



**ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS**  
**XIV General Chapter**  
**VI General Elective Chapter**

# **HOW SHOULD AN ORDER LIKE THE OFS BE MANAGED AT ALL ITS LEVELS?**

**OFS: A UNIQUE RELIGIOUS ENTITY  
IN THE CHURCH**

Reflection on the **identity** and **nature** of the OFS

# HOW SHOULD AN ORDER LIKE THE OFS BE MANAGED, AT ALL ITS LEVELS?

## OFS: A UNIQUE RELIGIOUS ENTITY IN THE CHURCH REFLECTION ON THE IDENTITY AND NATURE OF THE OFS.

Benedetto Lino

### INTRODUCTION

From the time of the promulgation of the Pauline Rule until now, the Secular Franciscan Order has been confronted with many urgent and important problems:

- **The unification of the Order**, which required years of tough commitment and absorbed the greatest part of the energy of the leaders of the Order,
- Juridical **codification of the OFS own Law**, General Constitutions, International and National Statutes, etc. and its enforcement,
- The effort to **amalgamate**, to give a common base and a **sense of belonging** to the thousands of Fraternities scattered in the whole world,
- **Integration into the various organisms** of the Franciscan Family, of the Church and into several other areas,
- **Daily management** of the complex life and events of the International Fraternity (Chapters, Fraternal and Pastoral Visits, Congresses, Formation Courses etc...)

For these reasons, there has been no time to perform an **in depth, internal, shared and personalized reflection on how the Order has to be managed**, in full respect of its identity and secularity, an Order that is present in 115 countries and counts almost a half million members, including the Franciscan Youth.

### 1. WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO URGENTLY ADDRESS THIS THEME?

First of all, because the OFS has **never been an Order organized with a centralized structure**.

Because the Order was divided in four fractions and they lived as separate entities during five centuries, and until today we still experience problems on how the sense of unity and belonging in the Order is actually perceived.

Because the Order has not yet found the **right models of organization, management and service of all Fraternities at all levels**.

Because there are vast areas in which dependence on the religious is still strong, either because secular Franciscans are not yet capable of assuming their responsibilities, or because in some areas persists the conviction in a number of religious that the OFS must be directed by the religious.

Since the promulgation of the Pauline Rule, the Order has made enormous progresses,

passing from a 5 centuries consolidated fragmentation to an accomplished *unity*, and yet ... the Order still has some difficulty in **understanding**, among other things,

- *What the Order really is: its IDENTITY AND NATURE*
- *How it should be organized and how it must function,*
- *How roles of responsibility and guide have to be implemented.*

**The OFS is an Order in the full sense of the word, a “True Order”<sup>1</sup>**, even though this reality is often pronounced but rarely understood.

**WE FORM A TRUE “SECULAR” ORDER**, truly immersed in the world, concretely living in the ordinary conditions of the world.

**It is impossible to look back in our own history to find adequate models.**

In fact, even at the time of our full autonomy (1215-1471), despite all the efforts of our predecessors, the **Order never obtained the permission to organize itself as a centralized Order**. Then, from 1471 to 1978, the Order lived as an appendage of the Franciscan male religious Orders under whose control the Order lived, without any kind of coordination or centralization of its own.

Only in 1978, the Order was recognized, for the first time in history, as a unified, autonomous and centralized Order and only since the 90ies did we start to speak in terms of concrete centralized and operational unity.

**WE FIND OURSELVES, THEREFORE, IN AN ENTIRELY NEW ENVIRONMENT  
AND WITHOUT ANY PRIOR MODEL OF OUR OWN.**

## **MODELS OF FRATERNITY**

Due to the lack of internal reflection on what the OFS really is, we still operate, by and large, according to **the model of the Local Fraternity**, applying largely the same schemes, procedures and errors also to the Fraternities of higher level, including the International level.

One of the most visible consequences of this, is that the **distribution of workload** is almost everywhere strongly **concentrated** (often times in a pathological manner), giving rise to unnatural **accumulations of responsibility**, at times of “**power**” rather than of authority understood as service.

Those who are elected in the National (and regional) *executive*<sup>2</sup> Councils are the ones who (most of the times no more than 2 or 3 people) individually take upon themselves the whole workload. This happens because frequently no persons of good will make themselves available, or because some (apparently too many) love to feel important and want to dominate the others, or simply because “*this is the way we’ve always done things*” in the Local Fraternities.

---

<sup>1</sup> St. John Paul II, to the OFS General Chapter, June 14, 1988

<sup>2</sup> We ought to unify the terminology and the nomenclature of the Order, so as to understand what and whom we are referring to, everywhere in the world: junta, giunta, bureau, executive council, plenary council, assembly, etc.. See also section 6.D, at page 20-21 of this document.

It is no longer acceptable, understandable and practicable that few people in charge at the various levels, **wear themselves out for the excessive workloads and responsibility**, ending up, at the end of their terms, physically and mentally drained, just as it is not possible to accept **hegemonies of individual persons or groups**.

## IN SEARCH OF A MODEL

In various ways, according to the different places, Secular Franciscans, in addition to the **model of the Local Fraternity** (unsuitable for the higher levels and, often, wrongly implemented at the local level), have tried to get inspiration from models borrowed from the **organization of religious Orders** or of **lay associations** of various nature. These models, however, are also concretely unsuitable and therefore inapplicable.

In fact, we are **neither one nor the other**. Nor their identity and nature are anywhere near or similar to ours.

We are **not “regular” religious**. They do not have family commitments, live under the same roof and dedicate 100% of their time to the life of their Orders to which they are bound by a vow of obedience.

We are **not like any other lay association or third order** (as described in Canon 303).

“Third Orders” are appendages of their respective religious Orders that govern them. They do not have a capillary and articulated diffusion as we have. They do not have a true autonomy nor a management of their own but are concretely directed, influenced and dependent on the religious. They are very different from us.

Lay associations have usually very different characteristics, mission, diffusion and origins with respect to us. Most of them were founded in very recent times. So, it is not possible to look at them to borrow organization models or functioning schemes.

Moreover, many of the so called “lay” associations are often concretely run by *clergy*.

In any case, it is not the purpose of this presentation to describe the profound differences existing between them and us.

A deep and well pondered **reflection**, followed by concrete **“experimentations”**, are needed to find a model and a style which fully suit our identity and nature and that can be adopted by the whole Secular Franciscan Order.

## 2. SOME FUNDAMENTAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

We have been confronted with and have solved (though not always in a fully satisfactory manner) many of the most urgent and pressing problems that have monopolized the attention of the OFS leaders since 1978 to date. Now, it is our duty to pause and reflect on ourselves (*who are we, as secular Franciscans*), on the basis of the true **nature** and **identity** of our Order and of the precious **experience** gathered during the 36 years from the promulgation of the new Rule, the new General Constitutions, Ritual, Statutes and unified status.

We wish to briefly touch, now, on just a few points that we consider essential to understand the nature of our Order and to develop our theme.

## A. THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY AND THE OFS ACCORDING TO THE PROJECT INSPIRED BY GOD TO SAINT FRANCIS.

### 1. THE OFS: A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE, A PROTOTYPE OF CHURCH

God inspired Francis to form a **threefold family** to include **all members of God's People**, men, women, lay, religious, ordained, single and married (a *representative sample*, a *chosen prototype* of the Church-Total Christ), in order that there may be people who, by fully conforming to Christ, like saint Francis, *in every state of life*, may **bring and offer Christ**, the *total Christ*, to the whole world and repair the Church in each of its components. The first article of our Rule fully confirms this.

Francis of Assisi did not try to **live Christ** only considering some aspects of His life. Francis tried to live Christ **in His total fullness**, by following every aspect of His life. Francis strived to be conformed to the Total Christ to the point of being considered an *alter Christus*, another Christ. Saint Francis, therefore, effectively, bore and brought to the world the whole Christ, **the total Christ**.

We must follow Christ in the footsteps of saint Francis and must tend to the very same conformation.

**OUR VOCATION-MISSION AS SECULAR FRANCISCANS IS IDENTICAL: WE MUST BEAR AND OFFER THE TOTAL CHRIST !!!**

Our Order is indeed very significant in the Church if it fully corresponds to God's project and fulfills the expectations of the Church. There is a project of grace on all of us which is not yet fully understood and largely unexploited.

We have a role in the Church which fully corresponds to Saint Francis mission, to implement in union with the entire Franciscan Family, of which **we represent more than 65%!<sup>3</sup>**

It is about time for us to fully live up to our mission and to the expectations of the Church both as individuals and as an Order.<sup>4</sup>

Holiness has always been present in the Order in individual persons. There are always generous souls, thanks be to God. They blossom everywhere. Not only in the Franciscan Family.

Where we are most wanting is **to be and work as an Order**.

THERE MUST BE A **REASON** WHY THE CHURCH, AFTER 8 CENTURIES, AGREEING TO THE UNHEARD REQUESTS OF THE FRANCISCAN PENITENTS OF THE 13TH CENTURY, FINALLY WANTED TO ESTABLISH US AS A **UNITED AND CENTRALIZED ORDER!**

**Certainly, this reason does exist** and it corresponds to the original project that God inspired to Francis. Now, we cannot fail to live up to the expectations!

---

<sup>3</sup> **Quantitatively**. Regrettably, due to our diffuse lack of preparation, our persisting substantial dependence on the religious in a number of countries, the little consideration in which we are kept as seculars and lay, our lingering in an indefinite "status quo", **qualitatively**, we count very little in the Family, almost nothing. On the contrary, every member of the Family ought to be considered as having equal dignity and, due to our large numerical presence in the world, the Family should rely on us more confidently.

<sup>4</sup> Message of Saint John Paul II to the OFS General Chapter, 22 Nov. 2002.

## 2. LAY AND SECULAR STATE

The Secular Franciscan Order is a providential and necessary “state and form of life”, inspired and raised up by God to Francis of Assisi within his Family to accomplish his mission. This “state” is absolutely indispensable for the completeness of the Franciscan Family and of the Church.

We must become fully aware that the OFS is a unique and essential reality in the Church with very personalized characteristics.

## 3. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING AN ORDER WITH A CENTRALIZED STRUCTURE

Francis of Assisi inaugurated the “apostolic” form of religious life.

At the time of Saint Francis, the only forms of religious life were the monastic one (monks), the eremitical one (hermits) and the canonical one (Canons Regular). They were characterized by the fact that the religious lived always in the same place and were under the authority (and still are) of the bishops of the local Dioceses.

Francis inaugurated a new “itinerant” religious form of life, like that of Jesus and his apostles, to bring and announce the Gospel to the whole world and to preach penance (conversion). His religious family received its mandate directly by the Pope (not by individual bishops) and, therefore, it was placed under the direct authority of the Holy See. His “monastery” is the world.

The Second and Third Franciscan Orders were founded to accomplish the very **same apostolic vocation/mission** in the entire world in a **coordinated manner** with the First Order.

Thus, **the Third Order, the Secular Franciscan Order, assumes the typical characteristics which represent the SECULAR (in the world) PROJECTION OF THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF SAINT FRANCIS AND OF HIS APOSTOLIC VOCATION/MISSION FOR THE WHOLE WORLD**, just as the Second Order (the Poor Clares) is the projection of his religious experience in the cloistered world.

In order to be able to accomplish this mission in a coordinated and efficacious manner, in the whole world, the first Order needed to have a single, unified world structure, not depending on the individual bishops but under the direct authority of the Holy See (the Pope).

In a similar manner, the **third Order, the OFS, does need a similar coordinated world structure and to be under the authority of the Holy See** (the Pope).

Only, for their apostolic activities in a given diocese, both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Order depend on the corresponding bishop, but for their organization, internal coordination and life, they are always under the direct authority of the Holy See.

The new OFS Rule finally put things back in order and regulates the life of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Order in accord with its original nature and identity and, at last, the Franciscan Family can operate and live according to its original joint authentic vocation/mission.

Now, it is necessary for the three branches of the Family to understand that the time has come to relinquish their individual “splendid” solitudes, and to start to closely collaborate

among themselves: the First Orders among themselves and, together, with the Second and the Third Order; Third Order Regular and the several institutes that share the same Rule among themselves and, together, with the rest of the Family. All this needs to be implemented in a very concrete manner and not just formally!

We still have a long way to go in this area and the OFS can do a lot by acting as a glue and catalyst for all the members of the family, as it already does.

## B. UNITY OF THE OFS

The unity of the OFS is described as “ORGANIC”. This means that every Fraternity, and consequently **each of its members**, is a part of the same body, and represents an *essential organ* of it.

«The Secular Franciscan Order ... is an ORGANIC UNION of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world ... ». (RULE 2)

«The OFS is divided (*articulated*) into fraternities of various levels, the purpose being to promote, in an orderly form, **the union and mutual collaboration among the brothers and sisters and their active and communal presence in both the local and the universal Church**. The OFS shall also support the commitment of the fraternities in their service to the world, and specifically to the life of society». (G.C Art. 28.2)

«Local fraternities are **grouped** into fraternities at various levels: regional, national and international according to criteria that are ecclesial, territorial, or of another nature. They are **coordinated and connected** according to the norm of the Rule and the Constitutions. **This is a REQUIREMENT of the COMMUNION AMONG THE FRATERNITIES, of the ORDERLY COLLABORATION AMONG THEM**, and of the **UNITY** of the OFS». (G.C. Art. 29.1).

**Unity, coordination and connection** are extremely important objectives in order to feel and be an Order. Great progress has been achieved, but we are still far from the objective of being and acting as **one** in the Church and in the world. A concrete unity of life and intents would render us a “force” of remarkable impact for our mission in the world, in unity with the whole Franciscan family.

## C. ORDER OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND COLLEGIALITY

It is essential that ALL Secular Franciscans understand that we are an **Order of Brothers**.

*“... the Lord gave me **brothers** ... the Most High Himself revealed to me that I had **to live according to the form of the holy Gospel**. (Testament 14)*

*The vocation of the OFS is a vocation **to live the Gospel in fraternal communion**. G.C. Art. 3.3*

In virtue of its foundational nature, our Order **must** have an ABSOLUTELY COLLEGIAL management and direction.

The Fraternity Councils are responsible for the **animation and guidance** and the Councils of the higher levels are responsible also to **connect and coordinate**.

«*While firmly upholding*

*the CO-RESPONSIBILITY of the Council (local) to animate and guide...*

*the CO-RESPONSIBILITY of the Council for the animation and guidance of the regional Fraternity*

*the CO-RESPONSIBILITY of the Council for the animation and guidance of the national Fraternity*

*the CO-RESPONSIBILITY of the CIOFS Presidency ... » (G.C. Art. 51, Art. 63, Art. 67, Art. 74)*

*«On various levels, each Fraternity is ANIMATED AND GUIDED by a Council and Minister, who are elected by the professed according to the Constitutions.*

*Their service, which lasts for a definite period, is marked by a ready and willing spirit and is a duty of responsibility to EACH MEMBER and to the COMMUNITY.*

**Within themselves, the Fraternities are structured IN DIFFERENT WAYS according to the norm of the Constitutions, ACCORDING TO THE VARIOUS NEEDS of their members and their regions, and under the guidance of their respective council». (Rule 21)**

We note again that there is an **obligation to serve** the INDIVIDUALS and the GROUPS and to **contrive and implement differentiated structures**, abiding by the General Constitutions, **according to the specific needs of the members.**

In the Councils (CIOFS Presidency is also a Council), **the Ministers**, who are integral part of them, **have very precise roles** of

- Presidency,
- Convocation,
- Representation,
- Sign of unity
- Assumption of civil and patrimonial responsibility, but most of all of
- **Guarantors and implementers of the decisions of the Councils and of the Chapters.**

**The ministers, at all levels, do not have autonomous powers with respect to the Councils, but instead they are the servants of the decisions of the Councils and of the Chapters.**

*«... it is the duty of the minister, who has the primary responsibility, to see that the directions and decisions of the council are put into practice. He or she will keep the council informed concerning his or her activities». G.C. 63.1; 67.1; 74.1*

Only one exception exists for the Minister General, and is: *to intervene in urgent cases, informing the Presidency of them, G.C. Art. 74.2 h.*

This aspect is usually ignored in the majority of cases by most ministers and also ... by most Councils!

It is, therefore, indispensable to recover, concretely and with full conviction, the fraternal dimension of humble and authentic service, a **truly responsible and collegial governance**, and for the ministers to shun all temptations of domination and of abusive imposition of their will on the others. This is a very concrete challenge in which we must seriously engage ourselves.

**D. EXACT UNDERSTANDING OF "SUBSIDIARITY" AND NECESSITY TO LIVE TO "BE ORDER" AND NOT ANARCHY. (ART. 33. C.G)**



«1. In the guidance and co-ordination of the Fraternities and of the Order, the **PERSONALITY AND CAPACITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND OF THE INDIVIDUAL FRATERNITIES** *should (must)* **BE PROMOTED**. The plurality of expressions of the Franciscan ideal and cultural variety must be respected.

2. The councils of higher levels *should (must)* **not do** what can be adequately carried out either by the local fraternities or by a council of a lower level. They *should (must)* **respect and promote their vitality so that they fulfill their duties properly**.

The local Fraternities and councils concerned *should (must)* **COMMIT THEMSELVES TO CARRY OUT THE DECISIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL** and of the other councils of higher levels, and **TO IMPLEMENT THEIR PROGRAMS, adapting them when necessary to their own situation»**.

Subsidiarity is not anarchy but respect of the local realities and encouragement to be responsible.

Subsidiarity is necessary to avoid possible **undue deprivation of authority** of the lower levels and “**dictatorship**” of the higher levels. Nevertheless, the second part of point 2 clearly and strongly underlines that the **OFS is an Order** and that the decisions of the International Council (supreme organ of the Order, of which the Presidency is the governing body) **must** be implemented, with the necessary adaptations.

## **E. FULL-TIME SECULAR FRANCISCANS**

We are secular consecrated persons and we remain such the entire time of our life. Our Profession is a true “nuptial alliance with Jesus Christ” and we have solemnly sworn to live up to what we have professed, every moment of our life. We cannot, and must not, be Secular Franciscans only by name or, as many do, only when we please.

## **F. FULLY RECONCILE SECULAR LIFE WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ORDER.**

Our vocation consists in being fully dedicated to the **service of God and of the Church in our secular state**.

We are precious to the Church and to the Franciscan Family to the extent we are and behave as true seculars, fully immersed in the things of the ordinary life of the world.

If our secularity does not allow us to fully accomplish all our tasks within the Order, we have to seek the help of our brothers and sisters who can help us, rather than neglect our other fundamental duties related to our ordinary life, in the family, at work or else. **It is not acceptable to neglect our duties as seculars**. Our specific mission and the service in the Order are mainly focused on the complete fulfillment of all our duties in the family, at work, in society. It is inconceivable to jeopardize one’s marriage, the service to our children, a harmonious family life, work or other, to fulfill our services within the structures of the Order. “Being secular” means to be able to act maintaining the right balance between all our duties and to learn how to work and serve cooperatively as a group, always and in every service position.

**“Secularity”** (*being in the world for the world*) **is the theological place in which we fully realize our vocation.**

### **3. FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS**

#### **WHICH PREVENT THE ORDER TO FULLY DEVELOP INTO WHAT IT SHOULD BE**

The present situation of the Order, despite the great progress attained in the last years, is characterized by four basic problems.

1. **Lack of understanding and awareness of the commitments made with our Profession to fully correspond to God's vocation for us.**

This is the result of an inadequate formation and is responsible for the

2. **Lack of commitment of many members to enter into a serious conversion journey.**
3. **Substantial ignorance of the Sacred Scriptures, of the writings of Saint Francis, of the essential texts of Franciscan spirituality, of the OFS Rule, of the General Constitutions, of the Ritual ...**
4. **Absence and/or lack of implementation of organizational structures and projects of the Order, consistent with its *nature*, which may allow a satisfactory spiritual and apostolic development.**

These themes are closely interconnected and influence and determine one another.

These basic problems may be summed up in two fundamental chapters:

#### **LACK OF CONVERSION AND IGNORANCE.**

In both FORMATION plays an essential role.

#### **CONVERSION.**

Though being an Order of "penitents" (i.e. people who have chosen in full awareness a journey of *conversion*, and should perfectly know the goal to reach (*perfection of love and total conformation to Christ, as Francis*), it seems that, for many secular Franciscans (too many, indeed) true "conversion" is more a topic of conversation than a program of life to implement.

Rarely, can we find ministers and, in general, persons who occupy responsibility positions, who carry out their ministry with *humility* and *authentic sense of service*. We find very often, instead, presumption, prevarication, carelessness, craving to appear, attachment to positions of command, shameless and arbitrary use of the (scanty) resources of the Fraternity, ease to resign if decisions are not promptly endorsed and we so on.

This is not only a matter of not knowing what the Rule and General Constitutions demand (absolutely unacceptable), but more importantly (and this is much worse) it is a total **lack of conversion**, of the true conversion of heart and mind. Though recognizing *in words* that our model of *sequela Christi* is Francis, many (too many, indeed) Secular Franciscans maintain attitudes and practices which are the exact contrary of the *humility, docility, meekness, search of poverty, obedience, profound sense of service and testimony, minority, exemplarity* etc. of Saint Francis.

**THE LACK OF AUTHENTIC CONVERSION IS, BY FAR, THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM WE ARE**

CONFRONTED WITH IN OUR ORDER. This is an endemic problem in the Order.<sup>5</sup>

Can we, dear brothers and sisters, in full honesty, affirm to be sincerely converted, like Francis, or at least to have undertaken an authentic and convinced conversion journey?

## IGNORANCE.

Even though there are happy exceptions, we have frequently (too frequently!) observed that in the Order, the habit of reading, studying and meditating the Gospel is not such common practice as it should be (*Secular Franciscans **must commit** themselves especially to careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel.* <sup>6</sup> Rule Art. 4).

Very rarely are the other books of the new Testament read, and almost never are the ones of the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup>

The Writings of Saint Francis and his biographies are hardly or superficially known or not at all. Many secular Franciscans simply live of common places. They just rely on sporadic conferences of some good friar and rarely do they engage in individual, assiduous and personalized frequentation of the Sacred Texts, Franciscan Sources and of the OFS fundamental texts.

The Rule is not well known and the General Constitutions much less still ! The Order is not well known, members do not know how it functions and ignore the fundamental rules on which the communion and structural life of the Order is based.

We have been answering for years to tens and tens of brothers and sisters on problems whose answer can be found by simply opening the Constitutions at the right page!

**If, starting from ourselves, all of us shall be willing to tackle these problems**, then, we will be able to face and resolve, together with the brothers and sisters of the whole world, the problem of the structures and management of our Order and, after adequate trial periods, find solutions which fully suit the nature of our Order.

We must have the courage of asking ourselves as we did before: how many of us can say, in all honesty, to have undertaken in earnest, without looking back, a journey of authentic conversion? How many can say that they are animated only by the desire to completely conform to Christ, **like Francis**?

How many can assert that their activities and behaviour are not often motivated to comply only with routine, formal and bureaucratic requirements rather than by spiritual

---

<sup>5</sup> This, largely, derives from the lack of *discernment of vocation* before admitting candidates to Profession and from a superficial formation. Generally, we speak of 2 years or more of formation. But let us not fool ourselves. If, in average, the candidates meet twice a month for 1 hour, during 10 months in a year, 2 years of formation correspond to only 40 hours !!! Less than 2 days !!! And self-formation is a rarity! Most candidates are content to do formation only during the formation meetings.

<sup>6</sup> This is a personal and **more faithful** translation from the *typical version* in Italian, as the English translation does not give the impelling sense of the obligation.

<sup>7</sup> «He who does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of God. Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ» (S. Jerome, Commentary on Isaiah). – See also St. Francis in 2C, LXXI, 105.

and fraternal service reasons?

#### **4. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF “MANAGEMENT”**

- a. **MANAGING AN ORDER MEANS, IN THE FIRST PLACE, TO KNOW WELL THE OBJECTIVES** to be reached through management.

These objectives are very well known: they are perfectly described in the Rule and in the General Constitutions. However, rarely, do they form the object of serious reflection, study, and concrete application.

#### **b. WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES ?**

In essence, the **objective is only one: TO BECOME SAINT** (*strive for perfect charity*) and to **BEHAVE CORRESPONDINGLY** (the mission).

All the other objectives stem from this fundamental objective and represent its concrete expressions. Here are the objectives that, most immediately, can be found in our Rule and Constitutions.

#### **RULE:**

- Strive for perfect charity in our secular state
- Live the Gospel in the manner of saint Francis
- Make present the charism of saint Francis
- Be witnesses and instruments of the mission of the Church
- Announce Christ by our life and words
- Re-build the Church
- Have the thoughts of Christ: permanent conversion
- Build a more fraternal and evangelical world
- Commit oneself in public life
- Commit in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

These objectives, contrary to what people usually think, **are not private objectives, which concern the only individual persons.**

These objectives **fully concern all and, most of all, LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS.**

We must interiorize and implement all these objectives personally, first, and then we must incessantly and passionately work to assist all others to accomplish them.

*«The office of minister or councilor is a fraternal service, a commitment to hold oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the fraternity so that each one will realize his or her own vocation and each fraternity will be a true community, ecclesial and Franciscan, actively present in the Church and in society». (C.G. 31.2)*

#### **GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS**

- **Animate and guide.**
- **Connect and coordinate:**
  - Work in order that **all the Fraternities** of all levels be **truly united, connected and coordinated**, that they may feel and be **one** and form a *one and only* Order.

- Work in order that there may be at all levels (local, regional, national and international) true **communion of objectives** of formation, of **apostolic** activities, of **concrete charity**, common objectives to **serve the Church and the world**, common objectives to **announce and bear witness to the Good News** (evangelization).
- Periodical area meetings to achieve joint reciprocal *knowledge, sharing and planning*.

As we have already said above, **unity, coordination and connection** are extremely important objectives in order to feel and be a true Order. There is still a lot of work to do to achieve this objective. And (it's worth repeating it), if we manage to reach a concrete unity of life and intentions, we could become a tremendously powerful "instrument" to accomplish our mission in the world, together the Franciscan Family.

*«Local fraternities are grouped into Fraternities at various levels: regional, national and international according to criteria that are ecclesial, territorial, or of another nature. They are **coordinated and connected according to the norm of the Rule and the Constitutions**. This is a REQUIREMENT of the communion among the Fraternities, of the **orderly collaboration among them**, and of the unity of the OFS». (Art. 29 1)*

- c. In order to accomplish the objectives, it is essential to **CHOOSE THE RIGHT PEOPLE** without yielding to the temptation of voting for our best friends, our "allies" who would favor our personal convenience or goals. The people we choose ought to **know well the nature** of the Order and its rules and should have the particular talents that are necessary to accomplish what the Fraternity needs in that particular moment.

*«The leaders of the OFS at every level must be*

- *perpetually professed,*
- *convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life,*
- *attentive to the life of the Church and of society with a broad and encompassing vision,*
- *open to dialogue, and*
- *ready to give and receive help and collaboration».* ( G.C. Art. 31.3)

- d. After having clarified the objectives, it is necessary **TO HAVE A PROJECT** and to **predispose PREVENTIVELY the actions** and the necessary and efficacious **organization** to implement it.

Very often, instead, in the absence of precise projects, we let **the events dominate us and dictate our priorities and agendas**. There is a widespread tendency to wait for a problem to occur, and to intervene afterwards, rather than to lay the bases to prevent the problem to occur. So, we end up running after the events rather than planning them and steering them to reach the objectives.

## **1 THE INSTITUTION, STRUCTURES AND PROJECTS MUST NEVER STIFLE OR HINDER THE MOTIONS THAT THE SPIRIT RAISE UP IN ALL OF US.**

It is indispensable to have well thought, precise projects, consistent with the spiritual and institutional aims to reach: we are an Order and the word "order" reminds us of the necessity to organize our life in a regular and orderly manner so as to accomplish our common vocation and mission. This, however, must not be done bureaucratically.

**The institution must never stifle or hamper the motions that the Spirit freely arouses in the persons.**<sup>8</sup> The leaders in charge, therefore, will always have to be very attentive to discern these impulses. We must learn how to listen and discern, and, when necessary, be able to modify our decisions.

f. Finally, it is absolutely essential to fully develop and wisely apply all the **INSTRUMENTS OF SELF-DETERMINATION AND PERSONALIZATION** provided for in our G.C., to comply with the needs of environmental, cultural, social and political diversities which characterize each country, within the framework of our Rule and General Constitutions.

In practice, this never occurs!

Suffice it to see how National Statutes are conceived, to understand how little they are “particular”. Often, Statutes are partial or total duplicates of the General Constitutions!

Art. 29.3. G.C. - **NATIONAL STATUTES must indicate the criteria for the organization of the OFS in the nation. The application of these criteria is left to the prudent judgment of the leaders of the fraternities concerned and of the national council.**

This article explicitly obliges (*must*) to find concrete and personalized ways to organize the Order, confiding in the faithful (*prudent*) creativity of the leaders, to better accomplish the objectives.

*«Where the situation and the needs of the members require it, sections or groups which gather members sharing **particular needs**, common interests, or the same **operational**<sup>9</sup> choices, may be established within the Fraternity under the guidance of the one council.*

*Such groups can give themselves specific norms relative to their meetings and activities, firmly remaining faithful, however, to the requirements which arise from membership in the one fraternity. National statutes may establish criteria suitable for the formation and functioning of these sections or groups». (Art. 34 G.C.)*

This article offers broad perspectives also to organize structures that are consistent with the implementation of the objectives of the Fraternity Councils. We must learn, when pertinent and applicable, to make a non restrictive reading of the articles of the G.C. .

## **5. SOME CONCRETE PROBLEMS**

We will indicate just a few which correspond to our experience and personal sensitivity. Afterwards, each one of you should offer his/her own constructive contribution on these and other possible topics on the basis of his/her own experience and sensitivity.

### **1. LACK OF COLLEGIALLY AND “DICTATORSHIP” OF THE MINISTERS. !!!**

This is the most frequent problem in the Order. The problem exists not only because there are ministers who think they are entitled to have absolute powers but also because

---

<sup>8</sup> Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, his last interview: *«We could, at least, look for men who are free and closer to their neighbors. Such as Bishop Romero and the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador. Where are the heroes who can inspire us? For no reason whatsoever we have to limit them by the bonds of the institution.»*

<sup>9</sup> This important adjective is missing in the English version. The *typical edition* in Italian recites: «... *identità di scelte operative*»: identity of operational choices.



there are councilors who are convinced that the minister is responsible and empowered to do everything, or who simply have no intention to get involved to serve.

The solution of this problem entirely resides on the full compliance with our Rule and General Constitutions. We have already dealt with this topic at point 2 section C at page 6 and 7 of this report.

## **2. COUNCILLORS WHO DO NOT ACCEPT INTERFERENCES OF THE MINISTERS AND COUNCILS.**

This is due to **individual personalities, lack of conversion and ignorance**, but also to the fact that the election of individual candidates (this now the prevailing fashion) by the Chapters give the wrong *impression* to these people that the **Chapters have conferred to them a direct and personal mandate** and as a consequence they presume that they are only responsible directly to the Chapters and not to the Councils. This is completely wrong! A methodological and mature reflection is needed to eliminate this serious error.

## **3. CHRONIC LACK OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES !!!**

We still adopt a financial contribution system from the National Fraternities that has proven its inefficiency and the impossibility to produce improvements.

We virtually have no other source of revenue.

## **4. EXHAUSTING WORKLOADS FOR THOSE WHO, IN THE COUNCILS, REALLY COMMIT THEMSELVES TO SERVE THE BROTHERS.**

This situation produces "exhaustion", physical and mental, in the people who are seriously committed to serve and it causes significant problems to the individuals and to the whole Fraternity. It causes a loss of sense of responsibility in the other members of the Council and of the other Fraternity members. It favours possible authoritarian management, which mortifies fraternity and collegiality.

## **5. INSUFFICIENT OR NO INVOLVEMENT AT ALL OF NON ELECTED MEMBERS, IN THE ACTIVITIES TO BE PERFORMED AT ALL LEVELS !!!**

The structures must always rely on the **best possible competencies**, ability, experience and availability to serve in the Fraternities, even if provided by non elected members. The elected members will always have the final responsibility and the wise coordination of all structures.

*«(All) The brothers and sisters are co-responsible for the life of the Fraternity to which they belong and for the OFS as the organic union of all the Fraternities throughout the world».* (G.C. Article 30.1)

## **6. LACK OF PERMANENT STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT THE ESSENTIAL GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS AND THE FUNDAMENTAL ACTIVITIES OF THE ORDER.**

This is what causes the problem described in point 4 above and is the result of what has been described in point 5. Some stable streamlined structures are needed to guarantee:

- Continuity of contents and action in the longer term
- Accomplishment of all the tasks of the Councils
- Fair distribution of workloads and greater efficiency in the implementation of tasks.

In the Order there is the widespread tendency to adopt the universally deprecated "spoils system" used in the political world. When ministers and Councils change the tendency is to change also all collaborators irrespective of whether they were good or bad.

Also the entire set-up of systems and projects of the previous “administration” tend to be radically changed, even if things had worked properly.

One thing is to give new impulse, to correct the patent errors and implement new essential projects, another thing is to restart all over and over again only because the new Ministers or the new members wish the activities to be in their image and likeness, to affirm their “authority” and superiority!

At the International level there are no **efficient and coordinated systems of decentralization**.

#### **7. SELF-ISOLATION AND EXCESSIVE LOCALIZATION IN THE PARISHES OR LOCAL COMMUNITIES. PERSISTING DEPENDENCE ON RELIGIOUS.**

#### **8. SUBSTANTIAL LACK OF WELL PREPARED AND AVAILABLE PERSONS !!!**

This is one of the reasons why it is largely impossible to create valid and lasting support structures. Such lack of well prepared people prevents the Order to develop an internal “know-how”. This obliges the Order to seek help outside and often times, even if such external help may be qualified, these persons may not speak the same language of the seculars and may substantially ignore their actual needs, history, Rule, identity etc.

#### **9. FRATERNAL AND PASTORAL VISITS !!!**

The **time** we dedicate to National Fraternities in FPV (but it is even worse in the Fraternities of lower levels) is always **extremely short, both during the on-the-spot visit and afterwards, if there are problems that require time and personal presence**. Concretely, it is always impossible to maintain a **continuous operational contact** and, if needed, a **protracted presence of the visitors on the spot**, to accompany and resolve the problems encountered. Often, the problems we find (which we rarely manage to resolve completely) need a direct, repeated and prolonged presence.

#### **10. INSUFFICIENT INVOLVEMENT IN CHURCH STRUCTURES AND DYNAMICS (LOCAL, DIOCESAN, GENERAL, G.C. ART. 62.2.b, 66.2.i).**

#### **11. INSUFFICIENT INTERACTION, IN CONCRETE AND OPERATIONAL TERMS, WITH THE REST OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY. LACK OF SHARED OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES.**

On this point, however, religious are more deficient than we, because they usually work as single isolated Orders. By and large, there is not yet a sufficient awareness in the Franciscan Family of the need to operate all together to accomplish the common apostolic objectives of mission and evangelization. Often times, there is no desire to work together.

#### **12. VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ORDER !!!**

We know very well, through our own experience, that the **transmission chain from the International Fraternity/Presidency downwards, most of the times**, stops already at the National Fraternity level, and almost never does it reach the local levels. If we do not correct this, it is simply an illusion that the Order may ever change to become what it is supposed to be.

With few exceptions, local, regional and national Fraternities have no contacts, exchanges or collaboration among themselves and less still do they share concrete projects.

Lack of communication is largely the responsibility of the higher levels who, in fact,



have the task of coordinating and connecting, but also of the Local Fraternities that often times do not wish to come out of their shell.

Finally, there is often no horizontal communication even from ministers toward the members of their own Councils and vice versa !!!

### **13. LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP OFS-YOUNG FRANCISCANS (YOUFRA). LACK OF ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD YOUFRA.**

*«OFS considers itself to be particularly responsible for Franciscan Youth, which is formed by those young people who feel called by the Holy Spirit to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi, **deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order**».* (G.C. 96.2)

*«The OFS ought to<sup>10</sup> **(must)** be ready to share its experience of evangelical life with the youth ... ».* (G.C. 96.1)

With rare exceptions, Secular Franciscans usually do not comply with what the Rule and the General Constitutions demand!

*«The Franciscan Youth has a specific organization, methods of formation, and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth ... ».* (G.C. 96.5)

**YouFra enjoys broad margins of autonomy** within the OFS.

In most cases, on the contrary, Secular Franciscans expect and claim to rule over YouFra, and when YouFrans refuse, the answer is indifference and loss of interest for them.

**All duties rest on the OFS:** animation, adequate Franciscan formation, sharing of the experience of evangelical life.

We are aware of several abuses in many countries and of substantial unwillingness of the OFS to comply with their duties towards YouFra.

*«The Franciscan Youth ... requests from the competent secular leaders ... **fraternal animation**».* (G.C. 96.6)

*«The OFS fraternities (must) commit themselves to give to the Franciscan Youth Fraternities a fraternal animator, who ... guarantees an adequate secular Franciscan formation.* (G.C. 97.2)

*«A representative of the Franciscan Youth is to be designated by his or her council to form part of the OFS council of the corresponding level; a representative of the OFS, designated by his or her own council, forms part of the council of the Franciscan Youth of the same level.*

*The representative of the Franciscan Youth has a vote in the OFS council only if he or she is a professed secular Franciscan».* (G.C. 97.4)

With rare exceptions, the OFS systematically ignores the duties imposed by the Rule and General Constitutions. The vast majority of the local and regional Fraternities do not implement this exchange of representatives which is essential to *promote a close communion with the OFS* (G.C. 97.3).

The relationship at the International level does work well.

---

<sup>10</sup> Again, here the translation in English is incorrect. The *typical version* in Italian says: “deve”= must.

**The Church, within the context of the Franciscan Family, has entrusted to the OFS the task of taking close care of the Young Franciscans, within its own organization.**

This task must be fully accomplished and with joy and strong conviction.

**THE OFS NEEDS YOUFRA MORE THAN YOUFRA NEEDS THE OFS !**

## **6. PROPOSALS TO RESOLVE SOME OF THE ABOVE PROBLEMS**

On the basis of the foregoing analysis of the problems and in full compliance with our own law, we offer some tentative solutions and working hypothesis.

**The dialogue is open** and we trust that the largest possible number of Secular Franciscans will also **give their personal contribution** which ought to be the fruit of your mature reflection (recognition and analysis of the problems, full knowledge of the *nature* and of the rules of the Order) so as to allow the formulation of shared proposals on which we can initiate a dialogue within the whole Order.

### **A. CREATION OF PERMANENT STRUCTURES**

To allow

- an effective continuity and consistency of contents and actions
- full performance of the tasks of the Councils
- a “humane” distribution of workloads.

#### **1. FORMATION OFFICE**

To connect and coordinate the various projects (initial and on-going formation, formation of formators, etc.) so as to guarantee an overall substantial unity of direction and coherence of contents.

The people responsible for the projects may be chosen also from among Secular Franciscans who are not elected members of the Presidency or of other Councils. The coordination and the direction of the Office will always be **the direct responsibility of the Presidency** (or other Councils).

The possibility of choosing people outside of the Presidency or Councils will guarantee the contribution of the **most qualified, expert and available persons from the whole Order.**

#### **2. PERMANENT ORGANISM TO COORDINATE JOINT ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY AT THE VARIOUS LEVELS.**

This is absolutely necessary so as to guarantee a continuity of presence, and to have more specific weight in the Family and not be considered always as *minus habentes*.

**Representation obviously belongs to the respective Minister**, but Ministers need qualified structures to help them fulfill this task.

At present, the **interactions in the Family are too scanty, virtually non-existent. Religious Orders are still too self-referential** and they do not live with the necessary intensity and conviction the interchange and collaboration in and with the Family. Much progress has been achieved on the perception and sensitivity of this topic, but the level of cooperation and sharing is still largely insufficient.

The OFS has acted as a *catalyst* and promoter of union and communion and it must continue to do so, by promoting structures and initiatives to reinforce its role with greater conviction.

3. **PERMANENT SCHOOL FOR THE PREPARATION OF TRULY COMPETENT PERSONS IN THE AREAS OF THEOLOGY, SPIRITUAL AND FRANCISCAN FORMATION, JURIDICAL MATTERS (CIC), JPIC MATTERS, to guarantee to the Order's an in-house own expertise and competent and qualified experts.** (International)
4. **ANNUAL COURSES OF FORMATION** (centralized or de-centralized) **FOR THE RECENTLY ELECTED MINISTERS AND INTERNATIONAL COUNCILLORS** (also if at 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> mandate – *repetita juvant*) and **other Council members. Also for the Ministers at the other levels.**  
To assure a suitable preparation to those who take up “government” responsibilities.
5. **INTERNATIONAL AREA COORDINATION ORGANISMS, to include THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCILLORS OF THE AREA, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE RESPECTIVE PRESIDENCY COUNCILLOR, to implement the Chapter and Presidency projects.**
6. **STABLE STRUCTURE TO HANDLE CONTACTS WITH THE HOLY SEE with qualified and expert persons, who report directly to the Minister General.**
7. **POOL OF PERSONS OF GREAT EXPERIENCE IN THE ORDER, who have proven to possess characteristics of balance, spirituality and relational ability who may be delegated by the Minister General TO PRESIDE OVER NATIONAL CHAPTERS OR CONDUCT FRATERNAL VISITS, when other Presidency members are not available or when the situation may so require. The Minister general is not obliged to delegate only members of the Presidency or of CIOFS and can choose according to his/her best judgment.**
8. **OFFICE FOR THE POSTULATION OF THE CAUSES OF SAINTS.**
9. **OFFICE FOR FINANCIAL MATTERS WITH STABLE PERSONNEL under the guidance of the General Treasurer and the supervision of the appointed Presidency Councillor.**
10. **AD HOC STUDY OFFICES**  
To perform surveys, compilation of texts, letters, projects and programs to avoid overburdening of the Presidency (and of Councils).  
The Presidency (or the Councils) will give the precise inputs and define the limits of the tasks. Members of the Councils (Presidency) would overview, verify and approve the work. The Council (Presidency), collegially, would examine the final result and approve.  
In order to reach this goal, the Executive Councils will have to choose and appoint competent persons (mandates and terms at the discretion of the appointing Council) who will offer permanent collaboration.
  - The appointments would automatically end with the elective Chapters.

- The persons may be confirmed (or changed, proven to be unsuitable) without time limit – since they can be dismissed anytime.

## B. SUFFICIENT AND CONSTANT FUNDING

We must implement systems that enable us

1. **to improve and optimize the funding through the contributions from our own Order** which are now our only financial resource and
2. **to obtain revenues in addition to the annual contributions** of National Fraternities.

There has not yet been the will or the time to make *courageous* and *creative* reflections to explore other ways. Possible ideas on which we could discuss:

### 1. DIRECT FUNDING FROM THE BASE.

National Councils often do not pay all their dues for the reason that most of the time they simply DO NOT HAVE the money! They do not receive sufficient contributions, if any, from the lower levels and, often times, they do not even have precise criteria for the contributions from the lower levels.

Art. 30.3 of the G.C. specifically says that ... *the brothers and sisters* ought to<sup>11</sup> (*will*) *provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and the operations of the Fraternities at higher levels, both by their financial assistance and by their contributions in other areas as well.*

### **MONEY ALWAYS COMES FROM THE INDIVIDUAL BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE LOCAL FRATERNITIES!**

We must make an effort to establish a system where the brothers and the sisters contribute right from their own Local Fraternities, **in a differentiated manner**, in favour of the Fraternities of higher level, including the International Fraternity.

If funds are collected directly “**at the source**” and transmitted to the higher levels of their own countries, already “labeled” with their specific destination, the National Councils will no longer have the worry (and the inability) of finding the funds.

### 2. VARIABLE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION ON THE BASIS OF YEARLY PRESIDENCY (or Council) BUDGETS.

Percentage Quotas should be established for each National Fraternity on the basis of the present contribution (or other acceptable mechanism). Each Fraternity would be called to contribute its percentage quota of the annually approved budget.

If, e.g., a National fraternity must contribute 10% of the total budget and the approved budget by the Chapter is € 150,000, this Fraternity will have to pay € 15,000. And so on.

This method would allow the full completion of all the necessary budgeted activities.

With the *per capita* contribution method based on the number of professed members, the Presidency (or the Councils) will be limited to plan whatever projects and activities may fit into the expected revenue and will not be able to do what the Councils or the Fraternities would like to, or should, implement.

---

<sup>11</sup> To be faithful to the *typical edition*, it should be translated “will”.

**3. PUBLISHING ACTIVITY**, in more languages, for common texts of Formation, History, Spirituality and other fundamental themes for the life of the Order.

This activity would allow

- to **circulate the same texts** of formation, culture, history and spirituality **throughout the world**, guaranteeing a shared and homogeneous basic **formation** and
- to **obtain profits from the sales**.

Certainly, at the international level (or in large Fraternities) there would be a sufficient number of potential purchasers to undertake this activity because. At international level, even if we consider that a mere 10% of the world Secular Franciscans would purchase the books, we could have a potential 40.000 possible “clients”! We must learn to think global.

### **C. PLANNING, WORKING METHODS AND TIMINGS TO MATCH (and not exceed) THE ACTUAL HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES. PRIORITIZATION.**

- **Working agendas should never be overloaded**, especially if the topics are complex.
- **Do not aim at doing more than you can possibly do**
- **It is better to do few things well rather than try to do too much and do it badly.**
- **It is important to give priority to important things rather than to the supposedly urgent ones.**

It is very important to discuss in depth every item in the agenda making sure that all Council members are well informed to make responsible decisions.

The items to be discussed, and on which decisions have to be made, have to be carefully prepared well ahead of time by the presenter, providing all elements necessary for the assessment and all members **MUST** examine the issues **BEFORE** the meeting, except in cases of evident *force majeure*. It is better to wait a little longer and consider all the aspects of a matter rather than simply “get it over with”.

### **D. UNIFY THE LOGIC, NOMENCLATURE AND FUNCTIONS FOR EQUIVALENT STRUCTURES IN THE ORDER**

#### **THE BASIC STRUCTURES OF FRATERNITIES**

- The two Fraternities **canonically erected by the hierarchical Church** are the **Local Fraternity** and the **International Fraternity**.
- The **intermediate Fraternities**, Regional and National, are **canonically constituted** by the **respective higher-level Councils**, National and International.

The **Local Fraternity** is *unique* in nature.

It is the place where **all brothers and sisters concretely live** and where, **all participate in the life and fundamental decisions** of the Fraternity.

The **Fraternities of higher level** are the **union of the corresponding Local Fraternities**. Their Councils have the task (just like the CIOFS Presidency) of **connecting and coordinating, animating and guiding**, in the logic of the corresponding levels, without undue interferences in what Local Fraternities can do by themselves. In the structures of

the higher-level Fraternities **do not live all the brothers and sisters of that level but only those who have been elected in the corresponding Councils or Presidency.**

The mandatory functions contemplated for the Local Fraternities *may* be a model for the other structures but **not in a binding way.**

There are different logics presiding over the formation of the Councils and the election of their members. Above all, **the rationale of the structures is different.**

In the Local Fraternity ALL members actively participate in everything.

In the **connecting and coordinating Fraternities** (higher level) there should be, instead, a **representative mechanism and structure** and an **executive government organ.**

For the higher-level Fraternities it should be necessary to apply the **ANALOGY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL.**

In other words, in these intermediate Fraternities it is strongly advisable to apply criteria that distinguish between the two sets of functions: **representative** and **executive.**

The International Fraternity (the Order as a whole) has an organ, the **INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL**, in which sit, with absolutely **equal representation, the representatives** of ALL the Constituted National Fraternities. When this Council meets as a **General Chapter, it has the supreme legislative, deliberative and elective power** in the Order.

Within this organism there is a **Presidency (executive organ)**, which is an integral part of the International Council.

Regional and National Councils, **in analogy with the International Council**, should, therefore, consist of a *representative body* formed by all the representatives of the lower level. This *representative Council* will have within itself an *executive organ* (like the CIOFS Presidency), which has the task of *managing the Order* and of *practically implementing the Capitular decisions.*

The fact that an Executive Council<sup>12</sup> **is only optional**<sup>13</sup> at the **regional and national levels**, while it is **mandatory for the Order as a whole**, is evident.

There may be very small regional or national Fraternities for which a single Regional or National Council, having both representative and executive attributions, is sufficient, by electing a Minister and whatever other functions the Fraternity will consider necessary<sup>14</sup>.

In the large and numerous Fraternities, instead, the **National Councils** should always have a **representative organ** in which all the Regional Fraternities (or Local, if there aren't Regional fraternities) have an *equal representation* and, within these Councils, there will have to be an **Executive Council** (or national Presidency), formed by those who have been elected in the corresponding Chapters, having **executive functions** between Chapters.

The same would apply to the Regional Fraternities, *mutatis mutandis.*

It is not rare to hear that, due to a wrong interpretation of the General Constitutions, in some places the word *giunta* (in Italian), *junta* (in Spanish and Portuguese), *board* (in English) and *bureau* (in French) is understood as a reduced group of 2-3 persons chosen

---

<sup>12</sup> The "Executive Council" terminology is used in English, "Bureau" in French and; *giunta esecutiva* and *junta ejecutiva/executiva* in Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

<sup>13</sup> C.G. 62.1 e 66.1: .. **may** be set up an executive council, whose duties are determined by the Statutes.

<sup>14</sup> ... the regional council is constituted according to the provisions of the National Statutes and of its own regional Statutes, 62.1; ... the National Council is constituted according to the provisions of the National Statutes, 66.1

among those elected in the Chapters, which may take up the leadership, in fact depriving of authority and responsibility the other legitimate members of the "Executive Council".

Another reason why the adoption of these criteria would be essential is that where such structures (Representative Council and Executive Council) are not codified in the Statutes, the Fraternal and Pastoral Visits (regional and national) **cannot** be extended to include the lower level Fraternities but must stop at the individual members of Executive Council. In fact, the G.C. recite "to make fraternal visits to the regional (national) Councils"(67.2.f & 74.2.e), and in the majority of the countries, the Councils are identified *tout court* only with the members of Elected Councils (Executive), without contemplating the institution of a larger *representative* Council.

Therefore, the definition and the composition of the Councils is crucial in this sense.

#### **E. FULL VALORIZATION AND PREVAILING IMPORTANCE OF THE SPIRITUAL ASPECTS IN THE WORK OF THE SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS**

The assistants are members of the Councils, in their own right, in order to have **voice and weight** in the *decisions*, with particular reference to their specific role and not because they have to necessarily perform the same work of the *seculars*, to the detriment of their institutional functions of spiritual assistance, which must remain their absolute priority.

For example, the General Assistants are only 4 and we know well that they are overloaded with work. Therefore, they do not have to be **necessarily** included in every single office, commission, working group and sub-group etc., unless in case of matters that are more pertinent to their functions or that the seculars are not well-equipped or capable to deal with. They may always intervene in the discussions, contribute in decision-making, be informed about all projects and intervene at any time, if they so wish.

#### **F. ENFORCE THE MANDATORY OBLIGATIONS CONTAINED IN THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS.**

The lack of knowledge of the General Constitutions by most Secular Franciscans is one of the major reasons why a number of duties are not complied with or simply overlooked, to use a euphemism.

Just a macroscopic example of a duty never complied with:

- **Preparation of the annual report** to be sent to the higher-level Council, after it has been approved by the Fraternity Council (local). GC 51.2.b
- **Preparation of the annual report** to the National Council CG 63.2f (62.2g)
- **To discuss and approve the annual report to the CIOFS Presidency** CG 66.2h

To our knowledge only 2 or 3 National Fraternities do comply with this duty which is so clearly described in the General Constitutions. The situation with the lower level Fraternities is perhaps even worse.

-----

#### **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT A GENERAL CHAPTER DELIBERATES ON THESE MATTERS?**

Because a reflection on these matters and the decisions that will follow:

- **Must be completely shared by all, and must fully correspond to the reality of the**

**entire Order,**

- **Must be accepted and adopted individually and collectively by all in the whole Order, and**
- **Must be shared and approved by the supreme authority of the Order.**

Assisi, November 3, 2014