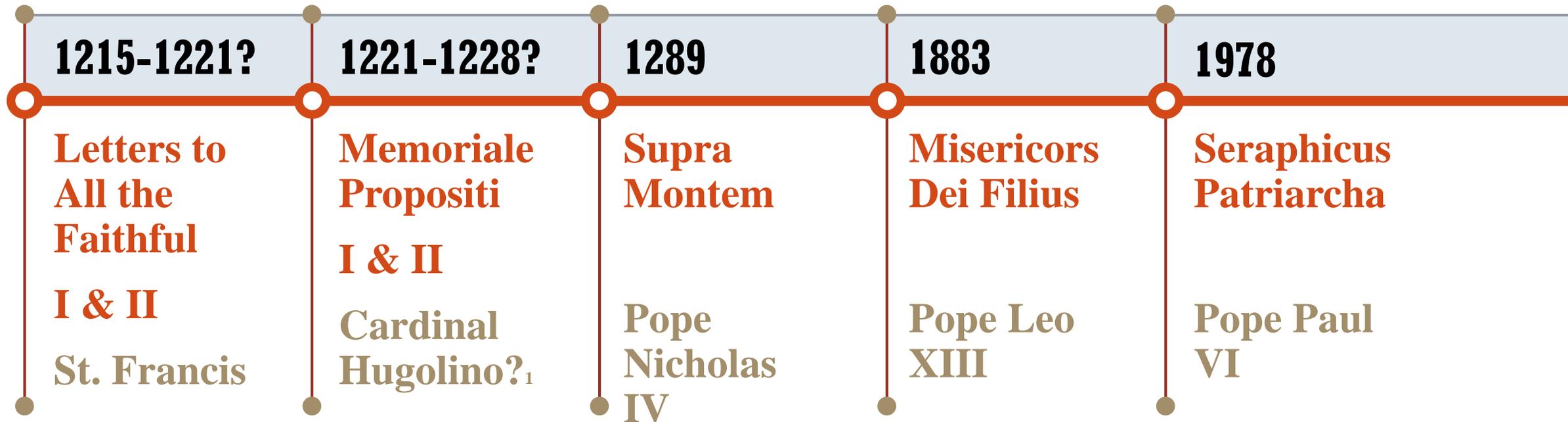
Sometimes, in order to preserve the same meaning, we have to change the words we use, or the ways we do things.

The Church has changed our Rule several times through the ages for exactly this reason – to preserve the original meaning as closely as possible.



TIMELINE

Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order



1. Who became Pope Gregory IX in 1227.

In 1200, the world is vastly different from ours

commonsense framework – context

- **Period of enormous social, economic, political change**
 - feudal system → towns and cities, commerce
 - barter society → re-invention of money
 - isolation, only local goods → communication, trade caravans
 - all-powerful nobility → more stratified population
- no scientific method, no technology, no libraries for the public, most people cannot read, write or add numbers unless they have paid to attend the local monastery school
- religious are identified almost completely with large, wealthy monasteries on huge estates...
- there are bands of penitents and also bands of popular “un-official” preachers who appeal to the common people, but they are not considered “religious” ...



How many of you have read a biography of St. Francis?

St. Francis fell in love with God...

But rather than join a monastery – which was the expected way to act when a person wanted to live in religious community – he took up a different kind of life – first as a penitent, and then as people came to him, leader of a community of penitents...

▪ **Why?**

- perhaps social class
- perhaps the way he understood what was happening

PS. A penitent is not someone who just likes misery or feels either extra-scrupulous or self-righteous. What is a penitent? What was the meaning of the word “penance” for St. Francis?²

2. The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation, Robert M. Stewart, 1991, p. 211.



Most high, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of
my heart
and give me, Lord,
correct faith, certain hope,
perfect charity, sense and
knowledge,
so that I may carry out Your
holy and true command.

- Francis didn't write a big set of books for teaching all about his spiritual life, like some other holy people. He didn't really write much about what had happened to him, except for this:

“The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward, I lingered a little and left the world...And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel.”

...and except for a few other things we know he dictated (and did) himself which indicate what was going on deep within him

- among these is the First Letter to All the Faithful

- **The First Letter to All the Faithful**

- written for laypeople who could not leave home and live with Francis and his band of brothers
- written in a “scriptural or inspirational fashion,” rather than a “juridical fashion”
- There were two versions; this first one is generally considered to be the first pattern– the prototype – for the lay Franciscan life
- Sometimes called the “Earlier Exhortation”
- familiar to Secular Franciscans because:
 - it begins, “**In the Name of the Lord! Chapter One: Concerning Those Who Do Penance**”
 - it can be found at the beginning of our modern Rule (1978)

About Franciscan documents:

The 1st Order Rule was written several times before it was approved (1221 & 1223). Why?

- St. Francis always had trouble putting his inspiration, his understanding of the life he and his brothers were living, down onto paper in such a way that it could be transmitted in its entirety on a document.
- If you look at Franciscan documents as time goes by – especially after about 1220 – you start to see the influences of other people helping him try to do this. Why?
 - Need for documents to regularize the Order with the Church
 - Communication & Formation needs since the Order was growing very quickly

In the same way, in attempts to communicate the Franciscan life faithfully for laypeople, there is a Second Letter to All the Faithful, and then two successive versions of a practical and more juridical document, called “Memoriale Propositi.”³

3. Widely believed to have been written by Cardinal Hugolino, who was to become Pope Gregory IX shortly after Francis' death.

Until 1289, Franciscan Penitents lived using community plus these documents as their guides. (But remember that most people did not read in the 13th century!)

During the 13th century, there was a huge amount of change and development in the Church, starting roughly with the 4th Lateran Council (1215) and continuing through the entire century. (Universities and other institutions and reforms; many of the things you consider “very Catholic” came into existence in the 13th century.)

However, because of the huge amount of change, there was also much controversy.

In 1289, Pope Nicholas IV promulgated the papal bull “Supra Montem,” containing the Rule for Franciscan penitents. Very similar to Memoriale Propositi with a few important additions.

- Francis is named explicitly as the founder.
- Names the First Order as the proper “religious advisors” or “visitors” to the fraternities.
- Gave the Order a function within society – social and Christian witness at the level of popular religiosity.
- There is an increased emphasis on living the Gospel life as a means of preserving orthodoxy, rather than living the Gospel life as a sheer response to God whom one comes to know and love (which is how Francis always understood it). Must be lived in the context of a loving relationship with God to retain the same meaning. 4

4. The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation, Robert M. Stewart, 1991, p. 211.

Supra Montem was the Secular Franciscan Rule for 594 years.

What happened in that 594 years...

- **Franciscan penitents were split up into “obediences”**
 - Probably ensured our survival as Franciscans through nearly 600 years, kept the bonds of family going → Plague, Renaissance, Reformation, Revolution, Jansenism, Gallicanism, Quietism, Romanticism
 - But over the years, lost the original formation and emphasis, becoming a “lay group affiliated with the friars” – emphasis on “affiliated with the friars”
 - At times, becoming a Third Order Franciscan was a highly aspirational or even fashionable thing to do
 - Franciscan penitents have been a lot of things for a lot of people over the centuries
- **Some Franciscan penitents joined into communities → TOR, regularized 1447 by Pope Nicholas V**
- **Other Franciscan-derived groups were also founded in the intervening centuries, so there are all kinds of Franciscans!**



Rule of 1883 – Misericors Dei Filius (The Merciful Son of God)

By 1883, after centuries of social and political development in Europe, the Church found her relationship with society changing. Alliances had shifted, boundaries had been redrawn, commonsense frameworks had changed once again. New technologies and intellectual discoveries made a re-evaluation of social conditions necessary again. **Another period of dramatic change!!**

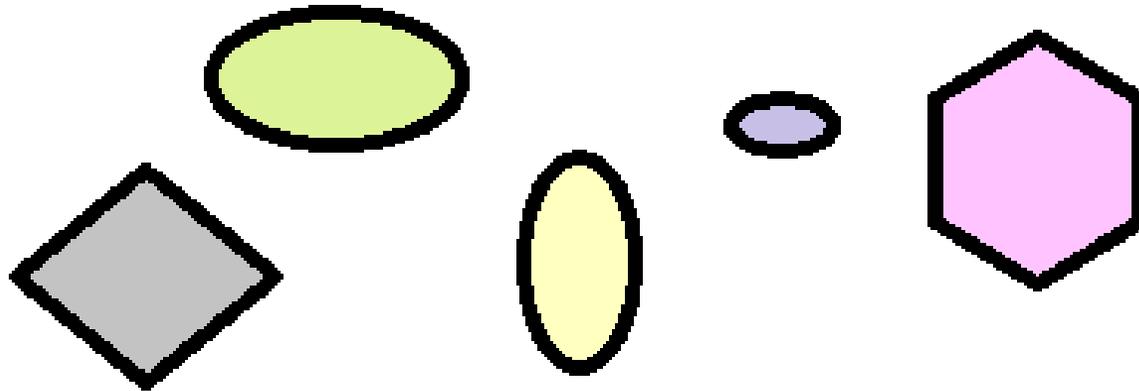
Pope Leo XIII praised the Franciscan Third Order, and recommended that everyone become a member. In an encyclical preparatory to the Rule of 1883, he wrote,

- “...therefore take pains that the people may become acquainted with the Third Order and truly esteem it; provide that those who have the cure of souls sedulously teach what it is, how easily anyone may enter it, with how great privileges tending to salvation it abounds, what advantages, public and private, it promises.”⁵

5. Auspicato Concessum, Encyclical by Pope Leo XIII, 1882.

Consequences of the Rule of 1883

- Became more like a devotional society than an Order; referred to as a “Sodality”
- Formation was very brief and often superficial
- Remember: Fraternities were still arranged in obediences
 - often became identified with particular parishes – looking more like parish groups than part of an Order
 - huge diversity of practices, lack of communication between fraternities, no concept of a unified Order



Catholic Action

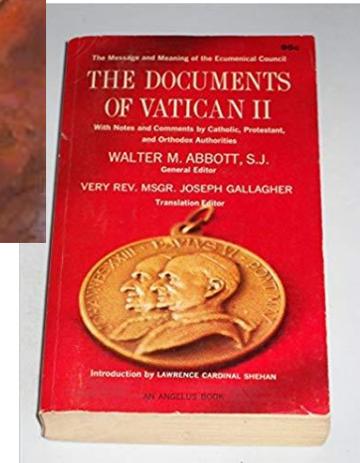
- Europe → developed slowly but was in full swing by 1915 – began as an effort to resist the social changes of the 19th-early 20th centuries. Ended by events surrounding WWII.
- USA → took a somewhat different path in our context
 - an effort to staff parishes & schools, serve rapidly expanding immigrant populations, and build a Catholic culture in the USA
 - everything and everyone was mobilized to the task – friars, sisters, nuns, monks, secular clergy, third orders including us (losing much of our identity in the process)
- Started ending gradually in the middle of the 20th century.

Second Vatican Council

“In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life. They behave as though at the time of former Councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life and for proper religious liberty. We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand.

In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfilment of God's superior and inscrutable designs. And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the Church.”

Pope Saint John XXIII, Opening Address, 1962.



4 Constitutions
3 Declarations
9 Decrees

Rule of 1978

- **Vatican II necessitated a “return to the sources.”** All the Orders and Congregations in the Franciscan Family participated in their own renewals, collaborating with each other as needed.
- **In 1966, our Rule’s revision began.** A draft version, produced with suggestions from, but without the direct participation of Secular Franciscan members, and modeled more or less on the previous versions, was sent out to lay fraternities in 1968, who rejected it overwhelmingly. Among the comments:
 - “The concept of Vatican II is absent.”
 - “The ecumenical spirit is lacking.”
 - “Not enough stress is put on being secular.”
 - “It deals too much with the rights and powers of the priests and does not mention the mutual responsibility of the First and Third Orders.”
 - “Nothing is mentioned about the message and mission to the world.”
 - “It does not envision the Order as a community, but as an institution, an organization.”
 - “Francis’ spirit is not expressed in the Rule of Life.”
 - “Chapter One mentions the Gospel as the tertiary’s Rule of Life. After that, there are only regulations and invitations to devotional practices.”
 - “Nothing is said about the need for continuous conversion.”
 - “This draft is for a dying Third Order, not the Third Order of the future.”

Comments from the CIOFS Video, www.franciscansusa.org.

Rule of 1978

- In October 1969, Third Order members were invited to participate in the process of revising the Rule, which was unprecedented.
- After years of work, a final draft identified, using seventeen essential points of Franciscan spirituality and the Rule was formulated around these points.
- The Rule was written in a “inspirational style” rather than a “juridical style.”
- The Rule was written to reflect learning and living in secular community, much more like the original experience of Franciscan penitents.
- The First Letter to All the Faithful, written by St. Francis, was added as a Prologue.
- The Rule was promulgated as “Seraphicus Patriarcha” by Pope Paul VI in 1978.

Seventeen Points of Franciscan Spirituality

1. To live the Gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis
2. To be converted continually
3. To live as brothers and sisters to all people and all creation
4. To live in communion with Christ
5. To follow the poor and crucified Christ
6. To share in the life and mission of the Church
7. To share in the love of the Father
8. To be instruments of peace
9. To have a life of prayer that is personal, communal and liturgical
10. To live in joy
11. To have a spirituality of a secular character
12. To be pilgrims on the way to the Father
13. To participate in the Apostolate of the Laity
14. To be at the service of the less fortunate
15. To be loyal to the Church in an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with her ministers
16. To be open to the action of the Spirit
17. To live in simplicity, humility and minority

From "The History of the Secular Franciscan Order and Its Rules by William Wicks OFS.

Questions?

1. Everyone sitting at your table belongs to your group. (You should have at least 4 people at your table. If not please regroup until you do.)
2. Choose someone from your group to take notes about observations during your discussion.
3. Excerpts from each version of the Rule which address the same topic have been placed at each table. Identify what that topic is.
4. Describe how the different versions of the Rule seem to treat the topic your group has. How has the method of approach to the topic changed from version to version, over time? Why?
5. Be prepared to name the topic, and present your observations.

You will be given _____ minutes to complete the activity and then we will all come back together for a summary.

Why was the First Letter to the Faithful placed at the start of the 1978 Rule?

Our fraternity with each needs to be more than organizational and formal. Why?



If you'd like to find out more about the history of the Secular Franciscan Rule:

- “Forty Years of the “New” Rule” – CIOFS Video, www.secularfranciscansusa.org
- The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation, Robert M. Stewart, Istituto Storico Dei Cappucini, 1991.
- “A Brief History of the Secular Franciscan Order and Its Rules,” William Wicks, FUN Manual, 2011.
- History of the Third Order Regular Rule: A Sourcebook, Margaret Carney OSF et al, 2008.
- St Francis and the Third Order, Raffaele Pazzelli TOR, 1982.
- The Franciscans in the Middle Ages, Michael Robson, 2006.