



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
Sacra Propediem -- Benedict XV 1921

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Meditation – Franciscan Minority

5. Profoundly saddened by the misfortunes which the Church was then passing through, Francis conceived the incredible design of renewing everything conformably to the principles of the Christian law. ...Francis, in the impossibility of opening the cloister to all whom the desire of being formed in his school drew to him, resolved to procure, even for souls living in the whirlpool of the world, the means to tend to Christian perfection. He founded, then, an Order properly called Tertiaries, differing from the two other Orders in that it would not bear the bond of the religious vows, but would be characterized by the same simplicity of life and the same spirit of penance. ***Thus the project which no founder of a regular Order had yet imagined, to cause the religious life to be practiced by all, Francis first conceived the idea of and the grace of God gave him to realize it...***

6. We shall confine Ourselves to this testimony of so authoritative a contemporary; of itself it suffices amply to show to what a depth and to what an extent this initiative of Francis of Assisi shook the popular masses, what notable and salutary reparations it worked therein.

7. Uncontested founder of the Third Order, as he was of the two first, Francis was for it, further, without doubt, the most wise legislator. We know that for this work he had the precious aid of Cardinal Ugolino, who later, under the name of Gregory IX, ... As to the rule of the Tertiaries, no one is ignorant that it was regularly approved by Our predecessor, Nicholas IV.

8. ...Our object is here, before all, to bring to light the character, and, as one says the particular spirit of the third Order, for the Church expects from it special advantages for the Christian people in this age, as hostile to virtue and to faith as was the epoch of Francis of Assisi. With his profound sense of situations and times Our predecessor, Leo XIII, of happy memory, desirous to adapt better the regulation of life of the Tertiaries to the social level of each of the faithful, brought, by the Constitution "Misericors Dei Filius" (1883)...

9. "Let none believe," said he, "that these changes take away anything whatsoever from the essential principles of that Order. We wish absolutely that they remain in their integrity, and secure from any branch." The rule of the Third Order has then undergone only retouchings of detail; its range and spirit have been respected, which remain what their holy founder willed them. Now it is Our conviction that the spirit of the Third Order, altogether impregnated with the wisdom of the Gospel, would be a powerful element for the making healthy of private and public morals if it were spread anew as in the times in which by his word and example Francis preached everywhere the Kingdom of God.

10. What Francis wished to shine out, above all, in his Tertiaries, and which ought to be as their characteristic mark, is ***fraternal charity***, most watchful guardian of peace and concord..., St. Francis was careful to make of it the spiritual rule of his children; and he attained this result, that the Third Order rendered naturally the greatest service to the entire human family.



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11. ***...But he did not dream that he ought to limit himself to this; individual conversion was but an instrument of which he availed himself to reawaken in the bosom of society love of Christian wisdom, and to gain all men for Christ.***

12. The preoccupation which had moved Francis of Assisi to make of the members of the Third Order messengers and apostles of peace in the midst of the bitter discords and civil wars of his time was ours in the days wherein the conflagration of a horrible war was kindled in almost the entire world; it has not ceased to be so at a moment in which, here and there, the smoking hearth of this ill-extinguished conflagration still shoots out flames.

13. To this scourge had been added the interior crisis which the nations are going through, first of the forgetfulness and prolonged disdain of Christian principles. We wish to say that this fight for the sharing of goods which sets in conflict the different classes of society is so relentless that it threatens already to lead to a universal catastrophe.

14. ***In this so vast field, wherein, as representative of the pacific King, We have lavished Our especially attentive cares, We make an appeal for the zealous help of all those who claim for themselves Christian peace, but especially for the collaboration of the Tertiaries. They will exert a marvelous influence in restoring concord in spirit the day wherein their number and their efforts will be developed. It is, then, desirable that in every city, town, and even in each village, the Third Order count henceforth a sufficient group of members, not of inactive adherents satisfied with the mere title of Tertiaries, but instead, of those who spend themselves with zeal for their own salvation and the salvation of their brothers...***

15. The peace for which humanity cries out is not that which the laborious treaty-making of human prudence can decree, but that which Christ brought by its message: "My peace I bring you; I do not give it as the world gives it." (John xiv: 27). The accords between State and State or between class and class which men have been able to shadow forth will not be durable, and will not have the force of true peace except on condition that they are founded on the pacification of hearts; and that itself is only possible if duty has bridled the passions whence all conflicts spring...

16. ***This Order, having for its object, as We have said to form its members in Christian perfection, even whilst they may be plunged in the embarrassments of the age, so true is it that no state of life is incompatible with sanctity, it happens, as it were, necessarily, where the Tertiaries in numbers observe faithfully their rule, that they are for all about them a source of encouragement in fulfilling their duties, and even to tending towards a perfection of life superior to the exigencies of the common law...***