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**«SO THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE»
THE LATER RULE OF SAINT FRANCIS**

**«PARA QUE TENGAN VIDA»
LA ÚLTIMA REGLA DE SAN FRANCISCO**

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Abstract: This article is intended as a contribution to the celebration of the eighth centenary of the Later Rule of St. Francis (Nov. 29, 1223) and analyzes its inspirational force in our secularized society. This is one of the four great Rules of consecrated life. It is not only a juridical text, but also a spiritual document, a guide “to live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel” (part 1). Those in authority must be at the service of this vital process, acting as mothers who take care of life (part 2). The third part presents the Rule’s current relevance and the need of an inspiring leadership that promotes processes of transformation to address the present challenges of religious life.

Keywords: Francis of Assisi; Franciscans; Later Rule; Religious Life; Leadership.

Resumen: Este artículo responde a la celebración del octavo centenario de la Regla bulada de San Francisco (29.11.1223), que es una de las cuatro grandes Reglas de la vida consagrada, y analiza su fuerza inspiradora en la actual sociedad secularizada. No es sólo un texto jurídico, sino también un documento espiritual, una guía “para vivir según la forma del santo evangelio” (1ª parte). Quienes detentan la autoridad tienen que estar al servicio de ese proceso vital que la Regla propone, actuando como madres que cuidan la vida (2ª parte). La tercera parte presenta su actualidad y la importancia de un liderazgo inspirador que promueva procesos de transformación para afrontar los desafíos de la vida consagrada.

Palabras clave: Francisco de Asís; Franciscanos; Regla bulada; Vida consagrada, Liderazgo.

This article is intended as a contribution to the celebration of the eighth centenary of St. Francis' Later Rule (Nov. 29, 1223) and analyzes its inspirational force in our secularized society. This is one of the four great Rules of consecrated life, along with that of Saint Basil (eremitical), Saint Augustine (canonical) and Saint Benedict (monastic). The Pope Honorius III confirmed it with the bull *Solet annuere*, which is a simple, stereotypical form,¹ also used in other occasions.² The Franciscan rule is embedded inside this bull, which serves as the introduction and conclusion of the entire official document. This apparent lack of official prominence may be due to the fact that Honorius III merely confirms the Rule³ that Innocent III had orally approved⁴ on April 16, 1209; that is, he gives his endorsement to a previous approval.⁵ The Pope thus circumvented the prohibition on founding new religious Orders which the Fourth Lateran Council had issued in 1215. Besides, the Pope showed the continuity between those drafts of the Rule.⁶

Francis' intention in writing the Rule could be expressed with the biblical phrase: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). In fact, he writes it so that all his friars may have in abundance the life in Christ they have professed. The Rule is a juridical text, but it is

¹ The Dominican Order adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine and was confirmed with the bull "*Religiosam vitam*" (Dec. 22, 1216), which, in addition to the Pope, was signed by 19 cardinals. Cf. BONI Andrea, *La novitas franciscana nel suo essere e nel suo divenire* (cc. 578/631), Antonianum, Rome 1998, 224-225.

² That same form will be used to approve Saint Clare's "*Forma vitae*". It had already been used, for example, to grant some privileges to the Cistercians. ESSER Kajetan, *La Orden franciscana, orígenes e ideales*, Arantzazu, Oñate 1976, 144-145; URIBE Fernando, *La Regla de San Francisco. Letra y Espíritu*, Espigas, Murcia 2006, 28, footnote 44.

³ "Ordinis vestri regulam, a bone memorie Innocentio papa predecessore nostro approbatam, annotatan presentibus, auctoritate vobis apostolica confirmamus." POPE HONORIUS III, «*Solet annuere*. Bull» (Nov. 29, 1223).

⁴ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «The Testament» [*Test*], 14-16, in ARMSTRONG Regis J. – HELLMANN J.A. Wayne – SHORT William (ed.), *Francis of Assisi: Early documents*, 3 vol., New City Press, New York 2001, [*FAED*], I, 124-127. Pope Innocent III approves it, although he considers it "exceptionally hard and severe." ID., «The Legend of the Three Companions» [*L3C*], 49 (*FAED* II, 61-110); cf. THOMAS OF CELANO, «The Life of Saint Francis» [*ICel*], 33 (*FAED* I, 171-308); BARTOLI LANGELI Attilio, «La *Solet annuere* come documento», in MARANESI Pietro – ACCROCCA Felice (ed.), *La regola di frate Francesco. Eredità e sfida*, Ed. Francescane, Padova 2012, 57-94.

⁵ DESBONNETS Théophile, *De la intuición a la institución. Los franciscanos*, Ed. Franciscanas, Arantzazu 1991, 129.

⁶ "Firmiter prohibemus ne quis de cætero novam religionem inveniat." FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL, c. 13: *Ne nimia religionum diversitas*, (1215).

also a historical and spiritual document that must be framed in that context, considering the intentionality with which it was written.

For centuries, however, the Rule was seen as a predominantly juridical text with more than 24 mandates, 17 councils, etc.⁷ There were even claimed that Christ himself had dictated it to Saint Francis.⁸ In making the religious profession, the friars vow to observe it, along with the three evangelical counsels, and therefore it was considered a mortal sin to transgress any of the precepts that had been identified in it. The “*Werkbuch zur Regel des Heiligen Franciskus*,” published in Germany in 1955, “can be considered the first serious and organic attempt to explain the Rule from parameters other than the traditional legal schemes.”⁹

Following the Second Vatican Council, which had promoted a more fraternal style of religious life, the casuistic interpretation of the legislative texts gave way to a reading conducted in the light of the original charism that the founders had lived and the authentic life project they had wished to express. In this new context, the Franciscan Rule ceased to be seen primarily as a normative text, and was put in relation to the vital and fraternal dynamism it promoted.

The first part of this article presents the Rule as the vital path that leads Franciscans to “observe” the Gospel. Those in authority must be at the service of that vital process (2nd part) and, therefore, they must be witnesses of Christ the Servant and mothers who care for life. They must also help friars listen to the Holy Spirit, who is their true minister general. The third part studies the current relevance of the Rule in our secularized society and the importance of the inspiring leadership it proposes. We need to initiate

⁷ Pope Clemente V identifies 24 precepts in the *LR*. COUNCIL OF VIENNA, «*Exivi de Paradiso*. Constitution» (May 6, 1312), COD 392-401; cf. SEDDA Filippo, «*Exivi de Paradiso*: la conciliazione di una storia contrastata,» in *Frate Francesco* 83/1 (2017) 137-159; RACCA Giorgio, *La Regola dei frati minori*, Porziuncula, Assisi 1986, 15-16. In addition to the three vows, D. I. Velásquez distinguishes 25 precepts that bind under mortal sin (VELÁSQUEZ Daniel Ignacio, *La Regla de los Frailes Menores*, Cali 1949, 29 ss.). Others raise the number of precepts to 28, 39, and even to 61. URIBE F., *La Regla de San Francisco*, 36-37, footnote 57.

⁸ Around the year 1325, Angelo Clareno wrote: “Conforme a la revelación que le hizo Cristo, Francisco se retiró al eremitorio de Fonte Colombo... Allí es donde escribió la Regla que le reveló Cristo, no poniendo en ella nada de lo que se le ocurriera a él mismo, sino escribiendo solamente lo que Cristo Jesús le revelaba desde el cielo.” CLARENO Angel, «Book of tribulations» quoted in DESBONNETS T., *De la intuición a la institución*, 9 (cf. *FF* 2113-2199/8, here 2179); cf. BONAVENTURE, «The Major Legend» [*LMj*], 4,11 (*FAED* II, 525-683).

⁹ URIBE F., «Comentar hoy la Regla franciscana,» in *Collectanea Franciscana* 76 (2006) 119-160, here 120.

vital processes of transformation that allow us to adequately incarnate the charismatic impulse that animated Saint Francis.

1. “The life of the lesser brothers begins”

“The Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me” (*Test* 14-15). The Rule begins and concludes by referring to the Gospel (*LR* 1,1 and 12,4), thus giving meaning to its entire content, since it is a text that arises from the evangelical life and is oriented to it. It is not merely a juridical text, but also a spiritual document, a guide “to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel.”

The experience of divine love, totally gratuitous and unexpected, moved Francis to live the Gospel (*Test* 14), to assume it “without a gloss,” to the point of transforming himself into a living Gospel. The Rule is at the service of this vital process that has the Gospel as its points of departure and arrival since it is born from the Gospel and tries to translate it into life. In fact, “The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel.”¹⁰

Francis “was no deaf hearer of the gospel” (*ICel* 22) and he always approached this listening in communion with the Church and with his brothers. His biographers tell us that the definitive clarification of his vocation happened when he already had companions (*Test* 14), after hearing the Gospel of the mission during a Mass. To make sure he understood it well, at the end of the celebration he asked the priest, representative of the Church, about it.¹¹

Following in this line, the Rule begins by inviting all friars to observe the Gospel in “obedience and reverence” to the Pope (*LR* 1,2) and ends by asking for a cardinal protector that will help them to be “always submissive and subject at the feet of the same Holy Church” (*LR* 12,4). For Francis, fidelity to the Gospel and fidelity to the Church always go together.

The Gospel goes beyond any kind of juridical text. Francis wants the Rule to be evocative and capable of moving friars into a vital experience

¹⁰ *LR* 1,1. On the ideal of evangelical life in the Middle Ages before St. Francis: GRUNDMANN Herbert, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, Notre Dame UP, Notre Dame in 2005.

¹¹ *L3C* 25; 28-29. Other biographers give a slightly different version, even with different biblical quotations. Cf. *ICel* 22; *LMj* 3,1.

of the Gospel. He prefers to exhort rather than to command: “I counsel, admonish, and exhort” (*LR* 3,10). He makes these exhortations vehemently, using three synonyms (symbolic number), and reinforces them by appealing to biblical texts: “in the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. 1Cor 4:14). Moreover, he writes in a discontinuous, unfinished, and unstructured way, for the Gospel is always an open horizon that invites to continuous discernment and unceasing creativity. He could have added other aspects, but he prefers it to be an open text that flows like life itself.

The division into twelve chapters, which we now know, was added by some official of the Roman Curia shortly before the papal approval. This brevity contrasts with the 73 chapters of the Rule of Saint Benedict. A brief, evocative text is enough for Francis of Assisi, because for him the true Rule and life is the Gospel.

1.1. The rule is life

“The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers begins.”¹² These first words (“*incipit*”) of the Rule indicate the intentionality with which it was written and how it must be observed. Rather than being a set of precepts, the Rule is life. In fact, in the early years, the friars did not have a juridical text of reference, but they had already assumed a concrete way of living the Gospel. This life would later be articulated in various texts, which are guides for the observance of the Gospel. The emphasis falls on the evangelical life and, for this reason, in the Earlier Rule, the word “rule” appears only twice, while “life” appears thirty times.

Francis speaks of only one rule,¹³ even though he wrote several drafts of it: Proto-Rule (1209), *ER* (1221), *LR* (1223). He wrote the first (proto-rule) using “primarily words of the Holy Gospel” (*ICel* 32). We do not know its content, but it is considered that its oral approval, in 1209, marks the beginning of the Franciscan Order. Afterwards, the *ER* was gradually elaborated. Its current version is usually dated in 1221. In modern times, the continuity between the *ER* and the *LR* of 1223 began to be discussed, especially after Paul Sabatier claimed that the *LR* had been an imposition of the pontifi-

¹² FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «The Later Rule» [*LR*], 1 (*FAED* I, 99-106).

¹³ “Il termine ‘Regola’ al singolare viene adesso utilizzato per indicare il lungo processo vitale e legislativo che include e collega lo sviluppo che va dal 1209 al 1223.” Dozzi Dino, «La Regola per la vita,» in MARANESI P. – ACCROCCA F. (ed.), *La regola di frate Francesco*, 191-228, here 191.

cal Curia through Cardinal Hugo of Ostia. In this way, Francis' return to the Gospel, which Sabatier saw as a prelude to the successive Protestant Reformation, would have been mitigated.¹⁴ Today, however, Francis' authorship of the *LR* and the continuity between both writings are generally accepted.¹⁵

In the *ER*, Francis asks his friars to "have no other rule"¹⁶ but two years later he writes the *LR* with a clear personal imprint (cf. *LR* 6; 8) and a frequent use of the first person. Besides, in his testament, he acknowledges that "the Lord has given me to speak and write" the *LR* (*Test* 39). It is true that the *LR* has few biblical quotations, few allusions to manual labor, and makes no reference to the care of lepers, but it is undeniable that it is the fruit of the process initiated by Francis with the Proto-rule. In fact, the *LR* shows an evolution and maturation in some subjects, for example, when it insists on having "the Spirit of the Lord and its holy activity" (*LR* 10,8). It is more synthetic and more juridical than the *ER*, but it still reflects well Francis' thought, life, and ideals.

Francis does not reject any of these versions of the Rule, but neither does he consider them sufficient in themselves, since the life he proposes is always one and the same: "to observe the Holy Gospel" (*LR* 1). Therefore, we should not be surprised that he firmly commands his friars "that no one delete or add to what has been written in this life" (*ER* 24,4) and, at the same time, he keeps modifying it. For example, in the letter to a minister, he acknowledges that, with "the advice of our brothers," he is preparing a new chapter that will include all those of the *ER* "that treat of mortal sin."¹⁷ He even indicates a possible wording that does not coincide with the text finally included in the *LR*. Therefore, the reflection on that topic continued (as it did on others) and did not stop with the papal approval. Thomas of Celano informs us that, after 1223, he wanted to include in the Rule that the Holy Spirit is the minister general, "but the papal seal already given to the rule precluded it" (*2Cel* 193).

¹⁴ SABATIER Paul, *Vita di san Francesco d'Assisi*, Mondadori, Milano 1978, 245-246; cf. LE GOFF Jacques, *Francesco d'Assisi*, Biblioteca Francescana, Milano 1998, 89.

¹⁵ Cf. MARANESI P., «Il travaglio di una redazione. Le novità testuali della Regola bollata indizi di un'evoluzione», in *Miscellanea Francescana* 109 (2009) 61-89; 353-384; ACCROCCA F., «Un cantiere aperto. Travagli redazionali delle Regole "di" Francesco», in MARANESI P. – ACCROCCA F. (ed.), *La regola di frate Francesco*, 13-56, here 40-41.

¹⁶ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «The Earlier Rule» [*ER*], 24,4 (*FAED* I, 63-86).

¹⁷ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «A Letter to a Minister» [*LtMin*], 13 (*FAED* I, 97-98).

Moreover, Francis presents the testament as a “remembrance, admonition, exhortation” so that “we might observe the Rule we have promised in a more Catholic way” (*Test* 34). Then, he asks his friars “not to place any gloss upon the Rule” (38) and not to say that the testament “is another Rule” (34), but he also asks them to have the testament always “together with the Rule” (36).¹⁸ He even adds new indications, for example, not “to ask any letter from the Roman Curia” (25) and not to receive churches and dwellings unless they are poor and the friars remain there merely “as guests” (24).

1.2. “Those who wish to adopt this Life” (*LR* 2)

To enter the Fraternity means “to receive (“accipere”) this life” (*Rb* 2:1), to insert oneself into this vital flow together with the other brothers and sisters. It is a gift, a life that is received gratuitously. Unfortunately, “accipere” is often translated as “embrace” or “take” this life, terms that emphasize the human decision over the divine initiative and the grace received.

The monks entered a well-defined and stable space (the monastery). The Rule of Saint Benedict reinforces the importance of this “entering” when it indicates that the patience of the candidate should be put to the test by making him wait at the door of the monastery. If he perseveres “in knocking for admission and after four or five days shall have been found patiently to bear all the injuries inflicted upon him and the difficulty of gaining entrance and shall be found to persist with his petition, let entrance be granted him.”¹⁹ Once inside, the candidate will have to conform to a well-defined pyramidal structure.

On the contrary, the Franciscans “embrace this life” to be itinerant, with no fixed place. G. Agamben affirms that Francis was the first to prioritize life over law,²⁰ because he insists on living the Gospel, rather than rigidly adhering to norms. Francis knows that the Rule is an appropriate instrument

¹⁸ Pope Gregory IX (formerly Cardinal Hugo of Ostia) denied any legal validity to the Testament. POPE GREGORY IX, «*Quo elongati*. Bull» (Sept. 28, 1230), in *Bullarium Franciscanum* I, 68-70 (*Fonti Francescane*, Ed. Francescane, Padova et al. ³2011 [FF], 2729-2739).

¹⁹ *The rule of St Benedict*, cap. 58.3, in *Internet*: https://www.solesmes.com/sites/default/files/upload/pdf/rule_of_st_benedict.pdf

²⁰ “La regola si trasforma in vita, diventa *forma vivendi e regula vivifica*.” AGAMBEN Giorgio, *Altissima povertà. Regole monastiche e forma di vita*, Neri Pozza, Vincenza 2011, 133.

to address conflictive situations, but he rather wants it to help friars live the Gospel. Indeed, the *LR* is intended to strengthen the ecclesial and juridical dimensions, but without undermining the vital core of his charismatic intuition.

Francis asks his friars to be poor and lesser brothers so that they can establish horizontal, reciprocal, and fraternal relationships in complete freedom. Thus, they will imitate the Incarnated Word, who humbled himself (*Kenosys*) to be our brother. Indeed, “disputes and lawsuits usually arise out of [possessions], and, because of this, love of God and neighbor are greatly impeded.” (*L3C* 35,6). Instead, itinerancy, poverty, and minority enable the vital dynamism that the friars have assumed in their religious profession.

Evangelization will focus more on personal relationships and witness than on the search for efficient means to transmit the message. The gentle manner of being “among” as lesser bothers will be the best way to show that the Kingdom of God is already present.²¹ Francis asks his friars to be “meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble” (*LR* 3.11), biblical terms that reflect Franciscan minority and, by being repetitive, reinforce it. In addition, the friars are urged to speak “courteously to everyone,” that is, adapting themselves politely to the condition of the recipients.

1.3. Let them “be received to obedience”

The candidates who accept to live the Holy Gospel, “may be received to obedience” (*LR* 2,11); that is, to live “in obedience” (*LR* 1), establishing relations that give life. While the monks enter the physical space of the monastery, the friars are “received” into the theological realm of obedience, to listen attentively to the Spirit and to walk together towards the Father, as pilgrims. Infidelity will be “to wander outside obedience” (*ER* 2,10; 5,16).

The word “obedience”²² reclaims here its etymological sense of listening attentively to the one who is in front (*ob-audire*). Indeed, obedience is always to the Holy Spirit,²³ who is the true General of the Order (*2Cel* 193) and to whom all friars must listen. Being received to obedience is to accept

²¹ “More by example than by word.” «The Assisi Compilation» [*CAss*], 20 (*FAED* II, 111-230).

²² ESSER K., «Gehorsam und Autorität in der frühfranziskanischen Gemeinschaft,» in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 34 (1971) 1-18.

²³ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «A Salutation to Virtues» [*SalV*] 16 (*FAED* I, 164-165).

that vital and interpersonal process of listening. In short, it involves entering into a respectful and welcoming relationship to walk together in minority and poverty.

Obedience indicates a specific condition of the minoritic and itinerant vocation, inasmuch as it entails a life not bound to a place (*stabilitas loci*) but a way of life in the midst of the world, united by the evangelical and theological bonds of the Gospel.²⁴

To make this itinerant life possible, the friars are allowed “to eat of all the food that is placed before them” (*ER* 3,13)). As the liturgy changed from one region to another, Francis allows them another innovation in religious life: to use “the breviary of the Pontifical Curia and the «Gallican» psalter, which were more readily available in the places of mission.”²⁵

1.3.1. Obedience in the first person

Francis always resorts to norms and exhortations with the same purpose: to foster the evangelical dynamism that permeates his experience and his way of life. Thus, there is no great difference between norms and exhortations. On the one hand, the affectionate tone and biblical references that characterize the exhortations and counsels do not attenuate but, on the contrary, reinforce the moral and spiritual indications that pervade them. On the other hand, his precepts by no means manifest the hand of a cold and meticulous legislator, but rather the affability and concern of the brother who look out for the good of all. Francis is well aware that norms are necessary, because of human weakness, and in fact he includes in the Rule some assertive expressions using the first person (“I strictly command”²⁶). These are certainly not an exhaustive and detailed list of everything that should be prescribed, but, rather, simple pointed reminders so that everyone may take to heart the commitment to be faithful to the Gospel.

²⁴ URIBE F., «Apuntes para una lectura actualizada de la regla franciscana. La dimensión evangelizadora de la vida según la regla bulada», in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* 36 (2006) 181-206, here 188. [my translation].

²⁵ URIBE F., «Apuntes para una lectura actualizada de la regla franciscana», 189 [my translation].

²⁶ *LR* 4,1. There are eleven such expressions: *LR* 2,17; 4,1; 3,10; 6,4; 6,6; 9,3; 10,3; 10,7; 11,1; 12,3; 12,4.

Francis' use of the first person in the Rule was a innovative for the time. The bull *Solet annuere* reinforces this subjective tone because Francis is its primary addressee, even though he had already renounced his functions as Minister General. Certainly, as founder and charismatic leader of the Order, he had led the drafting of the Rule, giving it a clear personal tone, but always with the help of both his friars and Cardinal Hugo of Ostia. Indeed, the Rule is not a starting point, but the result of years of community experience and reflection.

By using the first person, Francis expresses his own experience of divine gratuitousness: "The Most High Himself revealed to me" (*Test* 14). In this way he intends to transmit to the friars his prophetic enthusiasm, instead of coldly proposing to them a juridical program or a set of norms.

The relationship with the hierarchical Church is also expressed in personal terms, something new until then: "Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to our Lord Pope Honorius and his successors [...]. Let the other brothers be bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors" (*LR* 1,2). Institutional relations are channeled through the minister's personal relationship with the Pope (*LR* 8). The closeness of Hugo of Ostia further reinforced this personal dimension. Francis also asks his friars to respect the "impoverished priests" (*Test* 6-9) and to avoid feeling superior to others (*LR* 2,17).

The figure of the cardinal protector (*LR* 12,3-4) and the broad jurisdiction that Francis attributes to the Minister general "of the whole Fraternity" (*LR* 8,1), were two innovations in the consecrated life. Through the person of the Minister, the friars "obey the ecclesiastical authority" and "this same obedience also unites all the brothers among themselves."²⁷ The Minister general was elected for life until the General Chapter of 1506.²⁸

All this implied a strong centralization,²⁹ but Francis also established corrective elements. On the one hand, he limited the power of the Minister general, who could be dismissed if "the body of the provincial ministers and

²⁷ ESSER K., «Melius catholice observemus. Esposizione della Regola Franciscana alla luce degli scritti e delle parole di san Francesco,» in *Introduzione alla Regola franciscana*, Cammino, Milano 1969, 107-221, here 119 & 179. [My translation]. Cf. BONI A., *La novitas franciscana*, 223-255.

²⁸ URIBE F., *La Regla de San Francisco*, 241, footnote 29.

²⁹ "L'Ordine francescano si connota per una forte centralizzazione e fino al 1239 si può parlare di un governo assoluto da parte del ministro generale." RAMINA ANTONIO, «La carità dell'obbedienza», in MARANESI P. – ACCROCCA F. (ed.), *La regola di frate Francesco*, 435-470, here 446.

custodians” deemed it convenient (*LR* 8,4). Therefore, the General Chapter was the last instance and the supreme authority of the Order, something that the constitutions of the three Franciscan Orders also affirm today.³⁰ In addition, Francis insists on identifying his group as a fraternity, where horizontal relations are fostered, the identity of each brother is respected,³¹ and the participation of all is encouraged through Chapter assemblies. James of Vitry testifies that, at least until 1221, “all brothers” frequently gather “to rejoice in the Lord,” that is, for eminently fraternal reasons.

With great profit, the brothers of this Order assemble once a year in a designated place to rejoice in the Lord and eat together; with the advice of good men they draw up and promulgate holy laws and have them confirmed by the Lord Pope.³²

Francis establishes that the ministers should be servants who humbly welcome and help everyone, thus turning the pyramid structure of that society upside down. On the other hand, each friar must cultivate a personal relationship with his minister and will not break it even when he cannot obey him due to motives of conscience.³³

1.3.2. To obey is to embrace fraternity and the logic of gift

Imitating the Kenosis of Christ, Francis embraces poverty and minority, to be a universal brother; that is, he dominates the lust for power to embrace the logic of gift. His insistence on fraternal and personal relations also extends to pastoral and evangelizing task, which he wants to favor face-to-face encounters and mutual respect.

Obedience must be reciprocal: “let them serve and obey one another” (*ER* 5,14) and “show that they are members of the same family” (*LR* 6,7). In fact, the word “*communitas*” does not appear in the writings of Saint Francis,

³⁰ RAMINA A., «La carità dell’obbedienza», 468.

³¹ “Tutti i Fratelli formano un’unità le cui relazioni, pur legate in modo unitario e centrale da un ministro generale, debbono essere l’espressione dell’identità dei singoli fratelli così da restare una fraternità.” MARANESI P., «Il travaglio di una redazione», 364.

³² JACOB OF VITRY, «Letter I» (1216) (*FAED* I 578-580, here 580).

³³ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «Admonitions» [*Adm*], 3,7 (*FAED* I, 128-137).

despite being a widely used term in medieval monastic life.³⁴ Instead, he uses the term “*fraternitas*,” thus giving priority to horizontal relationships, dialogue, and personal encounter. Thomas of Celano reports that, on returning from Rome, after having obtained the papal approval of the proto-rule (1209), the friars discerned together “about whether they should live among people or go off to solitary places” (*ICel* 35). Francis maintained this attitude of dialogue and prayer also during the elaboration of the Rule.

While monastic communities gave priority to the relation of each monk with the institution, Francis wanted his friars to establish horizontal, circular, and fraternal relationships. He succeeded in having the term “fraternity”³⁵ included in the Later Rule, even though it was not a juridical term. In fact, the bull *Solet annuere* prefers the term “Order.”³⁶

It is not by chance that, while the monks of that time had precise rules about silence, Francis of Assisi does not prescribe anything about it. He rather insists that his friars “be careful not to slander or engage in disputes” (*ER* 11,1). Instead of taciturn monks or mute hermits, Francis wants his friars to be familiar and “love each other”³⁷ without dependencies or paternalism. “Let each one confidently make known his need to the other” (*LR* 6,8). He thus privileges the uniqueness of each friar, together with equality and reciprocity. At the beginning of his conversion, he had understood that the Christ of Saint Damian was asking him to repair the physical church (*L3C* 13), but later he became aware of having been called to strengthen fraternal relations in the family of the Sons of God.

2. Authority: mothers who care for life

The Franciscan rule promotes a vital dynamism that requires maternal care. Therefore, those who hold authority must care for their brothers with

³⁴ ODOARDI Giovanni, «Il S. Francesco della Comunità nei sec. XIV e XV», in GIEBEN Servus (ed.), *Francesco d’Assisi nella storia: Secoli XIII-XV*, vol 1, Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Rome 1983, 123-159, here 124.

³⁵ The word “*fraternitas*” appears four times. “Religion” (*LR* 2,12) & “Order” (*LR* 7,2) are used once each.

³⁶ Pope Honorius III had referred to the Franciscans as an “Order” in the bulls “*Pro dilectis filiis*” (May 29, 1220, *FF* 2709-2710) & “*Cum secundum consilium*” (Sept. 22, 1220, *FF* 2711-2715). “Noi riteniamo il loro Ordine tra quelli approvati” (*FF* 2710).

³⁷ FRANCISCO, «Testament of Siena,» [*TestS*], n. 3 (*FF* 132-135).

maternal love.³⁸ The other friars must respond with charitable obedience.³⁹ Indeed, “if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit!?”⁴⁰ The minister who is not able to serve charitably, in imitation of Christ, must be dismissed.⁴¹

Instead of the power of the *pater familias*, coined by Roman law and which, in some way, was assumed by the monastic abbot, Francis exercises his leadership by behaving mostly like a mother (he never uses for himself the word “father”).⁴² He uses the word “*mater*” twenty-four times in his writings and reserves the word “father” only for God. Those in authority must always act “humbly and charitably,” even when they must correct others (*LR* 10,1), for more than judges they are pastors, lesser brothers to whom “the care of the brothers’ souls has been entrusted” (*ER* 4,6).

If the authority of the “ministers and servants”⁴³ is meant to be maternal, the obedience of the other friars must also be “charitable,”⁴⁴ an expression of that unconditional gratuitousness that characterizes family relations. Each friar will be obedient while remaining responsible; that is, he will obey respecting the Rule (objective element) and his own conscience (subjective element). If the prelate commands him something contrary to his conscience, that is, against love, he may not obey him, but nevertheless he must not “abandon him” (*Adm* 3,7).

³⁸ *LR* 6,7-8. “Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most, four; let two of these be the mother.” FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «A Rule for Hermitages» [*RE*], 1 (*FAED*. I 61-62).

³⁹ Per Francesco, l’obbedienza “si articola in modalità diverse e apparentemente contrarie, cioè mediante un’obbedienza autonoma («vera obbedienza»), consegnata («obbedienza caritativa») e ritirata senza abbandonare i fratelli («perfetta obbedienza»).” MARANESI P., «La relazioni tra fratelli,» in MARANESI P. – ACCROCCA F. (ed.), *La regola di frate Francesco*, 507-549, here 524. We have studied with this issue of authority in: CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ M., *The universal fraternity. Franciscan roots of Fratelli tutti*, TAU, Phoenix (AZ) 2023.

⁴⁰ *LR* 6,8; *ER* 9,11.

⁴¹ *LR* 8,4. “Let him not become angry at the fault of a brother.” FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «Letter to the Faithful (longer version)» [*2LitF*], 44 (*FAED* I 45-51).

⁴² “I am speaking, my son, in this way - as a mother would.” FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «A Letter to Brother Leo» [*LtL*], n. 2 (*FAED* I, 122-123).

⁴³ *ER* 4,6; *LR* 10,6-7; *2LtaF* 42. Francis refuses to be called father, master, or superior. Cf. DESBONNETS T., *De la intuición a la institución*, c. 7.

⁴⁴ Charity is sister to obedience. *SalV* 3.

Clare of Assisi also asks Agnes of Prague to follow the advice of the minister general, friar Elias, and if anyone [Pope Gregory IX] were to suggest “any other thing to you that might hinder your perfection or that would seem contrary to your divine vocation, even though you must respect him, do not follow his counsel”⁴⁵.

2.1. Listening to the Holy Spirit, who is the true Minister General

The authority of the ministers and the reciprocal obedience of the friars will consist of listening to the Holy Spirit,⁴⁶ who is the true minister general of the Order.⁴⁷ The Spirit “blows where it wills” (Jn 3:8), making creative freedom possible. It is neither predictable nor capricious. Knowing this, Francis does not go into too much detail, but prefers to appeal to spiritual discernment. He lets ministers decide “as in the sight of God appears to them more expedient.”⁴⁸ He also asks the other friars to continually discern what to do in the light of the “spirit of the divine letter”,⁴⁹ that is, according to God.⁵⁰

Obedience involves discerning together the divine will for the whole fraternity and for each of its members, respecting the unique path of each brother. Therefore, rather than insisting on the authority of the prelates, Francis prefers to appeal to each friar’s conscience. When compelled by necessity, they may take decisions that do not conform to the general norm. For example, he allows them to “wear shoes” (*LR* 2,15); ride (*LR* 3,12), not to fast (*LR* 3,6,9), have another tunic (*LR* 2,13), eat of everything (*LR* 3,13). He encourages Brother Leo to act “in whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God” (*LtL* 3).

⁴⁵ CLARE OF ASSISI, «The Second Letter to Agnes of Prague» (1235), [*CtaCla2*], 17, in ARMSTRONG Regis J., *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (1216-1254), [*CAED*], New City Press, New York 2006, 47-49.

⁴⁶ Cf. GUERRA José Antonio, «Autoridad y obediencia en las dos Reglas franciscanas. Una reflexión sobre 1R 4-6 & 2R 10,» in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* 29 (2000) 203-248.

⁴⁷ THOMAS OF CELANO, «The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul» [*2Cel*], 193 (*FAED* II, 231-393). In the *LR*, Francis keeps the term “Fraternity” (*LR* 8), but his biographers always use “Order.”

⁴⁸ *LR* 7,2; 2,7.

⁴⁹ *Adm* 7,3. “In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God” *LtL* 3.

⁵⁰ *LR* 2,10; 7,2.

Francis thus challenges the legalistic conception of authority which, based on a negative anthropology (*Homo homini lupus*⁵¹), distributes quotas of power through a rigid and detailed regulation. The meticulous division of roles prevails over service, and everyone is expected to comply formally and meticulously with what has been agreed upon.

The saint of Assisi, however, trusts his friars' natural goodness and appeals to their responsibility, assuming an evangelical overturning in power relations (LR 10,5). God is the only Lord, and we are all equal in dignity. Therefore, the friars must obey "in everything they have promised the Lord to observe" (LR 10,3), but no one can be forced to do anything that is contrary to his soul⁵² and to the Rule. Francis never asks for a blind and irresponsible submission, because neither the superior nor the Rule stand above personal conscience.

Those in authority should not be called priors (ER 6,3), but ministers⁵³ and "servants"⁵⁴ who encourage all to live evangelically. The friars must rebuke the minister who "is walking according to the flesh" (ER 5,4). Francis asks one of them to welcome his friars, "even if they lay hands on you," and not wishing "that they be better Christians" (LtMin 2 & 7). "Let the one to whom obedience has been entrusted and who is considered the greater be the lesser and the servant of the other brothers" (2LtaF 42), thus imitating Christ, who "placed His will in the will of His Father" and suffered persecution and contempt, "leaving us an example that we might follow His footprints" (2LtaF 10-13).

⁵¹ PLAUTO, *Asinaria*, atto II. T. Hobbes completes this statement with his famous quote: "Mors tua vita mea." HOBBS Thomas, *De cive: elementos filosóficos sobre el ciudadano*, 1, 12, Alianza, Madrid 2016. Thomas Aquinas, however, reaffirms that man is naturally a friend of man: "*Homo homini naturaliter amicus.*" *S.Th* II-II q.114 a.1 ad.2; ID., *Summa contra Gentiles* 3, 117; 4, 54.

⁵² Here, the noun "soul" means personal conscience. URIBE F., *La Regla de San Francisco*, 277.

⁵³ The Rule of the *Ordo Sanctissimae Trinitatis et Captivorum* (OSsT: "Trinitarians", in *Internet*: <https://ora-et-labora.net/trinitariregola.html>), approved by Pope Innocent III in 1198, already includes the three vows, calls the members "brothers." The prelate is "minister" (n. 1) and will be elected by the "friars" "not according to the dignity of birth, but according to the merit of life and the doctrine of wisdom" (n. 27). Francis will be much more radical in asking for reciprocity and equality among all (clerics and lay friars). Cf. SCHMUCKI Okavian, «La Regola di Giovanni da Matha e la Regola di Francesco d'Assisi: somiglianze e peculiarità, nuovi rapporti con l'Islam,» in *Italia Francescana* 74/3 (1999) 11-42.

⁵⁴ LR 10,6; Adm 4.

With statements of this kind, Francis overturns the pyramid structure of that society.⁵⁵ This insistence was shocking for some of his ministers and provoked some resistance.

2.2. Reluctance of some ministers: The logic of power

The Later Rule emerged in a context of internal tensions that demanded a legal text which could serve as a reference for all. The evangelical lifestyle that the Franciscans had embraced was disrupted by the confrontation between different ways of understanding it. Many friars advocated for the adoption of the kind of legislation that had previously prevailed in consecrated life. Specifically, “they cited the Rule of blessed Benedict, of blessed Augustine, and of blessed Bernard, which teach how to live in such order in such a way” (*CAss* 18). They argued that this was the only way to deal effectively with the problems arising from the rapid growth of the number of friars, which in just ten years (1209-1219) had increased from twelve to about five thousand. This issue was discussed in the chapter of year 1219.⁵⁶ Francis opposed it.

Only a year later, he delegated his duties as General Minister,⁵⁷ probably because the structure of the Order had changed and he realized that the friars expected a less charismatic and more expeditious leadership in the exercise of power.⁵⁸ However, Francis continued to wield strong moral authority until his death, as it is evident in his Testament.⁵⁹

The establishment of the novitiate year reflected this growing institutionalization.⁶⁰ Some problems arising from lack of formation had to be addressed. James of Vitry, who had previously praised the Franciscans, warned

⁵⁵ Il modello era legato “alla proposta neoplatonica dello Pseudo Dionigi l’Areopagita secondo cui esisteva una corrispondenza tra la gerarchia celeste e quella ecclesiastica-sociale. [...] Il potere] originandosi da Dio, si distribuiva in modo ordinato e graduale dalla somma autorità (papa-imperatore) ai gradi inferiori.” MARANESI P., «La relazioni tra fratelli,» 508.

⁵⁶ «A mirror of the perfection», [*Spec*], n. 68 (*FAED* 3, 205-252).

⁵⁷ *2Cel* 143; cf. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, «A Letter to the entire Order» [*CiO*], 2 (*FAED* I, 116-121); *Test* 33. The delegation of functions probably took place on Sept. s, after his return from Egypt.

⁵⁸ When I realized that they “would not give up the journey that had already begun despite my preaching and my example. I entrusted the religion to the Lord and to the ministers.” *CAss* 106.

⁵⁹ Cf. ESSER K., «Das ‘ministerium generale’ des hi. Franziskus von Assisi», in *Franziskanische Studien* 33 (1951) 329-348.

⁶⁰ With the Bull “*Cum secundum consilium*” (Sept. 22, 1220, *FF* 2711-2715), Honorius III granted them the year of novitiate and the possibility of ecclesiastical censure.

now that “this Order is quite risky, because it sends out two by two throughout the world not only formed religious, but also immature young men.”⁶¹

Before leaving for the Holy Land, in August 1219, Francis appointed two vicars, Matthew of Narni and Gregory of Naples, who, in his absence, convened the so-called “Chapter of the Elders,” which promulgated Constitutions that endangered specific aspects of the Franciscan lifestyle⁶² and introduced changes on fasting, lepers, and the treatment of Poor Clares. This attempt to add “something to the Rule” provoked the hasty return of Francis, who went directly to talk with the Pope to ask him to appoint Hugo of Ostia as cardinal protector.⁶³

Thus, a year after starting his journey to the Holy Land,⁶⁴ the internal tensions had already escalated into conflicts. To address them, he realized that a new formulation of the Rule, approved by the Holy See, was very much needed. In this sense, *LR* can be seen as the compromise reached by the friars to resolve an internal conflict, although Francis will later add further observations to it in his testament.

These internal tensions and the encounter with Muslim diversity has helped Francis mature his ideas. He now feels the need to promote merciful hospitality (*ER* 16,10-20) and universal fraternity through minority and itinerancy.

The drafting process must be the fruit of an internal debate, but this task was not easy. Many ministers had a different concept of authority and wished to translate it into the new version of the Rule. They lamented that Francis had assigned them a weak “*potestas*” and feared that aspects of this type would be perpetuated or worsened in the new wording.

A great many ministers gathered around Brother Elias, who was the vicar of blessed Francis. «We heard that Brother Francis is making a new rule,» they told him, «and we fear that he will make it so harsh that we will not be able to observe it. We want you to go to him and tell him that we refuse to be bound to that Rule. Let him make it for himself and not for us»⁶⁵.

⁶¹ JACOB OF VITRY, «Letter VI» (1220) (*FAED* I 580-581), here 581.

⁶² “L’ascesi e il condizionamento delle offerte dei fedeli rischiavano di diventare elementi centrali e prevalenti rispetto al lavoro, all’attività apostolica, alla libertà di una vita condotta giorno per giorno.” MICCOLI G., «La storia religiosa,» 749, quoted in ACCROCCA F., «Un cantiere aperto,» 32.

⁶³ JORDAN OF GIANO, «Cronicle,» n. 12 & 14 (*FF* 2323-2412).

⁶⁴ Francis met Sultan Malik-el-Kamil in Damietta (Egypt), in August 2019, during the month-long truce that preceded the resumption of hostilities. Cf. FERRERO ERNESTO, *Francesco e il Sultano*, Einaudi, Torino 2019.

⁶⁵ *CAss* 17 (*FF* 1563). Cf. *CAss* 106f, 102d, 108g

These ministers were prone to a legalistic mentality, which is an expression of the logic of power and deals with conflicts by carefully distributing tasks and delimiting boundaries. Today it is assumed that this internal debate among the friars had more weight in the drafting of the Later Rule than the alleged pressures from the Roman Curia, which have often been alluded to. The ministers were able to increase some of their functions, for example, that those who had committed reserved sins should address them (*LR* 7) and not the guardians, as Francis wanted. They also managed to suppress other aspects, for example, “that chapter of the Rule where it says: «Take nothing for your journey, etc»”⁶⁶.

After the bull *Solet Annuere* (1223), Francis was left in the background and, in fact, no other papal document included him among the explicit addressees. Thomas of Celano tells us that, somewhat frustrated, he came to exclaim, when he was already sick: “Who are these people? They have snatched out of my hands my religion and that of the brothers” (*2Cel* 188). In 1226, Francis again made his voice heard with his testament, at the end of which he imparts his blessing not to all, but only to “whoever observes these things” (*Test* 40).

It seems, however, that those ministers failed in imposing themselves as they would have wished. The biographers assert that Francis “had many things written in the Rule and in his other writings, to which certain brothers, especially prelates, were opposed”⁶⁷.

3. Today we need the Rule

The tensions that accompanied Francis of Assisi in the drafting of the Rule are still present today in different ways. Fraternal life is our main vocational appeal, but also our greatest challenge, as recognized by those who

⁶⁶ *CAss* 102. The Assisi Compilation suggests that the ministers had made a version of the Rule disappear: “The first, which he had written at Christ’s instruction, was lost.” *CAss* 17; *LMj* 4,11. It should be noted that the *CAss* is a polemical and late source, which appeared almost a hundred years later among the Spirituals.

⁶⁷ *CAss* 106. “Although he did not write this in the Rule, particularly because it did not seem good to the brother ministers that the brothers should take this as a command, nevertheless, the holy father wanted to leave the brothers in his Testament and in his other writings his will about these things.” *CAss* 108.

embrace our life and by most of those who abandon it.⁶⁸ It is certainly easier to be observant than to be fraternal.

3.1. How should we live the Rule today?

In the present context of crisis, we have to listen again to Francis' words: "Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing."⁶⁹ To do this, we need to take up the Rule "simply and without gloss," discerning its message "with a holy activity" (*Test* 39); that is, living it under the action of the Spirit of the Lord (*LR* 10,8).

Pope Francis reminds us that consecrated life "is not about survival, but new life."⁷⁰ We must not fall into the temptation of those ministers who, to avoid continuous discernment, pushed Francis to adopt other known and proven solutions, such as "the Rule of blessed Benedict, of blessed Augustine, and of blessed Bernard" (*CAss* 18).

Today we could relate this to the so-called "programming method," which focuses on identifying activities ("what") and improving their management ("how") but ignores the "why?" of our living and acting. It is based on an analysis of the reality, followed by the formulation of options and priorities to guide the elaboration of concrete responses to the challenges encountered. Subsequently, the results are evaluated to verify whether the programmed objectives are being achieved.⁷¹ This is an attempt to preserve and improve what is already known, but without being open to new transformative perspectives.⁷² This choice is not consistent with the prophetic spirit that gave rise to the Franciscan movement.

⁶⁸ CENCINI Amedeo, *La vida fraterna: comunión de santos y de pecadores*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2019, 16.

⁶⁹ *ICel* 103. "Riconosciamo l'urgenza di tornare all'essenziale della nostra esperienza di fede e della nostra spiritualità per nutrire, mediante l'offerta liberatrice del Vangelo, il nostro mondo." RODRÍGUEZ CARBALLO José, «La grazia delle origini. VIII centenario della fondazione dell'Ordine dei Frati Minori (1209-2009),» in *Enchiridion dell'Ordine dei Frati Minori. Documenti 2003-2007*, III, LIEF, Vicenza 2009, 750-765, here 751.

⁷⁰ POPE FRANCIS, «Homily» (Feb 2, 2019), in *OR* 29 (Feb 4-5, 2019) 11.

⁷¹ GARCÍA PAREDES José C. Rey, «Procesos de transformación: volar, viajar, contemplar» (Jan. 31, 2017), in <https://vidareligiosa.es/procesos-de-transformacion-volar-viajar-contemplar/>

⁷² We basically follow here the ideas that we have expressed in our book: CARBAJO-NÚÑEZ Martín, *Being a Franciscan in the Digital Age: New Challenges, New Life*, TAU, Phoenix (AZ) 2021.

In situations of crisis like the current one, many prefer to stick to the usual ways, i.e. to those activities that for a long time have given security and social prestige to the Order. Longing for the past, they seek to maintain and revitalize those experiences at all costs and, if that does not work, they get ready to die a good death with dignity (*Ars moriendi*). They lack the creative and transformative capacity; they are unable to dream.

If we reduce the Rule to a set of precise norms that regulate daily life, it is evident that it has become obsolete to face today's challenges. We have seen that Francis did not understand it in this way either. He proposed some concrete norms in it, but above all, he speaks of the vital dynamism that leads us to embrace the Gospel. Our main question must focus on how the Rule can help us rediscover today that dynamism that inspired and moved Saint Francis.

3.2. Assuming the Rule as a vital process of transformation

The Later Rule can help us rediscover today the “why” of our religious consecration and is discerning whether we live “according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel” (*Test* 14). Francis continues to urge us to “observe poverty, humility, and the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised” (*LR* 12,4); that is, he continues to invite us to respond to today's challenges with creativity and audacity. Indeed, more than a program, we need a dream, an ideal that catalyzes our energies and compels us to open ourselves completely to the Holy Spirit.

The Franciscan Order, like all other groups of religious life, is a living organism that needs to be constantly open to vital processes of transformation; that is, it needs to rekindle the vital flame of its origins.

More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities⁷³.

“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2). The method of transformation that we need to

⁷³ POPE FRANCIS, «Apostolic letter to all Consecrated people» (Nov 21, 2014), n. 1,1, in *AAS* 106 (2014) 935-947.

adopt does not exclude thoughtful reflection and the necessary planning, but above all it seeks fidelity to the original ideal. The program is subordinated to the dream; the difficulties are lived in hope. “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mt 14:31).

3.3. Authority: Witnesses who inspire and animate

Francis of Assisi understands authority as service and asks those who hold it to behave like mothers who care for life. Instead of the pyramid model of feudalism, he proposes a circular model of reciprocal service. The exercise of authority and the “active and responsible” obedience⁷⁴ must be an expression of dialogue, self-giving, and listening to the Holy Spirit. The current OFM Constitutions expressed it as follows:

In order to promote responsible and active obedience, the Ministers and Guardians are to listen to the views of the friars either separately as individuals or in meetings; in fact, they are to ask for these views and encourage them, without prejudice, however, to their authority to decide and command what must be done⁷⁵.

Experts in leadership affirm today that the best leader is not an instructor, but a witness, who “collaborates with the flow of grace, who senses where the Spirit leads.”⁷⁶ Indeed, religious life needs an inspiring leadership that encourages active participation, creativity, and enthusiastic commitment in the process of transformation. The leader should inspire and instill enthusiasm showing the beauty of the charismatic ideal.

⁷⁴ “Subjects should be brought to the point where they will cooperate with an active and responsible obedience.” SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, «*Perfectae Caritatis*. Decree on the adaptation and renewal of Religious Life» (Oct. 28, 1965) [PC], n. 14, in *AAS* 58 (1966) 331-352.

⁷⁵ OFM, «General Constitutions,» [=CCGG], art. 45,2, in ID., *The Rule, The General Constitutions, The General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor*, General Curia OFM, Rome 2010.

⁷⁶ “Un testigo que colabora en el flujo de gracia, que intuye hacia dónde lleva el Espíritu.” GARCÍA PAREDES J.C.R., «El liderazgo “que viene de Dios,»» in *Vida religiosa* 112/4 (2012) 24. “No hacen falta maestros, sino testigos.” GONZALO L.A., «Líderes que mantengan la expectación y el apasionamiento,» in *Vida religiosa* 112/4 (2012) 17. “Today too, people prefer to listen to witnesses.” POPE FRANCIS, «*Evangelii gaudium*. Apostolic exhortation» (Nov. 24, 2013), [EG], 150, in *AAS* 105 (2013) 1019-1137.

Simon Sinek uses the image of three concentric circles to talk about leadership.⁷⁷ Inspirational leadership always begins with the “why?” (Innermost circle), then moves on to the “how” and finally to the “what.” Unfortunately, many people often reverse this order.

The Consecrated have also to be aware of the “why” of their own charism. Starting from it, they must discern “how” to live it today and in “what” activities to incarnate it. The leadership of the “why” agitates consciences, prompts to revise the accommodated ways of understanding the charism, the vision, and the mission. It focuses neither on the results (the “what”) nor on “how” to achieve them, but on the identity itself and on the ideal that should inspire everything. When the Congregation needs to be reorganized, the reflection does not focus on learning “what” other religious institutes have done and “how” to apply it to one’s own situation, but it begins discerning the “why” of that specific religious group in the current world.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the Rule of St. Francis continues today to be a source of spiritual and juridical inspiration not only for Franciscans, but also for the consecrated life and, in general, for the whole Church.

Francis wrote it at a time of internal tensions. Rather than trying to appease them with a commitment to precise norms, he prefers to appeal again to the grace of the origins; that is, to the evangelical ideal that had transformed his life (*Test* 1). This return to the origins does not exclude reflection, planning, and collaboration. In fact, Francis listened to ministers, to learned friars, and to the papal representative.

The Rule has a twofold value: juridical and spiritual. This richness makes it ever timely. Anyway, more than a code of conduct, the Rule is a spiritual document written by a brother for us to have life; that is, “for the salvation of our souls” (*ER* 24,1). He himself “called it their Book of Life, the hope of salvation, the marrow of the Gospel” (*2Cel* 208,2). With it, Francis continues to encourage and exhort us to live the Gospel.

The temptation is to leave that vital flow, which requires continuous listening (*ob-audience*), and turn the Rule into a well-defined list of activities and precepts. The continuous process of transformation, which

⁷⁷ SINEK S., *Start with why. How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*, Portfolio, New York 2009.

characterizes any vital organism, is thus abandoned to assume the method of programming, which “objectifies” the charism into structures, norms, and activities which are well defined and easily verified. From the vital flow we move to legalism, casuistry, and contract. Instead of continually seeking the living God, we prefer the golden calf, visible, tangible, and domesticated (cf. Ex 32). The logic of gift is replaced by the logic of power, which delimits tasks, obligations, and benefits: “What good must I do to gain eternal life?” (Mt 19:16).

The Second Vatican Council states that “the “founders’ spirit and special aims” must be “faithfully held in honor” (PC 2b). We Franciscans need to discern the best way to live today Saint Francis’ evangelical radicality.⁷⁸ It’s not about idealizing his figure without discerning new perspectives. We need to reread his life in the light of the Spirit, to discover or find again the evangelical intuition that moved him and that continues to be valid for us. Today he keeps repeating to us: “I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you yours” (LM 14,3).

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⁷⁸ “To discern, in the light of the Spirit, the best ways to preserve and adapt their charism and their spiritual patrimony.” JOHN PAUL II, «*Vita consecrata*, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation» [VC] 42 (March 25, 1996), in *AAS* 88 (1996) 377-486; SECONDIN Bruno, *Abitare gli orizzonti. Simboli, modelli e sfide della vita consacrata*, Paoline, Milano 2001, 99-102.

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