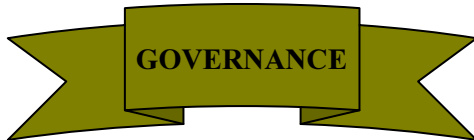




ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 5: "The Nature of the OFS"
sheet 5

5. Governance, Obedience, Assistance



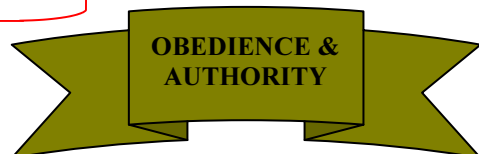
Though **for about 700 years** Secular Franciscans had a decentralised structure of government—fraternities existed 'of their own right', having a confederate relationship with the other fraternities [as in the monastic system]; **today OFS has a centralised structure of government.**

It is **Profession** which incorporates a person into the Order: 'Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment.' [Constitutions, 42.2] Yet we become members of the Order at the local level, and it is here that our evangelical commitment is first expressed: 'Profession is accepted by the minister of the local fraternity...in the name of the Church and of the SFO.' [Constitutions, 42.3] This perpetual state, begun by initial formation and sealed by profession, must continue to be nourished as the believer is nourished from the cradle to the grave [I Pet 2.2]: 'Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each and everyone and in the fulfilment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.' [Constitutions, 44.1] And, 'ongoing formation—...aims to assist brothers and sisters: in listening and meditating on the Word of God...in reflecting on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith and with the help of documents of the teaching Church...in discerning and deepening the Franciscan vocation by studying the writings of St Francis, St Clare and Franciscan authors.' [Constitutions, 44.3]



More than just a prayer group then!

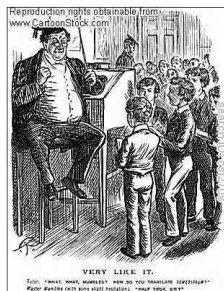
The nature of our centralised government resembles that of the Religious, but is not quite the same.



So we're an Order, but there's no obedience? Sounds good!



Not quite like that. The OFS has 'obedience' and it has 'authority' - but tailored, if you like, to the unique nature of our Order. For obedience, as understood by Religious, would be impossible and incompatible with a life which is totally secular and lay, with work and family commitments.



"OBEDIENCE"

Government of Religious—one based on **authority of the person who is elected to guide and serve, to whom one pledges obedience as part of the three Evangelical Counsels: poverty, chastity & obedience.** Secular Franciscans do not take these vows. Among us there is a Council with its Minister, and the Minister is obliged to do what the Council decides. Nevertheless, the Secular Franciscan lives in the spirit of the Evangelical Counsel of obedience, which is obedience to the Gospel, to the Church, and one's conscience—'uniting themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus...' [Rule, 10]. In a way, our 'Franciscan obedience' is encapsulated rather well in St Paul's exhortation: 'outdo one another in showing honour' [Rom 12.10].

"AUTHORITY"



The nature of authority of the Order should be understood always according to the spirit of two verbs—to animate; to guide. The rule of **subsidiarity** [doing everything at the lowest possible level] is crucial.

- local fraternity
- regional
- national
- international

The fraternities should have a broad capacity for self-determination to do what they are competent to do without interference from higher levels—which exist primarily to offer service, guidance, the guarantee of legality, linking, co-ordinating etc. And we must never forget that no matter how high we rise we are following in the steps of Francis who trod in the steps of Christ who 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant'. [Phil 2.7]

ASSISTANCE



We must remember, that **it is the Third Order that has obtained the privilege from the Apostolic See** of being under the jurisdiction of the First Order, on account of their spiritual good.

But this relationship is carefully defined:

- of equality, complementarity, intimate & reciprocal life-giving communion, mutual assistance & collaboration to carry out the mission entrusted to St Francis
- of necessity regarding spiritual & pastoral assistance, from our religious brothers, rather than from bishops, to ensure solidarity in the Franciscan mission
- of obedience & safeguard in the case of vigilance on behalf of the Church, to ensure fidelity to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church, union with the Franciscan Family