



Publication Name  
**PROPOSITUM**  
Vol. 6 - No. 2 - December

Period  
December

Year  
2002

Volume  
6

Number  
2

---

## FRANCISCANUM VITAE PROPOSITUM

( Brief of approbation of the up-dated TOR Rule by Pope John Paul II.

8th December 1982)

---

### FRANCISCAN MYSTICISM

#### "Love the Lord"

(Prologue of the TOR Rule)

#### List of Abbreviations

Adm The Admonitions

1LtF The First Letter to the Faithful

2LtF The Second Letter to the Faithful

LtOrd A Letter to the Entire Order

ExhP Exhortation to the Praise of God

ER Earlier Rule

LR Later Rule

SalBVM A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

SalV A Salutation of Virtues

Test Testament

1C The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano

---

## FOREWORD

In the name of the Lord!

On the 8th December we will remember with gratitude and joy, an important and decisive event in the history of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis.

Twenty years ago - on 8th December 1882 - Pope John Paul II gave his approval to our up-dated Rule with the Brief *Franciscanum Vitae Propositum* - the project of Franciscan life.

In a remarkable letter of 15th August 2002, Sister Carola Thomann, President of the IFC-TOR spoke of this event in an enthusiastic and detailed manner.

I share her enthusiasm, too, given that I had the great privilege of being a member of the international working group which prepared the Rule and Form of Life.

I was present at the General Assembly from 1st to 10th March 1982 and saw how, thanks to a good working method, the Superiors General from all over the world had arrived at accepting this Rule of Life.

"In the name of the Lord". This is how the original text began introducing the Rule itself.

"In the name of the Lord!"... Words of Saint Francis to his disciples, to those who chose the life of penance.

"In the name of the Lord!" Words of Saint Francis to us, the brothers and sisters of Penance.

Let us listen to these words, receive them, carry them and make them fruitful, because then the "Spirit of the Lord" will rest on us and will make his dwelling place within us.

Let us read and meditate on the Prologue of the Letter to the Faithful 1:1: Words of Saint Francis to us, the brothers and sisters of Penance, words laden with meaning and consequences.

Francis invites us to follow the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by beginning to do penance, allowing ourselves to be guided by the "Spirit of the Lord" (spiritual life) in order to find the divine life.

*Sr. Marianne Jungbluth*

*Franciscan of the Holy Family*

*Würzburg, November 2002*

---

## FRANCISCAN MYSTICISM

"Love the Lord"

(Prologue: TOR Rule)

### 1. "The Lord gave me"

The most important document which gives us information about the spiritual journey of Saint Francis is his Testament. He describes there - just before his death - the most important events of his life and briefly sums up the evolution and objectives of his Order. In the first sentence, he confesses that God took the initiative: "The Lord inspired me, Brother Francis, to embark upon a life of penance". Like a refrain, we find this confession above all in the first half of the Testament: "The Lord inspired me ..." (Test 1, 2, 4, 6, 14, 23, 39).

Francis reviewed his life and recognised God leading him. Simple verbs such as "go", "lead" and above all "reveal" show in what measure Francis describes his journey with words which reflect the experience of the spirit. He does not attribute his works to himself, but to the grace of God the "Most High who is the only source of every good" (Adm 8).

Francis acts as a 'Poverello', a little poor one who ceaselessly warns not to glorify oneself except in our infirmities (Adm 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 28): the first part of Francis' Testament is strictly speaking a thanksgiving for all that the Lord has done for him and through him as well as for the Brothers "that the Lord gave him" (Test 14).

## 2. " By divine inspiration "

Francis is persuaded that the life of a friar minor presupposes a call. Concerning the reception of the friars, he says: "If anyone is inspired by God to live our life and comes to our brothers, they should welcome him"(ER, 2 :1). The charism, the divine gift, is linked with one's will. These two elements are necessary conditions for a new life. From the second step, it is one's own will and the work of the Spirit that play a part, for the candidate must "if he is willing and able to do so in conscience, sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor". (...) However, "if anyone who seeks admission to the Order cannot dispose of his property without hindrance, although he is spiritually minded to do so, he should leave it all behind him and that is enough" (ER, 2: 4-11). On entering the community, inspiration is an important factor. The decision to join the friars must not be guided by selfish interest but must be born of spiritual motivation.

It is the same for those "who are inspired by God to work as missionaries among the Saracens and other unbelievers" (ER 16: 1). The witness of a missionary presupposes the individual call; ministers should examine, but not hesitate to give their permission when they recognise that the candidate is capable (ER 16: 3-4; LR 12:2).

Francis understood his own conversion and departure from the world (Test 1-3) as God's work. It is thus that he also considered the Order of the Poor Sisters (Poor Clares). Already in 1212-1213, he wrote to Clare and her sisters: "Because it was God who inspired you to become daughters and handmaids of the most high supreme King and Father of heaven and to espouse yourselves to the Holy Spirit, (...) I desire and promise you personally (...) the same loving care (...) and special solicitude for you" (Form of Life 1)

Francis not only makes this deep theological declaration that the Poor Sisters are spouses of the Holy Spirit; he refers their whole life to divine inspiration. It is a charism, a spiritual gift. He makes this same declaration 23 years later by the words: "*Audite, poverelle* ... Listen little poor ones called by the Lord (Exh 1).

Francis' conviction in God leading him finds an echo in Clare. In her Rule and her Letters, she too speaks of divine inspiration.

In the case of Francis and his companions, missionaries, as well as in the case of Clare and her sisters, it is a matter of "calls from the Holy Spirit". This expression must be deepened in a Franciscan perspective and brought to its accomplishment in life.

### 3. The experience of meekness in the Spirit

God's intervention does not suppress the human being's action. On the contrary, as much as Francis insists, in his Testament, on divine guidance, he also shows himself to be active: he goes out and meets the poor. Divine inspiration is like a fire that burns in him and urges him forward: outside Assisi, his merchant career is assured. The idea which fascinates him urges him on to unbelievable works. He does not remain fascinated; he looks after the lepers. The measure in which the action of the Spirit takes hold of his body and soul is manifested in the fact that Francis sees his conversion in an almost tasty manner. "When I had once become acquainted with them, what had previously nauseated me became a source of spiritual and physical consolation for me" (Test 3).

The passage from bitterness to sweetness when he embraced the disgusting lepers shows the real experience of the presence of the Spirit which bears fruit: freedom, joy, love, meekness (Ga 5:13-23). Francis often had this experience of the Spirit. In those circumstances he sang in French: for example, after his father disinherited him publicly, when he crossed the forest and explained to the robbers: "I am the herald of the great King" (1C 167). "Dolcezza" = sweetness on the troubadours' tongue - is for Francis the sign of the event of a new life created by God, a sign of rebirth in the Holy Spirit. In his Letter to the Faithful, he explains this in a more detailed manner using the opposition 'bitter-sweet'. As for all those who do not live in penance (...), they are blind for they have not seen the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ. They do not have spiritual wisdom, for they have not in them the Son of God who is the wisdom of the Father (...) See, then, you who are blind, deceived by your enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil, our fallen nature loves to commit sin and hates to serve God" (2LTF 53.66-69).

### 4. "The spirit of the flesh - the spirit of the Lord"

As in his letter to the Faithful, Francis frequently opposes the wisdom of the Spirit and the wisdom of the flesh and the world (SalVir 9:10; EdRest 5; Adm 27:1; cf 1Co 2: 6-16). For him - as for Saint Paul - the flesh, *sarx* (Rm 8), is an expression which describes the mortality of humans, their weakness, their feelings opposed to God that are in them, their selfishness and tendency to evil. That is why he could say: "wretched and pitiable as we are, ungrateful and evil, rotten through and through" (ER, 23:8).

The spirit and the spiritual - that Saint Paul calls *pneuma* - is on the contrary what comes from God and leads to God. The spirit of the Lord dwells in the "spiritual" person; God reigns in him/her; the tendencies of the flesh which mask his resemblance to God (Adm 5:1) are pushed away. The spirit of the Lord takes the place of the "I". Francis gives numerous examples to recognise the spiritual person. "We can be sure that a man is a true religious and has the spirit of God if his lower nature does not give way to pride when God accomplishes some good through him, and if he seems all the more worthless and inferior to others in his own eyes" (Adm 12).

To possess the spirit of the Lord, "it is not for us to be wise and calculating in the world's fashion; we should be useless, lowly and pure" (LTF 45-46). We open ourselves more to the spirit of the Lord by obedience, above all to divine inspirations, then to others and to the whole of creation. "Holy Obedience puts to shame all natural and selfish desires. It mortifies our lower nature and makes it obey the spirit and our fellow men. Obedience subjects a man to everyone on earth, and not only to men, but to all the beasts as well and to the wild animals, so that they can do what they like with him, as far as God allows them" (SalV 14-18). Man must learn to distance himself from himself becoming available and adjustable to the Spirit to discover the will of God in everything. This will is manifested also by creatures not gifted with reason and who act according to the limits that God has given them. That is why even torment and suffering that man can endure from the part of animals must be endured in obedience.

In ER 17: 9-16, Francis compares the spirit of the flesh and the spirit of the Lord in detail. The spirit of the flesh is known by pride and the vain desire to be glorified by the wisdom of this world, by "the wisdom of the flesh" (Rm 8:6), by the desire to speak much and do nothing, by exterior piety and hypocrisy. On the other hand, the spirit of the Lord is manifested through humility, patience and "peace of mind" (LR 17:15).

For Francis, the "flesh" is for the greater part of the time a symbolic word to describe attitudes. He takes the example of Jesus (Mk 7: 21-23) and Paul (Rm 8:6); 1Co 2: 6-16). He interiorises, he spiritualises the understanding of sin, situating it in the spirit of man, in the impure heart, in the selfish and sinful will (cf also ER 22: 5-8). In his admonitions, he draws attention to sins of thought in people, such as obstinacy, attachment to a function, pride, boasting, jealousy, vengeance, calumny, anger (Adm 2-11). This corresponds to what Celano says of Francis: "He first attacked evil in the tendencies of the spirit: (*vita spiritualia*), then in that of the body"(1C 51).

## **5. "Desire above all the spirit of the Lord and his holy operation"**

In almost all his writings, Francis warns against "the spirit of the flesh". We can understand then why he often demands of the brothers "to consider that they must above all else, desire to have the spirit of God at work within them (LR 10:8). With regard to ER 17: 9-16) he describes the negative attitudes more briefly in LR 10: 7-12 and explains the positive attitudes in a more detailed manner. The catalogue of sins which the brothers must be on guard against, is followed by the catalogue of virtues: prayer, patience, love of one's enemies, constancy. These virtues are the fruits of the spirit (cf Ga 5:22-26). The virtues reveal the working of the spirit of the Lord in persons.

Because of their divine origin, Francis calls all the virtues "holy"; they all come from the Lord (SaIV 4); they are "by the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, poured into the hearts of the faithful" (SaBVM 6). As such, they are the attitudes of God himself. "You are mercy, patience, meekness, our hope, our faith, our love"(PrsG).

Apart from LR 10:8, the writings speak four times more about the "holy working". For example, in the Letter to all the Faithful, "We give him birth by doing good which should be an example for others. (1LtF 1:1; 2LtF 53). Those who receive this letter "receive these words of our Lord Jesus Christ in a spirit of humility and love, by persevering and doing good to the last, because they are spirit and life ( 1 LtF 2: 19, 21; cf Jn 6:64).

Now we can understand why Saint Francis believed that everything good depended on God and was inspired by him. The words of Jesus Christ and Francis' own words are filled with a good odour (cf 2Co 2: 14-16; Ep 5:2), for - whispered, inspired by God - they give spirit and life; that is why they must be received in love more than simply human acts under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Concerning his Testament, Francis wishes that his words be "understood plainly and simply, and lived by doing good to the last" (Test 39). Understanding alone does not suffice, it must lead to action which is closely linked with works inspired by the spirit of the Lord. Our actions must be led by God and accomplished by his strength till the end. In our day, action means activity, strength, performance, perseverance, authority which are essentially masculine traits. Following the line of Saint Luke, Francis also relates works to Mary; it is a matter of opening oneself to the Spirit and obtaining from Him what we have to transmit to the world.

## **6. "The spirit of the Lord lives in his faithful"**

For Francis, the protagonist is not man but God. The Lord guided him, gave him brothers and revealed life according to the Gospel. The Friars Minor in general, missionaries in particular, Clare and her sisters, follow the "divine inspiration". For unbelievers to believe and for Christians to be converted, they need the light and grace of the Holy Spirit (SaIV 6).

Nevertheless, we are "worthless and wretched" (LR 23:8). Francis then prays: "Grant us, in your mercy, (...) to always want what pleases you so that we may be able to follow in the footsteps of your Son, and by your grace alone we may make our way to you, Most High, (...) (LtOrd 50-52). According to Francis'

understanding, man can do no good by himself; in his misery, he owes everything to the Creator. He who attributes to himself the capacity to do good or "who envies his brother the good God says or does through him"(Adm 8:3) commits a sin against the Holy Spirit.

This vision of man recalls the Lutheran theory of grace ("by grace alone") when Francis says with regard to the Eucharist: "And so it is really the Spirit of God who dwells in his faithful who receive the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord. Anyone who does not have this Spirit and presumes to receive him *eats and drinks judgement to himself* (1Co 11:29) (Adm 1: 12-13). The foundation of this phrase which at first sight is difficult to seize, is found further up in the admonition: : God is spirit (Jn 4:24) (...) Because God is a spirit he can be seen only in spirit; it is the spirit that gives life ; the flesh profits nothing (Jn 6:64) (Adm 1:5-6). The disciples who saw Jesus as man saw also and believed according to the spirit and the divinity that these are truly the most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf Adm 1:9). The divine corresponds to the divine. Since God is spirit, it is the domain of the spirit that corresponds to him. He must be seen with the eyes of the spirit (Adm 1:20), with the eyes of the spirit of the Lord who dwells in his faithful (cf Adm 1:20).

Who is the Lord whose spirit dwells in the faithful? One can immediately reply: the Holy Spirit. Now, Admonition 1 uses the word "Lord"(*dominus*) to designate the historical Jesus who proclaims the Gospel (vs. 1, 3, 8, 22), or the Eucharistic Christ (vs. 9, 12, 22). We must therefore complete the "spirit of the Lord" (verse 12) by the "spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ". Francis refers here to John and Paul: in his farewell discourse, Jesus speaks of the "spirit of truth that I will send from the Father" (Jn 15: 26); cf 16, 17: 13-14; 1Jn 3:24). Paul is clearer still: "Your interests, however, are not in the unspiritual but in the spiritual, since the Spirit of God has made His home in you. In fact, unless you possessed the spirit of Christ you would not belong to him"(Rm 8:9). If we live in the spirit of Christ, the spirit of God dwells in us. "Happy and blessed are those who bring forth fruits worthy of penance. The spirit of glory, the spirit of God will rest on them"(1P 4:14; cf LtF 1:6).

When Francis speaks of the spirit of the Lord he is thinking above all of Jesus' condition: his humility, his obedience to the will of the Father, his love for his enemies and his cross. These are also the characteristics of the true disciples of Christ, the servants of God. As several admonitions indicate, the servant of God who possesses the spirit of the Lord, does not boast before God and men; he submits, loves his enemies, perseveres in persecution and sickness and, "because of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, preserves peace of body and mind" (Adm 15:2; cf Adm 2-9; 11; 13-15; 19; 22-25).

## **7. "Serve one another mutually in the love of the Spirit"**

"The spirit of the Lord" illustrates above all Christ's condition and his lasting presence among those who follow him. Having recognised this, we understand better the texts of the ER. Chapter 5 treats of relationships between the brothers. According to Mt 20: 25-26 - *anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant* - we read in ER 5: 13-14 "Far from doing or speaking evil to one another, the friars should be glad to serve and obey one another in a spirit of charity". "Spirit of charity" would be easier to understand than "charity of spirit". It is not a question of our love for the Holy Spirit, but God's love for us, incarnated in his Son, *poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit* (Rm 5:5). "Charity of spirit" signifies: the love that Jesus has shown us, his spirit that dwells and acts when people follow his commandments. Referring to Ga 5:13, Francis describes the service and obedience to which the friars are devoted, by charity and the spirit of Jesus.

That Francis thinks here of the example of Christ is confirmed by the following sentence: This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rule 1221, 5:15). It is evident that the passage from "the charity of the spirit of Jesus Christ" to the "Holy Spirit" is not far (cf Rm 5:5; 15:30). One can then say: out of the charity of the Holy Spirit who dwelt and acted in Christ and now dwells and acts in his faithful, the brothers must serve and obey one another. "No matter where they are and or in whatever situation they find themselves, should, like spiritually minded men, diligently show reverence and honour to one another" (ER 7:15). According to what has just been said, This strange order means that the brothers must meet, not just in a human way but in a spiritual manner, in the spirit of Christ. Wherever the friars

meet, it is the divine spirit that brings them together. As for the ministers, Francis wishes "they must visit them often, giving them encouragement and spiritual advice"(ER 4:2). The Poor Sisters also wish to live together in the unity of the spirit and in the promise of highest poverty (cf Prologue of Clare's Rule).

Attitudes and behaviour are dictated by the spirit of the Lord. It is he who brings the community together and keeps it together. There is no deeper reality for man than the spirit of God. In this awareness, Francis wanted to introduce this directive in his Rule: the highest minister of the Order must be the Holy Spirit (2C 193).

## 8. "The letter kills, the spirit gives life"

Life in the spirit of Christ does not allow itself to be enclosed within definite forms. It is on this experience that the thrust of life cuts through the whole history of the Order. The friars must "walk spiritually (*spiritualiter*) and not carnally (*carnaliter*)" (ER 5:4-5; 16:5). They must have the same attitude as Christ: follow the Lord rather than one's own yearnings. It is in this sense that Hugues de Digne, in his Explanation of the Rule, keeps to an interpretation that is probably original. In chapter 6 of the unconfirmed Rule we find the expression "*spiritualiter*": "The friars who cannot observe the Rule, no matter where they are, must have recourse to their minister" (cf ER 6:1). While certain groups in the Order later limited themselves to the letter of the Rule, we find here the old concept of saying that the Gospel and the Rule which flows from it are to be followed spiritually, that is to say in the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Rule is not life but the opposite is true - life and the spirit emanating from Christ, his words offering spirit and life constitute the Rule and mark the experiences and fundamental inspirations of the first Franciscans.

"Spirit" is the key word to understand and explain the form of Franciscan life. Inspired by the spirit of the Lord, Francis aspired to the evangelical life open to the Spirit and filled by him. As in John, there is a close relationship here between the literal meaning and the spiritual meaning of the text. The true meaning of the biblical letters comes from the Spirit: it is he who give life to the letter. Therefore, Francis opposes an unspiritual exegesis of the Gospel. In Adm 7, he quotes Paul: "The letter kills but the spirit gives life" (2Co 3:6). He adds a deep, precise and universal counsel: it is not a matter of knowing the words (of the Gospel) and explaining them to others in order to boast about it, but "to follow the spirit of the divine letter"; knowledge has no personal merit but comes from God - it must result in action. Exegesis must not be aimed at increasing one's knowledge, but at leading to action and prayer. God will be more satisfied if we follow the Scriptures instead of limiting ourselves to reading them, says Francis in offering the first copy of the New Testament to the Order as a gift (2C 91; cf 2C 67).

## 9. "Spouses of the Holy Spirit" like Mary

In the Marian antiphon of the Office of the Passion, the prayer that is obligatory before and at the end of all the Hours, Francis greets the Mother of God: "Holy Virgin Mary, among all the women of the world there is none like you; you are the daughter and handmaid of the most High King and Father of heaven; you are the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ; you are the spouse of the Holy Spirit". Francis does not address Mary in an isolated manner, but in relation to the three divine Persons. She is what she is because she was chosen by God. Her title "*sponsa Spiritus Sancti*"(fiancée, spouse of the Holy Spirit) is not found in any other document of the time of Francis. He could therefore, have created it himself.

More important still is the fact that the mystic of Assisi did not reserve this title to Mary but extended it to the Poor Sisters and to all the faithful. He tells the sisters that they "have been made daughters and servants of the most high and sovereign King, the Father of heaven", and that they are "spouses" of the Holy Spirit" (Form of Life 1).

In the same way, the description of the life of penance opens with the beatitude: "Oh! How blessed are they who do such things On all those who do this and endure to the last, the Spirit of God will rest; He will make his dwelling in them and there he will stay and they will be children of your Father in heaven, whose work they do. It is they who are the brides, the brothers and the mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. A person is his bride when his faithful soul is united with Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit; we are his brothers when we do the will of his Father who is in heaven and we are mothers to him when we enthrone him in our hearts and souls by love with a pure and sincere conscience, and give him birth by doing good. This, too, should be an example to others"(LtF 1: 5-10).

In this nutshell of Franciscan mysticism which is prolonged in the two letters, in a song of jubilation and priestly prayer (Jn 17), the charismatic aspect of the experience of God celebrates its great triumph. Francis' joy overflows at the thought that God dwells in humans. According to him, those who love God and do works worthy of penance (cf LtF) grow in the true vocation of man: image of God (Gn 1:26), dwelling of the Father and the Son (Jn 14:23), temple of the Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19). In an astonishing way, Francis draws his vital energy from the mystery of the Trinity who dwells in each person. For him it is not only an impenetrable article of faith, but something personal which unites each Christian with God and makes them the family of God. At the same time that he insists on this dignity of Christians, Francis also insists on action. He sees the gifts and its demands. By faith and baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit and are incorporated in Christ (Ltf 51). We are his brothers if we do the will of the Father as he did; we are his mothers if we carry him in us, like Mary and generate him in leading a Christian life (LtF 52-53). It is thus that mission, contemplation, sending is born of mysticism.

The spirit that is open and obedient to the spirit of the Lord led Francis on the road to Christ and made him conform to Christ and created a unity with God in three Persons who fill him with joy. The Poor Man of Assisi is a charismatic in the true sense of the word. All have a share in his spirit who take to heart his exhortation: We should make a dwelling place within ourselves where he can stay, he who is the Lord God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (ER 22:27).

Fr. Leonhard Lehmann OFMCap., Rome

---

## Reference

This article is an extract from booklet 16 of

*Fernkurs Franziskanische Spiritualität* (Correspondence Course of Franciscan Spirituality) edited by INFAG - Interfranziskanische Arbeitsgemeinschaft

(Waldbreitbach, 1983).

Copyright given at the office of INFAG at Warzburg RFA,

on 21st October 2002 by the President, Sister Mathilde Haßenkamp.

---

## Exercise

### 1. Personal reflection

Think of your own story, the story of your life. In which situations could you say: The Lord has given me, the Lord has led me, the Lord has ...



## 2. Personal and group reflection

- Do an integrated reading of the Rule
  - Look for fundamental values in each chapter.
-