



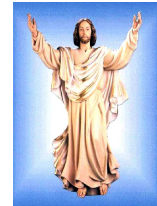
ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 4: "PROFESSION"
sheet 5

2. The Commitment of Profession
[II] Gospel Life in Secularity after the Manner of St Francis



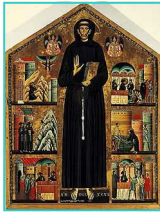
Profession in the OFS is marked by its necessary reference to St Francis. Few Orders in the Church are able to emphasise the centrality of their Founder to the extent it is possible for the members of the Franciscan Family. There are many reasons for this—some Orders do not identify with a specific Founder at all [eg Carmelites]; others are not founded as such by the name with which they identify [eg Augustinians]. The Servites have *five* 'Holy Founders'. But for the Franciscan, it is the extraordinary example of the life and calling of Francis that takes pride of place in our evangelical witness. We honour, revere, talk constantly about this most Christ-like of saints because we count ourselves so privileged to be partners with him in his unique place in the ongoing life of the Church. And every Franciscan knows that to talk about 'him' is to talk about 'Him'. As others are drawn through us to 'him' they are inexorably drawn to 'Him'. If Francis is always present on our lips it is because he is always present in our lives, and where the saints are, there Christ is to be found.



Hello—me again. Is Francis an 'icon' then?

In a kind of way he is. 'Icon', after all, is just the Greek word for 'image' - we could almost say 'mirror' - and in Francis' living of the gospel life we encounter Christ himself. There are many ways to 'incarnate' the Christian life—the Franciscan calling is just one of them. Not everyone is called by God to 'do it this way'.

The constant concern to underline the fact that Secular Franciscans intend to live the gospel *after the manner of St Francis* and by means of *this Rule* authenticated by the Church [Rule, 2; Constitutions 1. 3; 8.1], is by no means fortuitous. Francis, however, did not want us to 'end up with him' but with his Lord. For this reason the Ritual combines the *following of Christ* with the gospel life—because we observe the gospel in order to follow Christ. And this was the charismatic insight of Francis: for him, to *follow Christ* depends on the observance of the gospel. He came to know Christ through the gospel. The gospel is a *mediation* because it gives us the presence of Christ. And following the gospel meant following Christ's POVERTY, HUMILITY, PRECEPTS, DOCTRINE, WILL, SPIRIT—following in the footsteps of Christ [I Pet 2.21 'Christ...suffered...leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps']. For Francis, living the gospel life did not mean 'repeating the events of the Lord's earthly life' so much as structuring one's whole life on the pattern of [in the 'image' of, as a 'reflection' of] Jesus. As Christ 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' [Phil 2.7]. So Francis, and 'Franciscans', are those who serve, not those who are served [Mk 10.45], to the extent that, if anyone asks: 'Where can we find Christ?', Franciscans should be able to answer in all humility: 'Circumspice!' - 'Look around!'



Profession in the OFS commits a person to the study in the school of Christ, who is 'the book of Wisdom, written from within the heart of the Father, since he is the art of almighty God; it was written externally, when it became flesh'. [St Bonaventure]

'penance' [means 'conversion', never 'doing penance']. The origin of the Latin is the Greek 'metanoia' [a 'change of mind'], which in turn reflects the OT Hebrew 'shubah' [almost synonymous with a 'U turn'] - going back in the opposite direction; starting again; turning round. The concept of 'repentance' [metanoia] comes at the start of Jesus' mission: 'The time has come, the kingdom of God is at hand; REPENT, and believe the good news' [Mk 1.15], so the penitential dimension is at the heart of the gospel. Consequently, Secular Franciscans [in promising to live the gospel], commit themselves to live a penitential [repentance orientated] life.

The Secular Franciscans, like Francis, are called to imprint Christ on their hearts and be inwardly conformed to him; the vocation of the Secular Franciscan depends on the vocation of Francis.

And not to be tedious... 'Secularity'?



The Ritual specifically speaks of 'consecration that is lived in the world' as well as of 'the will to live in the world and for the world'. Further, the Rule [2] specifies the sphere in which the OFS does this by saying 'in their own secular state'. Secular state or secularity & world are two co-ordinates essential for understanding specific Secular Franciscan identity.

'Secularity' = in the world as human beings [usual meaning] but also

= assumption of one's native condition to make it a specific 'sign' [theological meaning] - at this level it is not just a fact of birth but indicates a free choice, in faith, by those intending to place their whole lives at the service of the kingdom of God.

'World' = likewise has a theological significance too. Remember what *Gaudium et Spes* had to say: the world is 'the whole human family, along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; that world which is the theatre of man's history, and the heir of his energies, his tragedies and his triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ, who was sacrificed and rose again to break the strangle-hold of personified evil, so that the world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfilment.' [GS, 2]

BEING & ACTION OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN TAKES PLACE IN THIS CONTEXT

'We love, because he first loved us' [John 4.19]

'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you... By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. [John 13.34f]