

Formation Course for National Spiritual Assistants to the OFS-YouFra
SECULAR FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

Seraphic College, Rome - November 11, 2019

Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR

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 (Const. OFS 9.1; cf. Rule OFS 5).

Introduction

This presentation is not intended to be exhaustive or only theoretical, but rather a set of proposals that arise from my experience as a general spiritual assistant and from reflecting on some fundamental concepts of the topic at hand: Secular Franciscan spirituality. I hope that these lines serve to stimulate the reflection of each one of the participants in this formation course and to renew our desire to know and promote this spirituality among the secular brothers and sisters and the young people who want to live the Gospel in fraternity inspired by the saint of Assisi.

1. What do we understand by spirituality?

Sometimes it is said that a person is “very spiritual” because he or she prays a lot or goes to the Church frequently, without taking into account other aspects of one’s life, such as service and charity towards one’s neighbor, faith formation, participation in society, etc. Although some of these stereotypes are being overcome in some environments, in others it is still thought that spirituality is an almost decorative aspect of the Christian life and/or something reserved for clergy, consecrated men and women and some lay people who do not have much to do, etc.

In reality, the subject of spirituality is very broad and goes beyond the confines of the Catholic, Christian and religious thought. Let it suffice for now to point out only some synthetic indications based on the historical and methodological point of view that would have to be developed extensively if one wanted to more deeply engage the subject. In principle it is important to arrive at the distinction between the different meanings of spirituality and Christian spirituality.

2. Anthropological approach to spirituality

From an anthropological approach, the theologian J. M. Garcia says that:

Spirituality is identified with a certain **attitude of people in facing the finitude and radicality of human existence**, referring to certain **deep and vital values** that encourage them to **think, feel** and **act**. This way of facing life could even contradict the religious world and move away from the so-called socio-historical religions¹.

Within the environments that revolve around the “**religious fact**”, diverse spiritualities have emerged, such as **Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist**, etc. However, the term spirituality has also penetrated the environment of **agnostics and atheists** giving way to “**lay spiritualities**” for which the sense of transcendence is projected in the horizontal and humanitarian context. The expansion that the concept of spirituality has had in recent

¹ J. M. GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual. Epistemología e interdisciplinariedad*, Salamanca, 2015, p. 48, our Engl. trans.

decades responds to the **deep need that human beings have to find and restore the relationships that allow them to fully realize their existence**². Hans Urs von Balthasar coined a classic definition of spirituality:

the fundamental, practical and existential attitude of a person. Such an attitude is a consequence of a person's understanding of the existence in the religious plane, more specifically in the ethical plane and of the concrete commitment in life. It is, therefore, an effective and habitual harmony that a person fulfills in his life based on perspectives and final decisions³.

The *Manual for Assistance to the OFS and YouFra (MASY)*, prepared by the Conference of general spiritual assistants (CAS) and published in 2006, reminds us of the various meanings of the term “spirituality” from diverse points of view:

Among its **various meanings**, the word “spirituality” is used to refer to styles of Christian life associated with specific existential circumstances (lay spirituality, priestly spirituality, religious spirituality) or certain spiritual traditions (Benedictine spirituality, Franciscan spirituality). Here it is used in both senses, and for this reason we speak of **secular and Franciscan** spirituality. (*MASY*, p. 37).

3. Christian spirituality

Although the expression *spiritualitas animae* existed in the **Latin philosophical sphere**, the concept of “spirituality” in its “abstract” modality and in its Christian theological-pastoral application **dates back to the patristic era**. The term is **not found in the Bible**, but its **contents are addressed with various orientations**. St. Paul gives the term *spiritualis* (*pneumatikós*) a specific and precise meaning (cf. *1 Cor* 15, 44-45; 3, 1-2)⁴. JM García further develops this concept both synthetically and precisely:

In the **Pauline synthesis** the *pneumatikós*, the transformed “**spiritual man**”, empowered in the Spirit of God and directed to fullness, opposes the *sarkikós* (**carnal**) and *psychikós* (**psychic**) to designate the **man liberated** from passions, selfishness, pride and “works of the flesh”. **The dynamisms of the Spirit lead the spiritual man to a unitary orientation, that of agape, that of joyful and magnanimous fidelity** (cf. *Gal* 5).

Spirituality is subsequently understood by the Church Fathers as “life according to the Spirit of God” and as “open progression” to further realizations according to the grace of baptism towards the eschatological perspective. In this sense Christian spirituality can be understood as “personal appropriation of faith” (W. Kasper) or as “word of God welcomed in the act of its development” (HU von Balthasar) or also as “life of the human subject (individual and communal) oriented to God through Christ under the action of the Spirit and inserted into the community of believers, where thanks to a particular charism of the Spirit (personal and/or communal), the subject lives his theological existence of faith, hope and charity, as testimony of the gift of God in the historical, cultural and social environment in which it is inserted and acts» (B. G. Iammarrone)⁵.

In this sense, it is interesting to recall what Pope Francis stated in the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* on the care of our common house (05.24.2015), regarding “social love” and its relationship to spirituality:

Social love is the key to authentic development: “In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, **love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be**

² Cfr. GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 49-50.

³ H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Spiritus creator*, Brescia 1972, p. 237, cited in GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 51.

⁴ Cfr. GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 52.

⁵ B.G. IAMMARRONE, *La spiritualità francescana. Anima e contenuti. Una proposta cristiana di vita per il presente*, Padova, 1993, p.13, cited in GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 53.

given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity”⁶. In this framework, **along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies** to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. **When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us** (*Laudato si'* 231).

4. Historical evolution of spiritual theology

In order to better understand Christian spirituality, it is necessary to remember that **spiritual theology has evolved throughout history** through a manifold and interesting journey. This presentation is not intended to exhaust this vast field but only to invite you to **better understand the current development** of Christian spirituality. JM García distinguishes in broad lines the following **aspects of this evolution**⁷:

- Spiritual theology in the transition from the « *sacred page* » to the « *sacred doctrine* »
- Spiritual theology from the 13th century to the beginning of the 20th century
- From ascetic and mystical theology to spiritual theology and theology of the Christian experience
- Nature and method of the theology of the Christian spiritual experience
- Interdisciplinary nature of the theology of the Christian spiritual experience
- The Christian spiritual experience
- The mystical Christian spiritual experience

Speaking of **recent manuals and monographic studies of spiritual theology**, the same author concludes that

From the 90s onwards, some questions (for example, the dimension of **the Christian experience** and the attention to the **gradual and progressive growth of the Christian life**, as well as the relationship between **Christian experience and mystical life - mystical theology**) have acquired relevance and centrality in the study of spiritual theology due to a more vivid **awareness of history, of the temporality and the gradualness of vital processes**⁸.

The reflections of various contemporary theologians have made it possible for the theology manuals to consider **«life lived as their object of study** and the concept of **spiritual experience as a cardinal point** to capture the nature of spiritual theology and the systematization of its contents in order to its teaching⁹. In this sense, “the Christian experience means **a reality given and received personally**, that is, lived mystery, “**lived experience of mystery**”¹⁰.

J. M. García adds: «An authentic path of Christian faith is necessarily a lived experience in which the object (*fides quae*) forms the subject (*fides qua*), that is, the revelation data is personalized in the believing subject»¹¹. The same author concludes that “it is not possible to have faith without experience, that faith requires experience and that it is called to develop

⁶ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*](#), Librería Editrice Vaticana, 2005, 582.

⁷ Cfr. GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*.

⁸ GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 217.

⁹ GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 218.

¹⁰ Cfr. F. RUIZ SALVADOR, *Le vie dello Spirito. Sintesi di teología spirituale*, Bologna, 1999, p. 20, cited in GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 350

¹¹ GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 359.

itself in experience, although the latter is also the result of faith, passes through faith and develops itself within faith»¹².

5. Spirituality of the lay faithful

On the basis of the above premises, we can now address the specific issue of the spirituality of the lay faithful. To this end it is useful to refer to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*¹³ (CSDC), published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The CSDC points out the distinctive elements of this spirituality:

The lay faithful are called to **cultivate an authentic lay spirituality** by which they are reborn as new men and women, both sanctified and sanctifiers, immersed in the mystery of God and inserted in society. Such a spirituality will build up the world according to Jesus' Spirit. It will make people capable of looking beyond history, without separating themselves from it, of cultivating a passionate love for God without looking away from their brothers and sisters, whom they are able to see as the Lord sees them and love as the Lord loves them. This spirituality precludes both an intimist spiritualism and a social activism, expressing itself instead in a life-giving synthesis that bestows unity, meaning and hope on an existence that for so many different reasons is contradictory and fragmented. Prompted by such a spirituality, the lay faithful are able to contribute “to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their own life ... they must manifest Christ to others”¹⁴. (CSDC 545)

The *Compendium* goes on to highlight the need for the lay faithful to *harmonize life and faith*, their spiritual and moral lives on one hand, and fulfilling their social duties, on the other:

The lay faithful must strengthen their spiritual and moral lives, becoming ever more competent in carrying out their social duties. A deepening of interior motivations and the acquisition of a style appropriate for their work in the social and political spheres are the results of a dynamic and ongoing formation directed above all to the attainment of **harmony between life, in all its complexity, and faith**. In the experience of believers, in fact, “there cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called 'spiritual' life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called 'secular' life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture”¹⁵. (CSDC 546)

The same document specifies the means to accomplish the aforesaid goal:

*Bringing faith and life together requires following the path judiciously indicated by the **characteristic elements of Christian living***: the Word of God as a reference point; the liturgical celebration of the Christian Mystery; personal prayer; the authentic experience of Church enhanced by the particular formational services of discerning spiritual guides; the exercise of the social virtues and a persevering commitment to cultural and professional formation. (CSDC 546)

6. Franciscan Spirituality

The aforementioned *Manual for Spiritual Assistance* – after recalling the importance of the Vatican II ecclesiology and the document *Christifideles laici* (1988) – reminds us that “the main points of lay spirituality are present in the Rule and GC of the OFS”, and makes us aware of the fact that “the OFS Rule is a mature fruit of Vatican II and later reflection, but at the same time it is also a faithful expression of the Franciscan spiritual heritage”. It goes on to state

¹² Cf. ROS GARCÍA, *Nel mezzo del camino l'esperienza di Dio*, 37-38, citado en GARCÍA, *Manual de teología espiritual*, p. 359.

¹³ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

¹⁴ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 31: AAS 57 (1965), 37-38.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici*, 59: AAS 81 (1989), 509.

that “[t]he *Rule* gives a Franciscan spirit and expression to these directives.¹⁶ The synthesis of lay and Franciscan spirituality becomes more concrete in the *General Constitutions*”¹⁷. The section concludes by affirming, “It is not easy to speak of Franciscan spirituality in a way that will show all the riches it contains”. (MASY, p. 38)

In order to continue, I will now propose the following definition of Franciscan spirituality suggested by Prof. Wieslaw Block, OFMCap:

“Franciscan spirituality is the Christian experience lived and witnessed to by Franciscans, yesterday and today, in their respective historical, cultural and ecclesial context, and inspired by the Christian and evangelical experience of Saint Francis of Assisi and illuminated by the values lived and intellectually elaborated by the great historical and spiritual tradition of the Franciscan Order”¹⁸.

7. Sources of Secular Franciscan Spirituality

In my opinion, the sources from which secular Franciscan spirituality can be drawn are the following:

7.1. The history of the Order:

7.1.1. The previous Rules:

- *Epistola ad Fideles I* of Francis of Assisi, before 1215?
- *Epistola ad Fideles II* of Francis of Assisi, 1221?
- *Memoriale propositi*, 1221-1228
- *Supra Montem* of Pope Nicholas IV, 1289
- *Misericors Dei Filius* of Pope Leo XIII, 1883

7.1.2. Chronicles and speeches

Another important source is undoubtedly the numerous preserved documents such as chronicles and discourses related to the Secular Franciscan Tertiaries in the various countries and localities. Suffice as an example the *Address by Pope Pius XII to the Franciscan Tertiaries of Italy* in 1956, cited by a footnote in the 1978 Rule, n. 1., note 3:

From Blessed Luchesio up to the innumerable lay people of every communion, to priests, to Bishops, to Roman Pontiffs, it is a true multitude of souls who attributed to the Third Order a great part of the spirit that animated them to walk on the path of perfection. No less surprising is the history of their works, directed to the religious, moral, social, and political reorganization of the society. [...] In times of struggle and revenge the Tertiaries became promoters of harmony and peace; against the abuses of the feudal lords they operated with prudent daring, for the benefit and defense of the most humble classes; to diminish and, as far as possible, to destroy the effects of heresies and schisms, they practiced and preached absolute fidelity to the Church and its visible Head; to put a row on the spread of injustice, arrogance, robbery, gave an example of detachment from wealth, vanity and honors¹⁹.

7.1.3. Testimony of saints, blessed, venerable, etc.

7.1.4. The Letters of the General Ministers of the Franciscan Family

¹⁶ Cf. OFS Rule, 4-19.

¹⁷ Cf. *OFS Const.*, 8-16 on the Form of Life, and 17-27 on Active Presence in the Church and in the World.

¹⁸ BLOCK, W., *Spiritualità francescana sistematica*, PUA Course notes, 2010, p.8.

¹⁹ *Address of His Holiness Pope Pius XII to the great Family of Third Order Franciscans of Italy*, Vatican Basilica – Sunday, 1 July 1956: http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1956/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19560701_ordine-francescano.html.

7.2. The current documents of the Order

- 7.2.1. The Rule *Seraphicus Patriarcha*, 1978
- 7.2.2. The General Constitutions of the OFS, 2000
- 7.2.3. The Ritual of the OFS, 1984

7.3. The current experience of lay people and young Franciscans

- 7.3.1. Personal experience
- 7.3.2. Experience of the local fraternity
- 7.3.3. Regional and national cultural elements: time-space-history
- 7.3.4. OFS General Chapters: 2007, 2011, 2014, 2017...
- 7.3.5. OFS-YouFra Continental and sub-continental congresses: Latin American, Asia-Oceania, African, European, etc.

8. Elements of Secular Franciscan Spirituality

If the OFS Rule and Constitutions are key documents to understand Secular Franciscan spirituality, it is necessary to study and reflect on them to highlight the essential elements of that spirituality. Obviously, since secular Franciscan spirituality finds its place within the larger Franciscan Tradition, it shares several of those elements and shows others that are specific to it. Next, I propose a list of these elements as an attempt to organize them into several categories, taking into account their richness, both simple and complex.

8.1. Living according to the form of the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ

The aforementioned *Manual for Spiritual Assistance* presents as the first characteristic of Secular Franciscan spirituality the observance of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

Saint Francis's *forma vitae* was nothing but a collection of various gospel passages especially dear to him. Here we would like to recall 24 February 1209, the feast of Saint Matthias. Francis, who is in the Portiuncula, hears the following passage from the Gospel: "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand... You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food*" (Mt 10:7-10). The biographers tell us that when he heard those words and the priest explained them to him, he exclaimed: "This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart"²⁰.

There are many other examples where Francis also urges his brothers to faithfully follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The way of life proposed by the saint is nothing but an application of the Gospel. Writing his *Testament* during the last weeks of his life, he reminds the brothers once again of their basic commitment to "live according to the pattern of the holy Gospel"²¹ (*MASY*, p. 38).

The *OFS Rule* clearly points out this central element of the life of Secular Franciscans:

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: **to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ** by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and people²². Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly²³. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel²⁴ (*OFS Rule* 4).

²⁰ Cf. 1C 22; FA:ED I, 201-02.

²¹ Test 14; FA:ED I, 125.

²² *I Celano* 18,115.

²³ *Jn.* 3,16; 14,6.

²⁴ VATICAN II, *Decree on Lay Apostolate*, 30.

A natural consequence of the centrality of the gospel in the Secular Franciscan spirituality is the centrality of Jesus Christ in this way of life. Let us recall what the *OFS Rule* says on this:

The spirituality of the secular Franciscan is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ,²⁵ rather than a detailed program to be put into practice. (*OFS Const.* 9.1; See *OFS Rule* 5).

“Christ, poor and crucified” [...] is the “book” in which the brothers and sisters, in imitation of Francis, learn the purpose and the way of living, loving, and suffering. They discover in Him the value of contradictions for the sake of justice and the meaning of the difficulties and the crosses of daily life. With Him they can accept the will of the Father even under the most difficult circumstances and live the Franciscan spirit of peace, rejecting every doctrine contrary to human dignity. (*OFS Const.* 10; See *OFS Rule* 10).

8.2. The love for the Word of God

Life according to the holy Gospel necessarily implies constant contact with the Word of God. This central element of Christian spirituality is also an integral part of Secular Franciscan spirituality, as the following texts recall:

The secular Franciscan, committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously **study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture.** The fraternity and its leaders should **foster love for the word of the Gospel** and help the brothers and sisters to know and understand it as it is proclaimed by the Church with the assistance of the Spirit²⁶ (*OFS Const.* 9. 2; See *OFS Rule* 4).

Those who are called to carry out the mission of catechists, presiders of ecclesial communities, or other ministries, as well as the sacred ministers, should make **the love of Francis for the word of God** their own, as well as **his faith** in those who announce it, and the **great fervour** with which he received the mission of preaching penance from the Pope (*OFS Const.* 17.3).

8.3. Living in a spirit of ongoing conversion

The *OFS Rule* and *Constitutions* make explicit the connection between the following of Christ and another fundamental value of the secular Franciscan tradition and spirituality: **ongoing conversion.**

United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance”²⁷, 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**”. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out **daily**²⁸ (*OFS Rule* 7).

Some **means to cultivate** this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, **individually and in fraternity,** are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God²⁹.

In this spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, are the **works of charity** in the interactions with the brothers and sisters³⁰. (*OFS Const.* 13.1-2).

²⁵ See *Rule* of 1221, Chapt. 22; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 51.

²⁶ See *Dei verbum* 10.

²⁷ First Rule – T.O.F.

²⁸ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 8; Decree on Ecumenism, 4; Const. Ap. “Paenitemini”, preamble

²⁹ *Ordo Poenitentiae. Praenotanda* 22 ff.

³⁰ See *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 25 ff.

8.4. Faithfulness to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit

The pneumatological dimension - openness and docility to the Holy Spirit - is central to the spirituality of Secular Franciscans, as it was for the saint of Assisi.

Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation and the animator of fraternal life and mission, secular Franciscans should seek to imitate the faithfulness of Francis to His inspiration. They should listen to the exhortation of the Saint to desire above all things "**the Spirit of God at work within them**"³¹ (*OFS Const.* 11).

8.5. Deep and familiar communion with the Trinitarian God

In the *Epistle ad Fideles I*, Francis of Assisi proclaims that those who engage in a life of penance and persevere in it are greatly blessed. For him, those who have begun this path of evangelical conversion based on the experience of God's love, have already begun to live true happiness, since they have entered into a life of deep and familiar communion with the Trinitarian God, thus:

[...] the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them (cf. *Is* 11:2) and make Its home and dwelling place among them (cf. *Jn* 14:23), and they are children of the heavenly Father (cf. *Mt* 5:45), whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Mt* 12,50). We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ; we are his brothers to him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven (*Mt* 12,50); we are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body [...]³².

Francis continues to describe in some detail what this communion implies with each person of the Trinity and the excellent value that such communion has. The Pauline Rule of 1978 clearly exhorts Secular Franciscans to embrace the experience of the triune God³³.

8.6. Living in fraternity

Another key element of Franciscan spirituality is clearly expressed in the *OFS Rule and Constitutions*. Expressions like “brothers and sisters”, “fraternity” and “fraternities” are often present throughout these documents. The *OFS Constitutions* introduce early in its text the centrality of the fraternal dimension in living the Gospel for Secular Franciscans:

The vocation to the OFS is a **vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion**. For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities. (*OFS Const* 3.3)

The *Manual for Spiritual Assistance* offers some background reflections on the meaning of fraternity for Francis of Assisi and all Franciscans:

Jesus' words, “*You are all brothers*” (*Mt* 23:8), found a special place in Francis's heart. Seeing that many were coming after him in order to follow this new way, he wrote in his *Testament*: “And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the holy Gospel.”³⁴

Francis's concept of fraternity as the place where God's presence is manifest is also essential in Franciscan spirituality. Christ is the true center of fraternal life. It is he who speaks to us through our brothers and sisters. It is he who unites us in the power of his Spirit. It is he who makes us all one. (*MASY*, p. 41)

³¹ *Rule* of 1223, Chapt. 10.

³² *Earlier Exhortation*, 6-10, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. I, ed. by R. J. Armstrong – J. A. Wayne Hellman – W. J. Short, New York, 1999, p. 41-42.

³³ TRUJILLO CANO, A., *Seduced by God, Seekers of Christ. Secular Franciscans and their relationship with God*, in *Koinonia*, 93 (2017), p. 1-6, Internet: <http://www.ciofs.org/portal/en/spiritual-assistance/koinonia?start=5>.

³⁴ Test 14; FA:ED I, 125.

8.7. Ecclesial communion

The *Manual for Spiritual Assistance* points out another important element of Secular Franciscan spirituality, “ecclesiality” or “ecclesial spirit”, that is, full and loving communion with the Church:

Another theme we rightly consider essential in Franciscan spirituality is ecclesiality. This too has its historical basis in the personal attitude of Saint Francis. Every step in his vocation, inspired by the Lord, was marked by a great love for the Church, beginning with his encounter with the Crucifix in the church of San Damiano, where he heard the Lord’s words: “*Francis, go rebuild my house; as you see, it is all being destroyed.*”³⁵ From that moment Francis began to carry out, with deep love, this command of the Lord.

The Church is a community of persons who share the same faith in Jesus Christ and live together as brothers and sisters, in spite of their differences. Thus, we come to another great theme of Franciscan spirituality: fraternity.

The *Rule and Constitutions of the OFS* make explicit this dimension of Franciscan Spirituality which should also be incorporated into the Secular Franciscans’ way of life:

Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to **living in full communion** with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity³⁶ (*OFS Rule* 6).

[...] the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to a faith-inspired reflection on the Church, its mission in today's world and the role of the Franciscan laity within it. They should take up the challenges and accept the responsibilities that this reflection will lead them to discover (*OFS Const.* 14.1).

8.8. Prayer, contemplation and sacramental life

Another central element of St. Francis’ evangelical experience and, thus, of Franciscan spirituality, is, undoubtedly, the dimension that encompasses prayer, contemplation and participation in the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life³⁷.” It is worth noting, though, that the *OFS Rule and Constitutions* make several important distinctions and nuances as they describe the diverse aspects and consequences of this decisive dimension of Secular Franciscan spirituality. They do this by grounding this diversification in sound scriptural and theological foundations and based on the Franciscan tradition.

Let us start with the **general principles** stated by the *OFS Rule and Constitutions*:

As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let **prayer and contemplation** be the soul of all they are and do³⁸.

Let them participate in the **sacramental life** of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in **liturgical prayer** in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ. (*OFS Rule* 8)

...They should seek to **discover the presence of the Father** in their own heart, in nature, and in the history of humanity in which His plan of salvation is fulfilled. The **contemplation** of this mystery will dispose them to **collaborate** in this loving plan (*OFS Const.* 12.3).

Let us continue with two of the most significant articles of the *OFS Constitutions* on **the Eucharist**:

³⁵ 2C 10; FA:ED II, 249.

³⁶ PAUL VI, *Discourse to the Tertiaries*, 19/5/1971

³⁷ LG 11

³⁸ Vatican II, *Decree on Lay Apostolate*, 4

The Eucharist is the centre of the life of the Church. Christ should be the centre of the life of the fraternity unites us to himself and to one another as a single body in it. Therefore, the Eucharist. The brothers and sisters should participate in the Eucharist as frequently as possible, being mindful of the respect and love shown by Francis, who, in the Eucharist, lived all the mysteries of the life of Christ (*OFS Const.* 14.2).

The fraternity should come together periodically, also as an ecclesial community to celebrate the Eucharist in a climate which strengthens the fraternal bond and characterises the identity of the Franciscan family. Where, for whatever reason, this particular celebration may not be possible, they should participate in the celebration of the larger ecclesial community (*OFS Const.* 53.2).

In this regard, the *Manual for Spiritual Assistance* reminds us the particular place that the Eucharist had in St. Francis' faith and life:

Contemplating Jesus in the Eucharist, **two things especially struck Francis**: *the humility of Jesus*, who is willing to remain with us under the appearances of bread and wine, and his *command to feed on him*. This humility and this command aroused in Francis's heart feelings of deep humility, together with a more intense desire to give himself to Jesus in order to live in and for him alone³⁹. (*MASY*, p. 39-40)

In addition to all this, the *OFS Constitutions* address **other related issues**, such as: the **purposes** of participating in the sacramental life of the Church, the participation at the **diversified liturgical prayer** of the Church, different **modalities of prayer**, and the importance of the **Eucharistic celebration for the life of the OFS fraternity**. This is expressed in the following articles:

They should **participate in the sacraments of the Church**, attentive not only to personal sanctification, but also to fostering the growth of the Church and the spreading of the Kingdom. They should **collaborate** in achieving living and conscious celebrations in their own parishes, particularly in the celebrations of baptism, confirmation, marriage, and the anointing of the sick. (*OFS Const.* 14.3)

The brothers and sisters as well as the fraternities should adhere to the indications of the Ritual with respect to the different forms of participating in the **liturgical prayer of the Church**, giving priority to the celebration of the **Liturgy of the Hours**⁴⁰. (*OFS Const.* 14.4)

In all places and at all times, it is possible for true worshippers of the Father to give him adoration and to pray to him. Nevertheless, the brothers and sisters should try to find **times of silence and recollection** dedicated exclusively to prayer. (*OFS Const.* 14.5)

8.9. Spirituality of family and marriage

Secular Franciscan spirituality cannot be conceived without the experience of family life; instead, it finds there its primordial place, as stated clearly by the *OFS Constitutions* (n. 24):

1. Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be **the first place** in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation [...] The way **spouses love each other** and affirm the value of fidelity is a **profound witness** for their own family, the Church, and the world.
2. In the fraternity:
 - **The spirituality of the family and of marriage** and the Christian attitude towards family problems should be a theme for dialogue and for the sharing of experiences;
 - they should **share the important moments of the family life** of their Franciscan brothers and sisters and they should give **fraternal attention** to those — single, widows, single parents, separated, divorced — who are living difficult situations.

³⁹ Cf. M. BORTOLI, *Lineamenti di spiritualità francescana*, Vicenza 1976, p. 48.

⁴⁰ *Ritual SFO*, Appendix 26, 27.

8.10. Active presence in the Church and in the world

Numbers 17-27 of the Constitutions make up a fundamental section of the life and mission of the OFS – the active presence of Secular Franciscans in the Church and in the world. This section describes the peculiar way in which they build the Kingdom of God.

8.10.1. Secularity: building the Kingdom of God in earthly realities

Secular Franciscans, committed by their **vocation to build the Kingdom of God in temporal situations and activities**, live their **membership both in the Church and in society** as an inseparable reality (*OFS Const* 20.1; See *OFS Rule* 14).

Called to work together in **building up the Church** as the sacrament of salvation for all and, through their baptism and profession, made “witnesses and instruments of her mission”, secular Franciscans proclaim Christ by their life and words. Their preferred apostolate is **personal witness**⁴¹ in the environment in which they live and service for **building up the Kingdom of God** within the situations of this world (*OFS Const.*17.1; See *OFS Rule* 6).

Participation in the **service of sanctification**, which the Church exercises through the liturgy, prayer, and works of penance and charity, is put into practice by the brothers and sisters above all in their own family, then in the fraternity and finally through their active presence in the local Church and in society (*OFS Const.* 17.4).

8.10.2. Taking courageous initiatives in your life in society

The Constitutions indicate what kind of initiatives secular Franciscans are called to take in social life and the criteria for doing so. This is indeed a prophetic exhortation that is not easy to fully assume, but such a challenge should not be ignored.

With Jesus, obedient even to death, **they should seek to know and do the will of the Father**. They should give thanks to God for the gift of freedom and for the revelation of the law of love. In order to carry out the will of the Father, they should accept the help which is offered to them through the mediation of the Church by those who are constituted as authority in her and by their confreres [...] (*OFS Const.* 12.2).

The **fraternities should engage themselves through courageous initiatives**, consistent with their Franciscan vocation and with the directives of the Church, in the field of human development and justice. They should take clear positions whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression or indifference. They should offer their fraternal service to the victims of injustice (*OFS Const.* 22.2).

8.10.3. Spirit of minority: or preferential pion for the poor

The OFS Constitutions present the spirit of minority in relation to the Secular Franciscans introducing prophetic challenges:

In the spirit of minority, they should opt for relationships which give **preference to the poor and to those on the fringe of society**, whether these be individuals or categories of persons or an entire people; they should **collaborate in overcoming the exclusions** of others and those forms of poverty that are the fruit of inefficiency and injustice (*OFS Const.* 19.2).

8.10.4. Spirituality of Work

Bases on solid theological premises, the OFS documents develop what we could call a true spirituality of work for secular Franciscans:

⁴¹ See *Rule* 1221, 17,3; *Legend of the Three Companions* 36; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 53.

As the **primary and fundamental contribution to building a more just and fraternal world**, they should commit themselves both to the **generous fulfilment of the duties proper to their occupation** and to the **professional training** that pertains to it [...] (*Const. OFS 20.2*).

For Francis, work is a gift and to work is a grace. Daily work is not only **the means of livelihood**, but the **opportunity to serve God and neighbour** as well as a way to **develop one's own personality**. In the conviction that work is **a right and a duty** and that every form of occupation deserves respect, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to **collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work** and so that **working conditions** may always be **more humane**. (*Const. OFS 21.1*; cfr. *OFS Rule 16*)

[...] Secular Franciscans should maintain a balance between work and rest and should strive to create meaningful forms of using leisure time⁴². (*OFS Const. 21.2*)

8.10.5. Peace bearers

The documents of the OFS clearly indicate that the peace that San Francisco announced and that he carried in his heart must also characterize the secular and young Franciscans.

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon⁴³. (*OFS Rule 19*)

The **renunciation of the use of violence**, characteristic of the followers of Francis, does not mean the renunciation of action. However, the brothers and sisters should take care that their interventions are **always inspired by Christian love** (*OFS Const. 22.3*).

Secular Franciscans are **called to be bearers of peace** in their families and in society:

- they should see to the proposal and spreading of peaceful ideas and attitudes;
- they should develop their own initiatives and should collaborate, individually and as a fraternity, with initiatives of the Pope, the local Churches, and the Franciscan Family;
- they should collaborate with those movements and institutions which promote peace while respecting its authentic foundations. (*OFS Const. 23.1*)

8.11. Living evangelical poverty

From solid theological bases, the Constitutions develop the peculiar call of secular Franciscans to live evangelical poverty from their secular condition and with a prophetic spirit.

Secular Franciscans [...] have **a particular manner of living evangelical poverty**. To understand and achieve it requires a strong personal commitment and the stimulation of the fraternity in prayer and dialogue, communal review of life, and attentiveness to the instructions of the Church, and the demands of society (*OFS Const. 15.2*).

Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to reduce their own personal needs so as to be better able to share spiritual and material goods with their brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. They should give thanks to God for the goods they have received, using them as good stewards and not as owners.

They should take a firm position against consumerism and against ideologies and practices which prefer riches over human and religious values and which permit the exploitation of the human person (*OFS Const. 15.3*).

⁴² See *Gaudium et Spes* 67; *Laborem exercens* 16 ff.

⁴³ *Rule of Leo XIII*, II,9; *Legend of the Three Companions* 14,58

8.12. Living with hope and evangelical joy

The joy of living is a characteristic that cannot be lacking in the Christian experience of secular Franciscans. This joy is rooted in the Gospel and extends itself in the various spheres of life, bringing hope which comes from an ethical commitment.

Following the Gospel, secular Franciscans therefore affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future. (*OFS Const.* 26. 1; cf. *Rule OFS* 19)

In the fraternity, the brothers and sisters should promote mutual understanding and they should see to it that the atmosphere of their meetings is welcoming and that it reflects joy. They should encourage one another for the good. (*OFS Const.* 26.2)

Conclusion

At the end of this presentation we can conclude by saying that the spirituality of secular Franciscans has developed and manifested itself in a huge variety of historical forms, all of which have emerged from their common sources, such as the evangelical experience of St Francis of Assisi – passionate about Christ Jesus, and the penitential movement to which the saint gave new vigor at the dawn of the thirteenth century. These sources have fed the historical trajectory of the Order, going through moments of growth and challenges, through diverse kinds of relationships with the Franciscan friars, sometimes in constructive ways, but other times in contrasting ways. Throughout this process, secular Franciscan tertiaries and more recently secular Franciscans have developed a rich and fluctuating spirituality as they interacted with their respective historical and ecclesial contexts. In doing so, they have demonstrated their fundamental attitudes, which respond to their shared faith and values. Many have made a big difference in their particular time and place; some have even given their lives for the love of Christ and neighbor.

The epochal and climate changes we are experiencing today present not only new challenges to secular and young Franciscans, but also unique opportunities for them to be an evangelical ferment in our convulsed world, which is at the same time pregnant with a future that is ours to build in hope, assuming our unavoidable co-responsibility for our common home and history.

As spiritual and pastoral assistants of the OFS and YouFra, we are called to be catalysts of the Franciscan charism, through our testimony and collaboration in formation. Hundreds of thousands of Secular Franciscans and thousands of young Franciscans have also received the gift of this charism, which has not lost its value in the face of the phenomena of secularism and postmodernity. As one and single spiritual family, secular and religious Franciscans are called to build together a «life-giving union with each other» (*OFS Rule* 1), not seeking our self-aggrandizement, but to be true bearers of «the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church»⁴⁴ for the life of the world.

Questions for reflection and sharing

1. What do I understand by spirituality?
2. How do secular Franciscans live their spirituality in the fraternity I assist?
3. What can I do to promote a better understanding and practice of the spirituality of the OFS through my service as spiritual and pastoral assistant?

⁴⁴ Vatican II, *Decree on Lay Apostolate*, 4,8.

Bibliography

1. ANDREOZZI G., *Storia delle regole e delle costituzioni dell'Ordine Franciscano Secolare. Manuale ad uso dei dirigenti e degli assistenti*, Perugia, 1988.
2. ANTINUCCI L., *Seguire Cristo alla maniera di Francesco. La vocazione laicale secondo la Regola dell'Ordine francescano secolare*, Padova, 2011.
3. ASSELLE M., *Le radici del passato, le sfide del futuro. Il Terz'Ordine Franciscano di fronte ai nuovi movimenti ecclesiali*, Assisi, 2014.
4. BACH L., *Franciscan Family Connections, Program to prepare Spiritual Assistants to serve the OFS*, Lindsborg, 2011.
5. Bouyer, P. – E. Vandenbroucke – L. Cogne, *Historie de la Spiritualité chrétienne I-IV*, Paris 1960-1966.
6. BOUYER L. – ANCILLI E. – SECONDIN B., *Storia della Spiritualità*, Bologna 1984.
7. CONFERENCIA DE LOS ASISTENTES GENERALES DE LA OFS, *Manual para la Asistencia de la OFS y de la JuFra*, Roma, 2006.
8. EGIDO V. I., *Ser Franciscano Seglar. Proyecto de espiritualidad y de vida*, Madrid, 2014.
9. FREGONA A., *L'Ordine Franciscano Secolare. Storia, legislazione, spiritualità*, Padova, 2007.
10. GARCÍA J. M., *Manual de teología espiritual. Epistemología e interdisciplinariedad*, Salamanca, 2015.
11. HENSE, E. – F. MAAS (eds.), *Towards a Theory of Spirituality*, Leuven/Paris/Walpole 2011.
12. *Magistero dei Papi e fraternità secolare. Da Pio IX a Giovanni Paolo II*, a cura di M. Bigi e L. Monaco, Roma, 1985.
13. MOYA RAMOS C., *La Orden Franciscana Seglar. Su naturaleza e historia. Su espiritualidad. Su organización*, Guadalajara, 1991.
14. PONTIFICIO CONSEJO JUSTICIA Y PAZ, *Compendio de la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, 2005.
15. RIVI P. – GASPARINI A., *L'impegno sociale del Terz'Ordine Franciscano. L'epoca di Leone XIII: da un frammento di storia, alcune indicazioni per l'oggi*, Assisi, 2012.
16. ROLHEISER R., *Seeking Spirituality. Guidelines for a Christian Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, London, 1998.
17. STEWART R. M., « *De illis qui faciunt penitentiam* ». *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation*, Roma, 1991.
18. TRUJILLO CANO A., *Seducidos por Dios, buscadores de Cristo. Los Franciscanos seculares y su relación con Dios*, en *Koinonia*, 93 (2017).
19. URIBE ESCOBAR F., *Núcleos del carisma de san Francisco de Asís. La identidad franciscana*, Oñati, 1ª. Reimpr., 2018.
20. *Vocación y misión de los laicos franciscanos en la Iglesia y en el mundo. Carta de los cuatro Ministros Generales de la Familia Franciscana*, Madrid, 1989.
21. WAAIJMANN, K., *Spirituality as Theology: Studies in Spirituality* 21 (2011) 1-43.
22. ZUDAIRE J., *Con Francesco alla sequela di Cristo. Introduzione alla Spiritualità e all'organizzazione dell'Ordine Franciscano Secolare*, 2ª ed., Assisi, 1996.