**SANYASA Journal of Consecrated Life**
A biannual published by Sanyasa: Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore, in view fostering theological reflection on the life and mission of consecrated life in all its aspects, and in its essential relationship with other forms of Christian life in the Church, with specific reference to the Indian and Asian Reality.

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SANYASA
Institute of Consecrated Life
Carmelaram, Bengaluru

Celebrates
the Year of the Consecrated Life (2015)

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“Where there are religious, there is joy” – Pope Francis

Let us Respond to the Exhortation of Pope Francis to Wake up the
World with the Joy of the Gospel

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EDITORIAL

Things that are so familiar are often taken for granted. The religious life that we live is one of such realities. The only significant learning for many religious about consecrated life happens in the novitiate, at a time, when many of us are very young. During the rest of the period of formation, when we are growing up and our experiences get expanded, we learnt almost about everything, except a systematic learning about religious life, our fundamental vocation. Even in the curriculum of theological formation of religious priests, rarely there will be a course on theology of religious life. History, charism, vocation, consecration, evangelical counsels, community life, mission proper to the consecrated etc., are all realities that call for re-visioning and re-commitment and yet, often they remain taken for granted and, therefore, un-reflected. Besides, there are also the increasing clericalization of religious life and lack of awareness of the distinctiveness of vocations to priesthood and religious life, adding to the confusion. The popular perception that prevails in the Church is that priests form the male and sisters form the female branches of the same vocation.

In such a context, the call of the Holy Father Francis to celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life is is an opportune moment. The Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis, written on November 21, 2014, the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to all consecrated people in order to initiate them into this Year of Consecrated Life, clearly brings out the aims, expectations and horizons of this special year. We are asked to pause, look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope so as to re-discover and live the beauty and meaning of our call to consecrated life. Stating the aims of this year, Pope Francis reiterates what Saint John Paul II had written in Vita Consecrata: “You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things” (No. 110).

Pope Francis is asking us, during course of this year, to reflect on our origins and history, in order to “thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work” (LG, 12). We must also be open to tell our stories, because to “tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts.” We must open up homes, chapels, ministries in an “exchange
of experiences on the life of prayer, on ways of deepening communion... on supporting persecuted Christians, and welcoming and assisting those seeking a deeper spiritual life or requiring moral or material support... No one can feel excused from seriously examining his or her presence in the Church’s life and from responding to the new demands constantly being made on us, to the cry of the poor.”

This issue of the Journal is intended to assist the readers in this regard. As the first article, we place the Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father, addressed to all consecrated persons, to initiate us well into the Year of consecrated life.

Next comes an article by George Panthalany. During the course of religious formation, there are some special moments or distinctive stages that we often take for granted; we think we know them. Initiation, novitiate and profession are such moments. With his biblical expertise, Panthalany, shows that they are not just hangovers from the olden times and goes on to provide us with a wider biblical and theological horizon within which we are able to understand the underlying formational dynamics, which he calls, “ritual elements and ritual processes” associated with initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life. It is simply that the ultimate truth can be experienced and expressed only by means of images and symbols of imagination. Leading us through an in-depth reading of these symbolic elements and ritual processes that Jesus himself used to celebrate and experience socio-religious ‘passages’ in his own life and to effect status passages in people as part of his ministry, the author takes us through an inside view of the interior movements of the spirit of God working through the formation process and agents of formation in initiation, novitiate and profession. A real resource to the formators and formees!

In the article that follows, Felix Podimattam, explores the theme of spirituality, especially in its relationship to priests and religious. He defines it as the art of living wisely and responsibly our Christian vocation in our personal and concrete setting. Taking a brief historic overview, he delves into the development of Christian spirituality, the diversity of its forms because of the need for inculturation of the Gospel stressed since Vatican II and the qualities needed to live authentically in the midst of such increased pluralism. He further details the spirituality of the priests, expressed through their overall life style and ministry, of the religious as professional mediators between God and His people, nurtured through personal and communitarian prayer and of the secular institutes in their
call to live their consecration in the midst of their secular engagements in the world.

We all know that the role of the superior in religious communities is going through a time of transition. Joseph Rovira, with his scholarly article, comes to our rescue at this critical time of transition; from the time when the superiors were all in all, we have passed into another time when they suffer from a loss of confidence and doubt whether there is anything for them to do at all. They are often faced with real indifference, prejudice and suspicion. Are superiors really obstacles or help? Choosing the word moderator rather than the more usual one of superior, Rovira looks at the moderator’s role in the religious community and re-visions it in a way that is meaningful, relevant and in tune with the wisdom of the Gospel and the ecclesial traditions. Beginning with a clarification of the meaning of authority and obedience in religious/consecrated Life and he helps us rediscover the role of the moderator by looking at the various interpretations and the forms of authority which appeared throughout the history of religious life. Elucidating the role in its dual aspects, he details, in this article, the first one, namely, the facilitation of the common search for God’s will.

Reflecting on leadership in consecrated life, Martin George, takes us to the world of the Pharisees and the leadership exercised by them in the Jewish tradition. With his biblical scholarship, he re-discovers their role with the intention of drawing lessons for consecrated life both from the achievements and failures of the Pharisees as religious leaders. Analysing the various sources of information quite critically, the author takes us through their origin, development, identity, internal organization and traits of their religious leadership, and brings out the convergences and divergences in the areas, focussed on by the Jesus movement and that of the Pharisees. The aim of the author in all this is to help consecrated men and women learn vital lessons for their leadership roles both in the Church and the contemporary society at large.

The central theme of Jesus’ teachings is God’s Kingdom and its coming. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus focused his attention primarily on his commitment to the Kingdom and has entrusted the church with this missionary mandate. Religious participate in the very mission of the Church by living out their various and multiple charisms. In doing so, they are affected by various challenges proper to our times. To help them respond to these challenges, S. Devadoss, takes up the commission of Jesus to the seventy (Lk 10: 1-12) and
finds that those exhortations in the commission are of powerful motivation and constant inspiration for a new paradigm of mission for consecrated persons. Through a meditative reading of this commissioning narrative of Jesus and analysing several principles which are contained in this, the author brings out their practical implications, challenges and motivates the contemporary religious men and women to carry out their mission authentically and effectively.

One might wonder about the relevance of an article by Jose Maria Vigil on the crisis of religious life in Europe in this Indian journal of consecrated life. The subtitle of the article should clarify the doubt. For all those interested in consecrated life, the events occurring in Europe at the beginning of the 21st Century in the area of consecrated life are worthy of attentive consideration. Though this article, focuses primarily on religious life, especially as it exists in Spain, it deals with the larger problem that affects Christianity as a whole and religion in general. The lived reality of Europe, according to the author, can, in the future, become the reality of other continents and the present experience of the religious will, in the future, be the experience of religious life in this part of the world. Many religious congregations that are present in our country have their original foundations in Europe. In the midst of re-organizations that are happening within and among them, the conclusions that the author draws can be immensely helpful.

What follows are two book reviews, prepared by Joni Rajan, SG and Thomas P.C., SDB, two of our Diploma students at the Institute.

As the Holy Father has announced, the year of consecrated Life begins on 30 November 2014, the First Sunday of Advent, and concludes with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on 2 February 2016. As we are already into this year, beginning with the season of Advent and Christmas, may we be guided by the spirit of Jesus, the Star of Bethlehem. Happy Christmas to all!

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF
(Chief Editor)
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Consecrated Life,

I am writing to you as the Successor of Peter, to whom the Lord entrusted the task of confirming his brothers and sisters in faith (cf. Lk 22:32). But I am also writing to you as a brother who, like yourselves, is consecrated to God.

Together let us thank the Father, who called us to follow Jesus by fully embracing the Gospel and serving the Church, and poured into our hearts the Holy Spirit, the source of our joy and our witness to God’s love and mercy before the world.

In response to requests from many of you and from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, I decided to proclaim a Year of Consecrated Life on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, which speaks of religious in its sixth chapter, and of the Decree Perfectae Caritatis on the renewal of religious life. The Year will begin on 30 November 2014, the First Sunday of Advent, and conclude with the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple on 2 February 2016.

After consultation with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life, I have chosen as the aims of this Year the same ones which Saint John Paul II proposed to the whole Church at the beginning of the third millennium, reiterating, in a certain sense, what he had earlier written in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata: “You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things” (No. 110).

I. AIMS OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

1. The first of these aims is to look to the past with gratitude. All our Institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins we see the hand of God
who, in his Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the Gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the Church. This initial experience then matured and developed, engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts, and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiatives and expressions of apostolic charity. Like the seed which becomes a tree, each Institute grew and stretched out its branches.

During this Year, it would be appropriate for each charismatic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12).

Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts.

In a particular way we give thanks to God for these fifty years which followed the Second Vatican Council. The Council represented a “breath” of the Holy Spirit upon the whole Church. In consequence, consecrated life undertook a fruitful journey of renewal which, for all its lights and shadows, has been a time of grace, marked by the presence of the Spirit.

May this Year of Consecrated Life also be an occasion for confessing humbly, with immense confidence in the God who is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), our own weakness and, in it, to experience the Lord’s merciful love. May this Year likewise be an occasion for bearing vigorous and joyful witness before the world to the holiness and vitality present in so many of those called to follow Jesus in the consecrated life.

2. This Year also calls us to live the present with passion. Grateful remembrance of the past leads us, as we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying
to the Church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our
congregated life.

From the beginnings of monasticism to the “new communities” of our own
time, every form of consecrated life has been born of the Spirit’s call to follow
Jesus as the Gospel teaches (cf. Perfectae Caritatis, 2). For the various founders
and foundresses, the Gospel was the absolute rule, whereas every other rule was
meant merely to be an expression of the Gospel and a means of living the Gospel
to the full. For them, the ideal was Christ; they sought to be interiorly united to
him and thus to be able to say with Saint Paul: “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil
1:21). Their vows were intended as a concrete expression of this passionate love.

The question we have to ask ourselves during this Year is if and how we
too are open to being challenged by the Gospel; whether the Gospel is truly
the “manual” for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make. The
Gospel is demanding: it demands to be lived radically and sincerely. It is not
enough to read it (even though the reading and study of Scripture is essential),
nor is it enough to meditate on it (which we do joyfully each day). Jesus asks us
to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives.

Once again, we have to ask ourselves: Is Jesus really our first and only love,
as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we
be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path.
For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will
be able to love because we have his own heart.

Our founders and foundresses shared in Jesus’ own compassion when
he saw the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. Like Jesus, who
compassionately spoke his gracious word, healed the sick, gave bread to the
hungry and offered his own life in sacrifice, so our founders and foundresses
sought in different ways to be the service of all those to whom the Spirit sent
them. They did so by their prayers of intercession, their preaching of the Gospel,
their works of catechesis, education, their service to the poor and the infirm…
The creativity of charity is boundless; it is able to find countless new ways of
bringing the newness of the Gospel to every culture and every corner of society.

The Year of Consecrated Life challenges us to examine our fidelity to the
mission entrusted to us. Are our ministries, our works and our presence consonant
with what the Spirit asked of our founders and foundresses? Are they suitable
for carrying out today, in society and the Church, those same ministries and
works? Do we have the same passion for our people, are we close to them to the

Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis

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point of sharing in their joys and sorrows, thus truly understanding their needs and helping to respond to them? “The same generosity and self-sacrifice which guided your founders – Saint John Paul II once said – must now inspire you, their spiritual children, to keep alive the charisms which, by the power of the same Spirit who awakened them, are constantly being enriched and adapted, while losing none of their unique character. It is up to you to place those charisms at the service of the Church and to work for the coming of Christ’s Kingdom in its fullness”.

Recalling our origins sheds light on yet another aspect of consecrated life. Our founders and foundresses were attracted by the unity of the Apostles with Christ and by the fellowship which marked the first community in Jerusalem. In establishing their own communities, each of them sought to replicate those models of evangelical living, to be of one heart and one soul, and to rejoice in the Lord’s presence (cf. Perfectae Caritatis, 15).

Living the present with passion means becoming “experts in communion”, “witnesses and architects of the ‘plan for unity’ which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.” In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.

So, be men and women of communion! Have the courage to be present in the midst of conflict and tension, as a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit who inspires in human hearts a passion for all to be one (cf. Jn 17:21). Live the mysticism of encounter, which entails “the ability to hear, to listen to other people; the ability to seek together ways and means.” Live in the light of the loving relationship of the three divine Persons (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), the model for all interpersonal relationships.

3. To embrace the future with hope should be the third aim of this Year. We all know the difficulties which the various forms of consecrated life are currently experiencing: decreasing vocations and aging members, particularly in the Western world; economic problems stemming from the global financial crisis; issues of internationalization and globalization; the threats posed by relativism and a sense of isolation and social irrelevance… But it is precisely amid these uncertainties, which we share with so many of our contemporaries, that we are called to practice the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who continues to tell us: “Be not afraid… for I am with you” (Jer 1:8).
This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.

So do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency, and even less to trust in your own strength. In scanning the horizons of your lives and the present moment, be watchful and alert. Together with Benedict XVI, I urge you not to “join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the Church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armour of light – as Saint Paul urged (cf. Rom 13:11-14) – keeping awake and watchful.”4 Let us constantly set out anew, with trust in the Lord.

I would especially like to say a word to those of you who are young. You are the present, since you are already taking active part in the lives of your Institutes, offering all the freshness and generosity of your “yes”. At the same time you are the future, for soon you will be called to take on roles of leadership in the life, formation, service and mission of your communities. This Year should see you actively engaged in dialogue with the previous generation. In fraternal communion you will be enriched by their experiences and wisdom, while at the same time inspiring them, by your own energy and enthusiasm, to recapture their original idealism. In this way the entire community can join in finding new ways of living the Gospel and responding more effectively to the need for witness and proclamation.

I am also happy to know that you will have the opportunity during this Year to meet with other young religious from different Institutes. May such encounters become a regular means of fostering communion, mutual support, and unity.

II. EXPECTATIONS FOR THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

What in particular do I expect from this Year of grace for consecrated life?

1. That the old saying will always be true: “Where there are religious, there is joy”. We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we need not seek our happiness elsewhere; that the authentic fraternity found in our communities increases our joy; and that our total self-giving in service to the Church, to families and young people, to the elderly and the poor, brings us life-long personal fulfilment.
None of us should be dour, discontented and dissatisfied, for “a gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom”. Like everyone else, we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older. But in all these things we should be able to discover “perfect joy”. For it is here that we learn to recognize the face of Christ, who became like us in all things, and to rejoice in the knowledge that we are being conformed to him who, out of love of us, did not refuse the sufferings of the cross.

In a society which exalts the cult of efficiency, fitness and success, one which ignores the poor and dismisses “losers”, we can witness by our lives to the truth of the words of Scripture: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10).

We can apply to the consecrated life the words of Benedict XVI which I cited in the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium: “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction” (No. 14). The consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy! Similarly, the apostolic effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.

As I said to the members of ecclesial movements on the Vigil of Pentecost last year: “Fundamentally, the strength of the Church is living by the Gospel and bearing witness to our faith. The Church is the salt of the earth; she is the light of the world. She is called to make present in society the leaven of the Kingdom of God and she does this primarily by her witness, her witness of brotherly love, of solidarity and of sharing with others” (18 May 2013).

2. I am counting on you “to wake up the world”, since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: “Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.” This is the priority that is needed right now: “to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth… a religious must never abandon prophecy” (29 November 2013).

Prophets receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events: they are like sentinels who keep watch in the night and sense the coming of the dawn (cf. Is 21:11-12). Prophets know God and they know the men and women who are their brothers and sisters. They are able to
discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are
beholden to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets
tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God
himself is on their side.

So I trust that, rather than living in some utopia, you will find ways to
create “alternate spaces”, where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity,
embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive. Monasteries,
communities, centres of spirituality, schools, hospitals, family shelters – all these
are places which the charity and creativity born of your charisms have brought
into being, and with constant creativity must continue to bring into being. They
should increasingly be the leaven for a society inspired by the Gospel, a “city on
a hill”, which testifies to the truth and the power of Jesus’ words.

At times, like Elijah and Jonah, you may feel the temptation to flee, to abandon
the task of being a prophet because it is too demanding, wearisome or apparently
fruitless. But prophets know that they are never alone. As he did with Jeremiah,
so God encourages us: “Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you”
(Jer 1:8).

3. Men and women religious, like all other consecrated persons, have been
called, as I mentioned, “experts in communion”. So I am hoping that the
“spirituality of communion”, so emphasized by Saint John Paul II, will become a
reality and that you will be in the forefront of responding to “the great challenge
facing us” in this new millennium: “to make the Church the home and the
school of communion.” I am sure that in this Year you will make every effort
to make the ideal of fraternity pursued by your founders and foundresses expand
everywhere, like concentric circles.

Communion is lived first and foremost within the respective communities of
each Institute. To this end, I would ask you to think about my frequent comments
about criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility as ways of acting which have
no place in our houses. This being the case, the path of charity open before us
is almost infinite, since it entails mutual acceptance and concern, practicing a
communion of goods both material and spiritual, fraternal correction and respect
for those who are weak … it is the “mystique of living together” which makes
our life “a sacred pilgrimage.” We need to ask ourselves about the way we relate
to persons from different cultures, as our communities become increasingly
international. How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she
thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co-
responsible?
I also hope for a growth in communion between the members of different Institutes. Might this Year be an occasion for us to step out more courageously from the confines of our respective Institutes and to work together, at the local and global levels, on projects involving formation, evangelization, and social action? This would make for a more effective prophetic witness. Communion and the encounter between different charisms and vocations can open up a path of hope. No one contributes to the future in isolation, by his or her efforts alone, but by seeing himself or herself as part of a true communion which is constantly open to encounter, dialogue, attentive listening and mutual assistance. Such a communion inoculates us from the disease of self-absorption.

Consecrated men and women are also called to true synergy with all other vocations in the Church, beginning with priests and the lay faithful, in order to “spread the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries.”

4. I also expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries. “Go into all the world”; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. Mk 16:15). A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine...

Don’t be closed in on yourselves, don’t be stifled by petty squabbles, don’t remain a hostage to your own problems. These will be resolved if you go forth and help others to resolve their own problems, and proclaim the Good News. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love.

I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, I would hope that structures can be streamlined, large religious houses repurposed for works which better respond to the present demands of evangelization and charity, and apostolates adjusted to new needs.

5. I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them.

Monasteries and groups which are primarily contemplative could meet or otherwise engage in an exchange of experiences on the life of prayer, on ways of deepening communion with the entire Church, on supporting persecuted
Christians, and welcoming and assisting those seeking a deeper spiritual life or requiring moral or material support.

The same can be done by Institutes dedicated to works of charity, teaching and cultural advancement, to preaching the Gospel or to carrying out specific pastoral ministries. It could also be done by Secular Institutes, whose members are found at almost every level of society. The creativity of the Spirit has generated ways of life and activities so diverse that they cannot be easily categorized or fit into ready-made templates. So I cannot address each and every charismatic configuration. Yet during this Year no one can feel excused from seriously examining his or her presence in the Church’s life and from responding to the new demands constantly being made on us, to the cry of the poor.

Only by such concern for the needs of the world, and by docility to the promptings of the Spirit, will this Year of Consecrated Life become an authentic *kairos*, a time rich in God’s grace, a time of transformation.

III. THE HORIZONS OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

1. In this letter, I wish to speak not only to consecrated persons, but also to the laity, who share with them the same ideals, spirit and mission. Some Religious Institutes have a long tradition in this regard, while the experience of others is more recent. Indeed, around each religious family, every Society of Apostolic Life and every Secular Institute, there is a larger family, a “charismatic family”, which includes a number of Institutes which identify with the same charism, and especially lay faithful who feel called, precisely as lay persons, to share in the same charismatic reality.

I urge you, as laity, to live this Year for Consecrated Life as a grace which can make you more aware of the gift you yourselves have received. Celebrate it with your entire “family”, so that you can grow and respond together to the promptings of the Spirit in society today. On some occasions when consecrated men and women from different Institutes come together, arrange to be present yourselves so as to give expression to the one gift of God. In this way you will come to know the experiences of other charismatic families and other lay groups, and thus have an opportunity for mutual enrichment and support.

2. The Year for Consecrated Life concerns not only consecrated persons, but the entire Church. Consequently, I ask the whole Christian people to be increasingly aware of the gift which is the presence of our many consecrated men and women, heirs of the great saints who have written the history of Christianity.
What would the Church be without Saint Benedict and Saint Basil, without Saint Augustine and Saint Bernard, without Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Angelica Merici and Saint Vincent de Paul. The list could go on and on, up to Saint John Bosco and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. As Blessed Paul VI pointed out: “Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted, and that the “salt” of faith would lose its savour in a world undergoing secularization” (*Evangelica Testificatio*, 3).

So I invite every Christian community to experience this Year above all as a moment of thanksgiving to the Lord and grateful remembrance for all the gifts we continue to receive, thanks to the sanctity of founders and foundresses, and from the fidelity to their charism shown by so many consecrated men and women. I ask all of you to draw close to these men and women, to rejoice with them, to share their difficulties and to assist them, to whatever degree possible, in their ministries and works, for the latter are, in the end, those of the entire Church. Let them know the affection and the warmth which the entire Christian people feels for them.

3. In this letter I do not hesitate to address a word to the consecrated men and women and to the members of fraternities and communities who belong to Churches of traditions other than the Catholic tradition. Monasticism is part of the heritage of the undivided Church, and is still very much alive in both the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church. The monastic tradition, and other later experiences from the time when the Church in the West was still united, have inspired analogous initiatives in the Ecclesial Communities of the reformed tradition. These have continued to give birth to further expressions of fraternal community and service.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life has planned a number of initiatives to facilitate encounters between members of different expressions of consecrated and fraternal life in the various Churches. I warmly encourage such meetings as a means of increasing mutual understanding, respect and reciprocal cooperation, so that the ecumenism of the consecrated life can prove helpful for the greater journey towards the unity of all the Churches.

4. Nor can we forget that the phenomenon of monasticism and of other expressions of religious fraternity is present in all the great religions. There
are instances, some long-standing, of inter-monastic dialogue involving the Catholic Church and certain of the great religious traditions. I trust that the Year of Consecrated Life will be an opportunity to review the progress made, to make consecrated persons aware of this dialogue, and to consider what further steps can be taken towards greater mutual understanding and greater cooperation in the many common areas of service to human life.

Journeying together always brings enrichment, and can open new paths to relationships between peoples and cultures, which nowadays appear so difficult.

5. Finally, in a special way, I address my brother bishops. May this Year be an opportunity to accept institutes of consecrated life, readily and joyfully, as a spiritual capital which contributes to the good of the whole body of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 43), and not simply that of the individual religious families. “Consecrated life is a gift to the Church, it is born of the Church, it grows in the Church, and it is entirely directed to the Church.” For this reason, precisely as a gift to the Church, it is not an isolated or marginal reality, but deeply a part of her. It is at the heart of the Church, a decisive element of her mission, inasmuch as it expresses the deepest nature of the Christian vocation and the yearning of the Church as the Bride for union with her sole Spouse. Thus, “it belongs… absolutely to the life and holiness” of the Church (*ibid.*, 44).

In the light of this, I ask you, the Pastors of the particular Churches, to show special concern for promoting within your communities the different charisms, whether long-standing or recent. I ask you to do this by your support and encouragement, your assistance in discernment, and your tender and loving closeness to those situations of suffering and weakness in which some consecrated men or women may find themselves. Above all, do this by instructing the People of God in the value of consecrated life, so that its beauty and holiness may shine forth in the Church.

I entrust this Year of Consecrated Life to Mary, the Virgin of listening and contemplation, the first disciple of her beloved Son. Let us look to her, the highly-beloved daughter of the Father, endowed with every gift of grace, as the unsurpassed model for all those who follow Christ in love of God and service to their neighbour.

Lastly, I join all of you in gratitude for the gifts of grace and light with which the Lord graciously wills to enrich us, and I accompany you with my Apostolic Blessing.
From the Vatican, 21 November 2014, Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Francis

Endnotes

1Apostolic Letter to the Religious of Latin America on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World Los caminos del Evangelio (29 June 1990), 26.


3Address to Rectors and Students of the Pontifical Colleges and Residences of Rome (2 May 2014).

4Pope Benedict XVI, Homily for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (2 February 2013).


6Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (24 November 2013), 87.

7John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata (25 March 1996), 51.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today many of the symbolic elements and ritual processes associated with initiation, novitiate and profession to consecrated life could appear as bizarre, irrelevant or insignificant hangovers from some antique cultures. They may not anymore make sense to present generation of formators as well as candidates. To hear the term ‘ritual, perhaps, could be allergic equally to formators and their candidates. They may justify it by portraying Jesus as ant-ritualistic. But many are misled on this matter by their failure to understand that the language of religion is the language of symbols, parables and poetry. The ultimate truth can be experienced and expressed only by means of images and symbols of imagination. Jesus’ favorite language of ‘God-talk’ was analogical. Even a quick glance at the gospel traditions can make it clear that Jesus vastly used the medium of ritual elements and ritual processes to celebrate and experience socio-religious ‘passages’ in his life as well as to effect status passages in people as part of his ministry. Jesus was certainly against the language of rituals when they were not consistent with life and actions. Just as Jesus expected people to be as true and good as their words (Mt 5:27), he also expected them to be as true and good as their symbolic language in rituals. This article is an attempt to analyze the symbolic world behind initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life, so that knowing that world one can be as true and good as the language of symbols one speaks, while undergoing or guiding the stages of initiation, novitiate and profession.

Rituals play a particularly significant role, among all the psycho-social and religious aspects of human life and experiences. One of the significant socio-cultural scenarios, chosen to interpret the psycho-social and religious experience of initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life in this article, is the
This article has chosen the analysis of the gospel tradition regarding baptism, desert and temptation experiences of Jesus, using the same scenario of ritual elements and ritual processes, to make an analogical reading of initiation, novitiate and profession. Baptism, desert and temptation experiences of Jesus form a unity in the gospel tradition and they are portrayed as constituent parts of a single process of ‘passage,’ expressed in a ritual form, associated with the life and mission of Jesus. If seen from the setting of ritual elements and ritual processes, the initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life too form a unity and they are part of a ritual process of status passage.

2. THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SCENARIO OF RITUAL ELEMENTS AND RITUAL PROCESSES

In the socio-cultural world, rituals make visible the social and spiritual boundaries and make the boundary passage involving status change possible and legitimate. Ritual makes order; that is, it draws boundaries through and around natural, social and spiritual spaces. It identifies those spaces as in or out, male or female, good or bad, high or low, won or lost, passed or failed, honour or shame, clean or polluted, legitimate or illegitimate, fake or original, and sacred or profane. One of the characteristic activities of a society is boundary making and boundary maintenance, and this is made possible and is executed through rituals. The importance of rituals, as fundamental constituents of human experience, is articulated well by Mary Douglas in the following words: “It is not too much to say that ritual is more to society than words are to thought. For it is very much possible to know something and then find words for it. But it is impossible to have socio-cultural and spiritual interactions and experiences without symbolic acts.”

According to Mark McVann, rituals are concerned primarily with the boundary lines drawn within a society and the important conditions which permit crossing of those lines. It means that not all boundaries within the system are intended never to be crossed. The system of rituals is developed in order to allow, for example, the ordinary objects and persons to pass into the realm of the holy/sacred or the polluted person to be integrated back into a state of cleanness (or purity) etc. Aaron and his sons moved from the realm of the common to the ‘holy’ through the medium of ritual elements and processes, that is, by the application of holy anointing oil and the rite of ordination (Ex 30:30ff). There were proper or specific rites for removing something from the sphere of the sacred to the sphere of the profane. For example, redemption of the firstborn by means of offering
There were ritual provisions for all these legitimate passages across the boundaries; other moves were illegitimate, resulting in death (e.g., profaning the Sabbath, eating holy food in an unclean state etc.).

Rituals constitute a highly significant aspect of life in any society. According to McVann, the rituals are concerned with transition or passage from one status to another and the conditions associated with them. People may move vertically up or down in the social scale, or laterally from inside to outside. Ritual transformation of status may occur either voluntarily (religious profession, marriage etc.), or involuntarily (trial and execution). The forms may vary but the rituals mark off peak events and critical transitional moments in life, such as birth, adulthood, marriage, consecration, ordination, healing, conviction, liberation, vindication, acquittal, death and the like. These and other such transitions in life are nearly always and everywhere surrounded with complex symbols. Rituals provide the participants with the means of understanding the way the world is perceived by their social or religious group and a way of participating in its patterns. Thus, ritual is a symbolic form of expression which mediates the cultural core values and attitudes that structure and sustain a society or institute. Ritual is then a mode of education which enables its participants to learn social or religious skills and values with which they settle down in life in their varying statuses.

Ritual, even if it dramatizes status change and transformation of persons, has, as one of its main functions, the maintenance of the social or religious values and system. According to McVann, a given ritual may bring about a change of status for participating individuals (for instance, the rite of profession to consecrated life or marriage), but it also serves the permanence of values of the society or institute. It is a means by which a society enforces its authority to assure continuity for the values and attitudes embedded in its institutions. At the same time, the encounter with life’s mysteries, which gives rituals their focus and power, makes them much more than being merely instruments to enforce conformity to the acceptable values of the society. Here we attempt to analyze the initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life against the scenario of ‘ritual elements and ritual processes,’ as developed by Victor Turner.

2.1. Ritual Elements in Initiation, Novitiate and Profession

Turner lists three important elements in a status-transformation-ritual which are applicable to initiation, novitiate and profession. They are identified as: (i) the initiands (the candidates) who undergo the change of role and status, (ii) the ritual elders who preside over the ritual, and (iii) the ritual symbols.
2.1.1. The Initiands

The ritual initiands or candidates are the persons, who individually or as a group, experience the status transformation ritual and so acquire new roles and status in their society. The suitable candidates have to be separated from the rest of society. In some of the voluntary initiation rituals such as initiation, novitiate and profession, the candidates have to explicitly demonstrate their willingness and fitness for the passage. Sometimes the fitness of the candidates for the passage by way of presence or absence of certain qualities or values in the candidates is tested through appropriate procedure. In the baptism-temptation accounts of Jesus in the gospel, Jesus is explicitly portrayed as the initiand or client who undergoes status challenge and status manifestation. In the initiation ritual into novitiate, the persons who voluntarily come forward, after being examined of their values and fitness by persons appointed by the institutes, either as individuals or as a group are separated from the rest of the society as candidates to undergo ritual of status change.

2.1.2. The Ritual Elders

According to Turner, the second important element is the ‘ritual elders.’ Ritual elders are the persons, officially charged with conducting the ritual. The movement from one status to another is presided over or guided by these persons qualified to supervise the transition and certify its legitimacy. As part of the status-transformation-rituals, they test the candidates regarding their suitability to undergo the passage by exposing them to tests or status challenges. They instruct them in the mysteries and values of life in their culture, society or institute. At appropriate times they exhibit and explain to candidates the sacred ritual symbols signifying the values and mysteries of their culture or institute. The ritual elders are often termed as “limit breakers” or “boundary jumpers.” They are called ‘limit breakers’ because they are considered immune to the powers harmful to those outside the ritual process as they have been appointed by the society to conduct the ritual and have themselves been transformed by it. Thus, unlike other people, ritual elders are authorized to deal with initiands who are in the dangerous and ambiguous state of liminality (e.g. novice masters or mistresses exclusively authorized to deal with novices). For example, doctors are authorized by the society to deal with diseased person, priests with sinners, and police or judges with criminals. There are appropriate rituals which authorize ritual elders (priests, prophets, judges) to exercise the role of professionals in rituals. Additionally, they may function as models for the initiands, because they are the “professionals” who embody the core values and mysteries of life in their
society or institute. As such, they bear the authority of society or institute to command and control (Mt 7:29; 8:5; 9:6-8; Mk 1:22, 27; Lk 8:29; 10:20). The authority of the ritual elders is significant because it is the faith in them or the recognition of the authority vested on them that make them powerful in guiding the rituals. Jesus consistently demanded faith (Mt 9:28; Mk 9:23) or recognition of his authority from the recipients, to exercise the socio-cultural and spiritual transitions in the form of physical or spiritual healings.

In the analogical case of baptism of Jesus, the gospel tradition portrays John the Baptist, the great bridge figure between the prophetic tradition of Old and New covenant, as the ritual elder officiating. Traditions surrounding John the Baptist in the biblical as well as extra-biblical sources make him fitting example to analyze the role and nature of the ritual elders. John the Baptist is portrayed as the one who mediated status changes to many through his ministry, especially through the ritual baptism he officiated. Basing on the Johannine tradition of the gospel, there are many scholars who presume that Jesus probably might have left his home after having encountered and influenced by the great prophetic figure, John the Baptist. To explain the desert experience of Jesus, some presume that Jesus might have been a member of a desert community of John. Johannine gospel tradition presents John the Baptist as the legitimate ritual authority or professional to legitimately introduce Jesus to the world (Jn 1:29). The synoptic tradition is very much outspoken regarding John the Baptist’s evaluation of Jesus as a fitting initiand to undergo the passage or manifest his status or identity. Based on his own experience, John prophetically read the identity of Jesus and so, rather than testing Jesus as the ritual elder, he is being presented as acknowledging his unfitness to officiate or mediate the passage. The enormous respect of John and Jesus for each other, found in the gospel tradition, is a vivid example of both acknowledging each other as ritual elders who can guide and mediate status-passages to candidates (cf. Mt 3:14; Lk 7:28; Jn 3:27). John the Baptist was a teacher who instructed his initiands in the mysteries and values of covenant-life and faithfulness to God. He certainly made use of the medium of sacred ritual symbols like desert, river, water, washing etc., for instructing them of the core values and mysteries of the covenantal life with God. His distinct and symbolic attires and food habits presented by gospel tradition also point towards his role as ritual elder in the prophetic tradition who lived as distinct in the margins of the society. He led or guided people of God to their all important spiritual symbol of the desert and the river, recreating the evergreen spiritual experience of the Jewish tradition. The initiands under John the Baptist confess their sins to him to make themselves fit for the initiation.
John the Baptist and Jesus are portrayed in the gospel tradition as ritual elders with the specific qualification of being “limit breakers” or “boundary jumpers.” The biblical and extra biblical traditions presented Pharisees as “separated people” who kept themselves away from the sinful world or sinners. But in contrast, John the Baptist and Jesus are portrayed as having access with the sinners and outcasts in their capacities as ‘limit breakers.’ We find that, in spite of the initial hesitation of John the Baptist to officiate the ritual, Jesus reposes his faith in him by virtually asking him to officiate the ritual on the ground of fulfilling righteousness. The ritual of initiation guided and mediated by the John the Baptist is followed by the experience of desert where Jesus professes or proves his values in a trial guided by the Spirit of God. At this stage, gospel tradition is clear in telling that it is the Spirit of God who led him to the desert. The Spirit of God exposes Jesus to conflicts as part of ritual process to manifest his values so that through this ritual Jesus reveals to the world his true identity and status.

In the initiation ritual in consecrated life, the ritual elders are those who are responsible for the institute and officiate the ritual of status change of new members. During the novitiate, it is the novice master or mistress who is authorized by the institute, accompanies the novices and attempts to remold the persons in accordance with the values and mysteries of the life proper to the institute. It is they who guide and expose the novices to challenges and conflicts to prove their values and fitness for the status passage. The analogical exposition of John the Baptist as a ritual elder is a fitting reminder of the authentic, exemplary, prophetic and charismatic life that the novice masters or mistresses and all those persons who are responsible to officiate, are supposed to live.

2.1.3. The Ritual Symbols

The ritual symbols play a crucial role and take various forms in the rituals. Sometimes symbols create a significant setting in which the status changing rituals will take place (such as rivers, deserts, mountains, certain trees, forests, temples, meals etc.). Most of the time, it is this physical, social or temporal setting of the ritual that will serve as the ‘dominant ritual symbol.’ The setting is the backdrop against which the ritual actions take place. The setting could be a physical, socio-cultural, temporal or religious environment. Such places or backgrounds are particularly significant for the ritualizing society or institute which can become a dominant ritual symbol for that community or the institute. They serve as dominant ritual symbols because they have the power to symbolically condense in them the important facts, values and mysteries of life the initiands are entering into. In some rituals, certain symbols are
exhibited at significant points to the initiands as part of their instruction in the basic facts, values and mysteries of their culture (cross, constitutions, Bible, lamp, religious habits, vestments etc). Initiands also make use of symbols to demonstrate the proper disposition or fitness for status change. For example, the gestures of kneeling, prostrating etc., for docility, humility and obedience or actions of carrying burning lamps, candles etc., for sacrifice and dedication are ritual symbols of a status passage in consecrated life. It is the ritual elders who reveal and interpret the sense of the ritual symbols to the initiands. Ritual symbols provide a focus for the initiands during their liminality and ensure that they concentrate on the facts, attitudes, values and mysteries of their society or institute which are symbolically concentrated and highlighted in them.

The physical settings11 of the analogical case of Jesus’ baptism and temptation are the river Jordan and the desert. According to J. L. Cox, the setting provides the ritual with its power and makes clear the contrast between the way things are and the way things ought to be. Rituals perform or act out how the social or religious person perceives the ideal. In the case of religious initiation and profession, the physical setting is often a Eucharistic meal.12 Temporal setting for the ritual, such as a day important for the society or institute could also be appropriate. For example, the choice of the day for the rite of initiation or profession to consecrated life such as the day of feast of the institute or some other such occasions or events important in the spiritual tradition of the institute would be meaningful. In the ritual scenario, the river, desert and Eucharistic meal can become the significant symbolic backdrop against which the ritual elements function and the resultant ritual processes and status passages are taking place.

In the analogical case, the all-important and the dominant ritual symbol under which the initiation of Jesus takes place is the river. There are also the symbols of water, washing etc. In the Jewish spiritual tradition, the crossing of the Red Sea through God’s miraculous intervention is the cherished dramatic moment in their status passage from slavery to the freedom. This allusion makes the background of the river Jordan a dominant ritual symbol for any such spiritual passage. After the initiation, Jesus was led to the all-important symbol of Jewish spiritual tradition, namely ‘the desert,’ by the Spirit of God. The evergreen spiritual experience of the Jewish tradition is the exodus pilgrimage. The symbol of the desert brings to memory God’s particular choice, intimate presence, marvelous plan, protection and intervention in the spiritual pilgrimage of Israel. The events of crossing of the Red sea and the desert experience remain the most significant symbols of God experience of the People of God. Thus, the river Jordan and the desert were the all-important ritual symbols, adopted from the Jewish tradition under the shadow of which Jesus manifests his identity and assumes his mission. Biblical
references to number ‘forty’ consistently symbolize (Noah and family in forty
days of flood, Jesus and disciples in forty days after resurrection etc.) the idea of
God’s intimate presence, union, care, plan, intervention, concern, protection etc.
Thus, the number ‘forty’ which is depicted as the period of temptation of Jesus
with its rich biblical tradition behind it becomes the important temporal setting
and thus a dominant ritual symbol.

The normal physical and spiritual setting of initiation and profession in
consecrated life is ‘Eucharistic ritual meal’, which Turner terms as a ‘dominant
symbol.”13 To understand the power of this particular setting and dominant ritual
symbol, we need to understand its capacity to condense the facts, values, mysteries
and spiritual experiences associated with Judaeo-Christian spiritual tradition.
One of the important common ancestors for ritual meal tradition for Jews which
made this ritual meal a ‘dominant symbol’ was the Passover tradition where Israel
made passage from slavery to freedom. In the new covenant, inaugurated by
Jesus, the Eucharistic meal could summarize the redemptive mysteries of faith,
namely the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. In the Christian tradition,
Eucharistic celebration becomes the most important religious backdrop which
can evoke the important facts, values and mysteries of salvation executed by
Jesus. This fact makes Eucharistic celebration the dominant ritual symbol under
the shadow of which the status transition or passage of any ‘common’ objects or
persons to the status of ‘sacred’ takes place.

Every society employs cultural means for creating, maintaining, and
celebrating its group identity, values and social system. Sacred ritual meals are
one such cultural reality in every society and culture. In Christian tradition, the
Eucharistic meal is a socio-cultural and religious reality, fulfilling these functions.
People use meals for physical nourishment but in any culture a meal can become
a ritual, communicating much in the socio-cultural and religious world.14 Being
in and out of a ritual meal celebration also contains a judgmental element on
fitness of the participants (Mt 22:11-14). Passover meal was also a judgmental
meal for the Egyptians who were excluded from this ritual meal and any Israelite
who attempts to unworthily participate in it. A meal as a dominant ritual symbol
replicates the profound socio-cultural and theological values and mysteries. But
Passover and Eucharistic meal with their added factor of judgmental symbolism,
also have the capacity to challenge the initiate regarding the fitness of him or
her with the possession of expected attitudes, values and mysteries necessary for
the passage. Thus, the Eucharistic meal guides, regulates, challenges the passage
and thus replicates the status transition of the candidates under its status as a
‘dominant ritual symbol’ in the Judeo-Christian cultural world.
Along with the dominant symbol of Eucharistic celebration, we have also a litany of other symbols used by the candidates and the ritual elders that can symbolically represent the facts, values and mysteries of the life of the consecrated. The use of symbolic objects, signs, and actions used, both by the candidates and ritual elders in various stages of initiation, novitiate, religious profession etc. are all examples. They include gestures, dresses, objects such as crucifix, candles, bible, constitution etc. These symbols become powerful when they are used by both candidates and ritual elders as consistent with their represented facts, values, attitudes and mysteries of life called to live in the institute.

2.2. Ritual Processes in Initiation, Novitiate and Profession

After analyzing the three ritual elements, the next task is analysing the ritual processes. According to Victor Turner, ritual processes involve three basic steps. Rather than merely stepping from the profane into the sacred, unclean to clean, outsider to insider, honour to shame or shame to honour, victory to failure or failure to victory, the participants must enter an intermediate liminal stage of ritual process as well. The three-step process involves (i) a separation from, (ii) a marginality towards (liminal Stage), and (iii) a reincorporation (aggregation) into society. In the case of analogy, these stages could be identified as the gospel accounts of baptism, forty days of desert-temptation experiences and aggregation of Jesus into the community with the starting of his public ministry. In the case of passage of candidates to consecrated life, these three steps could be clearly marked as rite of initiation, novitiate and rite of profession. The fundamental stages in any rite of passage remain largely the same, but all these three stages may not be fully articulated or important in every ritual. For example, in the analogical case, the gospel account about the aggregation rite of Jesus to the community has been shortened and just hinted by a simple statement in Mathew (4:11) and Luke(4:14-15). This condensing in the gospel tradition could be also deliberate, as it could be a hint that Jesus, following the prophetic tradition, is expected to be only partially aggregated to society. The prophets in general and Jesus as ‘the chosen One’ in particular, are called to remain in the margins of society, preserving their distinct identity.

2.2.1. Separation from Society

Individuals undergoing status passage rituals, tend to experience separation in three ways: separation from people, place and time (social, physical and temporal). Participants in a rite of passage are separated from the ordinary location and rhythm of the group’s life, because the experience into which they will enter is very much “out of the ordinary.” The place chosen for the
status-passage rite may be difficult to access, a sacred space to which tribal, clan or institute traditions have been tied for generations. Mountains, rivers, deserts, forests or other such places which tradition identifies as locations of special revelation, God experiences or habitats of spirits and gods, or places associated with the life and history of the institute and founder (in the case of religious institutes) are chosen as ideal sites for such rituals. Some or parts of the rituals are also performed in some selected places which have significant symbolic value for the community such as holy meals (Eucharistic meal in the case of religious profession) or a special journey or pilgrimage (Exodus). In the analogical case of baptism and temptations of Jesus, the physical setting of river and desert, the temporal setting of ‘forty days’ and the ritual elders guiding Jesus to such places and settings are serving this purpose of separating Jesus from the rest of the physical, social and temporal world. Gospel tradition indicates that in preparation for ritual passage, John the Baptist has led the people to desert creating social, physical and spiritual separation of spaces.

In the case of initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life, we could clearly identify the above mentioned threefold separation from people, place, and time. The exclusive and restricted interaction with the world, expected from the novices point towards this social separation. There is also a physical separation envisaged in the canonical year of the novitiate which happens in the exclusive novitiate house located at a place carefully chosen for this purpose, separated from the lives of the rest of the members of an institute and their activities. Normal restrictions linked to the stay of novices outside the specific novitiate house also hint towards it. Temporal separation is also envisaged as novitiate is considered as a period of time separated from the rest of the life span of the candidates. Having been cut off from the persons, points of reference, and activities which shaped their previous way of living, experience of novitiate is expected to create a temporal separation for the novices. Retreats, confessions and other spiritual exercises create a separation in view of the spiritual space for those who pass through the ritual process of initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life.

2.2.2. A State of Marginality towards Society (Liminal Stage)

In the process of transition to a new stage through ritual, there is a period in which initiands no longer fit into their former social category, and they have not yet entered the new stage either. It is called the *liminal* stage; a threshold, which is ‘neither this nor that’. A threshold is like a stage of being neither in nor out of a house, at the entrance; it is the transition point between them. In the ritual process of passage from being ‘common’ to a ‘consecrated’ person, we can
place the period of novitiate. During this liminal period, initiands may become disoriented, having been cut off from the persons, points of reference, and activities which shaped their previous way of living. In normal status-passage rituals, the initiands’ identity before the rite like that of children, innocent, legitimate, fake, holy, sinner or criminal may no longer be operative, but they have not yet attained a new role and status as adults, freed or convicted, married, consecrated or priests. Therefore, they are perceived as dangerous or as pollution to those outside the ritual process because the initiands exist in limbo, a realm where they are ‘in between.’

Liminality is often compared to the state of death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. In the tribal status passage rituals, they may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked (e.g. candidates becoming naked or semi naked in baptism rituals or stripping of ornaments or other formal attires of social status for novices etc). It is done to demonstrate that, as liminal beings, they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank, role or position in a social system. According to Turner, their exhibited behavior is normally passive or humble (Jesus before John the Baptist, novices with novice mistress or masters); they must obey their instructors implicitly, and even accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. They may be exposed to challenges, trials and conflicts. Resistance to instructions by the ritual elder, even when it appears to be arbitrary is uncalled for because the initiands have to demonstrate the values of docility and humility, a psychological condition conducive to be worked upon by the ritual elders. It is as though they are being reduced to a humble condition to be fashioned anew and to be endowed with additional powers that will enable them to cope with their new status in life.

This liminal phase, in fact, is the heart of the ritual process. It is the stage in which the ritual candidates are melted and remolded and made fit into a new status. With this purpose, certain status passage rituals in the liminal stage require exposing the initiands to some form of challenge, conflict, battle or hostile confrontation to test whether the facts, skills and values of the new role have been learned or whether the initiands are faithful to the change. This would be especially true of rituals which effect the passage to a warrior or a prophet (temptations of Jesus, humiliation, passion and death of Jesus etc.). In the analogical case of the manifestation of Jesus’ identity, the temptation accounts of Jesus in the gospel tradition serve this purpose of exposing to challenge, battle or hostile confrontation to test or manifest whether the skills, values and mysteries of life of the new role have been part of Jesus’ identity. As God’s consecrated
or ‘chosen One,’ the values, skills, mysteries that are to be manifested by Jesus could be summarized as the ‘Shema’ spirituality (Deut 6:4-9).

At the liminal stage, the initiands are trained and formed in a conflict or battle zone. In the accounts of status passages in biblical tradition, desert evokes the liminal stage and the zone of temptations from and battle with opposite forces. The liminal stage of Jesus in the temptation accounts of the gospel tradition involves conflicts with Satan. It can be analyzed and understood making use of the socio-cultural and ritual scenario of ‘challenge-riposte’ competition. According to McVann, challenge-riposte status contests (challenges) and rituals are solidly interlocked as part of the liminal phase of passage. They are also mutually complementary aspects of social life. Jerome H. Neyrey exposes us to the seriousness of these trials and conflicts (challenges) in the liminal stage when he says that ‘in such exercises, the initiands do not merely play a game or display a mock conflict. The self-worth, values, family, patrons, king and gods of the combatants - the vertical and horizontal axes of one’s honour - all come under assault.’ The initiands at the liminal phase is defending and witnessing all these facts, values and mysteries of life of the new status. What is at stake are the values of the primary constituents of the world inhabited by the one being challenged. When one is shamed, one’s person, priced (valued/significant) others, values and ideals are all put in the position of appearing to be not only without value, but worse, of being dirt. To be shamed or losing in such a trial then, is to be identified or labeled as pollution or garbage, and thus to be denied of any value or denied of being assigned of any positive place or status in the ordered cosmos. The failure in this challenge-riposte conflict will make the initiands unfit for status passage. The stage of liminality, characterized by the state of status indeterminacy is virtually visible in Jesus as he undergoes a challenge-riposte ritual-conflict in the narrative ritual accounts of temptation or passion, death and resurrection. Thus, the temptation accounts or passion accounts in which God’s spirit exposing Jesus to conflicts have a larger significance in the ritual processes and are deeply linked with the gospel portrayal of Jesus manifesting his identity, roles, values and mysteries of life to which he is making the passage.

According to McVann, the great significance of this conflict stage is revealed in the fact that along with the initiands, the very structure of the honour and shame in a society also undergoes a liminal experience. McVann articulates this by saying that “contests of honour are expressions of what is already known, that is, what having honour and being shamed are all about, but they are also simultaneously about what cannot be known in advance - whether or how a particular contest will affirm or undermine the very structure of honour-shame
itself. In fact, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus has not only undermined the existing structure of honour-shame, but also, created a new one. Similarly, the temptation account of the gospel tradition involves not only the status challenge to Jesus and Satan but also an issue of affirming and rejecting the very structure or value system of honour-shame itself in the society. The indeterminacy of boundaries and statuses which emerge when a challenge to status is issued, exposes the vulnerability of social system, social values and social organization, because the previously acknowledged system and order are under attack. Challenges to status of Jesus in the temptation accounts, thus, bear a clear resemblance to the liminal period in the ritual process because statuses and boundaries are denied or challenged before the new ones emerge or the old ones are reaffirmed. Thus, the conflict of initiands is not only to defend their honour but also to become instrumental to the honour of the very values for which an institute stands for. This is the role of the novices in a ritual process when they offer themselves for the public witness of the facts, values, attitudes and mysteries of the institute in contrast to some of the values and attitudes of the secular world.

The conflict of challenge-riposte encounters which the initiands should continuously carry out in the liminal stage may start with either positive or negative challenges. These challenges must be perceived and interpreted, and then be provided with an apt response. The process could be delineated in the following three steps: (a) A challenging action by sign, word or deed (a negative challenge would be an insult, a question, or a physical blow; In Lk 4:3 The devil said to him “if you are son of God command this......” also cf. Lk 4:6,9). (b) Perception (how the recipient interprets the challenging action or word. Perception of challenge and response of Jesus is presented in Lk 4:4, 7, 12 and parallels). (c) Reaction or response (counter-insult, answer, blow, or a reciprocal gift, cf. Lk 4:4, 7, 12).

This ritual game of challenge-riposte consists of a challenge (almost any word, gesture, or action) that seeks to undermine the honour of another person, and a response that answers in equal measure or worse, and may even be challenges in return. Positive (gifts, compliments) and negative (insults, challenges) must be addressed to avoid a serious loss of face or status. The following steps constitute the formal elements in the challenge-riposte contests in the liminal phase of the passage: (1) The legitimate or illegitimate claim of one for new status and honour; (2) the possible challenge to such a claim; (3) the right or wrong perception of such a challenge by the one who makes the claim; (4) the right or wrong response to the challenge; (5) the final loss or gain of status in front of
the eyes of the public (or the readers in a narrative ritual) as a result of the above process. In a narrative account, this process can be repeated as we find in the threefold temptation accounts of Jesus in the gospel tradition.

We can examine the status challenge to Jesus in Mt 4:1-10 or Lk 4:1-13, as an illustration of the points considered above, which can serve as a possible guide for our analysis of liminal stage and the role of exposing them to challenges and conflicts at this stage. In Mt 4:1-10, Jesus, after having been anointed by the Spirit of God, was led to the desert. The allusion of desert here is to the place of formation and testing chosen by God for the people of Israel (Num 14:22, 29-35; 16:13; Deut 6:16; Ex 17:2-3, 7) in the process of their passage to the status of people of God. The physical and temporal setting of forty days of temptation in the desert evokes the memory of 40 years of pilgrimage or formation of the people of God in the desert. Israel was expected to be docile, humble and had to completely depend upon God for her food, water, guidance, security and protection, in those forty years. Israel was made into a humbled state of complete dependence, evoking the state of realities in a liminal stage of status passage. Those forty years of liminal phase of passage, Israel was carried in the womb of Yahweh effecting intimate relation, union, care and protection.

In the temptation accounts of the gospel tradition, Jesus in the desert tries to respond to the disobedient Israel by personifying docility, humility, trust, dependence, obedience and the Shema spirituality. In a challenge-riposte conflict, Jesus rightly perceives the challenge of the devil and responds to devil by quoting Deut 8:3. Here, Jesus obeys the commandments as a paradigm of the life of obedience of Christians to the commandments of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2; Jas 1:25; 2:12; 2 Pet 3:2; Mt 28:19-20) and also the life of obedience of the consecrated people. Even after a forty-day fast, Jesus resists the temptation to turn stones into bread. Jesus waits on God to act for him (Lk 4:11). He places his trust or confidence in his Father personifying the obedience and humility which are the expected values and skills from the chosen One (Deut 7:9), especially in this liminal phase of the ritual process. Jesus acts from an intimate, obedient and personal relationship with his Father. In his response to the first challenge, Jesus upholds the honour of God and demonstrates complete obedience to God and succeeds where the people of Israel failed (Ex 16:2-21). Here in the challenge-riposte test, Jesus manifests that he loves the Lord “with all his heart” (thought) and feeds on the Shema spirituality. The temptation to change the stones into bread was a negative challenge from the devil to usurp the power of the creator God. It was similar to the temptation of the first parents to be like God in omnipotence (cf. Gen 3:4-6). Jesus refuses to sin against God, the creator
and manifests himself as the obedient Son. Manifesting his values, skills and mysteries of his unique relationship with God, Jesus proves that he hungers and thirsts for God’s Word, His presence and His glory. By rightly perceiving the challenge and responding to it, he upholds God’s values, mysteries and glory in this challenge-riposte conflict.

To the second negative challenge (Mt 4:5-7), namely, the temptation to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, Jesus rightly perceives the challenge and responds to it by quoting Deut 6:16. Here, he has proved his values and manifested that he will not put God to test. In its parallel from biblical tradition, Israel tested God with dissatisfaction in the wilderness (cf. Ex 17:2-3, 7). In this phase of formation of Israel, comparable to that of liminal stage, God was supplying all their needs and Israel was expected to be docile and trusting in God. But they demanded more than their needs, rather than demonstrating the values of docility and faith in the One who was guiding their formation and moulding them. Israel hardened their hearts which was detrimental to the process of remoulding and reformulating in the liminal state of their ritual process of passage. “Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?” (1 Samuel 6:6). Israel, in the wilderness, rather than living in docility and obedience to God who is mending and guiding them, adopted the same counter values and attitudes of hardening the heart like Pharaoh and Egyptians (cf. Ex 17:1-7; Ps 95:9; Rom 11:7; 1 Cor 10:9; 2 Cor 3:14). But where Israel failed, the Son is docile, trusting, dependent and obedient. Therefore, here in the second challenge-riposte contest Jesus perceives the challenge rightly and responds to it by manifesting that he loves the Lord “with all his soul.”

In the third temptation, the devil challenges Jesus and tries to mislead Jesus away from the will of the Father. Devil is tempting him to idolatry by bidding him to bow down and worship him. Satan indeed projects himself as God in place of the only one God, a gross violation of the value placed in the first commandment (Deut 5:6-7) and Shema spirituality (Deut 6:4-9). The allusion is certainly to the attraction to idolatry. The temptation is to drift from the true God who is moulding them and guiding them to the new status of the people of God. God was forming and moulding in the primary value of exclusive allegiance to the only true God (Deut 5:6-7) in their liminal phase of status passage to the people of God. In fact, it was a contrast to the value system of their surrounding people (e.g. the Canaanites) who practiced pagan religions and worship. In contrast to Israel, Jesus responds Satan with Deut 6:13 upholding the primary value of his identity. Jesus demonstrates that he perceived the challenge rightly and responds to it by manifesting the true value of loving God “with all his might.” Thus
the temptation accounts in the Old Testament concerning Israel and the gospel tradition regarding Jesus are part of the challenge-riposte ritual process in the liminal stage of the status passage.

Novitiate, by its very socio-cultural and religious nature as a liminal stage, is a conflict zone. The analogical reading of temptations of Jesus in the gospel tradition focuses the attention to the real need of candidates of consecrated life in the novitiate being challenged and tested to prove and manifest their faithfulness to the values, skills and mysteries of life expected of them. Both in the temptations of Jesus and in the liminal stage of novitiate, the content of the conflicts and values to be proved remain the same – the ‘Shema’ spirituality (Deut 6:4-9). Johannes Metz, the German theologian, in the book Followers of Christ, points out that the crisis for priests and religious today does not lie so much in the loss or dearth of vocations, as to the quality of our living – our failure to be radical followers of Christ and all-out witnesses to the gospel values. Diluting this aspect of challenging the candidates to become all-out witnesses of Jesus in the process of formation, results in the low quality of the consecrated people who, rather than witnessing the authentic values of Jesus and carrying forward the vision of their respective institutes, become counter witnesses.

At the heart of the ritual process, the participants’ isolation from the rest of society for the duration of the liminal phase (desert experience for Israel and Jesus; novitiate for the consecrated people), coupled with their subjection to the ritual elders who exposes them to the challenges, highlights the idea that they are brought into contact with powerful forces mediated to them by these ritual elders. These forces are mediated and the process is guided by the ritual elders with the expressed purpose of shaping or infusing the identity proper to the new status as consecrated persons in a life they will assume at the conclusion of the ritual. Here, in the case of novices, the old role and status which could be termed as the ‘worldly values’ must be rooted out, and completely new values (Deut 6:4-9) and identity must be impressed permanently upon them.

2.2.3. Reincorporation (Aggregation) into Society

According to Turner’s three phased rites of passage, in the third and final phase (reincorporation), the ‘passage’ is consummated. In the status transition ritual of consecrated persons, this stage could be identified as the rite of profession to consecrated life. This phase is marked by the entrance of the person or persons to their new condition, marked usually by some “rite of aggregation.” Once the ritual process is completed, the initiands return to society with new roles and status, as well as new rights and obligations. By virtue of the ritual, the society acknowledges that the initiands now have the capacities requisite for
fulfilling their new roles. Their status in the community has been redefined. In fact, after the ritual, they pass from the dangerous state (liminality) and become useful again to society as they take up the roles for which the ritual has prepared them.\textsuperscript{28} McVann and Turner note that those who have been initiated into certain particular roles such as prophets, priests, consecrated persons etc. undergo only a partial aggregation.\textsuperscript{29} While they provide very important services to their societies, they remain partially on the margins. They are “holy,” and their holiness is often characterized by their being distinct from the “ordinary” or “secular.”\textsuperscript{30} Consecrated persons have a prophetic role to play in the society, and, are called to live in the margins of the society. In this sense, aggregation of the consecrated persons to the rest of the social world outside the institute is partial.

CONCLUSION

The concept of ritual elements and ritual processes discussed could provide the necessary and adequate scenario for understanding the initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life and the socio-cultural and religious processes at work. One of the factors particularly brought to our attention in this ritual analysis is the ‘liminal stage,’ the phase which is the heart of the ritual process of passage, as a battle or conflict zone. By placing it in the analogical context of the temptation accounts of Jesus in his ‘desert battle,’ one of the elements of focus in this analysis was the importance of training and motivating the novices as combatants for the values of Jesus (\textit{Shema} spirituality Deut 6:4-9) and the vision of their institute. In fact, the spirit of the founders when they started the religious institutes was to prepare persons for the tough battle in the respective missions according to their charism. The book titled ‘The Spirit of St. Camillus’ has powerfully portrayed the dream and expectation of St. Camillus regarding the members of the institute he founded: ‘The hospitals are the battle fields of the servants of the sick, and their highest aspirations must be to live and to die in the hospital. The good soldier should die in war, the good sailor on the sea, and the good ‘Servant of the Sick’ in the hospital.’\textsuperscript{31} Today if religious institutes desire to bring back the original spirit of their founders in the institutes, they have to revive this idea and train their members, especially the novices with the spirit like that of soldiers in the battle field.

Ritual analysis of initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life can give rich insights and benefits to the candidates and formators in manifold ways. To begin with, one can say that, ritual analysis focuses attention of the candidates and ritual elders on the facts, values and mysteries of the life of an institute that the ritual symbols stand for. By studying the dynamics underlying the rituals of status passage in terms of ritual analysis, participants learn to recognize persons,
events and objects in their symbolic and functional roles in the rites of passage. It delineates the key ritual movements which focus on the important conditions which permit crossing of boundaries in a status transition ritual that are often overlooked or misunderstood. Ritual analysis offers a sense of coherence to the constituent parts of the initiation, novitiate and profession in consecrated life, which otherwise, may elude the understanding of both the novice masters/mistresses and novices. The transition experienced by the candidates of novitiate, the sense of their many symbolic actions, their new role in the institute, and the recognition of this by the larger society could all be clearly comprehensible, if seen in the ritual categories. We learn how all the pieces fit together and what significance is intended by a role, an individual act, symbol or phase etc., in the ritual processes of status passage of candidates, which otherwise may appear as bizarre, irrelevant or insignificant.

**End Note**

8Ibid.
12For both Jews and Christians fellowship meal is like what Turner calls a *dominant* ritual symbol. It is under the shadow of this ‘dominant’ symbol of rich theological and sociological meaning, the sinners, tax collectors or outcasts are transformed or initiated to the new way of life. V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 20.


Ibid.


V. Mario, *Spirit of St. Camillus*, (Bangalore: Camillian Publications, 1989), 266
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1. DEFINITION OF SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality may be described as the art of living responsibly, lovingly and wisely in our concrete setting. Spirituality refers to our way of being in the world in the light of God. More simply, spirituality is the way in which we relate with God, with others, with ourselves and with the cosmos. In short spiritual life is to do the will of God.

Christian spirituality consists in a partial re-enactment in our own lives of what happened once and for all in Jesus of Nazareth as the Incarnate Word. All authentic Christian spirituality is, consequently, an imitation of Christ - not a mechanical, servile imitation - but one which is spontaneous and free, proportioned to one’s unique personality and life situation.

2. PLURALISM IN SPIRITUALITY

There has always been a certain diversity which has characterized the history of Christian spirituality. There have been different schools of spirituality, different trends, different emphases, but all of these, in so far as they have been authentic, have been rooted in the same gospel message. They have, each in their own manner, been reflections on the one mystery of Christ.

From the Acts of the apostles and the letters of Paul as well as from the four gospel accounts, it is clear that from the very beginning Christians experienced and lived the mystery of Jesus Christ in different ways and therefore already had somewhat different spiritualities.

Despite their similarities, the synoptic writers emphasise different aspects of the Good News. Mark stresses the coming of God’s kingdom, especially...
through Jesus’ passion and death. Matthew and Luke give important spiritual teachings in their accounts of Jesus’ sermons; Matthew’s ecclesial interests differ somewhat from Luke’s frequent portrayal of God’s compassion revealed through Jesus Christ or from Luke’s many references to Jesus’ prayer. The distinctive Johannine gospel presents Jesus as the Word of God sent by the Father to reveal the Father, to call for faith in himself, and to promise the beginning of eternal life already in our earthly existence through his word, his gift of his Eucharistic body and blood, and his sending the Holy Spirit from the Father. The first letter of Peter has strongly influenced some spiritual traditions by its teaching about our sharing the divine nature and about every Christian as a sharer in the priesthood of Christ. James and Paul give different weight to the roles of faith and works in Christian life.

In patristic and later periods, each of the many varieties of Christian spirituality that developed sought to flow from the Gospel. Nevertheless, each emphasised different aspects of the Gospel in its teaching, liturgy, devotional practices, and forms of expression. The many strands of reflection on Jesus and his Gospel called forth different responses as the Gospel was preached, received, and inculturated in the early Church. This inculturation process led the Fathers of the Church to develop the theme of catholicity, that is, the variety in which the one faith was expressed and lived as the Gospel spread to different peoples and cultures.

Some of the most striking variations were those between the east and west, for example, between eastern stress on liturgy and Christ’s resurrection on the one hand, and western concentration on moral doctrine, original sin and Christ’s passion on the other. Within these larger traditions further differences emerged, for example, between Syrian and Byzantine spiritualities in the east, and among Celtic, Gallic, Germanic and Latin spiritualities in the west. Still further variations occurred within these. Various ways of living the Gospel in different times, places and cultures are evident in the rise of various forms of monasticism among men and women in both the east and the west. This development was followed by other forms of religious life: those of canons regular, mendicants, including second orders of nuns and third orders of laywomen and laymen. Lay spirituality expressed itself in many forms of popular piety, for example, in the building of shrines and cathedrals, in pilgrimages, in associations such as guilds, confraternities, and societies engaged in works of social justice and charity, in retreats, Catholic action and Cursillo groups, or in charismatic and other movements.
In the west, one of the most significant examples of pluralism in spirituality was the split between Protestant and Catholic spiritualities. Within many Christian churches, the last century has seen significant changes in spiritual outlook. The Second Vatican Council, through its renewed emphasis on the word of God in scripture, liturgy and preaching, and through its espousal of ecumenism, has affected not only Catholic but also Anglican and Protestant spirituality. For Catholics the council opened the way to specific spiritualities, as is clear from the troubled and sometimes belligerent reaction of those attached to spiritual traditions derived from baroque times or from more recent Christian experience. One of the Council’s most remarkable teaching was its recognition and positive evaluation of the differences between the eastern and western churches not only in liturgy, theology, and discipline, but also in spirituality.¹

Increasing official and theological insistence on the need for inculturation of the Gospel throughout the world has led to recognition of the need for pluralism in spirituality. Pluralism in theology has also been recognised, especially by Pope Paul VI, and such theological pluralism has important consequences for spirituality.²

The pluralism, while obviously having a place in any age of Christianity, is especially important to contemporary Christian life; for today’s Church offers a particularly advantageous climate for the development of authentic pluralism in Christian living. This favourable climate has developed because of the greater spirit of freedom which is present in today’s Church.

What are the qualities which are necessary to live in today’s Christian community with its increased pluralism? First of all, spiritual discernment. Among the diverse movements in today’s Church, which are really Spirit-led? Which one does the Spirit intend for me personally? To cope with today’s pluralism we also need Christian maturity. In the more tightly structured and monolithic Church of pre-Vatican II days, we had things spelled out in much greater detail. Finally, there is a special need today for the spirit of Christian tolerance - a tolerance of the views and life styles which do not agree with my own.

However, any constructed modern spirituality has no meaning if it is separated from the tradition out of which it springs. No one can acquire an authentically Christian identity which does not have a strongly biblical, historical, and ecclesial dimension.

Our sensitivity and appreciation for the history of spirituality can never shroud the value of freedom and spontaneity in seeking God. The ways in which God
may call a person to serve him are countless; and the saints were often strikingly
unsystematic people because they were aware of the overriding greatness of God.

The only central point of the spiritual life is God; and that center is everywhere.
God’s grace is greater than religious institutions or styles of spirituality; we can
never elevate any vision or technique into an absolute of the religious life. Each
individual man or woman is a unique and unrepeatable term of God’s creative
love. Each must find his or her path to God in a way proper to himself or herself.

3. SPIRITUALITY OF DIOCESAN PRIESTS

The context and environment of the diocesan priest’s ministry and especially
the distinctive character of his priestly ordination allow us to speak of a
spirituality that is proper to the diocesan priest. The spirituality of the diocesan
priest is distinct from that of the religious while not inferior to it. To this day, the
belief endures at least in certain quarters that the spiritual life of active ministry,
such as of diocesan priesthood, is inferior - or at least diminished - because it is
full of interruptions and mental burdens. For these people, diocesan priesthood
embodies a lifestyle with little spirituality. What spirituality it does have, it is
assumed, consists of remnants adapted from the religious life.

This way of looking at things is far from correct. Religious can cut away
many things from their lifestyle that the diocesan priests find central to theirs.
Religious communities can and do arrange their work around their prayer and
daily time-table, with prayer the priority. Priests in pastoral work, on the other
hand, find that the times and place of prayer need to adapt to the demands of
pastoral work. The schedule revolves around ministry to others, which cannot
always be scheduled in advance.

Most often the pattern of the priest’s life today as formerly, is at best somewhat
erratic: three funerals in one week and none for the next four, a flurry of meetings
at one time and none at another. Regularity in anything, even meals, falls apart
sometimes. If the ideal is a regular schedule, regular time for prayer, regular
ascetical exercises, even regular meals, they cannot manage it.

What is the specific identity of the diocesan priest’s spirituality? In a recent
classic study entitled The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest, and edited by Father
Donald Cozzens, Rector of St. Mary’s Seminary of the Diocese of Cleveland,
twelve experienced and qualified diocesan priests or diocesan priests become
bishops, in exciting, innovative and creative essays, have looked for answers to
our question. The following is a summary synthesis of what six of these essays
have to say.
3.1. Identity of the Diocesan Priest

Before we answer the question what is the specific identity of the diocesan priest’s spirituality, we need to specify the identity of the diocesan priest himself. Since the time of Trent, the priesthood was clearly defined, safely moored in Trent’s theological harbor. Few winds of change threatened the safe mooring. It was a time when the status of the priest went unquestioned and his authority unchallenged. One could catch a glimpse of awe and reverence in the eyes of some parishioners when they encountered their parish priest.

The present time in the history of the Church challenges the identity of the diocesan priest. The clarity of role and purpose that long sustained diocesan priests no longer holds. Sociologically, in today’s secular environment priests are regularly perceived as marginal figures who are considered briefly and with amused detachment. The message is patronizingly clear: While society still requires that a certain respect be shown the clergy, it is doctors and lawyers, business persons and politicians, scientists and bankers, who play the important roles. The peripheral role of the priest has apparently dampened his spirit and eroded his confidence. Yet priests remain important to Catholics in general as well as to society as a whole.

Secondly, Vatican II spawned serious reflection on the theology of the priesthood that in turn had led to a re-examination of the priest’s identity and spirituality. For many priests, particularly the older ones, the conciliar insights were disturbing and threatening. The feeling persisted that something was being lost. Some understood the external respect and reverence sustained by the culture of Trent to be a confirming sign of the sacredness, the special sacredness of the priesthood. So it was difficult for them to understand that not only were they priests to the people of God and for the people of God but they were also members of the people of God. A cloud seemed to engulf the priestly identity that for so long served them well, that validated the sacrifices inherent to the life-long commitment of celibate ministry. In some cases priests were more than disturbed and frightened; they were angry and hostile. Their center of security was shaken and for the first time they didn’t quite know their place.

Who are the diocesan priests in this post-conciliar Church? What is their charism as diocesan priests? Do they possess a spirituality grounded in the ministry and life they live?

Many would understand the priest’s identity as constituted by the call to preside at Eucharist. But while the Eucharist is closely linked to the priest’s vocation, it seems that it is not an adequate focus for understanding the unique ministry of the diocesan priest. On the one hand, it is clear that in the early
Church the presbyters did not preside at the Eucharist. And on the other hand, many priests today experience themselves very much as presbyters even when not preaching or presiding at the public celebration of the Eucharist.

In a 1996 *Origins* article entitled “Approaches to Spirituality” Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of America, maintained that the priest’s identity needs to be less functional and more sacramental. Catholic sacramental theology teaches us that being a priest is not simply a task that we have assumed, a function or responsibility like being a teacher. Priesthood is a sacramental reality that makes us different from other members of the Church, not automatically better but certainly different. When we speak of the sacramental character of the holy orders, we mean that from the time of our ordination, indeed throughout eternity, we are re-formed into the person of Christ. This is the most central and most important feature of our lives after our basic configuration to Christ in baptism and confirmation.

In a 1995 essay, also in *Origins*, “Priests: Religious Leaders, Doctors of the Soul,” Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago noted: “The priest is not primarily someone who works, preaches, ministers, counsels. Rather, he is someone who, at the core of his being, has been set on fire by God and who invites others to catch the flame.”

The sacrament of orders refers the priest directly to Christ. The Second Vatican Council connects Eucharistic presidency and pastoral leadership on the grounds that in both the priest acts in the person of Christ.

The priest not only performs the sacrament, he simultaneously is a sacrament – living, visible and audible sign of Christ interacting with the people. This is where the priest draws his strength - where he sees beyond what he does and experiences who he is. When linked to Christ as its inspiration and invigorating principle, priesthood is never boring or experienced as an endless series of repetitive functions and tasks. Priesthood itself is primarily relational and only secondarily functional.

3.2. Centrality of Silent Prayer in the Life of Priests

The relationship with God remains key in the life of priests. Priesthood does indeed require skill, competence, hard work, and discipline. There are tasks to perform and responsibilities to assume. But before one is sent on mission, he must first develop his relationship with God. If one examines the classic call narratives from scripture - those of Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, the twelve apostles, and Saint Paul - one sees this pattern emerge. God first establishes a relationship with someone before they are sent to proclaim the word. God is first
Abraham’s friend, then asks him to leave his native land. God quells Moses’ fears and answers his questions, then sends him to Pharaoh. Jeremiah’s complaint that he is too young for God’s work is answered; then he is sent to prophesy. Isaiah’s lips are purified; then he is sent to proclaim. The twelve gather around Jesus, travel with him, learn from him, eat with him, stay with him; then they are sent on mission. Paul encounters the risen Christ on the road to Damascus; then he is sent to preach to the Gentiles. Relationship precedes mission; it is not the other way around. It is not, for example, because they proclaim, teach, and preach that the great biblical figures are able to establish a relationship with God. God takes the initiative first in calling these people to a relationship with himself; then, through that relationship, they discover their task or mission.

Similarly, it is not because a priest performs sacred duties that he is in a relationship with Christ; rather, it is because of his relationship with Christ that a priest is given sacred duties, tasks, and ministry. To see this pattern in reverse is to fall into functionalism.

In an address to the newly ordained priests at Bogota, Columbia, Pope Paul VI said: “God has in us his living instrument, his minister, and therefore his interpreter, the echo of his voice....This tremendous fact (Lord, grant that we may never forget it) carries with it a duty, the first and sweetest of our sacerdotal life: That of intimacy with Christ, in the Holy Spirit and with You, Father (Jn 16:27); that is to say, an authentic and personal interior life, not only zealously nourished by the full state of grace, but also voluntarily manifested by continuous, conscious attention to prayerful colloquy and loving contemplation. The oft repeated words of Jesus at the last supper, “abide in my love,” (Jn 15:9; 15:4, etc.) are directed to us....In this desire for union with Christ and his revelation of the human and divine world, the minister who is the representative of Christ, finds his first characteristic attitude. By his charism of Holy Orders he is invited to personify Christ in himself. This is something very important and indispensable for us. Do not believe that this complete absorption of our conscious spirituality in the intimate colloquy with Christ is an obstacle or a brake on the dynamism of our ministry. It does not prevent our external ministry nor does it serve as an evasion of the trouble and the fatigue of our service to others, which is the mission confided to us. Rather, it is a stimulus for our active ministry, the source of our apostolic energy, and renders efficacious the mysterious relation between the love of Christ and our pastoral dedication.”

Without some continuing conversation in a relationship, you lose your friend; you lose your wife or husband; you lose your God. The depth of relationship equals the depth of communication. If I do not have a conversation “going”
with God, then when I have free time I will find something else to do with it. Just because I have more time doesn’t mean I will use it to turn to God. If the communication is ordinarily there, I will return to it repeatedly in many varied patterns.

Having established that the essence of Christian spirituality is interiority, we must recognize that there are many different ways of achieving that interiority. As mentioned earlier, the spirituality of the diocesan priest is not identical with that of the religious. To find the way best suited for the diocesan priest we must look at his life situation, the ministry or role which he carries out in the midst of the community. We may characterize the spirituality of the diocesan priest as a dialectical spirituality of prayer and ministry. The decision to pray is arguably the most important decision the priest makes concerning his spiritual life. At the same time, the decision to exercise priestly ministry is equally central to his spirituality. The emerging spirituality of the diocesan priest, therefore, is a dialectical spirituality that is rooted in his life of faith and prayer and at the same time shaped and forged by the exercise of his ministry. It is in the latter pole of the dialectic that we discover those characteristics that allow us to speak of a spirituality proper to the diocesan priest.

3.3. Vital Importance of Priestly Ministry

Vatican II affirmed that pastoral charity is the way to priestly perfection.\(^5\) The priest becomes holy within the community of faith by ministering to it. Priestly spirituality is found in the interaction between priest and people. The priest meets God in the community he serves.

Concretely, diocesan priests exercise their ministry (1) by leading the laity as servants; (2) by celebrating the dying and rising of Jesus in liturgy; and (3) by teaching, in a variety of contexts, what they believe about God and Christ and Church and the demands of Christian discipleship.

3.3.1. Ministry of Servant-Leader

This seems to be of the essence of a diocesan priest’s charism: The diocesan priest is someone who lives with the people, and each becomes a part of the other’s life. Almost every other element of his spirituality flows from this one inescapable fact.

In his 1990 Holy Thursday Message to priests, Pope John Paul II said that diocesan and other parish clergy have a unique charism that places them at the heart of the mission of the Church. Not only are they called forth from the laity to be priests but they also choose to continue to live among lay people, to lead
communities of lay men and women, and to focus their ministry on the mission and spirituality of the laity.

The situation of the laity and that of the secular clergy have much in common. Both seek to be in the world without being worldly. Both seek God in the unpredictability of daily life. Both find their spirituality focused on the Sunday liturgy, contemplation in action, care for families, weddings and funerals, the rearing of children, care for those in need, and active engagement in their cultural and social environment. Diocesan priests and the people they serve have much to teach one another because, despite the differences in their responsibilities, their pursuit of God shares a common milieu.

There are some things that only those who are committed to a spiritual life in the midst of the ups and downs of secular realities can teach one another. It is one thing to seek God in an environment ordered around religious concerns. It is a very different experience to find God amid the disorder and distractions of a world that often does its best to shut God out. In this the parish clergy and the lay faithful understand one another. The spirituality of the diocesan priest comes to birth and is nurtured among the laity and in many ways maintains the features of lay spirituality.

In living among the people, the diocesan priest may function in a variety of roles, such as counsellor, administrator, civil rights advocate, or teacher, in addition to his most common role as pastor. Nevertheless, his presence in the people’s lives always has a unique focus. His ministry ultimately points to the presence of Christ and his gospel. As the scriptural metaphor suggests, he is meant to be a spiritual leaven in the community - the gospel “yeast” that will cause the communal “dough” to rise.

### 3.3.2. Ministry of Presiding over the Eucharist

The diocesan priest’s life among the people achieves its summit in the celebration of the Eucharist. Presbyters are most fully who they are called to be as pastors, prophets, and priests in the Sunday Eucharistic assembly. It is no wonder that diocesan priests often speak of having their most fulfilling moments while presiding at Sunday liturgy. The priest’s greatest charism is to stand among his community around the Lord’s table and to give thanks to God.

We have yet to appreciate fully the revolutionary change in our understanding of Eucharist brought about by Vatican II and the liturgical directions in which its thinking continues to move us. To understand just how radically different Catholic Eucharist has become, one needs to remember where we have come from.
The theology of the Eucharist that emerged from the Council of Trent and persisted down to Vatican II was clearly that of medieval scholasticism, which spoke of sacraments in terms of matter and form and validity and liceity, minister and recipient. Thus, in the case of the Eucharist the matter was bread and wine; form, the words of consecration said by the priest over the bread and wine. The priest was the celebrant and did not need the people to have a valid Eucharist. All he needed was bread and wine and the words of consecration that he spoke.

The people were spectators, watching an action performed on their behalf. This was the Eucharistic heritage from Trent until Vatican II. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, as well as the liturgical documents issued after the council to implement the directives of that constitution, produced what can only be called unprecedented and explosive revolution in liturgical understanding and practice.

Though it would be too strong to say that the Council took the Eucharist away from the priest and gave it back to the people, it would not be too strong to say that it returned the Eucharist to what it had been in the beginning: an assembly of God’s people come together to praise God, to hear God’s word and to “break bread” with the firm belief that the Lord Jesus was present among them. It would be quite correct to say that the priest is no longer the central actor in this drama of salvation. That role belongs to the risen Jesus present in our midst through the action of the Spirit and to the assembly of people among whom he is present. Though not the central actor, the priest has a special role: while he is not the consecrator (the Holy Spirit is) he is, by reason of his ordination, the presider who leads the assembly and says on its behalf the prayer inviting God to send the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine and also on the assembly.

The Eucharistic “revolution” brought a radical change in Eucharistic vocabulary. Where we once restricted the role of “celebrant” to the priest, we now speak of the entire assembly as “celebrants.” The priest presides over the celebration. Where we used to speak of the priest changing the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, we now see his role as a humbler one: to ask God to send the Holy Spirit to effect this change, in other words, to ask God to send the Holy Spirit to do for us now what Jesus did at the Last Supper. The words “This is my Body,” “This is my Blood,” are no longer referred to as the words of consecration, but rather as the words of institution. They are a recital of what Jesus did at the Supper that become effective now through the action of the Spirit of God.

There is no question that the priest’s role in today’s Eucharist is a more modest one than it was in the Tridentine liturgy. At center stage in the Eucharist is the assembly, not the priest.
Priests are not just leaders at worship who must call forth the full, active, knowledgeable participation of God’s people; they are also promoters of a deeper spirituality which more and more people long for: a spirituality that goes beyond devotional exercises to an awakening of a deep sense of the union with God. Among other things, this means learning the value of silence. The priest as presider at the Eucharist must bring a contemplative dimension to the celebration of liturgy. Moments of silence in Eucharistic gathering and at other times in the midst of their day’s activities, can be a powerful way of helping all the faithful to realize their oneness in the Lord.

Some people do not know how to deal with silence: it almost seems to embarrass them. One of the greatest gifts a priest can contribute to the people he serves is an appreciation of the value of silence, not only in liturgy, but also in daily life. Clearly he can only do this authentically, if silence has become a regular and significant element in his own life. He must realize and help others to realize that there is so much more to life than the fleeting fragments of it that we catch in our words. Life is not an uninterrupted flow of words which is finally silenced only by death. Rather life, if it is true and genuine, develops in silence, comes to the surface in authentic words and returns to a deeper silence. At the end of life we speak our most authentic word of all, our final declaration of who we are in our depths. That word, which is our Amen to this life, ushers us into the eternal silence of God.

3.3.3. Ministry of Teaching

In a Church in which preaching had often been perfunctory and people felt only a less serious obligation to be present for the proclamation of the Scriptures and the homily, Vatican II states that “priests... have as their primary duty the proclamation of the gospel of God to all”.7 Karl Rahner affirms that a priest is a man to whom the word has been entrusted. He is, before all else, the minister and servant of the word of God.8

Both preparation for preaching and the experience of proclaiming God’s word week after week in the assembly are a golden highway to conversion and holiness in the life of the priest. In this sense the spirituality of the diocesan priest may also be qualified as a spirituality of proclamation of the word.

Not only has the council reminded the priest of his primordial obligation to preach the gospel, it has at the same time encouraged him to preach at weekday celebrations of the Eucharist as well as at the Sunday liturgy.9 Each day he is encouraged to offer a homily, each day he is shaped and formed by the word of God that he proclaims. Taken seriously, this responsibility to preach God’s word
becomes a ground and foundation of the diocesan priest’s spirituality. It requires, day after day, the reading of the Lectionary, prayer and reflection on the readings of the day, and the crafting of the homily itself. The encouragement to preach a homily at daily celebrations of Eucharist as well as Sunday celebrations is a major structural development in the spirituality of the priest emanating from Vatican II.

At the outset the preacher should be reminded that the first person he should preach to has to be himself. The holiness of the priest is the first and most effective proclamation of the word. Unless grounded in authentic holiness of life and maturity of personality, this most serious obligation and responsibility of the priest will remain substantially unfulfilled.

We have at our liturgy a much more sophisticated and educated community than we preached to in yesteryears. To treat lightly our responsibility particularly for the Sunday homily is to fail in one of the principal ways available to us for the promotion of the reign of God. To preach a good homily we need to love the scriptures. A wealth of excellent commentaries is easily at hand. We need to be acquainted with at least some of them.

The teaching ministry of the priest is by no means limited to the teaching that takes place at liturgy. There is the need of instructing the young, the parents of those whose children are to be baptized, those who are preparing for marriage. More than all these, there is the faith-formation that must be a life-time experience in the lives of all the faithful, including the priest.

3.4. Spirituality and Priestly Celibacy

Just as the spirituality of the diocesan priest is different from that of his religious and monastic brothers, so his experience of celibacy is also unique. While all humans are prone to experience the pains of loneliness and, at times, to feel burdened by that pain, loneliness is a particular trial for the diocesan priest. Celibacy denies the priest the companionship of a spouse and the support of children. His charism of living among the people takes him out of the monastery and away from the support of a religious community. This charism places him, often as the only priest, alone with his people. It is little wonder that the parish priest, after experiencing the joy of celebrating Sunday liturgies with his people, may find his spirits sinking on Sunday afternoons, after his people have all gone home to their families and he is left behind.

An essential gift offered to the celibate priest is a unique friendship with Jesus. Even a cursory reading of the scriptures clearly demonstrates the special friendship Jesus had with his twelve personally chosen disciples. With the
strength provided by his unique friendship with Jesus and with the support of his people, the priest becomes a kind of “sacrament” for his people as he calls on God to sanctify their lives.

Diocesan priests consistently speak of the support they receive from their brother priests. But the diocesan priest spends most of his time separated from other priests and immersed in his life among the people. As celibate men, priests often find refuge and support among a few families with whom they feel welcome and can relax. Such relationships can go awry in a number of ways. Nevertheless, being surrounded by the companionship of married couples and the enthusiasm of children, even for a few hours, is a comfort.

Arguably, the human soul has two basic longings: It longs for intimacy and for transcendence. So strong is its hunger for these two realities that failing to find authentic intimacy and transcendence, the soul will turn to pseudo forms. For example, often what motivates individuals to pursue promiscuous sexual encounters is the unrequited hunger for intimacy. Sexuality, being a major paradigm for union, is readily confused with authentic intimacy. If authentic experiences of transcendence go unmet, pseudo-states of transcendence are brought on by the use, and often abuse, of alcohol and other chemicals.

Failure to develop authentic celibate relationships of intimacy has led both to spiritual and vocational crises in the lives of countless priests. Authentic human intimacy is a hallmark of the mature and healthy adult. The capacity for mature and honest relationships is also critical for a sound and mature spiritual life.

There are large numbers of priests whose legitimate intimacy-needs remain unknown to them. Aware that something is missing and often unable to name that which is missing, they wrestle with their souls’ restlessness and discomfort. Prayer is intensified, spiritual directors are consulted, retreats are made - but the vague yet persistent feeling that something is missing disturbs their peace of soul. Whenever this state of soul exists, the celibacy issuelooms large. What is missing is judged to be wife and children and the comforts of family and home. While this may indeed be the case for some priests, for most others it is more an issue of a fundamental human need not being met: the need for intimacy. Priests who have acknowledged and addressed their intimacy-needs as mature, celibate men enjoy a spiritual life quite different in tone and texture from that of their brothers whose intimacy needs remain largely unfulfilled.

As the priest’s sense of God as Love grows, he will find that his own friendships with men and women are more and more central to his spirituality and his being. These friendships will matter more than ever before.10
To conclude, at the heart of any discussion of the quality of priestly life is the authenticity and maturity of the priest’s spirituality. It remains the fundamental issue undergirding his preaching, presiding, pastoral care, facilitating, and administering. To be the sign they were ordained to be, priests must be men of God.

4. SPIRITUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS

Father Michael Himes, professor at Boston College, U.S., told the annual meeting of the U.S. National Conference of Vicars for Religious that he foresees “an explosion of religious life in the next 50 years.” He said the forms of religious life will not remain what they are today. But he said people would be living “publicly vowed lives in community,” and suggested they might return to something closer to the way religious life was expressed when it first began.

Father Himes said he was confident of a resurgence of religious life because the Church needs it, and God could be trusted to supply the needs of the Church. But he also pointed to positive signs in the extensive interest in spirituality and in service that he has seen among college students. Young people are “not satisfied with the New Age stuff,” but are looking for “a rooted spiritual life,” he said.

Belief is central to religion: belief in God (gods), belief in the Bible (holy books), belief in the teachings of the Church (the teaching authorities of different religions), etc. Belief guides, conditions, influences, motivates, animates and permeates the life of most people. So too the life of a religious is influenced and animated by his or her belief. It is vitally important to proclaim and manifest that one is a believer in religious life, for an unshakable belief is central to one’s life as religious.

Why are we consecrated persons? Most of us would give one of the traditional and safe answers: “to do the will of God”, “to serve God”, “to serve others”, “to serve humanity”, “to preach the good news to people”, “to bring salvation to humanity”, “for the glory of God”, etc. But this is no more than a verbal answer as against an existential answer in the case of most of us. Verbal answer refers to answer in terms of words, whereas existential answer refers to answer in terms of life.

Is it not true that most of us who are teachers live as if teaching were our primary aim and objective? Do we not devote even our prayer time to the task of teaching? If so our existential answer to the question why we are consecrated persons is teaching. Is consecration necessary for effective teaching? Are not some of the lay teachers as good as ourselves or even better? Likewise, is it not true that most of us who are social workers have hardly time to devote to
silent prayer? If so, social work is the answer we give to the query why we are consecrated persons. Is consecration needed for serious social work? If so all the lay social workers should necessarily be cutting a sorry figure as compared to consecrated social workers which is far from true. Similarly, do not most of us who are nurses find scarcely any time for personal prayer? If so let us not fool ourselves by declaring that we have become consecrated persons for the “glory of God” or “for the salvation of souls”. Through our life we are revealing that we have chosen consecrated life for the purpose of nursing. Is consecration a requisite for exemplary nursing? Are there not lay nurses who outshine some of us in dedication and generosity? Likewise we can go on arguing about every apostolate we engage in including preaching. We are all familiar with lay people who are inspiring preachers. It means that even for the sacred ministry of preaching the word of God consecrated life is not necessary. In short, every ministry the consecrated persons are engaged in, can be performed by lay people equally well or even better.

If so, is there anything that only consecrated persons can do? Yes. It is to be apostles, prophets, mediators between God and his people. In his salvific design, God always communicates with his people through mediators such as Moses, Aaron, Anna and the like. He never deals with them directly.

True, lay people too are mediators. But they are no more than ordinary mediators as against consecrated persons who are professional mediators.

What differentiates ordinary mediators from professional mediators? Well, here are some examples to illustrate the difference. Not every adult is a professional doctor in as much as not everyone is trained to be such. Only those who are qualified in medical colleges are considered professional doctors. Yet, everyone is a “doctor” in the ordinary sense of the word, in as much as they are able to assist the sick, say, by way of massage, fomentation, simple first aid, etc. Likewise, every adult is an ordinary teacher because they are capable of imparting knowledge to others, however minimally. In fact, mothers - even illiterate ones - constitute the initial teachers. Yet we don’t call them professional teachers unless they have been qualified in training schools or colleges. Similarly, every adult may be called an ordinary “soldier” in so far as they are expected to defend the country as need arises. But are they professional soldiers? No, for most of them lack military training.

In a similar vein, lay people are indeed mediators between God and Men, but in the ordinary sense of the word. They are not professional mediators because they are not called, recruited and trained to be such. This is the privilege of
consecrated persons. They have the vocation and training to be professional mediators between God and Men.

In light of the foregoing reflections what is the difference between, say, a lay lady teacher and a sister teacher with identical qualifications? Before God the lay lady teacher is a professional teacher who is also a mediatrix between God and Men; whereas the sister teacher is a professional mediatrix between God and Men who is also a teacher. There is definitely a momentous difference.

Now we ask: can a consecrated person be a professional mediator and transmit God experience to others if he has himself not experienced God? Further, is it possible normally to experience God at depth in the center of our being without a good dose of silent prayer? Has any saint in any religion experienced God at depth without recourse to silent prayer? Never. Even Jesus Christ, as a human being, had to resort to silent prayer in order to experience God (Lk 3:21-22, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 9:28-29, 11:1, 22:39-46, 23:34, 23:46; Mk 1:35, 6:31, 6:46, 14:35-36; Mt 6:6, 11:25-26, 14:23, 19:13, 26:36-46). While dealing with spirituality of the diocesan priests we observed that spirituality is a search for true interiority and that prayer can be understood in two different ways. We usually understand prayer as an outward activity communicating with God in words. All the saints had recognized that deeper dimension of prayer, namely, prayer as inward venture: as the response to God within us, the discovery of God within us which leads ultimately to the discovery and fulfilment of our own true being in God. Concretely, this is the prayer of quiet and silence wherein we enter into God’s own silence in the depths of our being.

A simple principle lies at the heart of consecrated life: its members in so far as they are mediators between God and Men, in other words, mediators of God experience to Men, ought to be persons of God, persons of silent prayer.

At heart, consecrated persons are apostles, not professionals. Certainly, they should have all the necessary credentials in their field of expertise - but they must be motivated by the centrality of Jesus in their life in silent prayer, not by a need for success.

If we need biblical confirmation we have it in Mark 3: 13-15. We read in this passage: “And Jesus went up into the hills, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” Among the three objectives of the call of the apostles, the primary one is to be with Jesus. In other words, the principal purpose of being an apostle is to be lovingly present to the Lord. This comes out very clearly in the Good News translation: “Then Jesus
went up a hill and called to himself the men he wanted. They came to him, and he chose twelve, whom he named apostles. ‘I have chosen you to be with me,’ he told them. ‘I will also send you out to preach, and you will have authority to drive out demons.’” As is apparent the activities of preaching and fighting against all possible evils (demon is personification of evil) take second place after presence to the Lord. Silent prayer is the first responsibility of the apostles. As the religious are the apostles of today their highest duty should be evident.

During her many journeys, Mother Theresa was often interviewed by press reporters and journalists. Once she was asked about her congregation and whether she would call herself a “successful person” in the light of the fact that she and her sisters engaged in such a vast number of good works. To this Mother Theresa gave a meaningful, relevant, and a very celebrated answer: “God has not called me to be successful, but God has called me to be faithful”.

In this age particularly, the credibility of the consecrated life in the eyes of the people depend upon a perception of consecrated persons as primarily God-centered and then devoted to serving others. Historically, consecrated life was esteemed as comprising a unique body of persons who were willing to “give up everything” to follow the Master for becoming completely fascinated with God’s mystery, becoming bound so closely to Christ that even the power of death could not effect a separation.

Sometimes in their hectic activities consecrated persons forget that the first mission entrusted to them is the mission within: to experience the reality of Christ’s presence and to witness to that experience. Only when they have “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27) and are aware of “having been commissioned by God and of standing in his presence” (2 Cor 2:17) are they able to truly minister in his name.

It is often so easy to become a consummate professional, a respected social worker, a learned scholar, that consecrated persons forget who the real minister is, attributing their achievements and recognition to themselves. How easy and natural to forget that the only transforming power is the presence of Christ in giving meaning and purpose to deeds accomplished in his name! “Without me, you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain....It is vain that you rise up early and go late to rest (Ps 127:1-2).

The real crises in contemporary religious life are not related to vocations; they concern spirituality and significance. Unless our way of living the Gospel has at its heart Jesus Christ and regular life of personal and communal prayer, it eventually makes little sense to its members or, for that matter, to anyone else.
Religious are called to witness to God’s presence. It is not enough to repeat doctrinal or theoretical formulas; personal witness to a personal experience of God is called for, said Bishop John Osta of Patna, India in his intervention at the Bishops’ Synod for Asia (intervention no. 37). Bishop John called for a new contemplative lifestyle for all consecrated persons in the Church.

David Fleming SM, superior general of the Marianists (intervention no. 68) made an interesting contribution on some aspects of the “dialogue of religious experience.” His nine years in Nepal and India informed his presentation. He said: “To speak to the heart of Asian people and enter into a genuine dialogue of religious experience, religious and bishops should give special attention to developing the Christian contemplative life in Asia, as well as to enriching the contemplative dimension within all institutes of consecrated life, in order to create incultured forms of living the spirituality of each institute.”

Cardinal Eduardo Martinez Somalo, prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life gave the 81st intervention. The key to mission witness is who the consecrated person is, not what he or she does, he said.

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, superior general of the Jesuits, contrasted those who work for results with those who live out of love (intervention no. 97). The high-quality institutions run by religious orders do not automatically proclaim the love of God. Our apostolates proclaim love when they are run by people “though whom God’s love shines.”

A short comment, one of many during the synod, about centrality of God-experience, came from Bishop Gratian Mundaden of Bijnor, India (intervention no. 124): “A Hindu sadhu once told Abhishiktanandaswamy: If you want to touch the heart of Indians, every one of you must become a guru. A guru is one who has deep God-experience. Such a guru does not quote, does not instruct, does not formulate, does not dogmatize. The guru shares personal experience of God . . . There is an urgent need to change . . . The leadership of the Church has to change the style of functioning, to become more spiritual, free from institutional authoritarianism and fully at the service of the gospel and the world. Such a leadership will be able to animate people to God-experience and help them translate this experience into fraternal love. This is to be the original contribution of the gospel to Asia, where other religions concentrate on God-experience alone without any effort to serve the brethren.”

An increasing number of young people, looking at religious life as a possible commitment, want to be part of something larger than themselves and to work alongside others with the same vision and commitment.
5. SPIRITUALITY OF THE SECULAR INSTITUTES

Spirituality of the Secular Institutes comprises two elements, namely, living of secularity and living of consecration.

5.1. Living of Secularity

Secularity is what colors the way of life of Secular Institutes and constitutes the most significant characteristic of their consecrated life. This has been stressed over and again in all the ecclesiastical documents addressing the nature and activity of Secular Institutes. Just going to the world every now and again to witness to the kingdom of God or giving some good example does not suffice for Secular Institutes. They are to live their consecrated life exactly in the same situation as other lay people. Those who lead such a life follow literally what Vatican II says about laity. It is good to note that what Vatican II says about the laity is a contribution Secular Institutes have made to the theology of the laity. The very things that were said about Secular Institutes before Vatican II are those we find incorporated into the teaching of the Council regarding laity.

The spirituality of the Secular Institute may be termed as a spirituality of commitment as distinct from the spirituality of withdrawal. Whereas the spirituality of withdrawal fears egoism and worldliness and tends to seek God outside this world in pure adoration, the spirituality of commitment begins with himself and the world as he finds them and expects to find God there. The resurrected Christ lives and works now in the community of his followers, and the Christian through his own apostolic activity is caught up with Christ. The spirituality of commitment is profoundly this-worldly and incarnational. The world has been corrupted and used for sinful purposes, but it is also a redeemed world, on its way to complete redemption (Rom 8:21). There is less concern today about sin in the world than grace for the world, less thought about impure or ambivalent motivation in the Christian than his being an instrument of grace contributing to the extension of the kingdom of Christ on earth.

Obviously, there are hazards in the spirituality of commitment. Perhaps the most obvious one is excessive optimism against which a strict vigil is to be kept.

A key scriptural image frequently used to explain the consecrated life of Secular Institutes is leaven. As the leaven image suggests, secular consecration is generally lived in silent discretion, having a powerful, but rather invisible influence. Union with Christ by grace and special vocation can be lived in every human situation; as such it can be secular, lived in the midst of the world, and expressed by using the means of the world, in every profession, in all circumstances of place and time.
Hence Secular Institutes must exclude everything which would differentiate them from the ordinary lot of the people. Natural ties with family, relatives and neighbors are part of the secular state of life. Not less secular is interest in professional as well as social progress, in trade union matters and political affairs. Political allegiance too comes under this category.

5.2. Living of Consecration

The novelty and the peculiarity of Secular Institutes is the combination of consecration and secularity. The foundations of secular consecration impose on members of Secular Institutes specific obligations, through a sacred bond, to practice the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience in an ordinary life in the midst of the world.

5.3. Secular Institutes and Prayer

Canon 719, 1, states: “In order that members may respond faithfully to their vocation and that their apostolic action may proceed from their union with Christ they are to be diligent in prayer.” Members of Secular Institutes are not just any other lay group; they retain consecrated character. Hence, deep union with God in prayer is the basis of their involvement in secular affairs so that they would be able to transform the world and not be conformed to it.

St. Ignatius of Loyola taught his followers to work as if everything depended on themselves and to pray as if everything depended on God. Here, in brief, we have a great deal of the theology of prayer of Secular Institutes.

Prayer is the highest mode of the interior experience necessary for the development of the human person. Everyone has absolute need of a conscious inwardness amid his world of external experiences. Christ told his followers that there are times when they must close the doors of their rooms (literally or figuratively) and pray to their Father in secret. Only if we have this depth, can we give ourselves to others, share the Eucharist fully, reform the Church and communities within it, and build up the Body of Christ in the world. Only then can we avoid being shattered when catastrophes fall upon us or crises make demands upon us. Only with this depth can we face that supreme moment when Christ returns to us.

It goes without saying that apostolate is not the first aim of Secular Institutes. If it were, we would have to change our criteria of perfection and states of perfection. True, the apostolate and the need for more dedicated apostles has
occasioned the birth and growth of Secular Institutes, but the main purpose, the general end and first aim is always the sanctification of their members and the glory of God. The specific or distinguishing purpose is the apostolate.

We can never repeat enough that a Secular Institute is a state of perfection, a state of striving towards perfection. As such, the general purpose will necessarily be to procure the glory of God and the sanctification of its members through the practice of the evangelical counsels and the observance of its statutes. There might be a great concern about the apostolate, but it must always keep the glory of God and the sanctification of the members as the starting point and end point.

We now come to the point where we started, i.e. the spirituality of consecrated life. All the above deliberations have led us to conclude that consecrated spirituality is summed up in God experience.

End Note

1See Decree on Ecumenism, nos. 14-17.
4Emphasis mine.
5Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 14.
6See, e.g., the Catechism of the Catholic Church which uses the words “the institution narrative” # 1353.
7Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 4.
9Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 52.
SANYASA
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Carmelaram, Bengaluru

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“Where there are religious, there is joy” – Pope Francis
Let us Respond to the Exhortation of Pope Francis to Wake up the
World with the Joy of the Gospel

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In the area of Consecrated Life we note, at present, a situation which is at times disconcerting. From the time when Moderators of communities were omnipresent, when everything had to be filtered through their judgments and their decisions and the subjects merely complied as far as possible with the will of those who governed them, we have passed to another time wherein it seems that in some communities, the only one who is actually considered superfluous is the superior. It is not rare to note an attitude of real indifference, almost of prejudice, against those who govern. Communities without superiors have even appeared where orders are given by everyone and by no one.

Might we say that the figure of the Moderator is often an obstacle rather than a help? What is the Moderator’s role in the religious community at the present time? In the following pages I would like to offer some contributions toward answering these difficult questions.

1. **AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE IN RELIGIOUS/CONSECRATED LIFE**

First of all, if we want to rightly understand the role of the Moderator in religious communities, we have to start clarifying the meaning of authority and obedience in Religious/Consecrated Life. Therefore the necessity of this first subtitle.

Does obedience actually occupy the last place among Evangelical Counsels? If sometimes it cuts the figure of the “poor relative” it is because obedience is seen by some people only as the submission to a Superior according to a
constitutional order; forgetting, indeed, that it is aimed at the research of a divine will that is the real substance of every Christian life. This is why St. Thomas Aquinas used to call obedience “potissimum inter tria vota”: the most powerful among the three vows. In Consecrated Life (as in Christian life) everything after all is an expression of obedience to God, since everything (celibacy, poverty, fraternal life, prayer life, mission…, submission to the group and to those who preside it) is the answer to the call from God, and finally to the love of God.

And for what refers to authority (in the Church and in Consecrated Life), let’s say at once that it has to be understood starting from common obedience. In fact, in Consecrated Life (as in the Church) everyone obeys, Superiors and subjects; nobody is master of the others, but all are fundamentally equal (cf. LG 32c, ChL 15a, 17g, 37, 55c, CIC 208, CCC 872, VC 31b), all brothers/sisters are servants of one another and obeying altogether to the Lord: “(In the Religious community) all obey, each with various tasks” (FT 18b). “Reverence for the will of God keeps those in authority in a state of humbly seeking, so that their acting conforms as much as possible to that holy will… (Therefore) With the intention of doing God’s will, authority and obedience are not therefore two distinct realities or things absolutely opposed but rather two dimensions of the same evangelical reality, of the same Christian mystery, two complementary ways of participating in the same oblation of Christ…” (FT 12de). “Superiors themselves live in obedience to Christ and sincerely observe the Rule…” (FT 17c).

It is meaningful that in the Church the true Christian “title” of the supreme authority (the Pope) be: servus servorum Dei, servant of the servants of God. We are all servants (cf. Lk 17: 7-10), and he, being the supreme authority, is the servant of the other servants, the servant par excellence; the other titles are at least not so clearly evangelical as this. Remember the words of Benedict XVI in his homily during the Mass for the beginning of his Petrine Ministry (April 24th 2005): “My real program of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history (AAS 107 (2005) 709)” (FT 12b).

His words and attitude were not exaggerated; they were simply true, just according to the Gospel. Regarding other Papal titles, Holy Father is a sign of respect by the other believers, and a hope: hopefully be “holy”, because according to the history a certain number of Popes have not been “holy” at all. Head of State (of the Vatican City): this title is a political reality just since 1929, when Italy recognized the independence of the Vatican City as a State. Before there had been the “Pontifical States” along some centuries; but they disappeared
along the c. XIX, and finally when Rome was conquered in 1870 by the Italian troops of C. B. Cavour (1810-1861) and G. Garibaldi (1807-1882). And Summus Pontifex (Supreme Pontiff) was a pagan title of the Roman Emperor; when the latter left Rome for Bizantium, the head of the Christian community (the Pope) inherited him this non-Christian title, being requested to run the city. For the rest, it’s enough to read what Jesus said in the Gospel:

Do not let yourselves be called Master, because you have only one Master, and all of you are brothers. Neither should you call anyone on earth Father, because you have only one Father, he who is in Heaven. Nor should you be called Teacher, because Christ is the only Teacher for you. Let the greatest among you be the servant of all. For whoever makes himself great shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be great” (Mt 23: 8-12).

In the same way as there is only one Shepherd in the Christian community: “I am the good shepherd…” (Jn 10: 11.14); finally God is the real and unique Shepherd. Although those who represent Christ in the Church or in Consecrated Life are, in some extent, identified with Christ and even with God the Father: “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me (Christ); and he who rejects me, rejects the one (Father) who sent me” (Lk 10: 16). In this text Jesus was not speaking of the Superiors in Consecrated Life, but of the seventy-two disciples who were being sent to preach; and, anyway, we can refer to the entire Church as herald of the Gospel to the world.

It’s true that the entire New Testament speaks of obedience to the savior will of God as the starting point of all Christian life, and that some texts recommend submission to Church ministers; but, there is no saying, either of Jesus or of the apostolic Church, recommending that one should submit freely to a human authority as a special profession of Evangelical life. Although Jesus was a celibate, thus illustrating in a concrete manner a possible lifestyle, there is no event in Christ’s life nor is there any text in which freely chosen submission to a human authority appears as a possible form of Christian existence. We can cite only the obedience of Jesus to the Father, which inspires all forms of Christian obedience, but which is not by itself to establish Consecrated Life’s obedience. The transition from God to a human being as the immediate object of obedience remains to be explained. In fact, if we are fundamentally equal, how could another Christian ask me to obey him/her? And, inside the group of Jesus, He would be at any rate a model of Superior, not of Religious in general. So, one thing is to look for God’s will and to obey it, another thing is another
human being’s will and to obey it. The words of Paul (“Let everyone be subject to the authorities. For there is no authority that does not come from God, and the offices have been established by God…””, Rom 13: 1-7; cf. 1Tim 2: 1-3; Tt 3: 1; 1Pt 2: 13-14; Mt 22: 21) refer to the public political life (even pagan authorities), not to Consecrated Life or to the Church. In His dialogue with Pilate (cf. Jn 18: 33-37; 19: 10-11), Jesus recognizes his authority as coming “from above”, and still more that of the Sanhedrin as come from God, for they represented God’s authority for the Israel as nobody else in this world.

About authority, let us still remember other words of Jesus, on the way to preside the community: “You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and the powerful oppress them. It shall not be so among you; whoever wants to be more important in your group make himself your servant. And whoever wants to be first must make himself the slave of all. Be like the Son man who has come, not to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many” (Mt 20: 24-28; cf. Mk 10: 42-45).

The model will be Jesus, The Servant, washing His disciples’ feet: “You call me Master and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If then I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also must wash one another’s feet. I have just given you an example that as I have done, you also may do…” (Jn 13: 12-17; cf. VC 75, FT 12b, 17b).

Therefore the recent Magisterium will say: “Persons in authority are at the service of the community as was the Lord Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples, in order that the community in its turn be at the service of the Reign of God (cf. Jn 13: 1-17). Exercising authority in the midst of one’s brothers or sisters means serving them, following the example of Christ” (FT 17b).

To be in authority, according to Jesus, is not to go up, over the others; but to go down: otherwise it would be impossible to wash their feet, as Jesus did! Authority in the Church (and obviously in Consecrated Life) is not a power disguised as if it were a service, but just a service. In other words, the Evangelical authority is exactly the contrary of that happening in “the nations” (Mt 20: 25; Mk 10: 42), that means in the political society.

During the Holy Thursday’s Evening Mass, it is used that the Pope, Bishop, Parish Priest…, wash the feet (rapidly and already cleansed before and sometimes even perfumed!) of some people. It is a beautiful sign, but normally rather “poor”, because only Jesus was the Pastor and, moreover, His disciples’ feet were not so wonderfully washed and prepared; in fact, according to the Gospel, they were completely surprised and didn’t want that Jesus washed them (Jn 13: 2-15).
Summarizing, *authority* in the Church (and, of course, in Consecrated Life) —we repeat— is not a power disguised as if it were a *service*, but just and only a service. Otherwise we are simply far away from the Gospel. And, it is amazing how difficult it has been along the history to put into practice those statements of the Lord, in the Church and in Consecrated Life. Sometimes there are people who say: “My culture cannot understand authority in this way…; besides, the Gospel must be inculturated…”. And they don’t change their mind and behavior, thinking to be justified. It is true that the Gospel needs to be “inculturated”, but this doesn’t mean “changed”, because it is also true that cultures must be “evangelized”! F. i., when a culture (and there are!) admits polygamy, we say: “It is not acceptable, because Jesus was not only against polygamy, but even against divorce”. And we are sure that culture must change, must be evangelized, transformed according to the words of Jesus. Instead, when we speak of authority and obedience, we say the Gospel has to be inculturated, that is: it has to accept this way of understanding authority and obedience; conclusion: we don’t have to change our cultural way of thinking and behaving… How not to see this evident contradiction?

2. **TWO PREMISES MORE CONCRETELY ON THE MODERATOR’S ROLE**

The first premise has to do with the title of this article. I have chosen the word *moderator* rather than the more usual one of *superior*. The reason for this choice lies in the fact that the term *moderator* includes better the various forms of authority which appeared throughout the history of religious life; in fact the abbot, the prior, the guardian, the minister, the superior, the head of the group, etc., are all Moderators.

The second premise regards the difficulty of treating this subject in a general way. As we shall see later, in the history of religious life there has not been, nor is there today, a uniform concept and exercise of authority and of obedience nor, consequently, of the role of the Moderator. Types of religious obedience, rather than only type of religious obedience, have existed throughout history. So to whom should we turn our attention, and of what particular form of government should we speak? By remaining in the abstract, one risks engaging the interest of only a few. In fact the role of a Moderator in a monastery, in a convent of mendicants, in an apostolic house, or in a secular group, differs—not to mention the characteristics deriving from the charism of each Order, Congregation, or Institute. Furthermore the role of the Moderator is different in a community that is in charge of a parish, or of a boarding school, an asylum, a hospital, a retreat house, or in a community where the members carry out independent activities. It
is not the same in a novitiate, in a community where the members are still very young, or in one where, instead, all or almost all of the members are well along in years. In the same type of community this role has special nuances, depending on environmental circumstances or differing historical situations. Finally the method of governing a group of men or a group of women is not always the same. But here we must necessarily overlook many legitimate differences.

3. DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE MODERATOR IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Historically there are different types of religious obedience and different methods of governing. We might summarize these differences roughly as follows: a tendency to stress the vertical dimension of authority, although not losing sight of the fraternal dimension; and a tendency to stress the horizontal dimension of fraternity, while not denying the role of authority. Beginning with the twelfth century, apostolic activity asserted itself in a decisive manner, which led to a partially new presentation of the dyad authority/fraternity. In our own times a new type of relationship between members of the group and the person called to direct it has appeared in the Secular Institutes.

We find the first historical type of the Moderator’s role, (though it was not referred to in such terms) in the beginning of monasticism when community life did not yet exist, and every monk lived by himself. Whoever wanted to become a monk, before retiring into solitude, went to the desert and submitted to the charismatic authority of a “father,” an elderly and experienced monk, for a certain number of years. This “father” thus became, for a time, the one who formed or molded the soul of the future monk. After this period in which he learned spiritual asceticism, and which we may call the novitiate, the new monk went on his own to live in solitude. The words Anthony (250-356) addressed to his disciple Paul (243-347) after having tested him for a long time are revealing: “Behold, you are now a monk; remain alone, so that you may also be tried by the demons”9. (Palladius, Historia Lausiaca, 22).

Pachomius (292-346) inaugurated a new type of monastic life: cenobitism. His source of inspiration was the life in common (koinonia) of Christ and his apostles (cf. Mk 3:13-19; Mt 10), and the life of the first Christian community in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2-4). Thus he invited groups of anchorites to pool their personal property and their individual work together as a sign of their life in common. Later, from communion of goods they passed to communion in prayer and in worship. In these cenobia, which at times had more than a thousand members, there was need for discipline and order, besides spiritual motivation.
The abbot was the center of the whole life of the community and of its individual members; everything depended on him, either directly or through his delegates.

While with Pachomius everything centered on a charismatic father, we find that with Basil (351-379) the horizontal dimension was more accented. In the first edition of the Asketikon, even though there was a prefect in the community, stress was placed on mutual obedience among the members. In the second edition, the prefect’s authority was given greater importance, but he still remained a brother, not a father, in charge of order in the community. Mutual obedience resulting from the monk’s desire for peace, and their solidarity, came before all else. The Basilian fraternity was, therefore, less centralized than that of a Pachomian one. The Basilian abbot was not God’s representative, but a sort of primus inter pares, although he did have the main responsibility for the community.

Obedience, for Augustine (354-430), is not a consilium, but simply a reflection of charity, of that way of living anima una et cor unum in Deum which was apparent in the community described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:32). The center of community life is charity, brotherhood. Fraternal charity must suffice for the administration of the community; authority must intervene prudently, cauta gubernatio (a prudent leadership), only when difficulties arise. The superior is a father, and he must fulfill his duties, not as an exercise of power, but as a service of charity. The members must obey, not as servants under the law, but as free men under grace. The superior accomplishes his task by attending to the observance of the Rule (Praeceptum) and to the order and peace of the community.

In the Rule of the Master and the Rule of Benedict (470-547), the role of the abbot became pivotal in all of monastic life. The cenobite was sub regula vel abate (under the Rule and the abbot). Christ spoke through the abbot; thus the monk should always retain an attitude of attentiveness, of faith, of discipleship. Obedience to the Rule was basic for everyone, but the abbot was the interpreter of the Rule, thus obedience was normally directed toward him. In order to stress this dependence on the abbot, the Master liked to quote the Lord’s words in St. Luke: “Anyone who listens to you listens to me” (Lk 10:16). God’s word is heard in the Rule, and this was interpreted by the abbot. Even though the true head of the community is Christ, the abbot took his place, represented him among the brothers. Thus his authority was vicarious—he did not exercise it in his own name, but in the name of Christ—and it was universal: He was the father of the whole cenobium in all its aspects, and of each monk, whether for the most important things or the material ones. He was teacher, shepherd, spiritual physician and administrator of temporal affairs. But he was not a dictator, as
might have appeared from what we said; he was rather a father and a servant: He had to conform and adapt to all. His duty consisted in helping rather than in commanding, and he would have to render an account of everything to God. Finally, while one finds in the Master a radicalization of obedience toward the abbot, almost as if obedience were simply for the purpose of renouncement and nothing more, every hint of obedience for obedience’s sake disappeared in Benedict.

With Francis of Assisi (1182-1236) there was a return to insistence on brotherhood; we might say as in Basil. All the friars must mutually obey and serve each other. He forbade the use of the title of prior, and the exercise of any form of domineering power¹⁴, and he repeatedly insisted that the office of the minister be truly one of service. In spite of this, and to avoid all risks and contamination by the groups of self-styled Pauperes Christi who were in conflict with the hierarchy, Francis insisted that the friars obey their ministers, and that on their journeys they be always provided with the oboedientia. Moreover the minister’s role was less concerned with domestic order, because Franciscan obedience had evangelical life and the mission of preaching as its object¹⁵.

Beginning with the mendicant orders in the twelfth century, a new element appears: the referral of obedience to the apostolic or ecclesial mission. Obedience is still seen as a life of charity, but community life is entirely taken over by mission, and one might say that it leans toward the outside, toward the world and the Church. Thus the Moderator’s role becomes subject to the requirements of this mission, and it becomes necessary, within the religious fraternity, to reckon with the role of other authorities: that of the bishop, and especially that of the pope. We find this obedience to the Holy See in Francis and in Ignatius of Loyola (1491/1495-1556), and it will appear in the Constitutions of practically all the apostolic institutes. In the Society of Jesus this obedience to the pope is even the object of a fourth vow. In this context the role of the Moderator is important and relative at the same time, because it is placed at the service of the apostolic mission. Other than this, one cannot say that there have been any real novelties in the role of the Moderator, except for certain ascetical aspects: for instance, in the Society of Jesus, in order to better serve their mission, obedience must be total: “as it were, blind,” “as if they were corpses”. And this obedience is not to be rendered only by subjects to their immediate superiors, but by local superiors to their provincials, by the provincials to the general, and by the general to the pope¹⁶.

As for the Secular Institutes, it may seem that community life either does not exist in these at all as a daily reality or when it exists, it does not have much relevance, contrary to the situation in other forms of religious life. What role can
The Moderator’s Role in The Community (Part I)

The Moderator have in such a situation? To tell the truth, community life does exist among the members of these Institutes, not under the form of social groups visibly gathered together, but as spiritual communities. As Martelet says:

“The Secular Institute results from charismatic convergence of inspiration within a sociological divergence of situation; it sets up an explicit spiritual communion in the order of intentions, outside of any visible form of structured community, depending entirely on the participants’ common attachment to the same goals within a common situation of renouncement of the institutional means characteristic of sociologically constituted groups. The unity of inspiration takes objective shape in the Church, through secular fraternities which are canonically and spiritually consistent; but this official sanction introduces the fraternity into a type of authentic spiritual organisms without constituting them, by this fact, sociological groups.”

There is in them a certain emphasis on their insertion into the world and at the same time an experience of fellowship among the members of the Institute: a spiritual dependence from a common inspiration and complete personal autonomy of decision in secular matters. Their meetings and gatherings have the purpose of providing spiritual dialogue leading to an ever greater awareness of their special charism. Their common inspiration is also molded into a constitution which serves as a point of reference, and to which they pledge fidelity. In this context those who are responsible, the Moderators, serve as signs; that is, they express and maintain the whole group’s dependence on the charism which permits it to exist. Their mission is to be the appointed witnesses and, whenever necessary, the indispensable guarantors that the fraternity is dedicating itself within its inalienable spiritual identity. Even though a modicum of spiritual organization is necessary, their intervention should be extremely discreet, and motivated by spiritual zeal and consistent fidelity to their charism.

4. THE MODERATOR’S ROLE: FACILITATING THE COMMON SEARCH FOR GOD’S WILL

Following this brief historical note, let us now stop to reflect on some elements of the Moderator’s role which are common to the different forms of religious life. What I am about to say should be considered in the light of the charism and the special norms of each Institute.

We can speak of two major functions in the role of the Moderator; they are: 1. Facilitating the common search for God’s will; 2: Governing the community. In this part, we shall deal only with the first major function, namely, facilitating the common search for God’s will.
The primary significance of the Moderators’ role can be none other than that of stimulating the search for the will of God among, and for, their fellow religious: obedience to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as St. Paul would say (cf. Rom. 10:16; 2 Th. 1:8). From this point of view one cannot say that the community is divided into those who obey and those who command, because the entire community obeys. As FT has said, in the religious community “all obey, each with various tasks” (FT 18b). For the goal is not the Moderator’s will, but only and always God’s will, as so clearly FLC said, speaking on community life:

“There is a convergence of ‘yeses’ to God which unites a number of religious into one single community of life. Consecrated together –united in the same ‘yes’, united in the Holy Spirit- religious discover every day that their following of Christ, ‘obedient, poor and chaste’, is lived in fraternity, as was the case with the disciples who followed Jesus in his ministry. They are united with Christ, and therefore called to be united among themselves. They are united in the mission to oppose prophetically the idolatry of power, of possession and of pleasure (cf. RHA 25). Thus obedience binds together the various wills and unites them in one single fraternal community, endowed with a specific mission to be accomplished within the Church.

Obedience is a ‘yes’ to God’s design, by which he has entrusted a particular task to a group of people. It brings with it a bond to the mission, but also to the community which must carry out its service here and now and together. It also requires a clear-sighted vision of faith regarding the superiors who ‘fulfill their duty of service and leadership (MR 13) and who are to see that there is conformity between apostolic work and the mission. It is in communion with them that the divine will –the only will which can save- must be fulfilled” (FLC 44bcd; cf. PC 14).

Remember what we have said at the very beginning, quoting FT 12de, 17c. The community and those who preside it are accepted as mediations between us and God, for He has called us to form part of the group (cf. FT 9). But, precisely because we want to follow God’s will, it remains always the possibility to follow one’s own conscience, as it had already ET 28-29 said, and FT 27 repeated. Therefore, Podimattam deduce that to identify tout-court the will of God with the decisions of the authority (in Consecrated Life and in the Church): “… is an illusion and an usurpation of the authority of God”.

Thus, we can understand why PC 14 affirmed that the complete renouncement of our own will we offer to God, whereas to the Moderators we give a humble submission (humile obsequium). In other words, of course we obey to our
Moderators as the mediation God gives to us, calling us to the community (cf. FT 9); but the text (like as FLC 44) never confounds God’s will simply with the will of the group or of those presiding it. So, FT 26 speaks on the “difficult obedience” and the possible objection in/of conscience (FT 27), on which ET 28-29 had already spoken; and the difficulties also of those who are in authority (FT 30). In short, “authority can be seen as servant of the servants of God” (FLC 50a).

The “heart” of obedience, “is to do the will of God, to give complete leeway to this will, and this requires the renunciation of all personal projects that would thwart this will and the adoption of realistic means for discovering and fulfilling it, that is, prayer and the mediation of someone else”\(^1\)

Both the Moderator and all the other members of the community must live in “unconditional submission to the will of God”(ET 27). Everyone obeys.

Already in the Rule of the Master and in that of St. Benedict, although the abbot was seen as the center of the monastery, as the one who “takes the place,” who “represents” Christ among the members, still the role of the abbot was a vicarious one, precisely because he did not govern in his own name, but in the name of Christ. His was the responsibility of continually seeking to recognize Christ’s will. Obedience is a great deal more all-embracing and deep than just a simple submission to a Moderator; it is the gift of self by each member of the community to foster the search and fulfillment of God’s will according to the charism of each Institute. Vatican II said: “By their profession of obedience, religious offer the full dedication of their wills as a sacrifice of themselves to God, and by this means they are united more permanently and securely with God’s saving will” (PC 14a).

Thus, through their obedience, religious do not offer their wills to the Moderator or to the Institute, but to God within the structure of an actual Institute. This Institute represents the practical way of living out an obedience which may be given only to God. With its special manner (its gift of charism) of living the Christian faith, the Institute is nothing more than a way, a means, and a place where, and through which, religious seek to express and live their obedience to God. The religious (Moderator and “moderated” alike) form a group that is listening to and seeking the Father’s will, manifested to them through his Word, the Rule or Constitutions, the very life of the Church, and the signs of the times. This is repeated again a little later by the decree PC: “Religious, therefore, should be humbly submissive to their superiors, in a spirit of faith and of love for God’s will, and in accordance with their rules and constitutions” (PC 14b).
And the Council continues: “Religious, moved by the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to those who hold God’s place, their superiors. Through them they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ ministered to his brothers in submission to the Father, and laid down his life for the redemption of many (cf. Mt. 20:28; Jn. 10:14-18)” (PC 14a).

Here we return to the idea of the superior as God’s representative, and a close parallel is drawn between God and Christ on the one hand and the superior and subjects on the other. But this should be thoroughly understood if one does not want to lapse into a confusion of ideas without a theological foundation. The Moderator is not God in the community, but a fellow religious “guide”—as the same conciliar text notes—a coordinator, promoter, and animator in the search for God’s will. In fact, the object of Christ’s obedience can be none other than the same will of the Father, even though, as regards to the manner of seeking it and listening to it, these Christians rely on the help of their fellow religious who has been placed at the head of the community, as well as of the other religious. It is a question of an effort carried out together. So, as Cambier had already said: “Thus religious obedience does not consist primarily in a personal relation between superior and subject, but rather in an intelligent and generous quest, on the part of all the religious, for the will of God: although the charism of authority also has, without a doubt, an irreplaceable role to play in this project”.

This type of obedience is basic; consequently it conditions the whole life of a religious and is the only type that can justify submissive behavior.

From this point of view the Moderator must, at all times, appear mainly as a member of the community, one among the others, involved together with all of them in the common effort and not as someone set apart. In fact, he is not seeking his own interests, or any others outside those of the community. Within the community he is the representative of someone else (God), and not of himself; he stands before, or in the midst of, a group whose head is not himself, but Christ. For this reason: “His authority is entirely ‘poor’: It is that of a brother who permits the others to detect the higher authority that he is serving. It is a transparent authority”.

In front of the community there is not the Moderator, but God, Christ. That means that communion in the community is a common responsibility of all its members, although we ask the Moderator to put himself/herself in a special way to the service of communion (cf. FLC 50a; SAC 14b). The Moderator is therefore part of the community, inside the community, for the community. It doesn’t exist the Moderator and the community, as if they were opposed parts of
the same group, two parts of a trench being more or less at war between them. In the same way that doesn’t exist a Moderator without community, and the community is not for the Moderator. The confreres or co-sisters are not at his/her service, but all at the service of all, and all together at the service of God. The Moderator is in the middle of the community, close to every one, always ready to lend a hand. As we have said, in front of the community there is only Christ with Whom, thanks to the action of the Spirit, all together go towards the Father. As a consequence, “authority is not supposed to take the place of the subject’s conscience, but rather to help it clarify itself, become independently aware of what is best to do, become responsibly adult in reference to the choices that must be made.” The Moderator’s role is that of helping, of serving the human and spiritual maturity of the community and its individual members; as St. Benedict said: “The abbot must always think of the burden he has taken upon himself and know that his duty is rather that of helping than of commanding (magis prodesse quam praeese).” This is why Vatican II could say, without contradicting itself: “In this way, far from lowering the dignity of the human person, religious obedience leads it to maturity by extending the freedom of the sons of God” (PC 14b).

On the other hand, as we have said before, this is the Gospel meaning of authority, in opposition to that of the world: While the worldly concept is one of power and domination, Christian authority is one of service in imitation of Christ. He, in fact, presents himself as the one who serves, the servant who gives his life for others. He describes Himself as the “shepherd”, the one who has authority (cf. Jn 10: 11.14); but His purpose is not His own power or His own glory, but rather the welfare (more abundant life) of His sheep, and His Father’s glory. Nor does He impose His authority despotically, but prefaces it with His example of unselfish love and free service. After washing His disciples’ feet’ He says: “I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you” (Jn. 13;15; cf. 1 Pt. 2:20-25). And in another passage: “Here am I among you as one who serves!” (Lk. 22:27). Faced with this model the Christian can only say, with the first converts: “What must we do?” (Acts 2:37). Christ’s answer is: “Learn from me” (Mt. 11:29).

From the psycho-sociological point of view the Moderator is a leader rather than a head. Rather than being one who stands apart dominating the rest of the group, he or she animates and stimulates the group from within. Thus the Moderator is considered as “one of our own”, but at the same time is found to be, in some ways, standing out from the rest and rightly inspires affection and submission on the part of the group.
Thus our communities are not more-or-less absolute or constitutional monarchies, nor are they mini-dioceses, but fraternities. Religious superiors are not on a par with bishops. Episcopal authority has its source in a sacrament: it comes from Christ; it is vertical. Religious authority has its source in the community; it is horizontal. As the Council stated, religious life belongs to the Church’s life and holiness, but not to its hierarchical structure.

In these communities, as we have said, everyone (the Moderator and the other religious) seeks to obey God. This is the real purpose both of the vow of obedience and of community life; it is a common effort. Therefore authority should be understood, accepted, and exercised by and for the community, by and for communal life; The one who truly commands and requires obedience is God, but the religious lives this fact in a mediated way, through the mediation of the community to which he or she belongs, whether this is represented by the members all together or by the person of the Moderator. It is a mediated reality (cf. FT 9, 10a), but it is constantly tending toward its goal which can only be the will of the Father.

If what we have said so far on the role of the Moderator as animator of the common search for God’s will indicates, on the one hand, the reason and meaning of authority, it also speaks of its relativity. It is not easy to discern the divine will. Now, more than ever, we have become convinced of this. Because of this, we said, an automatic and constant identity between the will and actions of the Moderators and the will of the Father does not exist. This situation of seeking but not coinciding often involves uncertainty, errors, and failures on the part of superiors. Whoever is at the head of a community encounters doubts and problems, and this certainly has also happened before. But today the situation is aggravated because subjects are aware of it and draw their own conclusions. This is why it has become difficult to govern in our times. Moderators are placed between two fires: on the one hand their own uncertainties, and on the other the redde rationem to which they are constantly subjected by their communities.

Consequently, the Magisterium recognizes the “limitations of those who represent him (God)” (VC 92b; cf. FT 13d, 18a, 21c, 25, 28, 30a). If the Moderators are brothers/sisters among brothers/sisters, they have to avoid: “on the one hand, any attitude of domination and, on the other any form of paternalism or maternalism” (FT 14b; and the con-frères/co-sisters “any form of childishness” (FT 20b) or “childish dependence” (FT 25a).

The Moderator “represents” God, not because he/she is humanly infallible in his/her decisions, but because he/she tries to help the others to discern the will
of God using those means the Church has recognized as valid: the Word of God, the Rule or Constitutions, the legitimate decisions of the Chapters…, the needs of the individuals, the signs of the times, the necessities of the Church or of the society (cf. FT 11). Therefore, if the Moderator is legitimate and demands or decides something legitimately, the religious has to obey seeing in this the will of God (cf. VC 92b), unless there were grave personal difficulties, as Paul VI already appointed (ET 28-29) and it has been confirmed by FT (11, 20c, 26-27). After all, everyone is ultimately responsible of himself/herself in front of God (cf. GS 16, CCC 1706, 1713, 1776, 1791, 1794, 1795); and, in case of insoluble conflict between authority and individual, everyone is supposed to follow his/her own honest and sincere conscience, even abandoning the Institute if it were necessary.25

ABREVIATIONS

Magisterium’s Documents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author/Year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Catechism of the Catholic Church</td>
<td>John Paul II, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChL</td>
<td>Christifideles Laici</td>
<td>John Paul II, 1988</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>Codex Iuris Canonici</td>
<td>John Paul II, 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Essential Elements</td>
<td>CICLSAL, 1983</td>
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<td>EG</td>
<td>Evangelii Gaudium</td>
<td>Pope Francis, 2013</td>
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<td>ET</td>
<td>Evangelica Testificatio</td>
<td>Paul VI, 1971</td>
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<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Familiaris Consortio</td>
<td>John Paul II, 1981</td>
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<td>FLC</td>
<td>Fraternal Life in Community</td>
<td>CICLSAL, 1994</td>
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<td>FT</td>
<td>Faciem Tuam</td>
<td>CICLSAL, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td>Gravissimum Educationis</td>
<td>Vatican II, 1965</td>
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<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Gaudium et Spes</td>
<td>Vatican II, 1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Instrumentum Laboris for the IX Synod of Bishops</td>
<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Lumen Gentium</td>
<td>Vatican II, 1964</td>
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<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>Mutuae Relationes</td>
<td>SCRSI, 1978</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Perfectae Caritatis</td>
<td>Vatican II, 1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Potissimum Institutioni</td>
<td>CICLSAL, 1990</td>
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</table>
RHA Religious and Human Advancement, SCRSI, 1980.
SAC Starting Afresh from Christ, CICLSAL, 2002.
VC Vita Consecrata, John Paul II, 1996.

Books and Others:
AAS Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Vatican City.
DS Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, VV. AA., Beauchesne, Paris.
NDTM Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia Morale, VV. AA., Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo (M) 1990.
NRT Nouvelle Revue Théologique, Bruxelles.
PL Patrologia Latina.
RB Regula S. Benedicti.
RLA Religious Life Asia, CIP, Quezon City.
RM Regula Magistri.
STh Summa Theologiae, St. Thomas Aquinas.
UISG Unione Internazionale delle Superiore Generali, Roma.
ViCo Vita Consacrata, Ancora, Milano.

Endnotes

1 For reason of the page constraints, this article by Joseph Rovira is divided into two parts. The first is presented in this issue and the second part will appear in the issue due for July 2015.
2 For this topic, cf. among others, J. C. R. Garcia Paredes, The Evangelical Counsels: The Vows, Quezon City 2006, 47-86; id., Leadership and Authority, RLA 8 (2006) n. 1, 13-28; id., Theology of Religious Life, Quezon City 2006; id., Communion and Community, Quezon City 2006, 43-59; id., Fundamental Theology of the Forms of Christian Life, Quezon City 2012; J. M. Lozano,


4 St. Thomas, STh II-II q. 186 a. 8.

“… Here comes your God with might;… / Like a shepherd he tends his flock: / he gathers the lambs in his arms, / he carries them in his bosom, / gently leading those that are with young” (Is 40: 10-11). “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want…” (Ps 23). “O Shepherd of Israel…” (Ps 80: 1ff). Jesus will apply to Himself the words of the OT referred to Yahweh (Jn 10: 11-14). Ezekiel 34 speaks of the shepherds of Israel, a text that Jesus will apply again to Himself as a “good shepherd”, that is, what the prophetic text said on Yahweh: “… I myself will care for my sheep and watch over them. As the shepherd looks after his flock when he finds them scattered, so will I watch over my sheep and gather them from all the places where they are scattered in a time of cloud and fog (…). I will search for the lost and lead back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the fat and strong will be eliminated. I will shepherd my flock with justice…” (Ez 34: 11-16; cf. Jer 23: 1-4). Cf. Jn 10: 1-16; Lk 15: 4-7; Mt 18: 12-14.

4 In itself the text refers to the seventy-two disciples that once Jesus sent, two by two, ahead of Him to every town and place, where He Himself was to go (cf. Lk 10: 1).


8 Commenting these texts says a famous modern Christologist: “Mark 10: 42-45 summarizes it in
the simple call no longer to seek to rule but instead to serve. ‘Serve’ here should not be read in a bland and colorless sense. In its original meaning the word signified nothing other than waiting on tables. It was based on daily table service, which in the ancient world was the burden of the slaves, servants or free women. It was above all at table that the contrast between those more highly placed, who reclined comfortably, and the slaves or women who had to serve was most keenly felt. In Greek and Roman culture serving in the house was regarded as menial. It was by no means seldom at ancient banquets that the guests would wipe their greasy fingers on the hair of the slaves serving them. ‘How could a human being be happy while having to serve anyone at all?’ asked the Sophist Callicles in the Platonic dialogue Gorgias (491c). So it is no accident that Jesus shapes the new society he is beginning with his disciples at table. This is the starting point for the true revolution; here begins the genuinely classless society. So Jesus does not fight for the correct politics or the right form of the state but instead for fraternity and sorority in the people of God. He struggles not for power and for freedom from Rome but for the overturning and remaking of what power is. And that is certainly a political agenda. He knows that peace and justice, feeding on true fear of God, must grow from below” (G. Lohfink, Jesus of Nazareth, Quezon City 2013, 178-179).

palladius, Historia Lausiaca, 22.

… You must live in accord in the house and be one mind and one heart in God (…), for this you read in the Acts of the Apostles” (Praeceptum, 2-3).

Enarr. In Ps. 99, 10: PL 37, 1277.

RM 1.2, RB 1.2.

RM 2.6, 6.68, 10.51, 12.6, 57.16; cf. also 11.11, 89.20.


Cf. Rule 1221, 2. 4. 6. 17; Rule 1223, 9, 10, 12.

Cf. Constitutions S. J., 7.1, 8.16, 9.3.9.


F. Podimattam, o. c., 21.

B. Rueda, o. c., 8.


RB 64.

Cf. LG 24-27, CCC 874-876. The Bishop is “Vicar of Christ”, thanks to the special consecration (LG 27, CCC 895), what doesn’t exist in the case of the religious Moderators, submitted as they are to the Hierarchy (cf. MR 13b, VC 48-50).
The Moderator’s Role in The Community (Part I)

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“Where there are religious, there is joy” – Pope Francis

Let us Respond to the Exhortation of Pope Francis to Wake up the World with the Joy of the Gospel

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Consecrated men and women today exercise several important leadership roles (including that of a Jesuit Pope) in the Catholic Church and in the contemporary society at large. As religious leaders, we can learn from others of our category, especially those found in the biblical tradition. In this paper, we look at the Pharisees, who were Jewish religious leaders in Jesus’ time, with an intent to learn some lessons from their leadership model - both from their achievements and from their failures.

The Pharisees are important for two main reasons: first, the gospels present them as one of the principal groups opposing Jesus; second, modern Judaism traces its roots back to the Pharisees. However, describing the Pharisees is not easy. The modern Jews tend to praise them as sources of wisdom and learning, because they trace the origins of their religious traditions to the Pharisees. The Christians violently attack them for their legalism, hypocrisy etc. So, only an enquiry with reasoned curiosity can throw some light on this most important Jewish sect of the New Testament times. We consider them the most important sect because we notice that Pharisaism, which began as a national and religious revival movement among the laity of the middle class (and probably some priests), gradually turned out to be the backbone of Judaism when it faced a serious crisis after the destruction of Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. Undoubtedly, the Pharisees were greatly admired by the masses in the first century CE and before. And after the Jewish war (66-70 CE) and the fall of Jerusalem, the Pharisees were the only Jewish party, which survived that catastrophe. It was they who guided Judaism thereafter, giving it a new form and hope, especially in the religious sphere.

1. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Our sources that shed light on the Pharisees are the writings of Josephus,
the New Testament and the rabbinic literature. The first two provide only fragmentary information and do not deal with the origin and growth of the group. Though Josephus himself was probably a Pharisee, the circumstances in which he wrote his works between 75 and 100 CE do not guarantee an objective picture of the sect. The New Testament considers Pharisees as opponents of Jesus, in most cases; hence the interest is mostly polemic. Apart from that, the gospel writers seem to provide only a few details about them: e.g. their insistence on tithing and their commitment to purity laws and Sabbath. It is the rabbinic literature that sheds more light on the teachings of the Pharisees than the other two sources. However, they show no keen interest in a historical description of the Pharisees, but it is mostly in the form of laws promulgated for the government and administration of the Jewish community. We know that the later Pharisees had enormous influence on the rabbinic literature. This fact should be kept in mind in order to maintain objectivity, while depending on rabbinic literature as the primary source of information about the Pharisees. As in the case of the study of any religious movement, all that we know about the historical Pharisees is what these three sources tell us about them, which in turn is shaped by their respective beliefs, interests and concerns. Hence the result of this historical enquiry is bound to be modest.

2. THEIR NAME

The English word ‘Pharisee’ derives from the Greek *Pharisaios*, the origin of which may be traced to the Hebrew verb *parus* and Aramaic *peris*, which mean ‘to separate’. In rabbinic literature, the verb usually means ‘to separate’ and the Pharisee is repeatedly taken to mean ‘one who has been separated’. The usage however does not mean ‘dissident’ or separatist’ in a derogatory sense. Instead, “the name probably means ‘separatist’, implying that the Pharisees saw themselves and Israel as a people set apart for obedience to the Lord.” The context in which the name Pharisee appears in the rabbinic literature suggests a meaning such as ‘puritan’, a zealous proponent of ritual purity. Therefore their separation was not from the rest of the people, but from the ‘pollutions of the peoples of the land’ (Ezra 6:21; 9:1; 10:11; Neh 9:2; 10:28) and from the ‘nations of the world with their abominations’ (Lev 18:29; 2 Chr 36:14). In this sense, the Pharisees may be thought of as puritans.

In any case, the name must have been given to them by others, especially their opponents. For example, the *Mishnah* describes the group by the name Pharisees only three times – there it is attributed to a Sadducee. The Pharisees described themselves, using terms that mean ‘friend’, ‘scribe’ or ‘wise man’. In Jewish
literature, the preferred description of the Pharisees is ‘wise men’ or more often ‘our wise men’.

3. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

Nothing is certain about the origin of the Pharisees. Some trace their descent to a group of fervent Jews from the exilic and post-exilic period. When the threat to Israel’s identity became most acute during the exile, some Jews embarked on a radical campaign of separation from everything and everyone that ‘defiled’ the holy people; this drive to be ‘separate’ intensified under Ezra and Nehemiah and “planted the seeds that eventually germinated and grew into the sect of the Pharisees.” Tenney writes, “The Pharisees were the direct ecclesiastical descendants and heirs of those who tenaciously refused to compromise their faith during the exile and who maintained the purity of their worship in the midst of a degrading paganism.” Finkelstein also traces back the origin of Pharisees to the religious teachers who used to instruct the common people in the synagogues, where regular readings from the Torah, preaching and prayers were conducted in the exilic and post-exilic period. After the reconstruction of the temple and the religious reform under Ezra-Nehemiah, though the synagogues did not supplant the national cult in the Jerusalem temple, to which Jews made pilgrimages during annual feasts, the synagogues quickly took a central place in the religious and social life of the Jewish people. The regular gatherings in the synagogue built up a class of devout Jews who reverenced the Law and sought to observe it. The Ezra-Nehemiah emphasis on separation from the people of the land, coupled with opposition from external forces like the Samaritans, fostered the growth of a group of religious patriots, who militantly defended the Sabbath, scrupulously paid the tithes and repudiated mixed marriages (Neh 13:12-30). Thus, already in the late 5th and early 4th centuries, there existed in the populace of Judah a nucleus of Jewish puritans.

After the fall of Alexander’s empire, during the Hellenistic rule of the Ptolemies and Seleucids, this group of puritans withstood the temptations of Hellenism, whereas the priestly aristocracy was enchanted by Hellenistic ideas and was ready to accept them, even neglecting their Jewish heritage. Otzen says, “In any event, it was the conflict between the Hellenising Jews and the old-fashioned orthodox Jews which formed the background of the emergence of the Pharisees.” Their struggle against pagan invasion consummated in the Maccabean revolt, where they emerged victorious; at this point they are known as the Hasidim. Many scholars associate the origin of the Pharisees with this group of Hasideans (Hasidim). Needless to say, the Hasidim were a powerful factor in the political and social life of the Jews of that time.
During the revolt and after the Hasmoneans began ruling Israel, we have some definite historical references to the Pharisees as a sect. Josephus mentions them (*Antiquities* 13:171) as a somewhat independent group during the time of Jonathan. Hyrcanus I was educated at court by Pharisaic tutors and he surrounded himself with Pharisees as counsellors; but later he shifted allegiance and took the side of the Sadducees. So they were discontented with the Hasmonean rulers and “opposed to the priestly aristocracy, which was more interested in economic and political opportunism than in religious fervour.” Thereafter they appear as a popular party who governed the masses through their tribunes and opposed the aristocrats: they instigated a revolt against Alexander Jenneus (*Antiquities* 13:400-404); Alexandra then gave them seats in the high council (*Antiquities* 108-110); they faced opposition from Aristobulus II, whereas Hyncaus II protected them. Thus we see them clearly emerging as a new class within Judaism during the Hasmonean period. And “their emergence marked a challenge to almost all of the accepted religious structures of Pentateuchal Judaism, a victorious challenge which was to see Pharisaism become the dominant form of Jewish existence by the time the Romans destroyed the second temple (in 70 CE).”

During the first procuratorship, Annas was able to reorganize the Sanhedrin along aristocratic and Sadducean lines; but he and his successors needed the support of the Pharisaic scribes, who constituted the majority of the professional lawyers and largely controlled public opinion (*Antiquities* 17:298; 18:15ff). Hence in the days of Jesus and the Apostles, the Pharisees had two sources of power – as members of the Sanhedrin and from their influence and authority among the common people. As witnessed by the New Testament, the Pharisees did not generally tolerate the Jesus movement, though some (like Gamaliel in Acts 5:34) may have been sympathetic to it. During the Apostolic period, they exercised greater influence in the Sanhedrin and were especially powerful from 41 to 44 CE under Agrippa I. With the rise of the nationalists like the Zealots, they may have lost some of their popularity, because they resisted the excesses of the nationalists. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, they succeeded in re-establishing the High Council as a legal academy in Jamnia (Yavneh), under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai *et al.* Later, the scholars who moved to Galilee in the second century laid the groundwork for the *Mishnah*. Hence Pharisaism had a substantial influence on post-Christian Judaism.

4. **IDENTITY AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION**

The Pharisees were made up of lower ranks of priests, craftsmen, small farmers and merchants. In other words, unlike the Sadducees, they belonged to the middle class of the Jewish society of the time. The gospels often present the
Pharisees and scribes together, creating the impression that they were somewhat identical. The Pharisees gathered around famous teachers of the law, many of whom were scribes; thus the scribes became the chief ideologues of the Pharisees. Some scholars consider that most scribes were also Pharisees. In the first century CE, scribes and Pharisees had acquired a position of power in the Council.

In the religious sphere, Pharisaism was a revival and penitential movement. Its members intended to remind the Jews of their religious inheritance and warn them about the dangers inherent in the Hellenistic culture. Hence they insisted on the strict adherence of the Law and sought to do penance for the people’s failure to uphold the ancient religious ideals. Some scholars prefer to view Pharisaism as the Jewish version of a Hellenistic school of philosophy, like many others of the time. The ordinary Jews seem to have been fairly sympathetic to them.

Reicke holds the view that the Pharisees had “highly developed social relationships and structures.” The demand for separateness from the profane realm led the Pharisees’ seeking to associate with one another. Hence towards the beginning of the first century, probably they had banded together in communities. Within such closed fraternities, one could be sure that only like-minded men, determined to uphold their purity, would be present. There it was possible to dine together without the fear of being defiled; they could also discuss and “work out new regulations designed to deal with the many situations which necessarily arose in everyday life for anyone who desired to fulfil the letter of the law in its entirety.” Thus, organized Pharisaism formed associations dedicated to the practical realization of Levitical ideals: these groups were called habura in Hebrew (meaning ‘fellowship’ or ‘association’) and the members were called haber (‘comrade’). Membership in these associations was preceded by a time of probation (one month, according to Hillel and up to one year, according to Shammai), during which the aspirants have to demonstrate their obedience to the ritual prescriptions governing purity. Then they had to take an oath and were received into the association by a scribe. And there were various grades within the order. Paul had undergone such training under Gamaliel I and become a Pharisaic lay brother (Acts 22:3; 23:6). A further study culminating in an examination would have qualified him as a scribe.

5. RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES OF THE PHARISEES

The Pharisees are considered to be the spiritual mentors of the Jewish population from the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE. Hence their doctrines and practices had great influence on the Jewish religion and piety of the time. This fact became more strikingly evident in their post-temple (after
70 CE) history. The Rabbinic writings (the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*) are, for the most part, a continuation of the Pharisaic doctrinal tradition. When we attempt to enumerate the traits of Pharisaism, we encounter a problem: there is a lack of agreement on the matter between Josephus, the New Testament and the rabbinic traditions. However, critically analysing the sources, scholars have been able to reconstruct a somewhat reliable picture; here below we shall first briefly discuss some doctrinal features of the Pharisees and then list a few characteristics of their religious practice.

5.1. Zeal for the Law

Pharisees’ zeal for the Law was phenomenal. They considered the Law as the norm for every detail of individual life. Therefore all requirements in the Law were observed strictly and even overemphasised in order to avoid accidental neglect and violation of the Law. They went beyond the general requirements of the Law and demanded instead the exceptional. To remind them constantly of their obligation to follow the Law, they wore conspicuous phylacteries, containing verses from the Torah, on the left upper arm; tassels on the corners of the cloak (Mt 23:5) also served the same purpose. Because of their zeal for the Law, fasting, prayer and tithing were observed meticulously and sometimes ostentatiously (Mt 6:1-5). They were meticulous about paying tithes, even of the small seeds and spices that grew in their gardens (Mt 23:23). Thus they took pains to study the Law, interpret it correctly and practice it in their everyday life; moreover they insisted that other Jews also do the same.

5.2. Correct Interpretation of the Law

Their main thrust was on the correct interpretation of the Law and its careful observance. According to Josephus, Pharisees were considered the most accurate interpreters of the Law (*Jewish War* 2:162); this points to the essence of Pharisaism - their attempt to bring all aspects of Jewish life under the control of the Law. That is why they urged even the common people to follow the cleansing rituals prescribed for temple priests, because they viewed all Israel as a ‘kingdom of priests’. They studied the Law assiduously to determine the duties they owed to God. Their interpretation of the Law was exact and detailed. From their interpretations, what has survived to this day (in the rabbinic literature) are mainly the methods of interpretation applied by Hillel; his seven methods are famous. Every statement in the Scripture was scrutinised carefully, lest any command, expressed or implied, should be overlooked. However, this over-enthusiasm sometimes ended up in drawing unnecessarily fine distinctions in their interpretation (Mt 23:16-21).
5.3. Use of Oral Tradition in Interpretation

Unlike the Sadducees they widely used the oral tradition to determine proper conduct. The Pharisees claimed to be the custodians of the oral tradition. They expanded the scope of the written Law by means of the oral traditions, trying to reinterpret the written word to apply to changing conditions. In this process, some Pharisaic leaders were liberal and innovative (e.g. Hillel the elder), whereas some others were stricter and conservative (e.g. Shammai). As mentioned above, Hillel is said to have introduced seven basic methods of investigation in his exegetical discussions (called Midrash) around 20 BCE. Koester says that though the former principle of the ‘fence around the Torah’ continued to be basic for the interpretation of Torah, gradually the ‘tradition of the elders’ replaced the ‘fence’. The fence was static and would not be of help in new situations; so when new circumstances arose, it was the interpretation given by the elders in similar circumstances that helped them to update and extend the interpretation to real life situations. Hence a lot of time was spent by the Pharisaic scribes to memorise and copy such ‘traditions of the elders’. The decisions of a rabbi (‘traditions of the elders’) were applied by means of analogies and ingenious speculations to new cases as they arose. The fresh decision then becomes a ‘tradition’ in its turn; it is handed down and becomes the starting point for new decisions. Thus, the sum of what man had to know in order to live by the Law became ever greater. Hence, the legal texts of the Bible were more and more supplemented, and eventually almost replaced in some cases, by the exegetical tradition itself, ‘the tradition of the elders’ (Mt 15:2; Antiquities 13:297). Jesus reacted to this tendency to relativize the Scriptures and prefer traditions (Mk 7:8, 13). Many extremes of Pharisaism are often attributed to its rigid adherence to tradition.

5.4. Applying Logic and the Principle of Practicability in Interpretation

Apart from oral traditions of former sages, Hillel employed logical argument also as a basis for the exposition of the text. Allegorical interpretation was also employed by the Pharisees to adapt the statements of the Law to new situations. The need to apply logic and common sense in the interpretation of the Law arose from the fact that the Pharisees tried to lead normal middle-class lives, in spite of trying to observe the many rules of purity. Hence, in the development of casuistry, practicability was a major concern for them; there was no point in making laws which were impossible to practise in normal life! “This meant that the Pharisee was by nature a pragmatist, in the sense that, on the one hand he intensified the Law to the extreme, while on the other he modified them so as to be able to live with them.” Therefore in the Pharisaic-rabbinical legal discussion, we can see
many attempts to circumvent the Law or at least to make them milder to practise. In pursuit of practicability, “Pharisaic scribes applied their exegetical skill to relaxing the Law.”²⁸ Because different rabbis attach varying importance to the question of practicability, understandably, many differences existed between different Pharisaic schools, especially between those of Hillel and Shammai. The former laid more stress on practicability than the latter.

5.5. Innovations

They allowed many innovations in doctrine. They taught survival of the soul, resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8; Jewish War 2:163), a last judgement (Antiquities 18:14) and a world to come. They believed also in angels and demons. Angelology and demonology were not exclusively Pharisaic concerns, since they were found throughout the Judaism of the time (except among Sadducees). “Nevertheless, preoccupation with angels and demons was one of the principal characteristics of the sect.”²⁹ However, they reconciled it with strict monotheism.

5.6. Dignity of the Individual

“The central accomplishment of the Pharisees was the development of a new and profound appreciation of each individual person in the sight of God,” says Pawlikowski.³⁰ In Genesis and Psalms, God’s love for each man is reflected. The Pharisees, however, interpreted this sense of an individual’s worth in a way previously unknown in Judaism. According to the priestly, cultic system of religion favoured by the Sadducees, the ordinary person had to channel his worship of God through the priests, who were intermediaries between God and man. The Pharisees opposed this view and stressed the direct relationship of each individual to God the Father. Reference to God as father was in fact a new phenomenon in Jewish worship;³¹ by developing this notion of fatherhood of God, the Pharisees stressed the closeness of God to each individual Jew. The dignity of the individual in Pharisaic Judaism is attested in several passages of the Mishnah.³² In this understanding, each individual could attain holiness through the practice of Law; one danger involved in it is that the individual could also boast of his fulfilment of the Law (Lk 18:12) and become self-righteous.

5.7. Importance of Peoplehood

While respecting the dignity of the individual, the Pharisees did not have any intention of making religion a private affair nor establishing the individual as the moral ultimate. Instead, it was to be placed in the context of the traditional belief in the primacy of Israel, the people with a divine vocation. So the Pharisees did not take an ‘either-or’ approach, but a ‘both-and’ approach. Both the person and
the community should co-exist because without one the other loses much of its meaning.

5.8. Righteousness

They believed that righteousness can be attained through precise obedience to the commandments; this presupposes their insistence on free will. However, along with human freedom and responsibility (Antiquities 13:173), they also insisted on the divine omnipotence and providence. Here they differed from the Sadducees who insisted only on human freedom.

5.9. Messianism and Apocalyptism

Messainic hope was another characteristic of Pharisaism – they believed that strict fulfilment of the Law can bring about the coming of the Messiah. Pharisaism was also infiltrated with apocalyptic ideas, though it was not their ‘life-breath’ (as in the case of the Zealots); various rabbis differed in their reaction to apocalyptic. In any case, not less than the apocalyptists, many Pharisees also believed in the dramatic intervention of God to bring justice to his people and to establish a community based fully on God’s law.

6. OTHER FEATURES OF THEIR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Apart from the characteristic manner in which they interpreted the Law, there were also other features in the religious practice of the Pharisees that made them stand out from the other Jews of the time. These practices had lasting influence on the Jewish religion; some of them, especially the Synagogue, the rabbinic leadership and the enhanced role of women, may be considered as specific contributions of the Pharisaic religious praxis.

6.1. Ritual Purity

The Pharisees tried to develop the norms of purity narrated in the Scriptures and make it applicable to society, so that every Jew could realize the ideal of the covenant people. Their intention was to preserve and develop the purity of the Levitical covenant people (Neh 10:29-30) so as to apply it not only to priests and Levites but also to all Jewish people, because they are a priestly people. Rabbinic literature deals with this ideal of the Pharisees in great detail. “This fundamental theory (concept of purity) of the Pharisees found expression in a system of ritual observances based entirely on revelation and rigorously applied to society, coupled with optimistic and idealistic social policies intended to realize the covenant demands.” Members of the habura strictly maintained cultic purity through numerous practices such as washing of hands (Mt 15:2).
This purity had nothing to do with dirt or personal hygiene. Rather it concerned the proper observance of religious rituals that distinguished the ‘clean’ from the ‘unclean’ (Mt 15:1-20; Lk 11:37-40).

The numerous priestly regulations concerning purity and holiness are very technical by nature; hence for ordinary Jews leading a normal life, it is practically impossible to keep all those details in everyday life. Otzen summarises how the life of a Pharisee would be affected when he opts to practice cultic purity outside of the temple:

Those who attempted to carry out the Pharisaic program quickly discovered that their entire existence had to be ordered so as to enable them to keep the rules: they had to beware what they ate, whom they ate with, whom and what they touched; and they had to keep their distance from anything and everything which might conceivably sully their purity. Only the very few were able to live up to such demands, for which reason, Pharisaism speedily became an elitist movement composed of strong-willed and principled men who were willing to sacrifice everything to realize their ideal.37

Thus the Pharisaic concern to be pure38 went beyond the requirements of the Law because the Pharisees were extremely interested in the Law and took pains to apply them in great detail.

6.2. Sabbath Observance

The Pharisees observed the Sabbath, as prescribed by the teachings of the fathers and insisted that all Jews follow them (Mk 3:1-6 and parallels). The rabbis had formulated a list of 39 principal classes of work, prohibited on the Sabbath.39 Apart from these, there were also numerous sub-categories of forbidden work.40 Many of their tussles with Jesus and his disciples arose from their complaint that the latter did not observe the Sabbath in the way they did. That means they expected all to follow their prescriptions on Sabbath.

6.3. Table Fellowship, Tithing and Agricultural Taboos

Eating one’s secular (unconsecrated) food in a state of ritual purity, as if one were a Temple priest in the cult, was one of the requirements for membership as a Pharisee. Their table fellowship was an ordinary gathering in a private home, with all participating in an ordinary meal without stories or benedictions and other rites.41 But these meals required ritual purity. And while they lived amid neighbours who were not Pharisees, it was this meal that separated them from the ordinary people, who did not care for this ritual purity. To ensure this ritual
purity, rules had to be extended to the agricultural field, to the kitchen, to the bed and to the street. In deciding what one might safely eat without defiling oneself, several rules regarding tithing and agricultural taboos had to be observed. Food prepared from agricultural products, not properly grown and tithed, could not be eaten. So the Pharisees had to be selective even when they purchased food-grains from the market. Hence they regarded keeping the agricultural rules as a primary religious duty. But whether, to what degree, and how other Jews did so is not clear.

6.4. Separation and Distancing from the ‘Sinners’

As they were worried over the absorption of Judaism by Hellenism, they insisted on ‘separation from the larger society’ by ‘building a fence around the Torah’. They saw separation as the only guarantee of the survival of Israel’s vocation as a people. They separated themselves from ‘sinners’ (including the Gentiles and those Jews who associate with them) and nurtured a certain antipathy to the uneducated common folk (am ha’arez, meaning ‘the people of the land’). Jn 7:49 (“This crowd, who do not know the Law, are accursed”) is an expression of this antipathy.

6.5. The Temple and the Synagogue

One of the most significant achievements of Pharisaism was the shift of focus from the temple cult to everyday life. Hillel (ca. 50 BCE - 20 CE) seems to have played a major role in this shift. “Hillel came from the diaspora (Babylon), and this apparently contributed considerably to a development within Pharisaism which enabled it to become a religious movement that could exist de facto without the temple cult…” Hillel’s method of interpretation made it possible to detach the observance of the Law from the realm of the temple cult.

Whether the Pharisees initiated the synagogue culture is uncertain. In any case, the institution of Synagogue was widely used by the Pharisees to fashion the faith of the Jews. It was a place of study, prayer and meditation. Jews came here after their home liturgy on the Sabbath to listen to the rabbis interpret the meaning of the Scriptures for their own day. It was also a place of communal assembly: courts of law functioned there; strangers were welcomed in its hostel and the poor were given alms; and community funds were administered by its council. These communal, humanitarian, educational and religious functions of the synagogue made it the supreme centre of Jewish life. And because the Synagogue had gained prominence even before the destruction of the temple, Judaism could survive even after the destruction of the temple (70 CE).
6.6. Rabbinic Leadership

The emergence of the Rabbi changed the emphasis in Jewish liturgy. The rabbi, who was a lay leader, replaced the priest and became the new leader among the Pharisees. His role was to develop the oral law and to clarify for his followers the meaning of the written law in the concrete situation. The rise of rabbinic leadership was a theological victory for the Pharisees over the Sadducean priests, who had been the traditional rulers of the Jewish people. Though the Pharisees never denied the special role of the consecrated priests in the temple, they refused to accept the Sadducean claim that interpretation of the Pentateuch was their prerogative. The Pharisees argued that Moses gave the Law to the people, not to any specific group. According to them, the oral law was transmitted by the people from generation to generation. So anyone who studies and masters the tradition can teach and explain it. It was probably in this spirit that Jesus also took up the role as a rabbi.

6.7. Greater Role for Women

In the Pharisaic ideology, as we have seen, the focus of piety shifted out of the Temple; this opened up a new opportunity for women, who were otherwise restricted to the outer precincts of the Temple. Eating food in holy meals could be done now not only in the Temple, but also every day in one’s own home, observing the rules of cultic purity. If one kept these rules and ate his/her food as if he/she were a priest, one could enter the state of holiness. It was the women who prepared food in Palestinian homes, hence the responsibility of preparing food in accordance with the taboos, in order to ensure ritual purity, rested on them. “Accordingly, women gained a central role in the correct observance of the rules governing cultic cleanness.” So women now enjoyed the power to secure sanctification, the very privilege denied to them in the Temple.

It naturally entailed that women were expected to keep the same cultic taboos as men. So as far as the rites of the home are concerned, they attained complete equality with men. There was no distinction between men and women as regards the rules. Their cultic holiness no more depended on their relationship with men (like the wife/daughter of a priest). “Consequently, in the Pharisaic rite, women enjoyed full personhood.” For sure, this also complicated the life of women. We do not know how women responded to this challenge. But we have ample evidence to show that like men, women also voluntarily undertook the disciplines of sanctification as Pharisees understood them.
**7. POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT**

The NT and Rabbinic sources indicate that the Pharisees were preoccupied with personal and sectarian piety and functioned as a religious sect, not as a political party. They were indifferent to the type of government in Palestine (monarchy or Roman Province), as long as they were allowed to pursue the Law of God. So they at times opposed the Hasmoneans and later favoured the Romans in 63 BCE, because they found them better suited for their interests than the previous types of government. Hillel, a proponent of peace, characterised by humility, gentleness and patience, could not approve the tyrannical reign of Herod the Great, but he did not challenge him by threat or intimidation. On the other hand, he tried to ensure social justice by interpreting the law in favour of the poor - two legal decisions of Hillel enabled the poor to have easier access to loans and to recover within a year their homes, in case they were forced to sell them. We don’t find in his teaching things like Messianism and apocalyptic speculations, which could give rise to political dissension. Instead he taught that the pursuit of peace and love of humanity will ensure their future life. Shammai also pursued peace, though he was stricter in his interpretation of the Law. However, this does not guarantee that the different schools of the disciples of Hillel and Shammai were as detached from politics and power centres as they themselves were. And of course, there were other Pharisees who were not followers of either of them. We know that some Pharisees joined ranks with the revolutionaries in 6 CE and perhaps also in 4 BCE.

**8. INFLUENCE OF THE PHARISEES**

Though Josephus tells that they numbered only some 6,000 (*Antiquities* 17:42) in the time of Herod the Great, their influence on the Jewish society was much greater than one would expect from such a small group. From the time of their origin, till the modern times, they have played a leading role in shaping the beliefs and practices of the Jewish religion. In Jesus’ time, their prestige was so great that if a Jew wanted to be pious, he had to practice piety in the way the Pharisees did. That is the reason why Jesus and his disciples were questioned when they did not follow the Pharisaic manner of fasting, washing hands, observing the Sabbath etc. (Mk 2:18; Mk 7:5; Lk 18:12). It was taken for granted that any pious man would do the things that the Pharisees did. Their influence certainly grew after the destruction of Jerusalem, when they became the only dominant force in Judaism. Then, they were in a more advantageous position than any other sect in Palestine to take the leadership of the Jewish people. And their influence on Judaism is summarised in the words of Pawlikowski: “all modern Jewish groups (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist) have derived many of
their fundamental forms of religious life from the Pharisaic revolution in biblical Judaism.” Needless to say, through Judaism, they have influenced the whole world that is permeated by Christianity.

9. CRITICISM OF THE PHARISEES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The NT refers to Pharisees 97 times: 88 in the gospels, 8 in Acts and 1 in the letters. In the Gospels’ accounts, the recurrent themes about the Pharisees are the following: Sabbath observance, in particular, picking food (Mt 12:1-2) and healing the sick (Mt 12:10); purity laws (Mk 7:4), in particular, the view that purity laws are less important than ethical commandments (Mk 7:5-13; Mt 23:23, 25-26) and the issue of eating with persons who do not follow the purity laws (e.g. sinners and tax collectors – Lk 15:2; Mt 9:11); consecrating things to the temple and oath taking (Mt 23:16-22); tithing (Lk 18:12); fasting (Lk 5:33) and lawful divorce (Mt 19:3ff). Apart from these legal questions, there were also doctrinal issues that were disputed between the Pharisees and the Jesus movement: the powers of the Son of man (Mt 9:2-7), the authentication of the Messiah (Mt 22:42; Mk 15:32; Lk 22:67), relationship with the Romans (Mt 22:17), resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8) and the relative value of the commandments (Mk 12:28). Now, let us first look at some of the areas where the Jesus movement and the Pharisees agreed and then other areas, where they differed from each other.

9.1. Points of Convergence

In fact, Jesus was theologically more in accord with the Pharisees than with any other Jewish sect of the time. They shared much in common: unlike the Sadducees, both Jesus and the Pharisees accepted all of the Hebrew Scriptures as holy writ (Mt 7:12; 11:13; Lk 24:44; Jn 1:45). Both endorsed relatively late theological developments such as resurrection of the dead, angels and demons (Mt 22:23-33; Lk 20:27; Acts 23:6-10). And unlike the Essenes, both Jesus and the Pharisees believed that it was possible to lead a holy life, living among the people, without withdrawing to the desert.

And in practical life, we know that at least some Pharisees respected him as a fellow teacher, inviting him to dinner, perhaps to learn more of his teachings (Lk 7:37; 11:37; 14:1). Nicodemus (Jn 3:1) and Paul (Acts 23:6) were both eminent Pharisees; Gamaliel, a leading Pharisee of the time, spared the apostles (Acts 5:34); and at least some Pharisees became Christians, though not without problematic consequences (Acts 15:5). Hence, many scholars are of opinion that the NT criticism of the Pharisees is somewhat exaggerated.
especially the venomous language, may also reflect the hostility between the Church and the synagogue during the period when the NT books were written.58

9.2. Divergences

However, this does not mean that Jesus did not have differences with the Pharisees of his time; there were indeed doctrinal and practical differences that distinguished Jesus’ views about holiness and piety from that of the Pharisees. Let us note a few important ones here:

a) For Jesus, the Law of Moses was not the definitive end to the knowledge of God. He often transcended Mosaic Law, while describing the father (Mt 5:21-22; 27-28; 33-35). Jesus recognized the Pharisaic loyalty to the Law and agreed that they sat on Moses’ seat (Mt 23:2), as successors of the great lawgiver; however, that was not enough.

b) Moreover, according to Jesus, much of the ‘tradition of the elders’ (which the Pharisees held in high esteem) was probably an obstacle to communion with God (Mk 7:2-13 and parallels).

c) For Jesus, holiness does not depend on ritual purity, but on higher ethical values like love, justice, mercy (Mt 12:7; 15:11; 23:23-24) etc. A point repeatedly made in the anti-Pharisaic pericopes is that the Pharisees were not concerned with ethics, while being very strict about the rules of purity and table-fellowship.59 This complaint against Israel is not without precedence in biblical prophecy (Hos 6:6; Jer 14:12; Is 58:4,5).

d) Jesus dismantled the barrier between saint and sinner, by eating with the so-called ‘sinners’ (Lk 15:2) and even making them his disciples. The Pharisees who believed in racial purity and separation from sinners, could not digest Jesus’ interaction with tax collectors, Samaritans etc. In the apostolic times, his disciples realized that the ancient identifiers of the circumcised and uncircumcised were no longer applicable. Paul proclaimed that ethnic and social distinctions were erased in Christ (Rom 4:5; Gal 3:28).

e) Jesus may have considered piety and virtue as more of an inner disposition than something for public demonstration (Mt 6:1-7; 16-18). The Pharisees are accused of being excessively conscious of their virtues and parading them before God (Lk 18:11-12) and the people (Mt 23:5-12).

f) One’s words must be authenticated with corresponding deeds (Mt 23:3). The Pharisaic ideals often exceeded their performance; so they are called hypocrites and blind guides (Mt 23:13, 16).
g) The extreme legalism of the Pharisees, following the letter of the law and neglecting the spirit, often defeated the very purpose of the Law; hence, the criticism in Mt 23:16-28 etc. Often the moral point of view was superseded by the legal and formal point of view; their effort was only to do justice to the letter of the law.60

h) Practice of faith had become a heavy burden under Pharisaic rules and regulations.61 Jesus criticised it (Mt 23:4) and promised a lighter yoke (Mt 11:30). Whereas the Law was a burden for the ordinary people, for the master of the Law, it was a matter of pride to have fulfilled the Law, leading to a false sense of righteousness and a disdain for the sinner (Lk 18:9-14).

9.3. Understanding the Differences

Away from the popular negative picture of the Pharisees (deriving from the NT accounts), scholars agree that most of the Pharisees must have been deeply religious men, who really took the demands of the Law seriously. However, they did not probably escape the dangers of casuistry.62 Even the rabbinic writings criticise the extremes of Pharisaic piety – the observance of the letter of the Law leads to a multiplication of duties and a neglect of simple love for one’s neighbour. In fact, some Talmudic passages, which are opinions of the Pharisaic rabbis, are as critical of the Pharisees as in the NT texts.63 Furthermore, this criticism must be viewed as referring to some (groups of) Pharisees, not to all the Pharisees in general.

The following table provides some examples, explaining the Pharisaic position on some of the contentious issues between themselves and Jesus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Issue</th>
<th>The Pharisaic Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plucking grains on Sabbath (Mt 12:1ff)</td>
<td>Plucking grains is a sub-category of reaping, which is forbidden on Sabbath (there were some 39 chief categories of work, forbidden on a Sabbath).64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing on Sabbath (Lk 14:3)</td>
<td>Permitted only if there is a grave threat to life; so the leader of the synagogue says, “come and get healed on other six days” (Lk 13:14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can one rescue a person or an animal from the well on Sabbath (Lk 14:5)?</td>
<td>Opinion differed on this matter. In the beginning of Maccabean period, when the enemy attacked the Jews on the Sabbath, they refused to take arms and defend themselves, but allowed themselves to be massacred (1 Mac 2:34-38). This position changed later. The Zadokite fragments from Qumran expressly prohibited lifting an animal from the cistern on a Sabbath. But some rabbis allowed it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Re-visiting the Pharisees as Religious Leaders

### The Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Issue</th>
<th>The Pharisaic Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washing of hands and purity laws (Mk 7:3ff)</td>
<td>Pharisees had developed numerous complicated rules for purifying hands; there were separate rules for purifying the inside and outside of hollow vessels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostentatious piety (Mt 6:1 ff)</td>
<td>Pharisees had a practical educative function of setting a public example and condemning its opposite. But Jesus did not view piety this way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharisees receiving homage from the people (Mt 23:6)</td>
<td>As persons, who knew the Law and were concerned about its development, and who carried out for the society this essential duty of protecting the Law, they received respect and homage from the people, as if it was their right.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In any case, we have to face the fact that the gospels abound in the criticism of the Pharisees. And as a result of this, what pervades generally among the Christians is a negative picture of the Pharisees as legalists, hypocrites and people who care for the form, but not the spirit, of the Law. The Christian criticism of the Pharisees is countered by the Jewish apologetic for their religion; the Jews insist that the Pharisees really preached a religion of love, citing sources from the rabbinic literature. Both the criticism and the apologetic stem from the concerned party’s eagerness to justify and defend themselves, hence not to be taken at its face value.

### 10. LESSONS FOR THE CONSECRATED PEOPLE

As Christian leaders, there are many lessons that the consecrated men and women of today can learn from the Pharisees: their earnestness and commitment to their religion, their loyalty to the Law, their craving for holiness and purity, the importance given to the laity, the women and the non-cultic aspects of the religious practice. As I have already stated, after the emergence of the Pharisees, the Jews of all times have considered them as true heroes and role models. However, taking into consideration the numerous confrontations that Jesus had with the Pharisees, Christian leaders need to look up to Jesus as their model wherever there are such conflicts of religious principle and practice. They should beware of the mistakes that Jesus condemned in the Pharisees. Hence on the basis of our analysis of the Pharisees, let me summarise three things that the Christian leaders (or any religious leader) must not neglect:

**a) Critical Evaluation of One’s Religion:** We can notice in the Pharisees an inability to critically evaluate their religious principles and practices: e.g. their Sabbath observance and the concept of ritual purity and exclusivism, which Jesus opposed. Some might reasonably argue that most religious leaders of the time were incapable of critically looking at one’s own religion. But Jesus exhibited a remarkable ability to articulate in Judaism...
what was helpful in growing closer to God and to reject what was harmful. Even today, most religious leaders normally believe that they possess the right principles and that the practices of one’s religion are good and healthy. But an outsider can easily notice that what they believe is often not true. Hence all religious leaders should earnestly try to critically evaluate the beliefs and practices of one’s own religion and promote the healthy ones and discourage the unhealthy and outdated or superstitious beliefs and practices. Examples of such practices abound in all religions; I do not need to enumerate them here.

b) Setting the Right Priorities: The Pharisees probably failed to grasp the essence of their religion, thus insisting on the minutiae, but neglecting the really important aspects and ensuring ritual purity, but failing to clean the heart (Mt 23:23-26). Their casuistry was misleading and drawing people away from God. Every religious leader must know that the core of religion is not in its rituals and observances, but in its ethical principles. The former are useful as much as they help the latter. Similarly, religion must not teach its members to hate others, but to love and be agents of peace and communion in the world. We can only sympathise with the Pharisee returning from the temple after a useless exercise (Lk 18:9-14) or the elder son standing outside the banquet hall (Lk 15:28), despite their earnestness for the Law. Likewise, it is a pity when religious leaders spend much of their time and energy, setting the externals right, neglecting the matters of the heart. When religion becomes a show, how is it different from a political or cultural show? Hence religion must appeal to the heart and insist on righteous everyday living, more than regular practice of rituals.

c) Radiating Joy: In many cases, the Pharisaic elucidations, running into thousands of laws, had made the practice of religion very burdensome. Religion in such cases would be a matter of fear, threat and caution, not a medium to enjoy the communion with a loving God. Jesus changed this approach and radiated the joy of the good news to all he met, including the sinners and outcasts - through teaching, healing, praying, feeding etc. Even his painful death on the cross was transcended through the joy of the resurrection. Dedicating this year to consecrated people, Pope Francis invites all consecrated men and women to live “lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.” Religion and spirituality should not be a strenuous journey in the labyrinth of rules and regulations, but must become a joyful pilgrimage to a loving God, whom we love to seek. And the leaders have the primary duty to radiate that joy in their ministry of leadership.
Re-visiting the Pharisees as Religious Leaders

Endnotes

1The Mishnah (ca. 200 CE), the first great document of Judaism in its normative form includes teachings attributed to Pharisaic authorities, in particular, Gamaliel and his son Simeon. Moreover, the Mishnah regards Gamaliel’s father, the great rabbi Hillel, as one of the chief authorities for the Mishnah’s own traditions. Hence the Mishnah is believed to have preserved teachings belonging to the Pharisees of Jesus’ time. Cf. NEUSNER, Jacob, Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1984, 45.

2Though it was generally accepted among scholars that Josephus was a Pharisee (because he himself testifies it in Life 1:12), some modern scholars say that he only falsely claims so. According to them, his own account of his activities and his description of the Pharisees betray his claim to be a Pharisee. Cf. GRABBE, Lester L., “Sadducees and Pharisees” in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 2 (Part 3, Section 1, pp. 35-62); (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc.), 2011, 45.

3Steve Mason argues that Josephus was an aristocratic priest, who did not sympathise with the Pharisaic ideals, though he presents them as one of the philosophical schools. That is why he presents them as troublesome people, especially when interacting with power centres (Antiquities 13: 188-198; 400-432; 17:41-45). Cf. MASON, Steve, “Revisiting Josephus’ Pharisees” in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 2 (Part 3, Section 2, pp. 23-56), 26-27.

4When the gospels were written, Christianity was still largely a Jewish sect. “The gospels were designed in part to help Christians distinguish themselves from the other prominent Jewish groups... It was especially important for Christianity to distinguish itself from the Pharisees... with whom they had the most in common.” Cf. TOMASINO, Anthony J., Judaism before Jesus: The Ideas and Events that Shaped the New Testament World (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press), 2003, 164. Hence the rhetoric must be understood in this context, or it will be misinterpreted.

5Rabbinic traditions about the Pharisees are centred around the internal affairs of the Pharisaic party itself – mostly regarding the relationship between the two known houses of Pharisaism, namely, those of Hillel and Shammai. The other sects – Essenes, Christians etc. – are simply ignored. The Romans never occur. Among the Hasmoneans, only Yohanan, the high priest, is mentioned (he is hailed as a good Pharisee). Thus the inner life of the party takes precedence over the larger scheme of history – the affairs of the state, cult and country. Hence the cult is secondary; and the country’s struggle with the Romans is bypassed in silence. Cf. Neusner, Judaism, 54.

6SIMMONS, William A., Peoples of the New Testament (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc.), 2008, 53. He Says, “This quest in response to the holocaust of captivity may well have generated ideals, values and practices that eventually gave rise to the Pharisees.” In the aftermath of the exile, there was an extra-ordinary focus on the Law of Moses, especially on Sabbath observance, circumcision and purity regulation (Is 56:1-8; 58:13, 14; Ez 4:12-15; 22:26). This extra-ordinary focus on religious code and ritual could have been a seminal factor in the birth and development of the Pharisees. Later, the reform enforced by Ezra and Nehemiah provided a fertile ground for the growth of various religious groups consisting of those who were...
zealous for the Law and the tradition of the fathers; one such group later came to be known as Pharisees.


9Cf. SALDARINI, Antony J., Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier), 1988, 87-88. The shift occurred when one of the Pharisees called Eleazar made a false allegation against Hyrcanus and asked him to give up the High Priesthood. Though the other Pharisees disagreed with Eleazar, they refused to recommend death penalty for him. Thereupon Hyrcanus sensed disloyalty and shifted allegiance.


12In the new year of 70 CE, the month following the destruction of the temple, Johanan and his followers decreed a series of specific modification of the Law, necessitated by the disaster. Later, they claimed that the academy at Yavneh held the authority, formerly exerted by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Thereafter, the Yavneh academy became the high court, capable of enacting authoritative enactments. Cf. NEUSNER, Jacob, First Century Judaism in Crisis (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 1975, 177.

13Many of them may have been “skilled workers, including glassblowers, tentmakers, tanners, fullers, weavers and scribes.” SEGAL, Alan F., “The Second Temple Period” in The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion and Culture (pp. 34-57) (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2010, 46.

14For example, Smith compares the Pharisaic teachers with other Greek philosophers of the time: “Not only was the theory of the Pharisaic school that of a school of Greek philosophy, but so were its practices. Its teachers taught without pay, like philosophers; they attached to themselves particular disciples who followed them around and served them, like philosophers; they looked to gifts for support, like philosophers; they were exempt from taxation, like philosophers; they were distinguished in the street by their walk, speech and peculiar clothing, like philosophers; they practiced and praised asceticism, like philosophers; and finally – what is, after all, the meat of the matter – they discussed the questions philosophers discussed and reached the conclusions philosophers reached...” (SMITH, Palestinian Judaism in the First Century, p. 81). Neusner agrees with this theory. Cf. NEUSNER, Judaism, 52-53.

15Cf. STERN, “The Hasmonean Revolt and Its Place in the History of Jewish Society and Religion” in Jewish Society through the Ages, pp. 92-106 (New York: Schocken Books), 1973, 104: “Most classes of the nation were actually attached to the Pharisees and regarded the Pharisee sages as their natural leaders and the Pharisee Halakha as the natural expression of the Jewish religion.

16REICKE, Bo, The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 BC to AD 100
Re-visiting the Pharisees as Religious Leaders

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1968, 156. However, Koester has a different view: he says that they did not have rites of initiation for new members or rules for a common life, as in the case of Essenes. Theirs was an association, informally bound by common interests; their only institutional tie was the school house, which provided instruction to the young men (like a philosophical school). The Pharisees continued to use this school as its basis even after the Jewish war and it remained a characteristic of the rabbinic Judaism in the later years. Cf. KOESTER, Helmut, *Introduction to the NT, vol. I: History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1982, 243.

17 OTZEN, *Judaism in Antiquity*, 119. This did not mean that the Pharisees left their homes and lived together like the Essenes. A Pharisee retained his family and territorial allegiances, his roles in society and occupation, his friends and network of associates. At the same time, he committed to be a Pharisee, which claimed a part of his time, energy and resources. Cf. SALDARINI, Antony J., “Pharisees” in *ABD*, vol. 5 (pp. 289-303), 302.

18 Neusner says, “The traits of Pharisaism emphasized by Josephus, their principal beliefs and practices, nowhere occur in the rabbinic traditions of the Pharisees.” Similarly, the rabbinic traditions about the Pharisees do not discuss the questions and issues, which other contemporary groups (like the Jewish authorities, the Christians, Qumranians and writers of Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic literature and similar collections) had taken seriously. Cf. NEUSNER, *Judaism*, 53.

19 “To be faithful to the Torah and to help it penetrate every corner of life were the fundamentals of Pharisee thought.” STERN, Menahem, “The Hasmonean Revolt…”, 104.

20 Hillel’s methodology of interpretation of the Scripture revolutionised the intellectual life of Pharisaism. These principles were also known to exeges of Greek classic texts. The seven methods were: 1) inference *a minori ad majus*, 2) inference by analogy, 3) constructing a family (of biblical passages) on the basis of one passage, 4)… on the basis of two passages, 5) the general and the particular, 6) exposition by means of another similar passage, 7) deduction from the context… Cf. NEUSNER, *First Century*, 49.

21 The early rabbis related the order of reception of the oral tradition as follows: God revealed the written and oral Torah to Moses. The oral teachings were preserved by the fathers and inherited by the Pharisees. After the destruction of the temple, theses traditions were preserved by the early rabbis and finally codified in the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE). The *Talmuds* (400-600 CE) were massive commentaries on these teachings found in Mishnah. Cf. SIMMONS, *Peoples of the New Testament*, 51.

22 The basic premise on which they founded the oral tradition is that the Torah is obliged to find a suitable answer to all the questions that came up in life, in all its details. So the answers given in the Pharisaic circles embraced all aspects of religion, worship, law and social life. Cf. STERN, “The Hasmonean Revolt…”, 104.

23 Cf. REICKE, *The New Testament Era*, 158. Later, the term Midrash was used for commentaries on the individual books of the Bible. The systematic exegetical tradition that developed in the next centuries was made up of two elements: 1) the tradition of observances (halakka – ‘walking’) based on the legal material of the Bible and 2) the tradition of edification (haggada – ‘narration’), based on narrative and parenetic material. The literature of the systematic tradition is preserved
in the Talmud (‘teaching’), which has two collections: the Hebrew Mishnah (‘instruction’) assembled about 200 CE at Tiberias and the Aramaic Gemara (‘supplement’), preserved in a Palestinian version (400 CE) and a Babylonian version (500 CE).

24Cf. KOESTER, Introduction to the NT, 169. Once the famous Rabbi, Johannan ben Zakkai showered high praise on one of his disciples, comparing him to a plastered cistern, which would not lose even a drop of water. That means, memorising the teachings of the elders was considered to be a desirable virtue and the sign of a worthy disciple.

25A quotation from the rabbinic literature goes like this: “It is more culpable to teach contrary to the precepts of the scribes, than contrary to the Torah” (Sanhedrin 11:3). So, in this case, the tradition of the fathers were considered more binding than the written Torah itself (Cf. SCHÜRER, Emil, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ (Second division, vol. 2) (Peabody, Massachusetts: Henrickson Publishers Inc.), 1995, 12). However, Sanders concludes that the Pharisees did not consider the ‘tradition of the fathers’ equal to written Torah; the tradition stood at a lower level and was less binding, except when it supplemented the written Torah. Cf. SANDERS, E.P., Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah (London: SCM Press, 1990), 129.

26RHOADS, David M., Israel in Revolution: 6-74CE - A Political History Based on the Writings of Josephus (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1976, 34. We have already referred to Hillel’s seven methods, which were based on principles of logic.

27OTZEN, Judaism in Antiquity, 123

28FOERSTER, Werner, From the Exile to Christ: A Historical Introduction to Palestinian Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1964, 171. For example, one of the ‘works’ prohibited on the Sabbath was to carry a burden from one ‘domain’ to another. Usually, a house formed a ‘domain’ in itself. But if several houses surrounded a courtyard, the Pharisees found a way to convert it into a single ‘domain’: all the concerned houses could deposit some food in the courtyard before the onset of Sabbath – this symbolic act would make all those houses into a single ‘domain’, allowing them to carry any number of objects over the courtyard on the Sabbath. By means of other actions, the whole alleyway could be thus converted to a single ‘domain’. Similarly, one was allowed to walk only 2000 cubits on the Sabbath; but he could extend it by depositing in a place within 2000 cubits food for two meals and declaring that it would be his Sabbath abode; then he can walk 2000 cubits more from that point. Likewise, one could declare a tree to be his Sabbath abode and then undertake his movements from there. In all such rules, formal fulfilment of the law was stressed, often neglecting its spirit. Cf. SCHÜRER, A History of the Jewish People, 120.


30PAWLIKOWSKI, “The Pharisees and Christianity”, 48. Ellis Rivkin holds the same view, when he says, “if one were to attempt to pinpoint the most highly original and lasting achievement of the Pharisees, it would be their linking up the individual...to a single cosmic Father God who offered the individual personal immortality in the world to come...” RIVKIN, Ellis, “Who were the Pharisees?” in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 2 (Part 3, Section 3, pp. 1-34), 29.

31The fact that Jesus frequently addressed God as father may indicate that this notion had penetrated the ordinary Jewish population of the time. Cf. PAWLIKOWSKI, “The Pharisees and Christianity”, 48
For example, *Sanhedrin* 4:5 reads: “anyone who destroys a single human soul is reckoned by Scripture as having destroyed the entire world. And anyone who preserves a single soul, it is as though he kept the entire world alive.” *Yadaim* 4:4 reads: “He stamps every individual with the form of the first man, yet each individual is different from each other...”


Cf. DAVIES, 29. It was the fanaticism with which the Apocalyptists held these ideas that differentiated them from the Pharisees. However, there were also fervent apocalyptists among the Pharisees, Akiba, for example.


Marcel Simon says, “In the matter of ritual, the Pharisees’ position was characterised in general by their custom of multiplying prescriptions, particularly those dealing with ritual purity.” SIMON, *Jewish Sects*, 36.

RINGEN, *Judaism in Antiquity*, 118

But the Pharisees were not alone in this concern. Many Jews and pagans of that era shared the concern and established their own rituals for purification. What probably distinguished the Pharisees from others is that they went beyond the normal limits and stressed on every detail. For example, non-priestly Pharisees may have been the only lay people to try to keep the laws of Lev 11:32-38. Cf. SANDERS, *Jewish Law*, 246.

They were: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting (fit from unfit produce or crops), grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying, untying, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, trapping a deer, slaughtering it, flaying it, salting it, curing its hide, scraping it, cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing two letters in order to write two letters, building, tearing down, putting out a fire, kindling a fire, hitting with a hammer, and transporting an object from one domain to another.

“So many and varied were the rules of Sabbath observance, that the Mishnah at one point calls them ‘mountains hanging by a hair’ (*Mishnah Hagigah* 1:8) – that is to say, the Scriptural basis is very brief, and the rules many.” HILTON, Rabbi Michael with MARSHALL, Fr. Gordian OP, *The Gospels and Rabbinic Judaism: A Study Guide* (London: SCM Press), 1988, 98.

Cf. NEUSNER, *Judaism*, 58.

Cf. PAWLIKOWSKI, “The Pharisees and Christianity”, 51. Though the principle of the ‘fence’ may have gradually given way to the ‘traditions of the elders’, in any case, the distancing from the sinners continued to be a necessity.

According to them, there were some sinners who could not be converted through repentance, because repentance necessitated restitution for all the sins one has committed. For example, the tax collectors and prostitutes cannot even recollect their sins, so restitution is impossible; hence they cannot repent and be converted. Cf. LALFAKMAWIA, Joseph H., *General Introduction to Post Biblical Judaism* (Kolkata: Sceptre), 2013, 114.

Emil Schürer holds that what distinguishes the Pharisees from others is their ‘separation’ from the am ha-aretz, (the masses) and from the gentile nations because of a greater scrupulousness
with respect to the laws of ritual purity. He also presents a seemingly irrefutable proof text from the Tannaitic literature: “the garments of the am ha-aretz are a source of uncleanness to the Pharisees.” (*Mishnah Hagigah* 2:7) Cf. SCHÜRER, *A History of the Jewish People*, 10.

**KOESTER, Introduction to the NT**, 241.

**Cf. PAWLIKOWSKI, “The Pharisees and Christianity”, 50.**

**Cf. PAWLIKOWSKI, “The Pharisees and Christianity”, 49-50.**

**NEUSNER, *Judaism*, 59.**

**NEUSNER, *Judaism*, 59.**

In order to maintain ritual purity, the women had to abstain from cooking food for their family, when they were menstruating; moreover, as per the laws of cultic contamination listed in Lev 15, the objects on which they stood, sat or lay also became unclean; so they had to take special care to demarcate the places in which they walked, sat and stood during those days every month. When one woman was unclean other women in the house could undertake the cooking or they could opt to eat the ordinary meal (not ritually pure) for that period. However, if the second option is adopted, they would temporarily lose the state of holiness!

**These evidences are derived from writings of men only, making the picture incomplete, as usual. Cf. NEUSNER, *Judaism*, 59**

**One of the greatest compliments given to them by Josephus, describing their powerful position in the society is in Antiquities. It reads, “These have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say anything against the king, or against the high priest, they are presently believed” (Antiquities 13:288).**

**First of all, they advanced a comprehensive religious program to replace the temple cult. Second, the doctrines of life after death, retribution and recompense for suffering offered meaningful consolation to the men who were victims of the catastrophe. Third, their hermeneutical principles could easily adapt to changing circumstances. Fourth, they had the support from Rome (Josephus was there) and large parts of the nation. Fifth, they had already claimed their legitimate authority to interpret Judaism; now they pressed it. Cf. NEUSNER, *First Century*, 178.**

**PAWLIKOWSKI, “The Pharisees and Christianity”, 47.**

**Though all the gospels refer frequently to the Pharisees, we cannot obtain in the gospels a uniform picture about them; each evangelist presents the Pharisees differently, based on the experience of their community with the Pharisees. Since we cannot treat the matter elaborately here, what is presented below is a consolidated (hence less accurate) account. Saldarini and many other scholars assess the presentation in each gospel separately. Cf. SALDARINI, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees*, 144-198.**

**In fact, the Christian Pharisees’ intense concern with Jewish ethnicity, circumcision and other cultic rituals plagued the early Church throughout the Apostolic period (Acts 11:1-3; 15:1-5; Gal 2:1-15; Phil 3:2-3). In the end, however, the course of the Church was not to be directed along the Pharisaic lines (Acts15:13-29).**

**Some scholars even go the extent of suspecting that the various opponents of Jesus in the gospels are “mere straw figures to be knocked down by Jesus”. So the name of the group has no significance. Cf. GRABBE, “Sadducees and Pharisees”, 57.**
The Pharisaic academy at Jamnia had issued a prohibition order against the Christians, forbidding them from entering the Jewish synagogues. The hostility is also evident in the famous Benediction (in this case, malediction against Christians) introduced into the liturgy of the synagogue towards the end of the century. It reads: “Let the Nazarenes and the heretics perish as in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living and let them not be written with the righteous.” FOERSTER, From the Exile to Christ, 157.

Neusner is of opinion that presenting the Pharisaic insistence on tithing and purity rituals as opposed to moral behaviour is polemical. Cf. NEUSNER, Judaism, 55.

For example, Deut 24:1 permits a man to divorce his wife if he found in her anything objectionable: the word ‘objectionable’ was stretched to dangerous levels. According to Hillel, if she has spoiled his food, that is enough reason to divorce her; Akiba’s interpretation is even worse – if he finds another woman, fairer than his wife, he could divorce his wife. The problem lay in the fact that they could do such acts, without ‘breaking’ the law. Naturally, ethical principles were violated even without their realizing it; that was a tragedy. Cf. SCHÜRER, A History of the Jewish People, 122-123.

“At every step, at the work of his calling, at prayer, at meals, at home and abroad, from early morning till late in the evening, from youth to old age, the dead, deadening formula followed him…Life was a continual torment to the earnest man, who felt at every moment that he was in danger of transgressing the law.” SCHÜRER, A History of the Jewish People, 124.

Casuistry often leads to conclusions that violate the essence of morality. For example, the Mishnah forbids a Jewish woman from assisting a gentile woman in childbirth; but she can get such help from a non-Jewish woman. The principle is evidently based on the doctrine of election: the Jews were a chosen race and the others were condemned; so do not help another evil child to be born! When carried to its limit, casuistic conclusions often lead in the wrong direction. Cf. FOERSTER, From the Exile to Christ, 173-173.

The Babylonian Talmud (Sotah 22b) denounces six types of hypocritical Pharisees. Some of the sins named there are the very faults condemned by Jesus. Tomasino compares Jesus’ polemical language against the Pharisees to the vehemence with which Martin Luther attacked the Catholics of his day. Cf. TOMASINO, Judaism before Jesus, 164-165.

Sanders concludes that the transgression of Sabbath law by Jesus and his disciples were only minor infringements (inadvertent transgression), not amounting to violation of the Sabbath Law. These transgressions could be legally defended, showing respect for the Law. E.g. hunger overrides the Law and the Sabbath is made for people, not people for Sabbath. Cf. SANDERS, Jewish Law, 90.
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There is a general consensus among the Scripture scholars and theologians that the central theme of Jesus’ teachings is God’s Kingdom and its coming. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus focused his attention primarily on his commitment to the Kingdom with some 140 allusions in the Gospel texts. When Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, he commissioned both a smaller group of Twelve (Lk 9:1-6; Mt 10:5-15; Mk 6:6-13) as well as a larger group of disciples (Lk 10:1-12) to proclaim God’s Kingdom and to make it present. Following this pattern of mission, the Church has been trying to carry forward Jesus’ mission of implanting the values of God’s Kingdom like love, peace, forgiveness, freedom, justice and liberation for so many centuries. As part of the Church, the Consecrated persons or Religious participate in the very mission of the Church by exercising their diversity and multiplicity of charisms. As a result, we can notice the changes taking place from one generation to another with regard to the manifold expressions of her mission. Even though they perform diverse or multiple ministries, everything ultimately aims at fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ, fullness of God’s Kingdom here on earth.

In today’s context, the Church and more particularly the Consecrated persons are facing numerous challenges coming from different spheres of life, namely, the scientific advancement in transportation and communication, the existence of multiculturalism, religious pluralism and the influence of globalization. They are also affected by the increasing process of secularization and its consequences. These realities of life impel us to rethink the Gospel’s orientation about the mission of the Consecrated persons and to find out the avenues in order to be authentic and credible in the prevailing situation.

In this wider context, the commission of Jesus to the Seventy (+ two) (Lk 10: 1-12) is of vital importance and great relevance. It is true and clear that

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this commission is applicable to all the baptized as it is given to a larger group. Still it can be of powerful motivation and constant inspiration for a new paradigm of mission for consecrated persons. It is because the mission of the lay faithful is to “seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God,” (VC 31) as derived from their baptism and confirmation, the foundational consecration. And in the case of Religious, they too are called to live and establish God’s Kingdom but in a more profound, radical, intense and deeper way. The religious are called to do this due to their further, new and special consecration in addition to their basic one. By being radical followers of Jesus, they are in conformity with him who is, chaste, poor and obedient. The religious too want to be like him chaste, poor and obedient and so they take three fold vows. “They are so committed to their cause that they would even forgo marital life and family affiliations for achieving their cause or ideal. Their mission is exceptionally valuable for humanity as it strives to establish and spread God’s Kingdom, in the pattern of the ‘world-family ideal’ (vasudhaiva kutumbakam), deeply rooted in the Indian ethos.”

At the outset, I would like to make it clear to the readers that in this article, we are not going to deal with the question of what type of ministry that we, the Religious are expected to do in response to today’s context or challenges. Rather we will be basically dealing with the issue of how consecrated persons will carry out the mission of Jesus in an authentic manner. Therefore, I will be analyzing several principles, which are contained in this commissioning narrative, which can motivate us to carry out the mission effectively.

1. **CHURCH’S MISSION, AN IMPERATIVE FOR THE WORLD**

   To build up a healthy society, there is a vital need to have the contributions of the Church and the state. The Church is profoundly aware of the dignity of the human person because of her conviction that every human being is created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). As God created us with both material bodies and immortal spirits, the Church is bound to work for the spiritual as well as material needs of our existence. It is true that, “Christ gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The purpose He set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself came a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law” (GS 42).

   As far as the western world is concerned, Church’s contributions to build up a healthy society are enormous. Single handedly, she played a decisive role for the formation of the western civilization. Certainly, it is not to be considered as an
embellishment to state that what the modern western world is today, is because of the massive efforts undertaken on the part of the Church. To be specific and substantial, her innumerable contributions cannot be taken for granted in the fields of science, medicine, history, education, language, philosophy, theology, law, art, architecture, music, status of women, etc. “In total, Churches have diverse positive impacts on communities, ranging from increased trust, improved mental and physical health, decreased crime, and enhanced levels of volunteering and community outreach. These attributes build norms and values that encourage political stability and economic performance.”

As far as Europe is concerned, the period between the death of two great Monastic monks namely, St. Benedict (548) and St. Bernard (1153) is called as the ‘Benedictine centuries.’ The reason behind such a perception is that the monks were an integral part of the society at all levels such as spiritual, intellectual, artistic, administrative and economic. As a whole, the Religious life from very beginning have had a great impact on society at large and on the Church.

When it comes to our country, India, the commitment of the Church and more specifically the contributions of the Religious for the overall development of the Indian society cannot be easily overlooked. Still, to name briefly, a few areas of contribution of the Church, are education, health-care, literature, art and social work. On the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the ‘Daya Duar Mini Hospital,’ and the inauguration of the bi-centennial celebrations of the birth of Don Bosco, the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, appreciated the Catholic Church for the yeoman service that it was rendering in various fields like education, social work, and health care for the people of the area.

Church’s option for the social development manifests the compassionate heart of Jesus, which motivated her to work for the poor, downtrodden, exploited and marginalized in the Indian society. In the context of multi-culturality and multi-religiosity of our nation, secularism is very much insisted upon. From the beginning, the Church firmly stood for the secular credentials of the constitutions of our nation, while promoting justice, peace and harmony in the society.

We cannot ignore the contribution of the Religious to the various activities of the Church. While speaking about their contribution in the field of evangelization, Pope Paul VI stated that their apostolate is often outstanding in terms of its resourcefulness and initiative; they are generous and are often to be found in the most remote mission stations where they may have to endure great dangers to health and even to life (EN 69). Their commitment in administering centers for leprosy and AIDS patients, and homes for the destitute, abandoned children,
elderly people and the poor is very much esteemed by many. The religious have reached almost all the areas of human needs despite the vastness of the country and the small percentage of the Christian population.

Besides, whenever a nation is affected either by human-induced or natural disasters, the Church dares to reach the affected parties as soon as possible. As the population in disaster prone areas (i.e. coastal areas) keeps on growing constantly, the number of natural disasters has increased exponentially. It is said that as a whole, nearly one third of the world’s population has been affected, and millions have lost their lives due to natural as well as human-made disasters. They bring about destruction in infrastructure, induce population displacement, and basically undermine the fabric of sustainable development and human security. There are several Church agencies which are committed to assist at during these times of need.

2. **REQUISITE OF PRAYER FOR CHURCH’S MISSION**

In his commission, Jesus exhorts us to pray to have more laborers to do his mission. It is also equally important to realize that the effectiveness and relevance of the mission, basically depends upon the support of prayer. One of the substantial differences between a social worker and a missionary undertaking a social work is the element of faith. Though both of them do the same thing, there is a difference in the mode of doing. In general, a social worker can do any social activity without having any recourse to faith. But, a missionary has to combine both the action and prayer. He/she has to be a Martha and Mary at the same time. Whenever he/she carries out any missionary activity, he/she does it in the context of prayer, because prayer is seen as the soul of the apostolate and the apostolate aims at animating and inspiring prayer (VC. 67). Besides, it is because “through prayer, we experience the opening of our hearts to embrace what God intends for the world. Prayer enlarges our vision regarding the possibilities that God is able to bring to life through us.”

In his public life, Jesus had the habit of praying (Mk 1:35, 45; Lk 4:42; 5: 16). Whenever Jesus was performing miracles he did them in the context of prayer (Jn 6: 11:23; Mk 6:41; Mt 14:19; Lk 9:16). Before taking important decisions, he was in deep dialogue with the Father (Lk 6:12-13). When Jesus had frequent access to prayer, he was able to perceive and above all to discern God’s vision and his will. Initially Saul of Tarsus went about persecuting the followers of Jesus (Acts 9:1, 14). But after his encounter with the risen Christ in Damascus, he used to pray fervently. As a result, God sent Ananias to him to reveal his vision of a radical new mission that is proclaiming the message of Jesus to the

It is prayer which gives birth to the new avenues of our future mission, creative ways of exercising our charisms and the firm determination to carry out the mission of Jesus. “Mission begins in prayer. Mission is renewed and sustained by prayer. Apart from prayer, the mission of the Church is lost and the Church declines.” In prayer, we are in deep intimacy with God, acknowledge our dependence on Him, and open ourselves to Him so that we are in a better position to discern what He wants us to do. Prayer becomes an effective means through which we are enabled to obtain God’s courage and inner strength to encounter the various challenges arising in the exercise of Jesus’ mission. Missionaries, who are in the frontiers of mission frequently facing innumerable problems, difficulties and oppositions (Acts 4:24-31), must have instant access to prayer. When we look at the life of Jabez, we observe that he prayed to the God of Israel: “Keep me from harm that it may not pain me” (1Chr 4:10) and God granted what Jabez asked for. The Lord also requested us to pray: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13). The more we acknowledge the role of God, the more we will be able to bloom through our ministries. We also need to pray for one another and for ourselves so that we remain true and authentic to the God-given mission.

3. PREREQUISITE OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF EVERYONE

When Jesus instructs his disciples: “Go on your way” (Lk 10: 3), he expresses his wish that all his followers have to take part actively in the mission of the Church in their own way and basing on their own spiritual experience. Pope Francis tells us: “Anyone who has truly ex-perienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love” (EG 120). Jesus tries to remove the false notion that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is not merely the work of a selected few. Every follower of him must come forward enthusiastically in order to contribute generously.

None of the Religious should have the feeling that they are not gifted with the charisms of the Spirit and thus they are not in a position to contribute for the realization of the fullness of God’s Kingdom. St. Paul rightly asserts that all are endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 21:4-11). Varieties of gifts are given to different persons. Therefore each one of them should discern what type of gifts that I am endowed with and make use of them in a creative way for the common good. So, when we do not find and place them at the service of the
Kingdom, we will be facing the same situation as that of the person who received one talent but hid it (Mt 25:15-30). In fact, we will be considered as wicked, lazy and unworthy servants. Unworthiness is not on account of what God has given us but because we are lethargic and diabolic about the gifts received from God for the greater good.

As a whole, we must acknowledge the valuable contributions of thousands of religious men and women who with their unique charisms and gifts, hard work, sweat and toil, suffering and sacrifices, have contributed to the transformation of the socio-political, psycho-cultural, religious spheres of life. Once Mannathu Padmanabhan, one of the leaders of Hinduism said, if he happened to get the service of a hundred Christian nuns, he would be able to change the face of Kerala within a year. Generally, there is deep appreciation for the enormous works of the religious to build up a just society.

On the other hand, there are also several religious who are very much disinterested, mediocre, melancholic and lethargic in making use of their precious talents and abilities with which God has endowed them. In this way, they miserably fail to manifest God’s presence on earth by exercising their God given gifts. They seem to yield to the temptation of consumerist and comfort seeking culture and of position and power. We could sense in some of them, “a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervour” (EG 78). For them, Religious life “has become very secure and comfortable and does not face several of the harsh realities that many lay persons have to face in life.”

While dealing with the dangers of consecrated life, Joe Mannath rightly mentions that there exists “the pursuit of power and comfort and upward mobility rather than of service; the cult of mediocrity; division based on region, language, caste or tribe, often promoted by senior members; forgetting the mission and seeking our comfort zones;” Thus, their contribution to the mission of the Church is very much lacking and, above all, such persons lose their credibility of being called as consecrated persons. Persons who have got the experience of dealing with the Religious for many years as formators, superiors, spiritual and retreat directors express: “Many people take refuge and quite a few carry on surviving in religious life without having real vocation, causing great harm to themselves and to the respective congregations.” To such persons there is a strong invitation from the Lord and Master to get awakened to live a more meaningful religious life and to participate actively in his mission.

4. INEVITABILITY OF DANGERS

When we seriously analyze the very life of Jesus we can clearly understand that
he is a straightforward person and he does not give false assurance. This becomes
crystal clear from the demands of discipleship as expressed by Jesus to his would
be followers (Lk 9:57-62; Mt 8:18-22).17 To the first one who expresses that he
would like to follow Jesus wherever he goes, Jesus tells: “Before you follow
me, count your cost.” To the second person who says that he wants first to bury
his dead father before following him, Jesus informs that “in everything there is
a crucial moment; if that moment is missed the thing most likely will never be
done at all.” To the third one who wishes to follow Jesus, but only after saying
farewell to the family, Jesus conveys powerfully: “No ploughman ever ploughed
a straight furrow looking back over his shoulder. There are some whose hearts
are in the past. They walk forever backwards and thinking wistfully of the good
old days.” Hence, Jesus invites them to become aware of and to reflect about the
difficulties and challenges.

In the same way, when the rich man came up to Jesus with the question,
“what must I do in order to inherit the eternal life?,” Jesus told him to sell his
possessions and give the money to the poor (Mt 19:21). Though it is painful
to hear, Jesus communicated to him that it is highly impossible for him to
achieve his goal called “eternal life,” unless he shares his possession with the
poor and the vulnerable. The reason behind this demand of Jesus is very simple
but thought provoking. It is our excessive possession of resources that deprives
others of what is due to them. In the same way, when he sent his disciples,
he expressed: “I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves” (Lk
10:3). This metaphor cautions his followers to become aware of the challenges,
opposition and risks they will likely to encounter.

In line with his response to the expectation of the rich man, Jesus instructs
his disciples in a more substantial way to be detached from the material things by
telling them not to carry purse, bag and sandals (Lk 10:4). It is natural for human
beings to cling on to the things of this world. But he wants them to depend on
God’s providential care and the generosity of the simple people. Besides, by the
very fact of their detachment to material things, the disciples of Jesus are very
much in solidarity with the poor and the weak. In the context of Religious life
and its solidarity with the poor, Joseph Mattam writes: “This solidarity is born
of one’s love for them, and so one wants to share their condition. This solidarity
is to enable us to be with them, to awaken in them a new consciousness of their
rights, of the injustice done to them and of God’s plan in their favor.”18 This
kind of solidarity on the part of today’s Religious will impel them to take on
the “smell of the sheep” so that the sheep will be interested in listening to their
voice (EG 24). By exhorting them, not to carry purse, bag and sandals, Jesus
may expect them not to be preoccupied with these things but to be focused on the urgency of their mission.

5. THE URGENCY AND THE SINGULARITY OF PURPOSE

Jesus wanted that his mission is to be carried out on an emergency footing. He discouraged one of his would be followers who expressed that he would like to follow Jesus after burying his dead father (Lk 9:59-60; Mt 8:21-22). But Jesus makes it clear to him that in the life of discipleship priority must be given to one’s service to the Kingdom rather than to any other responsibility and relationship (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26). And there is no question of postponing one’s service to God’s Kingdom.

Jesus is not in favor of either delaying or postponing our commitment to the Kingdom because it becomes counter-productive. As E. Gladstone says: “Justice delayed is justice denied.” Martin Luther King makes it very clear: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Against the background where justice is being delayed we, the religious need to listen to the inspirational idea of Poet Longfellow, “Act in the living present.” He proposes that we need to live the present which is before us with all its possibilities. In the case of the exercise of his mission, Jesus wants his followers not to postpone the matters which deserve their immediate attention and to carry them out without delay. One of the reasons, why our commitment to the mission of Jesus is questioned, is because of our tendency to postpone the things that we are supposed to be done immediately. Many of us have to travel a long way in this regard. Therefore we need to take this invitation of Jesus very seriously and act accordingly.

The instruction of Jesus, not to greet anyone on the way (Lk 10:4) should not be perceived in terms of discourtesy. Instead he tries to communicate to his followers to be single-minded or focused in their mission. This reminds us of the instruction of Elisha to Gehazi not to salute any one even if someone salutes her and the prophet asks her to lay the staff upon the face of the dead child (2Kgs 4:29). This incident helps us understand the necessity of our whole hearted commitment and dedication to our mission instead of being diverted by other distractions. Pope John Paul II in his Post–Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, rightly mentions that both lay people as well as the consecrated persons “are called to follow Christ “more closely”, and to make him the “all” of their lives. The task of devoting themselves wholly to “mission” is therefore included in their call” (VC. 72).

It is also interesting to observe, our present Pope Francis, while repeatedly inviting us to be simple, honest and committed to our mission, also brings to our
notice: “Some resist giving themselves over completely to mission and thus end up in a state of paralysis and acedia” (EG 81). It is indeed painful to discover that there exists resistance and our own attachments and interests often extinguish the eagerness and enthusiasm brought about by the present Pope. Religious life is also affected by the so-called “worldliness,” which the Pope denounces. Hence, we fail to be single minded to the mission with which we are entrusted.

In the midst of such situation, we, the religious should never be discouraged. The evils of this world as well as those of the Church should not distort our enthusiasm and commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour!” (EG. 109).

6. THE PURPOSE OF JESUS’ SENDING

As far as this commission of Jesus is concerned, the purpose of disciples’ mission is to announce the imminence of God’s Kingdom to everyone who is ready to receive it. And the announcement, ‘the Kingdom of God has come near to you’ (Lk 10:9) is accompanied by the greeting of peace. Jesus’ messengers are supposed to bring the message of peace, pardon and hope as the realization of the promise of peace, which we come across in the infancy narrative (Lk 1:79; 2:14, 29; 19:38). Therefore the disciples are basically the prophets of peace rather than of doom. In Hebraic understanding, this greeting of peace, of Shalom, conveys ‘a fullness of peace and wholeness permeating every facet of a person’s life.’ So Jesus, after his resurrection, greets his disciples, saying, “Peace be with you” (Lk 24:36). In the same way, when Peter entered the house of Cornelius, a gentile, he conveys the good news of peace of Christ (Acts 19:36).

This message of our Master presupposes something from the part of its communicator and receiver. The communicator will be able to convey the good news of peace to others provided he/she enjoys a deeper communion with God. As a result, such a person is highly regarded, which becomes clear to us in the words of Isaiah: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’(Is 52:7). The receiver will be in a position to receive it only when he/she is really disposed to accept it. Thus, the readiness to receive and accept it whole heartedly is a vital element required on the part of the receiver to receive the peace of Christ.

When the greeting of peace is accepted, Jesus’ disciples are to continue the announcement of God’s Kingdom and they are supposed to commit themselves fully for its establishment. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, the central theme of his preaching is God’s Kingdom and its coming. It is true that
he did not define the meaning of the Kingdom in clear-cut terms, but his parables play a vital role in enabling us to perceive the significance of God’s Kingdom and its coming which is above all demonstrated through his life and ministry. Consequently, different theologians comprehend the Kingdom of God in diverse ways.21

Basically we are invited to understand it not in terms of ‘a place’ rather as ‘a dynamic event or state.’ It means to say; God is carrying out his saving power in a creative way. He makes it present in his preaching, miracles, and his practice of table-fellowship. Jacques Dupuis is of the view that, “for Jesus, the Kingdom was symbolic of the new ’rule’ God will bring about in the world, renewing all things and restoring all relationships between God and human beings as well as among people.”22 The perspective of the Reign of God is little more elaborated as an “inclusive, multifaceted strategy for the nonviolent liberation of the poor and the oppressed. It is spiritual in its essential nature but not to be reduced to any one creedal system.”23 When we think about God’s Kingdom, there may be a false notion associated with it that it belongs to the other world. In this regard, Soares-Prabhu makes it clear that it is “not an ‘other-worldly heaven’ into which we escape from the hard realities of history…, but is that ultimate goal in which all cosmic and human history finds its fulfillment. The Kingdom is thus the process and end-point of the movement of individual, societal and cosmic liberation initiated at creation and brought to fulfillment by Jesus’ revelation of the Father’s unconditional love.”24

When we go through different gospels we get the impression that the Kingdom is already present and operative in the very life and mission of Jesus (Mt 12:28; Lk 4:21) and at the same time, we read that it is something impending and imminent (Mk 1:15)). It is to be understood that the Kingdom of God is present in its initial form as a ‘plant’ but we all have to pray and work for the full realization of the Kingdom as a ‘tree’ and it is ultimately God who will bring it to its fullness. So, here comes the active participation of the Religious through their radical and deeper commitment towards God’s Kingdom. Soares-Prabhu expresses it in simple and clear-cut terms that they are invited to live out publically, professionally the gospel values implicit in all Christian life and thus they become the signs of the Kingdom.25 If we introspect critically and objectively how we live the values of God’s Kingdom and work for its establishment, we will definitely come to the realization that we need to go a long way to become credible witnesses to the Kingdom.
7. **Disciples, Not Seekers of Luxury and Comfort**

God is very much concerned in providing food to humanity from the beginning of the universe. After creating the human beings, He settled them in the paradise and said to them: “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food” (Gen 1:29). When the people of Israel were in the desert, He supplied them food and drink. He led them to the land of milk and honey. These incidents manifest to us how much God is concerned in fulfilling the basic needs of humanity and thus reveal the compassion of God, which ‘understands, assists and promotes.’

When Jesus came into this world he continued it by feeding five thousand (Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:30-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-14). This same Jesus assures his missionaries that their basic needs like food, drink and shelter will be met. For this reason, the Church is requested to exercise her hospitality. But he clearly instructs them not to look for or demand rather to receive the hospitality, food and drink that the people provide. They are not expected to seek for luxury and comfort while they are on their mission. Around 100 AD, there was the understanding, if a prophet happened to ask money or a meal, he was considered to be a false prophet. Therefore Jesus’ disciples are not to be the seekers of privileges, comforts and conveniences while exercising their mission. Otherwise they lose their credibility and authenticity.

But the realities of religious life in India tell us that there is a pathological craving for extravagance, sumptuousness, pleasure and lavishness. So sometime we are induced to ask, whether the spirit of simplicity and austerity, the sense of sacrifice and wholehearted commitment have become irrelevant in religious life. Many are driven to possess the latest gadgets like computers, cell-phones, iPhones, live and travel luxuriously. Reasons cited are for the effective and efficient apostolate. What about those old missionaries who lived simple life, using ordinary means of travel to carry out their missionary endeavors? Can we say that they were less effective in their missionary works? Without undermining the relevance of the advanced means of communication and conveyances, I would like to emphasis, it is the love for God, people and the world, dedication and commitment for mission that are more vital for the apostolic effectiveness.

There is also another element implicitly implied in this command. This approach will remove the social barriers that exist in our society. In this regard, we could find an appropriate example in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter and Paul were Jews by birth but, when they were exercising their mission they were received by the Gentiles and these apostles were able to eat with them. In India,
whether we like it or not we, the religious are very much influenced consciously or unconsciously by the misguided loyalties of rite, race, caste and language. And our association also tends to be with the elite or our own people, having the feeling of at home only with our own culture and language. Only when we are able to transcend these kinds of socio-cultural barriers, we will be considered as trustworthy missionaries according to the mind of our Lord and Master.

8. REJECTION AND PERSECUTION, INGREDIENT OF DISCIPLESHIP

It will not be an exaggeration to say that rejection is part and parcel of human life. No one is completely free or can escape from opposition. It is highly impossible to live our life without the feeling of denunciation. It will be strange or surprising if we do not experience rejection in our lives. Generally speaking, whenever we undertake certain action there will be some to support it and some others at least to speak against it. Our life experience tells us that it is very rare to get appreciation from everyone. All of us have experienced some form of resistance or rejection at one time or another. Rejection can come to one’s life due to many factors but, here, we are mainly concerned about denunciation due to one’s commitment to the mission of Jesus.

When we begin to play the prophetic role, we are sure to encounter resistance, rejection and persecution. We come across in the Bible a long list of instances, which indicate to us the rejection experienced by many committed persons. The patriarchs and prophets, who were sent by God, as His representatives, felt that their own people rejected them. We can say among the prophets, perhaps, Jeremiah was the one who faced the most hardships, denunciation, confrontation and persecution. He cried out that the people who were considered to be his friends watched for his downfall (Jer 20:10).

Jesus too was rejected by his family, friends, disciples, those he healed, his home synagogue, the Sanhedrin, the religious establishment. He also was persecuted by the crowds, the Roman authorities, the Roman legal system etc. It reaches its climax with his suffering and death on the Cross. He could foresee that his mission ultimately would take him to the cross. Hence, when he sent his disciples to do his mission, he cautioned them about the unavoidability of suffering, denunciation and persecution. He spoke to them about forthcoming persecutions, namely, “they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Mt 10:17-18, 22). Everything that happened in the life of the Master will also happen in the lives of his disciples. St. Paul gives his long list of persecutions and sufferings (2Cor 11:25ff).
In the history of Christianity in India, we notice many missionaries as well as laypersons who had undergone rejection. As long as there is the existence of injustice, inequality, exclusion, suppression and marginalization, our attempts to remove them will definitely lead us to confrontation, rejection and at times, death. I would like to mention just a few persons who sacrificed their lives for the sake of Christ in the recent years, such as, Fr. Antony in Jharkand, Frs. Herman and T. A. Thomas in Bihar, Sr. Rani Maria in Madhya Pradesh, Fr. Aruldoss in Orissa and Sr. Valsa John in Bihar. Besides, we also know how brutally Dr. Gram Stains, a Christian missionary together with his two tender sons was burned alive because of his commitment to Christ. Certainly, we should not also forget many laypersons who bore witness to Christ by shedding their blood. We cannot also ignore that easily the torture, raping, kidnapping and killing that took place in Kandhamal, Orissa in the very recent past. All these make us to realize that rejection, resistance and sufferings are inseparably connected to the life of discipleship.

9. **EXHORTATION FOR PERSEVERANCE**

Jesus directed his disciples how they should respond to the situation of rejection. They were asked to go out into the streets and shake off the dust from their feet as a sign of refutation (Lk 10:10-11). That is to say, even in the midst of persecution, today’s religious should not be disappointed or frustrated. Instead they continue to be “filled with joy” (Acts13:52) even amid persecution and go forward in their exercise of their mission. In general, the psychologists tell us that the best and common way to handle any form of rejection is to keep on building our self-confidence and not to give up. Self-confidence pays the way to construct the sense of persistence within us and it is this persistence that leads us to the conviction that life does not fail us as long as our life is intimately connected with perseverance. It is perseverance, which ultimately takes us to victory.

In the Hebrew Scriptures we observe that Elisha is presented as a persistent person. He was interested to have a double portion of Spirit, which was on Elijah. And Elijah said, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you;” (2Kgs 2:10). But it was not a pleasant path for Elisha to travel and he had to face a lot of resistance. Finally, when Elisha followed faithfully Elijah, he could get what he wanted. In the case of Joshua, God told him and prepared him for the battle. At the end, Joshua was able to obtain the inheritance. In the Christian scriptures, we notice that Jesus insists on the necessity and the importance of persistence through the parable of
the widow (Lk 18:1-8), the faith of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:22-28), and the healing of blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-51).

On various occasions, St. Paul also speaks about the need to have persistence: “Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart” (Gal 6:9; 2; Theo 3:13). We also know of Abraham Lincoln who was known for his determination. He participated 11 times in the election to become the President of the United States and could not succeed. But he did not give up and persevered in his hope. Finally he was elected to be the President in spite of the loss of two of his children and health problems.

As I have already mentioned, when we play our prophetic role against the rich and the powerful, identify with the poor and work against any issue that affects the dignity of human beings, we are sure to face tension, resistance and rejection. During those moments of desperation, disappointment and frustration, there is the temptation to be passive or silent spectator in our prophetic ministry. We still need to grow a lot in our commitment to the prophetic role. Soares-Prabhu writes that today’s religious “are still too bland, too conformist, too comfortably secure in our bourgeois mediocrity.”

In this context, it is good to remember the brave examples of those lay people from different walks of life, who are able to move forward in their fight against the injustice, corruption, land, sand and mining mafia in spite of the challenges like calumnies, suspension and frequent transfers they face. We see persons like N. Santhosh Hegde, former Karnataka Lokayukta and former Supreme Court judge, and John Michael D’cunha, the Special Court Judge in Karnataka, who remain the guardians of justice and honest professionals against the corrupted and powerful politicians. Indeed we need to salute them for their stern and straightforward approach. They do not yield to pressure tactics such as conducting protest rallies, damaging public properties, shedding crocodile tears etc., of the followers of the economically powerful politicians. While keeping Jesus as the absolute model, the Religious can also draw enormous inspiration from the above mentioned persons for our perseverance.

10. PROMISE OF THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD’S MISSION:

In view of encouraging and above all strengthening the disciples to persevere in their mission, Jesus assures them about the fulfillment of the redemptive mission of God: “Know this, the Kingdom of God has come near.” (Lk 10:11). It is to be seen more or less like God giving the assurance: “I will be with you” to those who had been called to perform his works. This is what we are able to perceive in diverse vocational narratives of Hebrew Scriptures (Ex 3:12; Is
Jesus’ Commission (Lk 10:1-12): A Call to Consecrated Persons...

1:5; Judges 6:16; Jer 1:8; Ezek 1:6). Pope Francis invites us to have the strong conviction that Christ “will not deprive us of the help we need to carry out the mission, which he has entrusted to us” (EG 275).

By proclaiming that the Kingdom has come near, Jesus announces the eschatological imminence of the Kingdom. The disciples reveal to those who receive them that God’s Kingdom has come near to them through the mighty works of Jesus as well as their preaching. In nutshell, it can be said that in their very presence, the Kingdom has come near. When the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked him, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” he pointed out to his healing miracles which serve as signs that the Kingdom is present and operational through him (Mt 11:3-6). Likewise, in his encounter with the Pharisees about his exorcisms, Jesus once again makes it clear that the Kingdom is active in his presence (Mt 12:28).

When consecrated persons identify themselves with the poor, marginalized, exploited or oppressed and are seen as friends of the poor and sinners, they manifest the presence of God’s Kingdom among them. When they are able to transcend merely charity and almsgiving to committing themselves for the social transformation and establishment of social system based on the values of God’s Kingdom like love, peace, freedom, they make the Kingdom present and operative in the society. If the religious, through their life and action, demonstrate that they are meek and humble of heart, merciful and compassionate, having thirst for justice and being persecuted for righteousness, they radiate the presence of God’s Kingdom in them. During those moments, when they are able to reject the ‘economy of exclusion and inequality’ (EG 53-54) resist the ‘new idolatry of money’ (EG 55-56) counter the financial system that controls us (EG 57-58) and do not allow ‘inequality which spawns violence’ (EG 59-60), the Kingdom gets rooted in their lives.

CONCLUSION

The vision and mission of Jesus is to establish God’s Kingdom, not based on economic and political power but on the beatitudes of Jesus (Mt 5:1-12; Lk 6:20-26) as Jesus himself demonstrated. Basically, we need to remove the false notion of the Kingdom that it belongs to the other world or heaven; instead it is deeply related to this world. When Jesus entered the face of the earth through his life and mission, he made present God’s Kingdom, which was in its initial form. Now, it is in the process of its completion which will take place when Christ comes again. Although the realization of God’s Kingdom, in its fullness, is God’s work, His people are invited to collaborate and contribute to it. As
a result, Kingdom is perceived in terms of a gift as well as a task. Thus the religious, by the very fact of their vocation are expected to commit fully to the realization of the Kingdom in its entirety. This form of Kingdom is addressed as ‘New Heaven and New Earth’ or ‘New Creation’ or ‘New Jerusalem’ or ‘missio trans’ in which “the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:3-4). When they wholeheartedly commit themselves to the realization of such situation, they will be considered as ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light to the world’ (Mt 5:13-14).

Endnotes


5“Churches contribute to vitally important components of successful societies, and their presence in communities provides many benefits that cannot be measured solely by direct revenue.” Andy Lewis, in http://erlc.com/article/some-positive-benefits-churches-bring-to-communities


7John Vaikath, “Indian President appreciates Catholic Church’s service to tribal population in Bengal,” in http://donboscoindia.com/english/bis/default_ms.php?prod=6.0&newsid=7182


10cf. “Catholic Relief Services” in http://www.interaction.org/member/catholic-relief-services

11Stanley Green, “Mission begins with prayer,” in http://www.mennonitemission.net/Stories/BeyondOurselves/Pray/Pages/Missionbeginswithprayer.aspx
Jesus’ Commission (Lk 10:1-12): A Call to Consecrated Persons...

12 Stanley Green, “Mission begins with prayer,” in http://www.mennonitemission.net/Stories/BeyondOurselves/Pray/Pages/Missionbeginswithprayer.aspx


26 Scaria Kuthirakkattel, (Editor), Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu.: Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action, 222.

27 It is equally worth mentioning a few IAS officials like Durga Shakti Nagpal in Uttar Pradesh, Raju Narayana Swamy in Kerala, Ashok Khemka in Haryana who are valued as genuine and committed to their office in spite of pressures. Another example is U. Sagayam, also known as Ashok Khemka of Tamil Nadu, who goes about exercising his responsibility with the motto ‘Reject bribe and hold your head high.’ He was given transfer 24 times in his 23 years of service. When he had courageously taken on the mining mafia during his stints as revenue officer and collector in Madurai, he was immensely appreciated for his brave and audacious action. Recently he was appointed by the Madras High Court to inspect various types of mining activities in Tamil Nadu and submit a report to the court.

28 The mission “inter gentes” is not to be seen as the final word with regard to mission. The mission “inter” is said to blossom into the mission “trans.” The objective of the mission is not to have a victory of one over the other, of one religion over another, of one culture over another,
of one denomination over another.' The mission has as its objective a “trans-”: to us something unknown, from which we would be able to see the emergence of the Kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem. This quotation is taken from the unpublished article of Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, “Theological Reflections on the Mission ‘Today’,” 11.
The events occurring in Europe at the beginning of the XXI Century in the area of religious life are worthy of attentive consideration. In this paper we will focus primarily on religious life, especially as it exists in Spain, but we will keep in mind the larger problem that affects Christianity as whole and religion in general in Europe.  

1. STATISTICAL ASSESSMENT  

Using numbers as our starting point, it can be said that religious life in Europe has “collapsed.” For those who have not been there, to say “collapsed” can appear to be an exaggeration, but historically speaking I believe it is an adequate word. For several decades vocations were scare, but in more recent years, it can be said that vocations simply do not exist. The very few persons who commit themselves to religious life are really “the exception that confirms the rule.”

Several years ago in the periodical *Sal Terrae*, José María Mardones, when speaking about the pastoral agents in Spain stated that there was very little room to move and that the situation was reaching “a point of no return”. Today that point has been surpassed and the situation has moved beyond that which Mardones announced: now we are simply trying to prepare for the landing, for the conclusion of the flight. Everything indicates that Western Europe is approaching the time when religious life will disappear as a relevant and vigorous protagonist in society and the church. Indeed, religious life as we have known it, is disappearing.

In a group of human persons, not only is their number important but so also is their age. The median age of religious has reached 65 — the age of retirement.

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As a whole, religious do not enjoy the best of health: the great majority of their members are not flexible enough to change, do not have the ability to renew themselves or adapt to new circumstances or open new frontiers, much less carry out radical reforms. The problem of age (and the corresponding lack of vitality) is as serious as the decreasing number of those actually associated with religious life.6

Because of a lack of personnel, many congregations are joining together with others and reducing their houses and regional organizations. The latest figures published in 2005 by the Spanish Conference of Religious indicate that male religious in Spain, who in 1980 numbered 30,100, had in 2000 a total figure of 16,618, and that in the last four years, to 2004, the reduction has been more pronounced, so that total figure has fallen by a staggering 22% to today’s number of just over thirteen thousand. This has led to the closing of over 400 communities or priories throughout Spain. For female religious, the drop in those same four years has been of just 4%. It is a generally accepted reality that young Europeans are not opting for the religious life, and - as far as religious who were born in Europe are concerned - religious life in Europe will be extinguished within one or, at most, two decades. Figures from the Institute for Youth indicate that, among Spaniards aged between 15 and 29, the percentage that declares itself practicing Catholics has plummeted from 28% in 2000 to 14.2% in 2004.

On the other hand, in the traditional societies of Africa and Asia, vocations continue to flourish. In some countries, the vocational boom is so strong that the general government of some congregations has been obliged to impose restrictions on the number of admissions into the seminary. India and Nigeria, for example, have large numbers entering religious life. Poland, however, with its acceptance of neo-liberalism, has ceased to be a source for vocations.

Using Latin America as a comparison, we know that just a few years ago we thought that “secularization” had not left its mark on religious life in Latin America. Vocations continued to flourish. Nevertheless, beginning in 2000, almost all of Latin America had experienced a new movement: most of the religious communities, men and women, observed signs of a new tendency with regard to vocations, namely, a decline in numbers. Religious life in Latin America is being “maintained” at a certain level; it is not growing nor are its members being sent abroad. It is perceived that a new era has begun, an era that will transform Latin America into the image of “secularized” Europe. This transformation will ultimately lead religious life in Latin America along the same course as that of Europe.
2. INSTITUTIONAL CAPTIVITY

Many theologians affirm that Catholic religious life finds itself in a position of institutional captivity. By nature, religious life is clearly charismatic and prophetic, yet the official institutional Church has placed them within the ironclad framework of Canon Law, thus depriving them of any possible prophetic freedom. Religious life has been assimilated into the institutional functioning of the Church — concretely speaking, the clergy, as an intermediate group, has been completely controlled by the institution and assimilated into it. During this “wintertime” of the Church, religious life is also passing through a time of “interior winter:” a great number of its initiatives have been suffocated and subjected to Vatican control (the elaboration and renewal of their Constitutions, the submission of their publications and other writing, the censure of their theologians [both men and women], the extraordinary intervention against CLAR [Commission for Latin American Religious] and some large religious congregations — Jesuits, Franciscans, Carmelites). Yet most religious communities feel comfortable with these institutional canonical statutes. Indeed it is an exception when a religious congregation feels that this institutional domestication goes against the very essence of religious life as a religious-cultural movement.

Given the present environment, it can be seen that in many areas religious life is being governed by men and women “administrators.” “This is not the time for prophecy, but for wisdom; not the time for far-reaching expectations, but for limited expectations” — these words are spoken to justify their passivity and connivance. In the past three decades, the risk takers and the creative people have been put aside. It is as though religious life has suffered a hemorrhage that has ceased only because there is nothing left to hemorrhage. Lacking a spirit of renewal and prophetic leaders, congregations democratically elect leaders who are “administrators”, “church people”, “people within the system”, who know how to avoid conflict and accommodate themselves without causing tension to the ecclesial “wintertime.”

As a whole, religious life is no longer viewed as a moral force in European society. For quite some time religious life has become marginalized, lacking in real social leadership, absent from important forums that shape public opinion and the future. Their interventions are closely aligned with the right, with conservative elements and social forces that hinder progress rather than with utopian and inventive forces that lead to a new future. Not even in the current debate about religion and the transformation of society do they make a positive contribution. They reduce themselves to seeking privileged influence and respect for the democratic and secular character of society.
It should be noted, for example, that in Catholic Spain, religious life for the most part identifies itself with the right, politically, ethically and economically. It takes a defensive position and places itself within the framework of the Church, which as an institution has little credibility in society.9

3. SPIRITUAL STAGNATION

Without fear of exaggerating, it can be affirmed that in Europe, religious life as a whole is not alive or overflowing with creativity and restlessness or filled with proposals to discover new roads that lead to the future. On the contrary (not in theory but at this precise time), religious life appears to be an intellectual desert, including theologically. Few offer an opinion; no one debates; no one takes a risk to point out possible solutions or offer at least a new interpretation. No one expects this nor even desires that this be done. No one speaks of transcendence, but people simply “mark time”, “waiting for Godot”, without explaining what they are waiting for and fearful at the same time.

It is not as though people have “their swords raised on high” contesting society or involved in some intra-ecclesial theological polemic. There is simply great indifference and apathy. European societies that fifty years ago were more than 80% Christian, today have turned their back on Christianity and are not interested in it. In this context, religious life, like the Catholic Church, feels abandoned, as though a divorce has taken place in their old age: there is no one with whom to discuss the matter; life has emigrated with young people to other places and the elders have been left behind to rejoice in a well-deserved retirement.

This can seem to be a very negative description but only to those who find themselves unprepared. Those who have reflected on this theme on more than one occasion will find it realistic, even though painful. Religious life in Europe is not only in crisis but in a critical and grave period, perhaps terminal in that which relates to European religious life (not religious life “in” Europe).10 A situation that when viewed with Christian hope is a “kairos”, an opportunity that calls us together and challenges us.

It should be pointed out that these generalizations would be false and unjust if they were interpreted literally. We must acknowledge the great social service that religious life has given to society, the good will and personal generosity (even heroic) of religious men and women ministering in the midst of a secularized European society. While we refer to some over-arching characteristics of religious life, we do not deny the great good that has been accomplished in particular places.
4. EVALUATIVE READING

4.1. The Problem is not with Religious Life but with the Church

I say this as a way of partially acquitting religious life: yet religious life suffers and shares the global crisis of Christianity. Religious life forms part of the church, a qualified part and is not able to escape the crisis of its global ecclesial point of reference.

Religious life cannot be considered in isolation, apart from its responsibilities. Religious life is part of a package and everything is in that part of the package. Every aspect of religious life is charged with history, primitive references, and ancient foundations that communicate, unconsciously, an unstated but well-known sense of belonging to a pre-modern, medieval and even pre-christian world.

For example, how do we interpret today obedience, chastity, clericalization (as it appears in congregations of men and women), mission, and the relationship of religious life to the church? How do we interpret these realities and leave aside their monarchical origins, their medieval perspective, their so-called mythology, their pre-modern values, their spiritualistic, monarchist, antidemocratic, enemy of the body, contrary to freedom and human development tendencies? All of these elements are obsolete and yet still play a role in the proclaimed and lived essence of religious life. Is it possible to re-read religious life and “free it from the chains of the past?” Or, having passed through several millenniums, shackled to secular traditions, today, in an era of change, is the only thing possible, the construction of a new building?

Religious life carries within every piece of its beautiful mosaic, an enormous wealth of references that pertain to an institution (the church, and in a wider sense, religion) that is in crisis. As much as religious life may want to, it cannot separate itself from or wash its hands of this crisis unless it sets itself apart with a clear prophetic rupture…. which it is incapable of doing right now.

But let us take another step.

4.2. The Problem is not with Christianity but with Religion

Again I say this as a way of partially acquitting the church and religious life: the crisis that Christianity is actually experiencing in Europe is not a crisis in Christianity itself, but a crisis in Christianity as a religion. In the recent past, we have seen this as a crisis in Christianity, but today we are aware of the fact that the crisis is deeper: religion itself is in crisis. If the historical European
religion were something else, then it would be this “something else” that would be in checkmate. What is in question is not just Christianity but “the form in which humanity is religious.”¹¹ This form has prevailed since the beginning of the agrarian society but today the last vestiges of this society are beginning to disappear in vast sectors of Europe and this is the first time that this phenomenon is occurring in history.

During the past ten thousand years, “religions” have maintained themselves as a type of religion that is agrarian by nature.¹² In the present social-cultural context, society is becoming less and less agrarian and must inevitably shed its “agrarian form of religion” which makes it most inaccessible. It must be understood that religion (in its anthropological-social-cultural form, a form assumed by human spirituality during the past ten thousand years) is going to disappear. Religiosity and human spirituality will continue and endure, but they will be transformed as they pass through a type of mutation or metamorphosis from which something perhaps unrecognizable will emerge.

It would take much space to prove all of this and I do not pretend to do that here. But those who have begun to surmise this “vision” now see these things being clarified: the agrarian world is dying, disappearing and this is irreversible. On this Titanic many things are sinking to the bottom. But neither life itself nor spirituality is sinking. Yes, certain forms are disappearing; an historical figure and a whole social-cultural vehicle is mortally wounded, even though it is predicted that its final agony will be prolonged.

Religious life is an institution that forms part of the Catholic Church, which in turn is an institution configured as a form of religion that, speaking in social-cultural terms, is in decline (in the historical sense that we have made precise here). It is probable, as Tillard says: “If we are not the last of the religious, then we are surely the last representatives of this historical way of being religious. This present way is fading away.” Like the multinational corporation that wants to survive in an aggressive market, so religious life ought to make a great investment in investigation, creativity, human resources, new experiences… that will allow it to grasp the forms which can crystallize the deepest essence of religious life in the future society. Perhaps it can survive if it is willing to cast aside every residue of bygone historical forms. Unfortunately religious life is not doing this.

4.3. The Problem is not with Europe but with Advanced Society

What is occurring in Europe is not some type of problem that is historically peculiar to this region. Rather it is the result of a social-cultural transformation
The Crisis of Religious Life in Europe:

that is taking place on this continent as it moves from an agrarian society to a post-industrial society and ultimately to a technological society, a ‘knowledge society’, one that is about to be definitively established. If this social-cultural transformation were occurring in South-east Asia or Africa, then they would also be experiencing this “crisis of religion.” This crisis cannot be identified as “European.”

Sooner or later this social-cultural transformation will take place on the whole planet, and I believe that because of the unification and worldwide extension of communication, this transformation will occur sooner rather than later. It is not that the European crisis will be exported to other continents. Rather, as other areas of the world enter an advanced form of society and rid themselves of the “infrastructure” of the agrarian society, then they will begin to experience this same crisis.

Thus, the problem of religious life in Europe is not the fact that it is European but that it is lived and inculturated in a society that is in a state of cultural mutation. For example, the men and women religious from Africa and Asia who are ministering in Europe can help the church and religious life prolong the traditions that today are disappearing. It is improbably, however, that these same religious can help open new inculturated avenues that the Europeans themselves do not know how to open. In past centuries, the European missions were established by men and women traveling from an advanced society to a less developed society. It is highly unlikely that a missionary movement in the opposite direction can be successful at a time of such profound cultural change. The needed change can only be assumed and responded to by those who have known, assumed, and lived this crisis within themselves.

4.4. The Problem is not one of “Updating” but of “Mutation”

Awareness of this problem is new, and the reader knows that only a minority are fully conscious of this problem. There is great confusion about the actual situation. Everyone perceives that something very profound and very unexpected has occurred, but the magnitude is so wide that no one has been able to localize it, to pin point it, and/or to express it. Therefore, perhaps we are in a time of waiting (this waiting is apart from the unnecessary halt that has resulted from the “ending of the Pontificate”, a waiting that the Catholic Church is now experiencing), and no one dares to undertake new interpretations.

I believe, however, that this much can be said: we are on the top of a hill. We are at a time when a whole new horizon appears before our eyes. The old view has become more distant, relative and is beginning to disappear. The problem
has changed radically. The reference point to resolve the problem is not located in the past, (during the past four decades we have referred back to Vatican II). The problem demands that we “break” with the past that is disappearing and create a new present with our anchor placed on a new North, and situated in an essentially different future.

Let me explain. During the last two decades, we have thought, with reason, that the great error of the official church was rooted in her attempts to reverse Vatican II. But things have changed. That was her primary error but it cannot be said that now it is the greatest problem or the first remedy. The ultimate difficulty (the most profound) which only now we are becoming aware of, but which, little by little, will clearly surface before us, is not the problem of frustrated conciliar “aggiornamento” but the “mutation” that is currently taking place. After forty years we have to stop looking at the Council as a point of reference. The “modern world” with which the Council wanted to enter into dialogue, no longer exists; we have a new group to dialogue with. If we tried updating in line with the Council, and even if this updating were successful, it would be completely out of step with the present reality. The problem resides not in the fact that the “modern world” has disappeared, but goes much deeper. The agrarian world that makes possible a type of religion like “Christianity” is disappearing. The Titanic is sinking and it is useless to kick against the goad, trying to fix it, refloat it or redirect it. The problem is not one of reform or re-establishment but rather one of mutation, metamorphosis and recasting.

Unless religious life adopts this perspective, it will continue to put patches on the problem and allow the boat to sink. It will remain enslaved in the smallness of its vision. Its institutions, in as much as they belong to a “religion” in decline, will also inevitably decline. Even though they are in good health, they will still sink with the Titanic on which they have embarked. The one realistic hope consists in saving only that which can be saved, remaining with what one has and ridding oneself of all hindrances. One must abandon that which cannot be saved and allow death to take that which must die. What can probably be saved is…. primarily: the talent of religious radicalism and boundlessness, that is, the ability to live on the frontier, free and unfettered in an unknown society that is coming into being, in a society that will help us (by force) strip ourselves of everything that is disappearing with the appearance of this new society. This can be accomplished by those willing to live religious life with all it radicalism, on the edge of the challenge, giving death to that which must die (“Let the dead bury the dead”), co-provoking a mutation of religious forms “beyond religion” and not looking upward (at that which is leaving us or does not allow us to act)
nor looking behind us, like a statue of salt (attached to traditions), and trying to renew a religion that is dying.

5. STRATEGIC ACTION

I want to make some observations with regard to ways of acting, but also want to allow each person to come to their own conclusions as applicable to their concrete situation.

The crisis in Europe is a new theological place ("locus theologicus"). During the past three decades Christianity has looked at Latin America, yet at the present time the events taking place in Europe have taken on a theological relevance and a religious significance that merit the attention of Christians everywhere. Europe must be carefully examined, for the present situation of religious life and the Church in Europe, might very well begin to appear in many other parts of the world.

The lived reality of Europe will, in the future, become the reality of other continents and the present experience of European Christianity will, in the future, be the experience of other religions. Because of the cultural osmosis created by the present system of communication, the Third World may very well experience this reality before it reaches the stage of adequate post-industrial development. This would indeed complicate the situation and create of a state of schizophrenia: a large part of the third world would quickly become a society with a post-religious (post-industrial) mentality, yet find itself in the midst a society with an infrastructure that is agrarian or simply industrial.

The “mission to Europe” is not the solution. Religious life in Europe will not resolve its crisis by “importing” diocesan or religious from the Third World or from some other place, nor will the European Church secure its future by “importing”, for example, seminarians from African and Latin America. These seminarians and young religious could help maintain the classical activities of the Church, its cult, parish life, popular devotions…. in other words, the traditional aspects, “that which has always been” — the areas that are dying. It will not be easy for these young foreigners to contribute to the construction of a “religion without religion” that is proper to an advanced society or a language that arises from within as the mature fruit of this crisis of classical religion and arises as a result of having lived this crisis on a very intense level. Help from the Third World might be beneficial for the continuation of classical European religion (but not perhaps for its survival). Only those who have lived and understood the depths of this crisis can create a religious language that is substantially new, coherent, and creative. Indeed, only these individuals can really help.
The same thing is happening to religious life in Europe: with the influx of religious from other continents, the presence of religious life in Europe can be maintained. This, however, will take on a form that continues religious life but does not truly “enter” Europe or “establish” communities that are really present and incarnate (not only physically but also mentally and spiritually) in this new model of post-industrial advanced society which is the society that rejects the old form of religious life. This is the only kind of “re-establishment” that can have a future.

If religious life were a multi-national corporation in crisis, then they would be willing to risk a great part of their budget and invest monies in the area of investigation and creativity in order to survive in a rapidly changing market. If religious life had a vision for the future, then it would invest its primary energies and best human resources in re-inventing the future, in investigating the true nature of the actual crisis and in assuming whatever risk is necessary to create a new future. Religious would have to be experts in such themes as the present religious crisis, the cultural changes taking place in advanced societies and the profound reconsideration of the nature of religion. They would have to be aware of the serious criticism leveled against traditional and classical religion and be willing to critique those elements of classical religion that have to be abandoned if it is not to fall into greater irrelevance. They must not only be technical experts in these areas, but also practical specialists, committed to experimentation. It seems to us, however, that nothing like this is occurring.15

It is necessary to respect the rhythm and time of each person. There are individuals, generations and institutions that have fulfilled their mission. Our time is not synchronized with history’s time. We have to know how to accept the hour of death; we have to learn the “art of dying,”16 dying without bitterness, but with hope and trust, dying in such a way that it becomes possible that from our own death, life springs up anew for those who follow us and thus the torch is entrusted to other hands.

It is also necessary to learn the “art of living”, the art of living in the present time, the present historical “kairos.” This is not the time to pause and listen nostalgically to the hymn “Near to Thee My God” being sung on the stern of the Titanic. We have to learn how to move beyond the past and launch out into the future. We have to stop trying to fix what cannot be fixed and clothe ourselves in new life.

Re-establish or recast? We see that re-establishment is not the answer. The events of the past 15 years show the failure of the attempts of re-establishment
within the system. We must recast the heavy metal that weighs us down, recast it in the furnace, form new molds, recast it outside the system so that instead of being crushed, it can have a possible future. We do not need any more attempts of re-establishment, of repeating the past; what we need is a “mutation,” a substantial change.

And in Latin America? Classically the ravaging “enemy” of Catholicism in Latin America were the “sects”. For some years now, people have begun to speak about the emergence of another enemy: indifference. We are seeing many faithful men and women in Latin America abandoning the Catholic Church — abandoning it not to join other new religious movements, but to enter a state of indifference. This has just begun and will become more serious in the coming years. As we have said, this is occurring not because there is a problem with religious life in Latin America but because there is a problem with “religion” in the actual society that is in the midst of a profound social change, a substantial mutation. Though it has just begun, it is nonetheless a reality on our Latin American continent. If religious life does not carefully analyze this situation and take into consideration the very profound factors that are in play here, then religious life will not resolve their own problems nor the problems of others, because these problems will not have been stated correctly.

Endnotes
1This article is originally written in Spanish and is translated into English by Charles T. Plock, CM.
2Probably some of the same things (concerning this starting point and other matters discussed in this article) could be said about religious life in the United States. I am going to limit myself, however, to a discussion of religious life in Europe, primarily, Spain.
3“What makes this worse is that we have ‘no room to move’. There are no possibilities of reacting creatively. There are only reactions and defensive moves: make an ordered and intelligent retreat, with the least possible ‘costs’. In this situation there is no possibility for a creative confrontation with the future to initiate pastoral actions or explore new possibilities” Sal Terrae 1022 (April, 1999), 282.
4Absolute “dissolution” never occurs in the historical evolution of social movements: something “residual” always remains and can be prolonged for decades or even centuries…
5This fact was published by CONFER in Spain in 2003. This median age also coincides with that of the diocesan priests in Spain.
6From 1978-2002 --- the time of John Paul II’s pontificate --- the number of priests has decreased by 4%, membership in religious congregations by 19%, lay religious by 27% and women
religious by 19%. This occurred at a time when the Catholic population increased by some 300 million persons.

“The prophetic movement has been reduced to one more structure of the institutional Church.” Cf. Diarmuid O’Murchu, Reframing Religious Life. An Expanded Vision for the Future, Paulus, United Kingdom 1998; Rehacer la vida religiosa. Una mirada abierta al futuro, Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 2001, p. 132.

“The idea that religious life could have meaning or significance outside of the official Church is something virtually inconceivable for the majority of men and women religious.” Cf. O’Murchu, ibid. p. 133.

According to an annual survey taken by “Latinbarómetro”: «El País», Madrid, October 21, 2004. Much more recently, according to the questionnaire of the BBV A Foundation relating to the Spanish university population, the Church has arrived now at a situation where it occupies the last place of all, «inspiring less confidence among Spain’s university-going population even than multi-national corporations, the government and the media. Besides, among professional groups, it is the religious (men and women) who «occupy the last position, after the political leaders, the Army, the entrepreneurs and officials»; cfr «La Vanguardia», Barcelona, 4 March 2005.

“I want to say here: If within 20 years religious life becomes in great part an ensemble of religious missionaries from other countries, this would mean that “European” religious life had really ended and been substituted by religious missionaries from other continents “in Europe.”

Here I refer to “religion” not as religiosity or a sense of meaning and depth, rather I refer to “religion” or “religions” as those forms that the spiritual character of the human person set up during that time of change known as the agrarian revolution, forms that humanity has lived with until the present time. Now, however, it is precisely the agrarian society that is disappearing.

In the precise meaning that we are giving to this word. Cf. Mariano Corbí, Religión sin religion, PPC, Madrid, 1996.

This “only now” is simply a way of speaking and can always be contradicted. I want to call attention to the French author Marcel Légaut, who 30 years ago spoke of a necessary “mutation” and metamorphosis in Christianity (his call then parallels my thesis here). He was a visionary who without the actual instruments of anthropological-cultural interpretation, captured that which is no less easier for us to see today. Cf. Mutación de la Iglesia y conversion personal, Aubier, Paris, 1975 or Creer en la Iglesia del Futuro, Sal Terrae, Santander, 1985.

Diarmuid O’Murchu, noting the observations of Raymond Hostie about the “cycles of religious life” states that the appearance of a new form of religious life “will probably not occur for another seventy years.” His observations are very interesting though he does not pretend to predict the future. Cf. ibidem, p. 127.

The results of the last Congress on the Consecrated Life that took place in Rome in November, 2004, seem to confirm this: its conclusions appear to be more an exercise in literature, poetry and conceptual ingenuity than an exercise in theology, realism and prophecy. The most radical problems of Christianity and the Church are not even mentioned — they simply do not exist.
Teilhad de Chardin said that the difficulty does not reside in solving a problem, but in planting the problem before oneself. This was the problem of the Congress on the Consecrated Life. What is worse is that perhaps this indicates that this is the problem with religious life throughout the world, for officially all of religious life was represented at the Congress.

“'My impression is that God asks religious and the monastic orders to have the courage to truly actualize themselves or accept a peaceful death.’” Marcelo Barros, Circular Letter of October, 2002.
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Amy Hereford, Religious Life at the Crossroads: A School for Mystics and Prophets
Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 2014, Pages 206, Rs. 145.

The author Sr. Amy Hereford belongs to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet from St. Louis, United States. Having graduate degrees in spirituality, communication, and civil and cannon law, she has close contact with many religious on legal matters. She wrote this book for all the religious, especially for the women religious. The book explores the emerging currents among the cohorts of younger women religious of the Post-Vatican II period. It will be an eye opener for all those religious who wish to know the evolutionary aspect of religious life, to re-imagine or re-vision their charism and community way of life. This book contains five chapters and concludes with an elaborated explanation on the aspect of a religious being mystic and prophet.

Hereford begins this book by borrowing few lines from Robert Frost’s Poem which explains the title of this book. By quoting these lines, she calls us to take less travelled road at the crossroad when we stand in dilemma. She says that it is easy to take the path that all travelled but calls for great risk to take the one the less travelled.

In the first chapter of this book, she explains how religious life evolved, got suppressed and renewed in the course of time. She scrutinizes the development of the major movements in the history of Religious life so far from desert movement to the renewal period of the Vatican II. After explaining the developments, she calls for a new response and caution in re-visioning the priorities of the religious today.

In the second chapter, Hereford explains the theology of community. She says that the community is a key to live the Christian life in today’s world. To explain this factor, she speaks of different individuals like Martin Luther,
from the reform tradition, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and so on, whose contribution is essential for the theology of community life. Together, Christians form the body of Christ in community, mediating Christ to one another.

The third chapter explains new ways of understanding charism, community, use of media, and contemplation among the new generation of the religious. Often, the newer members find themselves translating and explaining, rather than speaking their own truth in its own sense. They find it difficult to integrate socially and culturally because of the widening age gap in the community. The rapid developments in mass media and internet play a vital role in the understanding of religious life for the new generation. Therefore the use of them needs to be maintained and to be taught in the formation itself. We need to make use of the mass media to witness more about religious life without the original charism being diluted or lost.

In the fourth chapter, the author, in a creative and outstanding way, relates the evangelical counsels with day today’s challenges. The vows are to be re-imagined as life enhancing covenant. The vow of poverty invites us to create an alternate economy of simplicity of life, inter-dependence in community and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. The vow of celibate chastity has to be re-imagined as freedom for relationship, in spiritually, community, and in ministry. The vow of obedience enables us to create an alternate political system, one based not on power but on love and service. She also gives a new perspective on mission by stating that mission means going out in love to live the Gospel.

The fifth chapter is certainly a source of inspiration to readers. Hereford, in an exceptional way, expresses her view on the new form of religious life. If you cut one leg off a spider, it is lame; cut off its head, it is dead. In contrast, the starfish has a circular neural network and all its functions are distributed throughout its arms. If you cut off the arm of the starfish, it grows another, and it has no head to be cut off. This anecdote is an example for an institute or congregation to function in a new way. The emergence of a new form of religious life should learn to adopt this attitude of living and acting differently. As a conclusion to this book, the author explains the core of religious life, which is that every religious person is expected to be a ‘mystic and prophet.’ Our life as religious is a life that aspires to be the best in the human spirit; it gathers and nurtures our core as mystics and prophets.

There is no exaggeration in affirming that this book is a wonderful inspiration for all the religious, especially the women religious, to re-vision and to re-
imagine their call to religious life. It is written with simple theology and simple language so that all sorts of readers can understand. If one is thinking of taking a better and less travelled road in one’s religious life, this book will be certainly be a good resource.

Joni Rajan, SG

Michael Peters, Living Together
Bangalore: Dhyanavana Publications, 2014, pp 182, Rs. 150.00.

Michael Peters is a religious priest, belonging to the Congregation of Precious Blood missionaries. He is a qualified professor and a well-known retreat preacher.

The book, Living Together, is an attempt to describe the various aspects of communitarian spirit lived in communities of religious groups in the Catholic Church. It is an effort to explain the origin and development of various major orders, with biblical exegesis and doctrinal interpretation.

The book is divided into two parts with three chapters. The first part deals with the historical background of religious life and the practice of the three evangelical counsels. It begins with the ‘Apostolic community of Jesus,’ going on to the ‘Desert Fathers and Mothers’ and a few other significant personalities of the early Judeo-Christian period. The rest of the first part concentrates on the six major religious orders, namely, the Augustinians, the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Carmelites and the Jesuits. It is a rather detailed exposition of the spirituality of the religious life and community living practiced in these major orders. The author elaborates the particular nuances and concrete expression in the daily living of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in the above-mentioned orders.

The second part has two chapters. The first chapter deals with the evangelical counsels from a theological perspective. Jesus Christ is the most perfect model for all the three vows. A person in a religious order follows the example of the Lord Jesus and embraces the filial obedience with a mature, free and joyful heart. Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher of poverty and this vow is a proclamation of a person’s absolute dependence on the providence of God. At the same time, the person has to be a hard worker and not a lazy beggar! It is a liberating and
humbling experience which leads one to the world and others in charity. The third counsel is chastity; but for the author considers celibacy to be a better and apt word. Celibacy is a way or a form of living. It is an affirmation that God is the creator of the human body and God becomes the most intimate reality and this intimacy flows into others in total freedom. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to some. The second chapter is about the interconnectedness of the evangelical counsels and the cardinal moral virtues-faith, hope and charity; and also the relationship with the moral virtues such as prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

The author seems to emphasize the aspect of faith while human reason takes a back seat. An effort could have been made from the part of the author to offer a note on the major apostolic and active congregations of today. Also, a brief undertaking of the religious life in the context of India and the challenges in living out these values in this pluralistic society would have been a greater help for a modern-day reader. However, kudos to Fr. Michael for his attempt in this field and we expect more of such enriching contributions.

Thomas P. C., SDB
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