

## SPIRITUAL FEATURES OF THE NEW OFS RULE

Franciscan spirituality is **SPIRITUALITY OF LOVE**. Everything comes from God and returns to God.

In only 20 minutes we can say little. Therefore, we are selecting and presenting a few aspects briefly, and among them the following:

- TRINITARIAN SPIRITUALITY
- SPIRITUALITY OF CONFORMATION TO JESUS
- PENITENTIAL SPIRITUALITY (OF PERMANENT CONVERSION)
- SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION (ECCLESIAL, EUCHARISTIC, FRATERNAL)
- MISSION SPIRITUALITY
- CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY
- MARIAN SPIRITUALITY

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order has been "authenticated by the Church". With its approval, the Church receives it: **the Rule belongs to the Church**; it is **res Ecclesiae**, and with its authority the Church proposes those words (evangelical) which are **spirit and life**.<sup>1</sup>

Our Rule is **spirit and life**. "It is an authentic treasure in your hands, tuned to the **spirit of the Second Vatican Council** and responding to what the **Church is waiting to hear from you** (Three times Pope John Paul II addressed us November 22, 2002 "**the Church awaits you ...** "). Love, study and live your "*Rule*", because its values are **eminently evangelical** ".<sup>2</sup>

In the Rule there are no particular prescriptions to give, but as our General Constitutions, which are an essential complement to the Rule, remind us: "*The spirituality of the Secular Franciscan is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ, rather than a detailed program to be put into practice*" (CCGG 9.1).

We are invited to "*listen to what the Spirit says to the Church*" (Ap 2) and to do what the Church is expecting from the OFS, in the freedom of the children of God, paying attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the **signs of the times** (see art .3).

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the **gift** of the Rule is an act of faith, hope, love, **an act that "looks to the future: Duc in altum!"** (see again from the Pope John Paul II to the CIOFS on 22 November 2002).

### What is the source of our Rule?

The notes to our Rule always refer to the Gospel<sup>3</sup>, to St. Paul, to the writings of St. Francis, to the speeches by Popes to the OFS, to the Council: Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, etc. .... These notes are not random, they tell us how much our Rule is an admirable synthesis of what the Spirit says today to the Church. Yes, our Rule is spirit and life.

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Felice Cangelosi OFMCap, OFS Profession: gift and commitment

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II to CIOFS 27 09 1982 and 22 11 2002

<sup>3</sup> the word *Gospel*, *Word*, or *Scripture*, appears fourteen times in the Rule

<sup>4</sup> Pius XII in the "memorable" speech on 1 July 1956, St. Paul VI on 19 May 1971

<sup>5</sup> "The new evangelization began precisely with the Council, which Blessed John XXIII saw as a new Pentecost" Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Convention promoted by the Congregation for Bishops 20 09 2012

The name 'new Rule' is correct: our Rule is new, as a new fruit of the Council which is "*a new Pentecost for a new evangelization*". It is wonderful to discover how, almost word by word, our Rule originates from the Council.

There is no time to show, for example, how much you find of this great vision of the Council in the Rule: to contemplate in and from the **Mystery of God, the Mystery of the Church**, Christ's Bride, Body of Christ, People of God, of the **communion Church**, which is by nature a Church on a **mission**<sup>4</sup>. Or again, as Articles 10 to 19 refer to **the Social Doctrine of the Church**.

The **charismatic dimension** of our Rule is soon manifested in the first article.

We have been **called** by God, Holy Trinity, unfathomable mystery of love, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We did not choose ourselves, ours is a response to God's call that wants us to become his close collaborators. Our Rule is completely pervaded by this "**primacy of grace**".

We have been "**aroused by the Holy Spirit in the Church**, called (by the **Father**:" No one can come to Me, unless the Father draws him "Jn 14 17) to the following of **Christ, in the footsteps of St. Francis** and in the **mutual vital communion** in the Franciscan Family, to bear witness to the **charism** of St. Francis in the **life and mission** of the Church (art.1), and "**led by the Spirit strive for perfect charity in their own secular state**".

This, the call, is realized in a response of love to God's Love, that is, "*by their **Profession** they pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of Saint Francis, in their own secular state and by means of **this Rule** approved by the Church*" (art.2).

The Rule will allow anyone who wants to read it, love it and live it, to reach *the perfect charity*, the sanctity to which the Holy Spirit is calling us: "*but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour*" (1P 1,15).

The proposed path is that of the Christian, of every Christian, but to be accomplished with the intense and radical witness of Saint Francis. We are **committed to Profession**, as a response of love.

One of the features of our new Rule's is **simplicity** combined with a profound theology and spirituality: it is the **simplicity of the Gospel**.

## TRINITARIAN SPIRITUALITY

Our Rule is entirely enclosed in the prayer of Francis. It opens with his words, in the Prologue, with a strong confession of faith in the **One and Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit**: "Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and holy Father in heaven (...) to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete, (...) to have such a Brother and such a Son: our Lord Jesus Christ", and closes with the final blessing of the Testament, and the confirmation of **God's blessing for us penitents**. The faith of Francis assures us that "*May whoever observes all this be filled in heaven with the blessing of the most high Father, and on earth with that of his beloved Son, together with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.*"

**The whole Rule is pervaded by this concrete Trinitarian life** lived by St. Francis who, when he speaks of God, he invokes Him and always proclaims Him as "*Lord Almighty God in the Trinity and in Unity of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, creator of all things*"(Rnb21, 2): for example in

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<sup>6</sup> Described in Christifideles Laici

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II to CIOFS 22 11 2002

<sup>8</sup> In the text of our Rule, 16x is the name **Father**, 32x **Son** or Jesus or Christ, 7x **Holy Spirit**, and therefore, because we are children of the same and our only Father, 17x **brothers** or brotherly or brotherhood

article 4: "**Christ**, the gift of the **Father's** love, is the way to Him, the truth into which the **Holy Spirit** leads us".

We have no time to develop what this Trinitarian spirituality in St. Francis means concretely, a call to the total giving of himself.

## **SPIRITUALITY OF CONFORMATION TO JESUS**

Saint Francis did not limit **following Christ** to some aspects of his life. He sought to know and **live Christ in His total fullness**, following every aspect of His life, conforming himself, by grace, to Him to the point of being considered an *alter Christus*.

Francis was a true lover of Jesus desiring "*above all to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy intervention*" (2Reg 10, 8). What happened in La Verna, where he receives the stigmata, shows to what degree of intimacy he had arrived in the relationship with the poor and crucified Jesus. He could really say with Paul: "*For me, to live is Christ*" (Phil 1:21). If he strips himself of everything and chooses poverty, the reason for all this is Jesus, and only Jesus. Jesus is his everything; and that's enough to him! This is our "spirituality".

On June 22, 1967, Saint Paul VI defined the authentic essence of Franciscan charisma: "**The essence of Franciscan spirituality is ... Christ. Christ is the focal point** of this spirituality. We would say **only Christ**". This is the **heart of our Rule**.

## **PENITENTIAL SPIRITUALITY (OF PERMANENT CONVERSION)**

**"Brothers and sisters of penance"** ... *Let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls "conversion."* (art.7)

Francis invites us *today* - at this present moment, now - on the **path of conversion**. "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself*" said Jesus. The sacrifice of conceiving and organizing our life entirely centered on oneself, denying oneself, is the path of **conformation to Jesus**, through a **coherent commitment** of life and permanent conversion **to Him**. "*Nothing, then, of yours, hold on to you; so that He, who totally offers himself, is totally welcomed to you*". And **this up to being "transformed" in Him**, so that Jesus lives in us and we will recognize, with Saint Paul and Saint Francis, at the end of the journey "*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal 2:20). And how can we respond to this love, if not by embracing the crucified Jesus?

The **Prologue** of the Rule reveals to us the actual spirituality of St. Francis, the tangible spirituality of the penitents: the moment you forget, you love, you persevere, you become the **son** of the Father, you become a **spouse**, you become a **brother**, you become a **mother**, it is life of **such a great intimacy!** This is the key for reading the rest of the Rule ... **Starting from this key** all other things are simply **the works, the fruits of penance**: bearers of peace, etc.

"*Receiving the Spirit of the Lord*" "*without anything of our own*" starts precisely from the acknowledgement of this journey towards which the Rule urges us to follow Christ, poor and crucified, bearing witness to Him even among the difficulties and persecutions, living in His own perfect **obedience to the Father's will** who wants us all to be redeemed (Rule 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, **10**, 11; GGCC 9, 10, 11, 12). This is the most relevant aspect of the penitential spirituality of the Rule: a

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, 17th June 2007

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the whole Order 27-28

permanent conversion, a radical inner change, placing our trust completely in the action of the Holy Spirit, and the help of the Sacrament of Reconciliation which is the true way of sanctification, a privileged sign of our Father's merciful love and source of grace (article 7).

All this, written in the Rule that we have professed, is a demanding journey, a response to the crucified love of Jesus. We cannot limit ourselves at just an intellectual adherence to the contents of the Rule, we must move on to its concrete implementation. **From the Gospel, it means from Jesus, to life, and from life to the Gospel.** Here the authenticity of our vocation and our commitment come into play.

## **SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION**

The Rule is profoundly ecclesial, pervaded by a strong spirituality of communion, in the wake of the **ecclesiology of communion** rediscovered by the Second Vatican Council, and presented by Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (art.43).

The spirituality of communion is also expressed in article 6 where the Profession is emphasized as a fruitful baptism that unites us more deeply with the **Church** Bride of Christ and the people of God, and with its evangelizing mission in full communion with the Pope, bishops and priests, *in a trusting and open dialogue of apostolic creativity* (art.6).

The path is a communion and union with Jesus "If you remain in me and I in you" (Jn15: 5), with Jesus **living and working in the concreteness of the brothers** (art.5) especially the youngest ones (art.13), in the Word of Scripture, in the Church, Body of Christ (Article 6), in liturgical actions and in a particular way **in the Eucharistic communion**. Eucharistic spirituality means that I participate to the body of Christ: I live through him, in him, and with him, but not only with Him, but with my brothers, because if we receive the same bread, we become the same thing, a fraternity because *Christ he is the Firstborn of a multitude of brothers* (Rm 8,19)

The Order is divided into Fraternities and is, par excellence and by definition, an Order of brothers and sisters. The spirituality of communion is underlined by the first article "*in vital reciprocal communion*" to the last article of the Rule "*In concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility*". The fraternity must become a "school" of communion (art.24), where to learn to live the spirituality of communion and witness it **in the world** (art.13).

## **MISSION SPIRITUALITY**

For this reason, God inspired Francis to accept the formation of a **triple family** that included **all the members of God's people, men, women, lay people, religious, priests**, so that there would be people who fully conformed to Christ, in every form of life, could bear witness to Him entirely to the whole world to repair the Church in its parts. The first article of the OFS Rule offers us a confirmation.

**Our mission-vocation of following Christ in the footsteps of Saint Francis is identical: in various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, we bear witness to Christ in the innermost folds of the world thanks to our secularity.**

The articles of Chapter II of the Rule (art. 4 - art. 19) tell us how to live driven by the dynamic of the Gospel, to live the Word of the Gospel. At the beginning (art.4) is the **connection to Jesus**, who is the inspirer and center of our life with God and with our brothers and sisters. In the end (art.19), it is the purpose of life on earth, lived in Jesus, the Son: **the mission in the world** (peace, unity) and the eternal life ("the definitive encounter with the Father"). Being son (daughter) of the Father in the Son, and brothers (sisters) in Jesus, in the love of the Church, **for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.**

Where does our mission of serving the Church and the world come from? From "being": "*Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and **secular**, and the witness of building **fraternity**, sincerely and openly, are their **principal services to the Church**, which is the community of love. They should be recognized in it **by their "being," from which their mission springs***" (CCGG. Art. 100.3).

## CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY

The Rule (art.8) deeply urges us *to make prayer and contemplation the soul of our own **being** and of our **doing***, even giving us Jesus as a model: *as Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father ...* (art. 1). "The contemplation of the mystery of the presence of the Father in one's heart, in nature and in the history of men in which one's salvific plan is fulfilled makes us ready to collaborate in the Father's plan of love" (GGCC. Art. 12.3). It's no trivial matter! ... yet the **contemplative dimension** is often underestimated.

*"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?"* (1Co 3, 16). Contemplation is a true dialogue with God who awaits the only unconditional availability of the heart, the creature he loves in an unspeakable way: **the encounter of the not-created Love with the created love.**

## MARIAN SPIRITUALITY

We conclude with Most Holy Mary, She, Mother of God, Virgin made Church, daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, wife of the Holy Spirit, Protector and Advocate of the Franciscan family, is the perfect model of listening, of unconditional faith, of openness to God's Love, She who generated love incarnate!

Article 9 urges us to bear witness to **our ardent love** to Her, with the imitation of **her unconditional openness** and practice of a trusting and conscious prayer.

**Blessed Mary, sweet Mother, stay with us and pray for us!**

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There would be still a lot to say ...

Before ending, **let us thank God for the gift of Pope Francis** who, in his being and doing, in words and deeds, bears witness to the Franciscan spirituality, the first pope in history to take the name of Francis! It is a sign of the times<sup>5</sup>.

To study in depth the spirituality of the Rule, we can read the speeches of the Popes on the site: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/index\\_it.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/index_it.htm) for example: Pius XII on 1 July 1956; Paul VI on May 19, 1971, John Paul II on September 27, 1982, June 19, 1986, June 14, 1988, November 22, 2002. And as Pope Francis suggests: re-read the Council documents.

But, the Rule is more beautiful than the comments on the Rule : so let's study it directly in its words !

Rome, 24th March 2019  
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<sup>5</sup> "(...) in April 1976, I remember saying then, introducing the Conference: We must pray so much to obtain a Francis of our times. Perhaps not one, perhaps many. We live in an age in which the Vatican Council has revealed to us for a long and wide the dimension of God's people. Perhaps therefore, in these democratic times of ours, it is necessary for Francis to become the profile of all of us (...)" (John Paul II to the Friars Minor "Bernardini", 11 February 2003)